

# Lancaster

33



# Martyrs

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Between 1584 and 1646 fifteen priests and laymen were martyred at Lancaster, St Ambrose Barlow and St Edmund Arrowsmith were canonized by St Paul VI in 1970. They are counted among the 'Forty Martyrs' of England and Wales. With the exception of Ven. Lawrence Bailey the remaining Lancaster martyrs were beatified in 1987 by St John Paul II.







**Blessed  
James Bell**  
Priest & Martyr  
c. 1520–1584

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James Bell was born at Warrington in Lancashire. The exact date of his birth is not known. He studied at Oxford and was ordained priest in the reign of Queen Mary. Under Elizabeth he succumbed to the pressures brought to bear on those who would not conform to the established Church. According to manuscript sources he “ministered their bare few sacraments about 20 years in diverse places of England”.

In 1579 he returned to Lancashire where he was persuaded by a devout Catholic lady to return to the Catholic Faith. He was reconciled to the Church in 1581 and resumed priestly duties, devoting himself to arduous and dangerous missionary work. Apprehended in January 1584 he confessed his priesthood and was arraigned at Manchester Quarter

Sessions and then sent for trial at the Lancaster assizes in March. Condemned and sentenced to death he said to the Judge “I beg your Lordship would add to the sentence that my lips and the tops of my fingers may be cut off, for having sworn and subscribed to the articles of heretics contrary both to my conscience and to God’s Truth”.

Having spent the night in prayer, Fr James Bell was hanged and quartered the following day, April 20th, 1584.

At his execution he “pray[ed] expressly for all Catholics and for the conversion of all heretics...”

He was the only known Marian priest to have suffered martyrdom. Fr James Bell was beatified by Pope Pius XI in 1929.



**Blessed  
John Finch**  
Martyr  
c. 1548–1584

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John Finch was born at Eccleston in Lancashire. Although he was born into a Catholic family John was brought up a Protestant. After twenty years in London, where he grew to appreciate the contrast in belief and practice between Protestantism and Catholicism, he resolved to lead a Catholic life and on his return to Lancashire he was reconciled to the Faith. When he married his house became a focus for missionary work and he became a catechist.

At great danger to himself and his family he sheltered priests, an activity which eventually came to the attention of the authorities. At Christmas 1581 he was caught with a priest, George Ostliffe, and both were arrested. Finch was falsely accused of having betrayed the priest and other

Catholics and of having taken refuge in the house of the Earl of Derby. In fact he had been imprisoned in the Earl’s house where he was tortured in an attempt to make him abandon his faith. These attempts failed and he was taken first to the Fleet prison in Manchester and then to the House of Correction. Having refused to attend the Protestant church Finch was dragged there by his heels, his head banging on the stones. Many months of imprisonment followed in a damp dungeon with little food and frequent torture. All this time he prayed to be brought to trial and martyrdom.

After three years he was sent to Lancaster for trial where he was found guilty and condemned. He was executed on April 20th 1584, the same day as Blessed James Bell.



**Blessed  
Robert Nutter**  
Priest & Martyr  
c. 1550-1600

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**R**obert Nutter was born at Burnley in Lancashire and studied at Brasenose College Oxford in 1565. He and his brother John, also a Catholic martyr, became students at the English College in Reims. Ordained priest in December 1581, Robert returned to England. Nothing more is known of his activities until February 1584 when he was committed to the Tower of London. He remained in the pit for forty-seven days, wearing irons for forty-three days and twice being tortured by use of the “scavenger’s daughter”. This device, invented in the reign of Henry VIII, but apparently rarely used, worked using the opposite principle to the rack by compressing the body rather than stretching it. Nutter remained in prison until January 1585 when he and twenty other priests were banished and shipped to Boulogne

aboard the Mary Martin. However, before being allowed to leave the country Robert was forced to watch his brother John die for his faith at Tyburn. From Boulogne Nutter went to Rome, using the alias Rowley, but he was recaptured and imprisoned in Newgate Prison. Between 1597 and 1590 he was imprisoned in Wisbech Castle Cambridgeshire and then the Marshalsea. While in prison he joined the Dominican Order. However, in 1597 he signed a petition to the Jesuit priest Fr Henry Garnet (executed in 1605 for complicity in the Gunpowder Plot) in favour of having a Jesuit superior. But in November 1598 he and others petitioned the Pope to institute an archpriest, a request that was later withdrawn. Nutter escaped, but was recaptured and drawn and quartered with Edward Thwing, at Lancaster on July 26th 1600.



**Blessed  
Edward Thwing**  
Priest & Martyr  
1565-1600

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**E**dward Thwing was born at Heworth, near York. Between 1583 and 1587 he studied at the English College, Reims, some of the intervening years having been spent with the Jesuits at Pont-à-Mousson. He considered entering the Order but within two years returned to English College in Rome where he completed his studies.

He was ordained priest at Laon in December 1590. A severely ulcerated knee hampered Thwing’s early years as a priest but he was eventually able to embark for his native England.

He was captured almost immediately and imprisoned with his fellow priest Robert Nutter.

Together they managed to escape and

evade the authorities for three years. They were re-captured in May 1600 and condemned to death. They died together at Lancaster on July 26th 1600.



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**Blessed  
Thurston Hunt**  
Priest & Martyr  
1555-1601

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The Hunt family lived at Carlton Hall near Leeds. Thurston studied for the priesthood at Reims from 1594-8. Using the name Robert Greenlow, he worked for 15 years in the north of England before he was captured at Preston. He was apprehended while attempting to rescue fellow priest Robert Middleton who was on his way to Lancaster to be tried. Both men were heavily shackled and dispatched to London with their feet tied together beneath their horses' bellies and their hands tied behind them. When it appeared that Hunt had knowledge of the imminent Essex rebellion they were sent in some haste back to Lancaster. Hunt and Middleton were executed on April 3rd 1601. The crowd collected relics after their death and a contemporary verse records their fortitude and faith.

Hunt's hawtie  
corage staut,  
With godlie  
zeale soe true,  
Myld Middleton,  
O what tongue  
Can halfe thy  
vertue showe!



**Blessed  
Robert Middleton**  
Priest & Martyr  
1571-1601

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Robert Middleton was born at York to a Catholic family although, until he was in his teens, he followed the Protestant faith. However in 1586 his kinswoman, Margaret Clitherow, left him a striking example. Margaret Clitherow (née Middleton) was the first woman to die under the religious suppression of Queen Elizabeth I and is known as "The Pearl of York". She too had been born to Protestant parents, married young and had two children. She was received in to the Catholic Church a few years later and her son became a Catholic priest. Such was her devotion to her faith that she harboured many fugitive priests in her house, in the Shambles in York, which was frequently used for the celebration of Mass. Margaret was arrested, imprisoned and tortured in an attempt to make

her deny her faith. She stood firm and was condemned to be pressed to death on Good Friday March 25th 1586. When she learned of her fate she said: "I feel the weakness of my flesh which is troubled at this news, but my spirit rejoices greatly. For the love of God, pray for me and ask all good people to do likewise." She died after 15 minutes, having had heavy weights placed on a door which had been laid over her. After her death her hand was removed, and this relic is now housed in the chapel of the Bar Convent, York. Moved by her witness, Robert became a Catholic and, aged eighteen, he went to the English College at Reims to study for the priesthood. He was ordained priest in Rome in 1598 and returned to England soon afterwards and spent two years ministering to



**Ven.**  
**Lawrence Bailey**  
Martyr  
d. 1604

Lawrence Bailey (or Baily) is the only one of the Lancaster martyrs who has not been beatified and the one about whom we know the least.

He was one of many lay people who helped priests by hiding them or assisting them to escape. Canon R. N. Billington, second rector of St Peter's Cathedral Lancaster, and Cathedral historian, wrote these words about Bailey:

“In ... [1604], on 16th September, Lawrence Baily, a yeoman who had assisted a priest to escape from the pursuivants, was hanged at Lancaster as a felon on that account.”

37



Catholics in Lancaster. In November 1600, Middleton was arrested near Preston. An attempt to rescue him was made by four Catholics, of whom Fr Thurston Hunt was one, but the attempt failed. While incarcerated at Lancaster the priests were asked their opinion of Queen Elizabeth. Fr Middleton boldly replied that he acknowledged her temporal authority and prayed that God would one day make her a Catholic. He and Hunt were condemned to death.

A request made by Middleton sometime in 1599 to Fr Henry Garnet, superior of the English Jesuits, to enter the Society, was granted too late and Fr Garnet never knew whether Middleton had received it before his execution on April 3rd 1601.



**Blessed**  
**John Thules**  
Priest & Martyr  
1568-1616

John Thules (or Thulis) was born in Upholland, Lancashire and was ordained priest in Rome at in March 1590.

He returned to England and worked for some years before being arrested and committed to Lancaster Castle where Roger Wrenno (or Wrennall), a weaver, was also imprisoned.

They escaped together just before the Lent assizes but were recaptured the following day and imprisoned with four thieves, three of whom Fr Thules converted.

These three were executed after Thules and Wrenno in March 1616. Thules' quarters were then displayed in Lancaster, Preston, Wigan and Warrington.





**Blessed  
Roger Wrenno**  
(Wrennall)  
Martyr  
1578-1616

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Roger Wrenno, a weaver from the Kirkham district of Lancashire, had been imprisoned at Lancaster Castle with Fr John Thules and together they made a bid for freedom. They wandered all night but by dawn found themselves still very close to Lancaster and were quickly recaptured. Wrenno was condemned to death for assisting the priest and was hanged as a felon. The first attempt to hang him failed when the rope broke at which point he was urged to save his life by denying his faith. But Wrenno eagerly remounted the scaffold saying:

“If you had seen that which I have just now seen, you would be as much in haste to die as I am now.”

A new rope was found and he was executed with John Thules.



**Saint  
Edmund  
Arrowsmith**  
Priest & Martyr  
1585-1628

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Edmund was born in Haydock in Lancashire, the eldest son of Robert Arrowsmith, a yeoman farmer, and Margery Gerard kinswoman of Fr John Gerard, author of *The Diary of an Elizabethan Priest*, and of another Catholic martyr the Blessed Miles Gerard. Edmund had been baptized Brian but chose to use his confirmation name. The family suffered much for their faith, Edmund's father having been imprisoned for a time at Lancaster Castle. Edmund left England in 1605 to study at the English College, Douai, but poor health forced him to return home until 1607 when he resumed his studies at Douai. He was ordained at Arras on December 9th 1612 and sent back to minister in England a year later. Despite the dangers Arrowsmith ministered to

the Catholics of Lancashire until 1622 when he was arrested and questioned. He was later freed by order of King James I who had decreed that all arrested priests should be released. Arrowsmith entered the Society of Jesus at Clerkenwell, London 1624 and then returned to Lancashire to continue his ministry. In 1628 he was arrested, betrayed by the son of the landlord of the Blue Anchor Inn in south Lancashire, whom he had censured for an incestuous marriage. He was held in the dungeons of Lancaster Castle and at the Assizes came before Sir Henry Yelverton a Puritan judge known for his hatred of Catholicism. Yelverton swore that he would not leave Lancaster before the prisoner was executed and he saw his bowels burn before his face. Fr Arrowsmith was found guilty of being



“If you had seen that which I have just now seen, you would be as much in haste to die as I am now.”



**Blessed  
Richard Hayhurst**  
(Hurst)  
Martyr  
d. 1628

The day after Edmund Arrowsmith's martyrdom another Lancaster martyr went to his death. Hayhurst (or Hurst), a prosperous yeoman who farmed his own land near Preston, was probably born at Broughton in Lancashire. He came to the attention of the authorities as a stubborn and persistent recusant and his arrest was ordered. In the scuffle that followed one of his pursuers fell while running across a ploughed field, suffered a broken leg and subsequently died. Before his death the man had testified that his fall was an accident, but Hayhurst was arrested for his murder and brought to trial. The trial was a mockery as his real crime was recusancy and the events provided the perfect opportunity to make an example of him. Through Hayhurst's friends a petition was sent to King Charles

I, which was supported by Queen Henrietta Maria, but the Government was determined to secure a conviction and the jury was instructed to bring in a guilty verdict. The day after he was sentenced to death Hayhurst was dragged by the legs through the streets to hear a Protestant sermon. He put his fingers in his ears. On the gallows the next day he was told that his life would be spared if he would swear allegiance to the king. However, the oath contained words attacking the Catholic Faith and Hayhurst refused. He died on August 29th 1628. Canon Billington writes:

“He kissed the gallows on reaching the place of execution, and disregarding the ministers present, recommended himself to God, and begged the prayers of the Blessed Virgin, his angel guardian, and all the saints, especially St. John the Baptist, it being the day of his

a priest and sentenced to the dreadful death of a traitor. On August 28th 1628 huge crowds gathered as he was brought through the castle yard to receive absolution from St John Southworth who was imprisoned with him. He was then dragged on a hurdle to the place of execution on the moor overlooking the city. Cut down after being briefly hung Arrowsmith spoke:



love of Thee

“I die for love of Thee; for our Holy Faith; for the support of the authority of Thy vicar on earth, the successor of St Peter, true head of the Catholic Church which Thou hast founded and established.”

His last words were Bone Jesu. His quarters were displayed at Lancaster Castle as a warning to others. His right hand was retrieved as a relic and is preserved at St Oswald's Church, Ashton-in-Makerfield.

I die for

[beheading]. Ascending the ladder he repeated the names of Jesus and Mary, and so ...  
... was put to death.”





**Saint  
Ambrose Barlow**  
Priest & Martyr  
1585-1641

(Alias Radcliffe  
and Brereton)

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Ambrose was born at Barlow Hall near Manchester the fourth son of Sir Alexander Barlow and Mary, daughter of Sir Uryan Brereton of Handforth Hall, in Cheshire. The Barlow family had been reluctant converts to the Church of England. Ambrose's grandfather died in 1584 whilst imprisoned for his beliefs and Sir Alexander had two thirds of his estate confiscated as a result of his refusing to conform. On 30 November 1585, Ambrose was baptised at Didsbury chapel where the entry in the register may still be seen. He practised the Anglican faith until 1607, when he converted to Roman Catholicism. He was educated at the Benedictine monastery of St Gregory, Douai and entered the English College at Valladolid on September 20th 1610. He returned to Douai where in 1616, like his elder brother before him,

he was professed as a Benedictine monk. He was ordained the following year and sent to England where he ministered in South Lancashire with great zeal and fervour. On Easter Sunday, April 25th 1641, he was apprehended at Morley's Hall, the home of the Tyldesley family, some seven miles from Manchester. Canon Billington tells us: "After celebrating Mass on Easter Sunday in 1641 he addressed a congregation of about 100 Catholics; during his address the house was attacked by Protestants led by their minister". He was taken into custody by the Vicar of Eccles who marched ahead of his prisoners clad in his surplice, supported by some 400 men armed with clubs and swords. After four months at Lancaster Castle Barlow was tried and confessed to being a priest. He was executed on Friday September 10th 1641.



**Blessed  
Edward Bamber**  
Priest & Martyr  
1600-1646

Born in Poulton-le-Fylde, Lancashire, Edward Bamber was educated at the English College, Valladolid, ordained and sent to England. Upon his arrival at Dover he fell to his knees and thanked God. He was seen by the Governor of the Castle and was banished from the country.

Upon his return he was apprehended again, near Standish in Lancashire where, it is thought, he was the chaplain at Standish Hall. On his way to Lancaster he managed to escape while lodging at the Old Green Man Inn near Cloughton-on-Brock. A Mr Singleton of Broughton helped and sheltered him having found him wandering in a field.

Bamber was arrested yet again and

committed to Lancaster Castle where he remained for three years, escaping again but being recaptured. He was tried with two other priests, Thomas Whitaker and John Woodcock. All were condemned when two apostates gave witness against Bamber confirming that he had administered the sacraments.

He was able to reconcile to the Church a felon who had murdered his brother and encouraged his fellow martyrs to die bravely.

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He was stripped and hung, drawn and quartered on August 7th 1646.

... the house was attacked by Protestants led by their minister





**Blessed  
John Woodcock**  
Priest & Martyr  
1603-1646

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John Woodcock was born in Leyland, Lancashire. His mother was a Catholic and Woodcock converted in 1622. He studied at Saint-Omer for a year and was admitted to the English College, Rome in 1629.

In 1630 he joined the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin in Paris but shortly afterwards joined the Franciscans at Douai. For some years he lived at Arras as chaplain to a Mr Sheldon. By 1643 he was in Newcastle-upon-Tyne from where went to Lancashire but he was arrested after having spent only one night there. He was imprisoned at Lancaster Castle for two years and was condemned for being a priest with two others who were to die with him: Edward Bamber and Thomas Whitaker. When Woodcock was flung off the ladder the rope broke. Having been hanged a second time,

he was cut down and disembowelled alive. An arm bone of Blessed John Woodcock is preserved by the Franciscan nuns at Taunton.



**Blessed  
Thomas Whitaker**  
Priest & Martyr  
1614-1646

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Thomas Whitaker was born at Burnley in Lancashire the son of a schoolmaster. He was educated first at his father's school and then sent to Valladolid where he studied for the priesthood. He was ordained in 1638 and returned to England and for five years ministered in Lancashire.

He was arrested and escaped but on a second occasion was seized at Place Hall in Goosnargh and incarcerated at Lancaster Castle in 1643. He was placed in solitary confinement for six weeks at the beginning of what was to be a three year imprisonment.

He suffered greatly in anticipation of the dreadful death that awaited him but maintained a constant vigil of prayer and before his trial made a month's retreat to prepare for his

death. He refused all inducement to conform to Anglicanism and suffered on the same day as Blessed John Woodcock and Blessed Edward Bamber, saying to the sheriff:

“Use your pleasure with me, a reprieve or even a pardon upon your conditions I utterly refuse”.

He was the last priest to be executed at Lancaster. His portable tabernacle and chalice and paten are preserved at St Thomas's church, Cloughton-on-Brock.

