



Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest

St. Nicholas Owen

6 OCTOBER 2019



St Nicholas Owen - window at St. Mary's Church, Harvington Hall

The Elizabethan period stands out above any in our history for the ruthless pursuit by harsh and violent means to extirpate the Catholic religion in this country. The most anti-Catholic laws ever passed in Britain were passed during Elizabeth I's reign, which was a time of injustice and oppression. The queen had a vast network of spies and searchers. Her laws carried severe penalties and grotesque torture of Catholic prisoners was sanctioned. She even favoured her chief torturer, the notoriously sadistic Richard Topcliffe, with permission to maintain a place of torture in his house.

To appreciate how many people were affected by these anti-Catholic measures, we have to remember that Protestantism was still a new religion in Britain and had not been a popular cause. It had to be imposed on the people. The Act of Uniformity of 1558

penalised those who refused to attend the services of the new religion. Countless of Elizabeth's subjects were forced to violate their religious principles or suffer ruin, imprisonment, torture and, in far too many cases, martyrdom.

Priests were especially targeted

Elizabeth and her ministers wanted to cut off the supply of priests, but were frustrated by the flow of priests coming into England from continental seminaries. The Jesuits had also decided to join the English Mission part of their work. An act passed in 1584 meant that a priest could be convicted of high treason in England merely for being a priest. This was easier than convicting innocent men for pretended treasons. As priests were hunted down during surprise raids, the need grew for secret hiding places.

Nicholas Owen (c.1562- 1/2 March 1606), a Jesuit lay brother, was the greatest ever deviser of priests holes. When he was captured, the authorities, knowing who he was and how much he knew, put him to extreme torture, but he died without compromising anyone. Both his work and his martyrdom saved many lives.

*The Jesuit John Gerard wrote of him as follows:**

But the man who was most extremely used and with extremities brought unto the last extremity, which is death itself, was one Nicholas Owen, commonly called and most known by the name of Little John. By which name he was so famous and so much esteemed by all Catholics, especially those of the better sort, that few in England, either Priests or others, were of more credit. This man did for seventeen or eighteen years continually attend upon Father Garnett [also later martyred], and assist him in many occasions.

But his chief employment was in making secret places to hide Priests and Church stuff [items used for the Mass] in from the fury of searches; in which kind he was so skilful both to devise and frame the places in the best manner, and his help therein desired in so many places, that I verily think no man can be said to have done more good of all those that laboured in the English vineyard. For, first, he was the immediate occasion of saving the lives of many hundreds of persons, both ecclesiastical and secular, and of the estates also of these seculars, which had been lost and forfeited many times over if the Priests had been taken in their houses; of which some have escaped, not once but many times, in several searches that have come to the same house, and sometimes five or six Priests together at the same time.

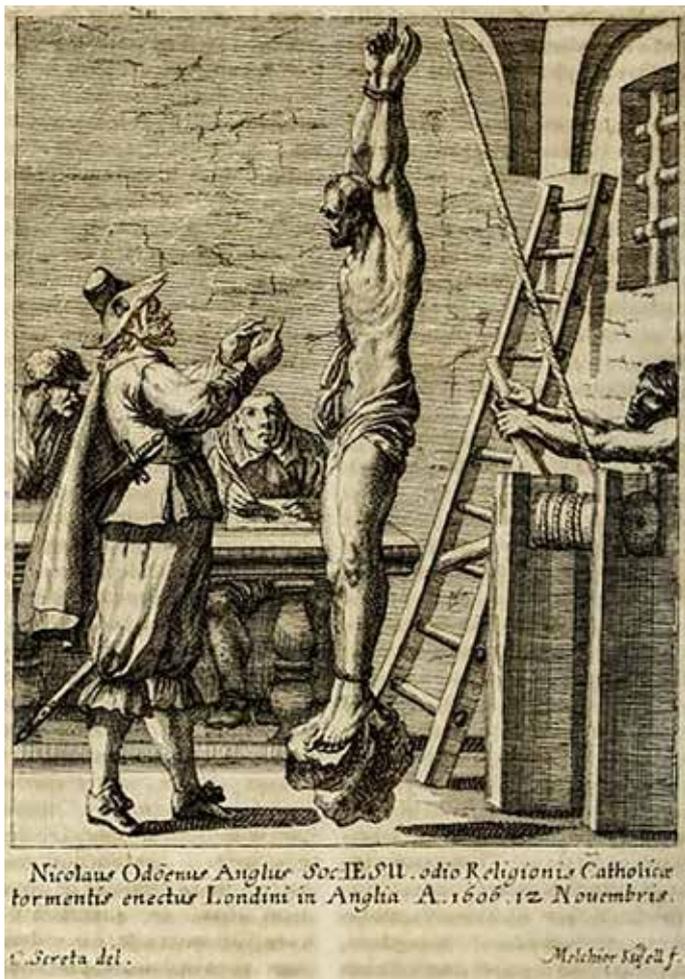
Myself have been one of the seven that have escaped that danger at one time in a secret place of his making. How many Priests then may we think this man did save by his endeavours in the space of seventeen years, having laboured in all shires and in the chiefest Catholic houses of England? Then for spiritual good, it is to be noted he was partner with them all in the gain of souls wherein he did preserve them; and to which end he intended directly all his works, labouring in that painful and dangerous business to keep them in safety for the saving of souls, which it appeared

well he respected more than his own body, for he was not ignorant that his office was much subject to the danger of spies, and that when he should happen to be taken he was sure to be extremely handled to wrest out of him the secrets of other men's houses. ...

Yea, he did much strive to make them [the priest holes] of several fashions in several places, that one being taken might give no light to the discovery of another. Wherein he had no doubt great aid from Almighty God, ... for he ever began his work with communicating [receiving Communion] ... and, as much as his labour would give him leave, did continually pray whilst he was working...

But, above all, that which did most commend him both in the sight of God and man, was his innocent life and earnest practice of solid virtues.... *Of his death, John Gerard notes that he died under torture. To cover it up the authorities pretended he committed suicide, but when Owen's kinswoman came to visit, the keeper admitted to her "The man is dead, he died in our hands."* Gerard concludes: ...the man had lived a saintly life, and his death was answerable, and he a glorious martyr of extraordinary merit ... I desire my soul may have part with his, and myself may be assisted with his holy prayers.

*The Condition of Catholics Under James I, Father Gerard's Narrative of the Gunpowder Plot, John Morris ed., 1872, Ch XI.



St Nicholas Owen being tortured in the Tower of London in 1606., engraving by Melchior Kusell, 1675. Topcliffe's favourite method was to hang a man by his hands.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Annual Latin Mass Society Pilgrimage to Wrexham in Honour of Saint Richard Gwyn, Martyr and Co-patron of the LMS. 1130am at St Mary's Cathedral, Regent Street, Wrexham LL1 1RB - Sung Mass and veneration of relic. Canon Post to give first blessings of a newly ordained priest.

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Weekly Schedule *

| | | Ordo | Cathedral | St Winefride's | Mass Intention |
|---|--------|--|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Sun | 6 Oct | External Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Rosary, comm. XVII Sunday after Pentecost | | 11.15 Mass | Allessandra Moe |
| October 6 th at 3.15pm Sunday Mass at St. Wulstan's Little Malvern. | | | | | |
| Mon | 7 Oct | Blessed Virgin Mary of the Rosary, II class, Com. of St. Mark Pope and Confessor. | 7.30am Mass | | Teresa Rayment |
| Tue | 8 Oct | St. Bridget Widow, III class, Com. of Ss. Sergius, Bacchus, Marcellus and Apuleius Martyrs. | 7.30am Mass | 7pm Mass | Private Intention Olivier Arousseau |
| Wed | 9 Oct | St. John Leonard Confessor, III class, Com. of St. Denis Bishop, Rusticus Priest, and Eleutherius Martyrs. | 7.30am Mass | | Aileen Cahalan RIP |
| Thu | 10 Oct | St. Francis Borgia Confessor, III class. | 7.30am Mass 11am Holy Hour | | Private Intention |
| Fri | 11 Oct | The Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, II class. | 7.30am Mass | 6.30pm Confessions 7pm Mass | Private Intention Susanne Elisabeth Frankel RIP |
| Sat | 12 Oct | Saturday in Honor of Our Lady | | 10.45 Confessions 11.15 Mass | Private Intention |
| Sun | 13 Oct | XVIII Sunday after Pentecost | | 11.15 Mass | Private Intention |
| October 13 th at 3.15pm Sunday Mass at St. Wulstan's Little Malvern. | | | | | |

* Changes to usual schedule: No changes this week.