



Friends of **St Leonard-at-the-Hythe**



NEWSLETTER 5 – JUNE 2025

Welcome to another of our occasional newsletters keeping you up to date with the various 'goings on' in and around St Leonard-at-the-Hythe.

The events season is already in full swing – hopefully you've managed to come along to one or more of these – there's a brief review of each below. More important is that you don't miss our future events – there's now an impressive range of events building up, with more to follow. Pop the dates in your diary – we hope to see you as the season progresses.

As always, lots has been going on behind the scenes, with some notable successes and exciting developments in the pipeline. As has been said before, the team at St Leonard's is quite small but seeks to achieve much to keep St Leonard's at the heart of the community. New volunteers, regardless of skills, are always welcome.



A different view of the tower. Photo by Dominic Russell-Price taken in recent photoshoot for the book – more details below.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

All events organised by the Friends of St Leonard are free to attend...donations are of course welcome!

For Arts Centre and Churches Conservation Trust (CCT) events, please check their respective websites.

JUNE:

Every Tuesday 10-12am **Creative Writing Surgery** with Dr Adrian May; an Essex Book Festival event.

14 - Saturday 2pm. **Pete Morton.**

The greatest folk singer/songwriter in England returns after his triumph last year! Pete Morton, England's greatest folk-based songwriter/performer, returns after a much talked-about gig last year. Don't miss a chance to see Pete on a rare visit to the area. His current album *Fair Freedom* is full of wonderful, uplifting songs and he has been previewing a new show *The Ghost of a Sailor's Talking Blues*, which combines comedy and choruses.

PETE MORTON
IN CONCERT
From "ANOTHER TRAIN" to "FOREVERMORE"
ST LEONARD-AT-THE-HYTHE
HYTHE HILL, COLCHESTER,
CO1 2NP
SAT 14 JUNE
2PM:
FREE EVENT!
THE GREAT SONGWRITER -
GUARDIAN REVIEW:
'A REVELATION!'
www.petemorton.com

21 - Saturday, 1-5pm. **Essex Book Festival** event.

See Book Festival programme. Featuring Marina Warner, Philip Terry and Clare Pollard.

JUNE (cont)

28 - Saturday 7pm: **Cover Stories.**

Jazz returns to St Leonard's!

After a great concert last year we look forward to dancing in the aisles again!

Friends of St Leonard's
Presents
Cover Stories

Cover Stories play a mix of jazz standards, blues, latin, classic rock and pop songs and French chansons.

Venue: St Leonard's Church, Hythe Hill, Colchester CO1 2PN

Date: Saturday 28th June
Doors open: 6-30pm
Performance starts at: 7pm until 9-30pm

Free event but all donations will go to the Friends of St Leonard's and be used to replenish this historic building

Refreshments

29 - Sunday 4pm: **Evening Prayer Service with Rev Belinda**



Another of Dominic's photos for the book.

JULY

4 - Friday 6.15-7.30pm: **Bellringing practice** All welcome!

5 - Saturday 2.30pm: **Renaissance Music in Court, the church and the Street**

Instrumental and choral music led by John Davies & the West Mersea Choir and Steve Evans & the Capriol Consort

The West Mersea Choir and members of the Capriol Consort (based in New Town and the Hythe) will take us on a whistle stop tour of what music was like in the first three hundred or so years of our beautiful medieval church. We will hear played and learn more about instruments such as the Crumhorn, Gemshorn and the Renaissance recorder. Both choral and instrumental music will be played that has been researched from historic archives.

12 - Saturday 2.30pm: **Retro 'hits' from the Ancient Guitar Family**

Frederick Lau will breathe new life into the music of lutes, theorbos and vihuelas, tracing a musical lineage that shaped the modern guitar. Enjoy timeless compositions by the musical contemporaries of Shakespeare and Cervantes. Don't miss this 60-minute recital which promises an immersive heritage journey through music.

19 - Saturday 6pm -9pm: **'Beer and Hymns'**

After last year's great success, come again to St Leonard's and enjoy singing all your old favourites accompanied by our fabulous organ.

There will be refreshments including a BBQ

27 - Sunday 2pm: **A new Lady Chapel Acoustic gig with the Adages**

Featuring Adrian May (vocal, guitar, uke) Jen Conquer (bassoon) and Marion Kent (accordion)

AUGUST:

1 - Friday 6.15-7.30pm: **Bellringing practice** All welcome!

9 - Saturday 7pm: **Terza**

Trio who proved such a success last year, with Dave Shepherd (fiddle, 'Blowzabella'), Kevi May (fiddle 'KEGS') and Stuart Moffat (guitar, bouzouki, 'KEGS')

16 - CCT Theatre booking

23 - Saturday 3-5pm: **St Leonard's Strawberry Fayre.**

Live music in the churchyard with strawberries and cream!

31 - Sunday 4pm: **Evening Prayer Service with Rev Belinda**

SEPTEMBER:

5 - Friday 6.15-7.30pm: **Bellringing practice** All welcome!

6 - Saturday 2pm: **Joan Norlev Taylor presents her new book 'Boy Jesus'**

Dr Joan Taylor has been invited to talk about her latest book *Boy Jesus*. She is Professor Emerita of Christian Origins and Second Temple Judaism at King's College, London.

Joan is an authority in Bible exegesis (Kings College London) with great understanding of the first century Judean society in which Jesus grew up as a boy.

13 + 20 – Saturdays: 10am till 4pm: **Heritage Open Days:**

27 - Saturday 2pm: Dr Adrian May will launch his latest book

'Myths and Heroes in Creative Writing: Re-Reading and Remaking'.

To quote Adrian: 'Please help Adrian launch his new book - or is it two new books?'

Read all about it at: <https://www.routledge.com/Myths-and-Heroes-in-Creative-Writing-Re-Reading-and-Remaking/May/p/book/9781041038962> coupled with Adrian's poems '*Grail Island*' at: <https://rosewoodpress.co.uk/grail-island/>.

The poems came out earlier this year but were written at the same time and on the same themes as the new creative writing book. Expect a discussion of the use and problems of 'myths and heroes', with examples from the poems.

Special price for the two books bought together: adrianmay.org.uk



FoSL regular Dr Adrian May.

OCTOBER:

3 - Friday 6.15-7.30pm: **Bellringing practice** All welcome!

8 - Wednesday 7pm: **Emmanuelle Dauvin** (violin and singer) an Arts Centre Event

NOVEMBER:

7 - Friday 6.15-7.30pm: **Bellringing practice** All welcome!

30 - Sunday 4pm: **Evening Prayer Service with Rev Belinda**

DECEMBER:

5 - Friday 6.15-7.30pm: **Bellringing practice** All welcome!

19 - Friday 7 for 7.30pm: **Carol Service**

We expect other events to be slotted into the calendar as the year progresses. Keep in touch with news and events via our social media (details at the end of this newsletter).

RECENT EVENTS – reviews mostly by Adrian May.

James Canton, author of *The Oak Papers*, among others, gave a fascinating talk on his newest book 'Renaturing: Small Ways to Wild the World'. His own small field, bought on a whim, gave a perfect example of how we can make our part of it more nature-friendly. He answered questions from all directions and enjoyed his second visit to us. James is head of Wild Writing at the University of Essex. Catch him soon at the Essex Book Festival.



Shaky George Day III and Shaky's Head.

Our third celebration of St George's Day and Shakespeare's birthday began after last year's event when one of the Friends dropped the bust of Shakespeare (which is always present at the event) on its way home from the church. The head fell off. It was only thanks to a friend of the Friends artist Nabil Ali that he was glued back together for this year's event and conveyed to church in our wheelbarrow (very stately) for this year.

The Friend claims that this amounts to a ritual, as the real Shakespeare's head is reputed not to be buried with his body, therefore the symbolic rejoining was crucial to the event's success. But what happens next year? Watch this space ...

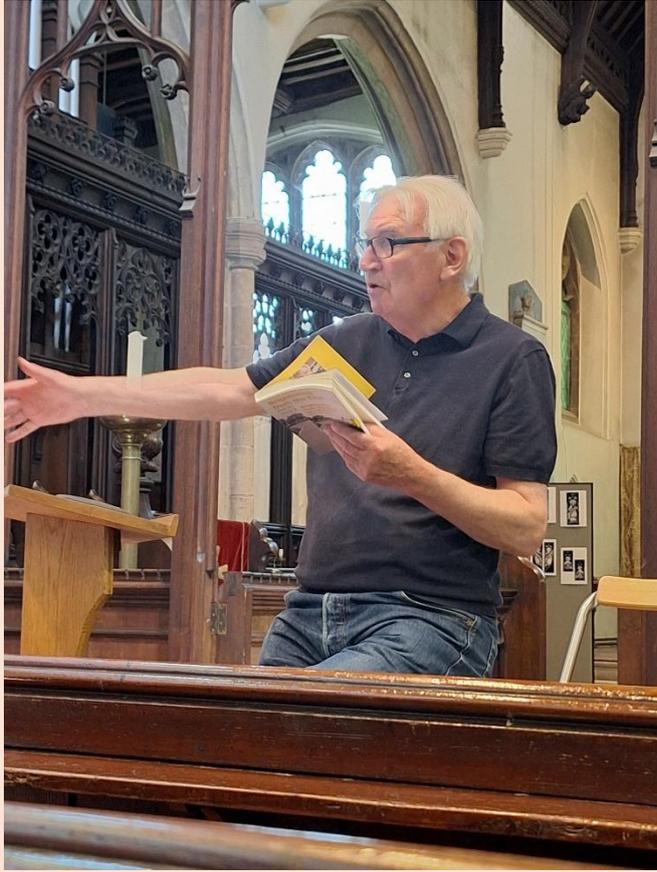


Described by Colchester Folk Club person Elaine Barker (Arts Centre; our pals) as 'A triumph!', over 75 people attended an evening of bell ringing, traditional and new songs, Colchester Morris, church organ and the splendid big vocal group Capstan Full Strength. To describe them as just a shanty group does not do them justice, but six big voices filled the church and felt 100% right for the venue. A great night which celebrated the local in a positive, inclusive way, with many of the talented Friends on stage as well as behind the scenes.

The evening marked the debut of our own new group (very local) The Adages (who I can exclusively reveal have a concert at St Len's on 27th July), our own Jen Conquer, our own Dr Stephen Evans' superb organ playing, our own brilliant campanologists too! We ran out of Colchester ales after about 10 minutes, as no-one had warned how much folkies like beer! Our MC promised that if everyone came back next year, we would make sure we had plenty.

It was such a great night, I could lose my head writing about it with such enthusiasm!





Ken Worpole is a historian but, in a way, not one of the past - as a social historian, interested in landscape and memory, he connects the past and the present environment in an engaging way. Again, we were honoured by his visit, talking about his new book of essays '*Brightening From The East*' (Little Toller Books). From the fascinating bit of personal writing at the beginning, then on to his seminal '*The New English Landscape*', Ken's sane and intelligent voice explains the world around us in understandable terms. He shares his enthusiasms for art and for other writers and his writing has a local focus, having much to do with Essex, but with a global reach in concerns for the way we live. Couple all that with being a great bloke and his talk suited us down to the literal ground! A warmly intelligent afternoon, in the sunshine too

Adrian adds: Just finished reading all through '*Brightening from the East*' and just wanted to tell you it's a great 'full Ken' introduction to his interests and thinking. Love the chapter on radical vicars, for instance and so much chimed with me. The kind of sane intelligence he shows that is a normal part of his writing, is salutary.

To a small but enthusiastic audience, biographer **Ian Collins** talked about his definitive biography of local and national legend and treasure Ronald Blythe, *Blythe Spirit*, helped by superb readings from actor David Holt. He sold all the books and we were thrilled to hear some of the history of our own church (in the book at p.109). The radical traditionalists who ran things a hundred years ago were like us, eccentric and interesting! A great afternoon, with friends from local history groups and the university attending.

Our review of 'events so far' concludes with our very recent visit by folk legend **Charlie Dore**. Charlie is on tour with the celebrated multi-instrumentalist Julian Littman, and we were delighted when Colchester Arts Centre asked if we would host them at St Leonard's. As one of the UK's most respected songwriters, described as a "venerated singer & songwriter of worldwide hits", Charlie's songs have been recorded by many including George Harrison, Tina Turner, Celine Dion and many more. An enthusiastic audience turned up to experience Charlie's eclectic, contemporary folk music. The evening concluded with her 1979 chart hit Pilot of the Airwaves.



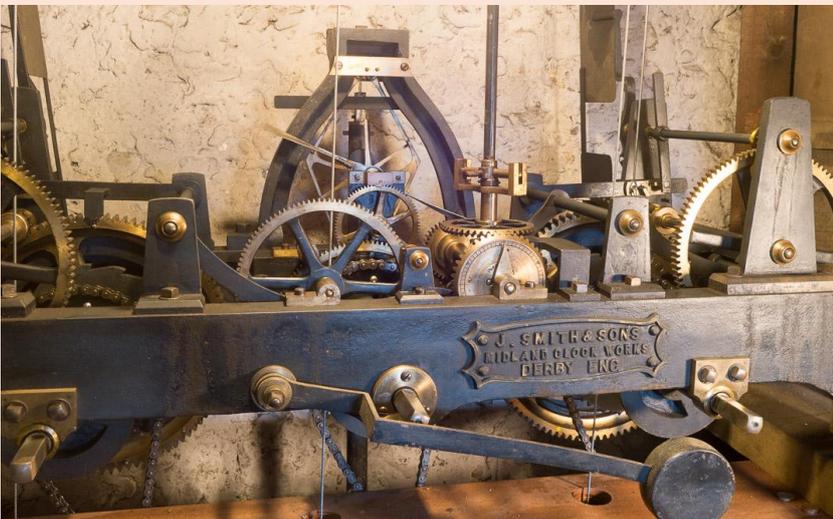
Charlie Dore and Julian Littman

The event helped show the magical effects possible at St Leonard's with creative lighting.



THE CHURCH CLOCK

The eagle eyed might have noticed that the clock in the church tower has stopped. It's been inspected and the fault, down to wear and tear, has been established. We hope that it will soon be up and running although showing correct time, not permanently two minutes fast as used to be the case to encourage Paxman's workers to arrive on time.



The clock mechanism, housed in the tower, will celebrate its centenary next year (although not formally dedicated until Jan 1927)

THE PORTABLE LOO... AKA ST LEONARD'S GROTTO

As reported in the previous Newsletter, Colchester City Council (CCC) demanded removal of our new portable loo on the grounds that, because we'd placed it on a base and popped a screen around it, it had a degree of permanence and therefore wasn't portable. Solutions considered included moving it around a bit to prove it was still portable!

Fortunately, we had a more positive meeting with a CCC planner who advised us to apply for formal planning permission which we did (albeit at an unhelpful cost of almost £300). Despite one expected objection, many of you responded with submissions supporting retention of the loo, and permission was granted. Credit where it's due, after intimating that permission if granted would likely be temporary for two years, CCC responded favourably to our request for a longer period in view of the likely extended timescales to achieve permanent facilities. The permission granted doesn't expire until the end of 2027.

Our big thanks to all those who were able to support our planning application – we've no doubt that such 'people power' made a difference. Next time you use the chemical loo, you can take pride that it's still available!

THE PERMANENT LOO...

As mentioned in the previous newsletter, this will be a regular heading for some time to come. Whilst the arrival of permanent facilities is still over the horizon, much groundwork has been done:

- We've traced 'lost' plans of the aborted 2011 scheme including the English Heritage letter of objection which gives a good indication of what might be acceptable in a revised scheme.
- Two contractors have visited to look at drainage options. A costly feature of the 2011 scheme was the necessity to pump effluent uphill into the Spurgeon Street sewer. We're hopeful that we might have found an easier solution.
- We've visited numerous local churches to see how they have installed loos, and 'tea point' type facilities, and to learn from their experiences, including funding.
- FoSL has been accepted by CCC as eligible for S106 grant aid given by developers in support of community projects. Whether we're successful would, in part, depend on whether any grant funds are available when required, but it could be a valuable source of ££££s.
- Useful meeting a few weeks ago with The Churches Conservation Trust (CCT) representatives to discuss the loo project (and more). Happy to confirm that the provision of loos is supported by CCT – all we have to do now is come up with a scheme that will impress both CCT and CCC planners, and find the cash!

The result of all this is that all options for provision of permanent facilities are still 'on the table' but we feel we might be getting closer to settling on a preferred option to take forward. More to follow ...

KITCHENETTE / TEA POINT AND DISABLED ACCESS

Closely connected with the above project are two more aspirations: to have a water supply into the church and decent access for disabled visitors.

Tea Point: At present, St Leonard's is not blessed with a potable water supply. Water for all the cups of tea and coffee served during our events has to be brought in, and the washing up carried off by a willing volunteer to be done at home. How much better will it be to have even basic kitchen facilities at St Leonard's! Connecting to the mains water and drainage for the loo gives us the perfect opportunity to achieve this.

Again, this was discussed with CCT during their recent visit and has their support in principle. We've discounted the unnecessary option for St Leonard's to have a full kitchen, with cooker etc, but a modest unit with sink, fridge, microwave and storage would be a revelation.

Our visits to other churches have presented some good ways of achieving this, including mobile serving units providing useful flexibility.

Disabled Access: As you'll know, the main access into St Leonard's is up several steps from the Hythe Hill pavement. There's little scope here to create ramped access without significant excavation and construction work. Similarly, entering via the churchyard gate further down Hythe Hill creates similar issues and the medieval door is, in any case, too narrow for wheelchair access. The Sacristy door around the corner is also too narrow and in an inconvenient location. The only other way in to the church is via the Spurgeon Street gate and in through the north door - that also requires navigating 6 uneven steps from churchyard to church floor level.

Any new permanent loo has to comply with the Equality Act 2010 regarding disabled access. That becomes a bit ironic if individuals with reduced mobility can't first get to the church! There's no easy obvious route for disabled access, but we're working on finding a solution.

These projects are closely linked to that of the loo and will progress alongside each other. When proposals are more advanced, we'll be looking to raise a significant sum – please step forward if you've fundraising / grant aid / planning experience (or just enthusiasm).

A THANK YOU TO OUR LOCAL COUNCILLORS

It gets a bit distressing sometimes to see our local councillors taking flak for matters which are frequently out of their control. We expect they are as frustrated as we are that, in these times of apparently never-ending public sector austerity, there aren't the resources available to do all the things expected in a timely manner. So here's a grateful acknowledgement from FoSL to all our local councillors for their interest in our plans for St Leonard's and their support given by whatever means possible. In particular, FoSL is most grateful for the support recently given to the loo planning application, and to Lee Scordis and Fay Smalls for supporting the project further with generous donations from their locality fund. There'll be some big bills to pay before long so their contributions, ringfenced to the loo project, have been gratefully received.

CHURCHYARD

We'd done well to beat back the growth of cow parsley over the past two years, but the start of 2025 saw it start to fight back. Disappointingly, the agreement drafted between FoSL and CCC at the start of the year, outlining a management regime confirming 'who does what and when' has so far failed to make an impression. The churchyard has only just received the first of CCC's expected four cuts a year



but still not in accordance with the expected management regime. Time to chase CCC again...

Whilst some areas are presently somewhat overgrown, FoSL volunteers have reclaimed the important areas such as paths and the open area adjacent to the north door and around the graves / headstones.



With completion of the window protection project, we now feel safer in encouraging use of the churchyard. As a start, we can now move on to laying paving slabs as bases for the three ex-Colchester Zoo wooden benches. This will give our Tuesday and events visitors an area in which to sit and enjoy the churchyard with a cup of tea and a biscuit.

Several planters have been donated – these will add a splash of colour to the churchyard, whilst preventing flowers being strimmed by CCT's maintenance contractor, CCC or over-enthusiastic FoSL volunteers!

Hoped for bird nesting boxes didn't appear for this season, but we hope might be forthcoming for next season.

GREETINGS

A message from Jane Hatton, who has taken over from Dean Wigzell as our Local Community Officer for the Churches Conservation Trust:

I would like to introduce myself as I am taking over the care of St Leonard's in Colchester. I have worked for the CCT for six years, looking after 26 churches in Suffolk and South Cambridgeshire. I live in Sudbury and with the CCT's commitment to be environmentally friendly, it made sense for me to take on the care of the CCT's North Essex churches.

The CCT has the largest collection of historic churches in the country which are vested to us by the Church of England as they are no longer used for regular worship. The CCT do not restore features that are missing but conserve what has been passed into our care. Most of our funding is spent on core repair and maintenance to ensure that our churches are structurally sound and weathertight. We greatly value the support that local people provide to their churches. This support is critical in keeping these historic churches vibrant and open for their communities and the best part of my job is to support my communities and I look forward to meeting everyone soon.

Jane recently visited St Leonard's so is already familiar with FoSL and our favourite church. We look forward to working with Jane, now our principal contact with CCT, as we seek to expand a community role for St Leonard-at-the-Hythe.

BELL RINGING

Having heard that church bells were to ring out across the land to commemorate VE Day 80, we were thrilled that our friends in the Essex Association of Change Ringers were able to fit St Leonard's into their timetable. On Thursday 8 May, 80 years exactly to the day when, no doubt the bells of St Leonard's joined thousands of others to ring out to mark the end of the war, those same bells sounded out again to mark this significant anniversary.





It was clear that others were keen to share the moment, and a good number of visitors joined us at the church to watch the bell ringers in action and to hear the bells out in the churchyard.

If you've not visited the church during one of the ringing sessions, do try and pop in... you might even get a go!

Future planned bell ringing dates are listed under Events, but do check before coming as there are sometimes unavoidable last-minute changes.

The bells are often also rung before some of our principal events.

A detail of the 2nd bell, cast in Sudbury in 1755. 32" in diameter, it weighs 5½ cwt (280 kg).

The 6 bells date from 1450 to 1926.



WINDOW PROTECTION



We got there! The four stained glass windows not protected from vandalism or accidental damage now have mesh protection – that's all of St Leonard's fine windows now protected. The unprotected south porch window was also similarly fitted.

The process was far more of a slog than anticipated but it all came good in the end. Our chosen contractor, Craftsman Glass is happily locally based in Tiptree (one of the few companies nationally that seemed interested in such work).

As soon as the funding was in place, cardboard templates were made for each window. The black powder coated stainless mesh was then locally formed in Ipswich before being fitted a few weeks ago.

Although we successfully bid for the full £7500 grant required unfortunately this didn't cover the final cost. We knew we had to contribute £750 being 10% towards the work. Delays between getting quotes and receiving the go-ahead to proceed saw costs rise 10% adding a further £750. We were also faced with unexpected 20% VAT of £1650 after wrongly assuming, when making the grant request, that CCT would be able to recover this. Our sincere thanks therefore go not just to Enover Community Trust for the initial grant, which made the project viable and got it off the ground, but also to the FoSL volunteer who most generously made up the unexpected financial shortfall.



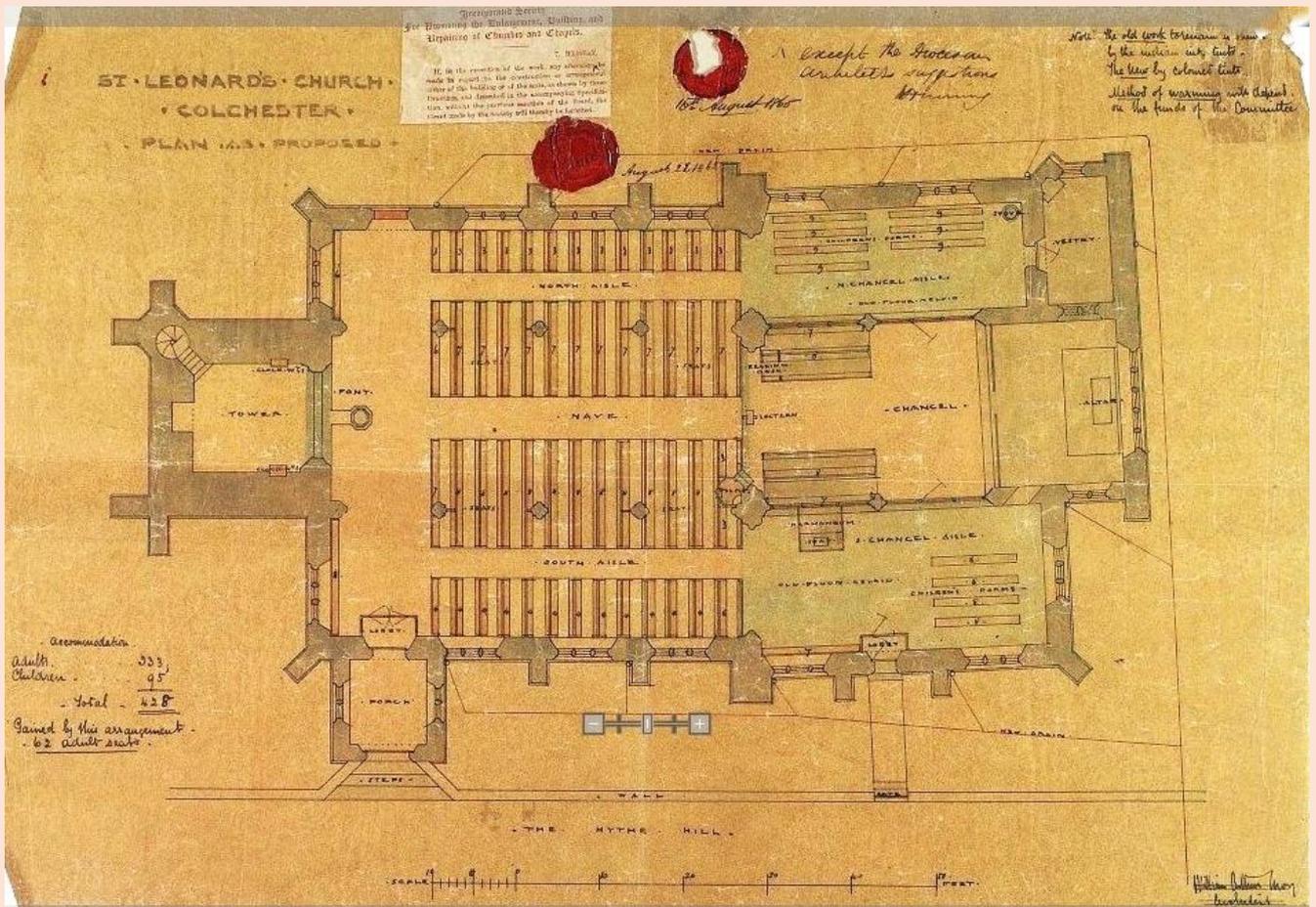
Extract from a photo of one of the now-protected windows showing, almost uniquely, King Charles the Martyr who is still the only person to have been canonised and made a saint by the Church of England.

THE BOOK

The previous Newsletter mentioned the proposed new guide to St Leonard's that was evolving into something somewhat bigger, including a history of the Hythe area to put the church into its historical context. As work progressed more new interesting information became available, and so the book grew. Outside of FoSL volunteers we need to thank notable local historians Andrew Phillips and Patrick Denney for giving their enthusiastic and willing support to the book project.

By the end of April, the draft had reached over 20,000 words. With no new info coming to light, the draft was forwarded to our friend Dominic in Norwich to prepare for publication. Dominic has 'knocked it into shape' but things subsequently slowed down a bit while we obtained (purchase in a few cases) best resolution images and ensured we're not breaching any copyright issues.

The book, title still to be finalised, will be a thing of beauty looking as good as it is interesting (we hope!). It should soon get off to the printers and will be available at St Leonard's, Red Lion Books and even Amazon!



One of the wonderful images obtained for the book, this one from the Lambeth Palace Library showing the 1865 plan for installing seating for 428 people (including benches for 95 children). The detail, pre-dating later Victorian additions, is fascinating, such as the stove in the north chapel and harmonium in the Lady Chapel.

As an example of our dedication to this project, a photographic expedition was made to the church starting at 6am to catch the dawn light illuminating the church. The effect as the sun rise morning light spread and moved throughout the church was stunning. Photographer was Dominic (another string to his bow) who, in two sessions over a total of 12 hours, captured wonderful images for the book.

The book will have its launch at St Leonard's before too long – this will be a big day for FoSL representing the culmination of much work, from the initial historic research through to publication. We must give recognition to The Essex Society for Archaeology & History and the Benham Seaman Trust who put their trust in FoSL and the potential of the book by each granting £1000 towards its production. This most generous support means that the book will retail at a sensible attractive price rather than being an unaffordable luxury item.

Watch this space for launch details...



Dawn in St Leonard's.

AND FINALLY.... TAKING STOCK - NOW AND THE FUTURE...

It's now four years since the Friends, under Joy's leadership, started doing 'SWOT' analysis and developed an action plan for the future of St Leonard's. A great deal has happened since then! So, how are we doing now? Well, hopefully you'll agree 'not bad'....?!

Thanks to all the hard work of our enthusiastic band of volunteers, our achievements include over 20 events held/planned this year so far (not including the regular bell ringing and open days), the imminent launch of a book about St Leonard's and the Hythe, and the stained glass window grilles finally installed. Visitor numbers and donations are healthy, and we're grateful for all the ongoing community support - both from individual supporters and our many 'stakeholder' groups and organisations.

All this is part of our mission to secure the future of St Leonard's. Cherish our 'Portaloo'!! It needs to do its bit until we get the permanent facilities that are essential for a community events centre. The Churches Conservation Trust (CCT) are supporting this project, and we continue to plan for a permanent toilet unit, kitchenette and, hopefully, access for wheelchairs and the less mobile. It seems that CCT may also be positive about a second project bid to undertake fabric works. Watch this space...

A huge amount of work by FoSL volunteers has been going on behind the scenes to get St Leonard's to this position. This work will need to continue for some years to come, especially as CCT has very limited capacity to support over 350 churches nationally, but the sooner we can get our project(s) accepted and into their system the sooner they can be progressed. There have been, and will be, many challenges, but....exciting times!



CONTACTS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

- Facebook: Friends of St Leonard-at-the-Hythe Colchester
- Instagram: St.Leonard_hythe_colchester.
- Website: www.stleonard-at-the-hythe.org.uk
- Email: friends@stleonard-at-the-hythe.org.uk