

The Arrest of St. Edmund Campion *at Lyford Grange*



It was Easter 1581 and, at Stonor House in Oxfordshire, the famous Jesuit priest, Edmund Campion, had managed to print his book, 'The Ten Reasons' (for being a Catholic) which denounced the Protestant Faith. He had been travelling round Protestant England preaching to Catholic families in secret and now made his way to Oxford to distribute his work.

The moated manor house at Lyford was an attractive place for a Catholic priest, for Francis and his wife, Jane who owned the Manor, had under their protection, a number of Brigittine nuns from Sion Abbey and had repeatedly invited them to visit. Hearing that Campion was in the neighbourhood of his country estate, he had written to him to beseech him to visit his family at their home, Moore Place (later known as Lyford Grange), at Lyford in West Hanney, Berkshire, about 13 miles south-west of Oxford. Campion had more than once refused such requests from him, but now, as he was so close by, he felt that he could give no excuse.

On Sunday morning, the ninth after Pentecost, Campion preached at the Grange on the gospel of the day, the peculiarly touching gospel of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem. There was an audience of sixty, unfortunately, one amongst them was a certain George Elliott, a Protestant of the most wicked personal reputation - apparently a rapist as well as a con-artist. More worryingly, he was a Government spy, armed with a warrant for Campion's arrest.

Elliott fetched a magistrate from Abingdon and a force of an hundred men to arrest Campion in the Queen's name. Then he went piously upstairs to take Mass from Edmund Campion. This, as well as the sermon, passed by peacefully. During dinner, an alarm was given. The watchman had seen soldiers approaching from some distance. Campion sprang up and started to leave at once. He felt his chances of escape were reasonable, whereas, if he stayed, the household would only be put in disarray, if not danger. But his devotees all clung to him, assuring him that Lyford was full of cunning secret passages and hidey-holes.

The space was just big enough for the three to lay down side by side, with their hands crossed on their chests. There, in the darkness, lay Father Edmund Campion and his two companions. Elliott noted the man's anxiety and immediately called, for a smith's hammer. He smacked it into the thin timber partition and through to the

narrow cell beyond. There, in the darkness, lay Father Edmund Campion and his two companions. Dawn was just breaking on Monday 17th July 1581. Campion remained quite calm, even cheerful. He and the two priests were arrested, along with seven gentlemen and two yeomen farmers. The first stop was at Abingdon.



The following day, they travelled on to Henley and through Maidenhead to Colnbrook where new orders arrived from the Royal Council. They were now to make a public show of things. The prisoners' elbows were tied from behind, their wrists roped together in front and their feet fastened under the horses. Their leader was decorated with a note pinned to his hat on which, in large lettering, was inscribed, "Campion, the Seditious Jesuit"; and so, humiliated in this way, they were taken to the City and paraded through the streets to the Tower of London. (Source from : David Nash Ford's Royal Berkshire History.)