

KENSAL GREEN CEMETERY  
KENSAL GREEN  
LONDON W10 4BA



TRADITION: DISSENTING  
(i.e. NON-ANGLICANS)

BUILT: 1831-4

CONGREGATION ACTIVE  
UNTIL: 1992

LISTING: GRADE II\*

OS GRID REFERENCE: TO23882

CHAPEL FOR NON-ANGLICANS  
AND FREETHINKERS IN EUROPE'S  
FIRST PUBLIC CEMETERY

# KENSAL GREEN DISSENTERS' CHAPEL



## TRANSPORT

The chapel backs onto Ladbrooke Grove near the junction with Harrow Road.

The Ladbrooke Grove entrance is 15 minutes' walk from Kensal Green tube station (Bakerloo). The cemetery is also served by buses 18, 23, 28, 52, 70, 295, 316 and 452.

## VISIT US

The Friends of Kensal Green Cemetery manage the chapel in behalf of HCT.

Group visit enquiries to Friends of Kensal Green Cemetery at [fokgc@hotmail.com](mailto:fokgc@hotmail.com)  
020 8969 0152; [www.kensalgreen.co.uk](http://www.kensalgreen.co.uk).

Modern kitchen, toilet & disabled access available.

## HISTORY & BACKGROUND

The Kensal Green Cemetery dissenters' Chapel was the first purpose-built chapel of its kind in a public cemetery, and was constructed as a key part of the wider complex in the early 19th century.

Kensal Green Cemetery, the first public cemetery in the the UK, arose as a response to London's inadequate burial ground provision, resulting in part from the growth of the city and the overcrowding of the existing churchyards and parochial burial grounds. Fears surrounding pollution helped to move public opinion in favour of the creation of larger garden cemeteries, as advocated by the landscape designer J.C. Loudon, who is buried at Kensal Green, and in 1832 Parliament passed a bill that incorporated the General Cemetery Company (GCC) "for the Interment of the Dead."

The GCC, which survives today, ran a competition in the following year for the design of the cemetery. It was won by Henry Edward Kendall, who proposed a number of buildings in a gothic style. However, the chairman of the General Cemetery Company, Sir John Dean Paul, preferred the neo-classical style, and so persuaded the Surveyor to the GCC, John Griffith, to draw up new designs, and it was these that were built. The cemetery allocated 39 acres of consecrated ground and 15 acres of unconsecrated ground to the Anglicans and dissenters (i.e. all those who were not Anglican by confession) respectively, and each had a corresponding chapel in which funeral services took place. As befitting Griffith's Greek Revival designs, the Anglican chapel follows the Doric order (that is, fluted columns with a plain square capital) while the dissenters' chapel follows the Ionic (fluted columns with a scroll-like capital). The dissenters' Chapel was completed in 1834. While the chapel was well used, with 193 interments in the catacombs within the first year, during the Second World War the chapel was hit by incendiary bombs, and was afterwards much vandalised.

J C Loudon (1783-1843)



AVAILABLE FOR  
COMMUNITY  
USES, INCLUDING  
LECTURES,  
EXHIBITIONS AND  
MEETINGS

THE CHAPEL IS LEASED TO THE  
FRIENDS OF KENSAL GREEN

To find out more visit [www.hct.org.uk](http://www.hct.org.uk) or contact [chapels@hct.org.uk](mailto:chapels@hct.org.uk)

THE HISTORIC CHAPELS TRUST | ST. GEORGE'S GERMAN LUTHERAN CHURCH,  
55 ALIE STREET, ALDGATE, LONDON E1 8EB, UK | REGISTERED CHARITY NO. 1017321



## THE EXTERIOR

Constructed of brick with a Portland stone façade, the main body of the chapel is rectangular, with two gently curved colonnades. These were intended to display tablets commemorating those entombed below, but few of these are in place, as the catacomb proved less popular than anticipated.

## THE INTERIOR

Entering through the main door to the chapel, you face a pulpit with a reading desk, from where the minister would conduct the funeral service. The chapel itself is sympathetic to the external Greek Revival features. The walls are half-panelled with timber, and stencilled with Greek motifs. Pilasters along the walls are painted to resemble polished marble.

Two rows of pews against the walls face towards a central trap-door, through which coffins would have been lowered to the catacombs below.

Among the celebrated burials are Marc and Isambard Brunel, Charles Babbage, Anthony Trollope, William Makepeace Thackeray, Terrence Rattigan and Harold Pinter.



*Dissenters Exhibition 'Unto the Self'*  
Photo © Adam Brown.



*A previous exhibition at the chapel.*

## FURTHER READING

James Stevens Curl, ed., *Kensal Green Cemetery: The Origins & Development of the General Cemetery of All Souls, Kensal Green, London, 1824-2001* (Chichester, 2001)

## SUBSEQUENT HISTORY

By 1992 the chapel was in a state of severe disrepair and the colonnade has partly collapsed. As part of ongoing plans to restore the building, the chapel was leased on a long-term basis to the Historic Chapels Trust. A programme of restoration took place in 1996-7, encompassing repairs to the main body of the chapel, the reconstruction of the colonnades, lost fittings reinstated, the refurbishment of the old vestry as an office and the creation of an exhibition gallery and meeting room on the site of a former maintenance yard. The work won the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea's Environment Award in 1997, and an Europa Nostra award in 1998.