

Reference Code:	ACJ/BC
Title:	Papers relating to the history, development and use of the Bar Convent, York
Creation Dates:	1686–present
Level of Description:	Collection
Medium:	108 archival boxes; 95 maps and plans
Extent:	36 linear metres
Creator:	Members of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, now the Congregation of Jesus
Administrative and Biographical History:	<p>The Bar Convent was purchased in 1686 following a donation from Sir Thomas Gascoigne (1596–1686) who requested that “we must have a school for our daughters”. As well as the convent, one of the earliest girls’ schools in the country was established by Sr Frances Bedingfield (1616–1704) at a house on what is now 17–19 Blossom Street, just outside the city walls of York and Mickelgate Bar, and has been in operation since that date. Founded by Mary Ward (1585–1645), the members of her order (later known as the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and since 2003 as the Congregation of Jesus) operated both a fee-paying boarding school and a Day School on the site. In the 1920s the two schools were merged into a grammar school which continued to be run by the sisters until 1985. At that time, it was handed over to lay management and merged with two other local grammar schools to become All Saints Comprehensive. It continues under this name today.</p> <p>In the 1760s, an increased number of fee-paying pupils on the books ushered in a period of financial security, precipitating a period of physical building and improvements. The celebrated Georgian architect Thomas Atkinson (1729–98) designed and built the house frontage, a hidden chapel and other rooms between 1766 and 1789, alongside other commissions such as the palace of the Archbishop of York in nearby Bishopthorpe. The Georgian frontage enclosed what had previously been a utilitarian courtyard between numbers 17 and 19 Blossom St, providing a grand entrance to the flourishing schools, and still functions as the main entrance of the convent today.</p> <p>Additional adjoining houses, including numbers 21, 23 and 25 Blossom Street were purchased from the 1780s onwards, and in the 1840s they were clad with a uniform façade in harmony with the rest of the building. This was designed by the ‘railway architect’ George Townsend Andrews (1804–55), who also glazed and tiled the entrance courtyard with a cast iron and glass roof and coloured Maw tiles, one of the last Maw floors surviving in the world. In 1835, additional rooms were also added to the convent, including a refectory and two kitchens for the boarders. These are still in use as the Bedingfield, Gascoigne and Aspinall function rooms respectively.</p>

In 1985 at the time of the school changes, the purpose and use of the Bar Convent itself was also changed entirely. Still a living convent, the sisters created a heritage property which encompassed a museum, café, shop and youth centre. Financial and administrative difficulties forced closure in 1994, and following refurbishment work and the appointment of Richard Masefield as first General Manager in 1995, meeting rooms were added and the youth centre converted into a Bed and Breakfast under the management of Leslie Baines until her untimely death in 2022. The St Bede's Pastoral Centre was also established in 1987 at the adjoining property of 21 Blossom Street. The centre was staffed by Benedictine monks from Ampleforth until 1993, since which time it has been managed by the sisters, and since 2017 under a lay Director [see ACJ: SB – St Bede's Collection].

From 2010 a successful fundraising campaign raised funds to design and install a brand-new museum, now the Living Heritage Centre, which was officially opened by Alex Polizzi and Sr Jane Livesey in October 2015. Function rooms and guest bedrooms were revamped, and the convent continues to function as a well-used and much beloved aspect of York's rich history.

Twenty-five members of the order have served as Superior or Reverend Mother of the Bar Convent since foundation:

1. Frances Bedingfield (*fl.* 1686–1696);
2. Dorothy Paston Bedingfield (*fl.* 1696–1734);
3. Ester Conyers (*fl.* 1734–1746);
4. Mary Hodshon (*fl.* 1746–1760);
5. Ann Aspinal (*fl.* 1760–1790);
6. Catherine Rouby (*fl.* 1790–1810);
7. Elizabeth Coyney (*fl.* 1810–1826);
8. M. Austin Chalmers (*fl.* 1826–1830);
9. M. Agnes Dunn (*fl.* 1830–1840);
10. M. Angela Browne (*fl.* 1840–1860);
11. M. Juliana Martin (*fl.* 1860–1883);
12. M. Loyola Giles (*fl.* 1883–1891);
13. M. Germana Noble (*fl.* 1891–1897);
14. M. Francis Pope (*fl.* 1897–1909);
15. M. Cecilia Kelly (*fl.* 1909–1925);
16. M. Alacoque Murphy (*fl.* 1926–1932);
17. M. Aquinas Duran (*fl.* 1932–1935);
18. M. Gertrude Murphy (*fl.* 1935–1950 and 1953–1964);
19. M. Imelda Gilbert (*fl.* 1950–1953);
20. M. Ancilla Barton (*fl.* 1964–1970);
21. M. Magdalen Ingram (*fl.* 1970–1976 and 1988–1991);
22. M. Agatha Leach (*fl.* 1976–1979, 1982–1988 and 1991–2001);
23. M. Pia Buxton (*fl.* 1979–1982);
24. Mary Walmsley (*fl.* 2001–2010 and 2016–2019);
25. Ann Stafford (*fl.* 2010–2016 and 2019–present).

<p>Archival History:</p>	<p>Assembled in the course of the life and activities in the building since 1686. Material has also been donated by members of the order, by past pupils of the school, and from others connected with the life and work of the convent.</p>
<p>Scope & Content:</p>	<p>Material relating to the history of the Bar Convent from 1686, including correspondence, legal papers, account books, photographs, maps and plans, convent diaries, spiritual writings, school records and property deeds.</p>
<p>Arrangement:</p>	<p>Arranged and catalogued by Nora Gurney (1921–74), director of the Borthwick Institute York, alongside community archivist Sr Margaret Mary Littlehales (1907–2009) in the 1960s. This original arrangement has been preserved, with the addition of new series as the collection has grown, under the guidance of Sr Gregory Kirkus (1910–2007), Sr Christina Kenworthy-Browne (<i>fl.</i> 2005–2017) and Dr Hannah Thomas (<i>fl.</i> Sept 2017 to present).</p> <p>ACJ/BC consists of 12 series:</p> <p>BC/3 – History of the Bar Convent, 1686–present</p> <p>Including historical documents from the 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, papers relating to Roman artefacts discovered in the convent garden in 1880, convent annals and family histories of early members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Roman Finds, 1880–1888 B. 17th and 18th Century Documents C. 19th and 20th Century Documents D. Approbation of the Institute, 1877 E. Notes on the archives, n.d. [] F. Annals, Diaries and Histories, 1835–present <p>BC/4 – Bar Convent Community</p> <p>Papers relating to individual members’ vows, professions, elections and wills. The series also includes documents relating to the chapel (opened 1769) including information about chaplains and relics, alongside papers relating to death and burial within the community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Postulants, professions and vows, 1788–2001. B. Bar Convent cemetery, 1826–2012 C. [empty] D. Election of Superiors, 1863–1883 E. Visitations, 1862–1909 F. Episcopal jurisdiction, 1830–1857 G. Customs of the house, 1861–1982 H. Spiritual conferences and sermons, 1609–1984 I. [empty]

J. The Chapel, 1769–present:

1. BC/4/J/1 – Chapel construction, fittings and fixtures
2. BC/4/J/2 – Victorian redesigns, 1847 and 1871/72
3. BC/4/J/3 – Bicentenary and Georgian resoration, 1969
4. BC/4/J/4 – Events in the Chapel
5. BC/4/J/5 – Chapel bequests and benefactors
6. BC/4/J/6 – Prayers, services and hymns
7. BC/4/J/7 – Sodalities and Confraternities

K. Relics, 1792–1962

L. Chaplains, 1866–2001

M. [empty]

N. Indulgences and suffrages, 1728–1918

O. Donations 1872–1882

P. Medical miscellanea, 17th century to 1753

BC/5 – Bar Convent Schools

Including material relating to the Bar Convent Boarding and Day Schools, later the Bar Convent Grammar School, alongside papers concerning St George's School (f.1852) and the convent school in Scarborough (1859–61).

A. Bar Convent School, 1710–1985

1. BC/5/A/1 – Bar Convent Boarding School, 1686–1928
2. BC/5/A/2 – Bar Convent Day School, 1686–1928
3. BC/5/A/3 – Bar Convent Grammar School, 1928–1985

B. St. George's School, f. 1852

C. Scarborough, 1859–1878

D. Correspondence about schools, 1850–1893

E. English Martyrs' School, 1889

BC/6 – Reverend Mother's Correspondence

Letters relating to various superiors of the Bar Convent from Bishops, Cardinals, General Superiors, members of the clergy and other houses of the order. A large collection of letters expressing sympathy for losses during the 1942 Blitz is also included:

A. Bishops, Cardinals, etc.

B. General Superiors

C. Correspondence 18th– 21st centuries

D. Letters of sympathy after 1942 Blitz

E. Letters about Mrs Wood the actress

F. From Canon Thompson

G. From Father John Morris, S.J.

H. From Rev. D H Haigh

I. From Stapehill and Teignmouth

- J. Re: Mother Rose Dunn
- K. Re: the Falcioni Children
- L. From houses of the Institute abroad
- M. From various institutions
- N. Letters in other archives
- O. From Elizabeth Blacklidge and M. Ann Aspinal

BC/7 – Bar Convent Business

General business correspondence including accounts, receipts, tax returns, bills for repair work and property deeds:

- A. General business correspondence and receipts
- B. Bills (mainly for buildings and alterations)
- C. Property Deeds, 1636–1972
- D. Account Books, 1731–1959
- E. Papers concerning family property
- F. Letters concerning family property
- G. Papers concerning Bar Convent property

BC/8 – Various historical papers

Papers relating to post-Reformation Catholic history, including English martyrs and St Margaret Clitherow (1556–86):

- A. Catholic History – general
- B. English Martyrs
- C. St Margaret Clitherow

BC/9 – Bar Convent Library and Archives

- A. Archives
- B. Library
- C. Cataloguers, Archivists and Librarians (non-community)

BC/10 – Events, Anniversaries and Celebrations

BC/10/1 – Bar Convent Events

BC/10/2 – Visits by Societies

	<p>BC/10/3 – Courses, Lectures, Conferences</p> <p>BC/10/4 – Mary Ward events</p> <p>BC/10/5 – Exhibitions</p> <p>BC/10/6 – Concerts and Readings</p> <p>BC/10/7 – Visit of John Paul II 1982</p> <p>BC/11 – Museum / Exhibition / Living Heritage Centre, 1987 to present</p> <p>BC/11/1 – First Museum, 1987–2015</p> <p>BC/11/2 – Living Heritage Centre project, 2010 onwards</p> <p>BC/11/3 – Maintenance and Administration</p> <p>BC/11/4 – Objects</p> <p>BC/11/5 – Friends of the Bar Convent, 1985–2018</p> <p>BC/MP – Maps and Plans Showing various aspects of the Bar Convent including chapel, garden and floor plans. 19th and 20th centuries:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Printed Maps and Engravings 2. Plans of the Bar Convent, c. 1840s–1969 3. Miscellaneous, 1882–1954 4. Central Heating Plans, 1936–1961 5. Sanitary Extensions, 1948 6. Dining Hall and Kitchen conversion, 1952 7. Plans of Blossom Street, 1844–1956 8. St Mary’s Convent Garden, 1845–1882
Conditions Governing Access:	By appointment only, and at the discretion of the Special Collections Manager.
Language of Material:	English; Latin; German; Spanish; Italian
Related Material:	ACJ/EP: Papers of the English Province; ACJ/MW: Mary Ward Collection and ACJ/SB: St Bede’s Centre York.