



CHURCH

building & HERITAGE
REVIEW



The Newman Chapel at The London Oratory (part II)

by Russell Taylor

1> A drawing for the altar rail gates to be made in iron and brass, incorporating Newman's arms © Russell Taylor Architects

2> Mass being celebrated at the new altar © Michael Jones

3> The Chapel seen from the nave of the church. This view shows some of the individual contributions to the Baroque interior. Though the basic architecture is by the original architect Hebert Gribble © Michael Jones

4> The Newman Chapel with a vista beyond through the Chapel of Our Lady into St Wilfrid's Chapel © Michael Jones

5> The façade of the Oratory with banners and hangings celebrating the beatification of Cardinal Newman. The portico was completed 1893, the dome 1896 © Russell Taylor Architects

Introduction

The last issue of *Church Building & Heritage Review* described the background to this project and illustrated the designs for the altar and reredos. In this issue the finished Chapel is shown. On September 19, John Henry Newman was beatified and on September 22 at a Solemn Mass of Thanksgiving the new Chapel and altar were blessed.

Approvals and tenders

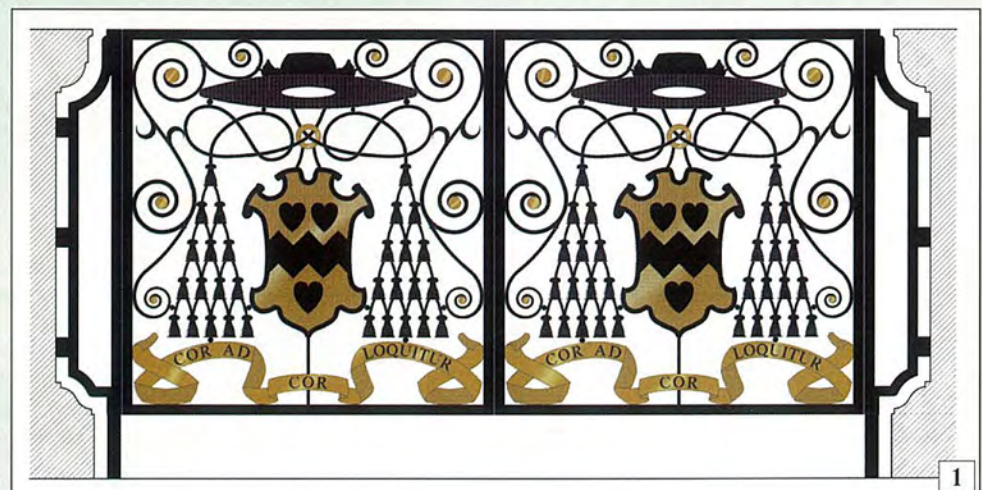
Most Catholic and Anglican churches (and some of other denominations) enjoy "ecclesiastical exemption." The London Oratory has opted out of this exemption, consequently an application was made to the local planning authority, The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, just as one would if it was a secular building.

The decision to create the Newman Chapel had been made rather late and in the end just 20 weeks remained between the application for Listed Building Consent, made in April, and completion on site at the beginning of September in time for the Pope's state visit to

Britain. The timetable therefore required the application to be decided within the target period of eight weeks and for construction to run smoothly and be completed with exceptional speed. Obviously no work could start on site until approval had been given, however the manufacture of the scagliola for the altar and reredos was started "at risk" and tenders invited for the general building work.

Russell Taylor Architects has good working relations with planners and in the case of Kensington and Chelsea they are excellent, the result, no doubt of a number of applications on various sites in the Royal Borough over the years.

Tenders were invited from leading contractors with experience in working on fine interiors and Fairhurst Ward Abbots, the lowest tenderer, were appointed in early July. Listed Building Consent was given June 28, work started on site July 12, the scagliola altar and reredos was installed from August 17 and all work was completed by September 10. In these times when it often seems to take forever to get approvals in





PROJECT TEAM

Client:
The London Oratory
www.bromptonoratory.com

Architect:
Russell Taylor Architects
www.rtarchitects.co.uk

Main Contractor:
Fairhurst Ward Abbots
www.fwagroup.co.uk

Scagliola:
Richard Feroze
www.richardferoze.com

place and even longer sometimes to get the building work done it is heartening to know that it does not always have to be like that.

The design

The Newman Chapel enthusiastically embraces the Classical and Baroque design tradition of The Oratory. Since its notional completion in 1884 the interior has been embellished by architects and artists over a number of years. But always, in spite of their individual designs each having its own identity, they have worked within the same broad tradition, not because of any instruction to do so but because they have believed it is the right thing to do. It is the application of that tradition, following the principles of Classicism, which is at the core of the design.

The altar, the site of the celebration of the Eucharist, is the most important part of the Chapel. Everything about it suggests permanence and solidity. The mensa is in part supported by massive volute consoles, seemingly bowed under the weight they carry.

Above the mensa, in line with the consoles, are small Corinthian pilasters framing the painting of Newman in the reredos. The Corinthian order is used because it is right for the hierarchy of orders used in the church: Corinthian on a large scale for the nave, Ionic on a medium scale for the side aisles and

Doric/Tuscan at a small scale for the order supporting the organ gallery. The reredos, because of its importance, starts this sequence again and as the illustrations show there are many similarities between the nave pilasters and those in the reredos. The whole church with its array of Corinthian pilasters in the nave contains the Newman Chapel. Within the chapel this is echoed by the reredos with its array of Corinthian pilasters containing the image of Newman himself. ■

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