

Dorset Martyrs Memorial, Gallows Hill, Dorchester

The Dorset Martyrs Memorial at Gallows Hill on South Walks, Dorchester was created by Dame Elisabeth Frink and was erected in 1986. It was funded by institutions and individuals of all denominations and the Arts Council of Great Britain through South West Arts.

During the religious troubles of the 16th and 17th centuries countless men and women — both Catholic and Protestant — were executed for their religious beliefs. The memorial represents two martyrs facing Death and commemorates all Dorset men and women who suffered for their faith and, in particular, seven known Catholics who were executed where the Memorial now stands —



Thomas Pilchard, Priest

Thomas Pilchard was a native of Sussex but he worked in the West of England. He was educated at Balliol College, Oxford, ordained to the priesthood in 1583, and joined the English Mission.

He was arrested in 1585 and banished to France. On his return he was arrested in London and sent to stand trial with his great friend Jessop in Dorchester. Thomas Pilchard was executed on 21 March 1587; Jessop died in Dorchester Gaol one year later.

William Pyke

William Pyke was a carpenter whose family are believed to have come from Bristol. He was received into the Catholic Church by Thomas Pilchard.

William Pyke was arrested as a recusant and brought to trial in 1591 charged with having, while in prison, spoken freely in favour of the Catholic religion. He was executed in 1591; the date is uncertain.

John Cornelius SJ, Priest

John Cornelius was born in Bodmin of Irish descent and was sent to Exeter College, Oxford by Sir John Arundell. He was ordained in 1584 at the English College in Rome.

John Cornelius was a Chaplain to the Arundell family at Chideock Castle where he was arrested after a search of the castle and sent to Dorchester to be tried for high treason along with Thomas Bosgrave, John Carey and Patrick Salmon. He was executed on 4 July 1594.

Thomas Bosgrave, John Carey and Patrick Salmon

Thomas Bosgrave was the son of Leonard Bosgrave and the grandson of Sir John Arundell, making him the great-great-grandson of Thomas Gray, 1st Marquis of Dorset and half-brother to Elizabeth of York, Queen Consort of King Henry VII.

Thomas Bosgrave, together with John Carey and Patrick Salmon, servants at Chideock Castle, was arrested and taken with John Cornelius to Dorchester where they were charged with harbouring a priest contrary to the statute of 1585. They were executed on 4 July, 1594.

Hugh Green, Priest

Hugh Green was born in London about 1584 and educated at Peterhouse, Cambridge. He was received into the Catholic church while travelling in Europe and went to study at the English College in Douay where he was ordained. He joined the English Mission in 1612.

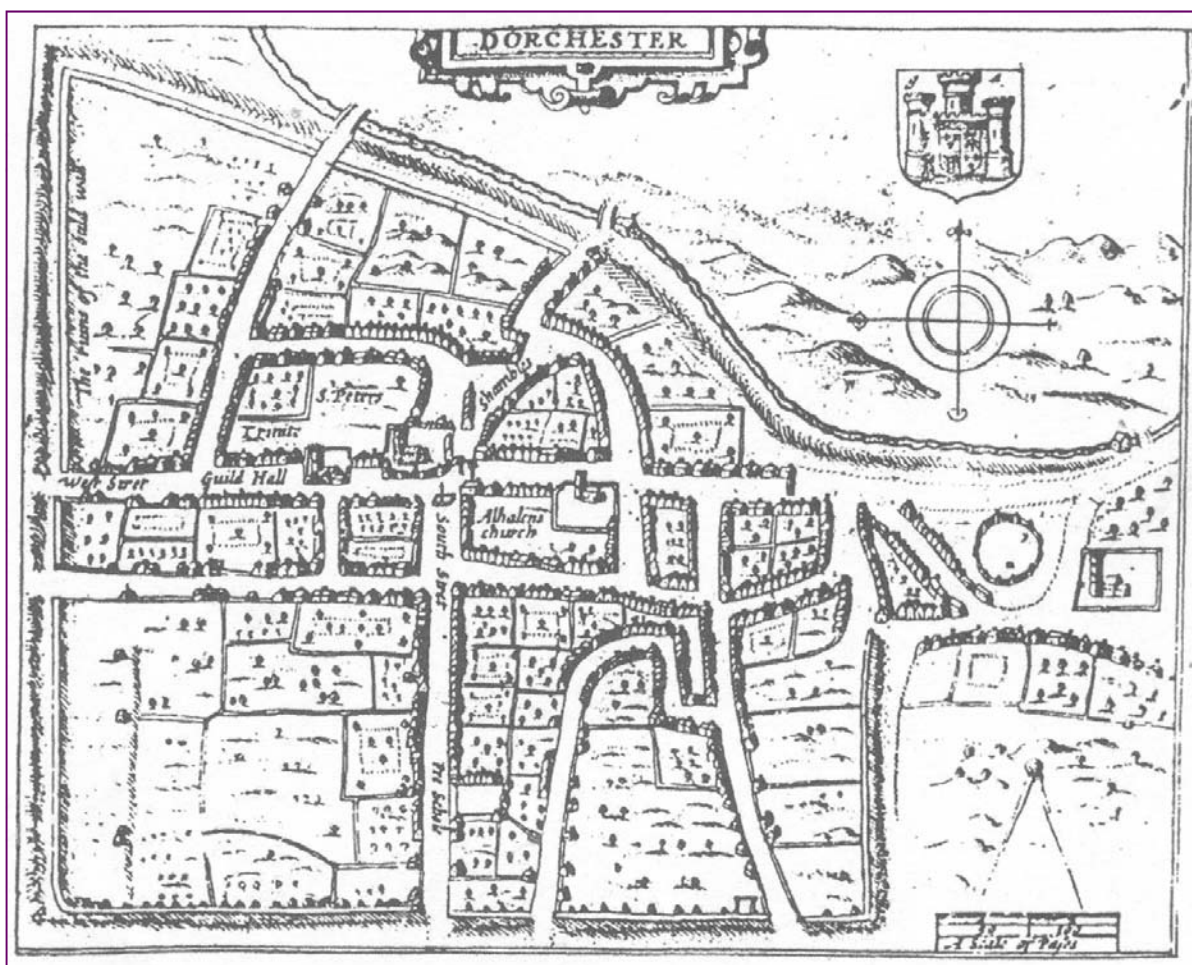
Following the Edict of 1642 that all popish priests were to depart the realm, Hugh Green was arrested at Lyme Regis boarding a ship for France. He was sent to Dorchester and charged with being a priest. He was executed on 19 August 1642.

Gallows Hill

John Speed's map of Dorchester was published in 1610. It shows the position of the gallows on Gallows Hill on the bottom of the map towards the right, close to the modern junction of Icen Way and South Walks. The gallows was made of two uprights and a crossbeam connecting them with enough space for a two-wheeled cart to pass through and enough space for multiple hangings. At that time the County Gaol was on High East Street near Icen Way, which used to be called Gaol Lane.

In the 16th and 17th centuries the penalty for high treason was to be hung, drawn and quartered. The victim was tortured, imprisoned, then taken to the gallows. He or she would be cut down after a short hanging, sometimes still alive, and cruelly butchered, with the limbs being torn from the body. The dismembered corpse was often placed on gateways. This is how Thomas Pilchard, John Cornelius, Hugh Green and many more died.

The gallows was removed to Maumbury Rings around 1703, which means that many of the 74 prisoners condemned to death during the 'Bloody Assize' following the Monmouth Rebellion in 1685 will also have been executed there.



This paper was prepared from information kindly supplied by Margaret Somerville