

WILLIAM SHARROCK'S ESCAPE

William Sharrock was born 1756 & baptised Walter; he died 4 July 1828, he was the only member of St Laurence's to provide unbroken continuity between pre-revolutionary Dieulouard and nineteenth-century Ampleforth. It may be noted (in connection with Dieulouard beer) that he says that while he was at Luxemburg he worked as a brewer. Written at Ampleforth 1803.

There were four Sharrocks; it seems they were brothers:

Bishop Gregory (William, 1742-1809),

Prior Jerome (Charles/James 1750-1808),

Dunstan (John, 1754-1831),

William (Walter 1756-1828).

THE BREAKING UP OF THE MONASTERY AT DIEULWART

12 October 1793

About ten o'clock at night, I was just gone to bed, and a person as I was told, came and knocked at my door, but as I was just dropping asleep I thought it was a dream, presently I heard four drums beat up. I could not imagine what was the matter, but I soon found it out when they began to knock down the door. I immediately jumped out of my bed, put on my clothes, and with my shoes in my hand ran down stairs into the garden and got under some stone steps where we formerly kept a large dog; there I stopped till two o'clock in the morning; it was very cold.

Thinking all was then quiet I took a sally out into the garden. I had no sooner got out of my den but I heard a waggon come to the front door, and the waggoner cried out 'Where are they? Some of the crew said 'Here they are', and someone made answer, 'There are only four, where are the other three?' There were seven beds for them, and immediately Mr Dauber cried out 'Where is Frere Guillaume?', and some of the crew replied 'We have not found him yet', so they told the carter to take them away.

I returned to my Dog Kennel, and laid myself down, till the o'clock struck six, when I got up but could scarcely walk for cold. I went to the front door with thoughts of getting to my room but was stopped by a Sentinel who said 'Who's there?' As soon as I spoke he knew who I was, and asked me where I was going. I told him I was going to my room. He said he would go with me, so we went upstairs together. The first door we came to was Mr Marsh's, there were four men guarding it. They asked me if I had seen him, I answered, 'No.' One of them took me by the hand and said I think you are almost frozen, we must see if we can get some fire for you. Another said he would go down into the kitchen to see if he could take me there, but he came back in a great hurry, and said I was not to go there, there were so many drunken people, so he took me into a small room. It had no fire place in it, so one of them ran down stairs and got an old iron pan with some hot embers in it, by which I warmed myself very well, and someone fetched a bottle of wine, and I drank one glass, and was going to take another. But somebody came to the door and said that the fellows were gone to the bill-loft to seek me; those that were with me in the room said that they thought it best for me to get off somewhere else, so I ran down the Boys' quarters, and got over into a stable that belonged to a Farmer of ours.

This being Sunday morning he told me to remain quiet till the people were all gone to Church, his dwelling house being just across the street. He told me that he would leave his house door unlocked, and that I might go upstairs to such a room where I should find a fire in it. I was to fasten the door after me till he came out of the Church when he would come to me. Accordingly he did come, and his wife and children also, and they seemed to grieve very much for me. We all sat down to dinner, and a sorrowful dinner it was for me I can assure you.

I stopped there from Sunday morning until Tuesday morning. He told me on Monday night that he could not keep me any longer for that the people began to suspect that I was somewhere about his house, and that if he was found out both he and I would have to suffer so he wished me to try to make my escape some how or other. There was a river about half a mile from his house that I had to cross. He said he would get a horse to take me over, so we left his house at about one o'clock on Tuesday morning and having crossed the river we shook hands together and parted.

I had about 80 or 90 miles to walk then before I could join my Confreres, and in a very desolate country. I began to consider what way I could take to avoid the French armies. I went to a place called Condée, a few miles from Metz, and on the road to Saarlouis. I had at Condée an acquaintance and I thought I could get some

help from him, but on the contrary I found none, for he told me that he could not think of my stopping at his house. I told him where I came from, but that availed nothing; but there happened to be a person in the house that followed me out, and said he wanted to speak to me. He said that he understood I came from Dieulwart. I told him that I did. He said he was very sorry for me. I asked him if he thought I could get my pass signed by the Mayor of the village, he said he thought he could, he chanced to be the Mayor himself, but a downright Aristocrat, so he signed it for me.

Then I travelled on to a place called Boulay where I stayed all night - where was formerly a Convent of Irish Recollects. I then went forward to Saarlouis, but before I got there I passed one of the French Camps, quite through them. You may suppose what a taking I was in; bolted through and did the best I could not to be taken notice of by them. They were playing at pitch and toss, so that they let me pass on.

After I left them I was quite at a loss which way to take. At least I came to an outhouse, and I inquired the road to Saarlouis. The man began to question me where I came from. I said I came from Dieulwart in Lorraine. 'Ho!', he exclaimed, 'I know what you are, but I will do you no harm. I know where Dieulwart is very well. I lived there myself once. I have been in your house many a time.' The man was something of an Excise Man. Now coming near to Saarlouis, I asked him if he could afford me some assistance to cross the Saar. This Saar is a town and river which divides France from Germany, and he told me that he dare not attempt such a thing. It would be as much as his life was worth. 'Besides', he said, 'the Saar is so well guarded that it would be impossible to get over.'

I was now about a mile from Saarlouis. This intelligence put me into great consternation. The man behaved very gently to me. He told me that my best way to get to Saarlouis would be to join some young recruits that came out of the town every morning to take the fresh air. This was about 10 o'clock. Whilst we were talking together we saw them coming. 'Now', he said, 'your best way will be to join them, and to take no notice, but enter into discourse with them and when they return, return with them.'

I then took leave of him, and joined the recruits; and fell into conversation with one of them. They took no notice of me, as I had a cockade in my hat, they thought I was one of them. But I was very much afraid on entering the town, they take so much notice of every body. However we went straight to the market place and there the officer dismissed us.

The young man that I had been talking with all the time asked me where I was billeted at. I told him I did not know the place, being a stranger as well as himself I had forgotten the name of the street and likewise of the public house. 'Never mind', he said, 'come along with me, it is all as one'. So I went with him, and we got our dinner, then we took a walk out. They were not allowed to walk out above a mile. We went a little way out of the town, where we saw a guard standing sentinel. I asked the sentinel many questions about different things. There were two woods near him, one to the right and the other to the left. I asked him which of them belonged to the French. He answered 'That on the right.' Then I said I supposed if any one wished to make his escape he must take to the left, and he answered 'Yes.'

After we had talked a little we went back as it was growing dark. We adjourned to our lodging house, and just as we got there, a serjeant came in with about 50 or 60 recruits. It was a very large room. I think we were about 100 in all. They were all drinking away as hard as they could, and I got seated by the recruiting serjeant and we talked away about one thing or another till some of them began to be tipsy, and I heard one of them say, 'That man looks like an Aristocrat.'

As soon as opportunity served I slipped out, and went to the landlady, and asked her if I could have a bed, and she said 'Yes.' So she shewed me my bed. And a very long night I found it, expecting every moment some of those ruffians coming to pull me out of bed; however they never came to molest me. As soon as it grew light I got up, and went and got shaved, and after I had had my breakfast I set off again to try what I could do, but with a very heavy heart. It was a very foggy morning which was all in my favour for they could not see me, but I was afraid of meeting with the Sentinel that I saw the day before, but I saw nothing of him, so I marched forward into the wood. The French Cavalry were riding up and down the wood, but it being Saturday, and meeting so many people they took no notice of me. The people were going to Saarlouis to market; some of them looked very hard at me as I had a cockade in my hat. They talked away, but I could not understand them.

When I saw that I was safe I took my cockade out of my hat, and stamped it under my foot. When I got out of the wood I could neither see a house, nor anything like a house. I marched on a little when I saw a village. When I came to the village I could not understand the people, or they could not understand French, so I did not know what to do. However I went into a house and asked for a glass of water, and a young woman brought me one, and seeing that I was a stranger she got her brother to take me to the curate's house. He could speak French very well so we

entered into discourse. He asked me where I came from, 'I said Dieulwart in Lorraine.' He told me that he had been at the Benedictine Monastery several times. He then asked me where I was going. I told him I was going to join my Confreres at Treves. He behaved very well to me and gave me something to eat and drink. I stopped with him great part of the day, and he seemed very glad that I had got out of the hands of the French; but he said I should find some difficulty with the Austrians, as I could not speak their language. They would be stopping me as a spy. To prevent that he gave me a pass to one of the Officers that I should come to, which I found to be true, as the Austrians were placed in different directions all the way from thence to Treves.

The first squadron that I came to I was stopped, and they took me to the Officer. I shewed him my pass, and he said 'Are you an English man?' I told him I was. He asked me what I was doing in those parts. I told him I was going to Treves, and thence to England as soon as I could get. He was very kind to me, and said he was very glad that I had escaped the French; and then he asked me many questions, How the French armies lay in those parts? Whether there was any quantity of soldiers in Saar Louis or not? I told him what I saw, and he was very well pleased, and gave me a pass to the next squadron, and likewise sent a soldier with me to guard me. When we came to the next squadron I presented my pass to the Officer, and he asked me a great many questions the same as the other. He sent with me another soldier five or six miles and directed me to the road to Treves which was about three leagues distant. I reached Treves at about four o'clock in the afternoon where I met with all my Confreres and very glad they were to see me. They all thought that I was gone to prison with the others. They asked me how I had escaped, &c. I expected to find Mr Marsh there, but he had set off for England. He only stayed one day with them.

I stopped about a month at Treves, and then I went to Luxemburgh to assist a man in brewing. I remained three months with him. I left Luxemburgh on the 20th of January 1794 for Bruxelles. I went the first day to a place called Arton five leagues from Luxembourg, where I stopped all night. The next morning I left Arton about 7 o'clock. When I got out of the town. I came to a large common, there was a great quantity of snow upon the ground which filled up all the tracks, so that I did not know which road to take. However I marched forward for a while. At last I saw a cottage at a distance from me, and I made up to it, when I entered it I saw two old Austrian soldiers taking their pot of gin. I supposed they asked me what I wanted, but I could not understand them, so one of them asked me in French, and where I was going. I told them I was quite a stranger and that I

was going to Bruxelles, and then to England as soon as I could. They were astonished when they heard that I came from England and asked me how I came into those parts. I told them I had made my escape out of France, and that I was going to my own country as soon as I could get. They were very kind to me. One of them asked me what I was going to do, as I did not know how to speak their language. I told them in French that I must do as well as I could.

‘Well,’ said one, ‘we are going as far as Louvain; that is not a great way from Bruxelles. If you will rely upon us as friends we will go together.’ I told them that I thought I should be very much to blame if I did not accept of their kind offer. So when they had finished their potation we set off on our day’s journey, and when night came they asked me what I was going to do for lodgings; for their parts they must go to the Mayor to get a Billet for themselves. I said I hoped they would also get one for me. They promised they would. So we went to the Mayor’s house, and when we got in they asked for a billet for three. He said he would not give one for three for he was sure that I did not belong to them, but they made answer that I did, that I was a recruit that they had picked up on the road, and a billet they would have. So with much ado the Mayor gave us one. When we had obtained our billet we went straight away to our lodgings. When we got there they wanted to know what I would have for supper. I told them whatever they had would be agreeable, so we clubbed together our pennies and bought a little mutton, and a few potatoes, and stewed them together. So we made a very good supper. And what we left we had for breakfast next morning. Then we set off on our day’s journey again. So I travelled three days with them, and very agreeable company I found them. They were two old Invalids that were going down to Louvain to end their days there. They were very sorry that I did not go farther with them, it being out of my road.

I marched on to Namur and stopped there all night. The next morning I set off for Bruxelles where I met with Mr Wilks and stayed with him two or three days. Then I came down to Ghent, from thence to Bruges and then to Ostende, where I stopped part of two days; thence I took shipping for Dover. On arriving there I took the coach for London, where I stopped a week, and then I took the coach for Shrewsbury and Acton Burnell, where I remained a year.

From Acton Burnell we went down to Lancashire where we were intended to have gone to a place called Brindle, where one Revd Mr Hadley lived. The Revd Mr Marsh, the Revd Mr James Burgess and myself went to take possession, but we were stopped by the Congregation. They would not so much as let Mr Marsh speak to Mr Hadley. So we left them, and we were obliged to seek an asylum elsewhere. So Mr Marsh got a place in Cheshire, Liverpool, where we stopped

eight months, and from thence we went to a place called Scholes near Prescott in Lancashire, where we remained about fifteen months. From Scholes we went to a place called Vernon Hall near Liverpool. We stayed there about five years. From there we went to Parbold near Wigan where I stopped about a year; then I went to Ampleforth College and joined the Revd Mr Appleton and the Revd Mr Chew in the year 1803.

Added in pencil,

‘This Copy belongs to the very Revd Moderator of the English Benedict[ines]. June 1856’

Transcribed March 2001; spelling & punctuation modernised.

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