

A joy to worship in a relaxed atmosphere

Avril Stouse is pleased to be back worshipping inside St Peter's, Hayling Island – though she enjoyed outdoor worship too!

Who are you? I'm Avril Stouse, a Londoner by birth and now happily settled on Hayling Island. I'm a retired headteacher and loved every minute of working with the children and young people in my care. My dear husband Ron sadly passed away during the first lockdown, but I don't have time to be bored or lonely, especially now I am churchwarden as well as a Girlguiding and Trefoil Guild member.

What church are you part of? I'm a member of St. Peter's on Hayling Island. It isn't the nearest church to my home, but it's the one Ron and I decided best suited our needs when we moved here 14 years ago. Being Ron's carer left little time to be very involved with church life at that time, but I did manage to set up the children's book corner and try to keep the library in order.

When we lived in Sussex, I used to drive past St Peter's to visit my daughter on Hayling, never dreaming that I would be a regular worshipper there.

Why did you start going there? We chose St Peter's because several of our neighbours worshipped there and, being a small church, we felt that we would soon get to know our fellow worshippers.

Going to church has always been



Avril Stouse at St Peter's, Hayling

an important part of my life. I attended and then helped to lead children's church and Sunday School, later becoming a member of the youth club and choir.

I attended a C of E secondary school and our school's church happened to be Southwark Cathedral, with visits also to St George the Martyr, Southwark, where Charles Dickens had worshipped many years previously.

What do you love about your church? St Peter's is such a happy church. It's friendly and

welcoming and we're just one big family. Everyone is so supportive and willing to do things and it's such a joy to be back together again after the past two years. When we weren't allowed inside the church, it was wonderful to be able to worship outside. We could actually see faces instead of backs of heads and worship together while listening to birds chirping in our beautiful churchyard.

I enjoy our varied services and love the relaxed atmosphere. Our monthly family services are a delight – happy occasions where the children are allowed to be children. Who cares if they run up and down the aisle or go exploring and sit in the chancel?

I often call in during the week and value this time to spend quiet moments to reflect and pray. A churchwarden's role can be busy on a Sunday, so this quiet time to myself is precious. It's a beautiful 12th century church and I often think of those thousands of worshippers in the past and what stories they would have to tell.

Often, passing visitors call in and I love welcoming them and telling them about our lovely church, its history, our very special Father Willis organ and our Russian Princess. We have an exciting time ahead as our three Hayling churches begin to work even more closely together.