

HIGH STREET
GRITTLETON
WILTSHIRE SN14 6AP



TRADITION: STRICT & PARTICULAR BAPTIST

BUILT: c.1720

CONGREGATION ACTIVE UNTIL: MAY 1982

LISTING: GRADE II*

OSGRID REFERENCE: ST862800

INTACT GEORGIAN CHAPEL AND HAVEN OF PEACE

GRITTLETON STRICT BAPTIST CHAPEL



TRANSPORT

Grittleton village is south west of Malmesbury about half a mile north of the M4. The nearest station is Chippenham, from where taxis are usually available.

The chapel is entered off the street through iron gates beside a red phone box and the village noticeboard.

Please park in the street or Village Hall car park - and please don't try to drive down the short track to the chapel.

VISIT US

The gate and chapel are normally locked, but we welcome visitors and groups. The key is available from the Neeld Arms pub 100 metres away in Grittleton High Street or from our volunteer keyholder on 01666 822730.

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

The Grittleton Strict Baptist Church was built in c.1720, through the patronage and support of a local family, the Houltons. The Strict & Particular Baptists, existing today as 'Gospel Standard' Baptists, are an offshoot of the General Baptist Church, and believe in predestination. This is the idea that some people, the elect, have already been chosen by God for salvation. Communion is 'strictly' only for those who had been baptised by full immersion in water.

The manor of Grittleton passed to Joseph Houlton of Trowbridge and Farleigh Hungerford through marriage in 1705, and the chapel was built in the grounds of Grittleton House. In 1771, on the death of Robert Houlton, a tenement building in Foscoate was granted for the use of a Baptist minister. In 1779 Houlton's nephew, also Robert, gave this building to the use of Richard Mosely, author of *The Baptist Register of Grittleton* and chapel minister 1776-1819. Other members of the Houlton family left legacies to the chapel, along with a house in Malmesbury.

Although Strict Baptist, the chapel community also contributed to wider life in the village. Robert Houlton left £60 in trust to the chapel for teaching poor Grittleton children to read, and this may have taken place in the room behind the pulpit. Originally accessed via the driveway of Grittleton House, a wall separating the chapel from the grounds was built at a later date, suggesting that a later owner of the house was less sympathetic to the Strict Baptist cause. It is now entered along a narrow drive behind gardens. The wall around the chapel may have been built by Joseph Neeld MP, who purchased the house in 1828. Neeld, commemorated by local pub *The Neeld Arms*, is distinguished by his dire parliamentary record. Despite holding his seat for almost thirty years, he never once made a speech in the Commons!

Above: the north gallery and pulpit.

Below: a concert by Bristol Harmony Choir.

Below: the south gallery and pews.



ENQUIRE & HIRE

THE CHAPEL IS AVAILABLE FOR HIRE FOR SMALL EVENTS SUCH AS CONCERTS

To find out more visit www.hct.org.uk or contact chapels@hct.org.uk

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THE EXTERIOR

A simple, homely looking building, the chapel has some interesting features to look at before you venture inside. There are some traces of lime wash on the outer walls – the chapel would originally have looked very different to its current external appearance. Crosses have been carved around the chapel door, while the south-east cornerstone has the dates 1722 and possibly 1705 scratched into it, along with the letters TF, WI, DI and BH. Two ministers are commemorated on tablets on the east wall. To the north lies a small burial ground. The earliest gravestone is dated 1788, while the most recent is from 1960. Many of the graves have both 'head' and 'foot' stones, with the shapes of the headstones reflected in those at the feet. Despite generously patronising the chapel, many of the Houltons are buried with monuments in the parish church of St Mary the Virgin, Grittleton, and seem to have been Anglicans.

THE INTERIOR

The interior of the church is a well-preserved and complete example of an early eighteenth century Baptist chapel, charming in its simplicity. A central aisle leads to a pulpit which has its own staircase and seat for a preacher. Seating is in box pews on either side of the aisle – three oak pews in the south east corner are eighteenth century, while the rest, of pine, date from the nineteenth. Look out for the small child's pew against the west wall.

Two galleries face each other at the north and south end. The north gallery has stands for music, and there may have once been a choir, although at times in the chapel's history singing was frowned upon by the congregation as unseemly. The electric organ suggests any qualms were overcome by the 1960s!

Baptisms were performed in the open air at the mill ponds at Gatcombe, Nettleton, Colham and Castle Combe, so, in spite of the importance attached to this ceremony, there is no font.

Beneath the north gallery is a vestry. Grittleton was originally visited by travelling Strict Baptist preachers on the Trowbridge and Bristol circuits, sometimes by foot, and there is a theory that this room was also used as overnight accommodation for preachers.

FURTHER READING

Stephen Farell, 'Neeld, Joseph (1789-1856), of Grittleton House, nr. Chippenham, Wilts.; Kelston Park, Som., and 6 Grosvenor Square, Mdx.', in D.R. Fisher, ed., *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1820-1832* (Cambridge, 2009)

Rev. E. Jackson, *The History of the Parish of Grittleton, in the County of Wilts.* (London, 1848).

Robert W. Oliver, *The Strict Baptist Chapels of England vol. V: Wiltshire and the West* (London, 1968), p.34.



SUBSEQUENT HISTORY

Grittleton survived as an active worshipping community until May 1982. Under the careful guardianship of Trustees the chapel was made a Grade II* listed building in 1985, and funds were raised to repair the roof and stonework in that same year. In 2011 the chapel was transferred to the Historic Chapels Trust, securing the building for future generations.