

News & Annual Report 2024



Supporting Churches in Essex and East London



*Roof repairs and rainwater goods at
Upminster, St. Laurence. © James Bettley*

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*Emily Gee will give the
Gepp Lecture on
Wednesday, 22nd May.
See page 12.
Do bring a friend. The Lecture
is open to non-members.*

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Churches Trust 2023-24



Chairman's message



Martin Stuchfield

I expressed pleasure in my message last year at the increase in the level of grants awarded. I am delighted to report an even higher level of support for Essex churches to a combined total of £202,000 (2022: £178,500) has been awarded to twenty-eight different buildings.

The continuing support of the Trust is crucial since churches and chapels are important heritage assets that are at significant risk as never before. A staggering 3,500 churches have closed in the last decade. The future of our churches is uncertain with costs increasing exponentially (most notably insurance, parish share and utilities).

A report published in 2015 recorded that one quarter of the UK's 16,000 churches had a weekly attendance of fewer than sixteen. Attendance has continued to decline and with it volunteers to assist in the upkeep of the buildings. Worryingly, the amount of funding distributed to churches from the National Lottery Heritage Fund fell by almost two-thirds between 2017 and 2023. Draft proposals published by the Church of England in 2021 (branded a "Church Closures Charter") have prompted the Church Commissioners to slow the timetable for

legislation. Notwithstanding, churches are facing closure, which is devastating for communities with the role of our Trust never more crucial.

It is therefore highly appropriate that Emily Gee, the Director for Cathedral and Church Buildings for the Church of England, has very kindly consented to give the 2024 Gepp Lecture at Chelmsford Cathedral on Wednesday, 22nd May. Ms Gee's lecture is appropriately entitled *Sustaining the House of God: a strategy for our Cathedral and Church Buildings*. This is a keynote and highly topical lecture and I look forward to meeting our many friends and supporters on that occasion.

The year under review marked the passing of three stalwart members of the Trust. Canon Harry Marsh who served as Hon Treasurer from 2014-23; Ray Clements who, ably supported by his beloved wife Beryl, was treasurer of Ride+Stride from 1999; and Victoria (Tory) Toler who was a highly valued member of the Events Committee. All served with considerable distinction and will be sadly missed.

I wish to thank our dedicated Trustees and the members of the Events and Grants Committees who willingly devote huge amounts of time to further the interests of the Trust. Finally, I wish to express my appreciation to all our supporters whose support has never been more appreciated and needed.

Martin Stuchfield
Chairman – Friends of Essex Churches Trust

Events

We started the year with a wonderful and entertaining talk by Andrew Prince in March, which was well received. With kind donations nearly £2,000 was raised.

Our Open Garden event was held at Shrubs Farm, Lamarsh in June by kind invitation of Mr and Mrs Robert Erith. Everyone enjoyed their wonderful garden and parkland featuring an Oak Arboretum. Teas were served in their fabulous Essex barn. Robert kindly spoke to everyone describing how he had transformed the garden over many years. Everyone had a lovely afternoon and lingered to talk in spectacular surroundings, raising nearly £2,000.



Open Garden hosts Robert & Sara Erith are presented with a Shrubs Farm jug by the Committee.

The Essex Gift Fair in October at Hylands House, Chelmsford was a huge success. Over £10,500 was raised – a record for this event. Thanks to Natalie Rowe's brilliant organisation and all the Committee and friends who helped out. Our thanks go to Whirlledge & Nott who generously sponsored the event alongside other Essex companies. This year the Fair will take place on Tuesday, 15th October, with a change of venue, at Chelmsford City Racecourse. Please save the date in your diaries.

For 2024 we have organised the usual Spring Study Day that will take place on Wednesday, 8th May. The interior designer, Nicky Haslam, will be giving a talk at Layer Marney Tower on Thursday, 16th May by kind permission of Nicholas and Sheila Charrington, and our Open Garden event will be held at Little Bentley Hall on Tuesday, 4th June, by kind permission of Christopher and Virginia Palmer-Tomkinson. The Annual Ride+Stride is on Saturday, 14th September, and the Autumn Study Day on Saturday, 5th October. Please see details of all these events on the Trust's website and support us with as many of your friends as possible.

Thanks go to the whole Events Committee as without their support and hard work nothing would be possible: Emma Brice, Georgie Dwerryhouse, Rachel Grainger, Catherine Leeder, Lance Lepper, Lucy Nicholls, Lucy O'Connor, John Pickthorn, Natalie Rowe, Jess Southwell, Martin Stuchfield, Olly Surguy and Becky Willis. Caroline Edwards and Jessie McGowan have stepped down from the Committee and we wish them well for the future. We welcomed Verity Barclay and Catherine Sprott who joined us this year.

We were deeply saddened by the passing of Tory Toler in February. She had been a member of the Events Committee since 2009, acting as Secretary for many years, and was a loyal supporter of the Trust. She will be greatly missed by us all.

Clare Ford

Chairman – Events Committee

Email: events@friendsofessexchurches.org.uk

Grants

In 2023, for the first time since 2017, the amount we offered in grants exceeded £200,000: 18 grants totalling £126,500 for repairs, and 10 grants totalling £75,500 for improvements. The increase over 2022 is almost entirely accounted for by grants in improvements, up from £51,000 in 2022. It's perhaps rash to read too much into these figures, but it does seem to show that parishes are keeping up with the vital task of maintaining their buildings in good order, and are also feeling more confident, post-pandemic, about investing in improved facilities. Both repairs and improvements play an essential part in ensuring that our parish churches have a viable future not only as places of worship but also as resources for the whole community.

There is little doubt that in the coming years increasing demands will be placed on us as grant-makers, which is just as it should be: the main purpose of our existence is to raise money by various means and give it away as fast as we can in the form of grants. As an organisation with no paid staff and very low overheads we have no need to hold on to reserves in excess of what we have committed to pay out in grants.

But working on church buildings is more expensive than it has ever been, thanks in particular to recent rises in the cost of materials, and parishes are having look to a wide range of other bodies to help with funding projects. It's hard work, and with the exception of the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the amounts are relatively small; but they add up, and the effort is worth it.

To take just one example from 2023: Belchamp Walter, St Mary, has quite a backlog of repairs and improvements it wishes to make, but the parish are starting, quite properly, with fixing the roof. The estimated cost of the work was £16,334, not including VAT which they will be able to reclaim under the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme. They felt able to contribute £5,000 from their own resources and, knowing that there was other work ahead, we offered a grant of £8,000. Since then the shortfall has been filled by grants from the Benefact Trust, the Ian M. Foulerton Charitable Trust, and the Fowler Smith & Jones Trust.

We like to think that the fact that we had offered a grant encouraged the other organisations to do likewise. In most cases we visit all the applicant churches, and often on these occasions we are able to offer advice as to where to look for additional funding. We also use the visit as an opportunity to make sure that the parish really needs our money, and that they don't have funds available that they are holding back for a rainy day: if you need a grant to mend a leaking roof, the rainy day has arrived.

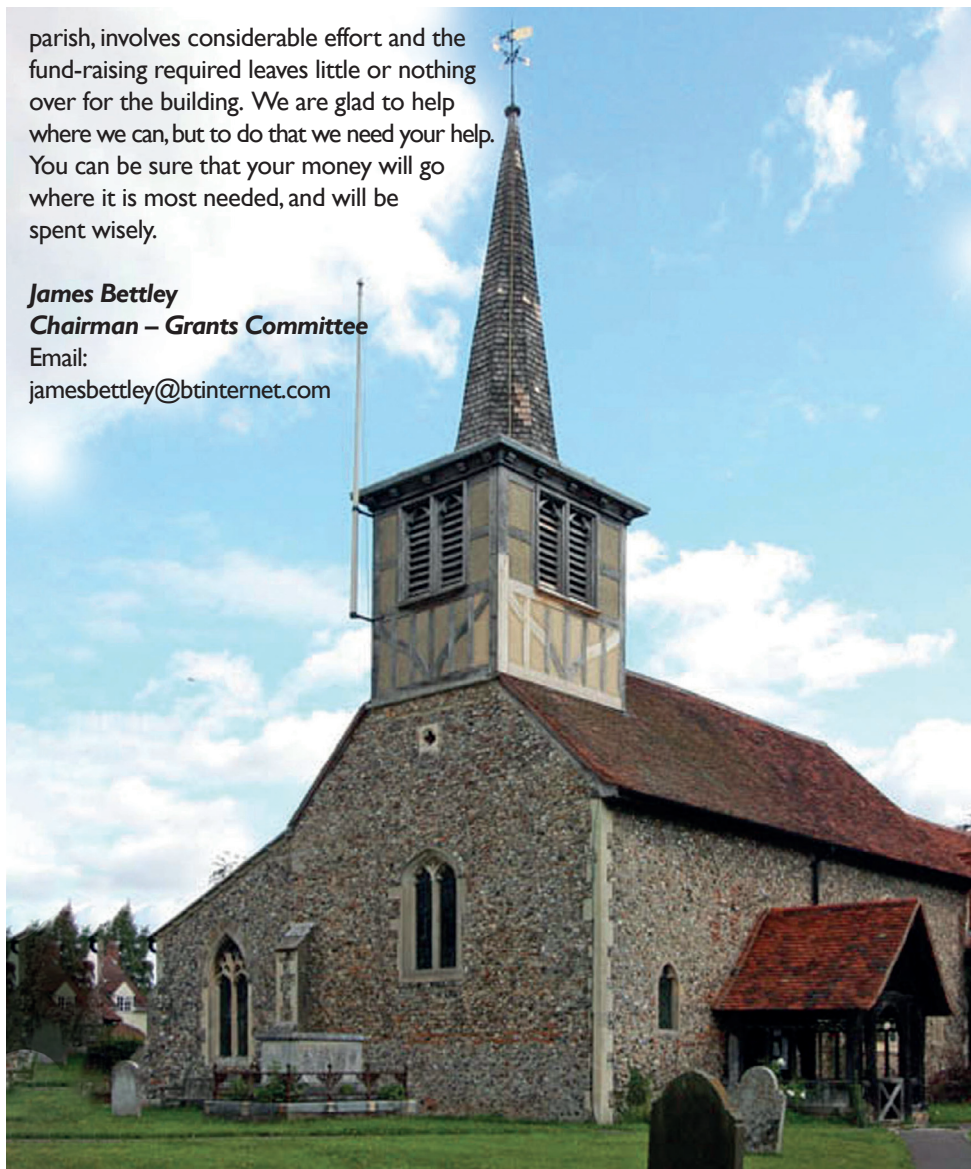
We do also recognise that parishes have a heavy burden in terms of other commitments, principally the parish share. Belchamp Walter was lucky to be chosen as the location for a wedding in the 2019 film *Downton Abbey* (the bride's bouquet is on display in the church as a memento). Two weeks' filming paid the parish share that year, but such windfalls are rare. Most years, for them and every other

parish, involves considerable effort and the fund-raising required leaves little or nothing over for the building. We are glad to help where we can, but to do that we need your help. You can be sure that your money will go where it is most needed, and will be spent wisely.

James Bettley
Chairman – Grants Committee

Email:

jamesbettley@btinternet.com



Repairs to stonework at Little Hallingbury, St Mary the Virgin. © Martin Stuchfield

Application forms for grants are available from John Bloomfield

Email: john.bloomfield@btinternet.com or download from the website,
www.friendsofessexchurches.org.uk.

2023 grant offers in full

Repairs

Beneficiary	Repairs	Amount
Belchamp Walter, St Mary	Roof repairs	£8,000
Buttsbury, St Mary	Masonry repairs	£5,000
Chappel, St Barnabas	Window repairs	£3,000
Chelmsford, St Andrew	Window repairs	£10,000
Colchester, St James the Great	Masonry repairs to windows	£5,000
Colchester, St John the Evangelist	Roof repairs and rainwater goods	£8,000
East Hanningfield, All Saints	Asbestos removal (addition to grant made in 2022)	£1,000
Great Parndon, St Mary the Virgin	Stabilising floor void	£4,000
Lamarsh, Holy Innocents	Ceiling plaster repairs	£8,000
Little Hallingbury, St Mary the Virgin	Stonework and other repairs	£5,000
Ovington, St Mary	Roof and timber repairs	£15,000
Shalford, St Andrew	Stonework repairs and window tracery	£2,500
South Ockendon, St Nicholas of Myra	Tower repairs and water damage	£10,000
Springfield, Holy Trinity	Replacement of roof slates	£3,000
Theydon Garnon, All Saints	Roof repairs	£10,000
Thorpe-le-Soken, St Michael	Gable wall repairs	£8,000
Upminster, St Laurence	Roof repairs and rainwater goods	£15,000
Wethersfield, St Mary Magdalene	Masonry repairs and drainage work	£6,000
TOTAL		£126,500

Improvements

Beneficiary	Repairs	Amount
Ashen, St Augustine	Refreshment facilities and lavatories	£10,000
Becontree, St Alban	Access ramp, handrail and lavatories	£10,000
Colchester, Christ Church	Improvements to facilities including disabled access	£10,000
Great Bromley, St George	Provision of servery	£8,000
Great Oakley, All Saints	Upgrading heating and lighting systems	£10,000
Little Leighs, St John the Evangelist	Provision of servery and lavatories	£10,000
Rayleigh, Christ Church (URC)	Improvements to reduce carbon footprint	£7,500
Roxwell, St Michael and All Angels	Disabled facilities	£5,000
Tollesbury, St Mary the Virgin	Improved tower access	£2,000
Woodford Bridge, St Paul	Access ramp and associated path work	£3,000
TOTAL		£75,500
COMBINED TOTAL		£202,000



Provision of servery at Great Bromley, St George. © John Vigar

Ride+Stride 2023

What a year this turned out to be! Coinciding with the hottest day of the year, we nevertheless had an impressive turnout of enthusiastic riders and striders, all battling the heat in their own inimitable ways for Ride+Stride 2023. We raised more money than last year – a 13% increase – thanks to everyone's efforts and by the participation of several more organised groups than in the past. It was a great day, enjoyed by many, and raised in excess of £27,000. Additional activities (coffee mornings, tower tours, used book sales, tea parties) increased funds raised. This year I was very much involved with Ingatestone, St John and St Erconwald, where we held a parish tea party and sale of cakes and second hand books – our select group of workers had a great time and doubled the money raised on the day. We hope more churches might be able to consider arranging events to coincide with Ride+Stride 2024.

There were several intrepid souls who embarked on cycle rides of staggering length, including a 70 mile tour of 37 churches starting from and returning to Saffron Walden, and also a cyclist riding from Lakenheath, St Mary the Virgin, to Rettendon, All Saints, covering 102 miles!

Both these keen supporters raised considerable sums for their churches and for the charity. We are extremely grateful to them for making such a huge contribution in the heat of the day! I joined a group of steamy cyclists for (a mainly liquid) lunch in Stondon Massey,

shortly after visiting the beautiful church of William Byrd fame.

The cyclists were full of excitement and pleasure at the wonderful and varied rural churches they had visited. As one said, "who knew that there were so many spectacular churches in Essex!" All supporters of Ride+Stride know this to be true, and I urge you to visit churches that you don't know well in 2024, when once again we take to our bikes, feet, horses, boats, scooters and any other forms of travel open to us for Ride+Stride on Saturday, 14th September 2024.

Rachel Grainger

Ride+Stride Organiser

Email: rideandstrideorganiser@friendsofessexchurches.org.uk



Julia Abel Smith (President) presenting the Ride+Stride Fundraising Cup to representatives of Leytonstone, St John the Baptist, at the AGM held at Upminster, St Laurence.

© James Bettley

Study Days

Friends of the Trust enjoyed two splendid Study Days in 2023, visiting churches in north Essex. John Vigar, a retired university lecturer who has been a professional ecclesiastical historian for over forty years, led both Study Days.

The Spring Study Day on 24th May commenced at Elsenham, St Mary the Virgin.

The building, standing in the grounds of Elsenham Hall, was built in the Norman period with a spectacular tympanum in the south porch. Two charming early 17th century brasses are set into the

north and south chancel pillars. The earliest commemorates Anne Fielde who died in 1615 at the tender age of 26. Attention was drawn to the prayer scroll that had been defaced in 1643-4 in accordance with the Parliament decree that “all Monuments of Superstition and Idolatry should be removed and abolished”.

Next to Widdington, St Mary the Virgin, a church that was heavily restored by Ewan Christian from 1872-4. Notwithstanding, several fine features remain including 14th century stained glass shields emblazoned with the arms of England and France in the



Henham, St Mary the Virgin © Martin Stuchfield

north-west chancel window; a panel with a sundial, hourglass and crown dated 1664; and the remains of a mid-15th century brass of a civilian found buried beneath the chancel floor during the Victorian restoration.

Following lunch the church vested in the Churches Conservation Trust at Stansted Mountfitchet, St Mary the Virgin, was visited. Its Norman origins were largely disguised during the restoration of 1887-8. The large building contains an important array of monuments including a cross-legged man in armour of c.1330. Of particular note is the monument and cartouche to Hester Salisbury, 1614, thought to be the work of the notable sculptor, Epiphanius Evesham. However, the most sumptuous commemoration was erected to Sir Thomas Myddelton, a Lord Mayor of London, who died in 1631. Finally the church at Henham, St Mary the Virgin, located enchantingly on the village green, commanded our attentions. Tea graciously provided by Jo Pimblett was greatly enjoyed whilst admiring the 12th century wall paintings featuring the head of a king or emperor; the 15th century screen; and an interesting slate ledger stone inlaid with white marble commemorating Samuel Feake who died in 1757 and was Chairman of the East India Company.

The Autumn Study Day on 21st October began at Great Bromley, St George, where Gregory Frostick, a keen supporter of the Trust, and Jenny Nicholls, provided a warm greeting and light refreshments. This important church building has been the recipient of numerous grants from the Trust. The key

features are the glorious double-hammerbeam roof and the magnificent ecclesiastical brass in the south aisle commemorating William Byschopton, a rector who died in 1432.

From Great Bromley the short distance was travelled to Little Bentley, St Mary. The interior is lofty with a 16th century hammerbeam roof and an impressive ironbound and closely-studded parish chest. The chief glory is hidden away in the north chapel under a rug. Sir William Pyrton, who died in 1490, is portrayed in armour with a collar of SS and portcullis pendant (the Beaufort badge used by the Tudors) with his widow Katherine.



Detail from the monumental brass commemorating Sir William Pyrton, c. 1490, at Little Bentley, St Mary the Virgin. © Martin Stuchfield

Brightlingsea, All Saints, was visited immediately after lunch where an enthusiastic reception committee eagerly showed off the new extension containing kitchen and lavatory facilities. Huge improvements have been made to the building over the last few years not least to the imposing 15th century tower that suffered in the great Colchester earthquake of 1884. It was very pleasing to see how the Trust's money had been spent with the church enjoying a new lease of life. The frieze of tiles around the walls of the nave recording parishioners who have died at sea served as a pertinent reminder that Brightlingsea is a coastal town and its status as a limb of the head Cinque Port of Sandwich. The sumptuous marble monument to Nicolas Magens of 1764 and the magnificent array of seven brasses to members of the Beryf family spanning a period from 1496 to 1578 stimulated considerable interest.

Finally the day concluded with a visit to Elmstead, St Anne and St Laurence, located at the end of a long lane with Elmstead Hall

nearby. The interior adorned with early 19th century box pews contains a series of wall paintings and the oak effigy of a cross-legged man in armour thought to represent Sir Thomas Weston, 1354. The church also contains two interesting brasses. The first comprising the head of a small civilian, dated c.1425, was found in the churchyard in 1984 and is now mounted on a wooden board in the south chapel. The second is a very rare form of brass memorial and the only example to be found in Essex. Two hands issue from clouds and support a heart with a scroll above, dated c.1500. The heart is inscribed "Credo" (I trust) with the Latin scroll in translation reading: "to behold the goodness of the Lord", i.e. a continuation of the inscription on the heart. A wonderful tea ended a most interesting day.

Thanks are due to John Vigar, Catherine Leeder (who acted as registrar) and the incumbents and churchwardens of all the churches visited.

Martin Stuchfield



Elmstead, St Anne and St Laurence © Martin Stuchfield

Upcoming events

WEDNESDAY, 8TH MAY – *Spring Study Day*

Our next study day, led by John Vigar, will visit the churches at Felsted, Little Dunmow, Pleshey and Rayne. Tickets are £10.00 for members and £15.00 for non-members. Please see website for booking form.

THURSDAY, 16TH MAY – *Talk*

6.30p.m. for 7.00p.m. Nicky Haslam, the interior designer, will be giving a talk at Layer Marney Tower. Tickets are £25.00 for members and £30.00 for non-members. Payment is preferred via BACS using reference "Haslam Talk" (sort code: 20-19-95, account no.: 60427888) or cheque made payable to FECEC.

Contact Jessica Southwell. Email: social@friendsofessexchurches.org.uk. Tel: 01206 330338 or 07885 302339.

WEDNESDAY, 22ND MAY – *Spring Meeting including AGM and Gepp Lecture*

Our Gepp Lecturer for 2024 will be Emily Gee the Director for Cathedral and Church Buildings for the Church of England. Ms Gee's lecture will be entitled *Sustaining the House of God: a strategy for our Cathedral and Church Buildings*. Chelmsford Cathedral, New Street, Chelmsford CM1 1TY at 8.15p.m., following the Annual General Meeting at 7.00p.m. and refreshments from 7.30p.m. Open to members and non-members; admission free. Please email Martin Stuchfield at martinstuchfield@pentlowhall.uk for further information; it would help us to know if you are planning to attend so that it is possible to gauge numbers for refreshments.

TUESDAY, 4TH JUNE – *Open Garden*

2.00p.m.–5.00p.m. The much-admired garden at Little Bentley Hall will be opened for us to enjoy. Tickets are £15.00 for members and £20.00 for non-members. Payment is preferred via BACS using reference "Open Garden" (sort code: 20-19-95, account no.: 60427888) or cheque made payable to FECEC. Contact Georgie Dwerryhouse. Email: garden@friendsofessexchurches.org.uk. Tel: 01787 224098.

SATURDAY, 14TH SEPTEMBER – *Ride+Stride*

9.00a.m.–5.00p.m. Take part in our sponsored cycle ride and walk. Visit unique churches, have fun with the family, enjoy some gentle exercise, and have a great day out in aid of a good cause. Download sponsorship and other forms from www.friendsofessexchurches.org.uk/ride-stride and create your own fundraising page on www.justgiving.com/foect.

SATURDAY, 5TH OCTOBER – *Autumn Study Day*

Details to be confirmed but it is planned to visit the churches at Belchamp St Paul, Borley, Foxearth and Pentlow.

TUESDAY, 15TH OCTOBER – *Gift Fair*

Our acclaimed Gift Fair at Chelmsford City Racecourse, Chelmsford CM3 1QP is the perfect place to start your Christmas shopping. Light lunches will be available. Details to follow.

Find full and updated details of events on www.friendsofessexchurches.org.uk/events.

Membership

I am pleased to report that income from donations and subscriptions for the year marginally increased to £22,629 (2022: £20,471) with tax reclaimed on gift-aid flat at £2,366 (2022: £2,358). A decade ago our members, donors and congregations throughout Essex and East London contributed more than £50,000 – a record. The intervening period has seen a reduction to less than half. Covid-19 certainly has not helped as we struggle to reach anywhere near pre-pandemic levels. In contrast our grant giving (our main purpose for existing) has increased to £202,000 (2022: £178,500).

I realise that many of you will have paid your subscription by Standing Order. Others may have paid by BACS or sent a cheque. For everyone else, now is the best time to renew. We do not routinely acknowledge subscriptions but please accept our thanks now.

Thankfully the Trust has benefitted from the hard work and ingenuity of the Events Committee and from legacies received. The latter are obviously unpredictable but over the last ten years the Trust has received a staggering £450,000 from legacies. Please consider

remembering us in your Will, as bequests to a registered charity are exempt from Inheritance Tax. You may not be aware that an estate can pay Inheritance Tax at a reduced rate of 36% if 10% or more is left to charity in a Will.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries or questions relating to membership.

Subscriptions and Gift Aid

Subscriptions are received throughout the year with Gift Aid claimed on a large percentage thereby benefiting the work of the Trust.

Gift Aid is claimed against UK taxpayers only and for every £1 claimed an extra 25 pence is reclaimed by the Trust. For example, a subscription of £20 means that £5 can be reclaimed.

If you, as a subscriber, are unsure whether or not Friends of Essex Churches is claiming Gift Aid against your subscription then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Catherine Leeder

Membership Secretary

Email: leedercatherine@gmail.com

Summarised accounts

Statement of financial activities for the year ended 31st December 2023

2022 £'000		2023 £'000
22.8	Donations and subscriptions	25.0
82.6	Legacies	–
26.2	Fundraising – Ride+Stride	36.0
22.8	– other events	26.3
10.4	Dividends and interest	14.7
164.8	Total income	102.0
(3.0)	Governance and support costs	(3.0)
(0.2)	Ride+Stride – fundraising expenses	(0.5)
(8.9)	– returned to churches	(15.6)
(10.3)	Other events – fundraising expenses	(8.9)
(2.1)	Promotion of public interest in churches	(1.6)
(17.5)	Repayment of grant for church roof alarms	–
(173.0)	Grants for work payable to churches	(186)
(215.0)	Total expenditure	215.6
(50.2)	Net (expenditure)	(113.6)
(10.3)	Unrealised (loss) on investments	(4.6)
(60.5)	Net movement in funds	(118.2)

Summary balance sheet as at 31 December 2023

2022 £'000		2023 £'000
174.9	Investments – market value	245.3
405.2	Cash and deposits	201.4
580.1	Total assets	446.7
(151.5)	Undrawn allocated grants	(136.0)
(2.0)	Accruals	(2.3)
426.6	Net assets Represented by	308.4
426.6	General Fund (unrestricted)	308.4
426.6	Total funds	308.4

Treasurer's report

The total funds of the Trust stand at £308,477 (2022: £426,251).

In 2023 a total of £202,000 (2022: £177,500) has been paid out in repair and improvement grants for the benefit of 28 different churches – quite a sum and significantly more than the previous year.

Thank you for being a member, attending

our events and participating in Ride+Stride – the churches that receive grants from the Trust are always most grateful.

For more details please see the summarised accounts on page 14.

Jo Pimblett
Treasurer

Email: pimbletts@btinternet.com

Legacies

We are hugely grateful for the bequests we have received over recent years. They have enabled the Grants Committee to repair and improve on a much larger scale.

Please do remember The Friends of Essex Churches Trust in your Will – a great

cause with the added bonus that it can reduce your liability to Inheritance Tax.

Please contact the Treasurer if you would like advice on suitable wording:
Jo Pimblett, Parsonage Bury, Henham,
Bishops Stortford CM22 6AN.
Email: pimbletts@btinternet.com

The Friends of Essex Churches Trust 2023-24

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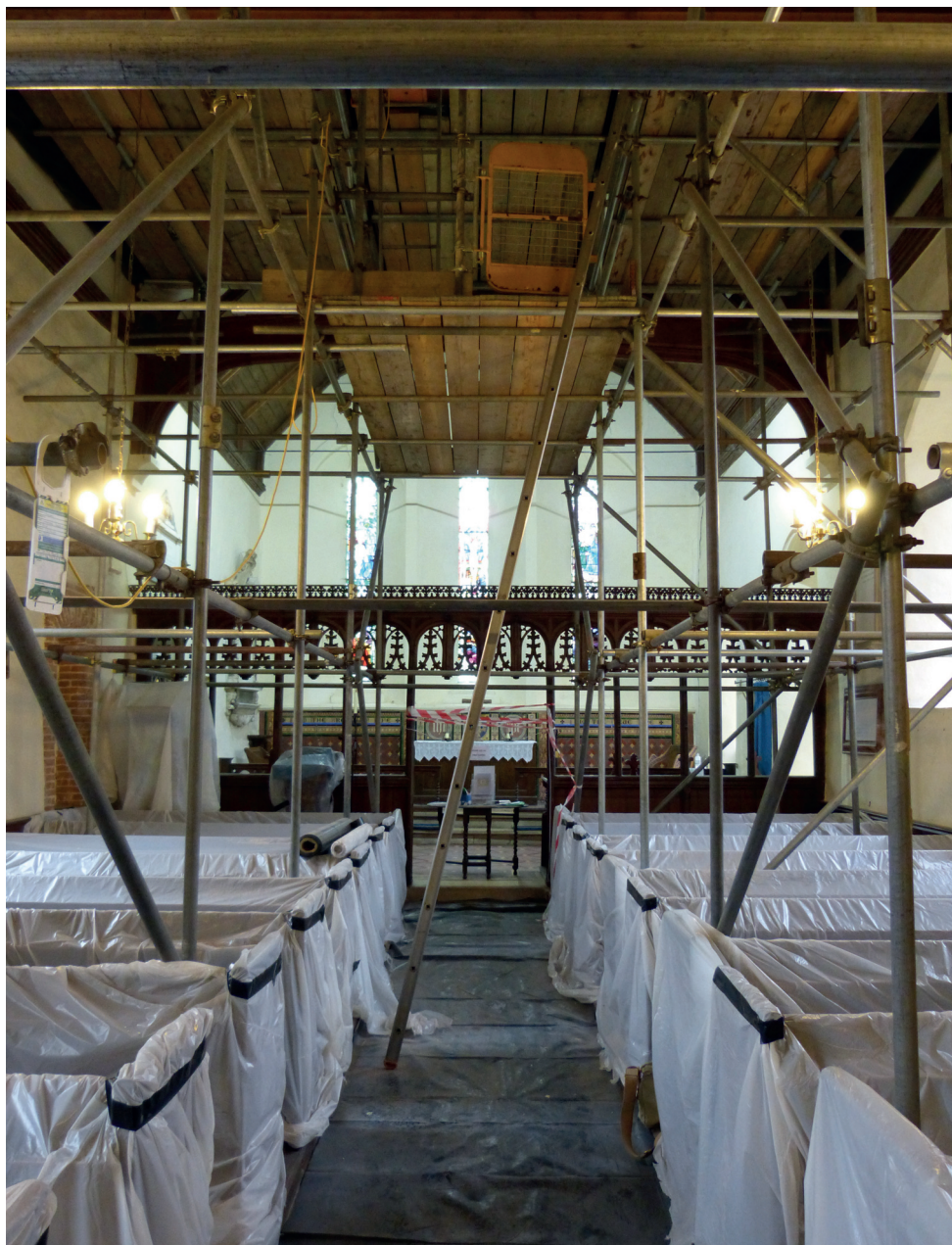
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Ceiling plaster repairs at Lamarsh, Holy Innocents. © James Bettley



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