

MARLBOROUGH COLLEGE - The Memorial Hall

Even during the war itself a fierce controversy raged about exactly how to commemorate the OM dead, but after various crises of fundraising and engineering, the Memorial Hall, endorsed by *Master Cyril Norwood as an opportunity "to provide for a permanent and visible record at Marlborough of those who have fallen"* as well as to allow for outward-looking lectures by guest speakers, was grandly opened in 1925 by Queen Victoria's son, Alfred, Duke of Connaught.

It was felt to be **so** important to construct the building close to Marlborough's iconic Chapel that, to cope with the high water table, the building was partly floated on a revolutionary raft of concrete. The architect, W G Newton, an OM and ex-combatant himself, created a Classically-inspired building in a style thought to convey a seriousness which would complement the Gothic of the Chapel. Restraint was a keynote: the only inscription was the word "**REMEMBER**", picked out in red over the inner doors to the auditorium.

Inside lay a cork-floored ambulatory from which to contemplate silently the names of the dead, arranged simply, alphabetically and with a kind of democracy in death. Only a tiny Maltese cross signalled the Victoria Cross recipients.

"Seven great windows of the auditorium mark the passage of the sun, like some great sundial throughout the day...with stone panels above the main doors...left blank to give a hint of silence and solemnity" intoned the *Architectural Review*.

The building was set in a designed "poetic" landscape with cherry trees at the back, (only one of which now remains), an approach through the rose garden, (the laundry was relocated), and a pergola with a quotation from the Greek poet Pindar, translated as: *within this quiet garden-close though o'er all lands our graves lie spread, still do we live and walk with those whose thoughts are with the dead* - suggesting, perhaps, that the act of remembering can itself recall the dead to life.

To the front of the building there was a pool of reflection with a turquoise and gold mosaic design inside it, and the view to the setting sun in the west left open. The semi-circular design, adapted from the Greek theatre was arranged to afford an imposing view from the Bath Road.

"Here in fact is a holy precinct. The chapel on its mound, the quiet garden, the empty space of the great brick forecourt, the memorial hall itself, all combine for one purpose. They are monuments to youth not death, departing from that frightful Onward-Christian-Soldiers' spirit which so permeated nineteenth-century "scholastic architecture".

Originally the building was designed to be one storey higher, but funds were problematic after the expenses of the war and the devaluation of the pound, and foundations had to be strengthened even for a reduced version. More and more uses were thrust upon the intended lecture hall, which came to provide a venue for drama and music, despite poor backstage facilities. The style, denigrated by Pevsner as "American campus", may be unpopular today, but the intentions, the detailing and the thoughtfulness of the building still impress.

The Rose Garden

Herbert Leaf was one of Marlborough College's most generous benefactors. Appointed by Canon Bell, he was a member of Common Room from 1877 until 1907; returning between 1917 and 1919 to alleviate wartime teaching shortages. He was a committed, kind and much-valued member of the College community, and of Marlborough and Wiltshire beyond. He was independently wealthy and in 1922, continuing an already well-established tradition of generosity, he donated £30,000 to the College. Much of this was to be spent on providing electricity to the College – and thence to the town; some of the remainder went towards the Memorial Hall and music rooms within. In addition, Herbert Leaf particularly wished for a Rose Garden to be created as part of the College memorial scheme; this would provide a quiet place of beauty to reflect on fallen OMs as well as being a memorial to his beloved wife Rose who died in 1922.

W G Newton designed the Rose Garden, together with its Pergola and Gate House, and what we see today is very much as he planned it. The Pergola stands on the ground that previously held the College laundry – a plain and utilitarian brick structure built in 1847. The area where the Rose Garden is laid out once contained a network of clotheslines laden with household linen. The Gate House, on the other hand, was built where a stable block previously stood.

Newton prepared a sketch plan which he sent with a letter to Norwood dated 24th March 1924. He describes his design and makes a suggestion that Norwood ‘talk it over with Mr Leaf’. We get a sense that it was important to him that all aspects of the College Memorial should exist in relation to each other and that the geometry be pleasing.

“ . . . my main idea, as you will see, has been to make a long grass lawn of 150 feet long x 15 feet wide, at the west end of the which will be seen the East pavilion of the Hall, and conversely, of course, from the window of this pavilion you will look right up the lawn . . . The connection with the Hall terrace I propose to arrange by making a sort of little Gate House . . . its archway would be on the axis of the terrace in front of the Hall . . . ”

On account of the shortage of building materials in Britain following the war, Newton was mindful of the need to recycle. In his ‘Specification of Works’ he states that “all materials from the existing buildings are to be stacked for reuse in the new work and properly cleaned”, and that “practically the only new materials required are tiles for the roof of the Gate House”. The foundations of the western half of the laundry and its floor thus became the foundations and floor of the pergola; the walls, piers and pavings of the new structures are built of bricks from the old ones; the tiles of the arches and cills came from the stable building; and timbers were salvaged for the pergola roof.

The layout and components of the Rose Garden are almost all contained in Newton’s sketch plan of March 1924. In it we can see the long lawn with a pathway that can be joined at either end allowing for a circular amble. Just inside the path he has drawn a large bed by the pergola and seven opposing pairs of beds along the length leading to three curved ones at the far end. Eight borders are arranged around the outside of the path. A yew hedge, within which eleven seats are embedded at intervals, has been etched to enclose the garden. In the final plan of May 1924 the lead figure on its stone platform is shown.

Newton devised the planting scheme. Roses were planted in all seventeen beds within the path to display a gentle graduation of colour starting with white roses in the bed by the pergola, through cream, lemon, soft orange, yellow blush, apricot and pink in the pairs of beds, to red roses at the curved end. This beautiful colour scheme is one of the few aspects of Newton’s design that no longer exists. The borders inside the yew hedge were planted with pinks, lavender and lilies; and climbing the pergola were wisteria, clematis, jasmine and *Hydrangea petiolaris* – the last of which still grows today.

Gráinne Lenehan

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