

**Launch of Sr Christina's newly published edition of  
'Mary Ward (1585-1645) A Briefe Relation...'  
2 December 2008**



Around 35 people were present on the evening of 2 December 2008 at the Bar Convent for the official “launch” of Sister Christina Kenworthy-Browne’s recently published “Mary Ward 1585-1645”.

The evening was a most warm and happy one, as befitted the completion of a project to which Sister Christina has committed unstinting time and energy over what is now a period of nearly two years. Those gathered were a combination of members of the CJ, together with Eileen McConnon and Magdalen O’Neill representing the IBVM, several members of the Catholic Record Society (CRS) which has sponsored the publication and various other friends and well-wishers, including Pamela Ellis who proofread the publication for Sister Christina.

It is a groundbreaking book in that it brings together, for the first time, the English Briefe Relation, the original biography of Mary Ward - on which all later ones have drawn – and some of Mary Ward’s own writings, under the headings of Autobiographical Fragments and Selected Letters and Documents. The initial request for this work came from Sr Gregory (and later the CRS), who asked for an edition of the Briefe Relation, and Sr Christina then chose the other texts to support it.

Sister Christina’s introduction to the book is masterly as is her editing of all the documents and her drawing of them all together for the first time in a way that will be hugely helpful both to scholars and to those who are less scholarly but deeply interested in Mary Ward – CJ, IBVM and laypeople alike. Her choice of illustrations is equally apposite.

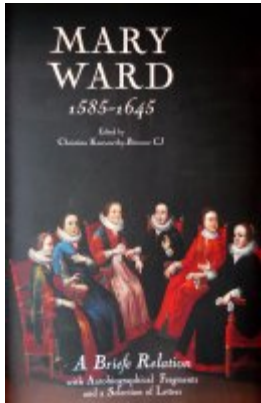
At the launch, after a brief welcome from me, both Sister Christina herself and Professor Alan McClelland who chairs the Editorial Committee of the Catholic Record Society each gave a brief speech, both of which are attached as Appendices to this account of what was a most happy and enjoyable evening, as well as one which was an important milestone in the steady progress towards making Mary Ward as widely known and appreciated as she deserves to be – especially in these coming Jubilee years of 2009-11.

Jane Livesey CJ  
8 December 2008 – Feast of the Immaculate Conception

/see over

## Mary Ward Book Launch 2 December 2008

### Sr Christina's words:



It has been a great privilege to spend a year in Mary Ward's company, working on the earliest biography and other source texts which bring us very close to her, especially as these source texts are now available just as they were written, with the spelling and syntax of the women of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

I have never considered myself to be a writer, not like Sr Gregory, with her unique style, but I love research, and can organise material. This work has come late in life – ten days ago I celebrated my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. It was the late Sister Gregory who suggested an edition of the Briefe Relation, giving encouragement at each step of the way, and I think that she has been working from above, manoeuvring the final stages. I owe a great debt of gratitude to her and to many others, as you will see in the acknowledgements.

But I must just mention Sister Jane Livesey, our Provincial, who has made this possible; my own Bar Convent community for their support; Pamela Ellis for the proof reading; and my sincere thanks to the Catholic Record Society who have published the book, especially to its editor, Dr Peter Doyle who worked so patiently with me to bring the raw material up to CRS standards.

There is a lot of literature now about our Foundress, including Sister Gregory's new booklet, which is on sale in the shop and which I recommend to you. There is no need for an account of her life. I frequently have the experience of introducing Mary Ward to students and researchers, and seeing their growing interest and enthusiasm as they discover her. She is a most attractive figure, a personality where daring and fortitude are combined with deep faith, affection and joy, and a forthright common-sense.

Until recently the source texts have been available only in private archives, as researchers have frequently complained. This book contains the earliest biography of Mary Ward, known as the *Briefe Relation*, thought to have been composed here in the village of Heworth by her early companions soon after her death in 1645. This is followed by Mary's own *Autobiography* of her early life, written reluctantly and piecemeal, and then a selection of letters and documents to complete the picture.

I would like to end with a quotation from a letter which we have in our archives from Fr Leo Hicks SJ, a great archivist, but one whom some CRS members present here will remember as sometimes rather testy and difficult to deal with. He had fallen under Mary Ward's spell and was writing in 1927 to Mother Salome Oates at the Bar Convent who was urging him to publish quickly his series in the Jesuit periodical *The Month*, titled *Mary Ward's Great Enterprise*. After some protests that he had a great deal of other work on hand and could in no way meet her deadlines, the end of his letter reads:

She seems to me remarkable – even among the saints – for the rare combination of qualities, indomitable courage and strength allied with such very human tenderness and gentleness.

Thank you all for coming to the launch, this joyful occasion in honour of our wonderful foundress.

/see over

**Mary Ward Book Launch**  
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**Professor Allan McClelland spoke as follows:**

Dear Sr Jane, Sisters, Fathers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to say a few words on the publication of this new study of Mary Ward. Next year the Congregation of Jesus will be marking 400 years since the commencement of the innovative, educative and evangelising mission of its foundress in 1609 which, shortly afterwards, was to take Ignatian spirituality as model and guide. And what a success story those 400 years contain.

It is particularly opportune that the foundation of the Institute should be recalled by the analysis of the first biography written on the life of Mary Ward. It was produced within five years of her demise and, hence, is one based upon personal memories, insights and understandings. As a result, we have here an important source book because it presents, in essence, Mary Ward's own view of her life and mission. The **Briefe Relation** is thought to have been produced at Heworth between 1645 and 1650, before the community moved to Paris. Although there is no named author, it is thought to have been the work of Mary Poyntz, possibly with Winefrid Wigmore, two of Mary Ward's close associates.

Sr Christina considers the Briefe Relation was intended to bolster the faith and commitment of Mary Ward's orphaned companions, to protect her good reputation, and to emphasise the essence of her spirituality. It is a straightforward, direct account of the early foundation, albeit infused with the love and loyalty of early companions that can admit of no weaknesses. Its very simple approach, however, makes it a valuable source book for recusant historians in their search for authentic background information and attitudes.

Sr Christina is to be congratulated, not only on her excellent introduction and editing of the text, autobiographical fragments and selected letters, but also on the selection of attractive illustrative plates, informative notes, careful bibliography and inclusive time-line that is particularly useful. This is an important book of which the Boydell Press and Catholic Record Society can be as proud as the Congregation and the editor. Sister Gregory Kirkus would have been delighted with it.

As an example of the style of the Briefe Relation I wish to present to you a short paragraph from it that is both vivid in description and evocative in meaning. It refers to the trials of Mary Ward in her confinement in the Poor Clare convent in Munich:

*All that could be said or done to make her seeme horridd or criminall to the Religious was done, her Prison the Roome that had beene used for all desperate and infectious diseases, the seeling one might reach with ones hand, two litle Windowes which looked upon the Graves and yet those borded up saving the space of ones hand to give a little light through the glasse, her doore with double Lockes, and chain'd, so many to watch by turnes, and others allotted to come into her, and none but such, none at all to speake to her.* (Christina Kenworthy-Browne CJ (ed): **Mary Ward 1585-1645: A Briefe Relation**, p. 48, paragraph 1)

We are told that Mary Ward was accustomed to say three things pleased her exceedingly but they were hard to be found, *'to witt, young People devout, sicke folks merry, and old folks patient'*. It is a statement that tells us much about the nature of her spirituality.

