

Sacred Treasures: Christian heritage centre, Stonyhurst

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Tales of faith and suffering in England's Sacred County

The television series *Gunpowder* was a powerful reminder of the suffering experienced by English Catholics in penal times. Nowhere suffered more than the sacred county – Lancashire – recognised by enemies of the Church as the greatest stronghold of Catholicism.

Nothing better illustrates the horror of those days than the story of two Lancastrians, beatified in 1987.

John Thules, ordained at the age of 24, ministered for over 20 years.

Arrested by the authorities, taken to Lancaster Castle, he was imprisoned with a Catholic weaver, Roger Wrenno, who had aided priests. Both were sentenced to death.

Following the execution of Fr Thules, by drawing and quartering, to begin his execution, Roger Wrenno had the noose placed around his neck. But, the rope broke, sending him tumbling to the ground, still alive. He knelt and prayed with his hands and eyes lifted towards heaven.

The sheriff offered him the chance to live. All he had to do was to deny his faith. In response, Roger Wrenno ran back to the scaffold ladder and eagerly scaled it, telling the sheriff: "If you had seen that which I have just now seen, you would be as much in haste to die as I am now."

Roger Wrenno became one of at least 15 Catholics executed for their faith at Lancaster between 1584-1646.

Another was Fr Thomas Whittaker, from Burnley, who ministered in St Michaels-on-Wyre, Goosnargh and Kirkham. Forced to watch the execution of his compatriots, Edward Bamber, of Poulton-le-Fylde, and John Woodcock, a Franciscan from Clayton-le-Woods, like Roger Wrenno, Fr Whittaker was also told he could save his life by denying his Roman Catholic faith.

With phenomenal courage, he responded: "Use your pleasure with me. A reprieve or even a pardon upon your condition I utterly refuse."

Many of these stories are preserved in the three volumes *Old Catholic Lancashire* (published in 1925, 1938, and 1941), compiled by the Benedictine historian, and true son of Lancashire, Dom Odo Blundell OSB, who died in 1943 – and are part of the collection that will be available in the Hardwick Library of Theodore House, at the Christian Heritage Centre at Stonyhurst, due to open in June 2018.

Like Lactantius, who wrote of the heroic sanctity of the martyrs of the early Church, Dom Odo Blundell believed that gathering up the fragments of a too easily forgotten past, and by understanding the virtues of sterner and less tolerant times, their stories would inspire future generations. The 21st century mission



Above, the Houses of Parliament, left a pencil, charcoal and pastel drawing of Edmund Campion by Charles Weld of Stonyhurst, c 1850. It was copied from a 16th century original painting thought to be at the Gesu Church in Rome, now lost. Top right, An image showing some of the names of those who have given their lives for their faith on show on the Christian Heritage Centre at Stonyhurst website

Edmund Campion - Francisca Yabl - Simon Francis Berrera - Jacob Wm Jde - Richard Leigh - Thomas Claudi Pueri - Paula Himmelfarb - William Gorman - Antoni Sordani - FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH - Roger Cresswell - James Harrison - William Gifford - Peter Francis Hickey - Charles Claxton - Michael Eustace Tyrone - John Antonio Gallenero - Robert Ludlow - Thomas Bopp - FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH - James Miller - Cristofel Magallon Jara - Agustin Kie - Ag - George Napper - Brian Sargent - Joseph M. Scrogan - Agustin Kien - Thomas Vaughan - Michael - FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH - Francis Egan - Joel Austin Gilman and 1 companions - Roger Cresswell - William Heston - John Barry - John Robinson - Thomas Reynolds - William - Peter Joseph Van Rongom - FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH - Dolores Carrillo - David Baker - Robert Ashby - Joseph Malton - CM Diaz - Mary Adeline Ann Dink - Nicola Chalk - Thomas - Thaddeus Joseph Hickey - Robert Salt - FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH - Wilsey Azulfusa Katal - Thomas Johnson - Baruchai Kiat Ju - Louis-François Adair Kater - Paul Yi Geronimo - Barbara Yi - John Howard - Copier Pierre de Thomas - François Robinson - Edward Oshannon - FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH - Michel François de la Gaudette - Calistus Caronnet - Christopher - Magd Salomon Sebata - Edward Sicking - Edward Fane - Antonia Kinner - John Regan Chai Chang - Pierre Louis de la Rochelecaudé Roper - FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH - Jean Gervais - Leo Karlhoefer Nakamura - Josef Jankowski - Sabas Kryn Sakara - Bramble Kibata - Thomas Richard - John Wang Kaito - James Dean - Thomas Oyer - FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH - Perro Hamanmachi - Mary Clare Chila Navero - Goffredo Giovanni Milla - Mughlana Chai - Elizabeth Baran - Barbara Chai Yong - Jean François Bouquet - George Gervais - Mary De Tian - FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH - Brian Campbell - Pedro Rato de los Pabos Angel and 8 companions - Pierre Bringer - Daniel Louis Andre Des Demerger - William Lay - Jief Zapata - Peter Van - Marie Antonia Krauschel - Polyzos Pliados - FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH - Pierre Assante - James Van Gooling - Maria Zhang Xia - David Goman - Raymond Li Quamben - Ni - Simon H - Roger Linn - Carol Jeong Choung - Edward Cherven - FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH - Paul Stronck - Pedro Ponsa Guarnido - Thomas Scrymgeour - Rafia Shimon - Nicola Gaudin - Thomas Carr - John Allen - Robert Beckstein - Alfonso Navarro-Bonito - FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH - Matthew Fishers - Columba Kim Hyoun - Teresa Yi Maun - Marcellina and Peter - Jol - Marie Nicolas Antonio Davelly - Richard Segura - Anthony Ratto - Lucia Vukich - FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH - Ralph Stronck - Anthony Hong Brian - Kanton Sikko - Charles Math - Agatha Han Sosa - Mikaymilan Binkovica - Augustin Chapalaine - Honoreur de Jesus Marie Françoise Gabriel de Conroy - Maria Van - FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH - Jiko Inara - Francis Lee - Thomas Pickering - Simon Hwang Egeung - Robert E. Bu - Clemens Omer - Jean-Antoine Bernard Segat - John Sabatino - Celia de Kato - FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH - Harimacki Rosen - Ji

Whalley and Sawley abbeys; to visit the ancient chapel of the Knights of St John, at Stydd, where legend holds that St Margaret Clitherow was secretly buried (and on whose shocking execution, in 1586, scenes in *Gunpowder* were based); or to see the isolated chapel of St William, at Lee House, near Chipping, where washing would be placed on a line as a secret signal that a priest had come to secretly celebrate Mass; and to pray at Ladye Well – a Walsingham in the north.

Ladye Well has its origins in the 11th century and the story has it that an Irish merchant was caught in a tempest on the Irish sea. He earnestly prayed that, if his life was spared, he would undertake some conspicuous work of piety. Having safely landed in Lancashire his prayers led him to Fernyhalgh, where he found a spring and an image of the Virgin Mary. He erected a chapel dedicated to the Virgin and the well became known as Ladye Well. It was destroyed by the Crown in 1547 but Catholics never went away, while miraculous virtue was attributed to the water.

These days, two Nigerian priests – from a country facing its own

contemporary persecution – care for pilgrims who visit while the Kerala Indians living in this part of Lancashire hold a service each month in their own vernacular.

Our Lady's title at Ladye Well is Queen of Martyrs and among its significant links with Lancashire's martyrs is the Burgess altar – also called the Old Mission altar. Made by a Mr Burgess in 1560, at the request of John Townley of Townley Hall, Burnley, Blessed John Woodcock, St Edmund Campion and St Edmund Arrowsmith all offered Mass on this altar – which was made to fold away like a sideboard so that priest hunters might not immediately guess its real purpose.

Perhaps, if we better understood why men and women of those times believed it was worth risking your life for your faith, we might be inspired to be more steadfast and to live more courageously today.

Theodore House will be the perfect base from which to explore the stories of the Sacred County. Accommodation bookings are now being taken. Email: info@christianheritagecentre.com or telephone: Anton' de Piro on 01254 827 147

The Christian Heritage Centre at Stonyhurst creates access to unique Catholic collections – items which draw on this country's Christian story. This registered charity is currently creating accommodation for scholars, retreatants and those wishing to deepen their Christian Faith. Theodore House will be followed by a Visitors' Centre which will enable parishes, schools and the general public to have even greater access to these amazing collections. To find out more go to www.christianheritagecentre.com or contact info@christianheritagecentre.com