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No. 27 Spring 1988

North East Catholic History Society

NORTH EAST CATHOLIC HISTORY SOCIETY

The Society was founded in July 1974 to foster interest and promote research into the history of the Catholic Church in North East England.

A yearly programme of talks and visits to places of Catholic interest is arranged and *NORTHERN CATHOLIC HISTORY*, the Society's periodical, is published twice yearly.

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NORTH EAST CATHOLIC HISTORY SOCIETY

The thirteenth A.G.M. held in St Mary's Cathedral Centre on 6 October, was encouragingly well attended. After the formal business, including the Chairman's review of last year's activities, thanks to the officers, and their re-election for this year, Fr Nicholson (Chairman) gave a talk, illustrated by slides, on the Lindisfarne Gospels. A fortnight later, on 17 October, fifty members and friends had the rare pleasure of visiting Hesleyside at the invitation of Major and Mrs Charlton and were kindly shown over the house and gardens by Mr Lloyd, to whom the thanks of the Society are gratefully recorded.

The lecture programme, arranged by Miss O'Callaghan, promised four diverse topics by experts in their respective fields of scholarship, and the two Autumn talks, by Dr John Derry on the Catholic Question in British Politics 1790–1829 on 3 November and by Dr Ewan Cameron on Thomas More on 1 December, were both of the highest quality and were thoroughly appreciated by a good attendance on each occasion. The talks by Dr Elizabeth Redgate on St Cuthbert on 23 February and by Dr Judith Champ on Bishop Ullathorne and the foundation of Oscott on 22 March are eagerly anticipated. Details of these talks and of the Summer outings are given on the inside end cover.

The present edition offers four articles covering three centuries and a broad territorial span. As promised, there is a further article on the Northumberland and Durham martyrs among the eighty-five beatified last November. Fr William Fee, who has done so much to foster interest and devotion to all the martyrs, writes brief biographies of the twelve North East martyrs – to whose number we should add that of Bl. Nicholas Postgate since the Society presumes to extend its interest to North Yorkshire – and so completing the series commenced with fuller accounts of Bl. George Errington and Bl. William Southerne in the previous two editions. Leo Gooch then provides extremely valuable notes and statistics on the numbers of Catholics in the two Northern Counties in 1780 and 1787. The strange story of Lady Jane Peat and her eccentricities, happily unrelated in any way to her Catholic faith, is told by Douglas Smith. Finally, the progress of the Church in the North generally during the ten years' episcopate of Bishop Thomas Smith, Vicar Apostolic of the Northern District from 1821 to 1831, is reviewed by Dr James Hagerty in an article based largely on research in the Leeds diocesan archives, providing a graphic account of some of the problems faced by bishops, priests and laity, weak in means but strong in faith, as the Church emerged from penal times.

Once again, the Hon. Editor earnestly solicits articles for future issues.

R.M. Gard

THE BEATIFIED HEROES OF THE NORTH

W. Fee

The beatification of the eighty-five venerable martyrs of England and Wales on Sunday 22 November, was a source of great joy to Catholics throughout England but especially to the Catholics here in the North because, of the eighty-five martyrs, twelve have been named as 'martyrs of the North' either because they were born here in the North, ministered here, suffered or died here. Of these, two were mentioned by the Holy Father by name in his homily at the beatification ceremony: Blessed Hugh Taylor and Blessed Joseph Lambton. Of the twelve, nine were priests and three were laymen, the priests being put to death simply and solely because they were priests and the laymen because they had 'harboured and maintained' such priests who were regarded as traitors to the sovereign. The priests were Hugh Taylor, Edward Burden, Richard Hill, Richard Holiday, John Hogg, Edmund Duke, Joseph Lambton, Thomas Palaser and William Southerne. The laymen were George Errington, John Norton and John Talbot. It may be of interest to note that of these twelve martyrs, six were closely associated with South Shields.

Throughout the years of persecution the Faith remained strong here in the North. We have only to recall the famous 'Rising of the North' in 1569 when the Catholics of the North, under the leadership of the Earls of Northumberland and Westmorland rose up in protest against the newly established Church under Queen Elizabeth I. The Rising failed and resulted in the deaths of Blessed Thomas Plumtree and Thomas Percy, Earl of Northumberland. From among the forty canonised martyrs we have St John Boste and St Henry Morse and among those beatified years ago we have Blessed Ralph Corby and John Duckett. Now, in the recently beatified martyrs, we have more heroic lives to recall.

Hugh Taylor is the first of our new Beati but we know little of him save that he ministered in Durham and the North Riding; that he was arrested at the home of a Marmaduke Bowes; that the latter was accused of harbouring a priest and that the two of them were executed at York, the priest on 26 November 1585, the layman on the following day.

Of our second martyr, *Edward Burden*, we have little information. While at Oxford he came under the influence of a future martyr, Edmund Campion, and became a Catholic and eventually a priest. He is regarded as a martyr of the North because he was a native of the bishopric of Durham. He suffered at York on 31 October or 29 November 1588.

We now come to four young priests, *Richard Hill*, *John Hogg*, *Richard Holiday* and *Edmund Duke*, who were arrested shortly after their arrival in England and were executed for their priesthood at Durham on 27 May 1590, without having been able to offer even one Mass here in England. It happened like this. The first three were ordained at Rheims on 23 September 1589 and the last mentioned at Rome on 3 September of the same year. Duke met them in France and they crossed over to England together. They arrived at South Shields and they were to make for a house in Shields belonging to a heroic Catholic lady, Ursula Taylor. This house was the headquarters of a wonderful underground organisation under the leadership of John Boste and George Errington. The members of this organisation arranged for the transport of candidates for the priesthood over to France and to receive them back after ordination. On this occasion the arrangements broke down. The young priests wandered about for some days and were arrested at Coxhoe on suspicion. When they were found to be priests, they were tried and were put to death at Dryburn, Durham, on 27 May 1590.

Two years later our next martyr, *Joseph Lambton* our youngest and the one who probably had the most painful death, won the martyr's crown at Newcastle. He was born at Malton in Yorkshire, studied for the priesthood at the English College in Rome, and was ordained in the Lateran Basilica on 28 March 1592. Within a very short time he was sent back to England, landing at South Shields. Spies were on the watch but he eluded them. He found refuge in the house of John Carr, the postmaster of Newcastle, who was not a Catholic but who was sympathetic to Catholics. Unfortunately, within two months our future martyr was arrested on suspicion of being a priest. He was tried and condemned as a traitor. No executioner could be found so a fellow prisoner was offered his freedom if he would carry out the gruesome task, including the disembowelling and quartering. He began but could not continue. The martyr lay there in agony till a local butcher was commissioned to finish the task. Joseph Lambton was only twenty-four

years old and had been a priest for only four months. His execution took place, according to some, on 27 July 1592 at Gallowgate and according to others, on the Town Moor on 31 July.

Four years later the first of our newly beatified laymen, *George Errington*, won the martyr's crown. As mentioned previously he, along with St John Boste, were the leading lights in an underground organisation with its headquarters in the house of Ursula Taylor in South Shields. Errington was born at Hirst, near Ashington. He was a convert to the Catholic Faith, having come under the influence of undergraduates, such as Edmund Campion, while at Oxford. He devoted his life to the care of priests and those who wished to be priests. Spies were on the watch. The house of Ursula Taylor was raided and there three young students for the priesthood were found sheltering. Errington and Taylor were arrested and condemned for 'harbouring and sheltering' priests. He was executed at York on 29 November 1596. Ursula Taylor was condemned to life imprisonment, first at York and then at Hull. She would have remained there had not kind and influential friends bailed her out.

We now come to three of the newly beatified who are known as the Gateshead martyrs. They were a priest, *Thomas Palaser*, and two laymen, *John Norton* and *John Talbot*. Norton had lapsed from the Catholic Faith and he had invited the priest to come and say Mass in his house at Ravensworth, near Gateshead, and there to reconcile him to the Church. Present at the Mass was his wife, Mary and a friend, John Talbot. Again spies were on the watch and the house was raided. Talbot tried to prevent the arrest of the priest. At their trial, Thomas Palaser was condemned to death for his priesthood, John and Mary for harbouring a priest, and Talbot for trying to prevent his arrest. Mary Norton was reprieved because she was expecting a child. The priest and the two laymen were put to death at Durham on 9 August 1600.

Another eighteen years were to elapse and another priest of the North would win the martyr's crown, *William Southerne*. For some thirteen years he ministered to the Catholics of persecution times, most of those years spent here in the North. For a time at least his headquarters were in a rented room in Sandgate, Newcastle, by the river Tyne. It is recorded that he said Mass at Dilston Castle, near Corbridge. He was betrayed by an apostate priest, William Johnson, who had once been a fellow student of his for the priesthood. His

trial was a farce. As the sentence of condemnation was read, he knelt down and thanked God for the privilege of being allowed to shed his blood for Christ our Lord. The sentence was carried out at Newcastle on 30 April 1618.

Today, we look back upon those sad, yet glorious, days of persecution in the 16th and 17th centuries; sad, because of so much suffering, glorious, because so many won a martyr's crown. Why did they suffer and die willingly and nobly? The answer is to be found in the last words of St Margaret Clitherow as she was about to be crushed to death for her Faith. The sheriff said to her, 'Mistress Clitherow you die for treason'. She replied, 'No, no, Mr Sheriff, I die for the love of my Lord Jesus Christ'. St Paul said that nothing, not even death, would come between himself and the love of God. The martyrs were of the same frame of mind.

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THE LAST RECUSANTS OF THE NORTH EAST: THE REPORTS OF 1780 AND 1787

L. Gooch

The size of the Catholic population of England after the Reformation, and especially in the eighteenth century, has long been a subject of historical debate. [1] One reason for this is the lack of unambiguous evidence, for a conflict often arises as to which is the more reliable of two, more or less contemporary, sources of information. This is illustrated particularly well in the two documents given below, one Anglican, the other Catholic. Both papers purport to give authoritative enumerations of the north eastern Catholics in the years between the Catholic Relief Acts of 1778 and 1791. The documents are presented here principally because they deserve attention in their own right as unpublished primary source material. However, in the context of establishing the size of the Catholic population at the end of the recusancy period, the documents raise the interesting question of who was better informed about the Catholic population, the Anglican or the Catholic clergy.

(I)

The Returns of Papists, 1780

The background to the compilation of the 1780 returns lies in the reaction to the first Catholic Relief Act. The Gordon Riots alarmed many parliamentarians and they sought to alleviate Protestant fears by emphasising that the Act was not intended to *encourage* Popery, merely to *tolerate* it. Some extremists, however, wished to repeal the Act and introduce new legislation to prevent any Catholic from teaching non-Catholic children and thus increase the number of converts. The moderates, on the other hand, were quite certain that there was no need for such action. A compromise was agreed whereby a census of the Catholics would be taken to establish exactly what the growth of Catholicism had been since the previous census of 1767. Accordingly, in July 1780, the House of Lords agreed to a motion by which the Anglican bishops were to give orders to all their clergy 'to make an exact enumeration of the Roman Catholics within their districts'. To the great satisfaction of the extremists, the national total did show an

increase in the Catholic population; but the moderates pointed out that although the *absolute* total had undoubtedly risen, *proportionately* the Catholic population had fallen. The anti-Catholic case therefore collapsed and ten years later the second Catholic Relief Act passed without substantial opposition.[2] The returns from the diocese of Durham are given below and may be compared with those of 1767 which showed there to have been 4,888 Catholic inhabitants in the diocese.[3]

An Account of the Numbers of Papists or reputed Papists in the several Parishes within the Diocese of Durham Octr. 1780.[4]

Aycliffe	37	Chatton	3
Alston	1	Chester le Street	166
Alwinton with Holystone	129	Chillingham	0
Alnham	7	Chollerton	47
Alnwick	83	Cockfield	1
Ancroft [5]	83	Coniscliffe	50
Auckland St. Andrew with Escomb	13	Corbridge	40
Auckland St. Helen	2	Cornhill	0
Bambrough	17	Corsenside	10
Barnard Castle	32	Craike	16
Bedlington	4	Cramlington	7
Belford	0	Croxdale	106
Bellingham	53	Dalton	4
Beadnell	1	Darlington	43
Berwick upon Tweed	13	Denton	9
Billingham	8	Dinsdale	0
Birtley	6	Doddington	5
Bishop Middleham	21	Durham	
Bishopton	0	North Bailey	13
Bishopwearmouth	77	South Bailey	2
Blanchland	0	St. Giles's	27
Bolam	4	St. Margaret's	143
Boldon	1	St. Nicholas's	37
Bothall with Shipwash	3	St. Oswald's	144
Brancepeth	58	Earsdon	19
Branxton	0	Easington	18
Brinkburne	5	Ebchester	2
Bywell St. Andrew	3	Edlingham	43
Bywell St. Peter	31	Edmondbyers	0
Carham	5	Egglestone	0
Castle Eden	9	Eglingham	14

Egglescliffe	10
Ellingham	102
Elsdon	11
Elton	3
Elwick	2
Embleton	2
Esh and Satley	84
Falstone	0
Felton	66
Ford	17
Gainford	60
Gateshead	58
Gosforth	4
Greatham	2
Grindon	2
Haltwhistle	6
Hamsterley	2
Hart	17
Hartburn	0
Hartlepool	22
Haughton	0
Hebburn	3
Heddon on the Wall	6
Heighington	4
Heworth	71
Holy Island	10
Horton	0
Houghton le Spring	12
Howick	0
Hunstanworth	0
Hurworth	7
Jarrow	0
Ilderton	0
Ingram	5
Kelloe	15
Kirkharle	1
Kirkhaugh	0
Kirknewton	7
Knaresdale	0
Kyloe	120
Lamesley	41
Lanchester	192
Lesbury	9
Longbenton	26
Longframlington	4
Longhorsley	50
Longhoughton	2
Longnewton	12
Lowick	59
Lucker	1
Medomsley	4
Meldon	4
Merrington	36
Middleton St. George	1
Middleton in Teesdale	0
Mitford	7
Monkhesledon	30
Monkwearmouth	25
Morpeth	77
Muggleswick	3
Netherwitton	94
Newburne	41
Newcastle	
All Saints	66
St. Andrew's	37
St. John's	74
St. Nicholas's	41
Norham	5
Norton	12
Ovingham	22
Penshaw	4
Pittington	9
Ponteland	4
Redmarshal	4
Rennington	0
Rock	0
Rothbury	48
Ryton	334
Sadberge	6
Seaham	0
Sedgefield	35
Shilbottle	1
Shotley	3
Simonburn	27

Slaley	6	Warkworth	22
Sockburn	0	Washington	7
South Shields	4	Whalton	0
Staindrop	4	Whelpington	106
Stainton	4	Whickham	28
Stamfordham	39	Whitburne	0
Stanhope	0	Whitfield	0
Stannington	0	Whittingham	257
Stockton	36	Whittonstall	1
Stranton	15	Whitworth	6
Sunderland	72	Whorlton	10
Tanfield	48	Widdrington	3
Trimdon	9	Winston	4
Tweedmouth	31	Witton Gilbert	17
Tynemouth	18	Witton le Wear	1
Ulgham	6	Wolsingham	5
Wallsend	2	Wolviston	0
Warden with Haydon and Newbrough	53	Woodhorn	5
		Wooler	2
			4,677

(II)

Report on the State of Catholicism in the Northern District of England, 1787.

This document needs no introduction since it is a routine example of the periodic report (or *Relatio*) made by vicars apostolic and bishops to the Roman curia. Extracts relating to Northumberland and Durham (in translation from the Latin) from Bishop Matthew Gibson's *Relatio* which he sent from Stella Hall on 5 January 1787 are given below. This may be compared with the similar report made by Bishop Francis Petre sent from Lancaster to Rome on 28 September 1773.[6]

Relatio Status Catholicae Religionis in Septentrionali Angliae Districtu.[7]

Northumberland has Durham to the south, Cumberland to the west, the Scottish border to the north and the German Ocean to the east. Circumference 145,000 miles. Parish churches 40 with many chapels.[8] There are 5 beautiful towns. *Newcastle*, a celebrated trading centre (Emporium celeberrimum), is situated on the river Tyne in the vicinity of which was born the eminent and famous Venerable Bede. Also in the

county is *Holy Island*, not very large, but a land of saints as the name indicates.

There are 21 priests: Seculars, 7; Order of St. Benedict, 6; ex-S.J., 5; Order of St. Dominic, 3. There are 10 domestic chapels. There are 3,130 Catholics; 340 in Newcastle; in Hexham, once the seat of the bishop, 200; in Corbridge 60; in Alnwick 50. Others are known to live nearby.

The *Bishopric of Durham* has Northumberland to the north, Cumberland and Westmorland to the west, the Province of York to the south and the German Ocean to the east. 103,000 miles in circumference. There are 50 churches with many chapels.[9] *Durham* is a town which excels all others and has a notable cathedral. There are 9 priests: Seculars, 7; Order of St. Benedict, 1; ex-S.J., 1. There are 1,676 Catholics; 300 in Durham; 200 in Sunderland; 150 in Stockton; the rest live in other small towns.

Note: I am grateful to the Clerk of the Records, House of Lords, and Rev. Michael Clifton, Southwark Archdiocesan Archivist, for photocopies of the two documents and for permission to publish them.

NOTES

1. e.g., J. Bossy, *The English CatholicCommunity, 1570–1850* (1975), chapter 13, in which some Northumberland Catholic missions are used as examples.
2. *Parliamentary History*, XXI (1780), passim.
3. A summary of the 1767 returns from the diocese of Durham can be found at: A.M.C. Forster, 'Catholicism in the Diocese of Durham in 1767'. *Ushaw Magazine*, Vol. 72, 91/2. It is hoped that the full returns will be published by the CRS in due course.
4. House of Lords, Main Papers. (Presented 5th March, 1781). Endorsed: 'making in the whole 4677. R. 31st Octr. 1780'.
5. The coincidence of the same figure for Ancroft and Alnwick may be a clerical error. (In 1767 Alnwick had 70 Catholics and Ancroft 50.)
6. J.H. Whyte, 'The Vicars Apostolics' Returns of 1773'. *Recusant History*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 209.
7. Southwark Archdiocesan Archives, pp. 535 ff.
8. Anglican.
9. ditto.

LADY JANE PEAT 1752–1842: A CATHOLIC ECCENTRIC

D.W. Smith

The manor of East Herrington within Houghton-le-Spring parish (Co. Durham) had formed part of the de Esh estate from the twelfth century. It passed by marriage to the recusant family of Smyth of Nunstainton [1] and by the nineteenth century this family was represented by Sir Edward Joseph Smyth, baronet, of Acton Burnell. Maria Smyth known to history as Mrs Fitzherbert, was grand-daughter to this baronet.

All this adds a further dimension to the story of Lady Peat who was born Jane Smith in 1752, daughter of Squire Matthew Smith of Herrington, a junior branch it seems of the Smyths of Esh, and Jane Taylor, of Stobbilee.[2] Jane herself was born at Stobbilee where the Taylors had been copyhold tenants since 1603 and a recusant family. Squire Matthew and his daughter — his wife died in 1798 — lived in a house at the crossroads in East Herrington on the Durham Road. The property was called Herrington House but known locally as Peat's Hall.

Unfortunately, there is no picture of Jane Smith, which is a pity for she was undoubtedly a colourful character. She is described as wearing a bonnet, shawl and gown not worth half-a-crown, having a massive gold chain round her neck and boots on her feet that had belonged to her father.

The first record of her misdemeanours appears in 1786 when with her father — a miser reputedly worth the enormous sum of £30,000 — they travelled home on horseback along the turnpike road from Durham. At the West Rainton turnpike gate, instead of paying the toll, they argued with the gate-keeper that they had no need to pay, having passed through that morning. Spurring his horse, Squire Matthew urged his daughter in a low tone to hurry past.

The gate-keeper, knowing their story to be untrue and having chased them 300 yards down the road was so furious that a wealthy man could stoop to such a low trick, that he applied to the Rev. Cooper Abbs for a summons against them. At the hearing, amidst an amused crowd, it was found that the Squire and his daughter had been in

Barnard Castle for a visit of several days and so could not have passed the toll that morning. Despite desperate pleadings with the magistrate for mitigation of the fine to forty shillings, he declared their pleas were to be rejected with the contempt they deserved, and fined each of them £10. [3]

Squire Matthew died in 1793 and was buried at the Rock Cemetery on Houghton Cut.

Three years later, Jane was again in trouble for avoiding taxes. For ladies of standing, the fashion was then to use hair powder, and the government in its ingenuity had latched on to this fashion as a possible means of revenue. Hair powder was to be made of starch and taxed at one guinea a year. Information was disclosed that Jane was avoiding the payment and being summoned, was given a stiff fine of £40.[4] It may have been she was informed against, for the truth was that Jane was disliked locally. Not only was she a miser as her father had been, she was also a hopeless case of kleptomania — charitably termed such in that the things she purloined were items she neither used nor needed. Though she might keep nine of the Commandments tolerably well, she found the eighth one impossible.

The despair of shopkeepers in Sunderland, everything she could lay her hands upon disappeared into the capacious pockets of her gown. At an auction at Pallion Hall it was discovered that a valuable shawl was missing from the cloakroom. When announced, the sale was stopped and all eyes turned upon her. Being confronted by the curate of Bishopwearmouth, a corner of the offending article slipped into view at the vital moment and she was caught red-handed. Being a lady of some standing, she was usually dismissed with a severe reprimand. In one store she admired a china tea-service to such an extent that the assistant kept an eye on her whilst busy elsewhere. First a cup, then a saucer and eventually three small plates disappeared into her pockets until she was apprehended. What she would have made of the goods on open display today hardly bears contemplation, but the stories of her compulsive thieving multiplied.[5] At a grocer's shop in High Street she was seen putting a pound of butter into her pocket so the youthful assistants determined to have a jibe at her expense. Edging her towards a roaring fire and holding her in conversation, the butter melted until it ran down her petticoats and legs. There seems no doubt that the local oral tradition bears authenticity: that many shopkeepers would place

items deliberately in her way to steal and then would apply to Mr Gregson of Burdon Hall, her lawyer, knowing she would be obliged to pay heavily to keep her out of court. In this way she reputedly escaped prosecution by paying the year's rent of a farm for stealing a silver spoon.

Finally, Mr Gregson got tired of the case and asked Dr Clanny what might be done. Following his invention of the safety lamp, Dr Clanny had come to know several prominent people and had then visiting him an old military companion, accompanied by the Rev. Sir Robert Peat. [6]

Robert Peat is an equally colourful character though perhaps deserving of less sympathy. Son of a watchmaker and silversmith from the Hamsterley area, he had been a 'Ten Year Man' at Trinity College, Cambridge [7] and ordained in the Church of England. After a living in Cambridgeshire and a military chaplain during the Peninsula War, he was then one of the hundred or so chaplains-in-ordinary to the Prince Regent. In 1802, Prinny gave him the living of New Brentford in Middlesex as a favour, though reports of him being a boon companion to the Regent at this time are evidently untrue from his remarks in a letter penned in 1813 to the Prince's secretary:

> Sir Robert Peat presents his respectful compliments to Col. MacMahon and requests the honour of a few minutes conversation respecting an intended publication which has come to his notice relating to the Princess of Wales, which in his opinion may produce much irritation in the public mind. Although Sir Robert has never had the honour of being presented to H.R.H. yet from having been so many years upon his list of chaplains added to other circumstances, he cannot help feeling much interested in anything that concerns the Prince. Sir Robert trusts this will apologize for interfering in a subject which concerns him no further than in showing his desire to seize every, even the most trifling occasion of proving his attachment to the Prince and the obligation he is under for the polite manner in which Col. MacMahon received him at Carlton House. [8]

Whilst in Sunderland, Robert Peat was to be introduced as a member of the Masonic Lodge [9] and was also introduced to Miss Smith. He was much taken with the prospect: he was a heavy gambler, eager for worldly success and here was a lady with an immense fortune, although nominally a Catholic. Could it also be he was swayed by her distant kinship with the Regent's unofficial wife as likely to advance him in favour? Favours indeed were to fall on Robert Peat. Made

Knight of St. Patrick, Knight of the Royal Order of St. Stanislaus (a distinction earned it seems by some relative for services rendered to Stanislaus, King of Poland), Chaplain to the Grange Lodge of England and, finally, in 1831, invested as first Grand Prior of the re-established Order of St. John of Jerusalem.[10]

For her part, Miss Smith was much impressed. She was alone by now and greatly taken with the idea of a title as well as the appearance of the man himself — 'a fine looking man, small, dressed like a dandy in a beautiful coat and waistcoat, white necktie and breeches with white silk stockings, and on the coat three gold orders . . . a good figure on horseback being an expert rider . . .highly distinguished manners and gentlemanly bearing . . .' [11]

But for her fortune she was more cautious. Marriage meant putting it at his disposal. It may also be that she hesitated in marrying not only outside the Faith but to a clergyman of the Church of England. Hence, when Sir Robert came out to Herrington to pursue the matter, she declared that she could not contemplate leaving the old homestead whilst it was still standing. This remark was remembered in the village as ominous by those who believed that Peat had a hand in attempting to bring the matrimonial crisis to a head.

In August that year or 1815, Jane Smith left the house in charge of her servant girl Isabella Young, and went off to Lanchester to collect her rents at Coldpike Hall and the Floss. The girl was nervous at being alone — it was an isolated crossroads and for several nights she thought she had heard someone trying the doors and windows. She asked to sleep at a neighbour's house but the evening Miss Smith was expected home she returned to the house and locked herself in. Her mistress did not return and at two in the morning John Stonehouse, the blacksmith who lived on the opposite side of the road, awoke to find light reflected on his ceiling.

Looking out, he saw Herrington House ablaze and with his brother he rushed across the road. The door was unlocked and they found the girl in the passageway, the flames not having reached her. Covered in blood and bruises, her head had been smashed, eyes beaten in, and her jawbone broken. It was impossible to tell if the house had been ransacked and there was little they could do with no means at hand to put it out. The girl's body was dragged into the yard and by daylight only blackened walls surrounded by outside sheds remained. [12]

Miss Smith was sent for and told of the fire. The first thing she did was to rake the embers and gather up all the loose nails, bolts and hinges to sell as scrap iron. The poor girl's body had been laid in a box in one of the sheds until the Coroner arrived to open the inquest 'in the place of death', as the law then required. Rather than pay for a night's lodging, Jane lay down in the abandoned box and covered herself with the horse-cloth that had shielded the body. However, during the night the heavy wind round the empty walls made such a rattling and sweeping the charred wood and dust into the shed she got a fright and called out for help.

Three Sunderland men were suspected of the crime but only on the gossip of having been seen in the neighbourhood. No real evidence could be found against them though the trial dragged on and off for four years.[13] At one point the judge asked Miss Smith if she did not consider the expense worth while in justice to the poor girl but evidently she did not.

The suspects were held in jail for so long a period that the Society of Friends took up their cases. They proved that one had been a hundred miles away from Herrington that night and the other falsely sworn by a seaman in hope of reward. Charges against the third man, James Wolfe, were dropped and he received a free pardon from the King. He was shunned for the rest of his life; further tragedy overtook his family when his grand-daughter was found dead and robbed at the foot of Rector's Gill in Bishopwearmouth. The murder remains unsolved. Had the fire been instigated and the girl recognised the intruder, or was it a simple case of an opportunist being disturbed?

At any rate, there was now no excuse for delaying the marriage. It took place at Houghton church in November 1815[14] but only after Jane had drawn up a marriage settlement by which she was able to retain at least half her fortune for herself. Sir Robert was granted £1,000 per annum. He celebrated at the Bridge Hotel in Sunderland then took her off to London to meet his fashionable friends. At the first party she was missing for a good while and the uneasy knight had a search made. She was found where she felt more at home: sitting on a cracket in the kitchen chatting to the servants. This was the first and last time Robert Peat tried to introduce her to society. He brought her back to Sunderland and rented a house in Villiers Street.

Lady Peat had once boasted that she could live on twopence a day.

Inspecting the larder, her husband soon found why. There were mouldy old pies and a leg of pork in advanced state of decomposition. It was too much for the dandy's stomach and he took lodgings in the next street. Here he invited some gentlemen to supper one evening and awaited his order from a local confectioner's shop in vain. The goods had been delivered by mistake to his lady and the contents devoured.

As soon as he could, Peat scuttled off to London, returning only once or twice a year to ride out with his lady. It was popularly believed that he had to stay one night a year with his wife or lose his allowance. Cynics said he had married Miss Smith's money and taken herself for a witness.

In the town itself, Lady Peat continued to make a nuisance of herself. She would appear inevitably at mealtimes in the hope of taking 'pot luck' and locally there grew up a saying, 'But don't tell Lady Peat' at anyone's stroke of luck. It was reputed that at this time she had also lost some £13,000 in a bank failure.

It is a sad tale. The marriage had been a failure. Though she had obtained her title, real happiness is not a thing to be had by acquisition.

Sir Robert died at his Brentford vicarage in April 1837. When told he was dead and that she must wear mourning, Jane exclaimed it was 'the best news I ever got in my life' and went out to purchase a bright yellow gown with ribboned bonnet — slipping an ostrich feather into her pocket — and paraded the town saying, 'What joyful news I have received, Sir Robert is dead!' In one account she is supposed to have worn her wedding dress on this perambulation.

For many years she lived in the basement room of the house in Villiers Street with one old servant, Bella. The rest of the rooms were crammed with an astonishing collection: at least twelve old tables in one room, a full set of forge implements, shoemaker's tools and carpenter's stock-in-trade, even an old teapot said, dubiously, to have belonged to Cromwell.

Becoming blind as she approached her ninety-second year, she was urged by her confessor, Father Philip Kearney, to make her last testament. She died in December of 1842 and her will — nine parchment pages — went into detail about the farms and lands scattered over the county. [15] The bulk of these were bequeathed to her mother's family but only on condition that they assumed the additional name

and arms of Smith — her last attempt to leave a mark on posterity.

Lady Peat was buried in the family vault at Houghton. Forgotten in the village where she once cut such a figure, in recent years only one old lady could recollect the saying, 'Don't tell Lady Peat!', but there have been reported seeings of a ghostly figure near the area where her old house stood. [16]

NOTES

1. W.R.Wiggen, *Esh Leaves*, Durham, 1914.
2. The relationship cannot be established with accuracy. Surtees does not enumerate the later family in his section on Herrington. Brockie states simply they were 'descended from the ancient recusant family of Smyth'. Jane certainly had property dealings with the baronet and purchased the tithes of Esh from him but no reference to her appears in the comprehensive catalogue of the Acton Burnell papers.

   George Taylor's daughter Catherine, married her cousin William Taylor and from these descends the Taylor-Smith family of Coldpike Hall. Their fourth great-grandson William, was priest at St Mary's, Sunderland and at Newcastle cathedral, his mother being the daughter of James Holsfirth of Leeds, first Roman Catholic Mayor in England since the Reformation. (Satley Registers: printed by DNPRS.) Edward Taylor, born 1803, assumed by Royal Licence name and arms of Smith on succeeding to estates of Hedleyhope and Stobbilee. He erected Coldpike Hall in 1859 and Broadwood Hall in 1875.
3. *Newcastle Courant*, 16 September 1786.
4. D.R.O. – Q/S/P/14.
5. William Brockie, *Sunderland Notables*, 1895. He gives many such stories which were also repeated in the *Monthly Chronicle.*
6. *Sunderland Antiquarian Society*, Vol. IX, 1908. An old military companion from Ireland. Dr Clanny, himself Knight Commander of St. John, came from Bangor, Co. Down.
7. *Alumni Cantab.* Admitted 1795 to Trinity College and D.D. of Glasgow 1799. He was Rector of Ashley and Silverly with Kirtling, Cambridgeshire 1804; Vicar of New Brentford 1808–1837. He seems to have been active until 1815 when a series of curates performed the duties. The church is now listed as derelict and redundant (information from present Rector 1976).
8. Royal Archives, 20610–20611. Another letter survives RA19552 conveying a message on behalf of the Portuguese ambassador. (By gracious permission.)
9. St. John's Lodge No.80, July 1829.
10. Invested 29 Jan. 1831.
11. Brockie, op.cit.
12. It was demolished in 1885 having long been used as a byre.
13. *Durham County Advertiser*, 1814–1820.
14. *Gentlemen's Magazine*, 1815, pt.2.630.
15. John Leadbitter, wine merchant of Newcastle, Edward Taylor, butcher of Crook and

Philip Kearney were executors. The will was sworn 'under £5000'. The former two received large estates in Esh, Brancepeth and elsewhere. According to a verbal report of her medical doctor (*Newcastle Chronicle Notes & Queries*, 7 Dec. 1885), the Canon had been pressed to receive the bulk of her fortune but he insisted on only the agreed sum of £18,000. Was this legacy included in the 'rest and residue' left to him in the will? Brockie, some fifty years later, records that this legacy was used to endow St Bede's Convent of Mercy in Sunderland. These sums do not appear in the will though it is impossible to tell how much was wrapped up in lawyer's language. Obviously, some financial considerations had taken place between the drawing up of the will in July 1841 and a codicil in October 1841 when legacies amounting to £9,000 to other relatives were cancelled. It may be, of course, that apart from the valuable and extensive estates, the reputed fortune owed much to the exaggeration of the stories that had begun to collect around her posthumous reputation by the time Brockie was writing in 1895.

16. Last reported 'sightings' were in 1985.

BISHOP THOMAS SMITH (1763–1831)
Vicar Apostolic of the Northern District, 1821–1831

NOTES ON THE NORTHERN DISTRICT UNDER BISHOP THOMAS SMITH, 1821–1831

J.M. Hagerty

The life and career of Bishop Thomas Smith, Vicar Apostolic of the Northern District from 1821 to 1831, covers an interesting period in the history of 18th- and 19th- century English Catholicism. As a boy, he grew up and was educated in penal times. Then, as a young priest, he escaped the French Revolution and helped to transfer the traditions of Douai to English soil. As a bishop, he presided over an extensive and increasingly urbanized district and, finally, as an old man, he lived to see the emancipation of Catholics.

Other works deal with Smith's role in the founding of the seminaries of Old Hall and Ushaw, and also with his part in the struggle for emancipation.[1] What is attempted here is a limited survey of the Northern District under Smith's administration by referring mainly to his papers held in the Leeds Diocesan Archives. From them emerges an interesting picture of day to day issues and problems facing the bishop, his priests and his flock.

Thomas Smith was born on 21 March 1763, at Brooms, near Lanchester, in County Durham. After his early education at Sedgeley Park, a school for the sons of middle class Catholic families, he transferred at the age of fifteen to Douai College, where 'he possessed genius, facility of acquiring knowledge, and was remarkable for his piety and obedience to the rules'. Following his ordination in 1787, he became Professor of Philosophy at the College and was later elected to supervise its financial affairs. Brady writes that Smith 'was distinguished for his general ability and for urbanity and suavity of manners', but Milburn contends that he was of limited financial acumen and, along with Douai's President, William Gibson, he was unable to overcome the problem of the College's mounting debt.[2]

During the French Revolution, Smith was imprisoned for sixteen months but was able to leave for England in March 1795. As he had been a senior professor at Douai he became involved in the establishment of the new seminary at Old Hall in Hertfordshire. With John Daniel, titular President of Douai, he came into contact with Bishop

Douglass of the London District, who was quickly impressed with his qualities. In August 1795, Douglass wrote to Bishop Walmesley of the Western District: 'Mr Daniel returned into the north taking with him a Mr Smith, Professor of Philosophy, whom I should have been glad to have detained'.[3] Smith, however, was destined for the northern mission and in November 1795 took up duties in Durham where he acquired a reputation for zeal, politeness and sound judgment. In the next few years he was instrumental in the winding up of Douai's affairs and his obvious abilities gave his superiors good reason to include his name among the candidates for the Vicar General of the Midland District and Coadjutor of the London District. In addition, he was offered, but declined, the Presidency of the English College at Valladolid.[4]

In 1807, Smith was appointed Coadjutor with right of succession to Bishop William Gibson of the Northern District. Gibson, who had been Smith's superior at Douai, was an authoritarian figure who did not willingly share responsibility. Smith's brief, therefore, forbade him from interfering in the affairs of the Vicariate without the express permission of Bishop Gibson.[5] Whilst Gibson was fit and active, such an arrangement, however strange, was manageable, but as the senior bishop got older and was increasingly affected by paralysis, his administration of the District deteriorated. In 1819, the three other Vicars Apostolic, without Smith's knowledge, wrote to Propaganda to request that full faculties be granted to the younger man. Gradwell, the Vicars' agent in Rome, wrote to Smith in May 1819 informing him of the Pope's decision to transfer authority to him. Such a sensitive move, however, had to be handled carefully, as Gradwell's letter to Smith illustrates:

> In this determination of His Holiness and the Sacred Congregation to which all missions are subject, nothing is intended to give umbrage to his excellent Vicar Apostolic, with which so much virtue and ability, with so much honour to himself and benefit to religion has presided eight and twenty years over the most Catholic district in England. On the contrary, I am assured, and believe it, that His Holiness is actuated by quite different motives; by a personal esteem for Dr. Gibson from a full knowledge of his virtues and merits; by compassion for his present infirmities and sufferings; and by a persuasion that by ordering your Lordship to submit to the burden of the heaviest district in Great Britain, he is contributing no less to the dignity, comfort and repose of the good, senior bishop than providing for the annually increasing difficulties and wants of the District.[6]

The Northern District comprised the seven northernmost counties of England — Cumberland, Westmorland, Lancashire, Cheshire, Yorkshire, Durham and Northumberland. Bishop Gibson's last *ad limina* in 1818 stated that there were 164 missioners serving a Catholic population of 200,000. According to Brady, in 1826 200 missioners served the same number of Catholics estimated by Gibson on 177 missions. And in 1830, again according to Brady, 172 missioners served 185,000 Catholics on 172 missions. Of the missions, 7 were in Cheshire, 82 were in Lancashire, 46 were in Yorkshire, 2 were in Westmorland, 12 were in Durham, 18 were in Northumberland, 4 were in Cumberland, and one was on the Isle of Man. The missioners were made up of 115 secular clergy, 31 Benedictines, 23 Jesuits, 2 Franciscans, and one Dominican.[7]

The administration of such a large district was a severe task for any Vicar Apostolic, given its geographical extent and diversity, the nature of communications, and the lack of any substantial organisational infrastructure. Within four years, therefore, Smith, suffering from ill-health, appealed to Rome for a coadjutor. In January 1824, he was given Fr Thomas Penswick, a 51-year-old missioner who had spent most of his career in Chester and Liverpool, in preference to Fr Thomas Gillow of North Shields and Dr John Lingard of Hornby in Lancashire. From the sources available, it appears that, generally speaking, Smith attended to matters east of the Pennines in addition to his overall brief, whilst Penswick supervised the administration of the District to the west of the Pennines.[8]

The deployment of priests, the provision of the chapels, and the general state of the District were the three principal and interrelated issues which the two bishops constantly had to face. An increasing number of Catholics, particularly in the new industrial areas, led to a growing demand for missioners and for adequate places of worship. In May 1824, for example, representatives of the 400-strong congregation at Rochdale complained to Smith that Fr Shepherd, who served them from Bolton, was too ill to perform his duties. They were 'destitute of spiritual assistance' and were especially concerned for the 'lower classes of society' and those who travelled long distances to attend Mass. The situation was compounded by the fact that Fr Shepherd also had to serve Bury and by the rumour that a priest would be placed at Aston-under-Lyne and serve Rochdale from there. Such an arrangement, it was argued, would not facilitate the proposed erection

of a new chapel at Rochdale. By September 1825, however, Penswick had convinced the congregations of Bury and Rochdale that together they could afford to support a priest and he wrote to Smith: '. . . the aggregate amount of these sums will supply all that is necessary for a missioner, including the upkeep of a horse which cannot be dispensed with in this widely scattered mission'.

The subsequent appointment of Fr Trappes to the mission in December eased the situation considerably, especially as he had a personal annual income of £170, but by early 1828 the Catholics of Bury were less than satisfied with his services. Mass was said only once every two weeks and then in a garret. It was obvious, they complained, that Fr Trappes could not serve both towns. An increasing congregation warranted both a regular minister and a new chapel, but, they continued, 'the congregation of Bury is entirely composed of poor labourers (chiefly English) and our poverty is so great as to render even the thought hopeless of our ever being able to erect a fit structure for the worship of the Almighty'.[9] The Catholics of Bury were to attend Mass in premises in Clerke Street and Henry Street before finally opening St Marie's in 1842, whilst those in Rochdale had to wait until 1830 for a proper chapel to be built.[10]

Despite the poverty of most urban congregations, there was a steady if slow increase in the number of chapels. The one at Pleasington Priory opened in 1819, St Augustine's, Manchester, opened in 1820, and subsequently chapels were opened at Ashton-under-Lyne (1825), St Patrick's, Liverpool (1826), Blackburn (1826), Durham (1828), Berwick-upon-Tweed (1828), Oldham (1829), Rochdale (1830), and St Patrick's, Leeds, was started in 1831.[11] The money to pay for the building of chapels came from the congregation themselves, from wealthy benefactors, and from begging trips undertaken by priests. Weekly contributions were collected from the faithful but the size and regularity of donations depended upon the health of local trade and industry. For example, Fr Rigby wrote to Bishop Smith from Barnsley in October 1829 asking for relief to supplement his income from the congregation of seven shillings a week. Of the 3,703 looms in the town, only 170 were in full work, whilst the rest were either partially employed or idle. Between three and four hundred Irish people had 'been returned by what they term passes to Ireland'![12]

Wealthy Catholic gentry provided substantial funds to either

instigate or support the building and maintenance of chapels. Thus, the Honourable Edward Petre promised £600 towards the building of a chapel at Huddersfield; Mr Towneley endowed the new chapel at Stella; Messrs Witham, Lovat, Eastwood, and Towneley contributed land and money for a chapel at Burnley; Mr Lomax of Clayton Hall provided the site for the chapel of St Mary, Clayton-le-Moor, and Mr Weld gave £500 to Fr John Briggs to establish a mission at Chester.[13]

Missioners also embarked on fund raising expeditions, in most cases to the annoyance of their colleagues and the embarrassment of their congregations. In 1823, for example, Fr Ashurst of St Augustine's, Manchester, complained bitterly to Smith about Fr Bannen coming from Bradford to beg in Manchester. Fr Ashurst (an Englishman) did not invite Fr Bannen (an Irishman) into his house, and 'this the Irish consider an indignity offered to their country and as such a violent prejudice is raised against me in the town and I am called everything but a gentleman'. Fr Smith of Hull, however, reported to Bishop Smith in August 1828 that he had just completed a successful begging tour of Northumberland and had now £300 cash in hand. But the sight of their pastor leaving them for begging trips annoyed the congregation around Sheffield, and Penswick urged Smith to encourage Fr McCarthy to organize planned offerings.[14]

It was with this idea in mind that a few missioners in the North East tried to launch a Catholic Missionary Society. Frs Gillow, Slater and Hogarth wrote an open letter to the Catholics of Northumberland and Durham calling for weekly contributions from all classes.

> In adopting the above resolutions [they wrote] we have been greatly influenced by the desire of relieving the clergy from the necessity of leaving their congregations to solicit contributions in other districts, for the creation of chapels, schools, etc., a custom which has long prevailed, but which has invariably been found not less painful to the feelings of the clergyman, than burdensome to the public.[15]

Begging trips were not the only cause of friction within the District and the two bishops had to deal with a number of petty and acrimonious disputes. Fr Geradot, an old French priest at St Anthony's, Scotland Road, Liverpool, was a source of much aggravation to Smith and Penswick. He demanded that Smith pay him money owed to him as a result of the building of the chapel. Despite a number of placatory measures, the old man remained adamant, even threatening legal action

against Penswick. News of the affair spread outside the District, much to Smith's disadvantage, and in the end Penswick suggested that they leave Geradot to his own devices. He wrote to Smith that Geradot was 'either in his dotage or lost to any feeling which should actuate an ecclesiastic'. He feared that Geradot would 'raise a schism' among the Irish and would disregard the bishops' attempts to solve the problem. In the end, the missioner put the church and presbytery on the market, claiming that it had been erected at his expense.[16]

Other disputes were equally injurious to Smith and the reputation of the Catholic community. Disagreement between Fr Rigby and his congregation at Ugthorpe, North Yorkshire, centred on the congregation's claim that their pastor was totally disorganized and that he disregarded Smith's authority.[17] At Hull, the community was divided by a bitter dispute over their priest, Fr Smith. At first, Smith appeared to do little about the matter. Those in Hull, wishing to end the quarrel, offered to pay the Bishop's expenses if he would go to the town to investigate. Vitriolic letters and poems were published but still the Bishop prevaricated. Ultimately, Smith handed the business over to Penswick who intervened and transferred the unfortunate priest. 'The more I consider your management of the Hull business', Smith wrote to Penswick, 'the more I am satisfied with it and think that under all the circumstances it could not have possibly been better'.[18]

The misconduct, incompetence and ill-health of priests were also a cause of concern to both bishops and congregation. Drunkenness and unseemly behaviour scandalized Catholics and brought joy to their enemies. Financial incompetence among the clergy exacerbated the poverty of missions and the District. And the intellectual, organizational, and spiritual weaknesses of some priests hampered the growth and development of individual missions. In August 1824, for example, Penswick reported to Smith from the Isle of Man that despite a considerable amount of money being spent on the house and chapel, they were in a deplorable state. 'This was not the most appalling feature of the picture which exhibited itself to us', he continued. What concerned him even more were 'a neglected congregation and youth unconscious of the blessings of religion'. He found the missioner to be 'a weak, ignorant and undiscerning man'.[19]

Most missioners living alone and on the urban missions found life harder than their colleagues serving wealthy family chapels.

Fr Pepper, a Benedictine stationed at Berwick-upon-Tweed, found nothing on his arrival but the bare walls 'except an old chest of drawers for the vestments, which are in tolerable good condition, 2 chairs — 1 in the chappel, the other in a room, one mirror, a bason stand, and a broken table'. He had to spend £40 on necessary items of furniture and cooking equipment, so that, he wrote to Smith, he had been obliged in his eightieth year 'to live very sparingly indeed'. However, his health was good, 'despite an inveterate pain in my jaw', and he was able to say Mass and deliver a sermon. He was unable to walk very far though and clung on 'with memory and faculties much failing and living like a hermit'. [20] Poor Fr Hull at Stella was also in a desperate plight. 'From the situation of the pain', he wrote to his Bishop, '. . . and the difficulty I have in making water, I apprehend my complaint is caused by the stone and for that, at my age, there is no remedy but patience and death'. [21] The priest at Birtley was beyond such stoicism and was 'quite deraigned', according to Mrs Humble who wrote an agonized letter to Smith whilst he was coadjutor. The congregation lived in terror and great damage had been done to the chapel and its fittings. The chapel was now 'nailed up' and, despite requests for assistance, none had been forthcoming. 'What a scandalous affair', she wrote, 'I have really made myself ill with looking after him. I can do no more'. [22]

For priests working in the industrial cities the threat to health came from visiting the unhygienic slums occupied by their congregations. Typhus and cholera their toll, as the *Manchester Gazette* of 13 November 1824 reported:

> Yesterday, of typhus fever at his house in Granby Row, the Rev. John Ashurst, Catholic priest in the 36th year of his age . . . He needs no eulogy in these pages: the poor will recount his virtues and everyone who knew him will lament his loss. [23]

However, the possibility of such a tragic death did not deter missioners from volunteering for such missions. 'Mr Fisher pleads hard for Oldham', wrote Penswick to Smith in 1829, 'so does Mr Hale for Congleton, but it will be as well to send him beyond the hills'.[24] The zeal of Fr Fisher was evident in a letter sent by him to Bishop Smith in 1825. 'Really, my Lord, it is the best plan to send a young priest to a poor place so that he begins to open his eyes at the commencement. Rochdale, Bury, and Oldham are at the option of any of the young clergy at Ushaw'. In particular, he had found the support of the dissenters

in the neighbourhood of Ashton-under-Lyne very helpful and they had donated generously to the erection of the new chapel. 'They are very liberal', he wrote, 'particularly the Unitarians'.[25] Fr Thomas MacDonald at Lambton, near Houghton-le-Spring had not been so fortunate. Since his arrival, he had met with every encouragement, except from a small group of Methodists 'headed by a preacher who had for a long while before my arrival . . . been endeavouring . . . to blacken my character by branding it with every crime they thought would render my endeavours unsuccessful . . .' He was accused of being an atheist, not knowing the Creed and Lord's Prayer, being ignorant of the Scriptures, and refusing to allow the Catechism to be used in school.[26] Despite Fr Fisher's good fortune, there was still a need for caution as Fr Petre reported to Smith in 1828: 'No news except that we Catholics still continue to wear the honourable badge of persecution'. [27]

Older gentry families, and especially those with a history of recusancy, were of course used to persecution, but conditions were definitely changing. New legislation and the transformation in the occupational structure of the country were to reduce the importance of such families, and the transition from the dependence on them to an increasing reliance on urban congregations was a feature of Smith's administration. Old expectations and practices died hard, however. Michael Tasburgh of Burghwallis wrote to Smith, via Fr Benedict Rayment at York, to inform him of his return from the Continent, and to request him

> . . . to provide us with a priest on the same footing as we had previous . . . My family and habits are so well known to you that it is unnecessary to enter into any detail respecting the disposition of the person likely to visit us but I will . . . observe that an individual of scrupulous and rigid opinions and habits would be disagreeable to us all, notwithstanding they have of late . . . become very fashionable.[28]

In a similar vein, Mr Selby of Biddleston wrote to Smith to inform him that he too had returned home and that he wished no interruption 'to take place in the performance of religious duties in the house' if, as expected, Fr Abbott was to be replaced. [29]

When Smith tried to move Fr Maddox from Ellingham, he received the following from Thomas Haggerston:

> I am extremely sorry that I cannot oblige you. At my time of life it is impossible for me to consent to remove Mr Maddox. He suits me enormously

well and is much liked by the congregation. He has now got himself comfortably settled here that I cannot think of changing him.

A little over a year later, however, Haggerston did accept Fr Crane and he wrote to the Bishop: 'The mission is an easy one, and if he will only not be on too familiar terms with the servants, I can conceive he may be happy and contented'.[30]

Other letters illustrate the desire of richer Catholics to keep their families and servants away from the urban congregations. Thus, in 1820, Fr Wagstaffe wrote to Smith from Stydd Lodge, near Blackburn, informing him that Mr Towneley, a great benefactor, 'expresses a great desire to keep his family entirely separate from the levelling and irreligious spirit which is so rapidly spreading and to which his servants are already becoming dupes . . .' [31]

Fr Richard Thompson noted the growing contradiction in the situation. The maintenance of private chapels and the erection of new ones, even with the generous assistance of richer Catholics, could not comfortably continue. Many old families could not, as Bishop Gibson had demanded, prove their chapels to have been in existence since 'time immemorial'; nor could the continuance of such chapels be tolerated when urban chapels 'are multiplying and approaching so near to the character of parish churches'.[32]

In the towns, however, the gentry's place as leader of Catholic society was assumed by a rising middle class. In Leeds, for example, the Catholics, led by James Holdforth, a merchant, and with the permission of Fr Lefebre, held numerous meetings 'to take into consideration the most effectual method of accommodating (the) rapid increasing congregation, the present chapel not being at all adequate even with its recent erected gallery'. Such was the wealth of the congregation that it had purchased land for a church, a presbytery and burial ground. The debt of £1,336, to be repaid in four annual instalments at 5 per cent interest, would be met by weekly subscriptions. All the congregation now wanted was Smith's approval for Fr Oxley, already based at Leeds, to take charge of the new chapel. [33] Thus, the confidence of one class was being displayed by another.

Although this examination of Smith's administration has been brief and superficial, it has highlighted certain features of interest. First, there was a marked change from the authoritarian style of Bishop Gibson to the less forceful and delegatory approach of Smith. The

authority of Smith was, on occasions, disputed by both clergy and laity in a manner which Gibson would have hardly tolerated. On the other hand, however, Smith's use of Penswick was to the advantage of the District and provided Penswick with the training which Smith had been denied. Secondly, the District itself was changing. More compact, urban missions were gradually being established and the social composition and leadership of the Catholic community was being transformed in consequence. The scattered missions centred on the houses of the gentry would henceforth be replaced by urban congregations increasingly Irish, served by increasing numbers of Irish priests, and led by men of new wealth. Thirdly, the Act of 1829 enabled Catholics to practise their religion freely and openly. No longer were they a persecuted minority and the circumstances which Smith had known all his life were to change dramatically in the next few decades.

Smith's period as Vicar Apostolic, therefore, was one of transition. Bishop Poynter once said that the office of a bishop in England 'is full of labour and anxiety', whilst Wiseman wrote to Penswick that he would have no trouble in obtaining a coadjutor on the grounds 'of the great extent of the District (and) the multifariousness of its administration'.[34] Ramsay's portrait of Thomas Smith shows a mild-mannered man, rather unsuited to the rigours of his office.

NOTES

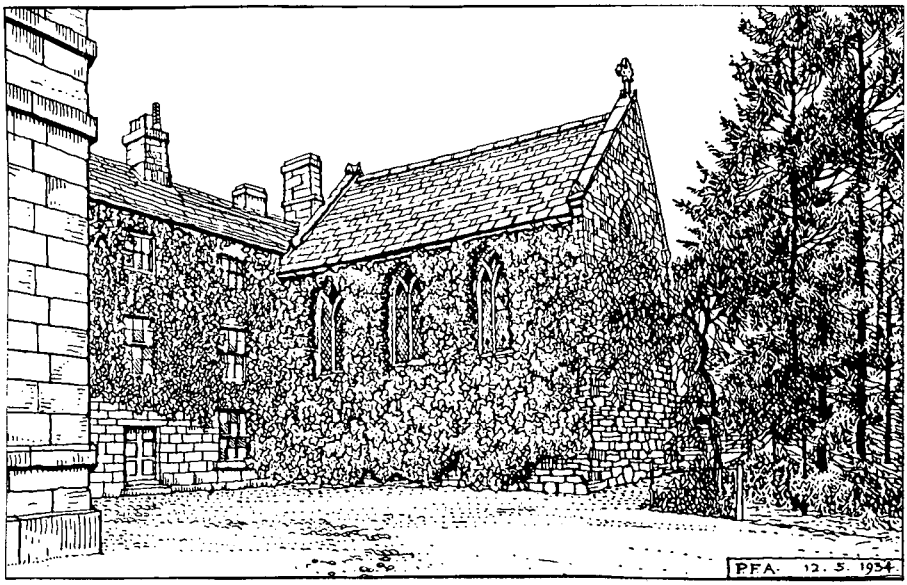
1. See B. Ward, *The Dawn of The Catholic Revival in England 1781–1803* (London, 1909), Vol. 2; D. Milburn, *A History of Ushaw College* (Ushaw, 1964); and J. Connell, *The Roman Catholic Church in England 1780–1850: A Study in Internal Politics* (Philadelphia, 1984).
2. W.M. Brady, *The Episcopal Succession 1400–1875* (Rome, 1875), Vol. 3, p.272; Milburn, op.cit., p.15.
3. Ward, op.cit., p.110.
4. Brady, op.cit., p.272; Ward, op.cit., pp.250–1.
5. J. Gillow, *Bibliographical Dictionary of English Catholics* (London, 1885–1902), Vol. 2, p.449.
6. Brady, op.cit., p.268; Leeds Diocesan Archives, Gradwell to Smith, May,6, 1819.
7. Brady, op.cit., 268 ff.
8. Brady, op.cit., p.272; L.D.A., for example, Penswick to Smith, May 1, 1822; Sept. 23, 1825; Smith to Penswick, Dec. 12, 1825; Sept. 7, 1827.
9. L.D.A., Halshall to Smith, May 30, 1824; Penswick to Smith, Sept. 23, 1825; J. Witham to Smith, Jan. 2, 1828.

10. C.A. Bolton, *Salford Diocese and Its Catholic Past* (Manchester, 1954), pp. 106–7.
11. Bolton, op.cit., pp.74–122; *Leeds Diocesan Directory.*
12. L.D.A., J. Rigby to Smith, Oct. 2, 1829.
13. See Bolton, op.cit., pp.74–122; L.D.A., J. Briggs to Smith, May 26, 1824.
14. L.D.A., J. Ashurst to Smith. Sept. 4, 1823; J. Smith to Smith, Aug. 6, 1828.
15. L.D.A., Smith correspondence, no. 58, Aug. 1828.
16. L.D.A., Penswick to Smith, May 1, 1822; Geradot to Smith, Aug. 16, 1822; Poynter to Smith, n.d.; Penswick to Smith, June 13, 20, 1824; Smith correspondence, no.201 (A), n.d; Penswick to Smith, Sept. 23, 1825; Penswick to Smith, Mar. 4, 1826.
17. L.D.A., petition to Smith, July 3, 1828; J. Lawson to Smith, July 4, 1828.
18. L.D.A., petitions to Smith, June 1828; W. Wilson to Penswick, Sept. 10, 1828; printed open letter to J. Smith, Sept. 22, 1828; Penswick to Smith, Jan. 1829; Smith to Penswick, Sept. 7, 1827; W. Wilson to Penswick, Nov. 28, 1827; Smith to Penswick, Dec. 19, 1827.
19. L.D.A., Penswick to Smith, Aug. 16, 1824.
20. L.D.A., Pepper to Smith, Aug. 14, 1817; see also T.G. Holt, 'Berwick upon Tweed: The Story of a Legacy', in *Northern Catholic History*, no. 18, Autumn 1983, pp. 6–7.
21. L.D.A., Hull to Smith, Jan. 27, 1827.
22. L.D.A., Humble to Smith, July 11, 1817.
23. Quoted in Bolton, op.cit., p.123.
24. L.D.A., Penswick to Smith, Aug. 29, 1829.
25. L.D.A., Fisher to Smith, Nov. 1, 1825.
26. L.D.A., MacDonald to Smith, July 9, 1817.
27. L.D.A., Petre to Smith, July 5, 1828.
28. L.D.A., Tasburgh to Rayment, Mar.8, 1828.
29. L.D.A., Abbott to Smith, May 15, 1828.
30. L.D.A., Haggerston to Smith, Mar. 9, 1828; Sept. 30, 1829.
31. L.D.A., Wagstaffe to Smith, Nov. 13, 1820.
32. L.D.A., Thompson to Smith, Dec. 22, 1827.
33. L.D.A., Bostock to Smith, Jan. 29, 1825.
34. L.D.A., Poynter to Penswick, May 4, 1826; Wiseman to Penswick, Sept. 10, 1831.

BIDDLESTONE AND THROPTON IN 1934

Extracts from *The Caravan Pilgrim*, by Peter F. Anson, 1938.

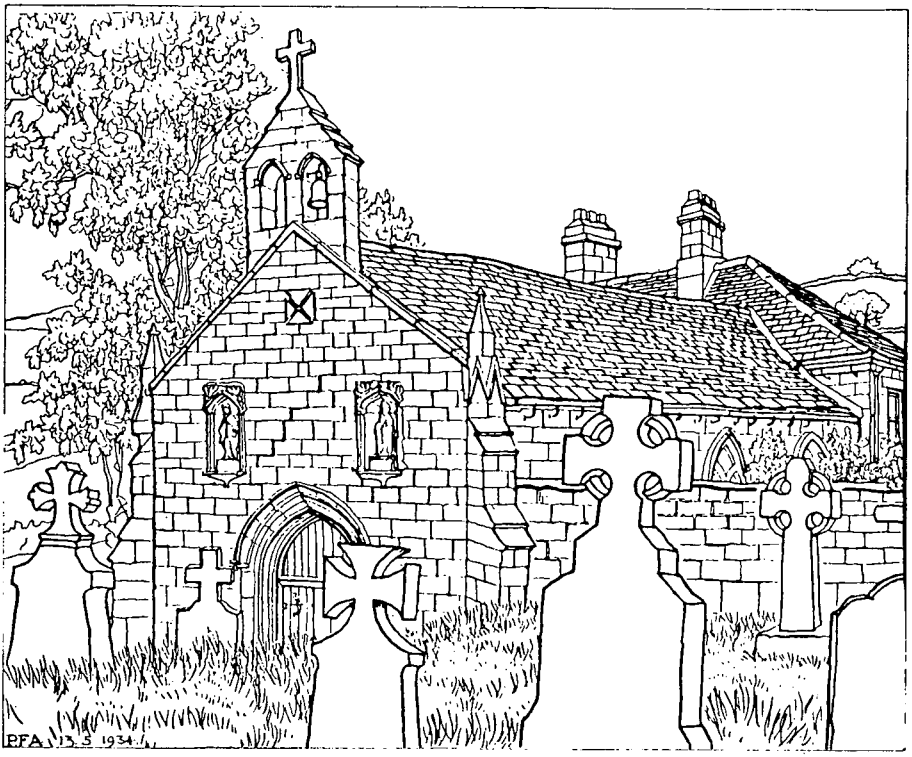
Biddlestone Hall chapel



One day during our stay at Thropton we were taken to Biddlestone Hall — up among the Cheviots. Thanks to the Selby family the Old Religion never died out in this wild and remote district. Mass has been said at Biddlestone Hall without a break for over 600 years, for somehow or other it was generally possible to keep a priest here. Sad to relate the estates were sold to Protestants some years ago, but it is good to know that the present owners allow the chapel to remain in use for Catholic worship.

We were shown over the place by Fr. Francis Hutchinson, now in charge of the mission of Biddlestone. He explained to us that the chapel was built on the upper floor of an old Peel Tower, and is therefore not so lofty as might be supposed from my sketch of the ivy covered exterior. A sad place in some ways, but a forceful reminder of what was the price paid by our forefathers for their loyalty to Catholicism.

All Saints church, Thropton



Thropton is one of the oldest Catholic missions in Northumberland, founded about 1700. But for some reason or other there are few records of its early history. The original chapel at Thropton Hall, the home of the Robson family, was pulled down in 1811. It was mainly through the generosity of this family that the present church was built in 1811 — a typical North of England 'Popish Mass House' of the pre-Emancipation times. Severe and plain without, the interior is in startling contrast, being brightly decorated. The style of architecture might be termed 'very early Gothic Revival.' One can see from the loving care bestowed on this venerable shrine, that Fr. Goundry appreciates and values it. On the old tombstones in the churchyard you can read the names of many an old family which helped to keep alive the Faith in Northumberland during the centuries of persecution.

PROGRAMME 1987/88

All lectures will be given in St Mary's Cathedral Centre, Clayton Street West, Newcastle upon Tyne, on Tuesdays, at 7.00 p.m.

6 October 1987	Annual General Meeting. Rev. W.J. Nicholson (Chairman), *The Lindisfarne Gospels*, with slides.
3 November 1987	Dr John Derry, *The Catholic Question in British Politics, 1790–1829.*
1 December 1987	Dr Ewan Cameron, *Thomas More: The Renaissance resists the Reformation.*
23 February 1988	Dr Elizabeth Redgate, *Saint Cuthbert.*
22 March 1988	Dr Judith F. Champ, *The Crown of the Diocesan Structure: Ullathorne and the foundation of Oscott College.*

Coach Excursions

17 October 1987 (Sat., half-day)	Bellingham and Hesleyside.
May 1988	York, The Bar Convent Museum.
June 1988	Naworth Castle, Cumbria.

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