

The Lamesley Martyrs



Chapel of the English College
Valladolid

Thomas Palasor was born at Ellerton-upon-Swale in North of Yorkshire. He studied for the priesthood at Saint Alban's College at Valladolid in Spain. He was ordained priest there in 1596

He had been imprisoned in the gatehouse at Westminster but escaped and fled to Yorkshire. He was sheltered by John Sayer at Worsall; the Sayers were staunch Catholics.

Some time later Henry Sanderson, who worked for Tobias Matthew, the Bishop of Durham arrested him in the house of John Norton, of Ravensworth, near Lamesley – the early accounts say 'Raven Hall' but the house is long gone.

Tobias Matthew's account says there was a struggle in which John Norton discharged a fowling pistol and was wounded under the arm with a sword thrust.



Ravensworth

John Norton was also arrested with his wife Margaret along with John Talbot who came from Thornton-le-Street and Richard Sayer of Worsall. Bishop Challoner in his account of what happened says that one of those arrested gave up his Catholic faith. There is no record of Richard Sayer's trial, he died in 1610; he may have obtained his freedom through other methods. The other four were tried at Durham and condemned to death. Mrs. Norton was believed to be pregnant and was relieved.

There is a story that while they were in prison, before the trial, the gaoler's wife attempted to poison them. A mutton broth had been prepared laced with poison. A maid was ordered to take it first to Thomas Palasor who saw blood forming crosses and 'O's' coming from the meat in the dish. He refused it and it was returned.

The gaoler's wife added some spices and sent it to Norton and Talbot. They too saw the same thing and refused it.

The servant-girl broke down and confessed what was going on and converted. Mary Day then entered the service of a Catholic woman, Eleanor Forcer, who passed on her testimony.

Father Palasor was hanged, drawn and quartered outside Durham on 9 August 1600 – the punishment for being a seminary priest. John Norton and John Talbot were hanged on the same day for assisting him.

Remembering such people of faith leads us to reflect upon our own relationship with God. It also reminds us that there are many people throughout the world today who are persecuted for their beliefs. We pray for a more tolerant and just world in which all are valued and respected.