



Mill Hill

Instilling values, inspiring minds

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Mill Hill School

Mill Hill Chapel

An Introduction to the Hymnbook,
The Chapel History and its main
Architectural Features



‘O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.’

Psalm 95 v.1

Since Mill Hill School was founded in 1807 generations of Millhillians have gathered to sing and ‘make a joyful noise’, as the Psalmist expresses it. This specially commissioned Mill Hill hymnbook is a rich resource of one hundred of the best-known and best-loved hymns and carols; some are centuries old, others are among the finest of contemporary hymnody. Our hymnbook also contains a short selection of readings and prayers as an aid to personal reflection and spiritual nourishment.

Some of the world’s most distinguished musicians have composed many of the hymn tunes in this volume. These include Bach, Beethoven, Handel, Haydn, Holst, Howells, Mendelssohn, Parry, Purcell, Sibelius, Vaughan Williams and Wesley, as well as several of the best modern composers of sacred music such as Rutter and Willcocks. Different hymn styles are incorporated, with tunes originating in America, Austria, France, Germany, Ireland, Russia, Scotland and Wales as well as England. This bespoke collection contains four-part harmonies for all the hymns as well as several rousing descants to be sung by Mill Hill’s Chapel Choir.

Distinguished Anglican authors such as Charles Wesley and John Newton have written the majority of the hymns’ words, but this volume also contains at least fifteen Nonconformist authors - in keeping with Mill Hill’s Nonconformist Christian foundation and heritage. One of the most famous Nonconformist hymn writers is Isaac Watts (1674-1748) whose words have been translated into many languages. He wrote over seven hundred and fifty hymns, three of which feature in our hymnbook, including ‘O God our help in ages past’. Other popular Nonconformist contributors are John Bunyan (1628-1688), author of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, a book which inspired the hymn ‘Who would true valour see’, and also Wales’s most famous hymn writer William Williams (1717-1791), who wrote the ever-popular ‘Guide me, O thou great Jehovah’. Also included are words written by distinguished poets such as William Blake,

George Herbert and Christina Rossetti, as well as two Poets Laureate, Robert Bridges and Nahum Tate. Indeed, one way to approach singing hymns is to understand them as profound poetry set to beautiful music.

A number of hymns in this selection are based on biblical texts, including eight taken directly from the Book of Psalms, which are Jewish songs that have been used in divine worship for over three thousand years. By tradition the author of many of these Psalms is David, the shepherd boy who became King of Israel; he is depicted in one of our Chapel windows. The most famous of these ancient songs is Psalm 23 which is known as ‘The Lord’s my Shepherd’, a hymn contained in this collection.

The Mill Hill Chapel in which these glorious hymns will be sung is the third Chapel in the School’s history and by far its most splendid. Indeed for many it is unquestionably Mill Hill’s architectural ‘jewel in the crown’. One can imagine that even HM Queen Elizabeth II would have been impressed when, as a young monarch, she toured the Chapel in 1957 as part of her official visit to Mill Hill for the School’s 150th anniversary celebrations.

The Chapel’s foundation stone, which is placed on the outside of the rounded apse facing the quad, was laid on 31st October 1896. Its inscription commemorates the generosity of Sir William Henry Wills, Lord Winterstoke of Blagdon (1830-1911), head of the great Wills industrial empire, loyal Old Millhillian, one-time Liberal MP, former Chairman of the Mill Hill Court of Governors and one of the School’s greatest benefactors. The Chapel’s famous architect Basil Champneys (1842-1935) also designed other important listed buildings around the country. These include: Mansfield College, Oxford, another Nonconformist foundation; Newnham College, Cambridge, which helped to pioneer women’s education; the Rhodes Building at Oriel College, Oxford; the Library at Somerville College, Oxford; and the John Ryland Library at Manchester University which has been acclaimed as ‘the best example of neo-Gothic architecture in Europe’ and for which Champneys was granted the architectural profession’s highest honour, the RIBA Gold Medal, awarded annually on behalf of the monarch. This world-famous library



also houses an ancient fragment of St John's Gospel dating from the 2nd century.

It took just two years to build the Chapel and it was completed in 1898 during the long and successful headship of Sir John David McClure, the School's Headmaster from 1891 to 1922, who was knighted for his services to education in 1913. He is commemorated with a special angel mosaic around the Isaac stained glass window, and also in a distinctive memorial stone inscribed in Latin which is set into the brickwork on the outside of the Chapel. There was a tradition, still observed as late as the 1950s, that pupils had to stop talking and take their hands out of their pockets as they walked past this commemorative tablet.

Along with the teak panelling and elegant pews, some of the most outstanding features of the Chapel are the beautiful stained glass windows containing important biblical characters, with Jesus depicted at both ends of the building. High above the striking golden apse – the half-dome that surrounds the chancel at the front of Chapel – is the twelve year-old Jesus in the Jerusalem Temple in the presence of his parents Joseph and Mary, seven teachers of the law and four Torah scrolls. At the rear of the Chapel above the balcony is the adult Jesus, robed in a red garment. These two windows symbolise the journey of all Millhillians during their time at School, as, through the love and support of parents and teachers, and by studying sources of knowledge, they grow in wisdom and maturity to find their place in the world.

In the stained glass windows along the south-east wall of the Chapel are central characters found in the Jewish Scriptures which for Christians form part of the Old Testament: Samuel, Joseph, David and Isaac are inspirational figures in both Judaism and Christianity. Across the aisle, on the opposite wall of the Chapel nave, are equally important figures from the New Testament who were essential to the development of Christianity: Paul, Timothy, John the Baptist and Peter. The windows are exquisitely designed and each one tells the story of the biblical character it represents. For example, Joseph can be seen receiving his famous coat; David is slaying Goliath; and John is baptising Jesus in the River Jordan. Interestingly, Jesus and all of these other biblical characters, with the exception of Timothy,

are referred to in the Islamic Scriptures, the Qur'an. The stained glass windows therefore are a powerful symbol of our inclusive community at Mill Hill, where pupils of 'all faiths and none' gather in Chapel week by week to reflect on the moral values which bind us together.

Our School Coat of Arms and motto 'et virtutem et musas' is found many times within the Chapel windows and fabric and most obviously high on the arch at the front of Chapel. It acts as a constant reminder of our ambition to instil values and inspire minds. Our Latin motto was bequeathed to the School in 1870 by Mill Hill's then headmaster Dr Richard Francis Weymouth (1869-1886) who is named in the Joseph window. It points us to the moral Virtues as well as the nine Muses, who in Greek mythology were the goddesses inspiring all knowledge. However the motto was influenced primarily by the biblical reference in 2 Peter Ch 1 v.5: 'Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge'. Inscribed in the windows and on various brass plaques around the Chapel are the names of some exceptional benefactors who have served the Mill Hill Foundation. Among them is Arthur James Rooker Roberts, an Old Millhillian who became the first Headmaster of Belmont School, as well as other former Mill Hill Headmasters: Thomas Priestley (1834-1852) whose window is above the balcony; the internationally renowned New Testament scholar Rev Dr John Seldon Whale (1944-1951), and Alastair Carew Graham (1979-1992) who ensured that music remained a strong and enduring part of the School's distinctive traditions.

It was during the latter's headship in 1986 that Mander Organs, one of the country's leading firms, built our fine Chapel organ. The firm has built and restored organs around the world, including those in the Royal Albert Hall and St Paul's Cathedral. The original 1898 Vowles organ was subsequently sold to Holy Cross Church in King's Cross. The Mander organ is still housed within the main section of the original Basil Champneys casing, albeit with some modifications. With its decorative wood carvings and burnished display pipes, which show an Italianate influence, the whole instrument is a work of art.



Another prominent feature of the Chapel fabric is the large brass eagle lectern upon whose wings the Chapel Bible rests. Lord Winterstoke bequeathed this beautiful lectern; the eagle being symbolic not only of St John, but also of the biblical wisdom being carried first to the congregation and thence to the four corners of the earth. In 1935 the School incorporated an open book, quite possibly the Bible, in the Mill Hill Coat of Arms, where it still features in the middle of the red cross. The First World War and Second World War Memorials at the front of the Chapel are particularly poignant, recalling in total the names of 308 Millhillians who lost their lives in these two terrible conflicts, many of whom would have sat in the pews where pupils still sit today.

The First World War Memorial honouring 188 men, was given by the family of Captain Alexander Findlater Todd, an Old Millhillian and England rugby international who died in Flanders, Belgium in 1915. The Memorial is inscribed with the words of Jesus in St John's Gospel: 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends'. These enduring reminders of their sacrifice make our Chapel a particularly sacred place; they encourage us to serve our fellow men and women, to make the world a better place and to live our own lives to the full. In the words of Laurence Binyon from his famous poem For the Fallen: 'We will remember them'.

In Chapel one's eyes cannot help but be drawn upwards towards the beautifully decorated ceiling with its white stucco carvings of exotic winged creatures, one calling to mind the symbol for St Mark, a winged lion. Greek lettering is also in evidence, depicting two early monograms for Jesus Christ: IHC derived from the first three letters of the Greek name for Jesus, and XP combining the first two Greek letters of the word Christ. Adorning the ceiling are the opening stanzas in Latin of an early 4th century Christian hymn called *Te Deum Laudamus*, which means, 'We praise thee, O God'. The faces of cherubim referred to in this canticle look down at us from on high. To have such an ancient hymn of praise above our heads, still regularly sung in Christian worship across the world and which has resounded over the centuries, continues to be an inspiration as we too lift our voices in song.

*Te Deum laudamus, te Dominum confitemur.
Te æternum Patrem omnis terra veneratur. Tibi
omnes angeli, tibi cæli et universæ potestates.
Tibi Cherubim et Seraphim incessabili voce
proclamant: Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus
Deus Sabaoth. Pleni sunt cæli et terra maiestatis
gloriæ tuæ.*

This is commonly translated as: We praise thee, O God; we acknowledge thee to be the Lord. All the earth doth worship thee; the Father everlasting. To thee all Angels cry aloud; the heavens, and all the powers therein. To thee Cherubim and Seraphim continually do cry: Holy, Holy, Holy; Lord God of Sabaoth. Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of thy glory.

Finally we are grateful to our numerous supporters whose generosity has contributed to the creation of this bespoke hymnbook; their names are found towards the back of this volume. In addition, many of the hymnbooks have been dedicated in memory of loved ones whose inscriptions are inside the front covers. The support of all these members of the wider Mill Hill community is testament to the enduring influence of the Foundation and especially the musical life of this Chapel. It is greatly to be hoped that the Chapel's architectural beauty, religious symbolism and glorious music-making will continue to enrich the lives of all Millhillians who pass through its doors. May all who sing from this hymnbook do so in the spirit of the motto of the Royal School of Church Music:

*Psallam spiritu et mente 'I will sing praises with
inspiration and intelligence'. 1 Corinthians 14 v.15*

**Revd Dr Richard Warden Foundation Chaplain,
2019**

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