

The English Church in an heroic age

THE MARTYRDOM OF BLESSED GEORGE HAYDOCK:

'Sadness turned into Joy'

By Barry Coldrey and
Leo Griffin

This is the third book in a series of modern lives of the English martyrs, commenced by Br Leo Griffin CFC 10 years ago.

The first was a *Life of St Margaret Clitheroe*, published in 1992, and the second, *The Life of St Philip Howard, Martyr*, released in 1998.

On this occasion, Br Griffin is joined by another author in completing the work, as advancing years and arthritis have taken some toll.

During penal times in Elizabethan England the principal stronghold of the Catholic survivors of persecution and repression was the county of Lancashire where a cluster of reasons guaranteed the survival of the Old Faith.

Lancashire was a large, sparsely-populated county remote from the wealth and commerce of the south east and distant from the seat of government in London.

However, the principal reason for the survival of Catholicism was the strength of the Catholic gentry.

The Haydocks were Lancashire gentry, their estates centred on Cottam, near Preston. Their forbears had been prominent in the political and social life of the county for generations.

In the religious turmoil of the 16th century, the family remained firmly Catholic through trial and persecution.

This account is focused on the story of Blessed George Haydock, the martyr, but there were three priests from the family ministering during Elizabeth's reign – George himself, his father, Vivian, and his older brother, Richard.

In a sense, the book is a glimpse at Catholic life in Lancashire in penal times, focused on the Haydock family.

In the 'lives' a little piece of 16th century England comes alive, on the one hand its excitement and splendour – it is the age of Shakespeare and exploration of the New World of the Americas – and, on the other, the reality of its awfulness and tragedy.

'Sadness turned into Joy'



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In spite of the risks of capture, imprisonment, torture and a gruesome death, there was no shortage of vocations to the priesthood.

During Queen Elizabeth I's reign (1558–1603), 815 young Englishmen fled England to be trained as priests in continental seminaries; 547 were ordained and returned to England secretly, of whom more than one-half were captured and imprisoned and between 120–130 of them were executed.

Sixty laymen and women were executed for assisting a priest in some way.

While the story focuses

on the Haydock family, there are many vignettes of life in the English Church in penal times.

There was Mistress (Mrs) Margaret Line who managed a secret hostel in London for some years, for priests who came to the capital on business. Eventually she was caught and condemned to death for 'harbouring a priest'. "Pity it wasn't a thousand," she remarked to the judge.

There were the Vaux sisters whose vast semi-fortified mansion at Badderly Clinton in a remote part Warwickshire was used for priests' meetings and retreats.

There is the finance officer in the municipality of Newcastle-on-Tyne outlining the substantial costs of arranging an execution of a priest and keen on finding cheaper suppliers.

An interesting read of the English-speaking Church in an heroic age.

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