

Freedom Fortnight 2016
The Relics of St Thomas More and St John Fisher



Supported by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops,
The Knights of Columbus and The Christian Heritage Centre at Stonyhurst



St John Fisher's Ring and a Reliquary
containing a bone and tooth of St
Thomas More



The Reformation in England was sparked by Henry VIII's desire to end his twenty-three year marriage to Catherine of Aragon (above) in order to marry Anne Boleyn.



JOHN FISHER, BISHOP OF ROCHESTER.

Thomas More was Henry VIII's Chancellor. John Fisher was Bishop of Rochester. They both resisted Henry's attempts to divorce his wife and to take away the rights of the Catholic Church. As the Pope consistently refused to allow Henry to end his marriage, the King made his Bishops swear an oath of allegiance to himself as Supreme Head of the Church in England. The only Bishop to refuse was John Fisher.



More and Fisher were imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1534 for their opposition to the King's will. Fisher's treatment in prison was particularly harsh, and he was forced to rely on the generosity of friends for food and drink as none was supplied to him.



Westminster Hall, in the Houses of Parliament. John Fisher and Thomas More were tried and convicted of treason in this hall. Their judges included Anne Boleyn's father.



Thomas More's cell in the Tower of London can still be seen today.

He spent fourteen months in prison, writing, praying and fasting.



This embroidered cap of red linen, gold and silver thread and spangles was made for Thomas More in his last years of life, probably by one of his daughters.

Half an hour before his death, John Fisher opened his New Testament for the last time and his eyes fell on the following words from St. John's Gospel, chapter 17,

"Eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Him whom you have sent, Jesus Christ. I have given you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. Do you now, Father, give me glory at your side".

Closing the book, he observed: *"There is enough learning in there to last me the rest of my life."*

His feast day is June 22nd. He is honoured as a scholar, a defender of conscience and a Catholic martyr.



JOHN FISHER, BISHOP OF ROCHESTER.



St Thomas More is the patron of lawyers and statesmen. He is revered as a passionate defender of conscience, and a Catholic martyr. His feast day is July 6th.

The Prayer of St Thomas More

O Lord, give us a mind that is humble,
quiet, peaceable,
patient and charitable,
and a taste of your Holy Spirit
in all our thoughts, words and deeds.

O Lord, give us a lively faith,
a firm hope, a fervent charity,
a love of you.

Take from us all
lukewarmness in meditation,
and all dullness in prayer.

Give us fervour and delight
in thinking of you,
your grace, and your tender compassion
toward us.

Give us, good Lord,
the grace to work for
the things we pray for.

Amen.



This ring belonged to John Fisher.

The image on the ring is of Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher, whose writings on logic, reason and the soul had a profound influence on early Christian theologians.

St Anselm used Aristotle's work as an argument for the existence of God, and St Thomas Aquinas based much of his *Summa Theologica* on the philosophy of Aristotle.

John Fisher was a deeply learned man, who spent years studying the Church Fathers and Aristotle's classical philosophy. He funded many scholarships at Cambridge University to allow poor students the chance to study there.

This ring may have been a reminder to him of mankind's search for God throughout human history.



This rock crystal and silver reliquary contains two separate relics of Thomas More- a piece of his jawbone and one half of a tooth. The reliquary was made in the mid 17th century and bears an inscription on the silver band surrounding the crystal,

'Reliquiae Thomae More. Mar. Ang. Chan'
(Relic of Thomas More, English Martyr, Chancellor).

Margaret Roper, Thomas More's beloved daughter, rescued her father's head from the spike on London Bridge where it was displayed after his execution in 1535. The piece of jawbone in this reliquary passed down from Thomas More's son John, to Cresacre More, the saint's great-grandson.

The tooth was given to Thomas More's niece, Joan Rastell, by Margaret Roper. Joan left it to her two sons, Jasper and Ellis Heywood, who both became Jesuit priests. They divided the tooth into two halves. After their deaths in the late 16th century, one half of the tooth passed to the father of Cresacre More. In the 1640s Cresacre had this small reliquary made for the bone and tooth relics.

The reliquary remained with the family of Elizabeth Gage, Cresacre's wife, until 1826 when the Gage family presented it to Stonyhurst.





After the deaths of More and Fisher, Henry VIII went on to destroy the ancient abbeys, monasteries and cathedral shrines of England. The King seized the lands and income of the abbeys and monasteries, including their schools and hospitals.

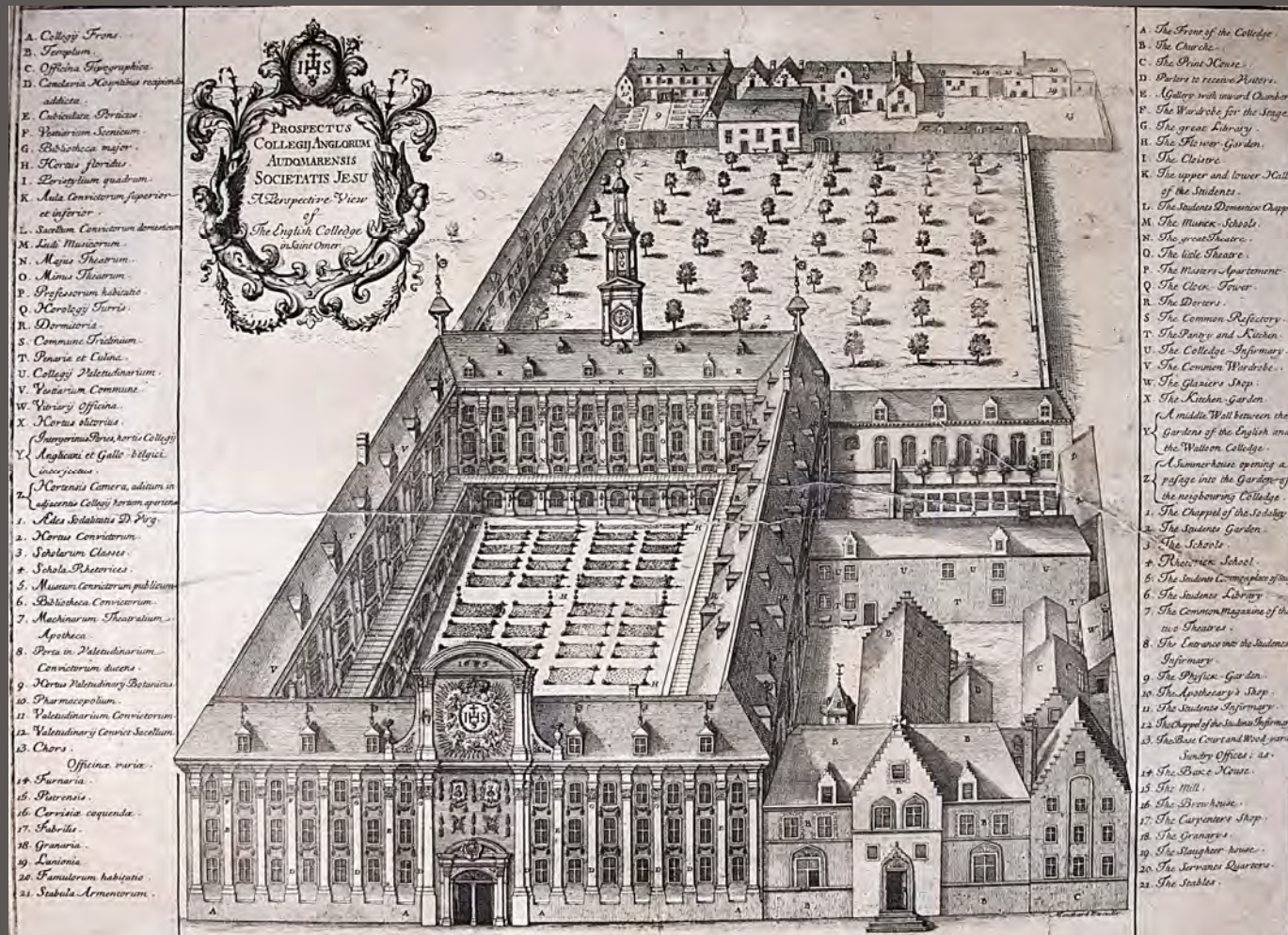
The images show Rievaulx Abbey in Yorkshire before and after its destruction in 1538.



Robert Persons and Edmund Campion were Jesuit missionaries in England in 1580, during the reign of Elizabeth I, the daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn. She passed laws to make Catholicism illegal. Priests were hunted and executed when caught. Catholic families were faced with heavy fines, imprisonment and loss of property if they persisted in their faith.



In 1581 Edmund Campion was betrayed, captured, tortured and executed at Tyburn in London. This is the rope that tied him down at his execution. His companion, Robert Persons, escaped to Europe and spent the rest of his life creating seminaries and schools to train English Catholic priests for the mission in England. Over 150 Catholic priests, laymen and women were executed for their faith under Elizabeth I.



Robert Persons founded a school for English Catholic boys in 1593. It was based in St Omer, near Calais in France, since Catholic education was illegal in England. It has three saints and twenty two martyrs in all, amongst its alumni. St Omer survives to this day as Stonyhurst College in northern England.



St Omer's College was founded in 1593 to educate English Catholic boys aged between ten and eighteen years of age. To avoid arrest, the boys were forced to change their names and travel in disguise to attend the school, crossing the English Channel to France.

Their parents were subjected to heavy fines and imprisonment for sending their sons abroad to the Jesuit College.



Many boys brought medieval Catholic vestments, books, illuminated manuscripts, silver plate and relics to St Omers College, to keep them safe. The government in England destroyed any Catholic items they could find. Ownership of Catholic prayer books, missals, rosaries and relics was a criminal offence.

This vestment was made for King Henry VII in 1495 and was used by his son, Henry VIII, for masses in Westminster Abbey, before the Reformation. It was rescued from destruction and came to St Omers in 1609.



Henry VIII destroyed the ancient shrines of saints in English Cathedrals, monasteries and churches from 1538 onwards. Many Catholics hid relics and sent them secretly to St Omers. This is a piece of St Thomas Becket's skull, rescued from Canterbury Cathedral. Becket was the patron saint of the school at St Omers.



Many English priests, laymen and laywomen were imprisoned and executed for their faith in the 16th and 17th centuries. This engraving shows the torture of Edward Oldcorne and Nicholas Owen, two Jesuits who died for their faith in 1606.



This is the right eye of Edward Oldcorne, an English Jesuit who was hanged, drawn and quartered in England in 1606. The eye was secretly collected from the place of execution and smuggled across the Channel to the school at St Omers.



St Omers College also educated many American Catholics who suffered persecution, particularly in Maryland. John and Charles Carroll came to St Omers in 1748. John became a Jesuit and a teacher at St Omers before returning to America to found Georgetown University and become the first American Catholic Archbishop. Charles, his cousin, was one of the Founding Fathers of the American Revolution and the only Catholic signatory of the Declaration of Independence.

Per nova sic vernans tibi gaudia deflect atas,
Ipsaq' erunt tantis vota minoris bonis,
Nos quoq' prateritos revocare videbimur annos,
Seq' salus valvâ, parva duobus erit. Car: Carroll

Sancta Cecilia Almachio respondet.
Epistola.

This is part of a Latin poem written by Charles Carroll at St Omers in 1753, when he was seventeen. It is about martyrdom, freedom of conscience and freedom of worship.



Ownership inscriptions of Charles and John Carroll in a St Omers schoolbook in 1751. The graffiti is also by one of the Carrolls, showing Maryland tobacco pipes.





Stonyhurst College in England; the oldest surviving Jesuit school, and the custodian of the most important collection of English Catholic culture in the world. It began its existence as St Omers College in 1593, moving to its present location in 1794.

The tour of the relics of St John Fisher and St Thomas More has been made possible by the most generous support of the Knights of Columbus and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, in collaboration with the Christian Heritage Centre at Stonyhurst.



The Christian Heritage Centre at Stonyhurst is a registered charity dedicated to provide access to the remarkable collection of Catholic relics, artefacts, vestments, books and manuscripts in the care of Stonyhurst College. It is in the process of building a Retreat and Study Centre at the College.

The next phase of the development will include a Museum, Exhibition and Education Centre bringing the inspirational message of these extraordinary collections to a new and wider audience.

www.christianheritagecentre.com