



Friends of St Leonard-at-the-Hythe

NEWSLETTER 9 – AUGUST 2026

Welcome to our latest newsletter

As I write our season of events is in full swing. We have enjoyed a huge variety of events, and this continues through the next few months, as you will read in this newsletter.

For the first time this year we have introduced a series of local history talks which have proved very popular. We've heard about significant houses in New Town from Sharon Mooney, the Essex barges from John Rayment and Zeppelins over Essex from David Dunford. Still to come in the next few weeks we have Peter Jones speaking about the Essex Earthquake of 1884, which destroyed the tower at St Leonard's, and Nabil Ali sharing stories of the children of St Leonard's school in the 1800s. We hope that these talks will become a regular feature at the church.



Sharon Mooney presenting in the cosy surrounds of the Lady Chapel.

St Leonard's has a tradition of folk music and you can read in this newsletter about the gig by our own Adages. We are looking forward to the return of Mr Walsh's Wonders in September.

Musical events have been very varied: we have had folk, opera and rock....with more to come!



Zeppelin over Colchester...AI artistic licence used for the talk publicity!

A first for us is the Craft Fair on the 29th August. We have more than 12 stalls, all local and high quality! Strawberries, cream, and cakes will be available.

We are again taking part with the national Heritage Open Days in September. We will be open Saturday 12th and 19th from 10am till 4pm for tours presenting the history of this medieval church and its significance in the Hythe. Refreshments will be available and obviously, our book will be on sale!

As you will be aware the Friends are ambitious for the church and have been planning for some time to improve facilities. The process grinds very slowly but we hope to have positive news very shortly. In order to be better prepared we are in the process of applying for charitable status. If successful it will mean that we are in a stronger position to apply for the grants that will be needed for future projects.

Some of you will remember Frederick Lau who gave a guitar recital at the church last year. He moved away from Colchester to continue his studies but has put excerpts from his recital on Instagram (fredlau_composer)

As always, we value the interest and support of you and all our Friends, and hope to see you at one or all of our remaining 2026 events. There should be something to suit all tastes.

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

FORTHCOMING EVENTS - 2026

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!

Events 2026:

August:

29 Sat 10am – 4pm **Craft fair** with strawberries and cream

30 Sunday 4pm **Evening Prayer Service**

September:

11 Friday 6.30pm **Bellringing***

16 Wednesday 7.00pm **Mr Walsh's Wonders**

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

October:

1 Thursday 7pm **'The Colchester Earthquake of 1884'** A local history talk by Peter Jones

9 Friday 6.30pm **Bellringing***

29 Thursday 7pm **'Shadows on the Blackboard'**

A history of St Leonard's National School, Hythe Hill by Nabil Ali. A local history talk.

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**

BELLRINGING*

Concern has been raised regarding the stability of the four pinnacles atop the corners of the tower. Initial inspection suggests all is OK – they are wired up, so if they do wobble should only fall inwards! But... better safe than sorry - The Churches Conservation Trust (owners of St Leonard's) are seeking specialist confirmation. Pending reassurance, all bell ringing has now been paused as a precaution. We'll let you know when bellringing is able to resume.

Made with AI

CRAFT FAIR

FREE ENTRY

Saturday
29 August 2026

10.00 – 16.00

St Leonard-at-the-Hythe,
Colchester, CO1 2PN

*Unusual and unique high quality gifts
created by local artists and crafters*

*Refreshments available
with Strawberries and Cream*

www.stleonard-at-the-hythe.org.uk

Friends of St Leonard-at-the-Hythe

friends@stleonard-at-the-hythe.org.uk

RECENT EVENTS – A QUICK REVIEW

Evy Frearson and Lianne Kaye (30 May).

These two fine young singer-songwriter-guitarists gave us a memorable performance at St Leonard's, with professional staging, lighting and sound. Evy was supported by Ollie Edgington; both previously did acoustic sets at the church in 2024. Evy has performed widely across the region and in London, where she has been recording music. Lianne has performed for over a decade, recently with both Sir Tom Jones in Castle Park, and Ed Sheeran in Ipswich. Both showcased their powerful and captivating songs in the unique setting that is St Leonard's....



Click on links below for Evy's 'Live at St Leonard's' video and more:

[Evy Frearson " Knife" Live at St Leonards](#)

[Evy Frearson - Break Your Hands \(Official Video\)](#)

<https://www.tiktok.com/@liannekayemusic/video/7660146659258633495>



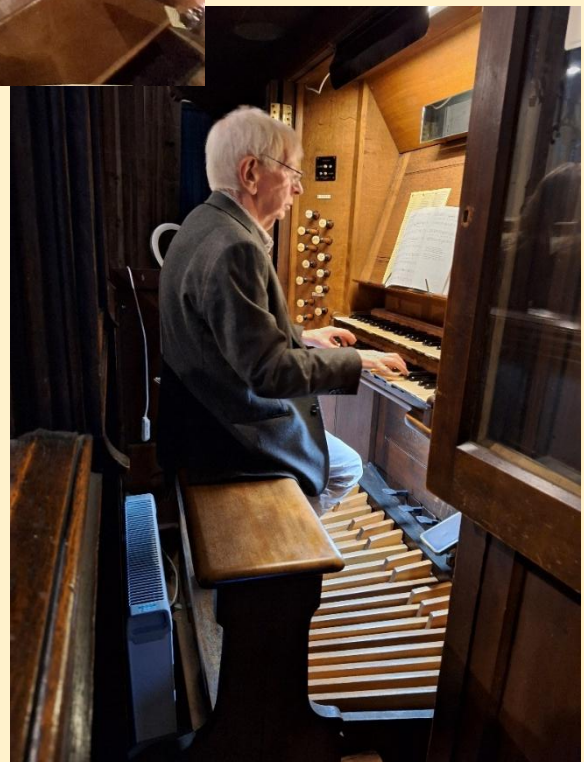
Beer and Hymns (18 July). This was our third year of Beer and Hymns and visitors enjoyed singing all the old favourite hymns played on our magnificent organ by our fellow FoSL Steve Evans

Local Colchester beer was enjoyed by many and we are very grateful to Colchester Brewery for their generous support (other lesser refreshments were available!).

Martin Kerins battled courageously with the BBQ supplying us all with delicious burgers and sausages from Martin's butchers in Canterbury Road (which sadly closed a few days later after 93 years in business). Thanks to all for making this a great success.



The 'choir' moved into the chancel pews for the last hymn providing a chance to watch Steve in action.



'Parsons of Interest' by the Adages (29 July).

'As a versatile folk trio of bassoon, accordion and guitar/ukelele, the *Adages* not only provide foot-tapping songs with lyrics that bring a smile, but shine the light on extraordinary local characters of the past. Their new show *Parsons of Interest* provides a witty and affectionate look at notable men of the cloth (and those connected with them) in Essex and beyond. From the 'Red Vicar' of Thaxted to the 'Divines' of St. Leonard's in Colchester – and not forgetting 'pretty Kitty Canham' of Thorpe-le-Soken – their stories are told with fascination and flare. It is a fine thing to leave such a show not only lifted but also with a new appreciation of these persons. Highly recommended'.

Joan Taylor, writer, historian and poet.



'An evening of opera' (31st July). We were very lucky that Giulia Cipriani, who performed for us last year, asked if she could do an open rehearsal for her Castle Park concert at St Leonard's. Giulia plus friends entertained us to a wonderful evening of opera and musical theatre, for which 300 people later paid to see in castle park....free at St Leonard's!



The Deltics (5th August).

We were fortunate that Adrian's friend Murray, who plays folk and rock, agreed to convert his band The Deltics - 'blues with attitude' - from merely practicing at St Leonard's to bringing us a gig. And, judging by the number of folks dancing in the aisles, what a gig it proved to be! Delighted to say that one of our volunteers danced so enthusiastically that a bottle of wine was smashed in the process!



Our music events have expanded to cover many different genres, catering for many of our regular and loyal visitors whilst also attracting new audiences, highlighting St Leonard's as a music venue, attracting interest and donations. We are looking at how we stage events and hope to purchase some equipment, particularly the type of stage platforms that we had for the Evy/Lianne event - on which point, we are grateful to St George's Infant School for their kind loan of the platforms.

'The Cursed Ring' (14 August). Quill and Inkling are a small touring theatre group who returned to St Leonard's to perform a Viking Saga 'The Cursed Ring'. Their highly entertaining, amusing and interactive performance was enjoyed by all who came.

JULIE MURPHY and folk events update

Julie Murphy's gig with us was on one of the hottest days, Wednesday 24 June but despite this, we had an enthusiastic audience to hear her unique mix of singing, storytelling, poetry and music. Everyone was fascinated with her Shruti box, which provides drone accompaniment. There was also her fiddle, often used as a backing instrument, though once bursting into a tune. She showed an interest in her Essex roots, as well as in Hardy's poetry and her adopted Welsh culture. Julie enjoyed her gig so much that she hopes to return next year with her husband Kerry, as they have performed often as a duo, sometimes under the name *Fernhill*.



Julie gets mobbed by appreciative FoSL supporter Martin Kerins.

Another solo singer has also offered a possibility of return. Our April Shaky George Day gig featured Mary McLaughlin who sang three songs in Irish Gaelic (diversity is us!), to universal acclaim. At least one of our FoSLs remembers her duo with songwriter Anne Lister, from the 1980s, when they went by the name of *Anonyma*. They have tentative plans for a reunion and promise to come to us, if this occurs next year.

The Adages gig was also a very hot Wednesday, so maybe folk is just hot this year in the Hythe. Another hot news item for folk is that *KEGS* have said a tentative yes to a gig on Shaky George Day 2027, on Friday 23 April. *KEGS* feature St Len's favourites Stu Moffat and Kevi May from *TERZA*, who sadly had to cancel a gig with us earlier this year. We still think about their appearances with the great fiddler and local hero Dave Shepherd – much missed.

Back to this year – we have our third Acoustic Lady Chapel session coming up, on Wednesday September 16th, with *Mr Walsh's Wonders*, featuring Karen and Colin Cater and Sue and John Cubbin. Expect songs and tunes in English folk style – doors 6.30pm. See you there – hot or not ...

THE 'HALF MARATHON' OF BELL RINGING

17 July presented a rare opportunity for visitors to experience a quarter peal being rung at St Leonard-at-the-Hythe.

A quarter peal is a performance of English change ringing lasting about 45 mins. It consists of 1260 continuous non repeating mathematical permutations. Often considered the 'half marathon' of bell ringing it requires intense physical stamina, focus and team work.

The six wonderful bells at St Leonard's date from 1450 through to 1926. Most were cast locally in Sudbury and Ipswich.

Visitors were able to watch the visiting group of bell ringers in action and to hear the bells from both within the church and out in the churchyard. Congratulation to our bell ringers for a 'half marathon' effort on a hot July day!



Proof that it's not easy for a snap to capture the concentration and action of change ringing!

LITTLE BROMLEY CHURCH

Many Friends of St Leonard's will also be familiar with the charming church of Little Bromley. As with St Leonard's, the church is now in the care of CCT.

Over the past few years, the Friends of Little Bromley Church have been fundraising towards repairing the bell tower. This year the target of £65,000 was reached and permission to begin work was received.

Work only started last weekend but, on popping into the church, it was surprising to see how much had already been removed from the bell tower, including 2 of the 4 bells.

The work will progress over the winter and hopefully be finished by next Spring/ Summer.

FoSL wish our friends at Little Bromley well and take inspiration that, if you push hard enough, good things are possible.



Little Bromley Bells

Nat Myers – an update

Some of you may recall that Nat Myers, a young country/blues artist from Kentucky, performed at St Leonard's in November 2024. We were privileged to have a unique talent here, especially as most of his performances are in the US. Sadly, Nat was diagnosed with sarcoma last year and has had extensive chemotherapy. He's on Facebook and there are clips of him playing guitar and singing on his hospital bed! I was reminded of what a fine musician he is, and he is an inspiration for all fighting a disease – he continues to be active in playing and sharing his music. We wish him the very best in battling this disease.



STAGING

A look at the event images above will show that our performers usually suffer the disadvantage of performing at the same floor level as the audience. The exception to this was the Evy Frearson gig when we borrowed staging from our friends at St George's school. This confirmed the desirability of FoSL owning its own staging with the convenience of it being available 'in house' whenever required.

A search on 'Marketplace' looked promising, albeit the seller wanted collection from Bethnal Green before 7.30am... we weren't too sorry when the items were withdrawn from sale!

Another spot-check on 'Marketplace' found more staging available but this time much closer to home at Wormingford. A quick run round to St Leonard's with a tape measure found that this staging (a different design to above) would perfectly fit the performers' usual area between the nave's front pews and the chancel.

As this is being typed, FoSLs Peter and Mike are off to Wormingford with Martin's van to 'do the deal'. With the staging available, and more imaginative lighting, we can start to offer our performers a better experience at St Leonard's.

PROJECTS: WC

The accessible WC project grinds on... to cut a convoluted tale short, FoSL prepared a detailed submission for CCT looking at all the loo options both within and outside the church. This included the required Statement of Need (why do we need a WC?) and Statement of Significance (what will be the impact on the historic church?). Our submission concluded with what FoSL believed to be the obvious location for a loo with a pragmatic balance of convenience, likely cost and minimal 'harm' to the church.

CCT presented FoSL's submission to its Conservation Committee for a decision. There's no disguising FoSL's upset at the 'collective steer' that subsequently came from the committee. FoSL was urged to reconsider issues, suggesting its detailed reasoning had been disregarded or overlooked, whilst seeming to push FoSL towards a much more complex and expensive loo option.

To its credit, CCT arranged for its key officials to visit St Leonard's to discuss further. FoSL prepared a robust response to the 'collective steer' – this was circulated to all parties before the meeting which took place a few weeks ago. Despite some obvious differences of opinion, the meeting was amicable with no bloodshed. Whilst no immediate decision was forthcoming, FoSL agreed to resubmit drawings and information, albeit this had been provided at an earlier stage, which seemed not to have been seen by those at the meeting.

FoSL's representations, as discussed at the recent meeting, were going to be put back before CCT's Conservation Committee on Monday this week. Armed with the more recent knowledge that Historic England supports FoSL's preferred loo location we were hopeful of prompt positive news but, at time of typing, we still await CCT's decision.

The above covers a period of almost a year. We think there are glaciers that move quicker than CCT at times! Nevertheless, despite its frustrations, FoSL appreciates CCT's engagement over the loo proposal and accepts that issues must be properly considered ... we just hope now that CCT can support FoSL's preferred option! More to follow in the next instalment.

PROJECTS: ACCESS PATH

As mentioned previously, Colchester City Council (CCC) was quick to confirm its support for the project to create a new accessible path from Hythe Hill into the church through the Lady Chapel door. All we need to do is fork out £££s and CCC, as land owners, will prepare the necessary agreement.

It could never be quite so simple, and so it proved. Unusually, although ownership of the churchyard was transferred to CCC, the agreement of the Diocese through their 'faculty' process is also required for any works. A site visit by the Chair of the Diocese Advisory Committee produced strong agreement to our proposal and a formal 'faculty' application was submitted to the Diocese. At the time of the previous Newsletter, we were anticipating the imminent granting of formal faculty permission. Whilst progress is being made, we hope the hoops through which we now jump bring us close to the desired outcome. Then all we have to do is seek quotes for the work, arrange archaeological watching brief, secure grants...

PROJECTS: OTHERS

The previous Newsletter reported that CCT direction would only allow us to pursue one CIP project at a time. We could therefore see some of our aims slipping years down the line. We raised this at our recent 'high-level' meeting with CCT - happily, it seems that internal reorganisation withing CCT might allow of a relaxing of this direction. Don't hold your breath, but it would be good to inject life into at least some of the 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).
- A handrail in the tower spiral staircase up to clock room level to permit supervised public access
- Provision of 'tea point' facilities in the church.



A wonderful image looking up Hythe Hill towards St Leonard's in the distance.

SATURDAY OPEN DAYS – AN UPDATE

The Saturdays continue on the first and third Saturday of the month 2–4pm. Average visitor numbers for Saturday Open Days this year to date are 4.3; this compares to 5.0 for Tuesday Open Days. Extreme heat may have slightly reduced numbers for both on some summer days, as it probably has for some of our recent events.

As expected, several Saturday visitors said they can't visit on Tuesdays due to work and, overall, there seem to be more younger folks. I think we can say that the Saturdays have made St Leonard's more accessible to a wider cohort of people.

Thanks to Peter and Lin who have manned all the additional Saturday openings and whose enthusiasm for weekend opening has made this possible, and to Adrian who has also frequently attended.

Needless to say, our thanks also go to all volunteers who ensure the church is open on Tuesdays and who also turn up to take care of things at the many events held throughout the year.

THE BOOK...

Do you have your copy? Don't forget it's available at the church for the special price of £10, representing a big saving over other outlets.

We're happy to report that sales have been rather buoyant. We've sold almost 200 copies and approach financial 'break even' point. Despite the generous support of The Essex Society for Archaeology and History and the Seaman Benham Trust for their invaluable financial support, FoSL injected a similar amount to get the book off the ground. Happily, that 'investment' is close to being repaid - future sales will soon be adding a



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

A 1000-year history of
Colchester Hythe and its church



modest sum to FoSL's financial coffers at a time when projects might soon be making significant financial demands.

CHURCHYARD

As with the rest of the county, the churchyard is parched. Some wild flowers are providing colour to the front. The flowering shrubs and bulbs did well in the spring.

The council strimmed part of the churchyard, the volunteers have kept it tidy and the grass cut for events using the churchyard, particularly for the 'Beer and Hymns' barbecue.

Since then the CCT contractor has cut close to the church. Several large boughs have recently fallen from some of the mature trees. Responsibility rests with the Council whose tree team has arranged for contractors to make safe and remove the broken branches.

When the weather gets a bit cooler the dead cow parsley will be attacked by volunteers, the compost heap turned and consolidated and wood moved to provide a "house" for hedgehogs and other creatures.

Not looking too bad!

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
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