

Our priceless cartoon and a tale of Faith

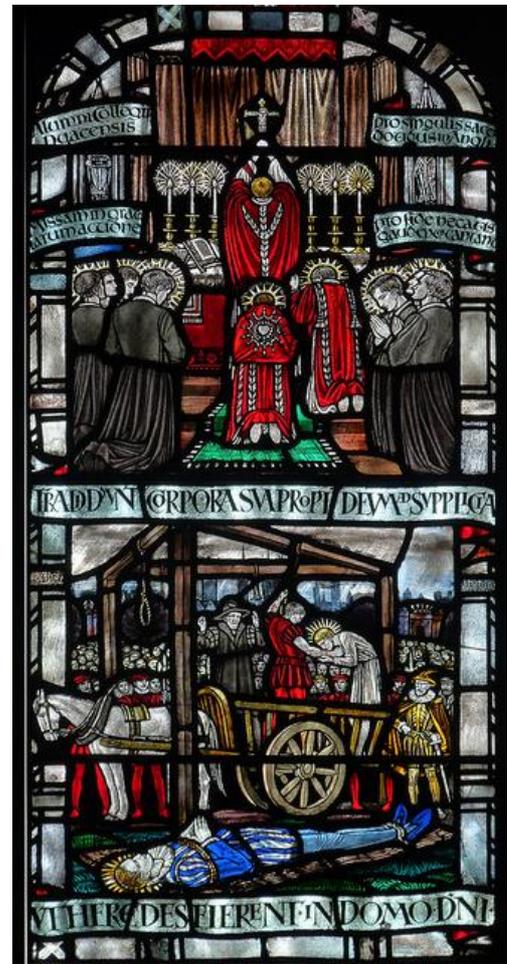
Nearly twelve months ago, St Alban's lent a priceless possession to a national art exhibition, *'Heavenly Lights – the untold story of Shrewsbury stained glass artist Margaret Agnes Rope'*, at Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery.

The word 'priceless' is often used inappropriately but in this case it is an accurate description. Hanging modestly on the wall of our church is a unique full-size drawing made by the stained-glass artist, Margaret Rope, as a study for a window in Shrewsbury Cathedral; one of very few Margaret Rope cartoons known to exist.

The pencil cartoon is perhaps easily overlooked since, hanging up high, its detail and narrative qualities are not clearly visible from the pews below. Yet we are blessed to have incredibly detailed scene from the lives of the Reformation Martyrs, which came to be part of the 'English Mission Window' constructed in 1921, commemorating priests who died for their faith during the reign of Elizabeth I. St Alban's cartoon shows the panel that was to become the central panel of the final window in the Cathedral.



© Ernest Denim



© Ernest Denim

The top part of the cartoon shows Mass at Douai College, 'home' to many Elizabethan priests living in exile. Inscribed in the scrolls in this part of the panel is *"Alumni Collegii Duacensis Missam In Gratiarum Actione Pro Singulis Sacerdotibus In Anglia Pro Fide Necatis Gaudentes Cantant"* or *"The students of Douai College sing Mass rejoicing in thanksgiving for every priest killed for the Faith in England"*.

The lower section of the cartoon is a depiction of the gallows at Tyburn in 1581, where St. Ralph Sherwin, St Alexander Bryant and St Edmund Campion were martyred for their Faith. The cartoon doesn't show us St Edmund Campion but the severed rope hanging at one end of the infamous triangular structure of the gallows suggests he has already been hanged, before being disembowelled and quartered. Standing in the horse cart, St Ralph Sherwin has witnessed the execution and is shown kissing the hand of the executioner before the noose is placed around his neck. This is witnessed by an Anglican minister, who, unsuccessfully, urges the saint to renounce his Faith when he still has time to do so, and, Sir Francis Knollys, the Queen's representative, standing behind the cart. Meanwhile, St Alexander Bryant, still tied to the wooden plank used to drag him through the crowds to Tyburn, lies to the side of the cart in prayer prior to his execution.

The inscription above and below the lower section of the cartoon reads *"Tradid[Er]unt Corpora Sua Propt[Er] Deum Ad Supplicia / Ut Heredes Fierent In Domo D[omi]ni"*, which in translation tells us, "They surrendered their bodies to die for the sake of God so that they would be made heirs in the house of the Lord".

Next time you are in church take time to study our priceless cartoon and reflect on the sacrifice of those who have gone before us that so that we are able to live our Faith so openly in this country. You may also wish to reflect on what you do to bear witness to your Faith; how do I carry on the Light of Faith in my daily life? Please pray for all martyrs of the Faith – in this country and across the world – and for those in parts of the world who face persecution for their Christian beliefs.

-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-