

CHAPEL WINDOWS

Symbolism

A carefully timed walk through the King's College Chapel with attention given to the many artistic elements that decorate its interior never cease to draw exclamations of appreciation for their beauty and ultimately the skill employed in painting, carving and sculpting.

This is the first article that we hope will give an insight into some of the features that reveal many hidden secrets and meaning.

The first must certainly be the Chapel Windows that, on a sunny day, radiate their beauty and expose the artistic skill of their designer that have withstood the 80+ years since their installation.

The windows were designed by the London artist Arthur Lucien Ward and took some 14 years to complete. We know that the building of the Chapel was foremost in the mind of Headmaster (and Owner) C T Major when, after deciding to move the College from its Remuera site to Middlemore so many of our Old Boys were killed in action during World War I. Major wanted to acknowledge that sacrifice and at the same time provide the College with an edifice reflecting its Christian heritage. The College moved in 1922 and within weeks of opening at Middlemore the foundation stone for the Chapel was laid and at the same time the windows were commissioned. It was not until 1936 that the final installation was complete. Sadly Ward never saw the windows in situ. One supposes the commission itself took much of his time and transport limitations and the unsettled world situation, leading up to yet another world conflict made a journey to distant New Zealand out of the question.

Entrance to the Chapel is invariably through the West Door and immediately the magnificence of the window at the eastern end above the sanctuary captures the eye. It portrays the central event of Christian history – the Crucifixion of Christ. There are many features (which is true of every individual window) that demonstrate the skill and biblical knowledge of the artist. True to Scripture, the figure of Jesus is accompanied by His Mother Mary, who is supported by John. The careful eye will discern the City of Jerusalem; the Four Beasts mentioned by the Prophet Ezekiel and later in the Book of Revelations; the Pelican at the very top of the central window symbolises self-sacrifice as she feeds her chicks with blood from her own breast – just one of many traditional symbols seen throughout the Chapel. Either side of the Crucifixion scene and encircling the Sanctuary show significant events in the life of Jesus.

The Annunciation by the angel Gabriel

The Nativity – Joseph is in attendance and angels singing 'Glory to God in the Highest'

The Resurrection – sleeping soldiers are awakened by the wonder of Jesus' return to life

The Ascension – the eleven remaining apostles witness the risen Jesus' rising to heaven

The Session – Jesus in glory, ruler of all spiritual powers and judge of all.

On the far left of the Sanctuary is the ANZAC Window, directly above the First World War Roll of Honour. A soldier of the time, has feet resting against a lion, symbol of courage, while his soul faces upward to the Heavenly City in the company of the Risen Lord. An early version of the College Coat of Arms is also seen.

Items to follow: The Parables – The Miracles – The Sanctuary Carvings – The west Window

John Bean

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