

Notes on the SHCJ gold crucifix ring, silver cross and rosary medal.

The following notes have been compiled from rough notes in M M Ursula Blake's hand, an article by M M Andrew Armour in **Source, no.5,1976 pp.31 - 44** and further checks to verify the references to SHCJ sources in Ursula's notes. Sister Helen Forshaw, European province archivist, has also looked at the copies of the photographs of Cornelia taken in 1860, 1863 and 1877, before those photographs were later "improved", and also at the small collection of medals which had been used as rosary medals in the early years of the Society. Further information has been found in the diary kept by M M Ignatia Bridges when she was with Cornelia at Hyères 1869 - 70, **Documentation (D) 61**.

The gold crucifix ring and the silver cross.

The early editions of the SHCJ Rules and Constitutions do not mention the giving of a ring at first profession and a cross at final profession.

The ring.

It is difficult to know what kind of ring was given at profession and on which finger it was worn before 1869/70. In the early photos of CC and the Sisters the hands are partially or wholly hidden by the big sleeves. The only reference so far discovered to a ring comes in a report in the then current issue of **The Tablet** in November 1863 which covered Bishop Grant's engagements for the week beginning on Sunday the 15th, a report which M M Theophila Laprimaudaye quotes from extensively in the **SHCJ Annals 1846- 1876, p.143**. The complete text is given in **D 33, Foundation at Mayfield, pp. 50 -56**.

The report describes how, on Wednesday 18th November, the Bishop "held a clothing and Profession at the Convent of the Holy Child Jesus, St. Leonard's (sic) - on - Sea."

When all had processed into the chapel for the double ceremony and the Novices had been presented

"in the usual form, the Litany of the Saints was solemnly chanted, when the Bishop intoned the Veni Creator, and proceeded to bless the habits, veils, and rings. Immediately after the clothing of the postulants, an eloquent and appropriate discourse was preached by the Rev. Father Locke, S.J. The Bishop then received the vows of the Novices, and invested them with the black veil and emblematic ring."

Is the reporter saying that the ring is itself emblematic, without any further decoration? A plain wedding ring would itself signify a nuptial relationship and without any surviving rings of that period to prove otherwise it seems the most probable conclusion to come to. I suspect that, given the fulsome descriptions of everything else by this reporter, he would have enthused over any additional embellishment!

That the rings were made of gold is clear from Mother Theophila's account of CC's visit to Rome in 1869 to obtain approval of the Rule as it had evolved up to that point. Theophila was one of the two companions who went with her and she explains that the Rule they had brought was not satisfactory "and many things must be added before the Rule could be presented for approval." **SHCJ Annals 1846-76, p. 185**. Padre Anselmo Knapen, OFM was sent to assist them.

"Among minor details however, it was laid down that the gold ring of Profession should bear a crucifix & that a cross should be worn by those who had made their Perpetual Vows; this last was not put into execution till the Epiphany of 1888, after the first approbation had been given."

This addition to the Rule appear in the 1869 text in Chapter II: **Of the admission of Novices, par. 2.**

“A gold Crucifix ring shall be given when the first Vows are made, and a silver cross suspended from the neck is reserved for the last Vows.”

(See **Source IV, 1975, p. 113**).

NB: the date of 1888 before the silver cross was in use - Cornelia never wore it herself! The cross was superimposed on the photos of her some time after this date.

On 15th June 1869 Cornelia and companions had an audience with Pius IX, of which we have two accounts: one in a letter to Bishop Grant by CC dated 16 June (CC **XV, pp. 14-16**) and one by Theophila in the Annals (**Annals, p.187**). Both mention that the Pope blessed their rings and the cross, but only Theophila mentions that the rings were the new gold crucifix rings, “which they wore for the first time.”

M M Ignatia Bridges mentions in the Diary that on the 14th November 1869 at Hyères "our Mother sent the rings to be altered." (*p. 124*) From the next extract it sounds as if she must have sent them to Rome for this purpose. For on Easter Friday in 1870, still at Hyères, Ignatia relates how they had a lovely day out and that "on our return we found that Richard and Mr Bowring had come from Rome and that Richard had left the crucifix rings." (*pp. 132-3*)

The silver cross.

Although according to CC Pius IX blessed the silver cross they preferred, Theophila reveals a surprising intervention by the Pope. From both accounts it sounds as if they had already had a silver cross made up and that it wasn't just a sketch. This is how Theophila describes the intervention.

“He blessed the Crucifix rings which they wore for the first time, but when our Mother showed him the silver cross, he said it was too ornate & one more simple was befitting the poverty of Religious. In effect, with her artistic love of the beautiful, our Mother had embellished the stem of the cross with a most beautiful lily, which of course was removed in compliance with the remarks of the Holy Father.”

This first ornate silver cross which was never used must, I think, be the one in the collection of CC relics preserved in the Cornelian section of the European Archives. At some stage it was labelled as "**Early Society cross.**" It certainly is ornate and the "most beautiful lily" mentioned by Theophila must be what is represented by the intricate design at the foot of the cross, front and back. For that is what does not appear on Cornelia's simplified version, while the heart pierced with a sword on the front and the sacred heart on the back with other small decorative details remain. The top and bottom and ends of the arms are simpler, and the words "Acta non Verba" are removed. The whole is also somewhat smaller.

The rosary medal.

Until 1896, the Golden Jubilee of the founding of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, there was no specially designed medal for attaching to the Rosary in lieu of a crucifix, (since a separate large crucifix was worn hanging from the cincture along with the Rosary). In the 1877 photo of Cornelia, where she is seated, two large medals can be seen very clearly. In the European Archives there is a small box containing several large medals and a little note written by M M Francis Bellasis who has signed it with her initials - M.M.F. It reads:

“Early Society Medals 1846”

(in pencil underneath & underlined "Valuable")

There is quite a variety in this box. There are two medals of St Ignatius, and another of the Flight into Egypt with St Ignatius on the reverse. There is one of the Holy Family with Angels worshipping the Blessed Sacrament on the reverse. Another has St Ignatius on one side and St Stanislaus on the other. St Francis of Assisi shares a medal with St Antony of Padua, while one of Jesus on the Cross flanked by Mary and St John has St John of God on the reverse. Another very worn one, smaller than the later Rosary medal, has the infant Jesus lying on straw on one side and an indecipherable inscription around a central boss showing a symbolic cross on the other. The Sacred Heart, our Lady and St Theresa of Avila also figure on other medals.

It seems that the choice of medal for the Rosary may well have been made by the individual according to her special devotions. This changed in **1896. A medal was struck to mark the Golden Jubilee of the Society.** It has the Holy Child on one side and the Society crest on the other. M M Andrew Armour in **Source 5, 1976, p.41** describes the probable origin of this particular presentation of the Holy Child, so important and dear to Cornelia:

"Carved above the main entrance of the Derby convent was the Holy Child standing in front of a cross, this familiar motif, though not original with Cornelia, was adopted early in Society history and expresses a wealth of spiritual insight in joining Bethlehem with Calvary. The first publication in the Society was a translation by Emily Bowles of French Meditations for Whitsuntide, printed in Derby in 1848. Cornelia herself wrote the introduction for "my dear children" — the children of the Derby schools

The frontispiece was a picture of the Holy Child Jesus with arms outstretched before across. ...

1896 was the Golden Jubilee of the foundation of the Society and there were many celebrations. At Mayfield on the 15th of August when all the superiors were meeting, Cardinal Vaughan blessed and distributed a new Society medal representing on one side the Holy Child with arms outstretched against a cross; this medal was then attached to the large rosaries worn by all the nuns until the recent change of habit."

Mother Maria Joseph Buckle in her **Recollections, vol.7, D 66, p.58** notes that Cornelia "drew or at least adopted the little picture in the Whitsuntide book - The Holy Child on a Cross."

Sr Claver Broadbent, who was professed in 1869, wrote in the 1920's her memories of CC, in the course of which she gives a good description of the final version of this image of the Holy Child on the 1896 medal. Although she probably has conflated details of this final evolution of the image with CC's use of an existing form in the earliest Derby days of the Society, her words explain it well.

"Then it was in spirit she saw our dear Lord as never yet He had depicted been - Beautiful, glorious, with the clouds of Heaven around the cross on which His head reclined. His seamless robe descended to His feet that rested on a plain support of wood

Smiling on her the Holy Child inspired the words she wrote below the Sacred Form "Learn of me for I am meek and lowly of Heart." Within the holy house of Nazareth our hidden life is passed, there we learn like little children growing day by day in wisdom and in grace e'en as Our Lord. Then did our Mother trace the starry crown to grace the monogram upon our Medal the seal of the Society, and below Actions not Words so runs the adage fair, the motto of the same Society. Reminding us that deeds alone can prove that we are worthy of the glorious name of Sisters of the Holy Child."