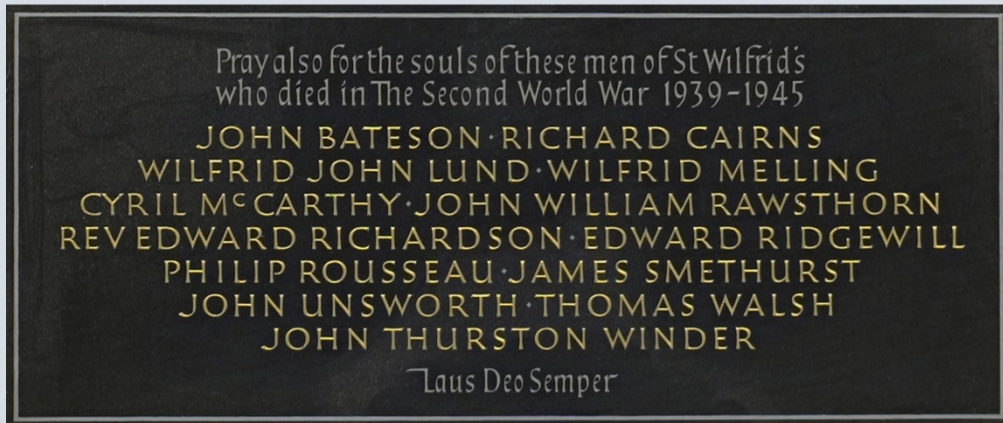


Two War Memorials In St. Wilfrid's Church Carved By John Shaw

By Andrew Mather and Aidan Turner-Bishop

St. Wilfrid's is fortunate in having two memorials, situated in the west aisle of the church, by John Shaw, the nationally renowned letter carver. Indeed, Preston has three of his pieces; the third being the exceptional Preston Pals War Memorial between platforms 3 and 4 on Preston Railway Station, and which was written about in the Parish Magazine Michaelmas 2018.



The War Memorial to the men of St Wilfrid's killed in World War II, carved by John Shaw in 1984.

How did this come about? In 1993 Leo Warren, a very active parishioner of St Wilfrid's and former history teacher at Preston Catholic College and Cardinal Newman College, wrote *Through Twenty Preston Guilds*. It was a privilege to work closely with him on the book's design and production. Sadly, Leo died in 2004.

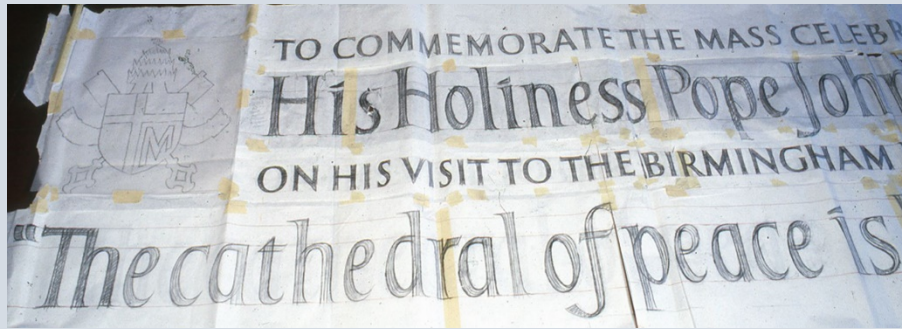
In the publication -copies are still available -there is a list of thirteen parishion-ers, including a priest, Rev Edward Richardson, who were killed in World War II. When Leo was asked why there was no memorial for them he could give no reason for this omission. The immediate response was to ensure, with the permission of the Parish Priest and help from others, that a fitting memorial should be created to their memory.

It was necessary to find a leading letter carver to design and make a suitable memorial. Seeking advice from Frank Roberts, a local Architect and a parishioner of St. Wilfrid's, he highly recommended John Shaw. He had been used previously by Frank who had been hugely impressed with the quality of his workmanship.

In 1994 John visited St Wilfrid's and was then commissioned to carry out the work. The Memorial, completed in 1994 over a period of four weeks, was laid in front of the 1914-1918 War Memorial and unveiled in November the same year.

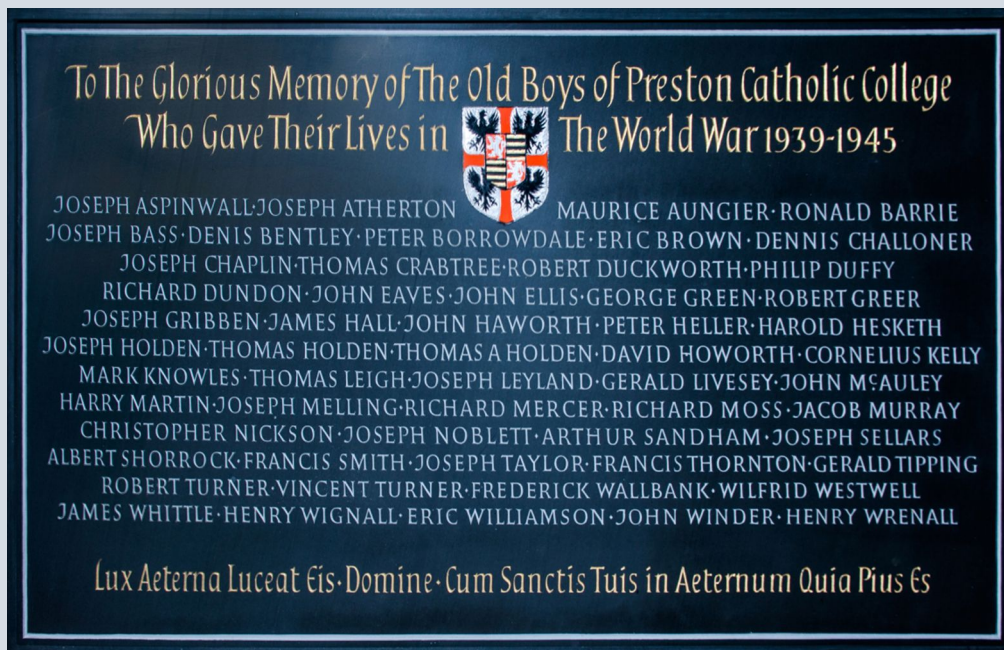
Exquisitely carved in Welsh slate, John Shaw's skill is very evident in his centring and spacing of the letters around an invisible central line: all done by eye and carved by hand. Not a laser cut anywhere!

Beneath the names is cut *Laus Dea Semper* (Praise God always). This prayer, sometimes abbreviated to LOS, is a traditional Jesuit inscription written at the end of documents, rather like AMDG, Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam (For the greater glory of God), the Jesuit motto, often placed at the beginning of documents or correspondence. This is very clearly a Jesuit memorial stone.



Carving the St. Wilfrid's memorials was a lengthy process, which involved producing an initial small-scale sketch of the design for approval. The chosen design was then drawn out at full size. The weight of the lettering and other aspects of design were then fine-tuned, to enable subtle changes to the spacing between the letters, words and lines. Then the outline drawing with chalk rubbed on the back of the layout sheet, was taped in position over the slate. The lettering was then traced over, giving chalk outlines on the slate to guide the carving. The carving was started at the bottom edge of the memorial, to avoid the chalk outlines being wiped off if the process had started at the top.

In 2006, Fr. Jimmy Langan SJ arranged for a second but a much larger memorial, to the fifty-six Old Boys of Preston Catholic College who had died in World War II. John Shaw commented that it was the largest number of letters on a memorial that he had ever carved. Their names are carved in beautiful lettering on Cumbrian Kirkby Blue slate. Above their names is a carefully drawn, and metallised coloured Arms of Preston Catholic College. This distinctive and hand-some heraldic shield is based on the arms of the Jesuit, St Aloysius Gonzaga SJ {1568-1591}.



The War Memorial to the Old Boys of Preston Catholic College killed in World War II, carved by John Shaw in 2007.

'The Gonzagas were an Italian princely family that ruled Mantova (Mantua). Their striking shield was adopted by the Headmaster Fr. Joseph Welsby SJ in 1910 as the arms of Preston Catholic College. The school's version was overlaid above a sword with the motto Fides [Faith] but Shaw used a simpler, and more elegant, version on the memorial. John Shaw feels that heraldry, of which he has

an exceptional mastery, 'is not often used where it might be both appropriate and effective, as it is widely thought to be old fashioned and to signify snobbery. This is to misunderstand it.' Beneath the names of this memorial there is a gilded refrain as at a Requiem Mass: Lux Aeterna Luceat Eis Domine Cum Sanctis Tuis in quotation in Latin from the prayers Aeternum Quia Pius Es {May everlasting light shine upon them, O Lord, with thy saints in eternity, for thou art merciful).

Consider the sheer craft and artistry by Shaw which went into creating this memorial. The letters were not created and cut using modern digital masonry engraving techniques. Each letter was drawn, carved and coloured or gilded by hand. The lettering design is most careful and elegant. Look at the 'J's in Joseph and John or the 'ofs in the gilded upper dedication. Consider the thought that went into spacing the fifty-six names. Even the middle dots between the names have been positioned perfectly. This is artistry and craft of the highest order -no computers used -and it is displayed in St Wilfrid's.

John Shaw's other memorial in Preston, as mentioned above, is the Preston Pals War Memorial, which is seen by literally millions of passengers each year. It was one of his last works before he retired in 2015.

John Shaw was born in 1952. He studied at the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts and Brighton Polytechnic. From 1991 to 2015 he was based in Market Rasen, Lincolnshire. In 2017 he wrote and published the handsomely produced Think of the words: a selection of works monograph, designed by Andrew Mather, about his work for many of the institutions and private individuals with whom he has been associated.



John Shaw in Preston Railway Station Buffet, after completing the Preston Pals War Memorial in July 2012.

You can simply walk down the west aisle of St. Wilfrid's to appreciate his undoubted artistry and craftsmanship.