

The Canonisation of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales

The cause for the canonisation of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales, which eventually took place on 25 October 1970, had its roots in the mid-19th Century when, following the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in England and Wales in 1850, Cardinal Nicholas Wiseman and Cardinal Henry Manning, successive Archbishops of Westminster from 1850 until 1892, led a campaign for the recognition of those who had been Martyred for the faith. Just a year previously, in 1849, Frederick William Faber had written the rousing hymn *Faith of Our Fathers* in memory of the Martyrs. Born and raised an Anglican, Faber converted and was ordained a Priest later becoming an Oratorian Father, the congregation founded by St Philip Neri to which St John Henry Newman also belonged. By 1935 nearly two hundred Reformation Martyrs had been beatified, earning the title 'Blessed', but only two, John Fisher and Thomas More, had been canonised; both on 19 May 1935 by Pope Pius XI.

Following the end of the Second World War, the cause, which had been largely dormant for some years, was gradually revived and, in December 1960, the names of thirty four English and six Welsh Martyrs were submitted to the Sacred Congregation of Rites by Cardinal William Godfrey, Archbishop of Westminster. All of these had been Martyred between 1535 and 1679. The list of names was drawn up in consultation with the Bishops of England and Wales and an attempt was made to ensure the list reflected a spread of social status and religious rank, together with a geographical spread and the existence of a well-established devotion. Of the forty, thirty three were Priests (twenty Religious and thirteen Secular) and seven were lay people. It is worth noting that around a quarter of these Martyrs came from within the historic boundaries of the County Palatine of Lancashire, a reminder, albeit a poignant one, that Lancashire remained a true stronghold of the faith despite the persecutions and difficulties that brought.

The Forty Martyrs of England and Wales put forward for canonisation (in order of Martyrdom) were:

John Houghton, 4 May 1535, Tyburn
Robert Lawrence, 4 May 1535, Tyburn
Augustine Webster, 4 May 1535, Tyburn
Richard Reynolds, 4 May 1535, Tyburn
John Stone, ? Dec 1539, Canterbury
Cuthbert Mayne, 30 Nov 1577, Launceston
Edmund Campion, 1 Dec 1581, Tyburn
Ralph Sherwin, 1 Dec 1581, Tyburn
Alexander Briant, 1 Dec 1581, Tyburn
John Paine, 2 April 1582, Chelmsford
Luke Kirby, 30 May 1582, Tyburn
Richard Gwyn, 17 Oct 1584, Wrexham
Margaret Clitherow, 25 March 1586, York

Henry Walpole, 7 April 1595, York
Philip Howard, 19 Oct 1595, The Tower
John Jones, 12 July 1598, Southwark
John Rigby, 21 June 1600, Southwark
Anne Line, 27 Feb 1601, Tyburn
Nicholas Owen, 2 March 1606, The Tower
Thomas Garnet, 23 June 1608, Tyburn
John Roberts, 10 Dec 1610, Tyburn
John Almond, 5 Dec 1612, Tyburn
Edmund Arrowsmith, 28 August 1628, Lancaster
Ambrose Barlow, 10 Sept 1641, Lancaster
Alban Roe, 31 Jan 1642, Tyburn
Henry Morse, 1 Feb 1645, Tyburn

Margaret Ward, 30 August 1588, Tyburn
Edmund Gennings, 10 Dec 1591, Gray's Inn
Swithun Wells, 10 Dec 1591, Gray's Inn
Eustace White, 10 Dec 1591, Tyburn
Polydore Plasden, 10 Dec 1591, Tyburn
John Boste, 24 July 1594, Durham
Robert Southwell, 21 Feb 1595, Tyburn

John Southworth, 28 June 1654, Tyburn
John Plessington, 19 July 1679, Chester
Philip Evans, 22 July 1679, Cardiff
John Lloyd, 22 July 1679, Cardiff
John Wall, 22 August 1679, Worcester
John Kemble, 22 August 1679, Hereford
David Lewis, 27 August 1679, Usk

Thirty four had been hanged, drawn and quartered, the most grisly form of execution reserved for traitors, whilst three had been hanged, one had died under torture, one had died in prison awaiting execution and, perhaps, one of the most well-known, Margaret Clitherow, had been crushed to death using the door of her house, weighted by rocks, the whole pressing down on a small but sharp rock placed under her back.



Plate 1 – St Edmund Arrowsmith, Martyred at Lancaster on 28 August 1628

On 24 May 1961, the re-opening of the cause was formally decreed by Pope John XXIII. It was no surprise, therefore, that once the list of forty names had been submitted, and the decree issued, the Diocese of Lancaster was quick off the mark in organising a rally in support of the cause. Other rallies, pilgrimages, and events

were organised, including an annual 'Martyrs Sunday', throughout England and Wales, as a concerted effort was made to progress the cause.

The Diocese of Lancaster rally took place on the afternoon of Sunday 2 July 1961 at the Deepdale stadium, home to Preston North End, and was attended by more than 20,000 people including over 200 clergy. Parishioners, school children, scouts, guides, cubs and brownies all processed through the streets of Preston from their respective churches to the stadium whilst others, from parishes further afield, arrived by coach. The *Lancashire Evening Post* reported that "It started back in the parishes where three huge processions based on St Joseph's, St Ignatius' and St Gregory's formed and walked through the streets with banners and bands to converge at Deepdale".



Plate 2 – Parishioners on Skeffington Road, Preston about to leave St Joseph's Church for Deepdale on 2 July 1961

A 'Pageant of the Martyrs' took place with forty individuals each dressed as a Martyr in the colourful costumes associated with the Tudor and Stuart periods. Narrators announced brief details of each Martyr's life and death and once all were assembled on the dais "they presented a huge tableau, strangely set in a modern football stand, of figures who suffered the strife and religious persecution in England and Wales 400 years ago".

The pageant was followed by Pontifical High Mass celebrated by Monsignor Thomas Eaton, the Vicar General of the diocese, in the presence of Bishop Thomas Flynn of Lancaster. The chalice used was that from St Thomas the Apostle Church,

Cloughton on Brock, which was described as “of English workmanship of the latter half of the 15th century, and was probably used by Bl. Edmund Campion, one of the Forty Martyrs, when he visited William (later Cardinal) Allen at Maynes Hall, near Rossall”.



Plate 3 – Pontifical High Mass at the Forty Martyrs Rally, Deepdale, Preston on 2 July 1961

The sermon was preached by Fr James Walsh SJ, the Vice-Postulator of the Cause of the Forty Martyrs. Following Mass, there was blessing of the sick with relics of Blesseds John Southworth, John Almond, Cuthbert Mayne, and Margaret Clitherow. In addition to widely reporting on the rally in its usual edition on Monday 3 July, the *Lancashire Evening Post* published a special commemorative edition on Tuesday 4 July. Both editions were well illustrated.



Plate 4 – The Lancashire Evening Post, 3 July 1961

Throughout the country, the faithful were encouraged to recite the 'Prayer to obtain the Canonisation of Forty of the Blessed Martyrs of England and Wales':

Let us pray.

Grant we beseech Thee, almighty God, that we, who admire in Thy Martyrs the courage of their glorious confession, may witness in ourselves the power of their loving intercession.

O God, who dost glorify those who glorify Thee, and who art honoured in the honours of Thy Saints, vouchsafe, we beseech Thee, by the solemn judgement of Thy Church to glorify the blood of the Martyrs who have been put to death in England and Wales for the testimony of Jesus. Through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Our Father. Hail Mary. I believe in God.

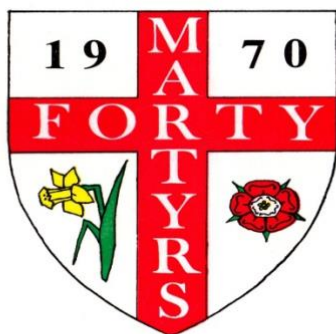
For the canonisation to proceed it was necessary for two miracles, granted through the intercession of the forty as a group, to be recognised. A list of 24 miracles was collated and submitted by the English and Welsh Bishops and, after careful examination, two of these were chosen for further scrutiny. The Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints, which had replaced the Sacred Congregation of Rites, granted a special dispensation whereby it was decided, subject to Papal approval, that one of the two miracles would be sufficient to allow the canonisation of all forty Martyrs to proceed. This was the "cure of a young mother affected with a malignant tumour (fibrosarcoma) in the left scapula, a cure which the Medical Council had judged gradual, perfect, constant and unaccountable on the natural plane".

On 4 May 1970 Pope Paul VI confirmed the "preternatural character of this cure brought about by God at the intercession of the 40 blessed Martyrs of England and Wales". The path was now open for the canonisation to take place on a date to be set. However, there was concern in some quarters about the effect the canonisation might have on the ecumenical agenda. In November 1969, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Michael Ramsey, had "expressed his apprehension that this Canonisation might rekindle animosity and polemics detrimental to the ecumenical spirit that has characterized the efforts of the Churches recently". It was clear however, that the majority of people within both faiths supported the canonisation and, on 18 May 1970, Pope Paul VI declared, during a consistory, that the canonisation would take place on 25 October that year "pointing out, with serene frankness and great charity, the ecumenical value of this Cause, also laying particular stress on the fact that we need the example of these Martyrs particularly today not only because the Christian religion is still exposed to violent persecution in various parts of the world, but also because at a time when the theories of materialism and naturalism are constantly gaining ground and threatening to destroy

the spiritual heritage of our civilization, the forty Martyrs - men and women from all walks of life - who did not hesitate to sacrifice their lives in obedience to the dictates of conscience and the divine will, stand out as noble witnesses to human dignity and freedom”.

Some 10,000 English and Welsh pilgrims, together with the Bishops of England and Wales and representative Bishops from Scotland and Ireland, were amongst the large congregation which attended the canonisation Mass in St Peter's Basilica. Special guests included descendants of many of the Martyrs, including the Duke of Norfolk, England and Wales's most senior Catholic layman and himself a collateral descendant of the soon to be St Philip Howard. The (English language version of the) service booklet, which I am lucky enough to have a copy of, runs to 112 pages and included Faber's hymn *Faith of Our Fathers*. As the Pope was carried through the basilica on the Sedia Gestatoria, a portable ceremonial throne on which Popes were carried on the shoulders of Papal Gentleman until its use was discontinued in 1978, the Anglican hymn *All People that on Earth Do Dwell* was sung. In recognition of the unique significance of the event for English and Welsh Catholics, the Maestro Perpetuo of the Sistine Chapel Choir, which would normally sing at all canonisation Masses, agreed that the Westminster Cathedral Choir could sing in its place. Amongst the pieces performed, the cathedral choir sang the Kyrie, the Gloria and the Agnus Dei from the *Mass of Five Voices* by William Byrd (1543 - 1623), perhaps the greatest Tudor composer who was a contemporary of twenty five of the forty Martyrs and who, whilst being a lifelong Catholic and recusant himself, is believed to have escaped the harsher penalties due to his musical genius.

FORTY
ENGLISH AND WELSH
MARTYRS



CANONIZED
25 OCTOBER 1970

Plate 5 – The cover of the Canonisation Mass Order of Service (English Edition)

In his eulogy for the Forty Martyrs, the Pope, speaking In English, expressed the hope that the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches would one day be reunited. He said:

“There will be no seeking to lessen the legitimate prestige and the worthy patrimony of piety and usage proper to the Anglican church, when the Roman Catholic church - this humble ‘servant of the servants of God’ - is able to embrace her ever beloved sister in the one authentic communion of the family of Christ: a communion of origin and faith, a communion of priesthood and of rule, a communion of the saints in the freedom and love of the spirit of Jesus.”

At the conclusion of the Mass, *Soul of My Saviour* was sung, the beautiful words of which are based on the original Latin text *Anima Christi* which is attributed to Pope John XXII (1249 - 1334). The hymn was written by Edward Caswall who, like Faber, was an Anglican who later converted, was ordained and became an Oratorian Father.

In accordance with tradition, the Pope was presented with relics of the new Saints, including a piece of the rope with which St Edmund Campion was hanged in 1581. The Catholic writer, Auberon Waugh, described the canonisation as “the biggest moment for English Catholicism since Catholic emancipation”.

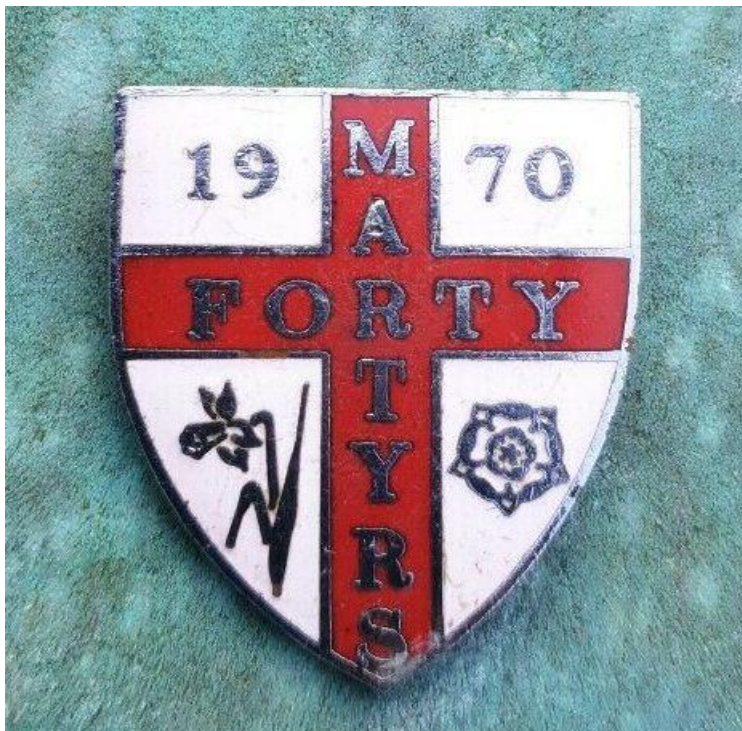


Plate 6 – Forty Martyrs of England and Wales Pin Badge

On 22 November 1987, Pope John Paul II beatified a further eighty five Martyrs of England and Wales. All of the Martyrs, both canonised and beatified, are now

commemorated in England on their feast day of 4 May. Prior to revisions made to the liturgical calendar in 2000, the forty canonised Martyrs had their own feast day on 25 October. In Wales, the feast is still kept on 25 October.

Today, many of the Martyrs, both canonised and beatified, are depicted in stained glass and in other forms in our churches. Many of them pre-date the 1970 canonisation; hence the inscriptions of those now canonised often still refer to them as 'Blessed'. The Martyrs are particularly commemorated at St Thomas of Canterbury and the English Martyrs in Preston which has been a focal point, in recent years, for an English Martyrs Pilgrimage organised by the Latin Mass Society. There is a Martyrs Altar and the church possesses a fabulous gold chasuble which depicts, amongst others, St Thomas of Canterbury, together with St Thomas More and St John Fisher. Relics of the Martyrs can be found at the Ladyewell Shrine at Fernyhalgh, near Preston where the Burgess Altar is preserved. This wooden altar, dating from 1560, is designed to fold away like a sideboard and is said to have been used by St Edmund Campion, St Edmund Arrowsmith and Blessed John Woodcock for the celebration of Mass. Arrowsmith House, Hoghton is where St Edmund Arrowsmith celebrated his final Mass. Many other churches in Lancashire, often hidden away in remote and beautiful locations, can claim a link to a Martyr. In some respects, the veneration of the Martyrs had fallen 'out of fashion' in more recent times but now, once more, interest in, and devotion to, these great men and women is being revived.



Plate 7 – The Martyrs Altar and Relics – Shrine Church of St Thomas of Canterbury and the English Martyrs, Preston

Of particular recent interest for the Diocese of Lancaster was the blessing of a new Martyrs icon at St Joseph's Church, Skerton, Lancaster. This stunning piece of art by Shropshire craftsman, Martin Earle, was blessed by Bishop Paul Swarbrick on 2 November 2019 and depicts the fourteen men, both lay and religious, who were Martyred at Lancaster. These include St Edmund Arrowsmith and St Ambrose Barlow (amongst the canonised Forty Martyrs), together with Blessed Roger Wrenno and Blessed Robert Nutter (who were beatified in 1987). Each of the two groups of seven Martyrs flank an image of the Holy Family and the icon, which is inspired by some of the great medieval altarpieces celebrating the Communion of Saints, is rich in imagery, symbolism and detail. This includes the pattern beneath the feet of the Holy Family which depicts Lancashire roses and the curlew and the pattern at the feet of the Martyrs which is inspired by a wallpaper design in the Ramsgate home of the celebrated Gothic Revival architect, Augustus Welby Pugin, whose younger son, Peter Paul Pugin, is the architect of St Joseph's Church.



Plate 8 – The Lancaster Martyrs Icon, St Joseph's Church, Skerton, Lancaster on the occasion of its blessing on 2 November 2019. Pictured are Bishop Paul Swarbrick of Lancaster (left) and Fr Philip Conner VF, Parish Priest and Rural Dean (right). The small wooden box in the centre is the portable Tabernacle used by Blessed Thomas Whitaker and which is now preserved at St Thomas the Apostle Church, Claughton-on-Brock, Garstang.

Plans are well underway to develop a Martyrs Walk, which will be described in a booklet, and which will take in St Joseph's Church and the icon; St Peter's Cathedral; Lancaster Castle where the fourteen Martyrs were imprisoned; and the site of the Martyrdoms on Lancaster Moors near Williamson Park, which today is marked by a simple plaque with the poignant words, "Can you drink the chalice that I am about to drink? They said to him, We can".

As we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the canonisation of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales this year, let us pray for them to intercede for us and for our country and also for the eventual canonisation of the remaining beatified Martyrs of England and Wales.

I am grateful to Fr John Millar of St Joseph's Church, Preston (Parish of St John XXIII), for access to the parish archives and for the use of the press cuttings and photographs of the Preston rally, and to Fr Philip Conner of St Joseph's Church, Lancaster, for information on the Martyrs icon and the proposed Lancaster Martyrs Walk. I am also grateful to Michael Durnan, Preston, for use of his photograph of the Martyrs icon at St Joseph's Church, Lancaster.

David Gorman
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