

SHREWSBURY: THE SOLDIER WINDOW

The Soldier Window, in the Sacred Heart Chapel, is a memorial to a soldier who died in the Great War and tells parts of the stories of two soldier saints.

The soldier commemorated is Eugene Sidney Cox, son of Sidney and Maude Cox of Schools Cottage, Kingsland, Shrewsbury. He was a private in the 2nd Battalion of the Irish Guards. On 27th November 1917, during the Battle of Cambrai, he was badly wounded and captured by the enemy: he died from his wounds 18 days later in Fourmies, and is buried there. He was 20 years old.

The small light at the apex of the window contains images connected with the Irish Guards: shamrocks, a bearskin hat with a blue plume on one side, the regimental badge and motto QUI SEPARABIT (Who shall separate [us]?).

Eugene is shown, in his army uniform, **in the two small lights below this. The left hand one** shows him serving Mass: the Latin inscription DOMINE DOMINE VIRTUS SALUTIS MEAE OBUMBRISTI SUPER CAPUT MEUM IN DIE BELLI translates as 'Lord, Master, the strength of my salvation, you have covered my head in the day of battle'. This is from Psalm 139/140, a prayer that God will rescue us from evil. Within the scene is one of the small details, only apparent on close inspection, which Margaret Rope often included in her windows. On the cloth covering the altar, partially obscured by priest and server, is a text MITIS SU.....ORDE. This appears in full as the second half of the inscription on the older Sacred Heart altar adjacent to the window: MITIS SUM ET HUMILIS CORDE (I am gentle and lowly in heart), Christ's words from Matthew 11:29.

In the right hand small light Eugene is receiving a martyr's crown from Christ, while the two soldier saints, St Martin and St Ignatius (see below), look on: here the inscription reads VERUMTAMEN JUSTI CONFITEBUNTUR NOMINI TUO ET HABITABUNT RECTI CUM VULTU TUO (Surely the righteous will give thanks to your name: the upright will dwell in your presence), another text from Psalm 139/140. Above Christ's head are seven stars: in Christian tradition the number seven represents perfection.

Note the strip of blue water below Christ. According to the account of the Creation in the Book of Genesis, beyond the earth's atmosphere was a solid vault, the firmament, containing the sun, moon and stars, and beyond that were 'the waters above', which were held back by the firmament (except during the Flood, when sluice gates in the firmament opened and some of the 'waters above' poured through). Heaven, God's dwelling place, was beyond the 'waters above': Psalm 103/104 includes the lines 'O Lord my God ... You build your palace on the waters above', and these waters were what St John saw in his vision of heaven and described in the Book of Revelation as 'a sea that seemed to be made of glass, like crystal'. The strip of blue water tells us that what we see above it is taking place in heaven. There are three such glimpses of heaven in this window.

Now to the two main lights. In each the lower scene comes first.

The main left hand light shows scenes from the life of St Martin of Tours (about 316-397). Martin was an officer in the Roman army. He decided to become a Christian, and was enrolled as a catechumen (one preparing for Baptism). One winter's night as he

was approaching the city gate of Amiens he met a poorly-clothed beggar shivering with cold in the snow. Martin took his sword, cut his cloak in two and gave one half to the beggar. This is the scene shown **in the lower half of the light**.

The following night as he lay in bed Martin had a vision of Christ in heaven wearing the cloak he had given away and saying to his attendant angels 'Martin, while still a catechumen, clothed me in this garment.' This is depicted **in the upper half of the light** (note the strip of blue water again), and Christ's words MARTINUS ADHUC CATECHUMENUS HAC ME VESTE CONTEXIT form the inscription below the scene: they are also used as an antiphon in the Office of St Martin's feast-day (11th November, once known as Martinmas). The inscription is in two parts, divided centrally by a roundel containing the phrase S. TRINITAS (Holy Trinity). In later life Martin zealously defended the doctrine of the Trinity against the numerous heretics who were then active.

Soon after his vision Martin was baptised. Later he was discharged from the army: he had said 'I am Christ's soldier; I am not allowed to fight.' He became a disciple of St Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers. Eventually he was made Bishop of Tours.

In the main right hand light are scenes from the life of St Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), founder of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). Ignatius had been born into a noble Spanish family at their ancestral home, the Castle of Loyola, and at first pursued a career as a soldier. **The lower part of the light** shows him, in a lively and colourful battle scene, leading the defence of the city of Pamplona (Anglicised as Pampeluna) against a besieging French army in 1521. The defenders are flying the flag of Castile: the French flag with its fleurs-de-lys is just visible beyond the battlements. A cannonball has just burst through the wall next to Ignatius and is about to shatter his leg. The fracture was badly set, leaving him with a permanent limp and ending his military career, and during a long convalescence he found God.

Above we see the pivotal moment when Ignatius began a new life dedicated to God's service. He is kneeling before the statue of Our Lady beside the altar in the church of the Benedictine abbey of Santa Maria de Montserrat: he has a stick because of his injured leg. On the cloth covering the altar we can see the words GRATIA PLENA (full of grace), part of the angel Gabriel's salutation to Our Lady at the Annunciation (Luke 1:28), which has been incorporated in the Catholic 'Hail Mary' prayer. Ignatius' sword and dagger are suspended from the statue, and below is the explanatory inscription IGNATIUS ANTE ARAM BEATAE VIRGINIS SUSPENSIS ARMIS SACRAE MILITIAE TIROCINIUM POSUIT (Ignatius, having hung up his arms before the altar of the Blessed Virgin, enlisted himself in the Holy Army). This text is based on part of a lesson in the Office of the saint's feast-day (31st July). In a roundel at the centre of the inscription is the Jesuit badge: the letters IHS, which are an abbreviation of the Greek IHΣΟΥΣ (Jesus), and the three nails from the Cross, which here represent the threefold vow of poverty, chastity and obedience.

There is more to this scene than simple narrative. The artist has shown Ignatius' sword and dagger hanging so that their shape forms the 'chi rho' symbol



This ancient Christian symbol is a combination of the Greek letters chi (X) and rho (P), these being the first two letters of the word ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ = Khristos = Christ: Ignatius' weapons, central to his old life, have become a symbol of Christ, centre of his new life. Behind the kneeling Ignatius is a tomb bearing the recumbent effigy of a knight in armour. The Latin inscription on the tomb, unfortunately difficult to see, translates as 'Here lies a soldier of man: here rises a soldier of Jesus'. The knight in armour is the old Ignatius, the 'soldier of man', who is dead and has been reborn as 'a soldier of Jesus'.

Above the tomb is another glimpse of heaven: Ignatius walks in the Light of Christ, carrying a cross in a procession of Jesuit saints. Here we see the more mature, bearded Ignatius whom we know from portraits. The saints to the left of Ignatius are martyrs: the palm branches they are holding are symbols of the victory of faith over the sufferings of martyrdom, and their outer robes are red, symbolic of a martyr's blood. Ten of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales, who died for their faith between 1535 and 1679, were Jesuits.

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