

Introduction

The archive of the Irish College, Salamanca was deposited in St Patricks College, Maynooth in 1951-52 on the closure of the college in 1952. In total, the collection contains the archives of the Irish Colleges in Salamanca, Santiago de Compostela, Seville, Madrid, Alcalá de Henares and Lisbon and also contains some material from the English College in Valladolid. It is the property of the Irish Episcopal Conference and spans from the late sixteenth to the mid-twentieth century.

The Irish College in Salamanca was founded by Rev. Thomas White (with the help of James Archer and Richard Conway, later to become his successors) who secured patronage from Philip II of Spain by means of a royal decree issued in Valladolid on 2 August 1592. This order gave Rev White, now named rector of the college, the *maestraescuela* (the University Judge) and the senate of the University of Salamanca the support and permission to the foundation of the ‘Regale Collegium Nobilium Hibernorum’ in Salamanca regarded as the first and the foremost of the Irish college on the Iberian Peninsula. This decree is often considered the inception of the Irish college in the city, known as the *Real Colegio de San Patricio de Nobles Irlandeses*.

From 1574 onwards Irish students, lay and clerical, had been coming to Salamanca in an effort to acquire through Spanish generosity the education they found so difficult to obtain at home. The main reason for this difficulty was the takeover of Ireland by the Protestant English state in the Tudor conquest of Ireland since 1534 resulting in a massive exile from the country. One of the main reasons for this was a series of penal laws against Catholics in operation in Ireland from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, which included acts forbidding Catholics to teach in Ireland or to send their children abroad for education, and the banishment of Catholic clergy, specifically foreign-educated priests.¹ These Irish exiles were escaping both a political and religious oppression in their country along with the havoc of war and general economic dislocation. They exiled to the continent where they were able to find educational and economic opportunities and a better quality of life in general. One of the main groups of exiles coming from Ireland were those seeking religious refuge.

¹ Richardson, Regina Whelan, (1995), ‘The Salamanca Archives’, in Agnes Neligan (ed), *Maynooth Library Treasures*, Royal Irish Academy, pp 112-147

They came to various European cities and towns seeking a place that supported the education and well being of Catholic seminarists. Quickly, a ‘network’ of Irish Colleges began to emerge in countries such as France, Italy and Spain which educated both clergy and laity. These colleges also acted as a social focus for Irish mercantile and military populations on the European mainland.

Salamanca was the first college to be founded in Spain and from there other colleges began to sprout up around various Spanish towns and cities. In the beginning these colleges were centers of education, politics and society. Supported by the Irish hierarchy and the Spanish monarchy the colleges had significant power in the political and social life of Spain. The Irish College in Salamanca was the largest of the colleges and it was considered the principal college. From its very inception the college received economic support from the crown. In 1593, by royal charter, Philip II granted a *juro* (a type of annuity) of 350,000 maravedis for the sustenance of the Seminary and his successors upheld this charity.² (SP/S/25/1). The revenues collected during these first years were rounded off by the contributions the students themselves made. Specifically, it had been established that the college would receive alms from the masses said by the student priests.

In 1608 the Salamanca College was incorporated into the University of Salamanca. Two years later a house was presented to the Irish by the King and it received the title ‘*El Colegio Real de los Nobles Irlandeses*’ or ‘The Royal College of Irish Nobles’. In addition to the yearly grant, Philip III established a viaticum of £ 10 for each student who finished his course and returned to Ireland.³

Other colleges soon followed in Alcalá de Henares, Santiago de Compostela, Seville and Madrid and in Portugal the Irish College of Lisbon. As with Salamanca, it was often the case that a body of students had already been in existence in an informal group, a school or a seminary, without it being as yet a college proper, and there is not always a single, definitive date for the foundation of each college.⁴

² Ana Castro Santamaria and Nieves Rupérez Almajano ‘The Real Colegio de San Patricio de Nobles Irlandeses of Salamanca: Its buildings and properties, 1592-1768,’ in the *Ulster Earls and Baaroque Europe. Refashioning Irish Identities, 1600-1800*, (eds.) Thomas O’Connor and Mary Ann Lyons (Dublin 2010), pp 223-41.

³ Henchy, Monica, ‘The Irish College at Salamanca’, *Studies* 70 (1981), 220-7.

⁴ Regina Whelan Richardson.

Student life:

If the colleges, at least at their origin, were not entirely ecclesiastical, the formation of priests were central to their mission. Irish students destined for the priesthood arrived in the peninsula Spain usually with some knowledge of Latin and the humanities received in the network of informal secondary schools in Ireland. Normally they entered the seminary at about eighteen years of age. Once in Spain, they enrolled for the prescribed study of arts and philosophy before moving on to theology and canon law. The whole course of study lasted seven years.⁵ On entering the college the students were required to write out formal promises known as a *juramentos* or 'oaths', which were witnessed and sealed usually by fellow students. In it they pledged themselves to return to their homeland at the end of his studies. In addition, they were required to be obedient to the College authorities and to observe the rules and also to recoup the College for maintenance if the student failed to take orders and return to serve on the 'Irish Mission'. The texts of these oaths shed light on the personal and educational background of the students, naming their parents and dioceses and giving details of their studies, sometimes including the names of their teachers or hedge-schoolmasters in Ireland.⁶ Once there, they enrolled for the prescribed study of arts and philosophy before moving on to theology and canon law. The whole course of study lasted seven years.

On the completion of their courses and following ordination the new priests applied to the king for the *viaticum*, a royal contribution granted in 1610 under certain conditions to newly-ordained priests of the Irish Colleges. This was worth one hundred ducats and was given to priests returning to Ireland to cover the cost of their journeys. Between 1619 and 1659, at least 280 Irish priests applied for the *viaticum*.

It is claimed that between 1594-1644, Salamanca educated 370 students including one primate of Ireland, 4 archbishops, 5 bishops, 9 provincials of religious orders, 30 martyrs, 120 order priests, 12 distinguished writers and 40 doctors of Divinity. Names include Patrick Curtis, former student and rector of Salamanca and later became archbishop of Armagh and primate of Ireland, and Patrick Everard, who became

⁵ O'Connell, Patricia, 'The early modern Irish College network in Iberia, 1590 – 1600' in *The Irish in Europe, 1580-1815* (ed.) Thomas O'Connor, (Dublin 2001), pp 62-63

⁶ Texts of the Salamanca oaths are published by rector Denis J O'Doherty 'Students of the Irish College, Salamanca.', in *Archivium Hibernicum* (1913, 1914, 19,5, 1917)

archbishop of Cashel and was president of Maynooth College between 1810 and 1812.⁷

Finance

During the early years of the Irish College there seems to have been a constant struggle to keep the college financially solvent. Most of the young Irish students could contribute nothing to its upkeep, and until 1610 it received no endowment from the King of Spain. Fortunately many voluntary grants and money was made at various times by local Irish merchants, who realized the value of the work the college was doing for their native land. In addition, Father James Archer had been appointed 'Prefect of the Mission' in all the Irish Colleges and his duties were to visit the different colleges, to examine the accounts and to garner as much financial help as possible. His account books show the revenue coming in from the City Councils, from Spanish and Irish noblemen, from ecclesiastics, from Irish merchants living in Spain and from 1610 onwards, Philip II grant in which he granted a *juro* (a type of annuity) of 350,000 maravedis for the sustenance of the Seminary. His successors were to uphold this charity.

As time went on, each rector had to have an eye to investments, buying lands, olive groves and vineyards, houses and other properties which would bring in an income on a continuous basis. The college had a summer house in Aldearrubia, a small village about 15kms from Salamanca. This residence was bought in 1749. When the property was bought it consisted of a large house, with cellar, courtyard, a large portiere, a well, a kiln, lofts, stables, cattle fold, hay loft and vines. There were 47.73 hectares in the main estate and additions of small pieces of land, such as meadows or vineyards, were made over time. Local villagers worked on the farm attached to the house, in particular to the wine harvest. Through the records we can see that this small property supplied wine for the needs of this house as well as altar wines and many items of food for college residents, especially wheat, honey vegetables and fruit. They also raised cattle and poultry.

⁷ O'Connell, Patricia, 'The early modern Irish College network in Iberia, 1590 – 1600', pp 54

The college owned various other lands which gave them produce to both use for the college as well as to sell locally including ‘fincas’ *Silvestre, Castellanos de Moriscos, Morisco, Alaejos, Mata de Armuna, Monterrubio de Armuna, Valdimiel, Gomecello, Huerta, Babilafuente, Castellanos de Villiqueza, Villamayor, San Cristobal de la Cuesta.*

Although the college produced much of its essential foodstuffs from its estate, it was still too often in dire financial straits. Payments of grants and other sources of income were frequently in arrears and investments never came up to expectations due to inflation and other problems.

Another means of financing for the college was through bequests, the most well known being that of O’Sullivan Beares. A well-known Irish man, Donal Cam O’Sullivan Beare had sought refuge in Spain after a tenacious defence of his lands and a spirited retreat in the aftermath of the Battle of Kinsale. When he arrived in Spain, in 1603 or 1604, he joined the many Irish exiles already seeking protection there, becoming one of a number of Irish men honoured by the Spanish monarch with titles and pensions. Philip III conferred on him a title corresponding to his position as chief of his clan in Ireland ‘Conde de Birhaven y Senor de los territorios de Bearra y Beantry’ and the prestigious honour of knight of Santiago. He was given a monthly pension of 300 ducats, as well as an annual grant of 1000 ducats to be paid by the Spanish treasury to himself and his heirs forever. Soon after O’Sullivan Beare’s arrival, Philip endowed an Irish college in Santiago for the education of the sons of these exiles, which differed from the other colleges in its lay character, with no requirement to study for the priesthood. O’Sullivan Beare took a great interest in this college and emphasised the importance of a Catholic education in a Catholic country for Irish noblemen, who would lead and sustain their followers in their faith.

At the end of the seventeenth century his son, Dermot O’Sullivan Beare, made a will naming the Irish College at Salamanca his heir in case his daughter should die childless. When he died in 1659 his daughter Antonia was only ten years old and later married the Marquis of Belforte (her natural uncle) who squandered the greater part of her inheritance. In 1718 she died childless and in complete poverty. She left what little property she possessed to her nephew, with the remainder to the college in Salamanca which helped put the college on a fairly secure financial footing.

Nineteenth and twentieth centuries

In 1767, the Irish College in Salamanca was so firmly established that when Charles III expelled the Jesuits from Spain in 1767, the College continued under royal protection. The only change was that from now on Irish secular priests instead of Jesuits became rectors. The house which the College had since 1610 was sold in 1768 and the building which the Spanish Jesuits had to vacate was given to the Irish College. After the departure of the Jesuits the colleges in Seville and Santiago fell into such disarray that they had to be incorporated with Salamanca in 1769; and in 1789 the rents and income of the Irish College at Alcala were also transferred.⁸

In 1807, upheaval did come for the Irish College in Salamanca with the French invasion of the Peninsular Wars. The college had to be closed although it is known that some Irish students joined Sir John Moores forces as interpreters. The rector at that time, Dr Patrick Curtis, remained alone in the College during this turbulent period and was subsequently expelled by the French. During the French occupations the College was looted and it lost nearly all its property including deeds of mortgage and treasury bonds. A large part of the archives and account books were also destroyed.⁹ The Irish did return to Salamanca after the war and from 1838 they occupied *el palacio del Arzobispo*, the Fonseca Palace, given to the Irish by the Town Council. It had been built in 1538 and the Irish were given the use of the building through the influence of the English Ambassador to Spain at that time, George Villiers.¹⁰ The building included a renaissance patio and arches adorned with portrait medallions, and its ornate interior, including a small chapel. This was where the college was to reside until it finally closed its doors in 1952. By that time most of the Irish colleges on the Continent had been closed, partly because of an improvement in education opportunities and a more tolerant situation in Ireland. A national seminary for Catholics at St Patricks Maynooth had been established since 1795, and Catholic emancipation came in 1829. But the Irish college at Salamanca held fast to its position throughout the century.

⁸ Henchy, Monica, 'The Irish College at Salamanca', p 223

⁹ Henchy, Monica, 'The Irish College at Salamanca', p 224

¹⁰ O'Connell, Patricia, 'The early modern Irish College network in Iberia, 1590 – 1600', p 57

Almost a century later the days of the Irish college in Salamanca were to be brought to a slow close with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. When the news of the revolt arrived, the students were on holidays in the summer villa of 'Pendueles' in Asturias and had to be evacuated through France. They were to be given 50 francs each for the journey back to Ireland by the Irish consul; this was to be the last 'viaticum' and these the last students of the Irish Colleges in Spain. The current rector Father Alexander McCabe, who had been on holidays in Ireland, returned to Salamanca in November 1936, to find that General Franco had established his headquarters there and that the college was being requisitioned by the military. This was resolutely opposed by the Rector. Eventually the Rector had to give way to pressure from the Spanish Government and allow the German Embassy to take over the college from June 1937 to May 1939.¹¹

At this stage, however, the College, which was over four hundred years old, was in need of extensive repairs of which the college had no way to finance. The only solution seemed to be to sell the College. However, the Spanish hierarchy maintained that the Irish could not do this since they did not own the College as by Spanish law all ecclesiastical property was owned by the State. The Irish bishops claimed they were in a special position since they held the original College as the gift of the Spanish monarchy and that Alfonso XIII in August 1914 had recognized their full right to the College and its investments. This was difficult to prove as a lot of the documents had been destroyed from the College archive during the French invasion. The Irish bishops sought an interview with General Franco and Ministers of State, and a compromise was arrived at whereby the College was given to the University of Salamanca on condition that the money realized from the sale of the villa, lands and investments be given partly to the Irish College in Rome, and partly to establish scholarships. The Colegio Mayor del Arzobispo Fonseca was taken over by the University of Salamanca and has now been renovated as a university residence and cultural centre; it is still also known as *El Colegio de los Irlandeses*.

¹¹ For more information of this period refer to Richardson, Regina Whelans (2012) 'The Irish in Asturias: the footprint of the Irish College, Salamanca 1913-1950', *Archivium Hibernicum*, 65. pp. 273-290