



Jesus College
OXFORD



A History of Jesus College Chapel

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Historical Overview

Jesus College, founded in 1571 during the reign of Elizabeth I, was the first Protestant college of the University of Oxford. As such, it has always been associated with the theology and worship of the Church of England as well as, later, the Welsh Church.

When the college was first founded, it had no chapel 'except whatever had done service for these purposes in the old buildings of White Hall'¹ (on the site of which Jesus College began). It is possible that the earliest members of Jesus College may have used the adjacent parish church of St. Michael at the Northgate for their worship.

The foundations of the chapel were laid in around 1619, during Griffith Powell's time as Principal, and much of the funding was provided by Sir Eubule Thelwall, who later succeeded Powell. The portrait of Thelwall which hangs in the Hall depicts his hand resting on a scroll reading 'A plan of the Chappell in Jesus Coll., Oxford built by Sir Eubule Thelwall.'

The chapel was consecrated by the Bishop of Oxford on May 28th, 1621.

At first, the chapel was shorter than the present building, and money was given by Sir Charles Williams in 1636 to extend the East End to the edge of Turl Street and the West End to its present position, creating the sanctuary and antechapel. This was also the date when the ornate 'Fayre East Window' was installed, although at this time it was glazed with clear glass.

The black and white marble slabs found in the sanctuary were given by Mr Lewis Roberts, recorded in 1648. Money for the screen (still present) was given in 1693 by Principal Jonathan Edwards.

A number of adaptations and additions were made over the coming centuries. In 1773, a large painting of *The Archangel*

¹ Hardy, Ernest George. 1899. *Jesus College*. London: FE Robinson and Co., p. 37.

Michael Defeating Satan, after Guido Reni, was donated to Jesus College by an Old Member, Thomas Viscount Bulkeley. Bulkeley had been on the Grand Tour and is likely to have seen the original in the church of Santa Maria della Concezione dei Cappuccini in Rome. This painting dominated the east end of the chapel, serving as an altarpiece, until the next major alteration: the installation of coloured glass into the east window, in 1853.

The east window glass was a prelude to a more throughgoing reordering, agreed in 1863. The architect was G.E. Street, Architect to the Diocese of Oxford. Street was influenced by the Gothic Revival movement. In keeping with the emphasis on the Eucharist in this movement, particularly in the Church of England, the renovations included bringing more attention to the sanctuary and high altar. The arch was widened to improve the view of Hedgeland's east window, a new reredos (of Street's design), was carved by Thomas Earp, Minton tiles were added to the flooring, and stone arcading to the sanctuary walls.

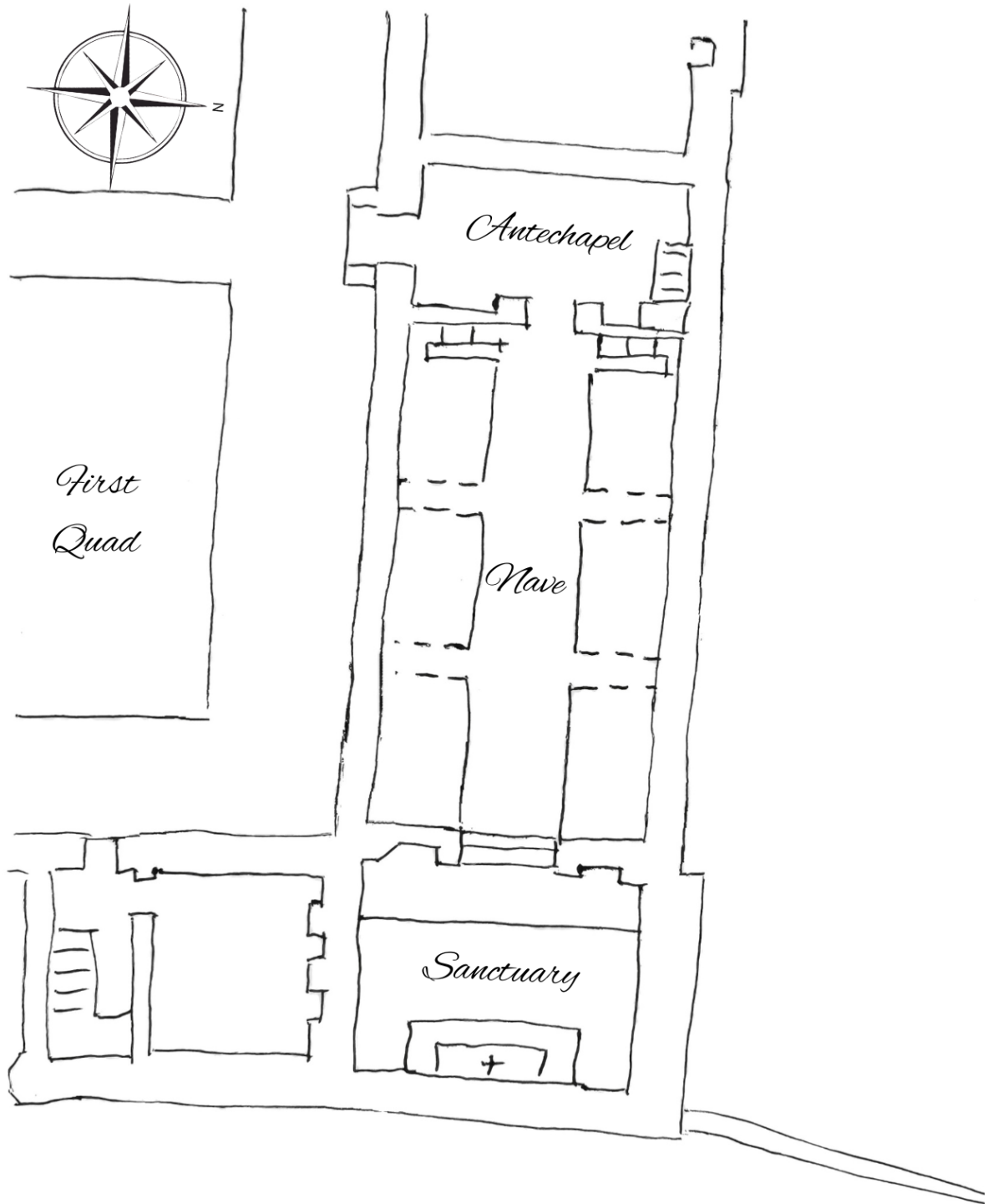
The reordering was controversial, with college histories complaining that much of the Jacobean wood was 'ruthlessly torn up and sold for a mere song to a passing stranger'² If you want to make up your own mind, a print of the chapel as it looked in 1814 can be seen on the front cover of this booklet.

Since the reordering, the only major changes have been the installation of a new organ by Binns of Leeds in c.1899, and its replacement with an organ built by William Drake in 1994.

² *Ibid.* p. xi

A Chapel Tour

Chapel Plan



Antechapel

As you enter Chapel, you pass under the carved motto 'Ascendat oratio descendat Gratia' (Let prayers ascend and grace come down) above the porch. The antechapel contains several memorial panels. There is a large memorial to members of the college killed in action during the First World War, as well as smaller memorials to several Old Members and Fellows.³

Behind the main door as you enter is a bronze bust of T. E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) by Eric Kennington. The bust was conceived in 1926 and described by Lawrence as 'Magnificent; there is no other word for it. It represents not me but my top moments, those few seconds when I succeed in thinking myself right out of things.'⁴ Our bust is from the 1961 edition and was donated by the Lawrence family.

Above the door is a wooden carving of the arms of Sir Eubule Thelwall, the major donor and benefactor behind the Chapel. JNL Baker, writing in 1954, complains that they can 'barely be seen' in this location, after they were moved from the screen in the late 19th century to make space for a new organ.

Organ Screen

The wooden screen, when first erected, bore the arms of two former Principals, Sir Eubule Thelwall (Principal 1621-30) and Sir Leoline Jenkins (Principal 1661-1673), both of whom were major benefactors towards the Chapel. The screen was probably installed in 1693, at the expense of another Principal, Jonathan Edwards. Principal Thelwall's arms were removed to their current position above the entrance when a new organ was installed in the late 19th century.

³ Memorials to those who lost their lives in the Second World War can be found in the Harold Wilson and Memorial Rooms, on Second Quad.

⁴ <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/kennington-head-of-t-e-lawrence-n05438>

Nave

The stalls were installed during the reordering of 1863, replacing taller benches of dark wood. The colourful tiled floor also dates from this period.

At the foot of the sanctuary steps is the memorial stone for Principal Sir Leoline Jenkins (principal from 1661-1673). Jenkins was a major benefactor of the College, and was buried in Chapel with great ceremony in 1685, after lying in the Divinity School for two days to allow 'the whole body of the university'⁵ to pay their respects.

On the walls of the nave are memorial stones to four other notable figures in college history:

Henry Maurice (1647-1691), Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity and a protégé of Leoline Jenkins.

William Jones (1676-1725), Principal from 1720-1725.

Jonathan Edwards (1629-1712), Vice-Principal from 1668-1686 and Principal from 1686-1712. He also served as Vice-Chancellor of the University (1689-1691).

John Lloyd (1636-1687), Principal from 1673-1686. He was Vice-Chancellor of the University 1682-1685 and was Consecrated Bishop of St. David's in 1686. He died at Jesus College in 1687, probably having never visited his diocese.

On the south wall hangs the Garter banner of Harold Wilson. Wilson studied Modern History at Jesus College from 1934, and graduated in PPE, and was Prime Minister twice, from 1964-1970 and 1974-1976. The banners of Knights of the Garter hang in the Quire of St. George's Chapel at Windsor Castle while the Knight is alive, after which they are displayed elsewhere or kept privately according to family wishes. Wilson's banner was given to Jesus College after his death in 1995.

⁵ From a biography of Sir Leoline Jenkins, quoted in Hardy (1899), p. 141-2.

Sanctuary

The present appearance of the sanctuary, finished in 1864, is the work of George Edmund Street (1824-1881), who was the Diocesan Architect of Oxford at the time. Street was a major figure in the Victorian Gothic Revival, and an active member of the Ecclesiological Society, which sought inspiration in the 'medieval Gothic' style of architecture. As the name of the Society suggests, this architectural inspiration was connected to a desire to reform the Church of England. As founder member J.M. Neale wrote "we know that Catholick ethics gave rise to Catholick architecture; may we not hope that, by a kind of reversed process, association with Catholick architecture will give rise to Catholick ethics"⁶

The aims of the Ecclesiastical Society were aligned with those of the broader Oxford Movement, which by the mid-Nineteenth century was concerned with drawing on pre-Reformation sources, as well as contemporary Roman Catholicism, to reform the Church of England, under the influence of figures including John Henry Newman, John Keble, and Edward Bouverie Pusey. This involved giving increased prominence to the celebration of the Eucharist in Church of England worship.

These concerns can be clearly seen in Street's work at Jesus. The sanctuary arch was widened to draw attention to the east end of the chapel, and the altar greatly increased in prominence, with its carved reredos depicting the crucifixion. Street even included three stone seats set into the wall on the south side of the sanctuary, where priest, deacon, and subdeacon could sit during the celebration of Holy Communion in the 'High Church' style, although there is nothing to suggest that it was ever actually used in this way.

Lewis Gilbertson, who was heavily involved in the reordering of the chapel, also failed in 1869 to pass a motion at Governing Body 'that there be a celebration of Holy Communion in Chapel

⁶ Neale, JM.1844. *On Private Devotion in Churches*. Rugeley: John Thomas Walters, London, p.20.

before Mattins on Holy Days and Sundays.’⁷ This indicates that, for all the ‘High Church’ influence on the architecture of the chapel, these views were not widely shared among the Fellowship of the time.

Indeed, the ‘High Church’ reredos has continued to be controversial, and some former chaplains instructed that it be covered with a curtain. Filled-in holes are visible in the marble along the top of the reredos where the curtain hooks were placed!

Aside from the altar, and the handsome tiling, the sanctuary also contains, on the north wall, memorials to Sir Eubule Thelwall and Francis Mansell (principal on three occasions in the 1600s). These originally stood on the nave side of the arch, before being moved to their present location when the arch was widened.

Opposite these memorials is a large copy of Guido Reni’s *Archangel Michael Defeats Satan*, which served as an altarpiece before the installation of Hedgeland’s window (see above for more details).

The large brass desk was given by ‘the sisters and administrators of the Reverend Mr. John Brickdale, BD, fellow of this College’ in 1721.

The pulpit is Jacobean. It is hard to tell from the Ackerman print where it was located before the 1864 reordering.

⁷ ‘Jesus College’, in *A History of the County of Oxford: Volume 3, the University of Oxford*, ed. H E Salter and Mary D Lobel (London, 1954), pp. 264-279. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/oxon/vol3/pp264-279> [accessed 24 August 2022].

Stained Glass

All the coloured glass in Chapel is from the 19th century – until this date all the windows were plain glass.

East Window

The first window to be completed was the east window, designed by George Caleb Hedgeland (1825-98). This glass was placed into the 'Fayre east window' (first installed in 1636), and the work was completed in 1855.

The window's particular luminous quality comes from the fact that Hedgeland, unlike his Victorian contemporaries, worked in painted, rather than stained, glass. Hedgeland achieved much success in the 1850s, but his career was short-lived – he is best known for his work on the west window of Norwich Cathedral (1853) and emigrated to Australia in 1859 following ill-health.⁸

The window features Christ in Majesty at the apex, three scenes of Christ raising the dead below this (the son of the widow of Nain; Jairus' daughter; Lazarus), and seven scenes from the life of Christ with their Old Testament Types occupying the main body of the window:

The Nativity / The Creation of Adam;
The Baptism of Christ / The Parting of the Red Sea;
The Last Supper / the Passover meal;
The Crucifixion / The Brass Serpent;
The Resurrection / Jonah released from the whale;
The risen Christ commissions his disciples / Moses and Aaron pass on the Levitical Priesthood;
The Ascension / The departure of Elijah in a fiery chariot.

North Side, Near Sanctuary

This window, from the studio of Lavers, Barraud, and Westlake, serves as a memorial to the Reverend Samuel Morris, a naval chaplain and Old Member of Jesus College, who died in the

⁸ <https://glaasincresearch.wordpress.com/2019/02/12/george-hedgeland-one-life-in-two-parts/>

sinking of *HMS Victoria* in 1893. The *Victoria* was lost with 358 hands in collision with *HMS Camperdown*, during exercises in the Eastern Mediterranean. Morris's compassion and bravery was noted by eyewitnesses:

In the hour of danger and of death, when all were acting bravely, he was conspicuous for his self-denying and successful efforts to save the sick and to maintain discipline. Nobly forgetful of his own safety, he worked with others to the end, and went down with the vessel ... seeing escape impossible he folded his arms upon his breast, and looking up to heaven, his lips moving in prayer, he died.⁹

The window itself shows Christ flanked by Ss. Peter and Paul. Christ holds a Bible, containing the words 'Ego sum resurrectio et vita. Qui credit in me etiam si mortuus fuerit, vivet.' (I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, although he be dead, shall live). Below this are three Biblical scenes of peril at sea: St. Peter attempting to walk on water; Jesus calming the storm; St. Paul's shipwreck.

The exact date of installation is not known, but it is mentioned in Hardy's history of 1899, so must have been in place by then.

South Side, Near Sanctuary

This window, from the studio of Clayton and Bell (perhaps the most prolific stained-glass studio of the Victorian era), commemorates Charles Williams, principal from 1858-77, and was most likely installed in 1879 or 1880.

The main scene depicts the Virgin and Child, flanked by Magi (left) and shepherds (right). Below this we see the Annunciation (left), Nativity (centre), and Presentation of Christ in the Temple (right).

⁹ Weston, Agnes. 1909. *My Life Among the Bluejackets* (London; J. Nisbet) pp. 174-5.

North Side, Near Screen

This window, from the studio of Charles Eadmer Kempe, commemorates Old Member and Fellow Llewelyn Thomas who came up in 1860 and was elected Fellow in 1872. He had been a contender for Principal in 1895 and died in 1897. The window must have been installed shortly after Thomas's death, as it is mentioned in Hardy's 1899 history.

The window features three Welsh Saints, patrons of the major Welsh Cathedrals: St. David (centre); St. Asaph (left); and St. Deiniol (right – patron of Bangor Cathedral and said to be the first Bishop of Bangor). It is typical of Kempe's style, including angels with distinctive peacock feather wings. It also reflects the 19th century Anglo-Catholic revival, depicting bishops with mitres and croziers, and St. Asaph in a chasuble (symbolic at the time of the 'ritualist' party aiming to introduce Catholic dress and ceremonial to the Church of England).

South Side, Near Screen

This window, also from the studio of Kempe, forms a pair with the Thomas window opposite. It commemorates Lewis Gilbertson (1814-1896), who was Fellow from 1840-72, and heavily involved in the 1863 reordering of the chapel. The window was erected by his widow at some time after the publication of Hardy's 1899 history.

Continuing the Welsh and Anglo-Catholic themes of the Thomas window, the Gilbertson window features two more Welsh saints (St. Cynfelyn, left; St. Padarn, right), as well as Archbishop Laud (centre).

St. Padarn, reputed to have held a bishopric around Llanbadarn Fawr in the early 6th Century, fits with the pattern of Welsh bishop-saints established in the Thomas window.

Archbishop Laud was Archbishop of Canterbury during the reign of Charles I, and was executed in 1645, towards the end of the First English Civil War. Due to his defence of the role of bishops in the Church of England (against the Puritans), he

became a figurehead for the High Church and Anglo-Catholic movements. This choice appears to have caused some debate – JNL Baker writes that the window ‘after some argument, and in some mysterious way, contains the figure of Laud’.¹⁰

St. Cynfelyn is a mysterious figure who probably also lived in the 6th Century. He owes his presence in this window to the fact that the Gilbertson family tomb is found in the churchyard of St. Cynfelyn’s church, Llangynfelyn, Ceredigion. The churchyard also contains a holy well associated with Cynfelyn.

Life in Chapel

The Early Days

The College Statutes reveal that Chapel played a large part in the life of the College. All members of college were expected to be in Chapel for Morning Prayers between five and six o’clock, except Doctors and Bachelors of Theology, who were only advised to take part. Evening Prayers were compulsory on the part of all, between nine and ten o’clock.

On Sundays and Holy Days, the timings changed, with Morning Prayers between eight and nine, and Evening Prayers between four and five.

The Founding Statutes of Jesus College specify that the operation of the College was ‘with a view to the final profession of holy theology.’ Chapel was the venue for important elements of this function. Once every fifteen days during Term, there were theological disputations from six to eight o’clock in Chapel, ‘the subject of the disputation being affixed to the Chapel door some days in advance that the disputants might come prepared’. Only senior members of college took part in the disputes, but all Fellows, Scholars and Commoners were obliged to attend.

¹⁰ Baker, JNL. 1971. *Jesus College, Oxford 1571-1971*. Oxford: Oxonian Press Ltd. p.59.

Every Thursday morning at six o'clock, junior members of college were required to attend Catechism: instruction on 'the Apostles' Creed, Lord's Prayer, Thirty-nine Articles &c.'

Welsh Services

Jesus College has always had a strong connection with Wales and the Welsh language. In 1878, College experimented with a daily Welsh language service in Chapel at 10pm. By 1879, this provision was reduced to a Welsh language service at 5.30pm on Wednesday and Fridays. The custom continued until 1925.

St. David's Day (March 1st) was celebrated with a Welsh service in Chapel in the late nineteenth century. It is unclear how consistently this has been the case, but today College marks St. David's Day each year with a Welsh-language service of Evensong followed by dinner.

Today

Today, the rhythm of life in Chapel during term time is less demanding – nothing is compulsory, but Morning Prayer is said daily at 9am, and Holy Communion is celebrated twice a week.

The major weekly service is Choral Evensong on a Sunday at 17.45, featuring a wide variety of guest preachers as well as music from the Chapel Choir.

With the opening of our new Cheng Yu Tung building, Jesus College has entered a new era of spiritual care for its students. The addition of a Multifaith Room means that there is now dedicated space for students of all faiths to practice their religion, and Jesus College is also the regular venue for meetings of the Oxford Interfaith Scriptural Reasoning society, where people of different faiths seek to engage deeply with commonality and difference. It will be exciting to see how this aspect of college life changes and develops in the coming years.

Bibliography

This history draws heavily on the work of previous historians of Jesus College. Some important texts follow:

Brigid Allen, 'The Early History of Jesus College, Oxford, 1571-1603' *Oxoniensia* LXIII (1998), pages 105-124.

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Acknowledgements

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Cover image: *Interior of the Chapel of Jesus College, Oxford*. Hand-coloured aquatint, published Oct. 1, 1814 at 101 Strand for R. Ackermann's *History of Oxford*. Public domain.