

THE WARWICK MARTYRS

Blessed John Sugar (1558-1604) and Blessed Robert Grissold (c.1575-1604)

Feast day 17 July

John Sugar was born at Wombourne near Wolverhampton about 1558 and studied at St Mary's Hall, Oxford, becoming a clergyman of the Established Church at Cannock in Staffordshire. He later became a Catholic, studied at the English College, Douai, and was ordained a priest on 21 April 1601. His ministry was in Warwickshire, Staffordshire and Worcestershire, where he travelled on foot and especially looked after the "poorer and meaner sort of Catholics".

Robert Grissold lived at Rowington in Warwickshire; he was the son of a weaver and is described as a "husbandman"; he had a special reverence for Catholic priests. He and John Sugar were arrested on the highway on 8 July 1603 after a raid on the Grissold house; Robert was given the chance of escaping by his first cousin, Clement Grissold, who was with the search party and had probably led it to the house, but he refused to leave the priest. Both were offered their freedom if they would conform. They were executed at Warwick on 16 July 1604. Sugar said on the scaffold "Be ye all merry, for we have not occasion of sorrow but of joy: for although I shall have a sharp dinner, yet I trust in Jesus Christ that I shall have a most sweet supper". They were beatified by Pope Saint John Paul II in 1987.

Blessed William Freeman (c.1558-1595)

Feast day 13 August

William Freeman was born in Yorkshire and studied at Magdalen College, Oxford. In 1586 he witnessed the execution of a Catholic priest in London, Bl. Edward Stransham, and this made such an impression on him that he was reconciled to the Church and left England to study for the priesthood. He was ordained at Rheims in France in 1589. For six years he worked in secret as a priest in Worcestershire and Warwickshire. He was arrested at Alvechurch, condemned to death for being a priest and hanged, drawn and quartered at Warwick on 13 August 1595. At the gallows he said: "I came hither to die for my faith, the true ancient and Catholic faith". He was beatified by Pope Pius XI in 1929.

Blessed Margaret Pole, Countess of Salisbury (1473 - 1541)

Feast day 28 May

Margaret was born at Farleigh Castle in Somerset and some of her early years were spent at Warwick Castle, the ancestral home. She was the only surviving daughter of George Plantagenet, Duke of Clarence, and his wife Isabel Neville, who was the elder daughter of Richard Neville, 16th Earl of Warwick (the 'Kingmaker'), and his wife Anne Beauchamp, 16th Countess of Warwick. She was the niece of Edward IV and Richard III. She married Sir Reginald Pole about 1491 and bore five sons, including Reginald Cardinal Pole who became Archbishop of Canterbury during the reign of Mary Tudor.

Margaret was widowed, named countess of Salisbury, and appointed governess to Princess Mary, daughter of Henry VIII and Queen Catherine of Aragon. She opposed Henry's marriage to Anne Boleyn, and the king exiled her from court, although he called her "the holiest woman in England." When her son, Cardinal Pole, denied Henry's Act of Supremacy, the king imprisoned Margaret in the Tower of London for two years. A white silk tunic was found in one of her coffers which was embroidered on the back with the Five Wounds. This was held to connect her with the Northern Uprising, and she was "attainted to die by act of Parliament". She was beheaded on May 28. In 1538, her other two sons were executed. She was never given a legal trial. She was seventy when she was martyred. Margaret was beatified in 1886.



