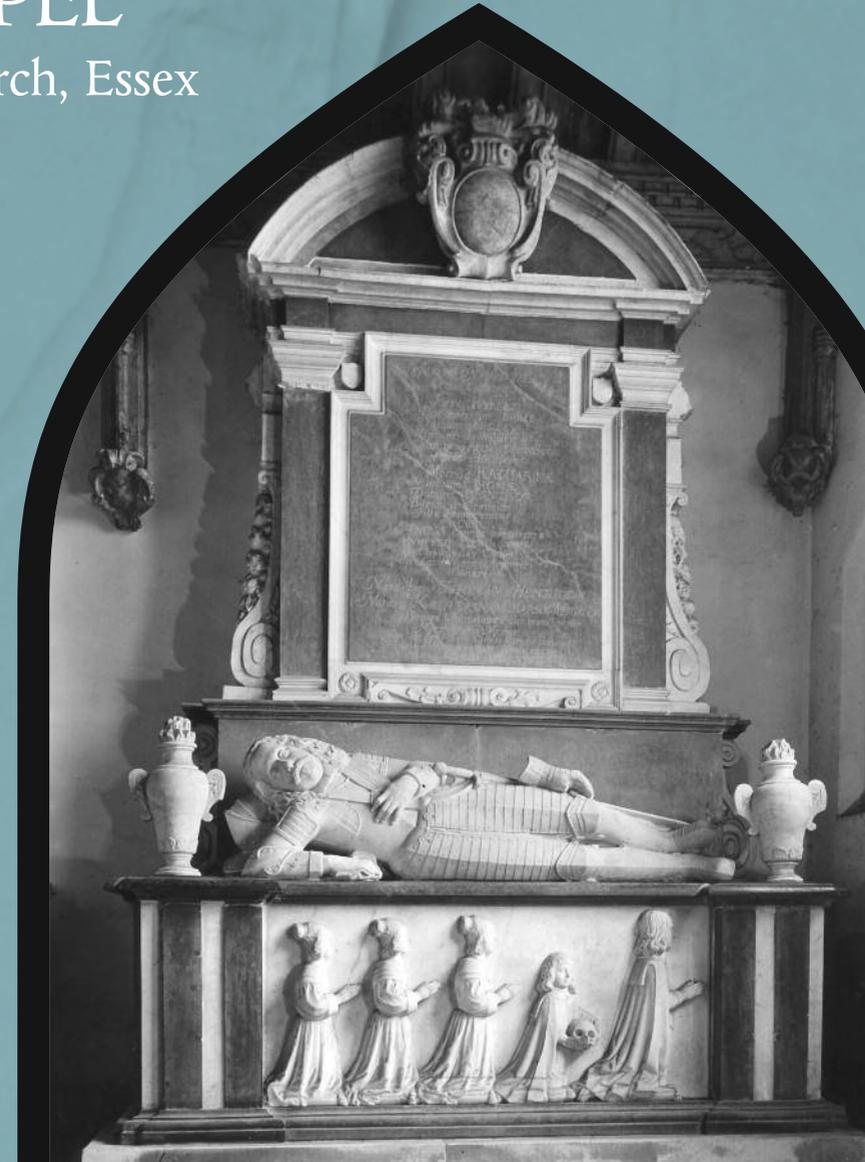




THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST

THE AUDLEY CHAPEL

Berechurch, Essex



THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST

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£1.50

THE AUDLEY CHAPEL

(at the former church of St Michael)

by Roy Tricker (Field Officer with The Churches Conservation Trust 1991–2002, church enthusiast, historian and lay canon)

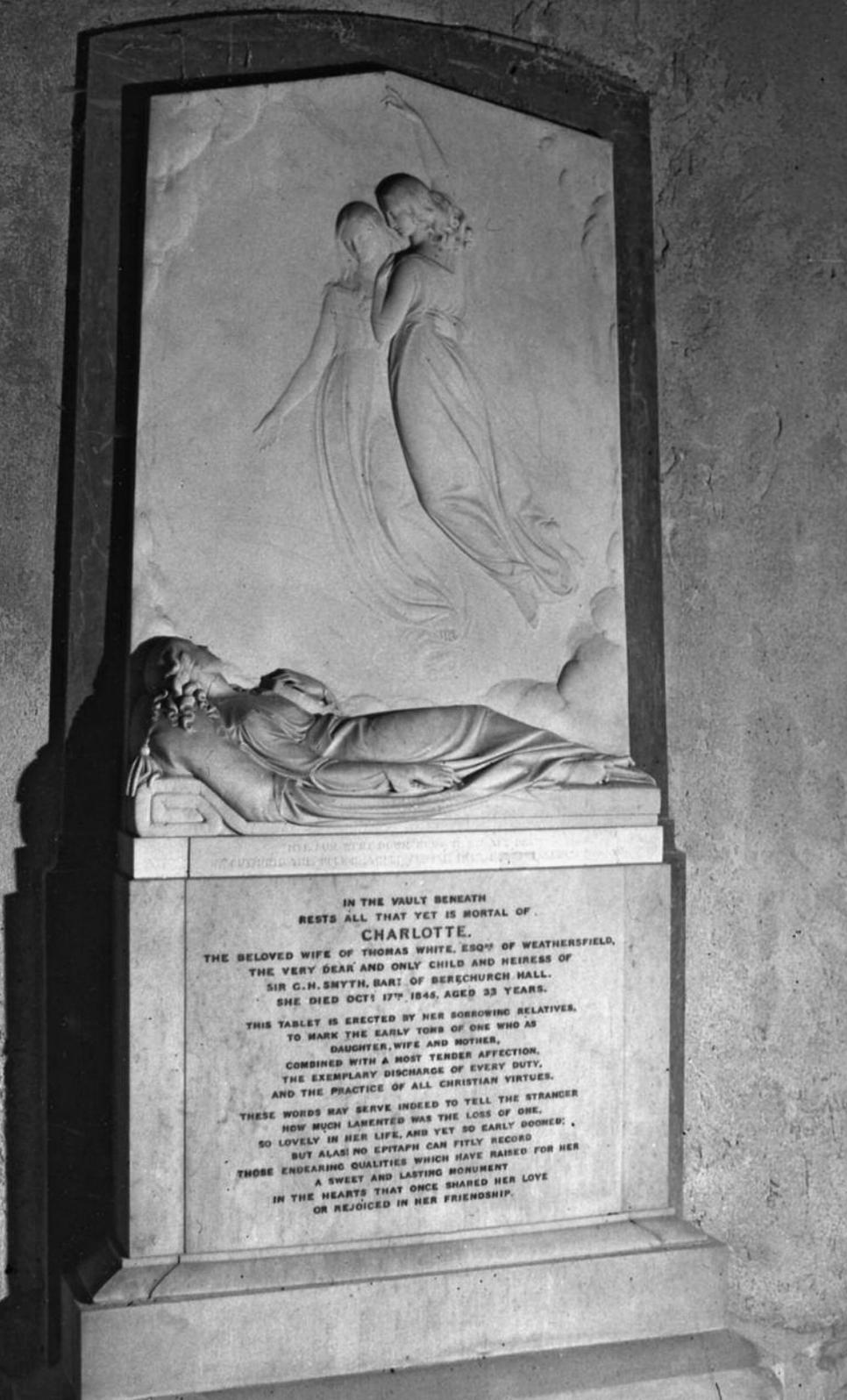
HISTORY

Although situated only two miles (3.2 km) as the crow flies due south from Colchester town centre, St Michael's, with the Audley Chapel on its north side, stands in a wood. A short track (described in 1872 as 'the new carriage drive') leads from Berechurch Hall Road to the sequestered churchyard, with the Military Correctional Training Centre to the east and the grounds of the former Berechurch Hall to the west. Most of the population lives about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile (1.2 km) to the north-east, at Black Heath along the Mersea Road, where the present parish church of St Margaret, with its distinctive green copper roof, was built in 1972.

Berechurch (which was a Liberty within the Borough of Colchester and was also known as West Donyland) was spelt 'Berdechirche' in the time around 1270 and its name indicates 'a church made of boards'. In this county where durable stone was rare and had to be imported from Kent or the Rutland area, many early churches were built of timber. Greenstead-juxta-Ongar still retains its Saxon nave of oak logs; and mediaeval towers, belfries, porches and monuments of timber may be seen in Essex churches. In the early 16th century St Michael's was a chapel-of-ease in the parish of Holy Trinity Colchester, but in 1536 it became a parish church in its own right.

Front cover: Monument to Sir Henry Audley on the north side with images of his five children beneath him (© Crown copyright. NMR.)

Left: Memorial to Charlotte White (d.1845) on the south wall (© Crown copyright. NMR.)



During the late 1400s and early 1500s the church had been rebuilt in slender Tudor bricks – another building material much used in Essex churches. This building may have replaced a 14th-century church as it reused a fine doorway of this period in the tower and also some late-14th-century windows, although it is thought that these may have been brought here from St John's Abbey, Colchester. The abbey owned the church and estate until its dissolution in 1536, when King Henry VIII granted Berechurch to Thomas, Lord Audley, his Lord Chancellor. Around this time the Audley Chapel was added to the north of the chancel as a memorial chapel for family members and their descendants who, presumably, are buried beneath it.

The chapel appears to have received some alteration in the 17th century when it was extended northwards, maybe to accommodate the tomb of Sir Henry Audley, and again in 1872, when the church underwent a thorough restoration by Mr W Sheaf of Berechurch to the designs of Mr Charles Pertwee of Chelmsford.

The 1872 restoration involved an almost total rebuilding of the body of the church, but not the tower, nor the Audley Chapel. A report at the time stated that, 'Here the care shown to the remains of the old fabric is strikingly exemplified. The ponderous weight of the monument to Sir Henry Audley had forced the north wall considerably out of perpendicular

and the old roof, worn by successive ages, had become too tender to be tampered with and so the chapel has been, as it were, encased in a new building, with the old roof about six inches (15.2cm) under the new one'. In fact, the restorers seem to have concentrated mostly on encasing the north wall, as original brickwork may be seen in much of the east and west walls. The transformed church was reopened on 23 December 1872, when the Archdeacon celebrated and preached. The Bishop (of Rochester), although unable to attend the service, was present at the hall afterwards, where about 200 people sat down to a celebratory meal.

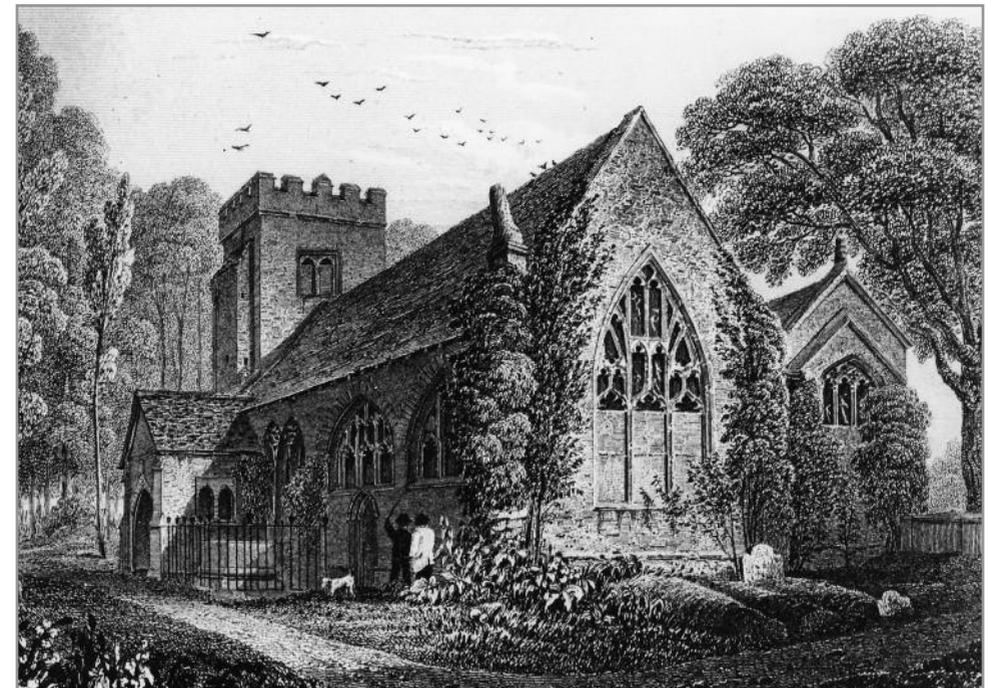
Because St Michael's was so far from where most of its population lived, it was declared redundant in 1975. The Audley Chapel, because of its great interest and beauty, was vested in 1981 in what is now The Churches Conservation Trust, for people to visit and enjoy. As such it remains a holy place, consecrated for prayer and worship. The main body of the church (which is not open to the public) now has a new lease of life as offices.

*The church and chapel from the south-east.
Drawn by John Greig c.1824 (Photograph JK Clayden)*

EXTERIOR OF THE CHURCH AND CHAPEL

The exterior of the small **church**, of which the chapel formed part, is built almost entirely of either Tudor or 19th-century brickwork. The Tudor bricks are easily identifiable because they are more slender and mellow than their later counterparts. The tower is Tudor, although its large and well-restored 14th-century west doorway, the three-light west window flanked

by large corbel heads and the windows above are of stone, reused here. The east wall and small sections of the south wall of the church are Tudor and there is a reused stone three-light east window. The north wall of the church was entirely rebuilt in 1872, when the decayed south porch was taken down, to be replaced a little later by the present porch.



CHAPEL INTERIOR

Most of the west wall of the **Audley Chapel** is of 16th-century brickwork and this original work is embellished with lozenge-shaped diaper patterns, using darker-coloured bricks. It can be clearly seen where this wall was extended northwards and heightened. The north wall has much 1872 brickwork to strengthen it. The west doorway has a moulded brick arch, set beneath a square hood mould. High in the wall above is a tiny lozenge-shaped window opening. The east wall too is mostly original 16th-century brickwork and its three-light east window also has brick mullions and tracery, although these have been plastered over. Its brick hood mould has attractive circular terminations, constructed with radiating bricks.



This small chapel, only 17½ ft long and 14½ ft wide (5.3 x 4.4m), was once open to the chancel through an **arch** (now blocked) in the south wall. The 16th- or 17th-century spiked **ironwork**, with two finials and gate, which formed a small screen within the arch to divide the chapel from the chancel, is still in place. A **recess** in the wall to the east of this may originally have contained a piscina drain, for the disposable water at the Eucharists celebrated on the chapel altar. This must have had a very short life, however, because all chantries were abolished by law between 1545 and 1547. The statues of saints which would have occupied the plain **niches** flanking the east window would also have been removed during the Reformation.

An important feature of the chapel is its beautiful single hammerbeam **roof**, although this has been altered and adjusted so much over the years that some of its timbers are not in their original positions. (Some experts have suggested that the roof may not even have been designed for this chapel.) The woodcarving, however, is exquisite. East Anglia is famous for its hammerbeam roofs, but these are usually at some considerable height from the ground, whereas here the timbers are low enough to examine at reasonably close quarters. Maybe the alterations took place in the 17th century, when the ten cartouches, painted with the arms of the Audleys and their alliances in marriage, were placed at the ends of the hammerbeams. The wallplate at the top of the south wall has

embattled decoration, whereas its northern counterpart also has leaf-scroll (its western section has been raised to the level of the hammerbeams). The carved spandrels beneath the collar beams and hammerbeams are worthy of note, as are the fretwork spandrels above the north-east, south-east and south-west hammerbeams. The horizontal purlins (along the roof midway up each side) are embellished with

leaf-scroll and the wind-braces beneath them have an array of carved motifs including foliage, flowers, vine-trails, leaves, pomegranates, and one delightful carved face with its tongue protruding. The rose and the pomegranate, featured here, were emblems of King Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon, so this roof may have been constructed during their married life (1509–26).



MEMORIALS

Lord Chancellor Thomas Audley (1488–1544) acquired the manor of Berechurch c.1536, along with Walden Abbey, near Saffron Walden, where he built his residence (the predecessor of Audley End mansion). His tomb may be seen in the parish church there. His brother, also Thomas, settled at Berechurch and became Lord of its Manor. When he died in 1557 it passed to his son, Thomas (d.1572), whose brothers, Thomas and John, are commemorated in a brass on the west wall. In 1572, the manor passed to Robert Audley and in 1642 to Sir Henry Audley, whose monument dominates the chapel interior. At his death it passed to his son Thomas, then in 1697 to his son Henry, whose death in 1714 ended the Audley succession at Berechurch, when the manor passed to the Smyth family.

The chapel contains memorials to these families and to other Berechurch worthies. A few of these were moved here from other parts of the church.

The Audley (or Awdeley) family memorials are as follows:

- Brass inscription to **Thomas Awdeley** of Gosbecks (1584) and his brother **John Awdeley** (1588). (Now fixed to the west wall.)
- A fine plaque, with hourglasses, and a shield with drapes at the top and cherubs at the sides, to **Robert Awdley** (1624). He was the third generation of his family at Berechurch and

married Catherine Windsor (d.1641) of Bradenham, Buckinghamshire. **Robert Awdley** and **Catherine** each have ledger slabs, with incised coats of arms, in the floor. (Plaque on west wall.)

- Dominating the interior is the massive monument, on the north side, to **Sir Henry Audley**. He was the eldest son of Robert and Catherine (above) and his first wife was Ann Packington of Chaddesley Corbett, Worcestershire. His date of death is not known but, as he is known to have been alive in 1664, this monument, erected in 1648, took shape during his lifetime. Flanked by flaming urns, his armour-clad effigy reclines on its side, looking out. His head rests upon his helmet and one of his gauntlets rests upon his sword. Beneath are the figures of his five children – Katherine, Marian, Abigail, Thomas and Henry, one of whom carries a skull, indicating that he had already died. Above is the Latin inscription, crowned by a curved pediment, with a central cartouche where his coat of arms was once painted.

OTHER MEMORIALS AND PLAQUES

WEST WALL

- Francis Canning of Abberton (1783) and Bridget (1823), and also his parents, four sisters and son, all of whom are buried in a nearby vault.

- A gothic memorial with pinnacles (by J Brown of London, 1849), to Nicholas Tomlinson of Monkwick (1842) and Elizabeth (1839), who are buried in a vault in the churchyard.

- A plaque in the form of a scroll (by Watts of Colchester) to Harriet Phelps (1874) and to her parents, Harriet and John Tettrell of Monkwick.

- A brass plaque (now difficult to read) recording the **restoration of the church** in 1872 and the provision of 66 additional sittings, of which 40 were to be for anybody to occupy, free of rent.

NORTH WALL

- A fine memorial of grey veined and white marble, with an urn beneath a Classical arch, to Sir Robert Smyth (1802).

EAST WALL

- A scroll to Mrs Maria Ward (1850).
- A plaque (by Hutchinson) to Bridget (*née* Canning) (1853), widow of John Bawtree of Abberton.
- Lieut. Col. Nicholas Ralph Tomlinson (1842).

SOUTH WALL

- The Revd Edward Grosse (1853), parish priest of Berechurch and of Layer-de-la-Haye.

- Lady Charlotte Sophia Smyth (1823).

- Louisa Caroline Este (1850).

- Two brothers – Lieut. William Hugh King (1918) and John Hedley King (1918), also their mother, Anna Sophia King (1937).

- Charlotte White (1845), daughter of Sir GH Smyth of Berechurch Hall. This memorial shows a reclining woman and two hovering figures. Called 'The Last Dream', it was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1850. The sculptor was Joseph Edwards (1814–83).

THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

The Churches Conservation Trust is the leading charity that cares for and preserves English churches of historic, architectural or archaeological importance that are no longer needed for regular worship. It promotes public enjoyment of them and their use as an educational and community resource.

Whatever the condition of the church when the Trust takes it over its aims are, first and foremost, to put the building and its contents into a sound and secure condition as speedily as possible. Then the church is repaired so that it is welcoming to visitors and those who attend the public events or occasional services that may be held there (Trust churches are still consecrated). Our objective is to keep it intact for the benefit of present and future generations, for local people and visitors alike to behold and enjoy.

There are over 335 Trust churches scattered widely through the length and breadth of England, in town and country, ranging from charmingly simple buildings in lovely settings to others of great richness and splendour; some are hard to find, all are worth the effort.

Many of the churches are open all year round, others have keyholders nearby; all are free. A notice regarding opening arrangements or keyholders will normally be found near the door. Otherwise, such information can be obtained direct from the Trust during office hours or from the website www.visitchurches.org.uk.

Visitors are most welcome and we hope this guidebook will encourage you to explore these wonderful buildings.

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St Martin, Colchester
West Stockwell Street

St Mary the Virgin, Little Bromley
3 miles W of Manningtree off A137

St Mary Old Church, West Bergholt
3 miles NW of Colchester off B1508

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I gratefully acknowledge an earlier guide to the Chapel by Richard Slaughter, and also the research of Alan Snelling and the assistance of the staff of the Local Studies Library at Colchester.

*Right: Memorial to Sir Robert Smyth (d.1802) in the north-west corner (© Crown copyright. NMR.)
Back cover: Cartouche with coat of arms on the roof*

