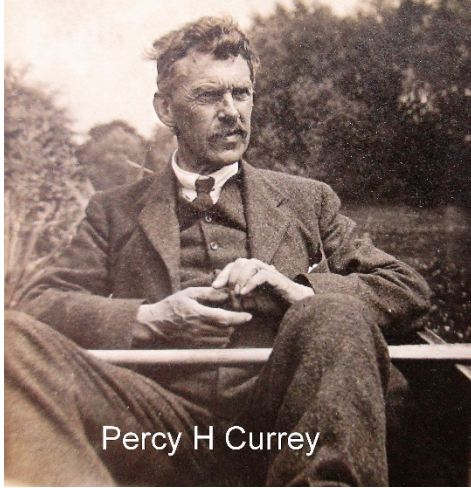


## **PERCY HEYLYN CURREY – ARCHITECT of DERBY SCHOOL**

**By Andrew Polkey**



Percy H Currey

The locally renowned Arts and Crafts architect Percy Heylyn Currey (1864-1942) was born into a well-established family of lawyers and architects. His uncle Henry was employed by the Duke of Devonshire as an architect and built a number of structures for the Duke in Buxton, while his other uncle William was a solicitor to the 6<sup>th</sup> Duke and handled much of his legal work in Derbyshire. Percy's father Benjamin Scott Currey (1830-1910) was articled to his uncle William and when qualified moved from London to Derbyshire where the Duke set him up as a junior partner to John

Barber of Derby. The firm prospered, becoming Barber & Currey operating from St. Michael's Court, and tasked primarily with looking after the Duke's legal business.

Benjamin married Helen Heygate in 1859 at St. Werburgh's church, the daughter of Dr. James Heygate, a wealthy surgeon living in Friargate. The latter was anxious to settle some property on his daughter and grandchildren, and so in 1867 the two men purchased a 17-acre estate in Little Eaton and Henry Currey, the Duke's architect, was called in to design the house known as Eaton Hill. The family moved there from Vernon Street and took up residence when the house was completed. Benjamin and Helen had seven children, five boys and two girls. Of the boys, Henry Erskine became a solicitor like his father, three became Anglican priests and remained single, and one, Percy, became an architect. The two girls never married and only Percy produced children.



Percy at School

### Early Years

Born on 21<sup>st</sup> November 1864 he was baptised at St. Michael's church, Derby, on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1865, the church practically adjoining his father's legal practice at St. Michael's House and from where his brother Harry was to carry on the firm till his death in 1943.

Percy attended Derby School between 1875 and 1882 when the school was at its height – raised from a mediocre position to one of

renown - under the headship of Rev. Walter Clark and had a roll of some 140 boys. During this time Percy developed an interest in drawing and studying old buildings as evidenced by his surviving sketchbooks, which contain a wealth of detailed drawings of local churches and prominent buildings. He toured the surrounding countryside on a bicycle during his leisure time and became an accomplished draftsman. Three of his brothers also attended Derby School, Harry Erskine, Reginald Heygate and Launcelot Sydney and secured places at Oxbridge colleges. Although Percy won a Rowland scholarship in 1878, unlike his four brothers, he did not go to university. The Rowland Scholarship seems to have been the work of John Barber, Percy's father's solicitor partner at St. Michael's House and also a Derby School Governor, whose client or associate, one Chapman Ward, owned tithes in Mickleover and wished to set up an annual fund from them of around £140. The endowment was to be named in honour of Ward's maternal grandfather, Alderman Samuel Rowland, who in 1816 had acquired Mickleover Old Hall and prospered there as a successful agronomist. Barber oversaw this transfer of property to the School Trustees in 1876 and rules were drawn up for externally moderated examinations to select four recipients per year, the value amounting to £25 for a period of two years.

Although the Currey brothers are listed in Tachella's Register, we have no sources from which to glean details of their school careers, as the school magazine and principal source of information did not appear until 1889, by which time all the Currey boys had left, though a surviving diary belonging to Percy contains only one reference to school, when on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1883 he remarked: "School began again. There are two new masters in Morgan and MacDonnell's places." Tachella tells us that J R Morgan BA taught Classics and was in post from 1879 to 1883, and Frederick Macdonnell BA (sic) from 1882-83 and who was responsible for French and German. Who their replacements were is less easy to determine, as two were drawing masters from Derby School of Art who arrived in 1883, and a Cambridge graduate Frank Stuckey who lasted only till 1885.

Leaving Derby School in 1883 he became articled to a local architect (F J Robinson) for three years and then in 1887 secured the post of assistant to Sir Arthur Blomfield of Montagu Place, London and worked with him on new buildings at Repton School - including the School chapel - before in 1888 finally setting himself up in practice at 3 Market Place, Derby. Given his father's wide circle of business connections and those of his three brothers in the church locally, he had every hope of making a success in his chosen profession.

Unsurprisingly then, his first known work is the entrance lodge to the family home at Eaton Hill in 1889, followed by a major restoration of Ilkeston parish church. A report of the official re-opening in the Derby Mercury of July 1889 gives an account of the work carried out, listing a new organ chamber, new oak seating in the chancel, the installation of a new altar with Hopton Wood stone steps, roof repairs and an improved heating system. The report contains the customary lengthy list of attendees, which included - besides the officiating Bishop of Southwell - a host of local clergy plus his brother Reginald, a local

businessman Charles Crompton, (who was to employ Percy a couple of years later in building two new churches in Ilkeston) and also James Sterndale-Bennett, then the current headmaster of Derby School from 1889 to 1898. Clearly Percy's renovations at St. Mary's Ilkeston had impressed several of these worthies and would provide in due course a valuable source of future work.

His first big solo commission came in 1889 to erect a new church at Borrowash (St. Stephen's), and soon after in 1891, at the age of 27, he was appointed to build a new chapel at Derby School in memory of his old headmaster who had died in 1889. The author remembers this building particularly well, being a pupil at the School from 1961 to 1966, and attending many services there, but



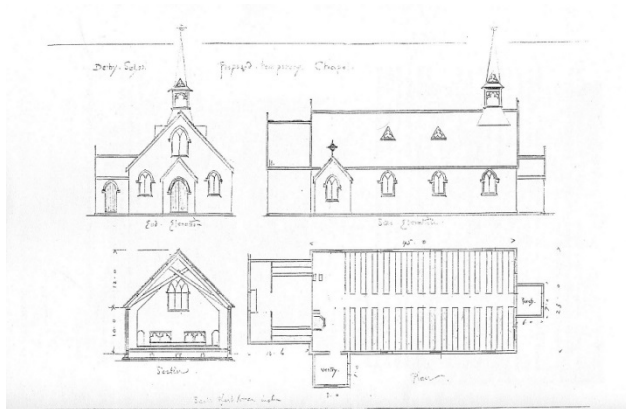
never knew that the designer of the chapel was an Old Boy. In this I daresay, I was hardly alone. Having lain empty and un-used for many years, and no other use having been found for it, the chapel was regrettably demolished in September 2017 to make way for the new King's Crescent housing development.

However, as most Old Derbeians would be familiar with and favour this particular building, it might be useful here therefore to examine something of its history and the genesis of its construction.

### Currey and Derby School Chapel

A report of the School Speech Day in the Derby Mercury for 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1891 carried an announcement by the headmaster J Sterndale-Bennett, that the foundation stone of a new "memorial chapel" had been laid on the 18<sup>th</sup> by Clara Clark, the sister of the former headmaster Walter Clark, and for many years a trusted helpmate and counsellor of her bachelor brother. The Latin inscription thereon had been provided by Mr. Cook Wilson, professor of logic at Oxford and a former pupil of the late headmaster. Plans had already been drawn up by "the School architect" Percy Currey who agreed to build the chancel first and then enlarge the chapel by a nave and further bays as and when funds permitted. The cost was estimated at £2000. It was also intended to build a laboratory and "other suitable buildings" financed from the endowment fund left by Sir Joseph Whitworth, which together with the Francis Ashe, (Emmanuel College) and Frederick Strutt bequests, amounted to barely £3,500 per annum.

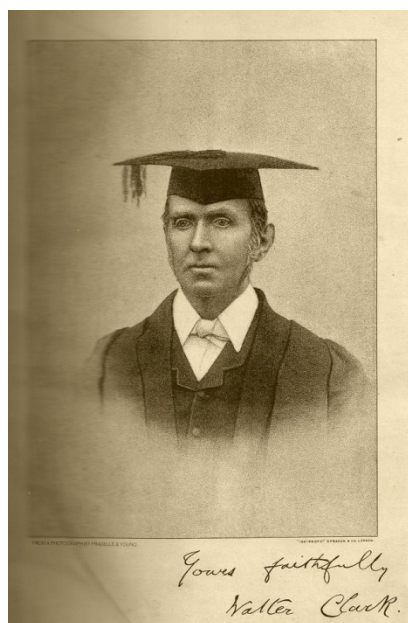
This was not the first chapel to appear on the St. Helen's House site, and was in fact a successor to a "tin chapel" that Walter Clark had opened in June 1882.



The Tin Chapel of 1882

Prior to this, the boys had used nearby St. Alkmund's church for services, and the current vicar the Rev. Edward Abney was also School Trustee. The Governors' Minutes for January 1881 reveal that Walter Clark had begun a subscription for a chapel, to which the then mayor of Derby, Abraham Woodiwiss had donated the sum of £200 at the Speech Day the previous December, and the Headmaster himself had

pledged a further £250, "if the chapel is built during my own tenure of the Headmastership and if it be of a size and style of architecture of which I approve." The following year he also added to his "wish-list" the requirement for a laboratory, and the Minutes state that "the ground had been inspected and that he was assured £400 would be required. If experiments are conducted in one of our classrooms, they must be injurious to the general health of the School. As for the chapel, a handsome stone one would cost £3000. Therefore I propose to provide an iron one . . . that will be ready for use in a month or six weeks." So here we have clear evidence that Walter Clark was already planning the considerable building programme that was to be completed some ten years later in his honour.



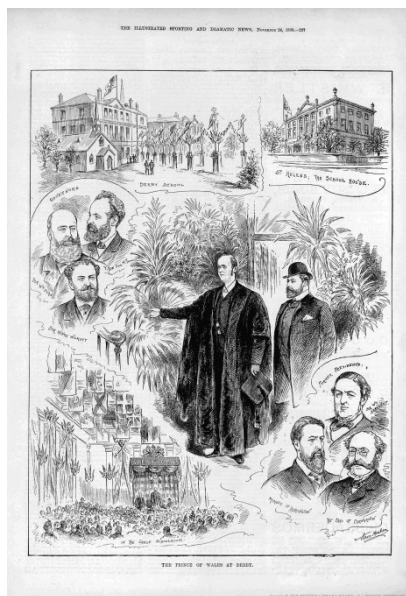
The Derby Daily Telegraph reported the opening ceremony presided over by the Bishop of Derby and described the edifice as being 60 feet by 23 feet and capable of accommodating 200 worshippers. Even so, Walter Clark in his report to the Governors was hoping that some "rich Derby gentleman would be a friend in need" and provide the wherewithal to erect a "handsome stone chapel" in the future. So clearly, he viewed the iron chapel as only a temporary expedient. One wonders what Percy made of it. His brother Rev. R H Currey (according to the Derby Mercury) preached there in March 1885 at a Lenten service open to all, and officiated over by Walter Clark. Did Percy possibly dream of creating something better in the fullness of time, as he must have attended services there whilst a pupil

during 1882-1883? We can only speculate. However, it seems certain that Percy Currey was by 1891 sufficiently approved of by Sterndale-Bennett to be described in the Derbeian as "*the School architect*"; as has already been shown, they were both in attendance at the Ilkeston dedication ceremony in July 1889, and Percy was then a guest at a meeting of the Old Derbeian Club meeting in July 1890 at which the new Headmaster was also present.

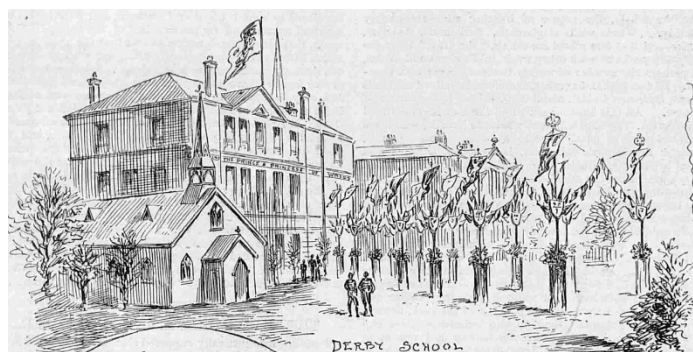


As to the future laboratory Walter Clark in 1881 was considering such a building to the north of the Pearson Building (Big School) and had requested plans and elevations to be prepared and submitted to the building committee. However, other matters intervened, and he did not live to see their realisation under his successor a decade later. It was indeed Clark's sudden death in April 1889 aged only 51, that drove the School authorities to see the completion of his vision as a fitting memorial. Appeals for donations were issued immediately and subscription lists published. The famous actor Richard Mansfield OD made a much publicised donation and by 1891 enough cash had been raised from interested parties (including donations from the Currey family) to enable building work to begin. The iron chapel was demolished and the proceeds sold to add to the fund, and eventually in 1901 its site was used for a fives court. Though nothing of this now survives, the fact that it was built by a later headmaster P K Tollit (1898-1906) is preserved by a commemorative circular plaque in the wall fronting the pavement on King Street, with a brief Latin date.

This long accepted narrative however is disputed by the recent find of a drawing published in the Illustrated Sporting & Dramatic News for November 1888, which shows the Prince of Wales making his second visit to Derby School and around whom are ranged a series of small sketches illustrative of various aspects of the event. One clearly depicts the iron chapel precisely occupying the ground upon which Currey's brick and stone chapel would come into being barely three years later. This would seem to settle the matter of the iron chapel's location, which was for so long erroneously held to be built on the land later used for the fives court.



Visit of Prince of Wales to Derby School  
1888



Detail top Left of Previous Picture Showing Tin Chapel

Concerning the two prestigious visits of the future King Edward VII to the School, it might be opportune here to refer to the obituary for Walter Clark published in the Derbyshire, for it was very much the personal achievement of the Headmaster, and raised the profile of the School enormously. We are told that the Prince of Wales "graciously consented to distribute the prizes in the capacity of President at the Speech Day" of 1872 and "it was to commemorate that memorable visit, that the handsome block of buildings which we call the New Buildings, was raised, a large proportion of the requisite money for which was given by our generous Headmaster. Last October

(1888) again, when the Prince of Wales was staying with Lord Hindlip at Doveridge Hall for the Derby races, Mr Clark was successful in inducing him to depart so far from the privacy of his visit as to call and inspect the Buildings which had been erected in memory of his former visit and to say a few graceful and appropriate words on the occasion."

Former pupils of the pre 1966 era at St. Helen's House might remember at the foot of the stairs leading up to Big School, a large dark framed canvass covered in faint gold lettering, which recorded the Prince's visit, his granting of an annual day's holiday in honour of the visit every 14<sup>th</sup> November, plus a list of distinguished scholars "in olden time," a list of annual presidents since 1868, and finally a reference to "the beloved Headmaster Walter Clark who passed away suddenly on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1889." Though the original has disappeared, a smaller modern copy was made and is currently displayed at the Derby Moor Academy site.



Clark's Grave at Uttoxeter New Road Cemetery, Derby

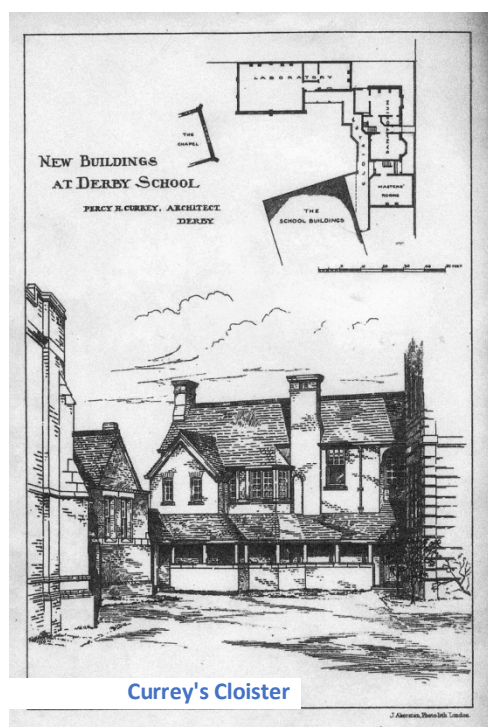
That the chapel was dedicated to the memory of an able and popular Headmaster is a fact impossible to doubt, though time inevitably weakened and eroded much of that memory. It must be admitted that the present writer and his contemporaries were largely in ignorance of his deeds, and indeed, to the entire history and purpose of the chapel. Those with Latin on their timetables could make some sense of the inscription on the foundation stone, but that was about as far as it went in our more secular age. However, things were very different in the 1890s, when every mention of the chapel was referenced in terms of it being the "Walter Clark memorial chapel." A former School chaplain, the Rev E E Dorling (1886-1890), preached at St. Alkmund's church prior to the foundation ceremony and a brief extract from his sermon gives a flavour of what the new building meant to his generation:

"It's walls will stand as silent witnesses of a man who, by God's providence, had the most to do with raising your School from the position of a second-rate County town School, to be an educational power in the country – who has stamped the impress of his own energy and enthusiasm on the tradition of this place – who was ever ready and willing to help, not only with his learning, but also with material assistance, and poor and promising scholar who might be under his charge – one, in short, whose every thought was the well-being of the School of which for memorable years he was the head.

"That is a tradition which you surely will not willingly let die; for, though very few of you now in the School knew the late Head Master, the remembrance of his example will endure, and the Memorial Chapel will help it to endure. The establishment of a permanent chapel was a cherished idea of his, and if he could have known it, it is the very form of memorial which he himself would have

chosen; and so we are glad to have been able to do this honour to his memory, and in days to come only what was best in him will be remembered, and Derby will prize as her noblest heritage, the remembrance of one who, strong dauntless fighter as he was, fell with all his harness on in the very midst of his work."

The same issue made reference to the New Buildings, which – besides the "Clark Memorial Chapel" – were described as a Sanatorium, Laboratory, and Masters' Rooms, which will, when complete, "be a very acceptable addition to the School Buildings, and will also greatly add to their appearance, forming as they will, a handsome little quadrangle." Further, "these buildings, with the exception of the Sanatorium, will be connected by a passage and cloister with the School House, and will include a large Laboratory, with private working rooms for the Science Master; two Masters' Sitting Rooms to correspond to the bed rooms in the Prince's Buildings; and the Sanatorium, which will be completely detached from the School, being approached only from the further side. The whole will be fronted by a handsome Cloister, which will be at the same time very convenient." These new structures were all illustrated in the pages of the School magazine and described as being "from the designs of Mr. P H Currey, the School Architect."



As remarked earlier, the School magazine – the Derbeian – came into existence in July 1889 almost certainly as a valedictory gesture to the memory of Walter Clark, but fortunately managed to continue until Derby School ceased to exist in 1989, and it is from the pages of the Derbeian of 1892 that we first see Currey's own sketch of the completed chapel and of the other buildings – the laboratory and Headmaster's House – the latter to be fronted by a "handsome cloister" and "to be paid for out of the slender endowment of the School." These works had proceeded in stages. First the chancel of the chapel had been raised and as already outlined, the foundation stone layed in December 1891. The Derbeian for December 1892 reviewed the work to date and reported

that a time capsule in the form of a bottle had been buried beneath the stone, containing a copy of the present Derbeian, together with a life of Walter Clark, the Derbyshire Advertiser of 1891, a copy of the School honours list for the past 25 years and a School prospectus. Unfortunately, when the chapel was demolished on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2017, no trace of the bottle or any of its contents was found. It must be concluded that they were removed by persons unknown at some period when the chapel was no longer in use after 1966.





However, the foundation stone was preserved by the contractors and the inscription can be translated as:

*"In memory of a most beloved man and brother, the Reverend Walter Clark BD, headmaster of Derby School for 22 years, this stone was placed by Clara Clark 18<sup>th</sup> December 1891 in the foundations of the chapel built by the devotion of his friends and pupils."*



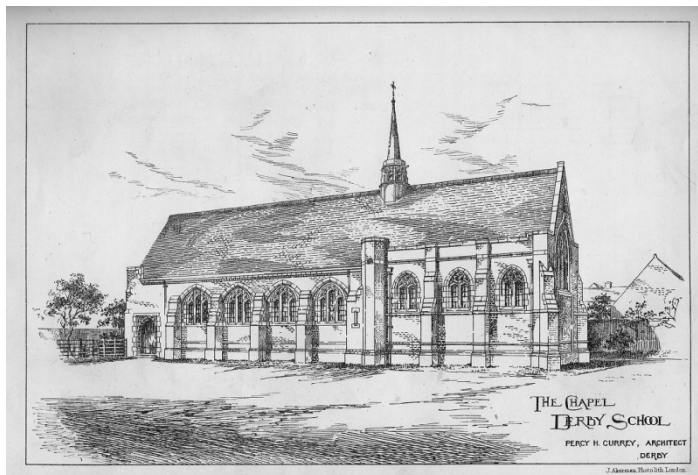
First Phase of the Chapel Build

Work progressed and the readership was informed in July of 1892 that the "new chapel is rapidly becoming a reality." The three bays of the chancel building were completed in March 1893, being described as in the Decorated style consisting of Leicestershire brick and Coxbench stone drawn from the quarries close to Little Eaton, the work so far costing £1003. High above the

foundation stone and the east window was a niche in which, said the local paper, "may be placed a figure of the founder of the School, Walter Durdant, bishop of Coventry and Lichfield in 1160." (These east front niches were to become something of a Currey trade mark in his later church building, but it appears that only St. Thomas at Somercotes (1901) has a statue in situ. The School chapel was never graced with a statue, whether of the said bishop or as was later



mooted, a statue of St. Helen.) Where the chancel and the first bay of the nave intersected, a small oak bell turret was set on the roof and encased in lead. The contractor chosen by Currey for the work so far, was Walkerdine of Bridge Street.



Currey's Original Design

by eight three-light windows with tracery of the Perpendicular order, the choir having six windows of two lights, and a large five-light window at the east end. Eventually they will be filled with stained glass; but at present tinted cathedral glass will be used. . . The roof, which will uniformly cover the whole building, will be of tiles; and between the nave and chancel, on the roof-ridge, will be a small oaken bell-turret. Internally the chapel will possess a boarded ceiling of half octagonal form, divided into bays and spaces by moulded ribs. Wood blocks will be the paving, with a central tiled passage. The choir, which will be raised by two steps above the nave, will accommodate forty clergy and choristers. The sanctuary will be paved with encaustic tiles. The architect is Mr. Percy H Currey, Derby." The above information, says Payne, is attributed to the courtesy of the present principal, Mr. James R Sterndale-Bennett, who no doubt had Currey's plans to hand. Payne concludes his piece on the "Clark Memorial Chapel" with a



Chapel as Built

When described by J C Payne in his "Derby Churches Old & New" of 1893 the walls were still rising "with all the rapidity that masons and builders can command" and would be "81 feet long and 21 feet 3 inches wide internally and 17 feet high to the wall plate or springing of the roof." (This apparent discrepancy with the various

measurements will be explained later.) " The nave will be lighted

ringing endorsement of the School, an encomium worth repeating here as illustrative of the contemporary nature of the School that both Sterndale-Bennett and Percy Currey endorsed:

"The provision of this new chapel cannot but strengthen the religious tendencies of the pupil for whom the stone walls of St. Helen's enclose all that is requisite to train him for his

calling, be it Church, Army, Letters or Law."

If Walter Clark is to be credited with raising the prestige and reputation of the School and adding to it the adjoining Pearson Building (Big School) in 1874, then Sterndale-Bennett should be recognised for carrying out the expansion programme inaugurated in 1891 that produced not only the chapel, but also the range of buildings variously known as the laboratory and the headmaster's house. Typed extracts taken later from the Governors' Minute Book confirm that Sterndale-Bennett was the principal originator of the building scheme and record that he formally submitted plans to them in July 1891. There had clearly been problems with the Charity Commissioners who "were not disposed to allow any money to be advanced from the endowment fund towards the Chapel," presumably due to it being a denominational venture, "therefore this money should be used to add to the proposed site of the Sanatorium." This document then lists the costs of the proposed Chapel as £867-4s-1d and states that the amount in the Walter Clark Memorial Fund to be £813-14s-4d, leaving a shortfall of £53-9s-9d yet to be raised. Crucially, the Headmaster asked that the Governors should "consider the Chapel to be the property of the School and take possession of it as such." The Governors expressed their approval and by January of the following year the Minutes recorded that "the exterior of our new Chapel is completed and that the building would soon be ready for use." Meanwhile, part of the "large school-room remained divided off and furnished as a Chapel for temporary use."



There was only one other building scheme to figure in the history of the School at the St. Helen's House site, and that was the series of wooden "temporary structures" that were erected by Headmaster Tom York in 1934 to the rear of the chapel to accommodate the

rising School roll. They had to be of wood, due to the GNR line (later LNER) running in a tunnel beneath the rear playground and which precluded the use of heavy brick buildings requiring deep foundations.

As remarked above, there can be no doubt that Sterndale-Bennett was the originator of the 1891 expansion programme, as the *Derbeian* for that year (December edition) contained a lengthy report of the School speech day which was also published in the *Derby Mercury* dated the 23<sup>rd</sup> and which is worth quoting substantially for the wealth of detail that it provides:

After morning service at St' Alkmund's church, "an adjournment was made to a tent in the School grounds underneath which the foundation ceremony was

performed, conducted by the lord (suffragen) bishop of Derby (Rt. Rev. E A Were DD) where Miss Clark very kindly laid the foundation stone." (It should be remembered that since 1884 Derby had been incorporated in the see of Southwell until 1927, when All Saints church became a cathedral and Derby became a diocese in its own right.) Of Miss Clark's participation, a later edition reported: "She was handed a silver trowel with which she placed the mortar under the stone, and the spirit level having been applied, she tapped the stone with a mallet and pronounced the words of blessing. The words of dedication were then uttered by the bishop and the service concluded with a few prayers and the blessing. Previous to Miss Clark's departure, at the close of the ceremony, the Head Master presented to her the trowel, in memory of the noble event. The trowel, which was exceedingly handsome, was enclosed in a neat leather case lined with the School colours, it having been specially made by Messrs. E Johnson of Derby. It is interesting to know that the spirit level used at the ceremony was the same which Her Majesty the Queen used when laying the foundation stone of the Royal Infirmary in May last, and was kindly lent, together with the ivory mallet, by Messrs. Johnson.

Afterwards, Sir William Evans (chairman of the governors) presided over a large gathering in the Schoolroom, where amongst those present were Lord Denman, Lord Scarsdale, Sir Alfred Haslam, Sir John Smith, Mr T H Harrison, the Mayor of Derby" and many more listed clergy and worthies of the town. Mr Sterndale-Bennett addressed the gathering and said: "that at the beginning of the year he had lain before the governors a scheme for some new buildings which would be exceedingly nice for them to have, but they were almost a necessity now on account of the increasing number of boys. (Applause) He was grateful to say that the governors met his proposals with the greatest possible encouragement and that behind the tent used for the foundation stone laying, they had already commenced to lay out the ground for building a new laboratory, and a sanatorium, and which would be entirely apart from the other buildings, but would be close by and in every respect very convenient. There would be some other rooms which might be used either as classrooms or libraries, or even for masters' lodgings and they would at any rate relieve the great pressure for space which was felt at the present time throughout the schoolhouse. (Hear, hear.)

These buildings, designed by the School architect, Mr. Currey, would not only fill up what had hitherto been rather an unsightly corner of the playground, but which would form a little court which he believed would be a very attractive feature of the School surroundings. (Hear, hear.) These buildings were to be erected from the School resources; they were to be built out of the endowment fund. He did not think there would be any better way of laying out the legacy which was left to the School by Sir Joseph Whitworth than in building a new science laboratory. (Applause.)





There was only one other topic he need touch upon; he alluded to the erection of their new memorial chapel. First he should like to say . . . how proud and pleased he was that Miss Clark was able to set aside a certain diffidence which they could well understand her to possess in revisiting the School; she had come amongst them to cement the old with the new and lay the stone of the chapel. The stone bore the inscription

by Professor Wilson of Oxford, one of Mr. Clark's most distinguished pupils, the inscription in a language that was dear to the late headmaster, and one which expressed in a way that no other could express, a long story of twenty-two years' hard work. He wished to tell them exactly what had to be done in regard to the chapel. The amount of money subscribed was a very large sum and a substantial testimony to the gratitude and affection of Mr. Clark's many friends and pupils; but when it was proposed that a complete chapel should be built with that sum, he thought it was a mistake. He believed it was not impossible that in years to come the School might increase very much, and it seemed to him to be a mistake to put up a small chapel which might be wholly inadequate, and to have to make place for a larger one. He suggested and Miss Clark concurred with it, that they might complete the nave as time went on. If they were to stand in the same position as other schools in the county, what they would require was a fine chancel (Hear, hear) and the funds required to complete it, together with the fittings, would come to not less than £2000. He was not going to say how he proposed to complete that scheme, but he felt sure there were sufficient friends of the School to enable them to finish the work. (Hear, hear.)



Laboratory Between Chapel & Headmaster's House

They ought to have a chapel in which they could welcome their old pupils, and where they could from time to time ask their parents to take part in the most important functions attracting to School life." (Applause.)

On February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1893 the dedication of the first phase by the Bishop of Derby took place and despite the lack of space, 18 confirmations took

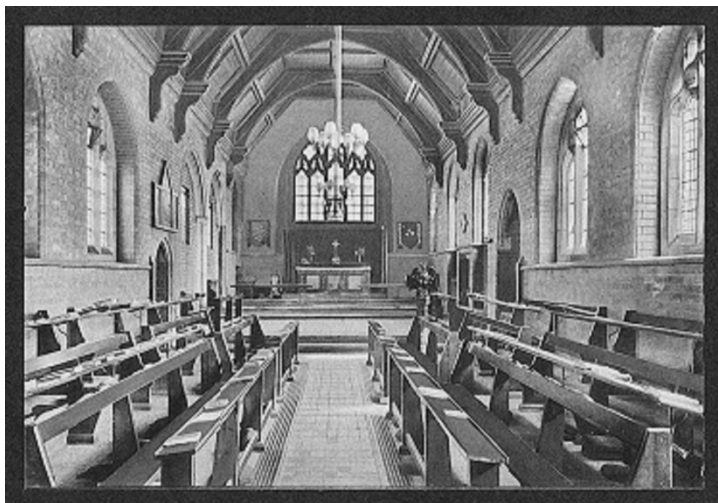
place. The chapel extension fund was thus a necessary development and soon got under way, assisted by donations from many well-wishers, including Percy Currey's father and brother Harry. Even his grandmother Mrs. Eliza Heygate provided the not inconsiderable sum of £10. Some 32 Old Derbeians also contributed, so that by the end of the year the Head could announce that the chapel was "now finished as far as the Chancel is concerned." A good proportion of the estimated £2000 required was raised by the novel idea of a fund-raising Bazaar held in November, attended by The Duchess of Devonshire, the Countess of Harrington, Lady Hindlip and a host of titled ladies and gentlemen; an entertainment and stalls were provided in the "large Schoolroom" and Miss Clara Clark also put in an appearance.



Headmaster's House Rear View

When examining the photos of the chapel included in this article, some readers may have noticed something of a discrepancy between Percy Currey's lithograph of 1892 and the later photographs. The original scheme was for a four-bay nave, but the completed chapel in fact possessed only three. The explanation for this alteration is to be found in a report of July 1894 from Sterndale-Bennett

to the School Governors' in which reference is made to a "slightly modified plan of Mr. Percy Currey the Architect." The report states "it is proposed to shorten the originally intended length by 9 feet. The building would then accommodate about 180 persons, in place of about 200. The advantages of the modified scheme are that the proportions of the building will be improved. The Architect himself considers the shortening a distinct gain to his design, in that the west end of the Chapel will not be so close to the street wall, and that the whole building could be finished at once, instead of by instalments."



Interior circa 1930s

Thus, it was that on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1895, though much delayed by bad weather, the bishop of Southwell, assisted by the bishop of Derby, was able to officiate at the dedication service of the completed chapel – completed that is, apart from the internal fittings. The Derby Mercury reported that the Headmaster later spoke in the large Schoolroom and said that "so far as the interior went, more had yet to be done. Mr Currey

the architect (who was present at the assembly) had drawn plans for a west-end screen, and a music gallery and oak stalls, which were very delightful to look at and dream about, and which he hoped ere long, by the united efforts of all, would become things of reality. But he did not think they had quite done with things of bricks and mortar yet . . .”

It would take many years before funds became available to fully decorate the interior and provide all the necessary accoutrements for worship, in terms of an altar, chalices, organ, candlesticks and such like requirements.

However, in November of 1895 it was reported that workmen were busy in the chapel installing two stained glass memorial windows. One was to the memory of a Master, James Tate MA who came to the School in 1889 as senior maths teacher, but who attended an interview to become Headmaster of Gillingham Grammar School in July of 1892 and died of a heart attack when he learned he had obtained the post! The second window was dedicated to Gerald Howard Tripp (1883-1894) the young son of Charles Tripp of 63 Friar Gate Derby, the Managing Director of Ind, Coope & Co, the well-known Burton brewery. Both windows were subsequently sold when the chapel was deconsecrated, and their images have been preserved. It is not known if there were others added later, but if so, they are outside the scope of this work.



Tripp Memorial Window of 1894

It was in March 1896 that the Derbeian was able to report that the final payments for building the chapel and putting in the temporary fixtures had now been made. The accounts were published and showed that a debt of some £63 was still outstanding, but the Old Derbeians

hoped to liquidate this sum later in the year.

It was at their Dinner in November, held at the Midland Hotel, with Mr. H H Bemrose MP in the chair, and Percy Currey and his brother Harry and some 30 or so ODs making up the attendees of the “Old Derbeian Club,” that the Headmaster addressed the assembled gathering. His remarks included a reference to the buildings, “which had recently been added” and said “that it was his earnest desire to see the New Chapel entirely completed and furnished as a College Chapel,” - (one in which the pews or benches faced each other across the aisle) - “to Mr. Currey’s beautiful design, during the period of his own



Headmastership.” From this we may surmise that work on the interior fixtures and fittings was still in progress, and this seems indeed to have been the case, for the Derbeian over the following years mentions bequests to the Chapel and donations of various items for use in routine Anglican services.



Chapel 1957

To conclude this expanded section on Percy Currey’s Chapel, we can be sure that he was a frequent participator in its many ceremonies over the years, as the ODs held services there that Percy was almost certain to have attended. Though his surviving adult diaries in the hands of his family only cover the period 1900-1902, there are several references therein to Percy attending School speech days, plays and other entertainments, so there can be little doubt that he was also a frequent visitor to the Chapel. With the passage of time, several commemorative events took place in which the School Chapel figured prominently, particularly the Boer War and the Great War, both of which were remembered by the fixing of marble tablets to the interior walls of the chapel. Both these and that commemorating the Second World War are now at Moorway Lane, but the names of the dead of both world wars are inscribed on the obelisk in the forecourt of St. Helen’s House and which still remains the property of the Old Derbeian Society. It was erected in 1921 by Sir Reginald Blomfield, the nephew of the same Sir Arthur Blomfield who first employed the young Percy Currey as his clerk of works at Repton School in 1886.



The Old Derbeian War Memorial Obelisk of 1921



Currey's Chapel Demolished 4th September 2017

## After Derby School

Having examined Currey's achievements at some length as "School Architect," it is now necessary to resume a brief study of his career thereafter and to appreciate why the present writer regards him to be one of the School's greatest alumni and an architect worthy of far greater recognition and appreciation.

During the 1890s and the conclusion of the work at Derby School, commissions came thick and fast and Percy's career took off, helped no doubt by his securing the post of Diocesan Surveyor in 1895, which ensured plenty of work from the church. His most productive period spanned the next twenty years and a list of his most important works is appended at the end of this brief article. Practically all of them are situated in Derbyshire and therefore relatively accessible. Those situated in Little Eaton will be examined in a later paragraph. As to the bare bones of professional biography, suffice it to say that in 1903 he went into partnership with fellow architect Charles Clayton Thompson and in 1907 he was admitted as a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects.



But what of the man himself? What do we know of him? Fortunately, there are some diaries as well as the copious sketchbooks, from which we can glean some idea of his personality and the sort of man he was. Clearly the boy was father to the man and his interest in buildings was firmly established during his schooldays. He was also a man who loved the countryside and no-where more so than his beloved Little

Eaton, as the pages of his diary testify to rambles and walks along the local footpaths with family members who shared his passions for walking, cycling and even river bathing.

He was a keen member of the Derby Archaeological Society and served for thirty years as its secretary, publishing several articles on a variety of architectural topics. As a member of the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings, he undertook a number of projects to rescue or repair endangered or damaged buildings – such as Wilne church and St. Mary's Bridge chapel. He was also, as aforesaid, fond of his old school, and attended many of the Old Derbyian Society functions, like speech days, dinners and school plays and finally became its President in 1925.

Here in Little Eaton he sang in the church choir, served as churchwarden, and also Chairman of the parish council from 1921-37. Clearly, he was very much a man who felt he had roots in the local landscape, and so it will come as no



surprise to find that he carried out a good deal of building hereabouts. Much of it was of a "bread and butter" nature that any architect of the time would be bound to undertake but which leaves no mark today and can only be discerned from random diary entries referring to erecting stables, surveying ground, repairing walls or renovating dilapidations. Much work was done of this kind for his siblings and therefore is not part of the more public work that he carried out, though it is believed he built a number of the extensions to the rear of The Poplars, a fine Georgian house opposite Elms Farm, where his elder brother Harry Erskine lived for a dozen or so years after marrying in 1897. Percy also married at St. Anne's church in the same year, to Augusta Leacroft, the daughter of a doctor, and known later by the family as "Emmie."

Prior to this Percy had lived with his parents at Eaton Hill, but now as a married man he needed a home of his own and so moved to a previously tenanted farm on the estate known as Wyndesmore. Here he substantially extended and expanded the farm cottage to create an attractive little villa in the Arts and Crafts style that he went on to make so much his own.



With the birth of his three children, Charlotte Maisie (1899), John Heylyn (1901), and Joyce Mary (1902), it became necessary for him to acquire larger premises, so in 1911 he built a new house in the Lutyan's style on a piece of land with a fine view to the south and named it after the field name on which it stood – The Hatherings.

The latter is probably his finest domestic creation, though a villa he built for a Midland Railway official Edward Letchford bordering the Arboretum in Loudon Street runs a close second and is certainly worth visiting. However, it is now subdivided into flats and much of the interior decoration has unfortunately been lost.



The finest collection of Currey's work in Derby is to be found at the site of the former Diocesan Training College on Uttoxeter New Road (now converted and sublet to a series of business and offices) where throughout his career he was called in to add a series of buildings as the College expanded. The chapel of 1900 bears a striking similarity to the Derby School chapel in red brick with gritstone embellishments, but with a battlemented parapet. It was deconsecrated in 1985 and now used as a workshop. Flanking it is a veritable cornucopia of Currey's work, comprising of a number of lecture rooms, accommodation blocks, dominated by a splendid Practice School of 1905, which displayed his hallmark predilection for steep tiled roofs, depressed gables and expansive fenestration. It was regrettably demolished in 1997 to make room for a series of undistinguished apartment blocks.

However, the remarkable Gymnasium of 1914 still survives with its lofty brick buttressing, but for how long? This ensemble was rightly praised by the builder and Derby Architect F H Thorpe, who commented: "The Training College buildings and schools are admitted to be splendidly planned and carried out – the Schools being the best in this county of their kind." Pevsner in his 1953 book on the architecture of Derbyshire, whilst stating that of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, "there is nothing of note," goes on to add, "except the sound and sensitive" work of P H Currey, "an architect worthy of being better known."



The same year (1914) he designed St. Mary's church at Buxton, perhaps his most perfect church, with sweeping roofs, and little dormer windows looking more like hooded eyebrows, giving the whole a perfect cottage-like appearance.

Thereafter he undertook few major commissions and was content to concentrate more on restoration work,

but his affection for his native village was manifested in a simple but beautifully designed lych-gate for St. Paul's church, erected in 1922 in honour of those who fell in the Great War.

His parents and sisters were buried in the churchyard, as were two of his children, so when Percy died in 1942 at the age of 78, he too found interment there, but of his grave no record remains. It is believed that the fragile wooden headboards he erected for his sisters were copied to mark his own final resting

place. An unfortunate decision, as his headboard failed to survive the rigours of wind and rain. Although his grave is unmarked and now lost, he needs no monument, as his many buildings surely stand as fitting memorials to this worthy son of Derby School.

### **Brief Gazetteer of Major Works**

St. Stephen's church, Borrowash – 1889  
Derby School Chapel - 1891  
St. John the Evangelist, Ilkeston – 1893  
Diocesan Training College chapel, Derby – 1900  
St. Peter's church, Stonebroom – 1900  
Christ church, Holloway – 1901  
St. Osmund's church, Derby – 1904  
St. Anne's church vicarage, Highfield Road, Derby -1906  
Diocesan Training College, Practising School - 1905  
Villa, 28 Loudon Street, Derby – 1907  
The Hatherings, Little Eaton – 1911 -  
Diocesan Training College Gymnasium, Derby – 1914  
St. Mary's church, Buxton – 1914  
St. Bartholomew's church, Derby – 1920  
St. Stephen's church, Sinfin, Derby – 1935

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