

# Building a Chapel — Our Lady and St Edmund

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*St. Edmund's School, Portsmouth*

St. Edmund's School is a Roman Catholic School, built in the district known as Landport, at the centre of the City of Portsmouth. It is surrounded by demolition and re-building — shops, offices, roads, and the new Civic Offices — and additions, alterations and extensions have been and are being made within the boundaries of the School itself. The latest addition to the range of school buildings is in many ways remarkable, because the whole School Community, pupils, parents and teachers, with the co-operation of the Governors and the Education Authority, have worked together to build a Chapel. Although worship can be, and is, carried out throughout the school and in all kinds of ways, a Chapel should have a special significance for a school like St. Edmund's because, as well as aspiring to be a Christian School, it was established to provide a Catholic education for the children of Portsmouth, and at the centre of Catholic life and belief is the Sacrifice of the Mass.

When St. Edmund's was opened in 1963, a small room was provided as an extension to the Assembly Hall to serve as a Chapel. As the school grew, the limitations of the Chapel became apparent. It was very small, it did not have a Chaplain's room suitable for interviews, it was ill-lit and poorly ventilated. As the Assembly Hall came to be used for Music, Drama and Movement during lesson time and for School Meals at lunch-time, the Chapel could not be maintained as a quiet place for Mass, Confessions and prayer. A chapel should be a very obvious centre of the School, easily accessible yet in a quiet area. It should be properly lit and ventilated, it should be equipped for Mass, Confessions and private prayer, and it should offer the Chaplain proper facilities for counselling members of the School. Many Staff had long felt the need for facilities such as these, and after generally sounding out opinion, the Headmaster, at a Governors' Meeting on 14th March, 1972, outlined this situation and secured their approval for a

proposal that we should try to raise, by voluntary effort £3,500, the estimated cost of a pre-fabricated Chapel to be erected on a suitable site.

The proposal was still-born. At a Staff Meeting called by the Headmaster on 19th April, 1972, to discuss the proposal, Mr. George Ferguson, Head of Metalwork Design, expressed his stern disapproval of "a pre-fab Chapel at inflated prices", and volunteered to organise and lead the building of a Chapel by members of the School at an estimated cost of £2,500. Those who attributed his offer to the heat of the room were readily understood! Mr. Ferguson has, nevertheless, been as good as his word. Today, we have our Chapel, thanks to him and all who have helped him.

Mr. John Wingfield, of W. H. Saunders and Co., Architects, drew up plans, despite constructive and obstructive ideas thrown at him from all sides, gradually overcame the official aversion to white bricks and secured planning permission. The lawned area near the Dining Hall and fish pond was chosen as the site. At the end of May, 1972, "footings" were marked out and soon the quadrangle was alive with boys wielding picks and shovels, pushing barrows full of earth, breaking bricks and mixing and laying concrete. In the process, the remains of Hereford Street, dating from long before the School was thought of, were uncovered, including an old church-warden pipe. As the trenches deepened, even the History Department became involved, conducting impromptu lessons in archaeology. As their diggings threatened the trench walls with collapse, Mr. Ferguson's bellows drove the budding Woolleys and Schliemanns from the site. Digging through slabs of re-inforced concrete and the remains of post-war demolition, many of the boys have never seemed so alive, before or since. With the aid of an ancient cement mixer, the base was laid, and none too soon. As the bricks arrived in their thousands, without warning and every

second taken up in unloading them adding precious seconds to the bill, it was "all hands to the chain". Columns of neatly stacked bricks quickly appeared, and only five parents complained of dusty clothes.

The "professionals" got to work on the bricks. As the walls rose, Mr. Jefferies and Mr. Anderson, with the woodworkers, were busy making window frames, door frames and doors. The roof girders, over a ton in weight, were rolled some forty yards and hoisted into place by six members of Staff, Mr. John Darmanin, a builder-parent, not a little wit and rivers of perspiration. The scoffers said it would never be done, but better this way than spending £50 to hire a crane, and all are still alive to tell the tale.

The roof was vital as winter approached, and Mr. Ferguson and the fourth year boys set to work, measuring and fitting joists, fitting sheets of chip board and covering the whole with roofing felt. It was a job for the dedicated, although some of the boys actually took delight in the job. Most of them managed to keep the sticky, bituminous "goo" on the felt; only one pair of trousers had to be replaced.

Over weekends, yard upon yard of electrical cable, all the electrical power points, the wall heaters and lighting were installed by Mr. Ferguson and Mr. Jenkins, an electrician who volunteered his help. The set of matching light fittings was achieved at an "Army surplus" price of 50p each! The water supply was laid on and a wash basin fitted into the Chaplain's room. Mr. Ferguson, Mr. Anderson and a group of boys then set to the task of fitting a thousand feet of tongued and grooved knotty pine to make the ceiling and the wall behind the altar. Girls and boys joined forces to apply three coats of varnish. Meanwhile the doors were fitted and varnished. The same "team" laid the wood block floor, sanded it, and gave it the now legendary "three coats". All that remained of benches discarded from the old changing rooms (the rest were used else-

where in the building) was transformed into a luxurious skirting board. The total cost of this operation was £100, a third of the estimated cost had it been done by contractors. Mr. Hayward kindly donated and laid a handsome red carpet around the altar and also supplied and laid the carpet in the aisles.

The work of fitting out the Chapel now began, although much of the preliminary work had already been done. Pupils were invited to submit designs for a tabernacle door and for an altar. The design for the tabernacle submitted by Jane Brickwood of the Fifth Year was accepted and worked in brass; the tabernacle itself was constructed from steel plate. The design represents the sun of St. Edmund, enclosing three intersecting circles which represent the Trinity. It recalls the badge of the School which is taken from the arms of St. Edmund of Abingdon, the School's Patron, and is based on the legend of the vision which Edmund received. After several designs for the altar had been received, a compromise was reached, and the altar has been made by Mr. Steve Jeffries, Head of Woodwork, from mahogany, inlaid with bands of sycamore. The candlesticks are the work of Mr. Jeffkins, some Sixth Form girls, under the guidance of Mrs. Hayter, have made the altar curtains, Sister Mary Bernadette has been hard at work on the altar linen, and Mrs. Kelly has been busy over a long period making vestments.

The windows on each side of the altar have been designed and made by Mr. D. Wylie, Head of Art. They consist of two sheets of glass, bonded together with a clear resin. The design is painted onto the inside surface and sandwiched with the resin between glass sheets. The windows portray the Crucifixion and Death of Christ and His glorious Resurrection. The colour sequences used show the pain and agony of crucifixion and the eventual conquest of death by the Resurrection. The images are largely sym-

bolic and rely on colour impact rather than more formal composition. Mr. Wylie also designed the large cross, made by Mr. Ferguson from polished aluminium tube.

The Chaplain's room has been furnished with storage cupboards and book-shelves made by Mr. Ferguson and Mr. Stearn, the workshop technician, and a carpet and fire-place donated by Mrs. E. Long, Mr. Darmanin laid the entrance steps, and the area around the Chapel has been prepared with the willing co-operation of the City Parks Department and planted with trees, shrubs and flowers. It is now tended by members of the Gardening Club.

Finally, on November 23rd, 1973, only eighteen months after work had begun, the Bishop of Portsmouth, the Right Reverend Derek Worlock, solemnly blessed and opened the Chapel, celebrating the first Mass with twelve priests representing all the Catholic Parishes of Portsmouth, and with a congregation made up of all those involved in its building. Led by the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Portsmouth, the congregation representing pupils, staff, parents, neighbours, the Education Authority, the Parishes, the Catholic Primary Schools, other Christian clergy, the Governors and architects, all gave thanks for the completion of one task and the start of another.

The building was complete. Although the work had called for many and varied skills, Mr. Ferguson and Members of Staff have involved a surprisingly large number of boys and girls of all ages and abilities, and not merely as navvies. No one has suffered academically; in fact, in some cases, it has proved to be a valuable education. The Maths Department has been seen calculating area, volume and measurement (How many bricks are needed . . . ?), local history and archaeology even threatened to bring about a withdrawal of labour! The craft subjects, inevitably, have been more obviously involved. At the same time, all have gained something which only an enterprise such as

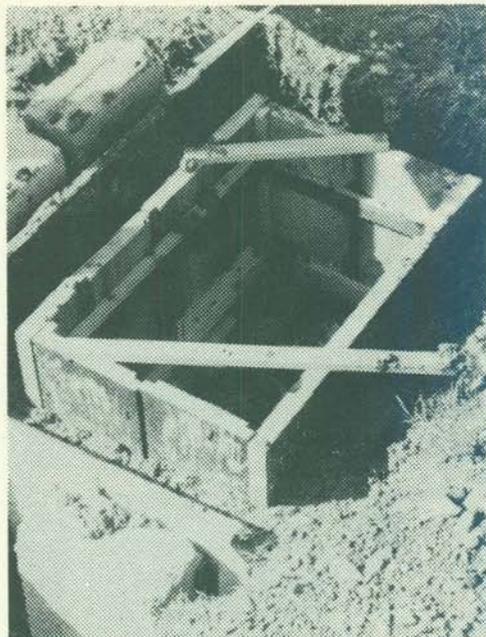
this can offer. Pupils and staff have worked side by side to produce something of use, of value and pride which is of and for the School which surrounds it.

Throughout the whole undertaking the work of fund raising has been equally important. Fayres, Jumble Sales, Bazaars, have played their part, with the sale of bricks, personal donations and collections made by Counselling Groups in the School. Those who arranged our initial loan made it possible for the work to begin. Members of the Parents Committee have given a great deal of time and effort of money raising activities. There have been many donations, large and small, from former pupils and friends of the School throughout the Diocese of Portsmouth. Two years after building commenced, it has been paid for in full, at a total cost of £2,500.

The work of furnishing the Chapel completely now begins. Apart from the altar and carpet, the Sanctuary lamp given by the Reeves family in memory of Jane Reeves, a pupil of the School, and a Madonna and Child, the gift of Fr. D. Mahy, the Chapel needs to be furnished in keeping with its style and purpose. This will be a gradual process, as the need arises, as funds permit, and as the talents of pupils and staff can be used. We have completed one project, in building a real centre of the School where present and future members can come together to worship in Christ. It has been a rare opportunity for all who have helped to build our Chapel, the craftsmen, designers, technicians, staff accountants, labourers, secretaries, fund raisers and supporters, pupils, staff and parents alike. If the Chapel is to fulfil its purpose, the second project must begin, because the purpose of the Chapel is to show to the whole School that their worship is the inspiration and the goal of their life and work.



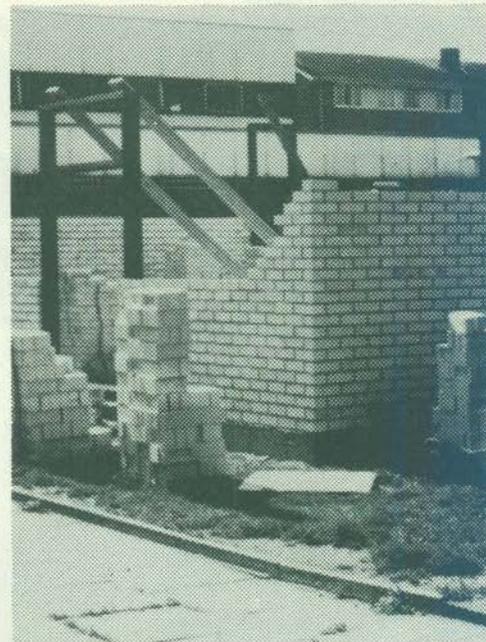
*Trench Digging*



*The Footings*

*Preparing the Foundations*

*Bricklaying*





*Roof Girders in Position*



*The Chapel Interior*

*The Completed Chapel*

