

Wootton Music and Worship Report

The choir sing regularly at Holy Communion services at St Mark's on Sunday mornings and occasionally at special services. on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of the month. Despite the ongoing support of our PTO retired priests in leading Holy Communion services, occasionally a priest was not available, and the parish organised services of Morning Prayer on those occasions, with the choir singing hymns. I also played hymns at the Brunch service and All Age Worship at St Mark's on the 1st and 3rd Sunday mornings of the month. At the beginning of 2023, the parish started experimenting on the 5th Sunday of the month with a Songs of Praise service. The music was chosen partly by members of the congregation, and partly by myself.

I played the electronic organ at Evensong at St Edmund's on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of the month, but due to the small congregation at Evensongs, I sometimes led the congregation in singing hymns unaccompanied. I also played the organ at both churches for funerals, memorial services and baptisms.

Apart from breaks in August and immediately after Christmas and Easter, choir practices were consistently held on Thursday evenings. Due to my other commitments, we moved the start time forward to 6pm during 2023, and ensured that practices ended no later than 7pm. Choir numbers remained stable at 7, with attendance fairly consistent. A few members of our choir are unable to attend as often as they would like because of family commitments, but their contribution when present always enhances the choir. I would like to thank all members of the choir for their ongoing commitment and support.

I coordinated the planning of parish worship so I am responsible for the planning of readings, the distribution of music, and communicating with visiting clergy before they celebrate the Eucharist with us. Anyone who wishes to take part in reading at services and joining the choir is very welcome. I am convinced that a vibrant act of worship of whatever type that expresses who we are as a parish will be the best possible form of mission we can give to those who are on the margins of our parish community.

I believe that worship will continue to be important in the growth and development of our East Medina plurality. I was not able to coordinate joint services in our parishes in 2023 as I had hoped, but I was asked to take over the direction of Cantus Vesperi from September, and their involvement will help to develop high-quality music across the plurality. Cantus Vesperi sang Evensong on Pentecost Sunday at St Edmund's as well as an Advent carol service on the 1st Sunday of December, and both were very successful and well attended services. With the PCC's approval, I intend to book them again for these services in 2024. Cantus Vesperi rehearse after Evensong services at St Edmund's, as this is a convenient time for us all to practise.

We continued the practice of having the Christmas Carol Service on the morning of the Sunday before Christmas, in place of All Age Worship. Holding it at St Mark's encouraged greater access for families and the elderly to this service. The choir also welcomed two occasional members for this occasion. The carol service was well

attended and appreciated. Christingle on Christmas Eve was a highlight in the parish's annual worship and the church was again packed in 2023. The worship planning group worked on the morning service on Good Friday to include a combination of readings, prayers, moments of reflection and music which aimed to be as accessible as possible for a wide range of people. The services on Good Friday, Easter Day and Christmas Day were at 10am to encourage greater attendance from the congregation. Steve and Sue Beynon were asked to lead the planning of Brunch with a rota of people taking charge of activities for children. David Bennison's role as a Lay Worship Leader has been very important in our worship, as has the support of Hilary Baldwin in leading services. This team of people has enabled the parish to use the spiritual gifts of many of its members.

I have an ongoing concern about the state of the pipe organ at St Edmund's, since I rarely play it, but when it has been played it appears to be maintaining its viability well, and does not need major repair. In the wet weather we often experienced in 2023 there were some ciphers from the organ at St Mark's, but these have been dealt with promptly.

Lastly, I would like to thank the whole parish for their ongoing support to me personally and for their encouragement in planning worship. We should always give thanks to God for the gifts we have been given that enable us to offer a rich and varied diet of services to a wide range of people. I would also like to thank the churchwardens and PCC in the past year for their ongoing support and generosity, and for raising my rate of pay for regular and occasional services based on RSCM rates. I am confident that we will be able to show a future incumbent that the parish's lay leaders have been adaptable and promoted high quality worship during a long interregnum.

David McCulloch