

ARCHIVIUM HIBERNICUM

Irish Historical Records

LXV 2012

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Irish Historical Records

(Incorporating since 1973 the proceedings of the
Irish Catholic Historical Committee)

LXV 2012

Documents

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The Irish in Asturias: the footprint of the Irish College, Salamanca, 1913–1950

The annual reports of the last two rectors of the Irish College at Salamanca, along with other documents in the Salamanca Archive,¹ provide important information on the life of the small Irish clerical community in Spain in the first half of the twentieth century.² The diaries and papers of Alexander McCabe also chronicle his personal experiences and the fate of the Irish College in Salamanca, during and beyond the Spanish Civil War.³ In his 1937–38 report, Rector McCabe describes his return to their summer villa in Asturias, from which the Irish students had been hastily evacuated the previous summer on the outbreak of hostilities. Travelling westward from

1 The author is grateful to Cathal McCauley, University Librarian, and Helen Fallon, Deputy Librarian, NUI Maynooth for facilitating this research, and to staff of the Russell Library and St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. Also to Colette O'Daly, National Library of Ireland for invaluable assistance.

The Salamanca Archive contains the archives of the Irish colleges in Spain from 1592 to the middle of the twentieth century, deposited in St. Patrick's College, Maynooth and property of the Irish Episcopal Conference. As the last surviving Irish college in Spain, material transferred there from the other Irish colleges: Alcalá, Santiago de Compostela, Madrid and Seville, are included in the collection. The archive, containing over 50,000 items, is chiefly administrative in nature, with some personal papers, and is a valuable source for the civil, social and ecclesiastical history of Ireland and Spain over almost four centuries. A number of documents taken from the archives have been published in previous issues of *Archivium Hibernicum*, most recently: Hugh Fenning, 'Students of the Irish College at Salamanca, 1592–1638' in *Archiv. Hib.*, lxii (2009), pp 7–36. See also 'Catalogue of the contents of volumes i-xlix of *Archivium Hibernicum*' in *Archiv. Hib.*, l (1996), pp 3–18. For further information and bibliography on the Irish Colleges in Spain and the Salamanca Archive see Regina Whelan Richardson, 'The Salamanca archives' in Agnes Neligan (ed.), *Maynooth library treasures: from the collections of St. Patrick's College* (Dublin, 1995), pp 144–7; idem (ed.), *The Salamanca letters: a catalogue of correspondence (1619–1871) from the archives of the Irish Colleges in Spain in the Library of St. Patrick's college, Maynooth, Ireland*; Patrick J. Corish, 'The Maynooth College Archive' in *Archiv. Hib.*, xlix (1995), pp 111–14. The current Salamanca Archive Catalogue Project is under way with a view to publishing the catalogue on-line, along with some of the collection's key items.

2 Details are taken from the Rectors' reports to the Irish hierarchy, cited 'Rector's report, [date]'. These annual printed reports exist from June 1909 to 1950 and are preserved in Salamanca Archive, Legajo S46. Reports for 1935, 1946, 1948 are missing. Denis J. O'Doherty was rector from 1912–1934. Alexander J. McCabe was rector from 1935–49. I have also drawn on the correspondence of John O'Hara (vice-rector, 1935–46) and Joseph Ranson (acting rector 1949–c.1951).

3 The papers of Alexander McCabe in the National Library of Ireland consist of 110 folders in 10 boxes, including diaries, correspondence, photographs and other documents, both personal and relating to the Irish College, Salamanca, and to Ireland. Alexander McCabe papers (National Library of Ireland, Acc. 4872).

Santander towards the coastal town of Llanes, he journeyed through the recently captured nationalist area on the night of 15 September 1937:

One of the many vivid memories of the Civil War will be the journey into Asturias, where the war was then raging. As all the bridges had been blown up the train stopped at the edge of the province...I had two military passes, and a huge munition-lorry going up to the Front took me the rest of the journey. The three soldiers in charge, two of them foreign volunteers, had each a rifle within easy reach and as we rushed along between the mountains and the sea, the beautiful harvest night seemed charged with the atmosphere and dynamism of war and death...When we arrived at the Villa and I found it looking as before, quite peaceful in the moonlight, I could scarcely believe it. Alongside, over the boundary wall, was the black ruin of the village school, which had been burned. I found the servants looking haggard and frightened, but they were quite safe and well. Early next morning the doors and windows all over the house were vibrating to the sound of shells and bombs bursting at the Front, but the booming of the guns seemed to be a friendly assurance that the danger had passed.⁴

However, Irish students were destined never to return to the summer house on the Costa Cantábrica, nor indeed to the Irish College in Salamanca which had fulfilled its role as a centre of education in Spain for Irish students and seminarians since its foundation by Philip II in 1592

The Casona de Verines villa still stands today in the village of Pendueles, a fine example of the striking ‘indiana’ architecture which is a feature of the Asturian urban and rural landscape.⁵ Built in the early twentieth century by returning emigrants who had made their fortunes in the Americas,⁶ the *casas indianas* symbolised the material wealth and success of their owners. Many of these successful businessmen returned to their home towns and villages to settle and build these beautiful and distinctive houses in Spanish colonial style, so that even small places in Asturias such as Pendueles may contain several of these large and imposing dwellings, palatial at their most grand. With decorated balconies and stairways, glazed galleries and columns they stand behind wrought-iron gates in gardens with tropical plants and characteristic palm trees. Aspiring to a

4 Rector’s report, 1937–38, p. 4.

5 ‘Casona’ means large house. The Casona de Verines is an example of the eclectic and compact architectural style of *indiana* dwelling. Verines refers to the area of Pendueles where the house is situated. It continues to be also known as ‘La Casa de los Irlandeses’, or ‘Casa de Nobles Irlandeses’. The name of the villa may also be written ‘Casona de Berines’.

6 Emigration from Asturias was chiefly to Latin America, and, from the Llanes area, to Cuba and Mexico in particular.

high standard of living conditions they incorporated running water, bathrooms and electricity. Quality materials were used in their construction, such as timber from South America, and their occupants looked to modernism, distinction and style, often sourcing decoration and furnishings from Barcelona and Paris. Their owners frequently took on a philanthropic role, improving and modernising the local area by funding public facilities such as schools, hospitals, churches, roads and water systems.

The Casona de Verines was the summer house of the Irish seminarians of the Irish College at Salamanca (Real Colegio de San Patricio de Nobles Irlandeses), who had been coming to Northern Spain for the summer vacation since 1913 and to Pendueles since 1920. They were permitted to return to Ireland for their summer holidays every third year. At one time the remaining students would decamp to their country house in Aldearrubia outside Salamanca, but by 1900 this had been in a state of disrepair for many years and was subsequently sold.⁷ Soon after becoming rector in 1912, Denis O'Doherty began to petition the Irish hierarchy to permit the students to take a house on the northern coast of Spain for the summer months.⁸ He put his case to the Irish Bishops claiming that it was disruptive and expensive for the students to return frequently to Ireland. By staying in Spain during the summer they would have the opportunity to pursue their special studies or tastes: languages, literature, history, painting etc. They would also have time for prayer and reflection as well as to enjoy a healthy lifestyle with proximity to beaches for a daily swim and the opportunity for excursions and exercise. He was aware of the many regional differences in Spain and wished for the students to observe that 'the Northern peoples are not Castilians, and differ very much from them' and to give them the opportunity 'to study racial character, habits, customs and manners'.⁹

The Irish Bishops finally took a unanimous decision that the College should take a house in the north of Spain for the summer. However, the students occasionally protested, as they were naturally very keen to return to Ireland for their summer holidays. The choice of the Cantabrian coast was a natural one; the cooler climate was a relief from the extreme summer heat of Castile, and the sea air and proximity to beaches for a daily swim a healthy incentive. Furthermore, many aspects of the surroundings and landscape were reminiscent of Ireland.

7 Bernard Maguire (rector 1898–1907) recommended that all students return to Ireland for the coming summer as: 'It is only by an abuse of terminology that the pair of sheds in which our students have been accustomed to spend the summer vacation could be dignified with the name of country house'. See Report on the present condition of the Irish College, Salamanca, IX. Country House, 19 May 1900 (Salamanca Archive, Legajo S46).

8 His predecessor and brother, Rector Michael J. O'Doherty (rector 1907–11) had already made a case to re-adopt the system of spending the summer vacation in Spain. (Rector's Report, 1908–09, p. 8).

9 Rector's report, 1913–14, p. 5

In the summer of 1913, the students took their holidays in that region for the first time, staying for 91 days in the Augustinian College in the county town of Llanes, Asturias. A local newspaper, *El Oriente de Asturias*, carried a report of a sporting event on its front page, entitled 'Foot-ball' with an accompanying photograph¹⁰

Por primera vez, el domingo último se celebró en esta villa un partido de 'foot-ball'. Los dos equipos que contendieron eran uno el [*sic*] compuesto por jóvenes de la localidad, y el otro por los estudiantes irlandeses que aquí veranean y que se hospedan en el Colegio de La Encarnación. Los irlandeses son maestros consumados en tan higiénico sport, hicieron excelentes jugadas y contaron cinco 'goals', mientras que los llaniscos no hicieron más que uno, acabando con este 'goal' el partido. Presenció en el partido innumera gente y le amenizó la banda municipal.¹¹

The following year they returned to Asturias, staying at the Vincentian College in Limpias. In 1915 they took a house near the strand of Bouzas, in Vigo, Galicia . Here they rented a house for £10 a month and were made very welcome:

The College has reason to be grateful to the Capuchin Fathers of Vigo for procuring the house and for getting their friends to supply the additional furnishings required. The courteous Bishop of the Diocese, Most Rev. Dr. Elijo Garay, not only gave us the full faculties of the diocese, but *moto proprio* suggested the fittingness of our having, and gave permission for the erection of, a semi-public oratory in the house, where Mass was said, a blessing and a convenience which I need not dwell on. His Lordship further recommended the College to the clergy of both Bouzas and Vigo in so far as we might require their services, and it was owing to his letters of presentation that we saw the two artistic family mansions of the Marquesses of Paza de la Merced and of Mos y Valladares, and were received and entertained in both by members of the respective families.¹²

10 Reproduced in Manuel Maya Conde, *Llanes, siglo XX (1900–1950)* (Llanes, 2000), p. 97. Founded in 1868, *El Oriente de Asturias* still appears today.

11 'Last Sunday a football match took place in this town for the first time. The two teams taking part were made up of local youths against the Irish students who are on holidays here and staying in the College of the Encarnación. The Irish are consummate masters of this healthy sport, they played excellently, scoring 5 goals, while the Llaniscos only got one goal, which terminated the game. Many people attended and the town band played at the event.' (Author's translation).

12 Rector's report, 1915–16, p. 5.

THE IRISH COLLEGE, SALAMANCA, 1913–1950

From here they made excursions to places of religious, historic and artistic interest, travelling on foot, by boat, by tram and bicycle:

Bayona, the one-time famous seaport, where many of our earliest students landed on coming from Ireland, was visited by sea-voyage, as were also, on another occasion, the inner reaches of Vigo Bay and the Islands of Cies, the Galician O’Brazil, which shelter the harbour on the seaside. Another excursion was made to Pontevedra, the capital of the province, and its surroundings. Tuy, the ecclesiastical capital, a frontier town formerly strongly fortified, was visited on bicycles.¹³

While in Galicia they visited Santiago de Compostela:

On the feast of St. James, we all had the happiness of joining in the celebration of the Jubilee year in Compostella, making the Stations and gaining the Indulgence. We had the distinction of being the only foreign pilgrimage which visited the shrine during the Jubilee, and as such were received with marked consideration by the authorities, both ecclesiastical and civil.¹⁴

There had been an Irish College in Santiago de Compostela from 1605 to 1769, originally established for lay students or *nobles irlandeses*, and associated with Donal O’Sullivan Beare.¹⁵ They returned to Asturias in 1916, taking a house on the coast between Gijon and La Coruña, and giving their address as ‘Colegio de Nobles Irlandeses, Salinas (Asturias), Spain’. The summers of 1917, 1918 and 1919 were spent in Nueva where they hired a summer house, and they again featured in *El Oriente de Asturias* with the following announcement of their imminent arrival in 1918:¹⁶ ‘Noticias recientes permiten asegurar que este verano vendrán a veranear entre nosotros los jóvenes alumnos del Colegio de Nobles Irlandeses, a quienes se prepara un cariñoso y entusiasta recibimiento, pues son muchas las simpatías que aquí tienen.’¹⁷ Rector O’Doherty comments on the welcoming atmosphere of Nueva in his report on the long vacation of 1917:

Notwithstanding the fact that the house is an old one and not well planned, the Summer in Nueva was thoroughly satisfactory. In

13 Rector’s report, 1915–16, p. 5.

14 Rector’s report, 1915–16, p. 5.

15 See Patricia O’Connell, *The Irish College at Santiago de Compostela, 1605–1769* (Dublin, 2007); idem, ‘The Irish College, Santiago de Compostela: 1605–1767’ in *Archiv. Hib.*, vi (1996) pp 19–28.

16 Reproduced in Manuel Maya Conde, *Llanes, siglo XX (1900–1950)* (Llanes, 2000), p. 128.

17 ‘We can now confirm the arrival this summer of the young students of the Irish College, who are greatly esteemed and who will receive a fond and enthusiastic reception here’ (Author’s translation).

taking the same quarters for this year, I am fulfilling the wishes not only of the students but also of all the inhabitants of Nueva. Special recognition is due to the kindness and generosity of the Count and Countess de la Vega del Sella, whose Palace and grounds were always open to both superiors and students, as well as to the affability and kindness of the Parish Priest, Don Antonio Mendez Palacios.¹⁸

The students first came to the village of Pendueles in 1920, situated in a scenic area between the mountains and the sea. It was close to the Sierra Plana de la Borbolla, overlooking the Mar Cantábrico.¹⁹ Here they discovered the Casona de Verines. The house and location made an immediate impression on Rector Denis O'Doherty, who hastened to recommend it as a permanent summer residence in his next report:

This summer, 1920, has been spent in Pendueles, a beautiful seaside resort with two strands, near the city of Santander, but still in the principality of Asturias. We were fortunate in being able to rent a family mansion, which is easily the finest we have occupied and in every way suitable to our needs.²⁰

And no wonder, for the Casona de Verines had been built as the dream house and family home of Ricardo Ortiz Gómez and Ana Hernández and their children. Ana was a native of Pendueles, and Ricardo had been an employee of her father, working in the agrarian sector in Brownsville, Texas. Ana inherited a large amount of money from her father, and her husband bought a number of properties in Pendueles in February 1919. The villa was a typical *casa indiana*, constructed soon afterwards, but only occupied for a short time before their return to the Americas. On 21 April 1921 Ricardo gave a legal authority from Matamoros in Mexico to José Posada of Llanes, to sell his properties in Pendueles.²¹

Solid and modern, the house could accommodate up to 50 students, was close to the railway station, and was to be sold furnished, including the piano.²² Permission was granted by the Irish Bishops and in the rector's report for the academic year 1922–23 O'Doherty could report the completion of the purchase of the summer villa. The amount paid was just under

18 Rector's report 1917–18, p. 2

19 Pendueles lies along one of the pilgrim routes to Santiago de Compostela: the 'Camino del Norte', at some 10 kilometers from the county town of Llanes.

20 Rector's report 1919–20, p. 4.

21 Marta Llavona del Campo, *Una arquitectura de distinción : análisis y evolución de la casa Indiana en el concejo de Llanes entre 1870 y 1936* (Oviedo, 2007). Entry on accompanying CD-ROM.

22 In 1952 the piano was sent to 'las Monjas Irlandesas de Madrid'. (Letter from Joseph Ranson to the then caretaker, 21 June, 1952. Private collection of the caretakers' family.)

82,000 pesetas (some £2,680 at the time) the largest amount ever spent by the College on a single purchase. He explained:

The property, acquired in fee simple, is as follows

1. The Villa is a handsome four-storey house of solid masonry, measuring some 45 x 35 feet, with all its furnishing, including an excellent piano, electric-light fittings, etc.
2. Stabling of all kinds, including coach-house and granary, the latter a fine room over 50 feet long and well lighted, which could serve equally as study, recreation room or dormitory, if required.
3. Gardens and orchard, of some two acres, on one end of which the buildings stand, all being surrounded by a high, solid wall of masonry.
4. A villager's house on the opposite side of the main road, acquired by the late owner to exclude unsuitable neighbours, and which might serve as a caretaker's dwelling.
5. Some three acres of pasture and arable land which, with the ground around the Villa, would enable us to have our own milk, vegetables and potatoes, as well as help towards the upkeep of the caretaker²³

The cost of maintaining the students during the summer was referred to by Michael O'Doherty in 1909 when he suggested a sum of £12 per student. The annual fee for the College in Salamanca was then set at £40 per student, with some free places available:

It might well seem that the high pension of £40 is meant to cover the vacation as well as the school year; but the manner in which the students are kept must be taken into account. The *menu* for each student is as follows: –

Breakfast: Fried eggs and coffee, with an abundant supply of milk

Dinner: 1st course, Soup.

2nd "Boiled meat and potatoes.

3rd "Roast meat and potatoes

4th "cheese, pudding, or fruit. Wine

Supper: 1st course Fresh fish

2nd "Steak and vegetable, or salad

3rd "Dessert. Wine²⁴

23 Rector's report, 1922–23, pp 6–7.

24 Rector's report 1908–1909, p. 8.

In an interview given in 1983, Alexander McCabe described the food in the College as ‘Irish food with the good things of Spain’ and recalled his own student days in Pendueles, ‘We had a summer house, that was a nice place but of course you were always under discipline’.²⁵

During the academic year in Salamanca the students rose at six in the morning for meditation and Mass. The rest of the day was taken up with study, class, and meals until spiritual reading at 8 o’clock, followed by supper, night prayers and all lights out at 10.00 p.m. It was considered important for them to continue the regularity and order of their daily life while on holidays, but the strict regime was relaxed somewhat during their sojourn on the Cantabrian coast. They made daily trips to the beach to swim, either to the local beach close by, or a little further on to that of Vidiago, and could also enjoy pleasant walks by the sea and along the cliff-top. There were tennis courts in the grounds and football was particularly important, and encouraged by Denis O’Doherty: ‘This year we hope to have a full house, which makes for more animation and more interest in games, especially football’.²⁶ Indoor games and amusements were facilitated, and reading, meditation, personal interests and the study and practice of Spanish and French were encouraged. Singing and playing the piano was complemented with a radio bought in 1928 ‘for entertaining the students during the summer evenings.’²⁷ For daily Mass and Communion they had their own oratory within the house, but on Sundays they sometimes went to the parish church, San Acisclo, a romanesque church named after the patron saint of Pendueles.

Pura Martínez, a long-time resident in the house behind the Villa gave her impression of the Irish students in an interview in 1985:

Eran muy simpáticos y se reían con nosotras, pero no les entendíamos nada de lo que nos decían. Pasaban por aquí en desbandada para la playa, toalla al hombro, a través de los prados. Un día a la semana, los llevaban de paseo y llegaban hasta Llanes. Volvían, a buen paso, todos en fila, los ojos bajos, pisar recio siempre guiados por el que les mandaba. Algunos días, al atardecer, se escuchaba el piano y los violins, tras los ventales de la Casona, acompañando sus cánticos... Cuando se marcharon, se despidieron de todos nosotros, invitándonos a una merienda en la finca’²⁸

25 Interview with Mgr. Alexander McCabe, former rector of the Irish College of Salamanca. 16 April 1986. (John Paul II Library, National University of Ireland, Maynooth. Library archives, no. 3, 2 sound cassettes. Henceforth AMC Interview 1986).

26 Rector’s report, 1929–30, p. 5.

27 Ibid.

28 Ramón Gonzalez Noriega. *Interview with Pura Martínez, 22 June 1985* (<http://renglonesperdidos.blogspot.com/search?q=berines>) (14 March 2002) ‘They were very nice and they laughed along with us, but we didn’t understand anything they said to us. They used to pass by here straggling across the fields, towels over their shoulders, on their way to the beach. Once a week, they were taken for a walk as far as Llanes. They would return striding briskly along

Another resident in Pendueles also recalled to this author her memories of looking over the wall as a small child to watch the students playing tennis in the grounds of the villa. They played football with her brother and local youths, and were very well thought of in the neighbourhood as being outgoing and friendly confirming Alexander McCabe's statement 'we mixed in all this time with Spaniards in the summer house.'²⁹ This was to stand them in good stead when some of their Spanish soccer acquaintances were among republicans overseeing their evacuation from Pendueles in 1936 on the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

In contrast to the more conservative, Catholic province of Salamanca, Asturias in the early 1930s was a republican stronghold and remained under the control of the elected government until late in 1937. Three years earlier in 1934 events there had foreshadowed the civil war when Asturias had played its part in the general strike and uprising against the right-wing government. The brutal suppression of the uprising by Francisco Franco earned him the nick-name and reputation of the Butcher of Asturias. However the Llanes region was a more conservative area and the inhabitants of the Villa de Nobles Irlandeses had remained undisturbed during the years of successive anti-clerical governments and unrest, with Rector McCabe remarking that the summer of 1934 had been spent in complete tranquillity, with trouble usually confined to the other end of the province, in the mining region.³⁰

In the early summer of 1936, on Monday 22 June, Alexander McCabe accompanied 15 students to the summer villa in Pendueles, travelling overnight by train from Salamanca. He journeyed onwards to Ireland via England, leaving them in the charge of the vice-rector John O'Hara, on the latter's return from his Irish holidays. He would later observe:

At the end of the Academic Year, 1936, five students were ordained to the Priesthood, one left, eight were due to spend the vacation in Ireland, and fifteen went to the Summer Villa in Asturias. We were almost on the eve of the Revolution, but few people suspected that it would break so soon, or take such a violent form. When we arrived in the North, we found everything quiet. Though there were isolated shootings here and there throughout Spain, that corner of Asturias enjoyed an Arcadian peace, and the students settled down to enjoy, as usual, the mountains and the sea.³¹

with their eyes cast down, their leader in charge at the head of the line. On some days, when evening was falling, you could hear the sound of the piano and the violins accompanying their singing, behind the windows of the Casona... When they left, they said goodbye to all of us, inviting us for refreshments on the premises' (Author's translation).

29 AMC interview (1986)

30 Rector's report. 1935–36, p. 5.

31 Rector's report. 1936–37, p. 1.

On 16 July 1936 Vice-Rector O'Hara was writing from Spain to Rector McCabe in Ireland with local and national news and political events.³² The following day the anti-government revolt led by Francisco Franco was to change forever the lives of the Spanish people and the fate of the Irish students in Spain. At first the village of Pendueles was relatively quiet with O'Hara reporting that they were suffering no serious inconvenience from the revolution. People went to Mass and worked in the fields as usual. There was no shortage of essential food, with bread and meat, and fish from Santander arriving regularly. The students continued to play football with the local young men, who were now in the government militia. Some students were challenged and searched on the road, but not detained. 'The local representatives of the Madrid government were friendly and helpful but there was a certain amount of danger from Red volunteers passing through...'.³³ On 27 July O'Hara declined the offer to evacuate on an English destroyer,³⁴ which had docked at Llanes 'as there was no grave danger in these parts then'.³⁵ However he had taken local advice to display a Union Jack on the balcony of the house in the belief that this was the only flag which would be respected by both sides, and half of the students wished to leave at this time.

The following Sunday morning trouble arrived at the very gates of the villa when the Vice-Rector was shot at twice from a passing lorry, because he failed to return the communist salute. According to McCabe 'It wasn't the local people, it wasn't the republicans, these were anarchists from Barcelona who went touring around'.³⁶ He also noted in his diary 'The Reds from the village were quite nice and apologetic'. Two local men came

32 Copy of Letter from John O'Hara, Pendueles to Alexander McCabe, Ireland, 16 Jul 1936 (AMC papers. Box 4, 61A Diary 1/1/36-10/1/37).

33 Index Alumnorum Regalis Collegii Sancti Patritii Nobilium Hibernorum apud Salmanticam 1931-, Index to students 1931-1948, pars tertia, un-numbered pages at end: In anno academico 1935-1936

34 On his arrival in Ireland, Alexander McCabe had gone directly to request assistance for the students from J.P. Walsh, Secretary of the Dept. of External affairs in the Irish Free State 'The Irish Government got in touch with the British Admiralty, the Admiralty sent a radio message to the destroyer Veteran in the Bay of Biscay and it put into the little fishing port of Llanes.' AMC papers. Box 4, 61A, Diary 1/1/36-10/1/37.

35 Copy of Letter from John O'Hara, Pendueles to Alexander McCabe, Ireland, 3 August 1936. AMC papers. Box 4, 61A, Diary 1/1/36-10/1/37. Later, comments from a recently returned Salamanca student, P[atrick]. Cunningham, were quoted in the Irish Press of 29 August, 1936, 'The Red Guards – now acting as soldiers – whose conduct towards rebels or suspects is anything but commendable – treat foreigners with the greatest respect...The Red Guards also refrain from demanding from foreigners the Communist salute, which they demand from their countrymen at the point of the revolver. When foreigners leave the country they are escorted by the Red Guards to the place of embarkment...The Communists are merciless in their treatment of Fascists or of anyone suspected of forwarding the Fascist cause. Many prisoners, including numbers of priests, are being confined by the Communist forces in Austurias [sic], and it is reported that the greater part of these have been put to death'.

36 AMC interview (1986)

to apologise and said that they had rung up Llanes and had the perpetrator arrested.³⁷ By this time the bridge at nearby La Franca was mined and the students were advised by the republicans not to pass there. The next day, 3 August, O'Hara received an urgent letter from the British consul in Santander, J. Bates, with arrangements for the immediate evacuation of the students.³⁸ At lunchtime the Vice-Rector told the students to pack up and that evening he went to Llanes to arrange a coach, and also, on the advice of the Consul, a republican escort.³⁹ At 7 a.m. on Tuesday 4 August the students and the Vice-rector left on a bus flying the Communist flag and draped with the Union Jack for their protection. Four republicans preceded them in a car and five accompanied them on the bus. Rector O'Hara reported that 'The Red guards'⁴⁰ gave them a cordial goodbye in Unquera, and hoped that they would be back soon again. From here they took the train to Santander where he observed that life appeared normal; trains and taxis were running, cafes were open and people were bathing on the Sardinero beach.⁴¹ With the help of the British consul the students were evacuated on the destroyer H.M.S. *Valorous* from the port of Santander, when they were glad to be offered ship's biscuits and Players cigarettes on board.⁴² They disembarked at St. Jean de Luz in France and the British Consul in Bayonne supplied them with tickets to travel to Paris.⁴³ Here

37 AMC papers. Box 4, 61A, Diary 1/1/36-10/1/37,

38 Bates's assistance was crucial, and McCabe later notes 'Mr. Bates was accused of helping 'Reds' (like Irish students?) and when the Military occupied Santander he was compelled to leave' (AMC papers. Box 4, 61A, Diary 1/1/36-10/1/37).

39 A permit issued in Pendueles on Monday 3 August 1936 allowed O'Hara to travel to Llanes and back, 'Autorize al Yrlandes Juan Ohara para trasladarse a Llanes acompanado de dos Milicianos de este comite y regrese.'. AMC writes in his diary: 'That evening he travelled to Llanes in a red [i.e Republican] car to see Mozan the owner of the garage to arrange the bus to take the students out the next day'. (AMC papers Box 4, Folder 61A, Diary 1/1/36-10/1/37).

40 AMC papers, Box 4, 61A, Diary 1/1/36-10/1/37.

41 O'Hara returned to Pendueles, to settle accounts and to assist the four employees from Salamanca to return home. This was not possible; conditions grew gradually worse and there was a shortage of food. 'Meanwhile all the churches in this district have been closed. I have allowed P[adre]. José to say Mass in the college, but I allowed no one else in, even on Sunday. There is a battle raging in Oviedo and it is reported that rebel forces are advancing on Santander.' Letter from J.O'Hara, Pendueles, to A. McCabe, Ireland. Box 4, Folder 61A. He eventually left at the end of August, travelled by train to Bilbao and was evacuated to France on another British destroyer, arriving in Ireland on 6 September 1936. He later continued in his post as vice-rector in Salamanca until the late 1940s when he returned to Ireland.

42 H.M.S. *Valorous* was part of the Second Flotilla sent to evacuate British tourists and residents who wished to leave, and to protect British commercial interests; the British diplomatic corps was on summer holiday in San Sebastian. The Irish students of Salamanca were holders of British passports at that time. For a personal description of the evacuation and journey home to Ireland by Salamanca student Michael Lane see article 'The Spanish Connection' in *The Longford Leader* (17 Nov, 1982). See also *Radharc* documentary *Spanish ale* shown on RTE television on 9 Nov. 1982 which features John O'Hara and a photographic still of the students on the H.M.S. *Valorous*, with another of its Captain.

43 One student from Gibraltar, Eduardo Rapallo, went home by boat from Marseilles. AMC papers, Box 4, 61A, Diary 1/1/36-10/1/37.

arrangements were made by the Irish Legation for their passage home, and they arrived in Dublin on Saturday 8 August.⁴⁴ They were to be the last students of the Irish Colleges in Spain.

Rector McCabe made his way back to Salamanca from Ireland in 1937 at the height of the civil war, where he was relieved to find the Irish College in good order. Salamanca was in the nationalist zone but he was anxious about the volatile situation in Asturias, the people there and the villa and employees (four servants and a caretaker). He applied for a military pass and for several days waited impatiently in Salamanca for permission to travel, difficult to obtain for a civilian and a foreigner. This arrived on 12 September 1937 and the next day he took a troop train, the first train to run from the nationalist area to Santander since the province of Cantabria had fallen. He now needed to make his way along the coast to Pendueles. Transport was almost non-existent; the trains stopped at the edge of the principality of Asturias, as all the bridges had been blown up. The nationalist offensive from the east had reached Pendueles on 2 September 1937 forcing the republican brigades to retreat westward towards Llanes. Following the fall of Llanes to the nationalists, the Battle of Mazuco began in the surrounding mountains when republicans held out until 22 September. The area was subject to air attack by nationalists, with the support of the German Condor legion of Guernica infamy. The advancing and retreating troops passed along the Santander/Oviedo road on which the Casona de Verines lay. Armed only with his two military passes, he managed to get a lift on the munitions lorry which brought him to his destination 'When they dropped me in Pendueles, and I saw the palm-trees in front and the Villa standing up in the beautiful milk-white moonlight, I didn't believe it.'⁴⁵

His relief on finding the house and employees safe was increased when he saw and heard evidence of the recent fighting there:

Compared with other places I saw along the route Pendueles suffered very little damage. And yet there was sufficient to remind

44 Various short reports on the events and return of the Salamanca students, rector and vice-rector appear in Irish newspapers of the time. A report in the *Irish Times*, 19 Nov. 1936, p. 7, quotes Eamon de Valera under the headline: British Navy's good work. Mr. de Valera's thanks in Dail: 'Replying to Mr. P.S. Doyle (U.I., Dublin, South) in the Dail yesterday, Mr de Valera said...'. Through the good offices of the British Naval and Consular Services a number of our citizens were evacuated from Spain, and I am glad to have this opportunity of expressing publicly our appreciation and thanks for the work done on our behalf by those British services. Any expenses incurred have been refunded by the Government of Saorstát Éireann... Mr. Doyle asked if any complaint had been made with regard to the treatment of Irish students from Salamanca College. Mr de Valera said he had not heard of it'. A cartoon in *Dublin Opinion* commented on this ironic moment in December 1936: Nelson climbs down from the Pillar to get a closer look at a newspaper headline 'President De Valera thanks British Navy' and exclaims "Gosh, for a moment I thought I was losin' the sight o' me sound eye!!").

45 AMC papers, Diary 20/4/1947-2/11/1947. Box 5, Folder 79.

one that our Villa was fortunate to escape. The church and the school had been burned, and only the walls and roof of the church and the walls of the school remained. There were two small anti-aircraft guns in the village, one at the entrance, about ten yards from our boundary wall, and another at the other end. On one occasion the latter opened fire at passing planes and in response that section was bombed and four houses were completely ruined. There were a few victims and one of them, an old man, was blown into fragments over a wide area. It was fortunate that the gun just behind our wall did not open fire also as this would provoke bombing in the area around our house. A railway bridge, two hundred yards from the Villa, was shelled twice from the sea, and then there was a day's fighting when the village was taken. A body of Red Militia, during the retreat, occupied the house for a night, and the garden and surroundings of the house were machine-gunned from the air. If one small shell or bomb fell in the Villa, it would ruin it completely. There was also the danger of incendiarism, but in the chances of war our property had the good fortune to escape destruction of damage, and the servants survived the ordeal and were quite well. During the attack the people abandoned their homes and took refuge in the large caves along the coast. Some of them are famous as the dwelling-places of pre-historic men, and even in the twentieth century they are still useful.⁴⁶

In his diaries he recounts some of his varied experiences in Pendueles and surrounding areas in the midst of the civil war. On Saturday 18 September he went to the nearby village of Buelna to get a pass to go to Llanes:

There are traffic signs in German along the road. Stopped a lorry and got a lift to Llanes. Met Padre Fidel, not in the College, but in a private house in the lower end of the town. The hospital was hit by a shell yesterday, and two people were killed. The German bombers go rambling up, and we can hear the sound of the guns, and I am impatient to get nearer to the Front. Asked in the Hotel 'Moderno' if they could give me lunch. They burst out laughing. The place was sacked and they had only a fork left. Then I went off to [A's]⁴⁷ shops, where they sell provisions. [A] is in jail, and here too, the shop had been sacked and practically all the shelves were empty. But curiously enough, the top shelf was untouched and there was a fine row of bottles of wine and champagne, which had

⁴⁶ Rector's report, 1937–38, p. 5.

⁴⁷ I have substituted 'A' for the real name in the original entry.

escaped the general loot. So I sat on a biscuit box, and had a fine meal of wine and biscuit.⁴⁸

Although McCabe's background and position as rector of a Catholic seminary placed him on the side of the nationalists, he had a rather liberal general outlook and was critical of the conservatism of the Spanish Catholic Church. He had a balanced view of the conflict in Spain and condemned wrong-doing and exaggerated reports on both sides.⁴⁹ The College had been on good terms with its Asturian neighbours, irrespective of their political hue. The mayor of Pendueles had sent copies of a pamphlet promoting socialist ideals and a forthcoming 'fiesta patriótica' to the Villa; the vice-rector sent 20 pesetas for the children's excursion in return. The pamphlet is signed 'A nuestros queridos amigos y huéspedes [illegible] los Nobles Irlandeses en prueba de nuestra mayor afecto y estimación. El Alcalde, Fernando García'. McCabe later wrote on the cover 'Author executed by military authorization 1937'.⁵⁰ The suffering of local people made a deep impression on him. Many letters from the caretaker's family among his private papers attest to the sympathy and support they received from Rector McCabe after the arrest and subsequent execution of the caretaker's son by the nationalists.⁵¹ McCabe destroyed many of his diaries from those years, stating: 'They contained many experiences and impressions of the Spanish civil war and of the World War as an ear and eye witness. I heard and saw enough...'.⁵² Here are his heartfelt words concerning events in October 1937, after witnessing the bodies of victims of the Civil War being washed up on a little beach near Pendueles, familiar to him since student days:

It is only when one knows a district and its people intimately that it is possible to realise fully the terrible character and tragedy of the Spanish war...I never felt sadder in my life than in Asturias then, and if all this bloodshed is washed away and forgotten, it will be, not only a triumph for General Franco, but a miracle, especially in a country like Spain.⁵³

48 AMC papers, Diary 20/4/1947-2/11/1947. Box 5, Folder 79.

49 See Dermot Keogh, 'An eye witness to history: Fr. Alexander J McCabe and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939' in *Breifne*, (1994), pp 445-488; idem, *Ireland and Europe 1919-1948*, (Dublin, 1988). Among several publications on Ireland and the Spanish Civil War are: Fergal McGarry, *Irish politics and the Spanish Civil War*, (Cork, 1999) and R.A. Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39: crusades in conflict* (Manchester, 1999).

50 To our dear friends and guests of [?] the Irish Nobles, in token of our great affection. (Author's translation) AMC papers, Box 1, Folder 2.

51 AMC papers, Box 2, Folder 42.

52 AMC papers, Spanish diary 13th Jan -Dec 31st 1937 (Box 4, folder 62, Front endpaper). Front endpaper also gives details of diaries destroyed by AMC in 1946: i.e from 1938-1945. However he retained some of the notebooks containing his notes from the period. See Folder 88, Index to notebooks and diaries. No. 9 Agosto 1. See also Folder 89, Lists of diaries destroyed by McCabe.

53 Rector's report, 1936-37, pp 4-5.

THE IRISH COLLEGE, SALAMANCA, 1913–1950

The turmoil and uncertainties following the Spanish Civil War and World War II, as well as currency-related problems were to mitigate against the return of the students to Salamanca and to Asturias. Rector McCabe remained in Salamanca seeing to the College business, and young Spanish priests taking degrees at the Pontifical University of Salamanca were at times in residence there. McCabe sometimes returned to holiday in Asturias during the summer months, staying at the villa and keeping in touch with people in the area. He resigned in 1949 and returned to Ireland where he was parish priest in Rossinver, Co. Leitrim and later chaplain to St. Joseph's nursing home in Virginia, Co. Cavan where he died in 1988. Joseph Ranson, another former Salamanca student from Enniscorthy, was appointed acting rector. He too visited the villa and occasionally accommodated visitors with Irish diplomatic and religious connections. In a letter to the caretaker informing him of his recent appointment as rector, Ranson announces his imminent arrival with some friends from Madrid, asks him to air the bedding, to seek out daily essentials such as bread, milk, potatoes, coffee and sugar, and to find a housekeeper for a few weeks.⁵⁴

By 1951 the Irish bishops were taking steps to close the last Irish college in Spain. The high cost of refurbishment and maintenance of the large and magnificent Colegio Mayor del Arzobispo Fonseca in Salamanca, of which they enjoyed the use but not the ownership, was a major consideration. In addition, there were sufficient places in the national seminary of Maynooth and other home colleges to accommodate all Irish seminarians. The building was taken over by the University of Salamanca and the villa, lands and investments sold, with the monies going to the Irish College in Rome.⁵⁵

Today the villa is owned by the University of Salamanca which runs English courses for children there during the summer months (Cursos Internacionales de la Universidad de Salamanca). It was renovated and reopened in June 1985. It is also the venue for the annual conference 'Los Encuentros de Verines', a prestigious gathering of Spanish literary writers and critics.

54 Joseph Ranson. [Letter to P. Sanmartín], (7 June 1950, Salamanca). Presented to the author by C. Sanmartín).

55 It took some time for the affairs of the Irish College to be wound up, and Ranson was still writing from Salamanca on college business in January 1953. Two Salamanca scholarships for Irish students to study in Spain, one lay and one religious, were established and tenable up to the mid 1980s.

Appendix

History and correspondence relating to the Salamanca students in the 1930s and 1940s is contained in Salamanca archive, legajo S52/2. The following extract and list of students are as entered into the bound volume containing the index to students 1931–1948: Index Alumnorum Regalis Collegii Sancti Patritii Nobilium Hibernorum apud Salmanticam 1931- . Pars tertia, un-numbered pages at end: In anno academico 1935–1936 :

Irish College Salamanca 1935–1936. There were 30 students on the rolls at the beginning of the year, but one student left in November. Nothing of exceptional interest happened during the year. In May, Captain O’Sullivan Beare M.D. of the British Army, a descendant of the well-known Irish chieftain, visited the College. Five students Mr. Tyrell (Armagh), Mr. Gormley (Clogher), Mr. Dempsey (Cork) Mr. McHugh (Tuam) and Mr. Kiely (Elphin) were ordained to priesthood in June, here in Salamanca, by the Bishop, Mgr. Plá y Daniel. After the Retreat conducted in the College, one student left [Richard J. Ward and Joseph Flanagan are marked ‘Abfuit’ (absent) on 15 June 1936]. The five young priests and 8 students, due to spend the vacation at home, left for Ireland.

Of the 23 students due to return, one had already gone to Carlow (Eugene Kerrigan) and another to Paris [Robert O’Connor]. The following is the distribution of the remainder:

To Maynooth

| | | |
|---------------------|----------|----------------|
| Charles Fitzpatrick | Achonry | [3rd Divinity] |
| Michael Lane | Ardagh | [3rd Divinity] |
| John Lynch | Dromore | [2nd Divinity] |
| James Passmore | Armagh | [2nd Divinity] |
| Michael Stack | Kerry | [2nd Divinity] |
| John Devitt | Galway | [2nd Divinity] |
| Joseph Noonan | Ross | [1st Divinity] |
| Leonard Moran | Meath | [1st Divinity] |
| Edward Hyland | Tuam | [1st Divinity] |
| Thomas Vesey | Achonry | [1st Divinity] |
| Patrick Cunningham | Raphoe | [1st Divinity] |
| Thomas Darcy | Killaloe | [2nd Arts] |
| Thomas Gleeson | Killaloe | [2nd Arts] |

THE IRISH COLLEGE, SALAMANCA, 1913–1950

To Clonliffe

| | | |
|------------------|--------|----------------|
| Patrick Kinsella | Dublin | [3rd Divinity] |
| Charles O'Reilly | Dublin | [2nd Divinity] |

To Kilkenny

| | | |
|----------------|---------|----------------|
| Thomas Marnell | Ossory | [2nd Divinity] |
| Patrick Lynch | Ossory | [1st Divinity] |
| Patrick McCabe | Kilmore | [1st Divinity] |

To Thurles

| | | |
|-------------|--------|----------------|
| Thomas Ryan | Cashel | [2nd Divinity] |
|-------------|--------|----------------|

To Wexford

| | | |
|---------------|-------|----------------|
| Matthew Doyle | Ferns | [2nd Divinity] |
|---------------|-------|----------------|

To Rome

| | | |
|-----------------------|-----------|--|
| Mr. [Eduardo] Rapallo | Gibraltar | |
|-----------------------|-----------|--|

No definitive list of the names of the students who went to Pendueles in the summer of 1936 has yet come to light. One could make a speculative list from the data contained in this Index volume, combined with other sources noted in this article. The *Longford Leader* article already mentioned features a photograph of Salamanca students from the year 1933; this includes the names and some further information on the last students of 1935–36, as their course was normally 6 years. There is a list of sixty-two priests who attended the reunion of those who studied at the Irish College, Salamanca, with their parishes and addresses in AMC papers, Box 2, Folder 31. The whereabouts of the photograph taken on board the H.M.S *Valorous* is unknown, and no reference to it appears in the documentation from the *Radharc* film *Spanish Ale* held in the Irish Film Institute Archive. (Production file for *Spanish Ale*, Box 277, Item no. 14980). A passenger list may survive in the National Archives of the UK government: ADM: Records of the Admiralty, Naval Forces [etc.] <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>.



*The Casona de Verines, Pendueles, Asturias, summer villa of the Irish students of Salamanca, c.1930s.
Reproduced with permission of the National Library of Ireland (AMC Papers, Box 1, Folder 29)*



Salamanca students at Salinas, summer 1916.

*Reproduced with permission of the Librarian, National University of Ireland Maynooth,
from the collections of St Patrick's College, Maynooth (Salamanca Desk, Box 13, Russell Library)*

(back): Cox (Ardagh), Donegan (Meath), Sullivan (Brooklyn),
Rev. R.J. Fitzgerald D.D. Vice Rector, Conway (Derry),
V. Rev D.J. O'Dogherty D.D. Rector, O'Hara (Achonry),
McSorely (Down and Connor) Hyland (Brooklyn), Kelly (Clonfert),
Robinson (Raphoe), Corcoran (Armagh), O'Reilly (Kilmore), Power (Waterford).
(front): Duffy (Kilmore), McDwyer (Armagh), Tierney (Clonfert), Ward (Clogher),
Rooney (Clogher), O'Dea (Killaloe), Meenagh (Armagh), O'Dea (Galway),
O'Reilly (Elphin).