

The Pioneering SHCJ who went to America in 1862

1) The Superior of the community: Sister Mary Xavier Noble (Eliza)

b. ? Nov. 1829 in Preston, Lancashire;
parents George Noble & Jane Smith
Clothed 16 August 1855
Professed 22 August 1857
Died 20 Dec. 1876, at Mark Cross, England

Note: Early in 1869 a sore appeared on her forehead which proved difficult to heal - when doctors managed to get it to close she suffered intolerable pain in her head. It was decided to leave the wound open but covered by a bandage. It was in fact a cerebral cancerous tumour, diagnosed too late to treat at that time. For the final 7 years of her life she suffered bouts of excruciating headaches but managed to continue as the Superior of the nascent province, in spite of increasing physical debility and a clouding of her intellect. She had never got on that well with Bishop Wood - he found her forthrightness/bluntness in speaking to him irritating and she found him pompous and patronising! There had been increasing tension between them over Bishop Danell's Rule - a complicated story of misunderstandings between her and Wood and her and Cornelia. No doubt her increasing suffering from the tumour and the effect of the tumour on her brain function contributed to these problems. Her own Sisters were devoted to her but increasingly concerned for her. They and Wood realised by 1876 that she was too ill to continue and so at the Bishop's request (or rather demand!) Cornelia agreed to recall her to England. She arrived in May 1876. Initially her health appeared to improve and she was able to teach music in the school, till the very morning of her death. Mother Maria Joseph Buckle records that she much edified everyone "by her prayerfulness and patience in the midst of terrible pain though at last she was quite alone and was found in her room where she had retired after giving a music lesson that morning. - She never again returned to consciousness - Mother Connelly felt her death acutely..." [D 67: p.13] Mother Francis Bellasis records that she had had a fit of apoplexy about an hour and a half after going to her cell. She was anointed by the chaplain, Fr. Warner who stayed by her bed for several hours in case she recovered enough" to receive Holy Viaticum". [D 75:p.614]. Writing to Bishop Danell on Dec. 20th Mother Gonzaga Snow gave a further detail. The apoplexy had happened about midday on the 19th and she had lingered, unconscious, till 4.00 a.m. on the 20th. Both the priest certainly and no doubt some if not all of the community would have been with her when she died.

2) Sister Agatha Deacy (Ellen)

b. 31 May 1835 - where we do not know: see note below.
Clothed 8 Feb. 1853 in Rupert house, Liverpool by Bishop Brown, in presence of Cornelia Connelly
Professed 16 August 1855
Died 30 Nov. 1904 at Sharon, USA

There is a mystery about where she was born and where educated (though it is said by SHCJ). Her mother was dead by 1862 and she had not heard from her father for some years. Because she was clothed in Liverpool her details were not entered into the original register (now lost) and so was not copied later into a new register. One wonders where she had been a postulant; had she come North with

CC on her visit to the North West & if so why? Had she been a postulant under Emily Bowles's care after being in either a parish school or the boarding school? She was a novice at St Leonards and after profession taught in the Training School and later went to Blackpool as headmistress of the Talbot Road school. She too had a sudden death - while at dinner in the community refectory at Sharon, aged 69. By all accounts she was a bright, energetic, lively person with a great sense of humour. In 1883 she founded the first community in the West, in Lincoln, Nebraska. At some stage her health declined and she moved back to Sharon. We are heavily indebted to her for her journal of their journey out to America and later for notes and annals about the early days of the Society and then of the work in America until Cornelia's death in 1879.

3) Sister Josephine Kern (Mary Josephine)

b. 25 March 1835 in London
 parents Jeremiah Kerr (sic) & Bridget Nolan (see below re the surname)

Clothed 19 March 1859 as a House Sister
 Professed 27 July 1861
 Died 8 Sept. 1897, aged 64, of consumption.

Note: The Clothing Register gives her surname and that of her father has Kerr, but the scribe of this register is not always accurate or it may have been misspelt in the original postulants' register. In any case she herself signs her name as Kern both on her vow formula and on the statement of her willingness to go to America. By this time both her parents lived in America. She was described later by one of the American Sisters who had known her as a "solid, stolid, sturdy nun" Although she was primarily involved in domestic work, it is clear from letters that at least in the first years at Towanda she also taught the children needlework. One would like to know more about her beyond the fact that she was "esteemed" for her simplicity and "candor" and her "love of holy poverty".

4) Sister Lucy Ignatia Newsham (Ellen)

b. 2 March 1838 in Preston, Lancashire;
 parents Richard Newsham & Alice Ireland

Clothed 22 August 1857
 Professed 9 Sept. 1859
 Died 17 Jan. 1869 of consumption, aged 30, at St Leonards,
 Philadelphia

Note: a very fulsome necrology in our province records says that she was with our Sisters in Preston from a child. The SHCJ went to Preston in 1853 to take charge of St Ignatius Girls' School which had been in existence since 1839. The children were taught by a few teachers assisted by pupil teachers. Looking at the dates involved speaking of Ellen Newsham as a child has to mean that she was about 15 when she met the nuns. As this was an elementary school it must mean that she was staying on as a pupil teacher. That is my conjecture! Another source says because of her contact with the SHCJ she went to the Training College at St Leonards and entered from there; many of the students in the College did indeed come by that route, of being initially trained as a pupil teacher. From surviving records it is clear that she was a bright, lively person, gentle, with a good sense of humour and a great capacity for loyal support of others. She was