

# BYZANTIUM IN BERKSHIRE

Fresh information on Sir Edwin Lutyens's first mausoleum, the Hannen columbarium at St Mary, Wargrave, Berkshire, is provided by correspondence published here for the first time by **Oliver Bradbury**. This small masterpiece shows Lutyens combining byzantine, classical and Arts and Crafts influences.



All the illustrations in this article are of the Hannen columbarium in the churchyard at St Mary, Wargrave, Berkshire, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944), 1904-1905. The photographs are by the author

## 1 The Hannen columbarium in its setting

I am especially grateful to Margaret Richardson (for advising on my initial draft), Alan Powers, Roger Bowdler, Peter Deane and the Revd. Canon John W. Ratings of Wargrave.

1 MS Oxf Diocesan papers C. 1285. The envelope is embossed with a stamp reading 'Oxford Diocesan Registry'.

2 They can be arranged into the following chronological order: (1) 4 December 1904; (2) 5 December 1904; (3) 6 December 1904; (4) 8 December 1904; (5) 9 December 1904; (6) 12 December 1904 [virtually illegible]; (7) 7 September 1905; (8) 3 October 1905; (9) 5 October 1905; (10) 10 October 1905; (11) 15 October 1905; (12) 16 October 1905; (13) 27 October 1905; (14) 31 October 1905; (15) 3 November 1905; (16) 4 November 1905; (17) 10 November 1905; (18) 11 November 1905; (19) 19 November 1905. One document is dated just '1905' and another is undated but is located next to the one dated 6 December 1904.

3 Likely to be Benjamin Hannen, who died in 1906 – he will be mentioned later in the article.

4 Rosemary Gray and Sue Griffiths (eds), *The Book of Wargrave: History and Reminiscences by the People of Wargrave*, Wargrave, 1986, p. 237.

5 The family no longer lives at Wargrave.

6 On 10 June of that year Lutyens wrote his wife, Lady Emily: 'I am in the train to Wargrave to see a house the Princess wants to buy' Royal Institute of British Architects Library (hereafter RIBA Library/2/3/17 (f-)). Princess Louise, Queen Victoria's youngest daughter, was a sculptor.

7 Christopher Hussey, *The Life of Sir Edwin Lutyens*, London, 1950, repr. Woodbridge, 1989, p. 165. According to Gray and Griffiths, op. cit., p. 238: 'In the book about her father, Mary Lutyens recounts how Beau Hannen declared that the years he spent serving his apprenticeship with Lutyens at Bloomsbury Square were amongst the happiest of his life. During time he designed the lych gate at Wargrave St Lawrence, where his family lived.'

8 Gray and Griffiths, op. cit., p. 237.

In a corner of the obscure Berkshire churchyard of St Mary, Wargrave, lies the earliest mausoleum or, more precisely, columbarium by Sir Edwin Lutyens. Although known to Lutyens scholars, it has never received much attention from them. The purpose of this article is to draw attention to unpublished correspondence in the Oxfordshire Record Office relating to this commission.<sup>1</sup>

These letters are contained in an envelope of twenty-one documents relating to the application for a faculty to construct the columbarium. The earliest is dated 4 December 1904 and the last 19 November 1905.<sup>2</sup> A letter dated 6 December 1904, from the vicar of Wargrave, the Revd. A.N. Austen Leigh, to Thomas M. Davenport, outlines the background:

The circumstances under which a faculty for the erection of a family vault or mausoleum is applied for

are the following.

A family of the name of Hannen have been long settled in Wargrave – there is an old Mr Hannen (brother of the late Lord Hannen);<sup>3</sup> three married sons, each with houses in the place; a sister in law, widow of the late Sir Nicholas Hannen, Chief Justice of Shanghai; and other near relatives, all living in the parish. Two deaths have taken place in the family, & the bodies in both cases have been cremated. This I believe intended that cremation should be the rule in the family.

They desire to have some vault or Mausoleum in the Church yard, in which the Urns or chests containing the Ashes could be deposited, & which they could enter to visit them [...]

The Hannen family first settled at

Wargrave in 1892 and lived at a house known as Ouseleys.<sup>4</sup> Like Lutyens, the family was in the building industry: in 1850 Benjamin Hannen had become joint head of the building firm Holland & Hannen, later to become Holland & Hannen and Cubitts.<sup>5</sup>

Lutyens's connection with Wargrave can be traced back to 1897, when he visited the village while looking for a house for his friend Princess Louise.<sup>6</sup> It is possible that he then encountered the family. He became a friend of Benjamin Hannen's son Edward Charles, whose son Nicholas (Beau) Hannen trained in Lutyens's office from 1902 to 1905; he went on to be a well-known actor. According to Christopher Hussey's *The Life of Sir Edwin Lutyens* (1950), 'Hannen [...] had a fine voice, and with Phipps and Milne, constituted a regular glee choir that would burst into harmony at the least excuse. The only occasion recalled by Hannen of this



2 Detail of the entrance to the mausoleum, showing the peacocks, symbols of immortality, carved in low relief in the lunette. The sculptor is unknown

3 The entrance gate, made of artificial stone



9 See for instance the Revd. A.N. Austen Leigh's letter dated 9 December 1904.

10 Erroneously described in Lynn F. Pearson, *Mausoleums*, Princes Risborough, 2002, p. 11, as being of 'iron'

11 A reference to St Augustine's most celebrated work, *De Civitate Dei*. Peacocks are a symbol of immortality because of the myth that their flesh never rots.

12 In private correspondence (25 November 2003) Margaret Richardson has drawn a comparison with similar lattice work used by William R. Lethaby at All Saints, Brockhampton-by-Ross, Herefordshire, 1901-1902, particularly in the east window.

13 REA Library: LUE/7/9/10 (-).

14 Although this letter has been published in Clayre Percy and Jane Ridley (eds.), *The Letters of Edwin Lutyens to his Wife, Lady Emily*, London, 1988, p.125, there are several transcription errors and omissions of text. I have transcribed from the original letter at the REA: LUE/7/9/11 (-).

15 Unfortunately these have disappeared.

16 REA Library: LUE/8/6/7.

17 REA Library: LUE/10/5/2 (-).

18 Colin Amery, et. al., *Lutyens, exh. cat.*, Arts Council of Great Britain, London, 1984, p. 195. Richardson, however, states (n. 12 above) that the Wargrave War Memorial was Lutyens's standard War Cross designed originally to go with his Great War Stone but rarely used in France. It was used in England – for example at St John, Busbridge, Surrey (1920).

19 Gray and Griffiths, op. cit., pp. 238-41, for a full discussion of the Wargrave War Memorial. The War Memorial is included in the former Department of the Environment's *List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest District of Wokingham*, December 1983, p. 41: 'War Memorial, [Grade] II: 1920 by Sir Edwin Lutyens. Lozenge plan cross of Portland stone with chamfered sides set on a base with inscriptions, and 3 stone steps of similar shape on plan.'

20 Ex. inf. Margaret Richardson [n. 12 above]. There is however no mention of this commission in Gradidge's job files, now at the REA. *The List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest District of Wokingham*, p. 41, describes the columbarium thus: 'Mausoleum, 22 metres south west of Church of St. Mary, [Grade] II', Mausoleum [sic] of the Hannen family, 1906-7 by Sir Edwin Lutyens. Red brick with courses of red tiles, stone details, stepped tile roof. Square plan. Single storey. Entrance front: has doorway flanked by peacocks carved in stone and pierced iron door, carved swag above. Interior: domed ceiling lined with ceramic slip tiles over 4 small brick barrel vaults, below these a semi-circular colonnade [sic] of 8 columns with moulded heads and bases, moulded frieze with the inscription "He is Not The God Of The Dead But Of The Living For All Live Unto Him".'

21 Ex. inf. the Revd. Canon John W. Ratings, presumably referring to the subterranean section (the vault), however, there appear to be unused chests within the body of the columbarium. There are twenty-seven and some are unlabelled. See Fig. 7.

uninhibited crew receiving reproof was when he threw a pat of butter (for office tea) at Evans's head which, missing its mark, smacked against Lutyens's door. Then the master's head appeared, said "Steady", and withdrew'.<sup>7</sup>

Gertrude Jekyll was also connected with Wargrave, having lived in Wargrave Hill (now Wargrave Manor) from 1868 to 1876.<sup>8</sup> Although Lutyens and Jekyll never collaborated on a Wargrave property, it is another link that might explain the choice of architect for the Hannen columbarium.

After a somewhat rocky start, when it seemed uncertain whether or not permission would be given to build the columbarium in the churchyard,<sup>9</sup> the faculty was finally granted in November 1905. The following document, in Lutyens's hand, is the proposed specification, dated 7 September 1905:

Columbarium: proposed to be built at Wargrave; Berks. for E. C. Hannen Esquire.

It is proposed to remove and rebuild, in a more convenient position, the existing dust-bin and tool shed.

The Plan of the Columbarium covers an area of ground twelve feet by twelve (12' x 12') and consists of a circular cella within four piers, which carry intersecting arches forming pendentives and completed by a saucer dome

On the North side is the entrance; a sliding door of solid stone<sup>10</sup> on which four panels are cut so as to leave a cross in relief upon its face

The materials will be brick and flint, as in the church tower, and some Portland Stone. The roof covering will be of brick.

The North arch contains a stone tympanum which will be carved with peacocks, the emblems of immortality. The East and West

tympanums will be carved to represent kneeling angels.

[In the right-hand margin]: Vide: St Augustine De Civitate Dei BK Chap. p.<sup>11</sup>

The little building is completed by an enclosed cross containing a figure of Our Lord ascending, the four quarters being filled by emblems of the four evangelists

The interior will be built and decorated with brick, chalk, and marble in a manner more truly Italian

Beneath the Columbarium will be a vault nine feet Square.

The proposals are important in that they give an unusual glimpse of Lutyens's interest in architectural iconography and meaning. There were, however, considerable changes in the execution. For instance, 'The East and West tympanums' were in fact filled with concentric latticework (Fig. 5).<sup>12</sup> Aside from this letter, there is next to nothing in terms of plans or architectural instructions, nor is there any clue to the identity of the craftsmen.

A few days later, on 11 September 1905, Lutyens wrote to Lady Emily: 'To night I go to Wargrave about the Hannen Columbarium'.<sup>13</sup> The next day he wrote the following letter to his wife:

In train to Wargrave [...] I slept at Lady Hannen's – going down with Bo to see about the Columbarium for Ted Hannen. [...] Can you think of a really beautiful text for the inside of the Columbarium Ted Hannen has found one – reported to me as being to the effect that the Lord is God of the Dead or God of the Living and it





don't either way sound right. I have no drear emblems – I have praising angels – peacocks whose flesh was held to be incorruptible were taken by the early +tians [Christians] as an emblem of immortality. Then I have various happy little thoughts and the building is surmounted by a + [cross] enclosing the figure of Our Lord ascending and emblems of the evangelists. Common place but cheerful hopeful and all easily read. Inside I want a fine rolling sentence – simple of hope faith and of an all pervading love. If the Bible don't give it – I wouldn't mind a poet or philosopher – a good thought is always inspired. Rather like the messages in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress sent by those who crossed the river to those that were left and had yet to face the crossing. Do you remember them?<sup>24</sup>

In the end the inscription chosen was taken from Luke, chapter 20, verse 38: 'He Is Not The God Of The Dead But Of The Living For All Live Unto Him'.

A little later on that year, on 3 October 1905, an 'Application for a Faculty for constructing a Vault or Columbarium in the Church-yard at Wargrave' was made:

'That on the application of Messr B. Hannen, E. C. Hannen & L. Hannen the Vestry consent to a Faculty being applied for the purpose of constructing a Vault for Coffins, and a Columbarium over



it for the reception of Cinerary Urns, for the use of the Hannen family who occupy several houses in the Village: the Building to be in accordance with the plans produced to the Vestry'. The plans are enclosed.<sup>25</sup>

In this letter there were further 'considerations' such as:

1. That the custom of Cremation seems likely to become more common, and that the wishes of those who desire the Urns containing the Ashes to be preserved in consecrated ground, & yet not buried, ought to be respected.
2. That the proposed building, placed as it is against a dead wall will be an ornament to the Churchyard [...]

These faculty documents follow the bureaucratic process of erecting a private mausoleum within a Church of England graveyard. Hence, on 4 November 1905, a petition was submitted to the Bishop of Oxford by the following Wargrave parishioners: 'Benjamin Hannen, of Ouseleys, Esquire, Benjamin Hannen Junior, of the Little House, Esquire, – Edward Charles Hannen, of Wargrave House, Esquire, Launcelot Hannen, of Gaunt House, Esquire, and Lady Hannen, of Lake Lodge'. They were 'desirous of constructing at their own Cost at the South East corner of the churchyard of the Parish Church of Wargrave, a Vault measuring Nine feet square with a Columbarium over it covering an area of Twelve feet square, according to the Plans of Edwin L. Lutyens, of 29, Bloomsbury Square, London, for the

reception of the Coffins and the cremated Remains of the Petitioners, and of any Members of their Families exclusively'. On 4 October 1906 Lutyens went 'To see the Hannen Columbarium',<sup>26</sup> and again on 3 August 1909: 'I am in the train again for Wargrave to see Columbarium'.<sup>27</sup>

After 1909, there are no further known references by Lutyens to the columbarium. However, in 1920 he designed a war memorial for Wargrave.<sup>28</sup> It is a design of remarkable economy.<sup>29</sup> In about 1985 the columbarium was restored by the late Roderick Gradidge, an architect and Lutyens enthusiast.<sup>30</sup> It is apparently now full up<sup>31</sup> and there is some concern about its condition; picturesque ivy currently smothers the dome.

It is not the purpose of this article to analyse the columbarium. Nonetheless, one cannot fail to note the fecundity of Lutyens's design; its tight composition on such a condensed scale; the richness of materials; and the element of playfulness on the architect's part. It can be read as a synthesis of Lutyens's early Arts and Crafts incarnation<sup>32</sup> with a rare embrace of – or perhaps flirtation with – Byzantine ecclesiastical architecture<sup>33</sup> and of course as an example of the architect's ongoing and ever-increasing dialogue with classicism – particularly that of the late seventeenth century.<sup>34</sup> The commission was clearly a turning point, representing a state of architectural flux; a decade later and Lutyens was a fully converted classicist in terms of both his funerary and domestic architecture. In fact, 1905 was the year in which Lutyens first fully embraced classicism, in his Sanmicheli-inspired house Heathcote in Ilkley, Yorkshire, of 1905-1907.<sup>35</sup>

4 The interior of the dome, lined with end-laid glass. At the centre is a carving of a dove

5 Detail of the pierced 'latticework' in one of the lateral lunettes

22 Richardson argues (n. 12 above) 'th Lutyens was just as much an Arts & man as the leading elite'.

23 Richardson argues (n. 12, above) tha byzantine/Ravenna-like feel is very st Wargrave and that comparisons shc drawn with Sidney Barnsley's Hagia Church, Lower Kingswood, Surrey ( which Lutyens might have known. Lutyens's design for an imaginary pa his 'Castle-in-the-Air' sketchbook he round-arched romanesque/byzantin and his two early built churches – the Overstrand Chapel, 1898, and the E Pkham Church, 1903, are both in br have round-arched portals. It was a favoured for churches. Overstrand a the arch and Diocletian window. In fa Hagia Sophia Church, with its use of brick, courses of red tiles and stone appears remarkably prophetic of Lut use of materials and – to a lesser ext architectural form at Wargrave. On th 'Castle-in-the-Air' sketch book, see Margaret Richardson, *Sketches by E Lutyens*, London, 1994, plate 14.

24 Typical of this style is the employe the cherub's head on the corner of f frieze (Fig. 6).

25 Amery, et al., op. cit., p. 103.

26 It has been little illustrated, however, Pearson, op. cit. (note 10), p. 11.

27 Richardson, op. cit. in n. 23 above, p.

28 This motif is based on the second-c Buddhist stupa at Sanchi, near B India. For a full discussion of the Phi Mausoleum (1914-16), see Roger E 'Golders Green Crematorium: the monuments', in Peter Jupp and Hlk Grainger (eds.), *Golders Green Crematorium 1902-2002: A London centenary in context*, London, 2002 49-52. Bowdler notes on p. 117, 'N reference is made to the mausoleum A.S.G. Butler's monumental 3-volume *Architecture of Sir Edwin Lutyens* of The secondary literature on the build very slight.' The same is true of th columbarium.

29 Richardson argues (n.12, above) th 'There are also certain features in th Columbarium which remind me of h work – eg. the strange elongated ca on the columns seem to anticipate h order, although here they are plain. A way he cuts out patterns in the slidr seems to prefigure similar work in hi Liverpool Crypt [1933-41]'.

30 Elsewhere, these tiles have been de as 'ceramic slip tiles', Gray and Giff cit., p. 25, and listing description, n. above.

31 For a recent study of the byzantine r its international context, see J.B. Bu *Byzantium Rediscovered*, London, 2 especially chapter three (pp. 106-17: the British revival). Almost contemp with Wargrave is Charles Holden's e masterpiece, the Bristol Central Libr 1902-1906. Here Holden combined byzantine, in the entrance hall, with classical, as in the upstairs referenc

32 Richardson (n.12 above).

33 Pearson, op. cit., pp. 23-24.





6 A winged cherub's head in the interior frieze, a detail that evokes seventeenth-century classicism

right

7 A view of the exterior that emphasises the Byzantine nature of the columbarium's domed cross-in-square plan and banded brick and stone walls

below

8 The interior, showing Lutyens's idiosyncratic capitals and the placing of the containers for the ashes in the angles of the cross-shaped interior

As a design, the columbarium is cryptic, especially when compared to the less idiosyncratic, more mainstream classicism of Lutyens's later funerary architecture. However, something of the building's exoticism would eventually reappear in a late work such as the King George V Memorial at New Delhi of 1930-38. Although the columbarium has been somewhat neglected by scholars, it is Lutyens's earliest mausoleum design, the mother of all his memorials to come.<sup>26</sup> In order to give it a little more context within the architect's career, let us turn to the Lutyens scholar Margaret Richardson: 'Apart from a few gravestones for his family and friends, Lutyens only designed two mausolea before the end of the First World War. The first was the Hannen Columbarium in Wargrave Churchyard (1905), and the second the Philipson Mausoleum. Both have a Roman character, the latter especially evoking a miniature Pantheon surrounded by a grille-like wall. The Philipson Mausoleum still survives and is important in prefiguring his work on the later memorials.'<sup>27</sup>



A comparison with the 1914 Philipson Mausoleum, in the cemetery of Golders Green crematorium, London – Lutyens's only other mausoleum – is instructive, for it illustrates the evolution of his architecture, from an Arts and Crafts/classical hybrid, as at Wargrave, to a full-blooded Roman classicism. The Philipson Mausoleum is emphatically classical, chillingly so, but even there Lutyens is characteristically ungrammatical in combining 'a grille-like wall' with a miniature Pantheon.<sup>28</sup>

On either side of the entrance to the Wargrave columbarium are carvings of peacocks of considerable finesse, in such low relief that they are almost invisible at times; to know the artist would be instructive (Fig. 2). Suitably sepulchral is the great weight of the pierced swivel axis entrance door – it appears to be cast in a stone composite (Fig. 3). The rest of the columbarium is constructed from red brick, red tile and stone. Unlike the Philipson Mausoleum, there is nothing austere about the building: it is quite homely in comparison.

The interior comes as a complete surprise in that it is predominantly classical. Lutyens often employed classicism internally in buildings that are not classical externally: the columbarium's semicircular sub-Tuscan colonnade of six columns (Fig. 8) is reminiscent of the circular courtyard at Lutyens's Papillon Hall, Leicestershire, of 1903-1904, and no doubt one can trace many of the building's motifs back through his *oeuvre*.<sup>29</sup> Another surprise is the rich choice of materials, the most idiosyncratic being the employment of end-laid glass tiles in the saucer dome (Fig. 4) and pendentives.<sup>30</sup>

Here Lutyens has created a shimmering, ambiguous surface but on a miniature scale, influenced by Byzantine ecclesiastical mosaics. Such a neo-Byzantine flavour brings to mind the early-Christian Byzantine style of J.F. Bentley's Westminster Cathedral, 1895-1903, and other examples of this little-studied late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century revival.<sup>31</sup>

Despite its rich little interior, there is nothing ostentatious about the Hannen columbarium; dismissed to an obscure corner, it is quite unassuming within the churchyard (Figs. 1 and 7). Neither is it remotely morbid. In the words of Margaret Richardson, 'It is really a most intricate building, beautifully put together – a sort of exemplar of craft and building'.<sup>32</sup> Architectural parallels are scarce; however, J.D. Campbell's family mausoleum at St Mary's Roman Catholic Cemetery, Kensal Green, London, of 1904, is instructive as a comparison of sorts. It was designed by the architect C.H.B. Quennell in the byzantine style and shares with the Hannen columbarium similar architectural massing and a coursed, polychromatic exterior.<sup>33</sup>

Although very much a continuation of the mid- to late-nineteenth-century custom of building mausoleums with richly ornamented interiors, the columbarium represents also the Edwardian tail-end of British mausoleum building, which had been in full swing since the mid-eighteenth century.

Oliver C. Bradbury's first book, *Cheltenham's Lost Heritage* (Sutton Publishing), was published last year.

