In 1986 the Chancel was re-ordered and redecorated in red, gold and green to emphasise it as the focal point of the church.

In addition to his involvement in the building’s architecture, Nicholson was also responsible for designing many of the original internal fittings for St Margaret’s including:

- the high altar, the chapel altars and the altar rails,
- the original stalls, and
- the pulpit (the original design included elaborately carved gilded panels to match the high altar, but they were never completed).

All other major furnishings were submitted to him for approval. Father Hilditch had great confidence in the judgement of Nicholson in such matters and was anxious that the harmony of his architectural creation should not be marred by the indiscriminate introduction of unworthy additions. Other features of interest include:

- The stone font in the back right hand corner of the church. The base is made of black marble and the wooden cover depicts the waters of baptism, the gate of salvation and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove.
- The small stained glass window, in the north aisle depicting St Michael fighting the dragon, which commemorates a parishioner killed in the Second World War.
- The stained glass window of the Lady Chapel depicting the adoration of the Magi.
- The statues of Our Lady with the Christ Child in the Lady Chapel, and Our Lady of Walsingham, by Anton Wagner, in the alcove to the right of the south door.
St Margaret’s Church was founded in 1919 but the present church dates from 1930. The construction of the Fenchurch Street line railway encouraged the development of Leigh, which expanded from a small fishing village to a large, residential suburb of London. St Margaret’s was built to be within walking distance of the new housing.

Despite being one of Southend’s more recent churches, St Margaret’s is historically and architecturally important. The Joint Architects were Graham Lloyd and Sir Charles Nicholson, the Diocesan Architect. Mr Lloyd drew up the initial plans, which were subsequently developed in conjunction with Sir Charles, who supervised the construction of the building throughout.

The building is in an early Italian Romanesque style, with a basilica plan. St Margaret’s pioneered a break away from the Gothic tradition in the district with outstanding success. It is now protected as a Grade II Listed Building.

Church Name. St Margaret of Antioch
The church is dedicated to St Margaret of Antioch. Canon Robert Stuart King, founder of the Church, is traditionally thought to have chosen the name, in memory of one of his parents who died on July 20th, St Margaret’s Day.

An Anglo Saxon legend relates that St Margaret was a shepherdess, who refused to marry the local ruler because he was not a Christian. He imprisoned her and the devil, representing evil in the form of a dragon, swallowed her. She burst from his belly, because she was armed with the cross of Jesus. She was tortured further and, despite the reluctance of the executioner to behead her, accepted that it was God’s will that she should die. She is considered the patron saint of pregnant women.

There are two statues of St Margaret: one outside in the niche above west door and another inside at the east end of the North aisle.

Historic Development of the Church
Canon Robert Stuart King, Rector of St Clement’s Church, founded a temporary Mission Church, in the north west corner of St Clement’s Parish in 1919. In 1925, with the foundation of the Conventional District of St Margaret, the Church became independent of St Clement’s and in 1929 St Margaret’s was given parochial status. The first priest-in-charge was Father Francis Hilditch.

The rapidly expanding population of Leigh soon outgrew the mission church and plans were made to erect a more permanent building. The foundation stone of the present church building was laid on 26th July 1930 by Henry Wilson, the Bishop of Chelmsford. The Nave, Chancel, South Aisle, Lady Chapel and two Vestries were built in 40 weeks at a cost of £8,500. The north aisle, with the Blessed Sacrament Chapel, was added later in 1938. The mission church became the church hall and survived for a further 34 years.

St Margaret’s continues to bring the good news of the Christian Gospel to all sections of the community within the parish. In some senses, given the social changes in society in the last thirty years, it finds itself in a mission situation, as it was at the very beginning in 1919.

Church Architecture
St Margaret’s is one of several churches in the Borough whose design was heavily influenced by the eminent church architect Sir Charles Nicolson. Others locally include St Albans, St Johns Road, Westcliff (1898) and St Michael’s, Leigh Road, Leigh (1924). They are all very different in style. St Margaret’s is built of concrete, which is roughcast rendered with decorative brick bands and dressings around the windows and doors.

The plain, sober exterior contrasts strongly with the luminous mainly white painted interior. The church is generously lit on all sides by round headed leaded light windows on north and south aisles, a high range of clerestory windows, three high, small rounded windows in the apse at the east end and a large Venetian window in the south aisle chapel. Despite alterations to the height of the organ, light still comes in from the arched windows at the west end.

The interior plan is simple and harmonious, with an arcade of Tuscan columns dividing the Nave and the Aisles and an open kingpost roof.

1. The rough rendered concrete exterior of St Margaret of Antioch Church is decorated with local bricks.
2. Statue of St Margaret, the Patron Saint, in the niche above the west door.
3. The Chancel and High Altar designed by Sir Charles Nicholson.
4. St Margaret’s Church Nave and Chancel.