



(Left): Worshipper Lisa Freeman with the 'prayer window' at St Francis', Alverstoke; (right): the outside of the 'tin mission' church

Milestone for 'tin mission' church

IT started in 1905 as a 'tin mission church'. Exactly 100 years later, St Francis' Church in Gosport is still going strong.

The Clayhall Road church, a daughter church of St Mary's, Alverstoke, is celebrating the anniversary with a variety of activities, events and improvements.

Portsmouth university art student Lisa Freeman has painted a 'prayer window' in the church, reflecting the view normally seen through the window in the Sunday School room.

It features trees, houses on the Gilkicker estate and the birds and animals often seen on the grass

behind the church fence – along with St Francis himself.

Worshippers are encouraged to write short prayers to be stuck onto the framework of the window as part of their meditations.

The congregation has also made and given away 100 centenary badges featuring a drawing of the church; actively fundraised to maintain and improve the building; and drawn up a development plan for the next five years – including new windows, a disabled toilet and maintenance work on the exterior.

The celebrations will continue on October 2 when Bishop Kenneth visits for the church's patronal festival. He will already have visited St Faith's, the other

daughter church of St Mary's, that morning. The two congregations will then join together for lunch.

The church was originally built as a club for men and boys, but with a Sunday evening service. During the Second World War it was a forces canteen. It was rededicated as a church again in 1947 and then again in 1961.

Its blue corrugated iron exterior was replaced by a modern fibreglass equivalent in the 1980s

It continues to be part of the local community, with the hall providing a venue for activities including folk dancing, Trefoil Guild, mums and babies group, Rainbows, Sunday worship with a Sunday School, prayer groups and parish activities. The building is

also popular for children's parties.

• Another Gosport church is celebrating a significant date this month. St Matthew's Church in Bridgemary is marking its 50th anniversary celebrations with a concert.

The Havant Youth Choir and Havant Saxophone and Clarinet Choir will perform in the Wych Lane church at 7pm on October 8. Tickets, priced at £5, are available on 01329-234156, and all proceeds will go to the church.

Worshipper Pat Goater said: "The building actually started life as a parish hall, but there were so many activities going on there that the clergy thought it would be a good idea to get it consecrated and turned into a church."

Hefty bill for church repairs revealed

PARISHES in our diocese still need to spend more than £5.6m on outstanding repairs to existing church buildings.

And 93 per cent of that needs to be spent on listed church buildings, according to a survey published last month.

Parishes across the country were asked a one-off question in the annual survey of attendance figures for 2003 about how much they thought still needed to be spent on repairs. The figures were based on five-yearly inspection reports. The national figure was more than £370m, 87 per cent of which was for listed churches.

Other survey results show that £921,000 was spent on major church repairs and £543,000 on other major repairs in our diocese during 2003.

The attendance figures showed an increase in average weekly church attendance from 15,400 adults and children in 2002 to 15,500 in 2003 in our diocese. Average Sunday attendance also rose from 13,500 to 13,900 in those 12 months.

The figures released by the national Church are collated from attendance counts over four Sundays in October. Those raw figures include non-regulars at baptisms, Harvest Festivals or other non-standard services.

But the figures are refined, in consultation with parishes, to help diocesan finance officers determine a more accurate figure for the number of 'regulars' at each church. That helps to determine the amount of parish share paid by each parish.

Tutu tribute for retiring clergyman



The Rev Arnold Hirst and his wife Jill

IT was the icing on the cake for retiring priest the Rev Arnold Hirst.

He had already experienced appreciation from a packed St Nicholas' Church in Wickham to mark his retirement after 45 years of ministry both there and in South Africa.

Then came the surprise - the reading of a tribute from the Most Rev Desmond Tutu, Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town.

"Arnold Hirst is a jail-bird," he said. "He and I and several church leaders were arrested in Johannesburg in apartheid South Africa for protesting in a public demonstration against the detention without trial of a

fellow church leader.

"We spent one night in gaol. It was a measure of Arnold's passion for and commitment to justice, peace and freedom.

"When the Hirsts left South Africa, it was our loss and your undoubted gain. We wish him and his family God's richest blessings in retirement. He has earned a richly deserved respite."

Around 270 people had packed into St Nicholas', the capacity of which was thought to be 230. Many former congregation members returned to thank Arnold for the way that his ministry had touched their lives.

Churchwarden Judy Lucas said: "The service

flowed beautifully and was most moving, with a congregation made up of every generation making their way to the altar rail for Arnold's last Holy Communion here."

And, in his final sermon as rector, Arnold emphasised the importance of the gospel message and our response to it.

Arnold had been rector of St Nicholas's Church, Wickham, since 1988. The night before his final service, bellringers rang a peal of Bob Minor - a total of 5,040 changes, which lasted for two hours and 40 minutes. And well-wishers also raised more than £7,700 towards the cost of his reception and a gift for Arnold and his wife Jill.

Porvoo links are sought in diocese

DO you or does your parish have any links with Lutheran churches in Scandinavia?

If so, our diocesan Porvoo adviser, the Rev Shirley Henderson, would like to get in touch with you.

"I am sure there are many initiatives going on which I am unaware of, and it would be good to organise some kind of 'information bank' to share experiences," she said.

'Porvoo' is the name given to links between Anglican and Scandinavian churches. Contact her on 01329-832162 or rev_shirley@hotmail.com.