

# Church still best place to get wed



Patrick and Claire walk down the aisle at St Mary's Church, Portchester

KATY and Jack Fryer really wanted to get married at St Mary's Church in Portchester – but they weren't sure if they could.

Her parents got married there 40 years ago, and they knew it would mean a lot to both families. They were relieved to discover that the family connection would allow them to have their dream wedding last summer.

Not only that, but everyone they met from the church made their preparations so much easier. They felt so welcomed into the church community that they kept going back.

St Mary's, inside the historic Portchester Castle, was the most popular wedding venue of all churches in our diocese in 2017. Between 40 and 50 couples get married there each year, mostly between April and September. On many Saturdays they perform three ceremonies a day, and some people get married on weekdays or Sundays.

And couples who get married there often speak highly of the church's involvement in their big day – taking them through the service in advance and answering their questions.

Katy, 31, said: "My mum and dad – Clive and Gwyn White – were celebrating their 40th anniversary, and we knew it would mean a lot to both families to get married there for sentimental reasons. We knew the marriage itself would have more meaning in a church.

"It's also so beautiful and it was big enough to fit in people who couldn't come to other parts of the day. My dad and I walked from the castle gate to the church, as he did 40 years before, and we met the bridesmaids and my mum outside.

"We had been to the church



IN DEPTH: CHURCH WEDDINGS



Top: Katy Fryer with her parents and bridesmaids at St Mary's; bottom: Jemma and Michael Cook outside the church after their wedding

to hear our banns read, and everyone was so welcoming. People came up to us and remembered who we were. My mum and dad renewed their vows there the week after our wedding, and the four of us are trying to go to church again together."

And Jack, also 31, said: "Everyone was so brilliant. When we first met Wendy, the administrator, we weren't sure if we could get married there, but we had that family connection. She answered all our questions, and it was a dream to work with her.

"Then Revd Ian came round and took us through the service, the

hymns and the prayers. When we met him, we knew the service would be great. Some of Katy's family who go to church were saying how wonderful his words were in the service."

Parish administrator Wendy Pyatt is often the first person that couples speak to. She prepares orders of service for them and helps to prepare bell-ringers, organists, choir members and to link them to a clergy person.

"I now produce bespoke timelines for each couple, which we give them at wedding preparation, which has helped immensely," she said. "We also give them a folder with all sorts of information in to