



# King's College London Chapel

**KING'S**  
*College*  
**LONDON**

## *A Brief History of King's College Chapel at the Strand*

**K**ing'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 researched teaching institution with over 31,000 students and more than 8,500 staff. It now welcomes students of all faiths and beliefs, 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 the Christian ministry, and is unusual amongst British educational institutions in that its Dean is an ordained person, responsible for overseeing the spiritual development and welfare of all students and staff.

### **The Chapel**

**T**he 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), by Robert Smirke, was completed in 1831 it contained a chapel that was situated in the same position as the present one. We have no illustrations of this chapel 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 that the original chapel should be reconstructed, 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, the Chapel remains at the heart of the College and 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 of King's.

## The 19<sup>th</sup> 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 semi-circular 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 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

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 College's estore: <http://estore.kcl.ac.uk>

### *A quiet space at the heart of the College*

As well as the formal worship that takes place in Chapel many people use it regularly for quiet prayer and reflection. In the hustle and bustle of College it is to the calm oasis of Chapel that many people of all traditions turn. The ongoing care and restoration ensures that this space continues to provide peace and calm for all in King's.

### *Associateship 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 department. With the help of expert teachers, it provides an opportunity to think about fundamental questions of Theology, Philosophy and Ethics in a way appropriate to the present day. Lectures used to take place in the Chapel, but are now held in the largest lecture theatre at the Strand campus (full details at [www.kcl.ac.uk/akc](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/akc)), and streamed across the campuses each week.

### *Concerts*

The new flexible seating arrangement, sound system and lighting ensure that the Chapel is a desirable venue for concerts, lectures and presentations for many groups both from within King's and beyond.

*For a fuller history of the Chapel prior to the 2000-1 refurbishment, the late Revd Dr Gordon Huelin's history of the Chapel is a great source of information and anecdote. It is now out of print but is available on our website. For more information about the windows and an in-depth reflection on the Chapel generally after that restoration a sermon preached by the Dean, the Revd Canon Professor Richard Burridge, is also available on the web site.*

*This pamphlet draws on writing by Chris Kenyon Jones, Caroline Bartholomew and Duncan Wilson for which we express our thanks.*

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/chaplaincy.html>

## The Crucifixion

Finally, at the centre of the new 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 us through the ultimate sacrifice of himself upon the cross. We see Mary distraught and weeping at the feet of her son's corpse. Her robe is made from a special piece of old English glass, which Joseph Nuttgens obtained, and reshaped to include in this new window.

## 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 which provide an extra layer of sound insulation.

## The Organ

By Henry Willis, originally dating from the 1860s. The original Willis organ was placed several feet higher than it is now, with the console under the front pipes. Major rebuilding and alteration had to be undertaken in the 1930s when the Chapel's pitched roof was replaced with the present flat ceiling. 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 of the building. In 1976 and again in the late 1990s the organ underwent rebuilds by the firm Bishop & Son. In

the 2000-1 work the organ pipes had major restoration which revealed the beautiful angel designs on the largest front-facing pipes. A new console designed by Bishop & Son was located its present position in the North Aisle adjacent 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 the workshop, and 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 each day when we pray for the life of our College. On Wednesday there is a Church of England Communion service and on Thursday Roman Catholic Mass and Orthodox Vespers take place.

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

The Choir's reputation justifiably increased under David Trendell's leadership until his untimely death in 2014, and this work is now being built on by Dr Joseph Fort, David's successor. The choir regularly sings for BBC

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 20<sup>th</sup> century Chapel

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.

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 and damage of most of the stained glass, architect Stephen Dykes Bower was asked to produce proposals for 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 at this time so that until the renovation work at the start of this century these were plain whitewashed walls.

Stephen 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 21<sup>st</sup> century Chapel

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

When the Principal set up a team to work on developing a new scheme for Chapel the dream began to become a reality: the Dean, the Chaplain, the Estates department and the Development office all worked together. Duncan Wilson of Inskip and Jenkins was appointed as architect, HBG as contractors and Joseph Nuttgens as stained glass artist.

As a result of the work in 2000-1, Scott's decorative scheme, probably executed by Clayton & Bell, is now substantially restored, despite the significant changes that were made in the 1930s and the post-war period.

The whole scheme of Chapel speaks to us of spirituality in the context of intellectual thought, and points to the College'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.

The inscription running around Chapel below these are the words of the Beatitudes – the guidelines of Jesus for a life of holiness and wisdom. The inscriptions over the arches contain Old and New Testament scriptures referring to wisdom.

The lower walls have a rich composition using a painted tile motif, which was discovered in the survey prior to the 2000 –1 restoration work and was faithfully recreated. The West wall contains the original tile design together with large figures of angels flanks the figurative and stencilled decoration of the organ case. The arcade columns have been restored to their original colour.

### *Sanctuary*

In the apse is a painted copy of a mosaic by the Renaissance artist 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 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 altar was reduced in size to restore it to its original size.

### *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, which was made originally for the Chapel in the hostel at Vincent Square where King's accommodated men who were training for the Anglican priesthood. When

the provision of training ended in 1979 the set was transferred to this Chapel and was cleaned and restored in the refurbishment.

The silver mantrap cross by Louis Osman is made in the shape of a working mantrap. The late Rev Dr Gordon Huelin, who both 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 man to go free.' The altar, also in silver with a perspex top, is the part of the set that includes the pair of silver spiked candlesticks on table-like bases (now in the sanctuary).

### *North chapel*

This has developed as a Chapel for prayer and meditation. It is the home of the three Icons in 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 Fostiroπούλου (wife of the College's Orthodox Chaplain) in 1997.

The Greek icon depicts Maria Theotokos [Mary the Mother of God] with the Christ child [Madonna and Child]. The Russian icon depicts the Transfiguration shows Christ above a mountainous landscape with Elijah on his left and Moses on his right, the Apostles Peter, James and John below. These Icons were acquired by Dean Sydney Evans in the 1970s.

### *South wall*

The sculpture by Hermann Nonnenmacher is a crouching figure, thought to be Job, with his

hands clasped as if in supplication, and looking upwards.

The wall relief, also by Hermann Nonnenmacher, is a Pietà of the head and shoulders of the dead Christ with the heads of three female figures (possibly the three Marys).

### *West Door*

The Legillum [lectern or pulpit] is a sculpture in horse brown oak (from a tree which fell during the great storms of 1987) by John Houlston and takes as its theme the Creation.

### *The Stained Glass window scheme*

Gilbert Scott's original design was to have significant characters from the Old and New Testaments 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, the renowned artist, Joseph Nuttgens, was commissioned to produce new window designs to the old topics and to reflect upon the objects of the College 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 Old and New Testaments, the Christian and Hebrew 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 Old Testament showing the key aspects of Prophets, Priests and Kings: Samuel and Isaiah, Moses and Aaron, and David and Solomon.

In the apse we have the same five topics as originally conceived by Gilbert Scott and yet

made new for the merged multi-faculty College which we now are.

### **Christ in the carpenter's shop**

We see Physical Science and Engineering in 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 Sciences here at the Strand.

### **Christ and the lawyers**

In his depiction of this scene, Joseph again hints at another School, 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 Dental Institute, 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 we find in our Faculties of Arts & Humanities, and Social Science & Public Policy. Behind Jesus' head we have the circle of the atom, while on the table we see the double helix of DNA, genes and chromosomes, looking back to the College'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.