

Netherhall House, London (1960-1984): The Commonwealth dimension¹

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Abstract: *The 1960s projected expansion of Netherhall House, an international hall of residence for students in London, took place at a time when the British Government was particularly concerned with the formation of the intellectual and political elites of its colonies or former colonies. This was also one of the aims of Netherhall House, and the hall would attract official help for its expansion plans. The article also examines, through an analysis of its operation, to what an extent the hall achieved those objectives.*

Keywords: *Netherhall House – British Council – Opus Dei – Josemaría Escrivá – Residences – London – 1960-1984*

Abstract: *Il progetto di ampliare la Netherhall House, una residenza universitaria internazionale con sede a Londra, è nato negli anni '60, in un momento in cui il governo britannico era particolarmente interessato alla formazione delle élites intellettuali e politiche nelle colonie e nelle ex-colonie. Questo era altresì uno degli obiettivi della residenza, che avrebbe potuto beneficiare dei contributi pubblici per il suo progetto di sviluppo. L'articolo esamina inoltre, attraverso un'analisi delle attività svolte, in qual misura la residenza ha conseguito i suoi obiettivi.*

Keywords: *Netherhall House – British Council – Opus Dei – Josemaría Escrivá – Residenze – 1960-1984*

¹ Until 1949 the expression British Commonwealth was used to describe the group of countries which were united as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations and owed allegiance to the British Crown. In 1949 India's recent independence and its constitution as a republic, while intending to continue as a member of the Commonwealth, led to the introduction of a change of name and character by the "London Declaration" of 26 April 1949: from then on it was to be officially known as the Commonwealth of Nations.

The history of Netherhall House from its foundation to the present might perhaps be conveniently divided into three periods. The first could cover from 1952, when the hall of residence for university students was set up, to the year 1960. In this latter year plans were set in motion to increase the capacity of the hall and develop its international dimension. The completion of this project, involving substantial building works, was to be carried out in two phases over a long period of time, and these can be used to define the second and third periods of Netherhall's history. The years 1960 to 1984 saw the building of the first phase of the new Netherhall (completed in 1966) and the extraordinary development of its international dimension. The academic year 1983-84 marked the start of a new period in the history of the hall of residence, when reduced capacity and mounting costs made it imperative to complete the project with the building of a revised second phase.

The present article concentrates its attention on the second period of Netherhall House's history (1960-1984) and in particular on its Commonwealth dimension. The historical context in which the development of Netherhall took place and the influence it had in defining the aims of the project are described in the first part of the article. This includes a section covering the contacts with the British Council and its involvement in the project. A second part studies how and to what an extent the hall of residence in the years 1966 to 1984 served the aims, both general and particular, inspiring the project².

On Bank Holiday Monday, 4 August 1958, Saint Josemaría Escrivá—accompanied by Fr Álvaro del Portillo, Fr Javier Echevarría and Armando Serrano—stepped onto British soil for the first time. He was to stay in England till the middle of September. This was his first prolonged residence

² The article is based mainly on archival material and also on oral interviews of former directors of Netherhall House. The records connected with the present subject are far from complete, particularly those of Government and other official bodies. Gaps in the archival record have been noted in the footnotes. In the search for materials the author has incurred many debts of gratitude. Dr Andrew Hegarty made available to the author some of the results of his archival research; Richard Temple, the Archivist of London University, offered friendly help in tracing particular documents and in searching for others, some of them untraceable; Miss A. Carter did a similar job at the British Council. Thanks are also due to the archivists at The National Archives, London (TNA), and the General Archive of the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei in Rome (AGP). I must also thank the Regional Commission of Opus Dei in Great Britain, the directors of Netherhall House and of Netherhall Educational Association for allowing me to use documents in their keeping. The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* contains entries on some of the individuals mentioned in this article.

away from Rome since his arrival to the Eternal City in 1946, and part of the reason for his visit to England was to be able to work in a temperate climate, away from Rome's oppressive August heat. He would return the following summers, the last being that of 1962. At the time of his visit, there were only three centres of Opus Dei in the country. Netherhall House, a student hall of residence set up in 1952, and Rosecroft House, a residence for women started in 1956, were in Hampstead, northwest London. The house rented for his stay was near these two places, and the morning following his arrival the Founder paid short visits to both of them. From the outset he encouraged the members of Opus Dei to expand their apostolate, reaching out of London to places like Cambridge, Oxford and Manchester. St Josemaría's great interest in the apostolic work of his sons and daughters in Great Britain was long-standing. He was conscious of the importance and influence of the country's metropolitan status as a centre for peoples from all over the world and also of the usefulness of the English language as a means of communication. Netherhall House had been from the first the result of his direct encouragement and he had expressed a hope that those students and trainees, who had come to take degrees and achieve professional qualifications in Great Britain, might also learn and take back with them to their own countries the true faith, and help spread the spirit of Opus Dei worldwide³.

His walks around London reinforced in him the impression of the cosmopolitan character of the city. The streets were thronged with people of all races and customs, originating from the four corners of the world-wide British Empire and the Commonwealth: London was a "crossroads of the world", he came to say from this moment onward. Those peoples were a constant reminder for St Josemaría of the many nations Opus Dei had not yet reached, and in his walks along the city he prayed that the people of those countries might find the true faith. Already in August he could write to Michael Richards, a lawyer, the first English Numerary member of Opus Dei, then in Rome: "This England, you rascal, è *una grande bella cosa* [is a wonderful thing]. If you help us—you specially—we will do some solid work in this crossroads of the world. Pray and offer little mortifications with joy"⁴. It was a theme that he would touch upon often in the following months,

³ See Testimonials of Juan Antonio Galarraga Ituarte and of Richard A. P. Stork, AGP A-212-3-1 and AGP A-243-3-14.

⁴ "Esta Inglaterra, bandido, è *una grande bella cosa*! Si nos ayudáis, especialmente tú, vamos a trabajar de firme en esta encrucijada del mundo: rezad y ofreced, con alegría, pequeñas mortificaciones" (AGP A.3-4, 271-3, c-580800-3).

encouraging the members of Opus Dei to pray for the Work in Great Britain. As he wrote to his children in Spain, to do so was to pray for the Work in the whole world⁵. At the practical level, several projects were the result of his direct encouragement: the expansion of Netherhall House and a residence for students at Grandpont House, in Oxford, being the most representative. The first was an obvious development: those in charge of Netherhall House already had considerable experience in running an international hall of residence for students; the second was facilitated by the finding of some convenient property in Oxford which the Catholic hierarchy had an option to buy, but which it had decided not to exercise.

Netherhall House had been set up in April 1952 in 18 Netherhall Gardens. The property had been recently renovated, and, together with 22 Netherhall Gardens, was going to be used as a hotel. It came onto the market at that time because of a disagreement between the owners. St Josemaría had been encouraging the members of Opus Dei in London to set up a hall of residence and this property was just right for the purpose; the only drawback was that there was no money to buy it. Michael Richards convinced Mr H. Neville, who with Mr Shaw owned both properties, that, in order to facilitate the purchase and speed it up, Mr Neville could obtain a mortgage on both 18 and 22 Netherhall Gardens. The hall of residence would undertake the repayment of the mortgage on both properties, and the freehold of n. 18 would be transferred to a charitable trust once the mortgage was finally repaid⁶. Mr Neville agreed to the proposal, and the Abbey National Building Society provided what amounted to a hundred-per-cent mortgage for the purchase of the property. They took possession in April 1952, and started operating a students' hall in the summer term of the 1951-52 academic year; the first residents coming from an advert published in *The Tablet*, a Catholic weekly, and through the recommendation of Mgr Gordon Wheeler, the then Catholic Chaplain of London University. The following summer, 16 Netherhall Gardens, the property of Westminster Catholic Archdiocese, was offered at very favourable terms: the Archdiocese guaranteeing a mortgage with the National Bank for the purchase of the property⁷. The new build-

⁵ “Rezad, poned como siempre a Nuestra Madre Santa María por intercesora, y veremos grandes trabajos de nuestro Opus Dei realizados en esta encrucijada de la tierra, para bien de las almas de todo el mundo” (AGP A.3-4, 271-3, c-580813-1).

⁶ See Letter of R. O’Brian to Mr Neville, 29 February 1952, which is kept in the Regional Commission of Great Britain.

⁷ It was later arranged that the final transfer of the title deeds was to take place when the

ings increased the number of places available in the residence to about sixty (mainly in shared rooms, as was then normal in students' residences). There was a good intake of students in the academic year 1953-54, and this was to continue in the following years. The interest of the Archdiocese in the project went beyond the facilities offered for the purchase of the property. The diocesan bishops were very supportive of the enterprise and visited the residence on several occasions: Cardinal Griffin did so in December of 1953; his auxiliary, Bishop Craven, the following May, and would do so often from then onwards; Cardinal Godfrey paid a visit to Netherhall in June 1958 and his successor, Cardinal Heenan, went to see the newly built Phase I in 1967; Bishop Casey, Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster, consecrated the altars of the new oratory in January 1969.

Netherhall House international character was evident from the outset. Among the first residents were Kinichiro Saito, from Japan, and Michael Britomotumayaga, a Christian Tamil from what was then Ceylon. In the first eight years of operation it offered accommodation to over three hundred students from nineteen countries. Almost two thirds of the residents were British; among the others there had been Irish (fifteen) and Spanish (twenty) students, as well as a good number of students coming from sub-Saharan Africa: Kenya (ten), Nigeria (ten) Ghana (twelve) and Uganda (six). The Far East was also well represented—Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, and Japan—and there were smaller contingents from both South and North America, and from Australia.

In 1958, and on subsequent visits, St Josemaría encouraged the members of Opus Dei in Great Britain to enlarge the hall of residence and to pay special attention to students coming from developing countries and from the new ones resulting from the process of decolonization. In the following years he was to send to Great Britain some people who had had experience in similar projects to help with the planning (architectural, economic, and so on) and with the negotiations necessary to get the project off the ground. The lawyer Dr Juan Masiá, who first came to Great Britain in 1960, had been involved in the setting up of the *Residenza Universitaria Internazionale* (RUI), which had opened in Rome in 1959. The RUI aspired to

bank mortgage had been repaid or the guarantee given by the diocese released (letter of R. O'Brian to M. Richards, 11 November 1953, which is kept in the Regional Commission of Great Britain). Although the acquisition of numbers 16 and 18 had been facilitated by the favourable conditions offered by the sellers, the mortgage repayments would be in future years a heavy burden on the hall of residence.

provide residents of all countries with a place to live in a friendly community of students, offering a programme of integral education that incorporated human, academic and professional formation. Masiá's experience would play an important role in early approaches to the British Council and other government bodies.

Mgr Escrivá's ideas were contemporary to important geopolitical events. In the late 1950s the process of decolonization was well advanced in South East Asia and West Africa. The general consensus, however, was that colonial rule in East Africa would continue into the 1970s and that European settler leadership would carry on for decades to come. Such predictions could hardly have been further off the mark. By 1964 most British dependencies in Africa had received independence on the basis of black majority rule: Ghana in 1957, Nigeria in 1960, Tanganyika and Sierra Leone in 1961, Uganda in 1962, Kenya in 1963, Zambia and Malawi in 1964. Both external and internal pressures had helped accelerate the process. An influential reason for granting independence to Malaya in 1957 and to the above African countries was the desire to gain the good-will of local politicians, and so to secure British economic interests and political influence in the newly independent nations. A peaceful and friendly transfer of power to nationalist groups was seen as the best way of achieving this. The logic of this position implied that effective and sustained nationalist pressure would prompt the British Government to concede their demands in order to avoid alienating popular nationalist sentiments and the emerging political leaderships.

The USA, as a matter of general policy, was in sympathy with and supportive of movements of self-determination, without taking much into consideration British responsibilities in preparing those countries for independence. As the Cold War intensified the competition between the two superpowers, American officials—without toning down their anti-colonialist rhetoric—came gradually to view the British Empire in a different light. In the wake of the Maoist triumph in China and stalemate in the Korean War, Washington came to rely more and more on the colonial powers, Britain and France in particular, to block Sino-Soviet expansion in Asia and in Africa⁸. This was a major theme of the 1959 government policy discussion paper "Africa: The Next Ten Years". It was difficult to predict accurately the

⁸ See William Roger LOUIS – Ronald ROBINSON, "The Imperialism of Decolonization", in William Roger LOUIS (ed.), *Ends of British Imperialism. The Scramble for Empire, Suez and Decolonization*, London, Tauris, 2006, pp. 459-60.

character of the emerging nations. It was obvious, however, that the political and social configuration of the new countries would depend in good measure on the ideological and political outlooks of those of their leaders who had had access to higher education. Government Minutes would therefore stress the importance of promoting education, whether by encouraging institutions of higher education in Africa or by welcoming African university students to Great Britain⁹. The importance of educating those new elites had not been lost on the Communist bloc, and Western and Eastern countries were to find themselves in competition to attract students from the emerging nations. Great Britain had a vital role to play in this process, as students from the fast-decreasing Empire and growing Commonwealth came to study in this country in increasing numbers.

Such themes would continue to occupy the minds of British and American strategists in the years to come. In this respect, it is interesting to note that from 12 to 14 June 1962 took place, behind closed doors, a long-planned Anglo-American Conference on UK/US Policies in Tropical Africa, organised by the Ditchley Foundation, and attended by officials, members of the respective governments, parliamentarians and experts from academia and elsewhere. The Conference, under the chairmanship of Lord Perth, articulated succinctly what had been for some time the general consensus of experts and policy makers. Of the four areas singled out for consideration—defence, economic matters, African votes in the UN and Soviet/Communist infiltration—the last topic received greatest attention. Sir Roger Stevens, Britain's Deputy Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, would affirm that although the results for the first two years of African independence were not too unfavourable, the “Russians started with the advantage of being able to represent their own post-revolutionary development as a model for independent African states to follow, and their anti-colonial propaganda was very much in line with African aspirations”¹⁰.

⁹ The British government considered that Christianity had a fundamental role to play “in keeping Africans orientated towards western ideals”. The churches were deeply involved in education in those countries (PREM 11/2587; PREM 11/2586 and PREM 11/2588, *Macmillan Cabinet Papers 1957-1963*, Digital Edition, TNA, London); see also the essay by Philip MURPHY, “Decolonisation under Macmillan”, in the same digital edition.

¹⁰ CO 1027/357, p. 7, TNA, London. The National Archives catalogue the documents preserving the reference given them in their departments of origin, in this case the Colonial Office; T (followed by a numeric reference) stands for the Treasury, ED for the Department of Education, BC for the British Council and FO for the Foreign Office.

Those attending the conference were generally agreed that education was a key factor in retaining intellectual influence in the newly created nations and in helping to resist Marxist penetration. There was a need to satisfy the aspirations of those who were looking for higher education abroad: if they were not offered it in the West, they would look elsewhere. Russia and its satellites were already trying to attract university students in competition with Western countries (USA, Britain and others) in order to form or to influence a generation of future leaders with their respective ideologies. Besides, the influence of Communism was not confined to those who studied behind the Iron Curtain: Marxist ideas were also being absorbed by students in French, British and other European universities¹¹. It was also noted that competition to attract students to overseas universities had resulted in a dearth of students for institutions of higher education set up in their countries of origin. Everyone was trying to draw on the same pool of people: the small number of those with A-level passes or their equivalent (final secondary school qualification). This situation made even more obvious the need for further training at lower academic level, in particular at the level of secondary education. As a result, there was a need for teachers from overseas until those countries could produce their own. So far, most teachers had been provided by religious bodies but the conference thought that these were bound to be fewer in future¹². Still, the conference's final press-release would stress the importance of non-governmental organisations in shaping the development of the newly independent countries, singling out in particular the role of the churches in education¹³.

The conference also brought up a question often considered by the British government: the need to improve the attention and care provided for those who came to Britain for their studies. Bringing Empire and Commonwealth students to study in the metropolis, or at American universities, would not necessarily produce positive results. African students in the USA might be negatively impressed by coming into contact with the reality of American racial segregation, while in Britain students from former or present colonies might feel neglected if they were to live in inadequate

¹¹ As Amadou Hampaté Ba would put it: "It is not the old wise Africa which is talking to you today but the Africa which is the product of your thinking. Our leaders only repeat what you Europeans have taught them". Quoted in Walter KOLARZ, "Religion and Communism in Africa", *The Heythrop Journal* 3 (3), 1962, p. 222.

¹² See CO 1027/357, pp. 9, 21, 23, 34, TNA, London.

¹³ See *The Times*, 15 June 1962, p. 8.

accommodation, lack proper attention, and so on. It was obvious that the treatment of students in their host countries would have considerable influence on their later attitudes towards them.

The welfare of Empire and Commonwealth students had been in the late 1950s a particular object of concern for the departments of British Government more directly involved. Numbers of overseas university students in England and Wales almost doubled between 1954 and 1965, keeping pace with the growth in numbers of United Kingdom university students. In the academic year 1953-54 there were 6,837 full-time overseas students in England and Wales (10.3% of the total university student population); in 1964-65 the number of full-time overseas students was 12,378 (10.9% of total)¹⁴. This growth took place at a time of general crisis in the provision of student residential accommodation. It had not kept pace with the growth in the student population¹⁵, and the need was particularly felt in London, which was naturally a favoured destination for most overseas students.

THE NETHERHALL PROJECT AND THE BRITISH COUNCIL

It was within this general atmosphere that Dr Masiá and Fr Cormac Burke approached the Colonial Office and met Lord Perth, Minister of State for Colonial Affairs and a prominent Catholic, on 9 August 1960. The memorandum they handed in to Lord Perth stressed the experience of Opus Dei in the cultural, spiritual, social and scientific formation of university students. According to the memorandum, Opus Dei was now intending to pay particular attention to university students from Africa and Asia, and two large halls were being planned in Oxford and London to accommodate a mix of home and overseas students. They emphasized that the hostels would be open to students of all races, nationalities and religious affiliations. The aim was to foster human, professional and spiritual development in an atmos-

¹⁴ See *Statistics of Education. Part 3: 1965*, London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1967, pp. 120 and 133. In 1953-54 there were also 2,551 overseas part-time students (24.3% of the total); in 1964-65 the number was 4,065 (28.1 % of total). These figures were subject to adjustment in later statistical studies.

¹⁵ It is difficult to get an accurate picture of the situation. In 1967 London had a full-time university student population of 30,396. Of these, after a considerable effort in previous years to promote halls of residence, only 7,485 students were resident in colleges or halls. *Statistics of Education: Universities, 1967*, Vol. 6. London, Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1969, p. 11.

phere of freedom, and to encourage in the students a sense of social responsibility towards the communities of which they were part. Significantly, the memorandum emphasized the importance of this task at a time when Communism was actively engaged in promoting Marxism among Afro-Asiatic students¹⁶. It added that the presence of those students in Western countries did not guarantee their absorption of Christian values and ideas, as a negative experience in the host countries—poor accommodation, racial prejudice—might have the opposite effect¹⁷.

Those proposals found a warm welcome, and this atmosphere was maintained in subsequent meetings with different officials, including Sir Christopher W.M. Cox, the influential educational adviser to the Colonial Office¹⁸. Although they received encouraging words from all the officials they met, the possibilities of financial assistance for those two projects looked rather remote at that stage. The government's resources, they were told, were limited and facing great demands. Dr Masiá and Fr Burke tried to form some sort of estimate of the chances of securing either capital or recurrent assistance at the present time or in the future but the officials they met, although manifesting a desire to help, were unable to give them any clear indication in that respect and could only suggest in vague terms different sources of possible finance: the British Council helping out of their budget for looking after students, obtaining funds from the Colonial Development Welfare

¹⁶ During the 1950s and 1960s, the expansion of atheistic Communism was a concern generally shared by Christian churches and, within the Catholic Church, by the Vatican, Catholic Bishops, clergy, and laity. For an introduction to the subject see Dianne KERBY (ed.), *Religion and the Cold War*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2003.

¹⁷ The Memorandum is attached to Lord Perth's minute of 9 August 1960, CO 1028/98, TNA, London.

¹⁸ Mr T.H. Baldwin, at the Treasury, met them on 12 August, writing in his memorandum: "The little I know of 'Opus Dei' has led me to expect a high calibre and Dr Masiá did not disappoint expectations. To meet a cultivated European of his sort induces regret that the influence of Europe in world affairs should have declined in favour of East and West" (Memorandum 17 August 1960, CO 1028/98, TNA, London); see also Minute of interview of Fr Burke and Juan Masiá with Mr Cockram, of the Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO) (Minute 60/16-9, dated 16 Sept 1960, which is kept in the Regional Commission of Great Britain), who insisted on the importance of welcoming students from the Commonwealth and praised the Netherhall project; see also Minute of interview of Fr Burke with Mr Stone, of the Colonial Office, in charge of the colonial students, who said that that the project would have the wholehearted support of his office (Minute 60/28-9, dated 28 September 1960, which is kept in the Regional Commission of Great Britain). Fr Burke and Dr Masiá also met some officials at the British Council, specially Miss Nancy Parkinson (Home Controller) and Mr Stephen Bach (Assistant Home Controller).

Fund and so on¹⁹. Lord Perth continued to show interest in the project and, at a meeting in February 1961 with Fr Burke and Masiá, mentioned that the Government was considering plans to provide finance through the British Council for more residential accommodation for overseas students. During the meeting, Juan Masiá mentioned that the Italian government was very happy with the work being done in the RUI, and Perth encouraged them to make their work known to officials at the British Council²⁰.

Lord Perth also made reference to the recent proposals of a Ministerial Committee recommending the Cabinet to budget several million pounds for hostel building. The official announcement was made in the Commons on 2 March 1961: the Government had decided to spend three million pounds to provide additional accommodation for five thousand overseas students²¹. The plan counted on a partnership between the Government and voluntary organisations, and the programme, under the name Overseas Students Welfare Expansion Programme (OSWEP), was to be administered by the British Council.

The programme seemed to offer the best possibility of public funds being granted for the London hostel. By then, however, the panorama had somewhat changed. The Oxford project had run into heavy weather, through a campaign aimed at changing the initial favourable disposition of some officials of the University, and the Hebdomadal Council had decided not to grant the licence for the hostel. The application had been withdrawn. After those events, Dr Masiá and Fr Burke approached the Colonial Office again and, in a meeting with Sir Christopher W.M. Cox, said that they would now concentrate on enlarging the capacity of their present hostel in London to two hundred places²². Unfortunately, events at Oxford had changed the Foreign Office's perception of Opus Dei. The unfavourable climate was reinforced by an article which appeared in *The Spectator* on 25 November 1960 and the letters published in response to it. The Foreign Office asked its representatives in Madrid and the Vatican for information about Opus Dei, and

¹⁹ See Minute of meeting with Mr. T. H. Baldwin, of the Colonial Office, on 12 August 1960, which is kept in the Regional Commission of Great Britain.

²⁰ See Minute of meeting on 26 January 1961, which is kept in the Regional Commission of Great Britain.

²¹ See Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 1960-61, vol. 635 (February 20 to March 3), cols 1724-1725.

²² See Minute of C.W.M. Cox, 1 November 1960, CO 1028/98, TNA, London.

Lord Perth himself made some parallel enquiries of his own²³. Foreign Office Minutes at the time began to build up a case against granting public funds for the London project. The reasons adduced were of various types: Opus Dei “evidently does not need money”; the hierarchy is not supportive of the work of Opus Dei; the organisation is aggressively proselytistic (a charge laid against Opus Dei at Oxford), and so on²⁴.

Another development impinging indirectly on the progress of the plans for Netherhall House took now place in the Autumn of 1960. Mgr Coonan, the National Catholic Chaplain for Overseas Students, had contacted British Council officials with a project to acquire a hotel and equip it as a residence for overseas students. Although Mgr Coonan was fully supportive of the Netherhall House proposal, the two projects were now to some extent in competition with each other in the search for government financial support. Grants were to be distributed proportionally among the different denominations²⁵, and the official feeling was that Mgr Coonan’s project should be given priority over Netherhall House. In the meantime, Lord Perth had met Cardinal Godfrey and asked him about Opus Dei. In the Minute he wrote on the meeting he reported that the Cardinal denied the rumour that the hierarchy in England viewed Opus Dei with disfavour or suspicion, adding that newspapers’ reports of secrecy and so forth were very wide of the mark; Opus Dei, the Cardinal had said, was working closely with Mgr Coonan, and the Cardinal would like both projects to receive government financial help. In Lord Perth’s opinion, however, the Cardinal would probably favour Mgr Coonan’s if, because of denominational competition, there were to be a question of financial support for only one Catholic project²⁶.

The plans for the Netherhall House project were ready in the early months of 1961, and planning permission was obtained from the London County Council (LCC) in April of the same year. Subsequently two proposals for OSWEP financial assistance were submitted in September 1961: one for a

²³ See D.M. Smith’s minutes, 19 and 27 January 1961, CO 1028/98, TNA, London.

²⁴ See CO 1028/98.

²⁵ Mr Cockram had already mentioned in the interview of 1 September that the funds would be distributed among the different denominations in such a way as not to give rise to complaints of favouritism. As a matter of fact, the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) and the Methodist Church would absorb close to fifty per cent of the funds in the first couple of years of operation of OSWEP.

²⁶ See Minute by Lord Perth, 16 March 1961, CO 1028/98, TNA, London.

hostel of two hundred beds in London; the other for a hostel of twenty beds in Manchester. The application for the Netherhall project, re-drafted with help from the British Council²⁷, was made by Fr John Anthony Galarraga and Richard A.P. Stork, an engineer. It asked for a grant of a hundred thousand pounds²⁸. In conversations during the Summer with Mr Bach, at the British Council, this official mentioned that although the Netherhall project was the best project that had come up under the OSWEP programme, he was concerned about how the adverse publicity over Oxford might influence the minds of members of the Committee²⁹.

In the following months, the urgent need to increase accommodation for Commonwealth and other overseas students made for a rather rapid process of dealing and approving the proposals from assorted voluntary bodies³⁰. The application for the Netherhall project was considered at the end of October and beginning of November in successive meetings of OSWEP, the interdepartmental body set up to administer the funds made available by the Government. The British Council, as was its custom whenever an OSWEP application concerned the University of London, had written beforehand to Sir Douglas Logan, Principal of London University, asking for the University's opinion³¹. There is no available record of the University's answer but it would seem that it did not recommend the project³². The Minutes of the meetings of OSWEP dealing with the Netherhall application repeat some of the objections mentioned above, including, despite Lord Perth's Minute of his

²⁷ Sent to Fr Burke with a covering letter from R. Washbourn (Assistant Controller III, Home Division) dated 15 September 1961, which is kept in the Regional Commission of Great Britain.

²⁸ See documents filed in the Regional Commission of Great Britain. The Netherhall development intended to provide some 130 new places. The project involved the demolition of the Victorian buildings used since 1952-53 for the hall of residence.

²⁹ Report to Card. Godfrey (November 1961), Godfrey Papers, Westminster Diocesan Archives, London.

³⁰ Thirty three applications had been approved in principle by March 1962 (T 277/1162, TNA, London).

³¹ See Nancy Parkinson to Douglas Logan, 13 October 1961 (Uncatalogued Box 236, file 4, London University Archive). The file contains the correspondence of the British Council with the University about the OSWEP applications. The above letter has a note pencilled on it, saying that a copy of the letter was in the Opus Dei file. In spite of the efforts of the Archivist, Richard Temple, we have not been able to locate this file.

³² In the case of Mgr Coonan's application to OSWEP, London University consulted Mgr Tomlinson, the University Catholic Chaplain; a report of his positive answer may be seen in the folder mentioned in note 31. Mgr Tomlinson must have also been consulted in respect to Netherhall, as this was the procedure followed by the University.

meeting with Cardinal Godfrey, that the Catholic hierarchy was antipathetic to Opus Dei. The applications, according to OSWEP, could not be faulted on technical grounds. The recommendation on 7 November, however, was that the application should be rejected on the basis that Opus Dei could be regarded as a proselytising body, and that this would be contrary to the requirement that students should be entirely free from any interference in religious matters. OSWEP acknowledged that “it would be extremely difficult to give Opus Dei reasons for the refusal”. On the other hand, it was likely that Ministers might be called upon to defend in public their decision, positive or not, and OSWEP considered that a refusal was the better alternative, “as Opus Dei might well prefer to keep quiet the fact that they had been unable to obtain official support”³³.

Mr B. Cockram³⁴, Director of Information Services of the Commonwealth Relations Office, had a meeting with Fr Burke and Richard Stork a few days later. Cockram, aware of the recommendations of OSWEP to the Ministers who were to take the final decision, suggested—off the record and unofficially—that it would be good to reinforce the application with a letter from the Archbishop of Westminster showing his support for the project, adding that it could also be useful to inform those who—like Lord Perth and Sir Christopher Cox—had shown real interest in the Netherhall development about the progress (or otherwise) of the application³⁵. On 2 December, Fr Burke sent to Cockram a letter from Cardinal Godfrey to Fr Burke supporting the project³⁶. It was circulated to the different departments involved. C. Walsingham from the Treasury, in a letter of 8 December to J.H. Brook, of the Ministry of Education, considered that the letter did not affect the decision taken by OSWEP on 7 November. Brook, in his response of 12 December, confessed

³³ See Minutes of OSWEP Meetings (61) 7th and (61) 8th, T 277/1065, pp. 1-2 and ED 46/1041, pp. 1-2, TNA, London.

³⁴ B. Cockram, in February 1961—before the plan for expanding the provision of accommodation for overseas students had been announced by the government—had already mentioned the possibility that the publicity surrounding the Oxford project could adversely affect the application for funds to the British Council (Minute 27 February 1961, AGP G-793).

³⁵ See Minute 1 Dec. 1961, which is kept in the Regional Commission of Great Britain. See also the report sent to Card. Godfrey (undated), Godfrey Papers, Westminster Diocesan Archives, London.

³⁶ See Card. Godfrey to Fr Cormac Burke, 30 November 1961, which is kept in the Regional Commission of Great Britain.

to finding it difficult to draw a valid distinction [...] between an application under the OSWEP scheme by, say, a Wesleyan organisation—which we have granted—and the current submission from Opus Dei. Are we entirely sure that the former is quite disinterested and that the latter are not, and are we approaching the hostel proposition in the spirit of “avowed intent”? The Herranz document says quite categorically, on page five³⁷, that its institutions “are open to every race and social class, on the basis of absolutely equal rights, and without any type of discrimination, whether on grounds of religious belief [,] or any other grounds.” Are we then to say that we just do not believe this? And, if so, are we prepared to say as much in public?³⁸

By 25 January 1962 no decision had been communicated to the charitable trust in spite of Fr Burke’s repeated requests for information. The Netherhall project had been brought up again in the OSWEP (62/1) meeting of 5 January 1962. The Minutes registered, somewhat grudgingly, support for Opus Dei “in part at least of the Catholic hierarchy”. The action proposed in the meeting of 7 November had by then obtained ministerial approval from the Foreign Office and the Commonwealth Relations Office. The Colonial Office Ministers had not yet seen the submission. The Minutes added that, “as Lord Perth had been approached personally by Opus Dei it would be unwise to act on the assumption that he would necessarily approve the proposed course of action”. The Colonial Office ministers were to be informed³⁹. This was done.

On 13 February 1962, Fr Cormac Burke and Enrique Cavana had met Lord Perth, who by then must have been aware of the OSWEP recommendations and their approval by the Foreign Office and the Commonwealth Relations Office. The interview was a serious and open discussion, and Lord Perth made it clear in the course of the conversation that he did not hold much hope of success for the application. Perth, leaving to one side the fact that Netherhall House had been running as an international hall of residence in London for almost ten years, advised that it would be better to try for a smaller project. This would have a double advantage: to show their competence in running a hall of residence for overseas students and to remove the prejudice against

³⁷ The “document” referred to was in fact an article first published in *Studi Cattolici* 24 (May-June 1961) and later in English, in pamphlet form: Julian HERRANZ, *Opus Dei*. The pamphlet had been sent together with a reprint of an article by José Luis ILLANES, “The Political Activity of Catholics in Modern Spain”, published in the *Wiseman Review* (Autumn 1961).

³⁸ Both letters can be found in ED 46/1041, which also contains a photocopy of Card. Godfrey’s letter to Fr Burke.

³⁹ See OSWEP (62/1), T 277/1163, p. 1-2, TNA, London.

it of “aggressive proselytising”, the flag waved by those who in Oxford had opposed the Grandpont project. Then, in his opinion, it would be the moment to present a new application to OSWEP for financial support⁴⁰.

Perth’s official opinion, as reported in the Minutes of the next meeting of OSWEP on 1 March, followed similar lines. Lord Perth’s views on the matter, as “broadly” recorded in the Minutes, were: i) Opus Dei’s operations in the UK were not as narrow and bigoted as those in Spain and in parts of America; ii) Opus Dei should be told that they had to convince the Universities of their *bona fides*; iii) any grants should be conditional on “non-praselytisation” [sic]; iv) any form of Christian anti-Communist organisation should be encouraged. Lord Perth’s contacts with Fr Burke had made clear that the charitable trust did not have the funds to realise the project without government assistance. Perth wanted a definitive decision on this application to be withheld, and for the charitable trust to be told that a grant could not be approved until the anxieties expressed had been resolved. The Minutes speculated that the objections of National Catholic Chaplaincy might have been drawn from their knowledge of how the residences in both London and Manchester were run. The meeting suggested that Lord Perth could recommend Opus Dei to withdraw their present application and obtain the support of the universities before presenting a new one. If Lord Perth wanted to change the decision of the Foreign Office and the Commonwealth Relations Office, he should contact the appropriate ministers in those departments⁴¹. The Minutes were dated 13 March 1962. By that time, Lord Perth had resigned, or was on the point of resigning, his position as Minister of State for Colonial Affairs.

Lord Perth did, however, follow up the Netherhall project after his departure from the Colonial Office. In April, he got in contact with Sir Hugh Fraser, parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, also a Catholic, to talk about the Netherhall project. He wrote subsequently to the Archbishop of Westminster, informing him about the meeting, and asking whether he could meet the Cardinal to discuss the situation⁴². The

⁴⁰ See Minute Brit 48/62, dated 21 February 1962, which is kept in the Regional Commission of Great Britain.

⁴¹ See OSWEP (62/2), T 277/1163, pp. 1-2, TNA, London. The National Catholic Chaplaincy did not exist as a corporate body. Some chaplains—Oxford and Manchester—had expressed their objections; others, like Coonan, were openly supportive, and the Cardinal thought that the chaplain of London University was in favour of the Netherhall project.

⁴² See Lord Perth to Card. Godfrey, 25 April 1962, Godfrey Papers, Westminster Diocesan Archives, London.

meeting was not possible but Mgr Derek Worlock, the Cardinal's private secretary, met Sir Hugh Fraser, and, in a subsequent letter, Fraser repeated the substance of their conversation: in his opinion there was nothing to be gained in pursuing the matter until the projects had won the support of the Universities, with the help of the Catholic chaplaincies. In his response Worlock mentioned that Mgr Tomlinson, the Catholic Chaplain of London University, and Mgr Coonan, the Chaplain for Overseas Students, supported the project, and that the Cardinal had done so all the way along⁴³. Sir Hugh Fraser and Mgr Worlock met on 2 July to talk about the issue, and Fraser mentioned that if the present application were pressed to a definitive decision, this would be a rejection. There was, he said, opposition within the University to the proposal, based on the events at Oxford, although he asked Worlock not to mention this point⁴⁴. His advice was to withdraw the application and to re-apply after a discreet period of time. Worlock offered to pass on his recommendations, and he did so in a meeting with Fr Burke and R. Stork on 12 July⁴⁵. The Netherhall application for the OSWEP grant was withdrawn that same month.

The preparation of a second OSWEP application started soon afterwards, and involved a re-study of the 1961 design. The original application had been for a residence of two hundred places to be built in two stages and the initial 1962 study inclined to keep that number. A later re-appraisal settled on applying for a grant for a hall of a hundred places in its first stage with

⁴³ See Sir Hugh Fraser to Mgr Derek Worlock, 5 June 1962, and Worlock to H. Fraser, 8 June 1962; both in Godfrey Papers, Westminster Diocesan Archives, London.

⁴⁴ OSWEP had also recommended not to mention the opinion of the university, as it had been obtained in confidence. Mgr Tomlinson had officially maintained a positive approach to Opus Dei, seemingly because of the Cardinal's interest in it, and had told Mgr Worlock how pleased he was "to find all the residents of Netherhall House at the University Mass at Soho each Sunday" (Mgr Worlock to Bishop of Salford, 16 Dec. 1960, Godfrey Papers, Westminster Diocesan Archives, London). He seems to have acted differently in private. Although we have found no documentary evidence in this respect, it might be assumed that he did not recommend the Netherhall project when asked about it by London University in 1961. Later, in 1963, he refused to provide a letter in support of the new application for an OSWEP grant. Archbishop Heenan, although disappointed at Tomlinson's refusal, felt that to write personally to the University would leave Tomlinson in a bad light; he intended to write to Tomlinson, saying that he considered the project important (Minute of meeting of J. Masiá and C. Burke with Archbishop Heenan at the English College (Rome), 14 October 1963, AGP G-793).

⁴⁵ See Minute of Mgr Worlock, 12 July 1962, Westminster Diocesan Archives, Godfrey Papers.

the possibility of adding a further hundred places (and a further OSWEP application) at a later time. The plans involved preserving the old buildings for residential accommodation and building of a new block to provide forty-eight new individual rooms (together with a Social Centre including library, reading room, oratory, auditorium and other facilities), plus a new block for the domestic staff, freeing some areas of the old buildings for residential accommodation.

By that time, the Commonwealth Relations Office and British Council review of the OSWEP programme in early 1963 had found that the provision of hostel accommodation for overseas students was making very slow progress. While the overseas student population had experienced a large increase since 1961, only some one thousand five hundred new beds had been provided of the original target of five thousand. A severe need for student accommodation continued to be felt, especially in London. The slow progress was blamed on several factors: voluntary bodies were experiencing difficulties in raising their share of the funds, while the guarantees required by OSWEP caused long delays in paying the grants. Both the Commonwealth Relations Office and the British Council recommended speeding up the procedure in order to accelerate the progress of the applications⁴⁶.

As far as the Netherhall application was concern, one of the first steps in spring and summer of 1963 had been to form a Development Committee of influential public figures, Catholic and non-Catholic, supporting the project. The Earl of Perth was to act for a time as Chairman of the Committee⁴⁷, and he was involved in drafting the application to OSWEP⁴⁸. Some members of the Development Committee had been involved in their official

⁴⁶ See Report of CRO and BC, T 317/298, TNA, London. The problem had become evident already in 1962 (see ED 46/1041, TNA, London).

⁴⁷ Lord Perth had agreed to be Chairman of the Committee for the appeal to the British Council but he felt that sponsoring fundraising outside the British Council would involve him in a conflict of interests vis-à-vis fund raising for Hinsley House (Lord Perth to C. Burke, 30 April 1963, which is kept in the Regional Commission of Great Britain). During its early years the Committee would also include Bernard Audley (Businessman), H. Bart-Smith (Solicitor), John Branagan (Vice-Chairman LCC), Thomas F. Burns (Publisher), Sir William Carron (Trade Unionist), Professor C.E. Dent (University College London), John Harvey (Barrister, Middle Temple), Eileen Hoare (LCC), Sir Hugh Linstead (Conservative MP), the Earl of Longford (Lord Privy Seal), Robert Mellish (Labour MP, Housing Minister), George F. Taylor (Banker), Sir Philip de Zulueta (Private secretary for foreign affairs to three consecutive Conservative Prime Ministers, 1955-64).

⁴⁸ See Cormac Burke to Lord Perth, 27 May 1963, and Perth to Burke, 10 June 1963, which are kept in the Regional Commission of Great Britain.

capacity in the initial approaches to government bodies and in the study of the previous application for financial assistance from OSWEP and the planning application. Some of them seemed to have agreed to support the OSWEP application out of a feeling that the Netherhall project had not been treated fairly in 1961-62. A meeting took place in the House of Lords on 23 May 1963, involving Lords Perth and Longford, Mgr Wheeler and Tom Burns, plus Cormac Burke and Richard Stork. Their conclusions were: to ask first for the support in writing of the new Archbishop (when appointed), the Chaplain of London University and the Chaplain to Overseas Students (the latter had already promised his support), and to get in contact with some university authorities and government officials⁴⁹. It was thought that a great deal depended on the support of the University of London. Fr Burke and Richard Stork had a meeting with Sir Douglas Logan, the Principal of London University, and Mgr Wheeler reinforced their visit with a personal letter. Sir Douglas, who had visited Netherhall during the study of the first OSWEP application, mentioned that he had always been behind the project, and was to write to the British Council in support of the Netherhall application on 12 August 1963⁵⁰.

The application, after some changes suggested by the British Council, would be presented in November 1963 by Netherhall Educational Association, the charity owner of Netherhall House, asking for a grant for seventy-five thousand pounds to be able to proceed with the project. There was no immediate response to the application, although there had been some encouraging unofficial reports saying that it had been approved in an OSWEP meeting in November and that in January 1964 the only step left was the approval of the Treasury⁵¹. Lord Perth approached the Treasury in January to enquire about the progress of the application but there was no positive response. Nothing more was heard for another couple of months. In March 1964 Perth made a personal approach to Lord Carrington, then Minister without Portfolio, who in his response made a reference to the reasons for not granting the previous grant application and mentioned that further information had been asked before giving the project their blessing⁵².

⁴⁹ See Minutes (undated) which are kept in the Regional Commission of Great Britain.

⁵⁰ See Sir Douglas Logan to Miss N. Parkinson, AGP G-798.

⁵¹ See Minutes 8 November 1963 and 15 January 1964, AGP G-793. The delay seems to have been due to the fact of its being an application with a "past history".

⁵² See Lord Carrington to Lord Perth, 13 March 1964, which is kept in the Regional Commission of Great Britain.

The letter is misleading, as the process of the application must have been well advanced by then, and might have been approved already⁵³. The approval in principle of a grant for seventy-five thousand pounds was communicated verbally on 1 April 1964, and the solicitors acting for Netherhall Educational Association, Titmuss, Sainer & Webb, received written confirmation in a letter from the British Council of 16 April 1964. The letter also specified the conditions under which it was granted⁵⁴.

The grant, however, was very small compared with the financial outlay involved in the project. In search of new sources of financing, the Development Committee had considered the possibilities offered by the Housing Act 1957, under section 120, which contemplated financial arrangements between a local authority and a housing association for the provision of housing. In London, the grants were administered by the London County Council. This body had been approached in December 1963 with a request for a loan to help finance the project. The final decision was delayed. The London County Council, concerned at the amount involved and over whether a hall of residence for students (not a housing association) fell within the object of the Housing Law, referred the matter to the Ministry of Housing⁵⁵. The response was in the affirmative and the London County Council approved the loan in June 1964, pending final ministerial confirmation⁵⁶. On the note sent to Rome to communicate the news and the imminent start of the building works

⁵³ No records of the meetings of OSWEP dealing with the second Netherhall application have been found in TNA. The search in the British Council Archive, under the Freedom of Information Act, did not produce positive results: the OSWEP box entitled Inter-Departmental Committee was almost empty; it only contained two folders unconnected with the Inter-Departmental Committee and OSWEP meetings.

⁵⁴ See John Frankenburg to Titmus, Sainer & Webb, 16 April 1964, which is kept in the Regional Commission of Great Britain. The agreement between the British Council and Netherhall Educational Association was signed on 27 October 1966. As it has already been mentioned, the delays in finalising the grants were due to the many details to be sorted out and the guarantees required by the British Council; these delays had been blamed for the financial difficulties encountered by some of the approved projects.

⁵⁵ See F.W. Lucas (LCC) to C. Burke, 23 January 1964; Burke to Lord Perth, 6 January 1963 [sic], Netherhall Educational Association, Wallet 5.

⁵⁶ The ministerial approval was communicated to LCC on 18 August 1964 (J. Mills to Clerk of LCC, Netherhall Educational Association). The original application was for £475,000. The LCC loan was £275,000 for the first phase of the project, and a further £200,000 for the second.

St Josemaría, who had followed very closely every step of the project, wrote: “*Deo gratias! 17-VI-64*”⁵⁷.

The works started soon after and were completed in 1966. On 1 November of that year Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, officially opened the new buildings in her capacity as Chancellor of London University. In her speech she mentioned the need for proper residential accommodation for the large numbers of students from all over the world coming to study in London: a place where they could find mutual respect and support, where beliefs and standards could be learned and practised. “I cannot imagine”, she added, “a better place to foster such standards than Netherhall House, which is based on Christian traditions—above all the tradition of service”⁵⁸.

AN INTERNATIONAL CONSTITUENCY

In 1966, with the completion of Phase I of the Netherhall House project, the residence had a capacity of some hundred places, an increase of some thirty places on previous years. There was also a considerable reduction in the number of shared rooms in the hall of residence: the new building contained only individual rooms and the number of shared rooms was further reduced by the lease of n. 16 Netherhall Gardens for use as a private school, thus providing a regular income to help balance the finances of the hall of residence. The shared rooms in n. 18 were at times used as single ones, given that students, as time went on, were more and more reluctant to share. Those rooms, however, could revert to multiple occupation if need arose.

During the 1960s, and especially after completion of the new block, the already international character of Netherhall House was further reinforced. The increase in the number of residents from Commonwealth countries at Netherhall was one of the conditions of the British Council grant: it stipulated that, “as far as reasonably practicable”, at least sixty-five places should be available to overseas Commonwealth students and fifteen to overseas students from other countries. The Directors’ Committee, in charge of the day-to-day running of Netherhall, made a determined effort to foster a rich variety of peoples and cultures in the hall of residence, and tried hard to keep to the quotas set by the agreement. It was not always easy. The demand from

⁵⁷ AGP G-793.

⁵⁸ Netherhall House brochure 1977, p. [3].

British students remained high, and many applicants had to be turned down; the proportion of British residents stayed more or less constant at about 40% of the total. The number of African students living in Netherhall continued being high during the 1960s: Kenya (twenty-two), Nigeria (nineteen), Uganda (twelve), and Ghana (ten) were the best-represented countries, with many others nations in single figures⁵⁹. Perhaps the most significant change in the origins of residents during the 1960s, with respect to the previous decade, was the considerable increase in the number of students from South East Asia, the Far East and the Indian subcontinent. Malaysia was the best-represented country (thirty-two), followed by India (twenty-five), Pakistan (eighteen), Hong Kong (fifteen) and so on. In 1967 there were students from thirty-two different countries living at Netherhall, and thirty-five different nationalities were represented in 1968.

Another of the requirements for halls supported by OSWEP grants was the setting up of a Management Committee, including a British Council representative, notionally responsible for the overall policy of each particular establishment. The Netherhall Committee started its regular meetings in 1967, and its Minutes are an important source for the study of the hall's operation during the following twenty years. The Minutes show that, in spite of increased numbers of Commonwealth students in Britain, it was not easy at times to keep exactly to the agreed quotas. This was due to diverse factors: few students being directed by the British Council to Netherhall in particular years, travelling costs from hall to more distant colleges, etc. There were, on the other hand, increasing numbers of applicants from other developing countries, especially from South America. The Netherhall Committee raised the question of whether these students could also be considered as part of the OSWEP quota. The official answer was formally in the negative: the programme was not capable of broadening its scope to include them⁶⁰.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s there were several significant changes in the numbers and nationalities of overseas students applying to Netherhall House. This in fact reflected a general trend experienced by British universities and institutions of higher education during those years. The main reason for the changes was a progressive and dramatic increase

⁵⁹ Both the Biafra war in Nigeria in the late 1960s and later the Idi Amin regime in Uganda in the 1970s created considerable problems for the students coming from those countries and Netherhall tried to help them in their plight.

⁶⁰ See Minutes of the Management Committee 1967-85, Netherhall House.

in the scale of fees to be paid by overseas students. There were three major instances of fee rises during those years, and each of them had an impact on numbers and on the provenance of students. Up to 1967 there had been a strong upward demand for places at British universities from overseas students. The Crosland⁶¹ fee increases of 1967 halted that growing demand and temporarily depressed the number of overseas applications. A subsequent recovery was in turn slowed down by the introduction of creeping increases in the years 1975 to 1979. The most dramatic impact, however, resulted from the introduction in the academic year 1981-82 of “full-cost” fees for overseas non-European⁶² students by the Conservative Government of Mrs Thatcher. It took place against the advice and wishes of the universities, and, depending on the type of degree, involved between three-fold and nine-fold increases in fees charges. As predicted since the change had been first mooted, this started a sharp decline in numbers of overseas applicants⁶³. The number of new postgraduate entrants from overseas countries fell by 16% in 1980-81, while the number of undergraduate entrants (excluding European Economic Community students) fell by 19%. The percentage of accepted undergraduate entrants who failed actually to enter university was another indicator of the same phenomenon: it rose to 29.7% in 1980-81. There was also a tendency for grants awarded not to be taken up by students of poor and very poor countries because of a variety of circumstances, mostly of a financial character. In some cases, political conditions in their nations of origin also played a part in that decline, as in the fall in the number of Iranian students coming to Britain during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Study of the provenance of Commonwealth university students at undergraduate and graduate level coming to Britain in those years shows a dramatic decrease in the number of applicants from poor and very poor countries, while poor but developing countries seem to have maintained their numbers. Nigeria had been by far the country sending more students to

⁶¹ Anthony Crosland was then Secretary of State for Education and Science in the Labour Government.

⁶² The European Community regulations meant that students from its member countries were treated as nationals in all countries of the Community.

⁶³ See *The Times*, 6 February 1981. Prof. Ralf Dahrendorf, Director of the London School of Economics, speaking at Netherhall in 1979, had criticised the university policies of the Thatcher government and warned about a dramatic drop in the number of overseas students if the government were to go ahead with further increases in fees (*Hampstead and Highgate Express*, 26 October 1979).

Britain for most of the 1960s, followed by India, Jamaica and Malaysia (with less than half the Nigerian number of students). In the 1970s and early 1980s, there was a substantial reduction in the number of Nigerian, Kenyan, Indian and Pakistani students, overtaken by substantial increases in the number of those coming from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and Middle Eastern countries, and specially those from the emerging South East Asia and Far Eastern Tiger Economies of Malaysia, Hong Kong and Singapore. Particularly significant in the late 1960s and during the 1970s was the increase in the number of Malaysian students coming to study in Great Britain: by 1968 it had become the country with most students in the UK, a position which it would maintain during the first half of 1980s, being briefly overtaken by Hong Kong afterwards⁶⁴.

The general decline in numbers of overseas students in the years 1979-81, together with a further reduction in the number of places in the residence in the 1980s, had a predictable influence on the number of different nationalities represented at Netherhall, although at its lowest ebb it never dropped below twenty⁶⁵. The impact of the *university* fees-increases was also clearly reflected in the origin of the students living at Netherhall during those years. In the late 1970s and early 1980s there is a dramatic drop in the number of African students living in the hall, proportionally greater than the general reduction of the numbers of students from those countries in the UK⁶⁶. The Kenyan, Nigerian, Zambian, Ugandan and other African students, so well represented at Netherhall in the first half of the 1970s, almost completely disappeared from the residence. The Kenyan residents had been the most numerous group of African residents in Netherhall in the 1960s, and Kenya continued providing the largest number of African residents in the years 1970 to 1977, reaching a maximum of thirteen in 1975-76. This state of affairs was to soon change. By the academic year 1979-80 there were only three Kenyan residents and the number never rose above that figure during the 1980s. Something similar might be said of other African countries like Ghana, Uganda, the Sudan, Tanzania and so on: after 1980, most of those countries would go unrepresented

⁶⁴ See *University Statistics, vol I: Students and Staff for 1980, 1985-87 and 1993-94*, University Statistical Record, London and Cheltenham, 1982, 1987, 1994; see also Richard LAYARD and Emmanuel PETOUSSIS, *Overseas Students' Fees and Demand for Education*, Centre for Labour Economics, London School of Economics, Discussion Paper n. 108, February 1982.

⁶⁵ See Director's Report to Management Committee, December 1968, Netherhall House. The reasons for the reduction of places in Netherhall House in the 1980s are described on p. 50.

⁶⁶ See Residents Application Forms 1967-1985, Netherhall House.

or have sporadically a single student; the numbers of Nigerian residents held up a bit longer but reached similar levels by 1984. As a result, the African nations represented in Netherhall went down from seventeen in the academic year 1975-76 to six in the year 1980-81.

Something similar may be said of the students coming from the sub-continent. India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka had a significant presence in the residence, especially the first. There were eleven Indian residents in 1971-72 and eight in the academic year 1976-77. The number of residents from those countries, however, would be substantially reduced from 1977 onwards: in 1980-81 there was only one Indian resident in Netherhall⁶⁷. The trend was markedly different in the case of the fast emerging Tiger Economies of the Far East. Malaysia continued well-represented at Netherhall during the 1970s reaching peaks of seventeen and thirteen residents in 1970-71 and 1979-80. But in the second half of the decade they were overtaken by students from Hong Kong, with twenty-one of them being at Netherhall in the academic year 1978-79 and eighteen the following one.

Among non-Commonwealth countries, Spain and Italy were best represented in the hall of residence from 1960 onwards. This was a natural consequence of the extension of the apostolic activities of Opus Dei had reached in those countries: many of those who applied to Netherhall from them had already had some previous contact with Opus Dei in their nations of origin. The number of residents from Italy and Spain, however, was never big and always far lower than the number of applicants. The number of Spanish students reached its peak in 1983-84 (fourteen), but for most of the period did not go beyond single-figures. Most European countries were represented in the residence—including some from the other side of the Iron Curtain—as were all American countries: Mexico (twenty), Argentina (thirteen) Chile (twelve), and Colombia (twelve) being the Latin-American developing countries sending more students to Netherhall in the years 1970 to 1984.

From a professional point of view, although the residents coming from the Commonwealth took a great variety of degree courses, medicine, engineering, economics, and accountancy were the studies attracting most students from

⁶⁷ As was to be expected, un-sponsored students were to be the ones more affected by the rise in fees. The official bodies had been for a long time seriously concerned about the precarious situation of un-sponsored or private students, particularly from Africa. The number of scholarship students seems never to have been more than some 17-20% of the total number (a sample for 1963 may be found in the Report of the Colonial Steering Committee, T 317/298, Annex A, TNA, London).

the developing countries. Whatever their degree, the message that the hall of residence tried to imbue in the students combined the importance of serious study and the responsibility of acquiring the professional expertise necessary to make a positive contribution to the societies in which they were to live and work in the future. The atmosphere of serious study fostered in Netherhall contributed to good academic results over the years, the performance of the residents being consistently above average. It is difficult to form a clear picture of the professional paths followed by Netherhall residents during the period under study, and it is obviously even more problematic to quantify their contribution to the economic, cultural and social development of their respective countries. Still, as one former resident from Hong Kong would put it in an interview for the video “Home from Home”, made about Netherhall in 1996: over the years “many Netherhall residents have gone on to achieve positions of responsibility”. A former resident was struck by this line when watching the video:

[That] night the quote kept coming back to me: surely he had meant positions of power? But no, he hadn't. It was in that one word that the whole Netherhall experience became clear to me. The whole reason that Netherhall came into existence [...] is to help people to awaken to the fact that we are part of something far bigger than ourselves [...]. As the years pass by, I start to think, not about what I have received from my parents, my country, my friends and in my life, but about what I should be giving as a person in a position of responsibility⁶⁸.

There are no records giving complete details of the professional careers of all or most former Netherhall residents, but those kept offer glimpses into the professional paths taken by them. In those years, the formation of medical doctors tended to be a priority for developing countries, and they were well represented in Netherhall. Among the many medical students in residence during the 1960s and 1970s, Peter Sinabulya (1967-68), one of a number of East African medical students during those years, was the first East African to gain the Fellowship of Ophthalmic Surgery and went on to run his own hospital in Uganda. Another, Nanda Amarasekera (1969), was President of the Sri Lanka College of Physicians in the 1990s, while, in Thailand, Suthina Songkhla (1974), became head of the Department of Nuclear Medicine at a hospital in Bangkok, and Kanit Muntarbhorn (1969) went on to occupy

⁶⁸ Aidan MORLEY, *Netherhall News* (Autumn 2000), p. 9.

the chair of Otolaryngology at Bangkok University. Still within the area of general health, Anthony Chan became Chief Pharmacist of Hong Kong. In the late 1960s and early 1970s Netherhall hosted a sizeable and active group of lawyers, mostly from Malaysia, who organized a law group in the hall and edited their own law magazine. From among this group, Denis Chang QC CBE (1968-69) would later become Chairman of the Bar Association of Hong Kong (1985-88), and also a member of the Executive Committee of Hong Kong set up by Chris Patten, its last British Governor. Another member of that group of lawyers, Mah Weng Kwai (1968), after a distinguished career in the Malaysian Judicial and Legal Service, was President of the Malaysian Bar for a time and is currently President of the Law Association for Asia and the Pacific and a Judge. Ian Carlson (1967), another law student, would become a judge in Hong Kong. Others would be partners of large law-firms or run their own. Engineering was also well represented among Netherhall students. Two engineers from among them would be involved in running the railways of their respective countries: Jo Maduekwe (1965), Managing Director of the Nigerian Railway Corporation from 1991 to 1995; Peter Mbunu Kigira (1976) would be in charge of a section of Kenyan railways. Others ran engineering firms, like Max Walumbe (1973) who was in charge of Geomax engineers in Nairobi, or Chow Kok Fong (1978), from Singapore, who, as head of projects for City Developments Limited, would be in charge of the construction of the tallest building in Singapore.

Many Netherhall residents studied economics. The late Godfrey Kassim Owango (1969-71), became head of the Agricultural Society of Kenya, and later President of its Chamber of Commerce, while in charge of Milligan & Co in Nairobi. Yeoh Eng Khoon, who lived in Netherhall in the late 1970s, went on to run the largest private Palm Oil firm in Malaysia. Investment and banking would also attract a good number of Netherhall students, many although not all, from the Far East. The late Ghulan Rahman (1968) was Chief Financial Controller for the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority. A few residents became active in politics. Alfred Diettre Spiff (1965), who had studied Naval Architecture, was Governor of Rivers State, Nigeria; the late Sailoisi Kepa, from Fiji, was for a while his country's High Commissioner in London, later Attorney General and by 1999 Ombudsman; Anu Patel (1971-72), another Fijian resident, became a Senator; while Tan Seng Giaw (1973), a doctor, became a Malaysian Member of Parliament, and Freddie Long (1969-71), a barrister, would be for many years a Member of Johore State Legislative Assembly and until recently Minister of Tourism and the Environment there;

Prof. Peter Nyot Kok (1975), Chairman of the South Sudan Law Society, was Minister of Higher Education until 2007; and Mak Sai Yiu (1977) became Assistant Commissioner of Labour in Hong Kong.

Netherhall former residents who followed a career in academia include Gilbert Onwu (1965), Professor at Ibadan University, Nigeria; Mohan Ranaweera (1977), who went on to teach law in Colombo; Augustine Chong (1960), the first Singaporean resident, who became Professor of Physics in Singapore, where other residents, like Louis Ta (1970-74), Joon Eng Chua (1979 & 1982), and Steven Chew (1976) also taught at the University. In South Africa, Prof. Francis Antonie (1973) was for some years Head of the School of Public Management at the University of Witwatersrand, and has been recently appointed Director of the Helen Suzman Foundation, founded in honour of the celebrated anti-apartheid campaigner of that name with the aim of strengthening South African democracy by promoting liberty and equality, individual human rights and respect for the needs of the poor and powerless.

“A HOME FROM HOME”

In an interview of 7 January 1967 with Tad Szulc of the *New York Times*, St Josemaría spoke about the work of Opus Dei in some English-speaking countries. He mentioned the work carried out by university halls of residence run by Opus Dei, providing “not only a place to stay but numerous activities to complete students’ human, and spiritual training”. He went on to single out Netherhall House for special mention because of its international character: “students from more than fifty countries [close to a hundred, in fact] have lived there. Many of them are non-christian, since Opus Dei’s houses are open to all without any racial or religious discrimination”⁶⁹. This had been very much the case of Netherhall since it first opened its doors, but it was particularly so from the mid-1960s onwards. The efforts of the Directors’ Committee had been focused, from the start, on trying to create a family atmosphere, and integrating people from very diverse cultures, races and religious beliefs. The remarkable success of Netherhall in so doing was due to many different factors. The Management Committee, and visitors to

⁶⁹ Josemaría ESCRIVÁ, *Conversations with Mgr Escrivá de Balaguer*, Shannon, Ecclesia Press, 1972, n. 56.

the hall, noted and remarked upon the effect that sharing meals together and the care of the material conditions of the house played in bringing people together⁷⁰. The residence offered full board at a time when halls of residence for students in London were often not doing so, and many were not even providing breakfast or were contemplating the possibility of not offering it⁷¹. Netherhall House provided a “home from home”, and the students from overseas were, perhaps, the ones to appreciate it best, as the most likely to experience isolation in Great Britain because of the separation from family, friends and habitual environment. The holiday periods made an important contribution to helping them feel particularly at home and to deepening cohesion in the diverse body of Netherhall residents. During the years under consideration, few overseas residents returned to their countries of origin for the Christmas or Easter holidays because of the high cost of air transport and their own economic situation. The result was that, at times, there were over fifty residents staying for the holidays, and the festive atmosphere and increased contact among them served as a very powerful integrating factor.

In a sense, although Netherhall did not provide directly academic teaching and training, it resembled more a traditional college in a collegiate university than a mere hall of residence offering sleeping accommodation for students, as tended to be the case elsewhere in London. St Josemaría insisted that from the first the residence should have an intense cultural life, and that adequate facilities for it—common rooms, auditorium and so on—should be provided⁷². The hall organised from the very beginning a wide range of activities to help broaden the students general outlook on a whole range of topics and to overcome the often narrow specialization of their university or professional studies: seminars and talks on specific topics, discussion groups, music recitals and so on. As the 1965-66 brochure put it, the policy of the residence was “to foster as far as possible frequent contact between the students and those who have made headway in the world, particularly

⁷⁰ Mr de Groot, from the British Council, who spoke at Netherhall on Tuesday 9 November 1971, mentioned how impressed he had been by the way the staff was run, while constant staff changes were a serious problem in other London halls of residence (Netherhall Diary, August 68 and May-November 71, AGP M 2.2-286-15). The Management Committee had remarked that the financial effort involved in providing high standards of meals and cleaning was high but was more than compensated by the catering department’s vital contribution to the general atmosphere of the house (Minutes of the Management Committee, 15 March 1983, Netherhall House).

⁷¹ See Minutes of the Management Committee, 30 March 1976, Netherhall House.

⁷² See AGP V-4927.

in the professions.” This took place specially through the Evening Guest Speakers—more after-dinner talks than formal lectures—that were organised on weekly or fortnightly basis. Prestigious personalities from academia, the political and business worlds, the arts, sport and other fields shared their experience and knowledge with the residents in an informal setting that fostered a lively exchange between speaker and students. These talks tended to be both informative and formative, insofar as the speakers served as inspiration for professional work done with competence and concern for ethical standards. They were normally well attended, and numbers naturally increased considerably in the case of some particularly important or popular personalities⁷³. The list of speakers invited over the years is a very large one indeed and it includes former residents returning to speak to their successors in the hall. The members of the Directors’ Committee were immediately involved in the invitation and follow-up of the speakers. The Management Committee, conscious of the formative importance of this activity, followed with great interest the list of speakers and progress of the talks, making suggestions and providing contacts with new possible invitees.

The students themselves played an important role in organizing activities in and from Netherhall, especially through the House Committee elected by the residents themselves. It worked as a channel for the initiative of the residents with respect to the operation of the residence and for planning and running many different activities. Among them, in the international atmosphere of Netherhall, the House Committee organised traditional national celebrations like those for the Chinese and Iranian New Year or for the Hindu Deepawali. By the initiative of the law students there took place in the 1970s and 1980s some mock trials involving most of the house and presided over by a senior barrister or even a Queen’s Counsel acting as judge. A particularly interesting one was a re-enactment jointly by historians and law students of the State trial of Charles I of England. This involvement of the residents in the running of the hall could not fail to be noticed by outsiders, and, in the June 1970 meeting of the Wardens of International Halls hosted by Netherhall, the other wardens, having remarked upon the excellent material

⁷³ There are no detailed records of attendance; the only precise numerical reference we have found mentions that the talks attracted regularly some twenty-five to forty residents and friends in the early 1980s (Management Committee Minutes, 10 March 1983, Netherhall House).

care of the residence, expressed their admiration for the number of tasks undertaken by the House Committee⁷⁴.

The students' attachment to Netherhall was shown in different ways over the years, besides and beyond their participation in the life and activities of the hall. In 1964, the house diary speaks of a couple of residents of modest resources from the West Indies and Ghana who, wanting to remain in Netherhall "because of the homely and good atmosphere", were working nights at the Post Office in order to pay for their stay⁷⁵. At other times, the names of the residents appear in the diary because of their involvement helping with the organisation of many activities, doing repairs around the house or assisting in the running of Netherhall Boys' Club. The picture, as might be expected, is not uniformly bright. The diaries also mention that when demands were being made of the residents, some rose to the occasion while others did not respond positively. In June 1965, when the new buildings were soon to be occupied and Netherhall was to receive a considerable number of foreign students, it was put to the existing residents that, if they wanted to return the following academic year, they would be expected to make a greater contribution to the integration of residents from overseas, contributing to the family atmosphere of the hall, participating more fully in the activities being organised, and so on. The diary, rather laconically, adds: "some said they did not wish to return"⁷⁶.

A few years later, in 1968, while the second phase of the Netherhall development was being prepared, a group of oriental students wrote in support of applications for funds being made to some companies connected with the Far East, stressing that what "strikes residents and visitors to the House is the truly informal family atmosphere one finds here, an atmosphere which has succeeded in transforming it from a mere Hall of Residence to a home", contributing to an important work of international understanding⁷⁷. Another telling instance of the residents' appreciation and support for Netherhall took place in 1982, when the hall found itself in a serious problem of liquidity because of a deficit for the year of some twenty thousand pounds.

⁷⁴ See Netherhall Diary, 19 April - 9 September 1970, AGP M 2.2-440-11.

⁷⁵ See Netherhall Diary, 5 September 1964 - 6 March 1965, Dec 22, AGP M 2.2-286-10.

⁷⁶ Netherhall Diary, 7 March - 28 September 1965, AGP M 2.2-268-11.

⁷⁷ Letter to J.F.E. Gilchrist, 5 April 1968, which is kept in the Regional Commission of Great Britain. The letter was signed by fifteen students from Singapore, Malaysia (Malaya, Sabah, Sarawak), Hong Kong, Korea and Burma; one of them was a member of the Executive Committee of the Great Britain Tamil Hindu Association.

The directors asked students to make loans to the house, raising over six thousand pounds in less than twenty-four hours⁷⁸.

The letters of individual residents tend to be more personal and less formal in the expression of their indebtedness to Netherhall House. An Iranian former resident, when sending Christmas greetings, would write: “I always loved the Christmas atmosphere in Netherhall. I wish I were with you. Although I left Netherhall over fifteen years ago I still have strong sentiments toward, what I call, the Netherhall family”⁷⁹. Peter Nyot Kok, from Sudan, manifested his appreciation for the “most gentle and friendly attitude you have shown to me. I certainly regard all this as a valuable enrichment of my experience in the U.K. in the face of which I have not yet found how to express my thankfulness adequately”⁸⁰. The words of the dental surgeon Jacob Kaimenyi, writing from Kenya to tell of his promotion to a senior lectureship in Nairobi (he is now Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University of Nairobi), encapsulate what many had found in the residence: “I am sure that whoever comes to Netherhall House gets a golden chance of seeing UNITY in diversity and also LOVE IN PRACTICE. People from different parts of the world are exposed to how they should live as brothers, despite their differences in COLOUR, CREED OR RACE”⁸¹.

This respect for diversity has always been particularly noticeable in the field of religious beliefs. The application forms of Netherhall residents show a great variety of religious affiliations. A majority tended to be Christians, mostly Catholic, but other religious denominations have been well represented (Muslims and Hindus in particular), and the catering staff of the residence undertook the task of providing for the different dietary requirements of each particular religious group: no beef, no pork, after-dark meals in Ramadan, and so on. There were also a fair number of students who claimed not to have any religion, and it is significant that the majority of these tended to be from the Far East, mostly of Chinese or Japanese origin⁸². The Summer term of 1971 might serve as a sample of the religious diversity to be found in Netherhall: there were forty Roman Catholic residents; the second largest group, with ten, had no religion; there were nine Hindu

⁷⁸ See Minutes of Management Committee, 15 March 1983, Netherhall House.

⁷⁹ Christmas card (no date), Netherhall House.

⁸⁰ Letter quoted in the 1977 Netherhall brochure.

⁸¹ J. Kaimenyi to A. Hegarty, 3 August 1987, Netherhall House. The capital letters are Kaimenyi's.

⁸² See Residents Application Forms 1967-1985, Netherhall House.

students and as many Muslims; seven Anglicans and eight Christians of other denominations; four Buddhists; two Sikhs and two Zoroastrians; lastly, one of the residents described himself as a freethinker and another as indifferent. The years 1965 to 1977 were the period of the greater number of non-Catholic and non-Christian residents, with substantial numbers of Muslim and Hindu students: 1975 to 1977 registered the largest numbers of Muslim (thirty-two) and Buddhist (fourteen) students, while 1971 to 1973 saw the peak of Hindu residents (twenty-one). After 1977, the general fall in numbers of overseas students in British Universities, because of rising fees, also had some impact on the religious composition of Netherhall. All Christian denominations and non-Christian religions were still represented but the number of non-Christian students was dramatically reduced. These numbers, as might be expected, fell even further when the closing of n. 18 in 1984 reduced the capacity of the residence to forty-eight⁸³.

Perhaps the aspect that non-Catholic and non-Christian residents seem to have appreciated most from a spiritual point of view was the fact that Netherhall offered an atmosphere in which religious and spiritual values were highly prized and religious differences respected, creating a favourable environment in which to live one's faith, Christian or otherwise. Harry Gunasingham (1973), a Hindu from Sri Lanka, stressed the atmosphere of religious respect in the residence, and wanted to replicate it in the Hindu Tamil communities of Southern India, with which he is deeply involved. I.K. Turay, from Sierra Leone, while thanking the residence for their assistance during his stay at Netherhall, added how he appreciated that "regardless of the religious differences, you accommodated me and made me feel at home"⁸⁴. On his part, Ali, a Shia-Muslim from Pakistan, back in his country, would write to the director of Netherhall wanting to share with his friends in the residence the joy at his good fortune in having become engaged to a girl, also a devout Shia-Muslim⁸⁵. A Hindu resident, Shanji Gatsuyaka, after leaving the residence, wrote to say how during his stay at Netherhall, he had "very much enjoyed the holy days of Easter. Although I'm not a Christian, I like the religious atmosphere and the pious people", adding that, having

⁸³ For the nationality and religion of the Netherhall residents see the application forms for the respective years in Netherhall House.

⁸⁴ I.K. Turay to B. Marsh, 20 May 1982, Netherhall House.

⁸⁵ See Ali R. to P. Herbert, 21 September 1990, Netherhall House.

stayed at Netherhall during Christmas, he would like to stay at Netherhall during Easter, if that were to be possible⁸⁶.

The hall offered Catholic spiritual and doctrinal activities which were open to both residents and non-residents, Catholic or not. The students were free to attend, if they so wished. Many did so. A sample study of the Netherhall diary shows frequent references to non-Catholics and even non-Christians attending classes of Catholic doctrine, either in groups or individually, and being present at Midnight Mass at Christmas or at the Easter Triduum ceremonies. The custom of paying a pilgrim visit to a shrine of our Lady during May—saying a part of the Rosary on the way, another in the shrine itself, and a third on the way back—seems to have attracted people of most faiths, including an atheist Bulgarian lecturer resident for a time in the hall. In such an atmosphere, it was to be expected that some residents would become interested in the Catholic faith. The Netherhall diary mentions the names of a good number of them and also permits following the progress of particular individuals from an initial show of interest in the faith to the moment when they were baptized or received into the Church. Other names disappear from the pages of the diary and, in these cases, it is difficult to know whether they continued receiving instruction in the Catholic faith and whether or not they were received or baptized in Netherhall or elsewhere. From the early 1960s to the present there are records of about thirty-seven people being baptized or received into the Church, although there is good reason to doubt whether this is in fact the full number of residents and friends who converted during their association with the hall. Looking at the converts, it appears that the majority were originally non-Catholic Christians, and a good number of them British. As far as the overseas students are concerned, there is a great variety of provenances and original religious convictions but most of converts are from the Far East—from Hong Kong in particular—and, before becoming Catholics, they seem to have nominally professed a traditional (mostly Buddhist) non-Christian faith or no faith at all.

There are no records extant of Hindu or Muslim residents being baptized during their stay at Netherhall. Hindu ideas about the validity of different religious experiences and beliefs made it relatively easy for Hindu residents to take a general interest in Christianity and participate in Christian religious events or celebrations, particularly at Christmas and Easter. On the other hand, this same religious philosophy might also tend

⁸⁶ See Shanji Gatsuyaka to A. Hegarty, 20 May 1987, Netherhall House.

to make conversion difficult. Muslim residents, for their part, seem to have been much more reticent in this respect. Both the exclusivity of Islam and the fact of being in close contact with other coreligionists in Netherhall may have contributed to a certain aloofness on their part from Christian doctrinal or spiritual activities⁸⁷. The influence of the hall's Christian atmosphere, however, did not seem to end with students leaving it. The record is, by its very nature, incomplete but a few stories may serve to illustrate the point. Almost forty years after leaving Netherhall, a Muslim resident of the 1960s, coming in contact with one of the Directors of Netherhall, mentioned that he was now a Christian and that he owed his faith to Netherhall. Ilyas Khan, a resident in 1980, would write thirty years later announcing his conversion to Catholicism: "The purpose of this e-mail is to say that the very very small flame that was ignited during those times has finally achieved its purpose of guiding my spirit to its rightful home. [...] I have often thought of contacting someone at Netherhall [...]. I doubt if anyone is still there from those days, but if so, I would be delighted if you could pass on my special thanks to them"⁸⁸. The story of another former resident is perhaps more singular. Rajadurai Rajasingham, a Hindu by religion, had been a resident in the early 1970s. He was met in Kuala Lumpur in the mid-1990s by Neil Pickering who, after being a resident himself in the late 1960s, became secretary of Netherhall House (1973-77). In their conversation it transpired that during his stay in the residence, encouraged by Louis Ta, Rajadurai had started to visit the Oratory regularly: "the best thing in Netherhall". Since leaving the hall, although not a Christian, he had been attending Holy Mass daily, unaware of the fact that another of the daily Mass-goers at the same church—Thomas Poh—was also a former resident. That fresh encounter with people from Netherhall crystallised his decision to receive Baptism. In order to do so, he wanted to go back to Netherhall, where his faith had first begun to grow. After spending a few weeks in London, receiving formal instruction, he returned to Kuala Lumpur, and, when everything was ready for his baptism, he flew back to London and was baptized in the Oratory

⁸⁷ The students committed themselves not to change the decoration of the bedrooms. This included a crucifix and an image of our Lady. Some Muslim residents did remove them on occasions; one of them is on record as having asked for permission to remove the crucifix in his room when kneeling in prayer towards Mecca, as the crucifix was on his line eastwards. Information received from Fr Bernard Marsh.

⁸⁸ I. Khan to P. Brown, 2 August 2010.

of Netherhall on 3 November 1999, Louis Ta and Thomas Poh being godparents by proxy⁸⁹.

St Josemaría had said that to pray for Great Britain was to pray for the world. That was true in more than one sense. As mentioned above, Western governments, Great Britain and the United States in particular, viewed education as a key factor in the social and economic development of newly independent countries, and as a means to retain their influence in those nations, while resisting Marxist penetration. It was obvious that the number of students from post-colonial countries in Western universities were not enough to create the educated base necessary for national development at all levels. The Ditchley Foundation meeting, quoted above, also stressed the shortage of students with A-level qualifications in Eastern Africa and in other parts of the continent, and how this fact restricted the supply of students from those regions to overseas universities and also tended to depress the local institutions of higher education set up in their countries of origin. The situation was such that in the early 1960s Makerere University in Uganda and Royal College in Kenya were accepting students for A-level studies. The dearth of well-qualified teachers underlying this problem required foreign teachers to supply this need until those countries could provide their own. Members of Opus Dei, while trying to expand Netherhall residence to accommodate more overseas students, were also promoting Strathmore Sixth Form College in Nairobi. Strathmore aimed at bridging the gap between school education and the university, affecting in particular African students. The college, the first interracial school in East Africa, obtained the backing of the pre-independence Kenyan government and started its operations in 1961⁹⁰. Netherhall House was involved to a certain extent in the early years of Strathmore. The international atmosphere of Netherhall put British and other European students in contact with those coming from newly independent countries and with their social and economic needs, and this awoke in some a desire to contribute to the development of those new nations. Jeremy White was one of the first to move to Nairobi. He

⁸⁹ I owe these two accounts to the oral testimony of Mr Neil Pickering, who was in contact with both former residents in question.

⁹⁰ The *Times Educational Supplement* published an article on Strathmore College on 30 March 1962, stressing the educational advantages of a sixth-form college, particularly in a Kenyan context. It presented a positive picture of the College, of its early success and integration policy. It is likely that this article, together with a pamphlet about Strathmore sent by Fr Burke to S.C.G. Bach on 17 January 1962, might have been brought to the notice of OSWEP when it was studying the second Netherhall application.

had been received into the Church at Netherhall on 15 August 1960, while still a student at Cambridge, and he expressed his desire to join Opus Dei immediately afterwards. He was then told to wait for a while, as he had only just become a Catholic. Jeremy's desire to join the staff of Strathmore College, however, was not subject to delay. He went to Strathmore in January 1961 and it was there that he joined Opus Dei. After working at Strathmore for a good number of years he moved to Nigeria, where he taught history at university, to help start the work of Opus Dei in that country. Strathmore also attracted other British people connected with Netherhall. Patrick Bennett David joined Jeremy at Genoa, while about the same time David Hogg, a Supernumerary, had set off on his journey to Nairobi by land. Peter McDermott, who had been attending means of spiritual formation at Netherhall around 1960-61, and would later become a Supernumerary, went for the start of the second academic year in March 1962, as did Jim Cavanna, a graduate from Oxford, and Santos Amer, a Numerary who had done his PhD in Physics at Cambridge. Both Jim and Santos would die in Nairobi in July 1963, in a car accident, while coming back from a rugby match. Other people associated with Netherhall would follow them over the years. In June 1980 Lars Nilson, a Swede who had been received into the Church at Netherhall, went to teach at Strathmore College Accountancy School (opened in 1966). Santiago Eguidazu, another Netherhall resident, joined Strathmore in 1983. He would die in August 1987, during a school trip to Mombasa, trying to save a pupil in difficulties while swimming in the sea. In time, a number of former Strathmore students would become residents of Netherhall House during their university studies in London.

St Josemaría had foreseen that the residents would also grow in appreciation for the spirit of Opus Dei and that some of them would help the expansion and development of the Work in their countries of origin or elsewhere, whether simply as friends or as members of the Work. This would in fact be the case from the very beginning. Professor Saito, one of the earliest Netherhall residents, was the one who received at the airport the first member of Opus Dei who went to Japan to start the apostolic work there. In other cases, the students themselves would be the ones bringing the spirit of Opus Dei to their countries of origin and asking the Work to start apostolic activities there. Thomas Poh, who had joined Opus Dei before his return to Malaysia, was protagonist of the first steps of the Work in that country, together with other ex-Netherhall residents. Stephen Lee and Anthony Chan, from Hong Kong, joined Opus Dei while in Netherhall and, the first already ordained a priest, were among those who took part in the early

years of the apostolic work of the Prelature in Hong Kong. Michael Chan (1978-80), from Malaysia, after studies in Rome and ordination as a priest of the Prelature, returned to South East Asia, working first in the Philippines and later in Singapore. In more recent times, Peter Herbert, who had been director of Netherhall from 1988 to 1996, went to Hong Kong, where he worked in a school; he then moved to Taiwan, and, after some years there, has recently returned to Honk Kong to be headmaster of the school where he had previously taught.

Although an attempt to complete the second phase of Netherhall House had been made immediately after building the first phase of the project, the result of the fundraising drive at the time had been disappointing and the realisation of the second phase had had to be postponed. In the 1980s it could not be put off any longer. In 1983, the number of available places in the residence was reduced because of the structural conditions of n. 18 Netherhall Gardens. Some rooms were put out of use in order to carry out repairs in them and the capacity of the hall of residence was cut to seventy-five places. Worse was to follow. A structural investigation of the building reported that n. 18 was no longer safe for occupation because of subsidence and related problems. In the Autumn of 1984 Netherhall House was left, therefore, with only forty-eight study bedrooms, in the new building. As a result, the precarious economic situation of the residence in the previous fifteen years became now untenable, and only substantial subsidies from the parent charity helped keep it afloat. The building of second stage was imperative, and the planning for it started as a matter of priority. The years of planning for the second phase, the campaign to obtain the financial means for building it, its opening, and the life in the hall of residence after 1984 are beyond the scope of this article and will be told elsewhere. The strong Commonwealth dimension of Netherhall House, however, has continued during what we have called its third period, and it is significant in this respect that the first stone of the new building project was laid by Chief Emeka Anyaoku, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, on 1 November 1993 (the anniversary of the opening of the first phase of new buildings in 1966 by the Queen Mother), in the presence of a number of Ambassadors and High Commissioners⁹¹ from the Commonwealth and other countries.

⁹¹ Commonwealth nations exchange High Commissioners rather than Ambassadors.

The years 1960 to 1984 witnessed the development of a truly international and multicultural community of students at Netherhall House. The analysis of the provenance of the students and the functioning of the hall of residence appear to show that during those years the Commonwealth dimension of Netherhall had fulfilled to a considerable degree the original expectations of the British Council, the London County Council, and of the promoters of the hall.

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