



St Mary's Parish Church, Portchester

St Mary's News

No 129 September 2026



From the Vicar

Welcome back after the summer break. I hope that most of you were able to get away or, if you stayed at home, you did some different things and met some interesting people. I took most of my annual leave this summer, so have not been around for about five weeks. During that time, I visited friends in Scotland (mostly school friends I'm still in touch with) and then went to Wales for a week. The rest of the time was spent at sunny Portchester-by-the-Sea. I recommend it if you haven't already been!



I work hard and rest hard. When I'm on holiday, I hardly give St Mary's a thought (and I think you would want it that way), and sometimes I think it would be lovely to be retired with health and money. But when I'm back, I go at things 'full on' which makes my wife nervous, and my colleagues frazzled. I don't know how else to do ministry, and tend to keep in top gear, so when I'm back, I love what I do. As I often say: "You're dead long enough."

Seriously, Jesus said: "I must do the works of him who sent me while it is still day, the night comes when no one can work." (*John 9:4*) These are days of great opportunity for the Church: we have freedom of worship, goodwill of the community, and lots still to do before Jesus comes.

The main news and personal conversations this summer seem to have been about the unusually long spell of very hot weather. Now cloudy days and rain don't seem so bad after all. I've worked a short time both in India and Africa where each day is much the same as we've recently experienced.

I love the variety of the seasons here in the UK – what's your favourite? I think mine is autumn: not too hot and not too cold, but with that sense of expectation in the air – lots of celebrations, anniversaries and Christmas coming! I was also born in October.

I love the seasons and variety of the Anglican Church: its different colours, robes, non-robes, moods, festivals, fasts, feasts, styles of music, noise, silence, liturgy and open prayer. Spare a thought for other churches where each week it's the same, and only one service is on offer, same old ... same old take it or leave it. Mind you, there are days when that actually sounds quite appealing, but I think I'd soon get bored.

At St Mary's in particular, we have an incredible variety, even more than other Anglican churches in the area who only offer one dish on the menu – 'this is what we do, take it or leave it'. Let's never take this for granted and let's support by our attendance and encouragement those who work so hard behind the scenes to create such an incredible menu. You'll be reading about some of these in this magazine. We normally have news and other articles first, and then towards the end of the magazine, 'what's on'. But my fear is that you may get tired reading so much, and never quite get to the end – and so miss out.

I've said it before, St Mary's is able to put on so much only because of the sheer dedication and enthusiasm not only of our clergy and staff, but of our great army of lay volunteers.

You'll be reading Valerie's obituary in this issue. We've lost too many great members and too soon. I think of people like Felicity Mellows, Janet Osler, Ellis Wheatley and others who turned up almost every Sunday and, if there was a job to do, got on with it. In particular, they noticed people. Others, like Enid Bazeley, Dorothy Whittingham, and Joyce Knight, had done their bit in the past and had 'retired' when I came – but their work lives on. This is my challenge to some of our newer and younger people – I love you coming to St Mary's, and love you for who you are and not for what you do; but, if you can do anything, please step into the shoes of those we remember.

Your friend and Vicar, Ian

Seeking to do what Jesus told us to do ...

"Go and make disciples ... baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)



Doing what the early Church did ...

"They devoted themselves the apostle's doctrine (teaching), to fellowship, breaking bread together (meals and Eucharist) and to the prayers (liturgy and open prayer)." (Acts 2:42)

Autumn/Winter Sermons

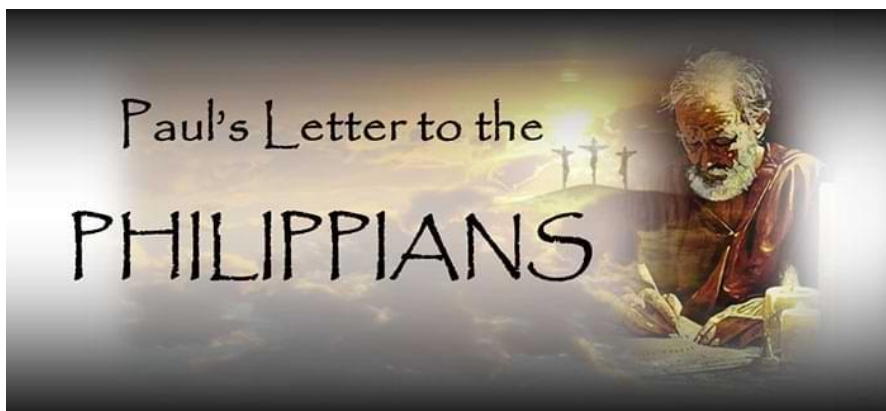
11.30am Later Service

Starting on 6th September, series on **Paul's Letter to the Philippians** (Rev Ian's favourite book in the Bible!)

'Positive, Purposeful Christian Living'

Sermon titles:

- *Introduction: Be Positive!*
- *My favourite church*
- *Partners in the Gospel*
- *God will see us through*
- *Making the best of a bad job*
- *Facing death positively*
- *New Life – new lifestyle*
- *You're a star!*
- *Good Friends*
- *DIY Religion – a heap of rubbish*
- *Growing up and getting on*
- *Joy and peace at Christmas*
- *Contentment at Christmas*



The Music at the 11.30am service, in a more contemporary genre, is one of the attractions, but we struggle to maintain a regular music group to lead (singers and musicians), and greatly appreciate what Pauline and Kathy do. We supplement this by the use of videos, and try to maintain a 50/50 balance. However, we are aware that the congregation is split also probably 50/50 by those who like/dislike videos. We really do need a strong leader, preferably a guitarist, but someone who can help lead us into the presence of God. We are currently putting something on Facebook to see if there is anyone out there. There are churches, some smaller than ours who have so many musicians, they are on a rota! (I wonder if anyone of them might feel led to come and help)



Holy Communion once a month
Children's activities every week
3rd Sunday Special (with buffet lunch for all)
Tea & Coffee at the end
Informal, contemporary worship;
practical sermons.

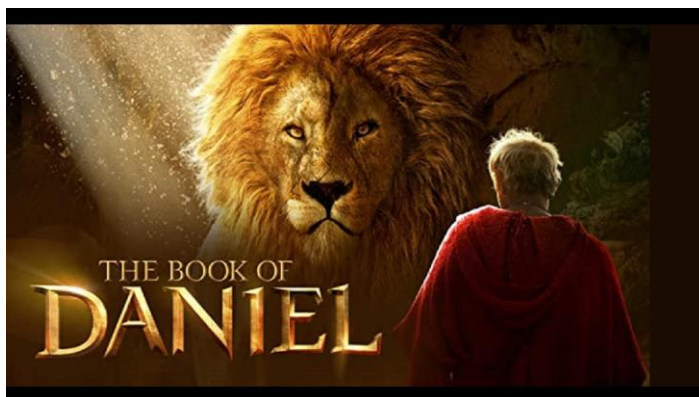
6.00pm Evening Service (Parish Hall, Assheton Court)

Our Evening Services start on **Sunday 13th September**. The worship is varied and based around the theme of the sermon. This autumn we're looking at:

The Prophet Daniel

Daniel was a young Hebrew in exile in Babylon, where there was a lot of pressure not to believe in or serve the living and true God, but Daniel and his friends found amazing faith in difficult times to stand up and be different, and made a positive impression on those around them (but also made a few enemies because of it!)

- *Daring to be different (Ch 1)*
- *Hope for troubled minds (Ch 2)*
- *When things get hot (Ch 3)*
- *The King's madness (Ch 4)*
- *The writing's on the wall (Ch 5)*
- *In the lion's den (Ch 6)*



Training courses

September - Preacher's Workshop.

Five sessions led by Rev Ian at the Hub, Thursdays 7pm – 8.30pm starting on **3rd September**. No charge, but please inform Ian or sign up on the notice board or via the Parish Office.

1. Sermons and Preachers
2. Preparing a sermon
3. Writing a sermon
4. Delivering a sermon
5. Teaching (different to preaching)

This final one is also the one we missed during the earlier course so all participants from that welcome.



October - Discovering and Developing your Spirit Gift.

**DISCOVER
YOUR
SPIRITUAL
GIFTS**

Every Christian has gifts which can be developed for God's service in and out of the Church. Knowing what our calling is, helps us to find our right place. Ephesians 4:11 lists five of these ministries: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. However, if you feel these sound a bit grand, how about putting them in today's context: starters and pioneers; truth-tellers, sharing good news, carers and explainers. These gifts need to work in harmony with each other in order to build a mature balanced church. For example, a

prophet's words can sometime sting, but pastors gently come alongside. Evangelists lead people to Christ, but teachers take them on to the next stages. Which one are you and how can this be developed?

Andy Economides will be leading a four-part series at the Hub on Thursdays 7pm – 8.30pm, starting on 8th October. Sign up on the notice board or via the Parish Office.



St Mary's Church Portchester

Classical Music Recital



FEATURING
Fumi Otsuki
Gisela Meyere



3 September 2026
at 1:00 pm

St Mary's Church
Portchester
PO16 9QW

Free Admission with Retiring Collection in aid of St Mary's Church

www.stmary-portchester.org.uk

St Mary's Parish Church, Portchester

Patronal Festival

Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary transferred from 15th August

Sunday 6th September

9.30am Festival Sung Eucharist
Preacher: Sr Mary Joy, Sisters of Bethany, Southsea

6.30pm Sung Evensong



Drawing Rev James Hair

Sunday 5th – Patronal Festival

The Patronal Festival is the day when the dedication of the church to a particular saint is celebrated; in our case, St Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Most English churches dedicated to saint have Mary as their patron. Her main Festival is the 15th August called variously ('The Falling Asleep' in Anglican churches; the 'Dormition' in Orthodox churches, and the 'Bodily Assumption' in the Roman Church). However, as 15th August is in the middle of the holidays – with small congregations, it is transferred to the 2nd Sunday in September, the Sunday nearest to the 8th September which is celebrated as her birth. It is a time to reflect on Mary's discipleship, obedience and Spirit-filled life.

9.30am Festival Eucharist (with incense)

Preacher: Sister Mary Joy (Sisters of Bethany, Southsea)

6.30pm – Prayer Book Evensong

With Hymns and sung responses

Sunday 20th Harvest Festival

This year's Harvest Festival will be a week earlier, and the main all-age service will be at **11.30am** when we hope members of the local uniformed organisations will join us. This year, the UK has seen extraordinary heatwaves which have badly affected the harvest – we can take nothing for granted! Let's thank God for the produce of the earth.

The 9.30am service will be a Communion service as normal, but with harvest hymns and readings. Harvest gifts can be brought to all three services today.



St Mary's Church Portchester, Home Instead Fareham and Gosport and HILS
are hosting the

PORTCHESTER WELL BEING FAYRE

Supporting healthier, happier and more connected lives in our community.

Information • Advice • Support • Connection



Saturday
19 September 2026
10:00am – 2:00pm



Portchester Parish Hall,
1 Assheton Court,
Portchester,
PO16 9PY



Free entry
Everyone
welcome!



FOOD SAMPLING

Enjoy a variety of food samples and discover new options and local services.



INFORMATION, ADVICE & SUPPORT

Find out about services available in the local area to support you or a loved one.



CONNECT & FEEL INFORMED

Meet local organisations, ask questions and connect with your community.



HEALTH & WELLBEING

Discover tips and resources to help you live well and stay independent.



ALL WELCOME

Everyone is welcome – older people, families, carers and anyone interested in wellbeing.



FOOD SAMPLING TICKETS

Tickets are required for the food sampling. Please collect your free ticket from St Mary's Church Office or call:

02392 321380
or Fiona – 07707 993351



DONATIONS WELCOME

All proceeds will go towards the

St Mary's Church
Restoration Fund.



Proudly supported by

home instead
Fareham and Gosport



Health & Independent Living Support

Tuesday 22nd 7.30pm Praise and Worship with Mission Guatemala

Joe and Kathy Snowden give you a warm welcome to an evening of praise and worship with missionaries from Guatemala – the Humphrey's family. The former Portchester Free Church have supported this mission for many years, and it has been our joy to be able to continue that from our 10% charity fund. Guatemala is a very challenging country for missionaries to work in (as is increasingly the case in many South American countries) because of drugs and militant political movements. But Mission Guatemala is staying there on the front line, bringing the hope of Jesus expressed in evangelism, education, worship and social care.



Have a look at the Mission's website and see the spiritual, education and social work they are involved with and come along and meet our friends personally. Thank you, St Mary's, for your support.

<https://www.missionguatemala.info/>

Sunday 27th – ALL TOGETHER SERVICE with J John at Community School

Two or three times a year, our three morning services combine for a celebration of our unity as one church. This autumn's service will be quite different and special, as we have what may be a one-off event in having J John as our guest speaker.

John is the best-known evangelist in the UK, although his ministry takes him all over the world. He has authored many books and his talks are on YouTube. John is also a Lay Canon of Coventry Cathedral. Tens of thousands of people have been won for Christ through his ministry, but the persona who led him to the Lord was Andy Economides who is well known to St Mary's folk.

The service will consist of well-known hymns and songs, and testimonies from people who have recently come to faith. There won't be a shared lunch this time, but we hope to have tea and coffee at the end.

Children will be catered for in their own activities in the school dining room which opens up into the mail hall, so parents can sit at the back and keep an eye on their children, yet at the same time enjoy the service.

Most importantly, this is an opportunity to invite friends to this service. It will be particularly inspiring for those on the fringe of the faith, or still searching. Special invitation cards are available. Please support us on that day.

Tuesday 6th October – Alpha Course



The Alpha Course starts slightly later this year to allow for interest from the service with J John. We begin on Tuesday 6th October 6.45pm at the church, with a meal followed by a video then discussion.

It is particularly helpful for those exploring or coming back to faith or preparing for baptism or confirmation.

Another change this year is that it will be shorter. An initial six weeks will include a Saturday morning 'Quiet Morning', but if there are any subjects the participants would like to cover, we will put on a follow-on course.

Jeff and Pauline Gennings will again lead the course. However, this year they will invite people to join the team as it will involve a bit more coming alongside people this time. There will be a sign-up sheet on the noticeboard or you can register via the office, or by having a word with Jeff and Pauline or Rev Ian.



SUNDAY

ALL TOGETHER

SERVICE

Worship with us and feel the spirit of
togetherness!



Sunday
September 27



At 10.30 am



**Portchester Community
School**
**White Hart Lane,
Portchester PO16 9BD**

**SPECIAL GUEST
SPEAKER**

CANON J. JOHN

J. John is an evangelist, minister, speaker, broadcaster and writer. He has been in ministry for four decades. He has spoken in towns, cities and universities in 69 countries.

Special Service in October as part of a weekend of 'Creative Cultural Connections'

African and Caribbean Weekend

Friday 9th – Sunday 11th October

To remember the 230th anniversary of
the black slaves at Portchester Castle



dock in Portsmouth Harbour. By the end of that month almost all of them, were living at Portchester Castle.

You can read about it here on the English Heritage website

<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/portchester-castle/history-and-stories/black-prisoners-at-portchester/>

Events on Friday and Saturday at the church are being organised by a group called 'Creative Cultural Connections'. Website: <https://sv2g.org.uk/>

Friday 9th 11am and Saturday 12.00pm

Sunday 10.30am Special Service at St Mary's (Combining 9.30am and 11.30am services)

A non-Communion 'Service of the Word' with African and Caribbean flavoured worship with many guests. If you have friends of African/Caribbean family origins, you might like to invite them.

Special Guest Preacher: Rev Reginald Grant

We are delighted to welcome Rev Reggie Grant as our preacher today. A native of The Bahamas, one of the Caribbean islands, he is currently Associate Priest at St Mark's Church, Reigate in the Diocese of Southwark.

Regie is a podiatrist working in the NHS so he serves St Mark's's in a non-stipendiary capacity as a self-supporting minister.





International Food Evening

We are holding this year's International Food evening on **Friday 9th October** as part of the weekend. We are inviting all those who are part of St Mary's, but whose (or their partner's) ethnic origin is outside of the UK to come along – in national dress if you like. At the last count, we had 18 nationalities represented at St Mary's. If you are able to bring a dish of food of your country that would be great! There is no cost, but we need indications of numbers so please contact the Parish Office or Sue Oliver on steve.sueoliver@yahoo.co.uk

Friday 25th 6.30pm Trafalgar Dinner

Given our close connection to the Royal Navy, we are holding a Trafalgar Dinner on 25th October at 6.30pm organised by Richard and Margaret Andrews. This will consist of a three-course meal with wine and drinks, and is limited to 60 people. Tickets for this are £20 each, but the larger than normal amount is because we want to make it a fundraiser for a special project...

Several years ago, three angel paintings were discovered in the church. They are in need of professional repair which we are having done and are currently with an art shop. We will have them mounted and placed in the church, but we reckon we are going to need around £1,000 for this. Already donations have been given and we are hoping that this evening will make up the balance.

St Mary's
Portchester

HARVEST SUPPER

Saturday 26th September 2026
Two-Course Meal followed by
Entertainment & Raffle
St Mary's Church, Portchester
6.00pm

Tickets (limited to 60)
£7.00 from St Mary's Tea Room,
Parish Office or QR Code

St Mary's
Portchester

A Fundraising Event for St Mary's Church Portchester

TRAFALGAR DAY DINNER

Friday 23rd October 2026 at 7.00pm

3-Course Meal with Wine/Soft Drink
SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKER
Tickets (limited to 60) £20
Please see Richard Andrews for tickets

Women's Thursday Bible Study

It has been a real joy to see the group grow over the past two years. Each week, the wealth of knowledge, wisdom, and different perspectives shared by the ladies helps to shine a bright light into parts of the Bible that we may never have fully understood on our own. Our discussions continually deepen our faith and encourage us to keep learning.

One participant wrote: "I am incredibly grateful for the friendship, kindness, and companionship of everyone in the group. The love and support we share make Thursday afternoon the highlight of my week, and I thank God for blessing me with such a wonderful group of women to learn, pray and grow alongside."

This group is open to all women. We meet in the Hub at 1.15-3pm. We start back on 17th September.

Parenting Courses

Rev Elizabeth has facilitated two Parenting Courses, one on a Thursday evening in the Hub and another in the church after St Mary's Lambs. Her friend Sara gave us strategies and tools to help us in difficult situations with our children, which were really useful. Being alongside others and sharing experiences in a relaxed way made it easy to open up about difficulties we experience as parents. It's been really interesting, eye opening and given us a new perspective on family life.

There is no 'manual' to parenting, but this course has helped me understand that there isn't a one-size-fits all, but the foundations are the same.

Elizabeth will be facilitating another course led by Sara at the Church of the Good Shepherd in September. If interested please speak to Elizabeth.

St Mary's
Portchester

ST MARY'S CHURCH
PORTCHESTER

MEN'S BREAKFAST
2ND SATURDAY OF THE MONTH
8.00AM

12 SEPT **ERIC STANDEN**
The "King of Instruments"
A Potted History of the Organ

10 OCT **ROB 'MITCH' MITCHELL**
A Life & Experience in the Police Force

14 NOV **REV IAN MEREDITH**
Woodbine Wille
World War 1 Chaplain & War Poet

12 DEC **MICK MELLOWS**
Faith of a Footballer

SPEAKER
Programme

PRAISE
AND
WORSHIP

Mission
Guatemala

22 SEPTEMBER, 2026
7:30PM
ST MARY'S CHURCH PORTCHESTER

COME AND HEAR INSPIRING STORIES FROM THE HUMPHRIES FAMILY AS THEY SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES FROM GUATEMALA AND GIVE AN UPDATE ON THEIR MISSIONARY WORK.





Amy at Lambeth Palace

In July, two of those who work with children and young people from our diocese went to Lambeth Palace, London, for a celebration honouring those who work in this ministry.

Amy Sparks, children's worker at St Mary's Church, Portchester, and Joel Doel, youth worker at St Margaret's Community Church, Southsea, were nominated to represent our diocese at the reception, hearing from Archbishop of Canterbury Sarah Mullally and two

other speakers, and enjoyed afternoon tea in the grounds of the palace.

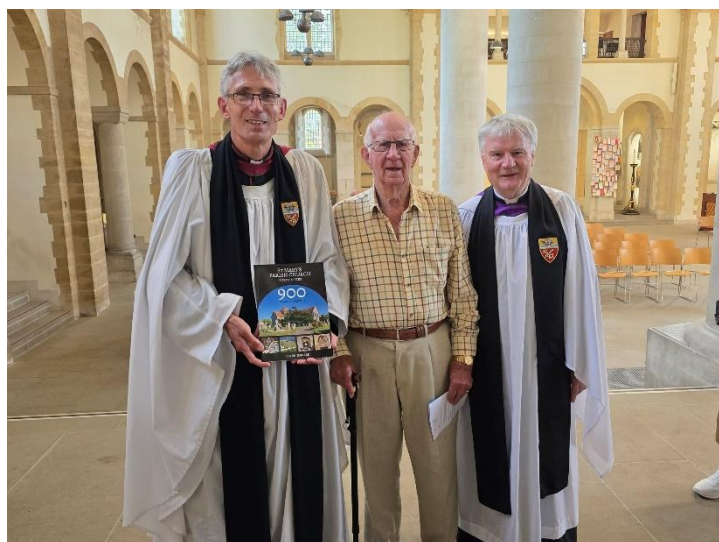
The reception is part of *Recognise*, a week of recognition for those involved in Children Youth and Family ministry. We at St Mary's added our appreciation for the work Amy does.



St Mary's at the Cathedral

Honorary Canons are invited to preach occasionally at the cathedral and on Sunday 19th July, Rev Ian was the preacher at the cathedral's service of Evensong. This began a series of sermons where the Canons were invited to preach on 'Rules for flourishing', or what sustains them in their ministry. Ian spoke on the practice of Jesus to withdraw to 'deserted places' to pray, and that regular times of prayer gave focus as well as energy for the many demands in ministry.

Ian was supported by around 50 members of our congregation who had travelled for the event. The clergy there commented that they had never seen quite a support before! (Ian says: "Thank you".)



At the close of the service, he presented the Dean with a copy of Bryan Jerrard's book on the history of St Mary's. He reminded the cathedral that Portchester was in fact its 'grandmother', as it 'planted' another priory at Southwick which in turn began the first church in Portsmouth, St Thomas's, now the cathedral. This link will become part of next year's celebrations of the 100th anniversary of the founding of Portsmouth Diocese.

Bryan's book has been selling very well, and we are down to our last 30 copies, so if you want one, do buy your copy at £10 from the Parish Office or Tea Room.

Confirmation



On Saturday 18th July, Amy Yates was among a group from our diocese who were confirmed at the cathedral. She had been prepared for this over the past few months by Rev Elizabeth who presented her. There were various events on at St Mary's that day, but some from our congregation were able to be present to support. Will and Amy are currently attending Good Shepherd at Crookhorn, but will continue to engage with events at St Mary's while they discern their future. We wish them well.

Amy wrote: *"Attending the confirmation classes has been a truly rewarding experience. Rev Elizabeth's in-depth knowledge has helped me explore not only the meaning of the Scriptures but also the true significance of confirmation and what it means to make this commitment."*

"No question has ever been too difficult or too in-depth for Elizabeth. She has patiently and thoughtfully answered every

one, helping me grow in both understanding and faith. These classes have only strengthened my decision to be confirmed. I now feel confident, well informed, and genuinely excited to take this next step in my Christian journey."

Rev Elizabeth and Amy are pictured here with Rt Rev Ian Brackley, a retired Assistant Bishop in the Diocese of Guildford, now living in our diocese and serving as an Honorary Assistant Bishop.

Talking about Confirmation, the next service at the cathedral will be on **Saturday 14th**

November at 5.45pm. Currently, we have two candidates, but we are hoping for some more. Confirmation is a service for those who were baptised as infants but who have since come to own the faith as adults. It is an opportunity to own the faith for themselves, to publicly confess Christ and to reaffirm personally the promises made on their behalf at their baptism. There is a course of preparation, which is normally part of the Alpha course, plus some extra subjects. If you are interested in being confirmed, please see Rev Ian.



Rev Celia Jones joins the Ministry Team

Celia has been a member of our congregation for several years since retiring to Portchester after ministry in the Church in Wales. Up until now, she has not sought PTO (Permission to Officiate), hence she has not taken any services apart from Quiet Days. However, she now feels able to take up PTO, which means she may have a greater role in ministry among us. However, Celia still wishes to keep low key, and will not be taking services such as weddings and funerals. We look forward to receiving whatever she feels she can offer.

Over the next few months, Celia has organised a couple of events which we hope you will support...

'An Extraordinary, Ordinary Love Story'

12th-18th October – St Mary's Church -10.00am to 4.00pm

Celia writes: "The idea for this exhibition was born during a retreat last year. Walking through the local landscape, I had TIME to enjoy the beauty of the natural world. It struck me how much we take for granted the extraordinary in the ordinary that surrounds us. I wrote a Haiku to describe what I was experiencing.

Extraordinary, Ordinary, you are blessed, I am blessed by you.

The natural world is one of the ways through which God communicates, it is a language of love. The psalmist knew this: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands." (*Psalms 19:1-4*)

The whole of nature, from human beings to rocks and stars, early morning dew and spiders' webs, is shot through with God's DNA!

Elizabeth Barrett-Browning knew this when she wrote;

"Earth is crammed with heaven and every common bush afire with God but only those who see take off their shoes. The rest sit around and pick blackberries".

(A reference to Moses walking on Holy Ground & the burning bush) *Exodus 3:2-5*

One of the textiles in this exhibition is called 'Seeds of Hope'. It tells the story of how God, when invited, enters our pain, our darkness, our anxiety and the groaning of the world's trauma, and begins the work of transformation through the Holy Spirit. Christ shares our pain. He knows from personal experience, all about suffering. Seeds of Hope are planted in our hearts which, when watered by the Spirit, germinate, blossom and produce fruit. Fruit produces more seeds of hope and the cycle goes on.

Colossians 1:27 tells us: 'Christ in you the Hope of Glory.'

Hope feeds us, hope sustains us, hope saves us.

The heart is a universal symbol of love – I hope to share God's love through the pieces I have chosen to exhibit. It is God's love story.

I encourage you to make your own hearts and dedicate them to someone special. The proceeds from the competition will go to St Mary's Church for its ongoing mission to share the Gospel message. Your hearts will complete the exhibition, so be adventurous, be creative and enjoy the process!



Advent Retreat.

Celia will also be leading the Advent Quiet Day on

Saturday 5th December at St Andrew's, Hayling Island.

Please put the date in your diary, and further details and a sign-up sheet will be available soon.

Summer Pilgrimage 1: Holy Island: A Week of Faith and Fellowship, Following in the Footsteps of Saints

By Julia Gay. Other participants' comments are in *"inverted commas and italics."*

On Friday 19th June, a motley but enthusiastic crew of pilgrims gathered their rucksacks and tightened their bootlaces, ready for a week of discovery in Northumberland, singing the age-old Pilgrim's Hymn:

*"We who would valiant be, 'gainst all disaster.
Got my brand new walking boots, and a box of plasters."*



Our home for the week, found after days of research by Ian Chandler, was a welcoming farmhouse with two cosy chalets on the outskirts of Alnwick. After settling in that first evening, we shared a hearty fish-and-chip supper, accompanied by a glass (or two) of wine.

Although we were not able to complete all of St Oswald's Way in the time we had, our itinerary was full, evolving during the week, shaped by the weather, energy, and tide times across to The Holy Island.

On Saturday, we travelled to Hadrian's Wall and walked from Housestead Fort to visit the remains of the iconic tree at Sycamore Gap. Though cut down last year, in an act of wanton vandalism, the site was far from desolate. New shoots were already growing from the stump, a powerful reminder that, even when humanity causes destruction, God's creation has a remarkable way of renewing itself. Standing there on the ancient Roman wall, surrounded by the most amazing views, was a moving experience for all of us. Valerie was *"astonished to find a lark above us. The song of the lark is beautiful. It was clear and so musical, travelling overhead with us, ascending until we left it behind us"*.

Sunday took us to Durham Cathedral, where we attended the Eucharist in one of the most magnificent places of worship in the country. After the service, a guided tour told of the cathedral's history and connection to St Cuthbert, whose shrine has drawn pilgrims for centuries. Not forgetting the tomb of Rev Ian's ancestors, the Neville family of County Durham. In the evening, we were invited back to a recital by the Durham Choral Scholars.

Monday was a trip to Bamburgh Castle, planned like a military operation to accommodate those who wanted to maximise time spent walking along the coast, and those who preferred to drive some or all of the way and spend more time visiting the castle and the village. We started with a hearty breakfast en route at the Piper's Pitch in Craster, run by Scotsman Andy and home of the famous Auchtermuchty, a huge bun filled with haggis, bacon, and kick of chili jam. We then set off *"walking along the beach to Bamburgh Castle, marvelling at the wildness, sea and man-made castle"*.



Later in the week we visited St Cuthbert's Cave, a natural sandstone shelter tucked within peaceful woodland, where monks hid St Cuthbert's body while fleeing Viking raids. The cave's cool stillness offered a moment of reflection, inviting us to imagine the devotion and courage of those early Christians.

Here I need to pause a moment to remember Valerie. By this point in the week, we had begun to realise that Valerie really was unwell and we were all concerned that the uphill walk from the car park to the cave would be too much for her. Valerie, with pilgrim's staff in hand, very slowly and serenely walked up the hill. One step, two steps, pause for breath; one step, two steps, pause for breath. There was no doubt in my mind who was walking with her every step of the way.

Probably the most memorable experience for all was walking the ancient Pilgrims' Causeway to the Holy Island of Lindisfarne. With the tide safely out, we followed the line of tall wooden poles across the sand: *"if we open our hearts to God and open our eyes to creation, the signs show us the way, just as the poles showed us the way to Holy Island"*. Even at low tide there are still some puddly bits and areas where you can sink into the mud. Only one of us fell flat in the mud; Hilary will tell you who that was! *"Seeing the footprints in the sand (and pawprints) on the causeway, gave me the feeling that God was with us"*.

There is so much to do and see on Holy Island, and a most special moment was walking out to St Cuthbert's Isle, where he lived as a hermit before moving to Inner Farne. *"The awesome feeling of sitting in St Cuthbert's home on the tidal island was something I'll never forget"*.

Inner Farne was our destination by boat the following day, where St Cuthbert spent his final years. Today, the island is home to thousands of seabirds, including puffins. We had chosen the perfect time to visit, as the end of June is breeding season and we were all excited to see 'pufflings' bobbing around. It was another special moment, *"sitting watching the puffins realising how perfect nature is"*. But watch out for the arctic terns who nest close to the pathways and would 'dive bomb' the humans at every available opportunity; so, if you don't take the precaution of wearing a hat....!!

Our final day was spent in silent reflection at Alnmouth Friary, a place of hospitality and prayer run by the Anglican Franciscans. We were encouraged to walk down to the beach at Alnmouth, a very beautiful part of the Northumberland coastline, and a truly 'thin' place.

That evening we shared a simple Pilgrims' Meal of homemade soup, bread, cheese and fruit, and reflected on the week we had spent together. Each of us had our own reasons for making the pilgrimage, yet throughout the week we discovered a shared sense of blessing, and a renewed awareness of God's presence in the landscapes we walked through and *"above all, the friendship within the group, observing the characters grow, develop bonds and faces smiling and laughing"*.

"Each of us will have taken something from our pilgrims' journey: a friendship made, a quiet reflection, a fear overcome, a moving forward, a fellowship, and each leaving our own 'footprints', encouraging others along the way."

Dedicated to the memory of Valerie Agar, a friend and fellow pilgrim.



Unsung Heroes: This month – Valerie Agar (Obituary)

Appreciation from Rev Ian Meredith



Each month in this magazine, we feature an ‘unsung hero’ – that is, a member of the congregation who doesn’t necessarily hold an official position, but who just gets on and does things in the background, usually many things which people are not aware of.

Given the way I was questioning Valerie a few months ago, she picked up that I was going to feature her soon (which of course I was). She asked me in no uncertain terms not to write anything about her. This was not a false modesty, but was a sincere and humble desire not to appear as a super saint, or better than others.

Picking up that she really meant it I said, jokingly: “OK – we’ll leave all that for your funeral.” Never thinking for a moment that that sad event would be sooner rather than later.

Valerie died on 26th June in Northumberland at the end of the Parish Pilgrimage to Lindisfarne and Durham. The church was full for her funeral on 31st July, when I was able to deliver this tribute.

Of course, behind all her reticence was the desire that God alone should receive the glory for anything that she had accomplished. So, although that service was one of thanksgiving, indeed a celebration of Valerie’s life, it was a worship service, which ultimately was not about her, but about the Lord whom she loved and served.

Valerie was the very first member of St Mary’s I had a conversation with. It was the evening of my interview for this job, just over 13 years ago. The candidates plus the PCC had a meal in The Cormorant, and it was supposed to be a bit like ‘speed dating’ where each member would spend a few minutes at the table talking with each candidate of whom there were five of us.

When it came to Valerie’s turn, she never left our table the whole evening, we tried to gently coax her to talk to some of the other candidates, but she wouldn’t leave us; it’s as if she knew! And we didn’t really want her to go, for here was a kindred spirit, and we knew we were at home. Such was the first impression. I remember also the love of dogs featured high in our respective agendas.

Valerie has been an amazing member of this church, and has served it in every capacity: Deanery Synod rep, PCC member, Secretary of the old Parish Hall, Churches Together rep, Scout leader, Christian Aid champion, Youth and Sunday School, Junior Church – and many others. If there was a job to be done, she would be there.

Faithful in her attendance, sometimes attending all three morning services, and often the evening although famously never on time. I used to say she was the ‘late Valerie Agar’ then.

If she was the first good conversation I had, she was also the one of the last, when I picked her up for the weekly Tuesday prayer group, as I always did.

The good that she did will live on, but so will the good that she was: humble, positive, encouraging, loving. I miss her, and we all do. Her type is rare even in church life today, where all too many are there for their needs and wants to be served, but Valerie, in imitating the life of Jesus as she did in so many ways, came not to be served, but to serve. Well done, good and faithful servant. Enjoy your reward, and we’ll see you again.

Obituary: Enid Bazeley

Enid Bazeley died on 25th July at the age of 93. She was a regular attender at St Mary's, along with her husband Roger, until the last two years when she has been in a nursing home in Lymington. Born in London from a Baptist family, she came to faith at an early age and was baptised there.

She trained as a nurse and midwife at the Middlesex Hospital where she joined the Christian Union and also became an Anglican. Her nursing career took her to Canada for a short while where she became a theatre sister.

She married Ted Parkin and had two sons, Tim and Doug.

Moving back to the UK, they opened a small grocery store in Fratton, Portsmouth. 1970 saw them move to Portchester, to King George Road where they lived for 30 years.

They joined St Mary's Church and became enthusiastic members. Ted died in 2000 and his cremated remains are buried in the churchyard, where those of Enid will also be laid to rest.

In 2002, she married Roger Bazeley, a widowed farmer from Southwick, who she met during the annual pilgrimage walk from Portchester to Southwick. Enid moved into the farm, but continued to attend St Mary's. Later, they moved into a cottage in Castle Street where both attended St Mary's, although also keeping their links with Southwick Church.

Roger is still alive, but not well these days and is being cared for in a nursing home in Denmead. Enid's funeral was held at St Mary's on 20th August.



LATEST ON BUILDING PROJECTS

The Bells. As you may know, it is our hope to have a set of eight bells installed in the bell tower. This has been a long and arduous process over the past three years, but we are almost there! The DAC finally approved the project and a notice appeared on the front door and notice board inviting any objections. Hopefully there will be none, and the next step will be the Chancellor issuing a Faculty (building permission). The next stage is that the order would be placed with the bell company to install, but we think that would take a year before the bells are in place. Once we are given the all-clear, we will launch a special fundraising campaign (although there is a significant amount of money already in the bell fund).

The construction of the **new gangway to the bell tower** will commence in January.

Toilets. Again, initial noises from official sources sound positive. The Planning Officer of Fareham Borough Council sees no objection at this stage, so it will now go to the DAC's September meeting. The aim is that around Christmas time we will have two additional new toilets (where the cupboard is, opposite the present toilet).

Building extension. This project has also been in process for several years and has been knocked around by several official bodies. At last, these six groups (Historic England, Fareham Borough Council, etc) have reached an agreement that the extension may be possible but, at present, could only be built on the footprint of what was once the south transept. However, this would also include the height, and as this would mirror the present north transept, would give us potentially three storeys, or three large rooms. The plan is currently with the architect and quantity surveyors, who are going to suggest a cost. Once we know what that will be (and it will be £ million+), we will then decide if it is worthwhile and achievable.

Lay Ministry at St Mary's

LICENSED

eg. Readers and lay pioneers

Two-year academic/formational training

Licensed to serve across the diocese

Accountable to the bishop

Support and training from the diocese

The Church of England very much encourages lay ministry, and is ahead of many other denominations in this respect. This is particularly so in Portsmouth Diocese, and especially at St Mary's. There are three official pathways to ministry in the diocese: Licensed, Authorised and Locally Recognised.

At St Mary's this month, we will see some more lay ministers coming on to the worship team. **Scott Brodrick and Leigh Williams** are currently in a discernment process for possible ordination. Please keep them in your prayers. In the meantime, they will be getting more experience in worship, and in particular will be serving as liturgical deacons at the 9.30 Parish Eucharist. In this role, they assist the Celebrant by leading the Confession and the Gospel, and by serving the Celebrant at the altar.

AUTHORISED

eg. pastoral assistants, worship leaders, preachers and youth/children's ministers

One-year diocesan training course

Authorised to serve within parish/benefice

Accountable to the bishop, supervised by the incumbent

Support and training from the diocese

Sue Oliver also begins her training with the diocese this September to become an Authorised Lay Minister, also serving as a liturgical deacon, occasional preaching as well as continuing her role as an Anna Chaplain and Pastoral Assistant.

Sue also organises the monthly **LADIES BREAKFASTS** which are on the first Saturday of each month 9.00am at the Parish Hall. The next one is on 5th September. Unfortunately, our booked speaker has had to cancel, so this one will be a **SOCIAL**. All ladies welcome.

Rev Ian recently held a course for **preachers** and all those who were on the course are being invited to give a short homily at a mid-week service, with **Ashley and Ben** also helping at the Sunday services. Again, this is to see if they have a preaching gift – and at what level, and what service would be most appropriate.

This course will be repeated in September, on Thursdays starting on 3rd September. Anyone is welcome to attend this. There is a sign-up sheet on the notice board, or contact Rev Ian.

Now that we have more families attending the 9.30am service, we are hoping to re-introduce our **Junior Servers Team** at least once a month.

If anyone else in the church would like to be involved in some sort of ministry, please see Rev Ian.

LOCALLY-RECOGNISED

eg. Anna Chaplains, home group leaders, those assisting with children/youth groups, those in prayer/listening ministry, and occasional worship leaders

Local training course

Commissioned locally to serve within single parish/benefice

Accountable to the incumbent

Support and training provided locally

Hymns we don't often sing

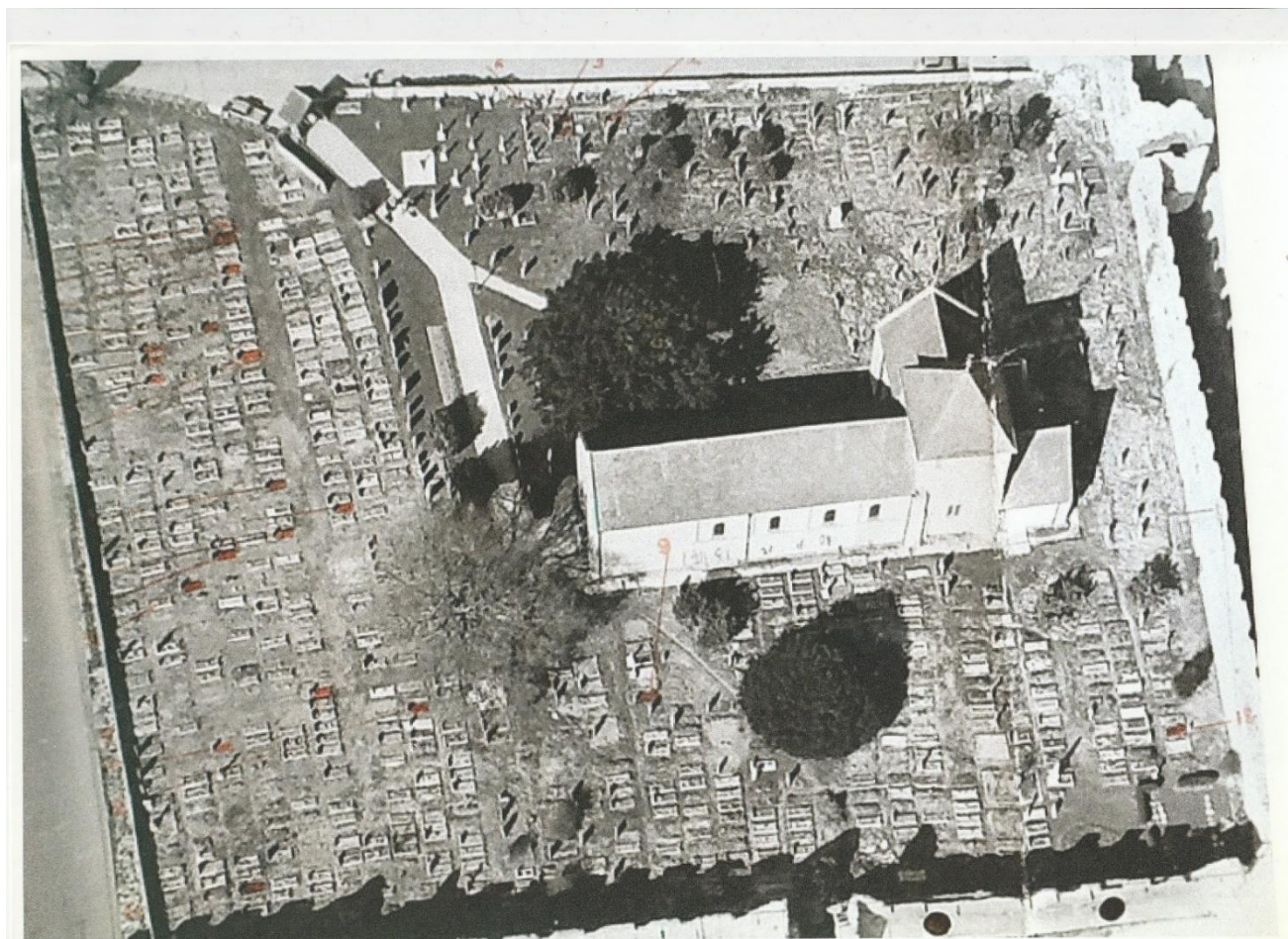
In the last magazine we asked for your hymn suggestions, and several of you let us know your favourites which we have been singing at the 9.30am service during the summer. Hope you all enjoyed them. However, this time we are asking for hymns which we don't normally sing. They don't have to be your favourites, but hymns which you think we should hear and sing. Please let Judith, the organist, or Rev Ian know your choices. From September, we will be introducing some of the 11.30am type songs which work well as hymns.

Mapping the Graveyard

By Pamela Wayman and Linda Cane

For the last seven years or so, a small team of volunteers has been working to map grave locations within St Mary's churchyard. The aim is to identify who is in which grave, and to produce a map to allow graves to be easily found.

Unfortunately, a number of graves are no longer visible. This was due (following consultation with relatives of those whose graves were affected) to the removal of many kerbstones in order to make grass cutting easier and thus to be able to maintain a tidier appearance in the graveyard. The photograph below was taken between 1949 and 1978 and shows the graveyard before the kerbstones were removed.



Following the removal of kerbstones in 1978, each grave was left with either a headstone or a single kerbstone (which would normally have an inscription on it), and all of these monuments were in lines running north to south allowing grass cutters to easily move between the rows. However, the kerbstones often only had partial inscriptions and, in many cases, have sunk into the ground and completely disappeared.

So, the first part of the project involved volunteers not only transcribing information from visible monuments but also searching for and uncovering buried kerbstones in an attempt to read their inscriptions and identify who was buried in that grave.

Hard-to-Read Inscriptions

Older headstones and kerbstones have become weathered over time and are very difficult to read. Taking rubbings is not permitted, so volunteers have had to use different methods to try to overcome this problem. One method is to try to read the inscription at different times of day and at different times of year when the sun is shining from different directions and angles. This method has worked particularly well for the headstones either

side of the path from the Lych Gate to the main door of the church. On a sunny day, the hour either side of midday will illuminate the majority of these headstone inscriptions.

Alternatively, gently rubbing flour onto a headstone, or squirting it with water (not both at the same time!), can make the inscription appear as if by magic!

Sadly, there are a few headstones that we have been unable to read, so their occupants will remain anonymous.

Old documentation

Prior to the removal of kerbstones, a couple of maps were made of the graveyard which only recorded a single surname against each grave. These maps provided two different numbering plans of the layout of the graves. Neither of these numbering plans worked particularly well in their own right but, used together, they make an effective way of locating not only graves where headstones or kerbstones are still standing but they also give a good indication of where graves without visible monuments are. We have therefore used these combined numbering plans for our own mapping.

At the same time as these maps were created, a list was made of the graves shown on those maps detailing, where known, surnames, initials and year of burial. This information has been crucial in allowing us to undertake research and identify who is in those graves where no monument exists or inscriptions have become illegible.

In 2001, a further map was made of the graveyard giving every individual headstone/kerbstone its own number, with only a single surname recorded against each grave. We will also cross refer this numbering system on our mapping.

Publishing our findings

Within the next couple of months, we will be able to produce a printed map and details of who is in every identified grave. A copy will be given to the Tea Room for visitors to refer to. A copy of the 2001 map is already available to view in the Tea Room.

The map and grave details will be published on the St Mary's Portchester webpage in due course.

We are already assisting relatives and family tree enthusiasts to locate graves; any enquires should be made to office@stmary-portchester.org.uk. If requested, we are more than happy to meet with you in the graveyard in order to help you locate a grave.

The oldest identified grave: 1692 - Jehu Cheesman (Senior)

The oldest record of a burial (which is inside the church): 1618 – Sir Thomas Cornwallis

The most popular surnames of identified graves: RUSSELL (34), COOPER (29), HAYTER (28), WHITING (27), GATES (25), STURGESS (25), HELLYER (23), MARTELL (22)

The number of people whose graves have been identified: 1,938.

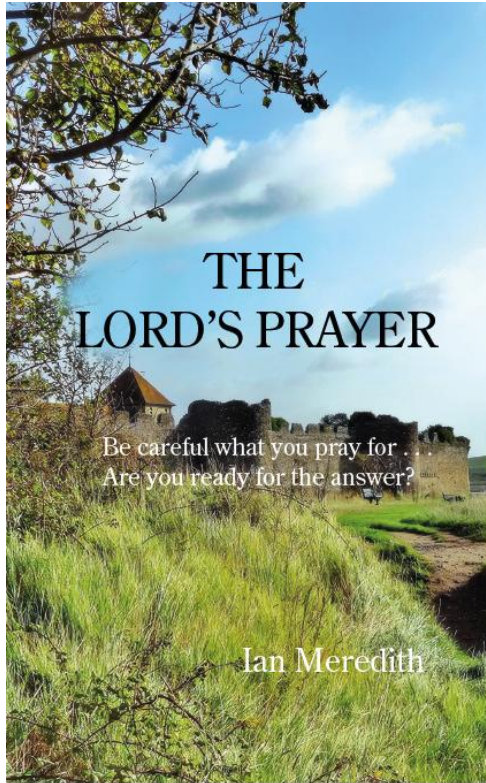
Special times of prayer this month

We have two evening sessions and two daytime sessions all held in the church. Tues 1st 8pm; Fri 11th 11am; Fri 18th 11am; Wed 23rd 7.30pm

We are praying particularly for :

- **The service with J. John on 27th**
- **The Alpha Course and those exploring faith**
- **Our young people's groups, particularly for those who have recently made a commitment to Christ.**

The Lord's Prayer: Are you ready for the answer?



Earlier this year, Rev Ian preached a series of sermons at the 9.30am Parish Eucharist looking at the Lord's Prayer line by line. Several members commented positively and asked if these could be published in book form – so, here we are!

The Lord's Prayer covers everything, and it is the one prayer that most people know off by heart – but then that's the weakness with oft-repeated prayers: we can say them on autopilot, without thinking about the words. That's true of the liturgy, and even worship songs. Also, we can know them so well, that we don't know them at all.

And what it's praying for, is the most revolutionary change you can imagine in the world we live in. A change to a world where what God wants *can* happen, where all the hungry are fed, and where forgiveness is the first imperative in all our relationships.

However, that's not exactly like the world we inhabit at the moment. So, if radical means looking for change from the roots up, yes, then it's radical.

You will find it challenging. In fact, you might even want to stop saying it for a while, because of the ideas in it.

- Do we really want the kingdom to come in glory – tonight?
- Can we be bothered taking on evil?
- Does it matter if we hold resentments and refuse to forgive?
- And what if we agreed with God that he can forgive us, but only to the extent that we are prepared to forgive others?

The books will be selling at £5 each. However, Marilyn Meredith has kindly donated the cost of printing the first batch in order that everyone who attends our services, as well as other friends can receive a free copy. We hope these will be available on Sunday 6th September at all services.

Children's Work Report August 2026

By Amy Sparks

St Mary's Lambs enjoyed their leaver's party this summer term. We enjoyed party games and songs, the children did a conga up the aisle and we had fun with the parachute too. We were sad to say goodbye to some of our 4-year old's, one of whom we have seen nearly every week since they were 7 weeks old! They gave us a beautiful gift – a personalised lamb picture which the children can add their thumb print to when they each leave for school. We did our first two thumb prints on that day. We are so blessed to know our St Mary's Lambs families, and we wish all the school starters every



blessing for September. During the summer holiday's we have enjoyed spending time with families outside in the castle for ball games and running around. St Mary's Lambs will return on September 16th for the new term.

Junior Church children at St Mary's have been completely blessed by Valerie for many years. Since I have known Valerie I've witnessed her amazing way with children, she took a genuine interest in each of them, taking time to talk to them on every occasion possible. Her Junior Church sessions were always engaging; the children would listen and take part in the varied activities she would give them. When I'm tidying the children's artwork at home, I often find things they've made with Valerie, and I realise how she always put a strong emphasis on letting the children know how much Jesus loves us all - and the children have made things that represent that love. That is something for us all to remember as we continue children's ministry while holding her example in our hearts.



The children decorated the letters of Valerie's name during one of our sessions. We were talking about Love as part of Christian character. We thanked God for Valerie's love for us and asked God to comfort us when we were feeling sad that we missed her. We praised God that now Valerie is with Jesus in heaven. We turned coffee filter papers into flowers as a way of showing our love. The children decorated several coffee filter papers and then had great fun spraying them with water. After a bit of cutting and twisting, the coffee filters made beautiful flowers, and we were honoured that the heart shaped 'flower' wreath could be used in Valerie's funeral.

Holly ran a great session for the children on 'Kindness' and told the story of Ruth and Boaz. The children were picking up sticks round the room and were reminded to always leave something and give to people in need. They went on a kindness treasure hunt around the church yard, and they were very kind in giving lollipops to friends.

If you enjoy working with children, then you are invited to join us in this vital ministry. Whether you would like to lead Junior Church sessions or help, whether you would like to help once a month or once a quarter, please do speak to me or send an email. We'd like to be able to offer something for two age groups but currently this isn't possible with the number of people we have on the team. We'd love to welcome more team members to increase our offering for the children and young people at St Mary's.



Holiday Club was held for three afternoons at the Scout Hut. We welcomed 17 children who took part in various activities such as art, crafts, sports, team games and playing with food! Our theme for day 1 was 'Jonah' and the children worked in teams to decorate a big fish after listening to the story.

Our theme for day 2 was 'football' and we learned from the Bible what Jesus said about the two greatest commandments. The children made beautiful 'welcome' signs that we can hang each time we have holiday club.

On day 3 we had 'Lego church' and listened to the story of 'The good Samaritan'. The children made Lego models in response to the



story and shared their creations with the group. The children also enjoyed building structures from marshmallows and pretzel sticks – then enjoyed eating them afterwards.

God bless the fantastic team who supported this – setting up, tidying, cleaning, encouraging the children, playing basketball, tennis, cricket – all sorts! The team really make it what it is. Thank you.

‘Recognise’ is a Church of England celebration to recognise the love and commitment of people who work in children, youth and family’s teams in churches all over the country. This was held in July and if you were there that Sunday, you would have seen a slideshow of all the people who currently work and volunteer in children’s teams for St Mary’s. It’s a lot of people! We then had cake after the service. I was nominated by our diocese along with a youth worker from Southsea to attend a celebration at Lambeth Palace. Archbishop Sarah Mullally spoke there of the importance of Children Youth and Families work for whole communities and what a difference this makes to people’s lives. Children’s work is only made possible by all the people who support it, who volunteer, who give financially or donate items for us to use. So, for everyone who has served in this ministry past and present, this is recognition for all.



Young Disciples will return in September. We will be having two sessions per month, and we look forward to welcoming the children back. The group is for children aged around 8-12 so do let me know if there’s anyone who would like to come along.

Cover photo: Portchester Memorial Gardens (Trevor Harman)

**Sunday Services: 8.00am; 9.30am & 11.30am (church in the castle)
& 6.00pm (Parish Hall)**

Wednesdays 6.30pm at the church and Fridays 10am at the Parish Hall.

Parish Office: Portchester Parish Hall, Assheton Court, Portchester, PO16 9PY

Tel: 02392 321380; E-mail: office@stmary-portchester.org.uk

Office hours: Tuesday – Thursday 9am – 4pm; Friday 9am – 1.00pm

Website: www.stmary-portchester.org.uk

Vicar: Rev Canon Dr Ian Meredith, Tel: 02392 375422; E-mail: irev@ymail.com