



# Saint Richard Gwyn

Richard Gwyn one of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales is also called Richard White. He was born in Montgomeryshire, Wales, in 1547, and studied at Cambridge University, England. He converted from Protestantism, to Catholicism returning to Wales in 1562. Little is known of Richard Gwyn's early life. At the age of 20 he matriculated at Oxford University, but did not complete a degree. He then went to Cambridge University, where he lived on the charity of St John's College and its master, the Roman Catholic George Bullock. In the early part of the reign of Elizabeth I, Bullock was forced to resign the mastership in July 1559 for being a Catholic which marked the end of Gwyn's university career in England, after just two years.

After attending the University of Douay, Gwyn returned to Wales and became a teacher in the Wrexham area, while continuing his studies on his own. He married Catherine; they had six children, three of whom survived him.

Owing to his refusal to change his faith he was arrested more than once. He often had to change his home and his school to avoid fines and imprisonment. Finally in 1579 he was arrested by the Vicar of Wrexham, a former Catholic who had conformed to Anglicanism, and confined to prison in Ruthin gaol, where he was offered liberty if he would conform to the Established Church. He escaped and remained a fugitive for a year and a half, was recaptured, and spent the next four years in one prison after another.

In May 1581 Gwyn was forcibly taken to St. Giles' Church in Wrexham, carried around the font on the shoulders of six men and laid in heavy shackles in front of the pulpit. However, he "so stirred his legs that with the noise of his irons the preacher's voice could not be heard." Gwyn was placed in the stocks for this and was taunted there by a local Anglican clergyman, who claimed that the Keys of the Church were given no less to him than to St. Peter. "There is this difference", Gwyn replied, "namely, that whereas Peter received the Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven, the keys you received were obviously those of the beer cellar."

Gwyn was fined £280 for refusing to attend Anglican Sunday Services, and another £140 for "brawling" for resisting attempts to take him there by force. When asked what payment he could make toward these huge sums, he answered, "Six-pence".

Richard Gwyn, John Hughes and Robert Morris were indicted for high treason in October 1583 and were brought to trial before a panel headed by the Chief Justice of Chester, Sir George Bromley. Witnesses gave evidence that they retained their allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church, including that Gwyn composed "certain rhymes of his own making against married priests and ministers. The three also stood accused of trying to make converts.

Despite their defences and objections to the dubious practices of the court Gwyn and Hughes were found guilty. Again Gwyn's life was offered to him on condition that he take the Oath of Supremacy and accept the Queen's claim to be Supreme Head of the Church of England, which he refused to do. Gwyn's wife consoled and encouraged him to the last. During sentencing, Hughes was reprieved and Gwyn condemned to death by hanging, drawing and quartering. His sentence was carried out in the Beast Market at Wrexham on 15 October 1584. He was the First Catholic Martyr in Wales.

Just before Gwyn was hanged he turned to the crowd and said, "I have been a jesting fellow, and if I have offended any that way, or by my songs, I beseech them for God's sake to forgive me." The hangman pulled on his leg irons hoping to put him out of his pain. When he appeared dead they cut him down, but he revived and remained conscious through the disembowelling, until his head was severed. His last words, in Welsh, were reportedly "*Iesu, trugarha wrthyf*" ("Jesus, have mercy on me").

Five carols and a funeral ode composed by Gwyn in Welsh have been discovered and published.

Relics of Richard Gwyn are to be found in the Cathedral Church of Our Lady of Sorrows, seat of the Bishop of Wrexham and also in the Catholic Church of Our Lady and Saint Richard Gwyn, Llanidloes.