

#### **4. EARLY 1700S CATHOLICS PENALISED BUT NOT EXECUTED**

##### **The Jacobite Rebellions and the last of the Chorleys of Chorley Hall**

We now come to the 18th century when the penal laws, though still in force, were often disregarded though many Catholic gentry were still being reduced to penury by the fines for non-attendance at church, for keeping schoolmasters, or for sending their sons overseas to be trained for the priesthood. However, the execution of men for their faith had now ceased and a more tolerant attitude on the part of the authorities was evident.

The failures of the two attempts in 1715 and 1745 to put the Stuarts back on the throne resulted in some Catholic gentry losing their lives and others their estates but these rebellions did not stop the activities of the many missionary priests, especially in Lancashire. The Jacobite rising of 1715 ended that great Catholic family of the Chorleys of Chorley Hall, when Richard Chorley, with his third son, Charles, rode out from his family home to fight for the Stuart cause, no doubt with the hope that the old religion would also be restored. He went in the company of many other Catholic friends from our district but they were fighting a lost cause and at the battle of Preston they were routed. Many of his friends lost their estates as a result of this and others had to pay heavy fines but Richard Chorley was beheaded on Gallows Hill, Preston (on the site now occupied by the Church of the English Martyrs), on February 9th 1716. His head, along with that of a friend, a Scottish nobleman, James Drummond, was placed on a pike and exhibited in Fishergate, Preston.

There would be a melancholy procession later that day as the two headless bodies were conveyed from the gallows, first to the family home, Chorley Hall, off Preston Road, where it would be joined by the sorrowing widow and some of her children. The interment took place secretly at dead of night at the Parish Church, presumably in the family vault, though there is a tradition that they were buried outside the church near the main doors, in an unmarked grave, either by Richard's own request or on the orders of the local

minister but there is no proof of this. A month later, Charles Chorley was buried in the same grave. It appears that Richard and his son were being taken to London for trial when the father was taken ill at Wigan; Charles was imprisoned at Liverpool and Richard taken back to Preston for his trial. The loathsome conditions in the Liverpool prison resulted in Charles contracting gaol fever and he died within the month. He was then 30 years of age and had had a distinguished career at Douai where he was noted for his charm and wit.

The tragic widow, before her marriage, was Catherine Walmsley of Lower Buckshaw Hall, Euxton and she bore her husband 14 children, most of whom died in infancy. The first one, William, died the day he was born. The second, John Edward, became a Benedictine priest and died, age 35, three years after his father. Charles was the third son, followed by Thomas who was baptised and buried in 1686. Another Thomas was born two years later, became a Jesuit priest and died three months after his Benedictine brother in 1718. Richard was born and died in 1690. Another William was born in 1692. Then there were twin sons, James born in May 1698 and buried five days later and Edward, buried six months later. Robert was born in 1699 and died five years later.

Catherine, the first girl, was born in 1679 and died 20 years later. Anne was born in 1682 and was buried in 1721, the last of the family to be buried in the family vault in the parish church. Mary was born in 1694 and, after her father's execution, she became a nun in a convent at Cambrai in France where the record of her entry is still preserved. It states she was the daughter of Richard Chorley, of Chorley Hall, England, "who lost his life defending the cause of his rightful King against the usurper from Hanover" - there was no doubt where the writer's sympathies lay! The last daughter was Bridget, born in 1696, who died at 8 years of age. Of the 14 children, 7 did not attain teenage.

The only son to have attained full maturity was William, the second brother to hold that name, who is believed to have lived well into the 1730s as he was fined for recusancy in 1732 and to have died without issue. Evidently the whole family held the faith to the last.

What a tragic family! Perhaps the words of the late . John Wilson best sums it up-“the unfortunate Chorleys, who gave up all the world values most for their crownless King; Jacobites and Hanoverians have passed away but the memory of those who were faithful even unto death in a losing cause must command the respect of every true Englishman”. In the “History of the Rebellion of 1715” written by the Reverend Robert Patten, one time chaplain to General Foster, a commander of the rebel forces, Richard Chorley is described as “a Papist, a gentleman of singular piety and habits”.

Chorley Hall was confiscated by the government and, together with its estates, it was then sold to Abraham Crompton of Derby for the sum of £5550. The hall itself was demolished early in the last century though parts of it were retained as a farmhouse with its Saxon barn but these were demolished about six years ago to make way for housing development. Many trees were planted on part of the site after the hall was first demolished which soon became a yearly nesting place for a colony of rooks some of which still make their home there. Last century the place became known as the “Crow Yard” but the site is now known as Rookwood Avenue and Chorley Hall Road. The large fish pond still remembered by many old Chorley people was probably all that was left of a moat around the hall.

### **Relics left by the Chorleys of Chorley Hall**

Of the personal effects of the Chorley family there are only two known to exist. One of these is a prayer book in the possession of successive rectors of Chorley St. Mary's, originally given to the late Monsignor Crank by the well-known Chorley solicitor, John Stanton. It was evidently the personal prayer book of Richard Chorley, grandfather of Richard, the executed rebel and

bears his signature on the title page. The book is in Latin and bears the imprint "Printed at Antwerp at the Offices of the Widow and Heirs of John Beller, under the sign of the Golden Eagle, in the year 1603". There is a calendar at the beginning of the book and opposite the date April 22nd is the entry in Richard's own handwriting: "Hoc die mater mea obit anno 1688. Dominica in albis." (My mother died on this date in the year 1688. Low Sunday)

The mother whom he so dutifully remembered was Elizabeth, daughter of John Crosse, of Crosse Hall, Chorley. No more silent yet eloquent testimony of Richard Chorley's Catholicity could be produced than this reminder of his mother's anniversary in his prayer book, the worn and discoloured pages of which prove him to have been "a man of prayer". This Richard would have been 22 years of age when Roger Wrennall was martyred for his faith and it is probable that there would be a bond of intimacy between the young squire's son dressed in the gay fashion of the period with ruff, very coloured doublet and hose and wearing a sword, and the more humbly dressed Chorley weaver when they met in the fields between Chorley Hall and Crosse Hall.

The only other relic of the Chorleys is another book, a Bible, still preserved in the Chorley Public Library. It was a gift to Richard Chorley, the executed rebel, 15 years before his death, by Josiah Chorley, a Presbyterian minister, descended from one of the younger branches of the family. Evidently the two were good friends and there is evidence at one time that Richard acted as guardian to Josiah. The inscription reads:

"This Holy Bible presented to Richard Chorley of Chorley, Esq.; to Catherine, his noble wife; to all his comely sons and daughters; and to his future descendants. In remembrance of a lineage and cherished guardianship; doth grant and bequeath by Josiah Chorley, a Minister of the Gospel, who, Lancashire-born, taught in Middlesex the Classics, and in Norfolk the Living Word of God, 1700".

It was printed by J. Richardson and T. Hodgkin, for the Company of Stationers, 1697. Josiah goes on to quote a number of scriptural texts, probably intended to remind Richard Chorley that he was a follower of the proscribed religion. This book also came into the hands of John Stanton, who gave it to the local library, where it should be treasured by succeeding generations of Chorley people as a sacred link with the family that gave the town its name.

### **The Gillibrand Family of Gillibrand Hall**

But we must return to Weld Bank. After Edward Rigby, of Burgh Hall, bought half of the manor of Chorley from the family of Stanleys of Knowsley in 1596, they retained their half for nearly 150 years until early in the 18th century when they sold it to the Gillibrand family of Gillibrand Hall and thus the manor was still in Catholic hands- the Shireburnes and the Gillibrands. The Gillibrands were sold the lease of Gillibrand Hall by the Rigbys when that family purchased their half of the Chorley manor.

The Gillibrands always claimed the title of Lower Chorley Hall for their residence, though everyone else seemed to describe it as Gillibrand Hall. The hall had at one time been a seat of the Harrington family (whose name is commemorated in Harrington Road) and was then known as the Pele. It was a semi-fortified building, surrounded by a moat, the remains of which can still be seen.

The Gillibrands gave a number of priests to the Church, one of them, the Rev. William Gillibrand SJ, serving the area around Chorley, including Weld Bank, very early in the 18th century. Little seems to be known of this man as his labours would have to be conducted in great secrecy but he would have been well-known to the last of the Chorleys and almost certainly would have been present at the nocturnal funeral at Chorley Parish Church. His own interment is recorded in the Parish Church registers: "April 22nd, 1722, Wm. Gillibrand, a Romish priest". Another of the family, Fr. Richard Gillibrand,

also a Jesuit, died in 1774, the year mass was first celebrated at the new Weld Bank church.

Another member of the family, John Gillibrand, married Margaret Charnock, daughter and sole heiress of Robert Charnock, of Astley Hall, who was the widow of Richard Brooke, the Brooke family thus becoming owners of Astley and ending the Catholic connections with that hall. John Gillibrand died in 1732 and his widow 12 years later. Still another brother, Thomas, died a year later and at one time his tombstone was to be seen in the parish churchyard but it has now disappeared. It had the Latin inscription so often seen on ancient tombstones: "As you are, I was. As I am, you shall be".

On the death in 1775 of the Thomas Gillibrand who then owned the Gillibrand estates, the succession passed to his brother, Fr. William Gillibrand who, like his namesake who died in 1722, was a member of the Jesuit order. He had served a number of missions in Lancashire, including Slate Delph, at Wheelton and at Southworth, in addition to ministering in Exeter where he was superior of the Jesuit District in 1765. Although he would be at Gillibrand only a few years - he died in 1779 - it would be at the same time that Fr. John Chadwick, the founder of Weld Bank parish, was here. No doubt he would cooperate with him in his work. Indeed the Gillibrand family were generous supporters of our parish until the last of the family left the church in circumstances which we will relate later.

Fr. William Gillibrand SJ was himself the founder of the first post-Reformation mission in Liverpool so it can be said with truth that Weld Bank had much to do with the start of Catholicity in that great city and the large archdiocese of which it is the centre.