

St Andrew's Church (from 1976)

A fire was spotted at St. Peter's Church, by Peter Page of Ford Lane, at 1:30am on Saturday 2nd October 1971. Arson or smoking embers from the stove were suspected, but no-one was ever charged. Two hatchments and the foundation stone from the Victorian rebuild were left in place; but were vandalised within two years. £1,000 of the insurance payment was spent making the walls safe.



Figure 1 - St Peter's Church the day after the Fire, Sunday October 3rd 1971

Fundraising started straight away with a gift of £50 from Alresford Sand and Gravel. The loss adjuster came the following week and agreed the building was a total loss – paying £31,500. Salvaged items included the brass Communion Cross, lead from the font, the new brass alms dish, and a piece of the wood engraved *Pulpit built 1848 JB*. Some of the tiles were sold to roof a cottage in Sible Hedingham. The remaining assets of the Church were valued at £1,480.

The Congregation worshiped in the Village Hall with the first service being a Harvest Festival and Baptism the next day of Andrew Smith, Gary Wells and Julie Pullen. Fifty-six Baptisms took place in the Village Hall, six in the open-air at St Peter's, two at the Primary School and one at the Cabin. Weddings were held at Elmstead. A gold brocade cover was made to cover a trestle table to act as a Communion Table. An outdoor Carol Service was held in the ruins of St Peter's on December 17th 1972. Good Friday 1973, was celebrated with an open air service at St Peter's. On Easter Sunday, Holy Communion was held in the Cabin, using series three for the first time, and in the afternoon there were three baptisms. Considerable discussion and prayer followed before it was agreed to build a new church closer to the main village for £30,000. In May 1973, Don Cardy and John Huke were re-elected as churchwardens. Mr Huke was also re-elected as treasurer and Jenny Pettitt as PCC secretary. A coffee morning was held in the Quarters which raised £16.35 for the church building fund. In September, a curry lunch at the garden of Dr and Mrs Smerdon raised £15 for the church building fund. Over 30 attended. The *diocesan purse* was £105, paid to the Deanery.

Members of the Royal British Legion and village organisations, with the congregation went to Elmstead Church where Rev Hallidie-Smith conducted the service. Wreaths were laid at the memorial. Plans for the new church were approved by Tendring Rural District Council. On Sunday December 23rd, the Bishop of Colchester conducted the Confirmation Service outdoors at the ruins of St Peter's, during the Carol Service. Illumination came from a large bonfire, a Christmas tree, a light on the crib and two other lights rigged by the congregation. An overhead projector screened the Carol lyrics. The Christmas Eve Holy Communion, Christmas Day early Communion and family service at 11am were held in the Village Hall.



**Figure 2 - Church in the Village Hall
(March 1976)**

Early plans included having separate nave, chancel, kitchen, toilets, general purpose room raised to act as a stage and chair store within a 2700 square foot building. There was to be a fibre-glass spire housing the recast spire bell; wooden doors on the south; and wheel-chair access. In April 1973, the architect had dropped the spire but included a room for eighty with a partition that moved to allow another 120 seats. The 34' tall building had a slate grey asbestos roof and windows at each apex. The south wall would be mainly glazed. At the west end were kitchens and toilets; with the main door on the west side. These plans were approved by church authorities and Tendring RDC planners. Villagers views though were mixed as it was so different to the medieval building it replaced. There was no space for the bell.

Four years of fund-raising followed, including selling dishes made with pieces of the melted window glass and leaving the cast iron safe outside the ruins for donations. There was a barbeque in the grounds of the Old Rectory; a curry in the garden of Dr Smeadon's; a *Hobbies and Handicraft Exhibition* on October 21st 1972; 75p calendars with a colour picture of St Peter's in the snow of Winter 1970; Christmas cards for 5p; Collection of Green Shield stamps; a donation of fees from a television programme *Shepherd in the Country* filmed at the Creek by Peter Barkworth; a Brownie Concert raised £3.50; Mother's Union coffee morning £58.89; sponsored walks by the Guides raised over £60; an egg-throwing competition with the cheque for £72 written on a white, hard-boiled egg; On November 10th 1973, a slide-show about Australia was held by JW Groves OBE, and the

Christmas Bazaar, made £92 which brought the total raised to £2,800. Due to the high inflation of the early 1970s the cost rose to £45,262; with grants of £11,000 coming from the Diocese of Chelmsford – to be repaid over ten years.

In May 1972, the first of the three destroyed church banners was replaced. The Mother's Union banner was dedicated in a service at St Paul's Clacton.

Throughout 1974, the Parochial Church Council and Rector became anxious over the delays of the diocesan parsonage committee. It was suggested that Alresford went into partnership with Elmstead Church, but this was declined as a link with Wivenhoe, Thorrington or Brightlingsea was more suitable. In October the Harvest Festival was held in the Village Hall, after an open day for the Sunday School. The produce was donated to Hamilton Lodge, Great Bromley. After family services cups of tea were served as an experiment that has continued. The Sunday School was to allow Secondary school pupils to attend.

The 1975 Essex-barn style church of St. Andrew's and St Peter's was designed by Bryan K. Thomas and Partners. (They had earlier been commissioned for the house at Beth Chatto's garden, c1960.) A fixed price contract was awarded to Cadman's of Colchester the builders and work commenced in early May 1975. The new church was built on the existing playing field next to the Village Hall; in 1972 Jeremy Wyatt of Alresford Hall donated a larger recreation field neighbouring the building and the Church gave him a piece of the Glebe behind the Old Rectory.

The new construction was built around hot-dipped galvanised steel box-section A-frames, which were reputedly the largest in the country at the time.



Figure 3 - On July 31st Ernie Jennings, a former Church Warden, laid the foundation bricks. The built took forty-six weeks.

A Hammond electric organ was purchased from Frinton. Plans for hanging the bell were not complete. Four Banns for weddings were read in the church doorway in February 1976. In March 1976, Toni Spurgin was the last baby to be Christened in the Village Hall. The first Wedding took place on Saturday March 13th 1976 between Scout Leader Nicholas Webb and Sunday School teacher Lesley Pearce; on a hardboard floor as the building was not dry enough to lay down the maple. Ray Milburn came dressed as a chimney sweep. On Sunday 4th April at the first family

service, Richard Chrisnall, the architect's son, was the first to be baptised followed by Michelle and Andrew Jory, Bruce Brooksbank and Sally Ault. In the next three months there were a further eleven. The first funeral was that of William Henry McKinley of Dawn, Colchester Road.

An engraved piece of pulpit (JB 1848) was reused in the Communion Table and lead from the 1610 font in the new font. Initially, the underground boiler room and the recreation field flooded as they were below the water-table. An automatic pump was fitted to rectify this in St Andrew's. St Andrew's opened as a multi-purpose building with a main room of 16m x 16m, with sufficient storage for all of the chairs. Rev Hallidie-Smith wore a cream and gold brocade cope made from the altar table cover used in the Village Hall, by Penelope Carter. His previous ones had been destroyed in the fire.

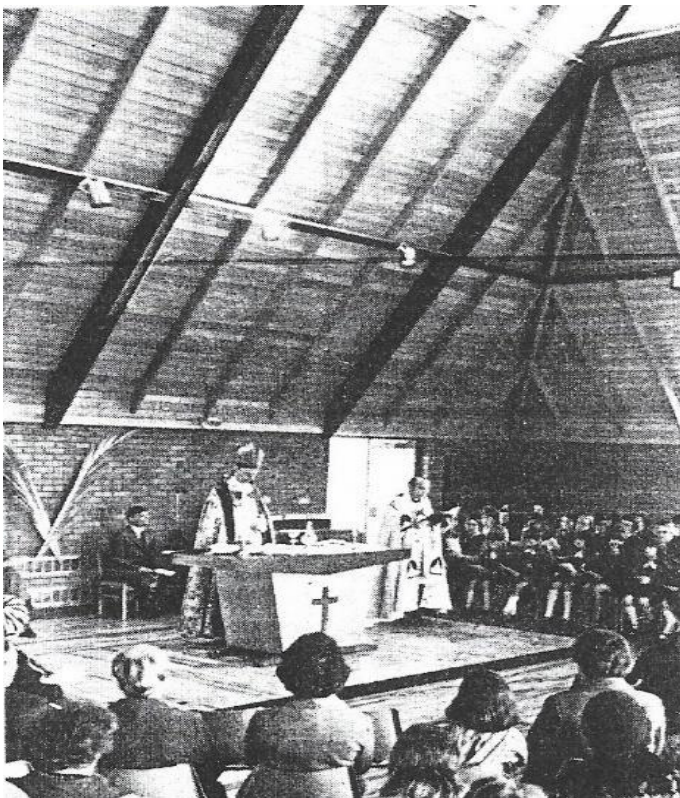


Figure 4 - The official dedication by the Bishop of Chelmsford, Bishop Roderick Coote, on Palm Sunday 11th April 1976.

In May, an open evening was held with Rev Hallidie-Smith wearing his gold cope decorated with emblems of Alresford's history. In September, the first Harvest Festival was held with sixty-three attending the Supper around a large cartwheel where the produce was displayed. Entertainment was by the Legionnaires, a barber-shop quartet from Colchester. A profit of £27.61 was made. On the Sunday, there were four services, and a family service, collecting a total of £31 shared with *Christian Aid*. The produce was sent to Hamilton Lodge, Great Bentley. On Monday, two classes from the Primary School visited.

RJ Butcher MA