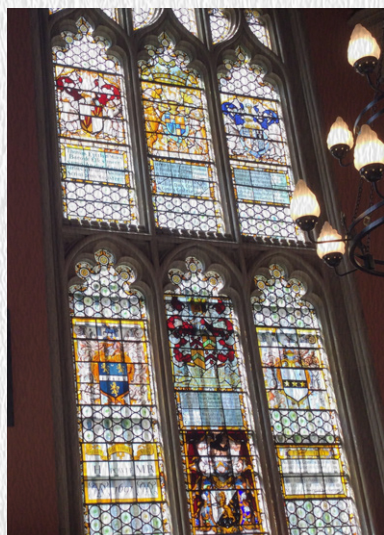


Maugham Library

No. 172

THE HERITAGE of FLEET STREET

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There has been a building on the site of the Maugham Library since 1217, when King Henry III built a house to provide a refuge for Jews who had converted to Christianity. During the reign of Richard II, certain converts received a two pence wage for life. But all this ended in 1290, when the Jews were expelled by Edward I, although the office continued with the house.

In 1377, the office was combined with that of the Master of the Rolls, whose job was to look after the long parchment scrolls, sewn head to tail and then rolled up. The scrolls contained all the records of the Court of Chancery. When the Master took up residence, the rolls were stored in the chapel, following typical medieval practice. The chapel eventually became the main storage location for national records.

The House of Converts was demolished in 1771 and replaced by a new House, but the chapel was retained and later restored. This building was in turn replaced by the current one, designed by Sir James Pennethorne to the most exacting standards. It was the first fire-proof building in England, built largely as a reaction to the fire at the Palace of Westminster in 1834. It was begun in 1851, and the Public Record Office opened in 1856, with later extensions.

It had been intended to incorporate the medieval structure into the Rolls Building, but it proved unsound and had to be demolished. One arch of the old building was saved and incorporated as the garden elevation of the Chancery Lane frontage. It incorporates a statue of King Henry III.

The Public Record Office eventually ran out of space, and

it was decided to relocate it to Kew; all records had been moved by 1997.

The Rolls Estate has now become the home of the Maugham Library of Kings College London.

The Ancient Rolls Chapel has now been renamed the Weston Room.

This room ought to be a major London tourist attraction, but hardly anyone knows about it, and it is not often open. It contains a number of treasures, including three large tomb monuments, dated between 1510 and 1620, and stained glass windows from the 17th and 18th centuries. It was renamed in recognition of the support given by the Garfield Weston Foundation towards the restoration works. During the works, a fine mosaic floor, probably laid in 1898, was discovered and restored.

The glass in the windows was removed during the Second World War. The oldest glass is in the four right-hand panes and dates from 1611. The bell is made of bell-metal and was made in 1611.

The magnificent funeral monuments above, all of past Masters of the Rolls, from left to right, are:

- Richard and Joan Alington, shown with their three daughters as small figures below. He died in 1561.
- Lord Bruce of Kinloss, who died in 1611, is shown lying in a furred robe on his right side. The small figure on his left is his daughter Christiana, who was married in the Rolls Chapel in 1511 at the age of 12.
- Dr. Yonge was Dean of York and died of the sweating sickness at the age of 49 in 1516. He is shown lying on a sarcophagus, dressed in a red gown with a squirrel cap. In the lunette above are the head of Christ with two cherubs.