

*“ties of sisterly love & affection”*¹
Unbroken Connections CJ - IBVM (Loreto) 1814 – 1888

CJ – IBVM Links Day
Manchester, 24th February 2018
Áine Mc Hugh, IBVM (Loreto) Archives

¹ TB/COR/3/10, M. Julia Martin York to M. Teresa Ball, 19 August, no year

Kathleen and I are delighted to be here today, to share some of the insights that we've gleaned from our work in the IBVM, Loreto Archives on the "*bonds of the most sisterly union*"², that existed between these two branches of the Institute. As archivists, we have long been convinced that M. Teresa Ball, who established the Institute in Ireland, saw herself as united with her sisters in York, continuing the religious life she had begun there, in the establishment and nurturing of a new branch of the Institute. Preparing for this talk challenged us to locate and use documentary evidence and facts to prove this point, and in doing so, we were surprised and excited by the depth of the friendship, sisterly love and support that we uncovered. Furthermore these demonstrations of friendship and union extended far beyond the lifetime of M. Teresa Ball, in unbroken ties between these houses of the one Institute.

My aim this afternoon, in this talk is to demonstrate how M. Teresa Ball, her Sisters in Ireland and her contemporary counterparts in The Bar Convent York, nourished, nurtured and greatly prized this 'special friendship' and union. This relationship extended beyond the bonds of close, personal relationships that M. Teresa Ball had formed during her schooldays and years as a novice and Sister in York. It evolved into a co-operative, generous, supportive bond that sustained various Superiors and Sisters for over 100 years after M. Teresa Ball's departure from York.

M. Teresa Ball was born Frances Ball, in Dublin on 6 January 1794, the youngest child of a wealthy Catholic merchant and his wife, at a time when the Penal Laws were gradually relaxing and a Catholic, professional, middle class was emerging. She joined her two older sisters as pupils in the Bar Convent, returning to Dublin on the sudden death of her father, to act as companion to her mother. Of her three elder sisters, one entered religious life with the Ursulines in Ireland, (where she had been a pupil), and the other two were married in Dublin. It was hoped that Frances would likewise make a "good marriage". In time Frances became aware of her vocation, and with the support of her life-long friend and ally, Dr Daniel Murray, Archbishop of Dublin, Frances entered the novitiate in the Bar Convent in 1814. It was Dr Murray's heartfelt wish that she would enter in York, return to Dublin and establish a house (or two) of the Institute in Dublin to provide education for middle class Catholic girls.

M. Coyney, Superior of the Bar Convent had refused an earlier invitation from Dr Murray to found a house of the Institute in Ireland, due to a lack of funds and Sisters. In May 1814, she accepted Frances Ball "*... as a member of our holy Institute with a view to training her for a foundress of a house of the same in Dublin*", but warns that "*this good work must solely rest with Miss Ball and her friends*". No support would be forthcoming from York. The terms under which the foundation would be made in Ireland, were thus clearly set out by M. Coyney, and established the clear understanding that it would not be under the jurisdiction of the Superior in York.

² SS/YOR/10, M. Julia Martin IBVM, York to M. Scholastica Somers, 13 April 1877

In hindsight, it must have been difficult for M. Coyney and her council, to accept a past pupil endowed with a wealthy dowry, as a novice and member of the Institute, aware that she would not remain. It was a very generous gesture on the part of M. Coyney and her Council.

Frances Ball entered the novitiate in York on 11 June 1814, was received into the novitiate on 8 September 1814 and professed on 8 September 1816. She was known in religion as Teresa. She remained in York for 7 years, teaching in the school, active in the community and sadly witnessed the death of two Sisters whom she expected would return to Ireland with her. M. Teresa returned to Ireland in August 1821, with two novices who had entered the novitiate in York only 2 years previous, and together they began the first house of the Institute in Ireland. A year after their return, this small community of three Sisters took up residence in Rathfarnham House. It was quickly renamed 'Loreto' in honour of the shrine in Ancona, Italy. The nickname, 'Loreto' stuck and as we know has remained in place until today.

In preparation for her return, M. Teresa aware that her community could not be affiliated with that of York, painstakingly copied the 1707 Constitutions, which were then not observed in York and the Archbishop of Dublin obtained a rescript from Rome which established Institute in Ireland under his jurisdiction.³ She returned to Ireland ready to establish house of the Institute that would devote itself to education. It's likely that she anticipated the establishment of only a few houses within the arch-diocese of Dublin, and not the international branch that it later expanded into.

We are fortunate that much of Teresa Ball's voluminous correspondence has survived to us today, and is carefully preserved in the IBVM, Loreto Institute Archives in Dublin. There is, of course, much that did not survive, and we are left to wonder at what has been omitted and lost, and to conjecture at her letters from the responses she received.

M. Teresa Ball had spent 12 years in York,⁴ 5 as a pupil and 7 years preparing for her return to Ireland. Her experiences there had a profound impact on her life; it was a community and a home that she was reluctant to leave.⁵ She referred to the Bar Convent York as the "Mother abode"⁶ and she later noted when deciding whether to accept an invitation to make a new foundation, that she was deliberating on "*the 21st filiation⁷ from Mickle Gate Bar, York*".

³ Mary Wright, "Mary Ward's Institute, The Struggle for Identity", p 101

⁴ TB/CAN/3/2, M. Teresa Ball to M. Teresa Dease, 26 April 1851

⁵ See TB/COR/9, letters from Dr Murray to M. Teresa Ball, reassure her and attempt to allay her fears, including a statement that she may never be called upon to leave her present home in York.

⁶ TB/TYP/8, M. Teresa Ball to M. Angela Brown, 17 March 1842

⁷ "The relation of a son or daughter to a parent", from "The Century Dictionary & Cylopedia", accessed at <https://archive.org/stream/centurydictionar03whituoft#page/2213/mode/1up>, 22/11/2017

It is clear that she saw York as the ‘Mother House’, the place of her formation, and the birthplace of both her own religious vocation and of the branch of the Institute that she introduced to Ireland.

M. Teresa’s correspondence with Sisters in York, reveal that sense of sisterly unity, of belonging to the one Institute, with a shared heritage, spirit, charism but with differing governance structures.

It was a practical impediment that did not allow for the unification of the Institute. There is no evidence that M. Teresa Ball ever considered the potential unity of the disjointed Institute, instead there is a sense that she simply accepted it as “*á fait au complet*”.

The decree issued by Benedict XIV in 1749, effectively recognising different branches of the one Institute was accepted as a blueprint for this new Irish branch. For M. Teresa Ball, this was, indisputably how the Institute was and should be structured. This fractured arrangement of the Institute, however, did not diminish her sense of sisterly unity with the Institute and the Sisters in York.

The practices, customs and observances she learned in York remained with her throughout her life, and these in turn, were shared with the following generations of women who entered the novitiate in Rathfarnham.

In 1857, M. Teresa Ball wrote to the Superior in Canada, encouraging faithful devotion to the Constitutions and customs, writing “*I am as happy as possible, striving not to deviate from the practices I learned in my 7 years’ novitiate.*”⁸

M. Teresa Ball wasn’t alone in looking for union of customs; the community in York looked to follow the customs observed in Rathfarnham. In 1841, M. Angela Brown, Superior, York wrote to Dr Murray, Archbishop of Dublin requesting that M. Teresa Ball send a “*copy of the Old Constitutions of York*”. Dr Murray wrote to M. Teresa explaining the request, “*Julia Brown has written to her in most earnest terms for it and seemed, I believe, to intimate that the very existence of her community depended on their returning to the good old system.*” The Constitutions were duly sent.

M. Teresa Ball wrote detailed letters York, responding to inquiries regarding various customs and practices observed in Rathfarnham, including the “*method of Lay Sisters making vows....*”⁹, “*customs with respect to abstinence on Friday*”, the use of legacies of professed Sisters,¹⁰ and a detailed plan of the food consumed daily in Rathfarnham (which had its own farm to supply much of its needs) and the Dublin town houses.¹¹

⁸ TB/CAN/3/24, M. Teresa Ball to M. Teresa Dease, 7 April 1857

⁹ TB/TYP/8, M. Teresa Ball to M. Angela Brown, 17 December 1840

¹⁰ TB/TYP/8, M. Teresa Ball to M. Angela Brown, 10 September 1841

¹¹ TB/TYP/8, M. Teresa Ball to M. Angela Brown, 18 September 1843

Again, in 1857 M. Angela Brown, Superior instructed one of the consultresses to write to M. Teresa Ball, inquiring “*whether or not your community recite an office for deceased Lay Sisters of those convents with which you are associated. Some here are under the impression that this is not the custom at Loretto, Rev. M. however will make no change until she hears from you.*”¹²

Correspondence with individual Sisters and Superiors in York are filled with examples of friendship and sisterly co-operation. M. Teresa’s correspondence with the Superiors in York, document a relationship between two peers, supporting and assisting one another in their respective roles, offering friendship, guidance and advice, and sympathising in their heavy burdens of leadership.

In February 1837, the Superior in York, M. Agnes (Rose) Dunn, wrote to M. Teresa Ball, a chatty letter full of news of the York community, beginning “*This year has so far been eventful to us...*” She gave news of the illness and rapid recovery of a M. Xaveria, a fire which broke out in houses near the Convent on 8th January and the arrival of citizens of York to prevent the fire from reaching the convent.¹³

M. Agnes Dunn entered the novitiate in York in 1813, one year ahead of M. Teresa and would have known each other in the small novitiate in York – the friendly tone of the letters certainly indicate a warm friendship. M. Agnes held the offices of Mistress of Novices, Consultress and Procuratrix, and in 1830 became Superior.

Six years later, in 1836, Dr John Briggs was appointed Vicar Apostolic of the Northern District, and began to assert the authority granted to him in the Gilbert Constitutions, which had been obtained by M. Coyney and firmly established the community in York as diocesan.¹⁴

One of the Sisters in York wrote to M. Teresa Ball referring to Dr Briggs in terms of “*strict confidence, I mention, that in some points, they [his ideas] are different from what I have been accustomed to, and very strict.*”¹⁵ From this we can deduce that some in York were not comfortable with the authority that the new Vicar Apostolic assumed for himself.

M. Agnes Dunn, Superior in York was one of those who was clearly uncomfortable with this development. She disputed the authority that Dr Briggs assumed, recognising that it was incompatible with the vision of central authority and independence held by Mary Ward. She became increasingly concerned about the path the Institute in York had taken, and turned to the Superiors of other communities of the Institute, including M. Teresa Ball, for advice and guidance.

¹² TB/COR/6/58, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, 13 October 1857

¹³ TB/COR/3/1, M. Rose (Agnes) Dunn to M. Teresa Ball, 7 February 1835

¹⁴ Mary Wright, “Mary Ward’s Institute, The Struggle for Identity”, p 99

¹⁵ TB/COR/3/3, M. Angela of Jesus to M. Teresa Ball, undated

Around 1838, M. Agnes wrote to M. Teresa Ball requesting that acceptance into the Institute in Ireland. On the advice of her community chaplain, M. Teresa Ball, replied requesting to know the reason for M. Agnes' desire to leave the Institute in York. Instead of a reply, M. Agnes arrived unannounced in Rathfarnham accompanied by her brother. M. Teresa later recalled this shock arrival; *"Being fatigued, Rose Dunn went to bed, and the following morning she left for Loretto Navan, whence she returned in about 10 days. I was not permitted to receive her here, as she would not state why she left York."*¹⁶ M. Agnes visited the Institute communities in Germany in the following year, before returning to York *"convinced that the community had moved in the wrong direction. She resigned her office and went to live in Hammersmith"*, and died there in 1849.¹⁷

M. Teresa held in deep affection both those she knew in York and the convent as the birthplace of her vocation and religious life. In 1843, M. Teresa was delighting in the new Loreto foundation in Dalkey, a convent built to her own design and situated on the sea-front outside Dublin. It was one of her favourite convents; she chose to leave Rathfarnham and spend her dying weeks there in 1861.

In September 1843, whilst in Dalkey, she wrote to M. Angela Brown in York, *"I am nearer to you since 2nd August when our little colony, now amounting to 40, came to the sea."*¹⁸ This convent in Dalkey, was the closest she had come to her beloved convent and community in York since she had left York 20 years earlier.

We can only imagine what it must have cost her, to visit Loreto Manchester some years later in 1852, and to forego the possibility of a visit to York. Such a visit would have been in contradiction to her dearly held views on personal indulgence and self sacrifice.

Warm, informal, chatty letters filled with news and inquiries for one another's health and that of mutual acquaintances criss-crossed the Irish Sea between M. Angela Brown in York and M. Teresa Ball in Rathfarnham. As two Superiors, they supported, encouraged and sympathised with one another in their roles.

M. Angela Brown suffered poor health for two years following a severe case of bronchitis in 1850¹⁹ and her wellbeing was a cause of great concern for her community. Prayers and petitions were offered for her recovery by the Sisters in Rathfarnham.²⁰ M. Teresa Ball repeatedly invited M. Angela to travel to Ireland to recuperate from her prolonged illness. M. Angela reluctantly declined as she felt unable to face the sea voyage, *"I need not assure you how gladly & gratefully Revd Mother would have availed herself of your kindness, had she been obliged to by her native air."*²¹ The gratitude of the entire community in York at these kind

¹⁶ TB/TYP/8, M. Teresa Ball to M. Angela Brown, 19 February 1849

¹⁷ Mary Wright, "Mary Ward's Institute, The Struggle for Identity", p 99

¹⁸ TB/TYP/8, M. Teresa Ball to M. Angela Brown, 18 September 1843

¹⁹ Henry J. Coleridge SJ, "St Mary's Convent, Micklegate Bar York [1686 – 1887]", (1887), p 356

²⁰ See for example TB/COR/6/15, TB/COR/6/28, TB/COR/6/30, TB/COR/6/33 & TB/COR/6/35

²¹ TB/COR/6/30

gestures was repeatedly expressed.²²

Similarly news of M. Teresa Ball's poor health in 1853, prompted great concern amongst the community in York, who were greatly "grieved" to hear of it, and wrote "*Dear Revd Mother & all will feel so desirous to hear how you go on, I may hope, perhaps that no long time will elapse before one of our dear Sisters at Loretto kindly favours us with a line.*"²³ They rejoiced in the news, some months later in May 1853 that the sad indisposition which made us all pray so hard for you"²⁴ had disappeared; although reports of its return in May 1854 prompted alarm²⁵.

In 1855, M. Teresa Ball's close friend and capable foundress, M. Benedicta Somers, Superior in Loreto Gorey died. On learning of her death, a member of the community in York immediately wrote to M. Teresa assuring her, "*We have lately performed the accustomed devotions for the [] Rev. M. Benedicta of Gorie (sic)*". The author added "*how I feel for the little community who have been thus bereaved.*"²⁶

There are numerous references to the performance of "*usual devotions*"²⁷ for deceased Sisters in Loreto houses, and similar appeals for prayers for ill and deceased Sisters from York. Responding to a query in 1849, M. Teresa Ball clarified for M. Angela Brown that the office for the dead, 3 Masses and communions are offered in all Loreto houses for deceased Sisters, and this same custom would be observed for the recently deceased Sr Elizabeth Browne, of York (not a relation). M. Teresa Ball also promised to send "*the board of anniversaries of our deceased*" to York.²⁸ Necrologies were shared and the deceased Sisters of both branches were remembered in daily prayers and petitions.

Support was offered to one another in new educational initiatives and in their missionary endeavours. In York, a change was required in the prospectus and fees, but before any change was considered, an appeal was made to Ireland for information and guidance. A Sister wrote on behalf of Rev. Mother (M. Angela Brown), who "*wishes before making any alteration to see those of some other establishments. She would feel greatly obliged to you to enclose a Prospectus, together with the form of drawing out the bills, together with the printed part of your periodical statement of the young ladies proficiency.*"²⁹ The requested information was promptly sent to York, where it was acknowledged that it would be of great "*assistance*" to the Mother Superior.³⁰

²² TB/COR/6/27 & TB/COR/6/30

²³ TB/COR/6/39, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, 5 February 1853

²⁴ TB/COR/6/41, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, 22 May 1853

²⁵ TB/COR/6/44, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, 22 May 1854

²⁶ TB/COR/6/47, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, 13 September [1856]

²⁷ TB/COR/6/57, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, 13 October 1857

²⁸ TB/TYP/8, M. Teresa Ball to M. Angela Brown, 19 February 1849

²⁹ TB/COR/6/9, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, no dates

³⁰ TB/COR/6/37, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, 21 January, no year

The Sisters in York also turned to Ireland for guidance on the practices and observances of the newly established children's sodality, the Children of Mary.³¹ Both branches worked together, sharing knowledge, insights and experiences to help one another to develop and expand their mission and ministries.

Their mutual cooperation was most clearly demonstrated in the correspondence relating to the first Loreto mission in Manchester which coincided with the beginning of the Bar Convent's ministry in St George's Primary School in York.

In the early 1850's there were approximately 38,000 destitute Irish emigrants living in Manchester. In 1851, Canon O'Toole, Pastor of St. Wilfrid's, Manchester requested that M. Teresa Ball send six sisters to assist him in his work among the growing Irish Catholic population. The invitation was readily agreed to, and a community of 6 young women, led by M. Anne Hickey arrived in Manchester on 3 October 1851. Their ministry was hard, unrelenting and beset with financial difficulties, but the Sisters were convinced of its value. M. Anne wrote to M. Teresa Ball after their arrival, "*As far as I can see this is a glorious mission*"³². There was no time to rest and the Sisters worked seven days a week.

At the same time as M. Teresa Ball received an invitation to send a community to Manchester, the Sisters in York wrote with delight of their invitation to open a school in the city, to meet the educational needs of York's poorest Catholics. The school would be known as St George's. The acceptance of this invitation was difficult for the Bar convent community and they barely had sufficient Sisters to meet the needs of this new ministry.³³

The new school was located some distance from the convent, and the Sisters working there were required to leave enclosure and to teach in an unfamiliar context. M. Angela Brown turned to M. Teresa Ball for assistance, "*Now, going out of our enclosure, in any way, will be a thing is entirely new to us, that any suggestion you would kindly make for the better carrying out of this plan would be most acceptable and perhaps also you have some regulation for similar circumstances which you would think well to let dear Rev Mother see.*"³⁴

M. Teresa Ball had opened her first 'free' school in Rathfarnham in May 1823, in a response to the need of the local village children who had no access to education. This tradition of providing both fee paying and free schools was replicated at each subsequent Loreto foundation. In these circumstances, it was only natural that the Sisters in York should turn to M. Teresa Ball for advice on the running of St George's School, and practical guidance on the delicate matter of leaving enclosure, in what the Sisters described as a "*bigoted town*".³⁵ The priests were to provide a covered carriage to carry the Sisters to and from the school,

³¹ TB/COR/6/37, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, 21 January, no year

³² TB/MAN/1, M. Anne Hickey to M. Teresa Ball, undated (October 1851)

³³ TB/COR/6/13, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, undated [1850/1851]

³⁴ TB/COR/6/18, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, undated [1850/1851]

³⁵ TB/COR/6/13, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, undated [1850/1851]

but M. Angela Brown worried what clothing should be worn over the habit when leaving the convent enclosure.

Advice on clothing for leaving enclosure and a suitable curriculum was sought from M. Teresa Ball who replied in detail. She described the curriculum offered to the children in the Loreto Free Schools in Dublin which included, *“Crochet work is an inducement to the children to forsake schools where they are bribed”*, noting that pupils made money from *“working collars with fine boar head thread.”*³⁶

She described the procedures followed by Sisters in preparing to leave the convent enclosure for work in external schools, in particular the clothing worn over the habit. Shawls were secured to the habit with hook and eye, a bonnet and a veil provided additional coverage. The guimpe and veil are removed *“until we arrived at our destination”*, and the Sisters travel in covered car. Each Sister carried a straw basket which contained articles of needlework which they worked on as the Sisters travelled in strict silence and she even provided a description of the practical shoes worn.³⁷

The opening of St George’s School in York was enthusiastically welcomed in Loreto communities in Ireland and abroad. M. Teresa Ball shared the news with the Loreto Superior in Canada, encouraging her to undertake a similar enterprise. She wrote; *“.....A letter from the convent at York, where I lived 12 years, states that schools are being built in the city, at a distance from the convent; three of the sisters, by the bishop’s wish, are to attend these schools; when fine, they will walk: in rain, they will have a conveyance. The nuns are delighted to extend their instructions. You will imitate this example.....”*³⁸

As the Sisters in York were busy preparing for the opening of St George’s School, they learned of the arrival of the Loreto Sisters in Manchester. A letter was quickly sent to M. Teresa Ball expressing their delight at the news: *“We all most heartily rejoiced to hear that we are no longer the only community of our holy Institute in England.”*

In a wonderful display of sisterly affection and support, the Sisters in York declared their intention of opening St George’s *“on Monday the 12th, the same day you named as fixed for the opening of the schools at Manchester.”*³⁹

The York community eagerly requested the names of the Sisters in Loreto Manchester so that we might *“open some communication with our dear Sisters”*.⁴⁰ Shortly afterwards their bishop visited Loreto Manchester, and immediately sent a list of the community to the Superior in York. The appearance of M. Anne Hickey’s name on the list brought joy to M. Alphonsa Ball, (niece to M. Teresa Ball and former pupil of Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham), who

³⁶ TB/TYP/8, M. Teresa Ball to M. Angela Brown, 2 April 1851

³⁷ TB/TYP/8, M. Teresa Ball to M. Angela Brown, 2 April 1851

³⁸ TB/CAN/3/2, M. Teresa Ball to M. Teresa Dease, 26 April 1851

³⁹ TB/COR/6/14, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, 23 January [1852]

⁴⁰ TB/COR/6/13, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, undated [1850]

wrote; *“I was delighted to recognise in Rev. Mother’s name, one well remembered by me. How delightful to hear of the foundation of another Loretto.....”*⁴¹

Communication between the communities in York and Manchester were clearly established. In July 1852, the Sisters in York knew of M. Teresa Ball’s visit to Manchester earlier that year.⁴²

Two years later in 1854, M. Anne Hickey, Superior Manchester visited York, with Sr Ambrose [Crocker] founding member of Loreto Manchester. Sr Ambrose was ill, and a ‘change of air’ was prescribed, so Sr Ambrose was brought to York, *“for a short time to see if change of air will restore her”*. M. Anne Hickey remained in York for only one night but Sr Ambrose remained longer⁴³, and the hospitality and the welcome given to both indicates a strong, underlying friendship.

Sr Ambrose sadly did not recover her health, she returned to Rathfarnham and died there in 1855, but her visit to York brought back happy memories of Rathfarnham to M. Alphonsa Ball in York. *“You can imagine that I must have felt delighted to see again one of those dear Nuns, the recollections, of whom is connected with the most pleasing associations of my youthful years.”*⁴⁴

Friendships with individual members of the York community were nurtured and encouraged. M. Teresa Ball’s collection includes letters from M. Aloysia [of the Hidden Life of Jesus & Mary], of York. Her letters are filled with unique insights into how these two branches corresponded, how they continued to support one another, and to prize and nurture this close and caring relationship.

In 1853, the community in York recalled the 25th anniversary of the entry of the first past pupil of Rathfarnham to the Rathfarnham novitiate. The community, through M. Aloysia sent their *“warmest congratulations & thousand best wishes to Sister Mary Stanislaus Mc Donnell in union with those offered personally by the dear Sisters with whom she has had 25 years of Heavens choicest blessings.”*⁴⁵

M. Stanislaus was not a past pupil of York, it was highly unlikely that she was known to the Sisters in York, yet her silver jubilee, was acknowledged and celebrated by them. The entrance of the first Loreto pupil to religious life in 1828 was especially significant, and it’s moving to learn of its recollection and celebration, 25 years later by the Sisters in York.

⁴¹ TB/COR/6/14, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, 23 January [1852]

⁴² TB/COR/6/31, M. [Aloysia] of the Hidden Life of Jesus to M. Teresa Ball, 3 July 1852

⁴³ TB/COR/6/44, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, 22 May 1854

⁴⁴ TB/COR/6/44, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, 22 May 1854

⁴⁵ TB/COR/3/5, M. Aloysia of the Hidden Life of Jesus & Mary, Feast of St Bernard, no year [1853]

Significant dates, occasions and feasts were celebrated and remembered in both branches. In 1840, M. Aloysia Blundelle, York wrote with confidence that *“the full jubilee of Sr Christine & the profession day of Mother Xaveria & myself”* will *“claim a special remembrance at Loretto House”*.⁴⁶

Significant dates in M. Teresa Ball’s life were recalled in York and in 1851 the community recalled that *“Today is the anniversary of your leaving St Mary’s. You cannot think it is forgotten here.....where all your anniversaries are commemorated.”*⁴⁷

In reading the letters of individual Sisters in the York community, there is a sense of other members of the community, rushing to ensure that their lines of greeting and remembrance were included, before letters were sealed and dispatched to M. Teresa Ball. There are frequent greetings inserted from a M. Regis, M. Mary Ambrose, M. Alphonsus, M. Aloysia and M. Xaveria.

In 1850, a Sister in York writing to M. Teresa Ball was instructed by a M. Gertrude to include a detailed *“account of the work got through by means of the wringing machine.”* M. Gertrude had carefully prepared a detailed description of the machine, how it operated, and the author was *“to inform dear Revd Mother that the wringing & washing machines are in as great repute as ever. With their aid the Sisters scoured in 3 days, 325 blankets & quilts. They did not rise til the usual hour 5 o’clock, made ½ an hour’s meditation & had ½ an hour for recreation after dinner before resuming their work, it should also be observed that they went through the accustomed work of the house as we have not any Lay Sisters whose sole employ is in the laundry. More than half the quilts & blankets are ready for the beds the day they are scoured if required.....”* The dimensions of the machine were carefully recorded, along with the reassurance that *“There is no occasion for a man to turn it. The sisters do it all themselves, but do not spend more than five minutes at a time turning the machine.”*⁴⁸

M. Bernard Blake, a Sister in the Irish branch and a former pupil of the Bar Convent York, joined M. Teresa in keeping the bonds of friendship and unity alive. M. Bernard had been a pupil in York when M. Teresa Ball was a young Sister, and she became extremely attached to her. M. Bernard followed M. Teresa to Ireland her, later entered Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham and was the second postulant to enter its fledgling novitiate.

We know that M. Bernard kept up a regular correspondence with the community in York, the receipt of her letters and news she shared with the community are frequently mentioned in letters from York to M. Teresa Ball. These letters were especially welcomed when the demands of office prevented M. Teresa from replying as quickly as she wished. M.

⁴⁶ TB/COR/3/6, Authorship unclear to M. Teresa Ball, 14 October 1840

⁴⁷ TB/COR/6/28, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, 10 August 1851

⁴⁸ TB/COR/6/25, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, 15 August 1850

Bernard's letters shared important news of M. Teresa's health, news of the Rathfarnham community and announcements of new Loreto foundations⁴⁹. We know that M. Bernard's letters were greeted with delight, from the following description: *"The letters from dear Sister M. Bernard to her acquaintances have given very great delight, for as you can imagine Rev. Mother has an eager audience when she has news in any way relating to your dear Loretto."*⁵⁰

Amongst M. Teresa Ball's papers is a carefully preserved file of letters from her niece, M. Alphonsa Ball, of the Bar Convent York. M. Alphonsa was M. Teresa Ball's niece, daughter of her older brother Nicholas Ball. Born in Dublin in 1825, a sickly child, she spent some of her early years in Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham as a young child, before moving to boarding school in the Bar Convent York, as it was believed the York air would be better for her health. She entered the novitiate in York in c. 1844, and in time served as Consultress and Mistress of Novices. Gregory Kirkus IBVM in her "IBVM Biographies" states that she *"was greatly loved and trusted by Reverend Mother Angela Browne, who described her as 'the perfect religious'"*.⁵¹

M. Alphonsa Ball allowed her correspondence with her beloved aunt, M. Teresa Ball, to lapse for some time but in c. 1845/1846, she resumed writing. Her first letter to her aunt after a gap of some years was written, *"on this feast of your taking possession of Loretto, Rathfarnham....."*⁵² M. Alphonsa's letters are particularly important in allowing us to explore the relationship between the community in York and M. Teresa Ball. From these letters, we learn that M. Teresa Ball continued to be remembered by the Sisters in York on *"on all your feasts"*⁵³, that all news of her foundations was welcomed, its successes prayed for and M. Teresa's anniversaries especially remembered.⁵⁴

M. Teresa Ball was a familiar name to all in York, *"You are not a stranger to any of us and here in the noviceship we often speak of you, of our dear Sister communities."*⁵⁵ Her letters were warmly welcomed and anticipated. An unusual period of silence from M. Teresa Ball brought the following request from York, *"I should fill a letter were I to attempt to express the wishes and the enquiries with regard to you, dearest Aunt, and to all relating to the prosperity of dear Loretto, suggested by the heart of each one of us now that we have been so very long without any communication with you.....if you only consider all the pleasure it will afford to us to hear something of you, I think that you will not be able to refuse."*⁵⁶

⁴⁹ See for example TB/COR/6/39, TB/COR/6/57, TB/COR/6/59, etc.

⁵⁰ TB/COR/6/7, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, 6th June (no year)

⁵¹ Gregory Kirkus IBVM, "IBVM Biographies", (2001), p 36

⁵² TB/COR/6/1, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, September 1843

⁵³ TB/COR/6/1, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, Undated

⁵⁴ For example see TB/COR/6/26, TB/COR/6/16, TB/COR/6/36,

⁵⁵ TB/COR/6/9, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, Undated

⁵⁶ TB/COR/6/9, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, Undated

On one occasion, M. Alphonsa Ball began her letter to her aunt apologising for the delay in writing to her, *“I must tell you that during one of our last recreation hours, the conversation having turned, as it often does, on you & your dear community, I got a good humoured scolding, for not having written you a line to wish a happy Xmas etc. One or two of my Sisters declared that if I delayed much longer they would ask permission from Rev Mother write instead of me, & she then enjoined me to write without delay.”*⁵⁷

M. Teresa Ball sent her first mission abroad, to India, in October 1841, and this mission along with the mission in Cadiz in Spain, was of special interest to the Sisters in York. The level of interest expressed in this mission, can be gauged when in March 1842, on receipt of the first, much longed for letter from the newly arrived missionaries to India, M. Teresa Ball shared the letter not with her other communities in Ireland, but with the *“Mother abode”* in York. We can imagine the delight as she sent this precious letter to M. Angela Brown in York; *“I’m sending this round to our houses the first fruits from India. I include the Mother abode...”* and concludes her letter, *“Will you return the letter from India; it must travel in Ireland.”*⁵⁸

In 1850, M. Teresa Ball sent the Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham annals which she had carefully and methodically handwritten since her return to Ireland in 1821, to the Sisters in York. The news that she would send the Annals was greeted with delight; *“I shall only observe that a warmest desire was testified to hear sometimes from our esteemed Sisters at Loretto and great delight at the prospect of perusing your Annals, which will be gratefully welcomed.”*⁵⁹ Arrangements were made for the careful transport of the Annals by a friend of both communities, a Mrs Dolan, which required a patient wait, but it was some months before the Annals safely arrived in York.

On receipt of the annals M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball was immediately commissioned to write to M. Teresa Ball of the delight and enjoyment the community derived from reading the Annals. *“I am charged by all my dear Sisters, & first of all by our beloved Revd Mother, to thank you a thousand times for the share which your kind loan has contributed to our interest & entertainment, during the recreation hours. I trust that we have not caused you any inconvenience by keeping so long the “Annals” of dear Loretto, which we have now the opportunity of restoring.”*⁶⁰

I think it is safe to say that the rich and frequent correspondence between the communities in York and Ireland brought mutual happiness and delight. They helped to nurture a supportive, interested and loving relationship between the communities. The close and

⁵⁷ TB/COR/6/38, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, 28 January 1853

⁵⁸ TB/TYP/8, M. Teresa Ball to M. Angela Brown, 17 March 1842

⁵⁹ TB/COR/6/23, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, 16 January 1850

⁶⁰ TB/COR/6/25, M. Alphonsa of Jesus Ball to M. Teresa Ball, 15 August 1850

warm relationship, those *“ties of sisterly love & affection which unite us with you”*⁶¹ continued to flourish after M. Teresa Ball’s death in 1861.

Two years after the death of M. Teresa Ball, M. Julia Martin, Superior in York wrote to M. Scholastica Somers, General Superior, Rathfarnham, continuing a conversation on the constitutions, and in the midst of her letter she asks after the community in Gibraltar. *“We shall be glad to hear of their safe landing & some particulars of the Convent in that locality. You see, dear Revd. Mother, we are very curious, but we are interested in what concerns the Institute.”*⁶²

Surviving letters from York indicates that communication continued, and the mutual interest and concern for one another’s affairs did not diminish.⁶³

The letters exchanged between M. Scholastica Somers, Rathfarnham and M. Julia Martin, York, after York’s successful petition for the approbation of the Institute in 1877 capture the continuing warmth of their friendship and ties.

M. Scholastica Somers wrote to M. Julia Martin: *“thank God for your good bishop who has attained this great blessing for you and through you for us all; it is a new link to unite us in grateful love to York to which we owe our existence and so many blessings.”*⁶⁴

M. Julia responded: *“Yes, my dear Revd. Mother, we are bound very closely together by the bonds of the most sisterly union. We are animated by the same spirit, working under the loving protection of our dear Mother & Patroness.....”*⁶⁵

M. Teresa Ball’s two successors in office, M. Scholastica Somers and later, M. Xaveria Fallon, continued to nurture and encourage this relationship with the Institute in York. M. Juliana of Jesus, York to M. Xaveria Fallon in February 1880. *“Your most welcome and affectionate lines have just reached me and claim an immediate response. Our Sisterly union will I trust continue unbroken in time and in Eternity.....We are her [Our Lady’s] children, sharing each other’s joys and sorrows. You dear Revd. Mother have proved to us that this is your line of action, we deeply appreciate it and lovingly respond to it.”*⁶⁶

In 1886, two members of the community in York had visited Rathfarnham; the visit was later recalled by M. Mary of Christina in July 1888, when she wrote to Rathfarnham sympathising on the death of M. Xaveria Fallon. *“I cannot tell you greatly I was edified with the dear invalid nearly two years ago, nor can I even faintly express my deep depth of gratitude to her and to you for the more than sisterly attention and kindness heaped upon me during my visit. I felt, or rather I was made to feel, that you and your fascinating and saintly Revd.*

⁶¹ TB/COR/3/10, M. Julia Martin to M. Teresa Ball, 19th August no year

⁶² SS/YOR/2, M. Julia Martin to M. S. Somers, 5 October 1863

⁶³ See for example SS/YOR/1, SS/YOR/3 -/4.

⁶⁴ Liz Cotter IBVM, “The Constitutions: Our Pathway to God”, p: 13

⁶⁵ SS/YOR/10, M. Julia Martin to M. S. Somers, 13 April 1877

⁶⁶ XF/YOR/1, M. Juliana of Jesus to M. X. Fallon, 2 February 1880

Mother treated me as if I had been one of your own community. I thanked God heartily for the spirit of sisterly union and charity which everyone poured upon us two poor wayfarers."

My aim today was to share some of the insights or evidence of the strong, loving friendship and sisterly unity that connected these two branches of the Institute. The deep, personal friendships that M. Teresa Ball forged during her time in York provided the foundation for this relationship, but I hope I've demonstrated that these ties were profoundly more than those of personal friendship. M. Teresa's deep, abiding love and sense of union with the Institute in York, her "*mother abode*", was instilled in her companions. This sense of "*two Sister communities*"⁶⁷ was shared with all who entered the Institute during her lifetime. This in turn was successfully conveyed to those who entered long after her death and found fresh expression in the new, supportive relationships that developed between the community in York and the Superior Generals who succeeded M. Teresa Ball. In the Bar Convent, the community continued to remember, communicate with and pray for "*each of those in dear Loreto, whom we do not know, but yet love.*"⁶⁸

I began this talk with a quote from an earlier letter of M. Julia Martin in York to M. Teresa Ball, where she spoke of the "*bonds of the most sisterly union*"⁶⁹ that connected both branches, but I think it is more appropriate to conclude with the words of M. Juliana of Jesus, York in 1880.

*"Our Sisterly union will I trust continue unbroken in time and in Eternity.....We are her [Our Lady's] children, sharing each other's joys and sorrows....."*⁷⁰

Áine Mc Hugh, IBVM Institute Archivist, 2018

⁶⁷ TB/COR/9/37, Dr Murray to M. Teresa Ball, 12 January 1841

⁶⁸ TB/COR/6/13, M. Alphonsa Ball to M. Teresa Ball, undated

⁶⁹ SS/YOR/10, M. Julia Martin IBVM, York to M. Scholastica Somers, 13 April 1877

⁷⁰ XF/YOR/1, M. Juliana of Jesus to M. X. Fallon, 2 February 1880