

Saint John Roberts



Born 1577: Trawsfynydd, Gwynedd. St. John's College, Oxford. Inns of Court, London.

The son of John and Anna Roberts; John Robert's ancestors were princes of Wales. John was brought up as a Protestant, but 1598 whilst in Paris, he joined the Church of Rome at Notre Dame. He entered the English College at Valladolid on 18th October 1598, but left the College in 1599 to join the Abbey of Saint Benedict, Valladolid. John was ordained at the Abbey of Saint Martin at Compostela in 1600.

John Roberts left for his mission in England on 26th December 1602, entering the country in April 1603. His arrival was anticipated and he was arrested in May 1603 and exiled. He returned to England in 1604, where he worked amongst victims of the plague in London. On 5th November, 1605, while Justice Grange was searching the house of Mrs. Thomas Percy, whose husband was involved in the Gunpowder Plot, he found Roberts there and arrested him. Although Roberts was not found to have had anything to do with the Plot, he was nevertheless arrested and imprisoned in the Gatehouse at Westminster for seven months before being exiled once again. During his seven-year mission, John was arrested a total of five times and banished thrice.

Whilst at Douai, John founded a house for exiled English Benedictines; this order became the monastery of Saint Gregory at Douai and exists today at Downside Abbey, near Bath.

John's final arrest came in London on the first Sunday of advent, on 2nd December 1610. John was finishing the Mass and wearing his vestments when he was taken. On 5th December he was tried and found guilty under the Act forbidding priests to minister in England, and on 10th December was hanged, drawn and quartered at Tyburn. When he saw the fire prepared for the incineration of his quartered remains, John said 'Here's a hot breakfast towards, despite the cold weather'. John Roberts' body was recovered and taken to St. Gregory's, Douai. Two fingers are still preserved at Downside and Erdington Abbeys.