

THE VENERABLE
ENGLISH COLLEGE



R O M E



Our History and
our Mission Today



Hospitality and Priestly Formation

The Venerable English College (VEC) was founded in Rome as the English Hospice in 1362. For over four hundred years we welcomed and gave lodging to English and Welsh pilgrims as they visited the holy sites of the city. In the period of the Reformation, while the Hospice continued, we became a seminary for the training of Catholic priests from England and Wales. Forty-four of our students gave their lives for their Catholic faith as martyrs.

Today, the Venerable English College has a three-fold mission:

- to train men for the Catholic priesthood: helping them grow in love and holiness, in the image of Christ the Good Shepherd, so they can serve others and serve the mission of the Church
- to welcome pilgrims from Britain and beyond: so they can feel at home in the Eternal City and grow in their love for the Catholic faith
- to share our unique history and heritage: so the treasures of our past can inspire future generations

Early History of the Hospice

Our roots go back over a thousand years. The first English Hospice was founded close to St Peter's Basilica in about 725 by King Ine of Wessex. It was a place of hospitality and refuge for pilgrims who made the dangerous journey to Rome.

In 1362, a group of traders founded a new English Hospice on our current site on the Via di Monserrato. The Black Death had recently ravaged Europe, and there was an urgent need to provide safe housing for the increasing numbers of pilgrims. Visitors of limited means were given free board and lodging for a week.

The new Hospice became a great centre of English life in the city. By the time of Henry VII it had become a royal foundation and was known as "the King's Hospice". The Wardens were appointed by the Crown and it nurtured a thriving intellectual community. A magnificent new church was built in 1501.





The Seminary and the Martyrs

After Henry VIII broke with Rome in the 1530s the number of pilgrims diminished. The Hospice became a place of refuge for exiles who were fleeing persecution back home. The Pope gradually took over responsibility for the house. When Elizabeth I became Queen in 1558, it became clear to Catholics that the Protestant Reformation was not going away, and that they would need places outside England to train a new generation of missionary priests.

The first continental seminary was established in Douai in northern France in 1568. The Venerable English College itself was then founded in Rome as a pontifical seminary in 1579 by Pope Gregory XIII and Cardinal William Allen,

using the facilities of the English Hospice.

The first seminarians lived and prayed together, and studied with the Jesuits at the Roman College nearby. They were constantly aware of the dangers their mission involved. Catholic priests in England and Wales were treated as traitors. If found guilty, they were hanged, drawn and quartered – a gruesome form of execution.

The young men took an alias when they arrived in Rome, to reduce the risk of being caught by English government spies. They took a Missionary Oath, promising they would go back to serve the mission in England and Wales after ordination, even at the cost of their lives. Their names were written in the Liber

Ruber ("the Red Book"), which records the details of every seminarian, from our first martyr, St Ralph Sherwin, up to the men who live here today.

Forty-four priests gave their lives as martyrs in the first hundred years of the College. Ten have been canonised, twenty-seven beatified. Every year we celebrate their feast day on 1 December. We venerate their relics, and stand before the Martyrs' Painting in the College church, singing the Latin hymn the Te Deum in their memory. They died out of love for Christ, for the Mass, for the teaching of the Catholic Church, for Mary and the Saints, and out of love for the Pope and loyalty to the Church of Rome. The same love motivates our seminarians today.

The College Today

So much has changed over the last 450 years, but the core mission remains the same: to form holy priests, and to be a place of hospitality for pilgrims.

Our community is formed of seminarians, priests doing graduate studies, Anglican exchange students, members of the formation team, and the wider domestic and administrative teams. About half of us come from England and Wales, and the others from dioceses across the globe. We live together in a community of prayer and friendship, supporting one another, and welcoming the many guests who come through the door.

We study philosophy with the Dominicans at the Angelicum University, and then theology with the Jesuits at the Gregorian University.

There is a special focus on “pastoral charity” (learning to love with the heart of Jesus the Good Shepherd), and on the missionary aspects of priesthood. This is why our pastoral placements in Rome and back home are so important. It’s great to be in Rome, to explore the history and the saints of the city, to build ecumenical and interfaith friendships here, and to get to know the universal Church through the many people who come here for work or study.



Friends of the Venerable English College

If you would like to stay connected with the College and support our mission, please join the Friends of the Venerable English College. The aims of the Friends are: to promote the mission of the College among the Catholic community; to foster knowledge of the history of the College and its Martyrs; to support the seminarians with prayer and encouragement; and to provide financial help for the material needs of the College.

Please visit the website to find out how to become a member: friendsofenglishcollegerome.org.uk

Palazzola

Palazzola is one of the most beautiful places in the world! A Roman villa, then a medieval monastery, it is now a guest house that is owned and run by the Venerable English College. It sits in the Castelli hills outside Rome, overlooking Lake Albano, with views of the Mediterranean Sea beyond. It has over fifty rooms, a fourteenth-century

church, a large swimming pool, and delicious home-made food.

It is the ideal place for a holiday, pilgrimage, retreat, or conference. It can be used as a base to visit Rome, or a place to hide away. You can bring a group from your parish or school, come with friends or family, or come alone with the assurance that you will

meet others in a friendly and welcoming environment. It is a place of hospitality, and of faith - but in a gentle way. People from all religious backgrounds and none have left Palazzola rested and refreshed.

Visit our website or email the Director for more information:

palazzola.net

palazzola@palazzola.net



Support the Venerable English College

If you have been inspired by the history and mission of the College, please support our mission of forming priests, welcoming pilgrims, and opening up our heritage. Your donation will make a real difference to the life of the College and the mission of the Church. Visit our website here to donate now, or email the Rector if you would like to discuss how to collaborate with us on any of our special projects: **vecrome.org/donate** or **rector@vecrome.org**

Web: vecrome.org Facebook: facebook.com/vecrome

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