Significant Features

Significant features of the church include:

- The East Window, depicting the Crucifixion, is hand-painted (rather than stained-glass), originating probably in Munich, and dates to c.1840. It bears the marks of considerable repair, having been damaged when a bolt of lightning struck the church (during the late 19th century).
- The 'Cutlass Stone' altar tomb, which stands almost immediately outside the porch, is inscribed to the memory of Mary Ellis, who died in 1609, at the reputed age of 119! The top of the tomb is deeply worn, it is said, by members of press gangs who sharpened their cutlasses upon it.
- The 'Stairway to Nowhere' set into the north wall of the church is an entrance and several steps which spiral to an open doorway some feet above. It would have originally led to the medieval Road Loft, a gallery above the Road Screen ('Rood', is a Saxon word for 'Cross') that separated the Nave from the Chancel. The screen has long since been removed.
- Two Dunkirk Memorials which commemorate the involvement of the fishermen of Leigh who risked and, in a number of instances, sacrificed their lives in the Dunkirk evacuation of 1940. The first, placed above the entrance to the Resurrection Chapel, is a unique memorial comprising two English flags. The second is in the southwest corner of the churchyard overlooking the sea.
- The tower is some 80ft high, and can be ascended by a newel staircase, comprising 100 steps, at the southeast corner. The view from the top over Leigh and the Estuary is superb. The tower also contains a six-bell peal, which may soon be augmented to eight.

Look also at the other graves and vaults in the churchyard, and the memorials, plaques and stones in the church itself, surviving from 17th and 18th. What appears to be the oldest is dated 1624, to William Hampton. Sadly, many of the inscriptions are difficult to discern, having weathered away over the course of time.
The present Church dates from the mid 15th century with Tudor and Victorian additions. Many of its features and churchyard monuments demonstrate St. Clement's close connection with the local fishing community which it served for well over five hundred years. Its fine setting on the hill slope overlooking Old Leigh and the Thames estuary, and its prominence at the heart of Leigh's shopping centre, make it an attractive historic focal point for the present-day community. The Church is now protected as a Grade II listed building.

Origins of the Church
St Clement was by tradition the fourth Bishop of Rome who suffered martyrdom in the persecution initiated by the Emperor Trajan in about AD100. The choice of St. Clement as patron saint for the Church may have resulted from the manner of his martyrdom - he was tied to an anchor and cast into the sea to drown.

Although the present Church dates from the 15th century, the earliest recorded Rector for Leigh is Andrew, in 1248. This suggests an earlier church in Leigh than the present building, although no physical evidence of it has survived. The Norman Domsday Book of 1086 records Leigh ('Legro') as a small fishing hamlet at the foot of the hill slope, but no church. So Leigh's first church may have originated between those dates.

Its position on the cliff top above the village may have been chosen because this is one of the highest local points. Similar reasoning lies behind the choice of sites for many ancient English churches. Proximity to the local manor house, Leigh Hall (which once stood close to Leigh Hall Road), may also have influenced its location.

Historic Development of the Church
The earliest parts of the church - the north aisle, the nave and the tower - are thought to date from middle of the 15th Century. Some, however, suggest the tower and Nave were built in the 16th century. Local legend has it that stones from the ruins of Hadleigh Castle were used in the construction. This seems unlikely, however, as the Castle would have been largely intact at that time.

The majority of the building, including the later additions, is of Kentish ragstone and flint rubble. In contrast to most domestic and farm buildings, parish churches were traditionally built of the best and most permanent materials which, if possible, would be stone. Our part of Essex has no natural stone, other than some flint. But a coarse type of limestone (ragstone) from Kent is readily available and transporting it by boat is easy. So many churches in our area are built in ragstone.

The main exception is the Tudor south porch built in red brick in the mid to late 16th century. This has typical Tudor moulded brickwork to the arched door and window openings and illustrates the increasing use of brick as a building material from this period onwards.

As Leigh began to expand at the end of the 19th century the church was enlarged. First, the east end of the Chancel was extended in 1872. Then the South Aisle was built in 1897 and the Lady Chapel added in 1913.

The 19th century was also a time for re-ordering the interior of many parish churches, including St. Clement's. The Rector, Robert Eden, undertook a major restoration in 1838. One notable element of this work can be seen in the 'poppy-headed' pews: each pew end is hand-carved, and no two are the same.

He also built a new Rectory, which is now Leigh Library, in a 'Tudor' style.

In recent times, Father Stephen Jones initiated work to adapt the south aisle to provide a valued dual-purpose facility for the church.

St Clement's has served countless generations of seafarers, and numerous memorials within the building speak of this heritage. It is also closely associated with the formation of Trinity House when the two Guilds of Pilots at Deptford and Leigh were combined. A brass tablet in the Resurrection Chapel lists many past members of the Guild, including naval notaries from the Haddock, Salmon, Bundock, and Goodlad families.

The church tower is a documented navigational reference point for shipping in the estuary.

1 St Clement's Church dates from C15 and is made of Kentish ragstone
2 The 'stairway to nowhere' which originally led to the Roof Screen
3 The Dunkirk Memorial
4 The Tudor brickwork porch on the south elevation