

## IN DEPTH: CREATIVE ARTS

he said. “For students at St Vincent College, they get to rub shoulders with people who’ve been in the music business for years.

“And the industry now expects up-and-coming artists to have already recorded and finished tracks. The days of signing a band and sending them to a recording studio are over – these days artists can record tracks themselves and build up a following online without being signed. The other thing we’re offering now is professional video recordings of them playing live.

“I’m not a person of faith myself, but I am passionate about the local community. Inviting young local musicians into the building to record or play music builds a connection with the building, which can only help someone like Matt Gatt to talk to them about coming to a Sunday service.”

Quay West Studios can also bring equipment to manage sound and lighting for festivals and events happening in our churches. In summer 2022, they helped St Mary’s Church, Portchester, to host the Soundwave Festival inside and outside their church building. And they can also pay session musicians to play alongside artists if needs be. For more information, see: [www.quayweststudios.com](http://www.quayweststudios.com)

Earlier this year, St John’s, Forton, hosted a performance of *Edith*, a play by theatre group Crowded Room about the trial of Edith Thompson, using verbatim court transcripts. She was hanged in 1923 after being convicted for murdering her husband, in what critics now regard as a miscarriage of justice.

The theatre company’s co-director Mark Knightley comes from Gosport and was keen to bring this production to his home town as part of a national tour. Audience members were invited to act as if they were they jury at the end of each performance.

St John’s, Forton, is also the venue



**Top: a performance of ‘Edith’ staged among the stained-glass windows and pews of St John’s, Forton, in March; below: a dance performance by Nova Grace Productions explores life in and out of lockdown**

for events run by Saint John Arts, which runs creative workshops and arts events.

It is funded by Gosport and Fareham Multi-Academy Trust, and recently hosted a dance performance in the church based on lockdown experiences during the Covid pandemic. It organised an art workshop during which residents painted a mural based on the history of the church and town. And it hosted dance and costume-making workshops for Gosport students that involved parading along Gosport High Street with two giant puppets.

Community arts leader Eleanor Hawkridge said: “The Church used to be at the forefront of arts and cultural commissioning, and this

artistic voice had huge impact in the culture of the day. It’s fitting that our church building at Saint John’s should be used to drive change in this area, by hosting creative projects and making creative freedom accessible to our community, and especially to its young people, who have faced unprecedented challenges over the last few years.”

And team rector the Rev Ray Driscoll said: “For me, our creativity comes from God, and so I’m really happy that our churches host theatre, dance, art and music events that can inspire us. And we’re hoping to build on those connections to re-establish a worshipping community at St John’s, which will have music and young people as part of its DNA.”

## Tribute acts pack out rural churches

**YOU** wouldn’t expect to see Harry Styles or Robbie Williams performing in a rural Hampshire church – but their soundalikes do!

All Saints, Botley, was inspired to book a Harry Styles tribute act after seeing the success of a Robbie Williams tribute at nearby St Peter’s, Curdridge.

The feeling was that both would help the churches connect with a younger audience – and help with fundraising.

Gillian Saivea, who booked ‘Harry Styled’ for Botley, said: “We hoped the evening would offer local families an affordable and

memorable experience that they might not have access to otherwise.

“It also showcases the church as a venue to the wider community and brings people into the building.

“There’s a new housing development right on our doorstep and we want to welcome as many young families as we can.

“These events can also be the first step for someone to engage with the church or rekindle their connection with it. We need to reach the next generation, and



Rob B Williams in St Peter’s Church, Curdridge

the more contact points there are, the better.”

The ‘Rob B Williams’ tribute act was the latest in a series of similar gigs hosted by St Peter’s Church, Curdridge. Music acts celebrating the work of Abba, Dolly Parton and Neil Diamond have also performed there.

The vicar, the Rev Gregg Mensingh, said: “The aim has been to

bring people in from the local community and to have a good time. It may also help us with our fundraising, but that’s not the main aim.

“The Rob B Williams act was very good. He didn’t look anything like him as he prepared in the vestry, but as soon as he appeared in the nave, he was strutting around just like Robbie Williams.”

## Annual festival is magnet for musicians

**IT** is a week-long extravaganza of music that puts the church at the heart of its local community.

Waterlooville Music Festival was founded in 2006, and became the most significant cultural event in the town, as well as one of the leading annual music festivals in Hampshire.

The church hosts concerts throughout the day and each evening, featuring a wide range of music genres and attracting musicians from across the country.

The daytime concerts are free, and there’s only a modest charge for the evening events, bringing affordable music to the



The Waterlooville Music Festival Choir performing this summer

local community.

It was former parish priest the Rev Mike Sheffield who was the catalyst for the festival to launch, soon after his arrival in 2005.

This summer’s programme featured children from local schools as well as local bands and choirs. They staged choral, orchestral, folk and brass

concerts, and the week was rounded off with an Elton John tribute act and the traditional flag-waving ‘Last Night of the Proms’-style spectacular.

It is a non-profit making community event organised by volunteers. Occasionally the festival does engage professionals, but

it usually aims to present the highest quality of local amateur musicians. For full details, see: [www.stgeorgesnews.org/wmf](http://www.stgeorgesnews.org/wmf)