

Our Story Part III

Chapel Part 1 FINAL

Among the dreams St. Peter's parishioners and clergy had for their new church in 1931 was "...an accessible chapel...a beautiful little chapel" for weekday services. Spokane architect Harold C. Whitehouse advocated for the placement of the chapel just off the nave, an economical alternative that permitted its pews to be oriented toward the chapel's altar during the week or rotated toward the nave to view larger services.

As is the case throughout St. Peter's Cathedral, the chapel's decoration exemplifies the Arts and Crafts movement values of honesty of design and materials, hand-made elements and furnishings, use of local building materials, and a veneration of medieval ideals. But, in the nearly one hundred years since it was constructed, the chapel has also evolved as a repository for memorials, gifts, and remembrances that continue to hew to those earlier ideals.

Termed a "side chapel" as it juts from the nave's south wall, the chapel's boxy exterior of locally made brick and rhyolitic breccia stone from a nearby quarry is lightened by brick buttresses that strengthen and break up the expansive east and west walls. High on the brick south wall, a cross-shaped configuration of handmade tiles donated by Whitehouse depict various cross designs. Clockwise, from the top, the tiles render: a cross Lorraine; a cross formée that was mistakenly rotated by a mason and not installed as detailed on the architectural drawing; at bottom center is a tile homage to St. Peter, the first Pope, as signified by the triregno or triple tiara and crossed keys; and, finally, a cross potent. The center tile's incised decoration of an interlinked trefoil and triangle signifies the Trinity.

Inside the cathedral where the chapel adjoins the nave, is a screen meaning "a barrier for subdividing [church] areas of differing function and liturgical significance". The chapel screen is comprised of a door and three wainscoting-height panels topped by a leaded glass tympanum and stone arch. Sandblasted designs of a thistle & a flower, perhaps a lily, adorn each panel & the door bottom. At one point, the drawings specified that plate glass inserted above each wood panel could be raised and lowered as required but there is no physical evidence this was done.

The leaded glass tympanum at the top of the screen is ornamented with hand-painted subjects, reading west to east: a *globus cruciger* or orb and cross symbolizing Christ's dominion; an upraised hand over a Jerusalem

cross; three fish overlapping to form a circle symbolizing the Trinity; and a fleur de lys or flower of the lily symbolizing the Virgin Mary.

The April 1931 drawings for the tympanum detailed generic floral and bird ornamentation but the wood panels' thistle flower (which becomes thistledown, a Visitation symbol) and tympanum's fleur de lys subjects reference the Virgin Mary. Shortly before St. Peter's dedication on Easter Sunday in late March 1932, Rev. Daniels wrote Whitehouse that "I am wondering if it would not be better to stick to the old designation of "Layde [sic] Chapel". Some of the saints you mention are all right, but I should think that there will be enough variety connected with the life of the Virgin Mary and tradition to use all the art and decoration one could desire..." Whitehouse swiftly concurred in a subsequent letter, so it is possible the ornamentation as executed on the panels and tympanum were to honor the Virgin Mary as was the "Layde Chapel" appellation.

Curiously, the historical record does not indicate that the "Layde Chapel" was ever dedicated with that name or the space referred to as such. In the late 1990s, inspired by the chapel's windows portraying St. Michael and the archangels, as well as the presence of a framed cross of nails from the Cathedral Church of St. Michael in Coventry, England, Dean Stephen Brehe recommended the vestry name the space "The Chapel of St. Michael and All Angels".

As noted, the chapel has become a repository of gifts over the decades since it was first decorated & one of the most striking is a silver-colored assemblage of three huge medieval nails configured into a cross, framed & hung on the east wall. In the 1970s, Dean Ray Brown and other clergy accompanied the Right Rev. Jackson Gilliam to Coventry where Hitler's Luftwaffe had dropped incendiary bombs on November 14, 1940, killing 568 people, destroying over four thousand homes and the medieval St. Michael's Cathedral. The following morning, the cathedral's stonemason was astounded to see in the ruins that two centuries-old roof beams had collapsed atop each other in such a way as to form a cross. The timbers were moved to a stone rubble "altar" and "Father Forgive" was written on the wall behind them. Shortly afterward, the priest from a nearby parish spotted three medieval nails as he carefully trod among the Cathedral's burned timbers and configured them into a cross. In the decades since, thousands of medieval nails have been recovered and formed into what is known as the "Coventry Cross of Nails". St. Peter's is among the hundreds of churches and organizations who advocate for reconciliation and peace to have received this gift from Coventry Cathedral.

To be continued...



