



**St Columba's College**

# **The Chapel**

Architect: William Butterfield

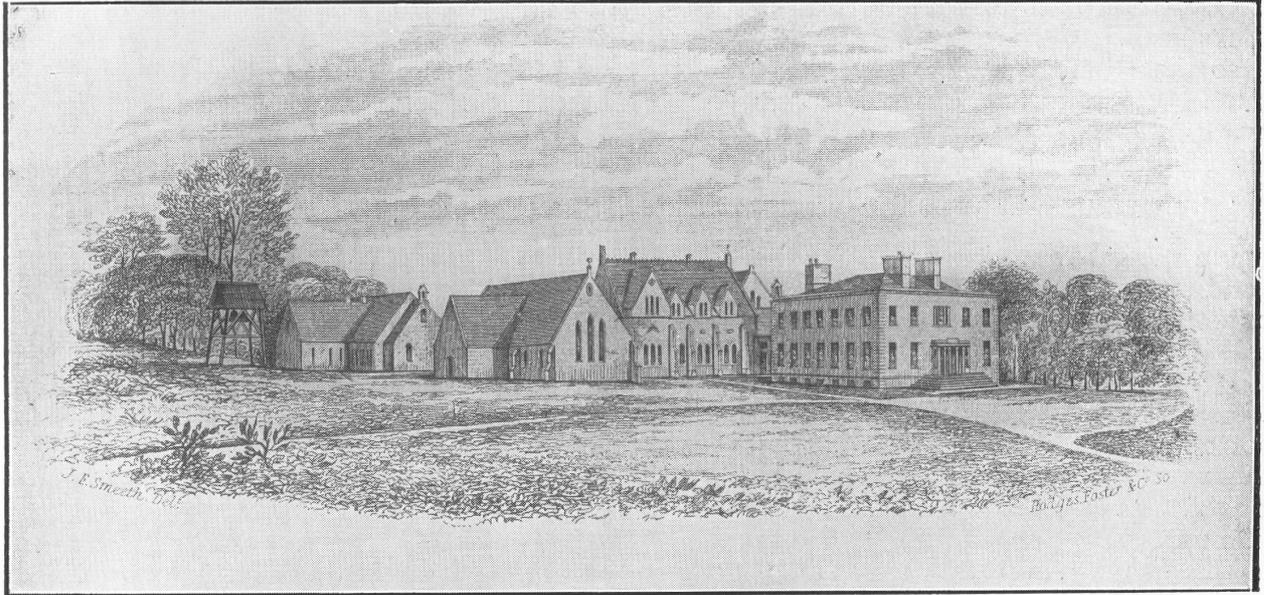
Dedicated to St Mark on September 1<sup>st</sup> 1880

*Our beautiful Chapel is in daily use throughout the school year, with short services from Monday to Saturday, and a longer service for boarders on Sunday. There is a full-time Church of Ireland Chaplain.*

The College's first Chapel, during the years (1843-49) when it was at Stackallan House in Co. Meath, was a converted coach-house. From that period there survives in the present Chapel the stalls which back onto the walls: these were, in his own words, 'picked up' by William Sewell, the Oxford don who was one of the chief Founders of the College, some at least being the gift of Magdalen College, Oxford.

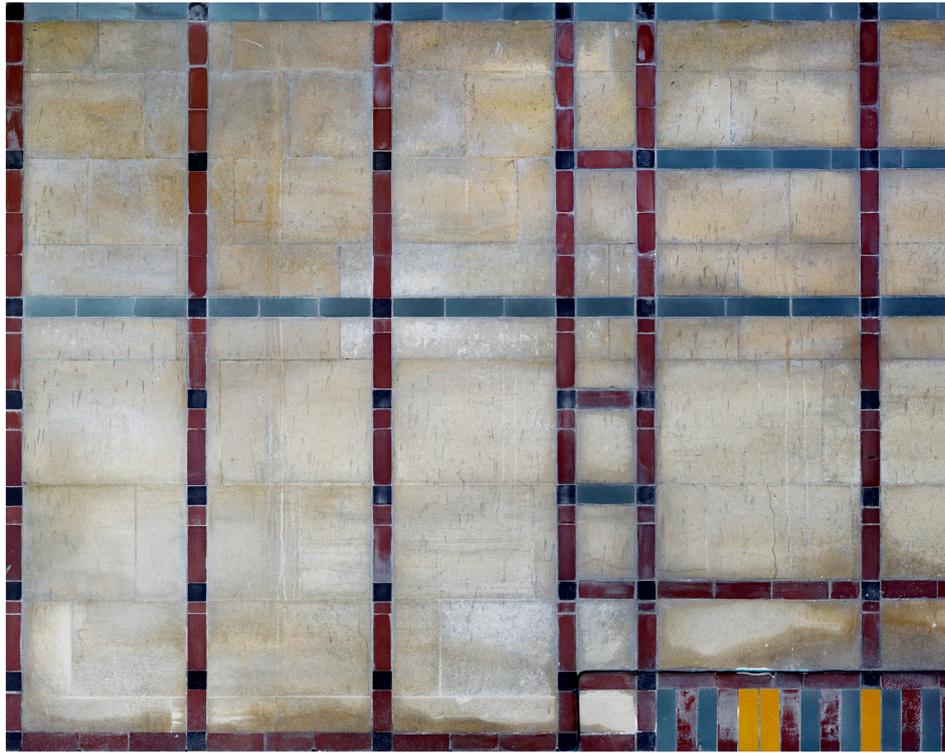
Another survival is the splendid bell, made by Mears of Whitechapel (the company closed in 2017 after almost 500 years of bell-making), the gift of the first Warden, R.C. Singleton: this bell was hung in a detached belfry at Stackallan and on the present site until 1880, when it was moved into the current belfry, integrated into the Chapel building.

When the College moved here in 1849 a wooden chapel, whose exterior walls were plastered to resemble stone, was erected (chiefly by the generosity of the Primate Visitor, Lord John George Beresford) on the terrace below the present Chapel (see the illustration on the next page from 1862); a stone cross inset in the grass marks the position of its altar. This Chapel contained the stalls and there were added in 1851 two important things still in use: the alabaster pulpit designed by P.C. Hardwick (the architect of the nearby 'Argyle' buildings) and the Caen stone lectern, the gift of a key Founder and benefactor, James Henthorn Todd.



GENERAL VIEW OF THE COLLEGE IN 1862.

This building gradually decayed until Reverend Robert Rice, Warden from 1867 to 1891, decided to replace it by a stone building worthy of the College. The College employed William Butterfield (1841-1900), the best-known ecclesiastical architect of his day in England, and the acknowledged leader of the Victorian Gothic Revival, a development from the Oxford Movement, which probably determined the unusual size of the sanctuary, at present regrettably invaded by seating. The photograph on the front of this leaflet was taken by James Morris in May 2019 for the biography of Butterfield being written by Dr Nicholas Olsberg (to be published in 2020), and all furniture other than the communion table was removed, to get as close as possible to how the Chapel would have looked in 1880. The builders, Parnell, were also English, chosen by Butterfield, who had recently designed new buildings for Rugby School and who he also worked with on his major achievement, Keble College in Oxford. Design started in December 1875 and work on the site itself started in July 1879 with the building of the rock-supporting terrace. The Chapel was completed quite rapidly and was dedicated to St Mark on September 1st 1880. The cost was £6000.



The exterior remains as Butterfield made it, following the general shape of the old Chapel, including its roof line and three-lancet East window. The grey granite of the walls is from the College grounds and the white granite of the buttresses from further up the mountain. The architect, whose signature note was polychromy, characteristically inserted layers of red sandstone from Cheshire and some Bath stone, while the roof slates come from Glamorganshire.

Inside, the three sanctuary steps are of stone from Sicily, Yorkshire and Glenowen near Clonmacnoise. The lectern was placed on a block of green marble. As is usual in college and school chapels the pews face each other (a 'collegiate' layout). Butterfield himself designed the East and West windows, all given as memorials. Three of the four evangelist windows were adapted from the old Chapel, the one to St. John being new. Other memorial windows were given later.



In the 20th century, in addition to the provision of two extra rows of seating to accommodate increased numbers of pupils, some important changes were made. The six 'coronae' hanging lights designed by Butterfield were removed in 1934, after which for more than half a century the Chapel was lit by electric lights in the ceiling: these were replaced in 1986 (thanks to a generous gift) by the Victorian chandeliers which restore the lighting system to something similar to Butterfield's. A more dramatic change was made in 1958. There was originally an ante-chapel cut off from the main Chapel by a screen of dark-stained oak running from wall to wall on the line of the step which still exists. This screen was solid at the two sides for a few feet from the floor, and the Warden's and Sub-Warden's stalls backed onto it. Originally the ante-chapel seated only visitors, but the increase in pupil numbers meant that it had to be filled with boys. So in 1958 the screen was removed, some of the oak of which it was made being employed to make the inner doors of the Chapel. The stalls which used to back onto it were moved to the west wall, with the organ

console between them, and the absence of the screen made possible some additional pews for pupils.

The original organ, built by Telford of Dublin, was moved from Stackallan House to the old wooden Chapel, and then to the present one, where it remained in use, with various additions and repairs, till 1940, being blown first by hand, then by water-power and finally by electricity. This was replaced by an organ from the disused Baggotrath Church, but this in turn had to be replaced in 1958 by the current instrument, a completely new one built by the Dutch firm Pels. This has needed reconstruction and maintenance over the years, and contributions will be welcome for work that currently still needs to be done.

The most revolutionary addition to the Chapel is the gallery built in early 1986, designed by John O'Connell to relieve congestion and to make it possible once again, in spite of greatly increased numbers, to have the whole school present at daily Chapel services. Fire regulations insisted on an exterior staircase, which has been placed unobtrusively around the back of the building on the south wall. The organ console was moved to the gallery.

The original Chapel, and all later additions and adornments, have been paid for by the gifts of Old Columbans, staff, friends, parents and pupils who have believed in communal worship as an essential part of the life of St Columba's College.



## Memorials and other fixtures

**In clockwise order from left of the door. OC = Old Columban.**

1. Window: Frederick Richards Wynne, OC, Bishop of Killaloe.
2. Tony Law, OC, died at the age of 22 in action in Palestine of wounds sustained in a land-mine explosion.
3. George Robertson: former teacher of French and Classics. See also the long brass plaque on the right-hand side of the organ casing (18).
4. Window: Henry Irwin entered the College in 1872 and became famous as a missionary priest working with the mining population of British Columbia as 'Father Pat'.
5. Saint Columba: Cartoon for a window by the artist Evie Hone (1894-1955).
6. Noel William Kennedy: Latin teacher, 1946-1982.
7. Graham Pearson: a pupil, who died suddenly in the College in 1982.
8. First World War Memorial: this tablet in memory of Old Columbans and staff who died in the 1914-18 War was originally opposite the door, and was moved to the current position in 1986, when the gallery was built. The Latin couplet on it was written by Warden Armstrong: 'These men, scorning the sweetness of life, laid down their lives and served their country.'
9. The Blackburn Memorial: the mosaic behind the altar, and the brass plaque below it. Reverend William Blackburn was Warden from 1909-1919. He died suddenly in the small hours of November 17<sup>th</sup> 1919; his grave is in Whitechurch. The mosaic was designed by Sarah Pursar of the stained glass workshop An Túr Gloine (The Glass Tower); she also restored the Founders' Windows in the Dining Hall.
10. Window (St John): George Francis William Reichel (entered 1870).
11. Second World War Memorial: the memorial tablet bears a Latin couplet composed by teacher G.K.White and Fellow Sir Robert Tate : 'Our company went out gaily from here and finished its course unvanquished and now hands on the torch to its own people.'
12. Lucius Gwynn, entered 1886, a son of Warden Gwynn, Irish cricket and rugby international, died of tuberculosis in a clinic in Davos, Switzerland, aged 29.

13. Plaque above the Senior Prefect's seat: Charles de la Poer Beresford, entered 1889.
14. Window: Robert Campbell Thompson, Chapel Prefect, entered 1919, died 1933. His dates are almost identical to Edwin Best (plaque below).
15. Plaque: Edwin Loftus Wilson Best (1903-34), entered 1920.
16. Sandham John Willis, Sub-Warden, Mathematics teacher (1925-66).
17. Reverend Bertram Walsh, Chaplain and Irish teacher (1960-93).
18. Organ plaque: Sir Stanley Cochrane, OC (entered 1893), was a great benefactor to the College. George Manship Robertson: see the plaque on the wall opposite (3). George Kennedy: brother of Noel Kennedy (see 6).
19. Albert Ludwig, teacher of foreign languages: though seeming to be healthy 'he fell into a depressed state towards the close of the Christmas vacation, a depression that deepened rapidly into the dream gloom of melancholia, then meningitis supervened, and death came with relentless speed.' (The Columban magazine).



*This leaflet has used some of the material of a previous version, which itself took some of its wording from G.K.White's A History of St Columba's College, 1843-1974, with substantial updating and augmentation. The photographs were taken by James Morris in May 2019, and are reproduced here by kind permission.*

***J.M. Girdham, Sub-Warden, August 2019.***