

The Martyrs of the Diocese of Hexham & Newcastle

Of the three hundred and fifteen of our Catholic ancestors who sacrificed their lives for the Catholic faith in England and Wales during the religious persecution of the 16th and 17th centuries, twenty six can be considered as “Martyrs of the North” as they were born, laboured or suffered within the confines of Northumberland and Durham. To return to England as a priest was high treason punishable by hanging, drawing and quartering; to shelter a priest was a felony punishable by imprisonment, fines, confiscation of property and in many cases, death. It was only heroes and heroines who could face such ordeals – these are our martyrs.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries England saw a period of turbulence and religious persecution. (For a comprehensive history of this period see [History of the Diocese](#) written by Rev. David Milburn.) Many Catholics in the North were imprisoned under appalling conditions. In Newcastle the prison at Newgate and the castle in Durham were dirty, dark and full of disease. Prisoners were kept shackled to a wall in an overcrowded, roofless, cold and often flooded cell.

Some like John Boste for example (one of the 40 English Martyrs) were taken to London to the Tower where they suffered brutal torture. Then they were brought back physically broken to face execution in Durham or Newcastle. Execution was barbaric – by hanging, drawing and quartering.

In 1590 four priests were executed together at Durham; their names were Edmund Duke, Richard Hill, John Holliday and John Hogg. An interesting legend suggests that;

“After the execution, it was noticed that a small stream near the site had completely dried up, and so the area is known as ‘Dryburn’ to this day.”

Northern Martyrs

Blessed Thomas Plumtree

Blessed Edward Waterson

Blessed William Patenson

St Henry Morse

Blessed Christopher Bales

Blessed George Gervase

Blessed Richard Hill

Blessed John Hogg

Blessed Richard Holiday

Blessed Edmund Duke

Blessed Richard Thirkeld

Blessed John Fenwick

St John Boste

Blessed John Ingram

Blessed George Swallowell

Blessed Joseph Lambton

Blessed Thomas Palliser

Blessed John Norton

Blessed Thomas Percy

Blessed Richard Kirkham

Blessed Ralph Corby

Blessed John Duckett

Blessed Edward Burden

Blessed Hugh Taylor

Blessed George Errington

God, all-powerful Father,

The Blessed Martyrs of our Diocese

Remained faithful in the face of danger and death.

Strengthen our faith

And take away our weakness.

Let the prayers and example of the martyrs

Help us share in the passion and resurrection of Christ

And bring us to eternal joy in your saints.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, for ever and ever.

PRAYER



John Boste is one of the best known Northern Martyrs. John Boste studied at Oxford, becoming a Catholic in 1576, and being ordained at Reims in 1581. John came back to England where he worked in the North East and became the object of a massive manhunt. He was betrayed, arrested, and taken to London. There he was crippled on the rack and returned to Dryburn near Durham. On 26 July 1594 he was hung, drawn and quartered at Dryburn. John was canonised by Pope Paul VI in 1970 as a martyr of Durham.

John Ingram suffered the same treatment as John Boste and was also executed on 26 July 1594, but his execution took place in Gateshead at a gallows near where is now the church of the Holy Trinity.

George Swallowell was executed on 29 July 1594 in the Market Place in Darlington.

Thomas Percy, senior, was executed in London in 1537, and his son, Blessed Thomas Percy, junior, was executed 35 years later at York in 1572. Both had joined rebellions to restore the Catholic faith in England, which ended in failure.

Joseph Lambton, another priest martyr, was a member of the famous Durham family. He was arrested soon after his arrival in England following his ordination in Rome and executed on the Town Moor in Newcastle on 27 July 1593.

Three Catholics; Thomas Palaser, John Talbot and John Norton were arrested at a house in Lamesley, Gateshead in 1600.

Thomas Palaser was a priest who had been ordained in France and was ministering in the North East and staying and praying at the house of John Norton and his wife, who was also arrested but later released as she was pregnant. John Talbot was with the group at prayer in the house.

The three were imprisoned and executed on Wednesday 9 August 1600 at the gallows site in Durham, on the crest of the hill at the north side of Durham City.

The brutality, religious intolerance and persecution that was associated with the martyrs was over four hundred years ago, but there are still human rights violations, torture, discrimination, false imprisonment and persecution in parts of the world today.

[Blessed George Errington](#)

George Errington was born in the Hirst area of what is now Ashington, Northumberland around 1553. His family was originally from the Stagshaw area of Hexham. He studied at Trinity College, Oxford. He was a close associate of St. John Boste who ran an underground movement with its headquarters in the home of Ursula Taylor of South Shields. This movement aimed to smuggle candidates for the priesthood abroad and, once trained, to return them as priests.

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[Blessed John Ingram 1565 – 1594](#)

John Ingram was born at Stoke Edith, Herefordshire. While a student at Oxford he was reconciled or converted to Catholicism and soon after left England to study for the Priesthood under Cardinal William Allen.

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[Blessed Thomas Percy](#)

There are many Thomas Percys who have earned a place in history and one of them Thomas Percy (1528 – 1572) was beatified by Leo XIII on 13 May 1895

Blessed Thomas Percy was the son of Thomas Percy Senior, who also was executed in 1537 for his adherence to the Catholic Religion.

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[Blessed John Talbot](#)

The third 'Lamesley Martyr', Blessed John Talbot, was born at Thornton-le-Street in North Yorkshire. He had already been persecuted for his adherence to the Catholic faith, having been convicted of recusancy in 1588.

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