

Memories of Fr. Gilbert Haydock Smith C.Ss.R

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Fr. Gilbert Haydock Smith who died in Hawkstone in 1972.

The Haydock family was an old Catholic family of Lancashire who retained the faith right through the penal times to the present day, and Gilbert was part of that family and obviously very proud of it as we shall see in a minute he had one sister, as I know an unmarried sister because I think the family died out with him. There were no other brothers or direct descendants.

Gilbert Haydock Smith was professed as a Redemptorist in 1915 which was two years before the code of canon law the 1917 code of canon law was published. And he maintained throughout his life that he was bound by not the new canon law, but by canon law as it was understood in 1915.

This led to a peculiarity in his lifestyle. He claimed that he was using a motor bike that was his sisters but that she didn't want it for her own personal use at any given time, so she lent it to him and would also because it was her bike be prepared to pay for the fuel to run it and for the repairs that were necessary for it.

As he grew older and no longer liked the idea of riding a motorbike, his sister acquired a car, and again she didn't drive so she lent it to him, and he had this car for many years in his Redemptorist life, claiming that under the old canon law it was perfectly Ok for him to use exactly what his sister had lent him.

It led to some difficulties with other communities, I remember when I was in Birmingham he used to visit us occasionally, from Hawkstone, but when he came he managed to have an almost empty tank and he would go across to the local garage, fill the car up, and fill two or three 2 gallon cans which he carried in the boot and charge it all to the monastery account and then drive off back to Hawkstone. And so after a time the Rector had to cancel the account we had in the local garage and we paid in cash every time we went.

While he was at Hawkstone he sometimes took the students to Shrewsbury, to help out at celebration in the cathedral or something like that. But on one occasion while he was driving to Shrewsbury with students in the car he skidded and he went through a hedge in a field, right through destroying the hedge at that point, but not harming the car so much that it was stopped.

The car continued to run and he drove along the field along by the hedge until he came to a gate. He asked a student to get out then and open the gate, which the student did, the student tried to get back into the car and Gilbert told him off immediately. He said "Stay were you are and close the gate when I get through, remember he said you are living in the country now and you never go through a gate and leave it open". The student simply looked back at the wide gaping hole in the hedge, but Gilbert said nothing