

MARY - WARD – POSTILLE
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Dear reader,

This postille is about the four marriage proposals which were made to Mary Ward as a child and as a young woman.

Whereas the inscriptions of the Painted Life suppose for all proposals that she refused them because she loved God, other sources reveal a more sophisticated process. Mary Ward found the answer to the vocation she had received from God in a gradual process of maturity.

Many kind regards from

Sister Ursula Dirmeier CJ

The First Proposal: William Redshaw 1593 – Painted Life 2

The inscription tells us the name of the proposer but the circumstances were different. In her Autobiographical Fragment Mary Ward writes about her aunt Alice Wright who is not much older than she: *“This relative went to visit my mother (...) and while she was living in my father’s house God wanted her to marry a man before she went back whom my father wanted me to marry as soon as I could be able to consent.”* This secret marriage was taken to court. The husband, who was still under age, was William Redshaw for whom Marmaduke Ward was estate manager because his father had died in 1583. Marmaduke was a younger cousin of the grandmother of this young man.

The Second Proposal: Shafto (1596) – Painted Life 5

The English Vita reports it as first proposal and that he was 10 years old. The connection with the name Shafto is therefore hypothetical.

The young man is described as equal of rank, rich and good-looking and that he was specially recommended by the Duke of Northumberland. Mary was ready for this marriage, but *“God’s providence, which had elected this chosen soul for a higher state didn’t allow this innocent love to take room in her heart and so it happened that the promising young man had to go home to London because of urgent matters regarding his property. God, whose working is always wonderful, removed her from this beginning love because she thought that her alleged husband was lacking perseverance, zeal and respect of her, which wasn’t really true because he loved an honoured her until he died a few months later.”* (Vita E 2v)

The Third Proposal (1597) – Painted Life 8

The inscription gives us the name of the proposer and tells us that she was still with her relatives and at the place of her First Communion. (in Harewell). It says that she was so

afflicted about the proposal “*because she was so caught up in divine love that she could not consent to any earthly love, so that she fell dangerously ill and her father was obliged to fetch her home.*” The English Vita (5v) adds that her father thought she had an aversion to the proposer. Soon after that she was taken to the House of the Babthorpes also because her parents hoped she might find a suitable husband there,(vgl.AB 3), in vain, as we know.

The Fourth Proposal: Edmund Neville (1605) – Painted Life 13

The inscription tells us the name of the proposer, that he had the legitimate claim to the title of the Duke of Westmoreland and that not only the parents urged Mary Ward but also her confessor.

The English Vita (8 r) adds that the confessor (some think it was P. Holtby but it could also have been John Mush) showed her that this marriage was the greater service to God and would even justify that she left the Convent as novice, above all because the proposer, who is described as a man who is noble, Catholic and full of virtues and good qualities, had decided to marry only Mary Ward or to become priest, which he then actually did.

Edmund Neville of Liversedge was born in about 1564 and converted to Catholicism at the age of 28. 1601 after the death of Charles Neville, the 6th Duke of Westmoreland, he claimed his title and his property as the family of the Nevilles of Liversedge dates back to Geoffrey Neville(died1285) the brother of Robert, the first Lord.

In 1608 Edmund was consecrated as priest in Rome and in 1609 he entered the Society of Jesus in Löwen. He worked in Lancashire from 1621 until his death in 1646.