

Who's Who?

St Leonard and Christina of Markyate

St Leonard

Hello, It's nice to see you.

Who am I? Well, I'm glad you asked.
My name is St Leonard and this church is named after me.

What's that, why?

Now, that is a good question. You see I was born in France, 1500 years ago. On 6th November, since you ask. I wanted to live a good and holy life and asked the King of France to let me set any prisoners free that I thought deserved their liberty.

He knew I was a good man and said "Oui". That's "yes" in French if you didn't know.

I ended up living as a hermit, in a tiny hut or cell I made for myself in the forests of Limoges in the middle of France. Bit draughty and cold at night, but I thought it would bring me closer to God and help me live my life in the best possible way. Seems it wasn't such a bad idea. After I died I was made a Saint, the Patron Saint of Prisoners.

And here we are. Lucky for me, people like to name churches after Saints. Well, I won the jackpot and got this beautiful building. Why here? Why in Hertfordshire and not France? Well, my friend, there are lots of other churches around Europe with my name, you could say I'm sort of a celebrity. But there's a



story for why this one was chosen. There's a very special reason and it's because of a very special lady.

Are you ready to hear the story?

Make yourself comfortable and let me introduce to you, Christina. Or to give her a formal title, Christina of Markyate. No, not the lady who works in the shop over in the next village; the lady I'm talking about was born almost 1000 years ago.

Christina of Markyate



Our Christina ran away from her family when they chose a husband for her that she did not like one little bit.

She left Huntingdon, in Cambridgeshire, 50 miles away – or back then, a hard and tiring 15 hours walk away from Flamstead. Legend has it that she lived on River Hill, just round the corner from here, in a tiny cell just like I did in that French forest, remember? Her room was so small it's thought that she could neither stand up nor lie down in it.

And there she stayed – for almost five years.

She was a bit of a local hero, our Christina. The abbots, heads of the monasteries over in St Albans, used to come and visit her and ask her advice. She was thought to be able to predict the future with her visions and dreams.

Christina died in 1185, round about the time this church you're standing in was being built. As she was never made a saint herself, and people wanted to honour her, when it came to naming this church, what better way to do it than to

name it after the saint who's Feast Day was on Christina's birthday.
6th November. You guessed it. My Feast Day. So, welcome to St Leonard's!