



Joseph Berington and the Gordon Riots

Timeline of the 18th Century

The Popery Act (1698)

Offered £100 to anyone who offered information about the whereabouts of anyone known to be "saying Mass or exercising any other Function of a Popish Bishop or Priest within these Realms" and deprive Catholics of the right to own land.

Security of the Sovereign Act (1714)

Empowered Justices of the Peace to 'test' suspected Papists with the Oath of Allegiance and prosecute anyone who refused to take it.

The Papist Act (1778)

In 1766 the Papacy recognised the Hanoverian dynasty. The Papist Act repealed various of the Penal laws for Catholics who swore allegiance to the crown.

The Jacobite Rebellions (1715,1745)

The son and grandson of James II (James and Charles respectively) invaded Scotland from France in the hopes of restoring the Stuart dynasty.

Roman Catholic Relief Act (1791)

Legalised the establishment of Catholic schools and permitted the practice of Catholic religion.

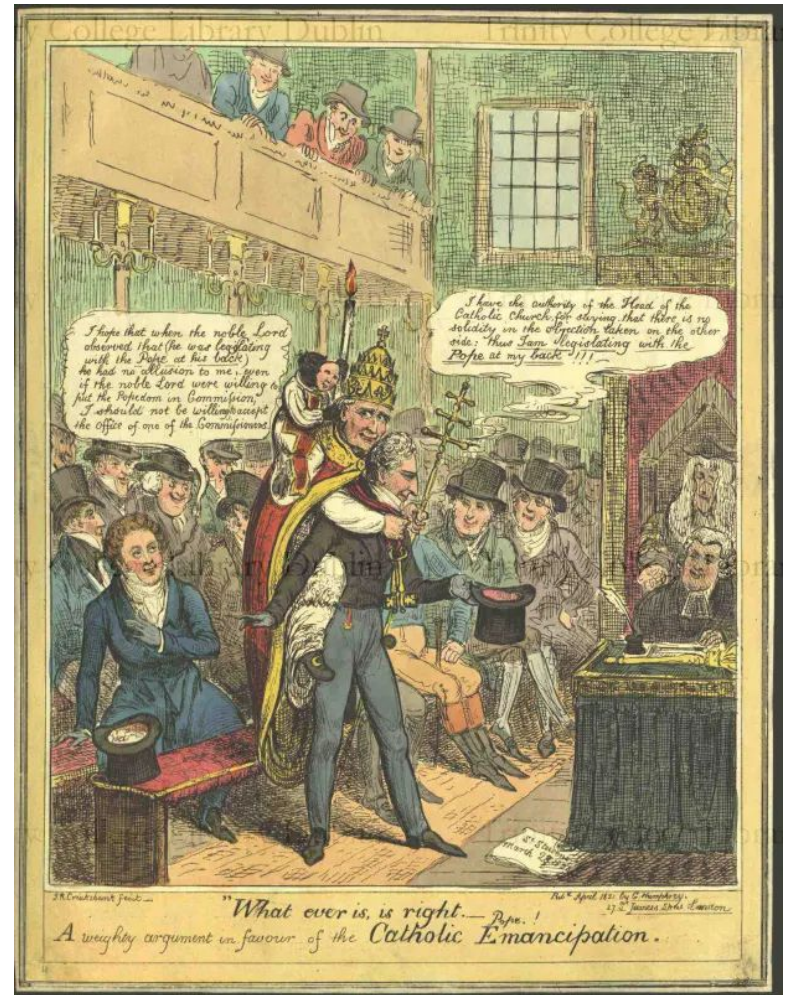
The Gordon Riots (1780)

Lord George Gordon, head of the Protestant Association, predicted that if Catholics were permitted to join the army, they would launch a coup. Mass riots spread across London leading to the deaths of 700 people.

Catholicism in the 18th Century

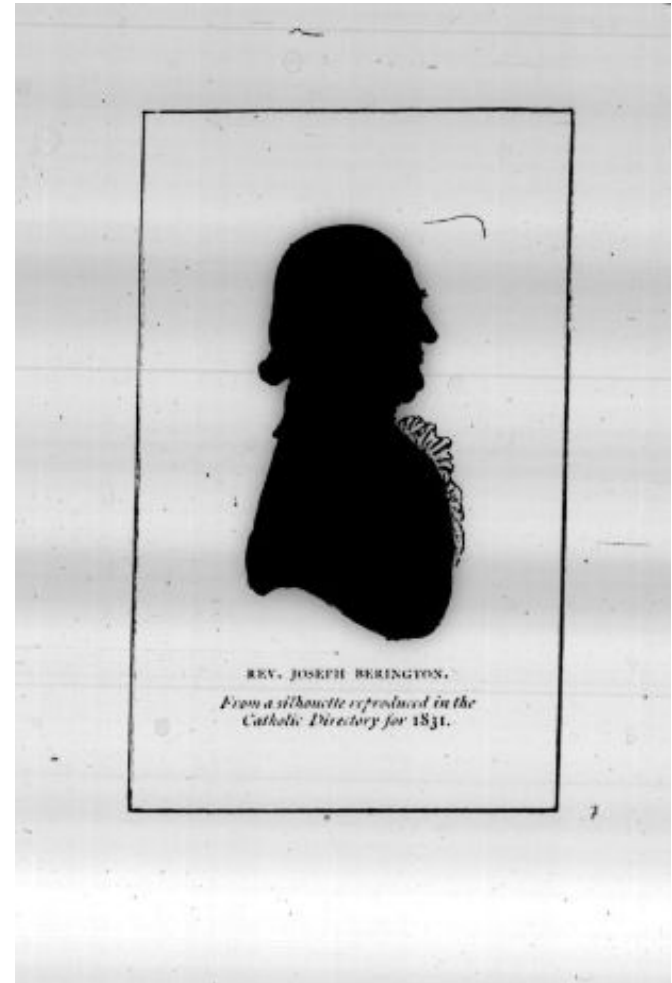
“To be a Roman Catholic in the eighteenth century meant, for the most of the period, membership of a community which was undoubtedly declining. In the first decades of the century Catholics numbered somewhere in the region of 100,000 or about two per cent of the total population. The returns of the Vicars Apostolic in 1775 give a figure of 59,500: significantly less than one per cent of the total population.”

- Eamonn Duffy.



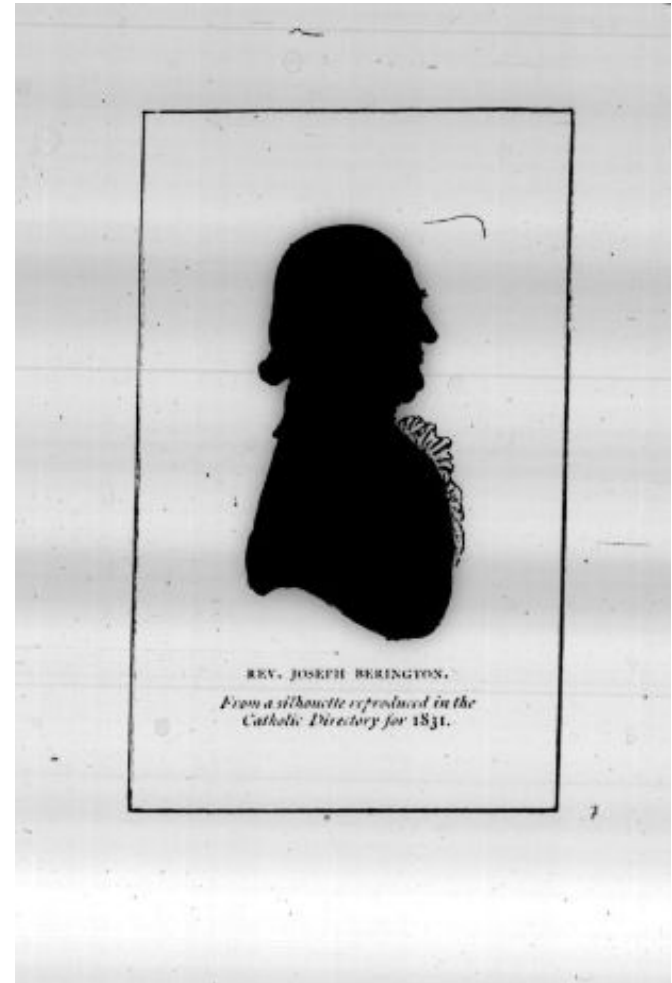
Joseph Berrington

Joseph Berrington was born in Herefordshire in 1743. He was sent to France when he was a teenager to study at the English College at Douai, eventually becoming chair of philosophy at the college.



Joseph Berrington

He returned to England in 1776 and became a chaplain and tutor to the Stapleton family in Yorkshire. He remained in their employ until 1782 when he took up residence at the clandestine Catholic mission in Oscott.



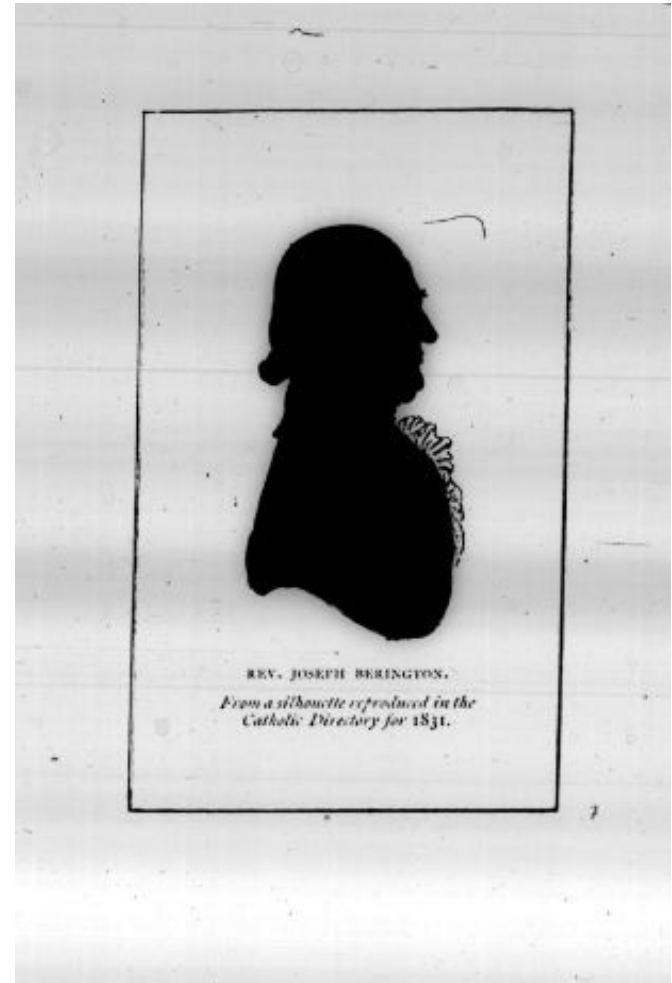
Joseph Berrington

I was at the house of Dr. Priestley, that my father first met the Rev. Joseph Berrington, a Roman Catholic gentleman, who, as it happened, was the Catholic priest of Oscott, a small hamlet about a mile and a half from Barr. My father invited him to visit us. I never shall forget the impression that the sight of Mr. Berrington made upon me, when I was not eight years old. It was tea-time, on a summer afternoon. The door opened, and Mr. Berrington appeared; a tall and most majestic figure. Mr. Berrington was in person very remarkable. **His countenance exhibited, if one may so say, sternness and mirthfulness in different proportions; his nostrils were slightly fastidious; his mouth closed like fate. He was a finished gentleman of the old school, and a model of the ecclesiastical decorum. His voice was deep and majestic, like the baying of a blood-hound; and when he intoned Mass, every action seemed to thrill through the soul.....** He was our most intimate neighbour at Barr. Three or four days seldom passed without his joining our dinner or tea-table; and as his house at Oscott was the rendezvous of much Catholic society, from that time Catholics became our social visitors, and many of them were yet more intimately connected with us.

- *The Memoirs of Mrs Schimmel Pennick.*

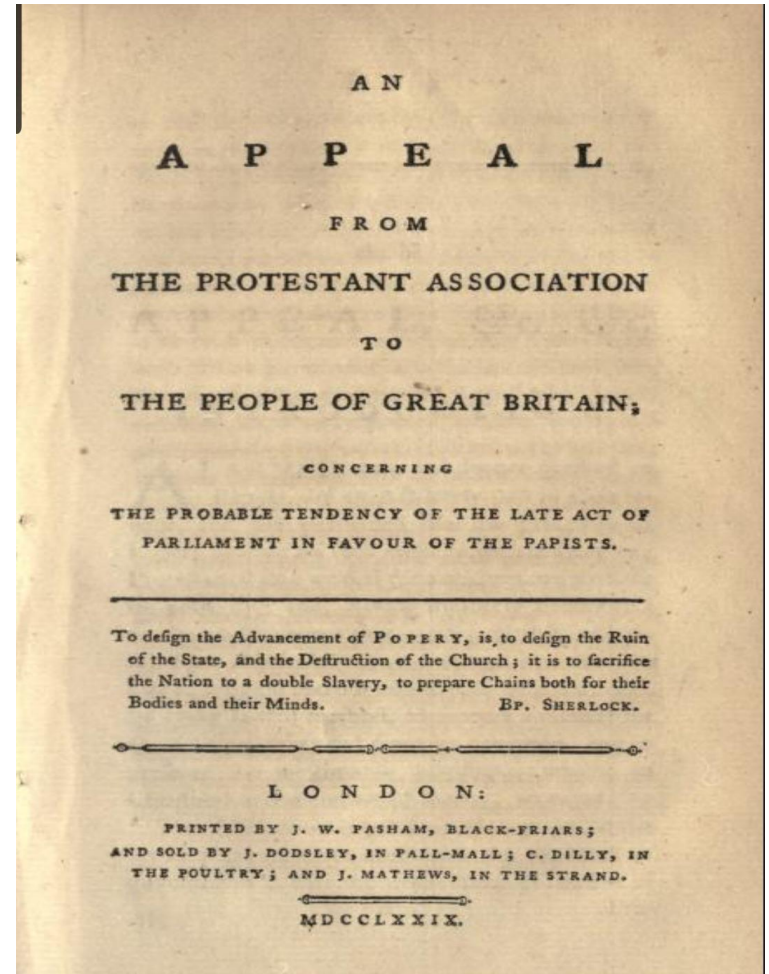
Joseph Berrington

In 1782, Berrington helped found the Catholic Committee. The Catholic Committee was formed as a separate body from the titular episcopacy in England and as such was disapproved of by Catholic hierarchy. Their philosophy was soon called Cisalpinism since they hoped to demonstrate that Catholics could be trusted not to put their allegiance to the Pope before the allegiance to country.



The Protestant Association

The Protestant Association was founded in 1778 in Scotland where large numbers of Protestants successfully mobilised to prevent the Papist's Act taking effect in Parliament. In 1779, the success of the Scottish campaign emboldened the leaders of the Association to take their campaign to London. The leader of the Protestant Association at this point was one Lord George Gordon.



Lord George Gordon

Gordon was an Eton educated Englishman, the son of the Marquess of Huntly. Having served in the navy he entered parliament in 1774. In parliament he gained a reputation as a demagogue, unwilling to collaborate with any party. In 1779 he essentially terminated his own political career by choosing to lead the Protestant Association in their march on Parliament.



The Gordon Riots

The march was organised for the 2 June 1780. Lord Gordon spoke to the crowd of 50,000 people at St George's Fields. He then led the crowd, which began to swell, to parliament where they presented their petition against the Act. The crowd was very volatile, physically assaulting members of the house of Lords outside Westminster hall.



The Gordon Riots

That evening, several embassy chapels were targeted by small parties of rioters. These included the chapel of the Bavarian embassy in Soho and the Sardinian embassy chapel in Lincoln's Inn Fields. 13 people were arrested and incarcerated at Newgate Prison.



The Gordon Riots

On the 3rd of June, a crowd gathered in the predominantly Irish area of Moorfields. Several private properties were attacked and burned. The crowd then moved on to Newgate where they attacked prison guards in order to free those rioters who had been arrested the night before. Graffiti was written on the side of the prison with the words: "His Majesty King Mob"



The Gordon Riots

On 6th June, Parliament met to debate Gordon's petition. That same day, the crowd moved on to Newgate Prison where they attacked prison guards in order to free those rioters who had been arrested the preceding nights. Graffiti was written on the side of the prison with the words: "His Majesty King Mob"



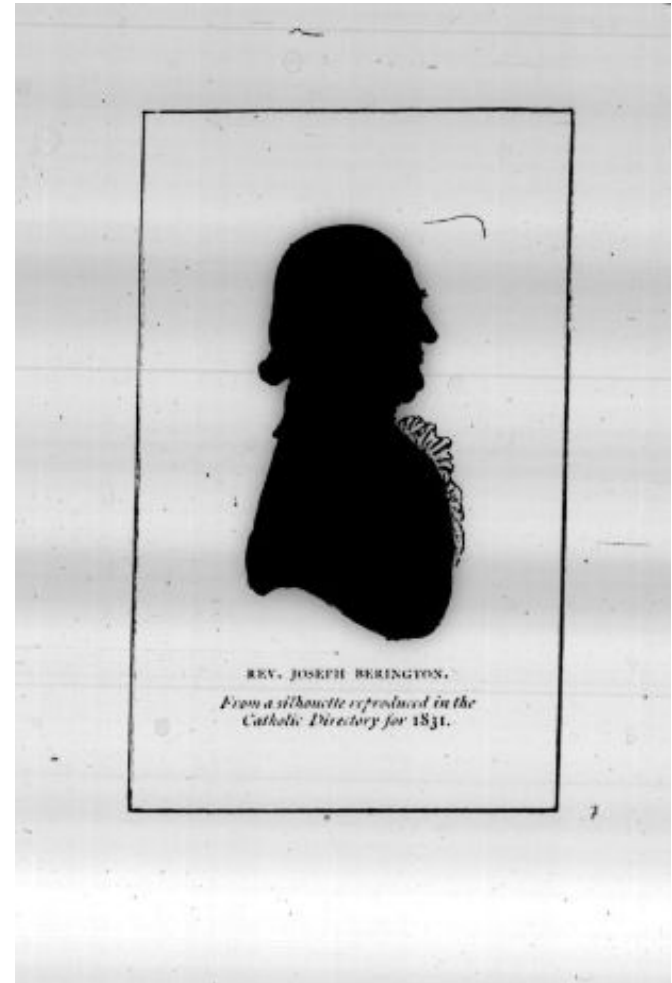
The Gordon Riots

Rioting continued and important public buildings including the Clink and the Bank of England were attacked. On the 7th, the army were called out and opened fire on the rioters leading to the deaths of an estimated 700 people.



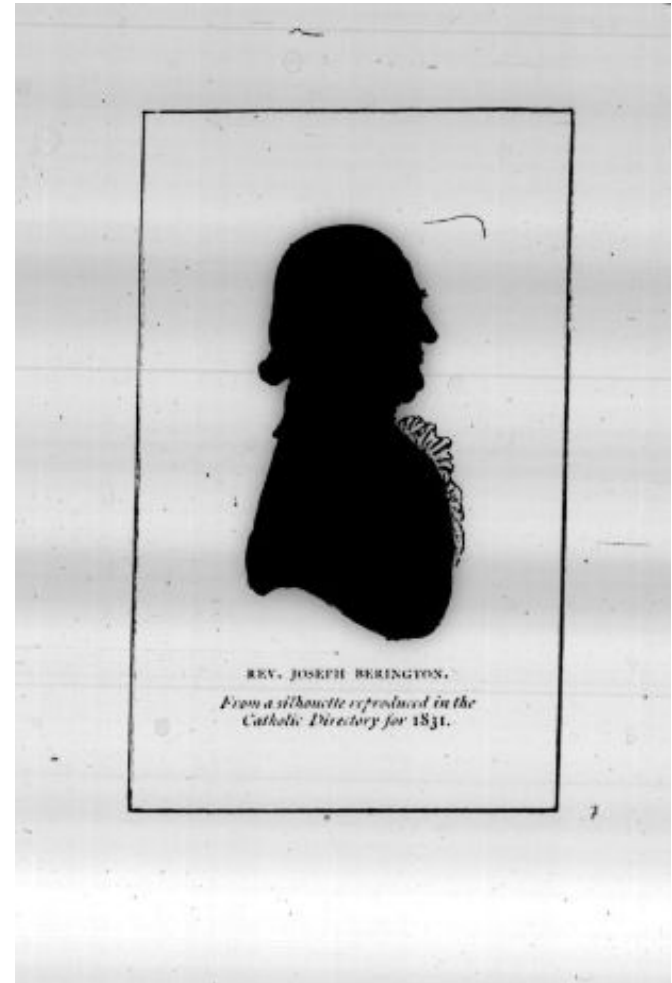
Joseph Berington's View of the Riot

“Fearful of adding to the scene of consternation, and desirous of convincing their greatest enemies, that the love of order and of peace was, in their minds, superior to all other considerations, the Catholics rather chose to see their property destroyed, and themselves shamefully insulted, than to resist.”



Joseph Berington's view of the Riot

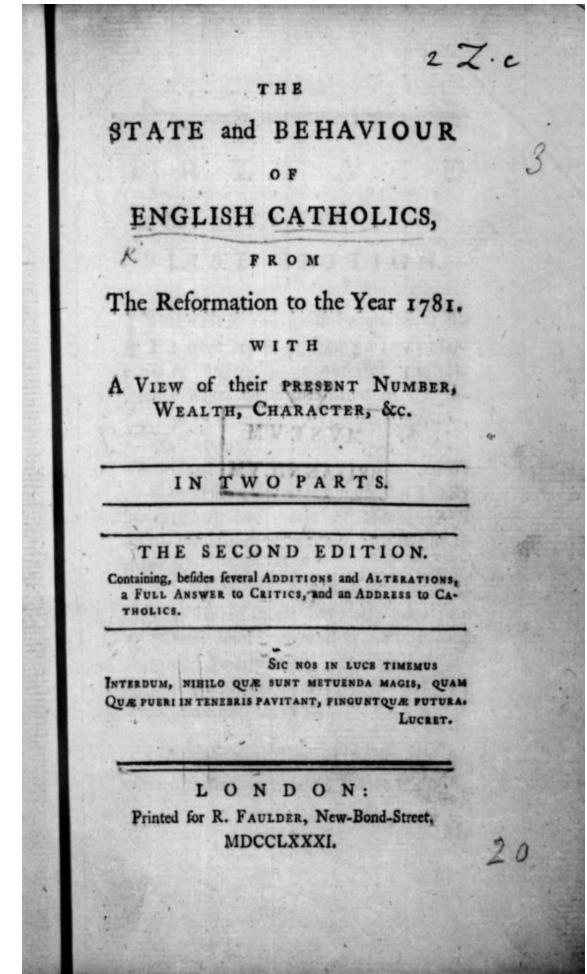
“The Catholics’ only wish had been, to possess their own property in legal security, to educate their own children, and to worship God in the manner their consciences directed. This privilege the laws of nature seem to allow to all men; but when a British Parliament had granted it to Catholics, a mob of British Protestants tumultuously demanded its revocation.”



The State and Behaviour of English Catholics

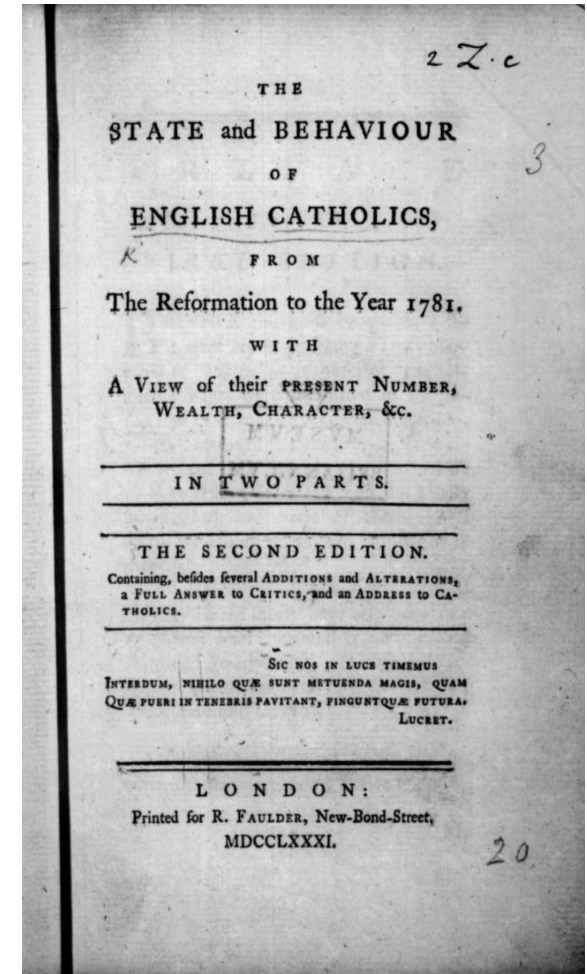
Shellshocked by the Gordon riots, Berington sat down in 1780 to write a full account of the nature of Catholicism in Britain in the hope that it would lead to a diffusion of the paranoia and bigotry which lay behind the riots.

He called it *The State and Behaviour of English Catholics*.



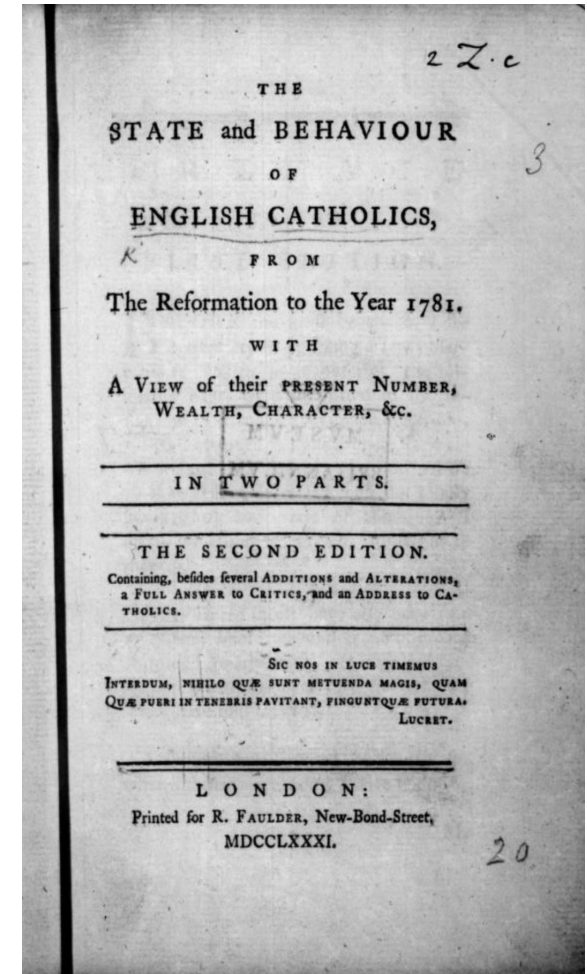
A Rationale for Presenting his Case

“How far, in certain circumstances, it might be advisable to be silent, I will not pretend to say. This I know, it is a conduct we practised for many years, but from it was never derived any good. Silence may be construed into a conviction of guilt, as well as of innocence. Before the repeal of the Penal Laws we were not molested, that is, not perpetually molested, (for there were some very recent instances of signal molestation) but our condition, at all times, was of that debasing and irksome nature, which would have justified the most active exertions. Shall I sit down silently satisfied, because the good humour of a Magistrate chooses to indulge me, whilst there are laws of which any miscreant has daily power to enforce the execution ? My ease, my property, and my life are at the disposal of every villain, and I am to be pleased, because he is not at this time disposed to deprive me of them. To-morrow his humour may vary, and I shall then be obliged to hide my head in some dark corner, or to fly from this land of boasted liberty.”



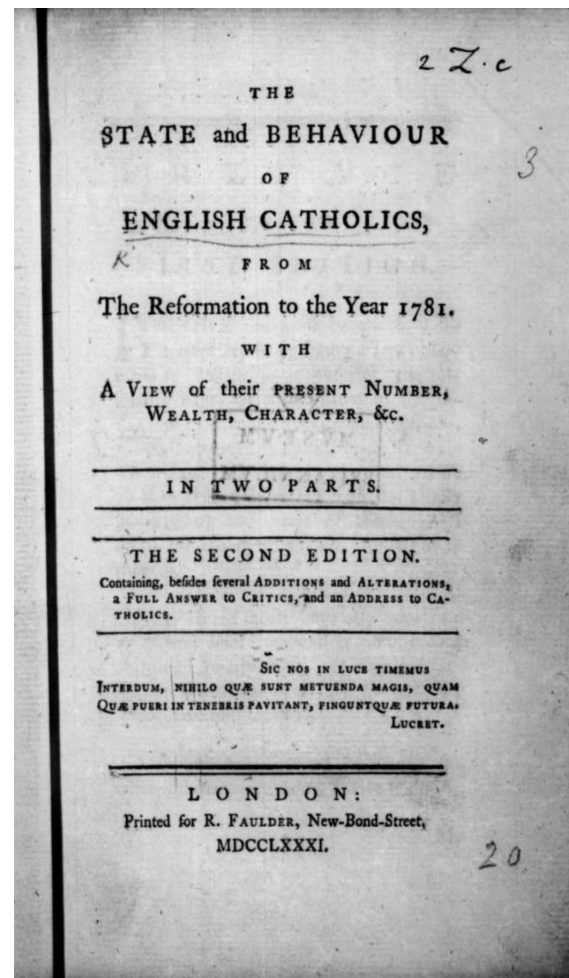
The Rationale for Making his Case

“I have often been much surprised, that Protestants in general should be so very unknowing in the business of Catholics. This is the source of all the prejudices entertained against us yet we have no arcana, which the most common eye is not allowed to penetrate: We only wish to have our principles and our conduct scrutinized with minute attention.”



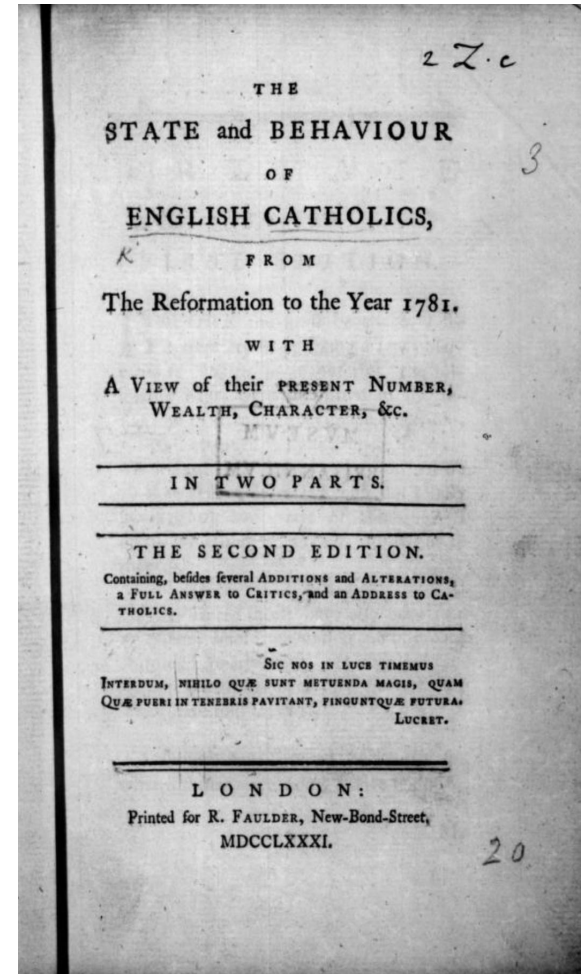
The Nature of Anti-Catholic Bigotry

“There still remains in the mind of almost every Protestant, from the highest to the lowest, from the best-informed to the most ignorant, from the infidel to the zealot, and from the fanatic to the man of cool reason, a rooted prejudice against the name of Catholic.... No sooner is the infant mind susceptible of the slightest impression, than it is the business of the nurse to paint a hideous form, and that she calls Popery.”



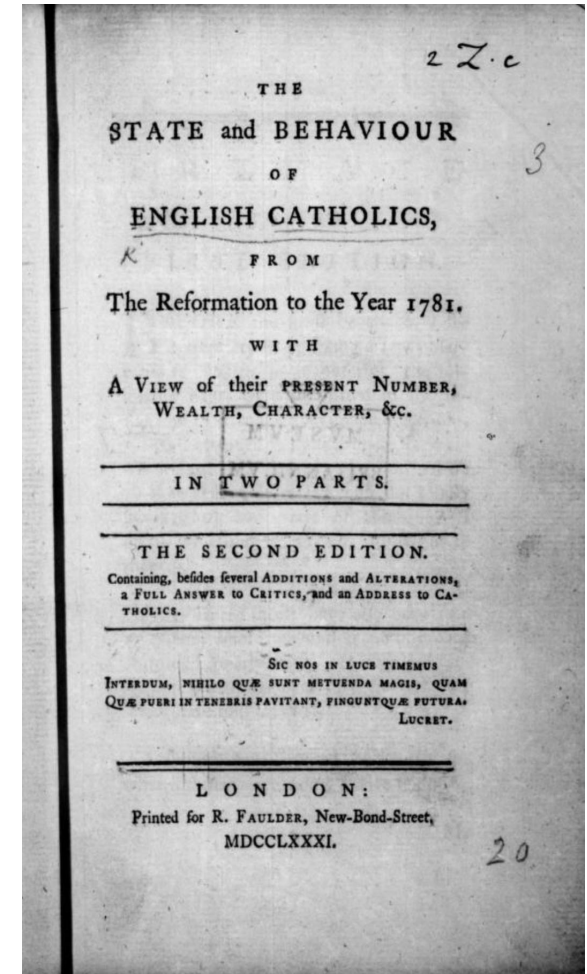
The Nature of Anti-Catholic Bigotry

“One observation only I wish to add; that in no part of the history of mankind do we meet with any society, who have made fewer attempts to regain their loft privileges, or who for these attempts have been subjected to severe penalties. Nor in their constant behaviour to Catholics, have Protestants shown the least trace of that liberal, humane, and manly spirit which, on every other other occasion, is seen to animate the breasts of Englishmen. Yet we are the old flock, from whence they sprang!.”



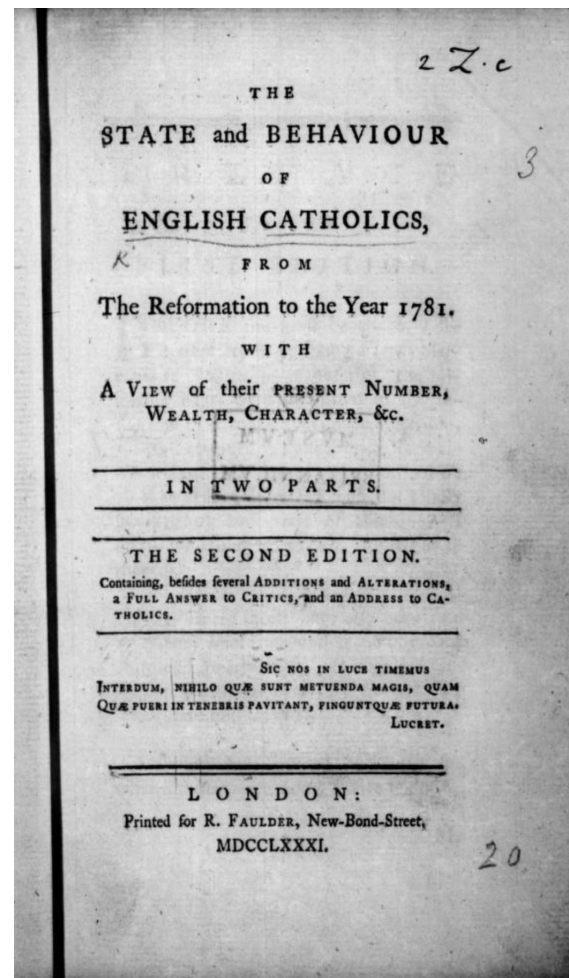
Disavowal of Mary's Reign

“As a friend to Catholics, it is natural I should wantonly bring forward transactions in which they were extremely censurable. My design was to justify our general conduct under Protestant Princes!”



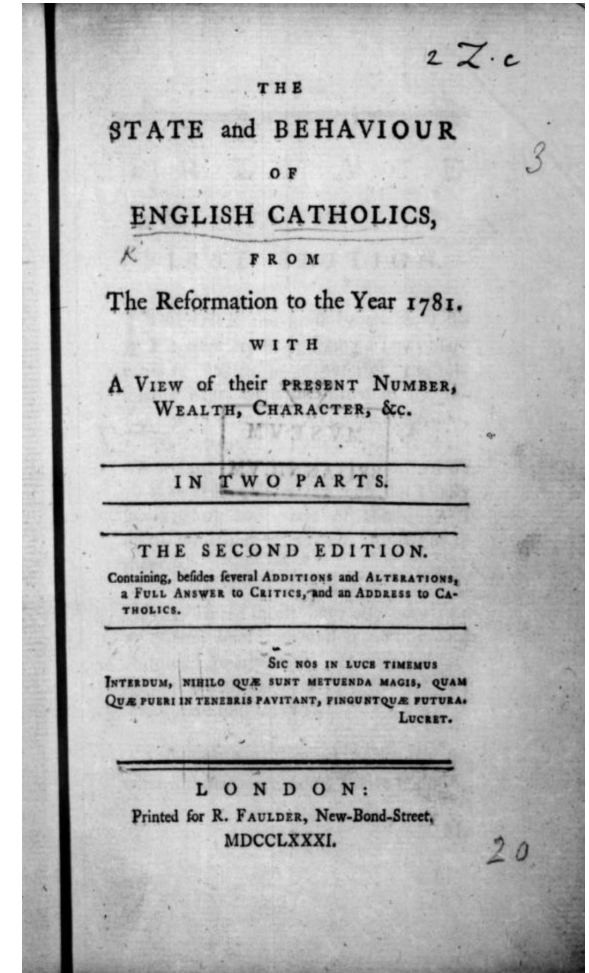
His Account of the Reign of the Gunpowder Plot

“The gunpowder plot... was the foulest scheme ever planned by man; and I wish to express my strongest destestation of it. A cause cannot be benefited by the disguise of truth. Had Catholics been sufficiently strong to have taken the field in the face of the sun against their enemies, what Englishman would not now applaud them? But the dark deeds of assasination must ever be execrated.”



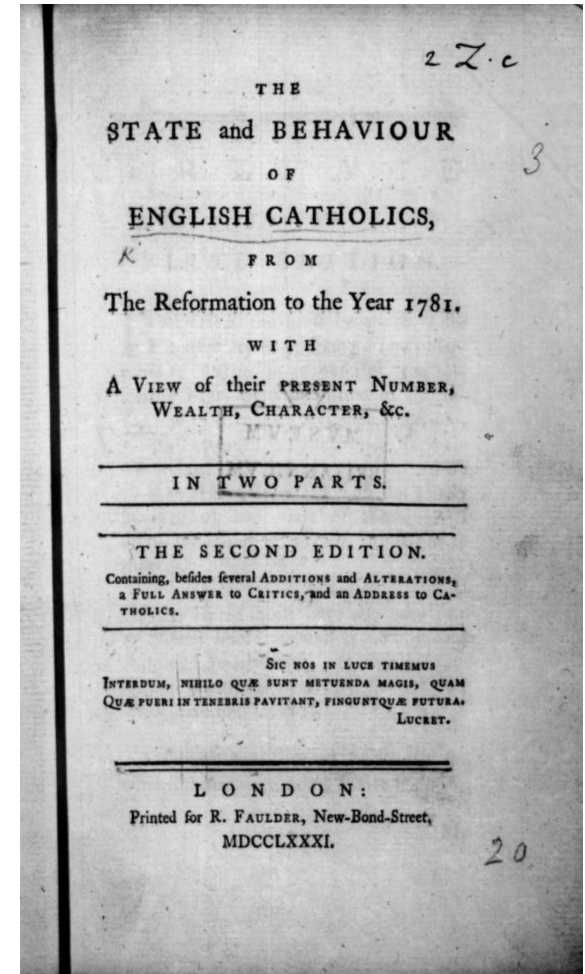
The Effects of Emancipation

“From the ease they had now, for a long time, enjoyed, and which, compared with their former state of perpetual vexation, was very great, Catholics had become more sociable; they began to taste those sweets of life, which liberty and open intercourse with the world can supply. As the weight of oppression lightened, and the severity of penal prosecution ceased, the stern vigour of their minds relaxed, and they everyday lost something of that enthusiasm of soul, which the sufferers for real, or for fancied justice, always experience. Such enthusiasm can give charms to oppression or to death. The consequences of this change were evident. Men of family grew daily less zealous in religion; their wonted loyalty abated; and they insensibly reformed first their politics, and soon after often conformed to the established Church.”



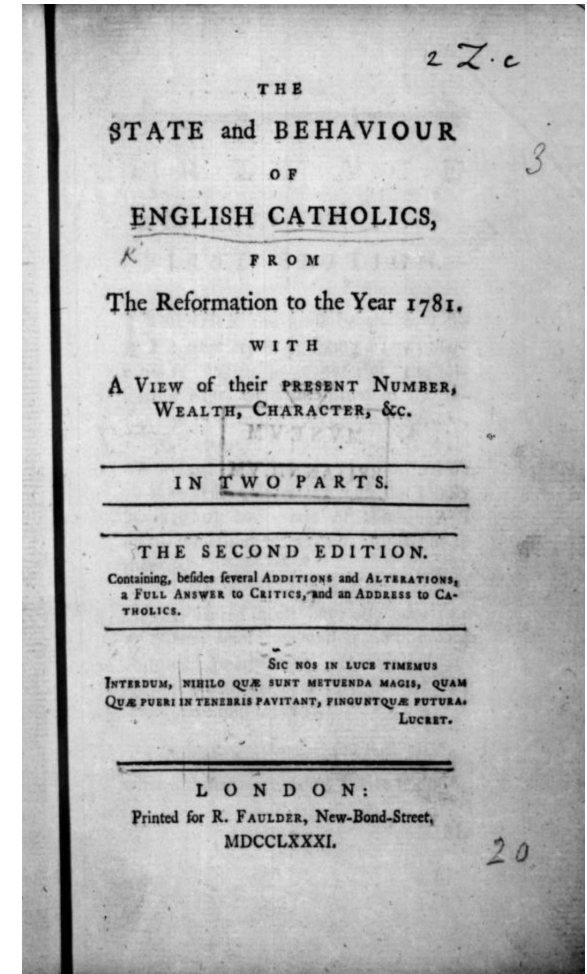
His Explanation for the Gordon Riots

"The Catholics had taken no unfair advantage of the indulgence granted them; they had opened no new Schools; had built no additional Chapels had inveigled no Protestant children; had laboured to make no new Proselytes, in a word, they had lived in the same retired, unoffending manner, as had been, for many years, their wonted practice. Their countenances had perhaps put on a more cheerful air, and did Englishmen envy them this small portion of happiness?"



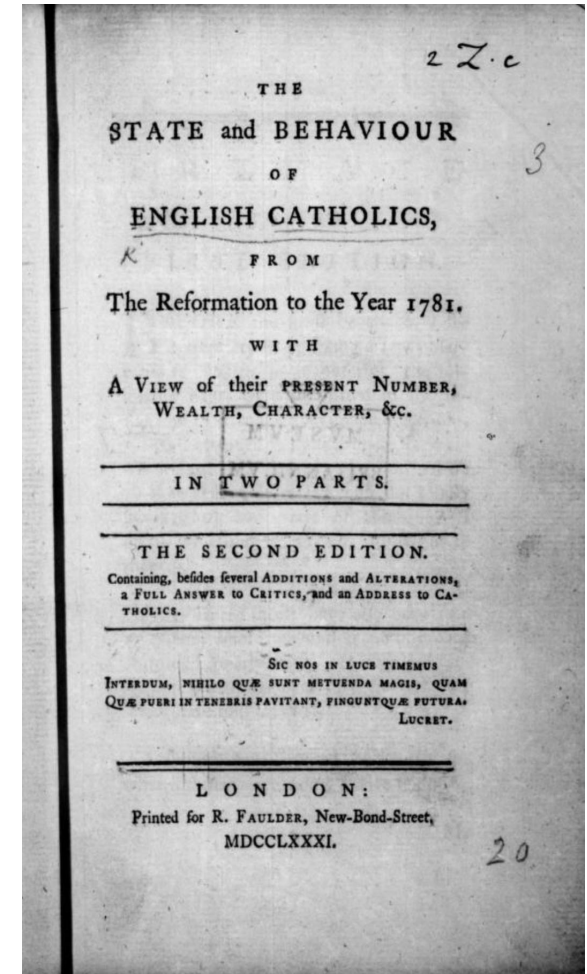
His Explanation for the Gordon Riots

"Under the popular cry "No Popery" an Association had been formed and the members of this association were the ostensible agents in the confusion and devastation which succeeded... I am ready to believe that much of the evil which was done, in the demolition of private and of national property, was merely accidental; that it was affected by the horrid activity of such miscreants, as are ever ready, under the screen of popular commotion, to practise their bad designs.. To all appearance there never was so illiterate and rude a multitude."



His Call for Ecumenism

“Those same restless and intolerant men, who, under the false pretence of zeal for religion, conceal, I fear, designs of a very dangerous tendency, are still loud in their cries against Popery. Them no reason, or conduct, or declaration of sentiments can satisfy. But when I look to the heads of the established Church, (and in their hands surely rests the great Cause of Religion) I perceive sentiments truly Christian, and a conduct which declares them to be friends to the common rights and privileges of human nature”



His Call for Ecumenism

“Where Catholics and Protestants blend promiscuously together, and pray to God under the same roof, all acrimony and marks of odious distinction must necessarily disappear.”

