

Does History Matter?

History invites us to remember and to value the past as a foundation for the present and for our steps into the unknowable future. I treasure the Bible and the traditions of worship that are so much part of my life because they contain so many of the ingredients with which I make sense of the world, give direction and purpose to my life and relationships, and meet God coming to save and restore.

Unsurprisingly, the story of Westminster is rich in such remembering. I can never walk into our chapel without being reminded that it was added to the college precisely to act as a prayer-filled reminder of war and the terrible cost of war. It matters that we remember things from the past because they teach us truths about greatness and sadness, about tremendous endeavour and terrible

tragedy. History teaches us where we come from. Its stories help to test, refine and inspire the stories we tell about ourselves.

So it is that October has been marked here by remembering the 17th October, 1899, when at 11:30am the dining hall was packed for the first time and Westminster College was opened. There followed a lunch for 665 that required two halls in the Guildhall and overflow in the Lion Hotel. After centuries of being outsiders, the predecessors of the URC were finding a new home in this ancient university community. And, of course, at the heart of this moment were the twin sisters whose portraits now take pride of place in that same hall, feet from where they sat that day 120 years ago.

We remember their vision and their passion for faith



and for learning. We remember the monumental effort it took from so many to build our college. We give thanks to God for what we have inherited.

Now it's our turn. Ours to create and tend and care as we bring this glorious place of welcome alive day after day. Ours to treasure it and look after it as it shelters fresh opportunities for teaching and learning, for meeting and celebrating, for rest and play, for stillness and worship, for encounter and discovery. We are laying our own foundations for the future. We honour this beginning because it helps us cherish even more what has been handed on to us.

Almighty God, the Giver of all grace, without whom none of our efforts can prosper, we beseech Thee to grant that all our work, being begun in dependence upon Thee, may so be continued that it shall receive Thy gracious acknowledgement, and be crowned with Thy benediction. Unite us now in Thy fellowship, and fill us with the spirit of thankfulness, that with enlarged hearts and renewed hope we may consecrate ourselves afresh to Thy service, through Jesus Christ, our only Advocate and Mediator. Amen.

First prayer offered at the opening in the dining hall by Revd Charles Moinet, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of England

A little bit about me



Last month's **Imagine** welcomed Jonathan and his family. I can use this space this month to share what some of you already know. When my time as Principal ends next summer, Jenny and I will move on as I go to serve as minister to two URC churches. Trinity-Henleaze is in the suburbs of Bristol, and Thornbury URC is in a market town about 18 miles to the north-east of Bristol.

After the very long time since I first confirmed a move it is good to finally know where we're going. This knowledge has a great blessing for me because it means I can now devote myself fully to Westminster with all the energy, hope, knowledge and commitment I have to offer you for these coming months. Transitions are big and often challenging times. For many years I have been teaching our students about how they can help churches flourish through times of transition. Now it is my turn, with you, to travel through this particular transition and to do it truly well.

