

150 YEARS OF HOLINESS AND WISDOM

Readings:

2 Chronicles 6.12-20 (text on Chapel ceiling)

1 Corinthians 1.22-24, 30; 2: 6-10 (text on south wall and north-east arch)

Curiosity is the theme of this Alumni weekend and it is always good when our Alumni are present to look back and to look forward with curiosity. It is especially appropriate to look both back and forward on this occasion of the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the dedication of this Chapel, and also as we approach the retirement of our Principal, Professor Sir Richard Trainor, after ten years of faithful service. I was filled with curiosity myself, looking back at the history and the foundation of the College in 1828 – 1829. My predecessors very helpfully bequeathed me a book in the Dean's Office called *Documents Relating to King's College London*. We have details of the Grant of Land to the College by the Crown on 11 June 1829, allowing King's to have this royal land next to Somerset House on the condition – and only on the condition – that it is a College that teaches “the doctrines and duties of Christianity” and has daily Christian prayer.

Of course, that is best exemplified our College Motto: *sancte et sapienter*, ‘with holiness and wisdom’, shown in this Chapel by the angels on the east wall holding the scrolls with the words *sancte et sapienter*, and also marked by the statues of Sophocles and Sappho downstairs in the Entrance Hall. It has been through that sense of having the daily praying of the College prayer that the College might function for the glory of God and ‘the benefit of our fellow creatures’ (which in the 1990s we refreshed into the phrase, ‘in the service of society’ as our mission statement and tagline) and through the growth of the AKC, which I know is special to many Alumni, that the College was fulfilling its purposes under the Royal Charter, and continues to do so today.

When the College opened in 1831, this was expressed architecturally in the Main King's Building by Smirke with the Great Hall below where we could teach our wisdom and the Chapel up above where we would practise holiness. Unfortunately, no images survive of the original Chapel, although we are told that it was, ‘fitted for worship according to the ecclesiological notions of George IV's reign’ in 1831. By the founding of the

Theology Department in 1847 and the High Church revival in the middle of the C19th the ecclesiological notions of George IV's reign will have seemed really rather inadequate as something for something as glorious as the Anglican foundation of King's College London. The Principal, the Rev'd Dr Jelf, put a letter from the Chaplain, Prof E H Plumtree before the Council about the 'meagreness and poverty' of the Chapel, 'at variance with the principles which the College was founded to assert'. As always happens, of course, there was a competition and a tender, and a young architect called George Gilbert Scott had just returned from his Grand Tour of the Mediterranean (and Tim is fond of saying, looking at what he had done to this Chapel, he obviously had too much laudanum when he was on his Tour!). So Scott submitted a proposal for a Chapel modelled on the lines of an ancient Christian basilica of the sort he had seen around the Mediterranean:

'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.'

That means that this part of Chapel around the altar is actually flying in space, and resting upon the Great Hall. If you have been out down Strand Lane to visit the Roman Bath, you will see the pillars upon which it rests instead. You can see pictures by the side of the organ of Scott's original plan with its wonderful nave roof. One aspect would not be allowed in any College tender today: Scott estimated the cost at either £3,800 or £4,800. In actual fact, it came in late and eventually cost £7,000! This was not the first time that a College building project came in over time and over budget!

However, the Chapel was sufficiently ready by June 1864, one hundred and fifty years ago, for the then Bishop of London to preach here at the opening and dedication of this Chapel. If you look at Scott's original designs in the picture by the organ, you will see that everything is very geometric and quite abstract. However, the Theology Department also wanted to make one or two theological statements about the purpose of King's College. As a result, the final design includes twelve Doctors of the Church: four Latin fathers, four Greek fathers and four Anglican fathers, all of whom had written significantly on the relationship between the Church and the State. The text down the south wall which is based on today's New Testament reading says, 'Among the mature, we speak wisdom' (1 Cor. 2.6) Clearly the implication is that this is opposed to lack of wisdom among the immature in the 'godless institution in Gower Street'! On the opposite north wall we read, 'Where shall wisdom be found? God alone knows the way to wisdom' (Job 28.12). Therefore, we can see a certain amount of political, and possibly theological, point-scoring going on between King's and University College London at this point in our history.

There have been, of course, lots of alterations over different periods of the College's history. The College Council record book has a minute that Arthur Caley Headlam (who was the last ordained Principal before the role was split into an ordained Dean and a lay Principal from 1908) brought to the Council meeting in 1907 a request from the ladies of the College that they might be allowed to attend worship in Chapel – and after careful consideration, the Council granted their request! During the period after the Great War, the War Memorial was put up in the Chapel Narthex around the great West Doors with all names of Alumni who lost their lives in that appalling slaughter. In the 1930s, it was discovered that the nave roof was leaking, so an extraordinary work of vandalism was created: since space was at a premium in the Strand (some things do not change!), the builders were instructed to put in a straight roof right across the arches and the two storey Hambledone Anatomy Building was added above the Chapel. The walls were whitewashed and, during the Second World War, the vandalism was completed by a bomb explosion which shattered all the windows. Temporary glass was put in which was still here when I arrived as Dean and when Tim arrived as College Chaplain in the mid-1990s.

So, the consequences of all of that will be the Chapel which many of you at this Service will remember from your undergraduate days: it was quite dark, hard to see in because the sun-light came in through the frosted glass and bounced off the whitewashed walls, causing your pupils to narrow, through which you tried to see the inscriptions and angels, all obscured by one hundred years of candle smoke. That was why we undertook the refurbishment project place in 2000 to restore the Chapel with Archbishop Desmond Tutu as the patron of the appeal; the restoration commissioned new stained glass for the windows, cleaned the walls and removed the whitewash and created this beautiful Chapel today which reflects Scott's original vision - and our project *did* come in on time and on budget! Many Alumni very kindly supported this work, for which we are very grateful. At that point we also set up the Choral Scholarships scheme, and I can see people here in this service today who have Choral Scholars, named after them, within the Choir now. Thank you very much for all your generous support.

During the refurbishment, Tim and I racked our brains over the question of what inscription to put on the Chapel roof. Dr Hugh Bowden from the Department of Classics drew our attention to the passage from 2 Chronicles which we had as our first reading: Solomon's prayer as he dedicates the Temple, 'Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built'. This is the Latin text which you can now see on the ceiling above us. We also restored the window scheme with scenes from the Old Testament on the South Side and the New Testament on the North Side. In the five windows behind me in the apse, Christ is shown as involved with lawyers, physical scientists, with engineering, with health and healing, and with the arts and sciences to make it clear that Christ is still involved in the multi-faculty, multi-site College with all the mergers and re-mergers that have gone on since its foundation.

So one hundred and fifty years ago, the Bishop of London stood here to dedicate this Chapel and to renew the foundation of the College from 1829. We stand here today with the same curiosity about the past and the future, still proclaiming that we are here for 'holiness and wisdom', and still teaching the AKC. You might be interested to know that there are one and a half thousand students enrolled on the AKC this year and I am delighted to announce a pilot project, which will open up the AKC to Alumni by distance learning from September this year onwards.

Chapel is still at the heart of the College for daily worship with the College prayer, for our weekly services with the Choir of Choral Evensong and Choral Eucharist, for our Roman Catholic Mass, Orthodox Vespers, for plays, concerts, lectures and, of course, the annual honorary Graduation Ceremonies. More importantly, the Chapel is a place of stillness next door to Chapters (the place where the old Theology Department used to be) and I never come in here and find it empty. There are always people in here, being quiet, thinking, praying, catching up with emails or whatever.

Therefore, I like to think that we who gather here today are the heirs of all of that tradition to which you contributed during your time here at the College and continue to support now as Alumni. It is entirely right that I should conclude with a huge thank you to the Principal for all that he has done to support the Chapel in the last decade with his regular appearances in the Principal's Stall. The new Principal told me recently that he looked forward to being in his stall on a Sunday morning; I had to warn him that he would be on his own as there are no longer any Sunday morning services, but that I appreciated the thought and looked forward to seeing him during the week! After the wonderful things achieved in the last one hundred and fifty years, we look forward to the next century or two and the continuing exploration of the College's mission for the glory of God and 'in the service of society'.

May the Lord God bless and guide King's College with holiness and with wisdom, Amen!

The Rev'd Canon Professor Richard A. Burrige

Dean of King's College London, and Professor of Biblical Interpretation.