

THE TASBURGHS OF FLIXTON AND CATHOLICISM IN NORTH-EAST SUFFOLK, 1642–1767

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THE TASBURGH FAMILY held extensive lands in north-east Suffolk until 1736 and in south Norfolk until 1783. The Tasburghs were Catholic recusants from 1629 onwards and from 1657 they patronised a mission by Benedictine monks which began at Flixton before moving to Bungay in 1823, where it continues to this day. In 1980 Nesta Evans produced an excellent study of the Tasburghs, whose origins are very ancient indeed, but she gave rather short shrift to the family after the death of Sir John Tasburgh in 1629. Evans telescoped the later Tasburghs into one page of her article, claiming that there was little evidence for them on account of their recusancy. She took the view that 'in [Sir John Tasburgh's] marriage with Lettice Cressy lay the seeds of [the family's] decline' and assumed that Charles Tasburgh's adoption of his mother's faith began a downward spiral into obscurity and, ultimately, extinction: 'It was the strain of recusancy which entered with Sir John's marriage to Lettice Cressy that led to the family's economic and social decline'.¹

Evidence for the later Tasburghs is not, in fact, as scarce as Evans believed. Furthermore, a strong argument can be made that the Tasburghs did not enter a spiral of decline from 1629. They successfully survived Parliamentary sequestrations of their lands for recusancy as well as the Popish Plot and the 1688 Revolution. The legal disabilities that Catholics suffered did not make them any less willing to involve themselves in their communities, and this is demonstrated by the fact that Richard Tasburgh of Flixton was a justice of the peace in the reign of James II. Success for a family such as the Tasburghs need not be measured in terms of dynastic continuity and financial and political progress. They not only founded a mission but also willingly cut it loose from financial dependence on them, which was a crucial precursor to growth.

Recusancy closed many doors to the Tasburghs but it also made them part of the close-knit world of East Anglian Catholicism, along with families such as the Bedingfields, Jerninghams, Gages and Rookwoods. They paid regular and culturally enriching visits to the Continent where they enrolled their sons and daughters in Catholic schools and colleges, and their chaplains represented a further link with the Continent and the expatriate culture of English Catholics.² The extinction of the Flixton Tasburghs in the 1730s can scarcely be blamed on their being Catholic; a relatively small number of the Flixton Tasburghs elected for the priestly or religious life compared with some other Catholic families.³ The Bodney Tasburghs survived for nearly fifty years after the extinction of the senior Flixton branch.

The Tasburghs probably migrated from the village that bears their name in Norfolk in around 1220 to the parish of St Peter, South Elmham in Suffolk, which borders on the parish of Flixton.⁴ In 1544 John Tasburgh, the father of Sir John, was granted the dissolved priory of Augustinian nuns at Flixton, which thereafter became his 'mansion house' and was known as 'the Abbey'.⁵ Sir John Tasburgh, described as a 'hot Protestant' by the Augustinian Canonesses of St Monica's, Louvain,⁶ married the Catholic Lettice Cressy (b. 1580) in 1593/4.⁷ In 1607 Sir John purchased the manor of Newhall in Flixton from his cousin Thomas Bateman, and built the new Flixton Hall there around 1615.⁸ In 1615 he purchased the five other manors of South Elmham from Dudley, Lord North.⁹ Sir John and Lettice had thirteen children (Fig. 135).

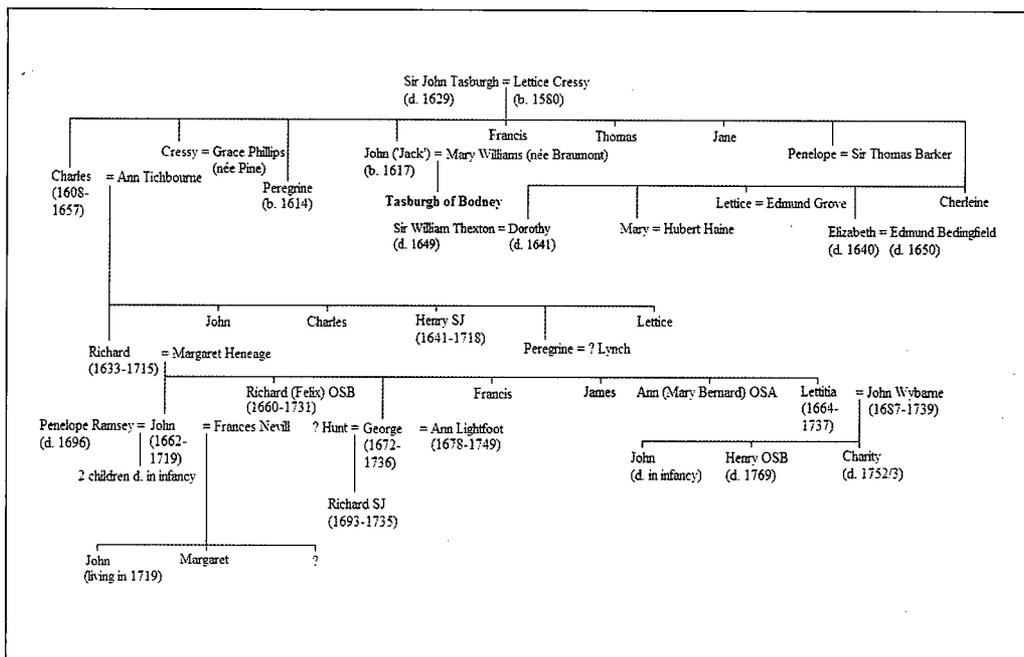


FIG. 135 – The Flixton Tasburgh family tree.

In spite of their father's Protestantism, we know that four of Sir John Tasburgh's sons were recusants. It is also likely that his fourth daughter Elizabeth, who married the Catholic Edmund Bedingfield, shared her husband's faith.¹⁰ Both Charles and Cressy, his two eldest sons, received their ostensibly Protestant early education at the grammar school in Eye under Mr Dormond, and matriculated at Christ's College, Cambridge in May 1626.¹¹ On 19 November 1628 Charles entered Gray's Inn but when his father died in March 1629 he was still under twenty-one years of age, and Sir John Sackville attempted to buy his wardship from Charles I for £2000.¹²

After Sir John Tasburgh's death it was Lettice who determined her sons' education, and in 1631 and 1632 Sir John's third and fourth sons, Peregrine and John, were enrolled at the English College, Douai.¹³ Even in the 1630s it was not uncommon for Catholics to attend Oxford and Cambridge, since the practice of Church Papistry or occasional conformity was widespread in the Catholic community. To choose to send one's children beyond seas for their education, however, was a sign of out-and-out recusancy. The Cambridge-educated Charles Tasburgh was almost certainly a Catholic before 1631 when he married Anne, the eldest daughter of Sir Richard Tichborne, from a staunch Hampshire recusant family.¹⁴ Charles and Anne had six children.

THE CHALLENGE OF SEQUESTRATION, 1642–57

On the outbreak of the Civil War and the formation of the Eastern Association, Parliament sequestered the estates of Royalist sympathisers and Popish recusants, who were considered disloyal by default. Catholic families dealt with the threat of sequestration in a variety of different ways. Some temporarily conformed.¹⁵ Others, who had placed their estates in the hands of Protestant trustees before the Civil War, avoided it altogether.¹⁶ Others had already compounded their estates for the payment of recusancy fines in the 1630s and were living on

their own lands as tenants; their lands could not be sequestrated as they did not own them. Others leased their lands to Protestant relatives in the hope that they would avoid sequestration, while still others challenged the authorities to produce evidence of their personal recusancy, and those with no other choice made a nuisance of themselves to the Committee for Compounding until it relented and restored some or all of their estates.

The Tasburghs, who had no trustees, were forced to adopt the last three strategies with varying degrees of success. They maintained neutrality in politics and, as recusants rather than 'delinquents', they were more likely to enjoy the Committee's sympathy. However, they also took advantage of the vast Parliamentary bureaucracy that emerged in the 1640s and demonstrated great persistence in their efforts to regain estates. There is also evidence of their use of Protestant relatives, most notably Sir Thomas Barker of Hardington, to advance their objectives. Furthermore, the lack of evidence for the recusancy of Cressy Tasburgh also assisted the family. Presentations of individuals to the Quarter Sessions for recusancy were irregular and unreliable, depending on the zeal and malice of individual magistrates, and it was not difficult for people to slip through the net. While many were 'reputed papists' and belonged to known Catholic families, proving that they were recusants could be problematic.

Charles Tasburgh's Flixton estate was sequestrated in 1643; on 5 February 1651 he made a request to the Committee for Compounding that Flixton Hall, Boys' Hall, 'Elmetham' (Elmham) Hall and the bridge at Homersfield should be repaired as nothing had been done to maintain them for the last eight years. Charles was within his rights to request this as it was expected that sequestrated properties would eventually be restored to their owners once the threat of war had passed; furthermore, it was in the interests of Parliament, which raised money from the sequestrated estates, to maintain them in a serviceable condition, and Homersfield bridge was an important crossing point on the river Waveney between Suffolk and Norfolk. On 9 September the Committee produced a certificate claiming that the repairs had been carried out, but at this point Charles asked that the houses on the estate, which had also been empty since sequestration, should be repaired as well. He also asked to be admitted as a tenant to the Flixton estate for seven years.¹⁷ It was standard practice for recusants to be permitted to occupy their own lands as tenants of the government as this represented an additional source of revenue for Parliament.

The second certificate of repairs was produced on 10 December but the Committee declined to approve Charles's request to be admitted as a tenant, since the previous certificate of repairs seems to have been lost ('No order herein till the former proceedings are produced'). It is possible that the Committee was simply stalling because Charles's request for tenancy was inconvenient or undesirable. Charles renewed his petition, this time signed by his mother Lettice as well, on 25 February 1652. Finally, on 7 April, the Committee granted Charles freedom to fell timber on the Flixton estate in order to carry out further repairs to Flixton Hall and the other properties, and to burn bricks. Charles estimated that repairs to the farms on the estate would cost £200 and repairs to Flixton Hall £300, and begged an allowance from the Committee. There is no evidence that he was successful. However, the Recusants' Estates Act of 21 October 1653 allowed recusants to contract for the purchase of two thirds of the original estate sequestrated; Charles did this on 17 January 1654.

Charles Tasburgh's involvement with the Committee for Compounding suggests that he was both a victim and a beneficiary of Parliamentary bureaucracy. He succeeded in making the government pay for repairs to his estate and, whilst he failed to obtain the tenancy and the allowance of £500 he later requested, by the time he reoccupied part of the estate in 1654 he had saved money on repairs. This may have been the reason why Charles asked for further repairs in September 1651, although this request undoubtedly delayed his return to the estate. Living as a landless gentleman was not cheap: according to a schedule of Charles's debts

drawn up on 23 May 1655 he owed a total of £1140 to eleven creditors.¹⁸

Charles Tasburgh died on 11 August 1657,¹⁹ and on 16 October an inquisition was taken 'for fynding out and seising two parte of the Estates of all & sun[dry] sequestred for popish Recusancy' at the King's Head inn, Bungay, before three commissioners appointed by Cromwell's Exchequer (Henry Hoogan, Nicholas Salter and John Morley). The commissioners found that Charles Tasburgh had owned 270 acres in the parishes of South Elmham St Margaret, Sancroft, Bungay, Flixton, South Elmham St James and Homersfield worth a total of £233,²⁰ including a watermill at Homersfield. In addition, the rents and fees due to the manor of South Elmham were worth £77. Flixton was at this time leased to a certain William Smith and it is possible that, for some of the 1650s at least, the Tasburghs were living in Norwich.²¹ The commissioners noted that one-third of this land remained under sequestration, but several individuals gave testimony that the bridge at Homersfield 'is now so much ruined and decayed that of necessity it must be new builded'. This would cost at least £200.²² On 18 November 1658 two-thirds of the lands originally belonging to Richard's grandmother Lettice Tasburgh were leased back to him by Letters Patent of Richard Cromwell for twenty-one years.²³

Charles's younger brother Cressy also suffered sequestration. He inherited the estate of Thomas Barley of Elsenham in Essex which was sequestered on account of Cressy's recusancy on 28 March 1650.²⁴ However, prior to sequestration the Elsenham estate had been leased to Sir Thomas Barker, Cressy's brother-in-law (Sir Thomas's wife was Penelope Tasburgh, second daughter of Sir John Tasburgh and Lettice Cressy) on 20 February 1650. The four-year lease was for a peppercorn rent, but Sir Thomas spent £1200 on the estate only to have it sequestered on account of his brother-in-law's recusancy. Both Sir Thomas and Cressy Tasburgh petitioned the Committee for Compounding, Cressy claiming that he 'was neither convicted [of recusancy] nor indicted thereof' when the sequestration took place. On 29 August the Committee ruled that Sir Thomas should receive two-thirds of the rents on security while Cressy's recusancy was investigated, and since Cressy was granted the rents on 17 October it would seem that the Committee was unable to find evidence of his recusancy. Finally, on 6 February 1651 the lease of Elsenham to Sir Thomas Barker was allowed and the sequestration was discharged.²⁵

On 19 January 1640 Cressy Tasburgh came into possession of three manors in Somerset (Cathanger, Merriott and Northall, otherwise known as Abbot's Isle) which were the jointure of his wife Grace Pine, the widow of Sir Thomas Phelips of Barrington, made over by her brother Arthur Pine. Sir Thomas Phelips was a cousin of Sir Robert Phelips (d. 1638), the radical MP for Ilchester before the Civil War.²⁶ The Somerset properties were subsequently sequestered on account of the involvement of Edmund Wyndham, Arthur Pine's brother-in-law, in the Royalist cause. On 19 May 1652 Cressy begged discharge of the sequestration of the Somerset properties on the grounds that they were his, not Wyndham's, and that he had never been suspected of active Royalism.²⁷ The discharge was denied, so Cressy altered his strategy and asked to have the rents of the properties on security, which was granted on 24 June 1652. The following year, on 19 May 1653, he requested the discharge once more and again the Committee declined, instead granting him the rents up to September on 12 July 1653; the fact that double security was demanded for the rents may indicate the Committee's exasperation with, or distrust of, Cressy Tasburgh. However, the estate was finally discharged completely on 10 November 1653.

Yet another request for the discharge of sequestered lands was made jointly by John, Thomas and Cressy Tasburgh, who appear to have been living at East Wretham in Norfolk at the time, together with Henry Humberston of Loddon, on 7 September 1654. The request concerned the Norfolk lands of Hubert Hacon which were bequeathed to John and Thomas

Tasburgh in a codicil to Hacon's will, while Hacon's Suffolk lands were granted by his widow Mary Hacon to Cressy Tasburgh and Henry Humberston for twenty years. The outcome of this request is not recorded.²⁸ It is not clear whether Hacon's lands were sequestrated for recusancy or 'delinquency' (Royalism) but the Tasburghs were sufficiently confident in the lack of evidence for their own recusancy to claim his estate. In addition to the estates of Charles and Cressy, two thirds of the lands bequeathed to their mother Lettice on the death of Sir John Tasburgh were sequestrated as well; Charles requested that the Committee certify their yearly value on 25 June 1651 and requested that they be let for seven years to his brother-in-law Sir Thomas Barker and Robert Ward, a merchant of Lombard Street.²⁹ It is possible that Ward was a banker to whom Charles was in debt and that the lease of his mother's estates was intended as repayment or security; on the other hand, the involvement of his brother-in-law might suggest that the two men were granted the lease of the property as friendly non-recusants in order to prevent its future sequestration.

EARLY MISSIONARY ACTIVITY AT FLIXTON, 1657-78

The Tasburghs emerged from the chaos of war and the uncertainty of the Commonwealth with most of their property intact and in good repair, which was more than could be said for many Catholic families. Charles Tasburgh was succeeded in August 1657 by his twenty-four-year-old son Richard (1633-1716), who married Margaret, daughter of Sir George Heneage of Hendon in Kent. Another daughter of Sir George Heneage, Mary, married Sir Francis Mannock in 1636, thus linking the Tasburghs to the influential Catholic Mannocks of Giffard's Hall, Stoke-by-Nayland.³⁰ It was probably Richard who invited the first Benedictine chaplain to Flixton in the year of his father's death. Why Richard chose to patronise the Benedictines in particular remains a mystery, as his family then had no connections with the Order; his younger brother Charles was educated at the English College, Douai, while Henry was about to enter the Jesuit College at St Omer and would later become a Jesuit himself. The Jesuits had the largest mission in England in the 1650s but they were but one competitor for the patronage of the recusant gentry.

The English Benedictine Congregation was founded in the first decade of the seventeenth century on the premise that a group of Englishmen in monastic orders had aggregated themselves to Dom Sigebert Buckley, the last surviving monk of Queen Mary's re-established Westminster Abbey. By doing this they claimed all the rights of the pre-Reformation monastic and cathedral foundations, which was a position confirmed by the Pope in 1633. St Gregory's Priory was founded at Douai in northern France in 1606, followed by St Laurence's Priory at Dieulouard in 1608 and St Edmund's Priory, Paris in 1615. In 1643 the monks took control of the German Abbey of Lambspring. When they were in their monastery, the monks were under the authority of the prior or abbot, but the Congregation was designed with the mission to England in mind. The priors were subject to an elected President of the whole Congregation. The Congregation claimed ordinary ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the pre-Reformation provinces of York and Canterbury (the North and South Provinces) and it was the Provincials of York and Canterbury who controlled the missions in their territory. The Benedictines came into conflict with the Vicars Apostolic, the non-territorial bishops appointed by Rome, since they denied the right of the Vicars Apostolic to regulate their clergy who had inherited pre-Reformation rights.

In the mid seventeenth century it was the gentry who, in the vast majority of cases, employed the monks and provided the mass centres from which they ministered. Families usually patronised a particular religious order, but it was not uncommon for families to shift their patronage or even remove it altogether (if, for instance, the head of the household died

and was succeeded by a Protestant). Consequently the position of chaplain to a recusant household was an insecure one, and of course it carried the same danger of capture, torture and execution faced by every Catholic priest in England.

The early years of the Civil War produced a Parliamentary backlash against Catholics, and especially Catholic clergy, that led to the martyrdom of several Benedictines, including the Suffolk-born Bartholomew Alban Roe. Even in these years the number of Benedictine missions continued to grow, with chaplaincies established at Kipton and Batley in Yorkshire in 1644 and 1645, at Hereford and Worcester in 1646 and at Bradenham in Buckinghamshire in 1649. Cromwell's regime proved to be at least as tolerant as Charles I's in the early 1630s, and the chaplaincies established during the Commonwealth included Stourton in Wiltshire (1652), Bidwell in Devon (1653), Longwood in Hampshire and Stockeld in Yorkshire in 1655 and Felton, Northumberland, in 1657.³¹ There had been a Benedictine presence in Suffolk in the form of William Palmer at Hintlesham Hall from 1622; when Palmer left Hintlesham is unclear, but he died at Longwood in 1655.³² In 1657 Flixton was the only Benedictine mission in the county, and it would remain so until the arrival of Dom Francis Howard at Coldham Hall, the home of the Rookwood family, in 1717.³³

The first of the monks at Flixton was Dom William Walgrave or Waldegrave, who was born at Barnston in Essex in 1588. Walgrave was converted to Catholicism by the Norfolk-born Jesuit Michael Walpole (brother of the martyr Henry Walpole) in 1608. In September 1615, after a spell at St Omer, Walgrave was at the English College in Valladolid where he was ordained as a secular priest in 1618. The following year he left for the English mission, where he used the aliases Playle, Mildmay and Hesper, but he was in prison from 1631–33.³⁴ It is likely that Walgrave returned to the Continent after his release; Gregory Allanson thought that Walgrave was a Cluniac before he joined the English Benedictines, but this may be just speculation.³⁵ However, Walgrave was professed as a Benedictine monk at St Gregory's, Douai, in 1650. From 1653–57 he acted as vicar to the English Benedictine nuns at Cambrai before being sent to Flixton.³⁶ On 21 January 1665 Walgrave 'died suddenly at Flixton in Suffolk by falling down from a pair of stairs'. The Benedictine annalist Benet Weldon noted that Walgrave was very charitable, and 'did much to help up the house of Cambrai'.³⁷

THE POPISH PLOT AND ITS AFTERMATH, 1678–1704

Between Walgrave's death in 1665 and the arrival of Dom John Augustine Hudson in 1704 there seems to have been no Benedictine chaplain at Flixton, and indeed there is no record of a chaplain of any kind. Whilst it was dangerous for a family to patronise a chaplain during the years of the Popish Plot scare, between 1678 and 1681, and again after the Revolution of 1688, it is surprising that there was no chaplain at Flixton during the relatively tolerant 1670s and the brief period of *de facto* toleration for Catholics that followed the accession of James II in 1685. In the 1670s the Tasburghs were a wealthy family; Gordon Blackwood has estimated their annual income from land at around £1400, while the 1674 Hearth Tax returns show twenty-four hearths at Flixton Hall.³⁸ According to a local legend recorded by Alfred Suckling, Flixton Hall was admired by Charles II himself.³⁹

The Tasburghs were certainly capable of patronising a chaplain, and one possible reason for the absence of one could have been that the Benedictines were unable or unwilling to provide one. In 1676 Bishop Compton of London conducted a census of religious conformity which required incumbents to count the number of papists in their parish, and this information would be very helpful on Flixton and the surrounding villages in illuminating the pattern of Catholic population. Unfortunately, however, none of the returns for the Archdeaconry of Suffolk, including the hundred of Wangford where Flixton lay, survive. In the town of Eye,

around sixteen miles from Flixton in the deanery of Hartismere, there was a Catholic population of seventeen.⁴⁰ This was high for the time, and it may be that the Catholic population converged on Eye in the 1670s since it was at the centre of a ring of Catholic families that included the Havers at Thelveton to the north; the Bedingfields at Stoke Ash to the south, Redenhall to the north-west and Redlingfield to the south-east, as well as the Yaxleys of Yaxley to the east. Henry and John Gage, both sons of Sir Edward Gage, first baronet of Hengrave, held estates nearby at Harleston and Stonham. Flixton was too far away from the epicentre of Catholicism in High Suffolk to be important at this time.

In 1678 the anti-Catholic frenzy whipped up by Titus Oates changed the lives of many English Catholics, the Tasburghs among them. Catholics were forbidden to leave their homes or be in the vicinity of London, and it was often those Catholics who would not or could not leave the capital who were arrested and imprisoned. It is possible that Richard Tasburgh was anticipating the threat when he drew up a draft conveyance of all his properties for the term of eleven years on 30 September 1678, to be held in trust by William Godbold, Robert London and Thomas Baxter. The conveyance stipulated that a rent-charge from the lands was to be paid to Tasburgh.⁴¹ This was the same arrangement as the Rookwood family of Stanningfield had with its trustees throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and it ensured that land could not be confiscated by the state.

Richard Tasburgh was arrested in London at some point before 2 February 1679, when he was bailed and his trial put off until the next term.⁴² Exactly what Tasburgh was charged with at this stage is unclear, but he was evidently free in October 1679 when he alleged that the informant Stephen Dugdale would be prepared to testify that his testimony against Catholics had been false in exchange for a sum of money.⁴³ Dugdale sued Tasburgh for subornation (inducing a witness to commit perjury), and on 12 February 1680 Tasburgh was brought to the bar for sentencing only for the judgement to be postponed until the following term.⁴⁴ On 22 May 1680 one of Richard Tasburgh's servants, named Corne, was bailed; he was also accused of subornation.⁴⁵

On 4th May 1680 a much more serious charge was brought against Richard Tasburgh, and he was arraigned for high treason. On 19 May he was brought to trial and found not guilty.⁴⁶ According to the inscription of 1705 on the memorial tablet to his wife Margaret in Flixton church, 'by a jury of worthy gentlemen out of Suffolk, [he] had Justice done him, for which he begeth the blessing of Heaven on them and their Posterity, heartily forgiving his Enemies and Persecutors'. The inscription records that Margaret 'was a patient sufferer in prison with her husband'. Even if he escaped the ultimate penalty of execution, Richard was finally sentenced for suborning Dugdale on 22 May 1680 and ordered to pay a fine of £100.⁴⁷

Richard Tasburgh had the dubious distinction of being mentioned by name in the articles of high treason against James, duke of York. According to the indictment, James had 'endeavoured to take off Dr Oates' testimony and his servants that of others of the King's evidence as Mr Dugdale's by Mr Tasborough'.⁴⁸ The idea that the duke was a traitor because he had discredited the evidence of treason brought against him could thrive only in the twisted thinking of the conspiracy theorists behind the Popish Plot, and their efforts to bring down James came to nothing. There is no evidence that Richard Tasburgh actually was a 'servant' of James, but during James II's reign he did briefly enjoy the public office from which Catholics had long been excluded when the King appointed him a justice of the peace.⁴⁹

Richard Tasburgh remained under suspicion; he appeared in 'A List of the Names of Papist and reputed Papist in the County of Suffolk', which may have been drawn up in 1681.⁵⁰ In 1682 Charles and John Tasburgh, probably Richard's younger brothers, subscribed their names to a protestation of innocence by a man accused of treason named Dowling.⁵¹ There is no evidence that the Tasburghs suffered the sort of attacks that some Suffolk Catholics

endured in December 1688, when news of the landing of William of Orange produced outbursts of anti-Catholic feeling among the population. However, Alfred Suckling reported a legend that rue was laid at the doors of several houses in Bungay on the evening of 1 March 1688, the night of a catastrophic fire in the town.⁵² Catholics were arsonists in the popular imagination, and some people apparently blamed the Tasburghs, probably interpreting the sprigs of rue as a warning to their fellow Papists. The Tasburghs seem to have been suffering financially in 1688, as it was in this year that Richard mortgaged the manor of Flixton Abbey for £1000.⁵³

Like the majority of Catholics in the south of England, the Flixton Tasburghs did not become involved in Jacobite activity, whatever their personal views on the monarchy. The only hint of Jacobitism among the Flixton Tasburghs is to be found in a letter written by Thomas Tasburgh, the Jesuit son of John Tasburgh of Bodney, to his fellow Jesuit Lewis Sabran on 21 March 1714. Thomas informed Sabran that his cousin 'Tasbourg' was 'resettled again in Champaine with a countreyman of his'.⁵⁴ Geoffrey Holt thought 'Tasbourg' was Francis Tasburgh, but Thomas had no cousin of that name (an uncle and a nephew were named Francis). Thomas's cousins were John, Charles and Peregrine (the second, third and fifth sons of Charles Tasburgh and Ann Tichborne). Thomas's letter, as well as the Gallicised spelling 'Tasbourg', suggests that one of the Flixton Tasburghs had become a naturalised Frenchman, which was a path often followed by impecunious followers of the Court of St Germain.

Although there was apparently no Benedictine chaplain at Flixton in the 1680s, Richard Tasburgh's second son Richard (1660–1731) was professed as a monk at St Edmund's, Paris in 1682, when he took the appropriate name of Felix.⁵⁵ Felix returned to St Gregory's, and he was shortly afterwards sent to London where he spent most of the rest of his life,⁵⁶ although his dealings with Flixton were far from over. Richard Tasburgh's second daughter, Ann, entered the convent of English Augustinian Canonesses in Bruges, where she took the name Mary Bernard; she was among the nuns touched for the 'King's Evil' by the young James Francis Edward Stuart in 1701.⁵⁷

THE END OF THE FLIXTON TASBURGHS AND THE INDEPENDENT MISSION, 1704–52

John Hudson, the second Benedictine chaplain at Flixton, was born in Lancashire and professed at St Laurence's, Dieulouard, in 1686.⁵⁸ In 1732 he died at Flixton and was buried in the churchyard; Alfred Toms recorded in 1915 that there was a tombstone bearing the inscription 'I. H. S., Johannes Hudson, obiit die 3 September [sic] 1732. Requiescat in Pace'.⁵⁹ The tombstone is no longer visible. At the time of his death Hudson was the Definitor of the South Province of the English Benedictine Congregation.

During Hudson's time at Flixton three other priests, none of them Benedictines, were associated with the mission. In 1718 a Yorkshire-born Jesuit, James Foxe alias Poole (1685–1760), was briefly there. In 1720 another Jesuit, Ignatius Constable alias Place (d. 1727) may have been there as well.⁶⁰ In 1727 the Jesuit Richard Tasburgh (1693–1735), the only son of Richard Tasburgh's third son George (1672–1736) and his first wife, was at Flixton. This Richard was born in Hampshire and educated at St Omer until 1710, when he entered the Jesuits. In 1715 he was appointed a teacher at Watten.⁶¹ He was ordained in 1723 after studies at Watten and Liege before joining the College of the Holy Apostles in 1725 (the College was the mission-structure of the Jesuits serving East Anglia and Essex established by the Petre family in 1633). It was not uncommon for a family member in holy orders to serve the mission patronised by his own family.⁶² In 1728 Richard Tasburgh SJ left Flixton for Norwich.

Richard's great uncle Henry (1641–1718) was also a Jesuit. In 1701 he was appointed to the important position of Superior of the College of St Aloysius, which covered Lancashire and the highest density of Catholics anywhere in England. At Ince Blundell Henry and another priest named Babthorpe built the 'New House', 'with a view to keeping a school and keeping boarders'. This was an ambitious aim in the first decade of the eighteenth century, and it apparently came to nothing; the New House was never more than a mass house. The Blundell Diary recorded the celebrations for Henry Tasburgh's jubilee as a priest in November 1714. Henry died at the New House he had built in 1718 and was buried at Hardkirk.⁶³

Richard Tasburgh, the founder of the Benedictine mission, charged his Flixton property with £400 per annum for the maintenance of a priest in his will of 15 May 1706.⁶⁴ However, on his death in 1715 the charge was not executed, probably because his son John (1662–1719) lived for only four more years after inheriting the estate. In 1715 all Catholics, who were unable to take the Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy to King George on account of the requirement that they deny transubstantiation, were required to register the yearly value of their estates. John Tasburgh's total estate at Flixton and South Elmham was valued at £959 14s 11½d.⁶⁵ In addition, John earned just £3 a year from an estate at Earsham.⁶⁶

On John's death in 1719, Flixton passed to his eldest son by his second wife Frances Nevill, also John, but he died not long afterwards, leaving behind no children. The estate then passed to Richard Tasburgh's second son, Felix the monk. Felix's brief period as master of Flixton was of great importance. Although there is no evidence that he ever visited the estate, Felix made over a farm called Davenport to trustees with directions that, on his death, it should be sold and the proceeds paid to a certain Francis Canning of the Middle Temple.⁶⁷ The sale of Davenport was clearly intended to support the mission and it finally made good the original provision in Richard Tasburgh's will. Felix was aware that the family was approaching the limit of its genealogical resources, and he took the first step towards freeing the mission from the patronage of the Tasburghs altogether. In addition, Felix endowed a fund of £20 a year 'for the Benefit of the poor at Flixton'.⁶⁸

Felix died on 11 February 1731 (not without debts) and the estate passed to his brother George. George was already living at Flixton in 1724, when he was probably running the estate on behalf of his absent brother. As part of a plea to the Court of Chancery after George Tasburgh's death to recover unpaid legal bills, the lawyer Matthew Britten submitted his account with George Tasburgh from January 1724 to August 1734.⁶⁹ The Jesuit Richard Tasburgh, George's son, witnessed George's promises to pay outstanding amounts to Britten in July 1725, June 1726, March 1727 and March 1728. A glimpse of George's social circle is provided by an undated letter of the 1730s among the Hengrave Manuscripts in Cambridge University Library from Mary Tasburgh, the wife of George's cousin Francis Tasburgh of Bodney, to her sister Delariviere Gage, the mother of Sir Thomas Gage, third baronet of Hengrave. In the letter, Mary described a 'wonderful appearance at Flixton' involving a stain shaped like the bust of a man on a pair of mahogany sliders given to George Tasburgh by Humphrey Burgoyne, who had recently died in an accident. The other witness to the supposed apparition was Henry Bedingfield of Coulsey Wood, who wrote an account of it to Francis Tasburgh.⁷⁰

On 16 July 1734 a Mr Hardcastle wrote to Gregory Greenwood, the Provincial of Canterbury (South Province), to inform him that the childless George Tasburgh had made arrangements for the continuance of the mission after his death. According to Francis Howard, the Benedictine chaplain to the Gage family at Hengrave Hall, George was frightened into creating the mission fund by the Protestant executor of Felix Tasburgh's will, who claimed that according to an act of parliament, George (as a Catholic) was not entitled to inherit the estate at all.⁷¹ The law in question was either the Act for Further Preventing the

Growth of Popery of 1700, which provided that the land of Catholics should pass to their nearest Protestant relatives, or the Papists Act 1722, which provided that the estates of those who declined to take the Oaths of Supremacy and Allegiance were forfeit to their nearest relative. Hardcastle recorded the details of the agreement:

At length we have come to a Conclusion in Mr Tasbough's Affaire, And I am in hopes of receiving 500l for you, in three weeks, or a Month. Mr Canning had Push'd the Esq[ui]r[e] Tasbough so far, as obliged him to send one up to Accomodate Affairs, one way, or Other, & Yesterday all was agreed to; & the Writings are drawing up. Mr Tasbough is to pay 500l p[oun]ds ready Money, at the signing of the Deeds; To pay, & clear Mr Felix Tasbough's Debts, & Law-Charges, &c: To settle a Fund of 300l p[oun]ds p[er] Ann[um] at Flixton, for One of Ours, to Assist the Family & Catholicks there-abouts; (with this Proviso,) that this Fund is not to take place, nor to commence, till after the death of the Present Esq[ui]r[e] George Tasbough. For the security of which 300l p[oun]ds p[er] Ann[um] Mr George Tasbough engages a great Part of his Estate in Trust for us, to Mr Loggins, & Mr Taylor. Mr Loggins is One of the Executors of Mr Felix Tasbough, One of an extreme Honest Character, made use of in like Cases, by most Catholicks in these Parts, as is also Mr Taylor. I was Forced to desire them, to take the Trust upon 'em, not having time to have your Orders about it: Mr Tasbough's Agent pressing to make an End, that he might get down, as speedily as he could, to the Assises. &c:⁷²

Through this agreement, Felix Tasburgh's vision of a financially secure and independent mission was finally realised.

Richard Tasburgh, who was George's only son by his first wife (a Miss Hunt), predeceased his father in 1735, and George Tasburgh himself died on 11 December 1736. In his will, George bequeathed all his personal possessions to his second wife, Anna Lightfoot, but he made no mention by name of whom he expected to succeed him in his estates. His brothers Francis and James had predeceased him, leaving only his sister Ann (or Mary Bernard), a nun at Bruges, and his youngest sister Lettitia or Lettice, who was married to John Wybarne (1687–1739) of Hawkwell in Kent. In the event it was Lettice Wybarne who inherited Flixton and the other manors. However, in his will George Tasburgh made careful provision to ensure that all of his debts were paid off by the sale or mortgage of his lands, but he exempted an area of land known as 'the Forty Acres' tenanted by Peter Wales and a farm tenanted by a clerk called Thomas Gunby. Tasburgh stipulated that these lands were to be held in trust by a lawyer, Robert Moxon of Barnard's Inn, and Peter Pullyn of Halesworth. Tasburgh stipulated that under no circumstances were these lands to be sold, and under the terms of the will his successors in the estate had no claim to them at all.⁷³ The law forbade the open use of lands to fund Catholic priests as a 'superstitious use', and it seems likely that Moxon and Pullyn were the successors of Loggins and Taylor, who administered the trust that supported the Benedictine mission. John Wybarne was, as it happened, a Catholic, but there was an ever present danger that an heir might renounce Catholicism in order to open up a career in public office, thus destroying a mission if it depended entirely on the goodwill of the landowner.

On inheriting the Flixton estate, Lettice Wybarne attempted, through a suit in the Court of Chancery, to regain the Tasburghs' ancient right of presentation to the advowsons of Homersfield, Flixton and the four South Elmham parishes. This ecclesiastical patronage had been given to William Taylor to hold in trust for the financial benefit of Charles Tasburgh on 3 August 1688, either because Charles Tasburgh did not consider himself qualified, as a Catholic, to appoint a Church of England clergyman or because he had reasons of conscience that made him reluctant to do so. From the fact that Lettice Wybarne needed to argue her case in Chancery, we can assume that the trust and the income from it had fallen into abeyance by the 1730s.⁷⁴

In 1737 a deeply unstable monk, Dom Richard Placid Ashton, arrived to take over the chaplaincy at Flixton and ensure the continuity of the Benedictine mission under the Wybarnes. Placid Ashton was born at Warrington in Lancashire in 1708 and professed at St Edmund's, Paris in 1725 (thus fulfilling Felix Tasburgh's desire that future chaplains should come from that house).⁷⁵ Gregory Allanson recorded that Ashton 'involved himself in debt and was removed in consequence from the Mission to his convent'.⁷⁶ The Acts of the South Province recorded the sums spent in attempting to settle Ashton's debts, with the last reference to him at Flixton in 1741.⁷⁷ Ashton seems to have returned to Paris at this date where his behaviour deteriorated; his prior had him put in chains, and Ashton seems to have apostatised three times.⁷⁸

Lettice Wybarne died on 1 July 1738 and her husband followed her a year later.⁷⁹ The heir to the estate was, once again, a Benedictine monk himself. Henry Wybarne (d. 1769) was professed at St Edmund's in 1723 and served as prior from 1737–45, before eventually rising to the position of Provincial of Canterbury.⁸⁰ However, there is no evidence to suggest that he ever inherited Flixton and the estate passed instead to his sister, Charity Wybarne. In 1740 another Jesuit arrived at Flixton, perhaps to compensate for Ashton's inadequacies. He was Anthony Bedingfield (1697–1752), a son of Francis and Dorothy Bedingfield of Redlingfield Hall in Suffolk and Bures Hall in Norfolk.⁸¹ However, he did not stay longer than a year and Ashton was not immediately replaced; once more Flixton was without a chaplain.⁸² Ashton's successor was Dom Edward Hussey. Hussey was born at Marnhull in Dorset and was professed at St Gregory's in 1731. He rose to the position of subprior before he was sent on the English mission in 1749. He was posted to Witham Place in Essex before arriving at Flixton in 1750. He remained there until 1752 when he left for Exeter. He died in his home village of Marnhull in 1785.⁸³

Hussey left Flixton at a crucial time, when the executors of Charity Wybarne were in the process of selling the estate to the Protestant Adair family. William Robert Adair (d. 1760) was the son of Sir Robert Adair of Ballymena, who raised a regiment for William of Orange and was knighted on the battlefield of the Boyne. William fought on the Hanoverian side at Culloden and took Jacobite prisoners back to Carlisle Castle.⁸⁴ At the time they purchased the Flixton estate it consisted of 284 acres in Flixton, Homersfield and South Elmham St Cross and was valued at £191 14s.⁸⁵ As such enthusiastic champions of the Protestant cause, the Adairs were the unlikely inheritors of the Tasburgh tradition of Benedictine patronage. Although documentary evidence of the conveyance of 'the Priest's House' or 'the Hollows' to the Benedictine chaplain in 1752 does not seem to survive, it undoubtedly took place.⁸⁶

It may have been in order to oversee Flixton's transition from a domestic chaplaincy to an independent mission that a senior figure was sent to replace Hussey in 1752. Dom William Maurus Westbrooke was the son of George Westbrooke and Lucy Darell of Scotney Castle in Kent. Westbrooke was professed at Lamspring Abbey in 1726, where he served as prior from 1736–39. He was sent to the North Province in 1740, serving at Wyton in East Yorkshire and then at Gilling Castle until his arrival at Flixton. During his time at Flixton, Westbrooke served as Secretary to the President of the English Benedictine Congregation (from 1745) and 'Definitor of the Regimen' (from 1757) as well as being appointed titular Cathedral Prior of Bath. He left Flixton for Shelton Hall, near Diss in 1771 and died at Lamspring in 1774.⁸⁷

According to Joy Rowe, in the 1750s Westbrooke 'established a flourishing enclave on the county border, running over into the territory served by the priest at Thelveton'.⁸⁸ However, Westbrooke's health was poor by the 1770s and the state of the mission deteriorated. On 28 November 1771 Bede Bennet, the Procurator of the South Province, wrote to the President of the Congregation, William Placid Naylor, that 'owing to Mr. Westbrook's deafness & late indisposition', the congregation at Flixton was 'almost entirely lost'. Bennet remarked of the

Flixton congregation that 'it will be very difficult to bring them to their duty after so long a want of a proper person'.⁸⁹ We can gain some idea of who may have been in Westbrooke's congregation from the 1767 census of Papists, which recorded the names, professions and ages of Catholics in each parish of the diocese of Norwich, as well as the length of time they had lived in the parish.

In addition to Westbrooke himself, the only Catholics in Flixton itself were Thomas Hatton, a 'writer', and his three unmarried daughters and one son. In neighbouring Homersfield there were three more Catholics. Elizabeth Rackham, a seamstress, was the only Catholic in South Elmham St Peter. The parish of St Mary, Bungay, contained the nailmaker Richard Partridge, his wife and four children, as well as two widows. The six Catholics in the parish of Holy Trinity and their four children went unnamed.⁹⁰ In Beccles were the turner John Cudden, his wife and son, and a spinster named Mary Barry. In total, the number of Catholics who might conceivably have worshipped at the Flixton mission in 1767 was 22, or 31 including children. This calculation assumes, of course, that all Catholics were counted in the 1767 census, which relied on the knowledge incumbents had of their own parishes.

Alfred Toms thought that the chaplain was initially based in the 'mansion house' constructed on the remains of the priory, and at a later date moved to Flixton Hall. This sounds like a local tradition and there is no evidence for it. It is not particularly likely, as a monk occupying a separate property would have been much more conspicuous to the authorities than a chaplain at Flixton Hall who could have passed himself off as a tutor or servant. Relations between the Tasburghs' Catholic mission and its Protestant neighbours were apparently good:

Outside their own parish they were, at times, the object of prejudice and persecution, but within its borders the ministrations of the Benedictine Fathers, whom they retained as chaplains, together with those of the parish church, appear to have been carried on side by side, with mutual respect and charity.⁹¹

There is precious little evidence of the work of the early chaplains at Flixton, as might be expected from the period, but it is likely that Toms's assessment is an accurate one on the grounds that, elsewhere in Suffolk with the sole exception of the Stour Valley,⁹² the relationship between Catholic landowners and their immediate neighbours was cordial.

CONCLUSION

The history of the later Tasburghs is much more than a story of decline. The Flixton estate suffered from instability brought about by a series of family deaths in the early eighteenth century, but the Flixton mission survived and seems to have been strengthened by the weakening hold of the Tasburghs themselves over the chaplains. Perhaps because he was a missionary priest himself, Felix Tasburgh was far-sighted enough to realise that the mission at Flixton required assets of its own to function effectively. Elsewhere in England, most chaplaincies did not begin to move towards independence and a 'proto-parish' structure until the 1740s.

All that remains of Sir John Tasburgh's magnificent Flixton Hall today is part of the ground floor, used as animal housing. The Priest's House is still standing, however, and there is a good collection of Tasburgh and Wybarne family monuments in Flixton church.⁹³ The Tasburghs' real legacy to Suffolk is not to be found in Flixton, however, but in the two magnificent Catholic churches in Bungay and Beccles, St Edmund the Martyr and St Bene't, which were founded by, and are still served by, the monks of Downside Abbey, the successor of St

Gregory's, Douai, as the only representatives of the ancient English Benedictine Congregation in East Anglia.

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NOTES

- 1 Evans 1980, 274, 279.
- 2 Glickman 2009, 76–77.
- 3 The Flixton Tasburghs produced two Jesuits, one Benedictine monk and an Augustinian Canoness, while the Bodney Tasburghs produced one Jesuit and two Canonesses. The Tasburghs were not the only Suffolk Catholic family to fail in the male line in this period; the same was true of the Rookwoods of Stanningfield (1759) and the senior line of the Gages of Hengrave (1767).
- 4 Toms 1915, 17.
- 5 Martin *et al.* 1989, 68.
- 6 Hamilton 1904, 253.
- 7 Evans 1980, 272.
- 8 Evidence for the construction of Flixton Hall is lacking: Martin *et al.* 1989, 68.
- 9 From a 1752 note on the valuation of the Tasburgh estate: SROL, HA12/B1/5/83. The manors were South Elmham St Cross (Homersfield), South Elmham St Mary, South Elmham St James, South Elmham All Saints and South Elmham St Nicholas.
- 10 Tasburgh family pedigree (1752): SROL, HA12/B1/5/83.
- 11 Venn 1924, IV, 200.
- 12 CSPD 1628–32, 487.
- 13 Burton and Williams 1911, 291, 304.
- 14 Evans 1980, 277. The couple's marriage settlement was drawn up on 2 July 1631: SROL, HA12/B2/7/24.
- 15 An example of an expedient Suffolk conformist was Mary D'Arcy, Countess Rivers, who even went so far as to endow a sermon on 'the distinctive doctrines of the Church of Rome' (Tymms 1854, 134–35).
- 16 One family that avoided sequestration of their Suffolk lands was the Rookwoods, who had already put their lands in trust on account of the treason of the Gunpowder Plotter Ambrose Rookwood (d. 1606). See Sir Robert Rookwood's plea to the Attorney General against recusancy fines due from his father and grandfather, 15 June 1636: SROB, 326/48.
- 17 CPCC, IV, 2708–9.
- 18 SROL, HA12/B1/4/71.
- 19 Venn 1924, IV, 200.
- 20 90 acres of arable land, 40 acres of meadow, 140 acres of pasture.
- 21 Charles's third son, Charles, was described as 'of Norwich' when he was admitted to the English College, Douai on 4 December 1650 (Burton and Williams 1912, 507). Evans 1980, 277 mistakenly thought this was the elder Charles Tasburgh.
- 22 SROL, HA12/A1/3.
- 23 SROL, HA12/B2/23/24.
- 24 Venn 1924, IV, 200 was in error when he stated that Cressy's wife Grace was the daughter of Thomas Barley.
- 25 CPCC, III, 2235.
- 26 Thompson 1953, 238–43.
- 27 CPCC, II, 965.
- 28 CPCC, V, 3190.
- 29 CPCC, IV, 2709.
- 30 EANQ 1885–86, 345.
- 31 Lunn 1980, 128–29, 226–31.

- 32 Birt 1913, 34.
- 33 Howard remained at Coldham until the early 1730s when he moved to Hengrave Hall; he was joined by Dom Alexius Stafford, who was chaplain to the Bond family in Bury St Edmunds. Both monks died in 1755.
- 34 Anstruther 1975, II, 332.
- 35 Allanson 1999, 75.
- 36 Birt 1913, 43.
- 37 Weldon 1881, 202.
- 38 Blackwood 2001, 230.
- 39 Suckling 1846, I, 200.
- 40 Whiteman and Clapinson 1986, 192, 235.
- 41 SROL, HA12/B2/23/6.
- 42 CSPD 1679–80, 296.
- 43 Kenyon 1972, 219.
- 44 CSPD 1679–80, 392.
- 45 CSPD 1679–80, 489.
- 46 Luttrell, I, 44.
- 47 Toms 1915, 45.
- 48 CSPD 1680–81, 117.
- 49 Blackwood 2001, 241.
- 50 EANQ 1885–86, 345.
- 51 CSPD 1682, 319.
- 52 Suckling 1846, I, 198.
- 53 SROL, HA12/B2/6/39.
- 54 Holt 1971, 79.
- 55 The name of Flixton is supposed to derive from a corruption of St Felix, the apostle of the East Angles.
- 56 In September 1714 Felix Tasburgh was supposed to be transporting knives, gloves and stockings from London to Paris on behalf of the Jesuit Fr. Coxon (Holt 1971, 165, 196).
- 57 Durrant 1925, 317.
- 58 Birt 1913, 87–88.
- 59 Toms 1915, 47.
- 60 Holt 1984, 67, 96.
- 61 Holt 1971, 285, 298.
- 62 Local examples include Henry Rookwood SJ at Coldham Hall in 1730 (see Holt 1984, 214–15) and John Gage SJ at Bury St Edmunds from 1755.
- 63 Foley 1877–83, V, 320, 362.
- 64 Allanson 1999, 157.
- 65 Estcourt and Payne 1885, 257. John was letting South Elmham Hall for £110. See also *Report to the Honourable the House of Commons* 1719, 17.
- 66 Estcourt and Payne 1885, 196.
- 67 Allanson 1999, 157.
- 68 South Province Book of Contracts 1717–1826, Downside MS 70, 24–25.
- 69 SROL, HA12/E1/3/9.
- 70 CUL, Hengrave MS 88/3/90.
- 71 Francis Howard to Gregory Greenwood, 1 January 1737, in South Province Book of Contracts 1717–1826, Downside MS 70, 62–63.
- 72 South Province Book of Contracts 1717–1826, Downside MS 70, 47–48. For a transcription of the actual settlement on Loggins and Taylor, see *idem*, 65–68.
- 73 SROL, HA12/E1/3/7.
- 74 SROL, HA12/E1/3/7.
- 75 Birt 1913, 103.
- 76 Allanson 1999, 192.
- 77 'Paid for Mr Ashton's board at Flixton', South Province Accounts, Downside MS, 163.
- 78 Allanson 1999, 193.
- 79 Suckling 1846, I, 200.
- 80 Birt 1913, 106.
- 81 Holt 1984, 29.
- 82 According to Henry Foley, Anthony Bedingfield succeeded Felix Tasburgh in 1735 'and he was the last [Jesuit] chaplain of that place' (Foley 1877–83, V, 575).

- 83 Birt 1913, 114.
 84 Toms 1915, 23.
 85 Nathaniel Cole to William Adair, 9 November 1752 (SROL, HA12/B1/5/83). Cole noted 'the land in St Cross is much the worst of any in the Park'.
 86 Toms 1915, 47.
 87 Birt 1913, 109.
 88 Rowe 1996, 195.
 89 Scott 1992, 88.
 90 Rowe 1996, 210, 218, 232–33.
 91 Toms 1915, 44–45.
 92 On anti-Catholicism in the Stour Valley during the English Civil War see Walter 1999.
 93 Martin *et al.* 1989, 68; Roberts 2010, 71–75.

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Abbreviations

CJ	<i>Journals of the House of Commons</i>
CPCC	<i>Calendar of Proceedings of the Committee for Compounding</i>
CSPD	<i>Calendar of State Papers Domestic</i>
CUL	Cambridge University Library
EANQ	<i>East Anglian Notes and Queries</i>
House of Lords MSS	<i>Manuscripts of the House of Lords</i> (C.L. Anstruther <i>et al.</i> eds)
OSA	Order of St Augustine
OSB	Order of St Benedict
SJ	Society of Jesus
SROB	Suffolk Record Office, Bury St Edmunds branch
SROL	Suffolk Record Office, Lowestoft branch