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The London Exile : Bishop Colbert de Castlehill and the French Bishops in London,1791-1814.

Content : The most numerous group of bishops exiled by the Civil Constitution of the Clergy were resident in Great Britain and lived principally in London . Great Britain had a disproportionately high number of clerics among its emigrants . All received pensions from the state despite their Catholicism and the fact they were enemy aliens in a time of war . The bishops were a diffuse group and represented dioceses across France while the lower clergy were mainly from Normandy and Brittany . They differed , too , in their political and theological views . Their de facto leader was La Marche , the bishop of St Pol de Leon , a Breton noted for his piety and business sense . The senior in rank was Arthur Dillon , archbishop of Narbonne and primate of Languedoc , not noted for his piety . Dillon , with his Anglo-Irish background , was unusual in his strong British connections , shared perhaps only with Colbert de Castlehill .

The contribution would look at the life of the London bishops with particular attention to their response to the Concordat which witnessed them coming together in the face of their dismissal from episcopal office and the growth of a reinvigorated ultramontane ecclesiology . Their joint Memoire represented a Gallican response to a new Church order . Colbert de Castlehill's role in this and in the subsequent creation of the Petite Eglise will be assessed.

The London Exile: Bishop Colbert de Castlehill and the French Bishops in London, 1791–1814

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The Civil Constitution of the Clergy in 1790 had huge consequences for the French Church. Its revolutionary restructuring, including the reorganisation of France's historic dioceses led to a deep schism in which more than half the clergy chose dispossession, and the exile which that implied, rather than signing up to the new Church order. Many thousands of these clergy sought refuge in the British Isles, enemy of the new French Republic, where, despite ingrained anti-Catholicism, the emigration became disproportionately ecclesiastical and the priests were accorded a friendlier reception than in many Catholic countries.¹ In the decades after 1790 the British Isles, and more especially London, hosted a considerable number of bishops, many of them remaining in London until their deaths.²

¹ See Dominic Aidan Bellenger, *The French Exiled Clergy in the British Isles after 1789* (Bath, 1986).

² For the bishops and the Concordat see Dominic Aidan Bellenger, 'The Last Ditch: The French Émigré Clergy in Britain and the Concordat of 1801', in Laure Philip and Juliette Reboul, eds, *French Emigrants in Revolutionised Europe: Connected Histories* (London, 2019), pp. 257–75, and Xavier Maréchaux, 'Reorganiser l'Église après la Revolution: les évêques d'Ancien Régime et Le Concordat de 1801', *Napoleonica: La Revue* 33 (2019), pp.67–98.

The great majority of the French lesser clergy exiled in the British Isles were *curés* and *vicaires* from Brittany or Normandy, although the bishops came from across the country, including the south. The most senior of the bishops by rank were Boisgelin of Aix³ and Dillon of Narbonne⁴ but leadership was provided by Jean-François de La Marche, bishop of the small Breton see of St Pol de Léon, whose austere piety and sound business sense made him a more acceptable figure to the British authorities than his grander and sometimes less edifying colleagues. His collaboration with the great anti-revolutionary Edmund Burke, his early arrival (1791) in the emigration, and his willingness to work hard all contributed to his influence.⁵

The ecclesiastical exiles of the French Revolution received a remarkably positive reception in Britain. They were presented as martyrs for Church and Crown by Pitt's administration and received considerable financial support from well wishers and later from the State. A voluntary fund, one of several, was established under the chairmanship of John Wilmot, a Member of Parliament who had previously been involved with fund-raising for the welfare of American Loyalists, another group identified by their fidelity to Church and Crown.⁶ As the stay of the clergy became prolonged, and voluntary contributions dwindled, the government provided money in the form of a parliamentary grant for 'the relief of the suffering clergy and laity of France'; this 'effectively married the philanthropic compassion

³ See E. Lavaquéry, *Le Cardinal de Boisgelin (1732–1804)*, 2 vols (Paris, 1920).

⁴ 'Arthur-Richard Dillon', *Bulletin de la Commission Archéologique et Littéraire de Narbonne* 51 (2008).

⁵ See Louis Kerbirou, *Jean-François de La Marche, évêque-comte de Léon, 1729–1806* (Paris, 1924).

⁶ Juliette Reboul, *French Emigration to Great Britain in Response to the French Revolution* (London, 2017), pp. 96–8.

of the elite from across the political spectrum with the Tory Pitt's ministry's concerns for national security'.⁷ Bishops received ten guineas a month, all lower clergy thirty-five shillings. For a state with an undeveloped tax system, a major war with France on its hands, and a small population, large sums were involved. Distributed by the Treasury, the funding became associated with the nascent Aliens Office and the monitoring of the émigrés. Much of the distribution of funds to individual recipients was administered by Bishop La Marche. He relied on old diocesan networks, especially through the good offices of former vicars general, to ensure that the grants did not get into the wrong hands. The political monitoring of the State was mirrored in La Marche's energetic pursuit of correct clerical behaviour and opinions.

Unlike his Breton and Norman counterparts, Colbert de Castlehill had few of his diocesan clergy with him in exile. Only seven of them appear on the Treasury lists, including a vicar general, Pierre-François d'Esparbes. The others were François Anglade, Charles-Joseph Bevy, Charles-Gabriel Blanchy, Jean Castanes, Simon Chabot and Claude-André de Pierrefitte.⁸ Anglade, a theologian, had a productive exile after his early years working as a gardener in Wales. The British authorities had endowed a seminary near Dublin, in Ireland, the Royal College of St Patrick at Maynooth, at least in part to prevent future Irish clergy from studying in continental Europe. Anglade became part of the foundation staff and was an important influence on the Irish clergy of the time, publishing a three-volume manual of philosophy in 1815–17, ensuring that the scholarly traditions of the French Church were to be continued in Ireland.⁹ Charles-Joseph Bevy, a Maurist Benedictine and a historian of French

⁷ Caroline Shaw, *Britannia's Embrace: Modern Humanitarianism and the Imperial Origins of Refugee Relief* (Oxford, 2015), p. 31.

⁸ Bellenger, *French Exiled Clergy*, pp. 142–280.

⁹ See Patrick Corish, *Maynooth College 1795–1995* (Dublin, 1994).

royalty and ritual, was well known enough in London's intellectual circles to be elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1793.¹⁰ Later, after his return to France, he became librarian to the Ministry of War. Among his numerous and very substantial publications was his *Manuel des Révolutions* (1793) which placed the French Revolution in the continuing context of dissent since the Middle Ages. With its plots and conspiracies it reflected the world picture of the émigrés.

In London the French clergy, as part of the wider émigré society, had a well developed sub-culture, but their lives were complicated not only by their identity as 'aliens', Catholics and Frenchmen, but also by their ecclesiastical status. Although in many ways, and especially as members of what were national, established Churches, the French clergy had more in common with the Church of England, with its endowments, bishops, cathedrals and parochial structures, they were Roman Catholics and that meant in Britain they were part of a small, struggling and barely tolerated community.

The London Catholics had ten or so places of worship, many of them in the 1790s still attached, at least formally, to Catholic embassies: notably the Bavarian, Spanish and Sardinian chapels.¹¹ The last of these, in Lincoln's Inn, Holborn, was the most substantial of the chapels and was the setting for many of the principal Catholic functions in London.¹² A few new chapels, reflecting the gradual lifting of anti-Catholic legislation following the First Catholic Relief Act of 1778, were built by prosperous Catholics. Of these the most important was St Patrick's, Soho, which catered for a growing Irish population. It was situated in an area long associated with French-speaking immigrants, mostly but not exclusively

¹⁰ A [printed] list of the members of the Society of Antiquaries (London, 1798).

¹¹ Bernard Ward, *Catholic London a Century Ago* (London, 1905).

¹² Rory O'Donnell, 'The Architectural Setting of Challoner's Episcopate', in Eamon Duffy, ed., *Challoner and his Church* (London, 1981), pp. 55–70.

Protestant.¹³ London Catholicism was on a small scale but was not negligible. The city was home to a Catholic bishop, the vicar apostolic of the London District, one of the four vicars apostolic in England and Wales who, as bishops working in ‘missionary’ areas, were directly answerable to the office of Propaganda Fide in Rome.¹⁴ From 1790 to 1812 the office was held by John Douglass.¹⁵ Born in Yorkshire, he was educated at the English College at Douai in northern France, the oldest of the English seminaries in Europe, and taught at another English college, that of Valladolid, in Spain, from 1753 to 1773. He had lived in and seen at first hand the Catholic Church as a majority faith. He worked in his native county until his appointment as vicar apostolic. The vicariates supplied various chaplaincies and Mass centres, but not canonical parishes. The number of priests, all educated outside England, was not great; it included not only secular priests but Jesuits – after the suppression of the Society known as ex-Jesuits – Benedictines, Dominicans and Franciscans, all ‘missionary’ in their work.¹⁶ The spiritual jurisdiction of the London District was perhaps surprisingly large as it not only covered London and the South of England, but the West Indies with the exception of Trinidad, and the Channel Islands of Guernsey and Jersey; before the American War of Independence the vicar’s remit had also included the Thirteen British Colonies in North America. As Catholic ordinary in London, the French émigré clergy, including bishops, came under his episcopal aegis; he had the power to grant faculties for the sacraments. This sometimes brought him into conflict with the French, especially when it came to marriages, a

¹³ See Dan Cruikshank, *Soho: A Street Guide to Soho’s History, Architecture and People* (London, 2019).

¹⁴ See Nicholas Schofield and Gerard Skinner, *The English Vicars Apostolic 1688–1850* (Oxford, 2009).

¹⁵ For Douglass see Geoffrey Scott in *ODNB* <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/7943>>.

¹⁶ Dominic Aidan Bellenger, *English and Welsh Priests 1558–1800* (Bath, 1984), p. 248.

difficult area because of the Anglican monopoly of the solemnisation of matrimony. The difficulties could be exacerbated by the ‘class’ issue, the plebeian Douglass against the aristocratic ‘évêques’. Douglass died at his residence, 4 Castle Street, Holborn, on 8 May 1812, was succeeded by Bishop William Poynter, his coadjutor since 1803, and was buried at St Pancras; his body was later taken to the college of St Edmund in the Hertfordshire countryside north of London, which had been founded to replace the college at Douai closed by the French Revolution. The unpublished manuscript diary he kept provides one of the most vivid archival sources for the period.¹⁷

The Castle Street residence was a brick-built terraced house of a type widely found London. It was a relatively humble place, far removed from the bishops’ palaces associated with the episcopal residences of Anglican or French bishops. There is a contemporary description of the house and its occupant by Henry Digby Best, an English convert to Catholicism, in an account of the circumstances of his reception into the Church in 1798.¹⁸ The ground floor, the entry level, had a dining room and a waiting room. The bishop’s study was on the first floor. The study was darkened by smoke (the writer does not say whether this was owing to coal or tobacco) and had on its walls a crucifix, a portrait of Cardinal Allen, the Elizabethan English cardinal and founder of the Douai College, and a print of Pope Pius VI. The bishop, attired in a black suit, wore a little close white wig, and sported a pectoral cross and an amethyst ring. The writer said the bishop welcomed him in French and that there was a French priest in attendance. The bishop had many preoccupations, chief among them the closure of the English colleges in Europe and the working out of a satisfactory arrangement to provide a *modus vivendi* between Catholics and the British State. The French priests, by

¹⁷ Archives of the Archbishop of Westminster, London. Bishop Douglass’ Diary (henceforth Douglass Diary).

¹⁸ *The London Magazine* 16 (1826), pp. 98–9.

their sheer numbers, were a pressing problem too, much eased in the short term by the work of Bishop La Marche, whose own home and office, shown in a contemporary print taken from a portrait by Danloux, was not far away from Dr Douglass' residence; La Marche is pictured attired in the same understated way as Douglass.¹⁹ Catholic London and émigré London were close neighbours; many of its Catholic clergy were French educated.

Kirsty Carpenter's work on émigré London has provided a detailed description of the milieu in which the émigrés operated. In 1796 32% of émigrés, clerical and lay, lived in Soho and 29% in Marylebone, a more prosperous district.²⁰ Bishop La Marche lived in rented accommodation in Little Queen Street, Holborn, not far from Soho or from the Sardinian Chapel. His landlady was Dorothy Silburn, a Catholic widow, who gained the epithet 'mother of the French exiled clergy'. His residence was known as La Providence and provided the central point of émigré life and support.²¹ There were numerous social outlets and amenities provided for the French, many of which were listed in Abbé Tardy's invaluable guide for the French in London.²² In Soho Square there was a French bookshop which provided a useful

¹⁹ Henri-Pierre Danloux's portrait of La Marche, now in the Louvre, was painted in 1793 with an engraving, by William Skelton, following in 1797. See Angelica Goodden, 'Danloux in England (1792–1802): an Émigré Artist', in Kirsty Carpenter and Philip Mansel, eds, *The French Émigrés in Europe and the Struggle against Revolution, 1789–1814* (London, 1999), pp. 165–83.

²⁰ Kirsty Carpenter, *Refugees of the French Revolution: Émigrés in London, 1789–1802* (London, 1999), p. 197.

²¹ Kirsty Carpenter, 'The novelty of the French Émigrés in London in the 1790s', in Debra Kelly and Martyn Cornick, eds, *A History of the French in London* (London, 2013), pp. 69–90, at pp. 76–7.

²² Marie-Joachim Tardy, *Manuel du voyageur à Londres* (London, 1800).

rendezvous. Enforced leisure led to many publications and the reading of numerous newspapers.²³ Central to the clergy were the chapels. Given the limited number of altars available in the existing chapels, the celebration of Mass by the numerous priests was difficult, and gradually, with Bishop Douglass' consent, as many as eight French chapels had been opened.²⁴ Later, a number of other chapels were built by French priests, as much for the use of the London Catholics as for émigrés, including one, opened in 1816, in Hampstead, on the northern fringes of London, which is the only one to survive, albeit in a much altered state.²⁵ The chapels in Little King Street, Portman Square, Marylebone, and Somers Town became the most celebrated. The Annunciation Chapel in Portman Square is very well documented; adjacent as it was to the residences of many of the most distinguished of the émigrés, including Colbert, as well as members of the Bourbon family, it took on something of the character of a chapel royal.²⁶ In Somers Town, a new area of speculative housing providing cheap and convenient accommodation, the chapel of St Aloysius was to become the focus of the many philanthropic activities of the Abbé Guy Carron, a Breton priest of marked personal holiness, with a genius for good works and a ready pen. His numerous initiatives included care for the sick and the elderly, as well as a soup kitchen and several schools.²⁷

²³ Kirsty Carpenter, 'London: Capital of the Emigration', in Carpenter and Mansel, *Émigrés in Europe* (1999), pp. 49–50.

²⁴ 'Notes on French Catholics in London after 1789', in Kelly and Cornick, *French in London*, pp. 91–8.

²⁵ See Dominic Aidan Bellenger, *Fearless Resting Place* (Bath, 2015), pp. 164–8.

²⁶ UCL blog: The French Chapel in Marylebone by the Survey of London (7 September 2018). Filed under South-West Marylebone.

²⁷ See Bellenger, *French Exiled Clergy*, pp. 104–9.

Somers Town was in the Anglican parish of St Pancras, and its church, one of the oldest in London, still stands near the London Eurostar Terminal. Its churchyard, often extended, was the burial place of numerous French exiles of the Revolution. It had long been the favoured place of rest for London's Catholics: 'The aristocratic and Catholic, Jacobite and émigré tombs set the tone and character of the cemetery – a tone of plaintive intensity, characterised by an aching sense of loss, not merely of the individual dead, but of noble causes and traditional ways of life.'²⁸ In 2002–3 major archaeological excavations were made on the site of what is now the extension to St Pancras Station. Among the burials discovered and recorded were those of Arthur O'Leary, the founder of St Patrick's, Soho,²⁹ and two of the French bishops, Dillon and Godart de Belbeuf, last bishop of Avranches.³⁰ Colbert was also interred there but his remains were not disturbed.

There were at least twenty French bishops resident in London at any one time in the 1790s and they seem to have met often, not least in the solemn requiem Masses which punctuated the emigration. Colbert himself appears from time to time in the surviving records. In 1793 he was at the King's House in Winchester. This was a disused royal residence set aside as a temporary home for many hundreds of priests, where life was modelled on a French seminary. There, in its large chapel, Colbert ordained to the priesthood Jean-Baptiste Marest of the diocese of Coutances.³¹ In June 1794, when the Scots vicar apostolic of the Lowlands, George Hay, visited London, Colbert facilitated a meeting

²⁸ Philip A. Emery and Kevin Wooldridge, *St Pancras Burial Ground: Excavations at St Pancras International, the London Terminus of High Speed 1, 2002–3* (London, 2011), p. 92.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

³¹ See Bellenger, *French Exiled Clergy*, p. 273.

between Hay and La Marche which attempted to direct some French priests to the Scottish mission.³² On 16 November 1799 he was among the French bishops present at a requiem Mass for Pope Pius VI at St Patrick's, Soho, where he performed one of the absolutions.³³ On 11 July 1806 he presided at the funeral of Archbishop Dillon in the King Street Chapel, which was 'hung in black'. Colbert was 'in his full pontificals' and assisted by 'all the other French Bishops now in London'. As well as pontificating at the Mass, he also officiated at the graveside at St Pancras.³⁴ On 8 April 1808, the feast of the Seven Dolours of the Blessed Virgin Mary, he blessed the Abbé Carron's new chapel of St Aloysius in Somers Town and celebrated a Solemn High Mass 'in pontificalibus'. The choir of the Portuguese Chapel sung and 'cards of invitation were sent to many Protestants as well as Catholics for the occasion'.³⁵ By then, on account of numerous deaths, including that of La Marche, he was probably seen as the most prominent of the remaining French bishops and it may be that as early as 1806 he took it on himself to grant faculties to all the French priests.³⁶ On the other hand, as we shall see, relations between the London vicar apostolic and the French had become problematic.

³² J. F. S. Gordon, *Journal and Appendix to Scotichronicon and Monasticon* (Glasgow, 1867), p. 369. For Colbert's Scottish context see James McGloin, 'Some Refugee French Clerics and Laymen in Scotland, 1789–1814', *Innes Review* 16 (1965), pp. 27–55.

³³ Douglass Diary, 16 November 1799.

³⁴ *The Gentleman's Magazine* (1806), p. 685.

³⁵ Douglass Diary, 8 April 1808.

³⁶ Bernard Ward, *The Eve of Catholic Emancipation* (London, 1911), vol. 2, p. 226.

Colbert's Scottish family connections gave him a social entrée which many of his fellow bishops lacked; only Dillon was better connected.³⁷ This gave him the ability not only to have a non-émigré network in London but also – surprisingly in a time of war – to journey to Scotland, as he did in 1797.³⁸ Among his London circle was Charles Grant, Viscount de Vaux (1749–c. 1818) at whose second marriage Colbert officiated.³⁹ Grant, born in Mauritius, came to Britain in 1790 and became interested in the scheme for the settlement of French exiles, clergy and laity, in Canada. This utopian plan, aimed at replanting Old France in a Canada, now under British rule, that was no longer New France, failed to materialise, although the despatch of a number of French priests did help to reinvigorate the Canadian Church.⁴⁰ The British government had its reservations: William Windham, secretary of state for war, was adamant that the French royalists were 'to be kept apart from other French emigrants there'.⁴¹ Colbert's friendship with Francis Gray, 14th Lord Gray (1765–1842) went deeper; his London address, 43 Gloucester Place, was a Gray property and he died, of inflammation of the bladder, at Gray's residence at Twickenham. A Tory peer and gentleman of letters, Gray was to become president of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland from 1813–23; Colbert attended a meeting of this learned society during his 1797 visit to

³⁷ For Dillon's social context see F. Jerningham, *The Jerningham Letters 1780–1843*, ed. E. Castle (London, 1896) 2 vols, and *Memoirs of Madame de La Tour du Pin*, ed. Felice Harcourt (London, 1970).

³⁸ John Sinclair, *Correspondence* (London, 1831), vol. 6, p. 252.

³⁹ Charles Grant, *Mémoires ...de la Maison Grant* (London, 1796).

⁴⁰ M. G. Hutt, 'Abbé P.J.L. Desjardins and the Scheme for the Settlement of French Priests in Canada, 1792–1802', *Canadian Historical Review* 39 (1958), pp. 93–124.

⁴¹ British Library Add. Ms 8075 (Puisaye Papers 104) ff. 14–17.

Scotland.⁴² In July 1796 he visited Horace Walpole, then at the end of his life, at Strawberry Hill⁴³ and in 1800 he was in conversation with Miss Mary Berry, another author resident in Twickenham, about the biography of Walpole, a close friend of hers, that she was writing.⁴⁴ An unexplored line of enquiry might be the Jacobite credentials of Colbert's family and milieu.⁴⁵

The bishops in London met on a number of occasions to discuss a response to the transformation of society in France and to provide instructions to 'missionaries' in their effort to rechristianise the country. Thirteen bishops met between 1 June and 30 September 1793 in an attempt to evolve an articulated political theology in response to the French Revolution and its secularisation. Throughout the emigration bishops kept in touch both with each other and with their old dioceses and planned for a return to office in the very changed circumstances of France, where the Constitutional Church was struggling to capture the support of the faithful. Any sort of meaningful restoration became less likely after the papal brief of 5 July 1796, which effectively recognised the new French Republic, and seemed almost impossible after the Napoleonic Concordat. The papal bull *Qui Christi Domini* of 28 November 1801 suppressed all the dioceses of the historic French Church and called for the resignation of all existing bishops. The French bishops in London had been pre-warned by a

⁴² *Account of the Institution and Progress of the Society of the Antiquaries of Scotland*, Part 3 (Edinburgh, 1831).

⁴³ *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence* (New Haven, 1944), vol. 12, p. 250.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 378–9.

⁴⁵ Edward Corp, 'The Jacobite Presence in Toulouse in the Eighteenth Century', *Diasporas* 5 (2004), pp. 124–45, and 'Jacobite Books in Toulouse', *Journal of the Edinburgh Bibliographical Society* 1 (2006), pp. 71–85.

papal representative, Charles Erskine, who had been sent to England to break the news and brought letters from Rome to each of the bishops, 'requiring the French bishops in England to resign their Bishoprics into his hands' as 'necessary for the restoration and preservation of the Catholic religion in France'.⁴⁶ In response, after a series of meetings on 19, 21 and 23 September held at Dillon's residence in Theyer Street, Marylebone, most of the bishops resident in London, including Colbert, compiled a *Mémoire* eventually published in 1802 which not only made clear that resignation was not an option but that their vision of the Church was the only one they would accept; at its heart was a very exalted concept of the episcopate.⁴⁷ They had long anticipated the Concordat: in 1796 and 1797 they met to address the plans for the restructuring of the French Church drawn up for Louis XVIII, which included the redrawing of the French dioceses.⁴⁸ The stance taken in 1801 was to remain intact until most of the bishops were dead and was to be a vital part of resistance to the Concordat, which showed itself in France with the birth of the Petite Église despite the public determination of the bishops 'to prevent a schism'.⁴⁹ In England, after 1801, the French bishops, although never excommunicated, were distanced from the vicars apostolic; the local variation of non-compliance with the Concordat, Blanchardism, took hold among the remaining French clergy, while the English vicars apostolic attempted to stamp it by imposing an oath.⁵⁰ In the last decade of his life it is not clear how much contact Colbert had

⁴⁶ Douglass Diary, 15 September 1801.

⁴⁷ *Mémoire des évêques français* (London, 1802).

⁴⁸ Bernard Plonger, *Théologie et Politique au Siècle des Lumières (1770–1820)* (Geneva, 1973), pp. 130–1.

⁴⁹ Douglass Diary, 31 March 1802.

⁵⁰ Ward, *Eve of the Catholic Revival*, vol 1, pp.83–98 and vol 2, pp. 221–32.

with dissident clergy in his former diocese, one of the great centres of the Petite Église, and to what extent he encouraged resistance to the new Church order.

Colbert died on 15 July 1811 and, after a requiem at King Street Chapel, his body was interred at St Pancras on 19 July.⁵¹ His long period of exile in London had been lived among a sizeable French community which, during the emigration, developed in solidarity and identity. The last years were perhaps clouded by the growing tensions between the few remaining bishops and the vicars apostolic to whom they had become thorns in the side. It was all far removed from that day, 25 June 1789, when, after joining the Third Estate in the National Assembly, he was carried shoulder high through Versailles.

⁵¹ *The Morning Chronicle*, London, 20 July 1811.