



THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST



CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS

Vange, Essex



THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST

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CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS

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



A church may well have stood in this commanding position upon its humpy hill for 1000 years. For most of this time All Saints served a small village community which was called 'Fengge' in 963, 'Phenge' in Domesday Book (1086) and 'Fange' in 1203, indicating a fen or marshy area. Now it is situated near the southern boundary of sprawling Basildon New Town, which has developed in and around former country villages, including Basildon, Laindon, Pitsea and Vange, over the past 50 years. In the 1860s Vange was a tiny village of 160 inhabitants; now it is a vast parish of over 12,000.

With the growth of Basildon southwards, a new church of St Chad was built in 1957–58 to the designs of Messrs Humphrys and Hurst about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile (1.2 km) to the north-east of the old church, in what has become the main centre of population. Both churches were in use until 1994 but the isolated position of All Saints made it vulnerable to vandalism and theft, and after two major thefts of tiles from the roof the building was closed and declared pastorally redundant in 1996. Because of its antiquity and interest, however, it was vested in The Churches Conservation Trust on 1 January 2003, to be cared for by the Church and the nation.

*Front cover: Interior from the
west gallery (Neil Rushton)*

*Left: Exterior from the east
(Neil Rushton)*

Treas
Memor
DEAR H

HISTORY

All Saints has changed and evolved over the centuries and contains work of many periods. Some of the landmarks in its long history are as follows:

This hilltop position may indicate an early site of Christian worship, although there is no visible evidence of pre-Conquest work in the present building.

The late 1000s and 1100s – Much of the present nave, its east wall and the chancel arch, and also maybe parts of the chancel date from this period. The font was made during the late 1100s.

The 1200s – 13th-century masonry patterns on the south chancel wall, and also evidence of a blocked tufa window discovered in its north wall, indicate work done to the chancel at this time.

The 1300s and 1400s – The earliest recorded rector was John de Bampton, who was instituted in 1328. About this time the roofs and the north doorway were fashioned. The square-headed windows, probably replacing small Norman windows, date from c. 1400. During the late 1400s the rood-loft staircase was built.

The 1500s – When John Sawnder's coffin was carried up the path for burial in the churchyard in 1503, a sheep (valued at 13d) was driven in front of it. It must have been quite a climb for both sheep and bearers. It was fulfilling what became a custom in Essex, called the 'fordrive', where an animal given as an offering to the church when a person died was driven at the

head of the funeral procession. Repairs were taking place in 1518, when Walter Bundock bequeathed 3s.4d towards the 'reparation' of the church.

The 1600s and 1700s – By this time the interior was furnished for the liturgical requirements of the Church of England 'by Law Established'. During the 1600s it acquired a pulpit, of which the top deck forms the present pulpit, and also a set of rails to prevent dogs from 'defiling ye sanctuary'. In 1685 the archdeacon ordered that the altar table should be shortened so that it could be placed 'altarwise' against the east wall, rather than longways in the chancel, as was the Puritan fashion. He also ordered that the royal arms be set up in the church and that certain structural repairs should be carried out, namely to the 'great crack in ye wall at the west end of the church' and to the 'butterice and cracks on ye north side'. It must have been shortly after this that the eastern section of the chancel was rebuilt and the chancel possibly shortened. The royal arms of Queen Anne (1702–14) were known to have been in the east window and it may have been during her reign that the work was done.

1816 – A parish rate was levied which raised £240 for repairs to the church. This was a considerable sum in those days and the repairs must have been extensive. The belfry was rebuilt at this time and maybe the interior was resealed with new box pews

1836–37 – The west wall was either rebuilt or extensively restored and the western gallery was erected to provide additional seating for 70 people. The western section of the roof was renewed in pine, the north doorway was blocked and the rood-loft staircase was discovered. The plans and specification were drawn up by Thomas Sneezum, Builder, of Billericay, and Richard Wingfield, Surveyor, signed the certificate. The work cost £70.1s.3d, of which £31.10s.0d was raised by rate and £35 was awarded by the Incorporated Church Building Society.

1855 – A visitor noted that the porch had recently been built, and a large modern buttress erected to support the north-east corner of the nave.

1896 – The nave was restored, its roof was re-boarded and the box pews were replaced by the present seating, to the designs of John Young of Great Winchester Street, near London Wall. At this time the pew-rent system was abolished and all seats became free of any charge. A photograph of the interior taken just before this restoration shows the nave with simple varnished box pews and a stove in the middle of the gangway, its flue-pipe reaching to the roof. The chancel arch was framed with a painted scroll decoration and above it was the text 'Behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy'. The east window was flanked by large boards, inscribed with the Lord's Prayer, Creed and the Ten Commandments.



Below: The south doorway and site of the porch (Neil Rushton)

Right: Exterior from the south-west (Neil Rushton)

EXTERIOR

The 1900s – Repairs and alterations carried out in 1904 included a new woodblock floor in the chancel, the renewal of the south doorway in Bath stone and the removal of the plaster from the internal nave walls. The churchyard was extended in 1929 and again in 1949. Some restoration work took place in 1954, when the panelling was placed on the walls of the sanctuary. All Saints continued in regular use for much of the 20th century and, having designed St Chad's, Humphrys & Hurst supervised repairs to All Saints in 1961, 1966 and 1970. Following its vesting in The Churches Conservation Trust a major programme of repairs costing some £300,000 was carried out during 2004, by Bakers of Danbury, under the supervision of Alan Greening, architect, of Southwold. Structural advice was provided by Edward Morton of The Morton Partnership Ltd. The wall paintings were conserved by Tom Organ and the monuments by Christopher Weeks.

All Saints stands proudly on the summit of its hillock, visible for some distance along the A13 which runs a short distance to the south.

The church is approached from the old London road through its large churchyard extension which contrasts somewhat with the old country churchyard round the church at the top. From this elevated position there are fine views eastwards to the hilltop tower which is all that remains of Pitsea's demolished church and to Canvey Island and its oil refineries, southwards across the Thames to Kent and south-westwards to the lofty tower of Fobbing church.



A variety of **building materials** may be seen in the walls, including various sizes of ragstone, chunks of tufa, and the occasional use of flints and bricks of various vintages. The building comprises nave and chancel only, its brick and timber south porch having been removed in recent years. Above the western gable of the nave is a small and simple timber **belfry**, and short four-sided spirelet. The weathervane displays the date 1816, when the belfry may have been rebuilt. Its timber cladding was renewed using larchwood in 2004.

The Norman **nave** was unbuttressed, indicating its early date, with blocks of stone, including tufa, set in its western corners. In the 1850s a brick buttress was provided to strengthen its north-east corner. The outline of one small blocked original window remains in the south wall – a 12th-century slit window in Reigate stone, with a slightly pointed arch, which would have had a wide internal splay through the wall to let in more light. About 1400 the slit windows were replaced by the present larger two-light square-headed windows in the north and south walls and the arch of the south doorway was made. The north doorway is smaller and may be a little

earlier. The west window has long lost its original stonework design and now has simple tracery patterns in wood, probably dating from 1836.

The **chancel** seems to have had a chequered history. Unlike the rest of the church, its maintenance was the direct responsibility of the rector and he appears to have had problems with it around the early 1700s. It may be because of the sloping ground upon which it stands that the eastern section of the chancel had to be taken down, necessitating the building of a new east wall and part of the north wall.

This is an unusual and interesting piece of work, because the stonework is punctuated with bands of red brick, producing a 'streaky bacon' effect and extending through the flanking buttresses and part of the north wall, which also needed rebuilding. Flints have also been used, some in the form of galleting in the mortar between the stones. The east window is a simple single opening, now protected by a new grille, in similar style to the west window tracery patterns. The south chancel wall is original and has a two-light window similar to those in the nave, although its stonework is a Victorian replacement of the c. 1400 original.

Below: The rood-loft stairs (Neil Rushton)

Right: Fragment of wall painting (Neil Rushton)

INTERIOR

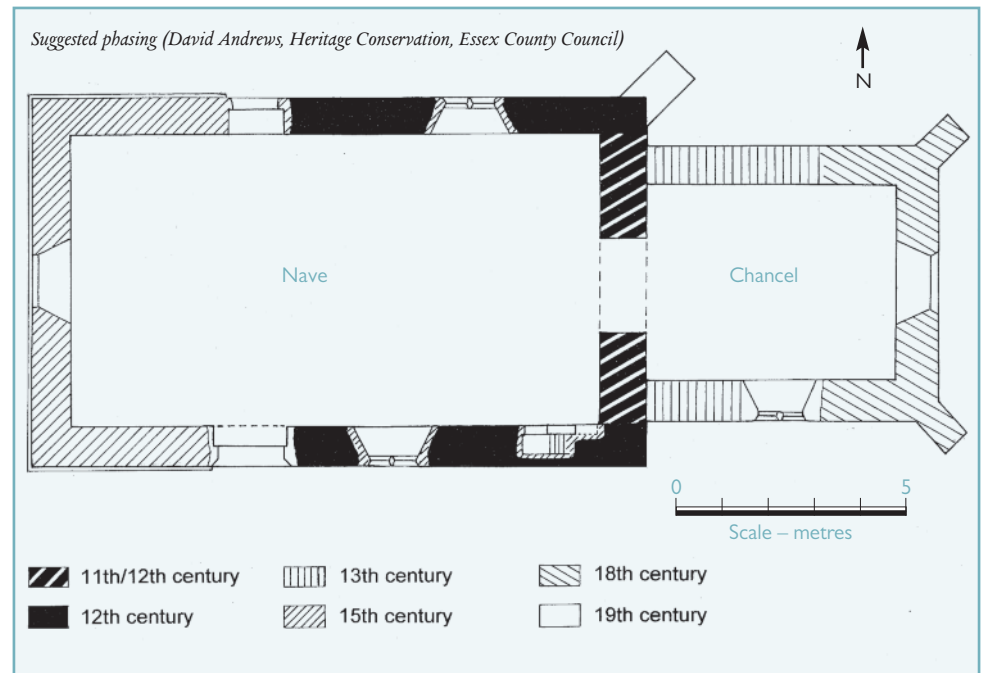
Entry is by means of new **south doors**, but woodwork from the former doors of 1836 has been preserved on their internal sides. The interior is bright and homely and light floods in through the clear **glass** of the windows. The vandalised and destroyed Victorian windows were replaced in 2004 by clear glass with blue borders. The east window contained 19th-century stained glass, showing the figure of Christ, standing in a field of flowers and with his hand raised in blessing – reglazed and reset in 1964 by AA Burcombe, a Vange glassmaker. All that remains of this are the rays of the Holy Spirit at the very top. Some fragments of the smashed glass were incorporated into a wooden cross which now adorns the parish church of St Chad. Also destroyed were the late-19th-century figures of SS Peter and Cecilia in the north window of the nave.

The plaster has been removed from the **walls** of the broad nave (c.40 ft (12.2m) long and 22ft 10in (7m) wide) and a careful look at the masonry reveals much patching up with 16th-century and later brick, especially to the east of the entrance and to the north of the chancel arch.

The Norman **chancel arch** is an interesting feature of the interior. Small, low, humble, round-headed and probably 900 years old, although much repaired, it penetrates a wall which is 3ft 9in (1.1m) thick. The upper section of the wall above it has clearly been rebuilt, maybe during the late 1300s or early 1400s, leaving the join between the two parts rather

crudely obvious. This would have been hidden by the former rood loft that jutted out into the nave along the east wall at this level, above the screen which divided the nave from the chancel.

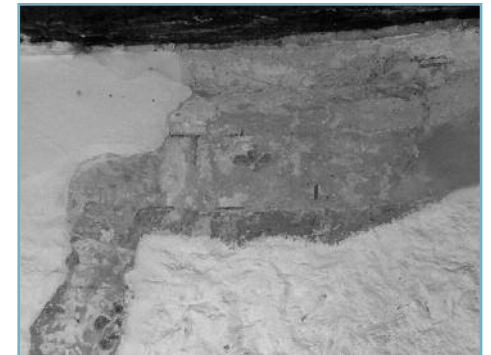
It was possible to walk along the loft and access to it was by means of the **rood-loft staircase**

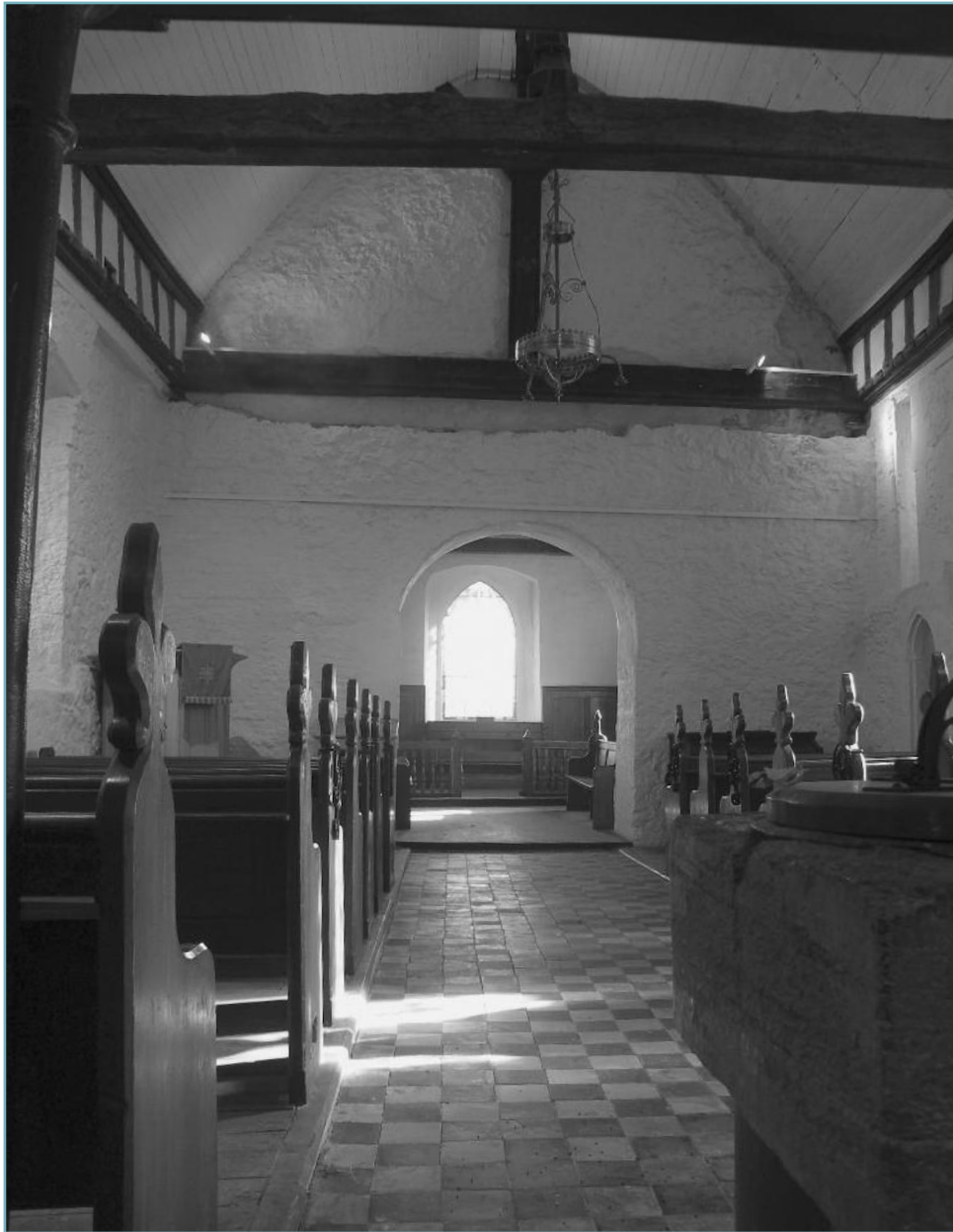


which remains in the thickness of the south wall nearby. In the space above the loft was the great Rood, showing Christ crucified and flanked by his mother and St John, and as a background to this the east wall appears to have had a painting of the Doom, or Last Judgement. A tiny fragment of the base of this **wall painting** has survived and may be seen just above the eastern tie beam, slightly to the north of the chancel arch. It shows a soul rising from the grave on Judgement Day. Flanking the chancel arch would have been side altars. In the masonry beside the staircase arch is a hint of what may be a small blocked arch for a piscina drain into which was poured the disposable water from Eucharists celebrated at the nearby altar.

The screen, loft, rood and Doom painting were probably all destroyed in the 1540s; just the staircase and tiny piece of painting survive as a reminder of them. Immediately above the chancel arch is a 19th-century iron tie rod linking the north and south walls. It can be seen externally where it is secured each side.

Considerably restored 14th-century timbers support the **nave roof**, including parts of the embattled cornices at the tops of the walls and the vertical beams in the walls above them. Three great tie beams – the central one being medieval – straddle the nave, from which crown posts rise to support the roof structure above, now hidden by a boarded ceiling of the 1970s, covering a 19th-century ceiling with broader boards, part of which has been exposed on the south side.





From the central tie beam hangs a fine brass **corona**, given in 1897 by John Bull, a local farmer and landowner, in memory of his wife Charlotte who died in 1895. She is commemorated on a metal plaque on the west wall at gallery level.

Towards the west end and near the entrance, symbolising entry into the family of the Church by Holy Baptism, stands the 12th-century **font**. Its square bowl of Purbeck marble, which has a crudely incised zigzag pattern on its eastern face,



Far left: Interior looking east (Neil Rushton)

Left: The brass corona of 1897 (Neil Rushton)

Below: The 17th-century pulpit (Neil Rushton)

rests upon a circular central pillar and four smaller (renewed) shafts. The four corners of the bowl have worn trefoil decorations and in the north-east and south-west corners are traces of the locking device which once secured a lid or cover to the font to prevent the baptismal water from being stolen. A Latin inscription on the base step records that the font was restored in 1884 in memory of Frances Eyre Wright – wife or daughter of the rector, the Revd H Edward Wright – who died in 1881. The present oak lid has attractive wrought-iron work supporting a wooden cross.

The western **gallery** dates from 1836 and has a simple panelled front supported upon two cast iron pillars. The original staircase balustrade remains, as do a few of the original narrow seats. Its floor is tiered at three levels to give the occupants a better view of what was taking place in the church. Fixed to the gallery front was a set of royal arms painted on wood and dated 1689, with the initials 'WR' for King William III. However, the arms do not show William's shield of Nassau, which indicates that they were probably updated from an existing Stuart arms of Charles II. They are now on display at the Diocesan Office in Chelmsford.

The **bell** in the turret above was made by Lester & Pack of Whitechapel in 1761. It has a diameter of 22 in (56 cm), weighs about 2½ cwt (127kg) and bears the name of Henry Roach, who was churchwarden at the time.

The nave is seated with pine **benches** of 1896, with simple fleurs-de-lys terminations to their ends. The **pulpit** dates from the late 17th century and was originally part of a three-decker arrangement. Nearby is what looks like an old-fashioned schoolmaster's **desk** which has been brought here from elsewhere.



MEMORIALS

The orientation of the **chancel** is out of line with the nave and **'weeps'** (or deflects) very slightly to the north. It has almost certainly been shortened and measures only 17½ ft (5.3m) in length and 14½ ft (4.4m) in width. This would explain the absence of a priest's door, sedilia and piscina. Evidence of a former 13th-century window on the north side was discovered behind the central wall tablet when it became detached from the wall.

The chancel **roof** is a simple single-framed and braced construction which contains ancient timbers. Until 2004 it was hidden by a plaster ceiling and its timbers show the marks of the former nails and laths. The two tie beams are 19th century. Although the panelling which lines the sanctuary walls dates only from 1954, the renewed **communion rails** incorporate 17th-century woodwork from the originals, which were placed here in the late 1600s.

On the wall to the west of the south chancel window are traces of 13th-century **wall painting** showing a masonry pattern, imitating stonework, with little flower designs. This is on one of the small areas where the plaster remains. One wonders what would have been discovered here had most of the internal plaster not been removed in 1904.

In addition to the memorials already mentioned, the following may be seen on the walls of the church, the first three on the north chancel wall, the fourth on the south nave wall and the fifth on the north nave wall.

1. A fine wall plaque in black and figured marbles, with a cartouche of arms above, commemorates the Revd **George Maule** who was rector here for 28 years until his death in 1667.



2. The Revd **David James**, 'near 20 years Curate of this Parish' (d.1806) and Elizabeth, his eight-month-old daughter, who died in 1804, are commemorated on a rectangular marble plaque.

3. A handsome plaque in black and figured marbles commemorates **Mary Maule** (née Champneis of Wrotham and wife of the Revd George Maule), who died in 1659. Also commemorated is Charles, their only child, who died shortly before his fourth birthday. Beneath the inscription is a cherub and above, in a swan-necked pediment, is her coat of arms. The epitaph, composed by her husband, reads as follows:

*'Reader; putt of thy shooes, thou tread'st on Holy earth,
Where lyes the rarest Phoenix, and Her Onely Birth;
Whom Shee survived; O strange, unheard of wonder.
But (Alas) now dead, those pavements buried under:
Lament Her loss, the world grows worse; of her rare brood
There is none left to breed the like; She was so good:
Blest Saint! once myne AEquall; O might I now adore thee!
Thy bliss, my loss, that thou to rest art gon before mee:
O let thy Cinders warme that Bed of dust for mee,
(Thy mournfull Husband) till I come to ly by Thee.'*



4. Small plaque (unveiled in November 1935) to **Elijah Barham Johnson** (d.1924) and **Ellen** his wife (d.1933), who were 'lifelong members of this congregation'.

5. Brass **war memorial** plaque, mounted on wood, bearing the names of 21 Vange parishioners who lost their lives in the First World War (1914–1918).

THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

The Churches Conservation Trust is the leading charity that cares for and preserves English churches of historic, architectural or archaeological importance that are no longer needed for regular worship. It promotes public enjoyment of them and their use as an educational and community resource.

Whatever the condition of the church when the Trust takes it over its aims are, first and foremost, to put the building and its contents into a sound and secure condition as speedily as possible. Then the church is repaired so that it is welcoming to visitors and those who attend the public events or occasional services that may be held there (Trust churches are still consecrated). Our objective is to keep it intact for the benefit of present and future generations, for local people and visitors alike to behold and enjoy.

There are some 340 churches scattered widely through the length and breadth of England, in town and country, ranging from charmingly simple buildings in lovely settings to others of great richness and splendour; some are hard to find, all are worth the effort.

Many of the churches are open all year round, others have keyholders nearby; all are free. A notice regarding opening arrangements or keyholders will normally be found near the door. Otherwise, such information can be obtained direct from the Trust during office hours or from the website www.visitchurches.org.uk.

Visitors are most welcome and we hope this guidebook will encourage you to explore these wonderful buildings.

NEARBY IS THE TRUST CHURCH OF
All Saints, East Horndon
4 miles S of Brentwood, near junction
of A127 and A128

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author acknowledges an earlier pamphlet on the church by Mrs J K Payne and the research of the church's architect, Alan Greening. He is grateful to Chloe Cockerill and George Pipe for their advice, to Ben and Mary Dormer for their kindness and help, and also to Lambeth Palace Library and the Essex County Record Office for the use of material in their care.

Right: View north-eastwards through the Norman chancel arch (Neil Rushton)
Back cover: The 12th-century font (Neil Rushton)

