

Catholic Church and Parish  
of Our Lady and  
St Edmund of Abingdon



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# THE CHURCH BUILDING AND BRIEF HISTORY

The church was built between 1857 and 1865 in Victorian Gothic styles. There had been no Catholic church in Abingdon, and no resident priest until the appointment of Rev Dr John Paul O'Toole in 1856. In 1850, Sir George Bowyer of Radley Hall had become a Catholic, and became a generous benefactor of the Catholics of Abingdon, giving money not only for the church but also for the foundation of the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy next door.

The first stage of the church began in late 1854 with the 'mission house', now known as the Presbytery. Then came the church itself, with the sanctuary and chapels - all designed by William Wardell, then the second phase by George Goldie. Sir George Bowyer became a Knight of Malta - hence the many depictions of the Maltese cross in the stained glass window behind the altar.

To the left of the sanctuary is the *Lady Chapel*, recalling the title of Abingdon's great abbey of St Mary. The church is actually built on land that once belonged to the abbey. The statue of Our Lady is a carefully restored medieval figure which was found in Culham, and was given to the church during Canon Sexton's incumbency in the late 1940s.

The chapel to the right of the sanctuary is dedicated to St Edmund Rich, who was born in Abingdon in about 1175, and lived in the town, probably near St Helen's church. He studied at Oxford and Paris, and taught at Oxford - where one of the colleges is named after him - before going first to Salisbury and finally to Canterbury as Archbishop. He developed a great devotion to the Holy Trinity, and the three interlocking circles found in the church and also beside the Norman door of St Nicholas church where his mother, Mabel, was buried, recall this devotion.

There have been various alterations to the sanctuary, largely as a result of changes introduced following the Second Vatican Council.

North of the church lies another of Sir George Bowyer's donations to the parish. This building, in Victorian Gothic style, was used from 1873 until the 1960s as St Edmund's School. The building now serves as the Parish Centre, a venue for many parochial events.

In the churchyard, there is a tall cross marking the grave of Rev Dr O'Toole, and nearby is a marble memorial to the 7th Earl of Abingdon - another generous benefactor to our church. This memorial was sculpted by the famous Catholic artist, Eric Gill. A separate area is set aside for the graves of the Sisters of Mercy, who served the parish since 1860.

### **REV DR JOHN PAUL O'TOOLE - THE FIRST RECTOR**

Rev John Paul O'Toole was a notable academic, and before coming to Abingdon he had spent some time at the Irish College in Paris, and later been appointed vice-president of the Queens College in Galway. After the Irish bishops withdrew their support for this scheme, he offered his services to the Bishop of Southwark, and was chosen as pastor of the Abingdon mission because of its proximity to Oxford. There were a number of would-be converts attending the university, but at that time, to be seen going to a Catholic church or meeting a Catholic priest, would ruin their academic career. It was hoped that they could hear Mass in Abingdon and receive instruction from Fr O'Toole, which is probably the reason that the presbytery is so large, and connected to the church by a cloister.

A more detailed history of the church can be viewed online at:  
[www.abingdon.gov.uk/abingdon\\_buildings/our-lady-and-st-edmunds](http://www.abingdon.gov.uk/abingdon_buildings/our-lady-and-st-edmunds)

# OUR PARISH TODAY

Today, Our Lady and St Edmund parish forms part of the *English Martyrs, Vale of White Horse* pastoral area. Within the parish we have the St Edmund's Primary School and OLA (Our Lady's Abingdon) independent senior and junior schools, both on the Radley Road.

The parish is a vibrant community, with many active groups supporting various aspects of its life. The congregation, with an average attendance of about 450, includes many nationalities and cultures. We have a *Covenant with the Poor*, and as a member of the *Church in Abingdon (CiA)*, we work closely with other member churches in a number of areas and have links with churches in the twin towns of Abingdon Argentan, Schongau, St Niklaas, Lucca and Colmar. As part of the Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth, we also have links with the Diocese of Bamenda in Cameroon.

We have regular programmes of preparation for the Sacraments of Baptism, First Communion and Confirmation. For adults, the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) prepares those interested in joining the Catholic Church.

## MASS AND OTHER TIMES

**Sundays:** 8.45am, 10.15am, 6.30pm

**Mondays:** 9.00am

**Tuesdays:** No daily Mass

**Wednesdays:** 7.00pm

**Thursdays:** 9.30am

**Fridays:** 7.00pm

**Saturdays:** 12 noon

✠ Confessions from 11 to 11.30am

✠ Exposition of the Blessed sacrament: 11 to 11.55am

**We also pray the Rosary 30 minutes before  
each of the weekday Masses.**

# GIFTS AND TALENTS

We have many groups and activities within our parish - all run by volunteers. More information about them is available on our website, and all contact can be made through the parish office. We also welcome new ideas and volunteers who can offer their gifts, talents and time to the parish community. *Some* of the current areas are:

- Altar Servers
- Baby & Toddler group
- Car sharing and lifts
- CAFOD
- Children's liturgy
- Church in Abingdon (CiA)
- Cleaning the church
- Faith development
- Flower arranging
- Grandparents' Assoc.
- Hospitality
- Live Simply
- Mass bidding prayers
- Music Ministry
- Open Doors/Warm Spaces
- Parish monthly lunch
- Prayer groups (several)
- Reading Ministry
- Sacramental preparation
- St Vincent de Paul Society
- Sunday Mass stewards
- Youth ministry & groups

The parish also has volunteers who give their time to the Parish Pastoral Council, the Fabric and Finance Committee, Safeguarding, Eucharistic Ministry, Bereavement Support, Website Management, Garden & Buildings Maintenance, and Health & Safety. Enquires can be made through the parish office.

# THE STAINED GLASS WINDOW AT THE FRONT OF OUR CHURCH

Nearly all the figures are in some way displaying the symbols (the cross) of the Order of the Knights of Malta. Perhaps a little less obvious is the small figure at the bottom of the centre panel at the foot of St Edmund **(5)**, who is wearing the cloak of the Order and offering a model of the church to the patronal figures above.

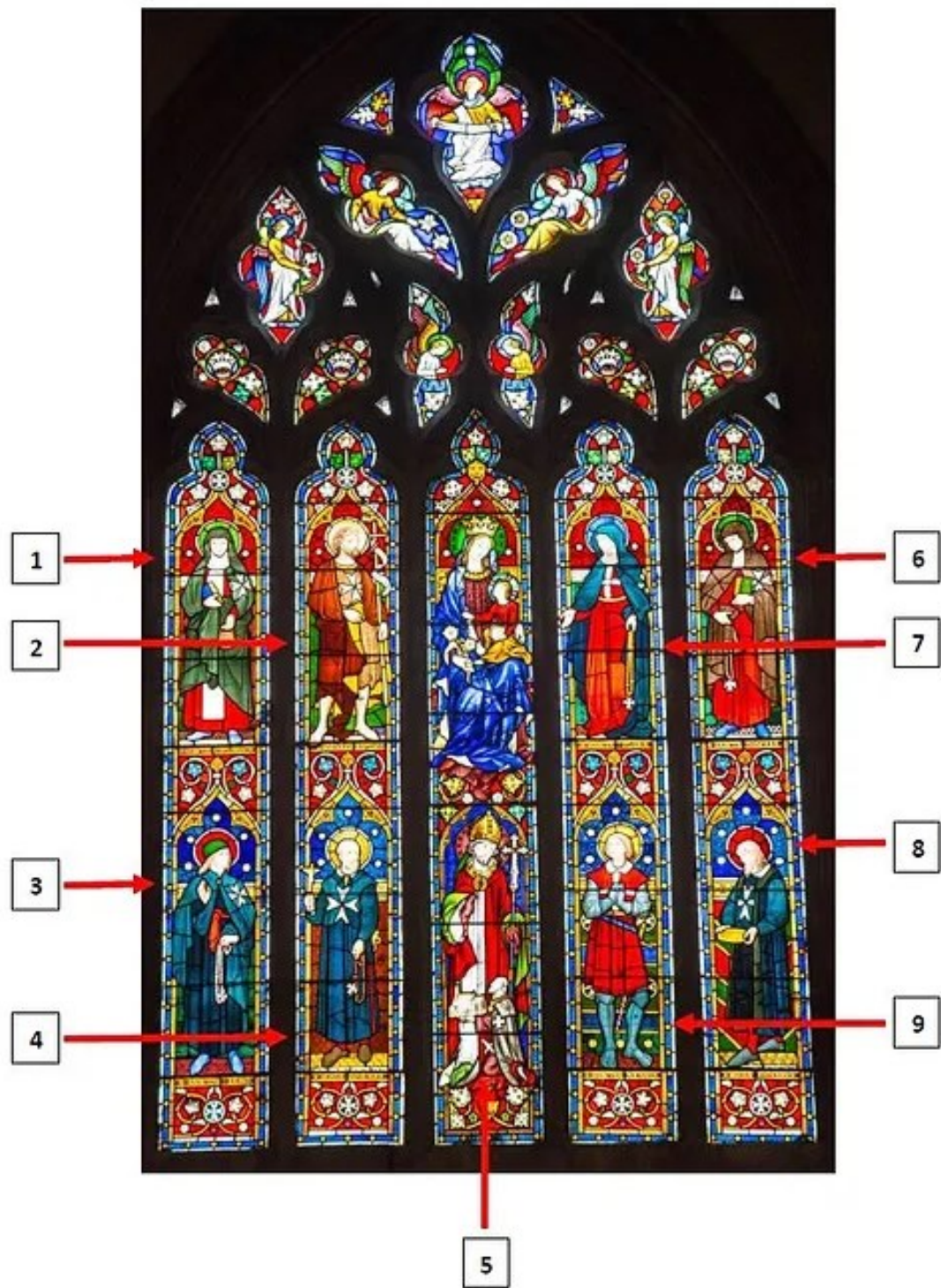
This figure represents Sir George Bowyer, a local aristocrat and nationally known legal expert. He became a Catholic in August 1850, and following his conversion, used his wealth and personal prestige in support of the Church. He paid for the building of two churches – one in London and this church in Abingdon. The original St Edmund's School (now the parish centre) was another of his benefactions. Apart from these philanthropic activities, Sir George was a major figure in the re-founding of an English branch of the Catholic Order of the Knights of Malta, and was made a Knight of Justice in 1858. This fact explains why the figures in the window, apart from Our Lady, St Edmund and Sir George himself, are saints of the Knights of Malta.

## THE CENTRE PANEL

**Top:** Our Lady of Abingdon with her Son, Jesus.

**Middle/Bottom (5):** St Edmund of Abingdon (also of Canterbury).

**Bottom (5):** Sir George Bowyer QC., MP., Knight of Malta



## LEFT PANELS OF STAINED GLASS WINDOW

**1. St Ubaldesca (Virgin of the Order of Malta):** St Ubaldesca was born to a humble farming family, and at an early age she resolved never to refuse the requests of the unfortunate. She entered the Order of Malta. As a nun, she gave the poor and the sick whatever she could. When she had nothing to give, she offered at least the comfort of her smile, paying close attention to their tales of trouble with fraternal understanding. She worked for 55 years in the infirmary attached to the monastery at Pisa. She died on 28th May 1206.

**2. St John the Baptist (or of Jerusalem):** He is the patron of the Order of Malta or Jerusalem, and as he is a very well-known figure, it is unnecessary to add anything in these short notes.

**3. St Hugo (Religious of the Order of Malta):** Though neither St Hugo's origins or date of birth are known, he is one of the most highly venerated saints of the Order. He was Commander at Genoa and administered the hospital there. Despite his high position, he worked tirelessly for the poor, giving them food, money, spiritual comfort and brotherly love. According to a contemporary portrait of the saint made when he was still alive, we know that he was a thin, small man, but with a very big heart. He is believed to have died in 1233.

**4. Blessed Raymund du Puy (Successor of Blessed Gerard and first Master of the Order of St John of Jerusalem):** Born, it is said, in the Dauphine, Blessed Raymund was the first to assume the title of Master of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem. He also introduced among the religious, the triple division of chaplains, knights and serving brothers. The hospital prospered under his stewardship and several popes confirmed the Order's aims, particularly Innocent II who, in 1130, ordered that the red banner with a white cross be carried into battle.



## RIGHT PANELS

**6. St Toscana (Religious of the Order of Malta):** She was born in Zevio near Verona in Italy, in about 1250 and married a man from Verona, Albert Canoculi, with whom she began to do remarkable work for the poor. After her husband's death, she sold all that she owned and became a nun in the Order of St John of Jerusalem, where she devoted her life to prayer and caring for the sick. She died on 14th July 1344.

**7. St Fleur of Beaulieu (Virgin of the Order of Malta):** Fleur, or Flora, was born about 1300 at Maurs in the south of France, and at the age of 13 entered the monastery of the Sisters of St John of Jerusalem at Beaulieu, near to Cahors. Here she devoted herself to caring for the poor and the sick in the hospital attached to the monastery. She died in 1347 and her relics are still in the nearby church at Issendulas.

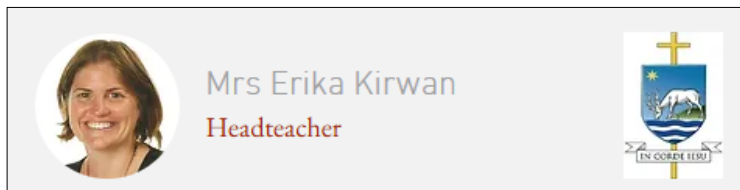
**8. Blessed Gerard (Founder of the Order of Malta):** It is not certain whether Gerard came from present day Italy or France. He went to Jerusalem, and there he established a hospice for pilgrims and the sick, next to the Church of St John. To maintain his work, he founded a religious community governed in accordance with the Rule of St Augustine. On February 15th 1113, the Order was solemnly approved by Pope Paschal II.

**9. St Nicasius (Martyr of the Order of Malta):** One of the Kameti family (later known as de Burgo), he was born in Sicily in 1135. He became a knight of the Order of St John, fought as one of the defenders at the siege of Acre in Palestine and was captured and beheaded there in 1187 with many others, including, it is said, his brother Ferrandino, because he would not convert to Islam.

## SCHOOL LINKS

We are fortunate to have some excellent Catholic schools in the parish on Radley Road.

### ST EDMUND'S PRIMARY SCHOOL



*Headteacher:* Mrs Erika Kirwan

*Address:* St Edmund's Catholic Primary School, Radley Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 3PP

*Telephone:* 01235 521558

*Email:* office.3856@st-edmunds-rc.oxon.sch.uk

*Website:* <https://st-edmunds-rc.oxon.sch.uk>

### OUR LADY'S ABINGDON SCHOOL (OLA)



*Head:* Mr Daniel Gibbons

*Address:* Our Lady's Abingdon School, Radley Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 3PS

*Telephone:* 01235 524658

*Email:* secretary@ola.org.uk

*Website:* <https://www.ola.org.uk>

## NEW TO THE PARISH?

We would be grateful if you could fill in our census form, which you can find in the porch of the church and also on our website.

Completed forms can be returned to the parish office using the presbytery letter box.

Do get to know others over tea or coffee in the parish centre (on the other side of the graveyard) after the 10.15am Mass on Sundays, and/or by getting involved with some of our many groups.



## SUPPORTING THE PARISH

If you are a UK taxpayer, please join the Gift Aid scheme for your financial contribution to the church. If you do, we can claim an extra 25p from the taxman for every £1 you give! To join in this scheme, please complete the downloadable *Gift Aid Declaration* form from our website or also available at the back of the church. There is also a *Standing Order form* which you can fill in if you wish to pay directly from your bank. Please hand the completed form into the parish office. You can also make your contributions at the offertory collection during Sunday Mass, or at the electronic payment facility at the back of the church, or online on our website.

Please note that donations for Mass intentions, weddings and Baptisms are a clergy stipend. These should be put in an envelope marked *FAO the parish priest*, and indicating what the offering is for and who is giving it. The envelope can then be left in the parish office or given with the offertory collection.

## OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION

### PARISH OFFICE - LOCATED IN THE PRESBYTERY

The parish office deals with most enquiries, bookings, requests for Mass intentions, etc.

The opening hours are from 8.15am to 12.15pm from Tuesdays to Fridays, but it is closed on bank holidays and every Monday.

### ADDRESS

1 Radley Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 3PL

### PHONE

01235 520375

### EMAIL

abingdon@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk

### WEBSITE

<https://www.ourladyandstedmund.org.uk>

***Weekly newsletters are available each Sunday and are also on our website. Both of these give up-to-date information.***

### PARISH TEAM

- ✝ *Parish priest:* Fr Jamie McGrath
- ✝ *Secretary:* Lisa Paterson
- ✝ Fabric and Finance Committee
- ✝ Parish Pastoral Council
- ✝ *MC:* Donie Kearney

