

PARISHES OF
ST PIUS X, ALDERLEY EDGE, ST BENEDICT'S, HANDFORTH
AND
SACRED HEART & ST TERESA'S WILMSLOW
WEEKLY REFLECTION

Sunday 15th June 2025: Holy Trinity
St. John Kemble

While visiting relatives in Hereford I noticed, in the market square, the name of a saint carved in the pavement along with other names and places. The square has its roots in the Anglo-Saxon period and has evolved over time, becoming a central hub for trade and commerce. The names of people who lived there offer insight into the town's past. One such name is St. John Kemble. I thought what a great way to remind people of their heritage and honour the past, so I decided to find out about him.

He was martyred at Hereford in 1679 and is buried at Welsh Newton. He was beatified by Pope Pius XI in 1929 and canonised by Pope Paul VI on 25 October 1970 as one of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales.

Born in circa 1599 at Rhydica Farm, St. Weonard's parish, near Monmouth, to Anne and John Kemble. He studied for the priesthood at the English College in Douai where he was ordained on 23 February 1625. Three months later, he returned to Wales where he ministered to local Catholics for the next fifty-four years.

In 1678, the infamous Popish Plot falsely accused English Catholics, especially priests, of attempting to assassinate Charles II and replace him with his brother, James, Duke of York. Captain John Scudamore of Kentchurch (a lapsed Catholic, although his wife and children were parishioners of John Kemble) arrived at Pembroke Castle in November 1678 to arrest the elderly John Kemble. At first, he was accused of being part of the Titus Oates Plot and was taken to London to be examined by Titus Oates himself. Although there was no suggestion he had been involved in the Plot, he was found guilty under the Statute of Elizabeth I of "being a Catholic priest." The statute treated foreign ordination as treason. He was found guilty and condemned in March 1679.

He was eighty years old when he told he was to be executed the same day. He asked for a little time to say prayers, smoke a pipe and drink a cup of sack (a type of sherry). This inspired the Herefordshire expressions "Kemble cup" or "Kemble pipe" for the last drink or smoke before departing. He said to the executioner, "be not

afraid, do thy office. I forgive thee with all my heart. Thou wilt do me greater kindness than discourtesy". He was left hanging by the neck for thirty minutes before he was cut down which was perhaps the executioner's kindness as the "drawing and quartering" elements of the sentence took place on his lifeless body on 22 August 1679 at Widemarsh Common, Hereford.

His body was claimed by his nephew, Captain Richard Kemble and buried at night at Welsh Newton, four miles north of Monmouth. The stone is inscribed "JK Dyed the 22 August Anno Do 1679". His death was greeted with dismay by Catholics and Protestants alike praising him as "a great gentleman".

St Mary's Monmouth holds relics of the Saint together with his chalice, missal, portable altar-stone and carved oak table on which he celebrated Mass at Pembridge Castle. One of his hands is preserved as a relic in St Francis Xavier's Church Hereford.

Bernard Kellett