

# ST MARTIN'S LOW MARPLE

## PARISH PROFILE



### *Low Marple, Marple and Marple Bridge*

The parish of St. Martin's, Low Marple (population approximately 4,300) lies towards the NE boundary of Marple and Marple Bridge (combined population approximately 23,500), 4 miles from Stockport and 9 miles from Manchester. It is beautifully situated on the edge of the Peak District and yet within very easy reach of the city: Edale is 20 minutes in one direction from Marple station (next to St. Martin's church) and Manchester Piccadilly 25 minutes in the other. Manchester airport is 20 minutes away by car (A555) and London is 2 hours by train from Stockport.

Marple is a very pretty and pleasant place to live and work. It has a wide range of cafés, bars, independent shops, restaurants, a cinema, a theatre and plenty of places to walk and exercise. The Memorial Park, with stunning views across the hills, is home to the Library, Health Centre, Senior Citizens' Hall, Children's Play Areas and Bowling Green and also has a new Skate-Park and French Boules Court. The 180-acre Etherow Park – one of England's first country parks and now attracting 250,000 visitors a year – has a sailing club, a café and a

small garden centre. Brabyn's Park – Marple's largest – is bordered by the river Goyt and the Peak Forest canal and hosts a popular 5km. Park Run every Saturday morning. One of Marple's most attractive features is the flight of 16 locks – one of the steepest in Britain – that carries the Peak Forest canal from the Marina in Marple, past St. Martin's, to the dramatic aqueduct over the River Goyt. The view from Marple Ridge over the Goyt valley and the canal is spectacular.

Between them, Marple and Marple Bridge have three state primary schools, a Catholic primary school, an independent primary school, a state secondary school, and a Sixth Form College. Stepping Hill hospital is 4 miles away in Stockport.

The area is not without its problems and challenges. St. Martin's makes weekly donations to the local Food Bank while the Mothers' Union donates household items, and the church gives toiletries and children's toys, to a refuge for victims of domestic abuse. Members of the congregation are also involved in fund-raising activities for *Wellspring*, a nearby homeless charity.

### *St. Martin's*



St. Martin's, Low Marple ([www.stmartins-lowmarple.co.uk](http://www.stmartins-lowmarple.co.uk)) – Marple's 'Hidden Gem' - is a Grade II\* listed building. It was commissioned by Ann and Maria Hudson, the owners of Brabyns Hall, who were enthusiastic followers of the Oxford Movement and wanted a church that would reflect the theological and architectural traditions of Anglo-Catholic ritual. The work was entrusted to the leading architect of the time, Edmund Sedding. When he died in 1868 the project was taken over by his younger brother, John Dando Sedding, whose other churches include Holy Trinity, Sloane Square, London. The church was finished in 1870. The Lady Chapel was added in 1896 and the Christopher Chapel in 1909 (both designed by Henry Wilson) to create what Pevsner describes as 'a quiet design . . . of uncommon sensitivity'.

The relatively modest exterior – walls of Pennine sandstone laid in random courses and topped by a plain roof of clay tiles – gives little hint of the impressive Arts and Crafts interior with its chancel window by William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, St.Christopher chapel painting by Christopher Whall (recently restored), stunning Art Nouveau font cover, and ‘Father Willis’ organ: a recording of a recent recital by Dr. Gordon Stewart is currently on sale to help raise funds for essential repairs.

The interior is plastered throughout and the timber roof structure is exposed below the plastered in-fill ceiling. The main body of the church can accommodate 140 in traditional pews (recently provided with new bench cushions) and there is room for another 25 in the Lady Chapel on loose chairs. A Children’s Corner has been created and there is wheelchair access. The church has an amplification system and an induction loop for those with hearing aids.



The Vicarage, built in 1982, is situated next to the east end of the church. It is a detached house with, downstairs, a living room, small dining room, a large kitchen, a utility room, a study and a toilet and, upstairs, four bedrooms and two bathrooms. There is an attached garage and a large garden at the back bordered by mature trees.

St. Martin’s Heritage Trust ([www.stmartinsheritagetrust.org.uk](http://www.stmartinsheritagetrust.org.uk)) was granted charitable status in 2014 to help preserve and publicise this precious piece of artistic heritage. It has a large and growing membership. As well as Saturday ‘Open Days’, it runs an ambitious and successful programme of events: 2019/20 has seen a Community Art Exhibition, a series of lectures on the Arts and Crafts Movement in the North-West, and a series of introductory talks on Morris as poet, artist, designer and businessman, events which have helped raise money for a number of restoration projects as well as raising the profile of the church both locally and nationally. Planned events include a visit to see Morris windows in neighbouring towns and a lecture on restoring Morris glass.

## *Community Links*

Across the churchyard is the Parish Hall. This was originally the Verger's house and school and is another attractive Grade II listed building. Today it is used by 16 regular groups including an Arts Society, Craft groups, Yoga classes, Dance groups, a Jazz Band, a Bridge Club, a children's Sign-Language class, as well as church groups such as the Mothers' Union and for events such as Burns Nights, Afternoon Teas, and coffee and biscuits or Bring-and-Share lunches after services. There is a Fairtrade stall once a month. The income these activities generate covers running costs, regular maintenance and repairs and has also paid for a new kitchen and heating system and new tables and chairs.



An important part of St. Martins' community involvement is the annual Christmas Tree Festival, held over three days and timed to coincide with the Marple Bridge 'Winter Wonderland' weekend when the Church Hall is open for lunch and hosts a small craft fair. Up to 20 local schools, groups and organisations decorate trees in the Lady Chapel and the church is then open until Christmas for visitors to see the trees. This is perhaps the busiest weekend of the church year.

Once a month, clergy and lay visitors administer Holy Communion at two local Care Homes. St. Martin's recognises that pastoral outreach is an area of its work that could be developed further.

## *Worship*

There are currently 132 people on the Electoral Roll. The worship at St. Martin's is in the Anglo-Catholic tradition: clergy wear vestments, there is a robed choir and an altar party consisting of MC, thurifer and two acolytes. Incense is used at all sung Eucharists and major festivals.

### *Sunday Services*

- 8.00am Holy Communion: Common Worship – said
- 10.00am Parish Mass: Common Worship – sung
- 10.00am (3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday) Family Mass
- 6.30pm (1<sup>st</sup> Sunday) Choral Evensong
- 6.30pm (All other Sundays) Evening Prayer

### *Wednesday Services*

- 9.30am Holy Communion: Common Worship – said

There is a very strong musical tradition at St. Martin's. The church has a paid Organist/Director of Music who is responsible for the selection and preparation of music appropriate to the liturgy and the seasons of the church year. A number of other organists, including a member of the choir, are available when required.



There is a regular SATB choir of twelve adults, with another five who join for Choral Evensong and other services. Practices take place on Wednesday evenings, and again before services.

For Sunday 10:00 Mass, the choir sings a Responsorial Psalm, two Motets or Anthems during Communion, and uses a variety of congregational Choral Mass settings. Choral Evensong consists of an Introit, an Anthem, settings for the Preces and Responses, Canticles and Psalms to the Anglican Chant. Special services with substantial musical input include the Advent Service of Light, Nine Lessons and Carols, services for Maundy Thursday and Good Friday and special midweek services such as Candlemas and Corpus Christi.

The choir has a large and varied repertoire, ranging from Plainsong and the Tudor music of Thomas Tallis and William Byrd, through to music by modern composers such as Ola Gjeilo and John Tavener. It has introduced the most recent edition of the Ancient and Modern Hymnbook - Ancient and Modern Hymns and Songs for Refreshing Worship (2013) – and is looking to develop other musical opportunities such as concerts, fund-raising and social events, and sing-alongs. It is frequently complimented on the way it enhances the prayerful, joyful and inspiring worship at St. Martin's.

An interesting feature of worship at St. Martin's has been a number of inventive and unusual Lent courses led by one of the lay readers. Two years ago, he organised a series of five visits in and around Manchester: the Manchester Jewish Museum, the Dead Sea Scrolls exhibition at Chester Cathedral Library, a guided tour of Manchester Cathedral, Manchester Art Gallery, and the Norman Adams Stations in St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church. This course was the subject of an article subsequently published in 'The Reader'. Last year the group considered the religious dimension of the paintings of Stanley Spencer and this year they have looked at the work of five Christian poets.

The church has three lay readers: Dr. Geoff Brammall, Antony Doust (Reader Emeritus) and Debbie Moores. There are two Church Wardens – Alan Ashurst and Teresa Thornecroft. The PCC has 17 members and meets 6 times a year. The Secretary is Rebecca Smith and the Treasurer is Alan Ashurst.

St. Martin's is a small but exceptionally caring and friendly church. It is a family that looks after its members and recognises the importance of encouragement and self-support. But, through the efforts of some very energetic and committed members, it has also worked hard to develop and strengthen its links both with the immediate community and, because of its artistic importance, other organisations and individuals. The outgoing incumbent was chair of the local ecumenical group 'Churches Together in Marple' and led the worship at the annual Service of Remembrance at the Memorial Park. He also established links with local primary schools and encouraged young couples with children to join the church, an area on which it recognises the need to build. St. Martin's church occupies a very valuable and precious place at the heart of this especially welcoming and open town.

### *Qualities and skills we would like to see in a new incumbent*

St. Martin's is looking for someone who will lead its congregation in prayer and worship, and nurture and encourage its spiritual development. Specifically, they would like to see:

- A commitment to maintaining and protecting the Anglo-Catholic tradition of worship including the choir and the fine musical tradition at St Martin's.
- The ability to foster a prayerful atmosphere which meets the needs of every member of the congregation and encourages them to develop spiritually.
- Excellent organisational, time-management, and communication skills.
- The ability to develop practical ideas for community outreach and build on existing initiatives, for example visiting schools and care homes.
- A willingness to be actively involved in Churches Together in Marple and the Rural Deanery.
- A commitment to developing the ministry of the church and its lay leadership.
- A willingness to look for ways of increasing the size of the congregation
- A willingness to develop the programme of occasional services and seek new venues such as schools.