Resiliency, Adaptability, and Agency: Exiled English nuns in France and the Spanish Netherlands, 1597-1700

by

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A Thesis
Presented to
The University of Guelph

In partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in
History

Guelph, Ontario, Canada

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ABSTRACT

RESILIENCY, ADAPTABILITY, AND AGENCY: EXILED ENGLISH NUNS IN FRANCE AND THE SPANISH NETHERLANDS, 1597-1700

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This thesis is an examination of the Catholic English women who fled to France and the Spanish Netherlands throughout the seventeenth century to escape religious persecution of Catholics in England and to become nuns. Through the analysis of three convent histories written by English nuns, this study investigates the relationships that the English nuns held within their local towns. The convent histories reveal that it was the spiritual, social, and economic bonds between the exiled nuns and the local townspeople that helped to secure the success of the English convents, as they provided the nuns with stable and reliable revenue streams. However, in order to secure and maintain these bonds the nuns had to adapt to meet the needs and expectations of the townspeople. Thus, exile complicated the nuns’ identity as a result of the division between their loyalty to the Catholic English mission and their financial dependency on the local town. I argue that as a result of the socio-economic and cultural ties with the local laity, the English nuns fostered an identity that incorporated elements of the local culture in order to sustain the convents’ longevity. Therefore, in order to survive the hardships experienced, the “exiled” English nuns had to demonstrate remarkable resiliency, adaptability, and agency to secure their place on the continent.
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Introduction

Between 1536 and 1541, King Henry VIII chose to dissolve the monasteries and convents throughout England in an effort to create a new Church of England based on the principles of Protestantism. At this time there were 142 convents and approximately 1,500 to 2,000 nuns in England.¹ Scholars have only recently examined what happened to the English nuns that were forced out of their religious houses, instructed to get married, become wives and mothers. With only small pensions to live off, these nuns had to find ways to reintegrate themselves within English society. The majority of nuns went back to take up residence with family members. However, sixty-seven percent of elderly nuns lived alone. Others lived together in pairs.² Some religious women went individually to live in Flemish and French convents. Only three of the religious communities were able to stay together; they included: the Brigittines of Syon Abbey, the Dominicans of Dartford, and Benedictines of Nunnaminster.³ Of these three communities, it was only the Brigittines that survived into the seventeenth century. In 1539, eighteen Brigittine nuns decided that, in order to continue their monastic life, they would have to move to the Spanish Netherlands. They joined the exodus of Catholic intellectuals from the universities and moved to the continent. However, unable to afford to establish their own convent, they settled with the Augustinian canonesses in Antwerp and then later moved to the Abbey of Maria Troon in Dendermonde.³ The Brigittine nuns maintained this nomadic existence until they moved to Lisbon in 1594.⁴

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The Brigettine community is distinct from the communities examined in this project as they were a community that had existed before the Reformation and therefore maintained a long history with distinct customs and practices. It was not until 1597, sixty years after the dissolution of monastic houses that Mary Percy, the daughter of the Earl of Northumberland, and Father Holt became interested in establishing a convent in the Spanish Netherlands. With such a long time span between the dissolution and the establishment of the exiled community the women that looked to join Percy in the establishment of the Brussels’ Benedictine community, had never lived in or been part of an English monastic community before. In this way, the women that are examined in this work must be considered as different from the English nuns of the late middle ages.

The women that were joining the exiled convents were members of an English Catholic community that historians, such as John Bossy and J.C. H. Aveling, argue began in the 1570s when missionary priests from continental seminaries arrived in England. The religion of this new community was distinct from the traditional Christianity that existed before the Reformations as the destruction of churches and the adoption of a Christocentric religion of Edward (1537-1553) had altered the traditional Christianity of England. Furthermore, even Mary I in her re-establishment of Catholicism had adopted elements of Henrican and Edwardian reforms. Finally, the new English Catholic community was heavily influenced by the Jesuits coming from the continent that arrived in England during the 1570s. With all these changes and adaptations taking place within the English Catholic community, it is apparent that English nuns

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who had grown up in this community would have adopted these reforms and brought them into
the English convents on the continent.

Not only had the Catholic religion in England changed but so had female monasticism
under the laws of the Council of Trent. Trent’s emphasis of clausura – that is, the physical
enclosure of women – changed the way that English female monasticism operated. Although
English convents in the late Middle Ages were expected to follow the papal decree of periculoso,
which ordered the enclosure of religious women, research on late medieval English convents has
shown that it was not followed strictly. In fact, English nuns of the fourteenth and fifteenth
century continued to interact outside convent walls with the laity.\(^7\) Bary Collett argues that the
non-religious people that lived within the convent including students, plumbers, cooks and
gardeners, made up a third family for the nuns.\(^8\) In this way, the changes made under the Council
of Trent would have significantly altered the way the English nuns would have been able to
interact with the laity of their local towns.

Finally, the economic status of the nuns of medieval England differed from those of the
early modern exiled convents. Barbara Harris in “A New Look at the Reformation: Aristocratic
Women in Nunneries 1450-1540,” examines 2,390 aristocratic daughters, of these women only
fifty-three became nuns.\(^9\) For the early modern English nuns, Claire Walker writes that “92% of
the choir nuns were daughters of gentlemen, esquires, baronets, knights and peers.”\(^10\) The reason

\(^8\) Barry Collett, “Holy Expectation: The Female Monastic Vocation in the Diocese of Winchester on the eve of the
Reformation,” in *The Culture of Medieval English Monasticism,* ed. James Clark (Woodbridge: Boydell Press,
2007), 163.
\(^9\) Barbara Harris, “A new look at the Reformation Aristocratic Women in Nunneries 1450-1540,” *Journal of British
\(^10\) Claire Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe: English Convents in France and the Low Countries*
why the vast majority of nuns came from the upper echelons of society had to do with the expense of the trip. Under Elizabeth I’s reign, laws were created to restrict English people from travelling abroad for a Catholic education or to join a religious institution, thus making it challenging and expensive for these women to travel across to the continent. The expense of the trip as well as the necessity to have an agent sent to England to take girls to the convent meant that convents were only accessible to women from families of high economic standing. Moreover, the exclusive nature of the English convents followed a trend in the English Catholic community during the seventeenth century. The nobility were the main focus of the English mission as they were the ones who could afford to house Catholic clergy. John Bossy states that until the eighteenth century it was only the gentry who “received the full impact of reformed Catholicism while the rest of the community was short of instruction.” Therefore, when examining the lives of the early modern nuns in exile, it is important to remember that although there was some continuity between the English convents before and after the Reformation there were also several differences. The Catholic religion, the convents’ structure, and the economic status of the women had all changed in some ways that shaped the lives of the exiled nuns.

Understanding the identity of the English nuns is essential to an analysis of the convent sources as it provides insight into why English women like Mary Percy became interested in establishing convents sixty years after the dissolution. As mentioned, after the Reformation several women moved to the continent to continue their religious lives in Flemish and French convents. In fact, groups of women continued to join these convents for decades after the dissolution. In 1569, twenty eight English women left to join the Flemish Augustinian convent in

Louvain. English women embraced the opportunity provided by these foreign convents as it was their only opportunity to lead a monastic life. However, many English nuns suffered from feelings of alienation as they struggled with the difference in language, food and social customs. Furthermore, life in the foreign convents separated the nuns from the English mission that they had been participating in, in their previous lives. The alienation and need to participate in the English mission is what drew Mary Percy and the other women who joined her to establish their own English convent. By opening a distinctly English convent, the nuns were able to focus their spiritual labours on the conversion of England, and therefore become active participants within the mission. In addition to praying for the re-establishment of Catholicism in England, Caroline Bowden writes that the other two purposes of the English convents were to foster English identity and to maintain Catholicism amongst English women. This would be done by creating generations of English nuns as well as through the Catholic education of secular girls who would raise their daughters as Catholics. Between 1598 and 1800 approximately 4,000 women entered the twenty-three English convents across Europe. There are many reasons for the popularity of the English convents; however, one main reason has to do with the agency the convents gave Catholic women as participants within the English mission. These convents came after the role of women as leaders of the recusants communities began to dwindle at the turn of the century.

13 Bowden, “Convents in exile,” vol. 1, xi.
15 Bowden, “Convents in exile,” vol. 1, xxxix.
16 Bowden, “Convents in exile,” vol. 1, xxxix.
17 A recusant refers to a Catholic who refused to attend Anglican mass and therefore publically rejected the Church of England.
Leading scholars in this new field have labelled this history of the nuns as a period of exile – an exile that lasted for two hundred years as the majority of religious communities were dissolved during the French Revolution. With such a long history on the continent, it is interesting that scholars have labelled these nuns through this time as exiles. In her work on early modern migrants, Raingard Esser defines “exiles” as a group of people that move to an area, but actively choose not to integrate in the local society.\textsuperscript{18} This definition is problematic for the English nuns; I hope to prove throughout the next few chapters, that the nuns did actively integrate themselves within the local society. However, this integration typically occurred because of financial necessity. The reason why the term “exile” is used rather than a term like “immigration” has the do with the nuns’ dedication and loyalty to the English mission, as well as their belief that their situation was temporary and that convents would eventually be able to return to England. The work that the English nuns put into presenting themselves as distinctly English makes it clear that they did not intend to identify as French or Flemish religious institutions.

Throughout this project questions will arise surrounding the nuns’ English identity. Addressing these questions brings up ideas about culture and the distinction between the English nuns and the French, Flemish, Irish and Scottish nuns. In her work on the identity politics of the English nuns, Marie-Louise Coolahan states that religious women are “transnational” as they share a rule and \textit{Opus-dei}\textsuperscript{19} that instruct them on how to live their lives.\textsuperscript{20} Although this is true for how the nuns structure their daily spiritual lives it does not acknowledge that the nuns also

\textsuperscript{18} Esser, “Out of Sight and on the Margins,” 11.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Opus Dei} translates to the work of God and refers to prayers recited at the Divine Office. According to Claire Walker the \textit{Opus Dei} was the primary function of contemplative orders.
brought with them distinct cultural traditions from their lives before monasticism. In this way, a discussion of culture must be brought up in an analysis of the English nuns’ relationship to nuns of other nations. When referring to English culture, I am referring to the distinct elements incorporated in the nuns’ daily life that they had adopted from their lives in England. This includes language, diet, art, music as well as religious tradition. As John Bossy states, the reforms to Catholicism experienced in England after the Reformation were “divorced” from the experiences on the continent. And so the Catholicism that the English nuns brought with them is distinct from the Catholicism that existed on the continent. By understanding these differences, one can better understand the English nuns’ relationship with their local community.

This body of work primarily looks at three documents that recorded the daily lives and were created by the English religious communities to document their history: Anne Nevile’s Annals of Five Communities of English Benedictine Nuns in Flanders, 1598-1687, The Diary of the "Blue Nuns" or Order of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, at Paris, 1658-1810, and Rouen Chronicle of the Poor Clare Sisters. This type of history writing allowed the nuns to construct a narrative that created a unified identity for the communities. These histories are, then, highly selective documents that the communities put together in order to create an idealized image of themselves. They were often intended to be published and used as documents for the promotion of the convents in order to recruit new members as well as to seek out additional funding. In her research Jodi Blinkoff notes that the purpose of these texts was to be an instructional guide for women on how to live a life in the pursuit of holiness. In the same way, the document about the daily lives of the nuns also functioned as a guide for Catholic women in

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England. It provided instruction on the pursuit of spiritual perfection. With this considered, it is important when reading these sources to remember their bias and the function that they were to fill.

In dealing with the three sources, there are some characteristics that the histories share. Since the communities used these histories as a promotional tool, this meant that throughout the text they continually used different techniques to elevate the convent’s reputation. In order to do this the communities of all three sources spent a lot of time emphasizing their relationship with prestigious families as well as government and church officials. By associating themselves with these high profile groups, the nuns were able to present themselves with a prominent status and make their community look more appealing to the nobility in England. The emphasis on a convent’s relationship with notable figures, both locally and in England, makes these convent histories an excellent source to examine the relationship between the English convents and the local aristocratic families. However, this also means that the histories leave out the relationships with the local people from the lower economic classes.

Furthermore, to better understand the histories of each community, it is important to recognize the context of each historical text. Anne Neville’s Annals of Five Communities of English Benedictine Nuns in Flanders, 1598-1687 is a unique text for early modern female monastic literature as the author is clearly identified as Abbess Anne Neville (d. 1689), the Abbess of the Pontoise convent. Typically, histories written by nuns were written by the community and did not have a distinct author. Anne Neville makes it clear that this is a personal history that she has created for the five communities. Because of this, she states that she only selected certain elements of the five communities’ history that she thought were of the utmost
importance. By selecting certain parts of the history, Neville tried to create a cohesive narrative between the five communities and therefore, unify the convents under their shared Benedictine identity. According to Neville’s history, it is clear that the Benedictine communities, with their deep rooted history in English monasticism, enjoyed a prominent status in the English Catholic community. On average, the Benedictine houses received larger dowries as they tended to attract the daughters of the most prominent English families. The relations that the houses maintained with these prominent English families also gave them connections to some of the more powerful and wealthier patrons on the continent. This is an aspect that Neville highlights throughout the annals.

The Rouen Chronicle of the Poor Clare Sisters discusses the history of the house between its foundations in 1644 to 1857. The Poor Clares lived on the Rue de Petit Maulévrier and their convent was called Jesus-Mary-Joseph. The history of the house was recorded in several stages starting in 1713. The section that covers their history from 1644 to 1700 was written by the community’s scribe, Cecily Cornwallis, from 1713 to her retirement as scribe in 1736. The history documents the daily happenings of the community as well as the obituaries of each year. These obituaries emphasize the exemplary lives that the English nuns lived and showcase the virtue and zeal of each nun. The chronicle of the community in Rouen aims to present an overarching narrative throughout their history. This narrative focuses on the sacrifices that the Poor Clares had to make for the wellbeing of the larger English mission. Through the history, then, there is an emphasis on the suffering of the nuns. It is through this narrative of sacrifice and

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23 Bowden, “Convents in exile,” vol. 1, xli.
suffering that the Poor Clares constructed their identity. The suffering gave the nuns’ lives meaning and gave the nuns agency as they believed their sacrifices were helping to preserve the English mission.

An important part of the order’s history that is not incorporated into the chronicles is the impact that the decrees of Trent had on the Poor Clares; they would drastically change how the nuns interacted with society. Before the Council of Trent the English Poor Clares had followed the reforms of St. Colette of Corbie, a fifteenth-century abbess that reformed the order by emphasizing the original tenants that denied ownership of property. The Colettine Poor Clares, as they were called, relied on charities that were provided to them and they made their living through begging. However, under the decrees of Trent religious women could no longer leave the convent and could thus no longer go out begging. So when Mary Ward set up the first convent of Poor Clares in Gravelines they had to adopt the rule of Pope Urban IV a rule that was established in 1263 when the order was institutionalized by ecclesiastic authorities. The rule allowed the nuns to own property, which would help in the process of enclosure as the community’s income would no longer rely on begging. The adoption of the rule of Urban IV changed their identity as a mendicant order and changed their lives as they were no longer allowed to beg for their alms.

*The Diary of the "Blue Nuns" or Order of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, at Paris, 1658-1810* is a history of the Conceptionist order written by Mother Susanna Hawkins.

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26 Bowden, “Convents in exile,” vol. 1, xvi.
27 For examples see pages 40, 89-91
28 Although France had its own reform program, scholarship on the English nuns asserts that the English communities followed Tridentine reforms.
30 Walker, “Combining Martha and Mary,” 402.
31 Walker, “Combining Martha and Mary,” 402.
This diary is part of a larger document of the community that records the community’s professions, obituaries, and the biographies of the confessors. The Conceptionists of Paris were situated on the Rue de Charenton in Faubourg-St.Antoine in their convent they called Bethlehem. Originally part of the Franciscan house in Nieuwpoort, Flanders, the nuns moved to Paris during the Franco-Spanish war after their farm had been destroyed by troops. The Bishop of Paris was not receptive to having a Franciscan order in his city, so the community instead adopted the order of the Immaculate Conception. The Conceptionists were founded as a religious order in 1489 by Beatrice de Silva and became popular in the early modern period throughout Spain and France. In Abbess Susanna Hawkins’ history of the convent, there is a tendency to focus on the charitable donations that the community received from both English nobility and aristocratic Parisian women. By focusing on the charities that they received, the history of the Conceptionist underlines their close relationship with the local community – the Parsians – more so than the other two histories.

The decision to limit the examination of the English convents to the years 1598 to 1700 is due to the many changes that took place after the 1700s, which would have required a different line of inquiry. John Bossy’s work on the English Catholic community notes a distinct change occurring in the eighteenth century. He states that the seventeenth century can be defined as a period of domestication for the Catholic clergy, due to their residency in the homes of England’s aristocracy. The eighteenth century saw a shift in this behaviour as the clergy left the homes of the nobility and tried to spread Catholicism to the other levels of society with the use of

catechisms.\textsuperscript{34} Furthermore, the records of the latter half of the eighteenth century are defined by the events leading up to the French Revolution, which shaped the communities and eventually a few of the English convents were turned into prisons in which the English nuns were kept as prisoners for several years.

Through the analysis of the histories of exiled English convents, this project investigates how the English nuns interacted with the local Flemish and French towns in their vicinity. Furthermore, this thesis will demonstrate that the nuns were able to create a relationship with the local laity based on “symbiotic reciprocity.”\textsuperscript{35} The analysis of this transnational relationship reveals the adaptability and agency of early modern religious women throughout Western Europe.

\textsuperscript{34} Bossy, “English Catholic Community,” 273.
\textsuperscript{35} Walker, “Gender and Politics,” 87.
Chapter 1 Historiography of the English Nuns in Exile

The impact of the Reformation and the dissolution of the convents have been important areas of study in the growing field of early modern gender history. More recently scholars have started to raise the question: “Who Were the Nuns?” More specifically, after the dissolution of convents during the English Reformation, what did the thousands of female religious do? Where did they go? During the last twenty years scholars have begun to answer these questions. Historian Barbara Harris initiated a research project in the 1990s that studied how the dissolution of convents directly influenced contemporary women. Over the last fifteen years, however, the field has primarily focused on the English nuns in exile in France, Belgium and Portugal. These convents functioned as bodies of cultural production within both the post-Tridentine Catholic Church as well as the English mission. Furthermore, the ideas, texts and art produced by the nuns were not kept within the realm of the convent; they transcended enclosure and were infused into lay society. Consequently, the exiled nuns were significant players in the history of the English Catholic community during the seventeenth century. They actively participated in debates over religious authority as well as discussions of the identity of the early modern Catholic religion. The nuns also worked as political agents in the assistance of royalist networks in continental Europe during the English civil war when Charles II was living in exile in France and the Spanish Netherlands. Through the records of these events, historians are beginning to realize that the nuns played an active role within the secular community and helped to shape the Catholic community both in exile and in England. Finally, as participants in foreign European

36 Who Were the Nuns references the ongoing project that started in 2008 at Queen Mary University of London. It investigates the membership of the English convents in exile, 1598-1800. The project members include Dr. Caroline Bowden, Dr. James Kelly, Dr. Jan Broadway, Dr. David Horne, Dr. Katharine Keats-Rohan, and Dr. Michael Questier.
communities, English nuns found ways to adapt to new cultural norms and immersed themselves in local communities to develop networks of community support in order to make a place for themselves in their new landscape.

The history of the English nuns in exile brings two major fields of historical inquiry together: studies of the Catholic English community in the early modern period and studies of the impact of post-Tridentine reforms on female monasticism. The large body of work existing in both these fields provides a base for further explorations of the lives of the exiled English nuns in France, South Netherlands and Portugal. As a recently defined topic in historical studies, the body of scholarship specifically on the exiled nuns is much smaller. Most of the work done on these nuns is based on ideas of how their situation in exile influenced their identity, religion and daily activities. In initial examinations of the exiled nuns, historians have tended to focus on how the nuns maintained their national identity and how they participated in familial and political issues from across the channel. However, the works of Claire Walker, Caroline Bowden and Marie Louise-Coolahan demonstrate a new interest in the transmission of culture and customs between the nuns and the foreign communities in which they lived. These historians have been concerned with issues of establishment, identity and authority.

The history of the early modern English Catholic community was a predominant field of study throughout the 1970s and 1980s with extensive research done by world renowned historians such as John Bossy. John Bossy’s work, *The English Catholic Community* published in 1975, represents a large shift in the way historians approached the study of English Catholicism. Before Bossy, historians believed that the early modern English Catholic community was a continuation from the pre-Reformation Catholic community. In this way historians approached the Catholic community as if it was simply diminishing over time after the
Reformation. John Bossy sets out to counter these assumed notions and he argues that post-Reformation Catholicism was largely distinct from pre-Reformation Christianity. Bossy examines the English Catholic community as a non-conforming minority group within early modern England. Bossy argues that the history of the early modern Catholic community begins with the arrival of the missionary priests in 1570 from seminary school on the continent.37 This start date is generated by Bossy’s definition of the English Catholic community since he defines the community as Catholic if it had access to the service of a missionary priest.38

Bossy’s work, shaped by this definition, focuses on the English gentry as the main part of the English Catholic community throughout the seventeenth century. Bossy’s work, however, only discusses the English Catholic community within England as he argues that the experience in England was divorced from the Catholicism on the continent.39 It is important to note, however, that the English nuns in exile although immersed in the Catholicism on the continent, for the most part had grown up within the English Catholic community that Bossy studied. The exiled English nuns came from gentry families and were immersed in the politics and reforms surrounding the English Catholic community before they left. Therefore, the extensive research completed on the English Catholic community provides information about the nuns’ identity and the cultural and political forces that shaped the nuns’ actions. In fact, one of the main focuses for historians involved in the study of the exiled nuns is how the English nuns actively engaged in English politics.

Bossy’s work on the English Catholics sparked an interest in this topic amongst historians. A year after Bossy published his work on the English Catholic community, J.C.H.

Aveling published his book entitled *The Handle and the Axe*. Aveling agrees with Bossy’s thesis regarding the discontinuity between pre-Reformation Christianity and post-Reformation Catholicism and he continues to argue that modern English Catholicism was born in 1570. However, he also argues that the Catholic community’s longevity was due to large numbers of gentry converting in the seventeenth century, and, later on, to Irish Catholics coming over in the eighteenth century. For Aveling, English Catholicism was constantly changing; it was a community of converts who brought their own ideas into the religion. He argues that similar to traditional Christianity, English Catholicism was not a cohesive religion. Aveling also suggests the reason that there seemed to be a lack of dissent at the beginning of the Reformation was that the majority of the English people did not believe the actions of Henry VIII would change the fundamentals of their religion. Instead, he argues that the English people viewed it as “pruning of adiaphora, that is, the details of the church fixed by human convenience (the Papacy, shrines and religious houses).” Finally, unlike Bossy, Aveling discusses the exiled monastic communities. According to Aveling, by 1670 “medievalism” was dying in England; however, it artificially survived within the exiled convents.

Arnold Pritchard’s work on the Elizabethan Catholic loyalism published a few years later addressed similar ideas to Aveling. Pritchard continues the explanation of why more people did not outwardly reject the new Anglican Church or become part of the Catholic community at the beginning of the Elizabethan period. When discussing contemporary perceptions of the small community of English Catholics, he states that, “leaving the established church for a small sect

40 Aveling, “Handle and the Axe,” 357.
44 Aveling, “Handle and the Axe,” 34.
with celibate clergy and the supremacy of a far away pope felt like a bigger break with the past than changes in 1559.”  

Finally, Eamond Duffy also argues for a break in the English Catholic traditions. He argues that under the reign of Mary I, the Catholicism of the 1550s had absorbed the “positive elements” of the reforms implemented by Henry VIII and Edward VI and had therefore changed from the traditional Christianity that existed before the reformation. 

Historical analysis of the lives of early modern nuns during and after the Reformation began to appear in the 1970s. This rising interest in the roles of women during the Reformation correlated with an interest in gender history. Historians entering the field began to discredit the traditional Protestant narrative, that suggested that nuns were forced into the convents against their will as young girls and that the dissolution of monasteries during the reformation was an improvement to the lives of these women. By the 1980s, gender historians like Lyndal Roper and Merry Wiesner-Hanks argued that with the Reformation, women were forced back into a subservient position within the patriarchal social structure. They saw the Reformation as a negative change in the lives of women and this included the dissolution of convents. With a shift in focus to sources written by the nuns, rather than by Protestant reformers and ecclesiastics, historians began to highlight that many nuns had a positive affinity for cloistered life and that after the dissolution many nuns fought to stay in the convents. The debates about female monasticism in the 1980s led to a new view of the nuns as active agents within their society.
rather than passive members of a male-dominated religious hierarchy. Since then, scholars such as Cordula Wyhe and Silvia Evangelisiti have been able to launch the idea that nuns were active participants in and creators of early modern culture. These scholars look at how religious women produced their own manuscripts and spiritual guides, and also immersed themselves in the production of music and theatre. In this scholarship, convents are seen as prominent institutions of cultural production.

A discussion of the Council of Trent and the impositions it created with the decrees of clausura is necessary in understanding how nuns acted as active participants in early modern culture. In 1566, Pope Pius V enforced the claustration of professed nuns and tertiaries; this doctrine of enclosure maintained that after a woman professed she became dead to the world and therefore cut ties with kin and community. This decree of enclosure for religious women, which was embraced by lay society, has been linked to chastity and suggests that for early modern society the most important task for an unmarried woman, was to maintain her chastity and therefore her respectability. Therefore, the topic of claustration has become interesting to gender historians in their analysis of early modern gender norms. With regards to the actual lives of the nuns, rules of clausura changed the ways in which the nuns interacted with lay society as well as their value to society. Furthermore, it had a large economic impact on the nuns. Silvia Evangelisiti argues that enclosure increased the likelihood for poverty in the convents. Enclosure forced the nuns to withdraw from the public sight and therefore the communities could no longer participate or be present in activities in the cities and towns in the same way that would

47 Cordula Wyhe, Female Monasticism in Early Modern Europe: And Interdisciplinary view (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 3.
allow them to form direct bonds with the laity. Claire Walker explains that it prevented austere orders like the Poor Clares from begging which provided a large portion of their revenues. Furthermore, begging was also a way for the nuns to display their humility.\textsuperscript{49} Elizabeth Rapley also discusses how enclosure made it difficult for monastic communities to rely on the sales of their farm crops since they could no longer go to the markets with their produce. Moreover, enclosure forced the nuns to rely on the service of laymen to oversee the maintenance of their lands and tenets. These landlords were oftentimes absent and shorthanded the nuns of their profits.\textsuperscript{54}

Although the many restrictions that the legislation of the Council of Trent placed on the European convents are widely accepted by historians, many have begun to question how strict the bishops and nuns were about enclosure in practice. Recent studies have revealed that complete isolation was not a reality for religious women. Cordula Wyhe states that claustration was actually a “flexible schema” and each community manipulated enclosure to fulfil their needs.\textsuperscript{50}\textsuperscript{51} Jutta Sperling, in her work on Venetian nuns in the late Renaissance, argues that enclosure could never be entirely successful as there were several social, political and cultural ties between the nuns and lay society.\textsuperscript{52} For instance, in Venice the aristocracy actually had an expectation that the nuns open up their parlours to the public and hold social gatherings for aristocratic men, musicians, and even women of “dubious reputation.”\textsuperscript{53}

Moreover, Danielle Culpepper’s research on the Ursuline order and clausura, provides further example of how nuns manipulated enclosure in order to maintain their relationship with the laity. In her work on the Ursulines in Parma and Piacenza, Culpepper discusses how both convents were able to establish a routine that allowed the nuns to leave the convent in order to go to the local church on a weekly basis. This journey outside the convent walls became an important ritual; it allowed the convent to prove itself as an honourable and reputable institution in the community. These interactions also provided the female boarding students with the possibility to present themselves in a respectable way to potential husbands. For Culpepper this custom shows that religious women acknowledged their place as an institution within lay society. Moreover, the senior nuns’ awareness of the significance of this short journey illustrates a consciousness of the convent’s civic responsibilities. The superiors’ conscious decision to break enclosure reveals how abbesses were willing to prioritize their civic responsibility over their allegiance to the Church and its reforms.

Not only did the convents break enclosure in order to maintain traditional bonds with secular society, historians are beginning to realize that many convents did so in order to survive economically. In fact, a convent’s ability to follow enclosure was a sign of the monastic community’s wealth. Jutta Sperling asserts that only communities who could live off their revenues would be able to follow the rules of enclosure. Typically, the economic needs of the convents forced the nuns to interact with the outside world in order to bring in alternative revenue streams. Sharon T. Strocchia argues that in 1427, based on the nuns’ records of

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endowment income, three-quarters of the Florentine nuns lived below official living costs. This meant that for many poor convents the nuns had to become involved in manual labour and other forms of work in order to survive. Strocchia concludes that, “inadequate endowment revenues… indicate why, captured from an economic standpoint, Florentine nuns remained so fully immersed in urban life.”

Claire Walker’s research on the economic history of the English convents reveals that English nuns were also aware of their need to raise additional funds in order to survive financially. She argues that financial concerns were one of the main considerations in the community’s decision-making process. In order to make money, the nuns were required to do additional work outside of the divine office; this work included a combination of “needlework, hospitality, education and housework.” Since English monastic communities were in a competitive market with other convents, English as well as local, the English communities would have to open the lines of communication between the convent and secular society in order to attract patrons.

Within the field of early modern female monasticism, many historians have focused on the development of the so-called “active orders.” These missionary orders came to the forefront during the sixteenth century after the Protestant Reformation. With the threat of the spread of Protestantism, some religious men and women began to believe that the preservation of

58 Strocchia, “Nuns and Nunneries in Renaissance Florence,” 77.
60 Walker, “Mary and Martha,” 416.
61 Walker, “Martha and Mary,” 397.
Catholicism required more than a life of contemplation.⁶¹ Active orders sought to spread Catholicism by leaving the monasteries and engaging with the laity directly. Some examples of active female religious orders were Angela Merici’s Ursuline nuns in Italy who set up day schools and sought to provide young girls with a Catholic education. Later in the seventeenth century, Mary Ward’s Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary took it a step further and tried to emulate the missionary pursuit of the Jesuits. Laurence Lux-Sterritt’s research on the Ursulines and Mary Ward’s English ladies, as they tend to be called, emphasizes that maintaining an active apostolate was a sacrifice for the nuns. Lux-Sterritt’s work demonstrates the nuns’ adaptability and she argues that the move away from a contemplative life to a vita apostolica was very difficult as the nuns had to give up fulfilling their own spiritual perfection in order to help others. Lux-Sterritt labels these religious women as “self-abnegating nuns” as they denied their own happiness in order to save the souls of others.⁶² Furthermore, as Lux-Sterritt explains, as noncloistered women, the English ladies were viewed as problematic in the eyes of the Church since the free movement of their missionary work was not considered suitable to feminine nature. She asserts that the dissolution of the English ladies was due to their break with gender norms.⁶³ This illustrates the boundaries of what the early modern Church saw as acceptable and therefore the limitations put on the exiled nuns. Convents had to make sure that if their actions broke enclosure, they were not also seen as crossing the lines in regards to their role as women.

Amy Leonard’s work on German Dominican nuns in Protestant Strassburg provides an interesting comparison to the displaced and exiled English religious women. Similar to the English nuns, the German nuns living in Strassburg found themselves in a situation where they

did not have their traditional support system to rely on as access to local bishops and Catholic clergy were denied to them. These German nuns had to adapt to changes in governance as well as a new structure in which they became a civic institution as opposed to a religious house. In this way, Leonard’s work addresses questions about how early modern religious women dealt with issues of displacement, fostering identity, and adaptability. In her work, Leonard looks at how the nuns transformed their utility within the city landscape in order to provide a secular and practical purpose. Her research seeks to prove that these distinctly Catholic institutions were able to survive in Protestant Germany because they fulfilled a need within society that appealed to the council and the wealthy families of the city. Convents were able to negotiate their survival within Protestant states because of their new categorization as civic institutions for the education of young girls. With the transformation from religious to civic institutions, the convents were no longer under the control of the bishops but instead were protected and governed by the town’s magistrates. Leonard’s work reveals how nuns were able negotiate a new role within local communities that did not support their religious beliefs. Her research reveals that although the Dominican houses were under secular control by a Protestant government, they were able to find ways to maintain the convents as Catholic institutions. As daughters of powerful families, the nuns were in a strong position and they could influence the decisions of the magistrate. In fact, Leonard argues that the nuns were able to make sure their lives changed very little. Even decades after the Reformation, the Strasbourg nuns still upheld their main role within the city as

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spiritual intercessors for the laity who donated money for prayers.\textsuperscript{68} So interestingly enough, unlike the English Catholics, Leonard claims that the religious lives of these Catholic nuns in a Protestant region were characterized by continuity rather than change.

A similar discussion of how early modern women negotiated their own space and role in a foreign society can be found in recent scholarship on the lives of migratory women. Fiona Reid and Katherine Holden’s anthology entitled \textit{Women on the Move} looks at the role of migration in the lives of women during the early modern era, a time when “land was becoming increasingly enclosed” especially for women.\textsuperscript{69} They state that they hope that the anthology will present the ways in which migration acted as a liberating experience for women although it could also restrict and impose conservative gender roles on women.\textsuperscript{70} One of the main concepts discussed in scholarship on early modern exile is identity. Historians have discussed how the migratory women shaped their identity and how they presented a self-constructed identity to their host society. Raingard Esser divides the migratory women in two groups: exiles and immigrants. She states that some women remained exiles as they chose not to integrate into their host society.\textsuperscript{71} Indeed, Katy Gibbons’ work suggests that English Catholic lay women on the continent chose to present themselves as exiles in order to accentuate that they were suffering for their religion. Moreover, they presented themselves as leaving England in order to achieve “freedom of conscience.”\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{68} Leonard, “Nails in the Wall,” 105.  
\textsuperscript{69} Katherine Holden and Fiona Reid, \textit{Women on the Move: Refugees, Migration and Exile} (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 2.  
\textsuperscript{70} Holden and Reid, “Women on the Move,” 6.  
\textsuperscript{71} Esser, “Out of Sight and on the Margins,” 11.  
The decision of the English nuns to identify as exiles provides insight into their relationship with both England and their host towns. As religious communities the convents made sure that they maintained their English identity and were seen as distinctly English institutions. However, due to numerous circumstances the nuns found that they were required to interact and form relationships with their host town. Even if they had a close relationship with the local towns, the nuns continued to view themselves as exiles as they never entirely integrated into the local towns, as will be seen throughout the upcoming chapters. The nuns’ belief that they would be able to return to England eventually, as well as their belief that their primary purpose was to serve the English mission shaped their decision to uphold their identity as exiles.

Virginia Bainbridge has studied the English nuns’ self-perception as exiles. Her work looks at the text *History of Syon’s Wanderings* written by the Brigettine nuns of Syon. The Brigettine nuns were the only English female religious community that had stayed together after the dissolution in 1539. They moved to Flanders shortly after the dissolution; however, they did not establish their own monastery and lived a nomadic life throughout the sixteenth century. The English Brigettine nuns compared their experiences as religious refugees to the biblical stories of the people of Israel. Bainbridge analyzes how the nuns identified themselves as God’s chosen people in order to imbue themselves with power and strength as well as to give significance to their struggles. Through their history the nuns accentuated the supernatural guidance that God had blessed them within their dreams and visions. In this way, the nuns took their history of suffering and vulnerability and altered it in order to emphasize their close and mystical

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74 Bainbridge, “Propaganda and the Supernatural,” 32.
75 Bainbridge, “Propaganda and the Supernatural,” 32.
relationship with God. By presenting themselves as God’s chosen people, the nuns underlined the spiritual strength that they garnered from their suffering, which brought them closer to God. This relationship would then enhance their role as mediators of the divine.  

In order to examine the impact that the exile had on the English nuns, several scholars have examined how the nuns were able to hold on to their national identity and culture. This emphasis on national identity has led to a focus on the nuns’ relationships and interactions with the Catholic community in England. Other elements that made up the nuns’ identity have largely been overlooked. Claire Walker claims that although the convents identified as English, their exile had fundamentally changed their relationship with English culture, church, and state.  

She argues that the nuns’ decision to join a convent on the continent was a rejection of the English church, state and society that had become distinctly Protestant. This rejection of the Protestant English society created a tension for the religious communities since, as Walker states, they still had a “quintessentially English outlook.” This outlook comes from the nuns’ belief in their role as active participants within the English mission. They believed the convents created a space for English Catholic women to leave home and continue to follow the Catholic religion while they waited for the return of Catholicism to England. 

Nancy Warren examines the tactics English nuns used in order to preserve their culture. Her work on the Brigittines of Syon Abbey looks at how the nomadic English community tried to maintain their national identity while they lived in Flemish monasteries. She states that in order to preserve their identity and culture, the nuns divided the monastery into separate sections.
for the English nuns and the Flemish nuns. Other scholars have focused on the literature that was read and translated by the nuns in order to address how the nuns tried to preserve their national identity. Marie-Louise Coolahan argues that the linguistic alienation that the nuns felt within the Flemish monasteries motivated the nuns to maintain their English heritage. She explains that in order to compensate for this alienation, the nuns translated their manuscripts in English as a way to “articulate their English identity.” Caroline Bowden’s work on the writing practices of the English nuns shows that translation of Flemish and French texts into English also helped the nuns hold onto a collective identity within the convent as the English nuns bonded over the readings.

More recently, historians have focused their attention on how the English nuns still participated in English politics and society despite their position as exiles. They have used manuscripts, newsletters, and personal letters to analyze how English nuns engaged in English news and politics. In Jenna Lay’s work on the religious instructional manuscripts written by Barbara Constable, Lay explains that manuscripts like these ones were intended to be circulated outside of the convent to Catholic families in England. In her manuscripts, Constable criticises religious practice and in particular she critiques post-Tridentine scandals. Therefore, Lay argues, Barbara Constable’s manuscripts illustrate how nuns were able to engage in an

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intellectual sphere outside of the convent and would debate religious politics. James Kelly’s work looks further into the English nuns’ involvement in the politics of England. He argues that nuns were actively engaged in religious politics before they professed and they continued to be informed and active in English politics even after. His research on convent recruitment reveals that the choice of which convent a Catholic family would send their daughter to was a highly politicized decision. His research on recruitment of nuns in Essex, for example, has shown that many English families chose convents that were affiliated with the Jesuit community. This conscious decision made by many Catholic noble families was representative of a larger issue in the English Catholic society. It exhibited the divide in the Catholic mission between those who supported Jesuit priests and those that supported secular parish priests. Kelly concludes that if the choice of convent was such a politicized process, then so was the continued life within the convent.

Claire Walker’s work on Abbess Mary Knatchbull shows that some nuns actually played key roles in English politics and were participants in royalist circles surrounding Charles II who was in exile in France and the Spanish Netherlands during the civil war. Walker examines the role Knatchbull played as a distributor of royalist information. Throughout the civil war many Catholic families that had sided with Charles I left England and moved to Catholic countries on the continent. As a result, there was an extensive network of English Catholics living in France and the Spanish Netherlands by the 1640s. The exiled convents were one element of these networks. Mary Knatchbull, as the Abbess of Ghent’s Benedictine order, had access to printed

84 Lay, “English Nun’s Authority,” 105.
“newsbooks” from England that allowed her to keep up with local politics. Furthermore, as a woman from a reputable family, it would be assumed that Knatchbull was of good moral character and could be trusted to participate in the transmission of news in these networks. She acted as a conveyor of royalist mail between England and the continent and communicated with Charles II’s Lord Chancellor who was in exile and monitored the security of Charles II’s mail while he was on the continent. Walker uses Knatchbull as an example of the agency that nuns were able to acquire due to the seventeenth century’s “news revolution.” She states that print culture empowered religious women to express their views during times of religious and political uncertainty. With access to new sources involving the exiled nuns, historians are just beginning to realize the political roles these nuns played in the struggles that were taking place in England. With a sense of urgency driving their actions, these monastic women took it upon themselves to take part in the larger English mission and to try to shape it according to their own ideas.

In her discussion of religious women’s writing and identity, Marie-Louise Coolahan stated that “a community of women religious is always transnational: the women belong firstly to the order, and then to their nation.” Whether this is true for the exiled English nuns is quite debatable as their concern for the preservation the English Catholic mission may have altered their priorities. However, it introduces an interesting idea about the transnationality of female monasticism. Historical research thus far has made it clear that convents were culturally ingrained into the communities in which they lived as well as in the English community that they lived in.

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left. However, the actual exchange between the nuns and the local communities is only briefly mentioned by a few scholars. Claire Walker asserts that the English nuns had to maintain a relationship with the local laity because of their economic needs as many houses were dependent on local charity and lay piety. Walker’s important work on the English nuns suggests that nuns founded a relationship with the local laity based on “functional reciprocity.” This meant that the nuns would receive patronage from local gentry and wealthy families in exchange for prayer. For Walker, this relationship, based on an exchange of services, led the English nuns to become part of the “local landscape of piety.” Through this relationship a wide diversity of social exchanges occurred between the two distinct communities, religious and secular. These interactions influenced how the nuns structured their lives and, therefore, the English religious communities would go on to establish a distinct culture separate from the English culture from which they came.

Caroline Bowden has also recently begun looking into the role of English convents as cultural centres for the towns in which they lived. She argues, “although their English identity was of central importance to the nuns, their religious identity cut them off from mainstream English culture, encouraging them to locate themselves within the cultural framework of their immediate surroundings.” Her work examines how the English convents as artistic and intellectual centres would have absorbed local artistic traditions as well as disseminated the customs that they had acquired in their previous life in England. Her research on English

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94 Caroline Bowden, “Patronage and Practice: Assessing the Significance of the English Convents as Cultural Centres in Flanders in the Seventeenth Century,” English Studies 92, no.5 (2011), 485.
95 Bowden, “Patronage and Practice,” 483-84.
convents in Flanders, for example, reveals the many ways in which the convents absorbed Flemish culture. She argues that from their entrance into their new country the nuns experienced cultural exchange as their newly built convents were constructed by local architects and therefore reference local styles rather than English ones. Convents would also have local musicians perform the divine offices. Through these performances the musicians would introduce the nuns to local music. One of Bowden’s more significant contributions is her discussion of the convent’s chapel as a liminal space, as the English nuns attended the mass at the same time as the local laity. Although the nuns were invisible to the laity since there was a physical divider between the two groups, both groups could hear each other’s participation in mass. The chapel was, therefore, a place for significant interaction between the nuns and laity. Furthermore, chapels were a place where the nuns could display the gifts donated by local families. Bowden’s research on the convents’ benefactors’ account books reveals that most donations of money, art, and other gifts were specifically given with the intention that they be used in the chapel. In this way, the nuns would be able to show their appreciation through their display of the donations.

Scholars such as Jenna Lay have also begun to look at the international exchange of ideas in terms of nuns’ writing. She states that many of the works written or translated by nuns were intended to be published and sent to other convents. For instance, the translations of the Benedictine rule by the Benedictine nuns in Cambrai, were filled with commentary and other spiritual texts. These translations would be sent to other Benedictine abbeys across Europe uniting women with shared ideas and beliefs. Caroline Bowden discusses this exchange of

96 Bowden, “Patronage and Practice,” 486.
97 Bowden, “Patronage and Practice,” 483.
98 Bowden, “Patronage and Practice,” 487.
literature, between the English nuns and the local towns. She states that many of the liturgical books for the convents were purchased within the locality. A liturgical book would be written in Latin and so it did not require new editions or English translations for the nuns. This meant the nuns could purchase the books locally out of convenience. In addition to this, Bowden discusses how the English nuns were also exposed to trans-national literature; English convents had French books in their libraries that the nuns had access to. Finally, she adds that the English nuns were also actively involved in the local publishing industry as they worked as translators.

Early modern English nuns’ immersion into new cultures with different social customs and languages needs to be examined further. The culture created and nurtured within the distinct space of the convent can provide a better understanding of early modern European cultural exchange in a time when exploration and conquest were at the forefront. The struggles experienced by the exiled communities united the nuns and allowed them to create a unified identity focused on their role as English Catholics working together for the conversion of England. Research has come to reveal the important role played by nuns in the Catholic mission, a role that has previously been ignored by prominent scholars like John Bossy. The nuns’ distance from England allowed historians to view them as peripheral to the broader topic of early modern Catholicism. However, it is clear that the interactions between the nuns within the convent actually represent and illuminate trends occurring across Europe. The upcoming chapters will investigate how the exiled English nuns developed relationships with their local towns, specifically the local gentry. This thesis reveals that the nuns’ spiritual labour did more than

100 Bowden, “Patronage and Practice,” 490.
106 Bowden, “Distribution of tyme,” 100.
101 Bowden, “Patronage and Practice,” 491.
support the English mission. The local lay people expected their spiritual needs to be fulfilled by the English nuns. This expectation created mutually receptive relationships that relied on the exchange of intercessory prayers for temporal goods. An analysis of these relationships illuminates the agency and adaptability possessed by early modern nuns and reveals how they shaped and created their own space of worship by actively engaging in this exchange.

Chapter 2 Migration, Foundations and the Establishment of Functional Reciprocity

On November 14, 1599, Jean Bartley was elected the first abbess of a distinctly English convent in Brussels. On that day, eight English women formally offered to be her subjects. This ceremony marked the beginning of the establishment of English convents across France and the Spanish Netherlands. A hundred years later there were twenty-two English convents in Europe. The remarkable establishment of so many foreign monastic houses shows that the English nuns were largely welcomed within these countries and able to find a way to survive in exile. The process of establishment, however, was not easy; the nuns’ struggles were numerous and diverse and they were all accentuated by the nuns’ dislocation from England. The seventeenth century was a tumultuous period in England; the warfare and religious strife made the nuns’ families in England an unreliable source of support. Furthermore, the many urgent needs and unforeseen difficulties made the English nuns realize that they could not rely solely on the support of the English Catholic community. They became aware of their need to find allies within a closer proximity. The hardships that occurred during the establishment of the English convents made it apparent to the exiled nuns that in order to survive they would have to adapt to their new circumstances and depend on the support of the local town, church, and government.
Indeed, their life in exile changed the English nuns’ relationship with the secular world. The nuns, who were typically of noble birth, were removed from their powerful families, which heightened their exposure to an array of political and ecclesiastical manipulation. It made the nuns much more dependent on the help and charity of others. For these women, the vulnerability that came with living in exile forced them to realize that they needed to foster a relationship with people from the local community as these were people they could form a union with. With this union the nuns hoped they would get support with their immediate hardships. The largest struggle for the nuns, however, was one of financial insecurity. Their financial stress influenced their interactions with local towns and nobility as they became reliant on them for monetary support. In return for the temporal support, the exiled nuns tried to assist the townspeople with their spiritual needs. This chapter will examine how the nuns developed a close relationship and earned the trust of the local laity in order for their convent to become a body of spiritual support for the town.

The Benedictine house in Brussels was the first English convent to be founded in continental Europe in 1598. Over the next eighty years there would be a total of twenty-two contemplative English houses established in France, the Spanish Netherlands and Portugal. Mary Percy was the key figure in implementing the foundation of this distinctly English convent. Percy was the daughter of the Earl of Northumberland. She had fled England with several other noble families a year earlier due to the persecution of Catholics and moved to Brussels. While living in Brussels amongst other noble English women, Percy began planning the creation of a convent.

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102 Although the Benedictine house in Brussels was founded in 1598 it was not until a year later that the Abbess was elected and the English women could profess.
specifically for English women. Previously, English women had moved to Europe to profess in French convents. Although these women seemed to be welcomed in the convents, the cultural and especially linguistic divide made the transition for the English women difficult. Furthermore, the women felt cut off from the English mission and desired to play a larger role in the reinstatement of Catholicism in England. These convents, however, were only seen as a temporary solution for English women as they still believed they would move back to England.  

Fortunately, for Percy and other English women involved in the establishment of English convents, their vision for the English mission in regards to female monasticism aligned perfectly with the desires of the Archduke Albert VII in Brussels. Near the end of the sixteenth century, Albert had become involved in the drive for the re-Catholicization of southern Netherlands. During this time he had been recruiting monastic orders to the area in the hopes that it would establish a post-Tridentine Catholic society. Naturally, Albert and his Duchess, the Infanta of Spain, took an interest in Mary Percy’s plans to establish an English Convent in continental Europe. The support of these foreign powers was necessary in order to attain the approval and funding that Percy needed to purchase the convent. Beginning in 1597, with the assistance of a Jesuit, Father Holt, Percy received the approval to build a new convent from the pope, the local bishop, and from Robert Parsons, the head of the English mission. The need for the Archduke’s support shows clearly that although these institutions were to be vessels of support for the English Catholic community they had to depend on the support of the foreign powers in order to survive.

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105 Bowden, “Patronage and Practice,” 484.
Similar to the Brussels’ Benedictine convent, the Ghent filiation that broke off in 1624 was financed by Philip of Spain. Philip shared Albert VII’s goal to bring back Catholicism. In this way, the convents were not necessarily founded due to concerns with the English mission but rather as a way for European Catholic rulers to support the Catholic Reformation. Powerful ecclesiastics were also behind the funding of the convents. In 1665, the Bishop of Ypres demanded that Mary Knatchbull and the Ghent community establish another filiation in Ypres. The bishop also announced that he would be liberal with his financial contributions to the house.

In addition to foreign support, the English Catholic community also financed the convents. The Benedictine filiation in Cambrai offers an example of this. In 1623 Father Rosendus Barlow, president of the English Benedictines and superior of the house of Douai, requested permission from the Bishop of Macklin and Mary Percy to found a Benedictine filiation in Cambrai. English nobility made up a large majority of the English Catholic community of the seventeenth century. These noble families wanted to preserve the Catholic tradition by sending their children across the Channel into Catholic Europe for their education. This custom started with boy schools in Spain in the mid-sixteenth century. By 1598 with the construction of the convent in Brussels, a Catholic education became a possibility for wealthy girls. The desire for a Catholic education of the nobilities’ daughters and the re-Catholization of the Netherlands meant that at the beginning of the seventeenth century there were many

powerful and wealthy families looking to support the foundation of English convents throughout Catholic Europe. Noble families subsequently funded several convents between 1598 and 1670.

The patronage of powerful nobility and ecclesiastics offered the nuns great assistance in their pursuit to establish religious houses. However, the original funding was often not enough for the construction and maintenance of religious houses and many monastic communities found themselves in a financial deficit. It became obvious that there would be a need for additional financial backing as expenses built up very quickly during the migration process. The cost of transportation, food and accommodation was greater than the amount of money that many communities had left with. For instance, 200 pounds sterling were given to the Franciscan nuns when they left Nieuwpoort. However, by the time they arrived in Paris they were left with only 100 pistoles\textsuperscript{110} which was equivalent to 80 pounds.\textsuperscript{111} In order to acquire funds during the process of migration representatives of the convents would have to go out into the towns and seek out local charities in the form of money, food or transportation services. For the most part, the nuns were not the ones directly engaging with the townspeople; communication with people outside the convent was the role of the priests and 
tourières. Many of these priests that accompanied the English communities were Jesuits coming from the college of Douai. However, there were also secular English priests involved. The 
tourières, who also sought out the help of local townspeople, were monastic women that were not confined by the rules of enclosure and could therefore leave the convent; their major role was to seek out charities from the local towns. These members of the community spent their time acquiring support for the communities

\textsuperscript{110} A pistole refers to a Spanish gold coin that was commonly used in the Spanish Netherlands. However, the Conceptionist community continued to use it after their establishment in Paris. According to a report from 1702 sent to the High Treasurer of England from the Mint Office a pistole was exchanged at a 1: 1.25 rate to pounds sterling and was of almost equivalent value to the gold coin in France, the Louis d’or.

\textsuperscript{111} “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 7, 9.
through their interactions with local nobility, local abbesses and government officials. While tourières typically went out into the town to seek out alms from local townspeople, the priests were the ones who met with dignitaries and powerful people within the towns and promoted the good reputation of the convent and the English cause. The nuns relied heavily on the work of these priests to initiate relationships between reputable officials and their community. From the beginning of the process of establishment, the nuns needed to have allegiances with highly respectable people in order to create an image of respectability and prestige for their monastic community so that they could gain support for their establishment as well as attain the trust and acceptance of the local laity.

Religious communities setting out to establish filiations or sister houses were especially vulnerable to financial crises. Thirteen of the twenty-two English convents were filiations. Filiations allowed the religious sisters to establish other houses under the same order and rule in diverse areas while still maintaining a connection and allegiance with their mother house. For example, the houses of Brussels and Ghent had a “religious union and charity for each other,” which meant that they would offer each other support in times of hardship. It also meant that lines of communication were strong between the two houses. Additionally, another reason for the significantly high portions of filiations was a lack of funds. In the later decades of the seventeenth century convents were overpopulated and underfunded as seen with the Benedictine of Pointoise who in 1667 only made 1,500 pounds sterling in rent, which had to cover the living costs of a community of 52 people. These convents could no longer afford to support all the nuns and communities had to separate and establish filiations. Women who left these poverty-stricken convents faced the hardest challenges as they had nothing financial to contribute to a new house.

Another large hurdle was that nuns leaving their mother house in order to establish filiations were not able to take their pensions with them to their new establishment. The houses that the nuns were leaving could not afford to have additional funds taken away from them as they were already typically strained financially. Instead, these women were sent out with a portion of money allotted by the abbess. Unless the filiations had the financial support of a patron, nuns establishing a sister house left with very little money. These sisters arrived impoverished in a new city that they were unfamiliar with and had no connections to. In fact, even convents with wealthy patrons had difficulty establishing sister houses. For example, when the Benedictines set up a filiation in Ghent, they only brought with them a bit of furniture and some items for their church.\footnote{Neville, "Abbess Neville's Annals," 19.} According to the annals of the Benedictine communities written by Lady Abbess Anne Neville, the sisters were attempting to establish a house “without one penny in their pockets.”\footnote{Neville, "Abbess Neville's Annals," 19.} Even with support from the king of Spain they were already 1,500 florins in debt before the nuns had even entered Ghent.\footnote{Neville, "Abbess Neville's Annals," 24.}

For the English nuns, the establishment of a new religious house was not only expensive it was also often very dangerous and placed the nuns in a vulnerable position. As exiles, the nuns did not have the knowledge of the language or the protection of their powerful families in England. In 1644, fifteen Poor Clares from the house of Gravelines left to establish a filiation in Rouen. This was the third filiation for the Poor Clares and was due to an overcrowding within the convent in Gravelines. These fifteen women feared their vulnerable position in their travels. Furthermore, they were concerned that Anne Wood, their tourière, was the only one who could
interact with the laity to seek out charities. They lamented the fact that there were no men to accompany them. Without a priest, the community would not have a representative to meet with local officials and dignitaries to procure a good reputation for the community. Moreover, it made getting approval for establishment more difficult as priests were typically the ones to write to Rome and the local bishops to get permission to establish new houses. These concerns motivated a Jesuit priest, Father Sillard, to join the Poor Clares on their journey.

Another main concern for the nuns was physical safety. The concern the English nuns of Nieuwpoort had for their physical protection was well warranted as they had to travel through many cities immersed in warfare during the Franco-Spanish war (1635-1659). The sisters fled Nieuwpoort in 1658 at the time of the Battle of Dunes when armies of the English Commonwealth, France, and Spain engaged in open combat causing destruction to the areas around them. The Franco-Spanish war had a devastating impact on the convent as Nieuwpoort had become impoverished and the convent’s farm was destroyed by English and French troops. The destruction of the nuns’ farm by the soldiers caused the nuns great distress as the farm was a large portion of the community’s livelihood. In addition, a lack of financial support from the laity put the nuns in a desperate situation as they could no longer afford for all of the sisters to stay there. The community had to get the permission of Reverend Father Peter Joseph Cape, who was the Guardian of the English seminary in Douai, to divide the convent so that

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120 “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 7.
three sickly women could go back to England and seven women could be sent out to France.  

They believed the establishment of a sister house in France would improve their conditions as the convent in Nieuwpoort was overcrowded with forty-eight women living within the house with barely any provisions. Still the migration to France in 1658 was risky and dangerous. They had to travel through war-torn areas steeped in anti-Catholic sentiments. These conditions were especially dangerous when the nuns travelled through Holland. During that portion of their journey, the nuns had to wear secular garments and rely on a lay brother to secure their transportation. Throughout their writings the nuns mourn the suffering that the interactions with the secular world caused them. They took solace, however, from their belief that they were suffering for the love of God and the English mission. Throughout their daily records the nuns emphasized the sacrifices and compromises they were making in order to fulfil their larger mission. The documentation of these sacrifices is significant as it reveals ways in which the nuns adapted to their circumstances and how they tried to understand their new position in exile.

The English sisters travelling through France did not have to go through the same physical hardship experienced in the Netherlands. The ability to travel through a Catholic country meant that the nuns were able to stay in religious houses during their migration period. The Poor Clares’ convent in Gravelines was near the border of the Spanish Netherlands and France and was only a day’s journey away from Calais. This meant the Poor Clares were able to stay in a Benedictine convent in Calais on the first night of their migration instead of staying in secular housing. The Poor Clares hoping to settle in Rouen, organized their journey in a way that

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121 “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 7.  
123 “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 8.  
124 “Chronicle of Rouen,” 27.
allowed them to stay with French and English convents along the way. The nuns did not discriminate based on order or nationality and for the most part were open to staying with any house that was willing to host them. Marie-Louise Coolahan in her work on the English nuns and their national identity states that “monastic women were always transnational because the order came before the nation.” In this way, it makes sense that these English nuns would not mind relying on the services of their French sisters. However, the fact that they also stayed in houses of differing orders signifies to Coolahan that the nuns prioritized their own individual identity over their order. They put the immediate needs of their house over their order’s rule. They also prioritized their survival and their success in the establishment of their house over their loyalty to their order and rule. This might be a result of the dangers that the exiled English nuns were exposed to which made them focus on their survival. The English nuns were willing to stay with various orders as they were travelling long distances and were desperate to find religious houses that were willing to host them without expense.

In general, the European convents were very welcoming and generous in their treatment of the English sisters. At a bare minimum, the French communities provided the English nuns with food, sleeping arrangements, and access to masses. However, most did more than this and tried to help the English nuns out with prominent connections for later in their journey. For example, throughout their stay in French convents, the Poor Clares were able to meet several powerful members of French society. On their first night with the French Benedictines in Calais, the Poor Clares had dinner with the Governor of Calais. The governor offered them his assistance in obtaining transportation. The abbess also put them in contact with a local townsman who would help them get through the next leg of their journey. The meeting with the Governor of

Calais reveals that the local powers had an interest in the English nuns. Both the Governor’s and the French communities’ effort to support the nuns showed that they valued their presence and saw the nuns as women of respectability who were worth creating alliances with. Furthermore, in Montreuil, the Benedictine abbess gave the Poor Clares a relic of Saint Austrebertha, a seventh-century saint that the community had based their reforms on and who was also the patron saint for Montreuil. This was a significant gesture for the Benedictine abbess; the chronicle emphasizes the gesture as it shows how important the visits of the English nuns were to the French communities and gave the English nuns greater prestige. Furthermore, each French abbess also provided the Poor Clares with letters of recommendation to allow them to stay in other French convents as well as gain access to the charity of local townspeople, who brought provisions such as sweet meats and other alms.

In addition to aiding the English nuns during their journeys, the French religious communities offered them a lot of assistance in the process of establishment. When Mary Percy and Father Holt were planning the foundation of the Brussels convent, they asked for the help of Jean Bartley, an English nun who had left England to profess in a French monastery in Reims. Bartley offered to assist in the establishment. In addition to Bartley, Mother Noëlle and two French nuns offered to go to Brussels and help get the English women settled in. The help provided by Mother Noëlle and the two French nuns reveals the transnational support system between monastic These transnational allegiances fostered an atmosphere of generosity in spite of the differences in language, social customs and religious reforms. The Poor Clares noted

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differences in religious practice during their stay with the Benedictines in Montreuil. The chronicle points out a difference in customs pertaining to food as the Benedictines served three courses—something that was not done by the austere order of the Poor Clares. The communities also had different reforms regarding music; the chronicle mentions that although the Benedictines were “strict and reformed…they still retained song in music”. This was a practice that the Poor Clares did not keep. However, despite these differences, the French communities’ support for the English mission reveals their interest in the re-institution of Catholicism across Europe.

The physical and financial challenge of travelling to a new town was just the beginning of the long and stressful task of establishing an English monastery in a foreign town. Once arriving in the new towns, these English nuns had to get the consent of the local government, church and community in order to begin constructing their convent. When Mary Percy sent a request to Rome in 1598 to start the construction of the convent in Brussels, Pope Clement VIII, of twenty-two English convents, accepted the request with the stipulation that the house remain under the obedience of “ordinary” clergy. However, even with the acceptance of the pope as well as the archduke and duchess, their position was not stable. After their establishment in Brussels, the bishop threatened to sell the house and have the community dispersed to other monasteries. This rejection shocked the nuns; however, Charles Manners, an English Jesuit priest assisting the religious community, visited with the bishop and restored the relationship. Unfortunately, for the English nuns, disputes with local bishops were a problem for several of the

130 “Chronicle of Rouen,” 10.
English communities and they regularly had to rely on priests to defend their communities. In this way, the relationship with the local community provided the nuns a source of support and encouragement as well as hurdles and rejection.

As monastic communities in exile, the English nuns were intruding on already well-established parishes and monastic houses. They were foreign religious bodies with different customs, language and traditions. Furthermore, the orders maintained distinctly English identities. This seemed to be a problem especially in France where the Catholic Church had maintained its strength through the Reformation. Many French bishops were threatened by the English nuns intruding into their jurisdiction. Some bishops even refused the English nuns entrance into their cities. The harsh reaction of some of the bishops towards the English nuns appears to come from their sense of uncertainty over their role in caring for the convents and in how English religious institutions would fit within the social and religious landscape of French and Flemish dioceses.

A concern many bishops had with the arrival of English nuns was that they would be a burden on the town. They worried that it would become the responsibility of the local church and town to save the convents from financial ruin. In 1652, after a grant had been procured for the establishment of a Benedictine house in Boulogne, five women arrived at the town. Upon their arrival a command from the bishop was brought to them that stated, “that they sho[u]ld not enter [that] town, under excommunication.”\textsuperscript{134} The priest travelling with the nuns met with the bishop and the bishop addressed his concerns about the nuns becoming a strain on the town. However, the priest explained that the community had been endowed with money and would be able to

\textsuperscript{134} Neville, "Abbess Neville's Annals," 38.
support themselves. With this information about financial support in mind, the bishop permitted
the English sisters to enter the town as long as they did so privately and only attended an early
mass. After this the nuns still struggled daily. It was only until when 2,000 pistoles were sent
to the community by an English lord, that they could begin to establish their religious
community. With this financial support, the Bishop of Boulogne allowed the nuns to elect an
abbess.145

Other bishops took issue with the specific monastic orders that the communities followed. For
instance, when the sisters of the Third Order Franciscans fled Nieuwpoort they had originally
intended on settling in Orléans. However, after staying there for three weeks they found out
that the bishop was “very advers[e] to their remaining there.”136 With this the nuns were forced to go
back to Paris. In Paris they rented a baker’s house. The Bishop of Paris did not acknowledge the
community until September of the next year, when Father Angelus, the English provincial of the
Third Order Franciscans, came to Paris. The Bishop of Paris told Father
Angelus that he would not let in any religious house of their order into Paris.137 Father Angelus
tried to get permission for the women to settle in the suburbs of St. Germain as he knew that the
order was permitted there. However, after six weeks of trying to befriend local church officials,
he still had no success in attaining permission for the house.138 The nuns were not able to leave
their original house until April of 1660, two years later when they moved to the suburb of St.
Anthony where their order was known to be accepted.149 Even after moving, the nuns still did not

136 "Diary of the Blue Nuns," 9. The rejection of the Franciscan order by the Bishop of Paris likely has to do with his
antagonism towards mendicant orders.
137 "Diary of the Blue Nuns," 10.
149 "Diary of the Blue Nuns," 11.
have the support of the Bishop of Paris. Not having the bishop’s support put the nuns in a very vulnerable position as they knew they would need his protection and connections in the future. So in 1661, with the support of the Bishop of Paris and Provincial Father Angelus, the convent wrote to Rome to get permission to change from the Third Order of St. Francis to the rule of the Immaculate Conception of our Blessed Lady.¹³⁹ With this transformation, the nuns became known as the “Blue Nuns of Paris.”

The English nuns’ decision to prioritize the demands of the local bishop addresses an interesting question about who the nuns owed their obedience to. The question is whether their affinity was primarily with their order or with the survival of the English mission. Marie-Louise Coolahan argues that the nuns prioritized their own identity as English exiles over any order or house.¹⁴⁰ Amy Leonard’s work also addresses this shift away from strict loyalty to the order as the main priority. In her book Nails in the Wall, Leonard discusses the survival of Catholic nuns in Protestant Germany; she argues that German nuns were willing to adapt their religion to the expectations of the city they lived in because they knew the convent’s best chance of survival depended on allegiance to the city council rather than the order.¹⁴¹ The English nuns’ position in exile put them in a similar situation; they had to decide what was more important: their allegiance to their order or their survival in exile. The diary of the Blue Nuns of Paris reveals that the nuns believed their survival was an integral part of the longevity of the English Catholic community as it provided a Catholic education to young girls from families of the Catholic

¹³⁹ “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 12.
nobility. Their allegiance to the mission rather than the order motivated the community to transform their order so they could be better accepted and supported by the local ecclesiastics.

Dependence on the support of local ecclesiastics allowed local bishops to mould the English convents. The English nuns accepted their role under the control of the continental European bishops and knew they had to work with them in order to succeed and become a reputable institution of spirituality. To create a good reputation for the convent, the nuns needed to show the laity that they were able to uphold their spiritual perfection by living chaste lives of poverty, humility and obedience. In order to do this, they had to maintain strict observance of their rule and respect the authority of the local bishop. As exiles, the nuns had to follow the regulations of the local bishops; these regulations also influenced how the nuns integrated with the lay community. The Poor Clares in Rouen, while living in their temporary housing, had to get permission from the bishop in order to have a priest says mass in their house. In 1667 the Conceptionist nuns in Paris they had to get permission from the bishop to receive the sacrament every Friday before mass and say benediction before mass and at night. However, the English nuns did not always accept the local bishops’ control. For example, during the election of a new abbess for the Ghent Benedictine community, the nuns accused the local bishop of intruding in the electoral process as he wanted to choose the interpreter that would assist him in the election process. However, the nuns knew they had the right to elect two religious men that would assist the bishop. Not wanting the election of the new abbess to be biased by the preferences of the

142 Caroline Bowden, “Community Space and Cultural Transmission Formation and Schooling in English Enclosed Convents in the Seventeenth Century,” History of Education 34, no.4 (July 2005), 381.
143 “Chronicle of Rouen,” 23.
144 “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 18.
bishop, the Benedictine nuns stood up to the bishop for their right to elect their representatives. In the end the nuns were successful in attaining their own representation. This dispute between the convent and the bishop shows that although the nuns knew they had to follow the local bishops they were not always passive subjects and sometimes engaged with the bishops to assert authority over their house.

The English nuns also had to seek out acceptance from local governments. Although many townspeople were supportive of the new English convents and thought that they would rejuvenate the spiritual health of their town, some members of the local government did not like the idea of foreign groups encroaching on their towns. The Bishop of Boulogne as well as several government officials also expressed a fear that the English convents would become a financial burden. The Poor Clares faced this issue when they attempted to set up a sister house in Rouen. By 1650, the Poor Clares had lived in Rouen for six years. They had lived in a small rented house during the six years in order to raise enough money to begin the construction of the convent. During this time they had established themselves within the town and garnered a lot of support from the townspeople. However, when they tried to apply to build their convent their petition to the town council was rejected. The city’s president disliked the English monastic community as he feared they would be a financial burden on the town and rejected the request for the foundation even though the nuns had been granted permission by the king and archbishop. In order to get permission to begin construction, the nuns had to wait to present their petition when the president was out of town.

146 “Chronicle of Rouen,” 41.  
147 “Chronicle of Rouen,” 41.
During the establishment of these convents, the English nuns faced numerous challenges and were forced to change their way of life in order to adapt. These rejections, however, represent a small amount of the interactions that the English nuns had upon their arrival. In general, it seems that the English nuns were well received by the local lay communities in which they integrated. Many saw the nuns as a good thing for the towns as they believed the nuns could improve the town’s spiritual well-being through their labours of prayer. When the first eight English women received their habits in Brussels in 1599, the Archduke Albertus, Duchess Isabella Clara Eugenia, and the Chief of the town of Brussels attended the ceremony. Their attendance showed the significance of the event for their city. The English nuns symbolized the re-Catholization of the city and a shift back to a way of life before the Reformation. This excitement is seen again a year later, in 1600, when the city had a celebration for the profession of the same eight women. All the city’s princes and magistrates attended the event. According to Anne Neville, those in attendance were “expressing great joy, as believing [that] by [this] monastery of holy virgins, dedicated to Almighty God they and the city should receive many blessings.” The English nuns thus symbolized the spiritual healing of the town.

Claire Walker’s work on the early modern English nuns discusses how dislocation from England affected the nuns. She argues that the English nuns eventually incorporated themselves into networks of local lay piety within the continental European towns. She states that the nuns did this through a process of “functional reciprocity.”

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between monastery and town goes back to feudal society. To establish a strong connection, the laity needed to believe that the nuns would help their families spiritually through life and death. The nuns were expected to pray for the town and have special masses and prayers for those who provided for the nuns with temporal commodities.\textsuperscript{152} Although the primary intention of the early modern English nuns was to support the English mission, it seems that this relationship of functional reciprocity was still assumed by the local laity. Their enthusiasm and support of the English convents indicates their belief that the presence of English convents would also benefit them. From the time of their arrival, English nuns benefited heavily from this assumption. Many filiations, already in financial squalor before they even purchased their monastery, realized that they would need the help of the local townspeople for bare necessities to survive. For example, the Blue Nuns of Paris, upon their arrival were amazed by the charity of the Parisians. They stated that Paris was “good to strangers.”\textsuperscript{153} When they stayed three weeks in a secular house in Paris local women came to the house everyday offering the nuns meat, bread, blankets, wood, bedding, and habits.\textsuperscript{154} The abbess of the community realized how vital this charity was for survival and began to offer to say the \textit{Te Deum} and \textit{Salve Regina} for every person that provided the sisters with charity.\textsuperscript{155} For the Blue Nuns of Paris it became apparent that the fostering of ties of reciprocity was crucial right from the beginning of their establishment.

Similar to the Blue Nuns, the Poor Clares of Rouen only had enough money to purchase a small house for the first eight years of their arrival. Every day while the house was not enclosed, people from the town would visit and gossip with the nuns about what was going on in the town.

\textsuperscript{152} Walker, “Gender and Politics,” 87.
\textsuperscript{153} “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 10.
\textsuperscript{154} “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 9.
\textsuperscript{155} “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 9.
and in other convents. During these visits with the nuns, the townspeople would also bring gifts of charity including roots, bread, wood and candles. They also received financial charity from wealthier families. The abbess saved this money in order to pay for the building of their convent. The construction of the convent depended on this money so much that the Poor Clares were afraid to request enclosure from the archbishop as they feared that it would cut them off from these daily alms. However, the nuns had managed to build strong and sustainable connections to the local community as they still received charity from the exiled secular English families living in France and the French laity a year after their enclosure. Wealthier English and French families provided the religious community with different forms of legacies—the majority being between 20 and 30 pistoles. Some wealthy locals like Madame la Residente de Bernière provided weekly charity of bread and a legacy of 500 pistoles. Some benefactors saw the support of the convent as a way to establish a burial plot, since many wealthy townspeople requested to be buried within the convent’s church. The desire to be buried within the English church exemplifies how effectively the English nuns were able to integrate into the “networks of local piety.” The deep concern that the local townspeople showed for the English nuns can be seen in how they tried to care for the specific needs of the nuns. During their arrival in Rouen, the Poor Clares described themselves as suffering tremendously in the “strange lands…deprived of the comfort of their home.” For the first six months they stayed in a small apartment that was “barren and full of cobwebs with a shared kitchen, quire, dormitory and refectory.” The apartment was so small that the nuns had to sleep on the floor boards for the first part of their

160 “Chronicle of Rouen,” 23.
stay. A local townsman, Madame Carée, saw the nuns suffering under these conditions as they had to spend hours praying on the plastered floorboards, so she had the floorboards matted. The emphasis of this thoughtful act in the community’s history is an example of how the nuns emphasized their relationship with local gentry. By providing examples of how Rouen’s gentry cared for the English nuns, the community was able to elevate their own reputation and status.

Some members of the towns became even more involved in the care and support of the convents as is seen with the case of the Blue Nuns in Paris. In 1672, a French woman named Madame la Marquise de Beaudauphin laid down the first stone of the convent’s church. In fact, a group of elite gentlewomen from Paris, that the diary refers to as the “French ladies,” were highly involved in the creation of the new church as they were responsible for collecting the funds that financed the church’s construction. The idea to construct a church for the English convent was first proposed by Madame La Marguerite; she started the raising of funds for the endeavor with a donation of 100 pistols. The Blue Nuns were appreciative of the labour of these French ladies and the nuns knew that that the construction of the church was only successful due to the generosity and hard work of these French women. This help seems to be very significant to the English nuns; the finished church was continuously referred to as “the church built by the French.” However this was not uncomplicated. Although the nuns held an appreciation for the help of the French ladies, they also highlighted through their history that the church never belonged to the convent and was a French building distinct from the English community. So much so, that the abbess, after five year of its construction, wanted to build a new

162 “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 22.
163 “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 22.
164 “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 22.
165 “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 22.
church and use the French church as a space for the young English students that resided within the convent. Therefore, it seems there was a limit to the amount of assistance the English convents were willing to accept from the local towns. The extent of the French ladies’ involvement seems to have threatened the English identity of the convent and made the nuns uncomfortable to use the church in their daily lives.

Trying to assess how an English convent might fit within the social landscape of a continental European town was one of the hardest challenges for these exiled nuns. Their integration and maintenance of continuous bonds with the town was not easy for them. However, they realized the necessity of the relationship in order for them to survive. Before the Poor Clares had their convent enclosed, the abbess invited the local townspeople to come and visit them. The religious sisters did their best to accommodate the French visitors; the abbess who was fluent in French engaged with the laity and encouraged them to address any spiritual and temporal needs that they had. They even allowed the laity to join them in the refectory for the divine office. In other words, the nuns offered something of value to the locals: spiritual access. The abbess also invited a local priest, Father Minime, to come say mass and preach to the nuns and laity in French. Not only did they invite the local townspeople to engage with them spiritually, they also invited them to the convent for social occasions. Many women came often to dine with the nuns. At times dignitaries also engaged in these social occasions. For example, Neville writes that the Councilor of Paris, Monseigneur L’ Epine who had an “affection” for the exiled nuns, and came to dine with the nuns. The nuns did their best to welcome the Councilor

165 “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 22.
166 "Chronicle of Rouen,” 25.
180 "Chronicle of Rouen,” 48
into their community; they allowed him the honour of dressing the meat\textsuperscript{167} within their kitchen.\textsuperscript{182} After these interactions with the nuns, Monseigneur L’Epine procured several alms in the form of monetary donations for the nuns of Rouen during his next visit to Paris. This relationship exemplifies how successful the nuns in Rouen had been at establishing a relationship based on functional reciprocity with the laity.

The effort that the Poor Clares took to incorporate the local laity into their daily lives during this period reveals how important the maintenance of a strong relationship with the town was for them. As an austere community, the ideals of the Poor Clare Order stressed a total detachment from worldly concerns as they felt that involvement with matters of the world would lead to imperfection.\textsuperscript{168} The Poor Clares in Rouen found the visits of the laity worrisome and expressed that the gossip and worldly concerns distracted them from living according to their holy profession.\textsuperscript{169} Furthermore, they considered the lack of quiet to be stressful and overwhelming. Sister Cecily Cornwalis wrote in the chronicle of the Rouen convent that the nuns mourned daily their existence in the “monstrous world” and worried about the constant diversion the visits of the laity created for them.\textsuperscript{170} However, the nuns chose to make this sacrifice in order to join the life of the town. By adapting and catering to the needs of the laity, the nuns secured a strong foundation with the town during their establishment. This foundation allowed the nuns to maintain a bond of functional reciprocity once they were enclosed. Their allowance of the laity to view the inner workings of the convent shows their hope to reveal how valuable the convent was for the religious lives of the townspeople.

\textsuperscript{167} “Dressing the meat” refers to the process of preparing meat through the removal feathers, skin and other extremities in order to be able to cook the meat. \textsuperscript{182} “Chronicle of Rouen,” 48
\textsuperscript{168} “Chronicle of Rouen,” 27.
\textsuperscript{169} “Chronicle of Rouen,” 28.
\textsuperscript{170} “Chronicle of Rouen,” 25.
In order to survive the process of migration and the establishment of their convents, the English nuns opened the lines of communication between themselves and diverse groups of people from the foreign countries they inhabited. Many times during the process of establishment the nuns needed the support of local people just to get the bare necessities for survival. This relationship between the English nuns and the locals seemed to be a balancing act for the nuns. The flexibility that the nuns maintained throughout the long process of establishment shows that they prioritized the survival of their individual houses over the maintenance of their religious order. They became aware of the fact that their success as an English monastic community, an identity that they were determined to maintain, relied on the help of the people around them. So in order to embrace the help of those that surrounded them, the nuns needed to adapt. They crossed the figurative and physical boundaries of the convent on several occasions in order to survive and make their convents successful. The vulnerability of the nuns due their place in exile meant they had to welcome the help offered to them regardless of a convent’s order or a person’s nationality.
Chapter 3  Adaptation, Resiliency, and Integration

After the establishment of the English convents, the exiled nuns continued to work on preserving their relationships with the local townspeople. The nuns found that the key to fostering good relations with the local community was the maintenance of a good reputation. A good reputation required that the monastic community upheld the ideals of spiritual perfection, which included that the religious community was perceived as united under complete obedience to the rule and order. This required the strict enforcement of obedience and order on the part of the community’s superiors as infighting could tarnish the community’s reputation and ruin their relationship with the town. Moreover, the community had to actively show its support for the laity by addressing their concerns with prayers and masses. In order to better show their support and solidarity with the town, the English nuns learned the local language as well as the religious histories and social customs of the town. Addressing the concerns of the town also meant that on many occasions the nuns had to prioritize the town’s needs over their own interests. There is evidence throughout the daily records of the nuns that they took the interest of the local town into consideration. Finally, when scandal and disease plagued the convents, the nuns found themselves withholding information from local authorities and compromising their own welfare in order to appease the local families that supported them. This chapter will examine how the records of the English Benedictines, Poor Clares of Rouen, and Conceptionists of Paris indicate that although relationships between the exiled communities and their local towns were constantly changing and they experienced periodic disputes, English nuns were able to find ways to create successful and lasting relationships with the people of the towns in which they lived.

The situation for the English Catholic community worsened throughout the seventeenth century with the English civil war, the Popish plot, and the arrival of William and Mary. The
Popish plot was a fictitious plot created by Titus Oates in 1678. Oates claimed that he had infiltrated a Jesuit group in London that was planning the murder of King Charles II in order to put his Catholic brother James on the throne. Oates’ fictitious plot incited anti-Catholic hysteria throughout England. Furthermore, the arrival and coronation William III and Mary II in 1688, both Protestants monarchs, extinguished the hopes of the English Catholic community for the conversion of England. William and Mary overthrew King James II at the request of English statesmen who were concerned that James would establish a Catholic dynasty in the English monarchy. After the arrival of William and Mary laws and oaths surrounding recusancy were updated, which made it difficult to practice Catholicism without facing imprisonment. The English convents were strongly affected by these events and found the consequences devastating for their survival. Abbess Anne Neville wrote in the annals of the English Benedictines that their convent was a “victim of the civil war.” Catholic English nobles had been the largest financial contributors for the English convents; they supported them with new postulants and, in addition, with charities. Many families of the English nobility were financially devastated by the religious and political crises and could no longer send money to the convents. Furthermore, the laws against Catholics became more severe and prohibited the nobility from sending their daughters to the continent for schooling. These restrictions severed many of the financial ties that the nuns had survived on. The restriction in funds put the nuns in a very vulnerable position that motivated them to further strengthen their relationship with the local communities.

The crisis for the English Catholic community came after a time of prosperity for the exiled convents during 1620s and 1640s. This meant that many communities did not foresee the catastrophic events that were to take place in England and were on the contrary encouraged by the high volume of girls coming over during these decades. The high expectations for new postulants led Abbess Eugenia Pulton of the Ghent Benedictines to begin a project of expansion as the current convent was full to capacity and more girls in England were requesting to join the community. The new convent would be able to accommodate the current sisters in addition to all the new postulants that were to arrive. The job to build the new convent was given to Mr. Hobroocke, a Dutch merchant that the nuns had befriended as he was fluent in English. Mr. Hobroocke said the construction would cost 2,500 pounds, which was a small enough number that Abbess Pulton agreed as she had the money at hand from all the recent novices that entered the community. However, due to the location of the new building the foundation had to be deeper than expected and the 2,500 pounds were spent before “the walls were a yard high above the ground.” In order to pay for the rest of the construction, the abbess had to take out a loan from Mr. Hobroocke with an interest rate of 6.25 percent. The annals illustrate an awareness of the fact that the interest rates were high as it states that Abbess Pulton assessed it would be tolerable as she had enough in rents from England to be able to pay it off quickly. The construction began for the convent in 1639 at a time of “promising prosperity.” However, by 1640 and 1641 Catholic persecution had grown worse in England and the money that the convent was expecting to receive from England began to dwindle. By 1642, the first year of the English

175 Neville, “Abbess Neville’s Annals,” 25.
civil war, the convent was completely cut off from the money it was to receive in rents. The financial situation quickly degraded and this prompted the Bishop of Ghent to get involved in the communities’ finances. The bishop’s solution was to prohibit novices without their portions from professing. This forced four English girls to leave the convent while other novices had to wait up to three years to profess.

The severed financial ties between England and the Ghent convent left the community in a position where they could no longer bring in enough money to pay off their debt to Mr. Hobroocke. The community’s financial situation after the civil war was so poor that in 1654 the community still owed Mr. Hobroocke six thousand pounds—a debt that was still growing as the interest was two hundred pounds per year. The community’s suffering as a result of the civil war provides insight into how deeply the events in England affected the English convents. Other English convents also suffered throughout the second half of the seventeenth century as a result of the turmoil in England. The Poor Clares in Rouen began to run out of money in 1653 and by 1686 the house in Rouen was in “eminent danger to be ruined” due to the isolation the Popish plot produced for the exiled convents. The connection of the Conceptionist nuns with England was severed in 1680; as a result of the Popish plot, the Catholic English nobles could no longer communicate with them due to the anti-Catholic sentiments that consumed England. This loss reduced the Blue Nuns of Paris to “great poverty.” In fact, the financial situation became so severe that a year later the creditors were threatening to seize assets from the convent.

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183 "Chronicle of Rouen," 50, 159.
184 "Diary of the Blue Nuns," 29.
185 "Diary of the Blue Nuns," 30.
financial stress experienced by the English convents helps to explain the history of the English nuns’ exile as it provides the context for the nuns’ actions as well as relationships that they developed with the local towns.

The vulnerability in the lines of communication between exiled convents and England, as seen with the Ghent community during the civil war, created awareness amongst the nuns that communities would not be able to solely rely on their English benefactors and investments for support. The nuns quickly realized that they would need the support of the local gentry and bishops in order to make it through the tumultuous times in England. To foster this relationship with the locals the English communities had to work to preserve their good reputation. To uphold the convent’s good reputation, English nuns also needed to support the spiritual needs of local people. In order to do this, English nuns would need to be able to speak French in order to engage with the local community and understand local priests. To introduce the language to the English girls, the Abbess would send their students at a young age to local monasteries and houses of local families to become fluent in the language. In Rouen, both Dorothy Macey and Margaret Blundell were sent to a French monastery. Another woman, Margaret Simmons, tried to join the Poor Clares Gravelines, but was deemed too young. Instead she was sent to a nearby Ursuline community to learn French. While studying with the Ursulines she formed a strong attachment to the sisters. In fact, she had such a strong affinity to the French sisters that during her clothing ceremony, when Margaret went from being a postulant to a novice, she had a French woman from the community cloth her. In addition to sending the young students to French houses the Abbess of the Poor Clares at Rouen also brought in a French priest to teach the

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186 “Chronicle of Rouen,” 76.
young students some French he instructed them using hagiographies of famous saints from the continent like Catherine of Sienna. The use of common local religious texts in the instruction of French, reveals that it was also important for the English nuns to learn local religious customs. Indeed, this exemplifies how the nuns tried to integrate into the social and religious landscape of French towns.

Furthermore, for the English nuns to maintain a good reputation in the local town the maintenance of their image of spiritual perfection had to become the top priority they factored it into diverse elements of their lives and they largely shaped their actions around how the public would perceive them. When the Abbess of Rouen wanted to celebrate the community’s newly constructed convent with a public procession to the convent, the confessor urged her against the idea. He felt that the procession would cause a commotion in the town and that it would be seen as a nuisance. The abbess followed the confessor’s warning and decided that the community would enter the convent privately instead. The abbess’ final decision exhibits how the concerns of the town were a significant part of the decision-making process for the convent. The Poor Clares made sure that their actions would not erode the relationship between themselves and the town. This relationship depended on their ability to adapt to and to accommodate the needs of the town. Finally, the decision to present this exchange between the abbess and the confessor in the community’s history shows the importance of the image of sacrifice for the Poor Clares’ creation of identity. The community continued to portray themselves as suffering in order to preserve their longevity in the service of the English mission.

188 “Chronicle of Rouen,” 37.
189 “Chronicle of Rouen,” 47.
190 Bowden, “Convents in exile,” vol. 1, xvi.
Proper decorum and humility in public spaces was only one aspect of the nuns’ ability to maintain a respectable image. A larger concern for the nuns was how the sisters interacted amongst themselves within the walls of the convent. As has been established, figuratively speaking, the convent walls were quite malleable and news travelled in and out of the convent with ease. This malleability allowed rumours of infighting to spread quickly to the local towns, to circles of the nobility throughout France and Flanders as well as across the channel to England. Reports of internal conflicts had devastating effects on the convents as they destroyed the convent’s image of spiritual “perfection.” Without the laity’s belief in the spiritual perfection of the nuns they would no longer receive students, postulants or charity as the bond of symbiotic reciprocity would be broken. For instance, when the Blue Nuns of Paris had a bout of infighting through the 1670s and 1680s, the community’s reputation was tarnished for several years. The conflicts began after the abbess tried to remove the community’s Jesuit confessor, Father Brown. The abbess felt that the interests of the Jesuits were not aligned with the convent’s interests and that Brown did not assist in advancing the convent’s goals.\(^{191}\) Additionally, she asked the archbishop to remove their Superior Alexander De L’Astre who had also taken up the interest of the Jesuits.\(^{192}\) The abbess’ dissent of the Jesuit cause is tied to the animosity between the Jesuit priests and the secular clergy that divided the English Catholic community in England throughout the seventeenth century. The animosity was a result of differing visions of the English Catholic community. Where Jesuits thought it should be in the form of a mission the secular priests wanted to have a structured church.\(^{193}\)

\(^{191}\) “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 24.
\(^{192}\) “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 25.
\(^{193}\) Bossy, “English Catholic Community,” 203.
influence over the community divided the nuns and led to resentment towards the abbess. The news of the dispute became public and the archbishop had to send an official from Paris in order to try to settle the disagreement.\textsuperscript{209} By 1682, awareness of these conflicts led many of the convent’s French benefactors to withdraw their charities.\textsuperscript{194} The convent was left with a reputation of disgrace and massive amounts of debt. However, this would not be permanent and after a few years the convent slowly built up the respect of the Parisians again. In 1684 the French clergy gave the community 37 livres in charities and this increased to 185 livres by 1685.\textsuperscript{211}

Thus, there were severe and very concrete repercussions when a convent’s reputation became dishonoured by infighting. This meant that an important part of an abbess’ responsibility was to maintain a cohesive and united community. In order to do this, the abbess needed to create an environment that brought together like-minded women that shared similar beliefs both in terms of religion and in terms of house organization and maintenance. These considerations arose when the abbess and discreets—the advisors of the abbess—had to choose which novices should be accepted into the community and which should be rejected. This meant that each novice’s personal traits, specifically their religious resolve needed to be evaluated before their profession. Each community’s superior needed to choose novices that they believed had a religious vocation. A woman that was not devoted to the order or that could not handle the rigours of monastic life had the potential to degrade the convent’s morale and reputation. The

\textsuperscript{194} “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 31.
\textsuperscript{211} “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 33.
The fragile nature of the English convent’s existence within the continental European towns meant that English convents tended to have high rejection rates.\textsuperscript{195} The Abbess of the Carmelites in Hoogstraen stated that, “the greatest disorder in nunneries is to receive novices without a vocation.”\textsuperscript{196} The Conceptionists of Paris had forty-two girls fail to profess out of the one hundred and five novices that wanted to join the convent.\textsuperscript{197} The high rejection of “unfit” novices is significant as it means that the English nuns were willing to sacrifice large sums of money that came from dowries in order to maintain order and unity within the convent. Claire Walker argues that the order and unity of the community would in turn preserve the convent’s spiritual health which was necessary for salvation and the survival of the convent.\textsuperscript{198}

Even with the large number of rejections, gossip and scandal were still part of the convents’ reality. For example, the Conceptionists’ diary discusses in detail the community’s experience with a dissenting nun. The diary focuses on the emotional nature of the dissenting nun, removing any responsibility from the community and placing the focus on the mental state of the individual nun. In 1663, Lucy Fortescue a sister of the Blue Nuns of Paris began to speak out against her role within the convent stating that her mother had forced her into joining the convent and that she had professed under age.\textsuperscript{199} Lucy had been a professed nun for twelve years and had been part of the original group of nuns who moved to Paris from Nieuwpoort.\textsuperscript{217} Her

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\textsuperscript{195} Caroline Bowden, “Missing Members: Selection and Governance in English Convents in Exile,” in \textit{The English Convents in Exile 1600-1800: Community, Culture and Identity}, ed. Caroline Bowden and James E. Kelly (Farnham: Ashgate publishing, 2013), 61.
\textsuperscript{196} Bowden, “Missing Members,” 59.
\textsuperscript{197} Bowden, “Missing Members,” 55.
\textsuperscript{199} “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 14.
\textsuperscript{217} “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 8.
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dissent came in the months after her father’s death and after a trip to England. The scribe of the diary is careful to record the history of Lucy’s unhappiness that started in 1661, two years before the final incident. The diary explains that Lucy was discontent over the community’s acceptance of the rule of the Immaculate Conception; she had taken the habit but refused to make vows to the new order. The diary further notes that in 1663, Lucy “continued to be sad and troubled in mind.” The diary also notes the accommodation that the community was willing to make for her, as she was granted permission to go to England for a few months with the hope that her spirits would improve on her return. However, when she was getting ready to return, she sent a request to the abbess to live as a pensioner rather than as a nun, as she wanted the freedom to go back to England as she desired. The Abbess Mother Tymperley and the other nuns would not allow her to live with them in this way, “as she could not live in this monastery without scandal most of all the French Ladies knowing her to be a professed nun of the third order of our Seraphical Father St. Francis.” Furthermore, the superiors worried about, “the illexample this manner of living would give to seculars without, as also to [the] young beginning [in the] community.” Instead of allowing her back into the community, the abbess put her in the care of the Jesuit Provincial for the English province who was responsible for caring for members of the English mission. At this time the abbess also offered to give her a pension to pay for her entrance into another religious house. Lucy Fortescue’s experience illustrates that the abbess and the superiors were concerned with each nun’s wellbeing – since they encouraged her

204 “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 15.
205 “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 15.
206 “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 15.
to leave for England; however, it also demonstrates that their priority lay with the monastic community and its reputation. The abbess’ consideration of how the French Ladies might perceive the actions of the convent in their decision-making process proves the value the English superiors put on the town’s opinion when running the convent.

The need to maintain cohesive and like-minded communities meant that girls from Ireland, Scotland, and continental Europe had an especially difficult time joining the English communities. Claire Walker’s research of 1,109 nuns in 10 cloisters between 1591 to 1710 reveals that 94% of women in the exiled convents identified themselves as English, 3% were
women from the continent and the other 1% were from Ireland and Scotland. The reason for this low number is that in the creation of the English convents many convents prohibited the admittance of nuns of other nationalities since the purpose of the convents was to pray for the conversion of England. Furthermore, the convents’ distinct national identity made it difficult for nuns from other countries to fit in with the communities due to cultural and linguistic distinctions. Similar experiences occurred when English nuns had tried to join French monasteries in the sixteenth century. When superiors of Rouen were looking for a new tourière they specifically requested that their confessor find a French woman. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the tourières were responsible for going into the local towns and forming connections between the laity and the community. Having a French woman fulfil the role of tourière meant that she would already have good relations with the laity and it would be easier to seek out alms in the town. Furthermore, a French tourière would also know the language and customs and would be able to more smoothly navigate the town. However, even with all these benefits the community quickly realized that the new French tourière was not a good fit and had her sent away. Seven years later in 1678 when the community brought in a young French woman from Paris to be a tourière, she did not fit in with the community and was let go. The vague explanation for the release of these French women from the community indicates larger culture differences that the English nuns could not specifically pinpoint. Furthermore, the speed with which superiors rejected the women indicates their concern over allowing a dissatisfied and alienated sister to live within the convent.

209 “Chronicle of Rouen,” 121.
228 149.
228 “Chronicle of Rouen,”
The case of Brigit Joseph [Barnwell] from Ireland illustrates the consequences of allowing discontented and culturally alienated novices to profess. Brigit was consistently unhappy living with the Poor Clares in Rouen. She wanted to go back to Ireland and began to reject her life within the convent. The discussion of Brigit’s experience in the chronicle of Rouen emphasizes the concern over Brigit’s behavior as “she gave public scandal within the community and perpetually disquieted their repose.”210 The chronicle notes the concern the abbess held that Brigit’s behavior would become known in the local community and so the abbess decided to send her back to Ireland without notifying any of the French authorities. The abbess’ decision to keep the scandal from the authorities provides further evidence for this chapter’s argument; the local town’s perception of the convent guided the nuns’ decisions and fostered a relationship where a convent’s reputation depended on the discretion of the nuns. Furthermore, a few years before Brigit left the convent, Sister Clare Ludovicks Tuite, another Irish sister in the Rouen convent had left due to her inability to live according to her profession.211 The chronicle states “the departure of Sister Brigit Joseph [Barnwell] gave so much pain to Reverend Mother Abbess, as did also Sister Clare Ludovicks [Tuite] leaving us, that her reverence and the discreet took as resolution never to receive any more of that nation.”231 The chronicle’s emphasis on the pain experienced by the abbess and the sisters highlights the close attachments that the sisters maintained as a community. However, the final decision to prohibit future Irish women from joining their community indicates that the Abbess assessed the convent’s health on the principles of order, unity, and solidarity.

210 “Chronicle of Rouen,” 150.
211 “Chronicle of Rouen,” 129. 231 156.
“Chronicle of Rouen,”
The Poor Clares of Rouen frequently withheld information from town authorities in order to avoid animosity amongst the local townspeople. Their desire to avoid confrontation with the town meant that they could not be honest regarding internal issues even when they were out of the nuns’ control as seen with their reaction to the plague in 1668. The plague first became apparent to the nuns when two of their students became severely ill. The severity of the plague put the abbess in a difficult position as she did not want to be scorned and alienated by the town for bringing on the plague. However, she also wanted to care for the students’ souls and provide them with their last rites. Unfortunately for the Poor Clares, their confessor was on his death bed and could no longer provide them these sacraments. The dilemma then was that in order to provide the young girls their last rites the abbess would need to publically request a priest to come to the convent which would make the plague public knowledge.\(^{212}\) The chaplain advised the abbess to conceal the plague as notice of the plague would mean that the authorities would prohibit public prayer and all churches would be closed down.\(^{213}\) Unfortunately for the nuns, the plague came at the time of St. Crispin’s day celebrations and so the closure of all public venues of worship would have had a large impact on the town. The chaplain advised that they wait until the three holy days were over to request a priest, so that the town would not be as affected by the restrictions.\(^{214}\) The abbess decided to conceal the information as she believed that the students were so young that their souls could still be pure without their last rites.\(^{215}\) However, the sacrifice became increasingly difficult for the abbess when a few of the choir nuns became very ill. The abbess had to decide whether it was more important for the sick nuns’ souls to receive absolution

\(^{212}\) “Chronicle of Rouen,” 95.
\(^{213}\) “Chronicle of Rouen,” 102.
\(^{214}\) “Chronicle of Rouen,” 102.
\(^{215}\) 95.

“Chronicle of Rouen,”
or for their community to maintain a good relationship with the town. In the end, the decision to keep the plague a secret was upheld until the Monday after the holy days. The Abbess decided that it was more important to appease the local town and secure the convent’s good reputation than it was to care for the souls of the dying students and nuns.

Once the outbreak of the plague was announced publically, several townspeople announced their concern for the English community. The French subjects who took it upon themselves to collect alms for the community were wealthy women. In total, the nuns received 844 livres in alms during the time of the plague. Their main benefactors were Madame Brinon and the sisters who worked in the local hospital. They also received the support of the town president’s wife as well as their daughter Madame Bernière. The first lady not only provided the community with 150 livres, she also offered the nuns to stay at two of her houses for the duration of the plague. Several priests also offered the convent spiritual support. After the nuns announced the plague to the government officials, they followed proper protocol to ensure they were segregated from the town so the plague could not spread past the convent walls. At this time both Father Lewis, a local French Capuchin, and Father Carpentier, another local French Jesuit, offered to live with the nuns in their segregation in order to be able to provide the nuns with daily mass and confession. The nuns rejected both requests as they stated that did not want to take priests away from their local congregations.

The sacrifice made in Rouen exhibits the extent to which English convents valued their relationship with their local towns. Their need to appease the town and minimize disturbances

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216 “Chronicle of Rouen,” 108.
218 , 109.
“Chronicle of Rouen,”
makes it clear that the maintenance of a strong relationship with the town became one of the priorities for the convent’s superiors. Their concerns were confirmed after the plague when

“Chronicle of Rouen,”
people of the town voiced their disapproval about the way the nuns handled the plague. They accused the nuns of endangering the town as they had let doctors and surgeons, who had come in contact with the disease, move freely between the convent and secular community. A year later in 1669, in response to this criticism, the abbess had an apothecary garden and infirmary constructed. The construction of these facilities was a great expense for the convent. The abbess again prioritized the appeasement of the town and their good relations over the convent’s financial health.

When considering that the purpose of the Rouen Chronicle was to emphasize the “exemplary lives” of their community in order to recruit new English girls, it is interesting that the nuns would allow for such a disreputable part of their history to be included. However, when viewed as part of a narrative that accentuates sacrifice and suffering, the decision to not provide their students with their last rites seems to be one of the more important sacrifices that the community had to make. In this way, the Poor Clares again describe themselves as making large personal sacrifices in order to preserve their community’s reputation and, with it, the hope for its longevity. Furthermore, the sacrifice reveals the nuns’ awareness that their longevity and their ability to actively engage in the English mission was strongly tied to their relationship with the local town.

219 “Chronicle of Rouen,” 118.
220 “Chronicle of Rouen,” 118.
221 Bowden, “Convents in exile,” vol. 1, xl.
In addition, religious and social integration into the local towns meant that the nuns had to take up the concerns of their countrymen on a local and national level. For instance in 1680 the Benedictines of Pontoise prayed for the success of the Dauphin of France’s recent marriage. Knowledge of the nuns’ support of the Dauphin was made known publicly, so when money was sent to religious houses in thanks of their support, the Benedictine community in Pontoise received 4,000 livres from the Bishop of Boulogne. Anne Neville, the abbess of the community, writes that the community was granted such a large sum because of their excellent relation with the bishop. Furthermore, a few years later in 1689 when the King of France had injured his arm, the Blue Nuns in Paris began to say a *Salve Regina* every Tuesday night for which they received ten pistoles. By taking time to include French national interests in their prayers, the English communities show an awareness of the benefits of supporting local and national concerns. Although there is a large monetary element involved in the motivations for their spiritual help, these acts also illustrate a gradual shift away from distinctly English institutions to convents willing to create a space for local needs.

The Poor Clares of Rouen had also fostered a close relationship with Rouen’s governing family. After experiencing difficulties with the city’s president when the community first attempted to build their convent, the nuns were grateful that the second president supported the English community’s cause. From the beginning of their relationship, the new president’s family took a keen interest in the lives of the nuns. In 1652, the community had to cope with a lawsuit that they issued against their neighbour Monsieur Le Page who had attempted to build a tower.

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222 Neville, “Abbess Neville’s Annals,” 70.
223 Neville, “Abbess Neville’s Annals,” 70.
224 *Salve Regina* a Marian hymn frequently sung within monastic houses from the medieval period on. 245 “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 37.

“Chronicle of Rouen,”
The nuns found the tower threatening to their sense of seclusion from the laity and sued Monsieur Le Page in order to get him to take down the tower. While trying to settle the lawsuit the president became involved and had Monsieur Le Page pull down the structure. The next year while the convent was still under construction, the president and his daughter, Madame de Bernière, paid to have the choir and the first dortoir (dormitory where the nuns would sleep) glassed as well as the boards put in the entire building. Additionally, they gave the community money for the care of the convent’s gardens. A few years later in 1666, the first lady gave the community 460 pistols so that they could repair their church; she also purchased a counter-table for the convent’s chapel that cost 450 pistols. The vested interest the president’s family took to care for the wellbeing of the community indicates that they saw the religious house as a part of the town. Moreover, they believed the reputation of the English convent had an effect on the status and prestige of the city. Finally, the devotion the president and his wife showed for the English community is further emphasized after their death. When the president and his wife died, they both had their hearts buried opposite one another in the English church. Their choice in the English church, as the burial site for their hearts, shows just how important the religious community was to them. As devoted subjects of the Poor Clares in Rouen, the couple had faith that the nuns would support their souls after death.

The interactions that occurred between the community in Rouen and the town on a daily basis reveal a growing relationship with two invested parties. The annals of the Poor Clares record how people would come daily to the convent for alms or to engage with the nuns at the

\[225\] 49.
\[226\] "Chronicle of Rouen," 49.
\[227\] "Chronicle of Rouen," 51.
\[228\] "Chronicle of Rouen," 84.
\[250\] "Chronicle of Rouen," 152.
An entry from 1684 discusses the visit from a town widow who came to the grate asking for the nuns to pray for her husband’s soul as she was worried about him suffering in purgatory. The abbess agreed to help the woman and had many masses and prayers said for the husband’s soul. The measures that the nuns took to support the townspeople increased as they created close ties with families within the town. In 1691 when a local patron, Madame du Tot, had passed away, the Abbess of Rouen asked for permission from the bishop for some of the sisters to open the grate and attend her funeral. The Poor Clares made an extra effort to attend Madame du Tot’s funeral as the sisters had a longstanding bond with the du Tot family. Monsieur du Tot, twenty-five years earlier, had come to an agreement with the abbess, vicaress, and discreets that the nuns would make his family part of all prayers and good works that the community would perform. In addition, the community would say the same prayers for the du Tot family that they would say for their own sisters. The abbess also agreed that the chapel would become the burial place for the du Tot family.

The du Tot’s role as important patrons for the community meant that the nuns made a special effort to support the family’s spiritual needs. The nuns’ decision to open the convent’s grate, therefore violating their vow of enclosure, to attend Madame du Tot’s burial reveals the significance of their relationship with the du Tot family. After the burial, Monsieur du Tot gave the abbess fifty livres and a Louis d’Or to the confessor so that the nuns would hold a service

229 “Chronicle of Rouen,” 152.
230 “Chronicle of Rouen,” 152.
231 “Chronicle of Rouen,” 152.
232 “Chronicle of Rouen,” 152.
233 “Chronicle of Rouen,” 87.
234 “Chronicle of Rouen,” 87.
235 “Chronicle of Rouen,” 81.
236 The Louis d’Or was a gold coin of France equivalent in value to the pistole.

“Chronicle of Rouen,”
for Madame du Tot on her anniversary days. Additionally, the du Tot family’s choice to make the English community’s chapel their burial place reveals their confidence in the English convent as a place of respectability and virtue. Moreover, their agreement to have the nuns pray and do good works for them signifies their faith in the nun’s spiritual perfection and the efficacy of the community’s prayers. This trust in the nuns proves that the Poor Clares had managed to maintain an excellent reputation within the local town.

The records of the Poor Clare community in Rouen from 1692 reveal further evidence to show the Poor Clares’ success in fostering and maintaining a strong relationship with the townspeople of Rouen. In 1692, the Poor Clares of Rouen suffered from a deadly disease that devastated the house for fifteen days. The community’s annals state that during this time the town of Rouen was “extremely charitable.” The nuns were supported by both the laity and French religious communities. The Carmelites of Rouen sent the community various supplies for the sick nuns. They also received support from the Ursulines, Nuns of the Visitation, and Franciscans of Rouen. Even communities outside of Rouen including the Carmelites of Paris went out in search of alms for the community. The doctors and surgeons that cared for the nuns during their time of sickness also tried to raise money and get supplies for the sick nuns. In fact, in only fifteen days the convent’s friends and supporters raised a hundred pistols in alms. The President of Rouen even took the time to visit the nuns and check on how they were managing. The dedication of the local town and other French religious communities to the

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237 161.
238 “Chronicle of Rouen,” 173.
239 “Chronicle of Rouen,” 173.
240 “Chronicle of Rouen,” 173.
241 173.

“Chronicle of Rouen,”
English nuns indicates how successful the Poor Clares were at both maintaining the community’s good reputation and adapting to meet the needs of the local community.

The high level of dedication to the well-being of the English nuns is also evident in the diary of the Blue Nuns of Paris. The support that the Blue Nuns received from the women of Paris indicates a deep interest and devotion to the survival of the community. The noblewomen of Paris, nine years after their involvement in the construction of the community’s church, were...
again heavily involved in the lives of the English nuns. By 1680, the Blue Nuns found themselves in a difficult position where they were no longer receiving money from England due to the fear of papal insurgency in England as a result of the Popish plot. The shortage of funds as a consequence of this meant that the community were in a difficult situation with creditors threatening to seize their assets. Several charitable women of Paris took interest in the nuns’ difficult financial situation, and in 1681 twenty of these women came to the grates of the monastery to talk to the nuns about how they could begin to pay down their debts and become self-sustaining. These women provided the community with 9,000 livres to pay off their debts. In addition to this, they worked with the nuns to try and figure out a way for the community to become self-sustaining. The French women also planned a monthly allowance for the community that would be provided to the English nuns by their benefactor Madame Decaur who was part of this charitable group.

The generosity of these women went beyond the basic monetary charity; the women took the time to meet with the nuns and set up a long term plan to ensure the longevity of the English community. They took an interest in the welfare of the community and made plans that would require their involvement in the affairs of the community for a long period of time. Furthermore, their interest in producing a self-sustaining community shows that their relationship with the community went beyond the bond of functional reciprocity. The French ladies provided more than money; they gave their time to the convent to find ways the community could make money for itself so that the nuns’ survival would not depend solely on the charity of local townspeople.

244 “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 30.
Relationships between the English nuns and their local towns were in no way stagnant. Attitudes and perceptions of the convent shifted according to the interactions between the two groups and the community’s ability to maintain an esteemed reputation. As mentioned previously, when the English Benedictine nuns tried to establish a filiation in Boulogne in 1652 the bishop told them that they could not enter the city as he believed they would become a financial burden on him and the town. However, the community’s priest was able to convince the bishop that the money the community had received would be enough to maintain the convent. A year later, Anne Neville writes that the bishop and the town had “great esteem and admiration for the nuns’ humility and virtue.” Unfortunately, shortly after the community had established itself in Boulogne, the siege of Dunkirk took place in 1658. Also known as the Battle of the Dunes, the siege mentioned previously was part of the Franco-Spanish war (1645-1658) and was a result of an agreement between Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell and Louis XIV of France. The two leaders agreed that Cromwell could take possession of Dunkirk and Mardyke if he gave Louis six thousand troops to help in the fight against the Spanish. This had a negative effect on the community as on June 4, 1658 open combat erupted near Dunkirk as the Spanish came to relieve the city from Cromwell’s English army. This in turn would bring in the the French army. Neville writes that the war distracted the nuns and produced a lot of difficulties for the community so they decided that it was in their best interest to leave Boulogne. In order to be able to move the entire monastic community, the Abbess of Boulogne had to get permission from the bishop. Although the bishop approved the request, Neville states that he did it for the best

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interest of the community and not for his own contentment. In fact, on the day that the community left Boulogne, the bishop, all his clergy and the town’s officials went down to the seaside to send them off. As they were leaving, he told the townspeople that had gathered there that he regretted that he would have to part with “such pious deserving children.” The attendance of the bishop and dignitaries shows, that after only six years in the city of Boulogne, the English nuns were able to successfully foster a close relationship with the people of Boulogne. Within this time they established themselves as a valuable part of the town as the community’s virtue and spiritual perfection gave the town a sense of honour.

Although many English convents were successful in creating close bonds with their local towns, this was not always the case as the religious and political climates changed in some areas where the convents were located. War and conquest made areas like Dunkirk unstable for the nuns. News of the siege of Dunkirk spread through the English convents and affected several of the English houses including the Benedictine communities of Dunkirk and Boulogne as well as the Poor Clares in Rouen. In the annals of the Poor Clares from Rouen the scribe describes the sadness the nuns felt over the siege as it meant that Dunkirk would be given to heretics, as Oliver Cromwell and his Protestant troops took over the city. After the Battle of the Dunes, England took possession of the city for four years; however, in 1662 Charles II sold it to the French. From this point on the city became an important fortress and port for the French army during the upcoming wars; the value placed on the city by Louis XIV made it a target for French

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251 The Poor Clares in Rouen had to community care for the nuns from Boulogne when they were on their way to Pontoise.
252 "Chronicle of Rouen," 63.
and Spanish armies. In 1678, Abbess Mary Carlyle, of the Benedictines in Dunkirk, tried to uproot the monastic community as she felt that the town was becoming “less wholesome.”

This was due to a blockage of the moated waterway Dunkirk which made the cleanliness and health of the city. Unfortunately, the community’s petition to move to Paris was rejected and the English sisters moved back to Dunkirk. The Abbess of Dunkirk’s willingness to uproot her entire community due to her belief in the town’s declining physical state reveals interconnectedness between the health of the town and the English communities. Furthermore, the hardships that the communities faced during the siege of Dunkirk and the concerns of the Dunkirk convent’s health shows that the English communities were not a separate entity to the town but actually a part of the town and therefore, were affected by the events occurring the town.

The records of the English Benedictines, Poor Clares of Rouen, and Conceptionists of Paris demonstrate that a number of English communities were able to successfully integrate into the religious and social landscape of the local towns in which they lived. Although the communities considered themselves to be distinctively English entities, their need to adapt to fulfill the needs of the local town meant that the English nuns began to gradually acquire the local language and literature of the townspeople. The integration of these nuns into their local towns meant that after decades in exile these convents became culturally distinct from England or any other nation. The significance of the English nuns’ success in creating strong relationships with the local townspeople, as seen in their daily records, should also be considered in the context of why these records were written. The annals, chronicles, and diaries that these records come from

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were written by nuns and were intended for a public audience, which means that the scribes who wrote these texts looked to promote the convents and even use them to recruit new members. Caroline Bowden in her analysis of the chronicles of Rouen claims that the chronicles were intended to promote the convent’s longevity and therefore prove its reputability as an established institution. The intended use of the documents reveals their potential for bias. The inclusion of local French and Flemish people within the histories of English communities shows the importance of their relationships with the nuns as the nuns took the time to record their interactions and made an effort to preserve them as part of the convent’s legacy. In recording their interactions with local aristocracy, such as the President of Rouen and the noblewomen of Paris, the English nuns hoped to elevate their community’s status by illustrating that they were reputable and prestigious enough to associate and foster relationships with respectable members of French and Flemish society.

257 Bowden, “Convents in Exile,” vol. 1, xi.
Chapter 4 Engagement and Investment in the Local Economy

The English convents’ religious and social integration into the local towns by the end of the seventeenth century reveals that throughout the first century in exile the nuns slowly adapted to their local surroundings. The nuns took part in local activities and actively created institutions that local townspeople could rely upon for spiritual assistance. The past two chapters have focused on religious and social elements of the relationship between the English nuns and the Flemish and French towns. However, as we have seen, both religious and social aspects came to be interlinked with economic issues as the nuns struggled to survive economically. Out of necessity the English nuns got involved in the local economies. One of the main sources of monetary revenue for the English nuns were charities. As discussed in previous chapters, many members of the local towns gave the nuns charity in return for prayers and masses. These exchanges were significant as they represent one way in which the English nuns engaged in what can be called the spiritual economy of the surrounding towns. Through the seventeenth century the English nuns’ economic status was very vulnerable due to their exile and isolation from their largest financial supporters. Not only did this vulnerability motivate the nuns to engage with the local laity and seek out charity, it also pushed the English houses to look for different sources of revenue within their local environment.

Initially, the engagement with the local marketplace took on very traditional forms with investments in annuities and property ownership. However, as time passed and the houses’ financial insecurity increasingly became a problem, the nuns began to look for alternative forms of income. These new revenue streams tested the limits of an English house’s rule and decrees of the Council of Trent. This chapter will argue that the English nuns successfully managed to extend the restrictions surrounding their ability to leave the convent and work in order to find
ways to bring in new revenue streams that were accepted by the laity as well as the local church. In doing so, the exiled sisters were able to actively participate in local markets and earn money within the towns, separately from their role as spiritual intercessors.

Knowledge of the financial and political circumstances of the English convents is very important for the analysis of the nuns’ relationship with the foreign towns they inhabited. Understanding their political and financial situation unveils the heightened sense of vulnerability that these exiled nuns must have felt. Largely abandoned by their English community, this sense of vulnerability motivated the nuns to foster relationships with the laity and become a part of the social, religious and economic landscape of local towns. The English Catholic noble families could not be relied upon entirely to support these institutions financially, politically or emotionally. This loss meant that the nuns had to become increasingly dependent on the local church and local nobility to support them. This increased dependence meant that it became ever more important for the English convents to maintain a respectable image and uphold prestige amongst the local townspeople and nobility. As previously mentioned, their relationship based on symbiotic reciprocity was delicate. It required the laity to have faith that the spiritual work the nuns did within the convent would get themselves and their loved ones closer to salvation.

Heightened financial vulnerability forced the English communities to spend more time on temporal issues. Financial struggles in England created hardship for the communities that relied on dowries and charities from wealthy families. These challenges changed the way in which the nuns had to structure their lives. Financial struggle meant that the nuns had to focus on ways in which they could earn money while at the same time saving what goods they had and limiting spending. Communities like the Ghent Benedictines, who struggled with debt from the time of
their establishment, had to find ways to adjust their way of life within the convent in order to save money. When Eugenia Pulton became the Abbess of the Ghent Benedictine Abbey in 1629, she immediately began trying to tackle the debt that had been acquired during the community’s foundation. She started by cutting back on food; she removed one of the three dishes that the nuns had for dinner and eliminated the morning meal for everyone but the sick. Furthermore, for a year she forbade eating in between meals; eating meat on Tuesdays, and limited eating in the refectory to only bread and butter.\textsuperscript{258} She also added additional time in the nuns’ daily schedule for work by making prayer start half an hour earlier and she turned the hours of recreation time into a time for work.\textsuperscript{259} Later in 1650 when Mary Knatchbull became abbess, the strict rules regarding diet were continued. However, she made sure that the rule of the choir and spiritual exercises took precedence over manual labour.\textsuperscript{260} Knatchbull believed that if the rule was followed exactly, then God would not fail to help provide her with what was needed to have temporal success.\textsuperscript{261} She did not want the community to make compromises in their spiritual lives as she felt that both their temporal needs and spiritual needs could be met without sacrificing their obedience to the rule.\textsuperscript{262}

However, not all abbesses could handle the stress of the financial responsibilities of their position. Mary Roper became Abbess of the Ghent community in 1642 during the first year of the English civil war. Her time as abbess took place when the financial situation of the community was at its worst. In her annals Anne Neville admires the virtue and humility of

\textsuperscript{258} Neville, “Abbess Neville’s Annals,” 24.
\textsuperscript{259} Neville, “Abbess Neville’s Annals,” 24.
\textsuperscript{260} Neville, “Abbess Neville’s Annals,” 36.
\textsuperscript{261} Neville, “Abbess Neville’s Annals,” 36.
\textsuperscript{262} Neville, “Abbess Neville’s Annals,” 36.
Roper; however, she notes that she was not equipped to handle the strain of the community’s debt. She states,

If religion only depended upon natural abilities, or interior graces for these she was incomparable. But alas there must be a sufficient fund to subsist by or the rest will come short of what we most desire. Though we vow poverty yet religion itself cannot subsist without such a portion of temporal as may maintain the community.  

Neville later stated that if their financial problems were not dealt with promptly they would lead to the destruction of the monastic community. This is indeed what would eventually happen to the Ghent convent. Neville wrote that although Abbess Mary Roper had a great reputation abroad and was esteemed within the convent, she started her time as abbess with “infinite disadvantages” including immense debts and a convent at full capacity with insufficient revenues to maintain all the nuns. The strain of the debt on Mary Roper was so great that she became severely ill during her time as abbess. Mary Roper died in 1650 after eight years of being the Abbess of the Benedictine Abbey of Ghent. The community was in such disrepair by this time that after her death, the community was divided and some of the sisters moved to Boulogne.

Anne Neville’s writing also acknowledges the necessity for a community’s superior to be able to manage the growing division in the nuns’ lives—the division and the interconnectedness of the spiritual and material. In order for a community to survive and fulfil its spiritual role, it needed to have money to be able to afford the material necessities. The English nuns could not live in complete spiritual abstraction as their material survival required them to earn money. This awareness obviously created stress and tension as it distracted the nuns from their spiritual vocation.

266 Neville, "Abbess Neville's Annals," 33.
The experience that the Benedictine nuns of Ghent had is representative of some of the ways that English nuns had to alter their way of life to keep up with economic demands. On average, the English convents had less money to support each nun than the local French convents. On top of this, Claire Walker argues that early modern society’s shift towards capitalism altered the utility of the nuns and the monetary value of their prayers. In her extensive work on the economics of convents in exile, Walker has looked at the traditional and nontraditional ways in which the English nuns earned money to support the convent. She argues that the nuns were living in a period of transition between “the feudalism of functional reciprocity and the rise of capitalism.”\(^\text{267}\) This meant the spiritual labour of prayer and masses were no longer enough to support the convent financially, and so they had to turn to non-traditional forms of manual labour to raise money.\(^\text{268}\) Furthermore, Walker explains that after the Council of Trent, it became increasingly expensive for nuns to support the community through contemplative labour as Trent encouraged salvation through attendance of masses rather than the intercessory prayers of the monastic houses.\(^\text{269}\) This led to an increase in the number of masses requested by the convent’s benefactors. In order for the nuns to provide these masses, they had to pay a priest to say each mass for their patrons.\(^\text{270}\) With the value of their prayers decreasing the convents’ duty to support their benefactors became increasingly expensive. Finally, Walker claims that in order to cope with all these changes, the nuns had to reinterpret their beliefs about work and

\(^{267}\) Walker, “Martha and Mary,” 416.

\(^{268}\) Walker, “Martha and Mary,” 416.

\(^{269}\) Walker, “Martha and Mary,” 403.

\(^{270}\) Walker, “Martha and Mary,” 403.
“blur the distinction between religious and secular work” in order to survive.²⁷¹

Outside of the symbiotic relationship with the laity that looked to exchange temporal goods for prayers, there were two main traditional avenues in which early modern nuns could bring in money for their convent: dowries and investments. In her work on the French teaching orders of the early modern period, Elizabeth Rapley states that dowries determined whether or not a convent would be successful.²⁷² In accordance with this, Sharon Strocchia, in her work on fifteenth-century Florentine convents, refers to dowries as the “financial lifeblood of female religious communities.”²⁷³ The importance of these spiritual dowries can be seen in the financial records of the Benedictine nuns in Brussels. In their first eighteen years, the convent received 12,830 pounds sterling from dowries.²⁷⁴ These dowries, given to the convent before the time of a novice’s profession, were often used for different purposes. In the first years of a religious community’s existence, the money made from dowries was used to buy property and build monasteries. Later on, however, the money was used to maintain the physical state of the convent’s buildings, as well as enhance the convent with extensions and decorations for the chapel. Money not used for the improvement of the convent was used to make investments so that the community could receive annuities.

The Brussels’ Benedictine’s financial records which gather information on all receipts, disbursements and debts, demonstrate how the money received from the dowries was distributed. Seventeen years after its founding in 1615, the convent took in 18,000 florins (which was

²⁷¹ Walker, “Martha and Mary,” 399.
²⁷³ Strocchia, “Nuns and Nunneries in Renaissance Florence,” 78.
equivalent to approximately 1,800 pounds sterling) from the profession of three women. Of this money, 1,500 florins went to providing the new nuns with their habits as well as furnishing their rooms. They provided Robert Parsons with approximately ninety pounds to pay the workmen who were working on their new building. They invested 2,590 florins in the lands of the Count of Bucquoy in order receive the revenues from tenant farmers. They also invested 3,500 florins in the Jesuit college of Douai and put 9,500 florins in the bank with Thomas Worthington. These records from 1615 reveal a prosperous period that took place in the early years of the English convent. With large sums of money coming into the convent at once, the nuns were able to put the majority of the money into investments so the community could receive rents. The convent would thus invest a large sum of money and then receive an annuity; typically, it was the interest on the loan. From the investment in the lands of the Count of Bucquoy the nuns earned 330 florins per year. From the college of Douai they received 250 florins annually. Furthermore, the Brussels Benedictines had also invested 10,000 florins in the Dutch college of the Fathers of the Society of Jesus from which they received 620 florins in rents. They had also invested with Monseigneur Vander Croyx an amount of 3,000 florins; from this they received 187 florins in annuities. It is important to note, however, that the funds that the Benedictines received in their first eighteen years are not representative of their financial history, as they represent a time of prosperity that could not be maintained through their time in exile. With this said the record of the Benedictine accounts show how the English nuns, through traditional revenue streams, participated in the local economy. Their investments with local

275 “Receipts, Disbursements and Debts,” 77.
277 “Receipts, Disbursements and Debts,” 78.
278 “Receipts, Disbursements and Debts,” 84.
279 “Receipts, Disbursements and Debts,” 92.
property, the local college for Jesuits, and local merchants meant that the English community engaged in local systems of finance and placed money into the local markets.

Another form of investment that the English nuns could make outside of the money market was property ownership. Convents could buy farmland or urban properties and rent them out to farmers, shopkeepers and other tenants. Elizabeth Rapley notes that many French religious houses owned and rented out farms and urban properties; however, they were typically not large sources of revenue. She explains that this had to with the payment of taxes required, as well as the difficulty of getting the agricultural products to local markets since the nuns were restricted by the rule of clausura.280 Furthermore, there was a devastating agricultural depression through the second half of the seventeenth century and many of the convents’ farm tenants went bankrupt by the end of the century due to poor yields.281 English convents’ ownership and renting of local land is another way the English nuns became part of the local economy. Although the nuns typically did not interact directly with their tenants, the exchange of money between local tenants and their English landlords is significant on its own. As owners of French and Flemish lands, the English nuns now had a stake in the welfare of the local farming lands and local production. The English Benedictines of Pontoise were one of the English communities that owned farm land. In 1667, the Abbot Montagu, an English Benedictine Abbot, came to visit the community after the election of Anne Neville as Abbess of Pontoise. Looking for monetary support from the Abbot, Anne explained to him the financial situation of the community. She stated that the community made roughly 600 livres annually in rents from their farm.282

Later on, Abbess Neville goes into further detail about the convent’s financial situation with the Abbot. She explains that the community earned 1,500 pounds annually in rents which included the pensions for students and novices. This revenue however, did not include charities and gifts that the community received. The sum of 1,500 pounds in addition to the charities received had to cover the living cost of the women, children and confessors which amounted to fifty-two people in total. Neville explained that this was not enough money to balance the living cost of the community let alone to pay off existing debts. Indeed, it seems that this was an inadequate amount of money. The Benedictines in Poitouise were not alone in their financial distress. Walker asserts that in many convents the traditional revenue sources were not enough to maintain the community; the English nuns were at a financial disadvantage in comparison to other continental convents. However, Rapley mentions that many scholars argue that nuns tended to exaggerate their financial distress in order to make sure they could secure money with patrons and the diocese. Therefore, when examining the diaries and annals of the English convents it is important to remember that although the financial situations of the exiled convents were bleak the descriptions of the convents are likely exaggerated in order for the readers to feel sympathy for the nuns and, in turn, provide charity.

In addition to receiving less money in rents than their European sisters, the isolation from their homeland made the situation for the English nuns even more challenging. In addition to investing in local institutions to receive annuals rents, convents also had money invested for rents in England as well. During times of political and religious strife in England, communication and

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284 Walker, “Martha and Mary,” 398.
travel to the English convents on the continent became difficult. This meant that rents coming from England did not always make it across the channel. The Ghent Benedictine nuns experienced this in 1642 during the English civil war when all rents from England were cut off.\textsuperscript{286} In this way, the nuns soon realized that the traditional revenue streams of rents, dowries and charities would no longer be a stable source of revenue to maintain the convents. The English nuns had to find alternative ways to earn money for their houses while still trying to obey the rules of Trent, specifically the \textit{clausura}. Furthermore, as Claire Walker explains, they had to be able to find types of work that were acceptable for women of the elite classes according to social customs.\textsuperscript{287} The nuns had to be careful not to cross any social boundaries by performing unacceptable forms of work since they needed to maintain their pristine reputation and thus retain the respect of the laity. However, the nuns did get involved in the production of goods as well as provision of services. They worked both with the local townspeople as well as with English exiles living within proximity. Therefore, the nuns’ attempts to provide temporal products and services led them to become further immersed in the local economic landscape of France and the Spanish Netherlands.

There were a few ways that the nuns were able to provide additional funds for the convent without having to perform actual manual labour. One common service that they could offer was the education of young girls. The education provided by the female monastic houses maintained its popularity in the early modern period. Active orders such as Mary Ward’s Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the French Ursulines showed a revitalized interest in spreading the teachings of the Roman Catholic religion in order to ward off a growing Protestant

\textsuperscript{286} Neville, "Abbess Neville's Annals," 26.
\textsuperscript{287} Walker, “Mary and Martha,” 400.
population. As an active order, Mary Ward’s English ladies went out into continental European towns to spread the Catholic religion much like the Jesuits. The Ursulines, on the other hand, were restricted by *clausura*; however, they were able to have day schools for local less privileged children.

As exiled institutions, the English contemplative houses were restricted in the education that they could offer young English girls, as their displacement thwarted the ability to run day schools. Instead, the English convents maintained a traditional boarding school system which catered to the Catholic nobles who could afford to send their daughters across the channel. The schools supported both younger girls looking to take up the religious life as well as secular girls who intended to go back to England and marry men from other prominent Catholic families. The families had to pay a yearly fee to allow their daughters to attend the convent school. This fee was in fact quite small. For example, in 1652 the Sepulchrines charged 15 pounds per year. However, eventually by the mid-eighteenth century this sum had gone up to one hundred pounds a year.  

Unfortunately for the nuns, the rule of *clausura* made it difficult to take in large numbers of students which limited the amount of money the convents could make from the schools. During the 1640s, the Poor Clares of Rouen had sixteen students housed; however, only two of those sixteen were secular and intended to go back to England. The Blue Nuns created one of the more popular convent schools and had typically between fifteen and thirty students.

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312 „Chronicle of Rouen,” 138.
313 Walker, “Gender and Politics,” 93.
It is interesting to note that the Blue Nuns’ school was not only popular amongst English families, but it was also well regarded by French families. The popularity of the Blue Nuns’ school amongst French families had to do with the fact that it operated as a “finishing school” rather than a school intended to educate future nuns. Whereas the majority of the English schools brought in girls at a young age and boarded them for several years, the Blue Nuns’ school program typically only lasted a few months. The creation of English finishing schools for young girls allowed the Blue Nuns to offer a new service to French families—an education in the English language. The diary of the Blue Nuns makes a note of this new service when it mentions the arrival of a French student, Miss Madolan who came to the convent in 1678 to learn English. In fact, Walker argues that the Blue Nuns’ convent most likely survived into the eighteenth century due to the success of their school. The Blue Nuns’ acceptance of local girls into their monastery is significant as it shows a willingness to incorporate the local lay people into their monastic institution. This alteration would mean that the original intention of the school—to provide a Catholic education to young English girls in order secure the longevity of the English Catholic community—had to change. Therefore, financial stress motivated the nuns to expand their schools and incorporate the education of locals allowing the distinctly English convent to slowly become into an institution that was integrated within the local town.

Another way that the convents made money through their interactions with the laity came from the allowance of lay people into the convents as pensioners. Pensioners were typically either refugees trying to escape religious and political turmoil or wealthy mature women, often widows, who were looking for a place to spend the later part of their life without committing to

290 Bowden, “Convents in exile,” vol. 1, xxv.
the rigours of monasticism. The position of the pensioners within the convent is interesting; even though their rooms were separate from those of the nuns and outside of enclosure, they still had quite extensive access to the nuns. Claire Walker writes that female pensioners were able to regularly converse and dine with the nuns as well as interact with them in the chapel.\textsuperscript{293} The convents’ attitude towards these aristocratic women tended to be positive, as the nuns found their stay to be both lucrative as well as beneficial to the convents’ reputation. Pensioners had to pay annual rates for their rooms and these rates varied between cloisters. For instance in Liège the Sepulchrines charged around twenty-six pounds per year.\textsuperscript{318} In 1683, when Lady Hamilton stayed with the Blue Nuns in Paris she paid one hundred pistoles for the year for her and her daughters. However, the scribe of the Blue Nuns notes that this was a large amount for the rooms and not their real value. According to their diary, Lady Hamilton gave the community such a large sum as an act of generosity as she knew the community was struggling after the withdrawal of funds from the French patrons as mentioned in the previous chapter.\textsuperscript{294}

The example of Lady Hamilton demonstrates the benefits of taking in pensioners. Not only did she provide the convent with large sums of money, she also sought out charities for the convent from other contacts. By the end of 1683, she had provided the convent with 643 livres; this included the money she directly gave to the community as well as the money she had procured for them.\textsuperscript{295} Moreover, Lady Hamilton’s presence in the monastery improved its status in the public’s perception. The diary states, “my Lady Hamilton was pleased to take great care of us and came with her daughters to live with us to give us credit which had been mightily lost by

\textsuperscript{293} Walker, “Martha and Mary,” 410. \textsuperscript{318} Walker, “Martha and Mary,” 411. \\
\textsuperscript{294} “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 32. \\
\textsuperscript{295} “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 32.
our little transactions.”\textsuperscript{296} After the dispute between the abbess and nuns over the Jesuit presence in the convent, the community had lost the respect of the citizens of Paris as well as of the English families who no longer wanted to send their daughters to the convent. As a respected member of the English nobility, Lady Hamilton’s presence in the English convent endowed the house with prestige as it showed that honourable women still desired to live in the religious house. Thus, the prominent noblewoman’s stay with the Blue Nuns improved the public image of the convent. Furthermore, enrolment of Lady Hamilton’s two daughters in the convent’s school showed that it was still an esteemed and valuable institution of education.

The discussion of pensioners differed drastically between the Poor Clares and the Blue Nuns; whereas the Blue Nuns portrayed their experience with Lady Hamilton and other pensioners as a positive one, the Poor Clares emphasized the suffering that pensioners inflicted on their way of life. The Poor Clares received the majority of their pensioners during the time of the Popish plot, and the arrival of William and Mary\textsuperscript{297} when many members of the Catholic nobility fled from England due to the high levels of persecution. They fled to Catholic countries and a few became pensioners and paid to live in the exiled convents. For six years during the time of the Popish plot, the convent at Rouen had to accommodate several of these recently exiled families. The nuns saw the pensioners as a large burden on the community and wrote that the Popish plot “caused them much sufferance.”\textsuperscript{298} The chronicle states that the English refugees created a strain for the nuns as it was the community’s responsibility to feed them and care for their daily needs. Furthermore, the nuns did not like how the admittance of secular people on the convent’s property distracted them from their religious life; they felt it took away from their

\textsuperscript{296} “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 32.

\textsuperscript{297} The arrival of William and Mary is now referred to as the Glorious Revolution, however, this was not terminology used by the nuns.

\textsuperscript{298} “Chronicle of Rouen,” 149.
prayer and contemplation.\textsuperscript{299} It is easy to see that the nuns would be worried by this situation as these strangers disrupted their routine and brought worldly influences into the convent. Their reliance upon the local community depended on inner structure and spiritual stringency and the presence of these English exiles made this increasingly difficult as it forced the nuns to focus on their temporal condition. However, due to their worsening financial position the nuns put up with the distractions as the English refugees were a source of income for the community.\textsuperscript{300}

The Poor Clares Chronicles’ description of the nuns’ reaction to the pensioners fits with the greater narrative of the Chronicles. Caroline Bowden writes that because the Poor Clares were an austere community they viewed their life in exile as a sacrifice that they had to make in order to help preserve the English mission.\textsuperscript{301} By giving up their lives in England and moving to exiled convents the nuns believed that their spiritual labours in the form of prayer would help in the conversion of England. This narrative of sacrifice helps to explain the nuns’ reactions to the pensioners; rather than focusing on the wealth and prestige that their community gained from the admittance of these English refugees, the Poor Clares chose to focus on their suffering. In order to maintain this story of sacrifice the nuns framed their experience with the pensioners in a way that allowed them to focus on how they gave up key elements of their spiritual life in order to help important members of the English Catholic Community during a time of severe persecution. Moreover, the hospitality offered to the refugees is another way the nuns were able to present themselves as actively participating within the English mission.

Finally, as the financial condition of the religious houses began to decline by the end of the seventeenth century, it became more common to take in pensioners. The diary of the Blue

\textsuperscript{299}“Chronicle of Rouen,” 150.
\textsuperscript{300}Walker, “Martha and Mary,” 411.
\textsuperscript{301}Bowden, “Convents in exile,” vol. 1, xvi.
\textsuperscript{327}“Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 32.
Nuns has a detailed record of the people that stayed within the house. The pensioners listed in the Blue Nuns records were all women, except during the decades of the civil war and the Popish Plot. By the 1680s, when ties to England were cut, the convent was receiving two to four new pensioners every year. By 1683 the diary states specifically that, “we now began to take French pensioners to help us.” This acknowledgement, that the English nuns now had started to take in French pensioners for financial help indicates that they had tried to avoid it previously. More importantly it reveals that the English nuns were beginning to look at the local community as a potential source of revenues and found another source for which they could benefit from the local market.

Even with the additional revenues of schools and pensioners some convents were still not bringing in enough money to maintain the living costs of their nuns. The Blue Nuns, despite all their efforts to make additional money for their convent, still did not have enough to sustain the convent. In 1681 when creditors began to threaten to seize assets the nuns started to collect money at the end of masses. Furthermore, not all convents had schools or were willing to take in pensioners as they did not want lay people intruding into their enclosure. Several convents therefore turned to the production of craft goods as an option to raise funds. These goods would be sold to visitors of the convents as well as be put on the local market and sold to merchants in the area. Many of these new revenue streams required manual labour which had been considered unsuitable for choir nuns since the Middle Ages. Manual labour was associated with people of lower economic status. It was therefore deemed inappropriate for the exiled nuns as they were typically daughters of aristocrats and gentry. However, certain forms of manual labour such as needlework were acceptable form of work for the nuns; it was not physically demanding and was

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a prominent part of the lives of aristocratic women. Claire Walker writes that with the exclusion of women from universities in the Middle Ages, nuns became isolated from the scholastic careers that monks pursued; instead, nuns began to put more focus on gender-acceptable forms of work specifically needlework.\textsuperscript{303} Furthermore, needlework was seen as a necessary form of work as the nuns needed to mend their habits and linens. The nuns were also able to imbue spiritual meaning into their needlework as they created ornaments for their chapel. The sale of the handcrafted ornaments had been popular in convents however Walker notes that sales of these ornaments did not provide much revenue for the convent; rather needlework intended to be a symbolic fulfilment of the manual labour that was prescribed in monastic rule since the time of Saint Augustine.\textsuperscript{304}

In order for the English communities to go from occasionally selling hand-stitched ornaments to a commercial enterprise, they were required to reinterpret their rules in a way that made room for their entrepreneurial endeavours. Furthermore as stated above, the nuns had to choose profitable jobs that were seen as an extension of a woman’s duties.\textsuperscript{305} Some communities like the Ghent Benedictines and Blue Nuns of Paris created a commercial venture out of their handmade craftwork and turned it into a financially productive outlet. However, the nuns had to be cautious of how they proceeded with their commercial endeavour as it was seen as unacceptable for religious women to be selling temporal goods. The nuns’ involvement in the local markets meant that they would need to focus on worldly concerns and would be wrapped up in business with local merchants and focused on the success of their sales. This went against the rule of clausura which required the nuns to remove themselves from the concerns of the

\textsuperscript{303} Walker, “Martha and Mary,” 401.
\textsuperscript{304} Walker, “Martha and Mary,” 399.
\textsuperscript{305} Walker, “Martha and Mary,” 400.
temporal world. Luckily, for the English nuns local church officials accepted their participation in commercial production of goods since they did not want to have to take on the nuns’ financial burden.\textsuperscript{306}

The types of craft goods produced differed between the convents; it also depended on the skills that the individual sisters would bring into the convent. In fact, communities like the Blue Nuns of Paris sought out women that they knew had special skills that would help out the convent. In 1689, the community recruited the Adamson sisters who were known for being talented watchmakers. In order to make sure that the sisters would choose their convent the abbess offered the sisters a substantially lowered dowry of only two hundred pounds for both sisters.\textsuperscript{307} The low dowry signifies how important the skill of watch making was for the religious community. As has been mentioned dowries were very important to the convent economy and basically determined the convents’ success or failure. So to sacrifice hundreds of pounds between the two dowries was a significant loss for the community. The convent clearly hoped to make much more than a few hundred pounds from the production of watches. Additionally, what is interesting to note is that the Adamson sisters were very much aware of their value to the community. On their admittance to the community the sisters stated that they would only enter if they knew that their work with watches would not take away from their religious duties or that they would not have to spend more time working than any other sister in the community.\textsuperscript{334} The success of the watch making business is not mentioned through the rest of the diary, however, the community’s belief in the benefits of acquiring sisters involved in watch making shows that the house actively tried to participate in different entrepreneurial endeavors.

\textsuperscript{306} Walker, “Martha and Mary,” 414.
\textsuperscript{307} “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 38.
\textsuperscript{334} “Diary of the Blue Nuns,” 38.
The Benedictines of Ghent were an English house, whose successful participation in local markets is well documented in their annals by. The house found commercial success in the production of silk flowers. The production of the flowers started when the community brought in Teresa Matlocke as a novice in 1624. Teresa was skilled in the art of printing leaves and was able to transfer her skills to other sisters in the convent. The nuns saw the silk flowers a serious economic venture. From within the convent the nuns set up a workshop to create their flowers.

As Claire Walker has demonstrated, in order to produce the quantity of flowers needed the sisters took turns with weekly shifts working eight-hour days making the flowers. These shifts took time away from the spiritual duties of their divine office. To make up for this the sisters instilled their work with spiritual meaning; they said the rosary while they worked and listened to other sisters read them scripture.

In the sixth century Saint Benedict wrote that manual labour was a necessary part of monasticism. Benedict considered leisure the “enemy of the soul” and manual labour was beneficial as it took away leisure time for the monks. The nuns’ incorporation of prayer and spiritual contemplation into their routine surrounding manual labour allowed them to prove that they could continue to complete their traditional role as intercessors in prayer for the laity while also earning money to maintain the convent. In this way, the nuns tried to adapt the rule of Benedict to their current financial needs in order to make their commercial endeavour acceptable within the realm of female monasticism. The Ghent Benedictines achieved much success in the

309 Walker, “Martha and Mary,” 412.
silk flower industry and collaborated with several merchants who agreed to sell their flowers. In fact, the sisters could make up to thirty pounds from one order of flowers.\textsuperscript{339} Sharon Strocchia argues that for the fifteenth-century Florentine nuns, inadequate endowment revenues pushed the nuns to continue to immerse themselves in the urban landscape.\textsuperscript{311} In terms of the poorest convents, “it was the nuns’ own labour that kept these convents afloat.” \textsuperscript{312} This is evident in the case of the Ghent Benedictines as their financial desperation forced them to become part of the economic market and deal with the physical world that they had vowed to leave.

As can been seen with the Blue Nuns and the Benedictines of Ghent, the English choir nuns found ways to bend the rules in order to produce craft goods that could be sold to provide the community with sustenance. They did this by choosing goods that could be produced within the walls of the convent and that did not require strenuous or highly physical work. Furthermore, they expanded on activities, such as needlework, that were already part of a nun’s daily life. Although the English choir nuns were successful at selling their goods they were still held back from production of craft goods due to their social status. The restrictions against choir nuns’ engagement with manual labour meant that many operations of production were performed by the lay sisters that lived in the English convents. Lay sisters tended to be women from the middling classes and they were expected to do the physical labour for the choir nuns.\textsuperscript{313} They had to do all the menial tasks that were not fitting for the choir nuns who most often had noble backgrounds. In exchange for completing the drudge work the lay sisters did not have as rigorous of a schedule as the choir nuns and their spiritual obligations were significantly less. The problem was that housing lay sisters was a large expense for the English communities as they

\textsuperscript{311} Strocchia, “Nuns and Nunneries in Renaissance Florence,” 79.
\textsuperscript{312} Strocchia, “Nuns and Nunneries in Renaissance Florence,” 77.
\textsuperscript{313} Walker, “Martha and Mary,” 400.
brought in less money in dowry fees and they also cost more to feed as they were working all day.\textsuperscript{314} For instance the Brussels Benedictines received only one hundred pounds from lay sister Agnes Boulton when she professed in 1622 and one hundred and thirty pounds from Alexia Shephard the same year.\textsuperscript{315} Due to financial restraints the English communities could therefore only afford to keep a few lay sisters. The lay sisters that the communities did have were immensely beneficial to them as they were able to participate in a large range of commercial ventures for the English convents.

The lay sisters of several English communities were involved in the town’s local markets. Just as the choir nuns adapted their commercial ventures to fit what was acceptable for women of their social status so too did the lay sisters. Lay sisters did not have as many limitations in the type of work that they could do since they were expected to labour in the convents. In fact, Claire Walker argues that society viewed the commercial endeavours completed by the lay sisters as acceptable because they were seen as extensions of the work that the sisters already did on a daily basis.\textsuperscript{316} For instance, lay sisters from the Augustinian house in Louvain provided a laundry service for local priests, monks and laity.\textsuperscript{317} The laundry service that started in 1645 earned the community between two hundred and five hundred florins annually.\textsuperscript{318} Although the service earned the sisters a profit, it was seen as an acceptable business as it was a chore the lay sisters already performed for their own convent. Additionally the Sepulchrines from Liège set up a malt making business in their convent and the Canonesses of Saint Monica operated a brew house in

\textsuperscript{314} Walker, “Gender and Politics,” 22.  
\textsuperscript{315} “Receipts, Disbursements and Debts,” 82.  
\textsuperscript{316} Walker, “Martha and Mary,” 414.  
\textsuperscript{317} Walker, “Gender and Politics,” 98.  
\textsuperscript{318} Walker, “Martha and Mary,” 414.
1624. Women had participated in both of these industries women since the Middle Ages, and they were therefore considered appropriate according to the gender ideology of the time.

The English nuns’ role as active participants in the secular economy reveals another way in which the nuns engaged with the local towns. By the end of the seventeenth century the exiled convents became reputable institutions within their towns. Furthermore, their commercial ties to the local towns shaped the way that the English convents would engage with the laity. For instance as an institution of education for local children and a place of residence for local elite women, communities like the Blue Nuns worked hard to advertise the success of the convent and its good reputation. Furthermore, as producers of local goods and services the convents would need to find ways to get their products out to market; they would need local representatives and engage with town merchants. The convents depended on the sales of their goods and services; the English nuns would therefore by necessity be invested and engaged in the activities and wellbeing of the town and its citizens. This provides yet another example of how the exiled religious communities actively and successfully integrated into the local communities and how they nurtured their social and cultural bonds with their French and Flemish towns.
Conclusion

The experience of exile is one that can accentuate feelings of vulnerability and instability; however, it can also inspire creativity and ingenuity. The daily records of the lives of English nuns in exile reveal these lived experiences and illustrate the diverse elements that shaped life in exile for thousands of early modern nuns. With the recent publication of *English Convents in Exile*, a six volume series of extensive records from the twenty-two English convents, historians are now able to see how resilient and resourceful English nuns had to be in order to sustain their convents and preserve their longevity despite hardships. Throughout the seventeenth century, the English nuns had to endure the physical destruction of several wars on the continent. During the Franco-Spanish war convent property was destroyed and the nuns considered their safety in jeopardy. This destruction took a toll on the nuns and forced communities like the Third Order Franciscans of Nieuwpoort to leave their convent. In addition to the damage inflicted by war, communities also had to endure disease, including the plague, which broke out on the continent during the seventeenth century. These physical burdens were magnified by the geographical distance separating nuns from their kin and support systems in England. However, the nuns survived these tribulations as they found creative ways to adapt to their circumstances. Furthermore, they received the support of local priests and townspeople who took an interest in the nuns and cared for them by providing them both spiritual and material necessities.

Although the challenges created by war and disease were taxing on the nuns, the most difficult element of exile for the nuns was the inconsistency and unpredictability of their revenue streams. As my current work reveals, financial stress shaped many layers of the experience of convent life. Access to revenues from England, including the dowries of postulants and rents,
relied on fragile networks of communication between England and the continent that were vulnerable to political unrest and war in England. Furthermore, throughout the seventeenth century, the English Catholic community experienced periods of discrimination and persecution making it increasingly difficult for the nuns’ families to send funds to the exiled convents. The instability of funds from England and frequent periods of financial deficits motivated the English nuns to find alternative sources of revenues for the convents. The immediacy of their needs as well as the desire for reliable sources of revenue led the nuns to engage in the economy of their local towns. The revenues that the nuns brought in from the town were divided between their role as spiritual mediators for the laity, which allowed the nuns access to patronage for their spiritual labours, such as prayers and the revenues they brought in from investments, manual work, and convent schools. Fortunately for the English nuns, the local gentry took an interest in the convents and several aristocratic families took on the role of benefactors to the exiled communities. As benefactors for the convent the elite families provided the convents with money and decorations for the chapel; in return, the nuns acted as spiritual mediators for the families and town. This exchange formed a bond of “functional reciprocity.” Therefore, I argue that the success of the English convents was a result of their integration into the local economy as the additional funds stabilized the revenues of the convents.

However, the English convents’ financial vulnerability put the nuns in a position of dependency on the funds of the local communities. This partial reliance on local funding shaped the lives of the English nuns as they had to monitor their appearance within the town and make sure that they were upholding an image of spiritual perfection. In order to do this, the nuns had to make sure that the laity believed the community upheld the traditional values of female
monasticism including chastity, unity of the monastic community, obedience, and humility. The maintenance of this image was difficult for financially insecure communities as it limited the type of work that they could do and prevented the nuns from access to help and support during times of trauma within the convents as the maintenance of the convents’ image was of utmost importance.

Dependence on local support also brought issues of obedience to the forefront as the nuns identified themselves primarily as members of the English Catholic community and believed that their commitment to the English mission meant that their main duty was to pray for the conversion of England to Catholicism. However, in reality the convents were under the jurisdiction of local bishops and had to obey the laws of the local towns. Furthermore, their reciprocal relationship with the local town meant that the nuns also had to spend a large portion of their time in prayer for the needs of local families as well as for the national concerns of France and the Spanish Netherlands. The nuns therefore, had to divide their spiritual labours between local and national concerns on the one hand and their own spiritual concerns on the other. As a result, the nuns had to amend their original objective to support the English Catholic community in order to make sure that they could afford to maintain their convents.

Finally, as the English convents became more invested in the local economy and formed stronger relationships with the laity, their interactions began to transform the culture within the convent as they sent out young students to be educated in French convents and the homes of the local laity. Nuns also began to read French literature, received spiritual assistance from local priests, and regularly interacted with local pensioners. Since the majority of nuns arrived in the

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convent at an early age, as either a student or postulant, it meant that the nuns spent the majority of their lives on the continent and were more familiar with the local laity, food, and musical traditions there than in England. Therefore, I argue that these transnational interactions created a distinct culture within the exiled convents that adapted elements of local French and Flemish culture into the culture of the English Catholic community. However, the scope of this paper is limited and although it addresses the ways in which the English nuns interacted with the local community, more research needs to be done on how these relationships shaped the culture and religious customs within the convents. A line of inquiry about the spiritual identity of these exiled women needs to be opened. This identity is complex and diverse as it combines elements of pre-Reformation Christianity with the modernizing English Catholicism and reform movements in continental European Catholicism. This examination would provide historians with an understanding of how religious practices were adapted and changed during a time of growing exploration and globalization.

The history of the English nuns in exile in France and the Spanish Netherland during the seventeenth century addresses questions regarding the changing roles of women, their identity, resiliency, and agency. Communities constantly faced issues surrounding money; however, even with all the financial struggles, of the twenty-two contemplative orders founded in France, the Spanish Netherland, and Portugal, only one community was dissolved due to insufficient funds. This was the Benedictine community of Pontoise, which closed in 1786. Therefore, the majority of English convents overcame the hardships of exiles and found ways to cope with the financial stress and sustained themselves throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century and demonstrated resiliency and adaptability.

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320 Bowden, “Convents in exile,” vol. 1, xxii.
The eventual closure of the English convents in France and the Spanish Netherlands came about with the French Revolution. From the beginning of the revolution, there was a strong sense of hostility towards monastic houses. By October 1789 the convents could no longer receive postulants. By 1790 monastic vows were abolished. And two years later there was a mass eviction of all monastic women across France. A few English convents were turned into prisons including the convent of the Poor Clares in Rouen in 1793. That same year, the Conceptionist nuns were imprisoned and sent to the English Augustinians’ house that had also been converted into a prison. Both communities were not released until the formation of the Directory in 1795. The Benedictine communities in Flanders were also affected by the French Revolution. In 1794, the Revolutionary army invaded Flanders which forced communities such as the Benedictine community in Dunkirk to flee to England. Carmen Mangion’s work on the English nuns in the French Revolution reveals how this tumultuous time brought issues of identity, adaptability and the English nuns’ resilience to the forefront. Throughout the revolution, the English nuns did not accept their place as prisoners to the revolutionary state. They worked diligently to prevent the state from taking their convent and lands. Mangion states that in order to preserve their way of life as well as their lands, the nuns wrote to the National Assembly as both English and French subjects. For example, the Augustinian nuns of Paris wrote that they should

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323 Bowden, “Convents in exile,” vol. 1, xxxiv.
353 Bowden, “Convents in exile,” vol. 1, xxxiii.
be able to keep their land as they had purchased it with English money and therefore were “not part of the patrimony of the French state.”

However, in the same petition to the National Assembly they also wrote that they deserved the protection of the state as they were “naturalized French subjects.” Furthermore, beyond referring to themselves as subjects of France, they also emphasized their utility by emphasizing their role as educators of young French girls. The same strategy, as discussed in chapter one, was employed by the Dominican nuns in Strassburg after the Protestant Reformation. Mangion argues that, similar to the Dominican nuns, the English nuns focused on their role as a civic institution, rather than a religious one, when appealing to the state. The Conceptionist nuns took an alternative approach to the Augustinian nuns who emphasized their identity as both English and French subjects. Instead, the Conceptionist nuns chose to emphasize their role as exiles highlighting their statelessness. The petitions of both the Augustinians and the Conceptionists highlight the diverse identities that the English nuns maintained almost two hundred years after the first English convent in exile was founded.

The complexity of the nuns’ identity can be further seen in 1795 after the nuns were released from imprisonment. Caroline Bowden argues that many of the nuns were reluctant to leave everything that they had established in exile. In 1791, a relief act was signed in England that legalized Catholic worship. The new act gave the exiled nuns an alternative option to stay on in France and Flanders. In fact, after their release from imprisonment several women decided

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330 Bowden, “Convents in exile,” vol. 1, xxv.
to stay on the continent. For example, in the Conceptionist community only three sisters returned to England in 1795. The remaining thirteen nuns stayed in France and tried to operate a small school in Paris.\(^{331}\) The decision of several English nuns to stay on the continent and re-establish themselves in their local community reveals the depth of the English nuns’ connection to their local towns and how complex their identity as exiles had become. Furthermore, I would argue that the Conceptionists’ decision to stay in Paris opens up a question for scholars of whether these nuns can continue to be called “exiles” as they had become part of their local town and identified as citizens of these towns.

The successful establishment and maintenance of English convents in exile for two centuries clearly demonstrates the bravery and ingenuity of the English nuns. Their ability to overcome the physical, financial, and emotional hardships that they persistently experienced on the continent indicates the degree of resiliency, adaptability, and agency of these women. In order to sustain their communities financially, the nuns had to make compromises in their commitment to the English mission in order to accommodate the needs of the local communities to bring in revenues. As a result the nuns became partially integrated into local communities and their economies, which complicated their sense of identity. This complex identity was shaped by the nuns’ loyalty to the English mission while also having socio-economic and cultural ties with the geographical communities in which they lived. Ultimately, the depth of this complex identity is revealed when thirteen English nuns chose to stay on the continent even after the legalization of Catholic worship in England.

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