

Saint John Rigby

A martyr's life and legacy

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and
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The Indictment of John Rigbye

Surrey Sessions

The jury on behalf of our lady the Queen alleged that John Rigbye, Yeoman, lately of the parish of St. Saviour, in the Borough of Southwark, in the aforesaid County of Surrey, being a natural subject of the Queen and not having God before his eyes, but instigated, seduced and moved by the devil on the first day of May in the fortieth year of the reign of our lady, Elizabeth, by the grace of God, Queen of England, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, was in a prison of our lady the Queen, called the Clynk within the aforesaid parish of St. Saviour in the aforesaid County of Surrey, by a certain Frances Harbert alias Buckley, a priest, claiming to have the power to absolve and persuade the subjects of our lady the Queen from the natural obedience towards the said lady our Queen with the intention of seducing them from the religion established by the authority of the said lady our Queen within her dominions to the Roman Religion, wilfully and traitorously persuaded against and withdrew from the religion established within her dominions, by the said lady our Queen and that the aforesaid John Rigbye was by the aforesaid Frances Harbert, alias Buckley on the first day of May in the fortieth year of the reign of our lady the Queen Elizabeth within the aforesaid parish of St. Saviour in the Borough of Southwark, wilfully and traitorously seduced from his natural obedience to our lady the Queen and at one and the same time and in the same place, was reconciled and wilfully and traitorously promised obedience to the See of Rome, contrary to the form of laws decreed and promulgated in such causes and likewise contrary to the Queen's peace and dignity.

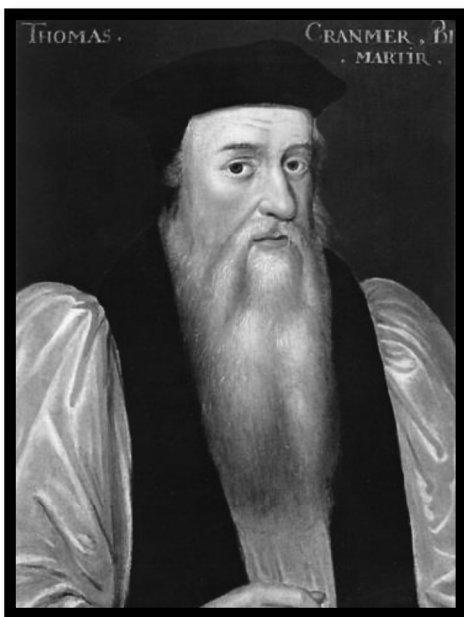
Endorsed: Found guilty to be hanged and drawn: reprieved for six weeks only and then to be hanged and drawn.

On the 21st June 1600 word was brought to him that he was to die that day.

(From the National Archives, displayed at St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Wrightington)

On June 21st 1600 John Rigby was hanged, drawn and quartered in London for the crime of “high treason”. This was committed because, having occasionally worshipped in an Anglican church when young, he had been “reconciled” to the Catholic faith. Furthermore, he had rejected several opportunities to save his life offered by a sympathetic judge and had determined to die for his beliefs. This act, almost four hundred years later, led to John being canonised. That a Christian state could view religious practice as treasonable, and the unwillingness of the martyr to make seemingly minor changes in his religious observance, can only be understood in the setting of a troubled, divided sixteenth century England. In this short work we attempt to put this event into its historical context and then go on to consider the longer term freeing of Catholics from persecution and the significance of this martyrdom today.

Henry VIII’s dispute and final break with Rome after 1533 had arisen because of his attempts to safeguard the Tudor dynasty by producing a male heir. Although religious practice changed comparatively little during his reign, the King replaced the Pope as Supreme Head of the English church. During the reigns of three of his children the nature of religious observance swung widely; severe measures were



Archbishop Thomas Cranmer

taken against those who did not follow the current official line. The reign of Edward VI (1537-53) saw the introduction of increasingly Protestant practices under the guidance of Archbishop Cranmer. The seizure of Church property, begun under Henry VIII, continued. The real presence of God in the sacraments of the bread and the wine was denied and communion in both forms could be taken by the laity rather than just by the priests. After much discussion the Book of Common Prayer was produced in 1552, specifying the liturgy to be used in parish churches. The Act of Uniformity 1551 stated that “...all and every Person and Persons inhabiting within this Realm, or any other of the King’s

Majesty's Dominions, shall diligently and faithfully, having no lawful or reasonable Excuse to be absent, endeavour themselves to resort to their Parish Church or Chapel accustomed, or, upon reasonable Let thereof, to some usual Place where Common Prayer and such Service of God shall be used”. Attendance or conducting a service at a place where the liturgy was not followed would lead to imprisonment.

Despite attempts to exclude her from the throne, Edward's Catholic half-sister, Mary, daughter of Catherine of Aragon, became queen and with determination set about undoing the work of Edward and Cranmer. On her accession in 1553 she issued a proclamation stating that she would not compel her subjects to follow her religion but all the religious legislation of Edward was repealed. Clerical celibacy was restored. Leading reformers such as Hugh Latimer and Thomas Cranmer were imprisoned. In an attempt to ensure the continuation of the Catholic line, Mary married Phillip of Spain in 1554. In that year the English church was returned to Roman jurisdiction and the Heresy Acts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were revived.



Maidstone martyrs' plaque

Fearing the penalties specified by these Acts, many rich Protestants sought exile but those that remained fell victim to the so-called Marian Persecution, giving the Queen the nickname "Bloody Mary". Bishops Latimer and Ridley were burned at the stake as heretics. Cranmer's renunciation of Protestantism was not enough to save him and he too was burned. In all, about two hundred and eighty religious dissenters met the same fate. Mary's failure to produce an heir led to the accession of her Protestant half-sister, Elizabeth, in 1558 and then the oppressors became the oppressed.

A crucial issue was the inter-relationship between religious loyalty and political allegiance. Any monarch could not be sure of the support of a subject who did not conform to his or her version of Christianity. Religious freedom could lead to the emergence of powerful groups intent on overthrowing the established order. The interplay of religion and politics may be seen throughout the reign of Elizabeth at both a domestic and international level.

Despite the urging of France to the contrary the Pope, Paul IV (1555-59), did not protest against Elizabeth's claim to the throne. She lost little time in removing the country from papal control and ending Catholic religious practices. Through the Act of Supremacy in 1558, and her adoption of the title "Supreme Governor of this realm" Elizabeth substituted royal for papal authority in spiritual matters. The Act of Uniformity of the same year replaced the mass and other Roman exercises with a modified version of the Book of Common Prayer dating from the reign of Edward VI.

The prayer-book introduced into the English language memorable phrases such as “from ashes to ashes, dust to dust” and “speak now or for ever hold thy peace”. The effect of the Act of Supremacy was that anyone who maintained papal authority would forfeit all goods and chattels in the case of the first offence. Reoffending would lead a person to face the law of Praemunire. This prohibited the assertion of any papal or foreign authority over that of the monarch, which could, after further offences, lead to charges of high treason and the banning of heirs from inheriting honours and offices. The Act of Uniformity was intended to force on the nation the adoption of the Book of Common Prayer. Any cleric who used any other form of service would lose property and be imprisoned. Those who refused to attend an Anglican service faced a fine of twelve pence on each occasion.

Throughout Elizabeth’s reign the intensity of measures taken against priests and the Catholic Faithful varied according to the degree of threat which they were deemed to pose. Tightening of the screw sometimes followed external challenges, usually from the Pope. It must not be assumed, however, that leading non-Catholics were of one mind as to how to deal with the Catholic population. Within Parliament the Commons sometimes expressed opinions considered too extreme by both the Lords and the monarch. Many compromises had to be made.

Initial relationships with the Papacy had been relatively friendly. Shortly after his consecration Pius IV (1559-65) had written to Elizabeth encouraging her to return the nation to the Catholic fold. His envoy was not allowed to enter the country and his invitation to English bishops to take part in the Council of Trent (1545-63) was rejected. Rumours circulated that the Pope was not entirely opposed to the Book of Common Prayer, and encouraged by this, to avoid fines, many Catholics reluctantly attended Anglican services, though often hearing mass in secret. Papal opposition to Anglican forms of worship became plain in 1562.

Elizabeth’s second parliament met in 1563 after the failure of a plot organised by the nephews of Cardinal Pole to overthrow the government. Ecclesiastical commissioners also reported that the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity were being flouted and the result was the passing of “an Act for the assurance of the queen’s royal power.” This specified that an oath affirming the supremacy of the Queen had to be taken by all holders of significant positions and by all those who attended mass or who assisted in its celebration. Refusal to take the oath would lead to forfeiture of property and imprisonment. A repeat offence would lead to the offender being hanged, drawn and quartered as a traitor. In practice the Act was not implemented fully but it posed a powerful threat.

At a Convocation of the English Church in 1563, under the leadership of Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury, The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion were accepted which set out the key features of the doctrine of the Church of England. They reflected some traditional Roman practice and avoided some of the more extreme Protestant ideas followed on the continent. The breach with Rome was made abundantly clear, The Pope was declared to have no power in England, the “Sacrifices of the Mass” were said to be fables; transubstantiation had no scriptural foundation; the Roman doctrines of purgatory, indulgences, the invocation of saints and the veneration of images and saints were described as foolish and vain inventions and “contrary to the Word of God.”

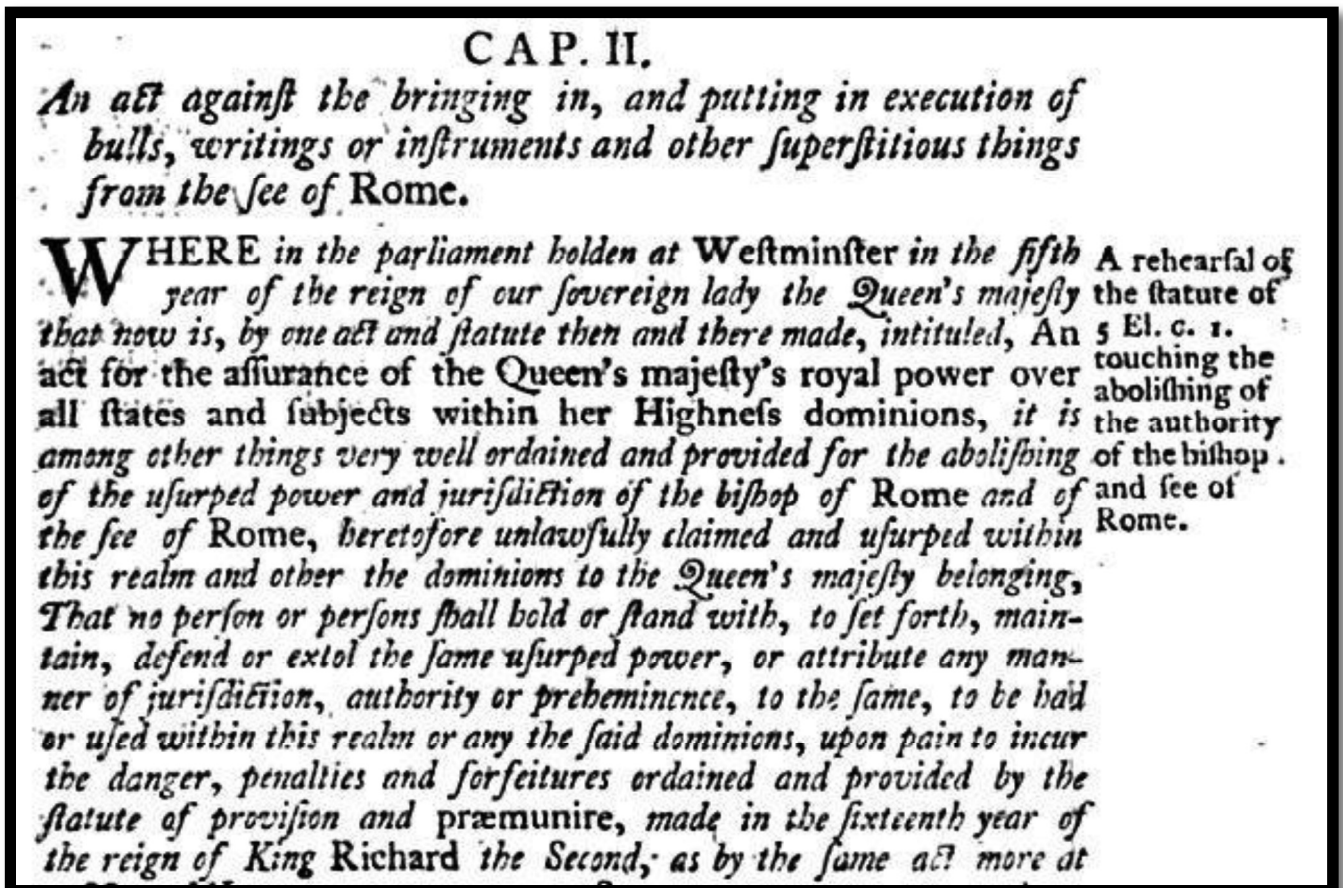
On the accession of Pope Pius V (1566 – 72) the papal attitude towards the Queen changed as it became obvious that there would be no voluntary return of England to Catholicism. The Pope made a strong condemnation of the Book of Common Prayer and two English priests, Sanders and Harding, were empowered to give absolution to all those guilty of schism, that is promoting division within the Church. This was followed up by a papal bull authorising the absolution of those who had been guilty of heresy by conforming to the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity. In 1568, William Allen set up a college or seminary in Douai to train young English men for the priesthood with the intention that these “seminary priests” should return to England to promote the Faith.

The Queen’s position was far from secure. There was a rival claimant to the throne, the Catholic Mary Queen of Scots, and in 1569, in her support, the Northern Rising occurred under the leadership of the Earls of Westmorland and Northumberland. This was put down with difficulty by Elizabeth’s forces. The papal response in 1570 was to issue a bull, “Regnans in Excelsis” excommunicating Elizabeth. The Pope’s displeasure and his reaction to events in England may be seen in the following extracts from the Bull:-

“Elizabeth, the pretended queen of England...having usurped the place of supreme head of the Church of England.....has reduced this same kingdom to a miserable ruin. She has.....oppressed the followers of the Catholic faith, instituted false preachers and ministers of impiety, abolished the sacrifice of the mass, prayers, fasts, celibacy and Catholic ceremonies.....She has dared to eject bishops, rectors of churches and other Catholic priests from their churches and benefices.....She has forced the people to come to terms with her wicked laws, to abjure the authority and obedience of the pope of Rome. She has thrown Catholic prelates and parsons into prison where many have miserably ended their lives...Therefore we declare the aforesaid Elizabeth to be a heretic and her to have incurred the sentence of excommunication and to be cut off from the unity of the body of Christ.”

The Bull goes on to deny “the pretended queen” the right to her crown and to absolve all her peoples from any sworn oaths of fealty and obedience. Those that persisted in following her commands should also consider themselves excommunicated. To people who accepted the reality of eternal damnation this was a dreadful penalty. Politically it was practically an instruction to rebel. It was in this year that John Rigby was born.

Royal reaction was both predictable and necessary. Statues were quickly passed making it high treason to affirm that the queen had no right to the crown or to declare her a heretic.

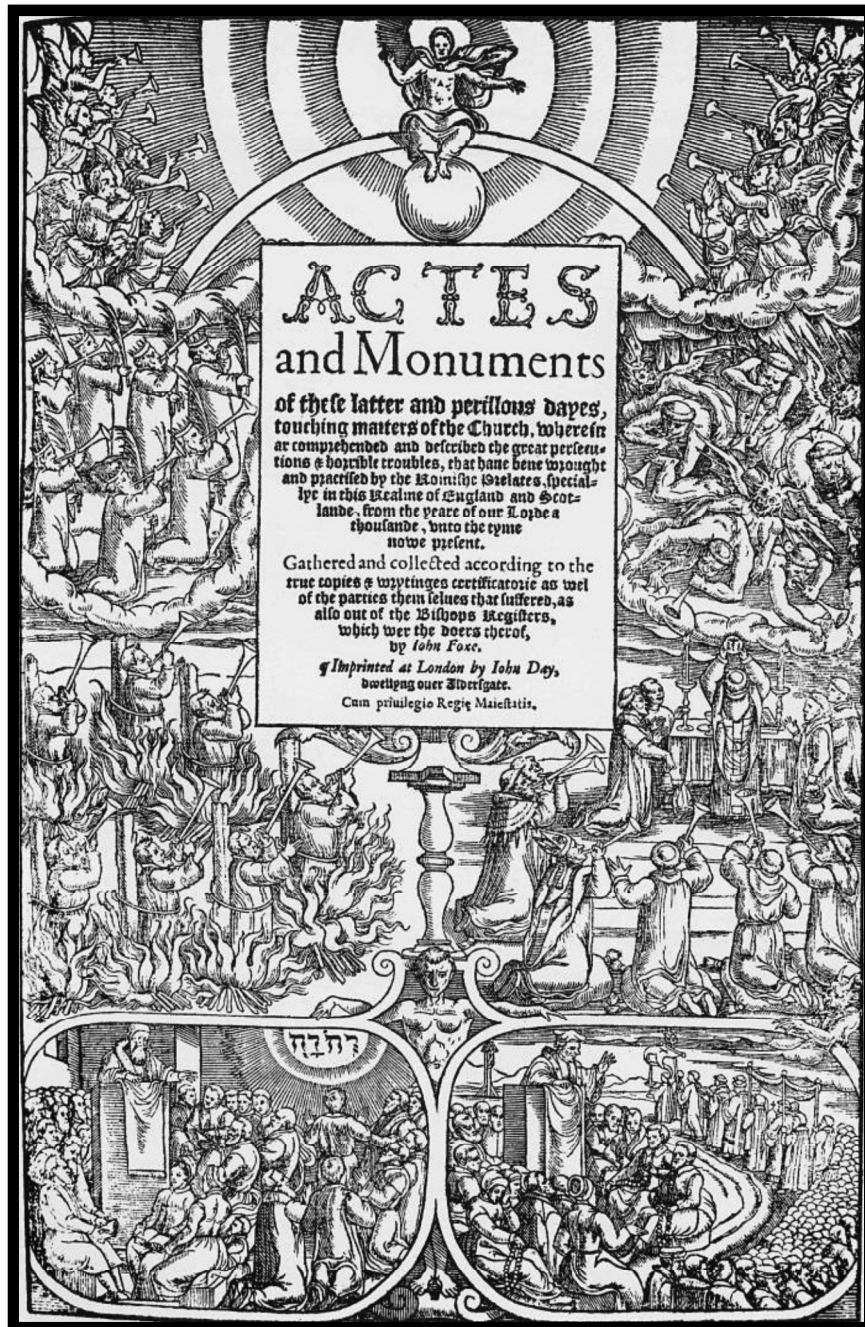


Similarly it was high treason to seek to put into effect or publish any papal bull. To counter the efforts of the seminary priests in trying to win back those who had agreed to attend the Anglican services, there was passed the Statute of Persuasion, (23 Eliz. C1) making it high treason for a priest to reconcile, and for a layman to be reconciled “from the religion now by the Queen’s authoritie established within her highness’s dominions to the Romish Religion.” It was on the basis of this statute that John Rigby was later to be put to death.

Penalties were imposed on those who brought into the country articles blessed by the Pope and on people leaving the country for lengthy periods without royal

approval. Fines and imprisonment for non-attendance at Anglican services or hearing the mass were increased. 1585 saw the passing of the “Act against Jesuits, Seminary priests and other such like disobedient persons”. This made it high treason for any Jesuit or seminary priest to be in England and a felony for anyone to harbour or relieve them. It was under the terms of this act that most of the English martyrs were executed during and after Elizabeth’s reign.

Meanwhile the attitude of the English population towards Catholics and Catholicism was being greatly influenced by a highly significant book, “Actes and Monuments”, generally known as “Foxe’s Book of Martyrs”.



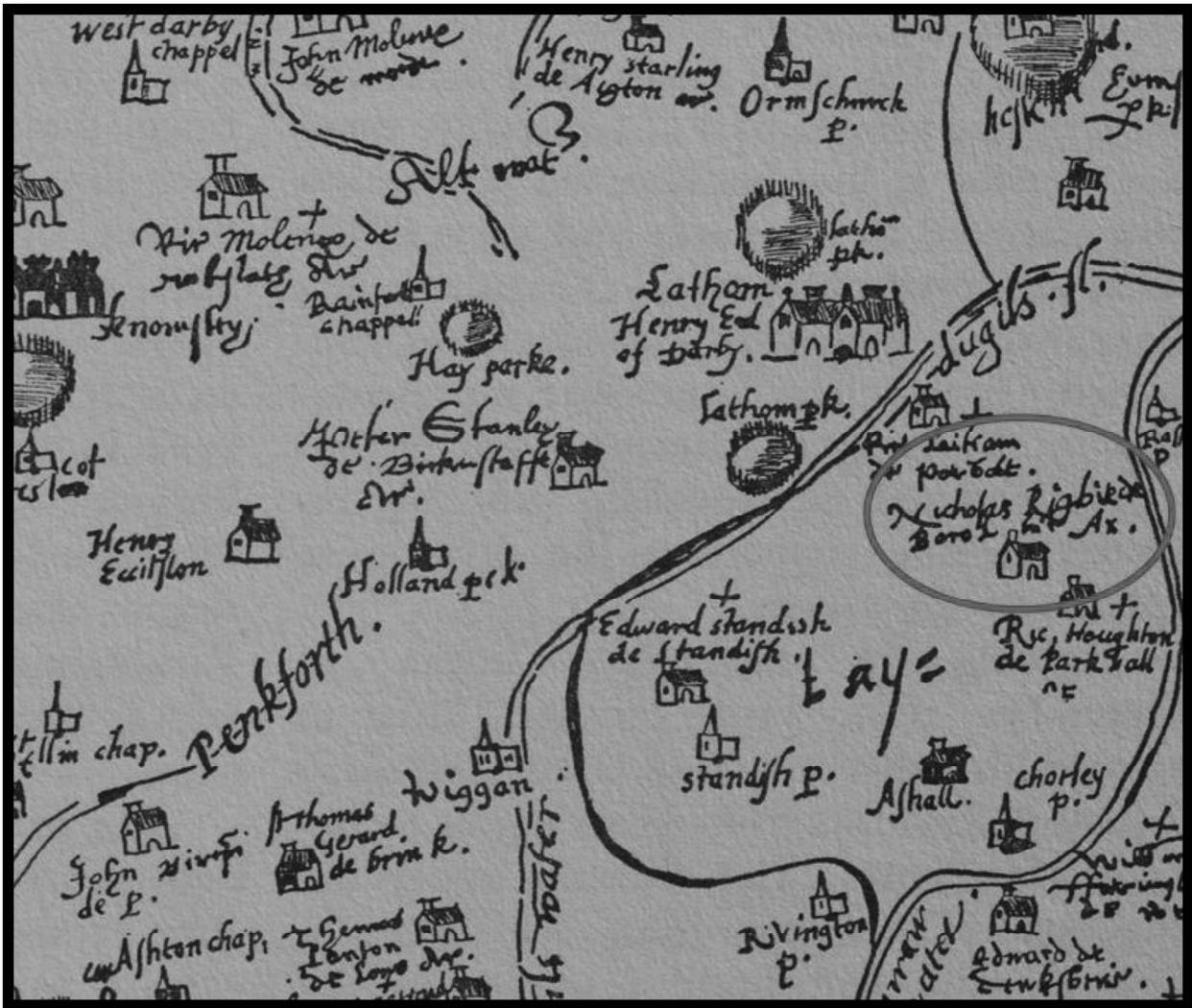
The first English edition appeared in 1563, published by John Day, which ran to almost 1,800 pages. John Foxe covered the history of those who had died for their faith from the early Christian martyrs, through the medieval period, ending with graphic illustrated accounts of those who had fallen victim to Marian persecution. By 1596 it had grown in size and it had reached its fifth edition. Far from being an unbiased text, it was a work of anti-Catholic propaganda. Following a Convocation order in 1571, this tome was chained beside the Great Bible, authorised by Henry VIII, in cathedrals and many churches. Selected readings were made from the pulpit and treated almost as Scripture. Some historians argue that it developed the concept of an English nation threatened by foreign enemies.



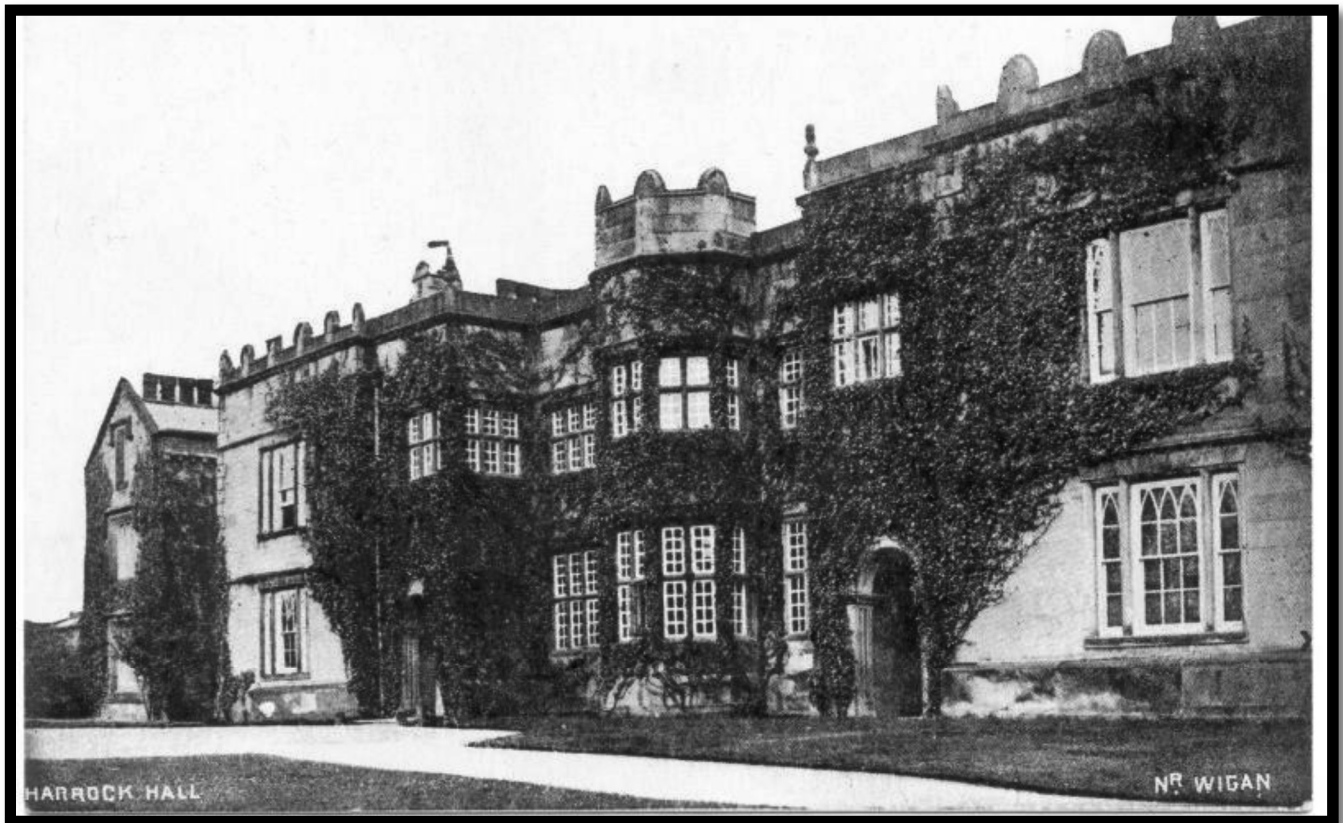
Protestant England faced its greatest challenge in the form of the Spanish Armada in 1588. Relations between Catholic Spain and Protestant England were always going to be difficult but problems were exacerbated by the piratical activities of English seamen and English support for Protestant rebels in the Low Countries. Elizabeth's order to execute her Catholic rival, Mary Queen of Scots, outraged Catholic Europe. The executed queen had left her claim to the English throne to Phillip II of Spain. Papal authority had been given to his plans to invade England and oust the Queen. In the event, the destruction of the invasion fleet boosted English national pride,

strengthened Elizabeth's support and led to Catholicism being associated with a lack of patriotism.

Although Elizabeth's persecution of Catholics applied throughout the country, in Lancashire it provoked the greatest opposition since this was the most Catholic of the English counties. Many members of the gentry, if not most, were Catholic and they managed to practise their faith since the royal officials supposed to implement quite draconian measures were often sympathetic to their views. The tenants of these landowners too were encouraged to maintain the faith of their ancestors. Elizabeth's ministers were aware of the potential danger lurking in Lancashire and, indeed, it was feared that the Lancashire coast could be a springboard for Spanish invasion. In the possession of William Cecil, Lord Burghley, Elizabeth's chief minister, was a map of Lancashire dating from about 1590. This shows the dwellings of the chief landowners of the county. Interestingly, for our purpose, this was annotated by Lord Burghley who placed a **X** against the houses of noted Catholic sympathisers. Significantly one of those marked was that of Nicholas Rigbie, father of John.



John Rigby is believed to have been born in 1570. His father one of a long succession of Nicholas Rigbys, who could trace their ancestry to the early Plantagenet kings. His mother Mary, the daughter of Oliver Breres of Preston, was also from a Catholic family. The family home, Harrock Hall, was in the parish of Eccleston, Lancashire and was fairly typical of that owned by the Lancashire gentry. The present Hall was probably rebuilt shortly after John Rigby's time.



All that is known about John Rigby is contained in a book produced a year after his martyrdom written by "T.W, a Seminary Priest" and called "A Relation of Sixtene Martyrs glorified in England in twelve monethes." Printed at Douai, the first half of the book is taken up with the story of John. Fascinatingly, the author wrote an introduction and then included John's own narrative of his trial written when he was in prison awaiting execution. It is now known that "TW" was Dr. Thomas Worthington, the President of Douai College, distantly related to John. He himself had worked as a priest in the reign of Elizabeth and had been banished in 1585 after a period of six months imprisonment in the Tower. He then went on to teach at Douai to prepare young men for the English mission. All subsequent authors have drawn on this text when discussing the life and death of John, for example Bishop Challoner in his 1741 work "Memoirs of Missionary Priests and other Catholics of Both Sexes that have Suffered Death in England on Religious Accounts." The present authors have used the version contained within a 1928 text entitled "A Lancashire Man. The Martyrdom of John Rigby at Southwark, A.D. 1600.", edited by C.A. Newdigate S.J..

In his Introduction, Thomas Worthington explains how John fell foul of the law. As one of the younger sons of Nicholas Rigby, he was brought up in the Faith and learned some Latin. Spending part of his youth in his father's house; sometimes, under threat of legal penalty, he attended Anglican services, perhaps at Standish church or Douglas Chapel. Later he regretted having done so and was, as he put it, "reconciled to God" by a Catholic priest. He was pleased that he had persuaded his own father return to Catholicism in his old age.

He entered the service of Sir Edmund Huddleston, a Catholic of Sawston Hall Cambridge, where apparently he worked as a steward.





He was sent by his master on business to Sir Richard Martin, Alderman of London. He was a goldsmith, Master of the Mint and former Lord Mayor, clearly a person of power and influence. For some reason Sir Richard “conceived offence and displeasure against him” and awaited an opportunity to be revenged which duly came.

Mistress Fortescue, a Catholic widow and daughter of Sir Edmund, was summoned to the Sessions at Newgate “for causes of Religion”, probably her non-attendance at Anglican services. Unknown to the authorities, she had been harbouring a priest and Jesuit, Father Gerard. She was sick and unable to appear and so had to send someone to testify for her in court. John Rigby was prepared to do this. He went to the Sessions and swore that she was sick and unable to attend. Sir Richard Martin, one of those on the Bench began “with choler to examine him of his own faith and religion.” Despite defending himself with resolution and courage in a series of court appearances he was convicted, imprisoned and later executed for treason.

John Rigby’s Narrative begins with “A COPY OF MY EXAMINATION, the 14th of February, 1600 taken before my Lord Mayor of London, Mr. Recorder, Sir Richard Martin, Justice Dale with others.” The section below combines selected extracts from the Narrative and summaries of the document. Direct quotations from John’s text are shown in italics.

Suddenly spoke Sir Richard Martin when about to swear on the Bible “What are you that will swear? A papist?”

To whom, taking my hand back, I answered “I am a man.”

“But what more?” saith he.

At which his reply, not being able to forbear laughter, I said: "Sir, what can I be more than a man?"

He then said: "Art thou a Papist, a Protestant, a Puritan or what Religion are thou of?"

Then John, having said that he had never been to the Church and never received Communion because he did not consider it to be a sacrament, was told that he was a "damnable creature".

He explained that had been brought up Catholicly and had gone back to this religion in adulthood.

"What", said Justice Dale, "wilt thou take the oath of Supremacy?" – "Sir", said I, "Now you seek my blood. I now not all that belongs to that oath. There be many can answer you better than I. I will not swear."

"And if the Pope should send in forces to invade this Realm, whose part would you then take, the Queen's or the Pope's?" – I answered, "The Queen's, my Lord."

"And if he should come to settle the Catholic Religion (as you term it), whose part would you then take?" – "Good my Lord, that concerns my life. I will not answer it."

He was then asked whether he was a priest, a friar, or taken religious orders to which he replied:- *"No more than professed myself, by God's grace, to live and die in the Catholic Church."*

He was then checked by a barber to see if he was bald, which presumably would show that he had been tonsured, the Court making him wait sitting on a hot stone where the irons were heating to brand felons. The stone burned through his hose and burnt his legs. His hair was cut close to the head and John paid the barber three pence.

Then my Lord called me again "How say you, will you yet go to Church?" – I answered, "No, my Lord, this hath not any whit daunted me."

He was asked his name and where he lived. Several responses brought laughter to the Court. At last the Lord Mayor commanded the keeper to take him into custody.

The Narrative continues dealing with his examination the following day before the Lord Chief Justice, the fearsome Sir John Popham. He was asked his name, where he was from and he explained that he was in service with Mistress Fortescue.

"What religion were you of, when you came to her?" "In heart a Catholic, my Lord."

"But you went to Church?", said he. "I did, my Lord, sometimes, but always intended by God's grace to become a Catholic."....

"Will you not go to Church?" "No, my Lord."

"You went to the Church once; then can you not be, as you say, a Catholic, but you must be reconciled. How say you then, were you reconciled or no?"

John was uncertain as how to respond to this, having some knowledge of the dangers which an answer could pose under the Statute of Persuasion. He said that he was

reconciled by Mr. Buckley who had been executed. This was the Ven. John Jones, alias Buckley, O.F.M., a fellow-labourer with Fr. John Gerard who was a friend of the Huddleston family. John Gerard had probably been the chief influence on John Rigby in his decision to return to the Catholic faith.

Evidence was taken down. The Judge commanded the keeper to take him and put him in chains John said *"I would not change my chain, for my Lord Mayor his great chain."* He gave the jailer sixpence. He was removed to the county jail, the White Lion in Southwark, where he remained until the 3rd March.

On Wednesday 3rd March, before the Sessions, he was called by Justice Gawdy to see him in the Judges' lodging. The Judge said that he had been told that he was sorry for his previous answers and he was willing to become a good subject and go to Church. *"How say you, will you go to Church now?"*

John replied *"I assure you my Lord, I am a true subject, and obedient to her Majesty and her laws, in anything which may not hurt my conscience. But to say that I will go to Church, I never did, nor never will...."*

Then spoke Justice Dale, a Justice of the Peace: "Thou art a cogging, cozening fellow, and gettest thy living no man knoweth how, by cogging and lying."

"Sir," said I, "for my getting I need not much to brag of it, and for my lying and cogging you speak of, I would gladly you should know, that the ancestors of the house from whence I came were gentlemen five hundred years before your grandfather was Justice." And so I stopped his mouth.

He was sent back to prison. On the following day, he went again to the Sessions and the Indictment was read to him. He answered its principal points. As to the charge of being reconciled to Catholicism he agreed that he was, but believed that it was lawful to be so.

He argued that he was not reconciled from obedience to Her Majesty or from his religion since he was never of any other religion even though on occasion he went to Church unwillingly. He asked whether the statute made it illegal to be reconciled to God.

He explained that his reconciliation was by a priest who was in the Clink prison and who was free to have visitors. The judges said that if the reconciliation was brought about by a Romish priest, this was treasonable.

Then said Justice Gawdy, "Good Rigby, I pray you think not in any sort I go about to seek your death, Her Majesty and her laws be merciful. If you will yet conform yourself and say here before the Jury go forth that you will go to Church and submit yourself, we will proceed no further."

“My Lord”, said I, “if that be all the offence I have committed, as I know it is; and if there be no other way but going to Church to help it, I would not wish your lordships to think I have (as I hope) risen thus many steps towards heaven, and now will wilfully let my foot slip and fall into the bottomless pit of hell. I hope in Jesus, He will strengthen me rather to suffer a thousand deaths if I had so many lives to lose. Let your law proceed.”

Then said the Judge to the Jury. “You must consider of it, you see what is said; you cannot but find it treason by the Law.

John asked the judge to command silence in court so that he could hear the verdict. When this was delivered, he could not hear and asked the foreman to speak up. After he said “Guilty” John said in a loud voice *“Laus tibi, Domine, Rex eternae gloriae”*.

Justice Gawdy said “What canst thou say for thyself, wherefore thou shouldst not have judgment of death?”

John answered by saying *“if that which before I said will not serve, I can say no more.”*

“Good Rigby”, said he, “think not that I seek your death. Will you yet go to Church?”

“No my Lord.”

“Why then”, said he, “judgment must pass”.

“I humbly thank your Lordship for your great pains; and freely forgive your Lordship and this poor Jury and all other persecutors in this cause whosoever.”

“Well said,” saith he, “indeed you show your charity.”

Dr Worthington’s then continues the account, covering the period until the date of execution. John was held in the White Lion prison after 4th March till early June. On the 19th June, he was brought again to court, this time before Justice Kingsmill and he was asked again whether he would go to church. Again he refused and then the judge said *“Then thou must needs die for longer reprieve thou canst not have.”* John is reported to have said *“My Lord, that is the thing which I desire and look for, but I think myself far unworthy to die for so good a cause.”*

The judge noticed that John was not in irons and he rebuked and fined the keeper for not doing his duty. John was later brought back to court in shackles. These, however, despite the best efforts of the jailer, kept falling off which greatly unnerved the jailer and led most who saw it to consider it miraculous.

It appears that John’s name had twice been put on the calendar of executions only to be removed by Justice Gawdy. However, this could not continue indefinitely. On the day of execution the Minister of Saint George’s Church came to see him but John rejected his services. Between 5 and 6 p.m., Mr Cheeke, one of the undersheriff’s officers, came for him. He said farewell to his fellow prisoners who knelt before him and he gave them a kiss of peace. He sat on the hurdle on which to be dragged to the

place of execution, St. Thomas Waterings, which was the execution place for London south of the Thames. On the way he encountered the Earl of Rutland and Captain Whitlock. He was asked who he was and why he was being taken to be executed. The Captain asked whether he was married to which John is reported to have said, "No Sir, I am a bachelor and more than that I am a maid." Captain said "I pray God send thee the Kingdom of Heaven and that thou mayest do well. I desire thee, pray for me." Taken from the hurdle to the execution cart, he knelt and said the Pater Noster, Ave Maria, Credo and Confiteor until he came to the words "the holy Apostles St. Peter and St. Paul". Worthington reports that "the ruder people complained that he prayed to the saints and so was not allowed to continue". He gave the executioner an angel of gold and his clothes. Before a large crowd, he made the sign of the Cross and prayed very affectionately for the Queen. The Under-Sheriff's Deputy asked him what traitors he knew in England. When he replied "None" the deputy gave instructions to drive away the cart. He was hanged briefly and cut down but landed on his feet. He was seized by the butchers and a spectator put his foot on John's throat. He was dismembered, disembowelled and beheaded; his quarters were then disposed of in various places in Southwark.

In an Epilogue Newdigate says that Father Garnet, the Superior of the English Mission of the Society of Jesus, wrote to the Father-General from London on March 11th 1601:-

"Last year in the month of June was martyred a noble youth named John Rigby. He had a great desire to be admitted to the Society as a laybrother. As your Paternity had not authorised me to receive any here as laybrothers I sent word to him to maintain his desire and that in due time it would be considered. He was then under sentence of death but was reprieved for some little time; and then at short notice executed. Had he had notice of his death he would have been more urgent for admission; for when he still had opportunity to make his escape from prison, he refused on any account to give up his hope for martyrdom unless he might have assurance of being accepted by the Society.... He was condemned simply for having been reconciled to our Holy Mother the Roman Church, although in truth he had never been out of it, and was a saint in life and death."

Queen Elizabeth's death did not improve the position of Catholics. Hostility to Catholicism increased because of the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 and the population became increasingly divided with religious beliefs ranging from Catholicism to extreme Puritanism. Matters became even worse during the reign of Charles I, (1625-49). His having a Catholic wife and his support of high Anglicanism roused the fury of Puritans. Lancashire showed a marked contrast between Catholic rural areas and the growing urban centres which were hotbeds of Puritanism. In 1628, Edmund

Arrowsmith, originating from Ashton, about ten miles from John Rigby's family home, was also executed and, like John, later canonised. The massacre of Irish Protestants by Catholics in 1641 was a major factor leading to the Civil War in which, ultimately, the monarchy came to rely on Catholic support. Records show that Nicholas Rigby of Harrock held a captaincy in the parliamentary army so the family probably had changed its religious allegiance. After the execution of Charles I, under the Commonwealth, the 1650 "Act for Relief of Religious People" gave Catholics greater freedom of religion that they had experienced for over ninety years. Oliver Cromwell is notorious for his repression of Irish Catholicism but "The Great Instrument of Government" (December 1653) stipulated that:-

"..such as profess faith in God by Jesus Christ (though differing in judgment from the doctrine, worship or discipline publicly held forth) shall not be restrained from, but shall be protected in, the profession of the Faith, and exercise of their religion; so long as they abuse not this liberty to the civil injury of others and to the actual disturbance of the public peace on their parts."

The restoration of the monarchy under Charles II in 1660 did no favour to Catholics. The key problem which they faced was that they were seen as ultimately having a greater loyalty to the Pope than to the monarch. The Monument to the Great Fire of London, 1666, had for almost two centuries a plaque ascribing it to a "Popish frenzy". The Popish Plot, fabricated by Titus Oates in 1678, was supposed to involve plans by the Jesuits to take over the whole country. They were to replace the King with his Catholic brother, James, and massacre Protestants. In Ireland Oliver Plunkett, the Catholic Archbishop of Armagh, whose work had been generally tolerated, was accused of plotting a French invasion. He was found guilty of treason and in 1681 was the last of the Catholic martyrs when he met his death at Tyburn. The reign of the Catholic James II (1685-88), who attempted to establish religious tolerance for his people, was cut short by the Glorious Revolution of 1688 after the birth of an heir who would have perpetuated Catholic rule. Anti-Catholic measures were increased. The Popery Act of 1698 provided for a bounty to be paid to anyone apprehending a "Popish Bishop, Priest or Jesuite". A Catholic priest holding a mass or someone running a Catholic school could be liable for "perpetual imprisonment." The Act of Settlement, 1701, stated that the heir to the throne could not be a papist and anyone marrying a papist would be excluded from the throne. This latter clause was only repealed in 2013.

Steps were taken to offer the throne to James II's son, James Francis Edward (The Old Pretender) on condition that he renounced Catholicism. This he refused to do. He and his son, Charles Edward both led rebellions against the Hanoverian kings, that of 1745 posing a particular threat.

THE
Protestant Tutor,
Instructing YOUTH, and Others,
In the Compleat Method of
Spelling, Reading, and Writing
True English :

Also, Discovering to them the Notorious
ERRORS, Damnable DOCTRINES,
and Cruel MASSACRES,
OF THE
Bloody Papists ;

Which ENGLAND may Expect from a
Popish Successor.

With Instructions for Grounding them in the
True Protestant Religion.

To which is Added,
The Preamble to the P A T E N T for Crea-
ting the Electoral Prince of HANNOVER, a
Peer of this Realm, as Duke of CAMBRIDGE :
With several other Remarkable Matters .

London, Printed and Sold by *B. Harris*, at the *Golden-Boar's-Head* in *Grace-church-street*. 1713.

Only towards the end of the eighteenth century did the position of Catholics improve. After the death of The Old Pretender in 1766 Pope Clement XIII recognised the legitimacy of the rule of George III. The Papists Act of 1778 removed many restrictions from Catholics who were prepared to swear an oath of loyalty to the monarch and who were prepared to deny the concept that excommunicated princes could be murdered. This, however, triggered the Gordon Riots in which a mob of 50,000 caused tumult in London until put down by the military.

The French Revolution brought some sympathy to its Catholic victims. In England, Catholic places of worship were tolerated and Catholics were no longer required to swear the Oath of Loyalty. It was only in 1829, however, that most of the remaining penalties on Catholics were removed in the Roman Catholic Relief Act. This stated:-
“Whereas by various Acts of Parliament, certain Restraints and Disabilities are imposed on the Roman Catholic subjects of His Majesty, to which other subjects of His Majesty are not liable: and whereas it is expedient that such restraints and disabilities shall be from henceforth discontinued: and whereas by various Acts certain Oaths and certain Declarations, commonly called the Declaration against Transubstantiation, and the Invocation of Saints, and the Sacrifice of the Mass, as practised in the Church of Rome, are or may be required to be taken, made and subscribed by the subjects of His Majesty, as qualifications for sitting and voting in Parliament, and for the enjoyment of certain offices, franchises, and civil rights; Be it Enacted by The King’s most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the Authority of the same, that from and after the commencement of this Act, all such parts of the said Acts as require the said Declarations, or either of them, to be made or subscribed by any of His Majesty’s Subjects as a qualification for sitting and voting in Parliament, or for the exercise or enjoyment of any office, franchise, or civil right, be and the same are (save as hereinafter provided and excepted) hereby repealed....”

The Catholic Church did prove attractive to a number of high-Anglicans who were part of the Oxford Movement. In 1845 John Henry Newman was accepted into the Catholic church, later becoming a cardinal. Anti-Catholic sentiment did increase with the influx of Irish migrants after the Potato Famine of the 1840s. In 1850, Catholic dioceses were re-established in Britain. The 1871 Universities Tests Act opened up the Universities to students of all religions. In 1880, St Joseph’s College, Upholland was built to provide priests for the half million Catholics living in the dioceses of Liverpool and Salford. It would seem, therefore that all that John Rigby and his fellow martyrs had desired had eventually been achieved. The struggle had, however, taken almost three centuries.

Indicative of the restored position of Catholicism in England was the start of work on Westminster Cathedral in 1895. The Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, Herbert Vaughan, sought to emphasise the importance of this new edifice by arranging for the relics of St. Edmund, one-time patron saint of England, to be returned from St. Sermin, Toulouse. The elaborate ceremonial produced an outcry in a hostile press with much criticism of the veneration of relics which scholars argued, in any case, could not be those of the saint. In the event, matters descended into farce when the Cardinal accepted that argument they were not genuine. However by 1910 Dom Bede Camm, in "Forgotten Shrines", felt able to write:-

"Englishmen of all creeds have grown more sympathetic of late, as they have come to know something of the true story of that long persecution which made their Catholic fellow countrymen outlaws in their own land, and turned their most treasured religious convictions into crime against the State. We are beginning to understand the extraordinary loyalty of these Recusants, so faithful to the sovereign who persecuted them just because they were so true to the religion of their fathers."

Catholic emancipation did not mean that there had been any weakening of the central tenets of the Faith or any acceptance of the practices of the Anglican Church. The Foreword to Newdigate's book was written by the Archbishop of Liverpool, Frederick Keating, who was to die in the year it was published. He personified traditional views. He had said in the 1920s that the staff recruited to the expanded college at Upholland, "one of the glories of Catholicism in England", were to be "unsullied by liberalism" and the views they expressed were to be in total conformity to those of Rome as conveyed through the Hierarchy. The following section of his Foreword is a superb statement of the fundamental differences then seen between Catholicism and Anglicanism:-

"The modern reader will observe how little English Catholics have moved from the position originally assumed against the Anglican Schism. Then, as now, they repudiated all aspersions on their loyalty as a wicked calumny. Then, as now, Catholicism was recognised as one form of religion, Protestantism, however disguised, as another. Then, as now, the Anglican Prayer-book, for all its Catholic pretensions, was regarded as a Protestant service book. Then, as now, an Anglican clergyman was "a minister" with no claim to the priestly character, and the Anglican Eucharist "a bare commemoration" having nothing in common with the Mass. Clear as noonday the unquestionable truth stands out that our Faith to-day is the "Faith of our fathers, living still, in spite of dungeon, fire, and sword." May the prayers of the Ven. John Rigby and our other martyrs win our country back to Catholic unity."

✠ Frederick William
Archbishop of Liverpool.

The description of John Rigby as “Venerable” should be noted. As early as 1642, the first steps were taken towards canonisation of the English martyrs but the process was suspended, partly because of the opposition likely to be faced in the wider community and partly because of the difficulties in obtaining the necessary evidence. The “Unam Sanctam Catholicam” website sets out the initial problems faced. To be accepted as a “martyr” it has to be established beyond any doubt that a person was directly put to death, and that this death was suffered on account of some point of the Faith. Meeting the criteria can be surprisingly demanding in situations where no documentary evidence was kept of the martyrdom, or when much time has elapsed. Both problems existed in the cases of many of those who died during the English Reformation. There is, however, the possibility of “equipollent evidence”, that is evidence which is equally strong. This could be proof of a cult going back at least one hundred years prior to the opening of the martyr's Cause. This proof is usually local feasts, records of homilies in praise of martyrs, hymns and sometimes architectural, in the form of shrines and art. Such was the persecution faced by Catholics in England that even such alternative evidence was hard to find.

Various attempts were made in 1866, 1871, 1874, and 1880 to get around this problem but, by 1881, almost a quarter of the English martyrs were still classed as “dilati”, or unrecognised, and even those cases which were not seemed stalled. Then, in 1880, the Promotor Fidei (Devil's Advocate) in the causes of the English martyrs was made aware of some extraordinary evidence of cult (equipollent evidence) by the Rector of the English College, Rome. Mgr. Henry O'Callaghan called attention to the existence in the College of a series of frescoes depicting the sufferings of the English martyrs painted between 1580 and 1582 by the Italian artist Nicholas Ciciniani. The frescoes depict traditional English martyrs such as St. Dunstan and St. Thomas Becket, but they also include depictions of the Reformation-era martyrs such as More, Fisher and many others. There was an inscription on the frescoes which read, "Martyr saints, who in ancient or more recent times of persecution have suffered in England for Christ and for the defence of the Catholic faith." The titles "saint" and "blessed" appear on many of the depictions. Furthermore, contemporary letters were discovered describing the frescoes as being made at the request of Pope Gregory XIII (1572-1585). This was extremely strong evidence of proof of cult, going back almost to the times of the martyrdoms, and showed papal approval. The Promotor Fidei recommended proceeding with the causes and the Sacred Congregation agreed.



On December 9th 1886, Leo XIII signed the commission for the introduction of the cause of two hundred and sixty one martyrs, officially establishing them as venerables. Sixty three of the martyrs were beatified in 1886, the best known being Thomas More and John Fisher. Further investigations were begun in 1923 leading to one hundred and thirty six beatifications of victims of religious persecution. C.A. Newdigate in his January 1928 Preface to "A Lancashire Man. The Martyrdom of John Rigby" states "While I write, the cause of his beatification is before the Sacred Congregation of Rites in Rome. Before long, please God, we shall be venerating him as the Blessed John Rigby." He was actually beatified, together with other martyrs, by Pope Pius XI on December 15th 1929. He had been venerated a week earlier.

John Fisher and Thomas More were canonised in 1935. The Hierarchy of England and Wales then promoted the canonisation of a limited group of the martyrs. After patient work, the list of forty martyrs was presented to the Holy See on December 1st, 1960. The selection was based on achieving a spread of social status, religious rank, geographical location and the extent of popular devotion. The list included the Blessed John Rigby. Sufficient data were collected about them to induce the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal William Godfrey, to send a description of twenty four seemingly miraculous cases to the Sacred Congregation. Two special cases were selected with one in particular standing out. This was the cure of a young

mother affected with a malignant tumour in the left scapula; a cure which the Medical Council had judged gradual, perfect, constant and unaccountable on the natural plane. Pope Paul VI confirmed that this cure had been brought about by God at the intercession of the Forty Blessed Martyrs of England and Wales and on the strength of this one miracle he gave permission for the whole group to be recognised as saints. Thus, on 25th October, 1970 John Rigby came to be canonised. Paolo Molinari, S.J., the Jesuit Postulator General who had been responsible for carrying out the research prior to canonisation, wrote:-

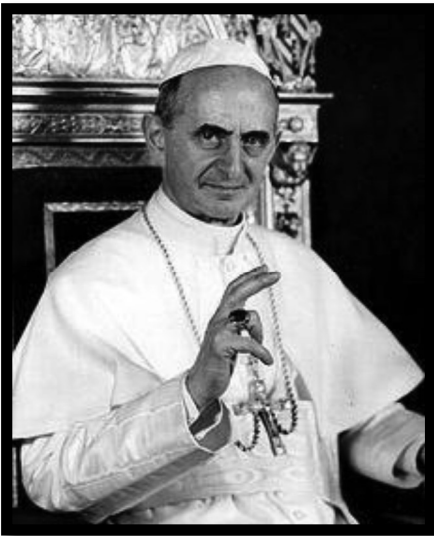
“And this is just what the Church intends to stress with their Canonisation. It was and is her intention to hold up to the admiration not only of Catholics, but of all men, the example of persons unconditionally loyal to Christ and to their conscience to the extent of being ready to shed their blood for that reason. Owing to their living faith in Christ, their personal attachment to Him, their deep sharing of His life and principles, these persons gave a clear demonstration of their authentically Christian charity for men, also when—on the scaffold—they prayed not only for those who shared their religious convictions, but also for all their fellow-countrymen, and in particular for the Head of the State and even for their executioners.”

In November 1969 the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Michael Ramsey, had expressed his apprehension that this canonisation might rekindle animosity harmful to the ecumenical movement which had become of major concern to the Christian churches, especially after the visit of Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, to Pope John XXIII in 1960, the first such meeting for almost five hundred years. In a Memorandum published in “The Tablet” of 29th November, 1969 Archbishop Ramsey explained:-

“I have been asked a number of times what I think would be the consequences for ecumenical work of the proposed canonisation. I am increasingly convinced that canonisation would be harmful to the ecumenical cause in England.....In England our past history creates inevitable difficulties for the ecumenical progress.....There is not only the prejudice of ultra-Protestant people but there is also the “siege mentality” which is still apt to possess Roman Catholics in England....The “siege mentality” is, I believe, bound up psychologically with a kind of martyrdom complex deeply, and of course intelligibly, rooted in history. My fear is that devotion to the English Martyrs on either side has been and still is a focus for this kind of mentality in its polemical form.I have read the “Manifesto for Martyrs’ Sunday 1965” and also the “Biblical Service for the Feast of the Martyrs of England and Wales”While some ecumenical language is used, the final outcome is that the Martyrs are to be invoked so that with the aid of their prayers for non-Roman Catholic Christians England may be brought within the Roman obedience. I cannot therefore help thinking that the proposed

canonisation will in the historical circumstances of England encourage on both sides the kind of emotions of which we are anxious to be rid.”

This anxiety, although shared by some Anglicans and Catholics, was not widespread. Right from the first announcement of the Re-opening of the Cause of the 40 Martyrs, decreed by Pope John XXIII in 1961, the Hierarchy of England and Wales let it be clearly understood that nothing was further from the intentions of the Bishops than to stir up bad feelings and quarrels of the past. The Catholic Herald of 23rd October 1970 reported that Archbishop Beck of Liverpool, in a Pastoral Letter, said the Catholics’ pride in the canonisation of the forty martyrs did not mean any blame was placed on other Christians and it was not a threat or hindrance to the growth of genuine ecumenism.



Indeed in his homily on 25th October 1970 Pope Paul VI greeted all those assembled for the canonisation, including the representative of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rev. Dr. Harry Smythe. He then said:-

“May the blood of these Martyrs be able to heal the great wound inflicted upon God’s Church by reason of the separation of the Anglican Church from the Catholic Church. Is it not one – these Martyrs say to us – the Church founded by Christ?

Is not this their witness? Their devotion to their nation gives us the assurance that on the day when – God willing – the unity of the faith and of Christian life is restored, no offence will be inflicted on the

honour and sovereignty of a great country such as England. There will be no seeking to lessen the legitimate prestige and worthy patrimony of piety and usage proper to the Anglican Church when the Roman 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 of faith, a communion of priesthood and of rule, a communion of the Saints in the freedom and love of the Spirit of Jesus.

Perhaps We shall have to go on, waiting and watching in prayer, in order to deserve that blessed day. But already We are strengthened in this hope by the heavenly friendship of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales who are canonised today. Amen.”

Historically this statement was of huge significance since many of the martyrs had died precisely because the two churches were not one. Not all Christians were convinced by these developments. Cardinal Willebrands had given an important

address on ecumenism in the Anglican cathedral in Liverpool on 21st January, 1970, an event disrupted by followers of the Rev. Ian Paisley shouting “No Popery here!”. Complex problems had to be overcome in the promotion of Christian unity, including the nature of faith, salvation and the significance of the Eucharist. The Catholic Church was prepared to embrace change, as shown by the activities of the Second Vatican Council. The impact of the decisions made by this body has been so fundamental as to lead some commentators to divide Church practice and philosophy into pre and post Vatican II.

The Council took place between 1962 and 1965, following Pope John XXIII’s statement that it was “time to open the windows of the Church and let in some fresh air”. Conflicts were apparent between the modernisers, emphasising Christian unity and the traditionalists who stressed the sanctity of ancient forms of worship and teachings. Perhaps the most apparent of the changes were in the form of the mass so that “devout and active participation by the faithful may be more easily achieved” (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 1963). These included the use of the vernacular language instead of Latin and the priest being allowed to face the congregation. After changes had been made to earlier proposals, a synod of bishops in Rome in October 1967, by a large majority, supported the New Order of the Mass, in some cases with reservations.

Not everyone had been convinced. On 25th September 1969, two retired cardinals, 79-year-old Alfredo Ottaviani and 84-year-old Antonio Bacci., wrote a letter with which they sent Pope Paul VI the text of the “Short Critical Study on the New Order of Mass”, which had been prepared in the previous June by a group of twelve theologians under the direction of Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre. The cardinals warned that the New Order “represented, both as a whole and in its details, a striking departure from the Catholic theology of the Mass as it was formulated in Session XXII of the Council of Trent.” The study that they transmitted said that on many points the New Mass had much to gladden the heart of even the most modernist Protestant. Many saw Vatican II as marking the end of the old certainties.

An American Catholic philosopher, Michael Novak, argued that some, invoking the “spirit” of the Council, have moved in directions far beyond what the participants would have wished. This may have happened to such an extent that it may be possible to be Catholic in culture rather than follow a specific set of beliefs or follow approved liturgy.

“Lumen Gentium”, the “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church”, is one of the key documents of the Council, promulgated by Pope Paul VI in November, 1964. Dealing

with the concept of the People of God, it recognised that Christian groups besides Catholics have elements of sanctity and truth in their beliefs and liturgy. In addition, the Church declared the possibility of Salvation for non-Christians and even non-theists.



Rigby College, Orrell, Near Wigan.

In pursuit of interfaith understanding on 21st November 2009 Archbishop Vincent Nichols visited the Hindu Temple in Neasden, North London, an action criticised by some within the Church. The official report stated “He was welcomed in traditional Hindu style – with a red vermilion mark applied to the forehead and the tying of a sacred thread on the wrist, symbolising friendship and goodwill.” Between 1972 and 1977 the Archbishop had been Chaplain at St. John

Since the 1960s, the Anglican and Catholic churches have moved closer together but they have faced a common problem in the form of a major decline of religious observance. This is manifested in reductions in baptisms, marriages, church attendance and, in the case of the Catholic Church, a massive fall in the number of young men entering the priesthood. On 18th November 2013, the Daily Telegraph reported that Lord Carey, former Archbishop of Canterbury, warned that Christianity is just a “generation away from extinction in Britain” unless churches make a dramatic breakthrough in attracting young people back to the faith. “Joy in ministry has been replaced by a feeling of heaviness.” He said that the reaction from the public was not so much hostile as dismissive which could be expressed in a variety of non-verbal ways “the shrug of indifference, the rolled eyes of embarrassment, the yawn of boredom” but he warned against relying on “more gimmicks to revive the Church’s fortune”. The Catholic Church has faced similar problems.

The participation of the Catholic Church in education has been viewed as crucially important. Pope Paul VI’s “Declaration on Christian Education”, (Gravissimum Educationis), 28th October 1965, stated that the proper function of the Catholic school was:-

“to help youth grow according to the new creatures they were made through baptism as they develop their own personalities, and finally to order the whole of human culture to the news of salvation so that the knowledge the students gradually acquire of the world, life and man is illuminated by faith.”

These words have been echoed by the Hierarchy. On 22nd November 2012 the Bishop of Nottingham, Malcolm McMahon OP, Chairman of the Catholic Education Service, addressed the Catholic Voices Academy. He went so far as to say:-

“Catholic schools mould their teachers, students and pupils so that they will “become saints”, living icons of Christ.” In 2003, this same education service issued a position paper which said:-

“the students come from a wide economic, social, cultural and faith spectrum. In welcoming and responding to this diversity, Catholic schools and colleges are active in equipping their students to live in a multi-cultural and multi-faith society...We urge the Catholic community to continue supporting our schools. This means, not least, meeting wherever possible the financial commitment of finding our contribution towards the cost of providing these institutions which in England is 10% and 15% in Wales.”

This financial burden is in itself a problem. On 6th January 2012 the “Catholic Herald” reported that the Rt. Rev. Michael Campbell OSA, Bishop of Lancaster, asked if it was right for parishioners to continue paying for the upkeep of schools where the majority of pupils and teachers belong to other faiths and none. In 2014, these schools are under pressure to increase the percentage of the pupils who are non-Catholic. Worryingly, education may not be the best way of wooing back the young since by no means all those passing through Catholic schools keep the Faith.

In 1928, when Newdigate’s book was written, the Catholic Church in England was flourishing after centuries of persecution and gave comfort, structure and support to millions. Catholicism then in England was a faith which John Rigby would have recognised and presumably he would still have preferred death as a Catholic to acceptance of Anglicanism. In 1934, the successor to Archbishop Keating, Archbishop Downey, argued that the ideal candidate for priesthood should not be encouraged to be clever or smart, not be encouraged to hold strange and original ideas or to break away from abiding, age-long traditions of the Church. Old certainties have gone and Traditionalists within the Church link its popular decline to post Vatican II innovations introduced to promote ecumenism and make it “relevant” to the modern world.

The following quotation is from a sermon published in 1755, entitled “Catholic Spirit”, by John Wesley (1703-91), co-founder of the Methodist movement:-

“Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences.”

Does this summarise the relationship now existing between senior figures in the Christian hierarchies?

When the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby and Pope Francis met in Rome in June 2013, they showed a remarkable similarity of approach, as reported in the Daily Telegraph. The Pope urged the Archbishop to continue proclaiming the sacredness of human life and the importance of the institution of the family built on marriage. The Archbishop said that he "felt at home" at the Vatican, and hoped that "the closeness of the two inaugurations may serve the reconciliation of the world and the Church" – an apparent reference to the leaders' common desire to tackle secularism by going out into the streets and meeting the people.



Both the Archbishop and the Pope spoke of the importance of reaching out to the world's disadvantaged. The Pope has refused to move into the papal palace, preferring to reside in a modest Vatican hotel, Casa Santa Marta. He has made a campaign against the culture of money one of the keystones of his papacy. The Archbishop is known for taking the bus and has reportedly turned up to interviews with the British media in clothes from the charity shop Oxfam and shoes with holes in them. The Pope said that "The history of relations between the Church of England and the Catholic Church is long and complex, and not without pain. Recent decades, however, have been marked by a journey of rapprochement and fraternity, and for this we give heartfelt thanks to God."

John Rigby is currently commemorated in various ways. Pastoral Area 13 of the Liverpool Archdiocese takes his name. Saint John Rigby Sixth Form College provides post 16 education for many Catholics in the area. For many years, an annual commemorative mass has taken place in the barn at Harrock Hall at a time near the

anniversary of his execution. There are stained glass windows showing the saint at the Roman Catholic churches of Our Lady and All Saints, Parbold and St. Mary's, Chorley. St. Joseph's, Wrightington houses his shrine in oils on wood, designed by Mr. J. Bond of Liverpool. This shows an artist's impression of John Rigby awaiting execution and also his home, Harrock Hall. It was unveiled on 27th October 1971 and blessed by Bishop Gray during mass on 3rd October 1971.

John Rigby and the Catholic martyrs faced death bravely because of the "smaller differences" in belief referred to by John Wesley. They judged that a horrible death to gain eternal reward was better than "the bottomless pit of hell". Their martyrdom would have cowed some into submission but inspired others to maintain the Faith and so rise "many stages to Heaven", no matter what the cost. Will the cheery style and informality of Pope Francis revitalise the Faith or are they merely the "gimmicks" against which Lord Carey warned? The leaders may be united on matters of social policy but can differences in doctrine always be ignored? Five hundred years after his death will John Rigby be viewed just as a stubborn man who was prepared to die bravely for old-fashioned beliefs or will the story of his sacrifice encourage a new legion of the young to maintain and spread a distinctive Faith? Time alone will tell.

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This window at Parbold, blessed on the 15th June 1930 to mark the Beatification of John Rigby, was a gift of members of the Rigby family. The parish priest at the time was Father Frederick Aidan Crow O.S.B.. He had been Procurator at Ampleforth during the building of the new monastery between 1895 and 1898.



St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church, Wrightington



The Shrine of St. John Rigby