

Brentwood Cathedral Guide

The Mother Church of
the Diocese of Brentwood





Welcome

Bishop Alan Williams SM

Welcome to Brentwood Cathedral which sits proudly at the heart of the Diocese of Brentwood, a large and diverse diocese that stretches from rural north Essex to the heart of the East End of London.

Its recognition as a Grade II* listed building by Historic England has elevated it to national significance, a worthy accolade for such a fine building. This guide will highlight some of its architectural features and help visitors appreciate better their religious symbolism.

Brentwood Cathedral is much more than a building, however.

*Bishop Alan at his
Consecration in the Cathedral
by Cardinal Vincent Nichols
on 1 July 2014.*

It serves as the Mother Church of our Diocese and the central place of worship for Catholics in Essex and East London. All the great Diocesan celebrations take place in the Cathedral where people gather to give praise and glory to God. It is our spiritual home and a sanctuary of prayer and sacramental life for many.



The Cathedral also serves as the home of a vibrant parish community and acts as a sacred place of prayer and peace for people of all denominations and faiths in Brentwood and beyond.

I hope you find your visit to our Cathedral rewarding and that this short guide helps you to appreciate how the stones, light and space of this building direct our thoughts to the keystone of our lives, Jesus Christ.



A proud heritage:

1861 church, 1970s adaptation, Quinlan Terry masterpiece

Catholic Emancipation in 1829 meant for the first time in over two hundred years Catholics in England were allowed to build new churches. One of the first in Essex was built in Brentwood in 1837 on land donated by the 11th Lord Petre, whose family had remained staunchly loyal to their faith through the turmoil of the Reformation and what followed.

That modest church still stands today and is now the Parish Hall that serves Brentwood Cathedral and its thriving parish.

The rapid growth of Catholicism in the decades immediately after Emancipation meant that the 1837 church soon proved inadequate and in 1861 a new, much larger church was built alongside. That is where the story of Brentwood Cathedral today begins.

That building now forms the rear part of the modern Brentwood Cathedral which was designed by Quinlan Terry and consecrated by Cardinal Basil Hume in 1991. The marriage of the neo-Classical Terry building with the mid-Victorian Gothic Revival church designed by Gilbert Blout is one of the most remarkable features of the Cathedral.

The 1861 church was a bold reflection of the growing confidence of Brentwood's Catholic community as it took full advantage of the newly granted freedom for denominations other than the Church of England to build towers and steeples. It was built of Kentish ragstone in the Gothic Revival style by Gilbert Blout and dedicated to the Sacred Heart and St Helen.

It opened with a relatively modest ceremony in July 1861 as Cardinal Wiseman, who was due to preside over the dedication, was ill and Bishop Morris, Titular Bishop of Troy, deputised. The altars weren't formally consecrated by Archbishop Manning until 1869.

This church, one of the largest Catholic churches in Essex, was the obvious choice as the Cathedral church when the Diocese of Brentwood was established in 1917.

For the next 60 years it served as Cathedral and parish church until the demands of an expanding Diocese, growing local population and the liturgical insights flowing from the Second Vatican Council led to a re-ordering of the Cathedral.



*Above: The gilded eagle lectern majestically sits on the octagonal ambo.
Below: The organ and box choir stalls made of ash in the former nave.*



The striking neo-classical building that forms the main part of the present cathedral was not the first response to those challenges. In the mid-1970s, a large modern extension was added to the designs of John Newton. The north wall and aisle of the 1861 building were demolished and the building was extended northward, with meeting halls on the north and west, and a porch at the north-east corner. The interior was completely re-ordered with an altar against the former south arcade.

This was open and spacious but lacked any sense of grandeur. Within a few years several design faults became apparent and in the mid-1980s the newly installed Bishop of Brentwood, Thomas McMahon, took the difficult decision to demolish it.

The choice of Quinlan Terry to build the replacement was a surprise, not least because it defied the conventional wisdom since the time of Augustus Pugin that classical and Gothic architecture were somehow antagonistic to each other. Terry believed nothing could be further from the truth and by reviving many of the features of the 1861 building he has successfully married the two styles.



1829

For the first time in over two hundred years Catholics in England were allowed to build new churches.

1837

One of the first churches in Essex was built in Brentwood on land donated by Lord Petre (pictured left).

1861

A new, much larger Gothic revival church was built alongside the original one.



The building today

- a step-by-step tour



Scan for a bird's eye view of the Cathedral.

The day-to-day entrance to the Cathedral is the doorway on the north-east corner of the building nearest the front gate. Just to the right of this doorway is the foundation stone.

This entrance takes the visitor into the narthex with its large mahogany panelled cupboard for the repository which is open for the sale of cards and sacred items.



As you enter the Cathedral, the power of its classical architecture is immediately apparent. Quinlan Terry's exploration of the influences of the early Italian Renaissance and the English Baroque of Christopher Wren can be seen in details throughout the building. All the Classical architectural orders are represented in the interior. There is the Tuscan arcade of arches that enclose the central part of the Cathedral with the strong Doric columns in the corners and around the outside, the Ionic pilasters (rectangular columns) of the large Palladian or Venetian windows in the east and west walls and the Corinthian and Composite features seen on the Bishop's Chair and organ case.



*Top: The main door which is based on the entrances to St Paul's Cathedral. Above the door is the Latin inscription *Surrexit Dominus - The Lord is Risen.**

Above left: The ambo and body of the Cathedral.

Above right: The door to the 1861 building decorated in the Gothic Revival style for the Year of Mercy in 2016.

In front of you is the large octagonal baptismal font. The octagon has been used as a Christian symbol from the earliest times to represent the eighth day – the Day of Resurrection and the first day of the new creation. On the wall beside it is a small wall safe, an ambry, that contains the oils of Baptism, Chrism and for the anointing of the sick.

A few steps further brings you to the two large main doors, behind which is a small porch that takes you to the external doors which are used for large congregations and for liturgical processions in and out of the Cathedral at solemn services.

Standing in front of these doors and looking across the centre of the Cathedral the visitor can take in all the main features of the 1861 and 1991 buildings and readily appreciate how one compliments the other. You can also see how the design and layout of the interior perfectly captures many of the liturgical insights of the Second Vatican Council by placing the altar at the centre of the building. Thus, the worshipping community are physically and spiritually gathered around the place where Christ becomes truly present at Mass.

Immediately in front as you stand by the doors is the Ambo with the traditional gilded eagle – the symbol of St John the Evangelist – from which the Liturgy of the Word is proclaimed. Like the font, this has an octagonal base and is set at the same height as the altar, symbolically emphasising the importance of both the table of the Lord's Word and the table of His Body and Blood.

Your eyes are then drawn towards the stone altar supported by eight Doric columns and beyond that to the Cathedra – the Bishop's chair.



Being seated is the ancient position for teaching and the prominence of the Cathedra emphasises this is the Bishop's cathedral from where he teaches. The Cathedral cathedra was made in Pisa of Nabresina stone and incorporates Corinthian pilasters on either side with steps of Portland stone. In the centre is the coat of arms of the Diocese of Brentwood.

It is from here that the Bishop presides over services and preaches, placing him in perfect symmetry with the ambo and altar. The simplicity of the arrangement is one of the distinctive features of the Cathedral. If you look up you will see the Stations of the Cross which tell the story

The cathedral's classical design, unusual in modern churches, is testament to the architectural skill and vision. It is a remarkable achievement.
Historic England



of Christ's final journey to the cross. The roundels were designed by Raphael Maklouf and are a meditation on the face of Christ.

As you cast your gaze upwards beyond the Stations of the Cross you will see the clerestory with its round-headed windows in the Classical-Wren style. In the centre, above the altar is the cupola, an octagonal lantern, that crowns the building externally and the altar internally. The richness of the ceiling with its ornate patterns picked out in gold leaf contrasts with the restraint of the rest of the building. As our hearts and minds gaze heavenwards so they glimpse something of our future glory.

That noble simplicity and the spiritual stillness it imparts is enhanced by the use of clear, hand-made glass in all the windows in the Classical part of the building. This means that the Cathedral is flooded with light at any time of the day which is further enhanced by the white walls and stone floor.

In the east aisle (to your left as you stand in front of the main doors), there are two rooms set aside to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation or Confession. Opposite them is a crucifix, formerly in the Catholic church at Stock, Essex.

The back of the Cathedral is formed by the nave and south aisle of the 1861 church. This provides a visual contrast to the main body of the Cathedral with the two-tier arc of choir stalls, elaborate organ case and stained glass windows which, at certain times of day, project their coloured light across the Bishop's Chair.

To the left as you look towards this end of the Cathedral is the Blessed Sacrament chapel which is housed in the chancel of the old church and is now reserved for quiet prayer in front of the Blessed Sacrament. This has a decorated ceiling and a fine stained glass window.

Beside the Blessed Sacrament chapel are the doors to the Sacristy and the altar servers' vestry. At the opposite end, the south door opens into a small porch that was redecorated in 2016, the Year of Mercy, in the Gothic style.

The building today

- a step-by-step tour

The organ came from the redundant Anglican church of St Mary-at-the-Wall in Colchester, as a gift from the Diocese of Chelmsford. It was originally built in 1889 by Hunter and rebuilt in 1931. It was completely rebuilt and restored by Percy Daniel & Co when installed in its new organ case in the Cathedral and has been enhanced several times since.

The lighting in the Cathedral is provided from brass chandeliers in the English Classical style. These also feature in the Parish Hall and the Song School, adding to a sense of unity across the whole Cathedral campus.

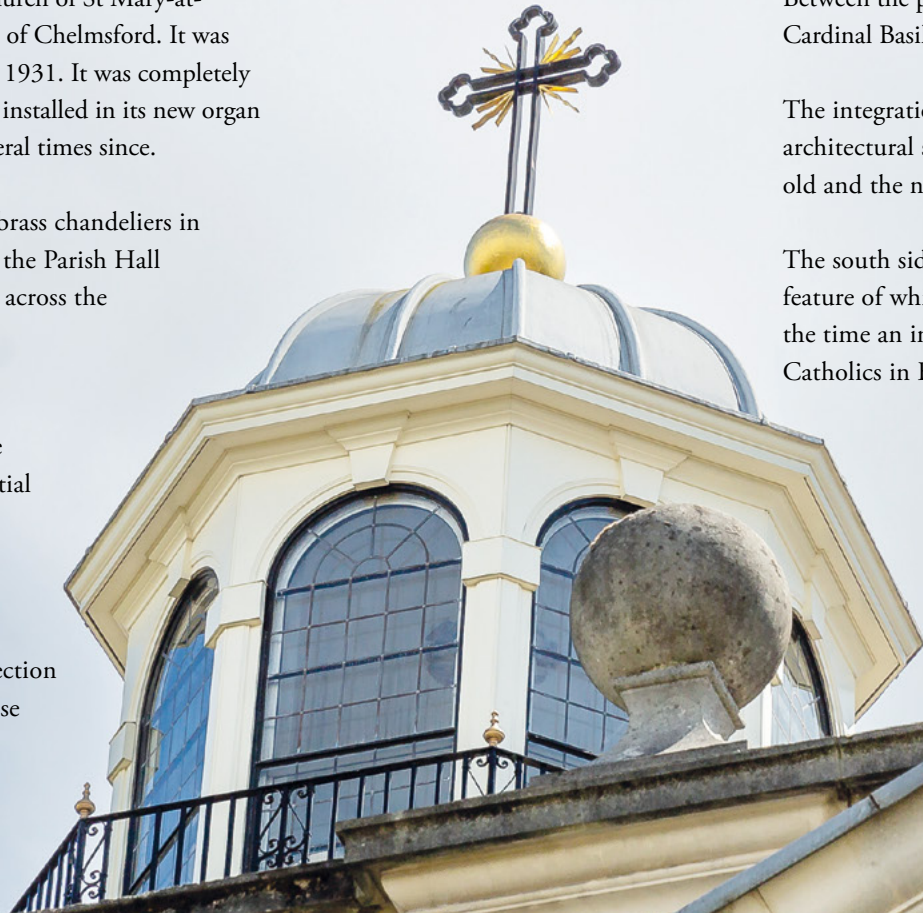
Externally: The north elevation consists of nine bays each divided by Doric pilasters with a large semi-circular portico supported by four substantial Doric columns in the centre. This was inspired by St Paul's Cathedral.

Above the doors is carved the words *Surrexit Dominus* ("The Lord is Risen"). Christ's Resurrection is the central interest of the building and all those sacred events that happen within it.

Between the portico and door in the north east corner is the stone, marking Cardinal Basil Hume's dedication of the new Cathedral on 31 May 1991.

The integration of two buildings built 150 years apart and in distinctive architectural styles is further enhanced along the east side which links the old and the new by using ragstone and Welsh slate roof tiles.

The south side consists entirely of the 1861 church, the most striking feature of which is the spire, modest by comparison to most but at the time an important statement of the growing confidence of Catholics in England.



The Mother Church of the Diocese

The Cathedral Church of St Helen is the Mother Church of the Diocese of Brentwood, a status it has enjoyed since the diocese was created in 1917. Before that, the Roman Catholic parishes of Essex were administered by the Archdiocese of Westminster.

On 22 March 1917 Pope Benedict XV appointed Monsignor Bernard Ward as Titular Bishop of Lydda and Apostolic Administrator of the new Diocese of Essex. Bishop Ward was consecrated by Cardinal Bourne in Westminster Cathedral on 10 April 1917.

Initially no name was given to the new diocese, save that of 'Essex', because no decision had been made as to where the new bishop would reside. As well as being a distinguished educationalist and the foremost historian of English Catholicism of his generation, Bishop Ward was also something of a railway buff. This influenced the choice of Brentwood as the seat of the new bishop because its station was the first on the London side of Shenfield junction, which gave access to the Colchester and Southend lines. Moreover, Brentwood itself boasted the fine, although modest in size, 1861 Gothic revival church, which would become the Cathedral, as well as several convents and Catholic schools.

The Diocese of Brentwood was formally erected on 20 July 1917 and Bishop Ward was named its first Bishop.

There have been six further Bishops of Brentwood, with longest serving being Thomas McMahon, who was the inspiration and driving force behind the development of the current Cathedral building as well as the

Bishops of Brentwood

1917-1920

Bernard Nicholas Ward

1920-1951

Arthur Doubleday

1951-1955

George Andrew Beck A.A.

Coadjutor 1948-1951, Bishop of Brentwood 1951-1955, later Bishop of Salford and Archbishop of Liverpool

1955-1969

Bernard Patrick Wall

1969-1989

Patrick Joseph Casey

1980-2014

Thomas McMahon

Continues as Parish Priest of Our Lady & St Joseph, Stock

2014 - present

Alan Williams SM



“ It serves as the Mother Church of our Diocese and the principal place of worship for Catholics in Essex and East London. It is our spiritual home and a genuinely holy place. ”

Bishop Alan

many enhancements across the wider Cathedral campus. The current Bishop is Alan Williams SM who was appointed on 14 April 2014 and ordained bishop in the Cathedral by Cardinal Nichols, 1 July 2014.

The present Diocese consists of the historic County of Essex, comprising the London boroughs of Barking & Dagenham, Havering, Newham, Redbridge and Waltham Forest, the unitary authorities of Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock and the County of Essex.

The Diocese is under the Patronage of Our Lady of Lourdes, St Edmund of Canterbury, St Erconwald and St Cedd.

Music at the heart of Cathedral worship

In the Second Vatican Council Decrees on the Liturgy a whole chapter is devoted to the importance of sacred music: “The musical tradition of the Universal Church is a treasure of ‘immeasurable value, greater even than that of any other art’.”

Maintaining and developing that tradition is at the heart of Cathedral worship at Brentwood. The Cathedral Choir is widely recognised as one of the finest in the English Roman Catholic church, providing music for one of the Sunday Masses, weekday Vespers and all the main celebrations that feature in the life of a busy Cathedral. The Cathedral Choir comprises the Lay Clerk singers. There are also the boy and girl choristers and former choristers, who are offered high quality training by the Music Department. This has enabled many to go on and establish professional careers in music.

The repertoire of the Cathedral Choir extends from plainchant, through the polyphonic and classical masterpieces to modern settings, several specially commissioned by the Cathedral Music Department.

There is also a vibrant Cathedral Music Group, a Youth Choir, a Children’s Ensemble and a Contemporary Group. These provide the music for the Family Mass every Sunday, often supported by instrumental ensembles.

The Cathedral also plays host to many school and community choirs and music groups as a performing venue. There are regular lunchtime recitals given by students from the Royal College of Music and London Conservatoires as well as outstanding local and international artists.



Scan to hear the Cathedral Choir sing Ave Maria.





The Stations of the Cross

Above the nave arcade are terracotta roundels representing the Stations of the Cross. The roundels were designed by Raphael Maklouf, best known for designing the image of Queen Elizabeth II that was used on all Commonwealth coins from 1985 to 1997.

The simple images are deceptively detailed and draw the eye in, enhancing their principal purpose of helping visitors reflect on Our Lord's Passion. The most striking feature of the Stations is the focus on the face of Christ and the other participants in the Passion story.

Most Stations of the Cross consist of fourteen images telling the story of the Passion, a formula that was standardised in the late 18th century. The Stations in Brentwood Cathedral include a 15th Station – the Resurrection – part of a more modern tradition formalised by Pope John Paul II in 2000.

The Stations run clockwise around the main body of the Cathedral with the final three above the arches behind the choir stalls.

- (1) Jesus is condemned to death
- (2) He is made to bear the cross
- (3) He falls the first time
- (4) He meets his mother
- (5) Simon of Cyrene is made to bear the cross
- (6) Veronica wipes Jesus' face
- (7) He falls the second time
- (8) The women of Jerusalem weep over Jesus
- (9) He falls the third time
- (10) He is stripped of his garments
- (11) He is nailed to the cross
- (12) He dies on the cross
- (13) He is taken down from the cross
- (14) He is laid in the sepulchre
- (15) Jesus rises from the dead

The final factor was my admiration of the Wren churches in London and how Christopher Wren had adapted each church for the site and space available. I felt such a style could be adapted for the liturgy of Vatican II

Classical tradition adapted for a new era

Bishop Emeritus
Thomas McMahon

There were several factors that influenced my decision to choose the Classical architectural style when the need to replace the 1974 Cathedral extension became evident. It was unfortunate that the concrete used in its construction had started to deteriorate so quickly but provident that a very large sum of money had been promised to build a new Cathedral.

There was a long tradition across Europe of building churches in the Classical style. I was also much influenced by the reasoning of Cardinal Vaughan who chose a different style for Westminster Cathedral from Westminster Abbey and St Paul's, so that each was judged on its own merits. From my time as a curate in Colchester, I was already very familiar with the work of Raymond Erith and Quinlan Terry, whose practice was close by. By 1985 Raymond Erith had died and Quinlan Terry was already considered by many as the leading Classical architect in the country.

The final factor was my admiration of the Wren churches in London and how Christopher Wren had adapted each church for the site and space available. In the same way I felt such a style could be adapted for the liturgy of Vatican II and offer a noble simplicity.

Just as churches prior to Vatican II reflected how the liturgy was celebrated, so too, churches designed for the renewed liturgy were to be clearly different. The general norms were established in the Vatican II decree on the liturgy, clearly stating that "Liturgical services are not private functions, but celebrations of the Church". It continued: "It is to be stressed that whenever rites, according to their specific nature, make provision for communal celebrations involving the presence and active participation of the faithful, this way of celebrating them is to be preferred... This rule applies with special force to the celebration of Mass and the administration of the Sacraments".

This spirit is embodied in all the key features of the Cathedral, most notably with the free-standing altar placed centrally around which the people gather.



Above: The portrait of Bishop Thomas painted by Francis Terry that hangs in Clergy House.



Right: The Blessed Sacrament chapel in the former chancel of the 1861 church.

Below: The Cathedral hosts all the great Diocesan services when the priests and people of Essex and East London come together in worship.

With the altar in the centre, the Blessed Sacrament takes its place in the sanctuary of the 1861 church. Even before the Second Vatican Council it was customary, in Cathedral churches, to have a separate Blessed Sacrament Chapel. The Tabernacle houses the Blessed Sacrament consecrated during the Eucharist. It is reserved both for private prayer and to enable Holy Communion to be taken to the sick. The Sanctuary lamp is always lit and denotes the Real Presence of Christ.

Another key feature is the placing of the Baptismal Font near the entrance, as it is the sacrament through which we become Christians. It is rich in symbolism and was designed around Romans 6.3: "When we were baptised in Christ Jesus we were baptised in his death". Hence the cruciform shape of the basin. The eight sides reflect the seven days of material creation and the 'eighth day' of the new creation and order of grace created through the resurrection of Christ. The three steps represent the dying and rising to new life. This is also symbolised by the Easter Candle.



The altars of the new church were consecrated by Archbishop Manning.

1869

1917

Designated the Cathedral church when the Diocese of Brentwood was established.

1974

Due to a growing Diocese, a large modern extension was added to the designs of John Newton.

1991

The Classical Cathedral was consecrated by Cardinal Hume on 31 May.

2022

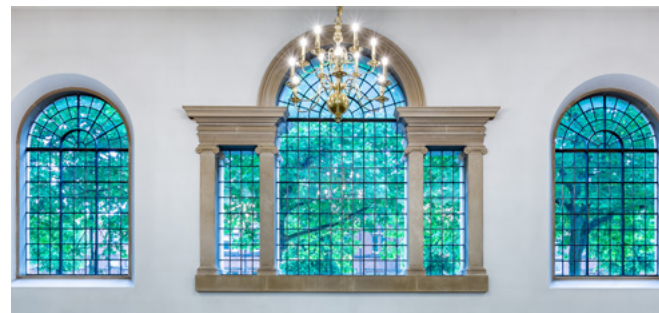
Brentwood Cathedral receives Grade II* listed status from Historic England.

Classical inspiration stresses continuity

Architect Quinlan Terry

When the 16th century Spanish Jesuit priest and architect Juan Bautista Villalpando described the divine inspiration behind Solomon's Temple, he also made a direct link to the origins of the great classical orders that are represented in this Cathedral. Villalpando takes the origins back to 1500BC when Moses was inspired to build the Tabernacle in the Wilderness, recorded in the book of Exodus, which in turn inspired Kings David and Solomon to build the Temple in Jerusalem around 1000 BC.

The hallmark of Classical architecture world-wide and throughout history has always been the three Classical orders described by Vitruvius, the great Roman authority on architecture, in the first century AD as Doric, Ionic and Corinthian. He added a fourth which he called Tuscan and during the Renaissance Italian architects like Vignola, Serlio and Palladio added a fifth Order which they called 'Composite', which is really a combination of the Ionic and Corinthian Orders, to increase their repertoire.



Top: The most prominent Classical order is the simple Tuscan order seen in the 16 columns surrounding the main body of the Cathedral with four powerful Doric pilasters in each corner which culminate in the distinctive triglyph frieze that runs around the central part of the building.

Below: The Venetian windows with their Ionic columns.

If we take into account the 2000 years history of the church, I include Romanesque and Gothic architecture as variations of those five classical orders. Classical and Gothic really come out of the same stable of load bearing masonry construction. This creates a continuity that runs through the architecture of Christian churches that is often overlooked, even dismissed, by some.

When you analyse a Gothic structure such as that you see in the 1861 building by Gilbert Blout, you will see that it has columns and arches and beams and ornaments and carvings, all ingredients of classical architecture. There is an especially strong similarity between Gothic columns and Tuscan columns, such as those supporting the altar and which we see around the main body of the Cathedral. They all have a base, a column, a capital and an arch. The principal difference is that the arches of Gothic design are pointed while those of classical design are rounded.

The key to identifying which Classical order you are looking at is to start with the capital.

The simplicity of the Tuscan order is easily seen around the altar and in the columns supporting the sixteen arches around the body of the Cathedral. These also display the distinctive thickening of Tuscan columns towards the base.

The presence of the Doric order is readily identified by the triglyph, the three column panels that surround the interior of the Cathedral, derived from the Doric columns in the four corners. They also dominate the external façade of the Cathedral.

The slender columns and ornate capital of the Ionic order with the curled decorations are readily seen in the east and west windows with the central arched windows flanked by two rectangular windows in the Venetian style.

The Corinthian and the Composite are the richest and grandest of the five orders. In Ancient Greece they were often used for temples dedicated to Zeus or Jupiter, and their flamboyance gives them a festive air. In the Cathedral the Corinthian order is used for the Cathedra or Bishop's chair, with the fluted pilasters transforming into the armrests.

It may sound strange for an architect to say this, but to me it matters far more that the people in the building are interested in the Gospel of Christ rather than the architectural quality of the building itself.

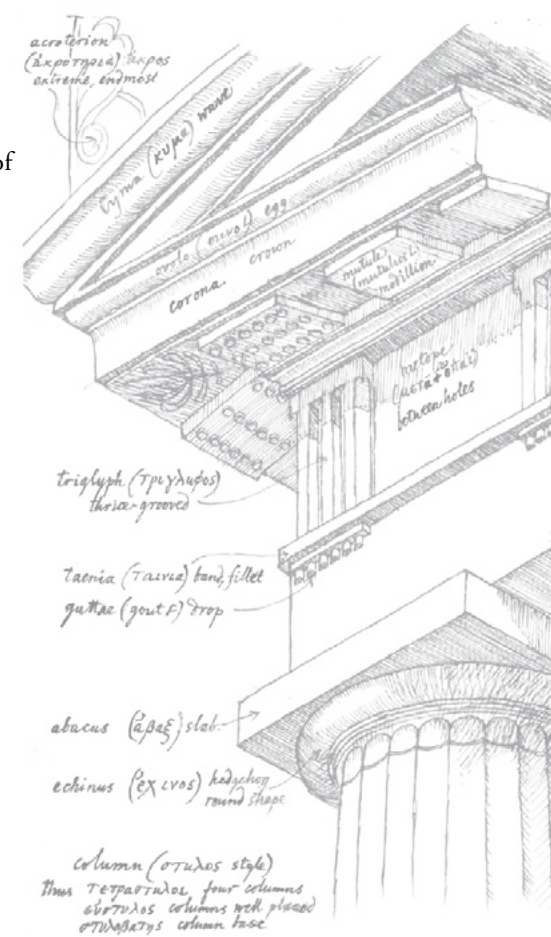
*Based on a talk given by Quinlan Terry at Brentwood Cathedral on 19 May, 2022 and his book *The Layman's Guide to Classical Architecture*.*



Scan to hear Quinlan Terry's lecture in full.



Scan to read a more detailed explanation from Quinlan Terry.



The flourishes of the Corinthian order can be seen on the organ case.



The altar is supported by eight Tuscan columns.



The white marble Cathedra or Bishop's Chair with its Corinthian pilasters with fluted shafts which become elegant serpentine arms either side.

Thank you to our contributors:

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