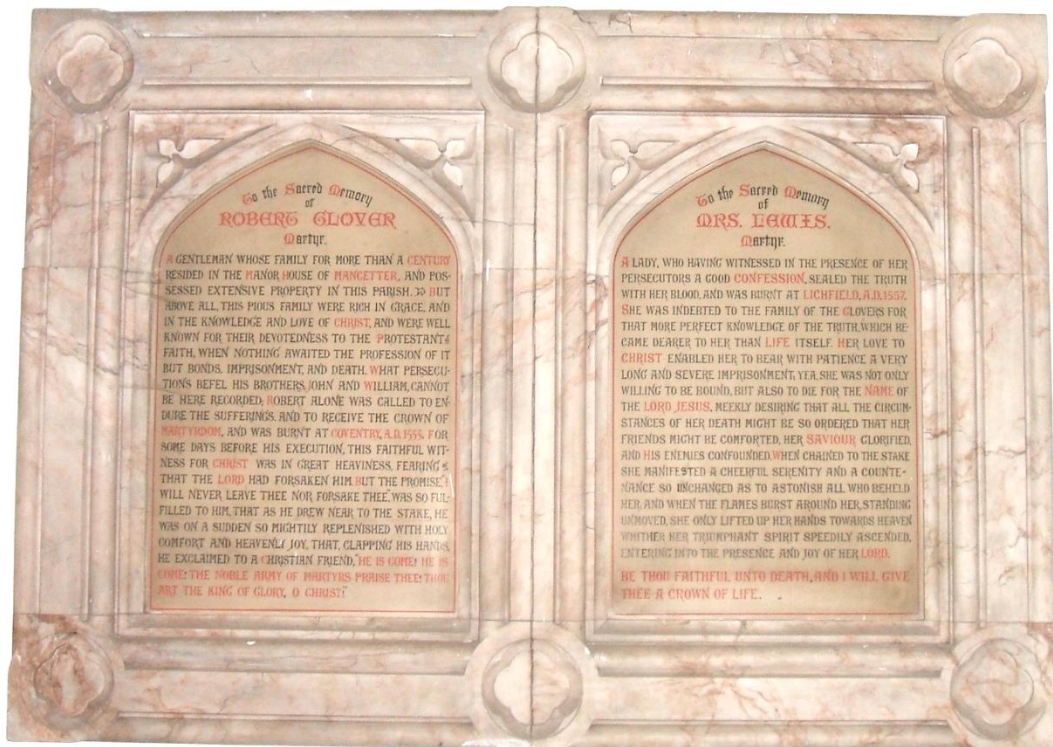


The Mancetter Martyrs



By Matthew Foster

Most people are familiar with the Roman history of Mancetter, and the key role it played in shaping Britain at that time. However, long after the Romans left, two local residents would also play their part in another bloody chapter in British history. Before I write about these two people, it is worth mentioning a few details that will help to put the events that took place into a bit more context.

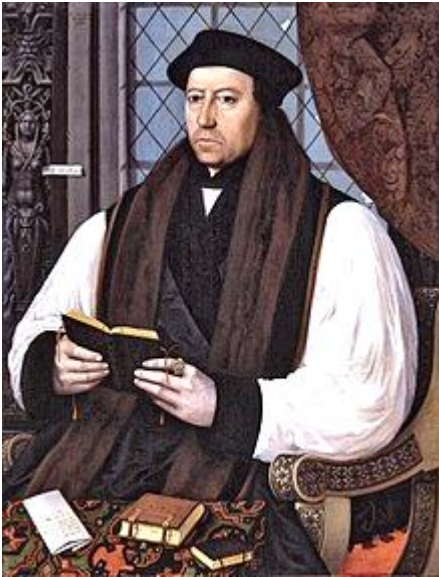


Furious that the pope wouldn't allow him to divorce his wife, Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII dissolved all contact with the Church in Rome, and in 1534, declared himself; "*Supreme Head on Earth of the Church of England.*" Rather a grand title for a grand man, with a grand ego. To ensure that all religious practitioners understood and conformed to this change, all catholic churches and monasteries were ransacked; all their treasures and money were now the property of the crown. However, Henry did give something back; and that was every church had to have a copy of the bible in it. This bible was translated into English, so everyone could read it, and not just priests and monks who could read Latin.

Some people accepted the change to this new religion, whilst others would put themselves and their families at risk, by continuing to practice Catholicism. Others would even be brave enough to shelter priests who wouldn't denounce their faith.

One person, who wasn't happy with this change, was Henry's own daughter Mary, who would later become Mary I, or Bloody Mary as her opponents called her. When she ascended to the thrown in 1553, she began reversing her father's work, and restored Catholicism back to the official religion of England. Once more there were those who were resistant to this change back, and dissension soon erupted. To quell any thoughts of rebellion, Mary revived the old Heresy laws in 1555. This meant that anyone not following the laws of the Catholic Church, or opposing its will in any way, would be classed as a heretic, and be burned at the stake.





During her reign, three hundred so-called heretics met this terrible fate, with dozens more dying in prison whilst they were waiting for their sentences to be carried out. In a world where social class and sexism built the entire social structure, these newly revived laws, promoted equality. It didn't matter who you were, who your family were, nor did your gender make any difference, if you were guilty, you were going to die. This can be highlighted by the fact, that the first person to die under these heresy laws was Henry's long-term advisor, Thomas Cranmer, who was Archbishop of Canterbury at the time of his execution.

Two people who were also killed under these draconian laws were local residents; Robert Glover, and Joyce Lewis, who will forever be known as the Mancetter Martyrs. What follows, are the individual stories of these two people, beginning with Robert Glover.

Robert Glover

Although it is Robert, who would pay the ultimate price for his religious beliefs, it was the actions of his brother John, who would first attract the attention of the authorities.



On the surface John Glover had a privileged lifestyle that any 16th century gentleman could want. Along with his family, and brothers Thomas and Robert, he lived in the Manor House in Mancetter. Not only did the brothers have a luxurious home, they also owned large stretches of land, they had money, and large amounts of other worldly goods. To put the icing on

the cake of their lifestyle, they were greatly respected by their peers and the people of the wider community.

However, John wasn't happy with this lifestyle that had been thrust upon him. He turned his back on the duties and responsibilities, someone of his position would have. Instead he left his two brothers, and his most trusted servants, to take up his share of the work. John didn't do this through

laziness however, he felt his time was better suited in quiet contemplation, and; *“Giving his life to the service of the lord”* as he called it.

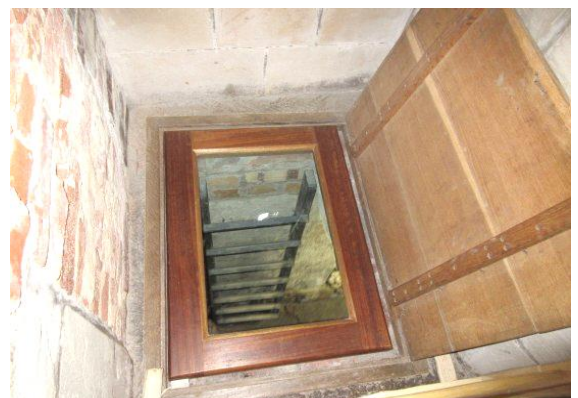
To dedicate one’s life in this way maybe commendable from a modern perspective, but in the 16th century, this kind of behaviour would have been classed as inappropriate, for someone of his status. John’s behaviour would come under even more scrutiny, when he began to boycott social functions which he was required to attend.

As time progressed, John began to publicly question certain aspects of the newly reinstated catholic faith. For example, he asked; *“Why was the Pope made head of the Christian faith, instead of Jesus Christ?”* and *“Why was there so much emphasis placed on the celebration of Mass, when this ritual wasn’t mentioned in the Bible?”* More damagingly personally for John, he began to question the authority of those who enforced the rules of the Catholic faith.

It didn’t take long for John’s rhetoric to reach the ears of Dr Baines, who was the Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield. He sent orders to the local Mayor, that John Glover and his two brothers were to be arrested. Luckily for the Glovers, the Mayor had a lot of respect for the family, and at great personal risk, warned them, that the local sheriff, Richard Hopkins was coming to arrest them.

On hearing this news, the brothers knew their only course of action was to escape, because they knew what was going to happen if they were arrested. However, fate had dealt the Glovers a particularly cruel blow, despite them receiving the tip off. At that particular moment in time, Robert Glover was seriously ill in bed. If he had tried to escape with Thomas and John, then he would have only slowed them down, which meant they all would have been caught.

We will never know the conversation that must have taken place between the three brothers at that moment in time, nor will we fully understand the guilt and heart ache they all must have felt. All we do know for certain is that Thomas and John used a secret passage, known as a “Priest hole,” which was in one of the upstairs rooms to escape. The irony of the fact is, that this



device was originally used to facilitate the escape of Catholics from the Protestant authorities; now it was helping Protestants to escape from the Catholic authorities.

Just as the Sheriff and his men entered the manor on the ground floor, Thomas and John escaped into the woods, which were at the back of the manor house. When Robert Glover was discovered so ill in bed by the sheriff and his men, Sheriff Hopkins took pity on him, and even contemplated letting him go. After all, it was John who was openly questioning the validity and authority of the church. However, his men weren't as merciful as the sheriff, and were afraid of encoring the wrath of Dr Baines, down on themselves. So, they managed to convince Sheriff Hopkins, that because Robert Glover was on the arrest warrant, they should indeed take him into custody, despite his frail condition. Unfortunately, Dr Baines was even less compassionate than the sheriff's men, and gave the order that Robert Glover be taken on the arduous and no doubt bumpy journey, in a horse and cart, to a prison in Lichfield. The chances are that this cart would have had bars on it, but it would have also been uncovered, so everyone could see him being taken away.

On arrival at Lichfield, he was placed in a small, dark, damp cell, with no sanitation facilities or even a proper bed. It is also worth noting at this point in history, if you wanted to eat and drink in prison, then you would have to pay for it yourself. Unlike the other prisoners, who had to sell personal items, such as their clothes or beg through the bars of their prison cell, Robert could afford to pay his way, and arranged for money to be sent to him. Robert would have to spend ten days in these squalid conditions before he was officially charged with any crime.



Robert might not have been as outspoken as his brother John, but his resolve and determination were as solid as granite. Plus, Robert also had an ace up his sleeve, which his brother didn't have. Several Years before his incarceration, Robert had attended Cambridge University. During his time there, he became an active member of some of the debating societies. So, when Dr Baines bought him before the court, to explain both his brother's and his own actions, they found Robert was a

formidable opponent. Not only did Robert vigorously defend his brother's and his own actions, but he also backed up all of his opinions and comments with quotes from the bible. He even refused to acknowledge the authority of the court.

In an attempt to break Robert's spirit, Dr Baines stopped his family, friends, even his own children from visiting him in prison. The only person who was allowed access was Augustine Bernher; who was clerk and servant to the Bishop of Worcester. Bernher attended many of the other martyrs during the Marian Persecutions, becoming an unofficial overseer to the widows and fatherless children this period generated. Robert held Bernher in such high regard, that in a letter to his wife, Robert referred to him as an "*angel of the lord.*" And that she should be guided by his instructions.

After many heated appearances in court, Robert was at last branded a heretic, and sentenced to death. Unsurprisingly, in the last few days of his life, his resolve and his faith began to wane. It is possible that Dr Baines may show mercy, if Robert renounced his previous beliefs, and begged for forgiveness. He even began to wonder whether God, whom he placed so much faith in, had at last abandoned him. Once more, Bernher was there to offer both spiritual and mental support to Robert.

Soon the time came for Robert to be transferred to Coventry, where his sentence was to be carried out. With his head bowed down, he was led towards the stake; in front of a large crowd. As he was being tied into place, he suddenly lifted his head, with a large grin spread across his face.



In a loud voice he declared; "*He has come, He has come! The noble army of martyrs praise thee! Thou art the King of Glory O Christ.*" A few moments after speaking these words, Robert Glover became the first of the Mancetter Martyrs.

It is unclear what happened to Thomas Glover, but the evidence suggests that he made his way down to the south of England, where he spent the rest of his life, and death, in poverty.

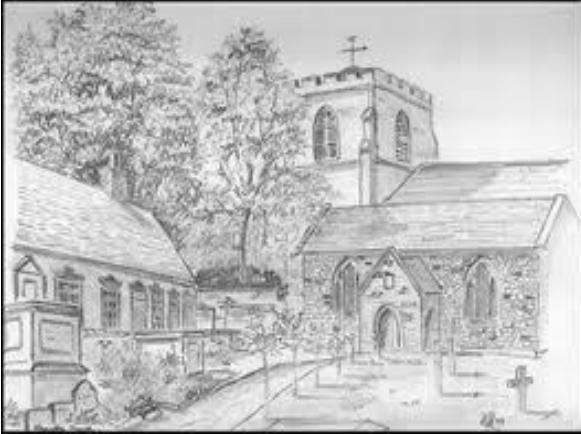
His brother, John Glover didn't fare much better either. In the last few years of the reign of Queen Mary, a new search for John was launched. He was eventually discovered in Somerset. Just as before, he managed to evade arrest by the authorities, by hiding in the local wood. For three days he hid there, before becoming ill, with possibly pneumonia, and soon died. Because he had been branded a heretic, he was buried in the local churchyard, without a priest being present; a terrible fate for any God-fearing Christian.

However, Dr Draycott, who was the chancellor of the local diocese, felt that this didn't go far enough. He insisted that John Glover's body should be exhumed immediately and thrown into the road. The parish priest objected to this course of action, because John had been interred six weeks at that time, and his semi-decomposed remains would cause; *"Considerable offence to passers-by."*

Reluctantly, Dr Draycott agreed with this point. However, he gave strict instructions that a special liturgy was to be performed, which would expel John's spirit from heaven. Then after a period of twelve months had passed, John Glover's remains were to be exhumed and thrown into the road. Once this had taken place, the ground where his grave had been, was to be re-blessed. Thus, concludes the story of the first of the Mancetter martyrs.



Joyce Lewis



The second of the Mancetter Martyrs, was a lady by the name of Joyce Lewis, who also happened to live in the Mancetter Manor estate. Unlike John, she enjoyed the lifestyle a person of privilege was offered. Although she had a lot of contact with the Glover family, she didn't share their Protestant views. She was a devoted Catholic and attended mass regularly.

All this changed however, when one day, she heard a speech by a well-educated preacher and ardent Protestant, called Lawrence Saunders. He caused quite a stir in the local community, by asking question like;

“Was it right to torture and kill people in the name of Christ?”

And pointing out what he called; *“The errors of the Popish religion.”* Like many of his contemporaries, Lawrence Saunders was burned at the stake in 1555 for heresy.



Despite the dangers that were associated with listening to such a person, the seeds of doubt began to germinate Joyce's mind, and she began to listen to more of what Lawrence had to say. As time passed, she even began to talk with John Glover, because his views and those of Lawrence Saunders were so similar. The more keenly she listened, the more she began to question the faith she once held onto so strongly. Eventually, she decided to change the *“Sinful way in which she was living her life.”* As she put it.

She became so disillusioned with the rites and the practices of the Catholic Church, that her husband had to drag her to church on a Sunday morning. It is unclear whether this was an act of faith on her husband's behalf, or whether he just feared the social repercussions of turning up to church without his wife. However, Joyce was about to do something, that was far worse than not turning up for church.

On this particular Sunday, it came to the part of the service, when the congregation stepped forward to be blessed with Holy Water. Joyce could no longer keep her feelings of contempt towards the church inside, and

she turned her back on the priest when he got to her. This would have sent a seismic shock wave through the entire congregation, and no doubt caused considerable embarrassment to her husband.

To put this action onto some kind of prospective, we all witnessed the controversy that erupted when a group of American Footballers, refused to stand for the national anthem, in protest of Donald Trump. More recently, we saw what happened when the Brexit Party MEP's, turned their backs in the European Parliament, when the European Anthem was being played.

Nowadays we call such acts as this, passive aggressive; a way of fighting the system, without hurting anyone, or breaking any laws. However, in a church in the 16th century, it was a million times worse than both of these modern events combined. The Catholic Church was far above politics, and Joyce Lewis had carried out an act which could be classed as blasphemy.

Not only were the congregation appalled by what had taken place, but the bishop also wanted to know the meaning behind this terrible outrage. So, he drew up a summons, for both Thomas and Joyce to appear before him, to explain what had happened. When the Bishop's officer arrived at the Lewis household, to deliver the summons, for some reason a heated argument broke out between the officer and Thomas. This argument culminated with Thomas drawing a knife and holding it to the officer's breast. Consumed with rage, Thomas then forced the officer to swallow the bishop's summons, as way of a reply. To ensure he had indeed swallowed the document, Thomas then forced the officer to drink a large glass of water, before being dismissed empty handed.



Furious at having his authority treated with such contempt, the bishop had both Thomas and Joyce brought immediately before him. Now that his rage had subsided, Thomas apologised unreservedly for his inexcusable behaviour, but his wife, however, wasn't so forthcoming. Instead she refused to admit that she had done anything wrong in the eyes of God. Maybe the bishop was swayed slightly by her status, or he felt squeamish about condemning a woman; either way, he gave her one more chance to

repent. He told Joyce, that she was to go home for a month; then return to the bishop where she could beg for mercy. To ensure her full co-operation with this matter, a hefty bond of £100 was levied on her return.

After they returned home, John Glover begged them to forgo the money and leave Mancetter, and start a new life, far away from the prying eyes of the Bishop. Unfortunately, history doesn't record the reason why they chose to stay put, but they did. Maybe Thomas Lewis thought that his wife would do as the bishop asked and would beg for forgiveness. Or was £100 too much money for them to lose. Either way, a month later, Joyce Lewis appeared before the Bishop once more. Despite all of her husband's pleading, she refused to apologise to the Bishop.

Left with no alternative, the Bishop sent Joyce to a prison which apparently was even worse than the one Robert Glover had been sent to. It was reported at the time, that one of the ladies who attended Joyce, actually fainted on arrival at the prison, because the smell was so bad. As mentioned earlier, just because you were a woman, didn't necessarily mean you were going to be treated any better than a man.

Whilst she was in prison, she was given many chances to apologise, and to re-embrace the Catholic faith. But she always refused, insisting that her faith in God wasn't in question; but she did object to the laws which were forced on her by the church, claiming; *"They were not necessary for the Glory of God."*

During her last official appearance before the bishop, she branded his words; *"Wicked and ungodly."* Unfortunately for Joyce, these words would seal her fate; because very soon after saying them, she was branded a heretic, and was sentenced to be executed in Lichfield.



For the whole 12 months of her incarceration, she kept a happy demeanour, even lending support to the other prisoners. It was like she didn't notice the terrible conditions in which she was kept in, nor did she seem concerned about the fate which was hanging over her head. Even her friends and family that came to visit her commented on how happy she looked. Whilst she was in prison, she also became acquainted with

Augustine Bernher, whom she wrote many fond letters about. These letters helped to cement the title of “Friend to the Martyrs” to Bernher.

Joyce’s bravery was demonstrated further on the night before she was scheduled to be executed. With her friends around her, she discussed with them how best her death could be used to glorify God, without any hint of concern towards her own safety. As a final service to her, two priests were sent to her, so that she could make her final confession. However, when they arrived at her cell, she dismissed them with a smile, telling them that she had; *“Already made her final confession to Christ her Saviour.”*

At around 3 o’clock in the morning however, Joyce’s demeanour changed, and like Robert, her faith began to stumble, and she began to question if eternal life was indeed waiting for her, after enduring the terrible ordeal of her incarceration and execution. However, her fears were abated by those who were with her that night. They quoted scripture to her and reminded her of all the saints who had been martyred in the service of Jesus Christ. By morning, her faith had been fully restored once more, and Joyce was convinced what she was doing would bring glory to the name of God.



Still smiling, she was led towards the stake, through the crowds of people. As she went, some women who supported her drank wine with her from a chalice, in a sort of hasty communion. This act didn’t go unnoticed, and the women involved had to pay a penance, and be re-blessed afterwards. As she was being tied to the stake, she lifted her hands towards the heavens, and smiled. She even stayed like this as the flames finally engulfed her mortal body. Unknown to the authorities or the crowd at that time, someone who was connected to the execution had taken pity on Joyce and

had added extra fuel to the pyre. This meant that the flames would burn hotter, and death would come quicker. And Joyce Lewis became the second of the Mancetter Martyrs.



To preserve the memory of these two brave individuals, tablets were erected underneath the pipe work for the old organ, in 1883. Also, there are two pictures depicting the martyrdom of Robert and Joyce by the main entrance to the church. So, if you have time, why not take a moment to look at these memorials; or take a couple of minutes to remember two remarkable members of the local community.