

SOUTH KILKENNY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



CARDINAL WISEMAN (1802 – 1865)

Nicholas Patrick Stephen Wiseman was born in Seville on 2 August 1802, the son of the merchant James Wiseman and his second wife, Xaveria (née Strange). In January 1805 James Wiseman died suddenly, and she with her three children returned to her father's house, Aylwardstown, Glenmore, Co. Kilkenny.

In 1809 Nicholas and his brother went to Ushaw College, where he was described as 'A somewhat gawky youth, with limbs all knit together, betokening the absence of all aptitude for athletics, sauntering about with a book under his arm, oftener alone than in company'. However in later life Wiseman had a great love for Ushaw, and wrote a play, *The Hidden Gem*, for the college's jubilee of 1858.

In 1818 he entered the English College in Rome. Wiseman subsequently rose to the top of his class and took his degree as Doctor of Divinity in 1824 and was ordained priest on 10th March 1825. In 1828 he took over as Rector of the English College, aged just twenty-five. He was popular with the students, taking them on expeditions to archaeological sites, and made the college a centre of intellectual and social life.

On 8th June 1840 he was consecrated Titular Bishop of Melipotamus by Cardinal Frasoni at the English College, in the presence of his mother.

In 1847 he became Pro-Vicar Apostolic of the London District and succeeded Bishop Walsh as Vicar Apostolic in 1849.

In the spring of 1850, Wiseman heard that he was to be created Cardinal Priest of Santa Pudenziana, and assumed this would entail a curial post. However, on arriving in Rome, he found out that he was to be Archbishop of Westminster, becoming the

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

first Archbishop of Westminster upon the re-establishment of the Catholic hierarchy in England and Wales and first cardinal resident in England since the reformation.

Wiseman was responsible for overseeing the establishment of a newly confident Catholic presence in England. These were the years of growth - in London alone, the number of churches increased from twenty-four in 1826 to one hundred and two in 1863. He died on February 15th 1865, with his funeral attracting huge crowds. He was interred at Kensal Green although, forty-two years to the day after his death, his body was translated to the crypt of Westminster Cathedral.

In 1858 Cardinal Wiseman toured Ireland and visited Aylwardstown House. While at Aylwardstown House he celebrated Mass and the altar which he used survives to this day.

Eddie Synnott