Thousands visit church tea room

IT’S quite literally a godsend for tourists who visit Portchester Castle.

Worshippers from St Mary’s Church inside the castle have opened a tea room for tourists, dog walkers, locals and other visitors. They can stop for hot drinks, home made cakes and the chance to chat.

Thousands of people have taken advantage of the tea room since it first opened a year ago. Tourists from South Africa, Australia and the USA have popped in, as have locals from around the corner.

In the summer, coachloads of tourists who visit Portchester Castle are grateful for somewhere to have refreshments, as the castle itself has no cafe. Those tourists can mix with wedding guests who have arrived early for a service.

Parents who bring children to the weekly toddler group in church and others attending church activities, can have a snack or lunch afterwards. And the volunteers who run the tea room enjoy meeting new people and providing hospitality.

The vicar, the Rev Charlie Allen, said: “The staff team are all volunteers and their ministry of hospitality, attentiveness and care reflects the welcome of Christ to all who come.

“The congregation at St Mary’s are delighted that those who come to church do not step into an empty building, but are welcomed by the church community who call it home.

“We have discovered that far more people pop in to say a prayer as a result, or perhaps take a flyer or two about activities at St Mary’s.”

Five different volunteer teams take it in turns to staff the tea room, from Mondays to Saturdays each week. Those volunteers and other worshippers bake homemade cakes to be sold too.

The products sold in the tea room are Fairtrade, to help those in developing countries, and there’s also a range of St Mary’s merchandise available.

In the past 12 months, the tea room has generated around £14,000, with the profits going into church funds.

Manager Margaret Andrews said: “We had run afternoon teas in the church in the summer for 20 years, so we had the equipment here already. It’s busiest in the summer months, but people come in throughout the year.

“People think that this church is a ruin because it’s inside the castle. They often can’t believe it’s a working church that is full every week.”

And volunteer Jennifer Jackson said: “I’ve just retired, so I’m able to be here two days a week. It’s one of the most fulfilling things I’ve ever done.”

The tea room is open from 10.30am-4pm, Monday to Saturday, in the summer, and from 10.30am-2pm in the winter months.

Pupils perform Biblical musical for huge crowds

Parishes and schools across our diocese have been buying the UK’s first Christian Easter eggs – to help tell the Easter story.

The Church of England has joined forces with chocolate-makers to produce The Real Easter Egg, the first and only one to explain Easter on the box.

Supermarkets rejected the idea of stocking them in the shops, so church schools and parishes were asked to join a campaign to help prove demand by placing orders for Easter 2011. The idea is to persuade supermarkets they should stock them in 2012.

Already more than 30,000 Easter eggs have been ordered nationwide. St John’s Church in Fareham have ordered 144 for members of the congregation and 96 for children attending their Easter holiday club.

Not only are the 125g Easter eggs made of Fairtrade chocolate, but the £4.50 price of each egg also includes a charitable donation. Churches and individuals have to order the eggs by January 31 so that they can be made and sent in time for Easter.

Order forms, posters and flyers can be downloaded from www.realeasteregg.co.uk. The eggs have to be ordered in multiples of 12.

Christian Easter eggs now for sale

Pupils from Years 3, 4 and 5 of Hook with Warsash C of E Primary were given a fantastic opportunity to perform in a professional theatre and have first-hand experience of being on stage in front of hundreds of people.

It’s the seventh year the school has used Fareham Hall for their annual productions and it’s proving to be the most popular event each year in the school’s calendar. Previous productions there include A Christmas Carol, The White Feather and The Snow Queen.

The part of Joseph was played by Year 6 pupil Cameron Russell who was joined on stage by classmates who took on the main parts. They were supported by a choir of more than 150 pupils from Years 3, 4 and 5.

There were also special guest appearances by pupils from Year 1 and 2 who sang a range of songs from Joseph after the interval.

Several ex-pupils from the school came along to support the show and sing along to their favourite songs.

Headteacher Christopher Hines said: “We would like to say a huge thank you to everyone involved who helped make it such a memorable and magical performance.”