

OUR LADY OF SORROWS CATHOLIC CHURCH, ETON



The remarkable chapel of Our Lady of Sorrows on Eton Court was created by one man as an expression of his devout Catholicism and for the benefit of Eton College boys and the wider community. However, when completed in 1914, the new church was met with hostility from Eton College's Head Master.

The building is the creation of **Alfred, Lord Braye**, an extraordinary man. He first arrived at Eton as Alfred Wyatt-Edgell (1849-1928), a nine year old boy starting at the college. His earliest impressions, recorded in his autobiography, included astonishment at the leisure time and freedom that his new school allowed him. However, he grew increasingly dissatisfied with the school's Anglican services and later converted to Catholicism while a student at King's College, Cambridge.

After Cambridge, a rich life of varied achievements followed. He was wounded while commanding a battalion during the Boer War and awarded the South African cross for his efforts; he became a long-serving magistrate in Rugby, and he also published his own poetry, as well as his thoughts on Catholicism.

As the third son, Alfred had never been expected to succeed to the Barony of Braye. However, his brother Henry (b. 1847) died at the age of just 19, while serving in Ireland. Then in 1879 Alfred suffered a series of losses: his aunt, Maria Otway-Cave (b. 1792), who held the Barony of Braye in abeyance; his eldest brother Edmund (b. 1845), who was serving in the Anglo-Zulu War; and his mother Henrietta (nee Otway; b. 1809) all passed away that year. In his grief, Braye was made 5th Baron Braye, inheriting the Stanford estate in Leicestershire, including Stanford Hall (built 1697-1700).



In addition to restoring Stanford Hall itself, Braye undertook the design and construction of a Catholic chapel between the main building and the stables. However, it would have a short history. The lack of any damp course meant that the structure soon became unsafe. Braye salvaged what he could, including marble balustrades, paintings and decorative features, before the building was demolished. These elements were reused for his second project to design and build a chapel, this time at Eton. Highlights from Braye's collection include an impressive painting of *The Lamentation* by the baroque painter Guido Reni (1575-1642), probably bought by Braye in Italy. Within the western-most side chapel, to the right as you enter, there is an Italian processional cross, dating from the late 15th or early 16th century. In the opposite side chapel, a high relief terracotta panel by ceramic artist George Tinworth (1843-1913) illustrates the New Testament story of the *Release of Peter*.

Braye's creation was not warmly received and the then Head Master at the college, Edward Lyttelton, was openly hostile. Consequently an ancient by-law was invoked, which prevented the building of any structure overlooking college land. But Braye remained defiant, designing a modestly proportioned and discreet chapel in the baroque style, with an interior richly covered by marble and gilt decoration and ornamented with paintings and decorative art collected for the purpose. After the completion of the chapel, Lyttelton warned Braye of 'the old bitter antagonism' towards Catholicism, and stated: 'I have flatly forbidden any boy going near the new church.'

Despite his achievement, Braye remained dissatisfied at the prejudice shown by the college, who sent Catholic Eton boys into Windsor to attend services. However, in 2012, more than 80 years after his death, the college purchased the building from the Catholic Diocese of Northampton for £1. Now, by sympathetically maintaining and restoring this remarkable building and its collections, the college plays an important role in preserving Braye's legacy and honouring his intention.