

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON: THE CHAPEL, BY GORDON HUELIN

The founders of King's College London were men of deep religious conviction who intended that the Chapel should be its central feature. In a letter of September 9, 1831, to the first Principal the Reverend William Otter, the Secretary, Mr. H. Smith, wrote: "Archdn. Cambridge has undertaken to fix the Chapel fittings with Mr. Smirke; and by his desire I have purchased a fol. Bible & prayer book for the Chaplain's use. I presume two Communion Services, and a prayer book for the Clerk must likewise be provided?" . The Minutes of the council, dated October 1, 1831, note that daily Prayers in the Chapel were to commence at 10 o'clock precisely, and that Samuel Davis was to be appointed as Chapel Clerk at a salary of £10 a year . A week later, Bishop Blomfield of London preached the sermon to mark the opening of the College, and from then on, the Chapel has played an important part in its life.

At first, private sittings at one guinea per annum were made available to members of the public who wished to attend the Sunday morning service; but only a few were taken up, and in 1841 after alterations had been made by Robert Smirke to the seating arrangements in the Chapel, the practice seems to have been discontinued . A silver flagon for use at Holy Communion given by some of the students in 1843, was gratefully accepted by the Council. In those days all students were expected to appear at the Sunday morning service unless previously excused by the Principal. Moreover, they had to attend its daily service or "theological lecture" held in the Chapel, and officials used to go round chalking down the names of those present .

One who was acquainted with the Chapel, first as a boy at the College School and later for a short period as an Engineering student, was William Burges who became a notable 19th century architect. According to Burges's diary, he carried out some alterations to the Chapel in 1852. He certainly drew up a plan in 1859 for its reconstruction which was to have been in the Florentine style, with the choir modelled on that of S. Clemente in Rome .

No pictures of the first Chapel have survived. This occupied the site of the present one, but it was a low and broad room 'fitted for worship according to the ecclesiological notions of George IV's reign', and its bareness and poverty made it altogether unworthy of the College. To quote the words of the Reverend E. H. Plumptre who was Chaplain from 1847-68: 'there is nothing in it to attract, nothing to impress the minds of those who meet in it with reverence, or leading them to remember it with attachment'. Accordingly, he wrote a letter to the Principal proposing its reconstruction. The Council voiced its approval and asked the eminent architect George Gilbert Scott to present a report. He did so in a letter to the Secretary of December 22, 1859, submitting his own plan for a Chapel modelled on the lines of an ancient Christian basilica: 'The existence of two ranges of iron columns in the room below the Chapel offers facilities for carrying out the idea I have suggested. It is true that we cannot safely erect massive stone columns, but I would in their place suggest double columns of metal (iron decorated with brass) in their form not unlike those in the cloister of St. John Lateran. These might carry a light clerestory with an open roof, slightly decorated with colour, as in the basilica of S. Miniato at Florence. The great difficulty is the erection of the semi-circular apse, which is essential to the basilican form; but I see means of effecting this by bracketing out with iron brackets etc. The present large windows must be divided by a columnar mullion, and should be filled with stained glass, and the Chapel of course decorated in a simple and appropriate manner, and be fitted up in a style suited to its general design'. He estimated the total cost as being 'about £3,800 or £4,800' .

The Council accepted the proposed scheme, and commissioned the carrying out of what was afterwards described as 'one of Mr. Gilbert Scott's most original works' . To meet the cost a 'King's College Chapel Fund' account was opened, and an Appeal went out to old students and the general public for financial help towards the reconstruction. The work took several years before being finally completed and proved much more expensive than the original estimate, with the bill amounting to more than £7,000, of which £6,264 was raised in voluntary contributions. A number of donors presented stained glass windows depicting scenes from the Gospels and characters from the Old and New Testaments. With the new roof and some of the oak fittings in place by 1864, sufficient progress had been made for the Bishop of London, Dr. A.C. Tait, to preach at the re-opening service on Sunday June 19 of that year.

In the semi-dome of the apse is a copy of one of Salviati's mosaics, representing Christ in Majesty with adoring angels. The long vertical panels on either side of the arch are elaborately decorated, and include figures bearing scrolls inscribed either with the motto of King's College 'Sancte et Sapienter', or with others appropriate to a religious foundation. The painted heads of Doctors of the Church and of four 16th and 17th century Anglican Divines which appear in the spandrels of the arches on each side of the nave, and which immediately catch the visitor's eye, seem to have been an afterthought, as in the original Gilbert Scott drawings the roundels containing them are filled with geometrical patterns. Scott's arrangement of the seating on a longitudinal plan, as in most of the older College chapels, led to criticism from one writer who also felt that the ritual arrangements were 'not quite up to the mark'.

Subsequent alterations to the College building caused a temporary closure of the Chapel. It was opened once more in 1881 at a special service, then the preacher was the Reverend H.P. Liddon, Canon of St. Paul's. According to a church guide of that year, there was during term time Matins at 11.00 every Sunday morning followed by Holy Communion, and Evensong occasionally at 7.00. Morning service was held daily at 9.30 for the School, and at 10.00 for the College. A surpliced choir consisted of students and boys on foundation as 'Choral Exhibitioners'. There were candles on the altar, but they were used 'only at Evening service for light'. However, by 1887 conditions were changing, and most students no longer lived within the vicinity of King's. It was therefore decided to hold the Sunday morning service at an earlier hour, and to confine it to resident students of the College. Shortly before the end of the 19th century the time of the week-day morning service for the College was altered to 9.30, so that lectures could start at 10.00.

It seems extraordinary now to find in a Minute Book of 1907 the Principal, Dr. Headlam, asking members of the Council whether they thought it would be advisable to accede to the request of some of the Women students working at the College that they might attend the Chapel services. The Council after pondering over the matter, decided that the ladies might be granted their wish. During 1907 a new lectern was provided to replace one that was inadequate, and two years later electric light was installed. In 1910 students of the Theological Department offered to give an altar cross. After some discussion the Council agreed, and approved the design submitted by one of the students, Mr. Percy Luker. To this cross was added in 1919 a pair of candlesticks presented by Dr. A.P. Newton, afterwards Rhodes Professor of Imperial History, in memory of his wife. Following the end of the First World War, as part of the memorial to those who had died on active service, new central doors flanked by panels bearing their names, were dedicated by the Bishop of London, Dr. A.F. Winnington-Ingram in June 1922.

The construction of the Hambleton Building of Anatomy at the top of the College in 1931-32 involved the substitution of a flat boarded ceiling with beams for the then existing sloping roof of the Chapel. It also necessitated the dismantling of the organ and its rebuilding at a lower level, with the removal of the console from the West Gallery to the east end. The council sought the advice of the Central Council for the Care of Churches before the work was put into operation, and received an assurance that the Chapel would not be spoilt by these alterations. Indeed the examination by the Central Council produced the discovery that the upper part of the building was of unsound construction, consisting of wood largely masked by painted canvas. Apart from the fact that the painted figures in the roundels above the eastern arch were left permanently with a truncated appearance, the effect of lowering the roof was generally considered to be an improvement, though not everyone has since endorsed this opinion. Much needed ventilation was provided by the conversion of the twelve windows on the floor level into casement windows which could be opened and cleaned as required. While all this reconstruction work was carried out, the daily acts of worship took place in the Great Hall, and a special service commemorating the centenary of the opening of the College was held on October 8, 1931 in the nearby church of St. Clement Danes. Later, the pulpit and lectern in the chapel were replaced by the present ambos.

During the war of 1939-45 damage was caused to the roof of the apse, and of the thirteen stained glass windows six were totally destroyed and several others broken. With the return to peace, a committee under the Dean, the Reverend Eric Abbott, was appointed to consider the question of restoration. An architect, Mr. Stephen Dykes Bower was consulted,

and he submitted a plan for the improvement of the whole Chapel in stages. His proposal that all the windows should be replaced by plain cathedral glass was accepted, the cost of this being covered by the War Damage Commission. By November 1948 fresh electric lighting had been installed. The early months of the following year saw the completion of the second stage of Mr. Dykes Bower's scheme to give the Chapel a better pattern and a greater dignity: the walls, ceiling and mural tablets were cleaned; the pillars were painted green; the organ console was set back; the seating was reduced, the staff stalls were brought down from the west end and placed in front of the Principal's, Dean's and Professors' stalls; the altar was moved out from the east wall, lengthened and draped with an overall green frontal of Laudian pattern; and the reredos was covered with a red velvet hanging. The greater part of the expense which these improvements incurred was met through the generosity of a number of anonymous benefactors.

At the same time, the plaque in memory of Bishop A.C. Headlam was placed on the outer wall of the Chapel. It commemorates his achievement in making the two parts of the College separate from each other and yet in unity. The two parts were reunited by the authority of the new Charter of April 1980, so that the plaque is now of particular historic interest.

Later, as a memorial to those who had died during the war, Mr. Dykes Bower designed new side doors bearing their names at the west end of the Chapel. These were dedicated by the Bishop of London, Dr. J.W.C. Wand, at a special service on November 11, 1952. It was then that two of the electric light fittings, which had been removed from the Chapel during the alterations of 1931-32, were rehung in the corridor outside where they can still be seen .

In 1958, when Canon Sydney Evans was Dean, the Chapel was cleaned. Old varnish and dirt were removed, revealing hitherto unsuspected colour and design, and the arch and apse were regilded to give added dignity to the arrangement of the altar and sanctuary already carried out . A new altar frontal to replace that of 20 years earlier was purchased in 1969. Further cleaning took place in 1974 and the Chapel was then freshened by new flooring, the total cost being £8,500.

Gifts donated to the Chapel in recent years include copies of the Greek Text of the New English Bible for use of the staff presented by Mr. J.T. Combridge, and a Lectern Bible in the Revised Standard Version in memory of the Reverend Professor George F. Woods . To commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the Foundation of the College members of King's College Ladies' Club, past and present, members of staff and students, and friends, under the inspiration of Lady Way, wife of the then Principal, embroidered about 100 hassocks. These were dedicated at a special service in June 1979 and form a splendid addition to the Chapel furnishings.

Following the dismantling of the Vincent Square Hostel Chapel during the summer of 1981, the silver cross and candlesticks, made by Louis Osman and previously in use there, were brought to the College Chapel where they can now be seen. The cross is a working mantrap, based on the idea that Christ on the cross prevented evil from trapping mankind in death. The silver palm leaf, symbol of the Messiah, holds apart the jaws of evil, a crown of thorns, so enabling man to go free.

The two icons at present standing in the north-west corner, one of the Transfiguration and one of the Blessed Virgin Mary with the infant Jesus, were commissioned by Canon Sydney Evans, when Dean of the College, from a Russian lady. This lady was married to a German, and when she had to flee from Germany and was forced to earn a living, she was taught to paint icons in a traditional way (which involves prayer and spiritual discipline as well as painting techniques) by a community of nuns .

Yet another red letter day in the history of the Chapel was the celebration in November 1981 of the 150th anniversary of its opening with a special service, at which Dr. Robert Runcie, Archbishop of Canterbury and Visitor to the College preached the sermon. On December 1, 1983 a service, with an address given by the Dean, the Reverend Richard Harries, in the presence of Her Royal Highness the Princess Anne, Chancellor of the University of London, marked the reunification of the College with King's College Hospital Medical School.

An important adjunct to worship in the Chapel is the Organ. Until 1835 services were held to the accompaniment of a barrel-organ which was purchased for £168 from Henry Bryceson, an organ builder of Tottenham Court, New Road . The Council then decided that this should be replaced by a finger-organ enclosed in the same case and costing not more than £110, for which Mr. Bryceson drew up full specifications. The order for this was already in hand, when a medical student, Mr. William Terry, generously offered to present the College with an organ in his possession. The Council gratefully accepted his offer and paid Mr. Bryceson £20 in compensation. Then years later, Mr. Terry's organ was, with his consent, removed, and a new and more powerful organ installed in its place 'the whole expense of the change being defrayed by subscription among the Professors, students and others connected with the College'.

In 1860, when plans were going ahead for the reconstruction of the Chapel, Mr. W.H. Monk, musical editor of Hymns Ancient and Modern and at that time Director of Music and Organist at the College, wrote to the Chaplain, the Reverend E.H. Plumptre, proposing that in the new Chapel the organ should be placed in a gallery at the west end over the principal entrance where it would for 'a great and noble ornament'. Monk was in fact able, with the Council's consent, to secure a finer instrument made by the well known firm of Messrs. Willis.

The Willis organ gave the College good service for many years, but by the early 1930s the condition of this historic and valuable instrument was causing grave concern, and in the course of alterations then made to the Chapel it was taken down and completely reconstructed by Mr. Henry Willis, grandson of the original maker. After another forty years, the organ was once again in need of major renovation, and in July 1973 a committee was set up to look into the matter. A number of estimates for repairs were obtained, and the possibility of purchasing a new organ costing £60,000 was seriously considered. Eventually, it was decided to employ the firm of Bishop & Son to refurbish the existing instrument at a cost of £11,300, and by November 1977 the work was completed, leaving the organ in perfect condition .

Scarcely less important than the provision of an organ for the Chapel in its early days was that of a choir. In 1843, the Chaplain informed the Principal that certain gentlemen connected with King's had not only for some time past been efficiently supplying the choir, but had also at their own expense remunerated two boys, to assist them in addition to the two paid by the College. The Council immediately undertook to meet the additional expense. Four years later, in order to put the choir on a proper footing, it was decided to appoint a Director of Music who would receive £50 a year. But because the choir still proved unsatisfactory both as regards the attendance of the boys and their behaviour during service, the Principal laid before the Council in 1848, a plan to institute a number of Choral Exhibitions. It was proposed to elect twelve boys 'being the sons of clergymen or some equally respectable class' to sing daily in the Chapel at the Evening service and twice on Sundays, in return for which they would receive a free education. The Council agreed, and this excellent arrangement lasted for many years. Then, with the ending of Sunday services and the departure of boys from the Strand, it became the responsibility of the students to provide such a choir as was needed. In recent years this duty has been admirably performed by the King's College Singers, a choir of about twenty students drawn from all the Faculties, founded by the Reverend Harold Last in 1945 and now directed by Mr. E. H. Warrell, the College Organist.

On the walls of the Chapel and of the corridor outside, are plaques commemorating a few of those who have played a notable part in the College life. Some were Principals, and others were associated with it as teachers or students. Among them is a memorial to the Reverend Hugh James Rose, the bill for which is still preserved in the archives . Besides being Principal, H.J. Rose was one of the men instrumental in bringing King's College into being .

Looked after by the Chaplain and sacristans, with daily services maintained throughout the term, and with provision for the needs of Christians of all denominations, the Chapel continues to fulfil the design of its founders and benefactors of more than 150 years ago.

CHAPLAINS

- 1831 Henry Moseley, M.A., F.R.S.
1834 John Allen, M.A.
1846 Edward Hayes Plumptre, M.A.
1869 Evelyn Joseph Hone, M.A.
1870 Donald Campbell, M.A.
1875 Henry William Watkins, M.A.
1878 Charles James Ball, M.A.
1879 Charles Coleridge Mackarness, M.A.
1880 George William Daniell, M.A.
1884 Richard John Knowling, M.A.
1885 Harold Smith, M.A.
1897 George Ernest Newsom, M.A.
1903 Stanley Charles Edmund Legg, M.A.
1919 Richard Hanson, M.A., B.D.
1924 Clement Francis Rogers, M.A.
1932 Eric Symes Abbott, M.A.
1936 Robert Linton Shields, M.A., D.Mus., A.R.C.M.
1945 Sydney Hall Evans, M.A., B.D.
1948 Frank Coventry, B.A., Ph.D.
1953 John Howard Churchill, M.A.
1960 Peter Everard Coleman, LL.B., A.K.C.
1966 David Geoffrey Martin, B.D., A.K.C.
1970 Richard John Kingsbury, B.A.
1976 Colin Bruce Slee, B.D., A.K.C.
1982 Christopher John Everard Moody, M.A.
1988 Philip Anthony Edwin Chester, LL.B., DipTh.

DEANS

- 1903 Arthur Cayley Headlam, D.D.
1913 Alfred Caldecott, D.D., D.Lit.
1918 Walter Robert Matthews, M.A., D.D.
1932 Richard Hanson, M.A., B.D.

1945 Eric Symes Abbott, M.A.
1956 Sydney Hall Evans, C.B.E., M.A., D.D.
1977 Ulrich Ernst Simon, D.D.
1980 Richard Douglas Harries, M.A.
1988 Reginald James Albert Askew, M.A.

ORGANISTS

1835 Henry Bevington
1854 William Henry Monk (Director of Choir from 1849)
1889 John Edward Wernham (joined College staff in 1886)
1916 Vacancy (Organ played by students under supervision of Department of Theology).
1937 Robert Linton Shields (Officially appointed Lecturer in Music as were all subsequent organists until 1980)
1941 Vacancy
1945 Harold Last
1953 Ernest H. Warrell

The College Prayer

Almighty God, the Fountain of wisdom and the Giver of every perfect gift; without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy; Send down, we beseech thee, thy blessing upon this College, and prosper the designs of its founders and benefactors. Enable us, by thy grace, faithfully to discharge the duties of our several stations, remembering the strict and solemn account which we must one day give before the judgement-seat of Christ. More particularly we pray, that the seeds of Learning, Virtue, and Religion, here sown, may bring forth fruit abundantly to thy glory and the benefit of our fellow creatures. These and all other blessings, for them and for us, we humbly ask, in the name and through the mediation of Jesus Christ thy Son, our Lord. Amen.