

## OUR LADY OF ABERDEEN

The Statue in the Cathedral at Aberdeen depicts Our Lady of Aberdeen - the Mother and the Child Jesus. This modern statue is a representation of the original which is now in Brussels and is known there as *Dame du Bon Succès*.

The statue was taken to Brussels in 1625. It is believed that it was sent by William Laing, the Procurator for the King of Spain, from Aberdeen to Dunkirk. During the turmoil of the destruction of Catholic life and worship, which some were pleased to call ‘the Scottish Reformation’ many religious objects from churches including St Machar's Cathedral in Old Aberdeen were given for safe keeping to Catholics or families sympathetic to the Church. It is claimed that the statue, originally in the Cathedral of St Machar, Our Lady of Pity, probably from as early as 1450, was taken and placed in a small chapel at Bridge of Dee, and from there it was placed in the custody of a Catholic family, the Gordons of Strathbogie who had connections with Spanish Royalty. For further safe-keeping in 1625 the statue was sent to the Low Countries by William Laing, an Aberdeen merchant, who held office as a Procurator in the Spanish Netherlands. Shortly after its arrival, the Statue of Our Lady of Aberdeen, was given to the care of the Archduchess **Isabella Clara Eugenia** [ 12 August 1566 – 1 December 1633] who was Sovereign of the Spanish Netherlands. Isabella was one of the most powerful women in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe. Her forces fought the Dutch and having won a naval battle, out of gratitude, she named the statue ‘Our Lady of Good Success’ - (*Dame du Bon Succès*). It was clothed in her own richly decorated garments and resplendent with precious jewels after the custom of the time. Ever since then, with a few interruptions, it has been a focus of popular and prayerful, even fervent devotion in Belgium for those seeking the aid of Our Lady [of Aberdeen].

This original statue was made from oak and walnut, but painted, in the medieval style. It can be visited at the Parish Church of Notre-Dame de Finistere, in Brussels. The Church is always full of people saying their prayers and seeking the consolations of faith.

In Scotland the Catholic Church celebrates Our Lady of Aberdeen every year on the Ninth of July. Copies of the Statue of Our Lady of Aberdeen were made in 1895 for St Mary's Cathedral in Aberdeen. Others are to be found at St Mary's House, Chanonry, Old Aberdeen, the Bishop's Residence and Diocesan Office and in St Peter's Buckie, and also in St Peter's Church in the Castlegate in Aberdeen.

Could the statue of Our Lady of Aberdeen be returned to Aberdeen? Unfortunately, current Belgian law stipulates that historic churches are the property of the state, along with their contents. Several Bishops of Aberdeen have asked for its return, but the Belgian authorities have always refused. There is a story that during the First World War soldiers in a Highland Regiment plotted to ‘retrieve’ it, but on seeing the devotion of local Belgian Catholics the soldiers decided to leave the statue in its ‘home away from home’.



**Brussels**



**Aberdeen**

“Mary is holding the baby Jesus up on her right arm, with her elbow slightly bent to provide support for him. In her right hand she carries a sceptre, a symbol of royalty, and a bunch of grapes, a symbol of the future and the enduring covenant in the communion of the blood and wine. Her left hand is holding on to Jesus’ right foot, with true maternal care for the safety of her baby. Just as any baby, feeling a little insecure up his mother’s arm, Jesus is shown to have his left hand firmly gripping on to his mother’s gown, while she has her head turned slightly towards him, keeping an eye on her precious child. Altogether it is a wonderful image of the intimate tenderness, love and care, trust and compassion between a mother and her baby. Jesus has a closed crown on his head, indicating that there is no higher authority, while Mary has an open crown. So we have the imposing authority and power of the crowns, the sceptre and the message of the grape and salvation, with the touching human tableau of a mother and her son, caring and trusting each other”.

“Our Lady of Aberdeen, Mother of God, Queen of Heaven, we thank you for your intercession on our behalf in the past. With renewed confidence we turn to you again, asking that you may through your Son, help to strengthen our faith and guide us in our resolve to carry out his will.

We commend to you our Holy Father, Pope Francis, and our Bishop, N., and ask that you may look favourably upon their intentions.

We pray for all the needs of the Church; that you may bring about unity among men in the love of your Son.

Our Lady of Aberdeen, we pray for those who rule us, we pray for our neighbours, our families and ourselves that the peace of Christ may reign among us, always.

Our Lady of Aberdeen, Our Lady of Good Success, pray for us.”



V. Queen of Heaven, rejoice, alleluia.

R. For He whom you did merit to bear, alleluia.

V. Has risen, as he said, alleluia.

R. Pray for us to God, alleluia.

V. Rejoice and be glad, O Virgin Mary, alleluia.

R. For the Lord has truly risen, alleluia.

O God, who gave joy to the world through the resurrection of Thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, grant we beseech Thee, that through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, His Mother, we may obtain the joys of everlasting life. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.