

Saint Edmund Campion

Born 24th January 1540: London. Fellow of St. John's College, Oxford.

Edmund's father was a Catholic bookseller whose family had converted to Anglicanism. He attended Christ's Hospital and intended to enter his father's trade; but earned a scholarship to Saint John's College. He took the Oath of Supremacy on the occasion of his degree in 1564. When Sir Thomas White, the founder of the college, was buried in 1567, the Latin oration was delivered by Campion.



Two years later he welcomed Queen Elizabeth to the university, and gained her esteem. He was chosen amongst the scholars to lead a public debate in front of the Queen. By the time the Queen left Oxford, Campion had earned the patronage of the powerful William Cecil and also the Earl of Leicester. It was thought that Campion might be a future Archbishop of Canterbury in the newly established Anglican Church. He became a Deacon in the Protestant Church in 1566 but he left Oxford in 1570, having become dissatisfied with Protestantism. Later he entered the English College in Douai. He joined the Society of Jesus in Rome in 1573 and was ordained in 1578 in Prague. He spent some time working in Bohemia and returned to London in 1580, crossing the Channel disguised as a jewel merchant. He and Father Robert Persons were the first two Jesuits appointed to the English mission.

Campion became known to the authorities when he wrote an open letter: *A Challenge to the Privy Council* or *Campion's Brag*, as it was dubbed by the Authorities. Widely distributed, this manuscript made his position more tenuous. He preached and ministered to Catholics in Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire, and Lancashire. Using a secret press at Stonor Park, he published *Rationes Decem* (Ten reasons showing the truth of the Catholic faith) Three weeks later he was arrested at Lyford in Berkshire. Imprisoned in the Tower of London, Philip Howard was present when Edmund was questioned in the presence of Queen Elizabeth, who asked him if he acknowledged her to be the true Queen of England. He replied in the affirmative, and she offered him wealth and position; on condition that he conform to the Protestant Church. He refused.

He was twice racked and every effort was made to shake his defiance but he held fast.

When he was sentenced to death as a traitor, he answered 'In condemning us, you condemn all your ancestors, all the ancient Bishops and Kings, all that was once the glory of England' and 'As to the treasons which have been laid to my charge, and for which I come here to suffer, I desire you all to bear witness with me that I am thereto altogether innocent. I am a Catholic man and a priest; in that Faith I have lived, and in that Faith do I intend to die. If you esteem my Religion treason, then I am guilty; as for the other treason, I never committed any, God is my judge.'

Edmund was hanged, drawn and quartered with Ralph Sherwin and Alexander Briant on 1st December 1581 at Tyburn. Parts of his body were displayed at each of the four city gates as a warning to other Catholics. Later his relics were distributed between Rome, Prague, London, Oxford, Stonyhurst and Roehampton. The ropes used in his execution are kept under glass display at Stonyhurst College in Lancashire.