



Friends of St Leonard-at-the-Hythe

NEWSLETTER 8 – MAY 2026

A belated happy new year to all our supporters.

St Leonard's year always starts in mid-February after our 5/6 week closure due to the cold weather. However, once the sun starts shining our activities start in earnest as you will see from our events list.

We are pleased to also offer two 'open days' each week: Tuesday noon till 2pm every week and Saturdays from 2-4pm on the 1st and 3rd weeks. With more volunteers we hope to extend these hours....so if you are interested??

There is, as always, lots of news – in particular, hear about our ongoing efforts to secure permanent toilet facilities at the church and also disabled access.

We hope to see you at one or all of our events. There should be something to suit all tastes.

Joy Hopkinson – Chair, Friends of St Leonard-at-the-Hythe.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS - 2026

Now that it is getting slightly warmer our events are starting up at a pace!

We have already had a very successful launch of our book about the history of the Hythe and its Church. We were pleased to welcome local Historian Andrew Philips, who spoke at the event.

This was followed on the 23 April by a celebration of Shakespeare's birthday and St George's Day. Sea Shanty group 'Capstan Full Strength' were in fine voice, together with our own 'Adages' plus Colchester Morris dancers. A delight was to hear singer Mary Mclaughlin singing in Irish.

Looking forward, we have some local history talks. The first is on the 14 May (7pm) when Sharon Mooney will speak about some of the past residents of New Town, followed on the 4 June (7pm) by John Rayment speaking about the Thames Sailing Barges.

We hope to have more local history interest talks later in the summer.

Folk music is very popular at St Leonard's. A real coup for us is a performance by Julie Murphy on 24 June (7pm). In July we have our own 'Adages' (Jen Conquer, Marion Kent and Adrian May) on the 29th (7pm). Then in August, on the 5th at 7pm, we have 'The Deltics' ---'Blues with Attitude'.

Other musical gigs include Evy Frearson, Lianne Kaye plus guests on the 30 May (7.30) 'Ethereal Gig'.

John Clifton and his band 'Cover Stories' returns on the 27 May (Saturday) at 7pm and in July we have Giulia Cipriani (soprano) also returning. On the 31 July (7.30pm doors open at 7) She is performing an open rehearsal for her Castle Park Concert in August.

A new venture for us is a Craft Fair on Saturday 29 August from 10am until 3pm. Strawberry cream teas and cakes will be available for a wonderful late summer afternoon.

But returning for the third year on Saturday 18 July (6-9pm) is our Beer and Hymns event. Local beer and traditional hymns (played on our organ) to enjoy!

Remember all our events are FREE but we love donations! As you are aware we are trying to improve facilities at St Leonard's so, as someone has said before, every little helps!

The event on the 30th May .(Evy Frearson) is ticketed and the only other event that is ticketed is a return of the theatre group 'Quill and Inkling'. This year they are performing 'The Cursed ring- a Viking Saga'. If last year is anything to go on it will be hilarious and very entertaining!

A full list of our events follows:

Events 2026:

May:

14 Thursday 7pm **Sharon Mooney – Who lived in a house like this?** A local history talk about New Town

30 Saturday 7.30 **'Ethereal Gig' – Evy Frearson, Lianne Kaye plus guest artists.** 31

Sunday 4pm **Evening prayer service**

June:

4 Thursday 7pm **The History of the Thames Sailing Barge and the Thames Sailing Barge Trust.** A local history talk by John Rayment:

12 Friday 6.30 **Bellringing**

24 Wednesday 7.30 **Julie Murphy** (Folk singer)

26 Fri 11am -5pm **Essex Book Festival** event.

27 Saturday 7pm **Cover Stories** (John Clifton and his Jazz Band)

July:

10 Friday 6.30pm **Bellringing**

18 Saturday 6-9pm **Beer and Hymns** Our annual celebration of traditional hymns played on our organ and enjoy local beer!

29 Wednesday 7pm **The Adages** (Folk group)

31 Friday 7.30pm **Giulia Cipriani (Soprano) and friends.** A special preview of her Castle Park concert in August.

August:

5 Wednesday 7pm The **Deltics** ('Blues with attitude')

14 Friday 6.30pm **Bellringing**

14 Friday 7.30pm **Quill and Inkling Theatre** production 'The Cursed Ring; Viking Saga

29 Sat 10am – 3pm **Craft fair** with strawberries and cream

30 Sunday 4pm **Evening Prayer Service**

September:

11 Friday 6.30pm **Bellringing**

Heritage open days .. Saturday 12 and Saturday 19. We will open from 10am until 4pm

October:

9 Friday 6.30pm **Bellringing November:**

13 Friday 6.30pm **Bellringing**

29 Sunday 4pm **Evening Prayer Service**

December:

11 Friday 6.30pm **Bellringing**

18 Friday 7pm for 7.30pm **Carol Service**

***Ethereal Gig.* Evy Frearson + Lianne Kaye + guest artists**

Saturday 30 May. Doors 7.30pm



We're excited to welcome back Evy Frearson, who supported Fraser Morgan at St Leonard's in 2024, together with Lianne Kaye and guest artists. Evy and Lianne are fine singer/songwriter/guitarists with distinctive styles in their own genres. Either artist would be brilliant at St Leonard's. But we have both for this gig!

Evy's alternative 'floaty' rock is paired with exceptional songwriting and a compelling performance. She has performed at multiple venues in Colchester – including the Arts Centre, Coda, and Three Wise Monkeys – and in Cambridge and London, with further dates in Camden and North London scheduled. Her atmospheric video for 'Break Your Hands' (Waiting Room EP, 2025) was filmed at St Leonard's last year (see evyfrearson.com).

Lianne Kaye's music 'brings the nostalgia of the 90s/00s into the present. Known for her powerful and captivating songs...drawing inspiration from the iconic sounds of college rock, pop, and Americana' (liannekaye.co.uk). Lianne has also performed widely, including at London's 100 Club and supporting Sir Tom Jones at Colchester Castle Park last summer.

Tickets £12 from: evyfrearson.com . Tickets also available on the door.

PROJECTS: WC

Newsletter No7 detailed CCT's Community Initiative Project (CIP) process required before we can undertake any practical work on the fabric of the church. The key project that we're pushing is the provision of permanent WC facilities. The process is regrettably somewhat drawn out but we are making progress of sorts. CCT's Conservation Project Officer has visited the church and a committee of conservation experts has considered our preferred option and come up with a 'collective steer' which has caused us some serious head scratching – we await a date for a further meeting with CCT. Separately, Historic England has made its own visit to the church to look at the same proposals – HE's report is awaited with interest! We can't say much more about the WC project at present but we hope for quick resolution as the clock is ticking on expiry of our 'Portaloo' temporary planning permission - we still need to go through the planning process, obtaining quotes and grants for the approved works. – more to follow in the next Newsletter.

PROJECTS: ACCESS PATH

There more positive news regarding the proposed new access path from Hythe Hill pavement leading up to the Lady Chapel door. The churchyard is in the ownership of Colchester City Council – they were quick to confirm their support for the project and willingness to grant the necessary agreement.

Separately, because of the way the churchyard was transferred to CCC, the agreement of the Diocese through their 'faculty' process is also required. Happily, a site visit by the Chair of the Diocese Advisory Committee produced strong agreement to our proposal. A formal 'faculty' application has been submitted to the Diocese – their formal permission, which obviates the requirement for Listed Building Consent is expected any time. We can then seek quotes for the work, archaeological watching brief, grants... but proper progress!

PROJECTS: OTHERS

Sadly, CCT direction is that they will only consider one CIP project at a time. We are therefore unable at present to make progress on any of our other desired projects for which CIPs have been submitted:

- Renovation of the decaying mural over the Chancel arch.
- Repair / renovation / redecoration of the lower interior church walls.
- Refurb of rendering in the porch interior (cleaning off life expired 'limewash' and recoating).
- Installation of a handrail in the tower spiral staircase up to clock room level (probably a rope handrail, to permit supervised public access).
- Provision of 'tea point' facilities in the church.

THE ARCHANGELS

Sometimes the smallest of tasks can be the most rewarding.

Fine carvings of Archangels Gabriel and Michael stand proudly either side to the entrance to the Lady Chapel.

Examination of CCT's undated photo opposite shows that poor Michael is missing not only his sword but his toes too.

A recent rummage in a drawer at the back of the church found two nicely carved items that no one had, until then, connected back to Archangel Michael. How many years they had been separated in anyone's guess but suffice to say that sword and toes are now back where they belong.



CCT's image of St Michael.



Sword and toes reunited.



Now we just need to find Archangel Gabriel's missing fingers!

JULIE MURPHY

“A towering talent both in traditional music and as a singer songwriter. She possesses a voice of stark, spectral beauty that recalls Shirley Collins and Sandy Denny” – Dafydd Goff,
The Guardian

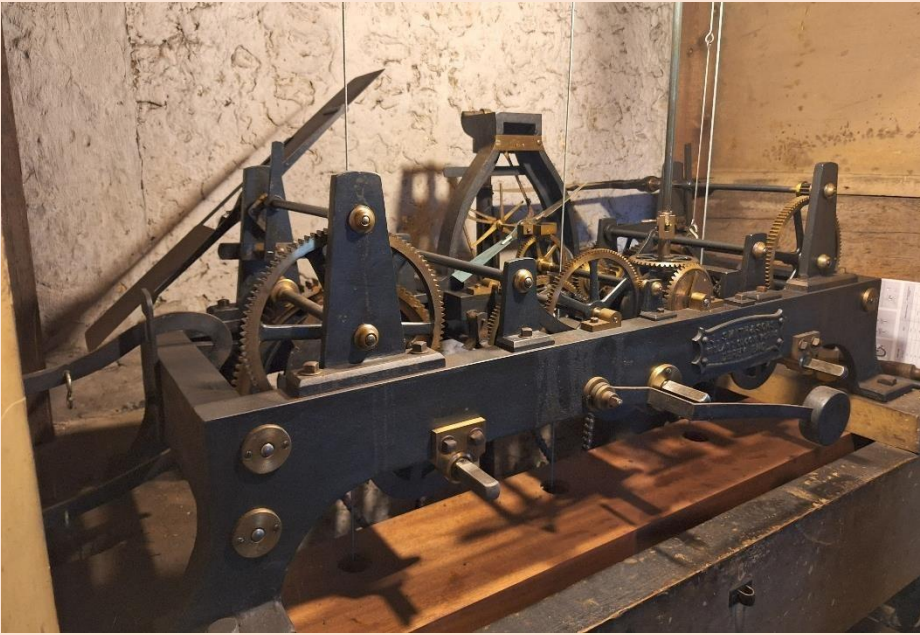


WEDNESDAY 24th JUNE 7pm
St Leonard-at-the-Hythe church,
Hythe Hill, Colchester, CO1 2NP Free
entry – donations welcome



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

THE TOWER CLOCK



The previous newsletter confirmed that our 1926 clock in the church tower needed nothing like the £5k to £14k for repair that had been quoted to CCT. The clock has now had its service and the one bearing requiring attention had a skim in a lathe and a bush inserted into its housing to maintain correct clearances... and all for a fraction of what we thought might be required.

Our thanks again to the Friend who made a generous donation towards clock repairs following an earlier Newsletter and Everllence (the new name for MAN Energy Solutions) for their support.

We're now confident that the clock will be in good order in time to commemorate the 100th anniversary of its formal commissioning in Jan 1927.

We sent out a press release celebrating the return of the clock but didn't expect a photo of the church to appear on the front page of the Standard, with the article itself (printed almost verbatim as drafted) on page 2.



LADY CHAPEL DOOR

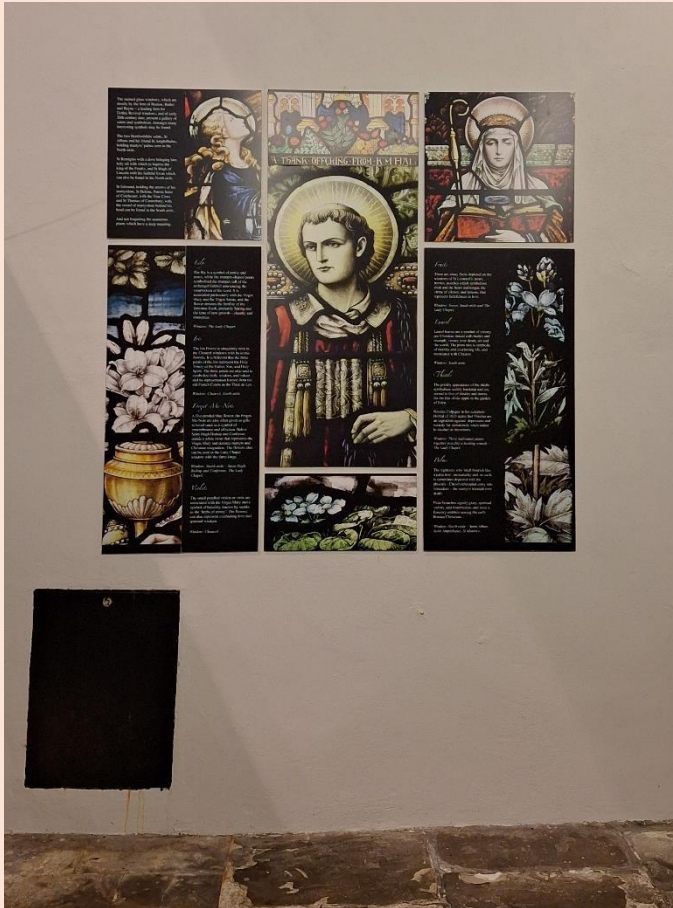


Good news... in the previous Newsletter we were looking for a locksmith able to open the Lady Chapel door. The Diocese suggested locksmiths based in either Bedfordshire or South Yorkshire – this was looking like an expensive problem.



It was then suggested we look in a locked wall cupboard in the sacristy – problem was we didn't have the key for that either! Being a modern Yale lock, it seemed reasonable to 'break in' and there, the first thing we saw, was a likely looking key. A few minutes later and the Lady Chapel door was open with fresh air and sunlight streaming in!

A friend of a Friend has already made a duplicate key and the original is now safely locked away in our key safe.



TOWER ROOM

The wonderful 'Flowers of St Leonard's' display produced several years ago by Nabil Ali was revamped at the end of last year and is now attractively displayed in new form within the Tower Room Gallery.

Come and take a look when next visiting the church.

VISITOR NUMBERS

Number crunching is only part of the story: St Leonard's is a community venue and we seek to do lots of different things to attract diverse visitors to the church – inevitably, visitor numbers vary from just a handful through to our blockbusting carol service!

Nevertheless, visitor numbers are healthy. We had approx. 1700-1800 visitors in 2024 and in 2025 (not including volunteers hosting open days/events etc) – this is a steep uplift since 2022.

Saturday Open Days on 1st and 3rd days of the month, since we started them last October, have attracted about the same number of visitors as the long-established Tuesdays.

Many thanks to all the volunteers that make this possible. The Tuesdays, in particular, are normally a hive of activity, with lots of gardening as well as welcoming visitors, the volunteer 'social', and plenty of tea and coffee drinking.... Thanks also to Lin for making the Saturday openings possible, and to the bell ringers for making the church come alive again in a special way. And, of course, to the many volunteers doing a galaxy of tasks to organise and host events.

CARPETS...

A new, somewhat unexpected new heading in this Newsletter. I visitor drew our attention to the two carpets laid out in the Chancel and Lady Chapel.

We've all seen them and walked over them – we've probably never really noticed them... but not anymore.

That in the Chancel is confirmed by London oriental carpet experts as 'particularly worthwhile and is consistent with a Heriz carpet from the North-West Persian region'. The Lady Chapel carpet is also confirmed of interest and appears to be of Persian origin.

Now that we know this, the advice is that both carpets should be inspected accurately to assess restoration requirements. We have made The Churches Conservation Trust aware and await their further advice on where we go from here.



The Chancel carpet.



The Lady Chapel carpet.

DOG SITTING

We like to think at St Leonard's that we're known for our hospitality. So, here's our Chair, Joy, looking after a wee pooch whilst a couple of visitors looked round the church.

The little one is looking very comfortable for the camera, and was perfectly happy to leave its owners to inspect the stained glass and medieval fabric etc....



THE BOOK...

It's not only here, but has been selling rather better than we might have expected. Red Lion Books in the High Street have been restocked several times, and the book is also selling well in the Tourist Information Office in Hollytrees museum near the castle.

Over 100 copies had already been sold by the time of the official book launch at the end of March. The event was well attended – those present 'endured' a PowerPoint presentation explaining how the book came into existence and its content.

It was good to welcome Dominic Russell-Price back to the church from home in Norwich (many of his photos adorn the book which he also prepared for publication) and local historian Andrew Phillips for giving both the book and FoSL rousing praise.

It was also a pleasure to welcome and thank once again The Essex Society for Archaeology and History and the Seaman Benham Trust for their invaluable financial support that proved essential in realising this book.

The book continues to sell well, so don't delay if you've yet to secure your copy – discounted to just £10 if bought direct from the church.



THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH OF
ST LEONARD-AT-THE-HYTHE

A 1000-year history of
Colchester Hythe and its church



Andrew Phillips singing our praises!



Look out for these numbers dotted around the church. They relate to sections in guide part of the book. Hopefully they might encourage visitors to purchase the book and give themselves a self-guided informative tour (although we've not seen that yet, but still early days).

CHURCHYARD

The green-fingered FoSLs continue to keep the churchyard under control. Increased financial pressures on Colchester City Council mean that we're likely in future to get just one cut per year – the rest will be down to FoSL's volunteers. New recruit, Mike, is out most Tuesdays keeping the paths and area between the new benches and church very tidy.

Spring flowers gave a good show, daffodils, tulips and snowdrops. The forsythia and philadelphus were magnificent. The wildlife area has plenty of cow parsley and nettles for the insects, although smothered our attempt at trying to grow wild flower seeds!

AND FINALLY... HOW TO RUN A SHAKY GEORGE DAY EVENT

Thursday 23 April 2026

Ingredients: Local, preferably iconic venue; open-minded, inclusive attitude, like the Scots do Burns' Night or the Irish do St Patrick's Day; localish headline act; local Morris side, local folk band playing English stuff, local beer; gesture towards inclusivity in something from another culture; celebration feeling of what you have and who you are; emblem of Shakespeare, e.g. First Folio or bust to decorate for his birth/ dying day, or of Spring, or St George. As near to April 23rd as you can, mix well and have fun.



To all the above, we add a large tick!

Our version of this began a few days earlier, as it has for the last four years, with bringing Shakespeare's bust (this year his head newly restored to its rightful place) to St Leonard's on the wheelbarrow,.

This time he came in through the Lady Chapel door, as we have recently found the key. Then he got decorated with a

high viz sash, a garland and a beanie with a torch built in, and set on high, as if giving a sermon.

Shakespeare's triumphal arrival.

Our great bell-ringing people were there at 6.30pm to start us off, but couldn't stay as they had another gig ringing somewhere else the same evening. They are with us once a month by the way – check listings for details. Something jolly and exuberant is always there when the bells peal.





Our headliners were Capstan Full Strength, returning from last year, with their superb 6-strong harmonies and their 'voyage beyond the sea shanty'. Mary McLaughlin graced us with her songs in Irish and her storytelling ability for a bit of magic from elsewhere. Her songs tied in well with the first song of the evening from local group The Adages, about the Christian Socialist 'Red Vicar', who flew both the Irish Republican Flag and the flag of St George in Thaxted, early last century (more of this on 29 July when they have their own gig).

The Adages

Colchester Morris paid tribute to the much missed local and internationally known musician, fiddler Dave Shepherd, and they danced and played both solo and duo items spiritedly.

We missed the organ playing, as there was a problem with our over-100-year-old instrument, now thankfully solved by our own maestro Steve Evans. Thanks to Foggy for being there to play, anyway. Some old things need lots of TLC, present company included.

A good time was had by all, despite the English weather reminding us that the nights can be cool. But the ritual worked, all is renewed, Spring is sprung and, with the launch of our own book on the church and the Hythe earlier this spring (still available at a special rate from St Leonard's) our programme of a summer of events is well started and celebrated



Colchester Morris Dancers

Mary McLaughlin



Capstan Full Strength

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