

Editorial: 400 and Out? The Riddle of Heythrop

It is always a matter of sadness when an institution devoted to the study of philosophy closes, and particularly when it is one which has just celebrated its four hundredth anniversary. But this is what seems to about to happen to Heythrop, the Jesuit philosophical and theological college in West London.

The name 'Heythrop' might raise eyebrows among those who thought that the Heythrop (pronounced Heethrop) was a hunt, the one connected to Chipping Norton and its eponymous set. How did what is now a constituent college of London University come to have the same name as a hunt, and how can a comparatively recent addition to a university (London), which is not 200 years old itself, be over 400 years old? To answer these riddles, we need a little history.

In 1614 Catholics in England were persecuted. Many had been martyred under both Elizabeth and James, often after torture and in peculiarly gruesome ways. To balance the story slightly, as recently as 1588 Protestant England had been at war with Catholic Spain. Catholics were widely suspected, correctly or not, of being in favour in Spain; and there had also been the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, generally seen as a Catholic attempt to blow up King and Parliament. It may actually have been a government plot to discredit Catholics, and many Catholics were loyal to England, but to be a Catholic in England at the turn of the seventeenth century was highly risky and potentially fatal.

This, then, was the context in which the English Jesuits in 1614 (with support from a redoubtable Spanish lady and their Order's own Spanish superior) set up an institution for educating young men who joined the Order in the philosophy and theology required for ordination to the priesthood. This was, of course, the Thomistic philosophy and theology approved by the Counter-Reformation Church, and the original choice of venue was in Louvain, then part of the Spanish Netherlands. The Spanish Netherlands might have seemed a somewhat provocative choice, and Louvain was uncomfortably close to England and to its spies. So in 1624 the Louvain Jesuit college moved itself to Liège, further from the coast, and under the protection of its Prince Bishop, a Bavarian aristocrat from the Wittelsbach family (which explains why the college was often referred to as the Anglo-Bavarian College).

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For the next one hundred and seventy years that the college was neither large nor financially healthy nor was its faculty distinguished (and in it philosophy seemed to be very much secondary to theology). But it did survive, even through the Papal suppression of the Jesuits in 1773. The French Revolution was a different matter however, and in 1794 the English Jesuits of Liège and their students had to flee the continent in panic and in fear of their lives. And, surprisingly perhaps, it was to England that they fled, to Stonyhurst, a large house and estate in Lancashire which a Catholic landowner gave them.

Although full Catholic Emancipation did not occur in Britain until 1829, from 1794 Stonyhurst began to develop both as the great school it still is and also as the Jesuit house of study for its own postulants, though the theological section decamped to St Beuno's in North Wales in 1848. Hopkins, who attended both, refers to both in his poetry. In 1926 philosophy and theology were reunited when the Jesuits took possession of Heythrop Hall, an uncomfortable and dilapidated mansion on what was then a remote and still is a chilly Cotswold ridge in North Oxfordshire. Heythrop's previous owners had included the Duke of Shrewsbury, who had actually commissioned it, and Thomas Brassey, the South American railway king. The Jesuit students were fabled to have sung the *Dies Irae* as they made their way up Heythrop's winding drive for the first time, to continue their studies of neo-Thomistic philosophy and theology, still in Latin by the way – a situation which persisted with little change until 1971. In 1971 Heythrop College, as it now was, and now rather grandly styled a Pontifical Athenaeum decamped once again, this time to London. to abandon the specifically pastoral and Jesuitical focus of the institution. Heythrop, as it was still called, but no longer a Pontifical Athenaeum, become a constituent college of London University, teaching and awarding London University degrees, as well as attending to the formation of students for the Catholic priesthood.

In 2016 the Jesuit Order decided that they could no longer support Heythrop College as a public university specialising in philosophy and theology (and no longer in Latin and no longer with a specifically Catholic timbre). Elsewhere in this issue John Haldane considers further aspects of Heythrop's history and also tackles the question as to whether there is a specifically Jesuitical type of philosophy.

So is it 400 and out for Heythrop? It may be that the formation of Jesuits in philosophy and theology will continue in Britain in some form. In which case, 'Heythrop' may come, in the future, to seem but one phase in an institution which has gone through many

changes and vicissitudes, undreamed of in the strife-torn and theologically riven England of 1614. But if the institution of 1614 continues, as we hope it does, Heythrop itself will be no more, except as the Chipping Norton hunt.