



About St Leonard's

The Hythe, as its Anglo-Saxon name suggests, was the port for Colchester, established here in the 12th century. A church would have been built for the community, although no trace of the earliest building survives.

The core of St Leonard's in its present form dates from the 14th century, although the south aisle, porch, south chapel and clerestory are several generations later.

In the summer of 1648 the church played a prominent, though short, role in the Siege of Colchester, being used to slow Parliamentary troops climbing the hill to storm the town of Colchester.

In the late 19th century the church was home to a high-church clergyman, Canon Carter, who embellished it with furnishings that reflected Tractarian thinking in seeking to restore traditional Catholic teachings and ceremonial within the Church of England, and made St Leonard's one of the most famous churches in the town.

Being in what was at that time an industrial part of Colchester, congregations gradually dwindled and the church was closed in 1985. It is now in the care of The Churches Conservation Trust which works in partnership with the Anglican parish of New Town and the Hythe to ensure that this venerable building remains at the heart of the local community, and can be used for occasional religious worship.

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The Churches Conservation Trust is the national charity protecting historic churches at risk.

We've saved over 340 beautiful buildings which attract more than 1.5 million visitors a year. With our help and with your support they are kept open and in use – living once again at the heart of their communities.



Access

Due to their age, historic church floors can be uneven and worn, and lighting can be low level. Please take care, especially in wet weather when floors can be slippery.

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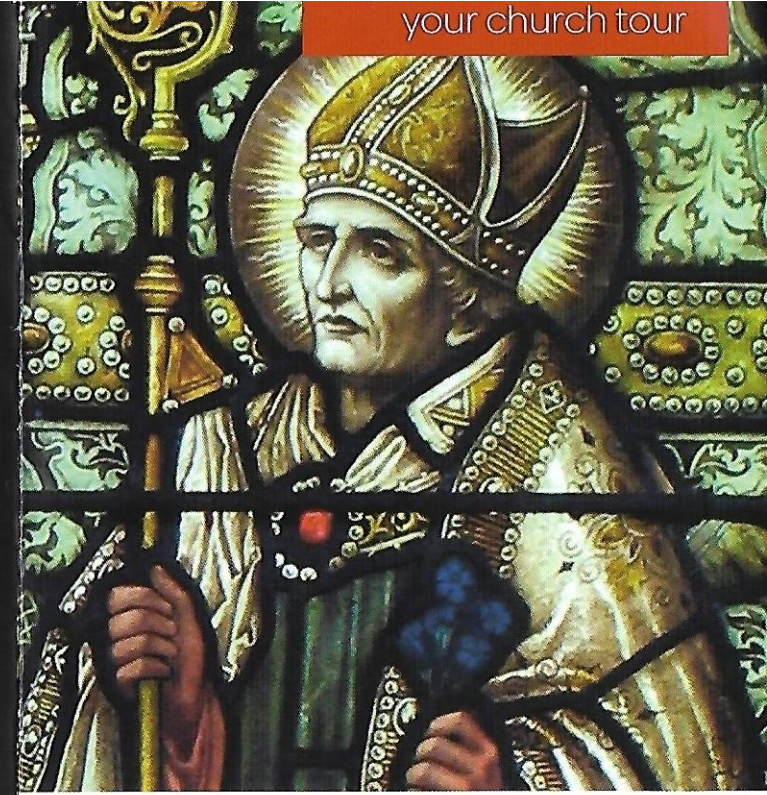
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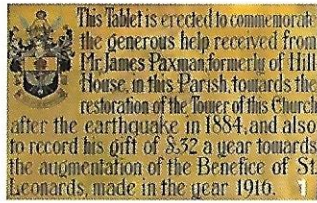
Church of St Leonard

The Hythe, Colchester, Essex



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1 To the side of the main door you can see the **upper doorway** that led into the parvise – or room over the porch. Nearby is a tablet commemorating the earthquake of 1884.



2 The **clerestory**, which makes the church so light, dates from about 1500 and is contemporary with the hammer beam roof. Each beam originally held a carved angel – the East Anglian tradition – and some survived into the 18th century.

3 The medieval **font** is not original to this church, but came here in 1840 from Rowhedge the adjacent parish. As well as Tudor roses it shows representations of the *Agnus Dei* (lamb of God) and a Chalice with the Sacred Host surrounded by Rays of Glory.



4 The **wall paintings** now to be seen over the chancel arch, are early 20th-century in date, and originally covered the whole of the interior. In the right light you can still see them shining through the later overpainting.

5 In the Lady chapel, an oblique **hagioscope**, or squint, enabled the celebrant at the altar here a direct line of view to his colleague at the High Altar and allowed two co-ordinated services to be held at the same time.



6 On the floor is a black **ledger slab** to Alice Bell who died in 1646. Her husband is referred to quaintly as a 'Marchant of London'.

7 On the north wall of the chancel is a finely carved **Georgian tablet** signed by George Lufkin, commemorating William Hawkins, a timber merchant, who died in 1812.

The **stained glass windows**, which are mostly by the firm of Heaton, Butler and Bayne, and of early 20th-century date, present a gallery of saints and symbolism. Amongst many interesting symbols may be found:

8 The two Hertfordshire saints, **St Alban** and his friend **St Amphibalus**, holding martyrs' palms.

9 **St Remigius** with a dove bringing him holy oil with which to baptise the King of the Franks, and **St Hugh of Lincoln** with his faithful Swan (cover).

10 **St Edmund**, holding the arrows of his martyrdom.

11 **St Helen**, Patron Saint of Colchester, with the True Cross.

12 **St Thomas of Canterbury**, with the sword of martyrdom behind his head.

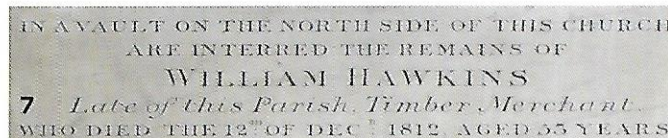
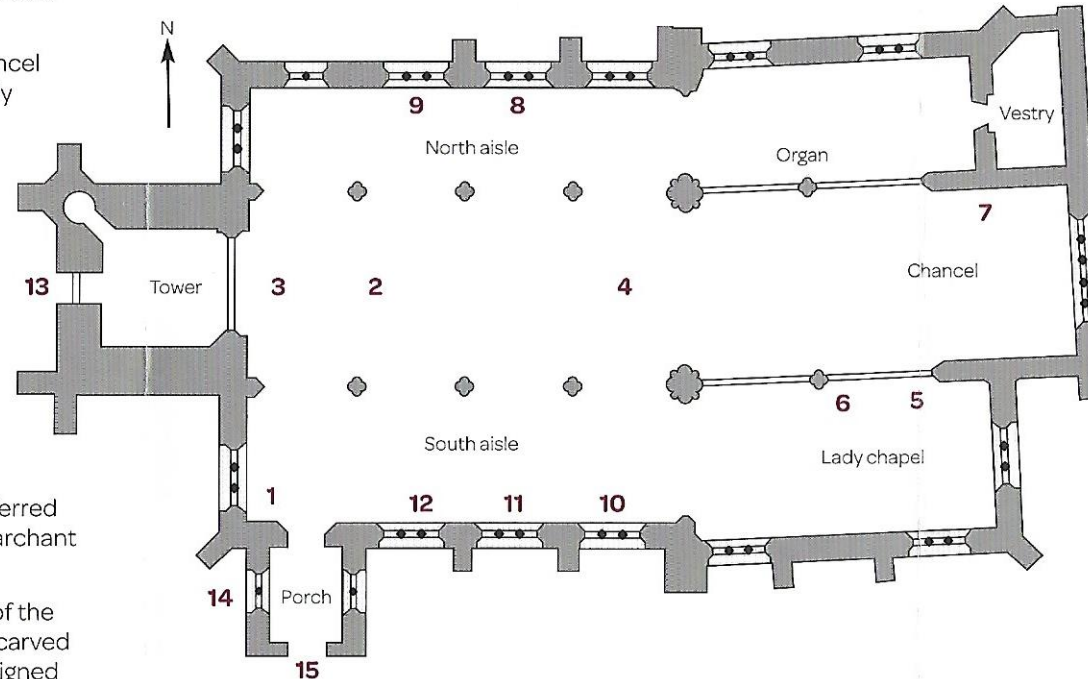
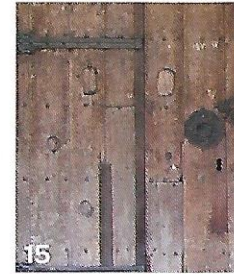


13 The **tower** is part of the original 14th-century building and is one of the finest in the area. It was rebuilt following substantial damage caused by the famous Essex earthquake of 1884. Near its base, on the south side, are the remains of a medieval stone clock face. Today its centre hole is home to a celebrated colony of wild bees, represented on the nearby metal sign in the churchyard.



14 The **porch** has an upper room, or parvise, which was for some time used as the parish jail – reached only by ladder from inside the church.

15 The medieval **south door** contains four large irregular holes. These are said to have been made by Royalist troops stationed in the church during the Civil War and were used to train their muskets on the attacking Parliamentarians. The church held out for an hour on 23 July 1648 before it, and subsequently the town, fell to the attackers.



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