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# Dr Marie Rowlands

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Dr Marie Rowlands, who died on Tuesday 22nd July 2025, was a long-standing and active member of the Catholic Record Society, and an important scholar of English Catholicism, particularly in relation to the West Midlands and to 'ordinary' Catholics.

Born in Wolverhampton, Marie trained and work as a teacher. She went on to study for higher degrees in History at the universities of Aston and Birmingham, then worked in higher education. Marie became Head of the History Department at the then newly-founded Newman College of Higher Education, now Birmingham Newman University. She was awarded research fellowships at Lucy Cavendish College, Cambridge, and at the University of Wolverhampton, remaining Emerita Research Fellow at Birmingham Newman University until her death.

Whilst Marie remained modest about her own achievements, her body of work and the meticulous research behind it was significant. Across a number of decades, Marie published on the history of Catholicism in England, with a particular focus on the West Midlands, and on the experience of laity and women. The themes of Marie's published research, and the questions in which she was interested, helped to expand understanding of Catholic experiences across a wide time span, and in a number of particular contexts. Most notable in Marie's work was the emphasis on a local and regional focus, with her particular expertise on the West Midlands; on the experience of non-elite Catholics; and on women. Marie's work, some of which was published by or in association with the Catholic Record Society, is quoted today, sometimes many years after first appearing in print. Starting with studies of tradesmen in the West Midlands, and encompassing Elizabethan Catholic women, clerical experience in the 17th and 18th centuries, and taxation in the Midlands, Marie published over 30 pieces of research. Her most recent project, on which she was working in the last months of her life, was exploring Catholic education in England between 1791 and 1840.

One particular example of the importance of Marie's scholarship can be seen in the edited collection, *English Catholics of Parish and Town*, where Marie was both editor and a contributing author.[1] This volume offered a reminder to look beyond the high profile and high

[1] Marie B. Rowlands, ed. *English Catholics of Parish and Town, 1558-1779*. Catholic Record Society Monograph Series, 5 (Catholic Record Society: London, 1999).

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status Catholics, to consider how Catholicism survived in urban and non-elite communities. It also encouraged Catholic studies to encompass a view of Catholic experience that went beyond persecution and marginalization, instead considering the ways in which Catholics interacted and integrated with the society in which they lived.

Marie's commitment to Catholic history and heritage was also demonstrated in her work to prevent the disappearance of important pieces of the architectural history of Catholicism in West Midlands. Later in life, Marie led a successful campaign to prevent the demolition of the historic Catholic buildings of Giffard House and the church of SS Peter and Paul in Wolverhampton.

Marie was a generous and tireless supporter of other scholars throughout her life. One element of this approach was evident through her attendance at the CRS conference over a number of decades, married with a commitment to welcome and encourage new members, and to nurture the work of new scholars. Current CRS members and now-established academics speak of the impact of her gentle and welcoming presence when they were finding their feet in the world of Catholic history. This was an approach seen in her academic work more broadly – former students discuss the years of continued support she provided as their own research and careers developed.

The significance of Marie's work was recognized at a number of levels. In 2020, in recognition of her services to Catholic history, she was the recipient of the Bene Merenti Medal, a medal awarded by the Pope each year for services to the Catholic Church. Important acknowledgement and appreciation of her work came also in *British Catholic History*, from Prof John Bossy in 2015. In a special piece that marked the transition of the Catholic Record Society's journal from *Recusant History* to *British Catholic History*, Bossy reviewed the scholarly field and gave his verdict on work past and present. In particular, he noted that Marie's work had to that point been 'inadequately recognized', noting in particular the importance of her research in shedding light on 'the ordinary Catholic', and in making the case for the importance of the eighteenth century as a period of study for scholars of English Catholicism.[2]

The length and importance of Marie's connection with the Catholic Record Society will be known to many members of the CRS, past and present, through her commitment to the conference- including her attendance at the 2025 CRS annual conference in the last week of her life—and through publications in *Recusant History*, *British Catholic History*, and the CRS volumes series, in addition to her wealth of wider scholarship. Many members remain grateful to have had the chance to have known and learned from her.

[2] John Bossy, 'Recusant History and after', *British Catholic History*, 32 (2015): 271-279 at p. 273.

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