



Diocese of Chichester  
**Living the Mystery of Faith**  
THE YEAR OF MATTHEW



## Introduction from The Bishop of Chichester

The anniversary of moving our mission centre from Selsey to Chichester in 1075 has been a catalyst for renewal, by ***living the mystery of faith*** that has been handed on to us.

This means being endlessly curious about how the Holy Scriptures and the sacraments of the New Covenant enable us to know, love, and follow Jesus Christ in today's noisy and distracted world.

It also invites us to address how to be more fully what we say we are: the body of Christ, his radiant Bride, the flock for which he laid down his life.

We seek to understand the qualities of being the Church: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, as challenging marks of mission shared by all Christians. We believe that this will bring us closer to Jesus Christ and present a more compelling account of his compassion and joy to the people of Sussex, young and old alike.

If God is calling you to join us in ***living the mystery of faith*** in some part of this diocese, we pray that the contribution of your gifts and experience will enrich our witness and deepen your own discipleship.

We take very seriously the call to diversity and radical inclusion as characteristic of the Church's mission. For this reason, we welcome applications from ordained women and Global Majority Heritage clergy, who are under-represented in those who serve this diocese.

***+Martin***





## Parish Profile

for

# St Mary's Church Kemp Town

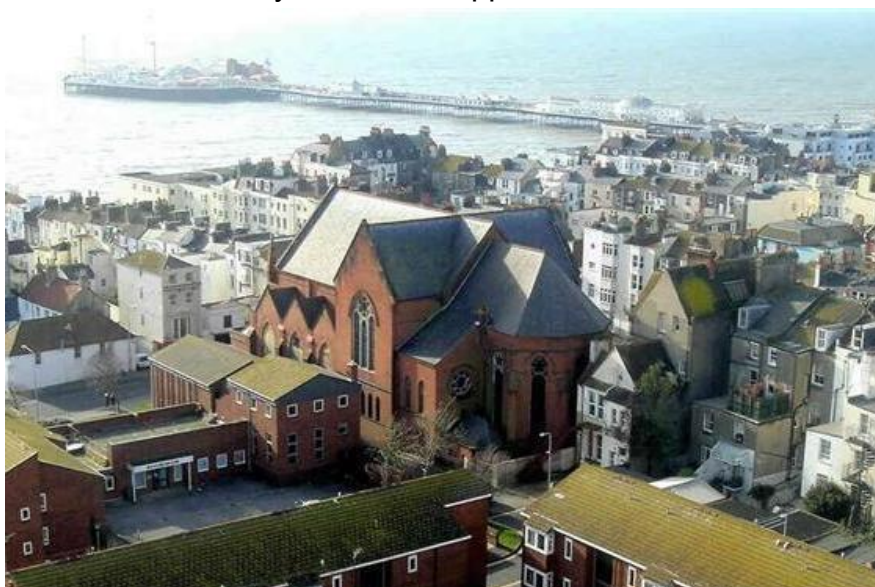
St Mary's Church is located on a busy crossroads, just off the seafront, only 200 yards from the sea, and not far from Brighton's famous Palace Pier. It stands as a sign of God's presence and a beacon of God's love. We are a



Christian community and followers of Jesus, which means that we try to be an inclusive and affirming community. St Mary's is a place for everyone - whatever your faith, or none. Whenever the doors are open, there are always people coming into the building: visitors from all round the world; local people; and people who come seeking a place of solace and a friendly face. There is always an element of surprise, and you never know who is coming through the door!

## LIFE AT ST MARY'S IS NEVER DULL

The original building, built in 1827, was designed by the most famous architect on the South Coast at the time, Amon Henry Wilds. However, in 1876, the Parish Clerk arrived at the Vicarage and hammered on the door. The Vicar, Revd Canon A.T. Waugh, looked at his ashen face and asked, "Well, Mr Moppett, you look very serious. Whatever is the matter? Has the church fallen down?" "Yes, Sir!" replied the distraught Clerk, "that is exactly what has happened!"



Aerial view of St Mary's Church, Kemp Town, available on [www.stmaryschurchbrighton.org.uk](http://www.stmaryschurchbrighton.org.uk)

The church that stands today was designed in the Gothic style by William Emerson, who designed many buildings in India. Consecrated in October 1878, the interior of the building is a surprise to many having an extraordinary internal presence, spacious and lofty, but at the same time, homely. It has good acoustics and is a popular performance venue. The church is grade 2\* listed. In recent years restoration work has been carried out, thanks to generous grants, on the north (ecclesiastical) side and on the exceptional stained-glass windows.

For the past 10 years, the church has presented a solid and consistent financial performance. The present congregation, following on from the foundations laid by those in the past, is very focused on the needs of the community, both spiritually and as a place where people can feel at home. The 'welcome' of the congregation to everyone is outstanding. Prayer undergirds all that happens. Part of our vision is to develop more partnerships in the community, and beyond, and extend outreach programmes and to continue to be loved by our diverse and growing community.

Margaret Green, *Licensed Lay Minister*

## THE BROADER CONTEXT

The Diocese has a long coastline (137 miles) and contains the South Downs National Park, the High Weald and Chichester Harbour. Brighton and Hove is the largest city in the diocese and the only city in East Sussex, a region that is otherwise mostly rural. A superficial impression may be one of prosperity, but behind the seafront façade, the city has many pockets of poverty.

St Mary's parish is the 517<sup>th</sup> most deprived in England. The church is surrounded by high rise social housing flats, hostels for the homeless and has very little family accommodation. The parish includes an area of the seafront, and also the much used, and popular Queen's Park.

The present church building is the second church to stand on the site. The first St Mary's was a private chapel built in the Greek Revival style, and the Revd Henry Venn Elliot was the first perpetual curate of St Mary's Chapel. He was the grandson of John Venn, a member of the Clapham Sect and a founder member of the church



Missionary Society. Henry's sister, Charlotte Elliott, was a poet who wrote many hymns, including the well-known "Just as I am, without one plea." During work to expand the chapel in 1876, the building collapsed, and the Elliott family contributed towards a new St Mary's Church. The architect was William Emerson who designed the church in the Gothic style, with significant Oriental and Classical features. It is a Grade 2\* listed building.

St Mary's is one of 26 churches in the Deanery of Brighton. The parish is bordered by the parishes of St George to the east, St Luke to the north and St Peter and the Chapel Royal to the west.

There is the possibility of pastoral re-organisation. The church is not at risk of closure, but there has been a suggestion that the parish may be shared with another church in the future; however, no decision has been taken yet. There is a vicarage which the Diocese is redecorating. It is a large, terraced house with three bedrooms, and an additional two which have been used previously as a lounge and a study.



External view of St Mary's Church Vicarage - taken by Philip Davis, 21 September 2025

The previous vicar, Rev. Andrew Woodward, was Rural Dean for 8 years, and his role brought an awareness of the wider picture of the church in Brighton. He was also the Bishop's Liaison Officer for the LGBTQI+ community. The church is situated in Kemp Town and has strong links to the LGBTQI+ community, particularly at the time of the annual 'Pride' celebration.

Lay ministry and lay involvement are considered important, and lay people participate in the work of the church at every level.

The vacancy has been triggered by the previous incumbent, who was employed part-time at 0.6, moving to a new parish in London. In previous years we have pledged 100% of the parish share, but recently this has been a proportion of the full amount. The small congregation, with finances raised from church and hall lettings, manages to pay its way and maintain a healthy financial position.

## THE VICAR WE NEED

The excitement and benefit of change await us. The opportunity exists to build on the previous vicar's achievements by taking us to new places and new opportunities.

Here are the characteristics we believe that are essential in a new vicar.

The successful candidate will be Anglo-Catholic in the inclusive-liberal tradition, with the following skills and experience:

1. Well-grounded in the faith, prayerful, energetic, and with the ability to cope with the unexpected.
2. Have the ability to lead without being autocratic, and guide the congregation to a deeper faith and commitment.
3. A good listener with strong pastoral skills.
4. Be an excellent liturgist who will maintain and develop St Mary's catholic tradition.
5. Has experience in a context that is less-resourced.

## ABOUT THE PARISH

### LOCATION

St Mary's is an inner-city parish. Being close to Brighton Palace Pier, the parish is a focal point for visitors to Brighton and also for many of the most vulnerable in society.



Map of St Mary's Parish, Kemp Town Google Map data (2010) accessed in May 2023

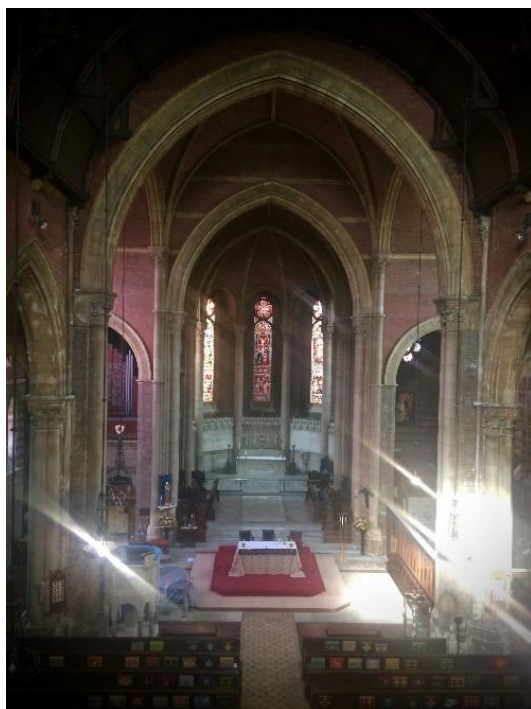
### DEMOGRAPHICS

The number of people living within the parish is just 6,451, and the Parish overall is a very needy area with deprivation levels being among the worst in the deanery or diocese. The parish covers an area of Brighton just behind the seafront and immediately east of the centre. The boundaries are the seafront, Old Steine, White Street, Sussex Street, the top of Queen's Park, Sutherland Road, and Bedford Street.

1. AGE – the parish has a high percentage of 20–29 year-olds, which reflects the fact that the city has two universities and a large student population; with slightly more 15 to 64-year-olds than national, diocesan or deanery figures and fewer children.
2. RELIGION – Brighton is notable for its relatively irreligious population. It's been called 'the most Godless city in England.' St Mary's Parish is at the Brighton 'norm' of 55% claiming they had no religion.

3. RACE – 80% of the parish consider themselves to be white, which is slightly lower than the Deanery or Diocesan figures.
4. DEPRIVATION – Chichester diocese has a relatively low average IMD (Index of Multiple Deprivation), with Sussex being generally perceived as affluent, however the picture is not uniform and 74% of our parish is in the most deprived categories. This includes, unfortunately, a high proportion, 32%, of pensioners experiencing poverty.
5. PROPERTY – 70% of property is rented; 30.3% of which is social housing.
6. SINGLE OCCUPANCY – Over 50% of households have only one occupant. As they age, some single occupants become unable to maintain their homes.

Due to historic City Council policies, there are many elderly people in social housing and a higher-than-average number of the population with health issues.



Aerial internal view of St Mary's Church, Kemp Town, taken during renovation works

## ABOUT THE CHURCH

Entering the church, and standing at the top of the steps, is a breath-taking moment. There is an element of surprise. "I never knew that this was here", is a common comment. Many people immediately feel that here is something special, many would say 'holy'. The church exists in an unprepossessing setting, very near the seafront. Many people who come in feel that they were drawn to enter the building and many want to stay and experience its peace.

The size and age of the building means that it requires constant monitoring. The internal space of the church is vast, and during the colder months, is heated whenever the church is open. The latest bill for refurbishing the gas heating system is over £30,000, and efforts are being made to raise this large sum.



The building is in a good state of repair and the works identified in the 2024 Quinquennial to be carried out within 12 months have been completed. The five-yearly EICR on the church electrical installation has been completed, and a full pass certificate issued after some remedial works. The church heating is being renovated and will be fully functional for this winter.

In the past 17 years, many grants were obtained, and several windows were restored however, being by the sea, the sandstone is liable to erosion. If there were sufficient funds, the Tower Room needs renovation, and the church would benefit from accessible toilets. The existing toilet facilities need improvement. The Church Hall was built in the 1980s and is in good repair. It contains a two-bed flat which is a source of income.

## THE CHURCH – as a WORSHIPPING PEOPLE

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*'Hello, you are very welcome!'*

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One of the most outstanding qualities of St Mary's is its welcome. This is apparent throughout the regular congregation and not just on Sundays but whenever the church is open during the week. There is a sensitivity and understanding of those who enter the building, many of whom are among the most vulnerable in society.



St Mary's Church, Kemp Town, interior view-  
taken by Fr Andrew Woodward, 6 November 2020

The congregation reflects the diversity of the parish and includes people from a variety of professions. Some people have worshipped here for many years, but we have also seen several new faces attending since Spring 2025.

The main service on Sunday morning is Sung Eucharist. The service is in the Anglo-Catholic tradition. As is fitting for a building the size of the church, there is a magnificent organ, the Bevington. There is also a 1904 Bechstein

grand piano. The small choir currently rehearses every Sunday, after Mass and we have an excellent group of visiting organists who play for us on Sundays.

Four priests with Permission to Officiate currently support the Eucharistic ministry. There are two lay ministers: a Reader and an Authorised Lay Minister (ALM). Members of the congregation read the lessons and lead intercessions. There are six Lay Ministers of Communion. The pastoral care team is very active, led by the Reader, and is fortunate to have a volunteer chaplain of the Royal Sussex Hospital on the team. There is a small team of servers, who are members of the Guild of Servers of the Sanctuary, a diocesan-wide organisation. There is also a Parish Administrator who, amongst other things, is responsible for church and hall bookings. Regular congregations range between 30 and 40 people, while major festivals such as Midnight Mass and Easter Day can attract close to 100 people.

The PCC meets every 6 to 8 weeks. The Eco subgroup works to ensure fair trade supplies are bought for the church and that our waste is recycled as much as possible. The Eco group has been given a Bronze award for their work.



St Mary's Church, Kemp Town, interior view- taken by Philip Davis, 17 September 2025

The church is open to visitors on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings from 9.00am until 1pm. Morning Prayer, which takes place in the Lady Chapel is at 9.30am. On Mondays, the service is from the Book of Common Prayer; at other

times, from Common Worship. On Wednesdays there is a Midweek Eucharist at 12.30pm, also held in the Lady Chapel. On Tuesdays we hold an Evening prayer service at 6.30pm. We have an Anglo-Catholic tradition which welcomes all. The Koalas children and parents/carers group meets weekly, and our Tea and Company drop-in also meets weekly in term time for tea, cake, and a chat, at which students from Brighton College are enthusiastic helpers.

Near the door is our Prayer Cushion, on which people may place prayer requests. Every Monday morning a small group of people pray for all those named on the Prayer Cushion, and for those who placed the requests there.

The church is a Big Issue Agency, which means that we supply copies of the Big Issue magazine to vendors in Brighton & Hove, as well as along the south coast. It also means that we provide support to vendors in various areas of their lives, including completing forms and preparing for appointments.

When the church is open, there are always people entering from all walks of life: visitors from overseas who have come to spend a few days in Brighton, regulars who live in the area, and many vulnerable people, including those living in nearby hostels or who are homeless. Our Safeguarding policy is kept constantly under review.

This is the church's mission - to be available to all who enter. Sometimes those who come present a challenge due to behavioural issues, but often there are meaningful encounters, sometimes most unexpectedly.



St Mary's Church (exterior)  
and the Kemp Town Carnival,

## THE CHURCH - AND THE COMMUNITY IT SERVES

St Mary's is located in an area characterised by seaside properties, including hotels and short-term rental accommodations. High-rise flats are also a prominent feature, and while there are some residential streets with terraced houses in the northern part of the parish, it is not primarily known for family housing.

Despite this, there are three schools within the parish: Queen's Park Primary School, the Royal Spa Nursery School, and Orchard Day Nursery. All of these are situated north of the busy Eastern Road, which appears to act as a significant barrier. Consequently, few children are typically seen in the St James's Street area of Brighton.

Many people live on their own, and the congregation reflects this. There are only three married couples in the congregation. Currently there are no families with children, although in the past this was not so, and there was a small Sunday School.

However, the annual Crib service at 3.00pm on Christmas Eve has for some years attracted many parents with small children, which is a delight to see.

In-house activities, to which everyone is invited, have included 'Art and Inspiration', on a Monday, in which members of the congregation have shared their passions in the Arts; Advent and Lent book discussions; and silent prayer and meditation, now once a month on the first Saturday of the month.

A highlight of the year for many local people is the free Christmas Day lunch, held in the church and again supported by a team of local volunteers.

Baptisms, weddings, and funerals are few these days, but every so often St Mary's is the chosen church for a big celebratory funeral. Recently the church was full to overflowing for the funeral of drag queen Maisie Trollette, aka David Raven.

The church hall consists of a large assembly room with a gallery, a smaller event space, disabled toilet, and a kitchen. The church hall is used for many community activities, including a Polling Station, a local councillors' surgery, and weekly baby and young children's group, known as Koalas. There are also a number of substance abuse support groups who use the hall. We work closely with our neighbours, including the Somerset Centre for older people.

A look at the back page of the pew sheet lists the activities taking place during the week, such as U3A guitar classes; Drum and Blaze drumming classes; AA



Newcomers; and our own free English conversation classes, called Kemp Town Talks.

The church itself, which is renowned for its excellent acoustics, hosts many free musical events on Saturdays. Our regular recital series is called, 'Fine Music for Free' which recently included The Belladonna Trio (the Eternal Feminine), and Spanish pianist and improviser, Harrison Williams (Waltz around Vienna). Historically, there have also been organ recitals which were very well attended.



St Mary's Church (interior) and the Actually Gay Men's Chorus' 2022 Christmas concert - taken by Fr Andrew Woodward, 17 December 2022

Being only a two-minute walk from the Aids memorial, every year on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December, Brighton and Hove LGBT choirs and musicians join forces for the annual World Aids Day concert in the church. The church and church hall are also regularly used in May for Brighton Festival Fringe events.

We were very touched when several groups who either use our halls or the church for rehearsals, recently held concerts on behalf of St Mary's, all proceeds from which were donated to the St Mary's emergency heating fund.

Situated in an area of urban deprivation, the congregation is very aware of the hardship that many face daily, and understand the needs of those when tragedy strikes, such as wars or natural disasters. The congregation has in the past played a very active role in supporting Samara's Aid, a charity started by a Brighton mother to support refugees from the Syrian conflict and ongoing collections are also made for Christian Aid, and when the need arises, for the Disaster Emergency Committee.

### FINANCIAL PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES.

Our finances are well managed, although this is a parish with limited resources, and we cover our parish ministry costs. The church benefits from reliable revenue through rentals, investment income, and regular donations; by expanding community use of facilities, strengthening fundraising campaigns, and carefully managing costs, it has real opportunities to balance its budget and move toward a more sustainable financial position. There are 29 regular givers, of whom 26 are gift-aided.

...the congregation is faithful  
and hopeful, and is keen to  
embrace the future...



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