

An Ancient Monument and a Living Church

The Chapel of St Peter-on-the-Wall Bradwell-on-Sea.
In the Year of Our Lord 2007

The world it seems, never ceases to beat a path to the ever-open door of the Chapel.

'Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest', as Thomas Chilsholm's hymn has it, the Pilgrims come. Each with their own story, each with their own gift of thankfulness to bring on their pilgrimage or with their burden of care to lay down here in this Holy Place. Some of them we meet by design – more and more groups want a 'guided' tour with a brief talk about the history and significance of this place. Others we meet by accident – wandering in when we are at the Chapel or encountering them somewhere on the road.

We keep a book at the chapel in which we invite visitors and pilgrims to record their names, when they came, where they came from and a brief comment. On one sample page of thirty-six entries are listed a diversity of places as far apart as Southend, Basildon, Perth West Australia, Danbury, Italy, Pitsea, Middelburg North Carolina, Dorking, Newport Pagnall, Apla Samoa, Cyprus and Venezuela. Their comments range across 'Peaceful', 'Beautiful', 'Wonderful', 'Amazing!', 'Impressive', 'Moving', 'Very Quaint', 'Beautifully Scerene', 'An Oasis of peace and more in a frantic world', 'Exudes the centuries of worship and peace', 'Never fails to amaze', 'What a surprise', 'Big!' 'Impresionante!' 'Holy', 'A proper place to worship.' and 'Yummy!' Few fail to be moved in some way by their visit here.

The Chapel year is underpinned by the Eucharist celebrated there at 08.00 on Wednesday mornings followed most weeks by breakfast at the Othona Community. This regular underpinning sustains many and varied activities: School visits, parish pilgrimages and confirmation groups, students of Architecture and Anglo-Saxon history. Chelmsford Cathedral Choir and the Cathedral 'walkers' make their annual visit to the chapel as do the Pleshey 'walkers' and the Choir from St Mark with St Margaret Plumstead Common.

The year unfolds with our Good Friday Walk of Witness following the Pilgrim Route from St Thomas Bradwell-on-Sea to St Peter's Chapel, walking the Stations of the Cross down the Chapel Track and finishing with a service in the Chapel. We gathered in the thickest mist we had seen all year at 05.30 on Easter Day to kindle the Paschal Fire and to celebrate that 'Christ was Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

The Chapel was the backdrop for the Annual Bradwell Pilgrimage on 07 Jul 2008 when Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor encouraged us all with his thoughts about Spiritual Ecumenism. Pilgrims were invited to leave behind a prayer card with their details and prayer concerns. Some 700 responded, some cards contain one name, some as many as 35! and all these people, places and concerns have been remembered throughout the year at our regular Wednesday service.

A wide and exciting variety of Summer Evening Services followed in July and August. The Chapel resounded to many voices of prayer and worship from the stately measured tones of formal Choral Evensong to Christian new wave. A film crew were present at the last Summer Evening Service, gathering material for a forthcoming magazine programme about contemporary life in the British countryside.

Innovations this year included the Parish Animal Service which was attended by 40 people, 10 dogs, 2 horses and a gerbil! The Chapel was the focus for a Deanery Mother's Union Quiet Day in September and continues to be the local Spiritual Home of the Othona Community with whom we work closely.

The 'season' ends with a Eucharist for St Cedd on the evening of the last Sunday in October. The Chapel is flooded with light and expectation at the Parish carol service on the evening of the Sunday before Christmas with once again more than 200 of us braving the elements to join our voices with those of the Angels and hear the Christmas story unfold.

We are all too aware of the depth of need and distress of an increasing number of people who arrive at the Chapel looking for answers to life's problems. Given the limited resources available to us, we are considering what further things might be done to provide information or support for these people.

As ever, tribute must be paid and thanks given to the band of local volunteers from Bradwell Parish and the Othona community for their hard and unsung work of cleaning, grass cutting, flower arranging, ensuring supply of books and publications, preparing for services, welcoming groups and individuals, providing refreshments, answering queries, tracking down lost property - and lost visitors! Thanks also to the Chapel Committee which cares for the fabric and finances of the Chapel.

Revd's Margaret and Laurence Whitford, Chaplains, St Peter-on-the-Wall, Bradwell-on-Sea.
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Also posted on www.bradwellchapel.org