

A place of sanctuary and mystery

Gill Clarke discovered that St Peter's Church, Petersfield, offered beautiful music and a special atmosphere



Gill Clarke, from St Peter's, Petersfield

Who are you? I'm Gill Clarke. I live on the edge of Petersfield.

Which church are you part of? St Peter's Church, in the centre of Petersfield. I generally go to the 9.30am Eucharist on a Sunday, and occasionally to midweek courses in Lent and Holy Week and other special services.

Why did you start going there? I was part of St Mary Magdalen Church in Sheet and belonged to the choir there, but for about eight or nine years, I went to St Peter's occasionally to join in its worship and found that I enjoyed the atmosphere and the welcome there.

I helped with the regular holiday club they used to have in the 1980s and 1990s, and met many of the regular worshippers from St Peter's. We had other joint activities too with the two choirs, so I knew quite a lot about St Peter's and what the church was like.

Eventually, I decided that I liked the sense of mystery and peace about St Peter's, and

started coming here each week from 2004. My husband doesn't usually come. He stays at home most weeks, but joins me at Christmas and Easter and supports me in lots of other ways.

What do you love about your church?

It's welcoming and friendly, and everyone will stop and speak to you. The worship also includes beautiful music, which is important to me, and a quiet atmosphere.

If I'm there during the week, I can light a candle and feel at peace. And there is also an interesting history, which appeals to me as a historian. It is a beautiful building.

I am involved in different things during the week. Each week we open an outreach cafe in the church on a Thursday morning. We can have 80 or so people in, some from the church, some who have just walked in and would like to chat.

I lead it once a month, and that normally involves a lot of baking. It is a great outreach, especially

as our church is right on the square in the middle of the town.

I'm also a sidesperson once a month, and I'm in charge of the welcoming team, whose job it is to welcome people to church. I also read the lesson, administer the chalice, I'm a member of the PCC and I count the offering sometimes too. I am on the rota to wash the altar linen, and I occasionally help with the sacristy.

There is something worthwhile about being able to contribute to the life of the church in these ways. Part of the joy of being part of a church community is being able to give something back and to remember that worship has taken place here for a thousand years.

I often think about all the different kinds of people through the ages who have brought their concerns and their troubles to St Peter's. There is an atmosphere of timelessness about the building, although I am well aware that we also move with the times and try to look to answer the needs of people today as well.