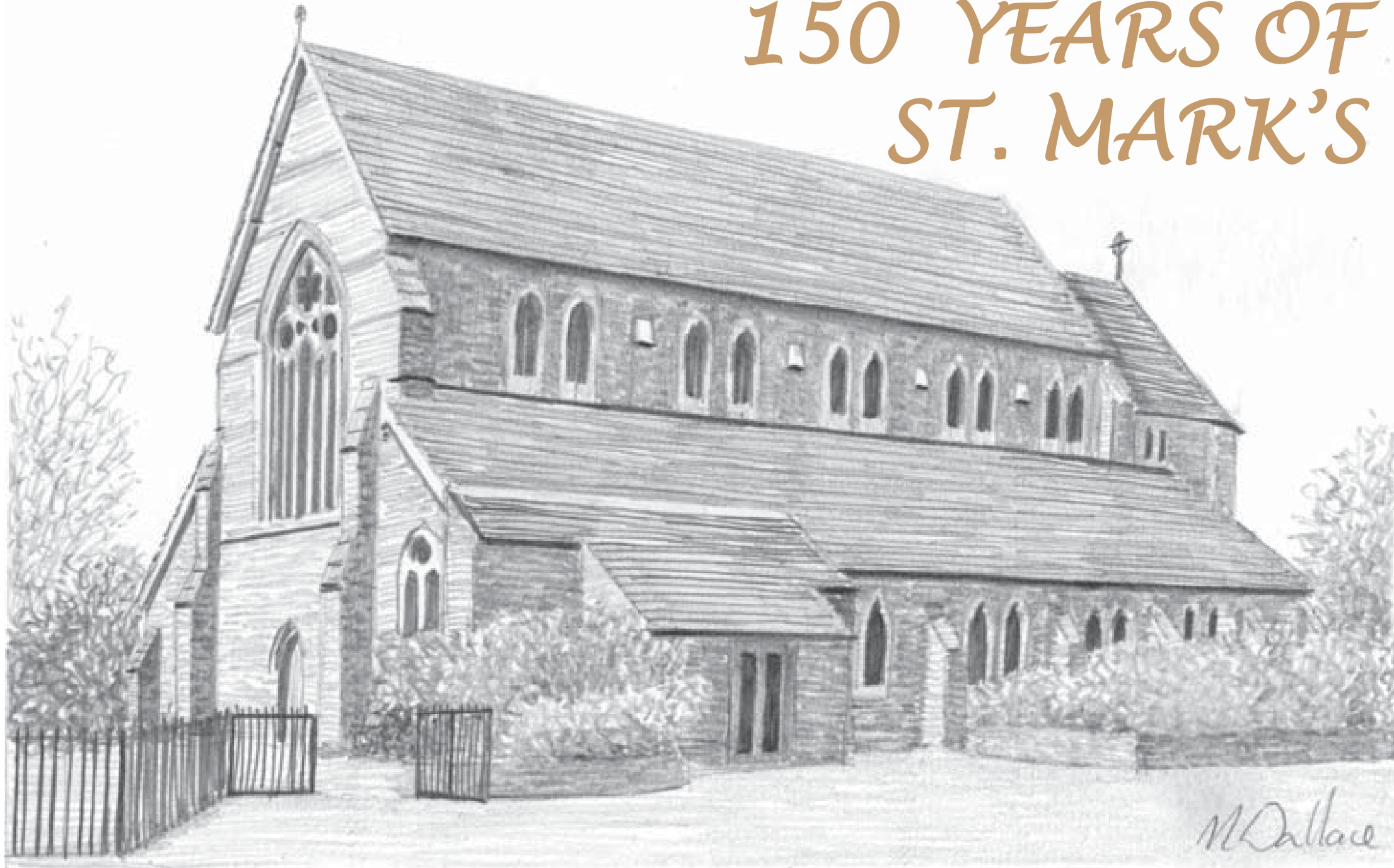


# 150 YEARS OF ST. MARK'S



*M. Dallace*

*St. Mark's Gillingham*

**150 years**



**1866-2016**

## Introduction

### Welcome to St Mark's!



Rev Saju Muthalaly - Vicar



Rev Richard England,  
Associate Vicar

*In this booklet, you'll read something of St Mark's story over the 150 years since the church was first opened. As you'll see, St Mark's has had many 'seasons' to its life. Countless people over the years have been helped and encouraged by St Mark's, its community and the message of God's love for us in Jesus that is at the heart of everything we do.*

*As you read through, we hope you'll get the sense that a church's story is not just about the building it inhabits. It is about the people who make up that church, and the truth of the Christian message at the heart of that community.*

*The Gospel, which is at the heart of St Mark's story, is not an end, but a beginning. Becoming a Christian and joining a church like St Mark's is the beginning of a lifelong journey of discovery. Discovering that God, who called the universe into being, knows us each by name. Discovering that Jesus came so that we can know God and be forgiven. Discovering that, when we say 'yes' to God in Jesus, he wants us to make a positive difference in the world. Discovering that, when we make this journey with others, we can find help and love in our most difficult moments.*

*At St Mark's, we are Christians because Christianity is true and because it makes a difference. Life is better when we walk with God and with each other. We live better, love more and can serve others because, amazingly, God served us in Jesus.*

*Every page of this booklet is filled with stories that reflect God's love for us in Jesus. We have 150 years of stories - far more than we could fit in any booklet! Behind every story is a wonderful truth: God knows us and cares for us and sent Jesus so we could know him too. We hope as you read you'll discover this wonderful truth for yourself.*

*With love, in Jesus' name,*

*Saju & Richard*

## Background to the Planting of St. Mark's Church Gillingham

To some St. Marks Church, standing imposing on the corner of the High Street, gives the appearance of having been there for three or four hundred years but in fact it was consecrated (opened or commissioned) on 24th April 1866. The same year that H. G. Wells, Beatrix Potter and James Ramsay MacDonald were all born. At the end of July W. G. Grace (elder statesman for cricket and Jesus) scored 224 not out for the All-England cricket team against Surrey at the Oval, just after his 18th birthday. On 1st August The National Olympian Association staged the first National Olympian Games field events at Crystal Palace in South London. W. G. Grace won the 440 yards hurdles, this event was a fore-runner for the modern Olympics.

### **Background.**

But let's consider the background that led to the planting of this new church.

Queen Victoria was on the Throne. The American Civil war was in full swing. The Napoleonic Wars were over. Thus the stage was wide open for the British Empire to expand and become the foremost power in the World. Which in turn lead to the growth of the Royal Navy, which had already seen much enlargement in the Napoleonic Wars.

Support for the Navy became par-amount. Chatham Dockyard saw massive expansion and Sheerness Dockyard was totally rebuilt. A new dockyard was even considered for the Isle of Grain on the North Bank of the Medway but this was dropped in favour of expansion at Ports-mouth.

The expansion of Chatham Dockyard led to the further requirement of housing for Naval personnel, their families and dockyard workers. Add to that support industries, plus the necessary suppliers and their shops that are needed in any community, it soon became clear that the village of Brompton which housed the main part of the Dockyard workforce, along with the villages of Gillingham and Chatham were going to expand. As they did at a phenomenal rate. At that time Gillingham was little more than a fishing village clustered around St Mary Magdalene Church and Gillingham Green.

The old village of Brompton sat within the defences of the Dockyard as can still be seen today. It was shared between the civilian, Naval, Marines and Army population. The Navy, as a result of lesions learnt in the Crimean War, were investing in new iron hulled ships, which added more work at The Dockyard and brought in new tradesmen with their families. The



*St. Mark's imposing street corner position.*

Achilles was the largest ship built for the Navy at the time and Charles Dickens wrote his observations of her construction. There was no room for expansion within the village for the extra workforce. The MOD insisted that the line of fire had to be preserved from Old Brompton's surrounding defences, leaving "The Lines" as one big empty, clear open ground, which we inherit today as one of Medway's precious "green lungs."

The new housing area beyond The Lines became known initially as New Brompton. Ordinance Survey maps

of the time call the area between the River and the A2 "The Parish of New Brompton".

Just at the same time the railway arrived with stations at Chatham and "New Brompton". The New Brompton station being renamed "Gillingham" when the railways were nationalised.

So the village of New Brompton grew spreading from Gillingham village, initially, westwards along towards Mill Road. By the 1851 Census New Brompton had a population of 9,000.

In 1848 the Church of England built a new Church for the area in Brompton

ton, named Holy Trinity (no, not that Holy Trinity Brompton!). The Church of England came to the village a bit late and by then the non-conformists were well established. Holy Trinity Brompton had many internal problems and at one point closed for 18 months. It had been known as a church of good works including feeding the poor. When it reopened in 1920 it had a congregation of four and that in a building designed for 1,000 people! It closed in 1950 and was incorporated into St. Mark's parish. The name, Holy Trinity, was taken over to the New Church then being built in Twydall. At the time many parishioners were being moved to the new estate at Twydall due to the slum clearance being carried out in Old Brompton.

### Back to the 1850s.

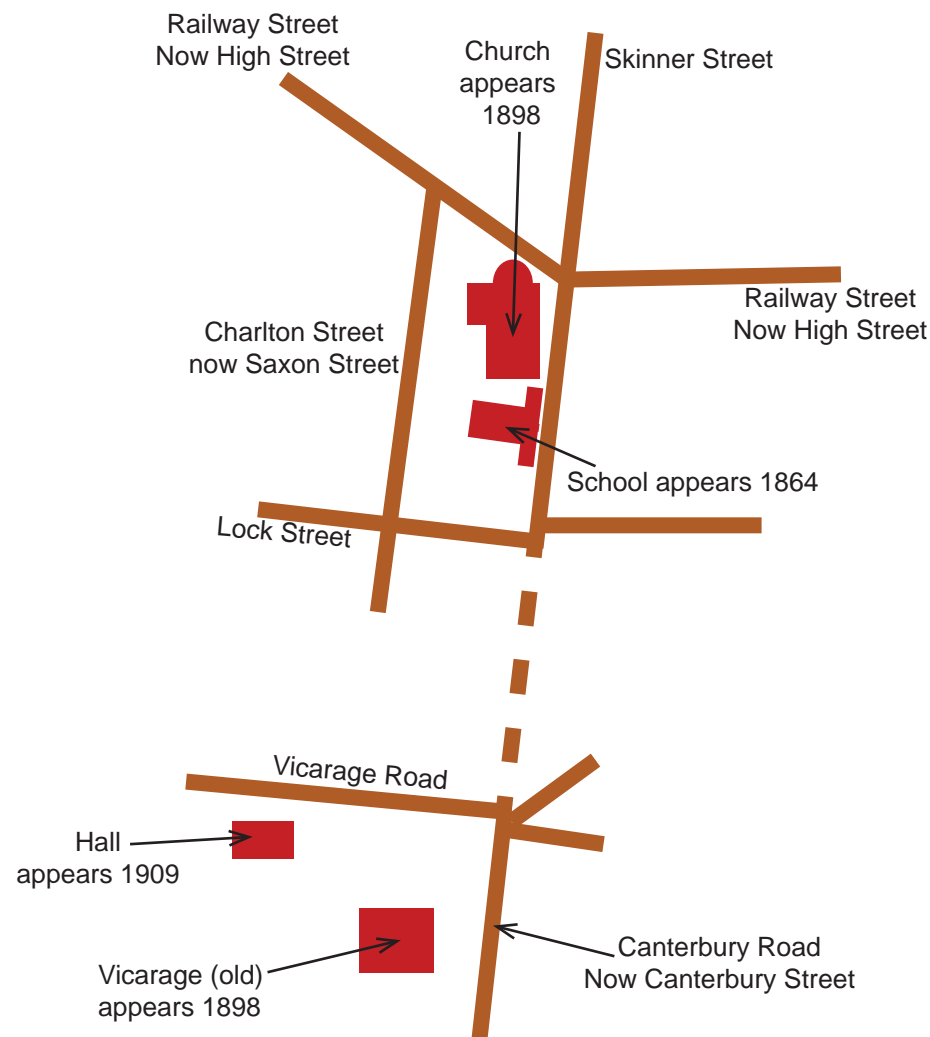
The Parish of New Brompton was rapidly expanding, filling the gap in between Gillingham Green and what is now Mill Road where the military land started. Looking at the OS maps of the time it's quite amazing to observe this expansion across lower Gillingham and then southwards towards the A2. Builders were buying up parcels of building land in the area, some for as little as 7/6d (37.5p). These plots can be seen marked out on the OS maps of the time including the plots that became the St. Mark's site and the Vicarage site. The St. Mark's site was pur-

chased from the Lock family for £237.

The people of this new village needed spiritual care, a shoulder to cry on, help when times were rough, celebration in times of joy. All denominations were looking at establishing themselves in the New Brompton area but this time the C of E were early in the rush. The people of the area had been lobbying for a church for a while. A group of interested leading citizens got together in 1857 in a series of meetings at the Monarch Public House (which stood at the corner of Fox Street and Arden Street). In August 1857 under the leadership of Rev W. Grant M.A., a curate from Gillingham Parish Church, a new church plant was started. Meetings were held at the Institute in Lower Britton Street. These ran for five years until 1862.

In 1861 a boy's school was opened on the site next door to the Church building site. The school was originally a wooden building but was later replaced with a more substantial brick building. St. Mark's Church of England Boys' School competed with Arden Street Wesleyan Methodist School for the top places in the Dockyard entrance exam. Maths, science, English and practical skills dominated the curriculum in both Schools.

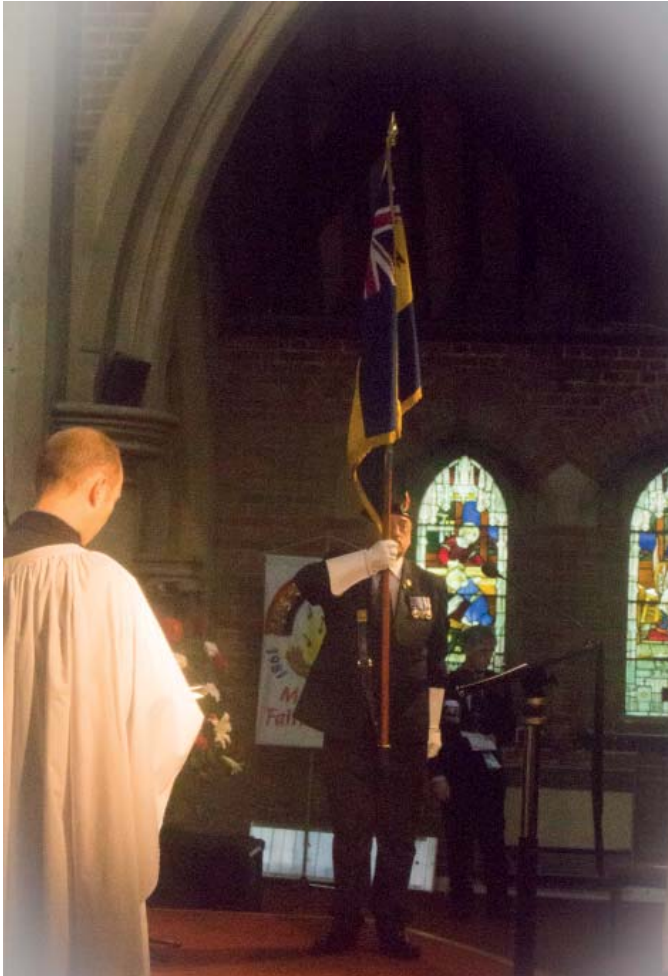
In January 1862 Rev Alfred Willis, who had been a curate at St Nicholas Church in Strood, took over the leadership of the Church plant. On 1st



*The development of Gillingham, dates are the first OS map that the buildings appeared on.*

May that year the Church moved into its new temporary home, sharing the wooden building with the school. The Church officially took the name of St. Mark with Rev Alfred Willis being the first incumbent. The school building

stood slightly south of the present Church site, lining up roughly where the site gates are now, up to and adjoining the first of the old shops in Canterbury Street (at that time it was Canterbury Road).



*Remembrance Sunday 2015.*

### **Open for Service.**

The date on the front of the First St. Mark's Register is 1863.

The first baptism was carried out on 11<sup>th</sup> October 1863. The child's name was William George Henry Morrele, the parents were George and Ellen, Dad was a Lieutenant RN and the address was given simply as New

Brompton. (Maybe it's vague because the place was still so small that they all knew each other!). Rev Willis officiated, unfortunately his writing is unclear so there's a bit of guess-work required in the gift of writing interpretation.

At that time on average there were between five and seven baptisms a week, how times have changed. Many were arranged in mid-week ceremonies.

The new building for the main church was under-way with Mr. Saint Aubyn of St. John Street, Bedford Row, London being the Architect.

### **St. Mark's At Last.**

On 24th April 1866 the New Church building was consecrated by the Bishop of Rochester.

St. Mark's had arrived. A 200 foot bell tower was on the original plans which would have stood where the main entrance to the Church is now, it's thought that the Military may have objected to this in their quest to control the line of fire in the area. The building seated 800 and all seats were free and unappropriated, some-

thing that went down well in the community and the local press. The Rev. Willis was determined that no-one should be restricted from attending services because they couldn't pay (which was the custom elsewhere at the time).

The design of St. Mark's is typical of the period. Constructed of yellow malm brick outside. Inside is un-plastered selected stock brick. It has an apsidal chancel and originally with a clerestoried nave, aisles and vestry. There are five arches on each side of the nave, these are supported on round pillars with moulded capitals. The chancel was enclosed by iron grilles which have long gone. The original 800 seats were of the wooden pew variety, these were replaced with loose chairs during the extensive modifications of 1983.

Comment was made in those early days about the lacking of stained glass. Some of the side windows are still left clear, many have been replaced with stained glass over the years. The stained glasswork generally depicts Biblical scenes. Some can be seen in the background of the Remembrance Sunday photo. The windows in the back wall and the apsidal chancel have always been stained glass.

In the weeks before the new building was opened baptisms fell away completely but as soon as it opened they were inundated, on 29th April alone there were five baptisms.

The first marriage was on 30th June 1866 between William Coomber, a seaman and Harriet Obey. Surprisingly the officiating priest was C. A. Netherall, Chaplain H. M.



*The Early Interior.*

Forces, not Alfred Willis, we can only speculate why.

With the new Church completed building attention returned to the School building. The original building was wooden, now a more permanent brick building was erected.

Under Rev Willis the Church grew and grew and kept on growing. He certainly did the work of an evangelist and in the process he set the pattern for the future of St. Mark's. It became a vibrant evangelistic Church.

In April 1872 Rev Willis left St. Marks to go to work in Hawaii. He became Bishop of Honolulu until 1903, when he moved to the Tonga Islands taking on the challenge as missionary Bishop. He died in office in 1921. There is a memorial to him in one of the windows close to the south door.

St. Mark's has served Gillingham well over the years, many aldermen councillors and military officers were first influenced by the ministry here. Its imposing position on the corner of Canterbury Street and the High Street make it difficult to miss. Over the years many clergy of note have served here among them David Watson who was a curate here. The arrival of John Collins in 1957 heralded a major new move of the Holy Spirit at St Mark's. St. Mark's became a Church well known in the Charismatic Renewal of the 1970s and 80s. Traveling about the country in that period, as soon as someone heard I

Page 7

was from Gillingham they'd ask "Do you know St. Mark's" but more about these things later.

A major refit of the Church was carried out about 1985. The pews were removed and replaced with more comfortable chairs. The building was carpeted throughout and in a new innovation for an Anglican Church (though maybe not unique) a total immersion baptistry was added under the extended front platform.

St. Mark's continues 150 years later reaching out to the people of Gillingham and beyond, pointing the way to Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. We're not perfect but we've a very good friend who is. NP



### Paul Smith on Alpha

It's amazing to think that St Mark's church has stood on the corner of Canterbury Street for one hundred & fifty years. The changes it must have seen, the main high street with its many different road surfaces, shop fronts, businesses and architecture. The church itself although the building structure hasn't changed much over the years it must have seen quite a few colourful, charismatic, God led and God loved vicars & curates (and perhaps some less colour-

ful ones !!).

I personally came to St Marks in 2011. I had quite a bad car accident in 1999 which left me in a wheelchair and needing 24 hour care. Although I'd learnt to cope with the physical side of my life I was struggling with certain aspects of it mentally. I did receive professional help for this but long term it wasn't a solution, I started to slip into depression and withdrew into myself. My carer at the time noticed this and suggested that going to church might help as she had just joined St Mark's church Gillingham where she went on an Alpha course which had been a great help for her. Not coming from a church background I struggled to see how it would help, never the less she persevered, often leaving religious literature around the house which I eventually started to read. After a while I agreed to go to St Marks with her.

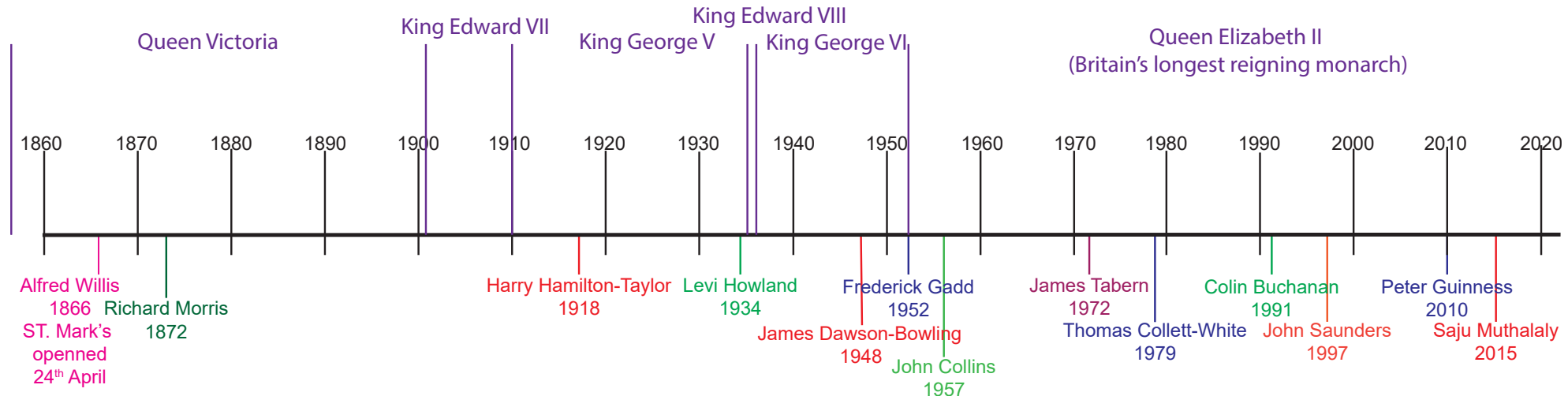
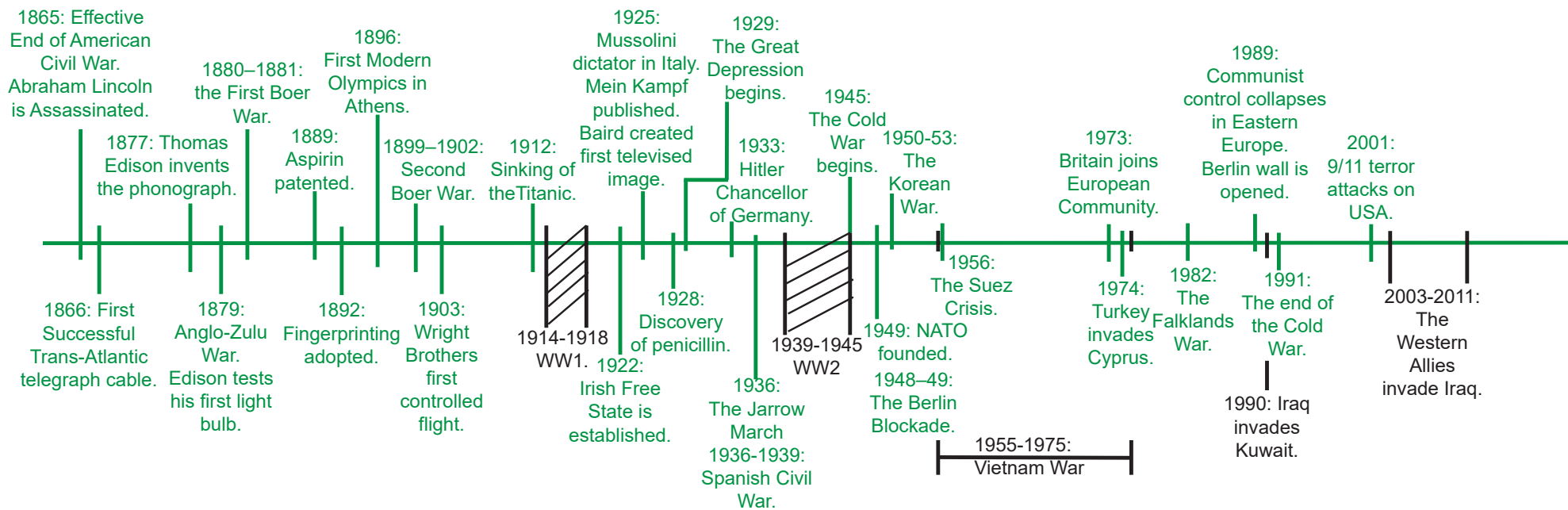
I was apprehensive. For me to go into a building where lots of people would stare at me was something I had to overcome. Finally one



*Last vestige of the old St. Mark's school, the school bell still hanging above the church vestry.*

Sunday morning we went. I didn't know what to expect but I was quite surprised everybody seemed happy and at peace. After being there for a short while I felt comfort, love and an overall feeling of wellbeing. I remember thinking if other people would come here and feel what I was feeling this church would be full to the brim.

I started going to St Marks regularly and enrolled on an Alpha course where I learnt a lot about God's love



It's interesting to note that for 99 years of St. Mark's 150 years there has been a Queen on the UK Throne.

*The St. Mark's Timeline, Paralleled to International Events.*





Paul Smith

for us and how He would like us to lead our lives. At the end of the course a few of us decided to commit our lives to God.

We were told that becoming a Christian would change our lives, how right they were.

By this time I wanted to move forward with my life. I had been feeling like a drain on society, being a burden on others and not giving anything back to. So one night I prayed and asked God for Him to help me to help others so I could put something back, to be of use in society. A few months later Foodbank opened at St Marks where I was able to get involved and help church and the local community.

My life has changed quite a bit since then I am much more my old self with the added support of Jesus Christ with me.

Thank you God for St Mark's church and everybody there

Amen PS



### Apocryphal Story?

During research for this publication we were told a story from the early 1980s that may or may not be a work of fiction.

The older (maybe 45 plus) age group will remember the "Under £5" advert columns that used to appear in the local press. Adverts were free but items for sale had to be under £5, as the name implies.

So which enterprising member of the youth group of the time put in an ad for the Vicar's car? NP



### Faith and Light by Rachel Littlewood

Very often, as we look back it seems that in the past were the "good old days". The opposite is true for learning disabled at St Mark's church.

When I joined St Mark's in 1975, my youngest daughter was not welcomed. Lucy is severely disabled and members of the congregation had not met anyone like her in church before. Nowadays "Faith and Light" are part of St Mark's and some of our members are also members of St Mark's.

Our Faith and Light community are part of a world wide movement now in 81 countries. Our local group was started in 1981 by a teacher who had been part of a Faith and Light group in Nottingham before moving to John Fisher school Chatham. In 1991 all the teachers involved with Faith and Light had moved on and the group needed a new leader and a new place to meet. So Faith and Light moved to St Mark's old vicarage and later the hall with me as it's new leader.

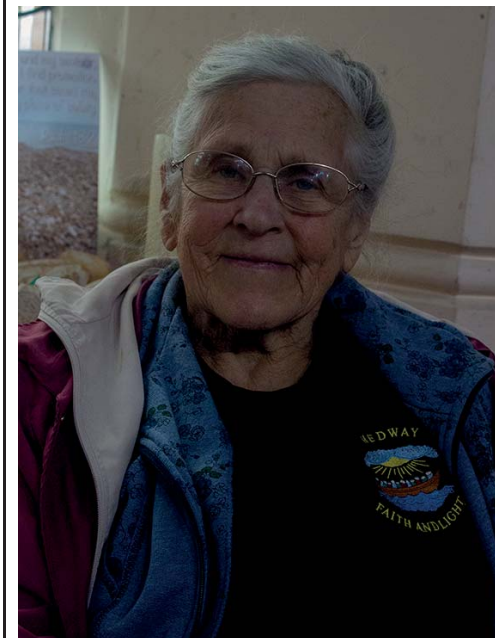
At first the group used the buildings but were not known by members of the church until one year we were asked to perform a Passion Play in St Mark's on Good Friday. This we did for several years. At that time one of the leaders, herself the mother of a severely disabled son, was excellent at producing the drama and we had a Downs Syndrome man who was always Jesus. I doubt if there was a dry eye in church, it was so very moving.

We did mimes in church at other times too. After one morning service

Colin Buchanan (the vicar at the time) gathered all the Faith and Light members into a line after the service and shook hands with each one.

Gradually Faith and Light at last became part of St Mark's. We had a mother of one of our members who belonged to Faith and Light herself confirmed one year and we have had a remembrance service for one of our members who died. Our chaplain for many years has been one of the St Mark's clergy.

Faith and Light welcomes any families who have a disabled member. They don't need to come to St Mark's Church. We have some members



Rachel Littlewood

who go to the Baptist Church and others who only come to Faith and Light. Faith and Light is now a “fresh expressions” church. We are there every other Wednesday evening in the church hall for all to join us but we are also very glad to be part of St Mark’s. RL

Rachel Littlewood has worked hard over the years to help the disabled and as I look around at the people gathered in any public meeting it is amazing that the Church is now so inclusive. The response to the learning disabled at St Mark’s has vastly improved over the years thanks to the work of Rachel and others. Rachel has now been awarded the MBE for her hard work for disabled people. NP



### Ken Wheeler's Memories

I attended St Mark’s from 1957 to the mid 1980’s when Miriam (my wife) and I moved to St Augustine’s. We were married at St Mark’s and all of our children were baptised there. Our wedding day was 20th September 1969, the same day as one other couple, Veda and Gordon Chantler.

Interesting memories? There are hundreds, but perhaps the funniest one for me concerned a Pathfinder Camp in the late 1950’s when David Macinnes was curate. A group of

us took his car during the night and pushed it to the beach at Seasalter. We later got “cold feet” and pushed it back. I was in the driving seat when we got to the garage and crumpled the wing because I misjudged the entry. He discovered the damage before breakfast and was, naturally, very angry. I was pouring tea when he angrily asked who was responsible and my hand shook so much that I spilt it on his fried breakfast. The rest, as they say, is history! KW

Ken Wheeler wrote a history of St Mark’s, some of the historical research has been used in this publication. He has just finished writing the history of St Augustine’s which will be published soon, this year is St Augustine’s Centenary year. NP



### Editor's Memories

My first memory of St. Mark’s is waiting, with my two elder sisters, at the bus stop opposite for the 145 or 146 bus up to the Jezreels. Behind me was Bakers, the toy shop, or as I knew it the model train shop (now JJs). Even then as a pre-infant school kid I was into train sets (thanks to my Dad) and at Bakers you could put a penny (that’s 1d) in the slot and watch the train go around the window display.

Looking across the road was a dingy

old building with something that read something like “St. Mark’s Infant School” written on the side.

“Is that still a school?” I asked.

“No.” was the reply from one of my sisters.

The building looked like it was on its last legs, ready to fall down at any moment. It stood between the last shop and somewhere close to where the gate is now to the church car park.

Then came the church next door. I didn’t know quite what to make of it. We were Methodists, attending the Central Hall in Chatham High Street. I didn’t know about the Church of England, seemed strange to me....

As a teenager, in my pre-Christian days, I once or twice went in the school building. Someone started an event called the “Community Boogie,” but the less said about that the better. I’m still surprised that the old building stood up to it. The building was pulled down a few years later.

Fast forward about 15 years. I’m now a Christian and an elder/deacon in the Elim Pentecostal Church. It’s February or March 1986 and my wife Maria had just died. Heavy snow had stopped me taking my two 7 year olds and my 5 year old to church in Rochester, so on the Sunday evening the four of us walked along to St. Mark’s, just to be nosey and find out what happened there. Well that was

certainly not what we were used to. I couldn’t understand the use of liturgy and after the meeting someone asked if we were going to join permanently. No pressure there then! No way I’d ever be part of an Anglican Church!

Fast forward again. I’m now several years married to Tina. Our youngest son Jon, had been an attender at St Mark’s youth group prior to Uni in Lancaster. While in Lancaster he attended St. Thomas’s Church and would take us there when we visited. Strangely St. T’s didn’t seem Anglican, you wouldn’t have known it was C of E unless you’d read it outside. The person in charge was someone called Peter Guinness. We were quite impressed.

Jon married Amy and moved to Petersfield after they had graduated. They now have two sons. Several years later a very excited Jon phoned us saying “Have you heard who the new vicar is at St. M’s?” Peter Guinness had already been installed. We went to have a look – and stayed. NP



**Helen Towers**  
**memories of**  
**St. Marks:**

My first day at St. Mark's was on 11th August 1991. I remember one person talking to me, he was wearing a white suit - Graham Davis!



*Helen and Trevor Towers*

The other memory is to do with the photo I am attaching

Trevor and I were married on 5th April 1997. Pentecostal and Anglican leaders came together to marry us (Paul and Jean Kerr and Don Button from Saffron Walden Pentecostal Church). In the evening we cleared the church and my family folk dance band took over

The photo shows the last point that I saw my veil. I turned around in the Page 11

doorway and the wind whisked it away above the shop opposite. It sat on their glass flat roof for a while then blew away again. HT



**Margaret Green Story**

Margaret is a believer and has seen many difficult times and many good times as she has followed Jesus over the years.

Margret has been coming to St. Mark's since the early 1950s, when



*Margaret Green*

Freddie Gad was the vicar. It was during the period when Holy Trinity in Brompton was closed and the parish was merged into St. Mark's.

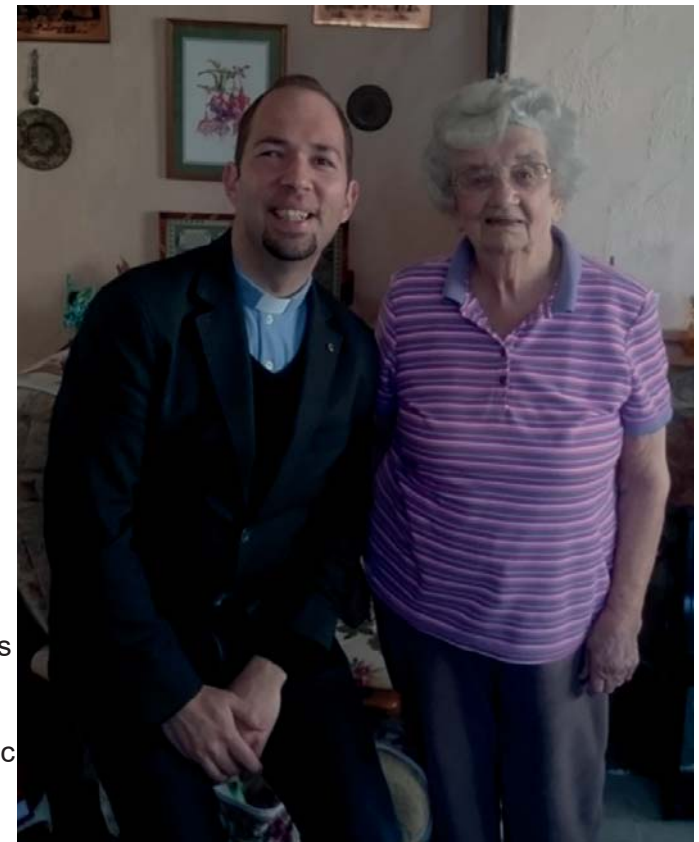
Freddie's daughter married Thomas Collet White, he was a Curate who later became the vicar of St Mark's.

John Collins took over as vicar after Freddie in 1957 and remained until 1972. John took over a struggling dock-yard parish and utterly transformed it. Under his ministry St. Mark's really changed and became famous as a "Charismatic Church."

John encouraged the members to go out and love the people of Gillingham, they used to go out in pairs to knock on doors and inviting people to come to church. They were encouraged to speak to their neighbours to get them to come to church, they started to come to Christ.

Under John the half night of prayer was started.

He brought many visiting speakers in, including Cory Ten Boom, the Dutch survivor of Hitler's concentration



*Richard England (associate vicar) with Hilda Luck. as far as we know Hilda is the oldest living person baptised at St. Mark's which happened in 1914.*

camps to speak at St Marks. Jean Darnell spoke to the ladies group, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues glorifying Jesus. David Shepherd, the cricketer and meet John Collins at bible school, he later became Bishop of Liverpool. Martin Lloyd Jones, the bible teacher visited.

David McInnes & David Watson were both curates of St Marks and they both stayed in the old vicarage.

John stayed at St Marks for about 15 years. He married several couples including Margaret and Stan at St Mark's.

There was a church newspaper called Marksmen, the surrounding shops paid for advertising space, this was printed on a press in a shed at the bottom of someone's garden.

At Christmas time the church was often packed and extra chairs would have to be added. MG



### Glyn Allen's Memories

Having been a member of St Mark's for 48 years there is so much that I could write. In fact I found it so difficult to know what to leave out. I have many memories - good, happy, sad, difficult, serious and funny as you would expect over such a long time. I therefore mention just three things that happened over those years which looking back were quite amusing, although not necessarily seen so at the time by those involved.

### **Communion Wine**

In the 80s the silver flagon used to hold Communion wine was not usually emptied after the service, but simply topped up with wine each week. One Sunday after the service I noticed that there was some thick



*The Rev Alfred Willis, St. Mark's First Vicar.*

residue in the bottom of the flagon, so decided to clean it. I put about half a cup of neat washing up liquid in the flagon with the intention of letting it soak until the next Sunday.

Unfortunately I forgot to tell anyone and before the next Communion Service and the Reader topped up the flagon with wine in the normal way, not knowing that the wine to be served was mixed with washing up liquid. You can imagine the reaction

of the first few communicants as they swallowed the mixture and you could literally say they 'foamed at the mouth'.

### **Christmas Tree**

The church refurbishment had just been completed at the end of 1984 and all was looking very smart including the new carpet. As the pews had been removed there was nowhere to mount the very tall Christmas tree, which was usually strapped to a pew. I therefore decided to stand it in a large metal dustbin at the back of church.

I filled the dustbin with bricks and earth to secure the tree in position. I then duly poured buckets of water into

the dustbin to prevent the tree from drying out and the needles dropping. It was only after the fourth bucket of water that I realised there was a large hole in the bottom of the dustbin and dirty brown water was running out over the new carpet with no way of stopping it.

### **Stuck in the loft**

In the 70s there was a team who op-

erated the Overhead Projector. One member of the team had an alcohol problem and during a service, after finishing operating the OHP, she went into the vestry. At the end of the service she could not be found, but there was an empty bottle of communion wine on the vestry desk.

Having drunk the bottle of wine she had climbed up the ladder into the loft and was so inebriated that she was well and truly stuck. Even though she was a large lady the OHP team leader had the difficult task to carry her down the ladder. GA



### Memories of Jenny Collet-White

It is difficult to summarise my three chapters at St Mark's, the first as vicar's daughter, the second as a curate's wife and the third as vicar's wife, it's no wonder that the church means so much to me.

The streets and alleys, the high street, the Lines, Darland Banks and everything about Gillingham, is crowded with reminiscences and often spiritual milestones for me and others. This might be a bit of nostalgia from an older person, but why not?

It was there that I came to faith in my early 20s, where I met and mar-



*Children's Church taken at Harvest 1954. The vicar is Derek Gadd and his daughter, the future, Jenny Collett-White is in the photo.*

ried Thomas. There that we saw God work in so many exciting ways and where we made some lifelong friends. We had moments of difficulty, heartache and sadness, but our memories of those times are rich and full of thankfulness to God for all he did and is still doing now in different times, but the same God.

Many things stand out, of course, but chief among them are our times

with some amazing colleagues, ordained and lay, the transformation of the church building, the missions, the home groups, the houseparties, the barn dances, the fabulous food in people's homes and at church events, the Christmas carol services to which we were so proud to invite non churchgoing friends, the adult and children's productions and most importantly our worship together and the teaching we were privileged

to receive as we learnt together and grew in our faith. We shall never forget the huge generosity and commitment of the church family to St Mark's and to us personally.

It was an amazing introduction to personal faith and depth of relationships for our three children. They shared with us the comings and goings, ups and downs of vicarage life, learning to survive the chilly winters in the otherwise fabulous house! We speak of those times often.

When we left, it was like a bereavement to me. We have been very blessed in the many years since and of course are so grateful for so much. Those years at St Marks are printed

indelibly on our hearts.

We pray that the church family in all its diversity, will continue to grow and change and be greatly blessed in the years to come. J C-W



## Dorothy Brundle on St. Mark's Church Coffee Shop

It started when Anne Chadwick spoke at St. Mark's about the Church Care Centre in May 1989. This started Tricia Martin looking for candidates who might be interested in joining her in church to pray for the Care Centre.

Monday, 19th June 1989, I (Dorothy Brundle) and Lesley Boast joined Tricia at 1 pm, in church to pray. Tricia suggested we start a Coffee Shop, in church with the proceeds (if any) to going to church funds for the Care Centre. The aim also was to provide a meeting place for Christians and the general public. A sort of come and see us and meet with us. We wished to spread the love of Christ but without being pushy. To make friends, then talk about Jesus.

As Gillingham Market was held on a Monday we chose to hold a weekly Coffee Shop on that day each week. So, Monday the 3rd July 1989, the church Coffee Shop was opened for the first time, from 10 am till 2 pm.

The Coffee Shop team of helpers gradually grew from within the congregation. We concentrated on only the very best would do, as we were part of the body of Jesus Christ. We had table cloths on each table and a vase of flowers. The crockery was a pretty matching set of cups and saucers, tea-plates and sugar bowls for each table. Each member of the

team wore an apron of co-ordinated design with the decor too. Everything had to be pleasing to the eye.

The team always had one, or preferably two members, who would be responsible for joining the customers and chatting over a cup of tea or coffee, a welcoming friendly listening ear. It soon became obvious to us that some folk came into the Coffee Shop on a regular basis because they lived alone and welcomed the opportunity to meet with friends, make friends and have a good old natter. Some came in because they saw the church was open and wanted to look around. They may have been baptised, married or been to a funeral at St Mark's. Some were worshipers at other local churches and after looking around the market would come in and exchange church news with us. Some wanted to know what St. Mark's had to offer for their own particular family and what our services were like.

Then we also had poor souls who came in because they were going through a trauma and felt coming into a church they would get some sort of comfort. We would always offer prayer for them or with them. We always had prayer before we opened the door that everyone who stepped over the threshold would be blessed by God. We knew we were to be part of that blessing of love and comfort too. Over the years the team of helpers had a natural flow of

waxing and waining. Some helpers were with us for an hour or two each Monday or perhaps once a fortnight. Some helpers gave many hours each week to the project. Then it became necessary to reduce the Coffee Shop open times by a couple of hours. It continued until Coffee Shop's natural closure in 2015 to be open from 10 am till mid-day.

Over the 26 years of Coffee Shop, many members of the congregation have been involved one way or another, in setting up, serving, ministry, clearing up, shopping, cooking washing-up, laundry. All have been valued.

The public who once were just public became friends and even became part of our congregation. God blessed this work and those who were part of it. Sadly it came to an end in 2015 but God always has the last word. Our society has changed so much over these years, God wants us to look afresh at our local society and deal with the newer problems rather than those that faced us back in 1989. DB



*Simeon's Housemother Mrs MacDonal second from left.*

*Standing is a young Ernie Mann.*

## **Simeon's Hostel for Ordinands**

In 1962, Simeon's Hostel for Ordinands opened in Balmoral Road and ran for eight years.

Over that time around 25 men lived and worked in the parish in preparation for full time ministry.

Three of the ordinands – John Freeth, John Saunders and Graham Cray subsequently joined St Mark's as clergy.

## **Canon Ernie Mann**

I was invited to a St. Mark's Evening Service in 1958 by a friend, David Tuck. Firstly I had been invited to tea with him and his wife Jill. They lived in Skinner Street with his parents. We then went to the 6:30pm service which I believe was St. Mark's first Guest Service held in the same pattern as All Souls, Langham Place in the West End of London. This is where the Vicar of St. Mark's Rev. John Collins had been a Curate before he came to Gillingham. A dramatic change for him to come from this fashionable West End Church next to the BBC building with a very large congregation to Gilling-



*A view of the old pews before the refurbishment.*

ham. The Vicar at All Souls was the Rev. John Stott, perhaps the most outstanding Clergyman of his generation.

I had no background in Church and up to this time I had no recollection of ever attending a Church service. My memory is of a very full church

and a welcoming atmosphere from the congregation and being squeezed into the pews.

John Collins used as his text Revelation 3 vs. 20 "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me". I was overwhelmed. It appeared that his preaching from the pulpit was just to me. Over the years I felt this on many occasions with the outstanding preachers at St. Mark's, John Collins and his Curates David MacInnes and David Watson.

At the end of the service John Collins explained if you wanted to give your life to Jesus he would explain how. But if you wanted to leave you could. Practically no one left and my two friends stayed beside me. At the end of the short extension of the service the Vicar explained how to commit your life to Christ. He prayed a short prayer of

committal which we could pray if we wished to commit our life to Christ. He then said if we had prayed that prayer it would be good to come out of the pews and come to the front of the church as a sign of that commitment. Our details were taken and we were encouraged to attend a weekly bible study with the Curate which was the Rev. David MacInnes in the Vicarage, now known as The Old Vicarage. The Vicar (his wife and family) and the two Curates all lived in the Vicarage, the Curates in bed sits. A number of books have been written about this period at St. Mark's.

The church was very privileged to have such outstanding clergy and visiting preachers (most notable being Corrie Ten Boon) back in the late 1950's and 1960's. The church grew in numbers and drew people from the whole of north Kent to come and hear the Word of God expounded and the Good News of Jesus preached. There was a very large youth group many of whom went into full time Christian Ministry.

It now seems a very long time ago.

EM



## Mandy Tozer Returning from Hong Kong

When I returned from Hong Kong in 2010 I was asked to fill the gap of Church secretary until the job could be advertised. I jumped at the chance of volunteering for what was my dream job, working with Christians and serving the church I loved. I don't think I did it very well but I did my best and have no regrets in those 18 months. What was wonderful for me was welcoming Peter Guinness and helping him settle into the office. Well I thought I helped him but he might not have the same opinion! To my shame I had never heard of Peter nor Michelle before they came to St Mark's but I soon learned of their importance in the Christian world. I loved Peter's sense of humour and his humble, gentle approach to others. I soon learned however that he did not tolerate fools gladly so I tried really hard not to be one! What a privilege it was for me to take on this role until passing on to the more capable hands of our dear Pauline Jackson. Now I know first-hand what a difficult and tiring job it can be so please do not take Pauline for granted as she continues with a willing heart to serve us and the Lord. MT



## The Late Mrs J. E. Packer.

This article originates in a local newspaper of 1928.

An old well-known resident of Gillingham passed away on June 7th in the person of Mrs Julia Emma Packer, widow of Mr William Packer, saddler and harness maker of High-street, Gillingham, for many years and who will be remembered by many of our old readers. The deceased lady who was in her 73rd year had lived in Gillingham for nearly fifty years, and had been, from the time she first lived in Gillingham, a member of St. Mark's Church. Mrs. Parker leaves three sons and three daughters. The funeral took place on Monday in Gillingham New Cemetery, the remains being deposited in the grave of her husband, who predeceased her by twenty years. The Vicar of St. Mark's, the Rev. H. Hamilton-Taylor, officiated at the graveside. Many beautiful floral tributes were placed on the grave.

Comments from Cindy Warne:

This obituary was for my great grandmother, we only have a photocopy from an old newspaper.

Julia Packer (nee Chittenden), born 28th March 1856. Julia married William Packer, a Saddler. One of their shops was at 65 High Street, nearly next door to St. Mark's Church.

As I understand, and the obituary seems to confirm this, once they had

moved to Gillingham, they attended St. Mark's Church for the rest of their lives - in Julia's case, that was nearly 50 years until her death in 1928 aged 72 years.

Eight of their children were baptised at St. Mark's, including my great Aunty Edie in January 1885 right up to my grandmother in 1897.

Our son John was also baptised there in 1990 nearly 100 years later.

St. Marks will always be a part of us and remembered very fondly. CW



## Just a Few Photos From the Celebration Weekend



*Rehman Chishti MP for Gillingham and Rainham*







*Bishop Graham  
Cray, former  
curate at St  
Mark's*



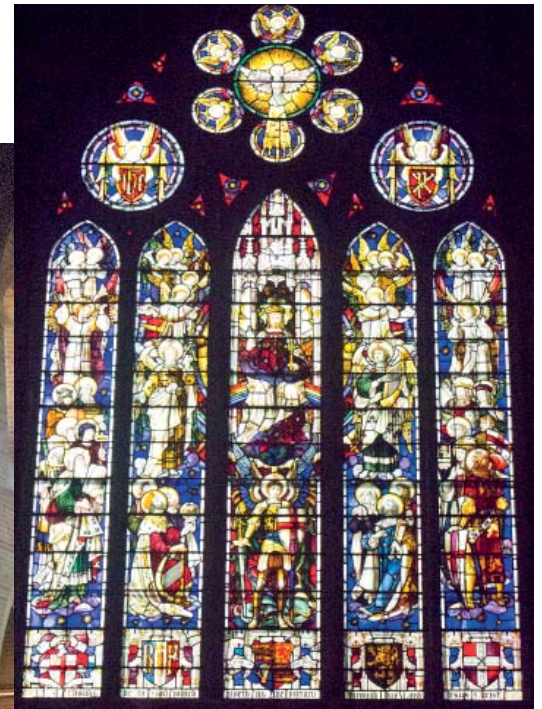
*Rev Saju  
Muthalaly - Vicar*



*The new "Full Immersion" Baptistry being built c1985.*



*The Baptistry in use today.*



*The Church Interior today.*



*Peter and Michele Guinness  
at their Retirement.*



*Carol Singing outside the Church, c1985-90.*



*Church Flowers.*

## St Mary's Island Church

In 1984 Chatham Dockyard closed, much to the distress of the people of the Medway Towns. The site was put to many different uses, Part of the Old Historic Dockyard was retained as a museum and display area. Part is industrial. Some is educational with many universities and colleges having campuses there.

Finally a large part of St. Mary's Island was developed for housing.

Many areas of the site have starred in TV and film, everything from "Call the Midwife" to "James Bond" and "Mr. Selfridge." It's almost a weekly event when a new crew turns up to do their filming.

In January 2000 a new Church was started on St. Mary's Island in the

Old Dockyard. It started as a joint Local Ecumenical Project between three local churches. More recently it has become a daughter church of St. Mark's.

Strangely enough, it meets in the local primary school in a new housing area, now haven't we heard that story somewhere before? Is history repeating its self or is this some kind

of pattern that God is using?

Bye-the-way, the Historic Dockyard is well worth a visit.



*St. Mary's Island Church, held in the school of the same name.*

Weddings

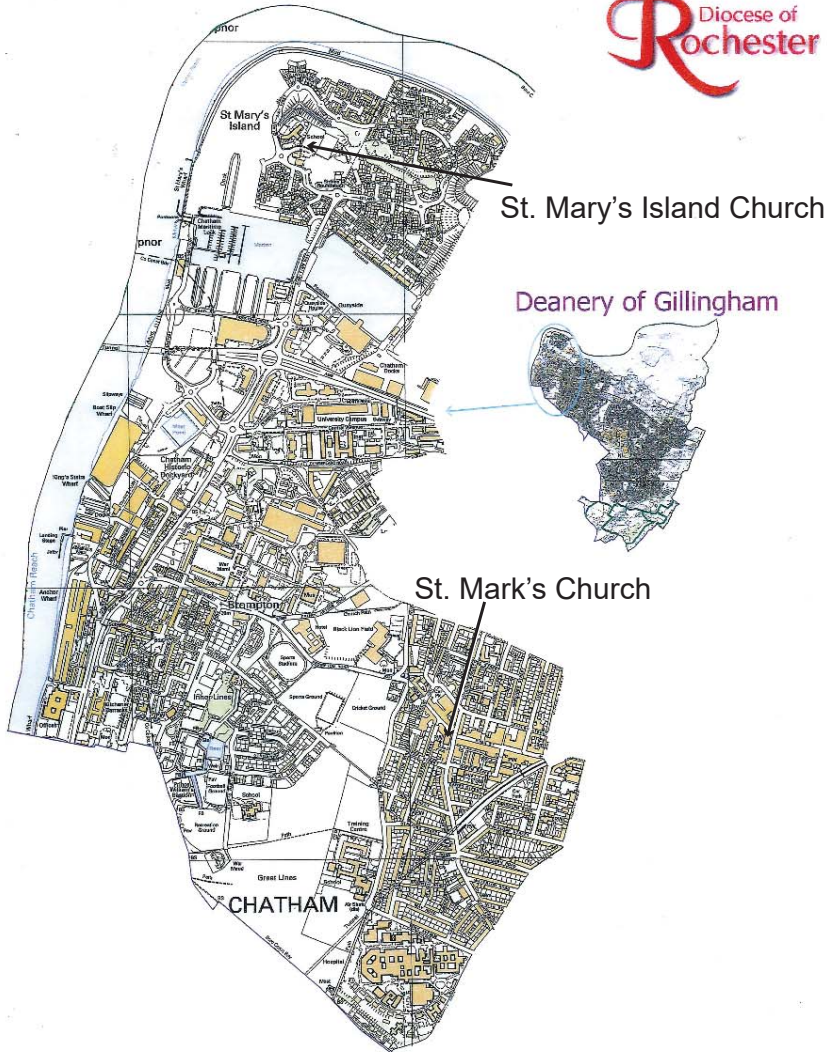








## Gillingham St Mark



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*A map of the parish of St. Mark's showing both Churches.*

## Why is St Mark's here?

Because of Jesus. To celebrate and communicate His wonderful name.

*"To please God. Teach his word. Serve others and connect people with Jesus".* As the Church strapline says.

- To bring peace in our town.
- To bring help when people are hurting.
- To make Gillingham a good place to live.

Jesus is the one and only Redeemer of the World, we put Him first in all things. We are a Bible believing Church, just one of many, many such churches in Medway, the UK and World – wide.

When the people of Gillingham is in crisis then we are here to help, because we know that this is what He has told us to do.

It's always amazing what Jesus will do. Many years ago two friends of mine stopped to talk to a group of bikers, outside an old biker café. One by one the bikers started their machines and rode off, until there was just one left and his bike wouldn't start! He tried hard but nothing he did would start his bike. My two friends asked if they could pray for the bike, he let them. They laid hands on it and prayed that Jesus would put the bike right. Next try on the kick start and the bike sprang into life.... One amazed Hell's Angel moved his allegiance from hell to the Kingdom of Heaven!

Do you have a need in your life? Then just ask Jesus to fix it or come and talk to us about it.

As we've said above, we are just one of many, many Churches in the Medway Towns whos' aim is to build the Kingdom of Heaven. In Jesus name.....



*The Church Big Lunch at the Vicarage Site, 7th June 2015*

**150 years**



**1866-2016**