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ABSTRACT

Multifaith buildings have become common in Europe, North America, and much of the world, but they have yet to receive sufficient scholarly attention in the history of religious ideas, or in the theory of material religion. This paper begins to address this lacuna by the consideration of an early, but little known, multifaith chapel donated to Somerville College Oxford in the 1930s, which is unique within Oxford University. Its history, architecture, and artworks give valuable insights into the religious, intellectual, and cultural roots of what would subsequently become a global norm. The chapel can be seen as both a manifestation of the aspirations of liberal Christianity in the interwar years, including the advancement of women and ecumenism, and of the contestation of the role of religion in higher education among elites in the same period. Examining the case of Somerville chapel contributes to the theory of religion by considering how unbelief and multifaith ideas may be attempted to be materially expressed, and how this physical presence subsequently may impact on institutions and people through ongoing contestation, and negotiated use.

Keywords: multifaith, interfaith, interreligious, unbelief, contestation, nondenominational, undenominational, chapel, Oxford, Kemp.

The Unique Case of Somerville College Chapel

> *"It's not a proper chapel, of course," said Mrs. Mark*
>
> *(The Bell, Iris Murdoch 2004, 59).*

Of the 38 colleges in the University of Oxford, 30 have a chapel. The majority of colleges and all of the historic foundations are Anglican institutions with chapels built according to the trends of Anglican architectural and theological traditions (Hall 2000). There are some exceptions to this, however. For example, St. Catherine's College is the only college that admits undergraduates and does not have a chapel. Mansfield College, originally Congregationalist, maintains a non-conformist tradition, but has converted its historic chapel into a dining hall. Once Unitarian, Harris Manchester College has since had chaplains from a variety of denominations. Nuffield College, a graduate-only college, has a small chapel designed by John Piper with no official chaplain or fixed denominational character. The other graduate-only colleges, all founded in the post-war period, have no chapels. In addition to the 38 colleges there are six "permanent private halls." These are institutions with chapels and denominational affiliations—two Anglican, three Catholic, and one Baptist.

Somerville, however, is different from all the other colleges and halls in that it is a large undergraduate college with a chapel and no religious affiliation. This contradiction—manifest in the design and purpose of its chapel—represents the college's pioneering place in the history of education. One of five women's colleges founded in Oxford in the nineteenth century for the education of women, Somerville has always been proudly and self-consciously undenominational. We use the term "undenominational" here as this is used in the college records alongside "non-sectarian" and "nondenominational." These terms are not to be confused with nondenominational evangelical Christian movements (Smith 1990). The

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meaning of “undenominational” to describe Somerville at its founding is perhaps best understood in contrast to its Anglican surroundings. Lady Margaret Hall, opened in the same year as Somerville, 1879, represented the wing of the Association for Promoting the Higher Education of Women that wished for an institution affiliated to the established church. Somerville is the result of the vision of those in the same movement who favored a women’s hall that was open to, and treated equally with those of all denominations and religious beliefs (Adams 1996). Members of its governing council included notable progressive English intellectuals of the age such as Mary Ward and the idealist philosopher, Thomas Hill Green, and later at the time of the donation of the chapel, the internationalist and classicist, Gilbert Murray (while the hall was for women, men originally served on its governing council).

Although it had no chapel until more than 50 years after its foundation, from the beginning of Somerville’s existence simple prayers of a broad Christian character led by tutors were said in the dining hall. These were never compulsory, but there is evidence to suggest they were well-attended and formed an integral part of college life. Two prayers, one written by Miss Maitland (principal 1889–1906), and another by M. V. Clarke (vice-principal 1934–1935), used for this purpose, survive. Adapted from the Presbyterian and Catholic traditions, these show how college prayers were deliberately altered to be acceptable to those of different Christian traditions, and to be said by its female members without the assistance of a male chaplain. Presently, according to the statutes of the college, the chapel must maintain the “non-sectarian character of the worship traditional to the college” (Somerville College 2008, 6). How this is currently interpreted is considered in the penultimate section of this paper, but for many years the chapel was primarily used for the regular gathering of those students and fellows who wished to pray in this manner (although there is evidence of periodic multifaith initiatives throughout the chapel’s history, as also detailed below).

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Somerville, now a full college of the university, also admits men. But its undenominational, inclusive character, and progressive ethos remains as a strong and self-conscious institutional identity (Somerville College 2016). This tradition is perhaps best demonstrated by the luminary alumnae of the college, known for their pioneering achievements and the advancement of women; to name a few examples, Constance Coltman (the first ordained female Christian minister in England (Congregationalist)), Indira Gandhi (the first female Prime Minister of India), Margaret Thatcher (the first female and first scientist Prime Minister of the United Kingdom), Dorothy Hodgkin (Nobel Prize-winning scientist), some of the leading English authors of the twentieth century—Dorothy L. Sayers, Iris Murdoch and Vera Brittain, and Brittain's daughter, Shirley Williams (stateswoman and peer).

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The undenominational and progressive roots of the college are materially represented in its undenominational and multifaith chapel, formally opened in 1935. We use "multifaith" anachronistically here as no suitable term existed at that time for the pioneering vision of its founder, Emily Georgiana Kemp. In this article we explore the physical appearance of the chapel, how this relates to its contested design and proposed role in college life, and what this monument may represent in the history of ideas—particularly in regard to changes in attitudes towards non-Christian religions and the development, and more public expression, of unbelief in the twentieth century (Budd 1977). Because these currents of thought are otherwise invisible in Oxford college chapels, which are largely gothic or neo-gothic, the unique but plain building can be puzzling to students, fellows, and visitors. The historian of architecture, Sir Nikolaus Pevsner, described it as "bleakly classical," while Somervillian writers Dorothy L. Sayers and Iris Murdoch set sinister plots in fictional but clearly imitated "derelict" undenominational chapels. The Shrewsbury College of Sayers' Gaudy Night is widely recognized to be based on her own alma mater, Somerville, whereas Murdoch

modeled the chapel of her lay community in The Bell on Somerville, but its setting on Prinknash Abbey (Murdoch 2004, 59; Pevsner 1973, 251; Sayers 2003).

For scholars of material religion, the chapel presents an interesting case because it illustrates how and why multifaith ideas, religious tolerance, and theological inclusivity were attempted to be materially expressed in early multifaith buildings in the contemporary era and how architectural design can subsequently impact on people and practice, through continued presence, contestation and use (Meyer et al. 2010). This is important because the chapel is an early example, hitherto unconsidered in academic literature, of a move toward multifaith buildings and rooms in public spaces that have subsequently become ubiquitous in educational institutions and elsewhere (Gilliat-Ray 2005a, 2005b; Johnson and Laurence 2012; LSC 2007; Parker 2009). The chapel raises questions about the theory of "religious" and "Christian" spaces and buildings, because it does not physically represent a coherent or dynamic meeting place of a particular or homogenous theological community or tradition, but rather affirms the contestation, compromise, and even doubt among its builders (Kieckhefer 2004; Kilde 2008). It shows how increasingly idiosyncratic visions of Christianity may have contributed to an "emptying out" of traditional Christian beliefs and attitudes from public institutions in favor of more universal and inclusive ideas about religion, and, in this case, religious buildings (Moulin 2017; Taylor 2007).

In his survey of multifaith buildings, Crompton writes that the origins of multifaith architecture "are obscure, there is no foundation story or any eminent person associated with it" 35 (Crompton 2013, 477). Although secreted away in the corner of an Oxford college, "unloved looking somehow" (Pevsner 1973, 251), Somerville chapel gives one foundation story, and its donor Emily Georgiana Kemp, an eminent, but largely unknown founder. However, we also argue, that as one founding story, the chapel also represents a stage in a wider secularization story between the time when Oxford college chapels were a norm, and

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the post-war period, which saw new Oxford colleges built without chapels and existing chapels converted for other uses. This story shows how among an intellectual elite, through the twin actions of contestation and progressive aspiration, traditional Christianity gave way to something more open to other religions, and something that could arguably also be considered more devoid of meaning and belief (Crompton 2013). From a material religion perspective, the eclectic and clashing use of symbol and space in the chapel, as well as the continued negotiation of its meaning by subsequent generations, provide an illuminating and early case study of the relationships between unbelief, pluralism, and materiality that similarly arise in later attempts to create multifaith spaces in educational institutions (Parker 2009).

The Material Manifestation of Inclusivity, Contestation, and Unbelief

> *Sunday evening prayers. The College was undenominational, but some form of Christian worship was held to be essential to community life. The chapel, with its stained glass windows, plain oak paneling and unadorned Communion table was a kind of Lowest Common Multiple of all sects and creeds*
>
> (Gaudy Night, Dorothy L. Sayers 2003, 63).

The chapel is a free-standing, ashlar, neo-classical building in Somerville's largest quadrangle (Figure 1). Vera Farnell, the dean who dedicated the chapel in 1935, described it as a symbol of universal brotherhood, and the classical building of stone arguably suggests monolithic weight and presence, and is in this sense reminiscent of Lutyens' cenotaph of 1920 in Whitehall (although perhaps not as elegantly proportioned) (Figure 2). Courtenay Theobald, the main architect, was sonin-law and business partner of the designer of the original Wembley Stadium, Maxwell Ayrton, who had served as assistant to Luytens. While

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this may be a tenuous link, it is of note that the cenotaph, also in Greek style, was commissioned by Prime Minister Lloyd George to be undenominational, and its open and abstract symbolism was preferred over a cross, also mooted at the time (Greenberg 1989). Like the cenotaph, the chapel has no overt religious imagery on its exterior, save an inscription (Figure 3). This is in Greek above the main door to the west: ΟΙΚΟΣ ΠΡΟΣΕΥΧΗΣ ΠΑΣΙΝ ΤΟΙΣ ΕΘΝΕΣΙΝ. This is derived from the last clause of Isaiah 56:7, which is usually quoted and translated into English in the King James Version as "for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people." Interestingly, on the exterior entrance of the chapel, the verb κληθήσεται (shall be called) has been removed, and the inscription literally reads a "A house (ΟΙΚΟΣ) of prayer (ΠΡΟΣΕΥΧΗΣ) for all peoples (ΠΑΣΙΝ ΤΟΙΣ ΕΘΝΕΣΙΝ)."1 The meaning of the use of this inscription is open to interpretation. Perhaps it removes any statement of to whom the chapel belongs, and thus perhaps significantly omits the first words of Jesus' famous reference to the prophecy in the Gospel (Mark 11:17). Alternatively, it may suggest that the prophecy of Jesus has already been fulfilled. In yet another interpretation the exterior inscription in Greek perhaps indicates one reading of the chapel as a "temple of reason" representing the classically inspired rationalist aestheticism in Somerville at that time, which had some strong humanist voices (Murray 1940). In any case, it is simplified from the more traditional translation favored by the chapel donor which was inscribed without authorization of the college in the interior vestibule.

FIG 1 The monolithic and plain exterior of the chapel at the time of its opening in 1935. Photograph courtesy of Somerville College.

The interior is plain and white-washed as is common in British nonconformist chapels, with three high-arched windows on the north and south walls (Figure 5). These features contribute two principal qualities identified as universal symbols of the sacred used in later multifaith buildings: space created by a high ceiling, and light created by the

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windows, some of which contain tinted green panes that create a distinctive ambience (Johnson and Laurence 2012). Under the windows are wooden stalls on either side of the nave in the collegiate style, with oak paneling inscribed with the names of deceased fellows in gilt (Figure 6). Principals' and vice-principals' memorials are inscribed on the paneling of the west wall, where traditionally the principal and vice-principal have sat either side of the door. These names include notable female philosophers, scientists, and aca-demics, such as Elizabeth Anscombe and Philippa Foot. At the east end there are also memorial tablets in stone for important members of the college who were not fellows, including Margaret Thatcher, Dorothy L. Sayers, and the chapel's donor, Emily Georgiana Kemp (Figure 7). In this way the chapel represents the bonds of the college members and serves as a place of memorial for them, and a celebration of the role of the college in the advancement of women, and its contribution to science, culture and public life. At the east end of the chapel the paneling stops at a raised dais, where two principal focal points originally included in the chapel's design are located: a stained glass window and a substantial wooden communion table. The communion table was placed in the chapel so that different denominations could use it for Eucharistic services (although the Anglican rite was not permitted by the Anglican Church until 1963).

FIG 2: The neo-classical and simple design of the chapel can be likened to Lutyens' cenotaph of 1920, also intended to be 8 religiously neutral. Photograph courtesy of Somerville College.

FIG 3: The authorized exterior inscription in Greek differs from the unauthorized inscription of the interior shown in Figure 4. Photograph courtesy of Jonathan Kirkpatrick, Zeuxis Photography.

The east end has changed in appearance over the years, symbolic of the contestation of the chapel's status as a Trinitarian place of worship. When the chapel was first opened it had no

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cross displayed, but soon after a silk brocade was hung under the window (also referred to by Murdoch in her undenominational chapel in The Bell) (Figure 8). In the early decade of the second millennium a simple large wooden cross was fixed on the wall above the communion table, which was removed in 2011 in favor of a smaller altar cross to be used only during acts of Christian worship. At the time of writing the east end was being used to display an installation, Many Hands, by the resident artist Patrice Moor, and for the storage of a grand piano used in concert performances (Figure 15 9 9). Looking from east to west above the entrance to the chapel is an organ gallery with a Harrison and Harrison organ in an oak case designed by Courtenay Theobald which includes cherubim modeled on his daughters.The window, by Reginald Bell, is the most striking feature in the otherwise unadorned space (Figure 10). In a landscape symbolizing the gateway to the knowledge of life, the Resurrecting Christ, with rays of emanating light symbolizing his influence on earth, hovers over two female figures wearing chasubles and stoles, one personifying Truth, holding a lamp, the other Learning, bearing a mirror (Kemp 1937). With the bright yellows and oranges of the stained glass contrasting with the polished wooden stalls and the plain blues and greens of the glass found in the other windows, the image sheds an explosive light over the space.

FIG 4: The inscription in the vestibule of the chapel was completed by Kemp's direct instruction against the wishes of Darbishire and the college council. Photograph courtesy of Jonathan Kirkpatrick, Zeuxis Photography.

Sayers' Gaudy Night was published in 1935, the same year as the chapel was opened in an interdenominational dedication service. Indeed, not only does the description of Sayers' fictional chapel resemble that of the real one at Somerville, but so do some other aspects of the story. The announcement of the donation of the chapel by the principal, Helen Darbishire, at the gaudy (a meeting of old students) of 1932, precipitated a heated dispute over the

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chapel, which perhaps also provided Sayers, who was present, with inspiration for the malicious pranks of her detective story. Reminiscent of the poison-pen letters in the novel, the college archive holds several vociferous letters of complaint about the chapel, most notably one from Lettice Fisher (née Ilbert) to Gilbert Murray, sealed with copious wax. importance of the college to its old members, and hence what was at stake with the prospect of the chapel, is perhaps illustrated by Lettice's daughter's third name, "Somerville." Mary Letitia Somerville Bennett would go on to be principal of another Oxford women's college, St. Hilda's, also illustrating the close familial ties of the English elite (Lettice herself was the wife of the warden of New College).

FIG 5: The chapel in 2016 showing the fixed seating and an art installation at the east end (detail given in Figure 9). Photograph courtesy of Jonathan Kirkpatrick, Zeuxis Photography.

Although Sayers was supportive enough to join in an effort to raise money for the later installation of an organ in the chapel, as an Anglican her criticism of the chapel's plain and undenominational character as the "lowest common multiple" was shared by others at the time, and has been so criticized by others since. On its opening, a visiting architectural journalist observed that it was as "non-committal as any church design could be" (The Architect and Building News 1935), a principle that has been subsequently defined as "negative-type" inclusivity in multifaith architecture—that emptiness is considered religiously neutral (Crompton 2013; Johnson and Laurence 2012) (Figure 11). On closer inspection, however, there are several symbols in 15 11 the chapel which manifest the unique vision and character of its donor.

Emily Georgiana Kemp: Artist, Art Collector, Explorer and Interfaith Pioneer

In 1932 one of the college's first students, Emily Georgiana Kemp (1860–1939) (Figure 12), anonymously offered to donate an undenominational religious building "for the promotion of the spiritual life, mainly by prayer and meditation for those

FIG 6: Looking down the chapel from the east end, the gilded names of deceased fellows can be seen reflecting in the setting sun. Photography courtesy of Jonathan Kirkpatrick, Zeuxis Photography.

A good example of the of all creeds and nations" (Kemp 1937). Kemp's own artistic and spiritual interests give much insight into her motivation for donating a unique religious building to Somerville. An adventurer, author, and artist from a liberal industrialist family, she had a life-long interest in art and a strong Baptist faith. After Somerville she went on to study fine art under Slade Professor Alphonse Legros at University College London before embarking on her first trip to China. A number of Legros' works were left to the Ashmolean in Kemp's bequest, including the oil Interior with an Organist and Procession, her own portrait, and a sketch of her sister Lydia Peto Kemp. In addition to these she left The Holy Family by Ambrosius Benson (ca.1550), a collection of her own watercolors, and Asian silks and artifacts she had also collected on her travels (Figure 13).

Before her death Kemp also donated an oil painting, Hyperion by G. F. Watts, to Somerville. This is an interesting connection, for Mary Fraser Tytler, another student at the Slade School who later married Watts, also designed and built an unusual chapel, the Watts Cemetery Chapel in Compton, Surrey. This chapel, under the spiritual custodianship of the Anglican Church, perhaps represents the opposite concept to Somerville's with its mix of Egyptian, folk and platonic symbolism—what can be understood as "positive type" inclusivity, whereby symbols from different traditions are placed together (Crompton 2013).

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FIG 7: Widely traveled, Kemp thought of herself more as a "friend" than a missionary, as indicated by her memorial. Photograph courtesy of Jonathan Kirkpatrick, Zeuxis Photography.

FIG 8: The east end of the chapel in the 1930s or 1940s had no cross displayed. Photograph courtesy of Somerville College.

Kemp had a strong interest in non-Christian cultures. She translated a book on Buddhism from German (Hackmann 1910) and mixed with key intellectuals who were involved in gaining greater understanding and relationship with the world's religions. These included Henry Norman Spalding who helped with the negotiations between Kemp and the college concerning the chapel's donation. Spalding established the professorial chair in Eastern Religions and Ethics at Oxford, the first incumbent being Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the second President of India.

FIG 9: The chapel now has many functions, here displaying the Many Hands installation by Patrice Moor, October 2016. Photograph courtesy of Jonathan Kirkpatrick, Zeuxis Photography.

FIG 10: The window by Reginald Bell depicts Christ in Glory reflecting Kemp's belief in Jesus as an important figure for all religions. Photograph courtesy of Jonathan Kirkpatrick, Zeuxis Photography.

FIG 11: The plain interior of the chapel in 1935, showing its two principal symbols: the "unadorned" communion table and the stained glass window of Christ in Glory. Photograph courtesy of Somerville College.

FIG 12: Kemp was an art collector and artist studying under Alphonse Legros who made this sketch of her. Photograph courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum.

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Another notable friend was the Nobel Prize-winning physician and theologian, Albert Schweitzer, who on Kemp's recommendation visited the chapel in 1934 when in England to give the Hibbert Lecture, to advise on the installation of the organ. However, Schweitzer's choice of organ was rejected by the college council and an organ was not installed until 1937 with funds raised by students and fellows, and not by Kemp.

FIG 13: Kemp made many watercolors to illustrate her travel books, this one depicting a mosque in Ashiho, China in 1907. Photograph courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum.

Kemp was a member of the pioneering interfaith association, the World Congress of Faiths, founded by her acquaintance, the mystic and explorer Sir Francis Younghusband. The first interfaith organization of its kind in the British Empire, the World Congress of Faiths, by encouraging fellowship between religious leaders and intellectuals, sought to gain greater understanding of what members believed was the mystical unity of the world's religions, which the British elite, such as Kemp, had encountered during the colonial period (Braybrooke 2013).

FIG 14: The nineteenth-century Della Robbia Annunciation depicts God's mission for woman—a spiritual theme of utmost importance for Kemp but an iconography initially rejected by the college council. Photograph courtesy of Jonathan Kirkpatrick, Zeuxis Photography.

Inspired by Younghusband and other spiritually-minded alpinists, Kemp undertook several journeys through Asia traversing some of the highest mountain passes in the world and visiting Christian, Muslim, and Buddhist sites, for which she was awarded the Grande Médaille en Vermeil by the French Geographical Society, and made a Fellow of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society (Morris-Suzuki 2010). These experiences, which formed her fervent but broad-minded views on religion, are narrated in her self-illustrated travel books

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(Kemp 1909, 1910, 1914, 1921). In addition, Kemp wrote two books about the work of women Baptist missionaries, although it seems Kemp herself was more interested in travel than missionary work (Kemp 1919, 1927).

The Story of a Contested Building

Kemp's first offer to donate a religious building to Somerville proposed that it was to be called "Christ's House." Despite this name, the building was intended by Kemp as a place where those of all faiths could pray, and students, in addition to continuing the college tradition of saying undenominational Christian prayers, could put on plays, listen to invited speakers and music, and sit and discuss their plans to change the world for the better. Kemp's original proposal therefore included a room with easy chairs and bookshelves for students to use, and it is because of this intended purpose that the chapel has its own cloakroom and lavatory for students' convenience. The college council accepted Kemp's donation but stipulated that it was to be called "the chapel"—in keeping with the norm for religious buildings in Oxford colleges. The principal, Helen Darbishire, from an influential Unitarian family, in consultation with the college council, made changes to the chapel's design contrary to Kemp's wishes, although it seems as though she shared a similar perspective to Kemp of the general concept of a chapel open to those of all religions (Darbishire 1962). These changes included a raised dais evoking a sense of a traditional chancel, and not creating an area for informal discussion and relaxation as originally intended by Kemp. In addition, Darbishire commissioned an ornate throne with the college crest and three free-standing chairs. These infuriated Kemp, who wished everyone to be equal in the chapel and therefore to be seated in the fixed stalls. The phrase "A house of prayer for all peoples" was authorized to be written in Greek on the outside of the chapel, but in keeping with its remit to provide a place of worship for all faiths unfettered from the constraints of any Christian denomination, the college council stated that there were to be no other religious images, symbols or texts

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displayed in the building. The college archive holds records of the original controversy caused by the chapel. A “College Meeting Extraordinary” was held by students in the college in which statements for and against the undenominational building were read out. Those in favor of the chapel argued that the pioneering character of Somerville’s undenominational foundation could be proudly symbolized by a building “in accordance with complete religious freedom” (Statement in Favor of Accepting the Proposed College Chapel 1932). Those against the chapel felt that such a noble vision was impossible in reality and that any service held in it would be “characterless and vague” (Petition Against the Proposed College Chapel 1932). It was argued that the informal prayers that already took place at that time in the dining hall would become overly formal in the context of a chapel; when said in such a building they would be in danger of simply creating what would be in effect another denomination and would not therefore fully embrace Somerville’s inclusive tradition of religious tolerance and freedom.

Because Darbishire and other members of the college were concerned about any overt Christian symbolism, or any outlandish or divisive religious activities in the chapel, Kemp acted independently of the college to influence the building project. The stained glass window was one such clash between Kemp’s liberal Christian faith, and the college council’s desire for something more universal and abstract in nature. While no evidence remains of the exact problems with the window originally installed, the archives show that the artist, Reginald Bell, was called in to retouch the windows after members of the college council had seen it and disapproved. A similar disagreement occurred over the inscription in the inner vestibule dedicating the chapel to “Jesus Christ the Lord the Giver of Life” and using the traditional King James translation of Isaiah 56:7. Against the wishes and knowledge of the principal and college council, Kemp directly ordered the carpenters to inscribe this in the wood leading to further ambiguity about the spiritual status of the building which has

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continued to the present day. It is pertinent to note that the chapel was dedicated to God in its opening service by the dean of the college, and only its window to Christ specifically (Somerville College 1935). Later, after the organ was installed in 1937 at another special service, it too was dedicated to Christ (Somerville College 1937). The chapel itself therefore was not consecrated or dedicated to Christ according to any rite, and neither was it dedicated by a man under the auspices of any denomination, even though present at the dedication service were a notable Anglican, the vicar of St. Mary's University Church, and a notable free churchman, Rev. Dr. William Boothby Selbie—a leading Congregationalist theologian, formerly principal of Mansfield College. This ceremony shows the strength of the ecumenical movement of the interwar years, particularly the increased familiarity between the free churches and the established church (Hastings 1991). The unconsecrated nature of the chapel has been stressed over the years as a mark of its inclusivity (and is likewise described in The Bell), although this is common of non-Episcopalian chapels.

Posthumously Kemp was granted one of her wishes for the chapel, however. Her collection of art was transferred to the Ashmolean Museum except for a terracotta relief derived from the Annunciation lunette in the Ospedale degli Innocenti (Foundlings' Hospital), Florence, by Andrea Della Robbia (1435–1525) (Figure 14). While Somerville's is a nineteenth-century piece, it is probable that Kemp believed it was genuine. When Kemp originally offered to fund "Christ's House," she wanted it to house the Annunciation. The college authorities did not want the image displayed prominently in the chapel due to its Catholic iconography, and the sculpture remained above her fireplace in her flat in London until her death on Christmas Day, 1939. Leaving it in her will to the college, the Annunciation was broken, reconditioned and placed above the north door by Courtenay Theobald, where it remains today, unseen unless one goes to the very far end of the chapel. Its subject gives a clue to the meaning of the chapel. The divine mission of Mary was of great

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personal significance to Kemp who saw the Annunciation, the acceptance of Mary to God's will, as symbolic of the importance of women in spreading God's message. Mary's life was the subject of her last book, Mary with her Son, Jesus (Kemp 1930), written on a trip navigating the river Amazon, during which time Kemp was also inspired to donate the chapel. This book similarly stresses that Mary Magdalene was the first of the disciples to see the resurrected Christ and this event is perhaps suggested by the aforementioned stained glass window to the above right of the Della Robbia. The chapel's concept, although intended to be a place of welcome and prayer for those of other traditions, grew out of a broad-minded but Christian faith. Kemp and Darbishire saw no conflict with the chapel being a Christian place of worship and its remit of being a house of prayer for those of all religions. It is for this reason that Kemp believed the chapel, although intended as a multi-purpose space for the use of those of all religions, could have a stained glass representation of Christ as its focal point. With those on the college council who disagreed with her on this point Kemp argued that Jesus was revered by those of all religions—something she testified to have witnessed on her extensive travels. Her attitude to non-Christian religions was most likely inspired by one of her traveling companions, Professor Marcus Dods, author of Muhammad, Buddha and Christ (Dods 1887). For Dods and Kemp, Christ is the most perfect revelation relating to an otherwise anthropologically universal need for religion.

In 1937 further conflict arose over Kemp's unauthorized leaflet about the chapel for a residential conference of the World Congress of Faiths held between Balliol and Somerville colleges (Kemp 1937). Kemp was eager for the delegates representing the world's religious traditions to use the new college chapel. For this purpose, Kemp printed the leaflet independently of the college authorities to promote the use of the chapel for prayer and meditation by the congress delegates. The leaflet soon proved to be controversial because it

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said the college was a place of religion, and Darbishire contacted Kemp asking her to urgently refrain from distributing it.

The attendees of the 1937 conference included a number of notable national and international religious figures, for example Yusuf Ali (translator of the Qur'an into English), Dame Edith Lyttleton (novelist and activist), The Begum Sultan Mir Amiruddin (Indian social and educational activist), Muang Aye Muang (of the World Buddhist Mission, Burma), and Aylmer Maude—Toltoy's biographer, friend and translator. The proceedings of the conference describe that in addition to the formal papers and discussions, devotional services were conducted for members of other religions by Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist delegates, thus fulfilling Kemp's desire that members of different religions could pray together. Yusuf Ali, citing Kemp's own view but not by name, cautiously noted of these devotions:

> *there may be differences of opinion as to whether people can enter into the devotional spirit of a religion to which they do not subscribe, but there can be no doubt that, given the right atmosphere, we are enabled to enter into the basic ideas underlying every earnest man's prayer and longing to reach the spiritual (World Congress of Faiths 1937, 165).*

The chapel represents an interesting and rare example of a religious building built for the use of those of more than just one faith in a period of history when such a building still should have been considered a "chapel" as opposed to a "multifaith prayer room"—the latter would only become commonplace 60 years later (Gilliat-Ray 2005a, 2005b).

Negotiating Materiality: The Use of a Contested and Inclusive Space

> *"It's quite simple, but it suits us. It's difficult, you know, for a lay community where nothing's ordained. It all has to be invented as you go along"*

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(The Bell, Iris Murdoch 2004, 139).

The ambiguities and contradictions suggested by the compromised symbolism of the chapel, and rumors originating from its controversial donation have been followed by ongoing contestation over its use. Pauline Adams, librarian emeritus and author of the definitive history of Somerville, notes that the chapel “has always been a focus of controversy in the college” (Adams 1996, 354). On one side of this dispute have been those who claim Somerville is not a secular foundation, only undenominationally Christian, and therefore the chapel is a Christian place of worship (Harvey 1984, 2008, 2013). The influence of this opinion, and that those who have held it have on the whole been the main users of the chapel, led to material change to the chapel in the form of the plain cross placed on its east wall, now removed. In reaction to this there have been counter-claims that the chapel is not a consecrated place of worship, and therefore it is not exclusively Christian. Somerville is a secular foundation because it was not founded by a Christian body, and consequently the chapel is a place of worship for those of all religions (hence the present use of a removable cross).

The challenges presented by the presence of the chapel and its material character may be summarized as the following triple-bind, well anticipated by its original critics. For practicing Christians, with its universalist leanings and architecture, the chapel remains less authentic than a place of worship operating under the authority and tradition of a particular denomination. Yet on the other hand, for those with secular, humanist, or universalist sympathies, because of its material aspects the chapel still appears to be of an exclusively Christian character. Furthermore, for the same reasons, for those of religions other than Christianity, the chapel appears to be a Christian place of worship. Given these contradictions it is perhaps unsurprising that the chapel features unfavorably in the fiction of Somerville’s most famous authors, and has since raised eyebrows and disagreement. To give a few

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examples, in the 1960s Principal Janet Vaughan advised Churchill College, Cambridge against attempting to build a similar kind of chapel to Somerville's due to the "unhappiness" surrounding it. In 1990 a student complained about the non-Christian nature of an address made by another student and pinned a notice in the chapel urging others to pray for the salvation of the college in case services would become too multifaith. In 2009 and 2010, the Somerville Atheist Society instigated a campaign to "fight for their rights, to gain free meals" in response to the practice of chapel goers having a free meal after each Sunday meeting. Again, in 2012 a spoof article in the Junior Common Room (undergraduate) magazine under the nom de plume Irene McGoads claimed that the chapel was not originally a place of worship, but a military laboratory for "parapsychic warfare." When these experiments caused harm to undergraduates during the Second World War, the chapel then became the center of a bizarre cult supplying the British Establishment with young initiates (McGoads 2012). With no chaplain, or indeed formal religious tradition other than its own, the corporate activities of the chapel have been shared among college members, perhaps inspiring Murdoch's uneasy addresses given in The Bell's lay community. Between 1935 and 1967 Sunday services of undenominational prayer were conducted by the principals and vice-principals. Following the format of the college prayers said before the chapel was built, these acts included two Bible readings, common hymns, the Lord's Prayer, and sometimes the addition of an address 30 by the principal, a member of the college, or an invited guest.

Until 1993 chapel activities were conducted by two fellows, Nan Dunbar and Barbara Harvey (Dunbar 1993). At its lowest ebb the chapel played only a small role in college life, and Sunday services of prayer were only attended by a few students and fellows. But in this period, the chapel did not go without influence. For example, Margret Thatcher noted the impression the chapel addresses of Helen Darbishire made upon her, perhaps not insignificant because it was Thatcher's government that would go on to endorse multifaith

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religious education and acts of worship in all state-funded schools (HM Government 1988; Moulin 2015; Thatcher 1995).

In 1993 college fellows stopped taking responsibility for services and a non-conformist minister was appointed on the understanding that he had "a sensitive knowledge of, and respect for, Judaism and other non-Christian religions" (Dunbar 1993, n.p.). After this, a chapel officer, later chapel director—usually doctoral students and all unordained—have taken responsibility of the religious activities in the chapel in conjunction with a chapel committee and, more recently, a music director. The appointment of the music director has led to an established and highly successful choir (Somerville College Choir 2016), thus fulfilling one of Kemp's original aspirations for the chapel to be a place for the appreciation of spiritual music. This has impacted upon the appearance of the chapel, which now has a grand piano and a harpsichord at the east end, which arguably detract from its original simplicity.

The main regular corporate activity currently held in the chapel is a Sunday evening event in term time coordinated by the chapel director. However, in addition to this the chapel, always open for personal reflection and prayer of college members, has also provided a venue for events as varied as members' weddings, art exhibitions, student drama, comedy, and music recitals by Somerville's budding musicians. Another annual event is the commemoration service when deceased alumnae of the college are remembered by their friends and the whole college community. This service has selected prayers, readings and hymns of a broadly Christian character carefully chosen to be more universal in nature by avoiding Christocentric references—read by participants and members rather than a minister of religion—and an address given by an alumna.

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While the chapel has certainly presented challenges it also has presented opportunities for enriching college life. Released from the traditional program and structure found in Anglican college chapels, the chapel director is given the opportunity and freedom to develop and organize the term's chapel events in conjunction with the interests of students and members. From 1993 to 2010, Sunday services followed the format of readings from the Bible, some simple prayers, an address by an invited speaker on a religious or spiritual theme, and some choral music by the choir. Speakers have usually been clergy or prominent laypeople from Christian denominations, but have also regularly included addresses by students and fellows, and addresses by representatives of non-Christian religions. While the "undenominational" character of the college chapel has been taken seriously in this regard, in actuality "interdenominational" better describes the overall character of these events, as the chapel has routinely hosted guests representing various denominations, and furthermore, regular separate Eucharistic services in the Roman Catholic, Anglican and free church traditions celebrated by visiting celebrants.

A decision to increase the multifaith activities in the chapel coincided with the appointment of Dr. Alice Prochaska as principal, and the successive appointments of the present article's authors to the role. During our tenures, while the events were overall in the majority Christian in nature, Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim, and Hindu speakers were invited to give talks about aspects of those religions. To avoid syncretism, these events were not intended to constitute corporate acts of worship, but talks accompanied by music. As part of Sunday evening prayers in the Christian tradition, speakers also came to talk on topics as diverse as cognitive science and religion, Wordsworth's attitude to religion, the relevance of Meister Eckhart's spirituality for today, Einstein and religion, religion and management, and John Donne. Talks relating to Somerville's history were also included as part of its activities. Margaret Thatcher's attitude to religion was explored, a talk on Sir Francis Younghusband

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provided some background to the chapel, and Siegfried Sassoon's niece (Sassoon was sent to Somerville with Robert Graves during the war for convalescence) guided students through the spiritual journey found in his post-war poetry. In addition to the Sunday evening prayer services and talks, weekly mindfulness meditation classes and Taizé services were held, and once a term there was an Anglican evensong and Communion, and a Catholic mass. The interdenominational and multifaith activities became well attended by students once the structure and concepts of the events became widely understood. For us, most important in conducting these various events was the avoidance of syncretism, by signaling clear differences between activities of prayer in accordance with a particular tradition, and other activities engaging with more than one religious tradition at a time. In respect to the development and growing success of the chapel program, it is interesting how the compromised and unusual design and history of the chapel led to this innovation in provision for members of the college. This was not undemanding for us, however, as coordinating activities across denominations and religions required reflection and a balancing of our own faith commitments and positionings in a context where religion and the chapel were still contested in the college community by both traditionally-minded Christians on the one hand, and secularists on the other (while also being ignored by the indifferent). Previously private about the practice of her own faith, the position itself and the enthusiasm and spirituality of the undergraduates integrated Gatty's faith and her work in a very public environment, challenging her as a woman to engage with God in the public rather than private sphere. For Gatty, a Roman Catholic and an art historian, the Annunciation became symbolic of the challenge of being a female asked to hold responsibility over such a theologically complex space. For Moulin-Stożek, on the other hand, reflexive distancing of the role of chapel director from his own denominational commitments became the normal way he would address pastoral and organizational tasks, drawing on his experience in the field of religious

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education in public schools and his work on philosoph ical methods of determining fairness in dealing with religion (Moulin 2009; Moulin and Robson 2012). At a time when the student body at Oxford has become increasingly international and religiously diverse, administrators in other Oxford colleges, especially Anglican foundations, are questioning their own models. While there is a call and a place for the traditions of Anglican evensong, during the course of our tenures at Somerville chapel we were approached by ordained colleagues in other colleges who wanted to understand and potentially incorporate aspects of Somerville inclusivity and openness in their own services and programs. The approaches employed at Somerville and the theory underlying them may still prove to be valuable in other contexts in the future.

Conclusion

Materially the chapel can be seen as a compromise between liberally-minded universalist Christians—who were comfortable with an inclusive religious building founded on their view of a simple ethical and monotheistic Christianity compatible in some ways with the beliefs and practices of other religions— and progressive humanist and internationalist aspirations, including the disputation of the role of Christianity in the college and wider society. What united those holding these opposing positions in Somerville was the common cause of the advancement of women, which for some Christians, especially Kemp, included progressive views of the role of women in the church. The material result was the stripping away of exclusive denominational markers to allow for a greater inclusivity brought about by simplicity, but still with Christian symbolism bearing witness to the importance of women to the church, ecumenically conceived, and their educational empowerment. The chapel is

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therefore a unique building that embodies important factors in the development of British Christianity and changing attitudes toward the role of women, women in education, religion and non-Christian religions, and growing unbelief, in British society in the twentieth century. It also represents the interaction of educated elites with the religions of the British Empire and the desire for a building where those of these different religions would be welcome and could pray, even if this idea rested on the theological belief that it was Christ that united them all. This approach to interreligious encounter rested on a theological and anthropological universalism, that religions represent different expressions of the same religious nature of mankind, and at their heart therefore capture the same truths which are most fully revealed in Christianity.

It was with a Christian vision that the chapel became a precursor for other multifaith spaces in the public square. The desire for greater interreligious encounter grew out of a sincerely held belief that a consideration of other religions could at least contribute to Christian spiritual life, and constitute part of the Christian mission of goodwill, even if the focal point of faith should always end up in Christ. This view of interreligious relations is perhaps naïve by contemporary standards, but its universalism, popular at the time, precipitated and allowed for the development of the global pluralism that has subsequently become a default position in an era of increased mobility of peoples. For once, elites such as Kemp and Younghusband, although motivated by Christianity, had followed their spiritual paths of interreligious enthusiasm; others could go theirs—resulting in a wide range of positions and understandings, some of them non-Christian (Moulin 2017). This is perhaps why the chapel can be misunderstood in the present. It is unrecognized as an example of Christian universalism, because the popularity of this view (and Unitarianism, the free churches, and liberal Christianity themselves) have since given way to a more polarized status quo between orthodox Trinitarian Christians and a range of unbelieving positions

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(Arweck and Lee 2014). Moreover, since the 1930s interreligious dialogue has developed into more reflexive forms that aim to retain the particularities of each tradition rather than attempting to universalize them (Moulin-Stożek 2017).

Despite the influence of universalist Christianity, it is evident that the contestation of the building also led to the chapel's material appearance, and that this materiality embodies the physical manifestation of cultural disagreement about the nature and form of religious and spiritual practice in the college. For example, the college does not offer theology as an undergraduate course, and there is a very strong academic focus on humanist philosophy and classics. On the one hand, the simplicity and emptiness of the chapel can be interpreted as the desire by some to remove religion from the college (and wider society). On the other hand, it leaves an open space for those who wish to integrate their own religious or spiritual practice into college life. The conflicting nature of its physicality, which incorporates the traditional wooden interior found in many Anglican college chapels, the Catholic symbol of the Annunciation, and a "feminine" celebration of the Resurrection, creates a space that is considered by most college members, even those who are unbelievers, as broadly spiritual. Its materiality is crucial to the way in which it impacts college life, and its contestation means that there is an ongoing discussion about the very fact and existence of the building. Yet the contestation surrounding its construction, and ongoing use is symbolic of a wider trend in the decline of support for Christian chapels on university campuses in the twentieth century on both sides of the Atlantic (Grubiak 2014). Its bland appearance is the result of a culture war between those who wished to preserve some form of Christian nurture in higher education, and those who wanted to dispense with it in favor of progress, science and humanism. In these ways the chapel of Somerville is a physical microcosm of the social changes beyond its quadrangles, but also an influential site where those changes were able to take hold and impact across generations of the British elite.

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Since the building of the chapel, with increased religious diversity in Britain caused by immigration and secularization (Skeie 2002), multifaith spaces have become the norm in universities, hospitals, and airports. Internationally, several high-profile chapels of a comparable concept have been instituted. These include, for example, the Rothko Chapel, Houston, the prayer room at the Brandenburg Gate, Berlin, the "faith zone" of Britain's Millennium Dome (Gilliat-Ray 2005b), and a similarly controversial interreligious space in the headquarters of the United Nations, New York. These, in most cases, function on the negative-type inclusivity of Somerville's chapel, and like Somerville's chapel have also been predicated on the hope of greater internationalism, the need for greater interreligious understanding and the power of art and image. It is difficult to imagine a chapel like Somerville's in an Oxford college prior to the 1930s. Yet at the time of writing, Somerville's undenominational chapel does not seem radical, but a time capsule representing a different, largely unknown era of religious (un)belief. Paradoxically, its continued physical presence and ambiguity mean that, through the deliberately diverse program of events necessitated by its unfixed denominational character, religion perhaps has a greater prominence in Somerville than in other colleges. The chapel therefore provides an example of how the physicality, use, and meaning of objects and space may evolve over time, and furthermore may be constructed by dispute and unbelief as well as by belief and consensus.

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