



The Italian Chapel

Philip Paris

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The Italian Chapel is a story of forbidden love, lifelong friendships torn apart, despair and hope, set against the backdrop of the creation of a symbol that is known around the world.

Amidst strikes, conflicts and untold hardships, the Italian prisoners of war sent to a tiny Orkney island during World War Two create a monument to the human spirit's ability to lift itself above great adversity. One artist falls in love with a local Orkney woman and leaves a token of his love in the chapel. It is still there today and, until now, no-one has ever known its true meaning . . .

The Italian Chapel Details

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Author : Philip Paris

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From Reader Review The Italian Chapel for online ebook

Joanne says

I must admit that I found the book a bit of a slow burner at first as the author spent some time setting the scene and introducing the characters. However, as I got to know the characters, I quickly found myself caught up in the story.

The book is, of course, based on a true story and I found the history of how the chapel was built by the Italian prisoners of war quite fascinating. Philip Paris mixes fact with fiction to produce a very readable account of how the building of The Italian Chapel came about. He includes characters who really did exist as well as creating some fictional ones. It was good to read at the back about what happened to the real men after the war, as well as learn that many of the incidents described in the book really did happen, even the more surprising ones. I was fascinated to learn that some of the materials used to build the chapel were salvaged from the scuttled ships at Scapa Flow.

The book put a human face on life in PoW camps. I expect that the experience was probably not the same everywhere but I liked the camp commander Major Buckland. He recognised that nobody on either side wanted to be there and that all had to make the best of it. Forced together through circumstances, the Italian prisoners and their British captors developed trust and respect in their relationships with each other. They soon came to realise that enemies or not, they were all just people with friends and families, hopes and dreams.

A gentle, though forbidden, romance is woven through the story too. This romance was only discovered by chance by the author when he had almost finished the book and he felt he just had to include it. I'm glad he did. The secret literally built into the chapel means I definitely want to go back again to see it for myself.

An impeccably researched, enjoyable story, The Italian Chapel book celebrates love, perseverance and friendship while the building itself stands as a testament to the resilience of the human spirit under difficult circumstances.

Claire McAlpine says

A delightful, life-affirming read inspired by the true story of Camp 60, Italian POW captives at Lamb Holm, Orkney Islands, building the causeways and then a chapel, saved from destruction and still standing today.

The author has added some fictional characters where information has been lost, but many of the events are based on actual events that took place, its tragic, funny, uplifting and somewhat reassuring in terms of humanity and its underlying need for building bridges between people and maintaining hope.

Would make a fabulous film!

Totally recommend for summer reading. I read the kindle version.

Full review here at Word by Word.

Sonya Alford says

I was kindly given 'The Italian Chapel' to read by Black and White Publishing. Originally published in 2009, it was recently republished on the 6th March 2014. Although fictional, this book is based on a true story. Philip Paris has also written 'Orkney's Italian Chapel', which is non-fiction.

In January 1942 over 500 Italian prisoners of war arrived on the Orkney island of Lamb Holm. They were given the enormous task of building several causeways in order to protect the British Navy. To the men it felt like a life without much hope. They just wanted the war to end quickly so that they could go back to their families.

Then one day things started to change. Padre Giacomo arrived bringing with him some much needed hope for the future of the men, but especially for Domenico Chiocchetti who was a talented artist. Domenico had come up with the wonderful idea of building a chapel. In order to fulfil his dream he needed to convince the British to allow him to build it and this is where Padre Giacomo was a great help to him. No one knew the full extent of Domenico's vision and they were left in awe at his creation. The building of the chapel brought many of the men together as they all wanted to help.

I thought this book was absolutely amazing, a truly fascinating story which has been well researched by the author. It is a part of history which everyone should know about. I really felt for the prisoners of war. Yes, they were treated very well in comparison to others but they were stuck there away from their loved ones, not knowing when or if they would ever see them again.

'The Italian Chapel' is a beautiful but heart-breaking love story and I would wholeheartedly recommend this book to everyone. It will stay with me for a long time to come and I really hope to visit the Italian Chapel one day.

Abigail Ameen says

This is excellent historical fiction! I never knew there was a little Italian chapel in Orkney that I wanted to visit until I read this book. Bravo

John says

A gripping story of Italian prisoners of war held in the Orkney's islands during WWII. Although fictionalized in some part the basic facts are accurate. A compelling celebration of God's spirit and its universal application to the suffering and hardships experienced by all mankind.

Jenny says

A truly heartwarming story and easy to read. I recently visited the chapel and although fictionalised to a degree (as explained in the afterword) it tallies with the stories we heard from locals when we were there. Highly recommend reading this before or after a visit to this wonderful Chapel in the Orkney islands.

Peter J Nicolls says

Very moving story.

Debbie says

Having just visited the chapel, I found this book very enjoyable. It is well written and does match the stories that I heard when I was there.

Ross Turner says

Very moving.

Pete F says

I have finished reading a book called 'The Italian Chapel', by Philip Paris, a combination of fact and fiction, but mostly fact. I was very interested in this book and the title jumped out at me when I saw it in the library in the fiction shelves. The reason being, is that I have been to the chapel myself, when I was in the Orkney Islands in 1999. It is situated on the small Orkney Island of Lamb Holm. It was built during World War II by Italian POWs, who were working on the nearby Churchill Barriers, which the British were building to stop German U-boats from attacking the British fleet in the Scapa Flow. The Italians spent several years at Camp 60 as it was called, and needed spiritual sustenance, so with the encouragement of an Italian padre, they built a chapel out of two joined up Nissen huts which were going spare. The main person involved in the project was Domenico Chiocchetti, who had artistic skills, but was helped by others stationed there, and encouraged by their British captors. The Nissen huts were added to with decoration and icons, an altar, a bell and a cross and all the other trimmings one would expect to see in a Catholic church, so that by the time the chapel was finished in 1945, it could not have been recognised as a couple of corrugated iron huts placed end to end, but instead a beautiful place of workmanship and worship, with so much art, architecture and loving care gone into it.

Over the decades since, it has had to be restored several times because of the ravages of the Orkney weather and the salty environment of the sea close by. It is a popular tourist attraction along with the Churchill Barriers which were made into roads after the war and which link several islands in the south of Orkney.

When I visited the chapel in June 1999, Chiocchetti, who had visited and helped to restore the chapel several

times over the decades, had died in Italy only weeks before in his 90s. The chapel is a testament to the endurance of the human spirit in adversity, and this book is very inspiring and beautifully written. Although parts of the book are fiction, most of the characters and events were real.

Karen says

Despite being an atheist I do like churches as buildings and after reading this I want to visit Orkney to see the Italian Chapel.

Jill says

Was recommended to me some time ago , and although I thought it was ok , it just didn't do it for me. I felt it went on for too long

Cindy says

I loved this book, probably in large part because we visited this chapel on a trip to Scotland and the Orkney Islands in 2014. The chapel was built by Italian POW's imprisoned there and was completed as WWII ended. We learned the history, heard the stories...and so when I heard about this book I really wanted to read it. It fills in all the things I didn't learn there, except for those facts that have been lost to time. If you get a chance, visit the chapel. Together with it's story, it's awe-inspiring.

M.J. J Mallon says

4.5 Stars.

This is a beautifully inspiring book, which just oozes charm and wonder. A big heart for this one. This fictional story based on true life events is set amidst the chaos and heartache of the Second World War. Italian prisoners of war are transported to the tiny Orkney island of Lamb Holm in January 1942. There they work together against the odds and the Scottish elements, to build the Churchill Barriers at Scapa Flow and a lasting monument to peace, and reconciliation. When Padre Giacomo arrives at the camp the spirits of the men begin to improve bolstered by his spiritual presence. The camp is awash with skilled men, no more so than Domenico Chiocchetti, a talented artist, and a sculptor. Domenico suggests building a chapel in the camp, constructing it out of two Nissan huts joined together. He can't begin to do this without the British camp commanders go ahead, but they agree. The building of the chapel draws the men together in a shared vision to create, rather than to destroy. The results are spectacular, transforming the two original Nissan huts beyond recognition. The characters in The Italian Chapel, breathe, you can almost hear the chatter and the camaraderie of these Italians, far from home, freezing in the Scottish weather, dedicated to a shared task to build a Chapel, a place of peace, a safe haven away from the horrors of war. The story is absorbing, uplifting, at times sad, but ultimately happy and triumphant. The relationships that developed between the Italians and the local people, and the respect that grew between them is an amazing testament to the power of human spirit, and selflessness in the face of adversity. The Chapel still stands as a true monument to hope, for

generations to come.

I found this novel so hard to rate. I just loved it so much! All the characters are portrayed beautifully, the dialogue, scene and setting are superb, but perhaps the romance between Giuseppe and Fiona could have been developed a little bit more. This is not surprising if you read the Author's Note at the end of the novel. At times I felt that I wanted more time with these two characters, so that is why I am giving The Italian Chapel 4.5 stars instead of 5. I would highly recommend this beautiful novel to readers who enjoy historical fiction, romance, and anyone who would like to read an uplifting story, that just grabs your attention from the very start.

The author's epilogue helps to clarify fact from fiction. The final quote of the epilogue reads: "The chapel remains, fragile and immortal, a symbol of peace and hope from people long gone for those yet to come." Though if you want the true story look no further than Philip Paris's non-fiction book, Orkney's Italian Chapel: The True Story of an Icon, also available and published by Black & White, www.blackandwhitepublishing.com.

Highly recommended for readers of Historical Fiction, Romance, and anyone who just wants a truly uplifting story!

My reflections on the book: I went to school in Scotland, and lived there for many years, yet I have never seen The Italian Chapel! After reading Philip Paris's book, I definitely want to remedy this and soon! I enjoyed the book so much that I was very keen to find out more.

Here are some of the resources I found on-line:

<http://www.finditinscotland.com/Scott...>

<http://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk...>

Background information about the Chapel:

The Italian Chapel on Lamb Holm in Orkney, Scotland, was built by Italian prisoners of war. 550 Italian prisoners of war, were captured in North Africa during World War II, and were brought to Orkney in 1942. The prisoners were stationed on the island between 1942 and 1945 to help in construction of the Churchill Barriers at Scapa Flow, four causeways created to block access to Scapa Flow. 200 were based at Camp 60 on the island of Lamb Holm. In 1943, Major T P Buckland, the Camp 60's new commandant, and Father Giacombazzi, the Camp's priest, agreed that a place of worship was required.

The chapel was constructed from two Nissen huts joined end-to-end. The corrugated interior was then covered with plasterboard and the altar and altar rail were constructed from concrete left over from work on the barriers. Most of the interior decoration was done by Domenico Chiocchetti, a POW from Moena. He painted the sanctuary end of the chapel and fellow-prisoners decorated the entire interior. They created a front facade out of concrete, concealing the shape of the hut and making the building look like a church. He remained on the island to finish the chapel even when his fellow prisoners were released shortly before the end of the war. In 1958 the Chapel Preservation Committee was set up by a group of Orcadians and in 1960 Chiocchetti returned to the chapel to assist in the restoration. He returned again in 1964 but was too ill to travel when some of the other prisoners returned in 1992 to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of their arrival on the island. He died in 1999. Today the chapel remains a popular tourist attraction, receiving over 100,000

visitors every year. It has become one of the most well-known and moving symbols of reconciliation in the British Isles.

My review is also available @ www.kyrosmagica.wordpress.com. Please join me there.

Lauren Gemmell says

After starting to plan a trip to Orkney I found a list of books about the area. This one was great, I enjoy historical fiction, the story was very true to life (perhaps too close to life and could have done with some more embellishment). However I enjoyed it immensely and would definitely recommend for anyone traveling to Orkney.
