

# **The CHURCH of ST. LEONARD SOUTHMINSTER**

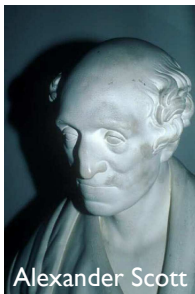
Welcome to our Church building.



The porch and North doorway through which you entered are about 495 years old (around 1520) At the centre of the porch's "tierceron" vaulting, (almost unique in Essex) is a boss portraying God as "a Trinity of persons." God the Father sits with the Son before him and the Holy Spirit (a Dove) above him. The porch has a room above reached through the small door and spiral stairs to the west of the main entrance. The original door of overlapping battens with strap hinges is still in place. The doorway and stairs are the same age as the porch. It is thought that over 400 years ago, the monks may have used this room as a place in which to instruct the local children. It was used until the early 21<sup>st</sup> century as a place in which occasionally to teach the Church's children.

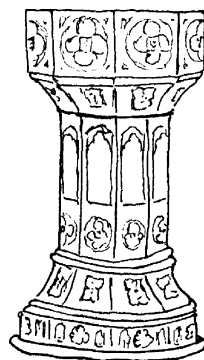
The monks probably came from the Abbey of St. Osyth, near Clacton. The original Southminster Church had been owned by the Abbey since about 1120. The Abbot had the right to the tithes of the parish and to appoint the incumbent. This remained the case for about 400 years - that is until Henry VIII dissolved the Abbey of St. Osyth in 1540. The first recorded vicar of Southminster was Thomas le Brett in 1333. There is a list on the South Wall opposite the main door.

The large 'library' table and bureau bookcase, at the back of the church, are two of the so-called 'Nelson Relics', though the table has been dated to around 1820, later than Nelson. The others are a gilt framed mirror and a cast iron box fireplace which are in the vestry and not on view. The exact history of these articles is rather vague, but they certainly seem to have arrived in the church during the incumbency of the Rev. Alexander Scott, Vicar from 1803-1840. This lively and energetic gentleman was Chaplain and Secretary to Admiral Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar, 21<sup>st</sup> October 1805. Nelson died in his arms. A picture recording the death of Nelson is mounted on the North wall.



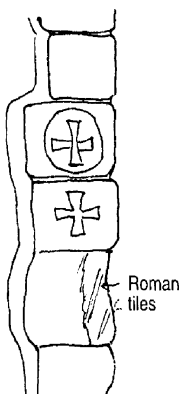
Alexander Scott

The large stone font is about 550 years old. It requires a set of steps for the Vicar to reach the water. The carved wooden cover is 19<sup>th</sup> century. The font has stood in various parts of the church but has been used for baptisms through all those years. It was used regularly until 2004, when its pillar was declared unsafe. Consequently it has been moved to a safe place and a portable font, in keeping with the church decor, is used for baptisms.



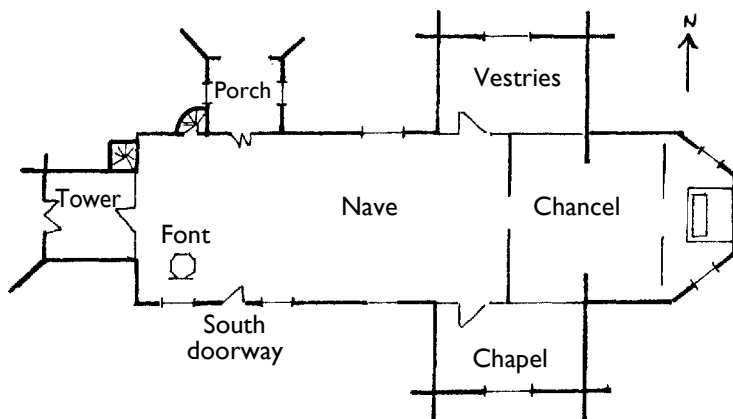
15<sup>th</sup> Century Font

The round-headed Norman South doorway is one of the oldest parts of the building. As it dates from the early 12th century this means that nearly 900 years ago the people of Southminster were coming this way into their church to join in worship and to pray. There has been a long, long history of prayer and worship in this building. On the left jamb of this doorway are two consecration crosses. The upper one probably dates from the time of the doorway, while the lower one marks the time in the 16<sup>th</sup> century when Vyntoner, Abbot of St. Osyth made many alterations to the Norman building and enlarged it.



Consecration  
crosses

Also incorporated into the stonework are some Roman tiles. As there is no building stone in this part of Essex the first builders of this church had to make use of whatever materials came to hand. This is why the exterior of the church is such an odd collection of materials.



In the late 1980s the ground floor of the tower was converted from bell-ringing chamber to kitchen and toilets. The staircase leads to the new ringing chamber on the first floor. This has shortened the ropes and made the bells easier to ring.

The interior of the church was decorated during 1996 as a self-help project of the then congregation. There was valuable assistance from Bradwell Power Station who loaned scaffolding and the skills of their riggers during the period. Sunday services continued as normal throughout the decoration, although no weddings were arranged. A photograph album recording the project is at the back of the church.

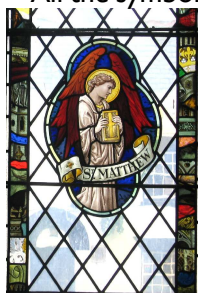
The latest modification to the building is the provision of good-quality comfortable and appropriate chairs in the nave instead of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, uncomfortable, pine pews. The flexibility so achieved has enabled a more imaginative use of the building since December 2004.



As you walk towards the East end of the church you will see on your right a framed record of all those from Southminster who served in the forces in the 1914-18 War. The names of those who died are inscribed in red. Above this is the mount containing the laid-up Standard of the Southminster branch of the Royal British Legion.

The two partially stained glass windows on opposite sides of the nave contain in their borders fragments of the original 19<sup>th</sup> century glass from the East windows. These windows were destroyed when the church was damaged by a German bomb in 1940. The four motifs symbolise the emphases of the four gospel writers: St. Matthew, a man; St. Mark, a lion; St. Luke, an ox; and St. John, an eagle.

All the symbols are to be found in the Book of Revelation Chapter 4 verse 7.



The 'Divine Man' of St. Matthew reminds us that his Gospel teaches us about the human nature of Christ.



The winged lion of St. Mark, refers to Jesus' activity in fighting the powers of evil as the unconquered king.



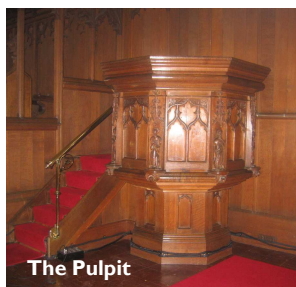
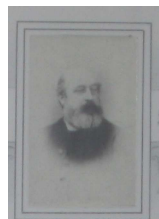
The ox of St. Luke portrays Jesus both as most powerful and as a carrier of the burdens of others.



The Eagle of St. John refers to his repeated teaching that Jesus 'came down from heaven' as God's Word made flesh.

As you stand level with the front seats you are at the point where the church was greatly enlarged by Alexander Scott. This is commemorated on the large wooden board on the North nave wall. By 1819 the work was completed. The roof had been raised, and the transepts, chancel and sanctuary built; but the interior was not as you see it now. The floor from this point Eastwards was all on one level and there were no dividing wooden screens or choir pews. A drawing in the choir vestry shows this. The windows were shortened between 1891 and 1901 to incorporate a stone bench in the sanctuary representing a mediaeval sedilia.

The Rev. William Henry Lowder, Vicar from 1891-1901, was responsible for the present arrangement. He is commemorated by a marble plaque on the North wall of the nave. The screen and pulpit, and possibly some other parts of the carved woodwork may be some of his own work, but we cannot be absolutely sure.



The Pulpit

The pulpit features carvings of the four gospel writers with their symbols below them. From right to left: Matthew, Mark, Luke (his ox has lost its horns) and John. The carving also includes two coats of arms. That on the right is of the Patron of the parish, Thomas Sutton, founder of Christ's Hospital in Charterhouse in London. Thomas Sutton

became Patron in 1611. The Carthusian Monastery used to house Sutton's Charity was, like St Osyth's Priory, a casualty of Henry VIII's purge of the monasteries. The Carthusians suffered savage persecution and several of the monks were martyred.



Arms of Thomas Sutton

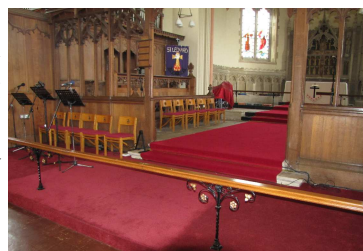
The shield on the left of the pulpit is of the Diocese of St. Albans. Essex was part of the Diocese of St Albans until 1914.



Eagle Lectern

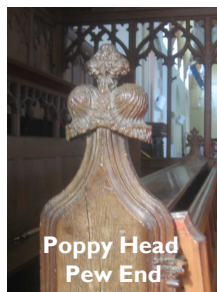
Near the pulpit is a free-standing preaching desk, which was purchased with the chairs. The brass 'eagle' lectern, together with the other brass round the building, is regularly polished by the volunteers from the congregation who form the Church Cleaning Team.

In early 2014 a low platform was added in front of the chancel step to enable a "nave altar" to be used. This helps members of the congregation with mobility problems who were finding difficulty negotiating the several steps to the 19th Century High Altar for Holy Communion. A removable rail matches the rail at the High Altar.





The poppy head pew ends at the East end of the front choir pews are much older than all the rest. They are thought to be 15<sup>th</sup> century - some 500 years old or more. The others are late 19<sup>th</sup> century copies. There is a misericord in the North clergy stall in the choir - a fold-down ledge which enabled the occupant to sit while appearing to stand.



Poppy Head  
Pew End



The present East windows replace those destroyed by a bomb in 1940. The two inner lights depict, on the left, Christ in his earthly ministry as 'The Good Shepherd', and on the right as our risen and ascended Lord, 'the Resurrection and the Life'.

The left hand window shows our patron saint, St. Leonard. He holds symbolic chains in his hand because he is the patron saint of prisoners. He is celebrated on 6th November.

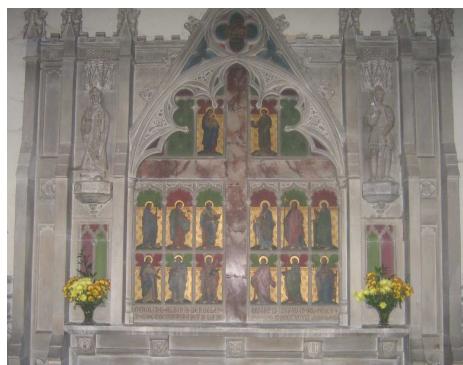


The right hand window is of the Celtic saint, Cedd, who founded the tiny chapel of St. Peter-on-the-Wall, pictured next to his right foot. It was built in 654 on the site of a Roman



St Peter-ad-murum

fort at Bradwell-on-Sea. It is well worth a visit while you are in this area. After 1360 years it is still a place of pilgrimage, prayer and spiritual nourishment. Each July it is the destination of the inter-Church Bradwell Pilgrimage. People from all over Essex and East London attend, together with the Bishops of the Church of England and Roman Catholic Dioceses of Chelmsford and Brentwood and senior Free Church Ministers.

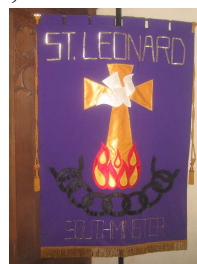


Behind the Holy Table is a reredos dedicated to Caroline, widow of George Berkeley, Vicar from 1840 to 1890. The Latin inscription says that she died in Easter Week 1897. The reredos is at the centre of a stone sedilia of thirteen arcades with a marble shelf on the right. The reredos pictures the Virgin and Child, and St. Leonard (top centre) with the 12

Apostles in two rows below. The stone figures are of St. Cedd (left), who first brought, in 653, the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to the East Saxons; and of St. Alban, England's first Christian martyr (right).

Under the sill below the reredos are the symbols of the Passion of Christ. These are, left to right: 30 pieces of silver; the 5 stigmata, i.e. wounds in heart, hands and feet; the instruments of the crucifixion - scourge, ladder, sponge on reed, spear, hammer and pincers; and the crown of thorns.

The St Leonard's banner, housed in the choir stalls, was made in 1994 for the Bradwell Pilgrimage.



The organ is one of the best in this area. It was re-built by Norman & Beard but still retains its original action, parts of which date from mid-19th century. An organ fund provides for the phased restoration of the instrument; phase 1 was completed in 2013; phase 2 is being resourced gradually.

Church Banner

Music for worship is provided, not only on the organ, but also by a Music Group whose membership includes people from teenage to retirement. Sensitive use of modern technology provides alternatives to hymn sheets especially when introducing modern songs. Technological developments have also



The organ

provided a necessary sound system with an induction loop for the hearing-impaired. Much of the liturgy is now also presented on screen.

By the door next to the pulpit is a stand for votive candles. We have found that lighting a candle as a sign of prayer has been of great comfort to many of our visitors and parishioners. Southminster Primary School is an academy within the Diocese of Chelmsford Vine Schools Trust and it visits the church regularly. After one such visit the School decided to have a similar Prayer Board in a quiet area of the school. The Church was glad to make this possible. Through the door lies the Chapel. This useful little room with its modern suspended ceiling meets many needs. Here the Church Council meets; children are taught; mid-week groups meet for prayer, worship and social activities. Holy Communion is celebrated here every Sunday.



Each Summer the Church runs a Holiday Club for Southminster children of Primary School age. The first week of the Summer holidays sees the church transformed - into a park, or a desert island, or the seaside or an Olympic stadium, or a Theatre or even a Fish & Chip Shop while songs, jokes, drama, games and practical activities are combined to give the message of Jesus to the children. Scrap books depicting the Clubs over recent years may be found at the back of the church. Older children are able to join the Youth groups, which meet when needed during term-time.





Many banners round the church have been designed and made by members of our congregation, often helped by children.



Since late 2010, as a ministry to local families, there has been a session of "Messy Church" on (usually) the first Monday of each month from 3.30 until 6 pm. This involves a time to 'chill out' on arrival with drinks, biscuits and games or puzzles. Then the families move round the various craft activities which are on a particular theme. At 5 pm there is a short worship session in the side chapel summarising the theme while leaders prepare the tables for a meal. Everyone shares the evening meal and people leave at 6 pm.

In the North transept is the choir vestry, now a store for staging, flower-arranging, musical and Messy Church equipment. On the wall is a contemporary artist's drawing of how the church used to be in about 1819.

*Before you go, please sit and spend time in prayer and quiet reflection, for this church dedicated to St. Leonard is God's house and has been so for nearly 900 years.*

*We hope we have been able to exercise our normal hospitality to you by providing tea, coffee or cold drinks. Take a look at our notice boards, inside and in the porch, to see details of our recent activities and our worldwide and local community links. And do sign our Visitors' Book please.*

When you leave you might like to take a walk round the outside. On the immediate right in the porch is a stoup, originally for holy water. Now it usually contains an arrangement of flowers. The niches over the porch entrance must at one time have had figures in them; the centre one was probably of a Virgin and Child.

The porch gates were installed in 1997 as a deterrent to vandals. They were designed and made by a local artist-blacksmith, Michael Hoyle. They achieved a design award from the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the

Care of Churches. Their subject is the Calvary crosses and the Crown of thorns. The gates are left open during the day to provide access to the Church and Community notice-boards on either side of the door. These supplement the new notice-boards facing Station Road and Burnham Road.



The war memorial, to your right, commemorates those from Southminster who died in the 1914-18, 1939-45 and Korean wars. Volunteers from the Church maintain the flower bed round the memorial. Now turn to your left.

From the outside, our building could never be described as beautiful but it has its points of interest. The base of the nave and tower are of 12<sup>th</sup> century rubble and Roman brick. The tower was raised

further in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The massive buttress on the South West corner suggests that there has been a structural problem ever since it was built.



The tower has a peal of 8 bells which, for several years were not rung because of fears for the safety of the tower structure, but

which have been ringing again since 2000, mainly for special occasions and when visiting teams enjoy the experience. The oldest bell dates from 1684 and the two newest were added in 1966. Some new bellropes were fitted in 2013 and there is regular maintenance.



On both North and South nave walls it is easy to see three distinct layers of building, the Norman base, Tudor flint clerestory, and Georgian brick. The round-headed Norman doorway on the South side has a medieval scratch dial on its Eastern jamb. Its purpose is not clear but it may have been a kind of rudimentary sundial. When the priest placed a stick in the hole it cast a shadow.



The large sundial high up on the wall was erected by Dr A.J. Scott when he was Vicar, in the early 19th Century. After severe weathering, it was restored by the British Sundial Society in 2010.

Weathering has taken its toll on the tower and we will restore it as and when funds permit. The roof has also had weather damage and was repaired in stages during 2011. The north wall of the nave awaits attention because of a damp problem.

At the Eastern end of the South nave wall the remains of a large red brick 12<sup>th</sup> century arch are visible. Walk right round to the East end and you can see the outline of the original lower level of the East windows between 1819 and about 1900.

The church has three Graveyards. Two of them are now closed for burials. In the oldest, to the South of the church, lies the grave of George Campion Barclay, Vicar for fifty years from 1840-1890. Along the wall to the East is an area for the burial of cremated remains, consecrated in 1999. Bronze plaques commemorate those whose ashes are buried here.



The grass in the churchyard is kept under control by volunteers from the Church, the Community Pay Back teams and the Parish Council.

Now continue back to the North side of the church. According to a survey of the parish made in 1790 there was a row of little cottages standing between the church and the road. They were pulled down when the church was enlarged in 1816-19, and the railings which originally topped the perimeter wall went to help the war effort during the Second World War.

To the North-East of the church lie the graves of John Hackblock (born 1732) and his son Peter (died 1835). These local Doctors left money to the Church and Village that to this day, as the Hackblock Educational Charity, helps local children and young people to further their education.

#### WE ARE GLAD YOU HAVE VISITED OUR CHURCH.

Our prayer is that as you go on your way your spiritual life may grow and develop, even as the spiritual life of the worshippers in Southminster Parish Church has changed, grown, developed and matured over the centuries.

As we say at the end of the Communion:

"May you go in peace to love and serve the Lord."

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See our web site  
[www.stleonardsouthminster.org.uk](http://www.stleonardsouthminster.org.uk)