

Mary Ward and co.

Interesting bites of history

Unrequited love

As a child and as a young woman Mary Ward received four offers of marriage. Whilst the inscriptions on the pictures of the Painted Life portray it as if she refused all four for love of God, other sources show a more differentiated picture. In a gradual process of growing up and maturing Mary Ward found her response to the vocation which God had laid within her.

Ursula Dirmeier CJ

The first courtship: William Redshaw (1593) – Painted Life 2

In the inscription of the picture the name of the suitor is given. Yet the immediate circumstances were in fact different than suggested there.

In the first autobiographical fragment Mary Ward writes about her aunt, Alice Wright, who was only a little older than herself: *“This kinswoman once went to see my mother (...) and living there at my father’s house (met) someone who he had intended me to marry when I had reached the age of consent, but God so disposed it that before my kinswoman returned to where I was living again, this person and she were married”*.

This clandestine marriage ceremony became a matter for the courts. The husband, William Redshaw, was still a minor and in the custody of Marmaduke Ward since his father had died in 1583. Marmaduke was a younger cousin of the young man’s grandmother.



The second courtship: Shafto (1596) – Painted Life 5



The English Vita describes this as the first proposal of marriage, and says that Mary was ten years old then.

The link with the name Shafto is consequently hypothetical.

The young man is described as being equal in rank, rich and handsome, and is particularly recommended by the Duke of Northumberland. Mary was open to this

marriage, but *“divine providence, having destined this select soul for a higher state, would not let this love, though so innocent, have place in her heart, reserved to himself, any longer; (God) disposed that this hopeful young man was to go to London on urgent affairs*

concerning his own estate, and so home. Thus, God, whose works are always admirable, weaned her from this beginning love by making her imagine some lack of constancy and fervour in her would-be husband, also concerning his respect towards herself, which was really not the case, for he both loved and honoured her until his death, which occurred a few months afterwards.” (Vita E 2v)

The third courtship: Eldrington (1597) – Painted Life 8



The inscription of the picture names the suitor and states that she was still living with her relatives, at the place where her First Communion took place (i.e. at Harewell). The courting, “because her heart was taken up with divine love and no longer wanted to allow any worldly love, horrified her so much that she became seriously ill and therefore had to be taken home by her father.” The English Vita adds (5v) that her father assumed that she had an aversion to the suitor. Soon afterwards she

was taken into the home of the Babthorpes, partly because her parents hoped that she would be more likely to find a suitable husband there (cf AB 3). As we know, this was to no avail.

The fourth courtship: Edmond Neville (1605) – Painted Life 13



The inscription on the painting records the name of the suitor and that he had a claim to the title of the Earl of Westmoreland, and that not only her parents but in particular Mary Ward’s confessor exerted pressure on her to accept him.

The English Vita (8r) adds that the confessor (some think that P. Holtby is meant, but it might also have

been John Mush) presented to her how this marriage would be of greater service to God and that even if she were a novice, she would be justified in leaving the convent again (to marry him), especially because the suitor, who is described as noble, Catholic and a man richly endowed with virtues and other qualities, had decided only to marry Mary Ward and otherwise to become a priest, which he did indeed eventually become.

Edmond Neville of Liversedge was born around 1564 and converted to Catholicism at the age of 28. In 1601, when Charles Neville, the 6th Earl of Westmoreland died, Edmond made his claim to the title and the estate, based on the family of the Nevilles of Liversedge being descended from Geoffrey Neville (died 1285), brother of Robert, the first Earl. Edmond was

ordained a priest in Rome in 1608 and entered the Society of Jesus in 1609 in Louvain. From 1621 until his death in the year 1646 he served in Lancashire.

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