

Chapel Decoration

Sir John Burnet commissioned the sculptor Archibald Dawson A.R.S.A. (1892-1938) to undertake the impressive Chapel carvings. Dawson was reportedly 'steeped in the traditions of Classical and Medieval sculpture to which he added an individuality and at times a puckish sense of humour,' which is perhaps best illustrated in the Chapel by the repeated motif of the pipe-smoking monkey.

It was significant for this commission that Dawson himself had fought in France with the 9th Battalion Highland Light Infantry – the Glasgow Highlanders. To him a memorial to men who had died was no formal, empty gesture, and Dawson paid his own tribute to the men who did not come back, with the Chapel carvings reportedly being some of his finest work. In the Chapel, Italian woodcarvers worked with Dawson and his assistant, Andrew Willison, on the mouldings and tracery of the choir stalls. Dawson treated them as though they were his pupils encouraging them to go beyond simply working to a plan and to put their undoubted creative skill to work. They responded with delight to this unaccustomed freedom and some of the loveliest figures are theirs.

The generous provision of decorative carving on the exterior of the Chapel and West Range stands in sharp contrast to the comparative dearth of sculpture on the rest of the main building, and suggests that Burnet was deliberately compensating for Gilbert Scott's apparent prudence in this aspect of his design. In Dawson 'he found a sculptor entirely in sympathy with the spirit of the project, and whose ability to move freely between medieval naturalism and a more modish Art Deco idiom was well suited to the self-consciously anachronistic historicism of the structure.' Dawson's distinctive humour, and the astonishing fertility of his imagination, was given full rein in this commission.

The interior is very chaste, with every aspect skilfully integrated. The tall single space is divided according to function with the centre part arranged in the collegiate manner with opposing choir stalls. The figures in low relief on the tympana above the entrance doors conform to medieval practice. Over the North door, facing the entrance normally used, is St. Christopher. Over the South door is the national saint, St. Andrew, with his nets. The statue below the East window represents St. Kentigern, the sixth-century evangelist of Strathclyde, better known in his city of Glasgow as St. Mungo. Behind the communion table are the royal arms as borne in Scotland.

In the tracery of the canopy of the stalls on the North side are carved the Phoenix rising from the flames, symbol of immortality, and the Burning Bush, the emblem of the Church of Scotland: corresponding to these on the South side are the Pelican, symbol of self-sacrifice, and the arms of the City of Glasgow.

The panels of the back rows of stalls display symbols of Christ – the monograms HIS and XP; the lamp - the light in Darkness; the king - the King of Glory; the sun - the Light of the World; and the ear of wheat - the Bread of Life. The Coats of Arms are those of the various Chancellors of the University, and on the middle row of stalls are Gothic Grotesques.

The figures at the sides of the Principal's stall on the North side are St. Matthew and St. Mark: their traditional symbols, the man and the lion, appear on the back of the stall. Corresponding to them on the Chancellor's stall on the South side are, St. Luke and St. John with their symbols, the ox and the eagle. Above the Chancellor's stall is an effigy of Bishop Turnbull, Bishop of Glasgow, founder and first Chancellor of the University, and above that of the Principal's stall stands St. Columba. The smaller identical figure on the canopies of both stalls is that of St. Michael, the soldier's saint, killing the dragon.

The carvings on the pulpit are thought to be the work of Walter Gilbert (1871-1946) and represent four Scottish saints, St. Margaret, St. Columba, St. Bride, and St. Oran. Above and below them appear symbols associated with them, the book, the dove, the lamp, and the Celtic cell. The figure on the newel post of the pulpit stairs is the Sower, sowing the seed of the Word. The two figures on the organ case are those of St. Francis and St. Cecilia, patron saints of music. While the carved hammer-beams, which carry the lights represent the ten virgins of the parable.

In 1965 the University Court commissioned the Department of Embroidery and Weaving in the Glasgow School of Art to design and make four pulpit falls for the Chapel. They are used in the Chapel throughout the year, each in its proper season – the purple in Advent and Lent; the white at Christmas and Epiphany, Easter and Trinity; the green in the season between Epiphany and Lent, and Whitsuntide; and the red at Pentecost and Kingdome tide, between Whitsuntide and Advent.

In October 1984 it was decided to create new covers for the 40 stall cushions in the Chapel, and a corresponding number of volunteers stepped forward to create the new designs. Unity was achieved both by the standardised border pattern and by the use of only eight colours throughout, which were taken from the stained glass of the 'Philosophy' window in the South Wall of the Chapel. The subjects represented in the centre panels were the choice of the volunteers, being their own subject of study or that of other members of their families.

Chapel Windows

In 1962 the Principal Sir Hector Hetherington stated:

On the fabric of this Chapel, no names are written save those of the sons and daughters of the university who died in our wars. It was built as their abiding memorial in this hallowed centre of our common life. But there are others who in their day were close to the heart of the University, and who have helped us by their works of peace. Of them also, memorials are here in the furnishings and adornments of the Chapel.

Funding for the Rose Window in the West wall, for example, was donated by the then Chancellor of the University, Sir Donald MacAlister (1854-1934), as a memorial to Earl Archibald Philip Primrose who had been both Rector and Chancellor to the University. As Principal of the University from 1907 to 1929, MacAlister had presided over a period of spectacular growth, with the Chapel being one of several important new buildings completed during his time in office.

For the 50th Jubilee of the Chapel it was decided to commission stained glass for two lancet openings in the South wall. In order to raise the required £3,000 however, an appeal was launched aimed primarily at attracting small donations of the many rather than large donations of the few. A special appeal went out to all those for whom the Chapel was associated with some special moment in their lives, including those who had been married there.

The majority of the stained glass windows in the Chapel were designed and made by Douglas Strachan, Hon. R.S.A. (1875-1950), who described his work in the Chapel as an attempt to figure the whole of human life as a spiritual enterprise. He further stated that:

the window [when] studied would give up its utmost detail to the spectator: while at times when his interest is otherwise engaged, the entire stained glass scheme should simply play its part in the serene dignity of the building as a setting for the occasion whatever it may be.

The West window portrays the daily occupations of men, illustrated from the history of Glasgow. The four lancet windows display four Scottish saints, St. Andrew, St. Columba, St. Mungo, and St. Ninian: above them are the building of the Old College, craftsmen from seven of the old town Guilds at work, and the building of Glasgow Cathedral; below them are Glasgow Fair, the meeting of St. Mungo and St. Columba on the banks of the Molendinar, the coming of St. Mungo to Glasgow, and the historic General Assembly of 1638, held in Glasgow Cathedral.

The eight lights of the rose window display the symbols of the four cardinal virtues of civic life and the coats of arms of the University and its three founders – James II, King of Scots, who requested that the University be established, Pope Nicholas V, whose bull erected it as a *studium generale*, and Bishop William Turnbull, to whose zeal for learning its creation was due. The window in the choir gallery displays the tree of knowledge reaching out to the four quarters of the earth and beneath it the figure of Alma Mater.

With the outbreak of hostilities in 1939 there was concern for the stained glass windows that had been completed and installed, most notably those in the West wall:

The windows are pretty well protected by the range of buildings round them. Unless a bomb were to drop bang in the middle of the Professors' Quadrangle I do not think they would suffer hurt, and if that were to happen, the whole Chapel would go. It is a bad business.

Despite such initial thoughts they were eventually removed to Edinburgh, along with the windows of the National Memorial.

The windows on the North and South walls symbolise the efforts of humankind to understand the universe in the several domains of academic study. The four lancet windows on the North wall represent: Theology, Law, Medicine, and Applied Science. The windows on the South wall represent: Science, Philosophy, History, and Literature. Strachan designed and made those on the North wall, and left designs for the History and Literature lights on the South wall. These were later executed by his pupil, Gordon Webster, in the 1950s. However, Strachan left no designs for the designated subjects of the remaining two lights, Philosophy and Science. These windows are the work of Keith New, A.R.C.A., who designed and built them in 1966. While the approach to their subjects is quite different from that of the existing glass in the nave, both of these lights, sharing a similar style in their strong linear movement and vertical emphasis, have forms which fill the whole windows, and are thus brought into balance with it. New stated: 'I would like to feel these windows express a certain kind of controlled energy – worldly physical, as well as the mentally creative.'

To celebrate the Chapel's Jubilee in 1979 the windows in the two lancet openings in the South wall were installed. These windows were designed and made by the artist, Alan Younger. In them he further developed the symbolic significance of the number twelve as depicted in the signs of the zodiac in the windows on the North and South walls.

The East windows, the Benedicite Window, were designed and made by Lawrence Lee, A.R.C.A., in 1962. They do not represent a literal reading of the theme of the Benedicite but rather point to the fact that since this is a Chapel in a University, they should direct our imagination to the concept that all knowledge comes from God and should lead back to Him.