

# St Paul's Chapel



THE OCTAGON TRAIL



**St Paul's Chapel is one of the most interesting buildings on the estate but the architect is unfortunately unknown.**

**Restored by Lewis Way in 1807, the chapel was built from parts of Stansted 'old house' ruins and incorporated earlier structures from this house such as the beautiful Tudor brickwork that had featured in its south entrance.**



In his book exploring the History of Stansted (The Enchanted Forest: The Story of Stansted in Sussex published in 1984) written by the 10th Earl of Bessborough with Clive Aslet, St Pauls Chapel was thought to be one of the most interesting buildings on the Stansted estate.

Stansted 'Old House' had been largely destroyed after being attacked by Parliamentary forces on 16th April 1644 in the Civil War. After Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, Richard Earl of Scarborough who owned Stansted, decided in 1688 to abandon the 'Old House' and build a more 'modern seat' on the site of the present main house. The ruins of the 'Old House' were used to provide stables, stock sheds, barns and a brew house to service the needs of the new house.

Lewis Way purchased Stansted House in 1804, with the intention that Stansted should become not only his family home, but also a special place to start a religious foundation. To fulfil this ambition, and those of his benefactor John Way to found a religious institution, in 1807 Way converted the brewhouse at Stansted into a private chapel.

Way had decided his life's work should be the conversion of Jews to Christianity and their restoration to Palestine. In 1818 Way crossed Europe, visiting Russia to gain support from Czar Alexander I. Lewis Way addressed assembled crowned heads of state at Aix-la-Chapelle in France in pursuit of trying to win tolerance for the Jewish people and allowing them the right to buy land in Palestine. As a result of this work, Way nicknamed himself 'The Wandering Jew'.

The Chapel sanctuary has a canopy supported by unusual wooden pillars and has a unique East Window with Christian and Jewish imagery. This reflects Lewis Way's failed ambition to establish Stansted as a centre for the conversion of the Jews to Christianity.

The Chapel is believed to be the only church in England with the Ten Commandments on stone tablets on the wall, written in Hebrew.

Lewis Way had the Chapel consecrated on the 25th January 1819 (The Feast of the Conversion of St Paul) by the Bishops of St David's and Gloucester. Some 300 people attended, including the poet John Keats.

Towards the end of January 1819, Keats travelled from Bedhampton village, near Havant, to Stansted to attend the consecration of the chapel.



Keats used the imagery of the chapel in one his poems 'The Eve of St Agnes'. It is possible that the atmospheric opening stanza of The Eve of St Agnes reflects the mid-winter weather in 1819:

St Agnes' Eve – Ah, bitter chill it was!  
The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;  
The hare limped trembling through the frozen grass,  
And silent was the flock in woolly fold:  
Numb were the beadsman's fingers, while he told  
His rosary, and while his frosted breath,  
Like pious incense from a censer old.  
Seemed taking flight for heaven, without a death,  
Past the sweet Virgin's picture, while his prayer he saith.

But it was stanzas XXIV and XXV which are most usually attributed to the chapel inspiring Keats' poetic imagery:

XXIV

A casement high and triple-arched there was,  
All garlanded with carven imageries  
Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass,  
And diamonded with panes of quaint device,  
Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,  
As are the tiger-moth's deep-damasked wings;  
And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,  
And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings,  
A shielded scutcheon blushed with blood of queens and kings.

XXV

Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,  
And threw warm gules on Madeline's fait breast,  
As down she knelt for heaven's grace and boon;  
Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together pressed,  
And on her hair a glory, like a saint:  
She seemed a splendid angel, newly dressed,  
Save wings, for Heaven – Porphyro grew faint;  
She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint.  
and 'The Eve of St Mark'.

By 1824 Lewis Way's dream of establishing Stansted as a Hebrew College for the training of Jews and foreign missionaries had failed. After investing in Stansted, his inherited fortune, had also dwindled dramatically.

To cut his financial losses, Way sold Stansted House and moved his family to Paris. He died in 1849 whilst living in Leamington, haunted by a sense of futility in his life as he had failed to deliver his religious mission.



Visits to St Pauls Chapel can be arranged via Stansted House Estate Office.

Phone: 01292 631252 Website: [www.theoctagonparish.org.uk/churches/st-pauls-chapel-stansted/](http://www.theoctagonparish.org.uk/churches/st-pauls-chapel-stansted/)