

Queen Anne's Little Church

DAVID BLOMFIELD

The story of how 'Queen Anne's Little Church' – the Kew chapel of 1714 – was transformed into the handsome building we now see on Kew Green, and of the extraordinary personalities involved in its history, is told at length in the recently published *St Anne's, Kew, 1714-2014*. The book owes a great debt to several members of this society, most especially George Cassidy for his *Chapel of St Anne, Kew Green, 1710-1769*, and John Cloake, whose work on the manor rolls has added immeasurably to our knowledge of Kew.

This article supplies the context for further detailed research by John Cloake, contained in the accompanying map and legend, for which there was no room in the book, but which could be of great value to future historians. John has been able to identify the homes of nearly all those responsible for the building of the chapel, by linking references in the manor rolls of that time to the surviving manor map of 1771. This information has been inserted on a map drawn by William Sitwell, which gives a vivid picture of the shape of Kew in 1714.

In the early years of the 18th century, Kew was no more than a hamlet, but it was a hamlet with pretensions. Under the Tudors in the 1500s, it had been home to the greatest in the land, with dukes and princes building houses along its river bank, eager to be close to Henry VII's new palace of Richmond. Then, when Elizabeth, the last of the Tudor sovereigns, died in Richmond Palace, the children of her Stuart successor, James I, also chose this stretch of the Thames for their summer homes, Prince Henry in Richmond and his sister Elizabeth in Kew. However, when Henry died and Elizabeth left to marry a German princeling, Kew and Richmond slid quietly out of the public eye, while the country was politically transformed, first by brutal civil war and then by the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688. Yet Kew did not entirely lose its links with royalty, as it lay in the manor of Richmond, which remained in the hands of the royal family.

Kew's population was small. The manor records indicate that in 1703 there were 153 adults and children living in 34 dwellings. Most of these

were cottages, housing fishermen, boatmen, and labourers working in the local market gardens, but there were also some six or seven substantial houses, which employed servants when the owners were there and caretakers when they were not. These houses and cottages were scattered around Kew Green.

The Green itself was of a distinctive shape, twice as long as it is today, but narrowing as it stretched west to where a ferry for horse and carriage traffic crossed the Thames, approximately where Kew Gardens has its Brentford gate today. (There was a ferry for pedestrians downstream, roughly on the line of the current Kew Bridge.) The Green was distinctive also in its lack of one basic element of community life: it had no church.

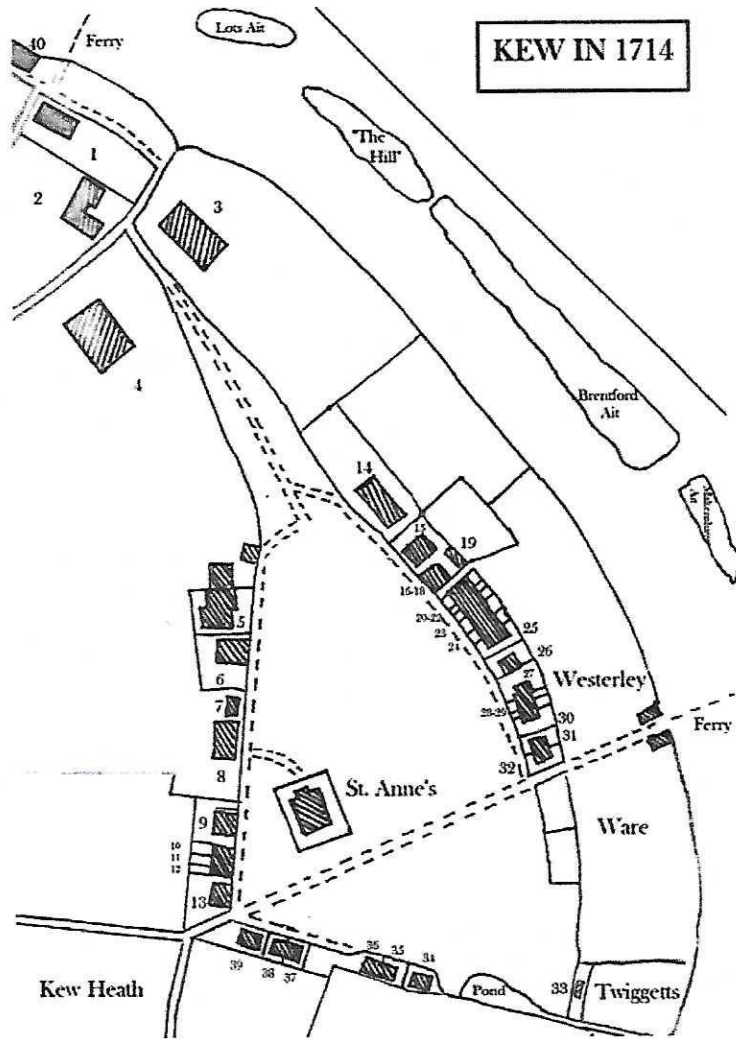
The reason for this lay in the way in which Kew had developed in Tudor and Stuart times: it was a hamlet of Richmond, not an independent village, and it had no squire around whom an independent parochial organisation might have grown – just a few aristocrats who spent only a few months of each year in Kew. By the reign of Queen Anne, this lack of a local church was no longer just an inconvenience: it had become a problem. Kew lay at the furthest limit of the very large parish of Kingston. The nearest place of worship within the parish was the chapel at Richmond, one mile away. St Lawrence's in Brentford was marginally closer, but it could be reached only via the ferry. In 1710 some of the richer residents of Kew decided to petition Queen Anne for a site on which to build a place of worship. This would not be a parish church – Kew was too small for that – but a 'chapel of ease' within the parish of Kingston, similar in status to the chapel in Richmond. The Vicar of Kingston 'most heartily' concurred, and to add weight to their petition the Kew worthies gathered promises of money.

The first roll of subscribers of 18 August 1710 constitutes an interesting group, as most of them were either major landholders in Kew at the time or would be so in the future, while others represented what were then considered the lower classes.

Richard Levett	£21.10	John Lely	£10.15
Chris Appleby	£10.15	Arthur Nixon	£10.00
Sir Chas Eyre	£20.00	John Murden	£10.15
Thos. Howlett	£10.00	John Martin	£5.00
Leigh Blackwell	£10.00	Jos Murden	£10.00
Wm. Cox	£10.00	Thos. Fuller	£2.10

No on page	1771 survey	Owner in 1714	Occupant(s) [* marks residences of subscribers to chapel.]
1	761	Richard Levett Esq.	* Leigh Backwell / Sir John Brown [change about this time]
2	762	do.	* Sir Charles Eyre
3	763	do.	* Richard Levett
4	729	Dorothy Lady Capel	* Lady Capel
5	733-8	Thomas & Melles Howlett	Arthur Nixon
6	739	Dorothy Lady Capel	* Arthur Nixon (publican, Rose and Crown)
7	741	Anne Mounteney widow	? Anne's son Richard Mounteney Jr.
8	747	do.	* Anne Mounteney
9	748	Mary Jackman	* John Martin (joiner)
10	751-2	do.	John Benham
11}	753-4	Thomas & Melles Howlett	{John Rencher
}		do.	{William Mahew
12}		do.	{John Haslen
13	755-7	Michael Layton	* Michael Layton (publican, Rising Sun)
14	765	John Lely	* John Lely
15	766a	Christopher Appleby	* Christopher Appleby
16	772-3	? [Wm Adams in 1703 [Wm Sutton by 1720]	widow Pew [by 1720]
17	775	John Hayter	John Hooper
18	775a	do.	Charles Prior
19	776	Samuel Hussey(gardener)	Thomas Flavell (gardener)
20	777	John Hayter	Richard Baxter
21	778	do.	John Low
22	779	do.	- Price
23	780	? [Thomas Brown in 1703 [John Hughes in 1724]	?
24	781-2	Jeremiah Murden	* John Murden
25	783	do.	Margaret Wells widow [in 1716]
26	784	do.	?
27	785	John Saint	John Saint
28	786a	Jeremiah Murden	John Davis
29	786b	do.	Jeremiah Murden Jr
30	786c	Jeremiah Murden Jr.	Jeremiah Murden Jr [? = * 'Joseph' Murden on subscriber list. But there was no such person.]
31	787	Thomas Howlett	Humphrey Jenkes and Henry Jenkes
32	788	do.	John Barton (blacksmith)
33	801	Thomas Powell	* Thomas Powell
34	805-6	William Cox	Sara Porter widow
35	807	do.	?? * Margaret Harris [Margaret Maine by 1726]
36	808	Thomas Howlett	* Thomas Howlett
37	809a	William Cox	? John Middleton
38	809b	do.	William Dudley (publican at Cock and Hoop before 1719)
39	809c	do.	* William Cox
40	uncertain	Manorial waste	* Thomas Fuller (fisherman)

Kew in 1714
Owners and occupants of houses
with subscribers to chapel
(For numbers of houses, see Map opposite)
List compiled by John Cloake



Kew in 1714

Based on a map drawn by William Sitwell
 For numbers of houses, see list opposite
 giving owners and occupants in 1714

Sir Richard Levett was a merchant, who had moved into the Dutch House (the present Kew Palace) in 1697 and became Lord Mayor of London in 1700. Sir Richard died in 1711, and his heirs played no part in the building of the chapel to which he had contributed.

Sir Charles Eyre and Colonel Leigh Backwell had the leases of two slightly smaller houses built by the ferry. Sir Charles, who acted as treasurer to the trustees, was a former Governor of Bengal.

John Lely lived just to the west of what is now the Herbarium. His house had once been owned by his grandfather, the court portrait painter, Sir John Lely, the first of a glorious succession of famous painters living in and around Kew over the next two centuries. Christopher Appleby lived next door on the site of the Herbarium. A barrister of the Middle Temple, he was to emerge as the most energetic of the trustees.

The Murdens and Thomas Howlett lived in smaller houses but were influential landlords, owning several properties around the Green. John Murden refused to pay his subscription for some time. Perhaps there was a disagreement about the building or about the siting of his pew. Whatever the problem, it must have been solved, as he was to be elected Chapelwarden in 1717.

William Cox and Arthur Nixon were tradesmen. Cox and his heirs ran nursery gardens in the area now bisected by Gloucester Road. Arthur Nixon was an inn-keeper. He ran the Rose and Crown, which then stood on the south of the Green where the Director of Kew Gardens now lives. (Nixon's successor would relocate the inn to the north side in 1725.)

John Martin and Thomas Fuller were workmen, and could not match the contributions promised by the others, but perhaps even then it was politically expedient for a petition to show it had support from all levels of the community. Martin rented a house a few doors to the west of Nixon. As a carpenter, he would have had a professional interest in the project. Thomas Fuller was a fisherman living upstream of the horse ferry. He was illiterate and signed with a mark, as did many of his contemporaries. According to a petition by his son in 1756, Thomas Fuller, fisherman, 'was in possession of a small tenement near the riverside going from Kew to Richmond. Her late Majesty Queen Carolineintended to make a terrace walk; this necessitated the pulling down of the old tenement...' Its exact location is unknown, but as the terrace ran southward from the Ferry House, John Cloake believes the likeliest spot is close to the Ferry House (no 1 on the map).

The men of Kew had organised their petition and subscription in great style, yet ironically the project could never have gone ahead without the backing of two far more powerful women.

The first was Lady Capel who lived in the biggest of all the houses in Kew. This was known as Kew House and stood opposite the Dutch House, just where the Green narrowed to little more than a lane. (Its site is now marked by a sundial on the lawn in front of Kew Palace.) She first added £50, and then another £50, to ensure the project was viable. She would later give some more to balance the books.

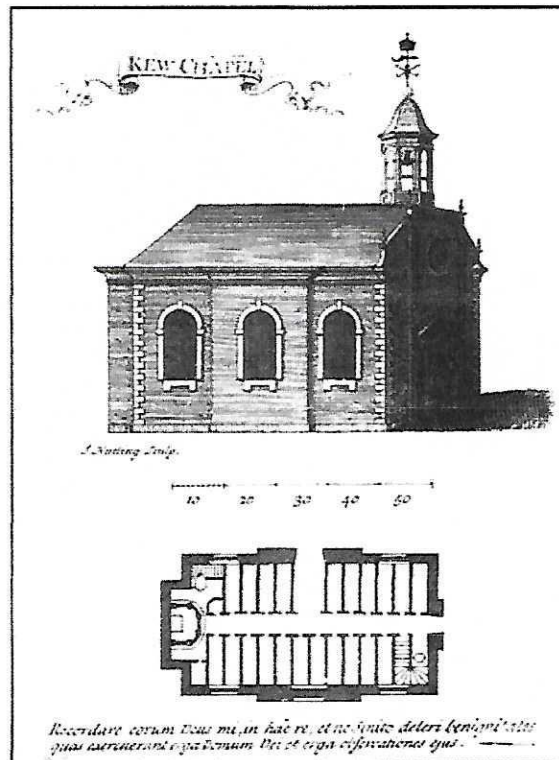
Still more important was Queen Anne. In granting her permission, on 28 June 1712, the Queen also granted a site 'One Hundred foot squareon the south side of Kew Green on an antient Gravell Pit or peice of wast ground adjoyning to the Road'. She also agreed to the petitioners' request for eighty oaks out of Richmond Park. When she was informed that that so great a number could not be spared, the petitioners were suspiciously well armed with an alternative: they would be very happy with £100 instead. She consented.

However, even with the Queen's money, there was still a shortfall and a bit more had to be raised with the help of a further five subscribers: Margaret Harris, Edward Lyford, Michael Layton, Thomas Powell and Ann Mounteney. Of these, the last three can be positively located in the manor records, and it is possible that Margaret Harris may have remarried and is the 'Margaret Maine' who appears in 1726. Only Edward Lyford is missing. John Cloake suggests that in 1714 he might have been living in one of nos 23, 26, 35 or 37.

In the end the building costs amounted to £500. The chapel was consecrated by the Bishop of Winchester on 12 May 1714. To get some idea of the size and shape of the original chapel, as Richard Perkins shrewdly noted in his 1993 guide to St Anne's, you must stand half way up the centre aisle of the present church. You will then be in the middle of the unpretentious rectangle measuring 54 feet by 27 feet that formed the first building. It consisted simply of a nave with a small recess at the east end for the altar, which would have stood approximately where the nave altar stands today. The north and south walls of the chapel, built in brick with stone dressings and large round-headed windows very similar in shape and size to those which you can now see, ran along the same lines as the rows of Tuscan columns to your left and right. At the west end the building finished roughly in line with the rearmost pew in the present-day nave. The little chapel had two doors, one in the south wall

and the other at the west end of the building, which was surmounted by a circular cupola. The cupola contained the bell, and was itself surmounted, first by a weather vane and then, splendidly, by a crown, celebrating its royal patronage.

The Queen died soon after the consecration, but Christopher Appleby has left a touching description of how 'Her Majesty, as she passed the Road to her Pallace at Windsor, always stopped her coach, whilst it was building and when it was finished at a place where it could be seen, and used to call it "Her Little Church"'. As a lawyer, writing some time after her death, and arguing for further subsidy, Appleby may, just possibly, have exaggerated her devotion to the project, but the hamlet of Kew was well aware of the value of royal patronage. Diplomatically, their little chapel was dedicated to St Anne.



Kew Chapel in 1714