

King's College London

Chapel



A brief history of King's College Chapel at the Strand

King's College London was founded by King George IV and the Duke of Wellington in 1829 as a university college in the tradition of the Church of England. When the University of London was established in 1836, King's became one of its two founding colleges.

Today King's is a multi-faculty research-led teaching institution with over 33,000 students and around 10,000 staff. It now welcomes students of all faiths, beliefs and backgrounds, and has come to occupy a leading position in higher education, both in the United Kingdom and internationally.

King's has a long and distinguished tradition of providing theological education and preparing people to serve in Christian ministry, and it is unusual amongst British educational institutions in that its Dean is an ordained person, responsible for over-seeing the spiritual development and welfare of all students and staff.

The Chapel

The Chapel is a Grade I listed building designed by the eminent Victorian architect George Gilbert Scott. When the original College building (also Grade I listed, now known as the King's

Building), by Robert Smirke, was completed in 1831 it contained a chapel which was situated in the same position as the present one. No illustrations of this chapel survive, but it was described as a low, broad, plain room 'fitted to the ecclesiological notions of George IV's reign'.

In 1859, King's College Council approved a proposal by the College Chaplain, the Revd Edward Plumtre, that the chapel should be redesigned, agreeing that its 'meagreness and poverty' made it unworthy of King's. Gilbert Scott was asked to make proposals. His scheme was accepted, and the reconstruction was completed in 1864 at a cost of just over £7,000.

A century and a half later, and approaching King's own 200th anniversary, the Chapel remains at the heart of the institution. It continues to provide a crucial spiritual focus for the King's community with regular services, and as a quiet space at the heart of the College, and is known and loved by generations of staff and students at King's.

The 19th Century Chapel

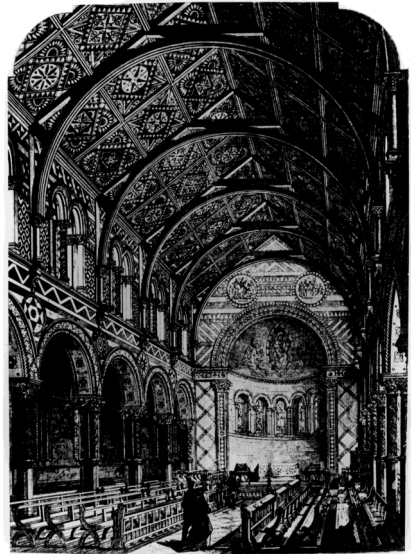
Scott outlined his proposals for the Chapel in a letter to the College Secretary of 22 December 1859:

I send you herewith a plan and an internal sketch showing what I would suggest as the best means of improving your college chapel. There can be no doubt that, in a classic building, the best mode of giving ecclesiastical character is the adoption of the form and, in some degree, the character of an ancient basilica. It is at once the original ideal of a classical Christian church, and the groundwork on which the majority of those in subsequently developed styles have been founded; and, though the earliest idea struck out for a large church, it possesses so much intrinsic dignity and solemnity of character that it has never since failed in exciting the respectful admiration which it at first inspired. Such being the case, I have always felt convinced that when the adoption of the classic style is imperative, this is the model we ought to adopt.

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 in Florence.

The great difficulty is the erection of the semicircular apse, which is essential to the basilican form; but I see the 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.



As the Chapel is situated above the Great Hall, Scott had to overcome a number of structural difficulties. He had to use a light-weight construction system for the arcade and upper nave walls that concentrate the loading above the iron columns on the floor below. The wall is therefore fabricated in iron with paired ornamental cast iron columns and an applied timber frame facing above. The original pitched roof was lightly built, in order to reduce stress on the wall framing.

The apse, which forms the chancel and gives direction to the interior, projects beyond the original east wall of the Chapel. As it stands approximately four storeys above ground, Scott supported it on a curved wrought iron

beam and a pair of cast iron columns, which in turn stand on an arcaded brick support structure. Framing out a section of the east wall also added apparent depth to the apse without the need for additional structural support.

The 20th Century Chapel

Over time, there were several developments that changed the Chapel from Scott's original design. The original pitched roof was covered with canvas decorated in bays with large star motifs. These were lost when the present coffered flat ceiling was substituted in 1931-32 to allow the construction of the Hambleton Building of Anatomy above (now the Anatomy Lecture Theatre and Anatomy Museum space).

The low-level windows were originally embellished with stained glass in the same style as the mosaics in the three blank windows. In 1948, following war damage including the loss of most of this stained glass, architect Stephen Dykes Bower was asked to produce proposals for the repair of the Chapel. Under his direction, the remaining stained glass was removed and tinted cathedral glass substituted. The arcade columns were painted green, and the original designs on the aisle and apse walls were also painted out, so that until the renovation work at the start of the 21st century, these were plain white-washed walls.

Dykes Bower also altered the lighting, replacing the original lights with four large square hanging fixtures. The two electroliers, which date from 1909 when electric lighting was first installed in the building, remain in the corridor outside the Chapel.

The 21st Century Chapel

With King's growth and development as a place of excellence and learning in a multi-cultural setting came a desire by the Chaplaincy team to have a Chapel which is sensitive to the tradition and relevant to the contemporary culture. From 1996, plans were drawn up to restore and refurbish the Chapel so that Scott's original design could be re-created, at the same time as developing a space that would have flexibility and relevance to the current generation of people using it.

To bring this dream to reality, the Principal (Prof Arthur Lucas) set up a team to work together: internally this included the Dean (the Revd Dr Richard Burrige), the College Chaplain (the Revd Tim Ditchfield), the Estates Department, and the Development Office, while Duncan Wilson of Inskip and Jenkins was appointed as architect, with HBG as contractors and Joseph Nuttgens as stained glass artist.

As a result of this work, undertaken in 2000-01, Scott's original decorative scheme, probably executed by Clayton & Bell, is now substantially restored, despite the significant changes which had been made in the 1930s and the post-war period.

The whole scheme of the Chapel speaks to us of spirituality in the context of intellectual thought, and points to the King's motto: *Sancte et Sapienter* (with holiness and with wisdom).

Parquetry techniques on the upper walls form diaper patterns, over which are painted interlacing and blocking designs, formal foliage and inscriptions.

Large roundels depicting Doctors of the Church and four 16th and 17th century Anglican Divines appear in the

spandrels of the nave arcade. They are examples to us of people who lived in a context of holiness and wisdom.

Below these, the inscription running around the Chapel is the words of the Beatitudes—the guidelines of Jesus for a life of holiness and wisdom. The inscriptions on the arches contain texts from the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, also referring to wisdom.

The lower walls have a rich composition using a painted tile motif, which was (re)discovered in the survey prior to the 2000-01 work, and was faithfully recreated. The west wall contains the original tile design, together with large figures of angels which flank the figurative and stencilled decoration of the organ case. The arcade columns have been restored to their original colour.

The sanctuary

In the apse is a painted copy of a mosaic by the Renaissance artist Francesco Salviati, depicting Christ in majesty flanked by angels symbolising the Spirit of God. The painted walls have their original design, and include the symbols of the gospel writers. The Reredos behind the altar includes at its heart an intricate mosaic whose central feature is the Lamb of God. The figurative work that embellishes the panels at either side of the apse includes six figures of angels set in diamond frames and bearing scrolls. The high altar frontals were commissioned from Watts & Co, and have matching vestments.

The south chapel

Since the restoration, this area of the Chapel has developed as a place to reflect on the sacrament of the Eucharist.

It features a unique set of artwork by Louis Osman, made originally for the chapel in the hostel at Vincent Square which housed men training at King's for the Anglican priesthood. When the hostel closed with the ending of the provision of training in 1979, the set was transferred to the Chapel at the Strand.

The silver cross mounted on the wall is in the form of a working mantrap. The late Revd Dr Gordon Huelin, who studied and taught at King's, wrote that it is '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 [humanity] to go free'. The altar, a silver frame with a perspex top, is part of the set, which also includes the pair of silver spiked candlesticks on table-like bases (in front of the high altar).

Also usually in the south chapel is the sculpture of a crouching figure, thought to be Job, with his hands clasped as if in supplication, and looking upwards. This, and the relief on the south wall, are by Hermann Nonnenmacher. The relief is a Pietà of the head and shoulders of the dead Christ with the heads of three female figures (probably the three Marys).

The north chapel

This has developed as a focussed area for prayer and meditation, and is the home of the icons in the Chapel. It is a space where people can spend time in silent reflection and light a candle.

The Icon of the Trinity (after Andrei Rublev) was written by Patsy Fostiropoulos in 1997.

The Greek icon depicts Mary Theotokos (Mary the Mother of God) with the Christchild. The Russian icon shows the Transfiguration, depicting Christ above a mountainous landscape with Elijah on his left and Moses on his right, with the Apostles Peter, James and John below. These were acquired in the 1960s by the Dean, the Revd Sydney Hall Evans.

The stained glass window scheme

Scott's original design was to have significant characters from the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament in the windows on the north and south walls, with five scenes from the life of Christ in the central apse over the altar. Faithful to the balancing of the tradition and the new situation, for the 2000-01 restoration the renowned artist Joseph Nuttgens was commissioned to produce new window designs to the old topics, and to reflect upon the objects of King's in its Charters.

The north and south wall windows are introduced by the two side windows of the call of God to Paul and to Abraham, those two giants who lead the list of those who responded to God in the Jewish and Christian scriptures.

The north wall continues with New Testament figures: the four Gospel writers, with Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Our Lord in the centre windows. The south wall contains figures of the Hebrew Scriptures showing the key aspects of Prophets, Priests, and Kings: Samuel and Isaiah, Moses and Aaron, and David and Solomon.

In the apse are the same five topics as originally conceived by Scott, and yet made new for the merged multi-faculty

institution King's now is.

Christ in the carpenter's shop

Physical Science and Engineering are seen in the instruments and measurements, wheels and angles, tools and equipment, all of which are included in the window, and yet hint at the activities in the classes and laboratories of the Faculty of Natural, Mathematical & Engineering Sciences here at the Strand.

Christ and the lawyers

In his depiction of this scene, Nuttgens again hints at another Faculty, that of Law, with a lawyer's wig being worn by one of the teachers. This window is dedicated to the memory of Dean Eric Symes Abbott.

Christ healing the sick

The late 20th century saw various mergers in the area of health and healing, resulting in the Florence Nightingale Faculty of Nursing, Midwifery & Palliative Care, the Faculty of Dentistry, Oral & Cranio-facial Sciences, the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience, and the Faculty of Life Sciences & Medicine. These are all reflected in the inner right window, which takes as its theme Jesus healing both individuals and the world.

Christ teaching the people

Here, Jesus is leading what looks to be a very lively seminar debate of the sort found in the King's Business School, and the Faculties of Arts & Humanities, and Social Science & Public Policy. Behind Jesus' head is the circle of the atom, while on the table can be seen the double helix of DNA, genes and chromosomes, looking back to King's involvement in the discovery of DNA

through the work of Rosalind Franklin and Maurice Wilkins. This window is dedicated to the memory of Dean Sydney Evans.

The Crucifixion

Finally, at the centre of the redesigned scheme, as at the centre of Scott's original scheme, is the Crucifixion, as the broken and bleeding body of Jesus hangs from the cross. That same Christ who was involved in science and construction, debates with lawyers, teaching and healing, expressed his total commitment to humanity through the ultimate sacrifice of himself on the cross. Mary is shown distraught and weeping at the feet of her son's corpse. Her robe is made from a special piece of old English glass, obtained by Nuttgens and re-shaped to include in this new window.

The west doors

The corridor side of the doors contain memorials listing those from King's who died in the World Wars of 1914-18 (around the centre doors, originally dedicated in June 1922) and 1939-45 (both side doors).

When not in use, the Legillum (a lectern or pulpit) is stored in the corridor. This is a sculpture in horse brown oak by John Houlston, using a fallen tree from the 'great storm' which hit the south of the UK in 1987, and which takes the Creation as its theme.

Further 21st century work

While the organ was away being restored in 2018 (see below), the opportunity was taken to touch up some of the decorations, to replace the previous surface of the floor with natural wood and to re-seal the panels

of the central aisle, and to install additional internal doors to provide an extra layer of sound insulation.

The organ

This instrument is by 'Father' Henry Willis, and originally dates from the 1860s. The pipes were initially placed several feet higher than they are now, with the console beneath them, above the double doors. Major rebuilding and alteration was undertaken in the 1930s when the Chapel's pitched roof was replaced with the present flat ceiling, and the reconstruction was carried out by Henry Willis III, the grandson of the original maker. At the same time, the console was moved to the north-east corner, near what is now the icon chapel.

In 1976 and again in the late 1990s the organ underwent rebuilds by the firm Bishop & Son. In the 2000-01 work, the organ pipes were treated to a major restoration, which revealed the beautiful angel designs on the largest front-facing pipes. A new console designed by Bishop & Son was located in the present position in the north aisle next to the choir stalls.

By 2017, it was clear that the previous rebuilds were not enough to deal with ongoing problems, so in a major project by Mander Organs the organ was completely dismantled and removed to their workshop, where it was thoroughly cleaned, restored, and (where necessary) rebuilt before being reinstalled. Another new console, this time of solid oak, was included in the project, and the new organ was played for the first time in the Opening of Year Service in September 2018.

Worship

The Chapel continues to be a focal point for the major Christian traditions in King's. Morning prayers are said regularly, when the life of King's is prayed for. There is a Church of England Eucharist (Communion) on Wednesday lunchtimes, and Roman Catholic Mass and Orthodox Vespers are held on Thursdays.

The choral tradition is very important to the Chapel, and the excellent Choir sings at Choral Evensong every Tuesday, and the Eucharist on Wednesday. As well as these regular term-time services, the Chapel is used for wedding and memorial services, and our special Advent Carols and Passion-tide services have become the highlights of the year for many at King's, and beyond.

The Choir's reputation justifiably increased under David Trendell's leadership from the 1990s until his untimely death in 2014. His work has been built on by Dr Joseph Fort, who has taken the Choir in new and exciting directions. The Choir regularly sings for BBC Radio 3's 'Choral Evensong', and have toured widely in Europe, the USA, and the Far East. They have a significant catalogue of CDs available for sale on the King's e-store: <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/choir/recordings>.

A quiet space at the heart of King's

As well as the formal worship which takes place in the Chapel, many people use it regularly for quiet and reflection. In the hustle and bustle of academic life, it is to the calm oasis of the Chapel that many people of all traditions turn, to offer prayers and to light candles.

Concerts

The flexible seating arrangement, the sound system and the improved lighting all ensure that the Chapel is in demand as a venue for concerts, lectures and presentations for many groups, both from within King's and outside.

Associate of King's College (AKC)

The Associateship of King's College is a long-established feature of King's, and draws together students from every Faculty attending the weekly lectures. With the help of expert teachers, the course provides an opportunity for intelligent, open-minded reflection on ethical and philosophical questions. For a long time lectures took place in the Chapel, but are now held in a lecture theatre on the ground floor of the King's Building, and are available online and as a podcast for King's staff and students. More information is at <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/akc>.

For a fuller history of the Chapel before the 2000-01 refurbishment, the late Revd Dr Gordon Huelin's account is a good source of information and anecdote. This is out of print, but can be found on our website at <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/chaplaincy/chapels-chaplaincies/chapels>.

This leaflet also draws on writing by Christine Kenyon-Jones, Caroline Bartholomew, and Duncan Wilson, for which grateful thanks are expressed.

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