

# New garden created in island churchyard

IT'S an inspirational project that has transformed an area of an overgrown Isle of Wight churchyard into a place of beauty and reflection.

Volunteers cleared 12ft high shrubs and brambles from graves outside St Mary's Church, Brighstone, and created a new 'Olive Garden' to be used for prayer and worship.

They also created a circular mosaic piece of art, which hangs in the garden to help visitors to reflect. Both the Olive Garden and the Tree of Life mosaic were dedicated to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in June. It's the latest step on the church's journey to become more ecologically friendly. St Mary's was given a bronze Eco-church Award by the charity A Rocha.

The St Mary's churchyard project was started by glass artist Ali Mascarenhas, who moved to Brighstone in 2016. When she heard a PCC discussion about the overgrown churchyard, she suggested that the church invite local people to help clear it. They ended up having several work parties, with up to a dozen helping each time.

Ali realised that the path across the churchyard was actually a village thoroughfare, so created a noticeboard with spiritual and environmental information on the path. She also organised some talks



Ali Mascarenhas in the Olive Garden with (left) the mosaic and a photography competition.

She also used a table-top made from toughened glass as the base for a 'tree of life' mosaic, put together by members of the local community and based on Revelation 22. Around 40 people took part, learning glass cutting and mosaic skills.

"I came and set up all my glass cutting equipment in the church, so people could be creating this mosaic in a spiritual context, and also the church family could see it develop week by week," she said. "They really enjoyed creating leaves, animals and fruit in glass and adding them to the overall image. The sky is created with transparent paint, so that the sun will shine through it."

Ali also thought about creating space in the churchyard to feature plants from the Bible. There was a small area towards the south-east

of the churchyard that had been cleared, but had no graves in it – and a great view of Blackgang cliffs was now visible. She thought it would work as a quiet area, and that the mosaic could be placed there. The garden can be used for prayer or Celtic worship or other small outdoor events.

That area has now become the Olive Garden, featuring plants named in the Bible, stone benches and a box that includes an audio recording, which describes the area to you.

Ali said: "It has been a huge learning experience! I feel in awe of what God has done and how the volunteers have come together to work on different aspects of the project. I feel privileged to have the opportunity to do this and to develop things as the Spirit has led me."

For more information, contact Ali on [Brighstonechurchyard@gmail.com](mailto:Brighstonechurchyard@gmail.com).