Broughton Catholic Charitable Society Wiltshire Members 1844

Society History

It is believed that the Society came into being after a smallpox epidemic had ravaged that part of the Fylde just north of Preston, Lancashire sometime in the 18th century. Many small farmers fell victims, leaving widows and often small children. The women and girls, who milked the cattle, seemed to have gained immunity through having caught cowpox. In true Christian charity, the rest of the farming community subscribed to help the bereaved families with money and also by working their lands for them. From this the idea grew of meeting regularly to help the living who were in need and to have Masses and prayers said for the dead.

In the beginning these meetings were in farmhouses, some of which had been Mass centres in penal days. From these informal meetings arose the idea of forming a permanent society, and as the Golden Ball at Broughton crossroads offered a central position, the first meeting was held there on the 6th May, 1787.

One of the prime movers in the new society's foundation was its first Secretary Peter Newby, who ran a school at Haighton House, Fernyhalgh. Newby, a former student at Douai, who had served for a time as steward on a slave ship, was a gifted poet and scholar. His hand is evident in the framing of the first rules. The sole surviving copy shows that the society's original subscription of 6s. 6d., in those days equal to a labourer's wage for 3-4 days. Members shared in Masses for the living and the dead, and those of one year's standing could petition for alms on behalf of some needy person or family.

Membership was open to all Catholic priests and laity who were Lancashire born, or resident in Lancashire, or of Lancastrian ancestry. While ladies could join in their own right, a husband's subscription gave full spiritual benefits to his wife, and allowed her to continue the membership if he should pre-decease her. Though most of the original members came from the Broughton area, the Society had such wide appeal that by the 1850s it had spread to every part of Lancashire and as the table below shows even further afield out of county.

It has met in the Broughton - Barton - Garstang area without a single break on each Whit Tuesday since its foundation. Broughton itself is at the very heartland of Lancashire Catholicism. No fewer than seven of the Lancashire martyrs came from the surrounding area, Blessed Richard Hurst from the village itself. The Whit Tuesday gatherings have long been famous for the wit of the after dinner speeches. Records show that in the 1920s and 30s these annual dinners proved so popular that up to 700 members were dining together in a huge marquee. Recent innovations now include the annual President's Mass, the Pilgrimage to the Shrine at Ladyewell, Fernyhalgh, and the Christmas Lunch which fills the Garstang Country Hotel to capacity.

Enjoyable though these occasions are, the Society's aims are not forgotten: the spiritual benefits of the members and the relief of hardship wherever it is encountered. Instead of paying subscriptions, priest-members offer Masses for all living members on or about Whit Tuesday and for all deceased members on or about the Commemoration of All Souls. Those priests who are able to do so accept Mass intentions when their turn comes round on a rota.

The business of the Society is conducted by a Secretary, a Treasurer, and a Board of Management comprising of two priests and two laymen form each of the three Lancashire dioceses, plus the President, the Vice-President and the President-Elect. The Chairman, who presides at all the meetings of the Board and at the annual meeting, is traditionally a priest, while the President is always a layman.

The table below lists those members from this parish who subscribed to the Charitable Society in 1844.

Surname	Given Names	Title	Status	Place of Abode	Subscription	Notes
Green	Edward	Mr.		East Tisbury	7s. 6d.	

Compiled from a list held at Lancashire Record Office, Bow Lane, Preston