

ACCESSED VIA
THORNDON COUNTRY PARK
OFF THE AVENUE
BRENTWOOD CM13 3SA

PETRE CHAPEL



TRADITION: ROMAN CATHOLIC
BUILT: 1854
CONGREGATION ACTIVE
UNTIL: 2007
LISTING: GRADE II*
OS GRID REFERENCE: NY 905 380

THE GOTHIC BURIAL CHAPEL
OF AN ARISTOCRATIC
ESSEX FAMILY



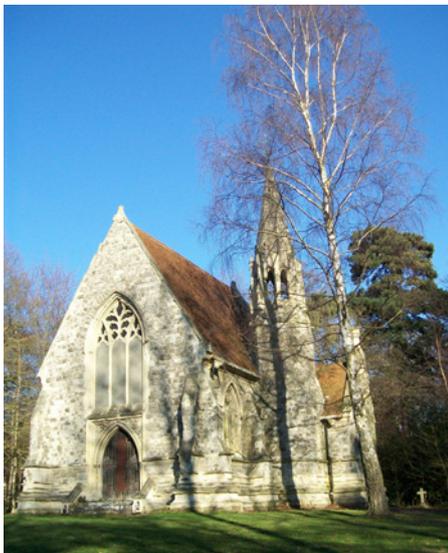
TRANSPORT

Enter Thorndon Country Park using the entrance off 'The Avenue' and park in the 'second car park' (i.e. not the one by the Visitor Centre). Walk from the second car park to the chapel (150 yards).

Please do not try to drive to the Chapel – there is no right of way for cars – and you may get stuck in soft ground.

WOODLAND BURIALS

The burial ground is consecrated and is available for Roman Catholic 'woodland' burials, (i.e. without memorial stones) by permission of the Bishop of Brentwood. To find out more please contact chapels@hct.org.uk



HISTORY & BACKGROUND

The Chapel was built in 1854 as a mortuary chapel for the Petre (pronounced 'Peter') family who owned nearby Thorndon Hall; it was built at the behest of William Bernard, 12th Baron Petre. After a major fire in 1878 the family left Thorndon Hall; the burnt shell was converted to private apartments in the 1960s. The Petre family seat today is Ingatestone Hall.

After the Reformation the Petre family held to their Catholic faith and were well known as Recusants (i.e. those who refused to acknowledge the established Church of England). At times they had to disguise their religious affiliations, under pain of death.

THE ARCHITECT

The full-blown gothic chapel was designed by William Wilkinson Wardell, being given a generous budget for a small building. It seems that William Petre had some influence over the design, as Wardell drafted two alternative designs for the chapel.

Wardell was successful at a young age and was an early adopter of the historically accurate Gothic Revival pioneered by A.W.N. Pugin. Wardell designed churches in Clapham, Greenwich, Stepney, Hammersmith and elsewhere. He suffered from tuberculosis, and emigrated to Australia in his early 30s for the warmer climate. He was even more prolific in Australia where his most celebrated works are St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne and St Mary's Cathedral Sydney. Wardell also worked confidently in the classical style – for example his Government House, Melbourne, Australia.



THE CHAPEL IS AVAILABLE FOR PRE-ARRANGED GROUP VISITS BUT CANNOT BE HIRED FOR EVENTS

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

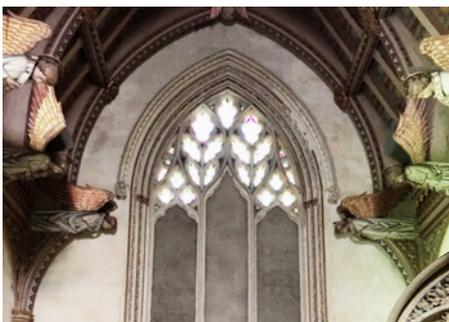
THE HISTORIC CHAPELS TRUST | ST. GEORGE'S GERMAN LUTHERAN CHURCH,
55 ALIE STREET, ALDGATE, LONDON E1 8EB, UK | REGISTERED CHARITY NO. 1017321



THE EXTERIOR

The Petre Chapel is a small but lively composition in ragstone with soft freestone dressings in the gothic style of the mid 14th century. There is an octagonal bellcote. Two encircling bands of prayers and leaf decoration run round the building. Sadly this soft stone has not weathered well but on the north side it reads '*Ego Sum Resurrectio et Vita Qui Credit in me Etiam si Mortuus Fuerit Vivet*' ('I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live'). Over the west door there is a depiction of the Last Judgement, with intricate detailing.

The compact proportions of the chapel remind the viewer of a large-scale reliquary, and perhaps this was the intention given its use as the last resting place of a dynasty of aristocratic Roman Catholics.



The windows are currently blocked following vandalism but we hope to find suitable Victorian stained glass to insert here.

THE INTERIOR

The roof is gloriously decorated with gilded angels on the richly painted hammer-beams. The floor is covered with Minton tiles and boasts the insignia of the Petre family. In the middle is a coffin lift, on which burials were lowered in to the vault.

Around the chapel are Stations of the Cross, which depict the final days of Christ's life - from his denunciation to his crucifixion and burial. The final, 14th, Station of the Cross is on the altar, which depicts Christ being laid in the tomb in keeping with it being a mortuary chapel. Many of the carvings have been damaged by vandals; they will be restored when funds permit.

The stained glass was by the Birmingham firm Hardman & Co; it was reputedly a fine set, but was lost to vandalism. By the time Historic Chapels Trust took on the chapel the windows were blocked up. We hope to give a home here to stained glass which is homeless or at risk when its host building is demolished or altered. If you know of suitable glass we can use here please let us know.



The Petre Arms carved in the wall.

As well as several Lords Petre and their close family, the crypt holds the remains of the recusant 3rd Earl of Derwentwater who in 1716 was executed in the Tower of London for treason, for his role in the Jacobite uprising. The Earl's body was recovered from the executioner by well-connected Catholic supporters and, in the 19th century, Lord Petre allowed re-interment of the Earl's remains at Petre Chapel. This ensured the remains were in ground consecrated by a Catholic bishop; it also associated the Petre family with a man widely regarded as a Catholic martyr.

SUBSEQUENT HISTORY

The Chapel is one of Essex's miniature treasures, but was in a parlous state when HCT took it over in 2010. Generous grants from Historic England and the Country Houses Foundation funded urgent repairs, which were completed in 2015 but there is a great deal still to do. You can help by sending donations, payable to Historic Chapels Trust to the address above. If you would like your gift to be earmarked for the Petre Chapel please say so.