



*Roy Hattersley with his parents*

## **PRESS WATCH - Lord Hattersley: How my married mother ran off with a priest**

**When a Roman Catholic priest runs off with the bride at whose wedding he officiated just two weeks before, it inevitably causes a scandal, the Sunday Telegraph reports.**

But it would have been a story that was eventually forgotten, had it not been for the fact that the priest in question, Frederick Hattersley, and his lover, Enid O'Hara, became parents a little over a year later to one of the most prominent political figures of the late 20th century.

Only now can the full story of how Lord Hattersley's father snatched his mother from her husband be disclosed. In a new book written by the Labour Party's former deputy leader, he reveals the astonishing family saga that eventually led to his father being excommunicated from the Catholic Church.

Lord Hattersley's latest version of how he came into being is altogether racier than a slightly more anodyne tale that he first learnt upon his father's death in 1973.

Lord Hattersley never knew about his father's past during his lifetime. For years he had only thought of Frederick Hattersley, despite his extraordinary in-depth knowledge of the history of the Catholic Church and the arcane workings of the Vatican, as a local government clerk or looking for work. But upon his death, he received a condolence letter from a bishop

informing him that his father had been a Catholic priest.

Enid Hattersley had originally been married to John O'Hara, a miner. She told her son, then aged in his 40s, that she had left her first husband after falling in love with the priest when he arrived at her workplace at the local coal merchant's to order a delivery. Over time, the two grew fond of each other and eventually Enid and Frederick ran off.

Or at least that's how Enid Hatterlsey, who went on to become Lord Mayor of Sheffield, told it.

But the new version – told in Lord Hattersley's latest book, *The Catholics*, a study of the Catholic Church in Britain since the Reformation – is even more scandalous. Lord Hattersley writes in the book's introduction: "My father – parish priest of St Joseph's church in Shirebrook, Nottingham – had met my mother after he agreed to 'instruct' her for admission to the Catholic Church in anticipation of her marriage to a young collier.

"Father Hattersley had performed the wedding ceremony. Two weeks later the priest and the bride ran away together. For the next 45 years they lived in bliss – married after my mother's first husband died in 1956."

O'Hara, wishing to avoid being at the centre of the scandal, also moved on. He died intestate over 20 years later in Mansfield in July 1956. His estate, valued at £373 12s 10d, was left to his former wife, suggesting he never remarried nor had children.

Frederick and Enid Hattersley finally married a few months later, prompting his excommunication because in the Church's eyes he was still a priest and forbidden to marry.

Lord Hattersley was only told the true story after a meeting with the Bishop of Nottingham, which he had arranged as part of his research for a novel loosely based around his father's life story as he then understood it.

Lord Hattersley, 84, told *The Sunday Telegraph*: "My parents met when he was instructing her to join the Catholic Church. They fell in love and decided nothing could be done about it. He officiated at the wedding ceremony and they ran away two to three weeks later.

"My father and I were very close. It was a very hard act for him to walk away from the Church and I was very proud of him for doing that."

Lord Hattersley has alluded to the extraordinary affair before, writing a new introduction to his

1983 autobiography *A Yorkshire Boyhood* as long ago as 2001 following the death of his mother in May that year.

When Enid died in 2001 at the age of 96, obituaries recorded the slightly more sanitised version of events. “She [Enid] kept house for her invalid mother, although she had by then married a miner called John O’Hara,” wrote *The Telegraph*, “When she was 27, however, Fr Frederick Hattersley (always known as Roy, his second name) called to order winter coal for his presbytery. After a brief courtship conducted perforce in secret, they decided to marry.”

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By Robert Mendick and Catherine Pepinster.  
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See also link to Guardian review in today’s CNI Media review

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