

Chapel of St Ignatius and Gerard Manley Hopkins

From *Gerard Manley Hopkins, a very private life* by Robert Bernard Martin:

‘In the last week of November 1878, he (Hopkins) went to Oxford as curate in St Aloysius Church. St Aloysius was the culmination of years of trying to get a more suitable and central Catholic church than the little chapel of St Ignatius in St Clement’s.

Although St Aloysius had succeeded St Ignatius as the centre of Oxford Catholicism, it had not wholly replaced it, for many members of the University and old Catholic Families preferred to attend Mass in familiar surroundings. In spite of the abolition of the religious tests for the University, undergraduates were still required to attend chapel in their own colleges, where services were of course Anglican, although they could be excused from attendance by their own colleges. Occasionally the University proctors would stand at the door of St Aloysius, taking the names of undergraduates who went in for mass. They were considerably more lax, however, about the little chapel of St Ignatius in St Clement. Something of the hostility that the chapel instilled in its neighbours in St Clement’s is indicated by the fact that the Sacrament there had to be locked into an iron safe to keep it from sacrilege.

Much of Hopkins’ time in Oxford was spent at St Ignatius. He watched over the running of the little school at St Ignatius, since there was not one at St Aloysius, and acted as chaplain to the infirmary at Nazareth House, which took care of small children and the aged. He was also expected to visit the gale. Another important part of his duty was as chaplain to the 52nd Light Infantry in the Cowley Barracks.

Perhaps the only old friend who became much closer to him during Hopkins’ time as a priest in Oxford, was Francis de Paravicini who had been an undergraduate acquaintance and was now a Fellow of Balliol. Paravicini’s wife was a convert.

In Oxford for the first time he lived the life of the majority of the members of the Society of Jesus hearing the confessions of the illiterate, visiting the sick, sitting long hours at the bedside of the dying, helping to teach in the school at St Ignatius, organising clubs and guilds and sodalities connected with the Church, walking several miles a day back and forth across Magdalen Bridge between St Aloysius and St Ignatius or the Barracks or the infirmary.

Early in October 1879, Hopkins was sent to Bedford Leigh near Manchester to help at St Joseph’s Parish for three months before moving to Liverpool.’

*Sister Marie Ann,
Governor of St Joseph’s Roman Catholic Primary School*