

## SECTION 'E' – SAINTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE CHURCH

## St Edmund – Our Patron, King and Martyr



Edmund ruled as King of East Anglia from around AD 855 to AD 870. He defended the kingdom from attacks but was captured in battle by the Danes. Refusing to renounce his Christian faith, he was beaten, tied to a tree then shot with arrows before finally being beheaded.

His body was brought to the town of Beodricsworth, now Bury St Edmunds. Miracles reported at the tomb attracted a stream of pilgrims; a Benedictine community was established there in 1020, and one of the largest Abbey Churches in Europe was built.

Although the Abbot was directly accountable to the Pope, monarchs came to pay homage, and the Abbey developed into one of the richest and most powerful domains. Coins, minted posthumously, bearing Edmund's name and the proliferation of medieval religious art representing him, attest to the rapid spread of his reputation and popularity. He was venerated as Patron Saint of England until the advent of the Crusades when he was superseded by St George. The Abbey was dissolved in 1539, torn down leaving ruins that can still be seen today. St Edmund's martyrdom is commemorated on 20 November.

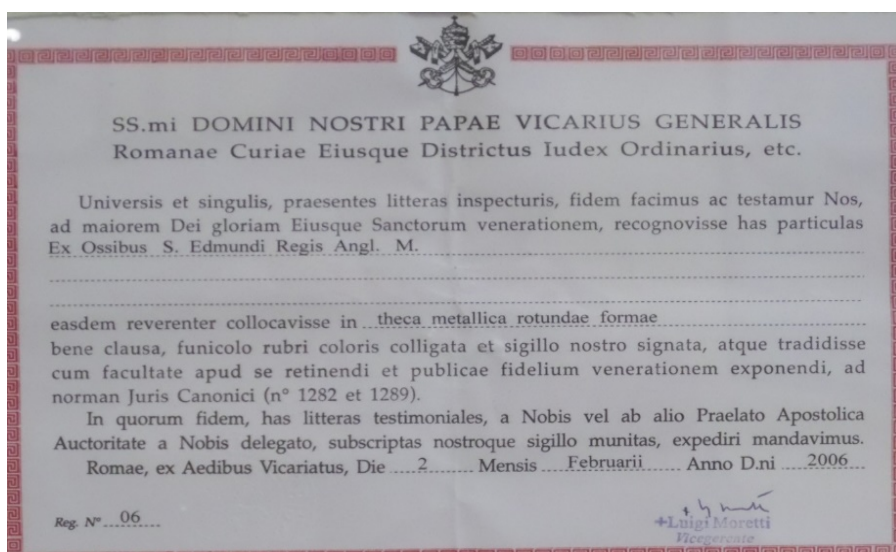
According to legend, his brother St Edwold was a hermit who lived as a recluse at Cerne, Dorset and is commemorated at Stockwood Church, Dorset's smallest church.

The history surrounding St Edmund has from time to time been subject to challenge and newly advanced theories. For example, whilst many believed Hoxne to have been his place of martyrdom the more modern contention is that it was Haegelisdun (in the parish of Bradfield) around six miles south of Bury St Edmunds. The removal of his remains from the shrine at the Abbey has featured in debates with claims that they were taken to France and counter-claims that his relics have been recovered to England and that his body may still lie within the town's former Abbey precincts. Given the history of this, including the separation of various corporeal remains to disseminate the cult of particular saints, there may be elements of truth in a number of apparently conflicting theories. Such arguments tend to deflect attention from the man himself – our patron Saint, who was prepared to sacrifice his life rather than renounce his faith.



At present the Church has custody of an authenticated relic of St Edmund, a small piece of bone, given to Fr Mark Hackeson during his time in Rome.

As described in Section 'F' it would appear that other relics were also once within the Church.



## St Alban and St Alban Roe

There are two Saints who sometimes cause confusion to our parishioners and visitors because they both bear the name of Alban. In summary, an icon of St Alban is displayed in the Church and recognition of him appears on the glazed door of the Blessed Sacrament Chapel; relics of St Alban Roe are contained in the altar. So, what links do these Saints have to our Catholic Church in Bury St Edmunds? The answers to this seemingly simple question are slightly more complex.

### St Alban

The birthdate of St Alban is unknown and the date of his death is disputed, but is variously described as 22 June AD 209 or the year 251 or 304. He is venerated as the first recorded Christian martyr in Britain, his feast-day being celebrated on 22 June. He is listed as one of four martyrs from Roman Britain.

One might be somewhat sceptical as to the veracity of records of his life since most of what was written about him was documented centuries after his death. As with many such situations, there is room for doubt as to accuracy and the problem of stories being embellished over time.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, Christians in Britain underwent extreme persecution and legend has it that Alban, who lived in Verulamium, the modern-day St Albans in Hertfordshire, provided shelter to a priest who was fleeing those who were pursuing him. Alban, impressed by the faith and dedication of the priest who prayed throughout the day and night, was inspired to follow his example and converted to Christianity.

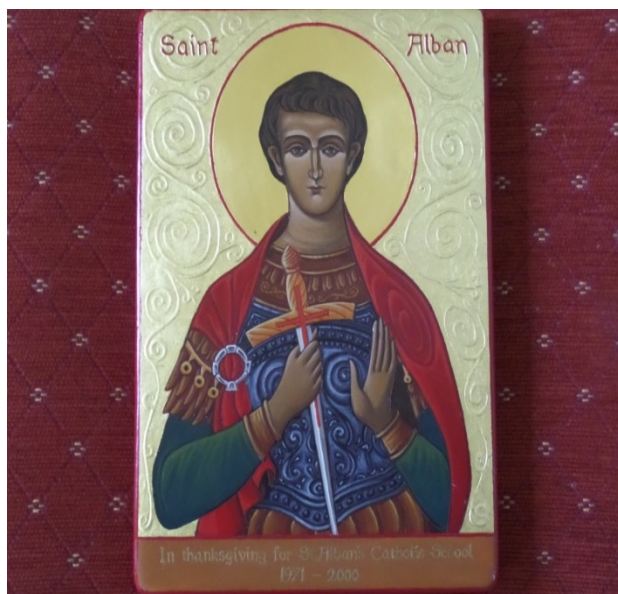
The authorities were informed that the priest was being given sanctuary by Alban and Roman soldiers were instructed to search Alban's house. As they came to arrest the priest, Alban purported to be the priest in order to save him. Alban was brought before a judge who became irate that Alban had sheltered a person who 'despised and blasphemed the (pagan) gods' and he imposed all the punishments that would otherwise have been handed down to the priest. As an alternative, Alban was offered the opportunity to accept the pagan rites but he refused, allegedly saying, *"I worship and adore the true and living God who created all things."* The enraged judge ordered Alban to be whipped but he endured this torture, resulting in the judge decreeing that he should be beheaded.

As Alban was led to be executed, he, his executioners and the townspeople, who had gathered to watch the execution, encountered a fast-flowing river which was incapable of being crossed and prevented their passage. Alban apparently raised his eyes heavenwards and the river dried up allowing them to proceed. The executioner threw down his sword and fell at the feet of Alban, pleading to be allowed to suffer the same fate as Alban. The procession continued to the summit of a hill when Alban announced that he was thirsty and prayed to God for water. His prayer was answered when water flowed from a spring at his feet. It was at this spot that he and the soldier who had earlier been converted were beheaded. The eyes of one of the executioners fell from their sockets onto the ground alongside Alban's head. It is further suggested that Alban's head rolled down the hill and that on coming to rest a well sprang up.

The judge, on learning what had occurred, ordered all persecution to cease and honoured Alban's name.

In AD 429 Germanus of Auxerre, a bishop, visited Britain and revealed that the previously unknown Alban had appeared to him in a holy dream describing his identity and martyrdom, resulting in Germanus recording the Saint's history.

St Alban's Cathedral is located in proximity to the site of Alban's execution and a well exists at the bottom of the hill. Various campaigns over the years have suggested that he should be the patron Saint of England. Saint Alban is venerated in the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican traditions.



So why is he referred to in St Edmund's Church in Bury St Edmunds? In 1971 a new Catholic primary school was constructed on the Howard Estate, catering for primary-aged children living north of the town. Dedicated to St Alban, this school survived until 2000 when its closure led to those of primary age being accommodated at St Edmund's Catholic School. The existence of St Alban's School was commemorated in the glazing of the Chapel door which was undertaken in 1978 by Stefan Oliver, signifying the part played by his mother Gabrielle Oliver in the establishment and development of education in the parish. Each corner of the door shows the symbol of each of the four patron saints of the schools of the parish: St Edmund; St Alban; St Louis; St Benedict.

Upon the School's closure on 21 July 2000, a request was made by the School Governors to Helen McIlldowie-Jenkins to create an icon of St Alban and this is displayed on the wall in close proximity to the Chapel, inscribed 'In thanksgiving for St Alban's Catholic School'. You can read more about this in Section 'F'.

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### St Alban Roe

Although the precise place of birth of Alban, born Bartholomew Roe, is not known and his date of birth may not be accurately recorded (there is reference to him being born on 20 July 1583), research shows that he was born in or near to Bury St Edmunds and that he was baptised locally at St Mary's Church on 27 February 1583, his parents being of the Church of England. He attended Cambridge University, and while there began to have doubts about the reformed religion and he and his brother James subsequently converted to Catholicism.

Whilst in the city of St Albans, he learned that a Catholic recusant (see Section 'H' for more about recusants) had been imprisoned there for his religious beliefs and he decided that he would visit the prisoner with the intention of persuading him to renounce his faith. It was an argument that

Bartholomew lost because the prisoner convinced him that it was Bartholomew's views that were erroneous.

The argumentative side of Bartholomew is mentioned at various times of his life. His eagerness to become a priest took him in 1608 to the English College seminary in Douai, France, but three years later he was expelled for being critical of its principal. However, undaunted, he remained in France and joined the novitiate at another English monastery, St Lawrence's at Dieulouard (from which the monastery at Ampleforth is descended) around 1612/1613 and was professed as Brother Alban in 1614.

In 1615, taking the name of Alban, he was ordained a priest and he returned to England to minister in secret but in 1618 he was imprisoned under laws that outlawed his priesthood and rendered him liable to the death penalty. In 1623 King James I announced a general amnesty and Alban was released from prison but exiled from his Country. Two years later he came back to England, was re-arrested and sent to prison at St Albans where conditions were extremely severe. His friends interceded and he was moved to the Fleet Prison in London where a more relaxed regime of punishment existed and he was allowed out by day but confined at night. His period of freedom was spent ministering to many people in the area.

During the time that Charles I ruled without parliament no imprisoned priests were executed but this changed when the Long Parliament convened and 20 priests were hanged between 1641 and 1646. This period coincided with his transfer in 1641 to Newgate to face trial for treason under the statute 27 Eliz c.2 an offence for which he was convicted.



On 21 January 1642 after celebrating Mass, Fr Alban Bartholomew Roe and his fellow priest Fr Thomas Reynolds were led to the gallows. It is recorded that Roe showed 'joy, contentment, constancy, fortitude and valour' as he approached his death.

On 25 October 1970 St Alban Roe was canonized by Pope Paul VI. As one of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales he shares a common feast day of 4 May, although his feast day was once also celebrated on 21 January.

St Alban Roe is therefore commemorated at St Edmund's as someone who was born in or near the town whose example of his good works and his willingness to profess his faith even in the face of death inspires us even today. On 28 April 2014 Bishop Alan Hopes consecrated the newly installed altar in St Edmund's Church which, as described in Section 'F', contains a relic of St Alban Roe.

### **St Ignatius of Loyola**

The youngest of 13 children, St Ignatius was of wealthy parentage having been born in 1491 in the family castle at Guipúzcoa, Spain. He enlisted in the Spanish Army to fight against the French but was seriously wounded and discharged in 1521. The fighting spirit was not diminished and he vowed to

dedicate his life as a 'soldier of the Catholic Faith' and took to writing his famous 'Spiritual Exercises', a simple 200-page set of meditations, prayers, and various other mental exercises. He travelled and studied, attaining his master's degree in Paris at the age of 43 years. His companions included St Francis Xavier.

His ideals, especially his humility and absolute obedience to the Pope were followed by other companions. In 1534 Ignatius founded The Society of Jesus or Jesuits as they became known, becoming its first Superior General in 1541. He was vigorous in opposing the Protestant Reformation and promoting the Counter-Reformation. He sent his companions as missionaries around Europe to create schools, colleges, and seminaries. In 1548 'Spiritual Exercises' was finally printed leading to him being brought before the Roman Inquisition but released. Of the Jesuits, 38 were subsequently declared Blessed and a further 38 canonized as Saints.

The Society had great difficulty in finding acceptance in England although St Ignatius visited in 1531 and 1558. Their Order was proscribed and several followers therefore went to seminaries in France to study for the priesthood whilst other like-minded people sought refuge abroad or became foreign missionaries. In Elizabethan England Jesuits were reviled as the embodiment of the Catholic threat to government and ruthlessly persecuted, many being martyred for their cause. Mass was celebrated in secret.

After Catholic emancipation in 1829 there was greater public acceptability of Catholicism. The Society of Jesus subsequently spread across England with the opening in 1849 of its London Church at Farm Street which holds many of its archives, as do Stonyhurst College in Lancashire and Campion Hall, Oxford.



St Ignatius Loyola died from Roman Fever (a form of malaria) in 1556 aged 65 years. He was beatified by Pope Paul V in 1609, canonized by Pope Gregory XV in 1622, and declared patron of all spiritual retreats by Pope Pius XI in 1922. His feast is celebrated on 31 July, the date of his death.

Within our Church at St Edmund's we are indebted to the contribution made by the Jesuits in restoring our opportunities to publicly profess our Faith and creating our Chapel, Church and the attached presbytery which have endured as beautiful places of faith and worship. The recognition of the continuance of the Society of Jesus to the Catholic mission in Bury St Edmunds is maintained by the presence of his relics in the altar (see also Section 'F').

## St Louis



The origins of the Sisters of St Louis can be traced back to Strasbourg 1797 with a spiritual union between three people which influenced a priest Abbe Bautain to found the Institute of St Louis in Juilly near Paris in 1842. This received the approbation of Rome in 1844 but in 1850 the priests disbanded leaving the Sisters remaining in the Order. In 1859 the first Irish foundation was established in Monaghan.

The Order modelled the life of Louis IX who was King of France from 1226 until his death from dysentery in the Crusades at the age of 56 years. Following the death of his father, Louis was crowned King at the age of 12 years although his mother ruled as Regent

until he reached the age of maturity. Illustrations of him vary but the one shown is an icon created by staff of St Louis Catholic Middle School in 2016 during their day of recollection at Clare Priory.

Louis was devoted to his people, driven by Christian values and was a reformer who overhauled the French judicial system to bring about fairness whilst penalising the excesses of life. He was a devout Catholic and he shunned pomp and ceremony so that greater help could be given to those in poverty. He was renowned for daily personally feeding and serving 13 poor people and he founded hospitals and visited the sick including those with leprosy.

The adult life of Louis was turbulent in his own country, with the challenges of Henry III of England and his personal involvement in two Crusades; in 1250 he was captured by the Egyptians but was released upon payment of a ransom.

He was responsible for the building of Sainte Chapelle in Paris and cathedrals, churches, libraries, hospitals and orphanages throughout France.

He died in 1270 and was canonised in 1297 by Pope Boniface; his feast is celebrated on 25 August.

The Order of the Sisters of St Louis expanded separately across Ireland and France. In 1903 the first Belgian foundation was established by the French Institute. In 1912 *a group of Sisters of St Louis led by Mother de Sales O'Byrne came from Monaghan, Ireland and arrived in Redditch to start the first English foundation.*

*In 1920 at the request of Fr Thompson SJ, the Parish priest of Gt. Yarmouth, who needed nuns to take charge of the Secondary and Elementary Schools, the sisters all moved to Gt. Yarmouth and thus began many years of Service in the East Anglian area of Northampton Diocese. A request from Fr O'Gorman was favourably received and on 17 January 1924 Mother Ephrim as Superior from Monaghan arrived in Bury St Edmunds bringing with her Sisters Mary John and Francis Regis for the high school and Sr. Frances for the elementary school. They were met with relief and a sincere welcome.*

Two days after their arrival in the town they opened a Convent School at 19 Westgate Street. It grew so rapidly to accommodate a mix of 80 Catholic and non-Catholic pupils that it moved in 1929 to the Castle in St Andrew's Street South. The senior section of the Convent School was granted grammar school status in 1958.

The success of the schools was apparent; the numbers attending St Edmund's School grew under the guidance of Sr Fanchea who remained its headmistress for 31 years. The majority of children at both schools were non-Catholic – at the elementary school the total of 115 pupils comprised only 37 Catholics.



In 1971 as part of local authority education changes to the three-tier system the St Louis Sisters took their Convent School into the system to form St Louis Middle School which combined a mix of lay-teachers and nuns. The demise of the School in 2016 resulted from the decision to revert to a two-tier system of education and use of the site to accommodate pupils of St Benedict's Upper School.

At the conclusion of the academic year in 2019 use of the site as a school ceased and in 2019 a planning application was lodged by M & D Developments for its demolition and the creation of nine homes and a car park for the town.

Until 1988 the nuns had resided within the Castle which contained their chapel. The Sisters of St Louis were heavily involved in pastoral care throughout the parish.



In 1986, having been tasked by her Order with community work, Sr Helena Moss founded the St Louis Family Service. She had come to our parish from Telford where she had been involved in the running of a Family Advice Centre. She exuded strength and was renowned by the expression, *"When St Helena asks you for something, you never say no!"* She concluded that Bury St Edmunds and Mildenhall had people with similar needs to those of Telford.

Within Bury St Edmunds the main action was to supplement the work of other churches, existing agencies and initiatives but she extended this through a group of 25 volunteers to reach out to families, the elderly and homeless people.

St Louis Family Service went from strength to strength from its small offices at the entrance to the Convent - these subsequently provided the charity's rebranding with the use of the name 'Gatehouse'.





Gatehouse progressed to a point where it engaged 17 staff and over 100 volunteers and it moved to larger premises at Dettingen Way, Bury St Edmunds, providing services and activities that included a project to reuse furniture, day care for the elderly and day care for those under 65 with long term neurological illness. The services at Mildenhall also addressed the needs of the vulnerable elderly.

Annually a team of willing volunteers provided a full lunch at no cost to the vulnerable, needy and lonely on Christmas Day in Bury St Edmunds, arranging transport as necessary. In addition, food hampers were distributed throughout December to those in need. As social change emerged, the Christmas lunch was discontinued in 2023 but the demands on the food bank increased. The growth of Gatehouse was the legacy of Sr Helena, sensitively and non-judgmentally working with and for the most impoverished and helping them where possible to help themselves. She died on 29 October 2020 in Eniskillen.

### **St Benedict**

As with the lives of many of the Saints, myth and legend sometimes cloud reality. When the monastery of Monte Cassino was rebuilt in 1964, Pope Paul VI proclaimed St Benedict the principal heavenly patron of the whole of Europe. St Benedict had not established this monastery but it is fact that monasteries that followed his Rule were places of learning and responsible for preserving significant manuscripts.

It is believed that St Benedict was born in Nursia, Rome and that his life spanned the years 480 to 547. He was educated in Rome but finding life there to be too decadent he moved to live as a hermit in rural Subiaco. Three years later he was discovered by a group of monks who persuaded him to become their spiritual leader but then regretted his strict regime and planned to poison him. When Benedict blessed the cup containing poisoned wine, it shattered. For this reason Benedict is often depicted with a broken cup with a snake creeping out of it, a symbol not dissimilar to that of St John.

Benedict ceased his association with these monks but he moved to establish 12 monasteries to the south of Rome, each with 12 monks. He subsequently moved to Monte Cassino where he destroyed the pagan temple to Apollo and replaced it with his own monastery, imposing his own Rule.



The Rule of St Benedict was set out in 73 short chapters covering how to live a spiritual life and how to efficiently administer a monastery. Emphasis was placed upon the virtues of obedience and humility. Monks were expected to daily devote 8 hours to prayer, 8 hours to sleep and the remainder to manual labour, reading or charitable works.

Benedict was canonised in 1220, Rome by Pope Honorius III. His feast is celebrated on 11 July.

The Order of St Benedict was established in Bury St Edmunds in the 11<sup>th</sup> century

and grew in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries with the building of its Norman Abbey to house the remains of our patron Saint, Edmund. Within the Abbey's Infirmary was the Church of St Benedict which consisted of a tower and portico and was the repose of some of the deceased Abbots. The Abbey was amongst the richest in the Country and became the place of pilgrimage to St Edmund's shrine. In 1327 it was attacked by local people rioting at the power and influence of the Monastery which extended across the Liberty of St Edmund (all of West Suffolk). The Abbey was rebuilt but went to ruin after its dissolution in 1539.

The local significance of St Benedict is etched in our parish memory through St Benedict's Catholic Upper School, Beetons Way, Bury St Edmunds which was opened on 28 February 1967 and extended in 2019.