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# Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society

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(incorporating the Cambs and Hunts Archaeological  
Society)

Volume LXXXIII

for 1994



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Volume LXXXIII

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Published by the Cambridge Antiquarian Society 1995

ISSN 0309-3606

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## EDITORIAL

This volume of the *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society* is the first by a new editor. I would like to thank, both the previous editor, Sarah Bendall, and the present officers and council members for their support and assistance.

Alert readers will observe that the style has been changed somewhat to simplify it and to bring it in line with the more usual modern practice,

This volume is predominantly archaeological. It is my hope that forthcoming volumes will also include papers of wider interest. I encourage our members — and others interested in Cambridgeshire — to submit papers with the kind of material they would like to read.

### **THE LIBRARY**

Members of the C.A.S. are reminded that, by agreement with the University of Cambridge, they are entitled to read in the Haddon Library, Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology, Downing St. The Library holds a large number of British and foreign serials exchanged for the *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, together with a wide range of archaeological and topographical books. Intending readers should apply to the Faculty Librarian, Mr Aidan Baker, and for access to, or information about, specialised collections to the Society's Librarian Dr J.D. Pickles, The Old Schools, Trinity Lane.

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# The East End of King's College Chapel

Graham Chainey

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## The Founder's Intent

Henry VI's 'Will' of 1448 required the high altar of King's College Chapel to be raised 3 foot above the level of the choir floor, which was to be raised 1 foot 6 inches above that of the antechapel, which was to be 4 foot 'above the grounds without'. A step known as the *gradus chori* was to cross the choir immediately east of the stalls.<sup>1</sup> Allowing 6 inches per step, these measurements suggest an intended arrangement of eight steps at the Chapel's western entrances, three at the choir entrance, and then, after the *gradus chori*, five altar steps.

As built, the Chapel has between five and seven steps at its western entrances and two at the choir entrance; but the sills of the turret doorways at the east end are about the required 3 feet above the choir floor. As Sir G.G. Scott noted in 1866, the ashlar facing of the east wall and the side walls in the eastern bay commences at the same raised level, 'drops a little [equivalent to one step] at the termination of the bay, and again, in a greater degree [equivalent to four steps], at about six feet further to the westward, and thence it coincides in level with the present pavement,'<sup>2</sup> indicating clearly the intention for a raised altar. These details were again revealed when the floor was taken up in 1968, the base courses of the walls being shown to be of brown oolitic limestone from Northamptonshire, by contrast with the finer white Yorkshire stone of the ashlar.<sup>3</sup>

The high altar's intended location was not specified in the Will, but verses commemorating the laying of the Chapel's foundation stone in 1446 record that the stone, intended to lie beneath the high altar, was placed 14 feet from the east wall.<sup>4</sup> At the sister foundation at Eton, the Will required the high altar, 12 feet long by 5 feet wide, to stand 8 feet from the east wall, approached by six steps including the *gradus chori*, each 6 inches deep.<sup>5</sup> Henry later increased the Eton altar to 18 feet by 4 feet 6 inches, with an image of the Virgin to its right, one of St Nicholas to its left, and a depiction of Christ and his Apostles set into a 2-foot-thick reredos. In the space behind the high altar, directly under the east window, was to be another altar, 9 feet by 3 feet, below an image of the Virgin and Child.<sup>6</sup> A similar arrangement was probably intended for King's.

The plain wall surfaces below window level at the Chapel's east end suggest that hangings, panelling or wall-painting (as in the choir at Eton) were intended. The college's temporary chapel, built 1444–5, had cloth-of-gold hangings on its walls, altar-frontals embroidered with *Dieu et Mon Droit*, a 'costly canopy of red cloth of bawdkin with greyhounds and hinds of gold' over its high altar, and curtains beside and a large Turkey carpet before the altar.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> M.R. James & J.W. Clark, *The Will of King Henry the Sixth* (Cambridge 1896) pp. 7–8.

<sup>2</sup> T.J.P. Carter, *King's College Chapel: Notes on its History and Present Condition* (London 1867) pp. 82–3.

<sup>3</sup> Francis Woodman, *The Architectural History of King's College Chapel* (London 1986) p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> R. Willis & J.W. Clark, *The Architectural History of the University of Cambridge* vol. 1 (Cambridge 1886) p. 465.

<sup>5</sup> James & Clark, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Carter, *op.cit.*, pp. 78–9n.

<sup>7</sup> William St John Hope, 'King's inventory', MS, King's College (hereafter KC) library. Quotations from the muniments and modern archives by permission of the Provost and Scholars of King's College, Cambridge.

### The Tudor High Altar

The steps and levels required by the founder and prepared for by his builders were not necessarily installed by those who completed the Chapel a century later, nor did an altar necessarily ever stand above his foundation stone.

An estimate of outstanding work on the Chapel, presented to Henry VIII sometime after 1515, put the cost of stone and workmanship for the proposed high altar at a modest £5, with £2 each for sixteen subsidiary altars.<sup>8</sup> The collapse in 1536–7 of the college's temporary chapel must have led to the premature use for worship of the new building, though its inauguration is not recorded. The stalls were probably not ready before 1538, the east window was installed in 1540, with glazing continuing until Henry's death in 1547 and paviors still at work in the first year of Edward VI.

The first record of any altar occurs in 1544–5; it was made in London, apparently by one of the king's foreign craftsmen. Lyne (probably Richard Lyne, fellow of King's 1529–47) paid 2s 10d for its carriage from the house of 'Master Butt' (the royal physician Sir William Butts, an active mediator between the king and the university and probably influential in bringing about the Chapel's completion) to the Gardrobe (the provost's town house on the Thames near Baynard's Castle) and thence to Bishopsgate. Carriage from Bishopsgate to Cambridge cost 6s 8d in addition to 20s paid *per* Dr Butts. 'Master Antonio' was paid 8s for carving or engraving ('celatura') four images, 8s for '100 double gold', 5s for carving or engraving one column, and 26s for his work 'from London to Cambridge'. Someone called Kelley (probably a local artisan) received 10s 4d for gilding the four images.<sup>9</sup> Antonio may have been Antonio del Nunziato, known as Antony Toto (1499–c. 1554), the Florentine artist brought to England by Pietro Torrigiano in 1519 to help with the high altar and other works in Henry VII's Chapel at Westminster Abbey; after subsequently perhaps working for Wolsey, he entered the king's service in 1530. Primarily a painter (king's sergeant-painter from 1544), Toto at least once, in 1533,

is described as 'graver' or carver.<sup>10</sup>

The new altar probably resembled that in Henry VII's Chapel, though it cannot have been so grand. The Westminster altar (destroyed 1643; now replaced by a replica) had a marble baldacchino over it supported on freestanding corner pillars of gilt bronze, with a royal coat of arms above the centre of the baldacchino and over each corner a terracotta kneeling angel holding an emblem of the Passion. The altar stone was of black marble, the altarpiece a bas-relief in gilt bronze depicting the Resurrection on its west side, the Nativity on its east. Although of the finest workmanship (Henry VII's executors advanced £1000 for it), Torrigiano's altar was a modest 9 feet in total width, 9 feet high to the cornice, with the angel figures 2 feet higher.<sup>11</sup> The four images Antonio carved for King's may have been similar angel figures above a baldacchino.

At Trinity College chapel, a building in many details designed in imitation of that at King's, the original high altar stood in the third bay from the east;<sup>12</sup> and this is probably where Antonio's altar was placed at King's, especially as later evidence shows the eastern two bays were left unpaved.

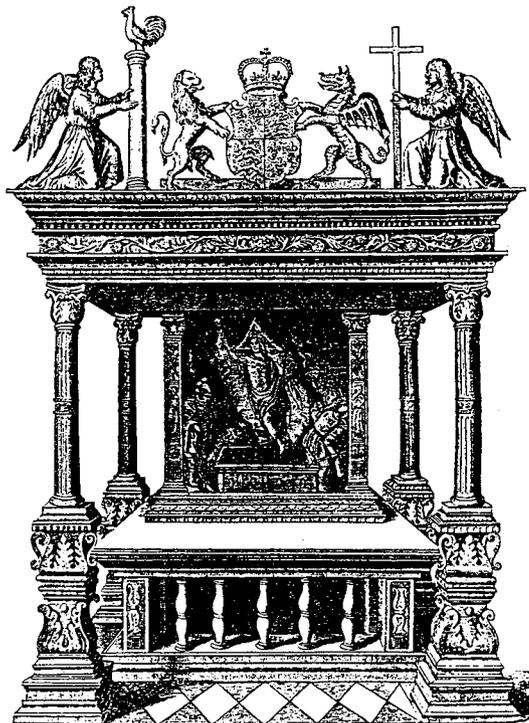


Figure 1. Torrigiano's high altar at Henry VII's Chapel, Westminster. (From Sandford, *Genealogical History of the Kings of England*, 1683)

<sup>8</sup> Willis & Clark, *op.cit.*, vol. 1 p. 482.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 523.

<sup>10</sup> R.W. Carden, 'The Italian artists in England during the sixteenth century', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries* 24 (1912) pp. 179–85.

<sup>11</sup> Alfred Higgins, 'On the work of the Florentine sculptors in England in the early part of the sixteenth century', *Archaeological Journal* 51 (1894) pp. 145–50, plates I & II. A similar altar was designed for Henry VIII's chantry-tomb at Windsor.

<sup>12</sup> Willis & Clark, *op.cit.*, vol. 2 p. 574.

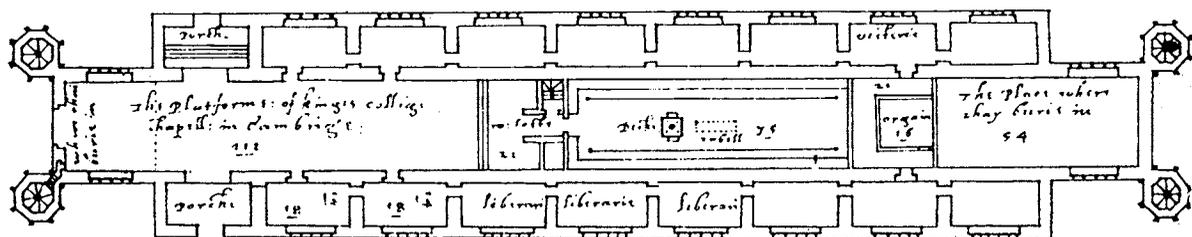


Figure 2. Robert Smythson: plan of King's College Chapel, c. 1609. (Royal Institute of British Architects)

### Protestant and Catholic

Antonio's altar did not survive long under the strongly protestant Edward VI: on 11 April 1549 the college paid 16d for its removal. On 6 May, however, during a visitation to reform the university's statutes, when everyone took an oath at King's 'for the abolishment of the Bishop of Rome and for the supremacy of the king's majesty', the visitors sat 'in the choir before the altar, against the vestry door'. Altars were not officially banned until November 1550.<sup>13</sup>

In 1553 with the return to Catholicism under Mary, a Romanist provost, Atkinson, was appointed, and on 28 October 'the whole Popish service, in Latin, was celebrated in King's College, by some zealous men of the house, though contrary to the laws then in force'.<sup>14</sup> The college purchased antiphons, gradals, psalters and a missal. On 16 December 1556 the Vice-Chancellor, Andrew Perne of Peterhouse, 'went to Dr Blythe's and bought tables that were the King's College altar'.<sup>15</sup> John Blythe was fellow of King's and Regius Professor of Physic; 'table' may mean altar-table, retable, decorative al-

tar-front, or picture.<sup>16</sup> Perne's purchase was presumably in preparation for the Marian visitation of the university a few weeks later (on 21 December he spent £15 on velvet suits and altar cloths); Great St Mary's being under interdiction and all university services during the visitation being held at King's, the altar was presumably restored. On 14 January 1557, during the visitation, the visitors said their prayers at the choir steps before entering the stalls; after mass 'they went up *ad gradum chori* to sit 'in places and seats appointed', and later 'went up to the altar and took down the Sacrament and searched the pix', before inspecting plate, vestments, and mass books in the side-chapels.<sup>17</sup>

### Puritanism

Provost Brassie, who died in 1558, left £10 'to be bestowed ... upon paving about the high altar';<sup>18</sup> but Mary died a week later and soon afterwards 8d was spent 'for destroying the high altars'. In 1561 1s was spent on a table of the ten commandments to be hung over what was still, however, referred to as the high altar. In

<sup>13</sup> John Lamb, *A Collection of Letters, Statutes and other Documents ... Illustrative of the History of the University of Cambridge during the Period of the Reformation* (London 1838) p. 109. Six altars were dismantled at Jesus in 1549, three at Queens; Great St Mary's lost its high altar and five side altars in 1550; the high altar at Christ's went in 1551. There was a general whitewashing of walls and storing or selling of plate and vestments. At King's many vestments were converted into theatrical costumes.

<sup>14</sup> John Strype, *Ecclesiastical Memorials* vol. 3 (1822). In fact, both Catholic and reformed forms of service appear to have been lawful between 24 October and 20 December 1553.

<sup>15</sup> Lamb, *op.cit.*, p. 193.

<sup>16</sup> J.H. Parker, *A Concise Glossary of Architectural Terms* (Oxford 1896) p. 276. Antony Toto was paid in 1530 for '5 tables standing in the king's library' and '4 great tables', in 1538 for a 'depicted table of Calomiae', in 1541 for a 'table of the story of King Alexander', all apparently paintings. - A.E. Popham, 'Hans Holbein's Italian contemporaries in England', *Burlington Magazine* 84 (1944) p. 13.

<sup>17</sup> Lamb, *op.cit.*, pp. 202-3. The visitation is satirised in Arthur Golding, *A Brief Treatise Concerning The Burning of Bucer and Phagius* (1562).

<sup>18</sup> KC muniments, ledger book, vol. 1 f. 414.

1564, the year Queen Elizabeth I visited Cambridge, Stephen Walls, who built the original choir stalls at Trinity, was paid 30s 'for the communion table' and 18d for two cushions for it.

For the queen's visit, the sanctuary was 'hanged with fine tapestry, or arras of the queen's, from the north vestry door, round by the communion table, unto the south vestry door; and all that place strawed with rushes. The communion table and pulpit hanged richly.' A traverse or screened compartment of crimson velvet for the queen was placed 'upon the south side, about the middle between the vestry door and the communion table (which stood north and south)'.<sup>19</sup> This leaves open whether table, traverse and door were aligned laterally, all in the third bay, with the table on the site of the high altar, or longitudinally, with the table further east. If the arras was not hung along the east wall, some kind of altar-screen must have existed behind the table to support it. Organs were played, though their position is not given.<sup>20</sup> The pulpit stood opposite the traverse.<sup>21</sup>

In 1566 repairs were made 'where the altars stood' and the next year 4s was paid 'for new cresting and joining the communion table'. In 1570, following the appointment of puritan Provost Goad, workmen removed 'the partition', perhaps an altar-screen; the organs were dismantled and sold. A cloth for the table, made in 1572 from 8 yards of Holland, cost £1 19s 4d. In 1575 there is a reference to the '*mensam sitam in choro*', suggesting the table now stood in the choir proper. A new cloth for the table, made in 1603 from 'Kent canvas', cost 4s 8d. In 1610 6s 8d was paid for 'a new wicker under the communion table' and in 1616 18s for 2 ft 3 in of green velvet for it. Sumptuously endowed with plate in its earliest years, the Chapel now possessed a single communion cup and flagon. A Venetian visitor in 1618 lamented: 'The

church is all bare, so that pondering this impiety, my eyes filled with tears when I thought of the destruction of the altars'.<sup>22</sup>

A plan of the Chapel made c. 1609 by Robert Smythson shows the arrangement near the end of Goad's rule.<sup>23</sup> The lectern stood in the middle of the choir, with the communion table lengthwise immediately to its east. The *gradus chori* is shown, and in the third bay from the east what appears to be a platform or raised step, 16 feet square, labelled 'organ'. This may be the original altar step; the organ that now stood on it must have been the two-manual instrument installed in the Chapel, after thirty-five years without any organ, by Thomas Dallam in 1605–6. The eastern side of the platform is extended across the width of the Chapel, perhaps representing another step or steps<sup>24</sup> leading up into the eastern two bays, which are marked 'the place where they bury in'. These eastern bays, which had probably never yet been used liturgically, apparently remained unpaved. They were tiled with 2500 white tiles in 1611–12.

### Burials

No details are recoverable of those buried at the east end prior to Smythson's plan.<sup>25</sup> At least twenty-six, however, are recoverable between that date and 1774, after when all burials took place in a new vault at the Chapel's west end.<sup>26</sup> William Cole recorded in 1742 that the east end was 'peculiarly appropriated for the interment of the senior fellows, as the antechapel is for that of the juniors, the choir not being suffered to be broke open by reason of the curious marble floor'.<sup>27</sup>

Cole's antiquarian collections yield twenty east-end burials: Henry Banister, vice-provost (d. 1617 aged 57); Arthur Johnson, vice-provost and proctor (d. 1621); Ralph Flood (d. 1624, 'drowned at Hell Mouth endeavouring to save another person who was in danger; his death was much lamented, being a very excellent

<sup>19</sup> 'Generally speaking, the communion tables at this time were placed east and west, but in cathedrals and collegiate churches the original position was adhered to.' - Carter, *op.cit.*, p. 59n.

<sup>20</sup> The organs were probably built by John Howe, who repaired them 'according to his obligation' in 1533. A great organ may have stood on the screen and a portable organ in the choir. In 1562 William Randall from Norfolk was paid 'for mending the less organs'.

<sup>21</sup> John Nichols, *Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth* (1788). A new pulpit was acquired for £1 in 1571; it was provided with a sounding-board in 1588 and a water-clock in 1590 (replaced by an hourglass in 1600). A purple velvet cushion was provided. This pulpit was replaced in 1853 by the Latimer pulpit from St Edward's church.

<sup>22</sup> Horatio Busino, in *Calendar of State Papers: Venetian 1617–1619* (London 1909) p. 248.

<sup>23</sup> Royal Institute of British Architects drawings collection, Smythson No.1/4 (1).

<sup>24</sup> RCHME *Cambridge* (1959: 115), however, interprets it as an altar-screen.

<sup>25</sup> Except possibly Richard Stevyns, vice-provost (d. 1505), buried 'in the choir'.

<sup>26</sup> Altogether, about 117 names are recoverable of those buried in various parts of the Chapel between 1458 and 1888, of whom 13 were buried after 1774 in the antechapel vault.

<sup>27</sup> British Library (hereafter BL) Add MS 5802 f.100.

scholar'); Edmund Sheafe (d. 1625 aged 27); Oliver Leigh, bursar (d. 1627); Martin Freeman, who in 1624 had 'answered the philosophy act before King James, Prince Charles and the two French ambassadors' (d. 1630: monument in a side-chapel); Wimond Carew, son of Richard Carew, author of the *Survey of Cornwall* (d. 1631 aged 25, 'a young man of exceeding great hopes and as great honesty'); Ralph Winterton, Regius Professor of Physic, translator and editor, of whose edition of Hippocrates it is said that 'no medical work at Cambridge has ever received so high a degree of academical commendation'<sup>28</sup> (d. 1636 aged 36); William Mendham, chaplain (d. 1640), 'on the south side of the altar'; Richard Johnson, bursar (d. 1650 'suddenly of grief', being accused of a felony by two other members of the college); John Waller, brother of the poet Edmund Waller (d. 1651 aged 35 'of convulsion fits'), 'next to Richard Johnson'; Osbert Fowler, college registrar (d. 1658), 'just above the steps' of the south side-chapel entrance; Simeon Sampson (d. 1658 of smallpox); Richard Day, nephew of Bishop Day of Chichester (d. 1658); John Pradman (d. 1666); John Hawtrey (d. 1673 aged 19), 'between the altar-rails and the south wall' (his tomb slab, paid for by his parents, was removed at the 1702 repaving and is now in a side-chapel); Middleton Lanoy (d. 1676); George Goad (d. 1678); John Gerard, senior fellow (d. 1690 aged 58), 'behind the altar on the south side' (his slab, removed in 1774, is now in a side-chapel); and Michael Mills, tutor of the college 'and very learned' (d. 1696 of smallpox).<sup>29</sup>

The extant Chapel register, begun 1707, records six further burials 'behind the altar': Thomas Traheron, master of the choir school (d. 1710 of smallpox); John Cleaver (d. 1716); Francis Dodsworth (d. 1726); Edward Wells, senior fellow (d. 1727), 'on the north side in the void space behind the altar'; Berkley Seymour, proctor and senior fellow (d. 1744 aged 58) at whose funeral Cole was present, recording that he was buried in a lead coffin with inscribed plate about 7 feet behind the altar-screen, near its north door;<sup>30</sup> and John Showell, vice-provost and dean (d. 1748).

As the location of burial is far from always given by either Cole or the register, and as

information for early burials is scant, the total at the east end may well have exceeded fifty.

### Laudism

Forty years of autocratic puritanism ended with Provost Goad's death in 1610. The organ was probably transferred from the east end to the roodloft in 1613.<sup>31</sup> In 1625 incense was used on a day of fasting; in 1628 a velvet cushion was donated for the communion table; in 1629 a purple velvet communion cloth with silk and gold fringes was bought for £27 6s 8d, partly paid out of donations; in 1630 another velvet cushion was donated and 6d paid for 'perfuming' the Chapel; by the same year a litany table had been installed. The bare choir walls behind the stalls received their present heraldic carved panelling in 1629–33 at the expense of Thomas Weaver.

In 1633, the year William Laud became Archbishop of Canterbury, a major rearrangement of the east end took place. Woodruffe,<sup>32</sup> the carver who in 1636 provided the gates at the choir entry, installed an altar-screen between the first piers from the east at a cost of £100, excluding £30 for floor and altar-rails. Removal of the table to the east end was by royal injunction.<sup>33</sup> New cloths for the table, costing £60, were bought in London; £50 13s 4d was spent 'pro le bason'; £2 4s 6d was spent on two books 'in quires' for the holy table, £23 4s for 'clasps and bosses' for them, and £1 13s for their covers. Tomson and Brent, freemasons, repaired 'les steps in orientali parte'. In 1635 £73 7s 6d was spent on damask for the east end, Tolly the upholsterer receiving a further £7 for making 'les hangings et footstools' and Woodruffe 2s 'for setting up les hangings'. At Michaelmas 1636 5s was paid for '6 tin candlesticks in usum altaris'. In 1637 and 1638 there are further references to incense, and the use of candles seems to have been stepped up; in 1639 6s was spent on '2 great tapers pro le communion table'. Very likely the walls between the stalls and the new altar-screen, as well as the reredos and altar itself, were hung with tapestries. Hooks

<sup>28</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>29</sup> BL Add MSS 5813, 5815, 5816, 5817, 5954.

<sup>30</sup> BL Add MS 5802 f.98. 'On digging Mr Seymour's grave, the Chapel clerk light upon Mr Dodsworth's coffin, which had not been buried 20 years, so that it was too fresh, and so a new grave was made at his feet.'

<sup>31</sup> At any rate, Dallam returned for eight weeks and although the nature of his work is not stated, the length of stay suggests the removal was made then.

<sup>32</sup> Probably Edward, rather than his son George, though both were active in the 1630s.

<sup>33</sup> A report on the Cambridge colleges sent to Laud in 1636 complained that at Corpus Christi 'the table, notwithstanding the king's pleasure declared for all colleges when himself ordered it to be set up at King's, stands still below as it did'.

remained on the choir walls until 1968.<sup>34</sup>

A puritan report compiled early in 1641 records the Laudian decoration of Cambridge chapels. The most elaborate, at Peterhouse, 'hath become the gaze of the university and a great invitation to strangers'. At St John's a series of large framed paintings depicting Christ's life adorned the walls. At Trinity, adornments allegedly costing £1000 included a similar series of pictures 'drawn upon blue kersey, this stained cloth being raised very high and flagging three sides of the chapel'. At King's the authors found:

An high altar with steps which have been erected of late years upon which the college hath been at great expense. Over the altar is an hanging canopy of wood. Behind the altar are hangings of red and blue taffety. The altar hath two or three coverings, one to the ground, a foot pace. On the altar stand two fair books richly embossed, one the Bible, the other the liturgy. A gilt basin on the altar. Two gilt candlesticks and two tapers which they sometimes light; sometimes four tapers burning upon the altar. A rail enclosing the altar. Turnings towards the east. Adoration towards the altar used by some. The service is sung with the organ on holy days, confession, prayers, creed etc., and cathedral service on other days with choristers and singing men at eight of the clock in the morning and at four at night; this hath been used of old. A litany desk below the high altar, at which they kneel that sing the litany with their faces towards the east. Many things in their service not easily understood. [Added] The Master of this college, Dr Collins, hath since this information was drawn removed the altar and placed it tablewise within the rails, taking away the candlesticks and basin. He hath likewise prohibited adoration towards the east and standing that way at the doxology and creed.<sup>35</sup>

### Civil War and Commonwealth

In September 1641 parliament ordered the university authorities to remove communion tables from the east end of chapels, to take away altar-rails, crosses, candlesticks and other such furnishings, and to level their chancel floors. Trinity duly removed its hangings and altar-rails; the master's wife hid the high altar. At

Jesus during the levelling of the chancel the medieval stone coffin lid of Berta Rosata which now lies in a transept was disinterred, suggesting the removed steps were ancient, not Laudian. At Great St Mary's the altar rails were removed, the chancel levelled. There is no record of alterations at King's.

Parliament's ordinance of 28 August 1643 required the demolition before 1 November in all churches of altars and stone tables, the removal of altar-rails, the levelling of any chancel 'which hath been within twenty years last past raised for any altar or communion table to stand upon', the removal from communion tables of all tapers, candlesticks and basins, and the removal from churches of crucifixes and images of members of the Trinity, the Virgin Mary, or saints. A further ordinance of 9 May 1644 required the demolition of organs and abolished the use of vestments, roods and fons.<sup>36</sup> William Dowsing, empowered to enforce the ordinances in the eastern counties, descended on Cambridge in December 1643. On Boxing Day he visited Pembroke and Queens' (where 'we digged up the steps for 3 hours') before arriving at King's, where he noted 'Steps to be taken & 1 thousand Superstitious Pictures ... to goe',<sup>37</sup> implying the levelling of the Laudian altar steps and the destruction of the stained glass. The hangings were doubtless removed; the organ was certainly dismantled. The 'Chapel ornaments' were preserved in the keeping of the Chapel clerk, Jonathan Pyndar; in 1652 they were sent to London. George Woodruffe in 1652 was paid £1 10s for work, probably repairs, about the altar-screen, requiring nails, iron and glue; Thomas Parker received £12 7s 6d for 400 paving tiles, perhaps to make good removed steps.

### 'Decent, though not grand'

Readornment of the Chapel followed Charles II's restoration. The carver Cornelius Austin received 12s in 1660 for repairing damaged woodwork in the choir. In 1661 nineteen English Liturgy books and a two-volume Bible were bought. In 1662 fresh hangings were purchased: 38 yards of damask cost £47 7s, 32 ounces of silk fringe cost £3 9s 6d, and 32 yards of dyed lining material cost £1 6s 6d. Austin was paid £24 12s for repairing the altar and apparently laid a new floor of black and white

<sup>34</sup> Graffiti, exposed on the sanctuary walls in 1964, were perhaps perpetrated behind hangings, or in the eastern bays when they were unused. An Elizabethan round of music has apparently now faded, as has the date '29 April 1524' claimed by Nigel Pennick, *The Mysteries of King's College Chapel* (Wellingborough 1978) p. 69.

<sup>35</sup> 'Innovations in religion and abuses in government in the University of Cambridge', BL MS Harleian 7019 No. 11. These complaints about 'high' practices contrast with those in the report made to Laud only five years earlier, when the furnishings at Trinity were described as mean, the table cloth 'not worth 14d', while at King's 'some of the choirmen cannot sing ... the choristers are near one half of them mutes ... they commonly post over their service and perform it with little reverence'.

<sup>36</sup> Henry Scobell, *A Collection of Acts and Ordinances* (1658) pp. 53-4, 69-70.

<sup>37</sup> A.C. Moule (ed.), *The Cambridge Journal of William Dowsing* (1926) p. 6.

marble within the altar rails, at the expense of Meric Head, MA of the college.<sup>38</sup> A Bible and a book of the new liturgy, sumptuously bound, were purchased for the altar. Cushions, hangings, candlesticks (1665) and other ornaments were provided. The litany desk was provided with a step in 1664 and a stool in 1673. Payments for incense are recorded in 1666, 1669, 1670 and 1674. In 1668 John Wardell provided the lectern with candleholders, and Provost Page donated a magnificent dish and two great silver candlesticks for the altar. Seven yards of purple altar cloth were bought in 1674. Having installed canopies over the stalls in 1675–8, Cornelius Austin panelled the walls between the ends of the stalls and the altar-screen in similar style in 1678–9 at a cost of £115, raised by subscription; the arms of Provosts Page and Collins and of Thomas Crouch, among others, appeared over the work. The choir as far as the altar was repaved in 1702 with black and white marble, at a cost of £300. Further silks and hangings were bought in 1704 and 1705.

Loggan's interior view of the Chapel (1690) provides the first pictorial glimpse of the east end, showing an altar with two large candlesticks on it, balustered altar-rails in front, a panelled screen behind with a carved frieze along its top, and the lower part of a canopy over the altar, probably supported on brackets. Cole (1742) describes the arrangement:

The high altar is not erected immediately under the east wall or window, but at a pretty distance from it, against a fine wainscot screen for that purpose which runs quite across the Chapel from the division of the first and second window, which has a kind of canopy over it adorned with fine carved work; and in the middle directly over the altar are the arms of the college royally crowned, and on either side of it four fleurs-de-lis de Florence crowned also. On each side of the rails is a door finely carved to enter the aforesaid void space [the eastern bay]; and over the south one are the arms of King [Charles] the First ... Over the [north] door are the arms of King Henry VI crowned, and supported by two antelopes. These are elegantly carved as is all what is about the screen of the altar. Under both these arms on the doors is carved H.R. with portcullises etc.<sup>39</sup> The back of the altar is hung with a rich silk damask of purple and crimson, with a fringe of the same quite as far as the rails reach. The furniture of the altar is of the same stuff, viz: covering, cushions, and large kneeling stools on both side; though it is always covered again with a fine white damask linen cloth. On an eminence on the altar against the screen, which is also covered like the altar itself, stands the noble embossed silver dish given by Sir Thomas Page, and which has the representation on it curiously wrought of the Lord's Supper, and on each side of it stand the two magnificent silver

candlesticks<sup>40</sup> given by the same person also, as was the small filigree worked silver paten which stands under the aforesaid dish, on the altar ... A fine purple silk elbow chair stands on the north side of the altar for the Provost when he officiates. The silver gilt hasps for the two large books on the altar, and which are bound in crimson velvet, have on them crowns and sceptres, and harps and thistles crowned. The altar stands on an eminence of one step above the rest all round, and railed in about it with neat wainscot rails, and round them on the outside, blue cloth cushions to kneel on ... The sides of the Chapel from this screen to the stalls on either side are elegantly wainscotted ... At a good distance from the eminence or first step on which the altar stands are three others.

Cole mentions the *gradus chori* 'exactly at the foot of the stalls' and records that the choir 'is entirely paved very beautifully ... quite to the screen of the altar with black and white marble squares in a regular figure'.<sup>41</sup> According to later writers, the 'void space' behind the altar-screen was used not only for burials but as a vestry.<sup>42</sup>

The antiquary Jeremiah Milles (1735) censured: 'What takes off very much from the beauty of the Chapel is the meanness of the altarpiece, which does not at all suit with the rest of the building. It is not quite at the east end of the Chapel, and is only a little wooden screen with two or three strips of silk put upon it.'<sup>43</sup> The first guidebook to the Chapel called the altarpiece 'decent, though not grand' and scheduled for replacement by 'a more noble one'.<sup>44</sup> Yet the magnificence of Woodruffe's matching choir gates, and Cole's description, suggest it was of no mean interest.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Stolen 1749; replaced 1750 by replicas 'made as near as could be to the pattern of the old', costing £93; stolen again 1817.

<sup>41</sup> BL Add MS 5802 ff.101–3.

<sup>42</sup> Francis Blomefield, *Collectanea Cantabrigensia* (1750) p.128; James Cook, *An Historical and Descriptive Account of King's College Chapel, Cambridge* (1829) p. 6; J.J. Smith (ed.), *The Cambridge Portfolio* (1840) p. 435.

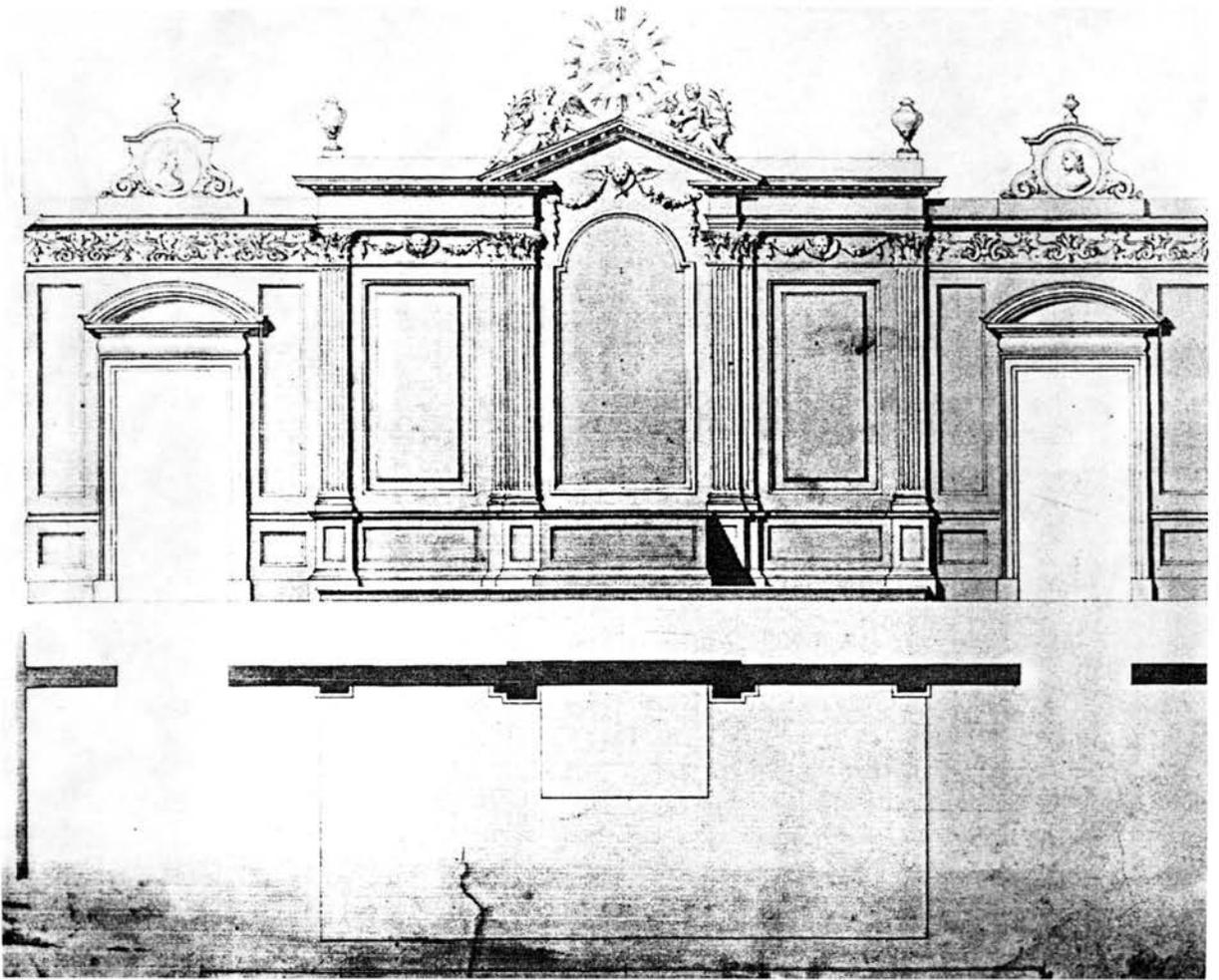
<sup>43</sup> 'Diary of a journey through England', BL Add MS 15,776 f.30.

<sup>44</sup> Henry Malden, *An Account of King's College Chapel in Cambridge* (1769) p.39.

<sup>45</sup> The altar-rails ('a seventeenth-century chinoiserie, almost' - Pevsner) survive at Milton, Cole's village. 'In 1774 I spoke to the provost [Cooke] and told him that he could not [better] dispose of part of the old altarpiece at King's College, which was lately taken down for a new one, than to give it to this dirty church of their patronage. He went into the church and said it was so squalid that unless the parish would do somewhat the altar part would make it look worse. However, part of the old rails were sent there and are now [1774] put up, and had it been the turn of the incumbent, I am confident a great part of the wainscot might have been procured; but the pomposity of Mr Naylor [the rector] was not gratified in the furniture of his church.' - BL Add MS 5807 f.2v.

<sup>38</sup> Cole, BL Add MS 5817 f.6.

<sup>39</sup> 'H.R.' similarly appears on the great west door (1615) and the choir gates (1636): Pevsner calls the gates 'an extremely early case of period imitation'.



**Figure 3.** James Gibbs: design for an altarpiece, 1724–7. (Victoria and Albert Museum)

### Gibbs, Burrough, Adam

Plans to replace the reredos originated in 1706 when Provost Roderick gave £150 'towards making a new altar'. William Fleetwood, Bishop of Ely, gave £21 10s in 1716; Roderick's widow bequeathed £50 in 1733. The fund looked to be greatly augmented in 1729 when John Hungerford, fellow, bequeathed two-thirds of his considerable estate to the college, to be paid after his widow's death and employed as his friend Provost Snape thought best. In 1742, shortly before his own death, Snape directed that, when received, enough of the money should go into the altarpiece fund to raise it to £1000. The inheritance was not received until 1759.

Meanwhile the college had apparently asked James Gibbs (1682–1754), while designing new buildings for them, to include a reredos: his plan for the completed college, published 1728,

presumably indicates his proposals. This shows an altar-screen, still between the first piers from the east and with entrances into the vacant bay beyond, but with six columns — a large one on either side of the altar with smaller flanking ones, probably to support a large baldacchino. The altar is shown raised on three altar steps and three more steps are marked between the second pair of piers though, curiously, not quite traversing the Chapel's width, the raised level of the fellows' stalls being prolonged eastwards along the side walls to meet them. Neither the *gradus chori* nor the two steps at the choir entrance are marked. An elevation and plan for an alternative altarpiece by Gibbs also survive. This depicts a relatively plain panelled screen with flanking doorways, with a decorative frieze along the cornice and ornamental angels and portrait medallions on the top. The altar is raised on one step. But at the time all available

funds were needed to complete the Fellows' Building.<sup>46</sup>

When funds became available in 1759, Sir James Burrough (1691–1764), Master of Caius and amateur architect, submitted two designs, one classical in wood, the other Gothic in stone. 'Both these, as it was to be a work of public view, and of lasting use, Mr Upton [fellow], as was thought advisable, took with him to London, for the opinions of those who might be competent judges in such a matter'. Burrough's estimate for the second scheme speaks of lowering the floor 'from the library [south side-chapel] door to the new steps', of a new marble pavement costing £120, of 31 'panels of wall-work' costing £295, and of four 'towers and turrets [based on the Chapel's corner turrets]' costing £165. The total cost would have been £718. Upton reported from London on 6 March 1759 that everyone favoured Gothic and stone; James 'Athenian' Stuart was 'particularly of this opinion, which I mention the rather as he is well known to disapprove entirely of the present fashionable taste of Gothic architecture'. But the design should be plain and simple, avoiding 'all gilding and finery, which everybody condemns. This I thought proper to take notice of, particularly as Mr Burrough proposed, if I remember right, to have a great deal of gilding in his Gothic plan.' In fact 'among the several gentlemen and artists whom I have talked with and showed it to' Upton found none who entirely approved of Burrough's plan.

Burrough being dropped, nothing was done until James Essex (1722–84), his former assistant and 'the person who actually drew the plan, under the direction of Sir James', and lately designer of an altarpiece for Lincoln Cathedral (still extant), was invited to submit a design. This was considered in November 1767 but at £1550 was twice as expensive as Burrough's original. At Christmas, therefore, Richard Pottenger, fellow, approached the classical architect James Adam (1734–94) who proved, he reported, 'very ready and well-pleased to undertake the plan, which, I dare say, he will do with taste, and in a manner suitable to the grandeur of our Chapel'.<sup>47</sup>

Adam arrived in March 1768 to measure up but his design, not received until early 1769, proved classical and included an arrogantly

towering central pediment which would have obscured the east window. Asked to resubmit, he rapidly produced an alternative design. 'There is no stopping the imagination of these *virtuosi*, especially when fired with so noble a subject', Pottenger enthused, forwarding the plans, and hoping the college would agree to go beyond the £1000 limit (Adam's estimate was £1097). But the new design, in wood painted to resemble stone and in frightful Gothick, would still have obscured the window. Adam defended it 'by saying that the pinnacles and battlements are to be in open work, and that the appearance of the painted glass through the interstices will have no bad effect' but the college was unimpressed.<sup>48</sup>

### Gothick Triumphant

The college returned to James Essex who, unlike the other three architects, was an enthusiast of Gothic, having restored Ely Cathedral and made a particular study of the Chapel during repairs. In 1770 he submitted three estimates for what was a modified version of Burrough's scheme. The most expensive, using the same Ancaster stone he had employed at Lincoln ('it will not turn green . . . will work easily, and will look rich'), would have cost £1465; the next, using Norway oak, £1353; and the cheapest, using 'Riga wood painted', £1043. The college, with £1390 currently available, chose the second.<sup>49</sup>

After nearly seventy years, work finally went ahead during a restoration of the Chapel in 1774–5.<sup>50</sup> Set back a few feet from the east wall, Essex's oak reredos had Gothic doorways on either side into the space beyond. A central figure, based, like the doorways, on the shape of the side-chapel doorways in the third bay, was designed to contain a painted altarpiece. Along the top were eight carved replicas of the Chapel's pinnacles (replacing the turrets of Burrough's original conception), six above the

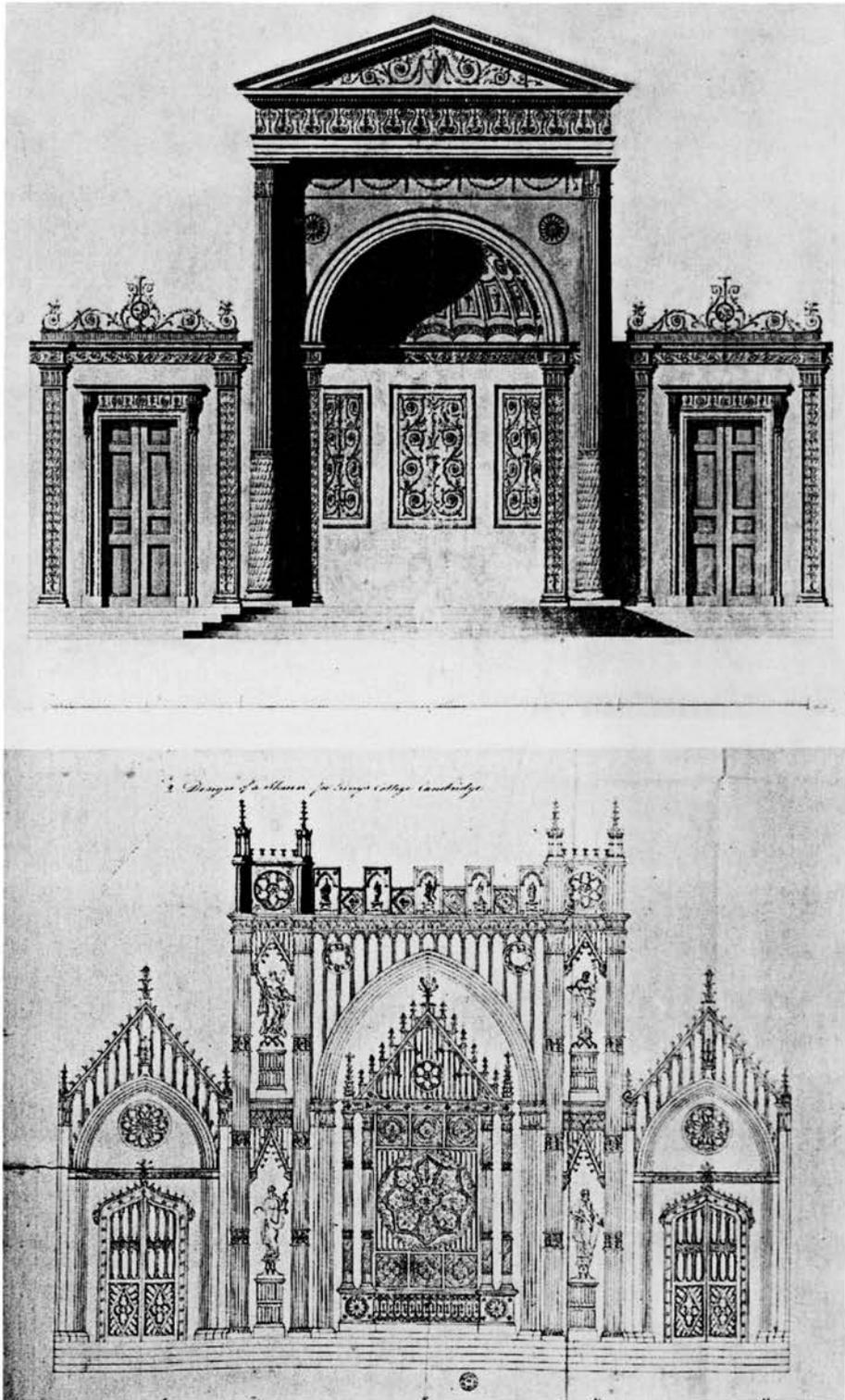
<sup>46</sup> James Gibbs, *A Book of Architecture* (1728) plate 32; 'The altarpiece for King's College at Cambridge', Victoria and Albert Museum, E3672-1913; Terry Friedman, *James Gibbs* (Yale 1984) pp. 234–5, 294.

<sup>47</sup> KC muniments, 'Altarpiece 1742–75': pp. 3, 5, 7, 11.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 21, 23, 27; Allan Doig, 'James Adam, James Essex and an altar-piece for King's College Chapel, Cambridge', *Architectural History* 21 (1978) pp. 79–82. Adam received £79 2s.

<sup>49</sup> 'Altarpiece 1742–75': p. 27.

<sup>50</sup> 9 April 1774: 'To moving the old altar rails'; 30 April: 'To moving the old screen at the altar back, 1½ days'; 28 May: 'To cleaning and sweeping out the dust at the altarpiece, 2½ days'; 20 August: 'To taking down the old wainscot betwixt the stalls and the new part of the altar'; 27 August: 'To taking down and clearing away the old screen, 2½ days'. - From carpenters' bills, KC muniments, 'Chapel Vouchers'.



**Figure 4.** James Adam: two designs for an altarpiece, 1768-9. (King's College)

altar-screen and two at the end of continuation panelling along the walls of the first bay; all projected 10 feet above window-sill level. Between the pinnacles ran a fringe of pierced battlements in imitation of those of the Chapel roof, and the carved work was decorated with crowns, portcullises and niches. The sanctuary was approached by four steps, with two altar-steps beyond, and bordered with fretted rails; the whole of the three eastern bays, down to the *gradus chori*, was repaved in a fussy chequer style similar to one Essex had used for Clare College chapel.<sup>51</sup> Cornelius Austin's panelling was retained in the two bays east of the stalls. The most reprehensible aspect of Essex's scheme (not included in his earlier designs) was the insertion of two gigantic niches in the stonework on either side of the east window. In the course of erecting his panelling he also 'hacked away' the string course of angel figures on the north and south walls and damaged that beneath the east window.<sup>52</sup> His work finally cost £1803. Additionally, £42 was spent on new plate for the altar, £23 on 33 yards of 'rich crimson damask', £36 on 26 yards of 'rich crimson Genoa velvet', £31 on 'rich gold fringe and 8 gold and crimson tassels', and £13 on 47 yards of Wilton carpet, bringing the total expenditure to £2017, twice the amount originally intended. The overall effect was closer to the Gothick pastiche of Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill (where Essex also worked) than to authentic Gothic. The eviction of Provost Hacumblen's great brass lectern from the choir showed the college's muddled sense of medieval ideals.<sup>53</sup>

### The 'Deposition'

The central panel of Essex's reredos being reserved for a painting, a former fellow of King's, Thomas Orde (later Lord Bolton), commissioned his friend George Romney to execute a 'Mater Dolorosa'. But some of the fellows opposed the commission and before Romney's painting was completed another former Kingsman, Frederick Howard, fifth Earl of Carlisle, donated a *Deposition*, then believed to be by the sixteenth-cen-

tury Italian artist Daniele da Volterra, if not by Raphael himself, though now attributed to Volterra's contemporary, Girolamo Siciolante da Sermoneta (1512–80).<sup>54</sup> Although Romney's picture was 'in a state of great forwardness' he never completed it.<sup>55</sup> A work of this kind was, however, outside his normal vein, and of the surviving sketches 'none are very convincing as religious works'.<sup>56</sup>

Siciolante's *Deposition*, probably painted c. 1568–72 for the church of San Giovanni dei Fiorentini in Rome and removed thence in the late seventeenth century, was bought by Lord Carlisle on the Grand Tour in 1767–8.<sup>57</sup> The panel measures 7 ft 7 in by 5 ft 9 in (231 × 175 cm) and depicts the scene after Christ's removal from the cross. Joseph of Arimathea and the Magdalene support the body, while the Virgin Mary and two other holy women stand to the right and a centurion in a plumed helmet and two other men stand to the left. At the foot of the cross stands St John with hands upraised, looking away right. Hailed at the time of its donation as 'one of the first pictures in the world',<sup>58</sup> it is a static, formalised depiction. Joseph Farington in 1805 thought it 'an inferior performance'; more recent critics find it 'lacking in strength of colour and carrying power of design', refer to its 'coldly marmoreal style and zinc-like drapery', or call its figures 'mute actors in a dignified and unemotional presentation of the body of Christ'.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>51</sup> The marble was supported on brick foundations and arches, 4 feet deep, costing an estimated £51. - 'Altarpiece 1742–75', pp. 4–5. The 1702 marble in the choir, presumably not so supported, was discoloured 'by the dampness of the soil underneath'. - Malden, *op.cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>52</sup> KC *Annual Report* 1897. Masons' bills include payments for 'cutting off projections of stone work for joiners'.

<sup>53</sup> 'I make no doubt, for I don't know it, but the litany desk is also sent packing, in this age of philosophy, reason and infidelity.' - Cole, BL Add MS 5802 f.108v.

<sup>54</sup> 'Artists pronounce it to be one of the best of Raphael's second manner' - *Cambridge Chronicle*, 31 March 1781. A *Catalogue of the Several Pictures ... in the University of Cambridge* (c. 1790) attributes it to Jacopo da Pontormo. The painting was still officially attributed to Volterra when cleaned in 1950 (*Annual Report*); the RCHME (1959) first officially attributed it to Siciolante; Ellis K. Waterhouse, *Burlington Magazine* 112 (1970) pp. 104–7, substantiated the attribution.

<sup>55</sup> John Romney, *Memoirs of the Life and Works of George Romney* (London 1830) pp. 136–7.

<sup>56</sup> Patricia Jaffé, *Drawings by George Romney from the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge* (Cambridge 1977) Nos. 28–9.

<sup>57</sup> Waterhouse, *loc.cit.*; John Brewster Hunter, 'The life and work of Girolamo Siciolante da Sermoneta' (Ph.D dissertation, University of Michigan 1983) pp. 329–32. Carlisle's own catalogue gives the price paid as £150; Cole told Horace Walpole on 17 December 1780 that it had cost £400, adding: 'Mr Essex tells me the light [in the Chapel] will not suit it'. Another *Deposition* by Siciolante, painted for Santi Apostoli, Rome, and mentioned by Vasari, is now in Poznan, Poland. *Gentleman's Magazine*, April 1781 p. 189.

<sup>58</sup> *The Farington Diary*, ed. John Greig vol. 3 (London 1924) p. 107; *Illustrated London News*, 1 February 1964 p. 175; Waterhouse, *loc.cit.*, p. 107; Hunter, *loc.cit.*, p. 330.



**Figure 5.** James Essex's altarpiece, photographed before 1872. (Cambridgeshire Libraries)

Donated in 1780, ceremoniously installed as altarpiece on Lady Day 1781, the *Deposition* adorned the east end for nearly two centuries: until 1897 as altarpiece (fitted awkwardly into the arched central panel of the reredos), until 1964 hanging on the sanctuary north wall. It then disappeared into the obscurity of a southern side-chapel, re-emerged briefly in 1986 to hang experimentally on the choir north wall, and is now kept in an antechapel side-chapel.

### The Quest for Authenticity

Essex's Gothick east end was commended at the time as 'peculiarly corresponding to the simplicity and magnificence of the building'.<sup>60</sup> Sir John Cullum, the Suffolk antiquary, noted: 'I must particularly congratulate the noble Chapel of King's College upon its new Gothic altarpiece, which it owes to the superior taste of Mr Essex. How few of our venerable cathedrals have escaped without some inconsistent mass of Grecian architecture!'<sup>61</sup> Another writer lamented: 'Few of our present artists can now make a design truly Gothic; and I have seen one for an altarpiece to King's College Chapel, Cambridge, made by Messrs Adelphi [Adam], which though pretty enough in itself, was in no way suitable to such a fine Gothic building, and has justly given place to one that does credit both to the designer and to the workman.'<sup>62</sup> J.S. Storer went so far as to claim that Essex's woodwork exhibited 'better taste' than the stalls themselves, which were 'of inferior design'.<sup>63</sup>

Only with the Gothic Revival's maturation did the work seem unfortunate. When Queen Victoria and Prince Albert sat enthroned with their backs to the altar in 1843, it was observed that the altarpiece was 'the only ugly thing in the Chapel, with a frightfully modern *Deposizione* over it, so that was no loss'.<sup>64</sup> In 1865 T.J.P. Carter, a young fellow of King's and subsequently author of a history of the Chapel, privately started a Reredos Fund and pressed for a return to the spirit of the founder's original intentions.

It is hardly necessary to say that immediate condemnation should be passed upon the woodwork which occupies the eastern bay. The motives which prompted its introduction were doubtless as excellent as the result is deplorable. The whole work is a violation of the original idea; it has no character, and belongs to the taste of no period: it contrasts most painfully with the adjoining panelwork, while the two large niches placed on either side of the east window seem only to require the insertion of two gigantic idols in order to complete their obtrusive vulgarity.

Sir G.G. Scott, requested by the fund to survey the east end to determine evidence of its original arrangement, recommended a return to what he believed were the original levels, with the altar in the middle of the eastern bay, a reredos 'of rich materials and workmanship'. Essex's wall-panelling replaced by rich hangings similar to those recently hung in Cologne Cathedral 'though treated in better art', Austin's panelling retained in the second and third bays, and wooden sedilia. Carter additionally wanted the Chapel's window niches filled with statues and the great vault coloured (as required by the estimate presented to Henry VIII), and even the organ and choir-stalls gilded and coloured — 'the arms which fill the panels at the back would probably be greatly improved by colour ... though perhaps nothing would render them completely satisfactory'.<sup>65</sup>

In 1874 Carter's fund commissioned William Burges (1827–81), most extravagant of Gothicists, to design a scheme. Burges proposed an elaborately carved stone altar-screen smothered with figure work and ornamentation, behind an 18-foot marble altar. Three large niches above the altar were to contain scenes showing the infant Christ, with the shepherds and the magi adoring, while in other niches were to be images of the Virgin Mary, St Nicholas, the Archangel Gabriel, and St Margaret. The screen was to be surmounted by five large figures on pedestals, including one of Henry VI kneeling at a desk, and there were to be doors through into the space beyond. All the figures were to be golden, the ornamental background fully coloured. Austin's panelling was to be 'heightened with gilding' and between it and the altar-screen would be 'tapestry, gilded leather, or some similar hangings'. The window niches were to receive painted statues, the window jambs and caps of the columns to be picked out, and the bosses and carving of the vault coloured. Sumptuously authentic in the eyes

<sup>60</sup> *Cambridge Chronicle*, 25 March 1775.

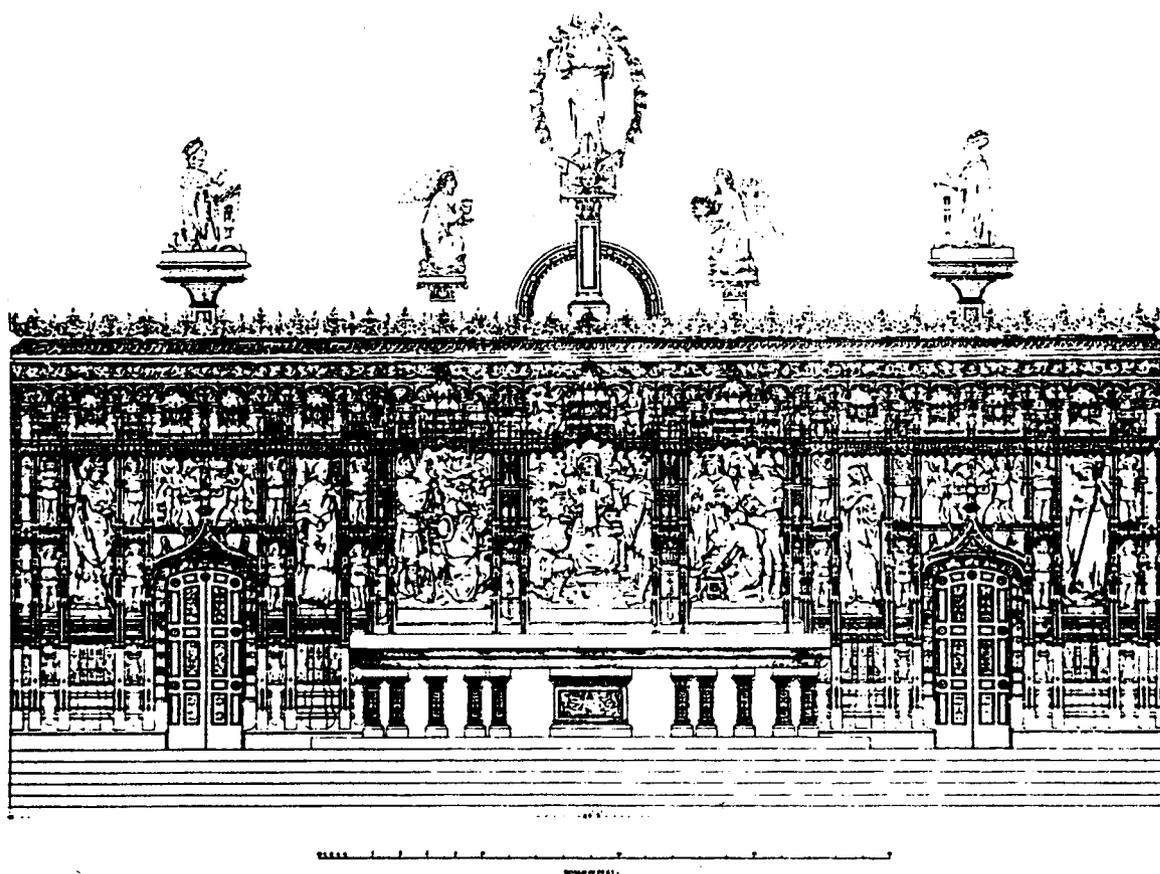
<sup>61</sup> Diary, 1 July 1775, Bury St Edmunds record office E2/44/3.

<sup>62</sup> Letter signed Architectus, *Gentleman's Magazine*, May 1781 p. 217.

<sup>63</sup> J.S. Storer, *Cantabrigia Illustrata* (Cambridge 1835) p. 11.

<sup>64</sup> *Twenty Years at Court*, ed. Mrs Steuart Erskine (London 1916) p. 62.

<sup>65</sup> Carter, *op.cit.*, pp. 76–84. Scott's report (Appendix A of Carter's book) was in fact probably prepared by his son. - Gavin Stamp, 'George Gilbert Scott, jun., and King's College Chapel', *Architectural History* 37 (1994) p. 160.



DESIGN FOR A NEW ALTAR SCREEN, KING'S COLLEGE CHAPEL, CAMBRIDGE.

**Figure 6.** William Burges: design for an altarpiece, 1874.

of Carter's group, Burges' scheme fortunately would have cost £8000, far more than was available.<sup>66</sup> His commission was in any case unofficial; in 1875 a donation to the college of £100 from F.T. Cobbold, fellow, was used to open an official New Altarpiece Fund. Contributions to both funds came in slowly.<sup>67</sup>

Meanwhile, independent of altarpiece plans but the result of a series of donations, the appearance of the east end was improved by the installation of two giant bronze candle-standards, 13 feet high, designed in 1872 by G.G. Scott junior and executed by J. Barkentin, the leading ecclesiastical metalworker. Designed each to hold one great taper 5 feet in height and six smaller ones, the standards stood on black marble bases with supporting lions mod-

elled on those of Hacumblen's lectern (itself restored to the choir in 1854). They cost £550. These 'magnificent examples of Victorian ecclesiastical metalwork' dignified the east end until 1964, 'imparting a monumental dignity to choir and sanctuary'.<sup>68</sup>

J.L. Pearson, the college's architect, commissioned by the Reredos Fund in 1889, designed a less costly stone reredos along broadly similar lines to that of Burges; but it did not prove acceptable. Then, in 1894, Thomas Garner (1839–1906) and G.F. Bodley (1827–1907) sent in a design for a triptych, 'low, with the wings supported by columns (stone or brass), generally Gothic but with Renaissance ornament admitted into the details'.<sup>69</sup> They wanted Essex's panelling replaced by tapestry, and the steps rearranged. M.R. James, senior dean,

<sup>66</sup> William Burges, 'Designs for a new altar-screen and sedilia for King's College Chapel, Cambridge', *The Architect*, 22 May 1875 pp. 304–5. He received £256 12s 5d.

<sup>67</sup> In 1892 the Reredos Fund stood at £2000, the New Altarpiece Fund at £1230.

<sup>68</sup> Stamp, *loc.cit.*, p. 162.

<sup>69</sup> Richard William Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James* (London 1980) p. 95.

thought it 'not in the least likely that any altarpiece designed for the Chapel at the time of its completion would have taken this [triptych] form', which he considered unEnglish, the Chapel being 'in all main points a truly English building, notwithstanding the fact that foreign workmen were employed upon the windows and woodwork'. He was even reluctant to lose Essex's woodwork, calling it

a really remarkable monument of the beginning of the Gothic revival. I do not say that it is very correct or very beautiful: but it does seem to me exceedingly interesting work, and surprisingly good of its time. The removal of the rails, pinnacles (and parapet, if necessary), and the masking of the whole surface with tapestry would be, I think, a practicable and desirable course to take; but I am entirely and strongly opposed to the destruction of the panelling.<sup>70</sup>

The triptych scheme was abandoned but in 1896, with no proper replacement agreed, the college agreed to let Garner and Bodley remove Essex's panelling experimentally, restore the steps and floor levels to 'what is presumed to have been their original disposition', remove Essex's stone niches, provide hangings for the eastern walls, and construct a new altar table in the middle of the eastern bay in 'the position originally contemplated by the founder'.<sup>71</sup>

### 'In a muddle'

Essex's reredos, panelling and stone niches were removed in 1897.<sup>72</sup> The angel frieze was repaired, the floor levels (which Essex had lowered at the east end by 5½ inches) were restored by prolonging the altar steps across the bay's full width, and the altar was placed in the centre of the bay.<sup>73</sup> The following year the east wall was experimentally hung with a loaned PreRaphaelite tapestry, executed by William Morris to a design by Edward Burne-Jones, depicting an episode from the legend of the Holy Grail.<sup>74</sup> This proved unsatisfactory: by 1900 the college had commissioned a London firm to produce specimen new hangings. James favoured hangings, emphasising that 'no hanging, however bright in colour, can possibly en-

ter into competition with the windows. The scales of colour in textile fabrics and in painted glass are so absolutely different.' As for an altarpiece: 'we might possibly take the view — it has been expressed before now — that the east window formed the best possible altarpiece.'<sup>75</sup>

In 1900, shortly after T.J.P. Carter's death, the rival funds were amalgamated. The Reredos Fund, having paid for the alterations since 1897, had £2200 remaining; the college fund amounted to £1600. Though Garner's reredos designs were rejected, he went ahead with a new altar, comprising a slab of black Irish marble 13 feet long resting on gilded alabaster supports carved to represent angels. Built by Messrs Farmer and Brindley, it was consecrated on Advent Sunday 1902. Even the altar raised objections, for the provost had to consult the college's visitor, the Bishop of Lincoln, as to its legality,<sup>76</sup> probably on account of the 'Romish' gradine or shelf structure behind the altar on which the cross and candles stood. Garner designed matching altar-rails, installed soon after; a carpet for the steps cost £150. By the end of 1902 two tapestry panels out of a total of four had been made and installed on the east wall and others had been designed for the sanctuary side walls. It was intended to retain the *Deposition* as altarpiece.<sup>77</sup>

Then, during what must have been heated discussions in early 1903, the whole problem of the east end was reopened. While James urged acceptance of the hangings, other fellows had other ideas. A.A. Tilley wanted hangings but not those being installed. Charles Waldstein wanted a wooden reredos matching the organ screen. Oscar Browning had no preference for hangings or reredos, but wanted the *Deposition* left out of it. Eventually the fellows voted for a wooden reredos, without the picture, and to have Garner replaced.<sup>78</sup>

Three young architects — T.B. Carter, A. Poynter, Detmar Blow — were invited to submit designs by November. Carter's was reminiscent of Burges': it featured an oak reredos in the second bay with, above the altar, a carved

<sup>70</sup> M.R. James, printed circular, 26 January 1895.

<sup>71</sup> Reredos committee, printed report, 26 April 1896.

<sup>72</sup> 'Lovers of the Chapel will be glad to learn that we shall never again see the old panelling that was so utterly out of harmony with the stalls. We trust that the new reredos will add as much to the beauty of the east end as the condemned decoration took away from it.' - *Cambridge Review*, 14 October 1897.

<sup>73</sup> *Annual Report 1897*. Essex's panelling was reused in the passage to the college hall.

<sup>74</sup> *Annual Report 1898*.

<sup>75</sup> M.R. James, printed memorandum, 5 June 1900.

<sup>76</sup> KC muniments, congregation book, 9 June 1900.

<sup>77</sup> Reredos committee, printed report, 29 November 1902.

<sup>78</sup> Congregation book, 31 January, 7 March 1903. At least one outside opinion was sought: W.R. Lethaby informed the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings on 5 May: 'I was asked to advise somewhat informally on the altar end of King's College Chapel which is in a muddle and has been for years, after their tearing down of some bogus Gothic of Essex. I send you a draft of my reply [not preserved]'. - SPAB, King's College file.

representation of the Adoration of the Magi and, in panels on either side, King David receiving the water from the well of Bethlehem and King Solomon receiving the Queen of Sheba. There were to be other kings and saints in niches, everything was to be lavishly gilded, the gates into the bay beyond, as well as the more important sculpture, being of gilded bronze.<sup>79</sup> Poynter's scheme, retaining the Deposition as altarpiece with heraldic decoration along the top of the reredos, was warmly favoured by James' Reredos committee; but at the congregation the fellows voted for Blow's.<sup>80</sup> At this point James resigned. 'When you have to take counsel with a body of 46 persons on a question of taste, unanimity is not easily secured . . . I should be loth to pass through the many stages of committees, reports, discussions, again.'<sup>81</sup>

### Classicism Triumphant

Detmar Blow (1867–1939), best known as an architect of town and country houses for wealthy clients, designed, in collaboration with Fernand Billerey, a reredos in Renaissance classical style, to stand against the east wall. Three canopied niches above the altar, separated by pairs of Corinthian columns, were to contain statues of Christ, the Virgin, and St Nicholas made of 'light oak or bronze gilt', against 'a dark oak background enriched with ebony and gold, the gilding appearing in the shell, the frieze below the shell, and the pilasters supporting the arch'. The cresting above the reredos was to be 'in the style of St Pietro at Perugia'. The Deposition was to be framed in new panelling on the north wall. Against the south wall were to be elaborate carved sedilia with, above the three seats, an entablature supported by pilasters, and behind the pilasters a carved panel representing a New Testament scene; there was to be a bust of Christ in the lunette and medallions of the Virgin and St John. This part of the scheme was to be in memory of Provost Austen Leigh (d. 1905). It was recommended to fill the reredos niches temporarily with casts of the Donatello statues in the Victoria and Albert Museum until specially designed ones could be made. Blow's plan was approved in 1905, but dogged by lack of funds. The chosen builders,

Rattee & Kett, in 1906 tendered an estimate of £3626 (excluding statues, expected to cost a further £2000); only £2150 was then available.<sup>82</sup>

By 1908 much of the woodwork was in place 'including almost the whole of the panelling, and the columns, together with the niches on the east wall. Progress in being made with the pilasters, capitals, frieze, and other decorative portions of the work'. By 1909 'the only part of the general scheme remaining to be executed is the sedilia', though 'the cresting around the entire reredos is not yet finished'. By 1911 'all the woodwork, including the sedilia, has been exposed to view since Easter', though 'still in an unfinished condition, awaiting, besides the statues, the cresting above the panelling'.<sup>83</sup> The cresting and other details had meanwhile undergone several modifications. In the end, only the canopied reredos had cresting over its three niches, the rest of the panelling being left without cresting; and the intended statues could not be afforded. By 1911 the fund was £105 overdrawn.

Austen's panelling was retained along the walls of the sanctuary's western bay and a half, but half a bay of it was removed (it was reused to panel a side-chapel) to make way for Blow's new panelling in the eastern bay and a half. After the *gradus chori*, there were now three steps across the Chapel's width between the second piers from the east, another slightly further east, then two altar steps. Essex's floor pattern in the three eastern bays was retained, as were Scott's candle-standards. A magnificent altar cross, made by W. Bainbridge Reynolds, was given in memory of Provost Austen Leigh. A bust of Christ, believed to be sixteenth-century Italian,<sup>84</sup> was installed over the sedilia.

Blow's reredos had to wait decades for its statues. In 1941 Sir Arthur Hill, former fellow, bequeathed £1500 for the purpose but nothing could be done during the war. In 1949 it

<sup>79</sup> T.B. Carter, *A Letter to the Provost on the Subject of the Reredos in the Chapel of the College* (privately printed 1903).

<sup>80</sup> Congregation book, 12 and 24 November 1903.

<sup>81</sup> M.R. James, *Eton and King's* (London 1926) pp. 228–9.

<sup>82</sup> Congregation book, 28 February, 11 March, 7 June 1905, 9 June 1906. Donations from fellows included: Provost James £100; Vice-Provost Whitting £100; E.C. Austen Leigh £105; W. Austen Leigh £100; W.H. Macaulay £20; C. Waldstein £15 15s; A.E. Brooke £10 10s; E.J. Dent £5; O. Browning £5; G.L. Dickinson £2; W.G. Headlam £1 1s; A.C. Pigou £1 1s. A water-colour of Blow's original design was presented to the college by his widow in 1939; reproduced in *Country Life*, 4 January 1941 p. 19.

<sup>83</sup> *Annual Report* 1908; congregation book, 26 October 1909; *Annual Report* 1911.

<sup>84</sup> Donated by Mr Pfungst, 'wine merchant and art-collector'. Like the candle-standards, altar cross, and many other donated objects, currently banished to store.



**Figure 7.** Detmar Blow's altarpiece, c. 1910, with experimental cresting and statue. (Cambridgeshire Libraries)

was decided it would be difficult to find three suitable antique statues, while ready-made ones 'from a church artshop' would be inappropriate, so they should be specially commissioned. Henry Moore (who had recently provided a *Madonna and Child* for a church in Northampton) was approached but indicated that he could not give an early decision as to whether he could undertake the task 'owing to pressure of other work'; after a wait of five years, the college was finally told that he was unable to

submit models.<sup>85</sup> He was replaced by J.R. Skeaping (1901–81), professor of sculpture at the Royal College of Art. Skeaping produced his first statue, of St Nicholas, using an exotic African wood, in 1957, at a cost of about £1000;

<sup>85</sup> According to one fellow of the time, the scheme fell through because Moore 'decided that he did not know how to do Christ in Glory in wood' - H.N.V. Temperley, letter to *The Times*, 6 June 1994.

Christ and the Virgin were installed by 1960. The statues were unloved — 'mummified Madonnas' — and were jettisoned with the rest of Blow's work in 1964.<sup>86</sup>

### The 'Adoration'

Described as 'appropriate,<sup>87</sup> 'in excellent taste',<sup>88</sup> 'sonorous',<sup>89</sup> and 'beautiful panelling which after four centuries at last gave the sanctuary the warmth and life it had always craved',<sup>90</sup> Detmar Blow's east end was dignified but unexciting and seemed to 'disappear mysteriously into the darkness' at evensong.<sup>91</sup> The sanctuary was 'lacking a proper focal point, was too cluttered, and was liturgically unsatisfactory'.<sup>92</sup> Minor alterations were made in 1956, including the removal of the gradine, and then in 1960 Robert Maguire and Keith Murray were invited to redesign the east end altogether. The prime movers on the Chapel committee when we were appointed were Alec Vidler and Victor de Waal (dean and sub-dean). Both were radical Christian theologians and much involved in the Liturgical Movement; and we were the only radical English Liturgical Movement architects.<sup>93</sup> The intention was to diminish the 'present dissociation between the sanctuary and the congregation seated in the stalls' so that Eucharist could again become 'the corporate act of the whole church'. Maguire and Murray argued that the woodwork in the eastern three bays, though 'good of its kind', destroyed the sanctuary's inherent architectural meaning, that the ashlar walls were meant to be visible, and that the altar, instead of acting

merely as 'end-stop for a vista', should be brought forward into the second bay (they recommended a shorter, squarer altar, perhaps with a baldacchino over it). 'The building as a whole should be seen as the masterpiece of spatial organisation it really is,' with antechapel, choir and sanctuary skilfully leading one into the next, and the altar, not the east window or 'any object placed on the lower east wall', as the true climax of everything.<sup>94</sup>

Then, in March 1961, came an unforeseen development. Major A.E. Allnatt (1889–1969), a property millionaire with no previous connection with the college, wrote enquiring whether King's would accept for the Chapel a painting by Sir Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), *The Adoration of the Magi*, which he had bought in 1959 and had decided, after failing to agree terms with the National Gallery, to donate to an ecclesiastical building. He had already saved the picture from going abroad and his proposal to reinstate this former altarpiece in a religious setting was well-intentioned. Many of the college's fellows, moreover, must have felt it was exactly what the Chapel's east end needed to relate it climactically, at last, to the rest of the building.

Of the ten or so *Adorations* that Rubens painted, versions hang in the Louvre, the Prado, the Hermitage Museum, the Royal Museum in Antwerp, and the Brussels Museum. All revel in the display of regal pomp, the contrast between the exotic kings and the humble surroundings of the child they come to worship.<sup>95</sup> Allnatt's version is large but comparatively simple, the last that Rubens executed, painted c. 1633–4 as altarpiece for the recently rebuilt convent church of the White Nuns in Louvain, Belgium. He was paid 920 florins for it (about £90). Oil on wood, it measures 10 ft 9¼ in by 8 ft 1¼ in (328 × 249 cm), weighs 15 cwt, and, unlike many works from Rubens' workshop, is entirely from his own hand. The Virgin Mary stands to the right, holding the infant Jesus, with Joseph at her side. In the foreground kneels the eldest king or magus, swinging a censer; behind him, the second king is in the process of falling to his knees, holding out a cup; behind him again stands the turbaned third king, with a golden casket. Two non-chalant soldiers and two attendants look on;

<sup>86</sup> Provost Sheppard, printed circular, 8 February 1949; college circulars, 5 November 1954, 1 March 1956. The statue committee comprised John Rothenstein, Richard Eurich, Eric Newton, John Piper, Victor Passmore, E.M. Forster, Dean Milner-White. Forster felt on 30 September 1948 that 'the college will be hard to persuade' that Moore would be suitable; on 20 October: 'I don't suppose the Henry Moore scheme will come to anything'. - *Selected Letters of E.M. Forster*, ed. Mary Lago and P.N. Furbank vol. 2 (London 1985) pp. 233–4. After 1964, Skeaping's statues were loaned for a while to Lincoln Cathedral.

<sup>87</sup> Christopher Hussey, *King's College Chapel, Cambridge* (London 1926) p. 31.

<sup>88</sup> Alec Clifton-Taylor, unpublished notebook, 1948.

<sup>89</sup> Nicholas Booth and Philip Taylor, *Cambridge New Architecture* (3rd edition, London 1970) p. 27.

<sup>90</sup> Hugh Plommer, *Cambridge News*, 19 December 1968.

<sup>91</sup> *Country Life*, 30 April 1964 p. 1047. 'Far away to the east, across a piece of night, the high altar shows a few yellow points.' - Hussey, *op.cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>92</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 1 February 1964 p. 174.

<sup>93</sup> Robert Maguire, personal communication, 7 January 1993.

<sup>94</sup> Robert Maguire and Keith Murray, 'King's College Chapel, Cambridge: report on the rearrangement of the east end', May 1962.

<sup>95</sup> Max Rooses, *Rubens*, trans. Harold Child (London 1904) pp. 124, 223, 380.

two cherubs hover overhead.<sup>96</sup> Rubens reputedly finished the picture in eight days<sup>97</sup> and there are signs that it was indeed painted fast, with the rapid mastery for which he was known: the paint is in places applied thinly, and there are compositional weaknesses. An eighteenth-century critic noted that 'the Virgin is pretty, but I do not think her well seated',<sup>98</sup> while Sir Joshua Reynolds, visiting Louvain in 1781, called it 'a slight performance. The Virgin holds the Infant but awkwardly, appearing to pinch the thigh'.<sup>99</sup> The Virgin's feet seem in the wrong place, her height excessive, her appearance too bourgeois for the stable setting. Two of the kings seem to admire her rather than the child; correspondingly, it is on the kings rather than the source of their devotion that the spectator's eye dwells. There is none of the savage realism and ironic insight of Bruegel's *Adoration* in the National Gallery, a picture which would better complement the Chapel's stained glass.

Framed by a columniated grey stone tabernacle, the *Adoration* adorned the Louvain church until the convent's suppression in 1783, surviving an attempt c. 1770 to steal it for the collection of Empress Maria Theresa.<sup>100</sup> In 1783 the picture went to Brussels with works of art from 65 other suppressed houses; Emperor Joseph II took his pick, but the Rubens was among rejects auctioned in 1785. Reynolds, in Brussels, now thought it 'tolerable' though not among Rubens' best works, recommending it to his patron, the Duke of Rutland, as the only item worth purchasing, the rest being 'the saddest trash'. The duke instructed Reynolds to bid up to 300 guineas, but it went for 8400 florins (about £800) to a Brussels collector, Jean-Baptiste Horion.<sup>101</sup> Resold at Horion's death in 1788 for 8000 florins to an English dealer, it passed into the collection of the Mar-

quis of Lansdowne. When Lansdowne's collection was dispersed at his death in 1806, the painting was acquired for 800 guineas by Lord Grosvenor, in whose family it remained.<sup>102</sup> Initially hung in the Rubens Room of Grosvenor House, London,<sup>103</sup> in later years it was relegated by the second Duke of Westminster to the staircase of his country seat, Eaton Hall near Chester, one of his executors admitting it 'was never highly thought of by the late duke or his advisers'.<sup>104</sup>

As early as 1952 the National Gallery expressed interest in acquiring the painting but were unable to offer its market value.<sup>105</sup> After the duke's death in 1953, his executors, faced with death duties of £17 million, decided to sell it with other paintings. Fears that it would go abroad led to questions in parliament as to why it could not be accepted in lieu of death duties. Paul Getty was among the bidders at Sotheby's on 24 June 1959. The final price was £275,000, then a world record for any painting. It was loaned to the National Gallery temporarily, but when the gallery's trustees failed to keep appointments with Allnatt 'it is not surprising that he became exasperated. Others in the know encouraged him to channel his generosity elsewhere'.<sup>106</sup> These included Michael Jaffé, leading Rubens scholar and fellow of King's, who wrote to the (as yet anonymous) purchaser proposing King's College Chapel as a suitable recipient. The idea of benefitting the Chapel had already occurred to Allnatt, for he used to visit Newmarket to watch his horses race 'and every time I came home from Newmarket I stopped at King's College Chapel in time to see the afternoon service. It was then that I decided, if ever the opportunity occurred, to do something for this place, with its unapproachable music'.<sup>107</sup>

There were already connections between Rubens and the Chapel: the 1702 floor pattern in the choir resembles one by Rubens and R.P. Huysens for the paving of the Jesuit church of St Ignace in Antwerp; a scene in window 14 (next the altar) is based on a Rubens painting; Provost Page's alms dish of 1668 was based on

<sup>96</sup> For discussion of the painting, see Rooses, *op.cit.*; F. Grossmann, *Burlington Magazine* 99 (January 1957) p. 5; Edward Lucie-Smith, *Rubens* (London 1961) p. 37; Michael Jaffé, *Cambridge Review*, 25 November 1961, pp. 142-3; Michael Jaffé, *Display and Devotion: Rubens's Adoration of the Magi* (Cambridge 1984). A sketch for the painting is preserved in the Wallace Collection, London.

<sup>97</sup> J.F.M. Michel, *Histoire de la vie de P.P. Rubens* (Brussels 1771) p. 194.

<sup>98</sup> J.B. Descampes, *Voyage pittoresque de la Flandre et du Brabant* (Rouen 1769) p. 104.

<sup>99</sup> Sir Joshua Reynolds, *A Journey to Flanders and Holland* (London 1797) p. 114.

<sup>100</sup> Edward Van Even, *Louvain monumental* (Louvain 1860) p. 265, *Louvain dans le passé et dans le présent* (Louvain 1895) p. 513. Both works contain views of the convent, which later served as a barracks.

<sup>101</sup> F.W. Hilles (ed.), *Letters of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (Cambridge 1929) pp. 129-39.

<sup>102</sup> Sotheby's sale catalogue, 24 June 1959 pp. 10-11.

<sup>103</sup> Anna Jameson, *Companion to the Most Celebrated Private Galleries of Art in London* (London 1844) pp. 227, 238, 271.

<sup>104</sup> Frank Herrmann, *Sotheby's: Portrait of an Auction House* (London 1980) pp. 358-9, 361.

<sup>105</sup> Lord Robbins, letter to *The Times*, 17 June 1959.

<sup>106</sup> Herrmann, *op.cit.*, pp. 359-64.

<sup>107</sup> A.E. Allnatt to Noel Annan, 7 May 1969: MS, KC library. Allnatt donated an El Greco, bought at the same sale, to New College, Oxford.

a Rubens design; and Rubens himself may well have visited the Chapel during his trip to Cambridge in October 1629. Nevertheless, Allnatt's offer (which was conditional on the picture being displayed prominently on the Chapel's central axis) needed careful thought and the college spent two months acquiring expert opinions. In April Provost Annan reported: 'We are hard at work on the aesthetic and technical problem which this wonderfully generous offer has posed. We must first be quite certain that no damage could come to the picture if it were placed in the Chapel. We are consulting experts on humidity, temperature, the effect of sunlight and pollution, and vibration from the organ.'<sup>108</sup>

On 6 May 1961 the college's governing body unanimously accepted the provost's motion 'gratefully to receive this munificent gift and rare addition to the worship, dignity and beauty of the Chapel, and to undertake to place it either in the antechapel above the archway of the organ screen or as an altarpiece whether in the choir or in the antechapel; if no scheme can be devised and preferred for treating it as an altarpiece, to hang it on the organ screen.'<sup>109</sup> A letter from Sir Kenneth Clark urged the college to disregard the argument that a baroque picture would be out of place in a Gothic church; but what 'probably clinched' the vote was a speech by Eric Milner-White, former dean, urging its placing behind the high altar.<sup>110</sup> It is debatable whether the fellows as yet realised the difficulties involved in incorporating a picture of this size and style beneath the Chapel's east window, or whether the alternative of hanging it on the organ screen was seriously contemplated. Soon afterwards the college agreed 'that the present altar and the two steps on which it stands be dismantled and stored'.<sup>111</sup> In October the views of five outside experts were solicited: though divided over matters of detail, four (Clark, Sir John Summerson, Anthony Blunt, Geoffrey Webb) favoured installing the Rubens as altarpiece; only Sir Nikolaus Pevsner dissented.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>108</sup> *The Times*, 26 April 1961. A survey of the Chapel's interior climate, made between June 1961 and July 1962, concluded that humidity levels would not damage the picture. - R.E. Lacey, 'A note on the climate inside a medieval chapel', *Studies in Conservation* 15 (1970) pp. 65-80.

<sup>109</sup> College circular, 6 May 1961. Fifty fellows, plus the provost, voted in favour.

<sup>110</sup> L.P. Wilkinson, *A Century of King's* (Cambridge 1980) p. 130.

<sup>111</sup> College circular, 28 July 1961.

### 'Pure C.P. Snow'

The Rubens arrived at King's on 15 November 1961 and was placed provisionally by Maguire and Murray on an easel in the antechapel near the south end of the screen. It remained here for over two years, seeming to many so superb that a faction developed which favoured keeping it permanently in the antechapel. However, in this position it obscured the screen and did not meet Allnatt's stipulation about the axis, while to make it the altarpiece to a new altar placed against the screen made little liturgical sense, and siting it in front of the great west door would have flouted the Chapel's powerful orientation, reduced seating capacity for carol services, and ruined views through the door.

In fact, once the difficulties of assimilating the Rubens into the building became apparent the unanimity with which it had been accepted disappeared. The atmosphere in the college during the debates that followed has been described as 'pure C.P. Snow',<sup>113</sup> with the altarpiece faction (Jaffé, Annan, bursar A.N.L. Munby and others) ranged against the antechapel faction. In March 1963, in response to the latter, Allnatt conceded that, while hoping the Rubens would be installed at the east end, 'he was content to let it stay permanently in its present position'; but the committee was enjoined, while taking note of this release from the original condition, to continue with their plans for incorporating it at the east end.<sup>114</sup> Maguire and Murray duly produced two new schemes. One, with the Rubens as altarpiece within a baldacchino after Torrigiano's altar at Westminster, was rejected as making the picture seem unimportant; the other, placing it in a mildly baroque pedimented frame against the east wall with an altar in the second bay, was initially

<sup>112</sup> Provost Leach, printed circular, 22 May 1967. 'When Pevsner was asked his opinion . . . he looked at the colour photograph the college was using and said enigmatically, "too much brass . . ." The picture, the price, or the college's acquisitive ambition?' - Robert Maguire, letter to *The Independent*, 30 December 1992.

<sup>113</sup> *Burlington Magazine*, July 1969 p. 413.

<sup>114</sup> College circular, 9 March 1963. At one point a jet was chartered to convey fellows to Holland to view a baroque reredos which Jaffé had persuaded a priest to sell, on the grounds it was the perfect solution. 'This was in black marble, the whole works, with a split pediment, angels with gilded trumpets, frame for a missing picture, monstrance throne with canopy, tabernacle, gradines, and altar.' The Rubens would have fitted it, but the ensemble would have obscured most of the east window and proved otherwise quite inappropriate. - Maguire, personal communication, 12 October 1993.

accepted. But the architects' concern for liturgical and architectural meaning was overruled and they were replaced by a more amenable architect, Sir Martyn Beckett (b. 1918), a designer of country houses and housing estates who had worked for the National Trust.<sup>115</sup>

An experimental one-year scheme was evolved, involving the removal of all the sanctuary woodwork and placing the Rubens in the eastern bay on low white marble balusters. The altar would be flanked by white marble candelabra mounted on black marble plinths, 9 feet tall and modelled on ones in a baroque church in Prague (plaster mock-ups were used initially); these would contain automatic hidden lighting to illuminate the picture. Only if the trial scheme proved successful in all seasons and light conditions would the college proceed with the total scheme, which would involve levelling the sanctuary floor and relaying it throughout to the same pattern as in the choir. In justification of the levelling, it was alleged that the north side-chapel doorway 'appears to have been cut off at the bottom [sic] by the raising of the floor level'; therefore lowering the floor 'would be a step nearer the original design'. Drawings and models, with previous east end designs, actual and proposed, were displayed in a side-chapel early in 1964.<sup>116</sup>

All the woodwork east of the stalls, by Cornelius Austin and Detmar Blow, was removed in March–April 1964.<sup>117</sup> The Rubens, still in its nineteenth-century frame,<sup>118</sup> was placed in the eastern bay on 21 April and subsequently reframed in its present 11-inch Antwerp black-and-gold frame. It was placed unnaturally low, at the level it would be if the sanctuary were levelled. For one critic, however, the first sight of it on entering the choir was 'most unexpected and thrilling', creating 'a new and closer relationship of antechapel and choir', although

there was also 'great shock at seeing bare stone walls . . . Tapestries seem to be called for.'<sup>119</sup> Speaking to the press on 22 April, Jaffé called the banished woodwork 'brown Windsor soup' and the Rubens 'the obvious and magnificent focus for the east end', pointing out that levelling the floor would allow 80 extra seats at carol services. 'Walking backwards and forwards along the centre line of the Chapel, Sir Martyn and Mr Jaffé demonstrated that the painting does not cut into the bottom of the east window until one is really too close to appreciate it. 'When one is 14 ft back from the painting, only 10 ft of the window is obscured', said Mr Jaffé, 'and that, by proportion, really isn't much'.<sup>120</sup> However, to minimise the obscuring of the window, in January 1965 the picture was shifted closer to the east wall.<sup>121</sup> The baroque candelabra having proved unpopular, Beckett designed instead four modernist wall-sconces, two for each side wall, comprising bunches of metal sticks, resembling elongated clarinets, with electric lights inside and glass candle-holders round the outside. Two mock-ups were fixed on the north wall in 1965.<sup>122</sup> 'Poor King's Chapel!' one critic commented at this point. 'Once the cynosure of Cambridge, it has now had its interior turned upside-down at the whim of art-historians probably not even Christians.'<sup>123</sup>

Problems remained. Once seen beneath the east window, a conflict was felt between the picture's swirling colours and those of the stained glass. The Rubens was also a similar shape to the window, which 'dwarfed it and made it look rather like a dependent postage stamp'.<sup>124</sup> Jaffé proposed plain shutters, one on each side, to give it a triptych shape (although the picture was never part of a triptych) and lend it independence of form.<sup>125</sup> The key problem, however, remained the picture's size. Total levelling of the floor was the only

<sup>115</sup> 'We were not sacked: the Chapel committee, after a stormy session in which the cultured were narrowly defeated by the aesthetes, produced a situation which so compromised us that we had no real alternative but to resign.' - Maguire, *Independent* letter. Beckett was privately commissioned by Jaffé, a friend of his, while Maguire and Murray were still officially the architects. - Maguire, personal communication, 12 October 1993.

<sup>116</sup> *The Times*, 14 November 1963; *Illustrated London News*, 1 February 1964 pp. 174–5. Hugh Plommer, like Maguire and Murray, suggested a return to a Tudor altar with baldacchino. But: 'What a pity the Rubens was not given to Trinity! It would have looked superb above the high altar there'. - *Cambridge Review*, 23 November 1963.

<sup>117</sup> It was stored, at their request (Blow's reredos having been made by their craftsmen), by Rattee & Kett.

<sup>118</sup> Later sold to Michael Heseltine MP.

<sup>119</sup> *Country Life*, 30 April 1964 p. 1047. *The Times*, 23 April 1964, was also favourable about the east-end position.

<sup>120</sup> *Cambridge News*, 23 April 1964; *The Times*, 23 April 1964.

<sup>121</sup> *Cambridge News*, 12 January 1965; Rodney Tibbs, *King's College Chapel, Cambridge: The Story and the Renovation* (Lavenham 1970) p. 34.

<sup>122</sup> Chapel adornment committee report, 23 November 1965. The sconces were scarcely practical, needing a step-ladder to reach the candles. In 1988 artificial candles were installed.

<sup>123</sup> Hugh Plommer, *Cambridge Review*, 12 June 1965.

<sup>124</sup> Wilkinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 130–31.

<sup>125</sup> The shutters also have practical use, enabling the picture to be closed up for symbolical or security purposes.

way it could be accommodated beneath the window — an unusual and questionable proposal for an ancient church and one which was accepted without public debate. To abolish Essex's floor pattern and restore to the sanctuary the 1702 one (which, as Cole testifies, had extended as far as the second bay) was one thing; to abolish the sequence of ritual steps required by the founder quite another. Yet the two alterations were interlinked by the altarpiece proponents in the phrase 'restoration of former floor levels and pattern', Essex allegedly being as responsible for the existence of steps as for the condemned pattern, the floor before his time, it was claimed, having been level.<sup>126</sup>

In November 1965 twenty-one fellows and one honorary fellow signed an eleventh-hour paper condemning the altarpiece scheme. Their reasons included the 'serious clash of tone and colour between picture and east window', the fact that most visitors were 'dissatisfied and often distressed by the present position of the picture', a feeling that the altar was 'becoming virtually an appendage to a picture', the bare sanctuary walls, the 'various metal objects now attached to the walls', and the 'triptych effect of the present frame'. They felt the picture had looked better in the antechapel. Fearing that 'enthusiasm for a great work of art, the Rubens, may lead to the spoiling of an even greater one, the Chapel', they called on the college to 'admit that it has made a mistake' and 'be willing to think again on so grave a matter as the whole treatment of the east end, whatever the cost in labour, in time, in money and even in sore feelings'.<sup>127</sup> The levelling of the floor was not mentioned.

However, when the scheme came before the college's governing body on 30 November, its supporters presented a battery of expert opinion in its favour, including letters from Sir Dennis Proctor, Professor John Coolidge, Professor P. Lasko, Denys Lasdun, Lord Methuen, Anthony Blunt, and Hugh Scrutton, and the scheme was approved by a majority of three votes. It was decided to implement it during a

full-scale restoration of the Chapel's interior, work on which commenced at the end of 1967.<sup>128</sup>

Anxiety lingered. On 24 October 1966 the Royal Fine Art Commission visited the Chapel. Their conclusion was that 'some conflict in interest is inevitable between the painting and the east window above it' and that had they been asked their opinion at the outset 'it is doubtful whether any members would have advised in favour of an attempt to use the picture as an altarpiece'. In the circumstances they could only recommend alterations to detail.<sup>129</sup> They too did not question the levelling.

### Art Display Triumphant

King's College Chapel remained closed throughout 1968. An architecture undergraduate who watched the work almost daily claims that, when the sanctuary floor was taken up and the brick vaults<sup>130</sup> on which it had rested were destroyed, 'not merely human remains but entire, unopened lead coffins . . . were found all over the sanctuary area in the first and second bays . . . I saw the bones and skulls with my own eyes, and the portions of lead coffins exposed as the fill which underlay the demolished brick vaults was removed.'<sup>131</sup> The dean, David Edwards, was called to conduct a brief service. The uncovering of remains was never published and few knew about it. Apparently no record was made of where they were found, nor of their identity (where evident). The marble was relaid on concrete.

The floor levelling necessitated lowering the sills of the side-chapel doorways and adding panels to the bottoms of the doors, altering their proportions. The ugly scars left along the side

<sup>126</sup> *Cambridge News*, 23 April 1964, 8 October 1968; press release 1967; *Annual Report* 1967; Wilkinson, *op.cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>127</sup> Typed circular, 24 November 1965. The signatories were F.E. Adcock, Peter Avery, R.R. Bolgar, J.B. Broadbent, R. Burridge, Kendal Dixon, Prof. M. Fortes, J.H. Goldthorpe, M.N. Hill, G. Horn, H.E. Huxley, Lord Kahn, Bryan Matthews, Christopher Morris, D.A. Parry, George Rylands, George Salt, A.F. Scholfield, S. Max Walters, David Willcocks, J.H. Williamson; 'also approved by E.M. Forster'.

<sup>128</sup> Allnatt's Chase Trust provided £41,000 towards the cost of rearranging the east end.

<sup>129</sup> Royal Fine Art Commission to the provost, 22 November 1966. A draft of 9 November, slightly stronger, called the decision to use the Rubens as altarpiece 'wrong in principle'. Those who visited the Chapel were Lord Bridges, Sir Colin Anderson, Sir Leslie Martin, Henry Moore, John Piper, Godfrey Samuel. Moore (presumably glad he never made those statues), Piper and Martin held 'quite definite' views about the picture's unsuitability as altarpiece. The commission's involvement was ambiguous: the provost initially informed them that King's 'were entitled to do as they wished with the Chapel'. - RFAC, King's College file.

<sup>130</sup> Believed at the time to be Tudor (Tibbs, *op.cit.*, p. 41; Woodman, *op.cit.*, p. 242), they probably dated from 1774.

<sup>131</sup> Peter Hodson, personal communications, 18 February 1987, 24 October 1990. See also Graham Chainey, 'A season for crying in the chapel', *The Independent*, 24 December 1992.

walls where the base stone met the ashlar were concealed behind stone benches in imitation of those in the antechapel. Cosmetic flights of steps were built to the turret doorways (stranded three feet above the new level), the doors themselves now being blocked up. The steps from the fellows' stalls into the sanctuary were removed.

The altar, reduced in length to match the width of the Rubens, was raised on a dais of three shallow marble steps and provided with a modernist new frontal featuring a pattern of octagons with gold appliqué stars forming a central cross, the colours chosen to harmonise with the Rubens. Designed by Joyce Conwy Evans of the Royal College of Art, woven by the Edinburgh Tapestry Company and embroidered in London by Elisabeth Geddes, it was said to be the only ecclesiastical textile in Britain in which tapestry weaving was combined with embroidery.<sup>132</sup>

The Chapel reopened in December 1968 to controversy. Canon Hugh Montefiore, vicar of Great St Mary's, protested at the omission of an altar cross, apparently intended to allow 'an unbroken view' of the Rubens: 'Is this a symbol of secularisation? . . . Is it right to subordinate liturgical function to aesthetic effect?'<sup>133</sup> A cross was later provided. The *Architects' Journal* agreed that the Chapel had been 'tastefully secularised' and thought the alterations 'motivated not by the demands of liturgical worship but by those of museum display . . . The focal point of the Chapel is an ambiguous muddle . . . The altar, in its lowered state, is unrelated to the space of the choir.'<sup>134</sup> The *Burlington Magazine* called the changes 'the best of a bad job . . . The basic problems — how rich stained glass with natural light streaming through it is to be reconciled with smooth oil paint lit by electric light, how slender Gothic is to be reconciled with exuberant Baroque — remain.'<sup>135</sup> Another

critic regretted the removal of the panelling — 'the Chapel now reverts to frigidity' — and called the frontal 'a bad copy of a fifteenth-century Italian ceiling'; a wag wrote: 'The restored Chapel at King's College is magnificent but I feel that if the Rubens was moved to the right, say as far as the Fitzwilliam Museum, it would look even better.'<sup>136</sup>

Critical response to the alterations has continued to be predominantly hostile. The Chapel was in danger of 'becoming an embalmed art gallery'.<sup>137</sup> 'If any building in the whole country was not made for [the Rubens], it was King's College Chapel.'<sup>138</sup> The east end was 'less dignified, and with a lesser sense of worship, than when it was backed by Blow and Billerey's fine classical altarpiece'.<sup>139</sup> 'The result is a botch-up job, attempting to mix perpendicular and renaissance with 1960s coffee-bar modern without regard to the true [geomantic] purpose of the Chapel as a microcosm of creation.'<sup>140</sup> The east end was 'swept, scoured, sterilized and hung about with 'Habitat' light-fittings', it was 'diminished in stature, in mystery, in reverence', transformed 'into a picture gallery'.<sup>141</sup> The alterations were the 'most reprehensible . . . of all examples of contemporary arrogance' in the treatment of ancient buildings, 'historically nonsensical and visually barbaric'; the 'cavalier treatment of one of the finest buildings in England remains an extraordinary scandal' and an 'aesthetic catastrophe'.<sup>142</sup> The choir had been 'devastated' by the removal of the panelling, leaving the walls 'absolutely and starkly bare, their whiteness vying with, instead of the woodwork setting off, the glorious glass'.<sup>143</sup> The introduction of the Rubens was 'a disaster . . . its colours belong to a totally different spectrum from those of the great east window', it destroyed the Chapel's inner harmony 'as cruelly as an F sharp in the middle of a C major chord'.<sup>144</sup> The Rubens was 'at odds with the

<sup>132</sup> The weaving employed cotton warps with wefts of wool and silk, metals and synthetic metals. The embroidery used gold and copper kid, Orion cloth, lurex fabrics, Japanese gold cord, pearls, crystal glass beads, rocailles diamanté, sequins, and filigree and hand-made buttons. The total cost was £1750. For several years before installation a mock-up was used, made from ingredients such as string, pipe-cleaners, silver foil, and plastic imitation Hepplewhite furniture mouldings, coloured with paints, inks and aerosols. - Patricia Wardle, 'The new altar frontal at King's College Chapel, Cambridge', translation of an article in *Bijvoorbeld* (1971) No.1 (typescript, KC library). It was originally intended to light the frontal with a striplight let into the top step. - RFAC, King's College file. The frontal was removed in 1989.

<sup>133</sup> *Great Saint Mary's Newsletter*, December 1968.

<sup>134</sup> *Architects' Journal*, 11 December 1968 p. 1368.

<sup>135</sup> *Burlington Magazine*, July 1969 p. 413.

<sup>136</sup> Hugh Plommer, Arthur Thair, letters to the *Cambridge News*, 19 December 1968.

<sup>137</sup> Booth & Taylor, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>138</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Cambridgeshire* (2nd edition, Harmondsworth 1970) p.107.

<sup>139</sup> Bryan Little, *Cambridge Evening News*, 26 September 1970.

<sup>140</sup> Pennick, *op.cit.*, p. 72.

<sup>141</sup> Robert O. Plowright, letter to *The Times*, 17 February 1975.

<sup>142</sup> Gavin Stamp, 'The art of leaving things alone', *Cambridge Review*, 28 January 1977 p. 76; *Private Eye*, 16 December 1982; letter to *The Independent*, 30 December 1992.

<sup>143</sup> Gerald Cobb, *English Cathedrals: The Forgotten Centuries* (London 1980) p. 17.

building . . . works of art should not be added to churches for the sake of it, so that the building becomes a museum.<sup>145</sup> The ensemble was 'badly thought out and crude in the extreme,' the Rubens 'a baroque masterpiece stranded in a Gothic church surrounded by gaudy shop-front tat'.<sup>146</sup> The 'spartan' walls 'removed some of the strong sense of enclosed space in the choir' and the Rubens was 'in competition with' the window.<sup>147</sup> 'I cannot think of any major ecclesiastical building which has suffered a comparable deformation.'<sup>148</sup>

The controversy resulted in 1974 in vandals scratching the letters 'IRA' across the foremost magus in the Rubens (the damage is still discernible). This in turn necessitated the introduction of security barriers, closed-circuit cameras and vandal alarms, so that the picture is rarely now seen from closer than 25 feet.

If the arrangements at the east end of King's College Chapel have reflected succeeding ages' liturgical and aesthetic aspirations, the current arrangement may be thought aptly to reflect its decade: celebrity art replaces spiritual symbolism, architectural meaning is replaced by interior design. Whereas before 1968 choir and sanctuary were one enclosed space, resonant with the same harmony, while the steps and change in floor pattern indicated gradations of significance within that space, now the bare walls differentiate sanctuary from choir, music from ritual, making two separate areas through which the levelled floor extends anomalously to the forced climax of the Rubens.

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<sup>144</sup> John Julius Norwich, *The Architecture of Southern England* (London 1985) p. 88.

<sup>145</sup> Roger de Grey, lecture at Winchester Cathedral, 6 October 1989.

<sup>146</sup> John Hoar, 'How atheists vandalised King's', *Sunday Telegraph* 24 June 1990.

<sup>147</sup> *Blue Guide to Churches and Chapels: Southern England* (1991) p. 135.

<sup>148</sup> Peter Hammond, author of *Liturgy and Architecture*, personal communication, 26 October 1993.

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The *Proceedings* are produced for the society by Dora A. Kemp. Printed and bound in Great Britain by Warwick Printing Company Ltd., Theatre Street, Warwick CV34 4DR.

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# Proceedings Volume LXXXIII, 1994

Price £10 for members, £12 for non-members

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