

St. Columba's Church, Pont Street, London

ST. COLUMBA's is once again a landmark on the London landscape. As one approaches it the strength and majesty of the building are most impressive. The tower, which is crowned with a Cross and the symbol of St. Andrew, calls to mind the old Scottish Tolbooth, and the high archway of the entrance, St. Regulus, St. Andrews. The corner stones of the arch are a block of marble from Iona and a stone from the pre-Reformation Cathedral of St. Andrews; so that, on entering the church, the people pass between actual parts of the centres of early Christianity in the east and west of Scotland. Above the centre door is a splendid statue of St. Columba standing in his coracle. It is the work of Mr Vernon Hill. He has represented the Saint with his hand raised in blessing upon the many as they enter and leave the building, and, though they may be unaware of it, upon the multitudes who daily pass by in Pont Street.

The building is so constructed that on the ground floor level there is the main vestibule with the Minister's and Deaconess's offices, a small hall or lounge with a kitchen off it and a committee room. Stairways lead up to the church and down to the hall, and there is a lift installed for those who find it difficult to negotiate the stairs. A striking feature of the vestibule, which is floored in Purbeck marble and has pillars of Honiton stone, is the sculptural group of two angels supporting the Scottish Saltire. The text, "My House shall be called a house of Prayer", is beautifully carved below, and reminds all who enter that though we have a building equipped for many activities, all centre upon the offering of ourselves in worship.

The hall, which has a seating accommodation of 800, is spacious and light and adequate for all the normal activities of the congregation. It has a sprung floor which makes it very suitable for Scottish dancing and badminton. There is a large stage which makes the production of plays less difficult than in most church halls, especially as there is a door at the back of it opening on to the rear exit of the building, to enable scenery to be brought in with very little effort. The stage lighting is permanently installed with a complete stage switchboard.

One of the features of the life of St. Columba's is the providing of lunch after morning service for those who wish it. The lunch is cooked in large, well equipped kitchens by voluntary teams, and is served in the hall; over 100 lunches are served each Sunday.

The church itself is on the first floor. It is basilican in form and the Holy Table is in the apse with the elders' chairs placed round it. The service is conducted from behind the Table. The beauty and spirituality of the church are very impressive and the inspiration to worship is felt very strongly on entering. The eye is immediately drawn to the stained glass rose window in the Sanctuary, which symbolizes the Incarnation. Round the outside of the window is the inscription: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory". The top quadrant symbolizes the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, with shafts of golden light radiating into the other quadrants. The Christ Child, lying in the manger attended by the Blessed Virgin, is depicted in the bottom quadrant. The other two quadrants illustrate the adoration of the Wise Men and the Shepherds in such a way that the attention is focused on the "babe". To appreciate the thought which Miss Moira Forsyth has devoted to this window, and the detail which relates the Gospel story to what we do each Sunday in our worship and in the Sacraments, there is, in the quadrant of the Shepherds, the Cross with the spear leaning against it and the robe draped over it to form a chalice: the Life which gave up the glories of heaven to come down to earth to win men, is the Life poured out on the Cross that all men might have life and have it more abundantly.

We lower our eyes to the focal point of the Sanctuary, a gold Cross hanging against a blue and gold dorsal; and then to the Holy Table, simple and dignified with its panels etched in gold and a Paschal Lamb in gold on the front panel.

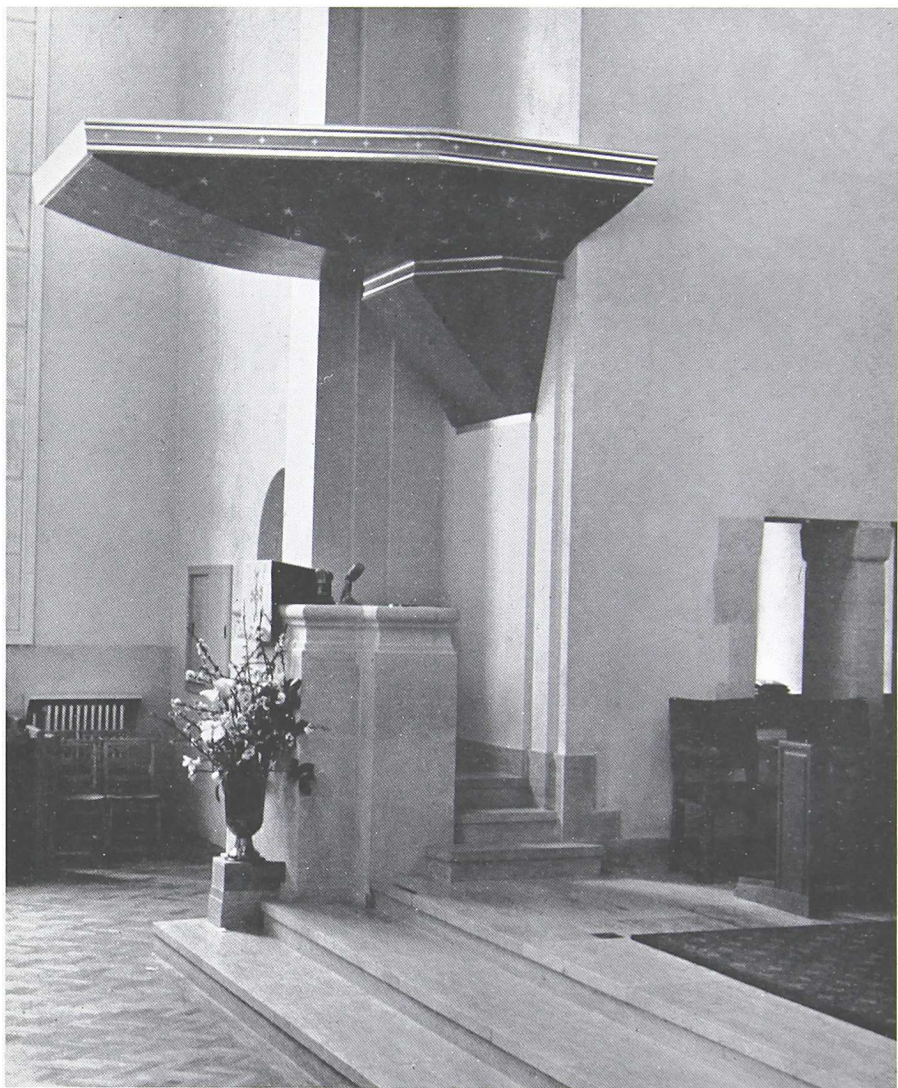
The Pulpit, absolutely plain, is constructed of Ancaster stone, and above it there is a sounding board painted blue and spangled with gold stars. The Lectern is made of wood, and is in the form of an eagle which has been finished in burnished gold. The Baptismal Font is carved out of Travertine marble, with a silver bowl for the water, and is heptagonal in shape. Beneath the windows the coats of arms of the Scottish counties have been carved and heraldically coloured with burnished gold and silver.



ST. COLUMBA'S CHURCH, PONT STREET: THE SANCTUARY.



ST. COLUMBA'S CHURCH, PONT STREET: LECTERN AND BAPTISMAL FONT.



ST. COLUMBA'S CHURCH, PONT STREET : THE PULPIT.



ST. COLUMBA'S CHURCH, PONT STREET : STAIRWAY.

In the south transept there is a very lovely chapel which has been dedicated to the memory of those who were killed in the various theatres of war, and who had served with the London Scottish Regiment. Behind the Holy Table is a Cross window. When Miss Forsyth measured it she discovered it to be the correct dimensions for a Scottish claymore; and that is the central feature of the window, marked out in lovely silver glass. The Battle Honours of the Regiment are carved into the reveals of the windows, and there are five memorial books containing the names of the fallen, placed on stands in the windows. Looking up the south aisle is a thrilling experience as the eye, taking in the lovely vaulted arches, is drawn to the Sword window of the London Scottish chapel.

The Minister's vestry and the Kirk Session room open off the church vestibule. The vestry is a very pleasing, comfortable, restful room and makes a pleasant place for taking interviews. The Session room is designed on the lines of a chapter house. Stalls for the elders, in limed oak, are arranged round the walls with a narrow table-shelf in front. In front of the Moderator's stall the emblem of "The Burning Bush" with the inscription *Nec tamen consumebatur* is emblazoned, and a deep-cut Cross, filled in gold, is on the back of his chair.

The organ will be built into the gallery. At the moment there is a small organ, but it is hoped the new organ will be ready to be dedicated when the Moderator of the General Assembly makes his visit to London at St. Andrew's tide. On the gallery level there is a tiny but delightful flat for the Deaconess. On the other side of the gallery there is the choir vestry.

Higher up in the tower is the Columbarium. The niches round the walls are constructed in oak and below the window, which is in the form of a Cross, is the Holy Table. The ceiling has a circular panel which is painted and decorated with the stars of the Plough, their pointers leading to the true north.

The Domestic Chapel, which is situated between the hall level and the church level, is probably the most used part of the building. Each morning of the week there is a staff service, attended by the Minister, Assistant Minister, Deaconess, Church Officer and Cleaners. It is also open to anyone who would like to come. The prayer of St. Chrysostom, "Prevent us, O Lord. . .", is the daily collect; intercession is made for each organization on the day it

meets ; and special prayers are offered for the sick and for those who ask that they should be prayed for. There is a celebration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion after morning service each Sunday. This chapel is also the scene of many baptisms and " quiet " weddings.

With thanksgiving to Almighty God we can truly say that the new St. Columba's has risen like a phoenix from the ashes of the destroyed church, and spreads her wings to reach out to the ever-growing number of London Scots who look to her for shelter and comfort and inspiration, and to carry on the great traditions of the Church of Scotland.

S. LINDSAY MCINTYRE