

Fr John Nutter, Martyr.

Born probably in Reedley Hollows, John and his brother went to Rheims in 1579 to train as seminary priests. Ordained in 1582, he was captured on landing back in England in January 1583, and was tried and executed on 12 February 1584.

Fr Robert Nutter, Martyr.

Brother of John, he was educated by the Catholic schoolmaster Thomas Yates at Burnley, entered Rheims in 1579 and was ordained in 1581. He came to England in 1582 and worked in Oxfordshire and Hants. He was captured in Oxford in 1584, was tortured in the Tower of London, and then imprisoned with his brother. Robert however was banished from England in 1585. He was captured on the high seas by a man of war when trying to return and was imprisoned again, but escaped in 1600 and came to Lancashire where he was recaptured and executed at Lancaster on 26 July 1600. He used the alias of Askew and Rowley.

Fr Robert Woodruff.

Born at Bank Top in 1552 and educated by Thomas Yates at Burnley Grammar School, he entered Douai in 1577 and was ordained in 1581. Returning to England in 1582, he was working in this area by 1586 and was captured in Little Crosby in 1590. Imprisoned in Wisbech and Framlington, he was banished the realm in 1601 but returned to England in 1603.

Fr Thomas Barcroft.

One of five sons of Thomas Barcroft, Senior, he was baptised in Burnley in 1566 and educated by Thomas Yates at Burnley Grammar School. He entered Rheims in 1582, went to Rome in 1584, returned to Rheims in 1589 and was ordained in 1589. Returning to England, he worked in this area until at least 1592, but no further references to him have been found to date.

Fr Thomas Whitaker, Martyr.

Brother of Humphrey, Thomas was baptised at St Peter's in 1611, and was educated at Burnley, St Omers and Valladolid where he was ordained in 1634. He returned to England in 1638 and worked around Goosnargh, Kirkham and St Michael on Wyre. Arrested, he escaped. Arrested again at Place Hall, Goosnargh, he was tried at Lancaster in 1643 and executed there 7 August 1646.

Fr Humphrey Whitaker

Born in 1613, Humphrey and his brother were the sons of Thomas Whitaker, master of the Free School in Burnley, and Helen Starkey. The father died in 1627, and the mother in 1652. Humphrey later used the alias of Francis Starkey and Francis Clayton. Educated at Burnley Grammar School, St Omers, and the Venerable English College, Rome, Humphrey was ordained in 1638. He spent 2 years as the agent of the English College at Piacenza, and then went to Lisbon to teach philosophy in 1640. He became Prefect of Studies there in 1642, and then taught at Douai 1647-1649. He acted as Canon and Secretary for the Chapter set up in England by the first Vicar Apostolic and then returned to Lisbon in 1650, becoming President of the College in 1651, and dying there in 1653.

Fr Thomas Towneley

The seventh son of Richard Towneley and Margaret Paston, Thomas was educated at Douai 1689, Paris 1690 and St Maglaine in 1694. After ordination he was working in the North of England by 1698 and in Lancashire by 1733. He died in May 1737, probably at Euxton Hall.

The unsung hero is of course the Burnley Schoolmaster, **Thomas Yates**, who educated these priests as young boys to be staunch Catholics at a time Catholicism was being persecuted. Yates later moved to Blackburn, where he continued to teach Catholicism. What price the influence of a good teacher?

Notes

The Venerable English College, Rome, the Colleges in Paris, at St Omers, in Douai, at Rheims, in Spain at Valladolid and in Portugal in Lisbon were formed to train English Seminary Priests for service in England, at risk of death or at least long imprisonment and torture. For obvious reasons of security, few records were kept, and those that were occasionally infiltrated by Government spies, who tried to send their agents to the Colleges, and used priests who apostated to inform on their former fellow students.

Priests who were Jesuits, Benedictines, Franciscans or Dominicans had within their respective orders a chain of command and authority, and circuits of "safe houses" within England. Secular clergy or "seminary priests as they were called initially lacked these until the appointment of Vicars Apostolic.