

HISTORY OF ST. FRANCIS CHURCH SILVER END

The building was originally an Essex Barn, built between 1690 and 1750 and belonging to Grooms Farm. It was bought by F I Crittall when he built the new village in 1926 to house the workers for his window factory. The barn was converted to serve as a church for the Church of England Community and was dedicated in 1930. The main beams of the barn were discovered in 1982 to be Scandinavian timber. From 1930 to 1982 the ceiling had been a deep midnight blue with gold stars and the beams were painted red with gold detailing. In 1982 the ceiling was re-painted to its current pale blue with some of the original gold patterns retained and the red paint from the beams was removed. In 1982 the kitchen and toilets were added in what had been a cow shed on the side of the barn.

The main entrance to the church was originally in the centre of the building where the barn doors would have been opened on both sides to gain access and to let air flow through during harvest time. The original hinges and smaller church entrance door, now blocked up, can be seen from the outside. The entrance was moved to its current location in 1968. The way building is sited means that the congregation faces the widow to the south and not the east as the normal convention.

The church and the land up to the road path and footpath running along the north end of the building is held on a 999 year lease from Braintree District Council. The church congregation are grateful to BDC for cutting the grass and planting the border beside the west wall.

The thatch is long wheat straw of which the original base layer still remains. The barn was re-thatched in 1988 at a cost of £12,000. This work was carried out by slightly lower skilled workers with the result that a further re-thatching took place in 2015 at a cost of £44,000, using P. S. Shelley Master Thatcher of Hockley, Essex, the company who had previously thatched the roof and is expected to last for 40 years with minor maintenance until the next major re-thatch is required. The funds were raised with the help of local individuals, fund raising events, a successful auction and grants from a number of organisations, details of whom are recorded in a booklet held in the church.

Francis Henry Crittall took an enthusiastic interest in the conversion of the barn working closely with the Architect Mr G. C. Holmes. He supplied the Crittall windows, doors and also the stained glass, which depicts St Francis of Assisi. Francis Crittall also supplied the lych gate, which is owned by and maintained by BDC. The lych gate fell into disrepair and was re-built by BDC in 1998. Mr Holmes designed the pulpit and Mr Smith designed the lectern.

The font, designed by Walter F. Crittall, was hewn from part of an oak tree, believed to have been planted near Silver End by King Stephen in the 12th Century, the same century in which St. Francis of Assisi was born. The font lid was made in the 1990's by Mr M Smith. The organ was re-located from London.

The carved riddle posts, now resting on the wall near the altar originally supported screens across the altar. The bell at high level outside the north wall was donated by May & Butcher Ltd. of Heybridge in June 1929 and was originally from an old warship. The silver chalice and paten, not on display, were a gift in 1929 from A. W. Ruggles-Brise in memory of his wife Mabel. The brass ewer dates from 1899 and is dedicated to St Mary so may have been originally in Rivenhall church. The tapestries behind the altar were designed by Jane Moss (nee Andrews) to represent Silver End's surroundings and to reflect St Francis of Assisi's appreciation of God's creation. They were worked on by Mrs J Broad, Mrs J Hawkes & Mrs A Robson in 1982/3. The tapestry of the Last Supper is by Mrs A Robson.

Additional electric heating was added in 2017 to supplement the main gas boiler served radiators. The radiators were provided with purpose designed wire guards to meet current legislation for children and vulnerable adults.