

help them make their choices.”

Jemma and Michael Cook also got married at St Mary’s Church, Portchester, last year. They enjoyed attending church so much that they came every fortnight for a year before their wedding in May.

“I love this church and had always dreamt of getting married there,” said Jemma, 34. “It had such a family atmosphere, and it was so full it was hard to get a seat.

“I’d grown up in church and led Sunday School and Michael had been an altar boy on the Isle of Wight, so it was important for us to get married in church. The whole day was brilliant, but saying our vows to each other in a church was the meaningful bit.”

Weddings are a key opportunity for the Church of England to offer ministry and support to people at a key moment in their lives. Wedding preparation can often be crucial to help couples to think not just about their big day, but also about the issues they’ll face in the rest of their married lives.

Research commissioned by the Church into why couples choose church weddings suggested that many are nervous when they make their first enquiry, and that the attitude of the initial person they speak to is crucial.

The research also suggested that the success or otherwise of the Church’s engagement with wedding couples depends largely on our vicars. Their personal warmth in marriage preparation and their welcome on the day makes a vast difference.

That’s why the national Church created high-quality resources for parishes to use with wedding couples, to help explain the process. Those resources are available on www.churchprinthub.org. It also launched www.yourchurchwedding.org



Graham and Annette Chapman today and (above right) on their wedding day in 1949

They’ve loved each other for 69 years

THEY fell in love the moment they saw each other – and soon they’ll be marking 69 years of married life.

Graham and Annette Chapman met in South Africa when he was visiting with the Merchant Navy and she was working as a nurse. They married in September 1949, two years after the Queen and Prince Philip.

The couple, from St Peter’s Church, Curdridge, will cut the official wedding cake at an event this month to celebrate love and marriage – and to mark the wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle.

The Royal Wedding Fayre happens at the church from 12noon until 4pm on June 9, and will include displays of vintage wedding dresses, hats, jewellery and gifts, as well as wedding bells, live music and a glass of bubbly.

It’s designed to promote

the idea of getting married in church and will include displays of wedding fashions and photos of couples who were married at St Peter’s.

Graham, who is 95, and Annette, who is 94, will be among several couples renewing their wedding vows on the day.

“I had a friend in Durban in South Africa, who I met when I got into port,” said Graham. “He asked if his girlfriend could bring her friend, and it turned out to be this lovely girl. I’ve always said that I fell in love with her there and then, and Annette says the same about me!

“She then came to train as a midwife in Guildford and Rickmansworth, and we eventually got engaged. She had to return to South Africa, and on my next trip, I sent her a cable while I was at sea asking if she wanted to get married when I arrived!”

The couple then moved to

London, where Graham worked as a manager at London Docks, then came to Curdridge 54 years ago. They have two children, four grandchildren and six great-grandchildren, some of whom are in South Africa and Australia. They’ve been involved with St Peter’s Church for much of that time.

“I think the secret of a good marriage is to love each other, and we do still love each other,” said Graham. “We have had disagreements, but never a flaming row. You do have to compromise to make it work. We’re looking forward to being involved in this special church fete.”

And Anna Clayton, who is organising the event, said: “Love is definitely in the air, with Harry and Meghan getting married. You can raise a glass to the newly-weds at our event, with locally-brewed beer, Pimms and Prosecco. It will start with church



bells ringing, and there will be live music all afternoon.

“There will be a chance for anyone to renew their wedding vows in a beautifully-decorated church – you don’t have to have been married in St Peter’s to do this – and to have a slice of wedding cake afterwards. Consider yourself invited to this special occasion!”

yourchurchwedding.org as a website for couples to browse, explaining everything including fees, music, licences, banns and more.

‘We knew the vows would have more meaning in a church’

The Church also has a presence at wedding fairs in our diocese alongside displays by photographers, wedding dress makers and limousines. Mothers’ Union members in Portsmouth diocese have staffed stands at such fairs for the past 10 years, encouraging couples to consider getting married in church.

Former diocesan president

Pauline Wale, who organises teams of volunteers to be there, said: “We do six or seven wedding fairs a year, often in hotels, and usually all day Sunday. We offer people cake and ask when and where they are getting married and if they’ve considered a church wedding.

“Many have the preconception that they can’t get married in church because they don’t go to church. Some of them aren’t sure because they are divorced, so we encourage them to have a conversation with the incumbent about it. We can give out leaflets and resources. To know that we’re helping people to think about church weddings is quite rewarding.”

For details, see: www.portsmouth.anglican.org/weddings



Lorna McCabe on her wedding day

Saying vows before God

WHEN Jon and Lorna McCabe decided to get married, there was no real debate about where.

Both had grown up at St Jude’s Church, Southsea, so it was a logical choice. As they were both Christians, saying their vows before God was also important. The couple, who now go to Harbour Church in Portsmouth, married there in 2014.

Jon said: “God had to be part of us getting married to each other, as this was going to be a Christian marriage.

“That was the real motivating factor behind getting married in church, rather than being in a

church building.”

And Lorna said: “We never really thought about not getting married in church.

“Both of us had gone to St Jude’s as children, and it was a community that had seen us growing up, so it was a natural choice.

“It also meant a lot to us that it was a Christian setting – not just for us, but because it meant our non-Christian friends would see how we like to worship, with guitars and drums.

“It’s also an attractive setting. Being Christians doesn’t mean you aren’t interested in how the wedding photos will look!”