

We host worship of all styles - and a festival!

Eric Standen enjoys leading worship in St Mary's, Portchester. He's also pleased the church can host music festivals and more

Who are you? I'm Eric, married to Rachel and with sons Jacob, 22 and Daniel, 18. I've just retired after 40 years in telecomms.

What church are you part of? Rachel and I met in the choir at St Philip's, Cosham, but we moved to Portchester in 1994 and felt we should go to our local church, St Mary's in Portchester Castle. We did worship in a local evangelical church for a few years, but never felt as though we'd left St Mary's.

Why did you start going there? Rachel and I both grew up as Anglicans, so when we moved we felt that we needed to go to our nearest church.

There was no choir, so I became part of the congregation. Rachel started leading some of the children's work and I became involved with the PCC. More recently, I've become a vocallist and keyboard player with the worship group.

What do you love about your church? St Mary's is unique because it's on a peninsula, and you have to choose to go there. It's also in the grounds of a Roman castle and is a pretty 900-year-old priory church, so lots of people visit us, and many couples want to get married there.

During the pandemic when we were only able to worship outside,



Eric Standen enjoyed Maya Lane (right) and others at the Soundwave Festival



we were able to hold services outdoors and be socially distanced. And nothing can beat leaving the church after Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve, walking through the castle grounds with a clear sky and the stars above.

St Mary's has three services – an 8am Book of Common Prayer, a 9.30am formal liturgical service, and an 11.30am service in a more contemporary style. I like having that choice, to be able to go to any of those services and know that you'll always be worshipping God.

Rachel and I tend to go to the 9.30am because we love formal liturgy. And one Sunday every month, I'll also be leading worship at the 11.30am. It's a real pleasure and a privilege to help other people to worship. Seeing young people

develop musically and as worship leaders is also very exciting.

I enjoy music, so I was pleased that the church was able to host the Soundwave Festival in July. Musicians and bands played inside and outside all afternoon and evening. The tradition that says churches can only be used for spiritual things is a bit staid. I think it's great that people can come for a music festival and leave thinking they want to find out more.

And the teaching at St Mary's is excellent. It's not just the preaching, the teaching overall is good. Rachel runs a women's group, and I'm involved with a pastoral group.

The congregation is growing and welcoming, and people can start their faith journey there.