

This is a compilation of many people's memories of an extraordinary man The Rev Peter Murphy.

Peter was Vicar at St John's and St Anne's between 1981 and 1993. He was well known and well loved by those who met him, not only within the church, but by the community at large. He was truly 'a man of the people', and remembered particularly for his spreading of the Gospel whenever and wherever the opportunity naturally arose, and, if necessary, even giving it a little nudge! He drew people to know Christ, and helped them to be able to share that love of Christ with others. He often did this through his influence and example. A man of many talents, he was also well known for his perceptive cartoons which are widely appreciated. He also wrote two books which he self-published during lockdown, entitled "Confessions of a Chameleon" and "Himself and Me" the story of two egos.

Before he came to Hythe he was a Team Vicar in Basingstoke with Cliff Wright. In Hythe during a vacancy, following the retirement of the vicar; he, Cliff and Jeff Watson (the 'Three Wise Men' was their nickname) worked supporting the parish. Sometimes, Cliff says, he was privileged to officiate when Peter was absent. He created a card for Cliff's 80th birthday which remains one of his treasured memories. In Basingstoke, Hythe and in his New Forest Parishes Peter touched the lives of so many people with the love and joy of the faith – he was approachable, non-judgmental and sensitive to all people's needs, not just to those with links to the church. One woman who had a baby met him as he walked between the church and the vicarage. He would greet her and stop and chat. Then he offered to look after the little one so she and her husband could go out for a meal. These people weren't churchgoers but for Peter that was never the point. Everyone loved to tell the stories of this man of God in their midst.

Peter was down to earth and his brand of outreach in Hythe was well known. He regularly popped into the local shops, offices and pubs to talk with the locals. At Midnight Mass it was standing room only with latecomers spilling out onto the church steps. You could be sure there would always be a contingent from the Mariner, Lord Nelson, Drummond Arms, Murray's Hotel, and the Malt and Hops who joined in enthusiastically, if not always as reverently as some folks would have liked.

He always attended the dawn service on Easter Day and on one occasion he performed a baptism on Calshot Beach. Up to his waist in the sea he 'dunked' the adult candidate under the waves – his white cassock billowing in the breeze and floating around him on the bobbing waves. Maybe this strengthened his desire to help out with the RNLI.

One very cold winter Sunday we arrived at St John's to find that the heating pipes had frozen and burst. So no church! It wasn't long before Peter had arranged to hold morning service in the public bar of the Drummond Arms Hotel. He actually used the darts chalkboard to write up the hymn numbers. It was great PR for Peter's 'Man of the people' ministry and the pub regulars joined in with the congregation from St John's. Until the

heating was fixed services continued in the old wooden hall. It wasn't as comfy as the pub but more reflective of our Anglican tradition of hard pews and austerity.

Following a time when parish life mostly happened in church buildings, Peter threw open our doors and charmed us outside, and outsiders to join us inside. He loved holding services in the open air, baptism in the sea, Easter ceremonies at dawn on the cliff at Lepe Beach, or leading a crowd with the donkey on Palm Sunday from St Anne's to St John's through the heart of the parish. To teach confirmation candidates about 'pneuma', the power of the wind of the Holy Spirit, he took them sailing. To get to know young people he rode with them on the 'Round the Island Bike Challenge'.

During meetings Peter would usually be drawing. He listened and inspired and amused all with his many cartoons on leaflets, posters and magazine covers. Sermons often surprised with a dramatic pictorial image, and one Lent Course was based on a sequence of famous pictures from the National Gallery.

When in a more formal mood Peter sang as Precentor when St John's Choir were asked to sing Evensong in the Cathedral because the regular choristers were on holiday. He always encouraged the choir and enjoyed the more adventurous modern anthems.

Peter was a 'Vicar with a difference'. He was full of surprises such as finding a group of 30 Muslims camping in our church one morning, and using the vestry as a prayer room. There were many over-nighters but one family stayed for weeks until Peter got them rehoused. There was the chef Peter too, who loved French cuisine. In the 80's he cooked meals for people as a thank you for working so hard fund raising even doing so in the Waitrose kitchens. Even through his illness you could find Peter helping Trish in the kitchen at 'Messy Church' and Alpha, some good chats among the suds and tea cloths.

We celebrated in pubs, on beaches, by rivers, different places each year. Everyone remembers the walk to Winchester with Peter and his dog 'Sinner' which raised thousands for 'Save the Children'. The choir suggested sponsorship for each time Sinner used a lamp-post, a 'sponsored pee'. The next day in a phone call from the diocesan hierarchy, the activity was thought to be in 'poor taste'. Peter's reply that children suffering abuse and neglect was far poorer in taste. The phone call ended there. Peter had a refreshing approach to authority! He was also a great story teller as both adults and children can confirm. 'He put in touch, the out of touch,' with talks at St John's Youth weeks away and school assemblies. He conducted a wedding on the ferry, a glorious sunny occasion over to the Isle of Wight, with a hasty return to St John's for a second wedding. He went on to conduct many special services at sea.

He trained a household of young people, the 'Root Group' to befriend the population of Netley View to encourage them to use St Anne's and develop its facilities. The rooms there are still in use. Many families will tell you how Peter married, christened and buried family members; how he supported families in those difficult times and how he loved to celebrate the special occasions including those he sailed with and those for whom he produced

delightful personal greeting cards. One family who arrived in Hythe just before their 20th wedding anniversary had not been made welcome in church for some years because of a divorce. Peter was not only welcoming but agreed to a wedding blessing in church. However they were asked to attend the classes for those about to be married so that 'others could learn from another's experience'. Peter was about people not protocols.

The two books he published are lasting mementoes of his artistic skills which have brought joy to many, including the Bishops. Peter was a creative and lovely man of God, yet he was also a down to earth 'man of the people'. He was a hugely talented cartoonist, and loved Art. He loved to sing and he will always be remembered with affection by those at St John's and in the wider Hythe and New Forest communities. His personal life ran parallel to those in his parish and this enabled him to relate to people and their struggles, not only with daily life, but with God, faith, resurrection, and all the other stages on that individual journey each one of us must take. We are fortunate to have known Peter, a profound man, a true friend and brother, who is now at peace and in the love of Christ where he belongs.

With thanks for their memories,

Norman and Maureen Curtis,

Jan Evans

Pamela Gilson

Ann Heslop

Peter Lawson

Cliff Wright

Sue and Dave Blomley