

## The Porter Family of The Mythe

In July 1989 the late Lez Hough produced his essay, *'The Foundation of the Mythe Mission, Tewkesbury'* as Journal X of the Gloucestershire and North Avon Catholic History Society. In his introduction he spoke of his delight in uncovering 'a story of remarkable generosity and piety' but, with typical modesty, he also added that his detective work should be seen as merely 'the foundations of a more comprehensive history of modern Catholicism in Tewkesbury'. This article is not the 'comprehensive history' but I have been able to discover a little more about Thomas Porter, his nephew Charles, and their relationships with the local Catholic family of Wakeman.

The Porters seem to hail from Orrell, near Wigan, in Lancashire and to date I have not discovered links with Endymion Porter, the recusant gentleman associated with Robert Dover's Cotswold Olympick Games, from whom Lez postulated the Porters of the Mythe might claim descent. In his will of 1813, Thomas Porter of the Mythe refers to his property at Gerards, Orrell whilst the 1861 census return for Mythe Villa House reveals that his nephew, Charles Porter, was born at Orrell in about 1797.

The important local connection seems to be the marriage between Thomas Porter and Frances Wakeman of Beckford Hall. This alliance brought the Porters into a long tradition of Catholic recusancy in the Tewkesbury area. So far I have not discovered the date of the wedding but it certainly took place before 1787. In that year Henry Wakeman of Beckford made his will and in it he refers to his daughter Frances Porter. She was probably born in about 1750 at Beckford Hall so the marriage could have been as early as the 1770s.

The 1836 edition of the *Tewkesbury Yearly Register and Magazine* marked the passing of Frances Porter's brother, the ninety-six-year-old William Wakeman, the last of the line of Wakemans of Beckford Hall, with the publication of his pedigree and a history of his family. Here we discover that Frances Porter was the eighth child of Henry Wakeman and his wife Mary, the daughter of Edmund Bracy, of Beoley, Worcestershire. We read that she was 'married to the late Thomas Porter, esq. of the Mythe, (who erected the delightful residence which is now in the possession of his nephew, Charles Porter, esq.) and died without issue.'

Interestingly the seventh child of Henry and Mary Wakeman was Walter Wakeman. According to the pedigree, he 'lived at the Mythe, and was honoured with a morning call by King George the Third, when he visited Tewkesbury and the Mythe Tute in 1788 : he married, 1. Anne, widow of ... Chinn; and 2. Mary, daughter of ... Williams, esq. of Little Malvern, where he resided during the latter part of his life, and died without issue.'

The late J. N. Langston added further details about this royal visit in his unpublished essay on Post Reformation Catholics in Tewkesbury: 'Walter Wakeman, brother of William Wakeman of Beckford, was living at the Mythe, and he was honoured with a morning call on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1788, by King George III and his Queen, together with the Princess Royal and the Princesses Augusta and Elizabeth, who were re-visiting Tewkesbury. They went to the summit of the Mythe Hill (then known as Mythe Tute, but afterwards as Royal Hill) which commands a fine and extensive view of the River Severn. *The Gloucester Journal*, quoting a Tewkesbury letter, said that "Walter

Wakeman, Esq., a gentleman of the persuasion of the church of Rome, and the proprietor of the ground on which their Majesties stood, as a mark of his loyalty and affection, made a large bonfire at the top of the hill, and illuminated his house in the evening.”

An elder brother of both Frances Porter and Walter Wakeman was Henry Wakeman. The pedigree refers to him as ‘an eminent land agent, of Baker-Street, Portman-Square, who built a house at the Mythe, now occupied by Joseph Longmore, esq. for his summer residence’. This Henry Wakeman, the younger, died at the Mythe in 1814.

The article in the 1836 *Tewkesbury Yearly Register and Magazine* further reveals historic links between the Mythe and the Wakeman Family:

‘The ancient Roman Catholic family of Wakeman derive their descent from John Wake, or Wakeman, who, after the Norman conquest, fixed his abode in Yorkshire, where his descendants appear to have remained for many generations.

Early in the fifteenth century, a William Wakeman, of this family came into Gloucestershire, and was ancestor of the Wakemans of Drayton in Worcestershire.

In about a century afterwards, we find Richard Wakeman living at the Mythe, and Thomas Wakeman at Southwick, both of which places are hamlets in the parish of Tewkesbury; while their brother Robert, or John (as he has been more frequently called) became Abbot of Tewkesbury, and afterwards Bishop of Gloucester. These three were younger brothers of William Wakeman of Drayton.

In the year 1551, Richard Wakeman, a nephew of the Bishop, and great grandson of John Wakeman of Drayton, was resident at Beckford; and from that period to the death of the last proprietor, the family appear to have made this village their constant residence.’

The first local reference that I have found for Thomas Porter dates from 1794 when he was excused from being a Director for the Poor of Tewkesbury because of his age. This means that his brother-in-law, Walter Wakeman, was living at the Mythe from before 1788 until his marriage in 1796, his brother-in-law, Henry Wakeman, owned a house there until 1814 whilst the Porters were resident there from before 1794.

The late Bryan Little in an article published in the magazine, *Gloucestershire & Avon Life* (February 1978), offers us further information:

‘The last Abbot of Tewkesbury, John Wakeman, is said, six years before the dissolution of his abbey, to have leased some of the monastery’s land at the Mythe to his brother Richard; the property included the house still standing and partly of Tudor date, known as King John’s Castle. After the dissolution, Richard Wakeman secured the ownership of the estate from the king, and the Wakemans, who remained Catholic throughout penal times, kept their land at the Mythe for another three centuries.’

Back in 1717, John Hopcutt, was given under ‘Mithe and Mithe Hook’ in a list of Papists compiled by the Clerk of the Peace. Together this patchy evidence indicates a continual Roman Catholic presence on the Mythe from the earliest recusant Wakemans until the closure of St Joseph’s Church in 1977 and the more recent sale to a dentist of the Porter home by their descendant, Valerie Townsend.

The Wakeman pedigree spoke of the ‘delightful residence’ erected by Thomas Porter on the Mythe. A copy lease dated 24<sup>th</sup> July 1812 refers to ‘The moiety or half of the capital messuage or tenement in the Mythe, pa. Tewkesbury; a close piece of meadow

and pasture (7 acres) of the late Walter Wakeman, now (belonging to) Thomas Porter, esq.' Alan Brooks has written in *'Gloucestershire 2: The Vale & the Forest of Dean'*: 'On this ridge above, enjoying splendid views over the river plain, several early C19 villas. The most notable is the Mythe, a three-bay villa with a brick rear portion dated 1812... Typical Regency fittings, with mahogany doors and reeded doorcases.'

Thomas Porter made his will in August 1813 and the Reverend John Birdsall, the Catholic Missioner at Cheltenham, witnessed the signing of this document. Thomas made provision for his wife Frances, together with three other relatives, namely his nephew, Charles Porter, who was then aged under twenty-one and a student at Stonyhurst, his niece, Miss Catherine Porter, who lived with him, and his niece, Mrs. Frances Sanderson of Preston. The executors were his brothers-in-law, William and Henry Wakeman. His property included his residence on the Mythe together with his shares in the Grand Junction Canal and Gerards at Orrell This will was proved at London on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1813.

Having considered the life of Thomas Porter and his connections with the ancient family of Wakeman, we now turn to his nephew, Charles Porter. As was mentioned Charles was born in 1796 at Orrell and was a student at Stonyhurst from 5<sup>th</sup> July 1807 until 11<sup>th</sup> August 1814. The *Supplement to the Stonyhurst Magazine (No 299, June 1932)* offers us a brief biography stating that Charles was born on 21<sup>st</sup> June 1796, the first son of Charles Porter of the Mythe by Dorothy, d of ... Yates, of Liverpool. The eleven-year-old Charles succeeded his father on his death on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1808. Lez Hough further gleaned from somewhere that Charles Porter's father was a coin collector. Whilst there is little reason to dispute any of this information it does seem unlikely that Charles Porter senior ever resided at the Mythe.

On 7th November 1822 Charles Porter married Elizabeth (sometimes Eliza), a daughter of John Wright of Kelvedon in Essex. She was the sister of William Wright who was a month older than Charles Porter and had been his contemporary throughout his time at Stonyhurst. In later life William Wright succeeded his great-uncle, Sir John Lawson, 6<sup>th</sup> Bart., of Brough Hall, and took the surname and arms of Lawson. Three years later, in 1837, Sir William Lawson was responsible for erecting the fine Catholic chapel at Brough Hall, which Lez Hough described as 'a replica of the archiepiscopal chapel at York Minster'. Lawson was created a Baronet on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1841, received the Order of Christ from Pope Gregory XVI in 1844 and he died on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1865. His arms are displayed in the west bay of Stonyhurst Refectory along with those of his brother-in-law, Charles Porter. Elizabeth and William Wright also had a younger sister Catherine Wright who died a spinster in Cheltenham on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1871, aged sixty-nine years. She was buried with the Porters at Kemerton. There is a reference in Cheltenham to a donation of £10 from a Miss Catherine Wright to St Gregory's School extension fund dated 12<sup>th</sup> April 1871.

Elizabeth Wright was born in 1794 and, according to the census return for 1861 she was born at Middleton in Yorkshire. Charles and Elizabeth settled in Tewkesbury in the house built by Uncle Thomas Porter at the Mythe. Alan Brooks describes how a Gothic ashlar façade was built in about 1825 for Charles Porter. The façade included mullioned and transformed Tudor-arched windows, with Perpendicular ground floor bay windows flanking a buttressed porch; parapet with raised centre with Porter's arms. Having re-modelled their home the couple were ready for their four children,

namely Charles William (born 1826), Mary Elizabeth (born 1830), Mary Clementina (born 1832) and Mary Catherine (born 1834).

Lez Hough corresponded with the late Sister Francis-Agnes Onslow and gleaned that the girls were enrolled at the Franciscan School at Taunton respectively in 1839, 1843 and 1845, 'each being at the time about ten years of age'. Young Charles William entered Stonyhurst on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1838 but sadly died there on 5<sup>th</sup> January 1845. The school records report that 'C. Porter died in the New Infirmary on Jan. 5<sup>th</sup> at 30'clock a.m. R.I.P.' *The Tewkesbury Yearly Register & Magazine* for 1845 reported:

'5<sup>th</sup> January 1845 At Stonyhurst College, Lancashire in the 19<sup>th</sup> year of his age, Charles William, only son of Charles Porter Esq. of the Mythe.'

During the last twenty years Charles Porter had become increasingly well respected in the Tewkesbury area. In 1824 he had served as Director of the Poor of Tewkesbury Parish and he was later to serve as Mayor on three occasions -1837, 1839 and 1841.

*The Tewkesbury Yearly Register and Magazine* for 9<sup>th</sup> November 1837 records the following:

'Mr Alderman Porter was elected Mayor without opposition. Mr Porter and the 2 senior magistrates of the borough F. Eyston and C.E. Hanford esquires are Roman Catholics and it is some what remarkable after the long and rigid exclusion from the Corporation of all who were not considered high churchmen, that the two Mayors elected under the Municipal Corporation Act should have been Dissenters and the 3<sup>rd</sup> a strict and consistent member of the Romish Church. May the "reformed town council" continue to choose a mayor so justly respected, as eminently honourable, and as well qualified to fulfil the important duties of the office as Mr Porter'

The same magazine recorded on 19<sup>th</sup> November 1841 that Charles Porter esq. was elected Mayor for the year ensuing and that Charles Porter esq. and James Blount Lewis esq. were both re-elected as aldermen. Elsewhere it was noted that Alderman Porter, who lived out of town, had said how disgraceful the cost of adequate water and drainage system would be at 2/- rate for twenty years. Porter was described by Lez Hough as 'a keen and discriminating sportsman, he was the owner of at least three guns by John Manton'

The 1834 edition of the Catholic national directory, the *Laity Directory*, included this anonymous notice: 'A gentleman, in the neighbourhood, is willing to assist in establishing a chapel in Tewkesbury, when this desirable object can be entered upon with a probability of success.' As Lez Hough remarked in his article, we can guess that this gentleman is no other than Charles Porter. Clearly the proposal made in this advertisement was not pursued for attention seems to have moved to the neighbouring village of Kemerton where the Eystons and Hanfords were preparing to erect a Catholic Church. Certainly Charles Porter was a donor to the funds for the building of the church at Kemerton. Once again the *Tewkesbury Yearly Register and Magazine* covered the solemn opening of St Benet's in 1843 and noted that Charles Porter and Family were present at the service. The Catholic national magazine, the *Weekly Orthodox Journal*, mangled the account and referred inaccurately to the presence of T.R. Porter and his Family. This inaccurate reference caused Lez Hough considerable confusion when he wrote his article in 1989.

Christine Collins, the historian of St Benet's Church, has discovered that in 1855 two statues, carved in stone, one of the Blessed Virgin with the Infant Saviour and the other of St Joseph, were presented to St Benet's Church by Charles Porter of the Mythe, Tewkesbury. These were placed in the niches on either side of the altar. Also she has found that in 1867 Porter endowed the Catholic School at Kemerton with the sum of £100. A copy of the 1852 trust deed for the school, now in the possession of the Eyston Family, refers to Charles Porter as one of the six trustees.

The 1861 census return reveals that Charles and Elizabeth Porter were living at Mythe Villa House with their two daughters and four servants. Charles was described as an Alderman and Magistrate. Their second daughter, Mary Clementina, had already joined the Assumption convent in Earl's Court Road, London in 1858 so she was obviously not at home on that night. Three years after the Census, in 1864, Mary Elizabeth married Francis-Gabriel de Lys at St George's Cathedral, Southwark and five years after that her sister Mary Catherine married Frederic Gerard at St Gregory's Cheltenham. The story of the building of St Joseph's Church and the lives of the descendents of Charles Porter have been fully told by Lez Hough and there is no need to repeat it here.

Elizabeth Porter died on 11<sup>th</sup> June 1865, aged seventy-one years, and was buried at St Benet's Kemerton. A fine monstrance was later commissioned in her memory. Her husband, Charles Porter, died on 19<sup>th</sup> March 1867, aged seventy-years, and he was buried with his wife at Kemerton. This event took place exactly three years before St Joseph's Church was opened on the Mythe. In his will, Lez Hough discovered that Charles Porter had made his daughter, the marquise, tenant for life of all the property that his Uncle Thomas Porter had enjoyed in his life time and that he, Charles Porter had inherited, together with the property that he had bought at various times since.

Whilst the story of the Mythe Mission has been fully told by Lez Hough it would seem that he did not have available to him the account of the opening of St Joseph's Church published in the *Tewkesbury Register & Gazette*, dated 26<sup>th</sup> March 1870, which I have included here:

#### 'The New Roman Catholic Chapel at Tewkesbury

An addition has just been made to the public buildings of the borough in the form of a Roman Catholic Chapel. For some time past the workmen of Messrs. Collins and Cullis have been engaged in a singular process of transformation on some buildings at the Mythe, which were formerly used as a coach house and stables for the mansion near thereto, the residence of the late W. Dillon Esq. The result of the labour expended is, that what was until recently a dilapidated block of stabling is now a substantial and neat looking place of worship. The scheme appeared to be to make as much of the old building as possible available for the construction of the new chapel. A new wall has been erected at the west end, in which are two windows and a small circular light, a niche of carved stone-work being placed in the centre, the whole surmounted by a bell turret and stone cross. Three windows have been inserted in the north wall, and an entrance porch, also surmounted by a cross, erected on the same side and near to the west end. Stone-capped buttresses are placed at certain points to give strength to the north and west walls. The south wall remains untouched with the exception of the erection against it of small chamber for the staircase which gives access to the gallery through a doorway on the inside. The roof which has been raised several feet, is slated and crowned with ornamental tilework. A portion of the stabling still remains untouched in its exterior at the east end, on which we understand a priest's residence is to be erected at some future time. The interior arrangements are in their present state of a very plain and simple description. The floor is boarded, and the seats are plain open benches with backs and knee boards. The Sanctuary, at the east end, is risen one step above the level of the floor of the body of the

church from which it is divided by a rail supported on ornamental ironwork, and is very beautifully laid with encaustic tiles and stone edgings. A further ascent of two steps leads to the altar, which is placed against the wall and adorned with the usual embellishments. A vestry is also erected at this end, access to the same being obtained through a doorway at the north corner of the Chancel. At the west end is a gallery for the organ and singers. The roof is supported by plain open woodwork and very neat in appearance.

The usual consecration and opening services took place on Saturday last, and were largely attended by the Catholic gentry of the neighbourhood and surrounding towns. We understand that the cost of the work has for the most part been borne by the Marquis de Lys, the owner of the estate on which the Chapel stands.'

Writing in *Gloucestershire and Avon Life* Bryan Little added 'It was formally opened on St Joseph's Day, 19<sup>th</sup> March, 1870, and as Bishop Clifford of Clifton was absent at the first Vatican Council, his Vicar General, Mgr. Bonomi, performed the ceremony.' Although the provision of the little church on the Mythe is normally attributed to the generosity of the Marquis de Lys it was made possible by the substantial legacy of his father-in-law, Charles Porter.

Charles and Elizabeth Porter are buried under a fine memorial under the trees behind the altar of St Benet's Church in Kemerton but their memorial in Tewkesbury is the beautifully restored Monstrance which was given in memory of Elizabeth Porter and is the tangible link for the parishioners of the present St Joseph's Church, which stands in the heart of the Borough of Tewkesbury.

**Richard Barton, August 2006**