

Brief Guide to the Church of Corpus Christi, St. Alphonsus and St. Margaret, Headington



Oxford Preservation Trust
Award 2023



Corpus Christi, St. Alphonsus and St Margaret

The foundation stone of the Church of Corpus Christi, St. Alphonsus and St. Margaret was laid by Cardinal Hinsley, the Archbishop of Westminster, in 1936 and the Church, designed by Gilbert Gardner, was formally opened by Archbishop Williams, the Archbishop of Birmingham, in 1937. This building was extended to its present size in 1956 and consecrated by Bishop Crispian Hollis in 1983. Over the years, there have been several additions both to the exterior and interior of the Church.



From 2022-2023 the interior was completely redecorated as a result of the generous legacy of Miss Judith Lea RIP. The ideas for the design were proposed by the Parish Priest, Fr. Mervyn Tower, and drawn up by the architect, Robert Eyles. There was a period of consultation and the proposals and the design were presented to parishioners who added suggestions and comments. The vibrant colours of gold, red and blue draw out the colours of the stained glass and continue those used in medieval Church decorations. The overall works were completed by Thames Ceilings Ltd. The inscriptions and surrounding artwork, along with the gold leaf stars of the Sanctuary ceiling, are the work of Saskia Hunning. The gold and red Venetian plastering and marble effect blue surrounds of the East Wall are the work of Jeremy Hadley. The lighting was designed and fitted by Bojen Electrical Ltd.

The Sanctuary

The Altar, Ambo and Tabernacle Stand, executed by Geoff Coppock in 1980, are of French limestone. The Sanctuary floor, of Italian terrazzo, was extended into a semi-circle in 2002. The Sanctuary Ceiling, in light blue studded with stars, mirrors the firmament of Heaven as described in Genesis 1:14-16.

On the right hand side is the niche for the Holy Oils (Holy Chrism, the Oil of Catechumens and the Oil of the Sick) while on the left is the traditional piscina.



The Stained Glass

The small apse was added to the East Wall of the Church in 1967 by Fr. Bernard McKenna and the stained glass, the work of Leslie Shiels, inserted in 1970. At the bottom is written:

'Forty Martyrs, we honour you and all who died for Christ'

as the windows commemorate the Canonization of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales by Pope St. Paul VI in 1970. Four of them, as representatives of them all, are depicted here. From top right clockwise they are Saints Ralph Sherwin, Margaret Clitherow, Swithun Wells and Nicholas Owen.

Ralph was a student at Exeter College before going to Douai and Rome to prepare for priesthood. He was martyred at Tyburn on December 1st 1581 and is the proto



Martyr of the Venerable English College Rome.

Margaret was a housewife who ran a small school for Catholic children on The Shambles in York and was crushed to death in 1586 for harbouring priests. She is depicted carrying the stones that caused her death.

Swithun, depicted with his pile of books, was a schoolmaster from Hampshire, martyred in 1591.

Nicholas, born in Newgate Oxford, was a Jesuit lay brother who built many priest holes in various Catholic houses. He is depicted with an adz – an instrument of

his carpentry. He was martyred in 1606.

At the centre top of the glass is the Host and Chalice, symbols of the Holy Eucharist and a reference to dedication of the Church – Corpus Christi. On the left of this are the Greek letters MPOV, the abbreviation of Mater Theou (The Mother of God). On the right is a representation of the Papal Tiara and the Keys entrusted to St. Peter. At the top left hand side is the Palm and Crown of martyrdom and at the top right is the Palm of Victory, the sacrificial Cross and the Alpha and Omega.



The Menoroth (seven branch candelabra)

The two menoroth on plinths on both sides of the Sanctuary arch are from East Jerusalem. They are symbols of the former Temple in Jerusalem and of the Jewish people, a sign of our Mother Faith and of our roots in Judaism as Christians.





Laudate Dominum in Sanctuario Eius

On the arch above the Chapel is the text of Psalm 150:1 in Latin .

Praise the Lord in his Sanctuary

The Nave

The Nave has a simple barreled roof shape, resembling an upside down boat. This reflects the meaning of the English word nave, derived from the Latin navis (boat). The boat represents the Barque of St. Peter, the Church.

The Stations of the Cross (The Headington Stations)

The Fourteen Stations around the walls of the Nave were designed and cast in resin bronze by Faith Tolkien (the daughter in Law of J.R.Tolkien who himself attended Mass and was a Reader at Corpus Christi when residing in the Parish) between 1985 and 1988. They were commissioned by Fr. Dennis Egan, in consultation with a committee from the Parish. They are different from the traditional Jerusalem Stations and are based on events described in the Passion and Resurrection Narratives. They include remarkable details and underneath each one are the letters AMDG (Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam – to the Greater Glory of God). The sequence (from the Choir Chapel clockwise) is as follows:

I: Jesus enters Jerusalem; II: Jesus washes his disciples feet; III: Jesus offers Himself in the Broken Bread; IV: Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane; V: Judas betrays Jesus; VI: Peter denies Jesus; VII: Jesus is condemned; VIII: Jesus is scourged; IX: Jesus is mocked; X: Simon of Cyrene takes up Jesus' cross; XI: Jesus is crucified; XII: Jesus is mourned at the foot of the cross; XIII: Jesus reveals himself to Mary Magdalene; XIV: The Lord reveals himself in the Breaking of Bread.



Tolkien Station X

There are small Italian brass copies of the traditional Fourteen Jerusalem Stations below the windows.

The Pieta

Placed in the niche that used to be the position of the Entrance to the 1936 structure is a resin copy of Michaelangelo's Pieta (in St. Peter's Rome).

The western elevation



The Baptistry

The Font of French limestone like the Altar and Ambo is positioned near the Entrance to the Church, the ancient tradition if there was not a separate Baptistry building.



Behind the Font is a copy of the Madonna and Child by Andrea della Robbia (the gift of Pam and Nick Coote). On the right of this is a drawing of St. Alphonsus de Liguori with the motto above of the Redemptorist Order which he founded *Copiosa Apud Eum Redemptio* (With Him there is plentiful redemption), from Psalm 130:7. On the left is a drawing of St. Margaret of Scotland, with the title above *Regina Scotiae* (The Queen of Scotland). The drawings include baptismal motifs, all the work of Robert Eyles.

On the arch above the Baptistry is the text of Colossians 3:2 in Greek:

***He zoe humon kekruptai sun to Christo
en to Theo***

Your life is hidden with Christ in God

The West Wall

On the Arch over the central Entrance/Exit Porch is the text of Leviticus 19:18 in Hebrew

Veahavta lereaka komoka Ani Adonai

You must love your neighbour as yourself



The attention on leaving the Church is summoned to be on the love of neighbour. Below this is etched glass. In the centre at the top is a Pelican feeding her young from the blood of her breast (a traditional symbol for the Eucharist) with the text

Pie Pellicane Jesu Domine (*O Divine Pelican, Jesus Lord*)

from the Hymn Adoro Te Devote by St. Thomas Aquinas.

On the right is St. Alphonsus with the text

Sancte Alphonse ora pro nobis (*St. Alphonsus pray for us*).

On the left is St. Margaret of Scotland with the text

Sancta Margarita ora pro nobis (*St. Margaret pray for us*).



The right hand Entrance/Exit

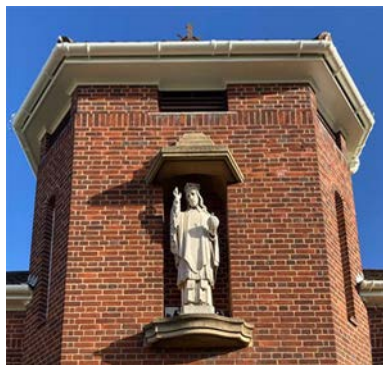
On the arch is the text of Psalm 121: in Latin

Dominus custodiet Introitum tuum et Exitum tuum

May the Lord guard your coming and going

The Statue of Christ the King (Exterior)

The Entrance Porch is crowned with a cast concrete statue of Christ the King, dressed as the Eternal High Priest. It is a proclamation of the truth that He is the Ruler of our Parish, of Oxford and of the whole Cosmos.



In November 2023 the Church won an award from the Oxford Preservation Trust for the redecorations.

More details can be found on the Parish Website: corpuschristiheadington.co.uk

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