

## The History of the Chapel Angels



Gill had been working to a brief from Sir Aston Webb, president of the RIBA (and architect of Admiralty Arch, Buckingham Palace facade etc). Both were in the pay of the school's treasurer, Sir Ernest Debenham. The school itself was being built as a memorial to employees of the drapery trade killed in the 1914 -1918 Great War. The original charity boarding school operating at Russell Hill Purley from 1865 had suddenly become overwhelmed by the needs of 300 new war orphans of drapery trade families. Howard Hollingsworth of the Oxford Street department store Bourne & Hollingsworth quickly purchased the 120 acres of the Ballards estate and generously presented it as the site for a new second school.

Just five years later new buildings were opened by the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII) on 23 July 1924 when the foundation stone for the chapel was laid. The chapel itself was to be largely funded by the textile company I & R Morley whose chairman was the school's president Baron Hollenden of Leigh. He was descendant of Samuel Morley, the Whig MP and philanthropist friend of Lord John Russell. Eric Gill's unusual 'leaf-lettering' under the chapel tower commemorates this.

Later, Gill's two white plaster figures of angels with golden trumpets were commissioned for either side of the chancel arch in the chapel. Between 10 and 14 August 1925 Eric Gill's diaries show he made daily visits to the school chapel site, some with architect Aston Webb, staying overnight at The George in George Street and charging £5 per day. Two early models of the angels were considered, one in wood and another in stone carved for a total charge of £17. On 7 November 1925 the completed angels arrived on site, Gill being paid finally on 31 December.

By then Eric Gill had completed the 10-inch serif lettering facing the Lime Tree quad, two panels on the dining hall walls, the chapel foundation stone and keystone angel, the tower frieze and the two angels with trumpets. And the school had acquired for generations to come unique works by, some say, Britain's greatest artist/craftsman of the twentieth century.

Brian Angel (at school 1938-1947)