

JONES, ROBERT (1560 - 1615), priest, of the Society of Jesus

Name: Robert Jones
Date of birth: 1560
Date of death: 1615
Gender: Male
Occupation: priest, of the Society of Jesus
Area of activity: Religion
Author: John Martin Cleary

and Superior of the English Jesuits from 1609 to 1613; was born in 1560 near Chirk, Denbighshire. Another account says Oswestry. He may have been a pupil of the martyr **Richard Gwyn** and was certainly acquainted with the **Edwardes** family of Plas Newydd yn y Waun, for he arrived at Reims on 20 August 1581 with Richard and Francis Edwardes, and at the English College, Rome, with the first named on 6 November 1582. Six months later, on 26 May 1583, he entered the Jesuit novitiate at Sant Andrea. Such was his reputation for learning at the completion of his studies and formation as a Jesuit, that he was employed from 1590 as a professor of philosophy at the Roman College, better known under its later title of the Gregorian University. Dictated notes of his lectures taken by students are preserved in several libraries in Europe.

Early in 1595 he was placed by the Jesuit General, Aquaviva, at the disposal of Fr. Robert Persons, the Prefect of the English Jesuit mission, who had long hoped to provide for the needs of the Roman Catholics in Wales. Passing through Spain, Jones arrived in England by July 1595. By 1605 he had set up an organization, centred in Monmouthshire and extending along the Marches, linking in close co-operation the recusant gentry, Welsh secular clergy and Welsh Jesuits, including Frs. Powell and Bennett. Money was provided through one of Fr. Jones's converts, **lady Frances Morgan** of Llantarnam, where he lived for long periods. The fund sufficed to maintain two Jesuits in North Wales and two in South Wales, and was later used by Frs. **John Salusbury, S.J.** and **Charles Gwynne, S.J.** to lease and then to buy the farm known as the Cwm, Llanrothal, which until 1678 served as the headquarters of the Welsh Jesuit College of S. Francis Xavier. In the year 1604 alone Fr. Jones sent students to the Valladolid and Douai seminaries from Shropshire, Herefordshire, Monmouthshire, and Worcestershire. On several occasions Welsh students were escorted to the seminaries by Fr. James Morris, one of four Welsh secular priests known to have worked under Fr. Jones's direction. These activities, doubtless, underlie the sheriff of Hereford's unsubstantiated charges of political subversion made against Jones in 1605 and explain the phrase 'Jones the Jesuit, the firebrand of all.'

He became vice-prefect of the whole Jesuit mission in England and Wales on 30 March 1609, at a crisis in the affairs of the recusant body. In 1608 executions of priests had recommenced, and the oath of allegiance was enforced intensively by the proclamation of 2 June 1610. The government secretly fostered disunion among the persecuted recusants, and controversy about the oath aroused interest throughout Europe, involving Jones's friend, Cardinal Bellarmine. Fr. Jones's letters, a selection from which, including one to Bellarmine, occupies forty-eight pages in *Foley's Records*, yield valuable evidence about the course of the struggle, and display his resolute leadership. They also show that the Welsh priests of the Appellant party refused to sign the petition of 1610 to Rome for the appointment of a bishop 'unless they are promised an archbishop to succeed **St. David**.' In 1609 Jones had completed and sent to Rome an English translation of a treatise 'De Potestate Papae,' but the general, Aquaviva, withheld permission to publish it, following the established policy of denying as far as possible local opportunity to adversaries of promoting disunion. He wrote an Italian narrative of the execution at Leominster in 1610 of **Fr. Roger Cadwaladr**, whom he succeeded in visiting in prison on the day he was sentenced to death.

In late 1611 his health was causing anxiety to his brethren and to Aquaviva in Rome, who was, however, reluctant to accede to Jones's request that he be replaced as vice-prefect. His successor, Fr. M. Walpole, was named on 17 August 1613 and took up his appointment in October. The Jesuit missionaries had increased, under his guidance, to fifty-seven priests in England and Wales, and it was mainly the result of his work that the catalogue of the newly-established vice-province of England in 1621 was able to list ten Jesuit priests engaged on the Welsh mission. Fr. Jones died in Wales on 20 August 1615, from injuries received in a fall on a dark night, when hurrying to christen a baby. His successor wrote of him: 'His career as a missionary had mostly been spent among the Britons, the ancient inhabitants of this island, in Wales a mountainous and not very fertile part of the country. He here led a life full of toil and peril, amongst a people which still clings to the old religion.' Foley calls him 'this distinguished Jesuit,' and prints an eloquent letter, reflecting his high qualities which he addressed to his Jesuit brethren in days of darkest adversity.

Author

John Martin Cleary

Sources

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