



RODBOROUGH TABERNACLE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

Welcome to our Little Chapel – a place of spiritual serenity and a valued example of Arts and Crafts Movement design.



The Little Chapel is a place of tranquillity and prayer – a retreat from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. It is used regularly for worship and for special occasions such as weddings and baptisms. Its undercroft is still used as meeting-room and headquarters by the local Scout group, providing a valued link with the wider community. We also welcome visitors who are interested in the Arts & Crafts Movement, as well as those simply seeking a place to reflect.

The Little Chapel was built circa 1835, originally as a coach house and stables to the Church, at a time when the sanctuary in the main church building was enlarged to accommodate a growing congregation.

Subsequently, during the pastorate of the Rev. C. Ernest Watson (1909-1942) the number of young people in the church increased considerably. This began in 1909 when Rev. Watson was inspired to start a Scout Troop. A Guide Company was added in 1914.

On Sunday afternoons, meetings attracted about fifty young people and Rev. Watson had the vision of converting the coach house into a worship centre for what was to become the Guild of the Tri-Sigma.

The idea caught the imagination of local businessman Reginald Tyrell, who lived about half a mile away on Walkley Hill. In 1925 he generously financed the cost of the conversion. The vestibule contains a plaque commemorating the skills of the craftsmen who carried it out.

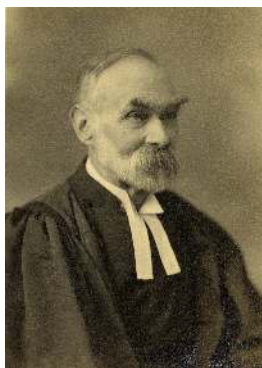


The alterations were designed and supervised by **Sidney Barnsley** from Sapperton, a renowned exponent of Arts and Crafts Movement design and now approaching the end of his long and illustrious career. The eventual result is the Little Chapel sanctuary that we see, unchanged, today. Doorways were converted, leaded windows added and the interior was transformed with the light oak panelled wainscot, pews and matching furniture that we see today. Floors were raised for the pulpit at one end and for the entrance with an oak screen and curtain at the other.

The green glass pendant lights were made by esteemed local blacksmith Alfred Bucknell, who worked with Gimson and the other Sapperton craftsmen.



The furniture and fittings were made under the direction of Dutch cabinetmaker **Peter van der Waals** at his Chalford workshop. Waals was employed by the Barnsley brothers and Ernest Gimson, a fellow Arts and Crafts Movement designer and craftsman of great repute.



Rev. C E Watson
(served 1909-1942 as minister) whose idea it was to convert the coach house and stables.



Additions were made in 1934, when the Oriel bay was erected behind the pulpit, plus the entrance vestibule with a linking corridor. These extensions were built in such a way as to avoid the two ancient beech trees of Rodborough Wood which became unsafe and were felled in 1950.



The Little Chapel in the 1930s

In the Oriel bay are three stained glass windows of special interest. The central window (circa 1936), by **Henry Payne**, depicts the Nativity and is dedicated to the memory of Mrs. Tyrell.



On the table below the Nativity window are further symbols of the Christian faith – a Bible, a wooden cross and a candle. From the Bible we learn of God's great love. The cross symbolises our Lord and His sacrifice. The candle represents the light of the risen Christ shining in the world.



The left hand window (circa 1937) by **Edward Payne**, Henry's son, is in memory of Mr. Tyrell. It is after Holman Hunt's famous painting and shows Christ the 'Light of the World'.

Jesus is knocking at the door of a person's heart, seeking admission. The door, however, can only be opened from the inside.

An interesting touch is the little bat which features in the top left of the window.



The opposite window depicts Jesus the Good Shepherd returning with the lost sheep. It is aptly dedicated to Rev. Charles Ernest Watson who served the Tabernacle as its greatly beloved pastor for 32 years. On the hilltop behind the figure is a small cross.

The window was made by **Whitefriars** of London, associates of the Barnsleys, famous for their glassware as well as stained glass. Their signature is identified by a tiny figure of a friar on the right hand side of the window.

During Communion services a simple wooden board is placed between the two pedestals. Christians remember the last supper that Christ shared with His disciples, offering them bread and wine as symbols of His broken body and the blood He shed for mankind, an act eternally reminding us of God's unwavering love revealed in the life, suffering and death of Jesus.



At the front of the Chapel is an oaken staff mounted by a brass circle enclosing three Greek Sigmas, or S's. This is the symbol of the Tri Sigma Guild.

The three S's represent Sincerity, Self surrender and Service, expressing the three ideals of Christian living.

Guild members progressed through various grades and were encouraged to enter full membership of the church.

Names of Guild members can be seen on small brass plaques in the Oriel bay.

At the rear of the Chapel a brass plaque records the dedication of the Chapel to the Tyrell family.

Beside it is a large, blue enamelled cross decorated with a vine and grapes. The cross is of the Italian school and was purchased by the Tyrells during a holiday in Italy.

It is reputed to be the largest piece produced by the artist at the time.

A further brass plaque acknowledges the generous financial support received from several charities which enabled us to renew the Chapel's main roof in 2009.



Funds were gratefully received from the National Churches Trust, the URC West Midlands Synod, the Gloucestershire Historic Churches Trust, the Langtree Trust, the Gloucestershire Environmental Trust and Rodborough Scouts, in addition to fundraising and donations made by the members and friends of Rodborough Tabernacle.

THE LITTLE CHAPEL, SIDNEY BARNESLEY AND THE ARTS & CRAFTS MOVEMENT



In 1893 three young architects and furniture designers left London, their erstwhile place of work, in order to set up permanently in the Cotswolds. They cared little for the “professional networking” (to use the modern parlance) that attached to work in the capital. They preferred instead to pursue in a peaceful and natural rural environment their ideals of producing simple, honest furniture, made by craftsmen with respect for the integrity of the raw materials - mainly locally sourced oak.

These three young men developed the practical skills required to produce their own furniture and, as they employed more craftsmen, to supervise the entire process. This was somewhat unusual for the times and at first local people did not quite know what to make of them. However, the years went by and their renown grew as their design style developed within a new philosophy that we know as the **Arts and Crafts Movement**. The Little Chapel and the pulpit area of the main church building are both fine examples of the genre.



Sidney Barnsley, Lucy Morley, **Ernest Gimson**, **Ernest Barnsley** with his wife Alice and their two daughters, Mary and Ethel, at Pinbury, Gloucestershire, about 1896
Photograph courtesy of Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum

The Arts and Crafts Movement was born out of growing concern that the increasing industrialisation of manufacturing at the beginning of the 19th century was destroying true craftsmanship. The advent of sophisticated machinery during the industrial revolution led to mass production with which village craftsmen could not compete. Many fell by the wayside and their traditional skills were being lost. But already there were those who recognised the threat and were prepared to speak out. The seeds of the Arts and Crafts Movement were sown.

The first big name to campaign for the return to true craftsmanship was architect **A.W.N Pugin** (joint designer of the Palace of Westminster), followed by **John Ruskin** and **William Morris** – the latter being perhaps the name now most associated with the Arts and Crafts Movement.

The tenets of this movement were simple – honesty and simplicity of design, genuine craftsmanship and use of local materials. The Arts and Crafts Movement grew to become a hugely important genre that was to influence the course of British design throughout the 20th century.

Our three young local architects were to be numbered among the most respected masters of the genre. They were brothers **Sidney and Ernest Barnsley** and fellow architect and designer, **Ernest Gimson**. These three men were to become the foremost of those who drew inspiration from its philosophy, and developed it so faithfully. Their contribution, therefore, to the remarkable phenomenon which was the Arts and Crafts Movement cannot be overstated.

It was **Sidney Barnsley** who, in the early 1920s towards the end of his illustrious career, designed the conversion of **Rodborough Tabernacle's coach house** into the **Little Chapel**, a highly regarded example of Arts and Crafts design which has remained unchanged to the present day.

Although the Barnsleys were from Birmingham and Gimson from Leicester, they shared remarkably similar family backgrounds and values – their parents were liberal thinkers and self-made businessmen with a strong humanitarian ethos.

The two 'Ernests' (Barnsley and Gimson) had also been fellow students during their architectural studies in London.

These shared experiences helped the men to develop a mutual respect and shared understanding of their design aspirations. All three were keen to develop hands-on experience of wood craft, with Sidney Barnsley particularly assiduous in this regard.

But Sidney never deserted his architectural roots and became a member of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. As such he undertook a lot of conservation and conversion work locally and many of Gloucestershire's ancient buildings have reason to be grateful to him – including, of course, the Little Chapel, which, without Sidney Barnsley's vision would never have existed in its present form.

On their arrival in Gloucestershire the Barnsleys and Gimson initially rented a house, Pinbury, not far from Cirencester. It was owned by Lord Bathurst, who later became a client. In 1902, needing larger premises, they established workshops in nearby Sapperton.

There Gimson employed as foreman Dutchman Peter van der Waals, who was also to become a first class and widely renowned master of Arts and Crafts design, establishing in 1920 his own workshops in Chalford. Waals continued his association with Sidney Barnsley after Gimson's death in 1919. It was Waals who designed the furniture and fittings of the Little Chapel which were made in his Chalford workshop.

Gimson also employed **Alfred Bucknell**, whose father and son were, like himself, highly regarded local blacksmiths. During his long association with Gimson, Bucknell made the green glass pendant lights in the Little Chapel.

Sidney Barnsley also converted Seynckley, in Amberley, formerly St Loe's School, and the home of one **Henry Payne**.

Henry Payne was himself a fine Arts and Crafts craftsman, working in stained glass. He therefore knew the Barnsleys well and, with his son **Edward**, was responsible for two of the three oriel windows in the **Little Chapel** as well as many other commissions in the county and also one for the Houses of Parliament.

Edward Payne at work



Sidney Barnsley was a quiet, unassuming and kindly man without a hint of pomposity. Such was his sensitivity to vernacular traditions and devotion to his craft that he only undertook commissions which were in harmony with his instincts.

From 1913 the number of such commissions increased as his reputation spread. He died shortly after his brother Ernest in 1926. His son Edward continued his father's work, becoming a distinguished designer in his own right.

Following Sidney's death, William Lethaby, a leading contemporary architect with considerable influence in the early development of the Arts and Crafts Movement, paid the following tribute to him in a letter to his widow:

"He has gone rich in honour, so dearly loved and so quiet a help to all things beautiful....he was a big Englishman....Our hope is that we may have more of the kind, but there can never be just that again"

(unpublished letter 24th Oct 1926. Source A. Davies)

Suffice it to say here that the quiet, unassuming serenity and simple beauty of the Little Chapel must surely stand as a tribute to him - the man and the craftsman.

Acknowledgement:

Mary Greensted: 'Gimson and the Barnsleys' (Alan Sutton 1980)

Some other local examples of Arts and Crafts design by the Barnsleys, Gimson and Henry Payne:

- Minchinhampton and Poulton Memorial Crosses by Sidney Barnsley, 1919
- Church of Edward the Confessor, Kempley, interior fittings by Ernest Barnsley and Gimson, 1903
- Rodmarton Manor by Ernest Barnsley 1909-26
- Fairford Memorial Cross by Gimson, 1919
- Stained glass by Henry Payne at St Mary Magdalene, Rodborough; St James' Church, Chipping Campden; Chapel of St Thomas More and St John Fisher, Box; and St Mary's Church, Berkeley

Work by them can also be seen in the Arts and Crafts Movement gallery, Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum.



Interior of the Little Chapel



Rev Watson with young members of the congregation outside the Little Chapel

Finally, thank you for visiting our Little Chapel. We hope you have enjoyed your visit and will want to come again.

The Little Chapel is open to visitors on Sunday afternoons, or a private group visit can be arranged by telephoning Ron Cook on 01453 763026. Church members will be happy to show you around and you will also always be welcome at our Sunday morning services (10.30am).

Further information about the Tabernacle, its history and life today can be found on our website at <http://community.stroud.gov.uk/tabernacle>

Go in the knowledge that God loves you.
May the joy of the risen Lord Jesus be yours.
May the Holy Spirit be your travelling companion.
May you know the Peace of Christ all your days.



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