

A Brief Tour of The Red Mount Chapel

**Please be careful as you move around this building.
Beware the low headroom, uneven steps and floors.**

Introduction

The Chapel of St Mary on the Mount, known as the Red Mount Chapel, was built between 1483-85 by Robert Curraunt for William Spynke, the Benedictine prior of Lynn. It was for use by pilgrims travelling to the shrine of Our Lady at Walsingham. The chapel was built on 'the hylle called the Lady of the Mounte', on the line of the town's defences. The brick-built chapel is octagonal, with buttresses at each corner. It has three entrances, the one at the rear probably being used by the priest.

Since it was closed for worship in the 1530's, the chapel has been used for water storage; as a study, as a gunpowder store during the civil war; as an observatory and as a stable. By 1800 it was in a poor state of repair and was restored in 1828 by public subscription. Further work took place in the 1920's and 30's.

During major repairs in 2007, the building was re-roofed, discrete structural repairs carried out and new lighting installed. The entry passage into the Lower Chapel was partially reconstructed, along with a section of the perimeter wall. The remainder of the many-sided wall originally surrounding the chapel is now hidden beneath the mound.

Ground Floor

The Lower Chapel

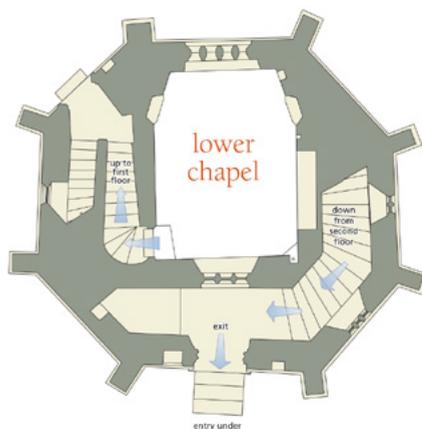
This is the older of the two chapels in the building and lies partly under the mound. The walls were originally plastered and possibly coloured. Records of 1485 show that on the high altar here were four candlesticks, with a tall

candlestick to either side. The altar cloth was embroidered with a star. The chapel may have represented the Holy Sepulchre, the recess on the right containing a reclining figure of the dead Christ. Statues would also have stood in the two tall niches on either side of the window. The level of the original floor is largely uncertain due to changes over the last 500 years.

After the dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530's the Red Mount became the property of the town council, who began to dismantle it. By 1577 this chapel contained a lead water storage tank - the remains of a brick drain can be seen in the passage. During the later 1700's it was partly filled with soil and a door inserted into the east window to form a stable. Local legend has it that a tunnel connected the Red Mount with Castle Rising Castle nearly four miles away. Sadly there is no evidence for this!

Note the bat box. During the winter the chapel is home to important colonies of Natterer's and brown long eared bats.

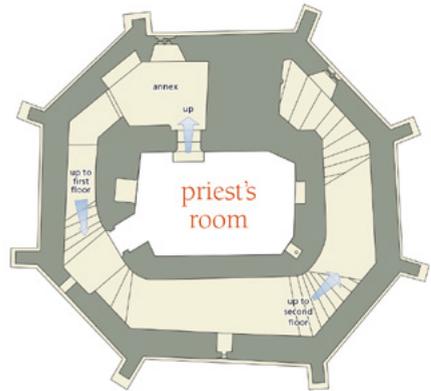
Unusual features of this building are the two staircases which run anticlockwise from the entrances around the central core to the Upper Chapel. As you climb the stairs, note the recessed brick handrail. A similar one exists in the gatehouse of nearby Oxburgh Hall which was built about the same time.



First Floor

The Priest's Room *(reached by uneven stairs)*

The main room at this level has been called the Priest's Room since the 1800's. It was probably used by the priest and for the storage of vestments and valuables. At either end is a recessed cupboard and in one corner a tunnel-like feature with a damaged barrel vault sloping downwards into the thickness of the wall. The metal ties were inserted in the 1920's. On the east side of this room is a small annex with a window. When you leave the Priest's Room, turn left into the short passage, and climb the timber steps to the Upper Chapel.



Second Floor

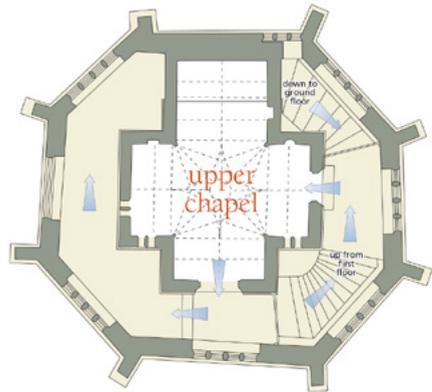
The Upper Chapel *(reached by uneven stairs)*

This stone chapel is the architectural glory of the building. It was built in 1506 in the shape of a cross, probably replacing an earlier one of brick. Its design is attributed to John Wastell, a master mason who also designed the fan vaulting of the Retrochoir of Peterborough Cathedral and that of King's College Chapel, Cambridge. The Upper Chapel cost £14 11 shillings to build. Further money was spent on gilding the altar and on buying an organ (probably handheld), an iron lectern, and on mass and music books. Originally the two niches on



either side of the altar recess would have been surrounded by elaborately carved frames. The step and raised section are part of the 1828 restoration of the building. The stained glass window above was designed by Colin Shewring in the 1980's. It depicts a lily (a symbol of the Virgin Mary) against a blue background representing the sea.

The walls of the chapel are covered with graffiti dating from the period of the Civil War, including sets of initials and dates inside building-shaped outlines topped with a flag. The earliest piece of graffiti dates back to 1639.



Leaving the chapel by its west doors, you pass into a gallery from which pilgrims could glimpse services taking place in the chapel. Passing through a doorway, descend by the main staircase to the exit doors on the mound. At the corner, just before the brick handrail begins, note the alterations made to the original building in order to support the stone chapel above. Note also the change in the flag on one piece of graffiti as a result of the unification of England and Scotland in 1707. Looking back and upwards you can see evidence of a staircase rising to the roof, probably connected with the building's use as an observatory in the late eighteenth century. Opposite the exit doors you can look down into the Lower Chapel through a nineteenth century window.

We hope you enjoy your visit to this unique historic building. For more information about the Red Mount Chapel and The Walks restoration project please visit our website www.west-norfolk.gov.uk