

OXFORD CENTRE FOR METHODISM AND CHURCH HISTORY

Westminster at War

Archives & Research, No. 1

New for 2019, 'Archives & Research' from the Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History (OCMCH) will provide introductions to the Centre's rich collections of archives, artworks, and printed works as a resource for supporting diverse areas of research. This first instalment commemorates the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War through an exploration of the impact of that conflict on Westminster Training College, and the records that tell its story.

Westminster College operated under a 'special relationship' with the University of London. This allowed its students to study at a UCL college for three years, before completing a fourth year of teacher training at Westminster. At the outbreak of war in 1939 the college was evacuated based on where students were studying at the time: those based at Kings College went to Bristol, UCL science students to Bangor, Arts students to Aberystwyth, Economics to Cambridge, and fourth year teacher training students are recorded as only moving as far as Borough Road College in Isleworth.

With evacuation plans in place for the staff and students of Westminster, attention was turned to the site and contents of the College. Stained glass from the chapel was promptly removed to a secure location, and the organ was relocated to

Westminster College was a Methodist training institution that operated between 1851 and 2000. Originally located on Horseferry Road in the City of Westminster, in 1959 it relocated to Harcourt Hill in Oxford. Following the merger with Oxford Brookes University in 2000, Westminster ceased to be an independent college, and became the campus we see today.



Photograph, Bomb damage to interior of Westminster College chapel, Horseferry Road, 1940s

the Principal's house. Other furnishings were either stored or sold. Much of the College premises was subsequently requisitioned for war use – as it had been during the First World War. Ideally placed for wartime operations in the heart of London, the College served as a training ground for Fire Brigade volunteers, and the gymnasium was used as an auxiliary mortuary from 1938.

Several members of Westminster staff and students (current and former) enlisted in the Armed Forces, and had extensive and varied wartime careers. In all, 25 lost their lives in 1939-1945. The continuation of the College itself was also jeopardised when, having avoided considerable damage for much of the war, several buildings were rendered virtually unusable by multiple bombs on 4 March 1944. The chapel suffered almost £5000 of damage alone. Remarkably, however, the College returned to Horseferry Road with the end of the threat to London after D-Day, fully opening again in September 1945. As the College was rebuilt, the Westminsterians who fell during the Second World War were recorded on the rededicated war memorial, which can be seen today in the chapel at Harcourt Hill.

Archives

The story of Westminster College during the Second World War can be traced through the college archives at the OCMCH.

Some selections from this extensive collection include:

Official records of the college during wartime include **minutes of the Governing Body, 1939-1945**, and the working papers of **Principals A. W. Harrison (1930-1940)** and **J. S. Ross (1940-1953)**.

Further material can be found among the **papers of the Bursars of Westminster College**, which include correspondence, inventories, reports, and other papers relating to Fire Services use of the College during the war. Bursar N. Cyril Patten acted as an Air Raid Precautions 'Incident Officer' for the City of Westminster, and compiled bomb damage maps of the area marking where incendiaries dropped in the vicinity of the College.

The staff and students who served in the armed forces during the war are memorialised in a **collection of photographs** possibly compiled by Principal J. S. Ross. This poignant record is testimony to the variety of roles undertaken by Westminsterians, in RAF training schools, as infantry, army chaplains, and more.

Among personal papers of College staff is the **wartime journal of Donald W. Crompton (Principal of Westminster College from 1969-81)** with No. 152 Squadron, Royal Air Force in N. Africa, Sicily, Italy, India, and Burma, 1942-46.



Ordnance Survey map for the City of Westminster marked, 'Bombs In This Area, 1939-1946'

DIGITAL COLLECTIONS

OTHER WARTIME RECORDS

Roll of Men in the King's Forces, 1917

'Victory Bulletin', 1918-1919

Westminsterians who died on active service the First World War, photograph album



Telegram describing bomb damage to Westminster College, 15 March 1944

All material cited from the collections of the OCMCH

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**Oxford Centre for Methodism
and Church History**

Oxford Brookes University
Harcourt Hill Campus
Oxford Brookes University
OX2 9AT