

4. Prosperity to Bankruptcy – the eldest son, James Anthony Molteno, and his family

DRAFT ONLY

James Anthony Molteno's life¹ was one of significant achievement, but also of sadness and, in the end, failure. A failure that cast a long shadow on the lives of not just himself and his wife, but their children. He had succeeded to the thriving printselling business his father had built up over nearly 40 years and ran it with great distinction. His obituary in 1845 paid him this tribute: 'We have to record the death of another of the old printsellers – one whose name is familiar to all who make Art either their amusement or their study – Molteno of Pall Mall.'²

He had been well educated, having been sent to St Edmund's, England's oldest Catholic school. Founded in Tudor times (1568) but soon forced into exile across the Channel, it had only recently (in 1793) moved back to England to a beautiful 400 acre site at Old Hall Green in Hertfordshire.³ This became possible because of the gradual lifting of Catholic disabilities that had begun; in particular, the 1778 Catholic Relief Act had legalized Catholic schools for the first time since the Reformation.

James Anthony took over the business on his father's death in late 1816, but had already had many years' experience as a printseller. Now in his early thirties, he moved into the old family home at 29 Pall Mall, but shifted the premises to 20 Pall Mall a few years later in 1821. With him, of course, came his wife, Mary Mylius Molteno, and their three young children. During the school holidays, they would be joined by his three youngest sisters, whom his father had made him responsible for in his will.

Mary Mylius's family

Mary and James Anthony had married in the summer of 1807 in the Royal Sardinian Chapel in Lincoln's Inn Fields.⁴ It was the oldest Catholic chapel in continuous use in London. Ransacked and

¹ James Anthony Molteno was called Anthony in the trade, like his father. To avoid confusion, he would often sign himself J. Anthony Molteno. In this book, I shall refer to him always as James Anthony.

² UCT Special Collection. Unfortunately, the typescript does not say where this obituary was published.

³ <http://www.stedmundcollege.org/About/History>.

⁴ The record of their marriage is dated 30 May 1807 and is in a rather muddled mix of Latin and Italian, James Anthony becoming Jacobus Anthonius Molteno and Mary's father, William Mylius, Gulielmo. *Catholic Records Society*, Vol. XIX, Miscellanea XI (London, 1817). The Chapel, built by Inigo Jones and enlarged by Sir Christopher Wren, was abandoned in 1909 when the London County Council was constructing a big new road, Kingsway, from the Aldwych. The present church was built a short distance away. Source: *New Advent, online Catholic Encyclopedia*.

burned down during a wave of anti-Catholic riots back in 1688, it was attacked again in the Gordon Riots of 1780. Mary's family were of Austrian origin, but had settled in London. Her father, William Frederick Mylius, was an active Catholic.⁵ He was a schoolmaster and had opened an academy in Red Lion Square in 1801. In 1830 he moved it a little way out of Central London to the Manor House in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, beside the Thames – which may be one reason why three of his Molteno granddaughters landed up living in that part of London during their last years. He advertised the academy⁶ as a 'School for Young Gentlemen' conducted 'on the system of the London University College' and informed parents that there was 'a direct conveyance by omnibus from Chelsea to the London University for those pupils who may wish to attend lectures.'⁷

William Mylius wrote various school books, including *An Abridged History of England designed principally for the Use of Catholic Seminaries* which, as the Catholic population in England grew rapidly in the 19th century,⁸ went through numerous editions. He was also the author of the even better selling *Mylius's School Dictionary of the English Language* 'to which [in the 9th edition] is prefixed a New Guide to the English tongue by E. Baldwin'.

He only stopped work when he was 77, and lived on for another ten years until, in the words of the *Bibliographical Dictionary of the English Catholics*, he 'closed his meritorious life, 24 December 1863, aged 87.'⁹ His great granddaughter, Kate Molteno, remembered him as a very old, bearded gentleman with 'white hair and velvet cap', seemingly very stern and cold.¹⁰ He certainly was held in great esteem by his family and both his Christian names, William and Frederick, cascaded down the generations of his Molteno descendants.

James Anthony and Mary Molteno's children

William Mylius's daughter Mary bore nine children in 15 years. She was pregnant during roughly half her married life until, at the age of forty, she lost her last child, James Joseph, when he was only eight months old.

⁵ J. Gillow, *Bibliographical Dictionary of the English Catholics: The Breach with Rome to the Present Time* (in 5 vols), Burns & Oates Ltd., n.d., Vol.V, p. 153.

⁶ *Catholic Directory for 1847*, p. 147.

⁷ University College London was founded in 1826 on an explicitly secular basis because of the continuing exclusion of non-Anglicans by Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Church of England opposition, however, prevented the new university initially from being allowed to award degrees until the University of London was granted a royal charter in 1836.

⁸ As a result, in particular, of the arrival of many Irish in the years following the great Famine of 1845.

⁹ J. Gillow, *Bibliographical Dictionary*, op.cit.

¹⁰ Catherine 'Kate' Molteno was a little girl of six when William Mylius retired in 1853.

Her first born had also died in infancy, and her daughter, Agnes Emma, when she was seventeen.¹¹ Of the seven children who survived into adulthood, only two married – Mary (Charles Parker in 1832) and William (Letitia Jones in 1839). Mary and Charles Parker had several daughters but only one son; William and Letitia Molteno two daughters and a son.¹² The result was that the Molteno surname, despite James Anthony and Mary having had a large family, was carried on only through the one boy William and Letitia had. This was in stark contrast, as we will see, to James Anthony’s brother John Molteno who had numerous male descendants bearing the Molteno name.

James “Anthony” Molteno and Mary Mylius’s children¹³

Birth (or Baptism)	Christian Names	Marriage	Spouse	Death
1807 (April)	“Elizabeth” Mary	--		1882
1808 (10 Feb)	Thomas Mylius	--		1847
1809 (22 August)	Elizabeth (?) “Mary” ¹⁴ Lucy	1832	Charles Parker	1872
1811	“Rose” Mary	--		1889
Abt. 1815	“Clara” Agnes	--		1872
1816 (22 November)	“William” Frederick	1839	Letitia Jones	1846 (20 October)
1818 (5 August)	Catherine “Kate” Mary	--		1878 (8 June)
1820 (9 April)	Agnes Emma	--		1837 (3 February)
1822 (5 June)	James Joseph	--		1823 (25 January)

¹¹ *Catholic Record Society*, Vol. XII, ‘Laity’s Directory’ Obituaries, 1773-1839.

¹² In addition, William and Letitia Molteno had two babies in Jamaica who did not survive.

¹³ This list of children is the result of the work that Jenny Molteno and I did. It may still contain errors, in particular birth dates. There were no official BMD (Births, Marriages and Deaths) records until 1837 and no nationwide census until 1841, and I have not been able to trace all these christenings in the Catholic chapels. The frequent occurrence of the same Christian names for different children makes things even more difficult. Quote marks indicate the particular forename each child was known by.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Mary Molteno who married Charles Parker was baptised on the day of her birth, 22 August 1809, in the Sardinian Embassy Chapel, Lincoln Inns Fields. Kenneth Lee to Fiona Lorimer, 3.12.1981.

The lifting of Catholic Disabilities

James Anthony and Mary's family were fortunate in living in much less anxious times than the first generation of Moltenos in England had experienced. The pace of lifting Catholic disabilities – the term used for the legally enshrined suppression of Catholic worship and the wide-ranging discriminatory measures against Roman Catholics – speeded up during the first half of the 19th century. The 1778 and 1791 Catholic Relief Acts had removed most of the old penal laws including things like the threat of life imprisonment for any Roman Catholic priest or schoolmaster who was caught. Mass could now be celebrated and new Catholic chapels built provided, however, they did not have the temerity to have a steeple – Church of England bishops in the House of Lords felt that would threaten the distinctive character of their churches with their spires! Catholic schools and convents (but not monasteries) were also tolerated and it became lawful to belong to a Catholic ecclesiastical order or community. Some posts in the law and 'other ranks' in the armed forces were opened up to Catholics. And in 1817 a Roman Catholic could for the first time become a commissioned officer in the Army or Royal Navy.¹⁵

A more general step followed in 1829 with the Catholic Emancipation Act, but only after years of earlier bills being defeated in the House of Lords at the behest of the Anglican Bishops. Even at this date half a century after the passage of the first legislation to lift some Catholic disabilities, the Church of England tried to block the bill's passage by whipping up a public frenzy; in Bristol, for example, a gigantic petition was got up and 20,000 people were roused to demonstrate in Queen Square.¹⁶ But the bill was eventually passed. It freed Catholics from most remaining legal disabilities. There was no longer a requirement on them to swear an oath denying the Doctrine of Transubstantiation when taking up certain public offices,¹⁷ and this made it possible for Roman Catholics to play a political role in England again, including taking their seats in Parliament, if elected. One should not make too much of this concession, however, since the franchise remained extraordinarily narrow until the 1832 Reform Act began another century-long process, widening the number of people qualified to vote.

In 1836 the Registration Act was passed which got rid of the 1753 Clandestine Marriages (often called the Hardwicke) Act and recognised marriages celebrated by Catholic priests.¹⁸ No longer did Catholics have to go through a Church of England ceremony conducted by an Anglican priest in order for their marriage to be regarded as legal.

The 1852 Burial Act legalised Catholic cemeteries and for the first time English Catholics could be buried in what they regarded as consecrated ground. Even then the Universities of Oxford and

¹⁵ M. D. R. Leys, *Catholics in England – 1559-1829: A Social History*, Longmans, 1961.

¹⁶ J. O. Maynard, *Sisters of Mercy – Bristol*, London, Mercy Union Generalate, 2008.

¹⁷ Transubstantiation – the theological view that the water and wine consecrated during Mass is transformed in some literal sense into the body and blood of Christ.

¹⁸ *Catholic Ancestor*, Journal of the Catholic Family History Society, Vol. 12, No. 2, August 2008.

Cambridge, never in the vanguard of social change, stood out; they only admitted Catholic students with the repeal of the Test Acts a generation later in 1873.¹⁹

Prejudice against Catholics, however, continued all through the 19th century. At one end of society, the occasional mob could be whipped up on the streets as James Anthony and Mary's daughter, Catherine (Kate) Molteno, was to experience in Bristol in 1851 during a campaign against convents; she and her fellow nuns had to be instructed not to wear their habits in public in order to avoid being identified and possibly assaulted.²⁰ At the other end of the social spectrum, a bizarre event illustrated how upper-class Britain was prey to equally outrageous behaviour. In 1873 the Marquis of Ripon, a member of Gladstone's Liberal Cabinet, converted to Catholicism. No Roman Catholic had been a Cabinet Minister since the Reformation and Ripon was forced to resign. *The Times* brayed: 'A statesman who becomes a convert to Roman Catholicism forfeits at once the confidence of the English people. Such a step ... can only be regarded as betraying an irreparable weakness of character.'²¹ Gladstone, to his credit, soon defied this nonsense and made Ripon Viceroy of India; the result being a Roman Catholic Queen Victoria's personal representative in the most important territory of the British Empire!

A devout Catholic Family

James Anthony and Mary were committed Roman Catholics. Like their parents before them, they had their children baptised in one or other of the Catholic Embassy Chapels (four of the children in the Bavarian Embassy Chapel where James Anthony himself had been christened). They asked Fr. Thomas Rigby, the Chaplain at Lincoln's Inn Fields where they had been married, to be godson to their first son, Thomas Mylius Molteno, when he was born in 1808, and when Fr. Rigby later died, he left bequests to both Thomas and his parents.²²

James Anthony also became active in various Catholic bodies formed as the Church took advantage of the lifting of various prohibitions on Catholic activity to re-constitute itself organizationally. Most prominently, and quite late in his life, when the Catholic Institute of Great Britain was founded in 1838 under the presidency of the Earl of Shrewsbury, he, along with his father in law, William Mylius, served on its first General Committee.²³ The Institute's purpose was to defend the Catholic

¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Edmund's_College,_Cambridge

²⁰ M. D. R. Leys, *Catholics in England – 1559-1829: A Social History*, Longmans, 1961.

²¹ Cited in P. Kirkpatrick, *A Chronology of Faith: English Catholic History since the Reformation*, Bath, Downside Abbey Press, 2001, p. 95.

²² G. Anstruther, OP, *The Seminary Priests: A Dictionary of the Secular Clergy of England & Wales 1558-1850*, Vol. IV – 1716-1800, Great Wakering, Mayhew-McCrimmon, 1977, p. 229. Thomas's surname misspelt as Moltano.

²³ *Catholic Directory, Ecclesiastical Register and Almanac*, (presumably) 1839. The Directory claimed there were now some 200,000 Roman Catholics in the London area, vastly more than in the time of James Anthony's father.

faith by producing cheap literature in answer to Protestant tracts. It organized lectures and lending libraries, set up branches in Catholic parishes, and from 1845 concentrated on promoting Catholic education.²⁴

Two of James Anthony and Mary's daughters decided when they grew up to become Catholic nuns, as did several of their granddaughters (Mary Parker's children). Their son, Thomas Molteno, having been educated, along with his brother William, at his father's old school, St Edmund's was ordained as a Catholic priest in 1833.²⁵ He served as priest in charge in Reading for 18 months in 1838-40 before moving to Cowdray near Easebourne in West Sussex.²⁶ He died in 1847 at the age of only 39. One can imagine the distress of his mother who was by then a widow.

The fourth one of James Anthony and Mary's children to choose a religious vocation was Thomas's much younger sister, Catherine (or Kate, as she was called in the family). She decided to become a nun the year after her mother died in 1850, by which time she was already in her thirties. As we will see later in this chapter, we are fortunate to know a lot about her life, and it provides a fascinating glimpse into what it was like to be a nun in the middle of the 19th century.

Catholic emancipation may not have opened up many new opportunities for James Anthony and Mary's children apart from the possibility of pursuing a religious vocation, but it did remove one obstacle to their seeing themselves as primarily and permanently English, despite their Molteno grandfather having been an Italian immigrant and Roman Catholic.

Respectability and Prosperity

The family printselling business thrived. Printsellers had to have a nose for market opportunities like any other businessmen, and James Anthony successfully seized them. One example occurred when an artist called Rusbridge happened to be sailing to the Cape in 1821. His boat put in, as usual, at the remote South Atlantic island of St Helena in order to take on fresh water and supplies. There Rusbridge saw Napoleon who had been deposed as Emperor of France and sent into lifelong exile following the battle of Waterloo, and he took the opportunity to paint his portrait. James Anthony, together with a son of his father's old partner Paul Colnaghi, bought the rights to the painting which was said in *The Times* to be 'the only genuine likeness of Napoleon on St Helena'. One can imagine how prints portraying the great bogeyman of Europe must have made quite a stir in London circles and beyond.

A very different example of his commercial nous was when he, along with various other printsellers, organised a private exhibition in June 1833 of the drawings of J. M. W. Turner, who was to become the most renowned British painter of all time. Much later in the 19th century, Sir Donald Currie, the Victorian shipping magnate, bought a whole lot of Turner's paintings as an investment. Several of

²⁴ Jean Olwen Maynard, *Sisters of Mercy— Bristol*, London, Mercy Union Generalate, 2008, p. 59.

²⁵ C. Fitzgerald-Lombard, *English and Welsh Priests, 1801-1914*, Bath, Downside Abbey, 1993.

²⁶ *Catholic Records Society*, Vol. XXXII, p. 126ff.

them passed on his death to his daughter, Bessie, and her husband Percy Molteno, who was a great nephew of James Anthony!

The family entered a period of comfortable affluence. Pall Mall, where they lived, continued as a prestigious West End address in the early decades of the 19th century. The establishment of various exclusive 'gentlemen's clubs' on the street made certain of this, while the process of upgrading it gradually eliminated the less salubrious courts and alleys running off it.

James Anthony was able in the 1820s, as we have seen, to educate both his elder boys at what today we would call a public school (ie a boarding school for upper-class boys, prestigious as well as expensive). And when his last born son, James Joseph, died after only a few months in 1823, James Anthony and Mary went to the expense of burying him in a vault in the Church of St Mary Moorfields; 15 years later their youngest daughter Agnes Emma was also laid to rest on 8 February 1837 in Vault 18 of the same church.

They employed had servants, as one would expect. This led to an upsetting incident on one occasion. One of them, William Barnett Collyer, stole a whole lot of prints, a set of fire irons, and some books from James Anthony, and was sent for trial in early 1823 at the Old Bailey. He was a young man, just 24, and had been sacked after Christmas for coming back drunk. He pawned some of what he had stolen and then made the mistake of trying to sell sixteen of the prints to Martin Colnaghi, another printseller. Martin, who knew James Anthony well – the families having been friends for two generations – recognised the prints and sent him a message. After a brief trial in which James Anthony, a constable at the watch-house, and three pawnbrokers all gave evidence, the judge, Lord Chief Baron Richards, found Collyer guilty of 'stealing to the value of 39 shillings only' and sentenced him to be transported for fourteen years.²⁷

The family at this time were firmly part of that growing middle ground of Victorian society whose conditions of life were far removed from the grinding squalor of the London working class, but who were not party to the unbridled opulence of the aristocracy or even confident security of the landed gentry.

Bankruptcy

In the early 1830s James Anthony went into partnership with another prominent London printseller, Francis Graves. The first hint of trouble came with the dissolution of their partnership in July 1835.²⁸ Described as 'the old established printsellers of Pall Mall', the sale of their assets had to take place in

²⁷ www.oldbaileyonline.org Ref. No. T18230115-47. In a different trial three years earlier, in which James Anthony also gave evidence, the theft of 16 silver spoons from the butler's pantry at the home of Edward Jerninham Esq., Hanover Square, led to the young offender (who was only 18) being sentenced to death. Ref. No. t1820412-3.

²⁸ *London Gazette*, 21.7.1835. The details of what followed were all reported in this paper.

stages, each lasting several days.²⁹ A catalogue of ‘the very valuable collection of engravings, copper plates, books, and books of prints’ of Messrs. Molteno and Graves was published by Southgate & Son for the purposes of the sale.

The next thing that happened was an announcement in the press a year later (29 August 1836) that ‘James Anthony Molteno, insolvent’ was ‘unable to meet his engagement with his creditors’. We have no idea why, after 20 years of successfully running the business, he landed up in this position. What followed however was brutally swift. While Francis Graves was soon back in business in Cockspur Street, a Fiat in Bankruptcy was issued against James Anthony. He had to surrender himself to Edward Holroyd, a Commissioner in His Majesty’s Court of Bankruptcy. And when he appeared there on 28 October, he had to make ‘a full discovery and disclosure of his estate and effects’. The following year in May 1837, ‘a Certificate [of bankruptcy?] of the said J. A. Molteno’ was allowed and confirmed by the Court of Review. What followed then was a long drawn out process – a series of ‘Dividends’ were made (payments to his creditors of part of what he owed them) were made, the first being 2s 6d in the pound and the last seventeen years later in 1853 (only 2½ d. in the pound). By this time, both James Anthony and Mary had died, as had both their sons, Thomas and William Molteno.

Impoverishment

The consequences for the family were devastating even if they were able to go on living at 20 Pall Mall for several more years until James Anthony’s death. One wonders how he must have felt in the period following the bankruptcy. He had seen so many years of professional renown, only then to endure the humiliation of his printselling business folding. And having been comfortably well off, the family had suddenly to face being seriously hard up. What is more, he also had been a respected figure in Catholic circles, only to have his son, William, defy him – as we will see – and marry a Protestant. His death certificate records that he died at his home at 20 Pall Mall on 17 August 1845 – the cause of death ‘disease of the heart’. Little, perhaps, did the person reporting it realize how right they must have been.

Following his death, Mary moved out to more modest lodgings at 16 Tavistock Street, Bedford Square. She then had to move again, this time to Manchester Street in Marylebone where she lived for the short time remaining to her. She was 68 at the time of her death in the summer of 1850. The death certificate states she died of something called ‘hoemiphoegia’. A notice in the papers (dated 4 June 1850), presumably put in by one of her daughters, described her rather quaintly as a ‘relict of the late Mr Molteno of Pall Mall’. It is an indication of how the family still thought of itself at mid century that they placed the death notice in that quintessentially Establishment organ, *The Times*.

²⁹ A. W. Tull, *A Biography and Descriptive Account of the Life and Career of Francesco Bartolozzi RA*, 4 vols., London, Field and Tull, 1885, p.190.

She was buried in All Souls Catholic Cemetery in Chelsea where her husband had been interred five years earlier (on 13 August 1845).³⁰

The bankruptcy had a huge impact on the children. The second eldest daughter, Mary was already married to Charles Parker, but her sisters – Elizabeth, Clara Agnes, Rose and Catherine (who was only eighteen when the blow fell) – were all still unmarried. Following the bankruptcy, they seem to have stayed with their parents and looked after them. As for their two brothers, Thomas had already become a priest before the financial blow fell, but William could now no longer look forward to taking over his father's business and soon emigrated. Both of them died young, within a year of one another, and just a little while before their mother passed away.

Absolute impoverishment of the family may have been staved off, at least initially, by help from the girls' grandfather on their mother's side. William Mylius was still running his school in Chelsea at the time of the bankruptcy and only retired in 1853. There had also been some money left over after the bankruptcy, although the family found it difficult to adjust to their new circumstances and continued to spend more than they could afford. 'Instead of retrenching after his death, the family kept up their former style of living as long as the money lasted.'³¹

The girls fairly soon had to find ways of earning a living. Almost the only thing for middle-class, single women lacking independent means could do was to become a governess. Elizabeth did this in England and Rose got a post in Italy, thereby becoming the first Molteno to return to that country in three-quarters of a century. Catherine took a different route, albeit also in teaching, and entered the Sisters of Mercy Convent in Bristol the year after her mother's death. As for Clara Agnes, she was an invalid and lived with Elizabeth most of her life.

This is how it came about that the only offspring of Mary and James Anthony to survive into the third quarter of the 19th century were 'the aunts'³² – Elizabeth and Clara in London, Rose in Italy,³³ Catherine as a nun in Bristol, and Mary Parker.

Their niece, Kate Molteno, William's daughter, remembered Elizabeth as a very talented woman who helped her mother educate the younger girls in the family.³⁴ A stark indication of how hard up she and Clara Agnes were can be seen in the 1851 census, the year after their mother died.

³⁰ Source: M. Gandy, 'Italian Catholics in London', *Catholic Ancestor*, Vol. 12, No. 2, August 2008, p. 98. A photograph of a portrait of Mary Molteno, painted by William Carpenter Jnr. in 1839, exists in the Kathleen Murray papers, Box 102, UCT Special Collections.

³¹ Bertie (Herbert George) Molteno, William's grandson, to Kenneth Lee, 26.5.1942 relating what his father Frederick had told him.

³² Catherine 'Kate' Molteno, William Molteno's daughter, speaks of her three unmarried Molteno aunts – Elizabeth, Rose and Clara. Catherine 'Kate' Molteno to Betty Molteno, 13.3.1922.

³³ Not to be confused with her Aunt Rose Molteno, James Anthony's sister, who landed up in the United States. See Chapter 3.

³⁴ Kate Molteno, in letters to Betty Molteno, 1921-26.

Elizabeth, now in her early 40s, and Clara were in lodgings with people called Cook in Marylebone, West London. This family itself was in modest circumstances – Fanny Cook was head of the household, her son a solicitor’s articled clerk, and daughter a sixteen-year old ‘scholar’, possibly being taught by Elizabeth who now listed herself as a governess. At some point the two Molteno sisters moved to Chelsea and when 20 years later, in 1872, Clara died there suddenly of ‘cerebral congestion’,³⁵ Elizabeth was left entirely on her own. This continued until her other younger sister, Rose, returned to England to look after her in old age.³⁶

Rose was ‘a most fascinating person – clever at repartee, recitation, composing poetry...’ After the bankruptcy, she had got a position at the British Ambassador’s residence in Naples as a governess. The family became so fond of her that she remained there virtually her whole life until, in her 60s, ‘she tore herself away from her numerous Italian friends on purpose to come and live with her only remaining sister, Elizabeth, who was left all alone [after Clara’s death] and very poor.’ Elizabeth died in 1882 in her mid 70s; Rose nine years later in 1891.³⁷

Another shock – William Molteno marries a Protestant

Equally dramatic was the effect of the bankruptcy on their brother, William Molteno.³⁸ He had trained as a printseller and was expecting to take over his father’s business. That possibility was now closed off.³⁹

³⁵ Her death certificate. Elizabeth and Clara were living at 16 Cadogan Terrace, Chelsea, at this time.

³⁶ Catherine ‘Kate’ Molteno to Betty Molteno, letters, 1921-26.

³⁷ A memorial pamphlet about Rose Molteno came into the possession of Kenneth Lee (letter to Fiona Lorimer, 3.12.1981).

³⁸ William Molteno had been born on 29 November 1816. He was baptised the same day at the Bavarian Embassy Chapel, Warwick Street, Golden Square which lies a couple of hundred yards from Piccadilly Circus, just east of Regent Street. A painting of him just before his marriage survives in the Australian branch of his descendants. It was painted in oils by Worthington on two blocks of wood and dated 1838. Another painting from this time was inherited by William’s granddaughter, Elsie Rose Lee (nee Molteno). It was ‘a large and very fine oil portrait’ of William’s mother, Mary Molteno. A third one, ‘a huge painting of the Molteno family sitting round a table eating fruit’, was given to William and inherited by his grandson, Frederick John Molteno. It was so large, roughly twelve feet by seven, that he had to put it into storage in London. When he eventually sent for it from Guernsey, the storage firm said it had already been collected by someone else! Kenneth Lee to T. R. M. Ashfield, 4.9.1981.

³⁹ William was still describing himself as a printseller on his marriage certificate in 1839, three years after his father’s bankruptcy.

Things were made more complicated by his decision in 1839 to get married. And to a Protestant! William's wife, Letitia Jones, was the daughter of a 'soldier', Thomas Jones of Clerkenwell, and only about nineteen years old, possibly even younger. Their first child was born promptly eleven months later in the following year. They called him 'Frederick' John Molteno⁴⁰ and Letitia acquiesced in his being baptised into the Catholic Church.

'William' Frederick Molteno and Letitia Jones's children⁴¹

Birth	Christian Names	Marriage	Spouse	Death
1840	'Frederick' John	1879	Georgiana Pope White	1909
1845	Mary	--		?
1847	Catherine Clara 'Kate' ⁴²	--		1930

William's mother and father, and sisters, were all so deeply committed to their Catholic identity that the marriage was a great shock. James Anthony seems to have refused to attend the wedding on 23 November 1839; certainly he wasn't a witness, nor were there any other Molteno witnesses. What's more, the notice of the marriage had not been published as banns in a church, but in the 'Superintendent Registrar's Office'. The marriage itself was conducted 'according to the Rights and Ceremonies of the Parties'. William gave his address as his wife's father's address in Upper Wharton Street, not 20 Pall Mall. All this points to the probability that he had had to leave home because of the row. Years later Bertie Molteno, William's grandson, wrote that William's marriage had broken his father's heart, and that James Anthony had fallen into a decline and the business gone to rack and ruin.⁴³ In fact, the bankruptcy had preceded William's marriage by three years. But whatever the precise sequence of events, William's marriage caused a terrible ruction, besides marking the end of a printselling tradition in the family that had existed for over 60 years.

⁴⁰ Frederick John Molteno was born on 29 October 1840 at 8 William St., Hampstead Road, London. Source: birth certificate. He was baptised the following day in the Roman Catholic church of St Aloysius, Somers Town.

⁴¹ This table excludes the two children who died in Jamaica in infancy. Mary was the only child born in Jamaica to survive. She and her deceased brother, William Molteno, were both baptised as Catholics there. Quotation marks indicate the name by which each child was known in the family.

⁴² Jenny Molteno in Australia obtained a copy of Kate's birth registration. She was born at 16 Margaret St., London in the sub-district of All Souls in the registration district of Marylebone, on 15 July 1847.

⁴³ Herbert George Molteno to Kenneth Lee, 26.5.1942.

Now that he was married, William had to face the question how to earn his living. Somehow he obtained a position in the Customs House at Port Maria in Jamaica and he, Letitia and baby Frederick sailed for the island towards the end of 1840.⁴⁴ It was an affectionate marriage, judging by the one letter (undated) of William's to Letitia in Kingston, Jamaica that survives. Written in beautiful handwriting (he clearly had had a good schooling at St. Edmunds), he tells 'My Dearest Letitia' to 'kiss the children for me', encloses £2, and urges her to 'get your teeth done if you have time'. They had three more children on the island, two of whom died almost immediately.

Britain's colonies in the Tropics were seriously unhealthy places in an age when people had little or no notion of water-borne germs or how contagious diseases were transmitted. While the Empire opened up all sorts of economic opportunities for British immigrants – in the armed forces, government posts, business, and, in some colonies, access to cheap land – many paid with their lives. Not without reason, was the West Coast of Africa, for example, called the White Man's Grave. The same could be said of the Caribbean islands.⁴⁵ Shortly after the babies' deaths, a friend of William's got yellow fever. William insisted on visiting him, contracted the fever himself and was carried off in October 1846.⁴⁶

Letitia, now in her mid 20s, was suddenly bereft of husband and income. She had two young children in tow, Frederick and a little girl called Mary who had been born on the island, and she was three months pregnant. Accompanied by a black nurse⁴⁷ in her employ, she got back to England and was taken in by her mother in London.

A rather extraordinary thing then happened. On 17 July 1847, three days after Kate was born in London, her Molteno grandmother, James Anthony's widow Mary, arrived on the doorstep, swept the tiny baby up as well as the nurse (presumably Letitia refused to go along), and took them off to the Catholic Church of St. James, Spanish Place in Manchester Square where Kate was duly christened. This put a stop to the possible disaster of a Molteno child not being baptised as a Catholic! But no wonder Kate commented: 'my mother was not friendly with the Moltenos.' Letitia married again a couple of years later (in 1850) and had several more children⁴⁸ with her second

⁴⁴ Catherine 'Kate' Molteno, William's daughter, to Betty Molteno, 20.2.1922. She was told that it was William's father, James Anthony, who had got the post for him in the Customs House in Jamaica. Certainly, William's wife Letitia, now widowed, recorded Kate's father as having been 'Customs House Officer, Port Maria, Jamaica.' Source: entry in birth register, dated 15 July 1847, in the registration district of Marylebone.

⁴⁵ In India too, Britain's most valuable imperial possession, the price paid by Britons working there in terms of lives lost was equally high.

⁴⁶ *The Times*, 1.1.1847, records the death of Mr William Molteno of Her Majesty's Customs Service at Jamaica.

⁴⁷ As happens so often when a family employs domestic servants, their names are not mentioned and they become invisible to history except as the generic category of 'servant'.

⁴⁸ Letitia Ann Emily (b.1851), William (b. 1853), George, Charlotte and Helen Cooke. Source: Jenny Molteno to Robert Molteno, email 24.5.2009 and 18 October 2011. Ann Emily never married and ended up in the 1920s as the elderly housekeeper to a Mr Rolfe in Wimbledon; she kept in touch with Kate Molteno to the end of her life.

husband, William Richard Cooke, a composer,⁴⁹ who was very kind to Kate and treated her like one of his own.

Grandma Mary Molteno did help Letitia a little bit financially, finding the money to send the two older Molteno children, Frederick and Mary, to Catholic boarding schools for a time before her death. Frederick was sent off to the Benedictine College as a boarder. But he was not happy there and his other grandmother (Letitia's mother) put him then in a Protestant school. From then on, he was brought up in the Protestant faith, unlike his two sisters, Mary and Kate. When he left school, he got a job as a clerk in Morley's 'the great manufacturer'. Later, as we will see in a subsequent chapter, he trained in the newly emerging technology of photography which provided him with a modest living for the rest of his life.

'The aunts' as Frederick called them (his deceased father, William Molteno's, sisters), left Letitia and the three Molteno children alone for a number of years after Grandma Molteno died in 1850. Kate didn't see them again until she was 12 years old and in fact took the initiative herself to get in touch. Her Aunt Catherine (also called 'Kate'), who had joined a Catholic Order called the Sisters of Mercy several years before, responded positively and got her niece a place in a Catholic school in Belgium where Kate was instructed for the first time in the Catholic faith and stopped attending a Protestant church. Catherine helped her subsequently get a job as a governess in Lisbon where she ended up staying for over 30 years.⁵⁰

Mary Molteno marries Charles Parker, Agent to the Duke of Bedford

A few years before James Anthony's bankruptcy, his daughter Mary⁵¹ had got married in 1832, and quite advantageously.⁵² Charles Parker was a fellow Catholic. He was an architect, and more to the point financially, long-serving Agent to the Duke of Bedford who owned extensive property in London, including Covent Garden market and its environs.⁵³ Charles also had a serious interest in a particular style of Italian architecture which he wrote about in his book, *Villa Rustica*, after several years of travel there.

⁴⁹ Letitia Molteno and William Richard Cooke got married three years after her return from Jamaica on 11 May 1850. Mr Cooke's father had been a butler. A process of what sociologists call downward social mobility was clearly at work in this branch of the family following the bankruptcy. Source: copy of a register of Marriages, Registration District of Marylebone.

⁵⁰ Catherine 'Kate' Molteno's letters to Betty Molteno, 1920s. See Chapter 12B (CORRECT THIS CHAPTER NUMBER)

⁵¹ The West Middlesex Marriage Index gives her names as Mary Lucy, whereas the Bavarian Embassy Chapel baptismal records call her Elizabeth Mary, as does her death certificate.

⁵² I am indebted to Jenny Molteno who did a lot of the Internet-based research into the Parkers.

⁵³ *The Times*, 14.4.1857, called him 'the surveyor to the Duke of Bedford'.

Mary and Charles made their home at 75 Great Russell Street. This was a pleasant residential area belonging to the Duke, and where Charles was responsible in 1854 for the installation of sewers and water closets at the Duke's expense.⁵⁴

In his work as the Duke's Agent, he was heavily involved in upgrading Covent Garden in the late 1850s.⁵⁵ The area was not simply home to the greatest market in England for fruit and flowers. There was also a seamier side. In the late 18th century, it had become 'the great square of Venus... One would imagine that all the prostitutes of the Kingdom had pitched upon this blessed neighbourhood for a place of general rendezvous. For here are lewd women, here is a great variety of open houses whose principal employment is to minister incitements to lust.' This continued in Charles Parker's time. In 1857 he persuaded the Duke to spend hundreds of pounds doing up seven houses that had become occupied by prostitutes. But no sooner had the repairs been completed, including installing water closets 'and other conveniences', than the buildings were once again taken over by 'prostitutes of the lowest description'. In desperation, Charles was forced to block up the entrance and get a builder to pull the houses down again! In the process of demolition, a bricklayer's labourer was accidentally killed and several others injured, and Charles found himself in court.⁵⁶

Mary and Charles's marriage was a happy one, barring one source of sadness. As their niece, Kate Molteno, described it, Charles was 'an excellent husband and a kind father, but a little stern....'⁵⁷ It was perhaps this sternness that led their son, also called Charles,⁵⁸ in mid-century to give 'his parents much anxiety... [He] never settled down to any definite work, led a rather wild life [and] caused his parents great sorrow. He eventually disappeared and it was thought he had gone to Australia. He was never heard of any more.'

Charles and Mary also had five daughters. Frances was the first to leave home.⁵⁹ Inspired, in part by her mother, a saintly woman who visited the poor and took her faith very seriously,⁶⁰ she decided to follow her great aunts Emma and Eloise Molteno (Anthony and Mary's daughters) and become a nun. She did not choose the Benedictines however, but instead joined a Franciscan order called the Poor Clares⁶¹. The basic elements of their Rule revolved around the liturgy, private prayer, work and

⁵⁴ http://www.ucl.ac.uk/bloomsbury-project/streets/charlotte_street.htm.

⁵⁵ F. H. W. Sheppard (General Editor), *Survey of London*, Vol. 36, 1970, 'Covent Garden Market', pp. 129-150.

⁵⁶ *The Times*, 14.4.1857.

⁵⁷ Notes made by Betty Molteno from a letter to her from Catherine 'Kate' Molteno, who was a first cousin of the Parker children, 30.3.1922. Unfortunately, much of Betty's notes have disappeared.

⁵⁸ Charles Parker had been baptised by his Uncle, Fr. Thomas Molteno, in the Bavarian Embassy Chapel on 31 January 1836.

⁵⁹ Kate Molteno's recollections are the basis of almost all we know about Frances Parker.

⁶⁰ Kate Molteno to Betty Molteno, letters, 1922.

⁶¹ The Poor Clares continue in existence in England to this day, although now based at Much Birch, Hereford. The woman who founded the Order was actually born in Assisi and had listened to St. Francis. She was the first

community life, all infused with a Franciscan simplicity. Their first English house was in Bayswater, London, but they moved afterwards to Bullingham in Hertfordshire. Frances Parker was, her cousin Kate Molteno related years later, 'much beloved by them all, and was finally made Lady Abbess. She died in 1913.' After her death Kate took her niece, Elsie Rose Molteno,⁶² along with Elsie's little son, Dennis, to meet the nuns. 'They gave me a very warm reception and spoke most enthusiastically of [Frances]. They all loved her so much and were very sorry to lose her, although she had been an invalid for many years. My little grandnephew sang for them. He had a sweet little voice and they were charmed with him. They offered us a splendid tea and sent a special plate of their first strawberries to the little singer.'

Kate also told Betty Molteno that there were four other Parker sisters, a fact confirmed by a biographical entry for their father, Charles Parker, when he died in 1881, which stated that he was survived by four daughters.⁶³ Two of them, Catherine Mary and Teresa Mary, both unmarried, were appointed his executors and made responsible for his estate, which was valued at £16,000, a very considerable sum in those days.

All five girls seem to have become nuns in the second half of the 19th century. We know for certain that two of them did, in addition to Frances – Mary Aloysia Elizabeth Parker (1834 - 1894) entered the Poor Clares in 1861 when she was 27 and her sister, Catherine Mary Parker (1850 - 1920), 20 years later in 1881.⁶⁴ It seems likely that Catherine Mary had stayed at home after her mother died in 1872 and looked after her father who went blind some time before his death in 1881.⁶⁵ It happened quite often in Catholic families that an unmarried daughter would take on this kind of responsibility and then enter a religious house after the deaths of her parents.

woman to write her own Rule; and at a time when all religious were supposed to follow an identical rule. She felt however that her ideals of poverty were not enshrined in the Rule as laid down. www.theotokos.org.uk

⁶² See a later chapter for the story of Elsie Rose Molteno's marriage to Arthur Lee and her family.

⁶³ *The National Biography* entry for Charles Parker.

⁶⁴ Catherine Parker had been baptised on 24 December 1846 at St Patrick's, Sutton St., Soho, sponsored by her Aunt Catherine Molteno (who later became a Sister of Mercy). Source: Catholic Family History Society, 'Baptisms 1779-1851, for St Patrick's'. Another Catherine Mary Parker, also a daughter of Charles Parker and Mary Molteno, was baptised in the same church four years later on 28 May 1850. The first Catherine must have died and the next little girl born called after her. This was quite a common practice in an age of high infant mortality.

⁶⁵ *Index of Catholic Nuns*, Society of Genealogists on-line data set. Genealogical research is made more difficult because young Catholic girls were often given an additional name when they got confirmed. And if they later entered a religious order, they then took another new name. So Mary Aloysia Parker became Mother Veronica and her sister, Catherine Mary, Mother Catherine Magdalene.

These daughters of Mary and Charles Parker, the fourth generation of the Molteno family in England, were the last to choose a full-time religious vocation.⁶⁶

The Life Religious – Catherine Molteno, a Sister of Mercy

We have seen how many Molteno women in the first three generations of the family in England chose a religious vocation – Anthony’s two daughters Emma and Eloise, his grandson Thomas and granddaughter Catherine ‘Kate’ Molteno,⁶⁷ and several of his great granddaughters (Mary Parker’s children). We are fortunate to be able to get some sense of what life was like for these Molteno nuns in the 19th century. This is because we know a lot about the life of Catherine Molteno who became a Sister of Mercy.

Of course, life as a religious varied greatly, depending on which Order one joined. The Sisters of Mercy were very different from the huge Benedictine and Franciscan orders which had houses all over Europe and large endowments. An Irishwoman, Catherine McAuley, had opened what she called her House of Mercy in Dublin in 1835. Her main motivation was to help the poor, and it was only when the Church told her that she had to have a formal structure for her social work that she founded the Sisters of Mercy.⁶⁸

Mercy work⁶⁹ was always ‘about seeing and responding to someone else’s needs. The needs could be either of the body or spiritual.’ Its nuns worked through teaching, counselling, comforting and praying. They took four vows – poverty, obedience, chastity, and service to those in need. The small ebony and ivory Mercy Cross each nun wore had no human figure on it – deliberately signifying each nun placing herself on the cross with Christ.

The Sisters of Mercy were also distinctive in other ways. Each convent was independent of the others. And because the Order lacked large endowments and accumulated property, at least at the time Catherine was a nun, each convent had to finance itself. The Bristol house was so short of

⁶⁶ The *Index of Nuns* compiled by the Catholic Family History Society lists none of these Molteno religious because many Orders either did not reply to its inquiries or regarded the information as confidential. Explanation by Margaret Butler to Robert Molteno, 24.4.2009.

⁶⁷ Confusingly, both Catherine Mary Molteno, youngest daughter of James Anthony and Mary Molteno, was called Kate by her family, as was her niece, William Molteno’s daughter Catherine (the relative who told Betty Molteno so much about the earlier history of the family in her letters in the 1920s). Catherine Mary took the religious name of Sister Mary de Sales when she became a nun. To avoid confusion with her niece, I have called her Catherine throughout this chapter.

⁶⁸ Sources: website of St Mary’s Convent, Birmingham; Sister Barbara Jeffery, ‘Catherine McAuley’s Views on Education’, *Catholic Ancestor*, Vol. 13, No. 1, April 2010; and, most importantly, a superb history by J. O. Maynard, *Sisters of Mercy – Bristol*, London, Mercy Union Generalate, 2008. I could not have written about Kate without this book.

⁶⁹ Website of St Mary’s Convent, Birmingham.

money that they often could not afford a regular doctor to attend them and the nuns' living conditions were austere.

The tiny convent had been founded in 1846 only five years before Kate's arrival. It was in a house which was not large enough even for the chapel to have its own room where daily Mass could be celebrated. The building lay in the industrial heart of this sizeable port city and the area roundabout a maze of narrow courts and alleys with sweatshops and slum housing. Nearly half the families in these tenements lived in one room. The air was smoky, smelly and noisy. Water came in standpipes; there was no water-borne sewage. Epidemics were frequent. Typhus, or Irish fever as it was often called, was endemic, as in many English cities in the 19th century, and a quarter of people contracting it usually died. The infant mortality rate was even higher – almost 50%, a figure that would shock people today in even the poorest developing countries. Children as young as eight or nine worked 12-hour shifts in the factories. These were the conditions surrounding the little convent on Dighton Street⁷⁰ as the nuns set themselves to visiting the poor, in particular the Irish Catholic poor, and started an elementary school.

Catherine, coming from a genteel existence in London's West End, must have been nearly overwhelmed when she first arrived on 3 March 1851. What's more, a new outbreak of anti-Catholic hysteria was sweeping the country in response to the Vatican's decision the previous September to re-establish a full-blown Roman Catholic hierarchy in England. In Bristol, on Guy Fawkes Night, an effigy of the newly appointed first Catholic Archbishop of Westminster was burnt, and there were calls to suppress all convents. Undeterred, Catherine received her Habit in August, and made her Profession becoming a full member of the Order two years later, taking the name Sister Mary De Sales.⁷¹

The process of her joining the Order had at first run up against an obstacle – she was very hard up. Most new entrants to Catholic orders, called choir sisters, came from well-off families who would provide their relative with a dowry. Typically this was at least £600 at this time; the interest (about £30 a year) covering their living costs in the convent. But convents also recruited lay sisters – working-class women who brought no dowry. The lay sisters did the menial jobs like cleaning and cooking and usually took their meals separately from the choir sisters. Class distinctions trumped the vocational solidarity of religious orders and were reproduced even in this 'community' of the Sisters of Mercy. Catherine did not have the money for a dowry due to the bankruptcy her father had gone through. Luckily a benefactress of the Convent was persuaded to allow her donation to be used in financing one or two educated women who wanted to become choir sisters but had no dowry, to join the Order. Catherine, who was described as 'a member of an old Catholic family' and 'of very superior talents and education eminently calculated for the direction of the school',⁷² was the beneficiary.

⁷⁰ Maynard, *op.cit.*, pp. 56, 67.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 198.

⁷² *Ibid.* p. 74.

At the time she joined, the community had only four choir sisters, two lay sisters and three probationers. She immediately took on the main responsibility for the teaching. Teacher training was still in its infancy,⁷³ but she set to and three years later became the first member of the community to get a teaching certificate. This was no mean feat since, being a nun, she could not go off and attend a course in some other part of the country; indeed it was quite a business even arranging for her to go to London to take the exam. But having this qualification was necessary for the convent to get a government grant of £29 a year to pay for two pupil teachers.

A slum child's experience of schooling in the middle of the 19th century was far removed from anything one could imagine today. The Convent's entire school was held in one big room. Often as many as 120 children would cram in, not to mention 'babies in abundance' (the 'small lords of creation' as Catherine called them); these the older schoolgirls had to look after because their mothers were at work. One can imagine the near Bedlam-like conditions that often prevailed. But Catherine was tolerant. She commented in her school logbook: 'some of them (the 4th class), boasting only of naked feet, cannot be expected to stand still like statues.'

A 'monitorial' system was used whereby 'older children under the supervision of one sergeant-major-like adult would teach the younger'. These Pupil Teachers were in reality just the best pupils who took on the role at the age of 13. They supposedly got one and a half hours of instruction of their own each day, and were paid £10-20 a year.⁷⁴

By the late 1860s, the school had grown greatly in numbers and the syllabus developed. It consisted of the 4 R's (Religious Instruction being one of them). The children also learnt a little Geography, Grammar, History, Poetry and Singing, as well as practical skills like sewing and knitting. Catherine was known for enlivening her History lessons with tales of Catholic heroines like Mary Queen of Scots.

The school thrived under her leadership. A report in June 1857 stated: 'This school continues to progress, as might be expected under so excellent and capable a teacher.... There is much improvement in the methods, especially in Grammar and Geography.' But special attention to Arithmetic was needed! As for Catherine herself, the diocesan visitation report for 1858-59 described her as 'very efficient, exemplary, and [not to be forgotten from a financial point of view] certified'.

The tiny community of sisters didn't only run the school. The Convent also acted as a refuge for young women; they were given work in the laundry as the easiest way of covering the costs of providing them with shelter. An industrial school also existed at one point, teaching the girls practical skills like needlework and doing the laundry so that they could earn their living. There were also evening classes and for many years a soup kitchen, until the money ran out. And the nuns went out into the streets to visit the poor and the sick. We have to stand in awe of this tiny number of dedicated women selflessly serving the poorest of the poor in so many different ways.

⁷³ The first teacher training college had been set up in Battersea, London, in 1843. J. Davies, 'Catholic Teacher Training in the 19th Century', *Catholic Ancestor*, Vol. 11, No. 4, May 2007.

⁷⁴ J. Davies, 'Catholic Teacher Training in the 19th Century', *Catholic Ancestor*, Vol. 11, No. 4, May 2007.

The strain on Catherine was considerable. Her life as a teacher in this school was light years away from the experience of her elder sisters who making ends meet as governesses in the homes of some well off family, and with only one or two girls to tutor. From time to time, she was forced to take to her bed with inflammation of the legs as a result of standing in school all day. On one occasion, in September 1861, she made herself get up in order to take part in the election of the next Mother Superior, only to be elected to the post herself. She forthwith took to her bed again where she was compelled to stay for a couple of months. But she served as Mother Superior, as well as running the school, for the next six years.

Catherine kept in touch with her family. Her invalid sister Clare even joined the Order as a postulant for a short time, but it didn't last. She also played a part in the life of her niece, Kate Molteno. Kate actually joined the Convent for a time in 1867 and was regarded as a great asset in the teaching – she was twenty at the time – but she decided this vocation was not for her. Catherine also remained in contact with her Uncle Charles Dominic Molteno in Scotland; in one letter she wrote of how 'nearly ten years ago, I left the world' and 'How happy I am amongst our Lord's dear little ones. The day is too short for all our plans. The rest will come in Eternity.'⁷⁵

In 1873, she was elected Mother Superior again. She was now 55 years old. Sadly, she suffered a serious stroke the following year. She received the last rites, but made a partial recovery although she was never able to resume teaching. She grew more and more enfeebled and in the last year of her life could only speak and swallow with great difficulty. Eventually in midsummer – 8 June, to be exact – 1878, she died. The six Sisters and all the children attended her funeral.

⁷⁵ Sister Mary de Sales to C. D. Molteno, c. 1861.