

A Brief Guide to the Windows

Imagine OLEM church as an enormous picture book, narrating with a myriad of colours and shapes stories from Britain's past and histories from the Scriptures, as well as promises of a heavenly future. That is the purpose of OLEM's stained-glass windows. They are there to look at and admire, but above all to "read". This brief guide will help you begin to read the windows, although much will be left for the curious visitor to sleuth for themselves.

The Angels

Notice in the various windows of the church the angels that ornament the tracery, particularly in the west window (by Lensfield Road), the windows of Holy Souls Chapel at the back of the church, the windows in the sanctuary, and the tracery in the window of Mary and Joseph's betrothal. These angels remind us that the inside of a consecrated church should be for us a foretaste of Heaven, where the countless unseen angels continually adore God veiled in the tabernacle with the cry that the prophet Isaiah heard (Isaiah 6:3), and which is said or sung in every Mass: "Holy Holy Holy Lord God of Hosts!"

The Marian Windows

As the principle patroness of OLEM, the Blessed Virgin Mary is found in various windows throughout the church. These windows depict the events of her life according to the Scriptures and the Church's ancient apostolic teaching.

a) The Betrothal

As you face the altar, the window closest to the sanctuary on Hills Road side shows the betrothal of Mary to her husband Joseph. This window was originally part of a chapel dedicated to the latter, hence the statue of him nearby.



Look out for:

- ❖ The angel holding a wedding ring above Mary and Joseph.

d) Ever-Virgin

The Church has always taught that Mary was a virgin throughout her life. Her motherhood does not take away her maidenhood, since the conception and birth of Jesus was the work of the Holy Spirit. The four lancet windows in the North Transept under the big Rose Window (Hills Road side of the church, near the sanctuary), illustrate the perpetual virginity of Mary with the help of four images from the Old Testament: the Burning Bush, the Flowering Rod of Aaron, Gideon's Fleece, and the Stone Cut from the Mountain not with Human Hands. Mary is compared to the bush, rod, fleece and mountain, and Christ is the miraculous fire, flower, dew and stone.

e) The Assumption

The Assumption is the greatest liturgical feast of Our Lady. It celebrates Mary being assumed body and soul into Heaven at the end of her earthly life, as a consequence of her unique vocation in God's plan and her complete freedom from sin. It is the patronal feast of OLEM, since it was on this day, August 15th in 1884, that Yolande Lynn-Stephens offered to pay for the new church. In the left-hand window of the central triptych on the sanctuary wall you can see Mary surrounded by angels as she is taken from the open tomb into Heaven. Above her is the coat of arms of Pius XII who solemnly defined the doctrine in 1950 at the request of the faithful. The right-hand window shows the Crowning of Our Lady as Queen of Heaven, in the presence of the Blessed Trinity. The central window illustrates Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended on Mary and the apostles as tongues of flame, enabling them to witness to Jesus throughout the world.



Look out for:

- ❖ The lilies in the open tomb of the Assumption window, symbols of Mary's purity.
- ❖ Mary's posture in the central Pentecost window. She is shown in the ancient *orans* position of the early Church, with hands extended in prayer, completely open to the action of the Holy Spirit.



Look out for:

South Side

- ❖ The pope with a dove on his shoulder in the second bay. This is Gregory the Great, who sent Augustine (standing next to him) to convert the English to Christianity in 597. The king (standing next to Augustine) was baptised, along with many of his subjects.
- ❖ The nun holding a golden staff, or crozier, in the third bay. This is St Etheldreda, a princess of East Anglia who was twice married but obtained permission to leave her second husband – much against his will! – and founded a monastery for both monks and nuns on the Isle of Ely which she had inherited from her first husband.
- ❖ The last two saints, Philip Neri and Paul of the Cross. The one founded the Oratorian congregation, the other the Passionist order. These two Italians have an indirect connection to England, because some 40 years before OLEM was built the great Anglican priest John Henry Newman was received into the Church by the Passionist missionary Blessed Dominic Barberi, and went on to found the first Oratory in England.

North Side

- ❖ St Patrick in the first bay... wearing green, obviously!
- ❖ The otter at the feet of St Cuthbert in the second bay. Cuthbert's fellow monks on Lindisfarne witnessed him in the middle of the night stand waist deep in the sea singing the psalms. When he returned to the shore the otters came to dry his feet.
- ❖ St Dunstan in the third window, holding a pair of tongs. This symbolises his skill in making metal vessels for the church sanctuary, but there is also a legend that Dunstan used such tongs to catch the devil's nose when the devil came to tempt him!

- ❖ The tracery above, in which sick pilgrims approach the shrine of St Thomas – he was officially proclaimed a saint only three years after his death in 1170.
- ❖ The Constitutions of Clarendon that Thomas holds before the king. This document was the king's controversial attempt to assert the power of the state over that of the Church.
- ❖ The golden light emanating from the saint's halo in the martyrdom window onto those around him.
- ❖ The tracery above the window, in which Henry II undergoes scourging by the monks as a penance for the death of his old friend.

The English Martyrs

In 1886, while OLEM was in the midst of being built, the Church officially recognised the first group of post-Reformation English martyrs as *beati* (blessed). Over the next century, nearly 300 men and women who died for the Catholic faith in England during the 16th and 17th centuries would be recognised by the Church, giving Catholics heavenly intercessors and models for earthly life. The story of the English martyrs is told in the aisle windows of OLEM. These windows are in fact replacements of the originals, because in 1941 a German bomb blew up the sacristy during an air raid and in the process knocked out the windows on the church's lower level.

a) The Fisher Aisle

The south aisle (by Lensfield Road car park) tells the story of St John Fisher, chancellor of Cambridge University and the only English bishop who refused to recognise King Henry VIII's divorce of Catherine of Aragon, remarriage to Ann Boleyn, and his setting himself up as head of the Church in England in opposition to the pope. Fisher had been made bishop by the king's father, Henry VII, whose mother, Lady Margaret Beaufort, was a close friend of Fisher and benefactress of the University. The first window (going west to east) shows the whole family at a

b) The North Aisle

The north aisle (by Hills Road) shows the fate of other English Martyrs. The first window portrays the very first martyrs of May 4th 1535, the Carthusian prior John Houghton and companions, who after imprisonment in the Tower of London were hung, drawn and quartered at Tyburn... the gruesome death of traitors. The second window shows St Thomas More on the way to his execution. More was a close friend of Fisher's as well as an eminent scholar and (briefly) the king's chancellor, and his refusal to sign the oaths accepting the king's divorce and separation from Rome caused as much national and international stir as Fisher's. Next to him in the window is a Franciscan friar, St John Forest, being burned to death. The third window depicts Blessed Margaret Pole, whose son Reginald had written a public criticism of Henry's divorce. Far from convincing Henry to change his ways, Reginald only provoked the king to kill his mother in revenge! The final window shows two Jesuit martyrs, St Alex Briant, tortured repeatedly with the infamous rack, and St Edmund Campion, the darling of Oxford and the court who after his conversion and priestly ordination became "the Pope's champion" by his eloquent writing and preaching.



Look out for:

- ❖ The portrayal of a Mass in the first window, as in the Fisher aisle. Both the priests, Cambridge graduates named John, are wearing red vestments – in this aisle it is because the monks are celebrating a Mass of the Holy Spirit, asking for heavenly guidance in their decision about whether or not to refuse the king's oath.
- ❖ Thomas More watching the monks go to their death from his own window in the Tower above. He remarks to his daughter Meg that "[These monks] be now as cheerfully going to their death as if they were bridegrooms".
- ❖ Thomas More's beard in the third window, grown while in prison. On the chopping block, More, who was always ready with a joke, allegedly instructed to the executioner, "Do not cut my beard, for it has done no wrong!"

especially the Holy Eucharist in the Mass. Here in the baptistery, where baptism, the first of the sacraments, is administered, all seven sacraments are illustrated. The window opposite the entrance shows Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Communion, the sacraments by which a Christian becomes part of the Church. The window to the right shows Confession, Marriage, Ordination and Anointing of the Sick.



Look out for:

- ❖ The Holy Spirit depicted as the dove that Noah sends out from the ark after the flood... a reminder that by the waters of baptism the Holy Spirit brings the Christian into the “ark” of the Church.

BAs in the Belfry

As you leave OLEM by the Hills Road doors, looking up into the Bell Tower from the centre of the church you can see two long windows with several figures in each. These figures represent various Cambridge Colleges. Not all the patrons are obvious, but see if you can work out some of them. For example, in the top of the left-hand window, the Holy Trinity represents Trinity College. Canon Scott hoped initially that OLEM would become the Catholic chaplaincy for Cambridge University (only in 1871 did the University allow Catholics to attend, and only in 1895 did the Catholic bishops themselves do likewise). As it turned out, OLEM remained solely a parochial church, but these windows reflect the unique “Town and Gown” relationship that exists in this city.