

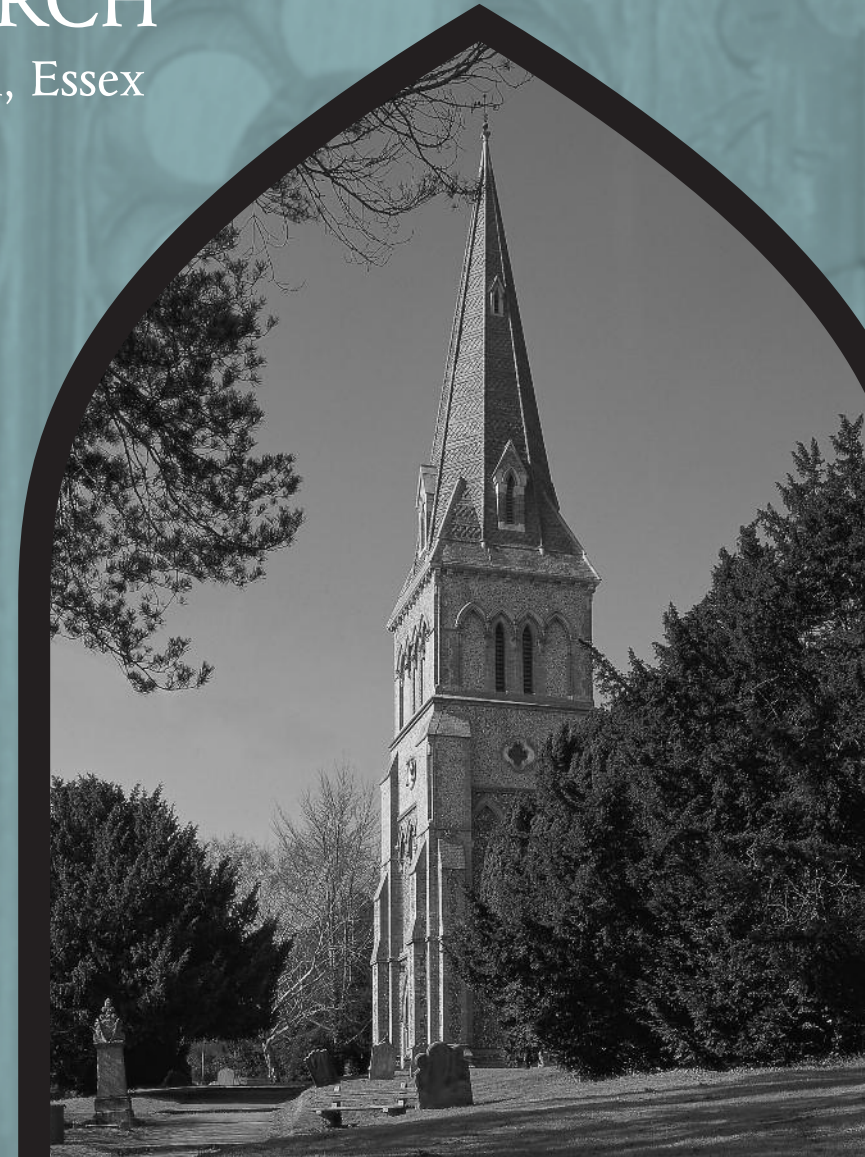


THE CHURCHES  
CONSERVATION TRUST



# HOLY TRINITY CHURCH

Halstead, Essex



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1 West Smithfield London EC1A 9EE

Tel: 020 7213 0660 Fax: 020 7213 0678 Email: [central@tcct.org.uk](mailto:central@tcct.org.uk)

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£1.50

*Halstead, Essex*

# HOLY TRINITY CHURCH

*by Roy Tricker (Field Officer with The Churches Conservation Trust 1991–2002,  
church enthusiast, historian and lay canon)*

## HISTORY

This church was built in 1843–44 to serve the community which had grown up on the western side of the River Colne, which flows through this busy Essex market town. It was consecrated by the Bishop of London, in whose diocese Halstead was situated until 1846, when Essex became part of the diocese of Rochester, in whose care it remained until the diocese of St Albans was created in 1877. It was not until 1914 that Essex had its own diocese, with its cathedral at Chelmsford.

Although not an ancient church, Holy Trinity is a building of great interest and character. It is an early work of Sir George Gilbert Scott and shows the skill of this great architect of the Gothic Revival, who created a building of dignity and splendid proportions. Its interior has been beautified during subsequent years, as benefactors have adorned it with fine woodwork and glass.

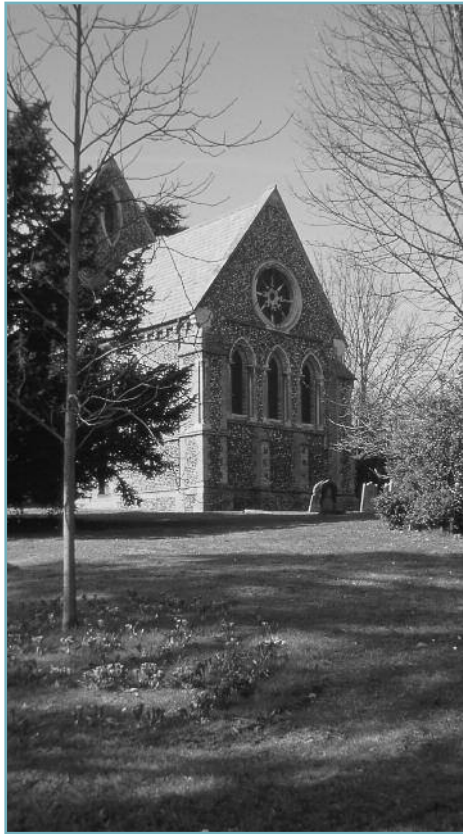
It is believed to stand upon (or very near) the site of the ancient Merchants' Guild Chapel of the Holy Trinity, which was suppressed in 1545, although its foundations could still be seen in 1700.

Holy Trinity parish has been reunited with its mother parish of St Andrew and the mediaeval church in the town centre is now once again the parish church for people on both sides of the river. Holy Trinity church is no longer in use as a parish church but was vested in what is now The Churches Conservation Trust in 1988, to be preserved by and for the Church and the Nation.

*Front cover: Tower and spire  
(Clifford Knowles)*

*Left: Interior looking east  
(Clifford Knowles)*





Major repairs to the spire took place in 1994, and further conservation and repair work to other parts of the fabric was executed in 1999 under the supervision of Mr Henry Freeland of Cambridge.

#### THE ARCHITECT AND BEGINNINGS

George Gilbert Scott (1811–78) was one of the most versatile and prolific architects of the Gothic Revival. His work may be seen in 16 English cathedrals and in a multitude of churches, great and small, which he designed, including St Giles' Camberwell and St Mary Abbots Kensington in London, and St George's Doncaster and the Trust church of All Souls' Haley Hill, Halifax, Yorkshire.

Here at Holy Trinity can be seen the boldness and dignity of the Early English style of architecture which was fashionable in churches built between c. 1190–1250, with single lancet windows, steeply-pitched roofs and noble proportions. Scott's churches are often refreshingly true to mediaeval designs, as here; yet, this is not just a mere imitation of an old church, because he used the building methods and materials of his own time. The flint facing hides walls of brick and the windows, doorways, arcades, corner-quoins, and even the spire, are all of buff-grey gault brick. The building contractors were Messrs Johnstone.

The 150 feet (45.7 metre) high tower and spire have caused problems in the past. On 20 July 1844, 11 days before the church was to be

consecrated, the spire collapsed, having reached a height of 115 ft (35 m). This was due, it was thought, to the speed of its erection, some 30 ft (9 m) having been added during the previous week. The following year a distinct twist was noticed in the spire and again it was rebuilt, the work being completed in August 1846.

The consecration of the church by Bishop Blomfield of London, on Thursday 10 October 1844, attracted a large congregation and 89 clergy were present. The collection totalled £381, a tremendous sum in those days. The cost of the church was £4,690. 15s., the majority of which was given by Mrs Mary Gee of Colne House, Earls Colne. She also paid for the nearby church of St James Greenstead Green – an elegant building in the Decorated style of architecture, also designed by George Gilbert Scott and completed in 1845.

## EXTERIOR

It is worthwhile standing back to admire the building as a whole, in its commanding setting on a rise and in an attractive churchyard. Here can be seen Scott's genius in creating dignity through fine proportions and architecture derived from the 13th century. His success in creating the feel of a mediaeval church is the more amazing in that, whilst the walls are faced with whole **flints**, as one might expect in a north Essex church, the dressings for the windows, doorways, quoins, etc. are formed in gault **brick**. **Stone** is employed only in the hood moulds which frame the arches, the corbels, and the circular shafts which embellish the sides of the windows and doorways. The stone has suffered the onslaught of more than 150 years of British weather in this exposed spot much worse than the brick.

The **windows** in the nave, aisles and chancel are nearly all single lancet windows, true to the Early English style. The south aisle windows are flanked by shafts, with foliated capitals and hood moulds resting upon carved corbels. Above is the clerestory, with its stone arcading, featuring an array of carved faces, framing the 12 lancet windows. It is interesting to note that on the outside the smaller arches contain the windows, whereas inside the larger arches contain the windows, because of their wider internal splays. It is also notable that on the exterior of the north side, which is not seen so often, there are no shafts to the windows, no clerestory arcading and the stone corbels are all

uncarved. The **organ chamber**, to the north of the chancel, was added in 1878.

The walls are strengthened and enhanced by **buttresses** of flint and brick and the corners have pairs of clasping buttresses with a stone shaft between them, complete with carved capital and base. At the tops of the walls are horizontal corbel-tables and there are **string-courses** beneath the aisle and chancel windows.

The **east face of the chancel** has two additional eastern buttresses and three lancet windows of equal height, above which is a circular wheel window – a Norman feature, seen in famous churches like Barfreystone, Kent – the spokes of which are carved colonettes. Of these the top four have their capitals facing outwards and the bottom four are the reverse.



*Right: The north arcade (Clifford Knowles)*

*Far right: Memorial chapel in the south aisle (Clifford Knowles)*

## INTERIOR

The **west front** is handsome indeed, with its three tall lancet windows in the nave, with a single lancet above, and single lancets at the west ends of the aisles, and also its great west doorway of brick, with two stone shafts each side and corbel heads.

The prominent **tower and spire** are set to the south of the south aisle and the tower-base forms a porch. This is the crowning glory of the church and is an important feature on the Halstead skyline. Again the style is pure Early English, with clasping buttresses at the corners, strengthened by additional set-back buttresses lower down. The grand entrance arch has three orders of stone shafts, with carved capitals. The arcaded first stage, although the shafts were removed in the 1960s, has tall lancet windows; above are quatrefoil windows which are embellished by carvings. The belfry stage is also arcaded, with a variety of carved heads upon which the hood moulds rest, and is pierced by two lancet windows each side. Above the corbel-table at the summit of the tower rises the handsome broach spire, complete with gabled spire-lights on the four cardinal faces, in which stone is used, and ribs at the angles. As noted above, the spire is almost entirely constructed in bricks, which are set in alternating patterns, forming bands all the way up. A spiral staircase of 22 steps, in the north-west corner, gives access to the first stage. Above hangs the small single bell, by C & G Mears of Whitechapel, probably of 1844.

The interior has lofty and dignified proportions and again demonstrates the beauty of Early English architecture in gault brick. Much beauty and colour have been added during later years, especially in the superb woodcarving and the fine glass.

The aisles are divided from the nave by **arcades** of six bays, resting upon alternating circular and octagonal piers of brick, with square stone capitals carved with a variety of foliage designs. The arches are framed by continuous hood moulds, resting upon carved heads of kings, queens, bishops, etc., including the young Queen Victoria and her beloved Albert facing each other towards the east end of the nave. The **chancel arch** has brick shafts and roll-moulding.

The nave has an arcaded **clerestory**, with effective stonework in the shafts, capitals and hood moulds, and an arch-braced **roof**. The six larger and six smaller arch-braces rest upon foliage capitals and the timbers are strengthened by arched wind-braces along the sides. The apex is some 50 ft (15.2m) above the floor. The **chancel roof** has arch-braces, set closely together.

The plain and functional **benches** in the nave and aisles are by Scott (1844), but many of the later furnishings and fittings in the church are memorials to people of the past who have been associated with it. These have relevant inscriptions and are worthy pieces of craftsmanship – even the **cupboards** for the books and electrical equipment at the west end,



which were made in 1952. The **oil painting** on the north aisle wall was given by George Courtauld and is a copy of an original painting, housed in the Vatican, of St Martha – a French saint from Picardy.

The west end of the south aisle was made into a bapistry in 1926, when Scott's **font** was moved here from the west end of the nave. Its square bowl has a small cross in each face; there is carved foliage beneath the bowl and at the foot of the octagonal stem. The hexagonal **pulpit** was designed by the Revd Albert E Austin (vicar from 1904–43) and his clerk and verger, Mr W H Sargent, who made it to replace Scott's tall stone pulpit, which was approached by means of the (now blocked) staircase to the north of the chancel arch. The two-sided wooden **lectern**, standing upon four shafts, was given in 1906 by George Courtauld and was designed by Charles Spooner – an undeservedly little-known architect who created some delightful work in churches and designed the grand church of St Bartholomew, Ipswich.

The eastern end of the south aisle was converted into a small devotional chapel as a memorial to



those who died in the First World War (1914–18), to the designs of the Colchester architect, Duncan W Clark. It was dedicated on 15 October 1922 and is divided off by a beautiful **screen** in the fashion of 15th-century East Anglian screens, with carved and traceried openings, complete with pendant heads and foliage on the cusps, painted coats of arms and an inscription to Lt Col E Deacon, who perished at Ypres in 1915. Wooden **panelling** lines the chapel walls – that on the south side bears the names of the Fallen. The **altar** here is a fine piece of woodcarving, and has various emblems of the Blessed Sacrament in its front and sides. The old Dutch **chandelier** in the chapel was given by Mrs Deacon, in memory of her husband.

The **chancel**, although typically of the 1840s somewhat short in proportion to the length of the nave, is nevertheless colourful and devotional, with Scott's three lancets, with their internal shafts, hood moulds and corbel heads, and the wheel window above, forming a pleasing climax at the east end. Here is further 20th-century woodwork, designed by Duncan Clark.



Door to the organ console (Clifford Knowles)

the chancel furnishings were given by his former Stansted parishioners. The **sanctuary lamp** was made in 1914 by Barkentin and Krall and is a reminder of the moderate Prayer Book Catholic tradition which Fr Austin developed here. He introduced eucharistic vestments in the year of his arrival, which must have been quite an innovation considering the fate of the altar cross which had been given in 1882. Such were the feelings against this 'object of popery' that it was stolen from the church and thrown into the River Colne, later to be discovered bent and disfigured. It was hidden away for several years and then handed to Fr Austin in 1911, together with £5 towards its restoration. In 1916 the Warham Guild restored it and it can now be seen at the head of the **processional cross**.

To the north of the chancel, and set behind an arch of 1878, is the **organ**, which has three manuals, pedals and 25 speaking stops. The instrument dates mostly from its rebuilding and enlargement by J J Binns of Leeds in 1909. The first organ, by Smith of Edgware Road, was installed in 1851. It was replaced by a new organ by Smith of Bristol in 1858, which was in turn moved and enlarged by Norman of Norwich in 1878 when the new chamber was built to contain it. The fine traceried console doors of 1909 have beautiful hinges.

In the **priests' stalls**, carved by Kenneth Mabbitt of Colchester in 1931, are seen the ship – the emblem of the church, the arms of the Province of Canterbury, the 'XP' emblem of Our Lord and the Star of David. The ends of the choir stalls show the Instruments of the Passion (nails, scourges, crown of thorns, spear and sponges, etc.). These stalls were made by S Marshall of Coggeshall in 1913, when the chancel also received its black and white marble flooring. Clark's design and Marshall's craftsmanship can also be seen in the panelled **wainscoting** around the chancel and sanctuary walls, with its frieze of carving at the top, punctuated by little shields with coats of arms and emblems. A marble **reredos** was installed in 1894, but was replaced in 1951 by the present carved and painted cornice, with its leaf-trail and emblems of the Holy Trinity (central) and the four Evangelists. This is a memorial to the Revd A E Austin (vicar 1904–43) who did much to beautify this church. He came here from a curacy at Stansted Mountfitchet and some of

Right: South aisle windows three and four (Clifford Knowles)

## STAINED GLASS

Many of the windows were given as memorials and are appropriately inscribed.

**CHANCEL, EAST WINDOW** The three lancets contain personifications of Faith, Hope and Charity in glass by Burlison and Grylls, given by the Revd F J Greenham (vicar 1877–89) in memory of his wife, in 1887.

The patterned glass in the wheel window above is earlier and of different vintage.

**NAVE, WEST WINDOW** Nine panels of glass by Charles Clutterbuck of Stratford, given by Canon Duncan Fraser (the first vicar, 1845–77), but restored and reset by Messrs Drury & Lowndes of Fulham in 1913. Central is the crucified Christ, with his Mother and St John, flanked by scenes of the Baptism of Jesus and Jesus welcoming children. The baptism theme is continued in the lower panels, where Naaman is being told by Elisha to wash in the River Jordan, Moses is lifting up the serpent in the Wilderness and taking the Israelites through the Red Sea, seen as a form of Baptism.

### SOUTH AISLE – FROM WEST TO EAST

**WEST WINDOW** St Hilda, Abbess of Whitby, showing Whitby Abbey. By A K Nicholson of London. Made in 1932.



### SOUTH SIDE

1. St Cedd, who brought Christianity to Essex in the 7th century. By A K Nicholson, 1932.
2. Jesus the Good Shepherd. By A K Nicholson, 1931.
3. Mary and Martha. Installed c. 1901.
4. The Virgin Mary praying the Magnificat. Installed c. 1908.
5. The Good Samaritan, c. 1900.

**EAST WINDOW** The Risen Christ. By J C Bewsey of St John's Wood, London. Installed in 1922.

### NORTH AISLE

1. St Barnabas, c. 1896.
2. Our Lord carrying a chalice, c. 1900.

# THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

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St Martin, Colchester  
West Stockwell Street

St Mary the Virgin, Little Bromley  
3 miles SW of Manningtree off A137

St Mary Old Church, West Bergholt  
3 miles NW of Colchester off B1508

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