

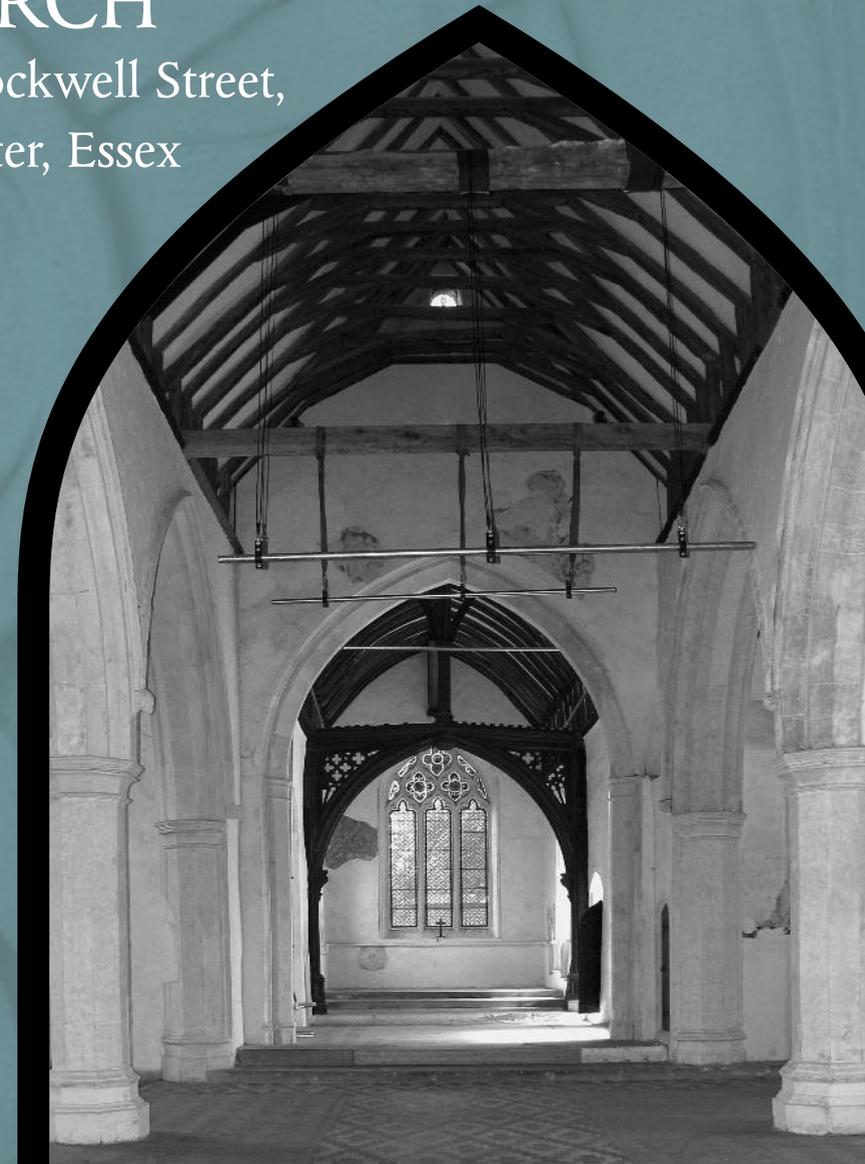


THE CHURCHES  
CONSERVATION TRUST



# ST MARTIN'S CHURCH

West Stockwell Street,  
Colchester, Essex



THE CHURCHES  
CONSERVATION TRUST

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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*West Stockwell Street, Colchester, Essex*

# ST MARTIN'S CHURCH

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

## INTRODUCTION

St Martin's is one of seven existing mediaeval parish churches in central Colchester. St Leonard-at-the-Hythe, about a mile (1.6 km) to the east and also in the care of The Churches Conservation Trust, brings the total to eight. Each of these churches served the defined area of the town which constituted its own parish. In the 19th and early 20th centuries the population moved out of the town centre to the newly-built suburbs, where new parishes were created and new churches built to serve them. By the mid-20th century the Church authorities gave serious thought to the problem of Colchester's very 'over-churched' town centre and devised a scheme which would enable several of the church buildings to retire as parish churches and have new leases of life through alternative uses. Subsequently two became museums, one a masonic hall, another a concert hall and St Martin's was used by a theatre group, who transformed its interior.

*Front cover: The interior today looking east, after conservation and redecoration (Dr J Salmon)*

*Left: The restored 14th-century priest's doorway (Dr J Salmon)*



## HISTORY

Thus these precious buildings were preserved, their exteriors still gracing the Colchester townscape and inspiring people with their beauty and antiquity. Only one church – the mighty Victorian St Nicholas' in the High Street – was demolished. St Leonard-at-the-Hythe was vested in The Churches Conservation Trust in 1987, complete with all its beautiful fittings, and is well worth a visit. St Martin's was vested in 1996, nearly half a century after its closure and after many years of theatrical use.



As in the case with most ancient churches, the building we see today has gradually evolved over the centuries as people from different periods and Christian traditions have altered it and left their mark upon it. From what can be deduced from the building itself and from the little documentary evidence available, the main landmarks in the long history of the church are as follows:

**c. 1000–1200** – It has been suggested that there has been a place of worship on this spot for at least 1000 years and maybe for considerably longer. The core of the west walls of the nave and north aisle may date from the early 1100s, and in the west wall of the aisle is a broken vertical line of tiles marking the angle of the original narrow Norman aisle. It is thought that the tower dates from the late 1100s, although its west doorway is 300 years later. In its masonry are many reused Roman bricks, salvaged from the remains of buildings which were part of the Roman *Camulodunum* – Britain's oldest recorded town. The bricks may originally have been made in the 200s AD or even earlier.

**c. 1320–1345** – The present chancel was built, maybe replacing a shorter Norman one, and possibly also the present transepts were formed, although it could be that the Norman church was cruciform. A chapel or sacristy, now long since disappeared, was built to the north of the chancel.

**c. 1375–1500** – The north and south aisles and their arcades took their present shape. They were considerably wider than the old Norman

north aisle but not as wide as the transepts. The tower received its west doorway and the chancel arch was remodelled, probably to coincide with the erection of the rood screen and loft, the rood-loft staircase (which is still in place) and the Doom painting above. During the late 1400s the church received its beautiful octagonal font, now in use at Rowhedge church.

**c. 1660–1851** – There seems to have been a decline in church life at St Martin's and certainly the building suffered considerably during this period. It is recorded that in 1607 the windows in the chancel were in need of repair, and also the tower was too weak and damaged to hold its three bells, so two of them, which were cracked, were sold. Part of the tower had collapsed by 1633 and more was damaged in the Siege of Colchester in 1648. Although a new bell had been made by Myles Graye of Colchester in 1642, it was not until over a century later, in 1768, that the upper part of what remained of the tower was repaired and covered over with a sloping roof. In 1748 Philip Morant wrote that 'there is at present no divine service performed in the church, neither hath any clergyman been of late instituted thereto'. Evidently parishioners of St Martin's and St Runwald's churches used St Peter's church. The Revd Yorick Smythies, who is commemorated in the church, was rector here from 1770–1824 and also rector of Little Bentley for 29 years. In 1810, the Holy Communion was celebrated quarterly for about 20 communicants.

In 1840 the church was reseated and its interior painted and coloured. It appears that the pews, all of which had doors, formed one block in the centre of the nave, so there was no central aisle. The preacher at the reopening in July was the Revd Alexander Murray, curate of Clapham and formerly curate at St Peter's. The rector from 1836–48 was the Revd William Murray, who left to take charge of the parish of Salcombe, Devon, where he remained until 1861. When the religious census was held in 1851, there were



congregations of 167 at the morning service and 250 in the evening.

**1876–1883** – Whilst he was supervising the rebuilding of St Nicholas' church in the High Street – a grand Gothic revival building demolished in 1956 – the eminent architect Sir George Gilbert Scott visited St Martin's and was so fascinated with it that not only did he bring the Royal Archaeological Institute to see it but also paid for the chancel ceiling to be removed, revealing the ancient roof timbers.

The church was closed for much of 1882 and the first part of 1883, whilst it underwent restoration to the designs of EJ Dampier of Trinity Chambers, Colchester. The roofs of the nave and aisles were stripped of their plaster ceilings and repaired, the transverse arch of the north chapel was rebuilt, the seats were cleaned and varnished and the walls recoloured. The external walls were repaired, the south-west buttress carefully restored and a new matching north-west buttress made to replace one which had been removed many years before. The windows were restored and reglazed and a new west window was created, using old materials, in the north aisle. It was noted that fragmentary remains of a painting of the Last Judgement were discovered above the chancel arch. The work was carried out by Messrs Gardner & Son of Coggeshall, who subcontracted to the Colchester firms of LJ Watts for the masonry and W Rogers for the glazing. The Bishop of

St Albans, who had paid for the new priest's door, preached at the reopening service on 7 June 1883, which was also attended by his suffragan, the Bishop of Colchester. The collection at the service realised £52 2s. 3d – a considerable amount in those days.

**1887–1891** – Despite this restoration, a description of the interior in October 1887 makes rather sad reading. Daylight was visible through the chancel roof and the vestry was unusable; its roof had been punctured by a large hole and its decaying walls were propped up by wooden poles. The only entrances to the church were via the priest's door and the west door of the tower, the porch having been blocked up and used as a lumber-room.

The benches stood upon a wooden platform, with bare earth beneath. The aisles were paved with 'the commonest bricks and tiles', and the tiling of the chancel floor was 'not fit for a scullery – all chipped, cracked and broken, and very common'. The piping for the gas burners ran through the squint and around the walls and pillars, 'in appearance like rivers on a map'. The squint also provided a channel for a very large pipe which supplied the preacher with cold air from outside whilst he occupied the pulpit, which stood at least three feet (0.9m) west of the chancel arch, with the lectern and clergy-desk nearby.

The font, which was covered with several coats of paint and whitewash, had become a receptacle



for all kinds of rubbish, including much dirty paper. A gallery once used by the choir stood at the west end. The choir had moved to stalls in the chancel and on Sunday 23 October 1887 comprised four girls, four men and two boys, who sat on one side, whilst on the other side just one old lady occupied the whole bench!

The chancel floor was at a lower level than that of the nave. The altar rails, of deal, had a gate on the north side, which was in several pieces and almost impossible to open. In the sanctuary was a wooden platform, covered with red and green baize, upon which stood the small and almost square deal communion table, covered with a faded and moth-eaten red cloth and adorned only with book-rests at its north and south ends.

To add to the atmosphere, it was recorded that 'on a damp evening a mist filled the church, arising from the ground'. Such was the state of the church when the Revd Henry Percy Williams arrived as curate-in-charge (1887–90) and then rector (1890–1900). Trained at Ely Theological College, he served curacies at Sellack with Kings Caple (Herefordshire) and St Mary at the Walls

(Colchester) and was in the tradition of the Catholic Movement in the Church of England, with its emphasis on the sacraments, dignified worship and beautifully adorned churches which were holy places and must be worthy venues for Christian worship. He was determined to make St Martin's a beautiful and prayerful place and, with a committee of parishioners and others, invited the Revd Ernest Geldart (1848–1929), the Anglo-Catholic priest and architect, to draw up plans for its restoration.

Ernest Geldart was then rector of Little Braxted, near Witham. During his time there he transformed his tiny church, covering its walls with murals and equipping it with beautiful furnishings. He wrote a book entitled *The Art of Garnishing Churches* and was responsible for 'garnishing' and restoring several English churches. He designed the rebuilt church at Rawreth, near Rayleigh, and his most spectacular piece of church adornment is the sumptuous reredos at St Cuthbert's Philbeach Gardens, Earls Court. Much of his work was done for Anglo-Catholic parishes. His diary records his first visit to St Martin's on 11 November 1890 – 'Took 12.30 train to Colchester found S. Martin's



The interior c.1932, from an old postcard

“vicarage” I suppose I ought to call it being a substitute for the non-existent rectory. Had lunch with Williams the rector & then went over to the Church & measured up the chancel’. Work began in May 1891 and the church was closed until the reopening in October, services taking place in a large room attached to St Martin’s House, which was converted into a mission room.

On the site of the former north chapel, a heating chamber was excavated and foundations laid for a new vestry which would also serve as an organ chamber to be built at a later date. What was intended as a temporary vestry was built on the site and this still stands. The west gallery was taken down, opening up the tower arch, all the seating was removed and the interior was refloored with wood blocks and Devonshire tiles. The decaying stonework in the capitals and bases of the arcade piers was repaired and replaced where necessary and a new stone base was made for the pulpit. The chancel roof was retiled and in its north wall was placed the stone ‘window’ to the vestry. The mediaeval Purbeck marble altar slab, which had been abolished at the Reformation and quietly buried, was discovered and was placed

again in its rightful position on the high altar. (Stone altars were then still illegal in the Church of England and those who dared to install them were considered to be very ‘extreme’.) This altar is now in the church of St James, East Hill. A low screen dado was erected beneath the chancel arch, a litany desk was made from woodwork which formed the old sounding board above the pulpit, an oak eagle lectern was given and Mrs Laing (widow of the Revd William Laing, rector from 1852–89) gave an altar cross. The nave and aisles were seated with chairs and a side chapel was made in the south transept. What did cause a little controversy locally was Ernest Geldart’s colour scheme for the interior; the walls were distempered in various colours, including red, green, orange, mauve and yellow, with stencilled designs covering the east wall.

The contractor was Mr Frederick Dupont and the work cost about £850, although not all that Geldart planned was carried out. There were to have been a complete rood screen with iron gates, clergy and choir vestries, and a carved reredos behind the high altar, standing free of the east wall, with a 2ft (0.6m) passage behind it.

Those who attended the reopening services which took place on Thursday 8 October would

have seen quite a transformation. The preacher at 3 pm was the Bishop of Colchester and the Revd Ythil Barrington, the Anglo-Catholic vicar of the civic church of St Mary le Tower, Ipswich, preached at the 7 pm service. The celebrations continued on the following Sunday, when the Revd CL Acland (Headmaster of Colchester Royal Grammar School, who in 1892 became vicar of All Saints’ Cambridge – a church now also in the care of The Churches Conservation Trust) preached in the morning and Canon Newbolt (Chancellor of St Paul’s cathedral) in the evening. At Evensong on 25 October the preacher was the Revd Ernest Geldart, architect of the restoration work.

#### CLERGY AND CHURCH LIFE FROM 1891 ONWARDS.

The Revd **Henry Williams** developed a moderate ‘Prayer Book Catholic’ tradition at St Martin’s, with celebrations of the Holy Communion every Sunday and on saints’ days, choral celebrations at festivals and, from 1897 onwards, on the first Sunday of each month. People complained at the vestry meeting in 1899 of an ‘increase in ritual over the past year’, but the worship was never ‘extreme’ and, for a small downtown parish, congregations were good, with Easter and Christmas communicants usually in the 70s and 80s. In April 1900, Mr Williams left to be Vicar of Rampton, Nottinghamshire, and was succeeded by the Revd **John IB Cockin**, who stayed only 11 months. He had spent the previous 20 years

ministering in India, where he returned in 1902 to become Archdeacon of Lucknow. (He later became rector of Barnwell, Northamptonshire and then of Milton Lilbourne, Wiltshire.)

The Revd **Oscar D Watkins** (rector 1902–07) had been curate at the Anglo-Catholic stronghold of St Michael and All Angels Croydon before beginning his 26-year ministry in India. He ended up as Archdeacon of Lucknow and exchanged positions with Mr Cockin. In the service registers he always used the term ‘Holy Eucharist’. The church was closed for repairs in 1902 and 1904 – the latter probably for renovating the tower, to Ernest Geldart’s designs. In 1900 there was a debt of £325 still owing on the 1891 restoration and in 1906 Dr W Mabury (churchwarden) undertook to take personal responsibility to clear the £118 6s. 10d which was still owing. The musical tradition was clearly developing at St Martin’s and in 1904 there were 14 choirboys. Mr Watkins left to become vicar of St Cross, Holywell, Oxford in 1907.

The two years’ at St Martin’s (1907–09) of the Revd **William Davis** was his only period as a parish incumbent. He had served eight curacies (including periods at Mistley, Arundel and twice at Great Amwell, Hertfordshire) and two French chaplaincies. (He left for a year’s ministry at Aix-la-Chapelle before retiring to Hythe, Kent.) During his time here several requiems were recorded in the register and also a Festal Evensong and Solemn *Te Deum* at Harvest.

The Revd **Arthur Chamberlain Green** (1910–13) died in office. He had been curate at St Columba's Leytonstone and curate-in-charge of Aldersbrook, Wanstead. In 1913 a new organ by Messrs Hill & Son was provided for the church. This is now in use at the church of St Barnabas, Old Heath, Colchester. (It has two manuals and pedals, with 8 speaking stops and four couplers.)

The tradition of short-staying clergy at St Martin's was broken with the arrival of the Revd **Henry Frederick de Courcy-Benwell**, a keen member of the local Labour and Independent Labour parties and a keen pastor and visitor, who remained here from 1913 until his death in 1932. He had served several curacies and came here having been missionary at St Barnabas Mission Victoria Docks for 12 years. He was to be the last incumbent of St Martin's as a single



benefice. Discussions took place in 1928 about uniting the parish with that of Holy Trinity and this became a reality in 1932.

The Revd **Espine Robert Monck-Mason** had been vicar of St John's Southend and curate-in-charge of Thorpe le Soken before his arrival at Holy Trinity in 1910. Some 22 years later he also took St Martin's under his wing and was rector of the joint benefice until his retirement in 1939. During much of this time, St Martin's was in the care of Captain GG Malvern, a Church Army Evangelist. He and his wife worked hard in the parish and were very popular. At Christmas 1937 there were 68 communicants and the parish magazine recorded that 'the church looked very beautiful: the white flowers, the holly, the glorious altar frontal and hangings combined with the red cassocks of the servers and the beautiful vestments worn by the celebrant'.

He was succeeded by the Revd **George William Boothroyd**, an Evangelical, who had been curate at St Peter's Clifton and St James' Hatcham, curate-in-charge of St Matthew's Worthing, Vicar of St James' Cheltenham and rector of Wivenhoe. In 1947 discussions were taking place about parochial reorganisation in over-churches central Colchester, and the Bishop of Colchester addressed the joint parochial church councils about the possibility of both churches ceasing to be parish churches. It was thought that Holy Trinity might be used for private prayer and special services, whilst St Martin's might become a cultural centre for



church work, with its chancel furnished as a chapel. The following years saw a gradual decline in church life at St Martin's. Sunday Evensong was discontinued and the Holy Communion was celebrated every other week. The final meeting of the Parochial Church Council was held in May 1953, after which the church closed and its furnishings were dispersed.

In 1957 the building was transferred to the Colchester theatre group for use as a cultural centre. The interior was painted black and a stage was erected at the west end. In 1987 however the church had deteriorated to such an extent that it was declared unsafe for public performances. Its future was finally secured in October 1996, when it was vested in The Churches Conservation Trust, to be conserved and cared for with Government and Church Commissioners' money as an historic and holy place and an important part of Colchester's rich heritage. Prior to vesting English Heritage gave a generous grant of £135,000 to enable emergency work to be carried out.

Since vesting, major repairs have been carried out under the direction of Mr Henry Freeland of Cambridge. These include complete repair and retiling of the roofs, repointing and consolidating the walls, unblocking the windows and the repair and conservation of their stonework and glazing, and also the provision of new drainage. Internally the chancel ceiling and the wooden arch have been repaired and new lime plaster ceilings to the nave, aisles and transepts have been provided. Support from The Heritage Lottery Fund enabled the cleaning and conserving of the internal stonework, monuments and the Victorian stencilling, as well as repairing and limewashing the interior. Simple facilities for community use and wheelchair access were also provided. This work was completed in 2003 and received a Colchester Civic Trust Award.

*Below: Elegant reticulated tracery (c.1330) in the east window  
(Dr J Salmon)*

*Right: The exterior from the south-west (Dr J Salmon)*

## EXTERIOR

St Martin's stands on the east side of West Stockwell Street, which Nikolaus Pevsner describes as 'perhaps the most attractive street in Colchester'. It runs dramatically downhill from the stately 162ft (49.4m) Victoria Tower of John Belcher's Town Hall, past Brightwen Binyon's neo-Jacobean former library and St Runwald's (detached) churchyard, into the largely unspoilt Dutch Quarter, with its quaint old houses. It provides a quiet contrast with the busy High Street at the top, where, in the middle of the road, stood the curious little church of St Runwald, which was demolished in 1878.

The tree-shaded **churchyard**, with its fine chestnuts, is now maintained by the Borough Council, and is an oasis of green tranquillity, with the small Victorian schoolroom to the east. There are several interesting memorials, including an 18th-century headstone (opposite the porch) to James Robjen and the huge tomb near the south transept to Alderman William Sparling (a solicitor and twice mayor of Colchester), who died in 1816, his wife Mary, who died in 1841 and four of their children. This takes the form of a great sarcophagus, on four legs with scrolls, which has pillars with flames at its four corners. An early 19th-century tomb, dramatically raised on a brick plinth to the west of the tower, announces 'Gloria Dei' (Glory to God) to the passers by.

The church building itself presents a variety of mellow colours in its **building materials**,

including blocks of limestone, cobblestones, chunks of brown septaria, flints, and an abundance of warm-coloured Roman bricks and tiles which the mediaeval builders reused in the masonry. The character of the building is enhanced by its tiled rooflines, the nave, chancel, aisles and transepts all having their own gabled roofs.

The massive stump of the truncated **tower** still dominates the western end. How grand this tower must have looked when it was complete with its belfry stage and parapet. Already dilapidated by 1633, these were destroyed by General Fairfax's cannon during the Siege of Colchester in 1648. The structure incorporates many Roman bricks and its south-west corner is strengthened by angle buttresses. The sturdy staircase turret in the north-west corner has pilaster buttresses and still contains the spiral staircase (lit by small quatrefoil windows) which



led to the upper chambers. Presumably the 'half arches' near the base of the north and south walls are a device to add strength to the construction of the tower. They may well be of 12th-century date. The large 15th-century west doorway has quatrefoil (four-lobed) designs in the spandrels flanking its arch, beneath a square hood mould. High up on the north side is an 18th-century round-headed window to let out the sound of the bell, which was hung at this level after the bell chamber had been destroyed. The Victorians added the small two-light south window to give more light.

The **aisles** have two-light 14th-century west windows and three-light 15th-century windows in their north and south walls. The south-west buttress has a delightful crocketed and pinnacled niche, with a little vaulted ceiling – all original 15th-century work. The north-west buttress and its niche date from 1883, as does the west window, which was constructed of 14th-century materials. The upper part of the west wall of the north aisle is timber-framed and in the masonry beneath can be seen the width of the narrow original aisle, marked by Roman

bricks to the left of the window. The north doorway has a door of considerable age, beneath a continuously-moulded arch (possibly c.1400). The Victorians replaced its hood mould; its square stone corbels are still waiting to be carved. The south doorway is sheltered by a picturesque **south porch**, which has square timber-framed openings, each fitted with four 17th-century-style wooden balusters.

Eastwards of the aisles are the **transepts**, which are lit by three-light 15th-century north and south windows. There are Roman bricks in the south-east quoin (corner) of the **nave**. The **chancel** has a large three-light 15th-century south-west window and further east are 14th-century two-light north and south windows. The three-light east window has net-like 'reticulated' tracery of c.1330. Of similar date (but well restored in 1883) is the priest's doorway on the south side, with its 'ogee-shaped' arch embellished with crockets and flanked by pinnacles. Bishop Claughton of St Albans had the door restored in 1883 at his own expense. Above it is evidence of a blocked window.

## INTERIOR

The absence of furnishings allows appreciation of the fine proportions of the building, and also the design of the **windows**, with their 14th- and 15th-century tracery – some carefully restored in 1883. The aisles and transepts are separated from the nave by elegant three-bay **arcades**; the piers have moulded capitals and bases and the hood moulds framing the arches rest upon fascinating carved corbels, including three faces on the south and two intriguing creatures on the



north. The aisles open out beneath transverse arches into the transepts and beyond the chancel arch, which was remodelled in the 15th century, is the long chancel with its handsome east window of c. 1330. The chancel is indeed long: (32 ft/9.8m) in proportion to the nave (46 ft/14m). Often the ratio is about 2:1.

The roofs of the church retain much of their mediaeval timberwork. The nave, aisles and transepts have simple single-framed and braced roofs and three sturdy tie beams straddle the nave. The aisle roofs have simple arch-braces framing the arcades, with central wall posts resting upon plain wooden corbels – that in the north aisle was recently renewed. Spanning the chancel is a beautiful 15th-century timber arch, which is a noteworthy feature of the church. This noble piece of design and construction supports a vertical crown post which in turn supports the roof timbers. At the apex of the arch is a boss, carved in the form of a human face, surrounded by foliage. The spandrels each side have openwork carving and the wooden arch rests upon 17th-century scrolly corbels, fixed to the vertical timbers which rise from the floor. This arch stood at the division of the chancel and sanctuary and was once spanned by a horizontal beam, which was sawn off long ago. The eminent architect Sir George Gilbert Scott was so impressed with this that he caused the chancel ceiling to be removed and the arch restored at his own cost, revealing the superb 14th-century timbers of the chancel roof.

The spaces between the vertical beams in the upper parts of the walls were once filled with traceried woodwork, one section of which remains on the north side and, although now difficult to see, the apex of the roof is studded with carved bosses, carved with foliage and faces.

The nave **floor**, of cream, brown and black tiles from Devonshire, was part of Ernest Geldart's 1891 restoration. He also designed the two glazed **plaques** of encaustic tiles: the plaque in

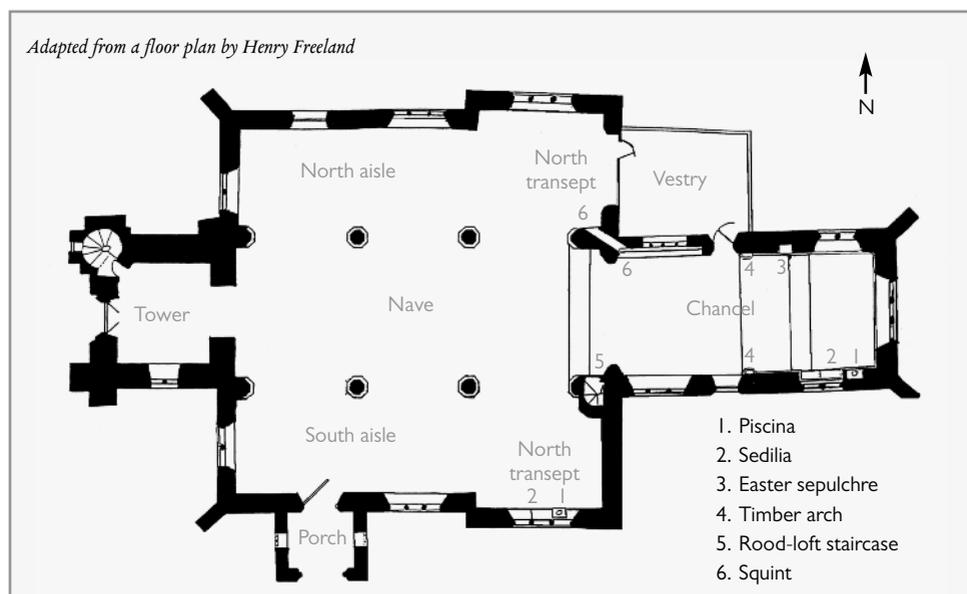
the north aisle was placed there by the Mayor and Corporation to record the destruction of the upper part of the tower, whilst the other in the south aisle, on the rood-loft staircase abutment, records the restoration of the church in 1891.

The **rood-loft staircase** is still in place; its lower entrance is to the south of the chancel arch. The upper entrance led onto the loft, or gallery, jutting out into the nave, above the rood



screen, which separated the nave and chancel. Its main use was so that people could tend the multitude of candles which burned in front of the great Rood, with the figures of the crucified Christ, his Mother and St John, which stood on the rood beam behind it and probably filled the upper part of the chancel arch. Originally a **Doom painting** (the Last Judgment) would have covered the entire wall above the chancel arch. It depicted the figure of Christ seated centrally in judgment over the Damned to his left and Saved to his right – a pictorial scheme much favoured in the mediaeval period.

The painting was probably whitewashed over around 1543, when it is recorded that St Martin's had begun selling its goods as part of the Reformation Order to take away 'all shrines, pictures, paintings, and all other monuments of feigned miracles, pilgrimages, idolatry and superstition'. The layers of limewash have greatly contributed to the preservation of these wall paintings although only fragments survive today. Evidence of the paintings was first revealed in the 1883 restoration; it was rediscovered by the conservator Donald Smith in 1991 and has been further investigated by



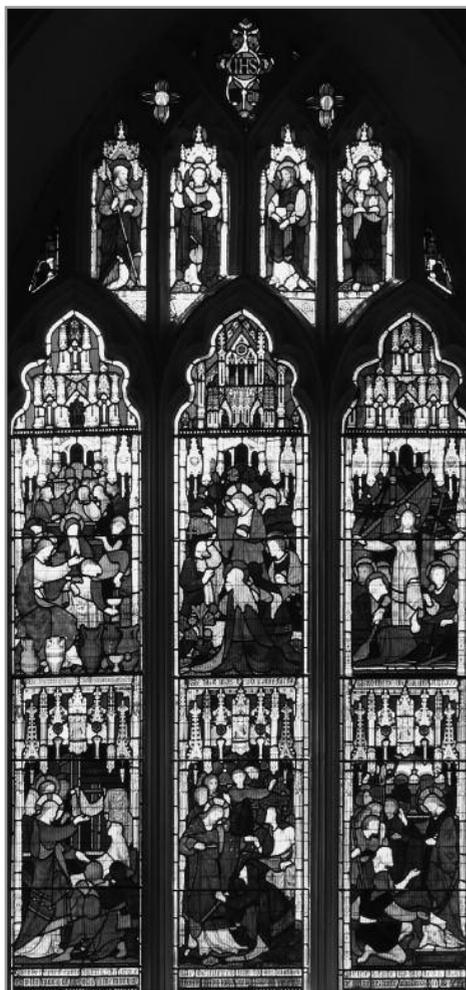
Tobit Curteis Associates in 1996 and by Messrs Paine & Stewart in 2000. The small area of the lower southern part which has been revealed shows remarkably well-defined figures of souls in hell, being tormented by rather gruesome-looking demons. Ernest Geldart, in 1891, devised a scheme for colouring the walls. The chancel had simple stencilled patterns in green, whilst the south aisle had red-ochre with a black dado beneath on the east wall, divided by a band of black and white **chevron pattern** forming a background to the side altar here. Traces of the pattern have survived on this wall.

It is known that there was an altar in the south transept in mediaeval times, because there is a simple, trefoil-headed **piscina** recess in its south wall, beneath which is a fine mediaeval carved head which was discovered loose in the vestry. Into the piscina drain was poured the disposable water used at the Eucharists celebrated at the altar here. In the wall nearby is a **sedilium** (seat) where the priests sat during parts of the service.

There would probably have been a corresponding chapel in the north transept and it may well be that there was another altar on this side some distance to the west because, through the great thickness of the wall to the north of the chancel arch, is a **squint** (also known as a hagioscope), giving a direct view from this position towards the high altar. It has been said that this enabled people in the north aisle to see into the chancel,



Stained glass of 1865 in the south transept window  
(Dr J Salmon)



but their view would have been very limited. However, a chantry priest saying Mass at a side altar would have been able to synchronise his actions with a priest saying a simultaneous Mass at the high altar.

On the north side of the **chancel** is an unusual **four-light opening**, created within a blind arch in the wall in 1891. Behind it was a rather makeshift vestry which now houses lavatories and a small kitchenette. It is known that there was once a mediaeval chapel here. The vestry doorway has a moulded 14th-century arch and in the woodwork of the **vestry door** are late-17th-century panels carved with garlands, incorporated into the 19th-century timbers. Maybe this was some of the carved woodwork the Revd William Murray acquired from the roof of a house at Headgate Corner around 1840, which was reused in the church.

Further east in the north wall is a large recess which may well have been the **Easter sepulchre**. Here the consecrated bread of the Blessed Sacrament was placed with great ceremony on Good Friday, where it remained until it was placed with triumph upon the altar on Easter Day, thus symbolising our Lord's burial in the tomb. Remains of a later wooden cupboard here indicate its use as an aumbry, possibly for the reservation of the Sacrament during the latter part of the church's active life.

The **sanctuary piscina** shows handsome craftsmanship of c. 1330. Its arch also has the

Right: Carving at the apex of the timber arch in the chancel  
(Dr J Salmon)



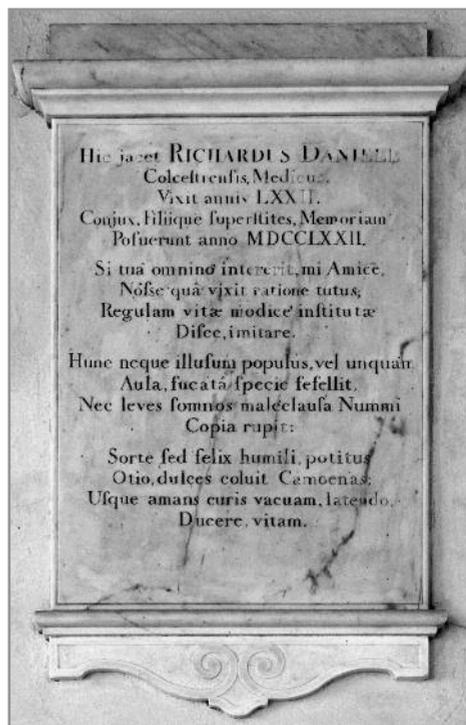
Below: 13th-century coffin-lid in the sanctuary floor  
(Dr J Salmon)

curved ogee shape of the period; it is embellished with small crockets and is flanked by pinnacles. The window sill nearby has been lowered to form a set of two stepped **sedilia**, where the celebrant and deacon sat during parts of the Mass. The present position of the piscina and sedilia would make their use today rather inconvenient, showing how much the sanctuary floor was heightened during the 19th-century restoration. In the sanctuary floor, on the north side, is a 13th-century **coffin-lid**, adorned with



a carved cross in relief. This once covered a stone coffin containing the body of a priest: it was found in the churchyard in the 1830s.

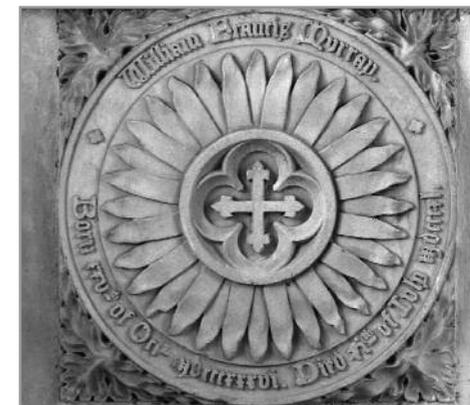
Nothing now remains of the mediaeval stained glass which would have provided a kaleidoscope of scenes and symbols to teach the Faith to the people, although the south transept window shows six of the miracles of Jesus in colourful **19th-century stained glass**. This window was given in 1865 in memory of John and Ann Moy, who died in 1865 and 1864 respectively, by their six surviving children. The top three scenes show the wedding at Cana, the raising of Lazarus and Jesus stepping out of a boat into (or onto) the water; beneath them are the healing of Jairus' daughter, the raising of the son of the widow of Nain and the healing of the paralysed man. In the small tracery lights are the four Gospel writers (St John carries the poisoned chalice which is his emblem). The window is by Robert Bayne, chief designer of the important stained glass firm of Heaton, Butler and Bayne whose work in the 1860s was particularly praised.



Left: Wall plaque to Richard Daniell in the north aisle (Dr J Salmon)

Right: Memorial to three-year-old William Francis Murray on the east wall (Dr J Salmon)

Below: Siege of Colchester plaque of glazed tiles, designed by Ernest Geldart in 1891 (Dr J Salmon)



#### MEMORIAL INSCRIPTIONS

On the walls of the church are several plaques and inscriptions, commemorating people of the past who were once part of this church and parish.

#### NAVE – WEST WALL

■ **Francis Pigott, MD**, (1787), his wife **Mary** (1793) and son **Francis** (1766). *Oval plaque, south of the tower arch.*

■ **William Cole**, a merchant (1759) and his daughter **Martha** (1758). *Matching oval plaque, north of the tower arch.*

■ Mrs **Ann Dennis** (1793), daughter of Francis Pigott (by George Lufkin). *Over the tower arch.*

#### NORTH AISLE

■ Plaque with Latin inscription to The Revd **Richard Daniell** (1772). *West wall.*

■ **John Round**, barrister (1813) and **Catherine** (1802), who was the daughter of Edward Green of Lawford Hall and widow of the Revd Richard Daniell. John bequeathed £100 to augment the value of what was a very poor living. *North wall.*

■ Plaque of encaustic tiles by Ernest Geldart, erected by the Corporation in 1892 to commemorate the **destruction of the upper part of the tower** by the cannon of General Fairfax in 1648 and ‘to draw attention to the metal bullets which were embedded in the font at the same perilous time’. A correspondent in a local newspaper in 1910 questioned whether the word ‘commemorate’ was the most

appropriate one for the destruction of a church tower. *North wall.*

■ Captain **Royston Barton** (1802), his wife **Thamar**, daughter of Samuel Wall (1806) and their daughter **Beatrix Chadwick** (1810). *North wall.*

#### SOUTH AISLE, SOUTH TRANSEPT AND CHANCEL

■ **Elizabeth Driffield** (1796). Her husband, Major Joseph Driffield, composed her epitaph, which is worth pausing to read – ‘Here sleeps Eliza. Midst severest cares my soul’s best comfort. Nuptial joys adieu .....’. *West wall.*

■ The Revd **Yorick Smythies** (1824). He was rector here for 54 years, also 59 years rector of Little Bentley. Also his wife **Ann**, daughter of the Revd Thomas Leigh of Greenwich (1814). *South wall.*

■ Captain **Royston Bowyer Burton** (killed in action in 1813). *South wall.*

■ Part of a plaque to **WF Murray** (1840). See below. *South wall.*

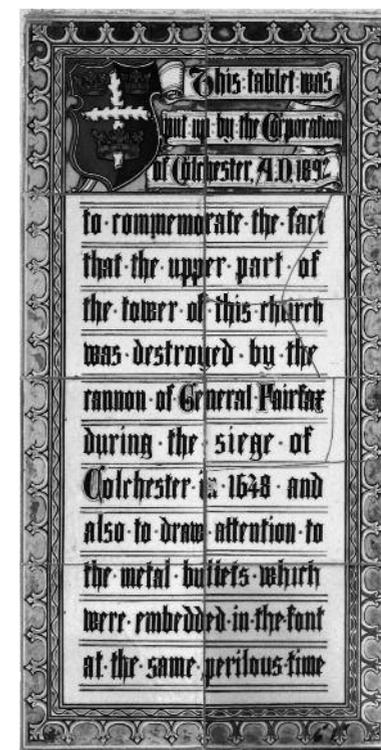
■ The **1914–18 war memorial**, commemorating 16 parishioners who lost their lives, including the organist, Henry Sanger and Frank H Mills, a chorister. *South wall.*

■ Scroll plaque, in memory of **Alice Mary Blyth** (died Christmas Day 1893), wife of John Blyth, churchwarden. *South transept.*

■ Plaque beneath the memorial window, commemorating the gift of it, in memory of **John Moy**, (1865) and **Ann** (1864) by their six surviving children. *South transept.*

■ Small glazed plaque by Ernest Geldart, recording the **restoration of the church** in 1891, when Henry Percy Williams was Rector and Dr William Mabury and John Blyth were churchwardens. *South transept, on rood-loft staircase abutment.*

■ A roundel, with a cross surrounded by rays set against foliage, in memory of **William Francis Murray** (1840), the three-year-old son of the Revd William Murray (rector), who had the recently discovered 13th-century coffin lid placed in the floor nearby over the grave of his child. *Chancel, east wall.*



# 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.

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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](http://www.visitchurches.org.uk).

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

**NEARBY ARE THE TRUST CHURCHES OF**  
Audley Chapel, St Michael, Berechurch  
1 mile S of Colchester between B1025 & B1026

St Leonard-at-the-Hythe, Colchester  
1 mile E of town centre on Hythe Hill

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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*Right: View looking north-eastwards, into the north transept and chancel (Dr J Salmon)*  
*Back cover: Corbel figure supporting the arcade hood mould (Dr J Salmon)*

