

CHAPEL OF OUR LADY AND ST. ELPHIN

A Brief History and Guide

Elphin is reputed to have been a priest-teacher who lived near the River Mersey and was killed in a conflict between the Kings of Northumbria and Mercia in 642 AD. A Church was built on the site and dedicated to St. Elphin and the present Parish Church of Warrington still bears his name. In 1844 the Rector of Warrington, the Revd. Horace Powys, founded the School and the girls used to attend the Parish Church for worship. In 1904 the School bought the Darley Dale Hydro and twelve years later the old stable block was converted into the School Chapel and dedicated by the Bishop of Southwell.

The window above the Altar is a representation of St. Elphin with the True Cross and underneath the words:

"Ecce ignum Crucis in quo salus mundi pependit" - Behold the wood of the Cross on which hangs the world's salvation.

The oak screen behind the Altar carries four badges, the outer ones being the Coat of Arms of the Bishop of Derby and the other of Fr. Stanton, a former Chaplain who was a benefactor of the Chapel. The inner badges are crowned Monograms of Jesus and Mary.

The crucifix which hangs on the screen was carved in the Austrian village of Oberammergau. The free standing Altar and candlesticks were designed and made by Gillam's of Sheffield and were first used on 22nd September 1982, at a Service to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of the Revd. David Prytherch, Chaplain of St. Elphin's from 1965 to 1985. The consecration stone of the previous Altar was incorporated in the mensa of the new Altar. The incised Resurrection Cross on the front of the Altar is a reminder that new life comes from the Risen Christ through the Holy Eucharist.

The Altar Rails were designed and made by a former School carpenter, Mr S. Bradley, and were the gift of Old Girls in memory of Miss M.L. Flood - Headmistress of the School 1910-1933, who died in 1971. Behind the Head's Stall is a list of all Heads and behind the Chaplain's Stall a list of priests who have served the School as Chaplains.

The Processional Cross was given by a number of Old Girls whose names are on the reverse. On the Cross is a representation of Christ the King with IC and XC (IHCOYC XPICTOC - Jesus Christ) on either side and underneath the word NIKΑ - Victor.

The Lady Chapel on the left has at its entrance a Statue of the Madonna and Child carved by a refugee from Oberammergau. Behind the Altar is a tabernacle in which the Blessed Sacrament is Reserved and on the Altar is an In Memoriam Book. Also in the Chapel is a tritych of the Madonna and Child and a copy of a painting of the Madonna brought back from Italy after a School trip.

The hassocks were the inspiration of an Old Girl, Mrs Margaret Carmichael (nee Houghton 1928-31), who persuaded other Old Girls and Staff to embroider the patterns she had designed, which include the School Badge, Diocesan Coat of Arms and One Tree Hill, a familiar landmark to generations of pupils.

The tapestry on the wall above the organ is a representation of the Risen Christ made in Belgium and donated in memory of Muriel Wells by her sister Lady Osmond (nee Wells 1925-32). It is a vivid reminder to those leaving the Chapel after the Eucharist 'to go in peace to love and serve the Lord'.

A lighting system was installed in 1972 from money donated by Old Girls in memory of Miss Eveleen Stopford, Headmistress 1941-1958 and who died in 1971.

In 1988 the Chapel was recarpeted and redecorated, the intricate gold painting being done by a Housemistress, Mrs Anne Phillpot. The lighting was redesigned and once again the Old Girls' Guild contributed towards this.

On Confirmation Day, 1989, the Bishop of Warrington dedicated two choir kneelers which have been beautifully recovered in tapestry by Mrs Dianne Stevenson. Two more are in the process of being made. The Bishop also dedicated the new Font designed and made by Mr Clive Penman, father of Mrs Stephen Yeo. The Font was used for the first time on Confirmation Day.

In 1844 Warrington was within the Diocese of Chester; but in succeeding years other Dioceses were carved from it: Manchester in 1848, Liverpool in 1880, Blackburn in 1926. The Coats of Arms of the first three Dioceses form the School Badge, and the Bishops of the four Dioceses are Patron Bishops of the School. The present Chairman of Governors is the Bishop of Warrington (a Suffragan of Liverpool). In 1904 Darley Dale was in the Diocese of Southwell, but became a part of the Diocese of Derby when it was created in 1927. The present Bishop of Derby is a member of the Governing Body and as Diocesan Bishop licences the Chaplain.

The Revd. H. Powys, the School Founder, was consecrated Bishop of Sodor and Man in 1854, and by a strange coincidence one hundred years later, in 1954, the present Head's uncle was appointed Bishop of the same Diocese.

For many years the School was served by priests who visited the School as Chaplain, and their pastoral care was supplemented by Clergy fathers and by priests from the Society of the Sacred Mission, Kelham, and from the Community of the Resurrection, Mirfield. In 1965 the first residential Chaplain was appointed to the pastoral care of the School Community.

St. Elphin's is quite clearly an Anglican School, and although there are always a few Roman Catholics and members of the Free Churches most of the girls are Anglicans. On Sundays all Boarders attend Holy Communion at 11.00 a.m. (ASB Rite A). Each weekday the girls and Staff attend a short act of worship at the beginning of the day. There is always at least one midweek Eucharist - attendance is voluntary, and the major Holy Days are observed by either a Sung Eucharist or a Festal Evensong.

The girls are invited to participate in the Services by reading Lessons, leading the Intercessions, taking up the Offertory, etc. Senior girls volunteer to work as Sacristans, who prepare the Chapel for Services, and there is also a loyal band of Servers - these girls form the Chapel Guild.

There are two Chapel Choirs, one to lead the worship at the weekday Services and a Boarders' Choir which sings on Sundays. Membership of Chapel Choirs is seen as an act of Christian commitment and the girls are presented by the Choirmaster to the Chaplain for admission from whom they receive their R.S.C.M. badge and Certificate of Membership.

The Social Services Committee organizes the raising of money for charity each year, arranges for the distribution of Harvest goods and also provides a Christmas tea and Carols for the elderly.

At the beginning of each School year girls are invited to join preparation classes leading to Baptism/Confirmation. The age range is between 12 years and 18 years, and the Chaplain, having obtained parents' permission, writes to all the Parish Clergy so they are kept in touch and can visit the girls in the holidays. The Confirmation Service is held in the School Chapel before Easter.

The Chapel is open each day and girls are encouraged to use it for private prayer or as a place for quiet recollection.

The Chaplain has an Office within the Main School and is always available to see any girl who may wish to discuss any matter in confidence.

May the Lord of his great mercy bless you, and give you understanding of his wisdom and grace;

May He nourish you with the riches of the Catholic Faith, and make you persevere in all good work;

May He keep your steps from wandering, and direct you into the paths of love and peace.

Southwark Diocese