

**Welcome to our
Ghanaian friend**

IDWAL round-up: pages 8-9



**Heavenly hunks
strip off for 2004**

Charity calendar: page 2



Archaeologist Kate Longcliffe digs the initial trench on the north side of St Mary's Church

WE MAY NEED TO REWRITE CITY HISTORY

**Kids enjoy the beach -
several miles inland!**



Children from the 'fish' rockpool at Hambledon's holiday club hold up the giant fish they made in their craft session.

HAMBLEDON may be a long way from the seaside, but it didn't stop these children enjoying beach activities this summer.

Fifty-six children from around and beyond the village came to Seaside Rock - the holiday club run by St Peter and St Paul's Church in the village hall.

They danced on their own 'beach', learnt about the nautical life of the disciple Peter and split into different groups - called 'rock-pools' - for activities.

The week included songs, craft, stories, outdoor games and creative prayer. It was followed by a family service on the Sunday.

Organiser Alison Hubbard said: "This is the third year we've run a holiday club, and I think we've all learnt as helpers about how to do so.

"Many of the children who came don't go to church, and some of the 40 adults and teenagers we had helping are on the fringe of our congregation themselves."

**CHRISTIANITY in
Portsmouth may be
500 years older than
was first thought.**

A discovery at a city church may persuade historians to rewrite the story of how faith spread across the south coast.

Preliminary archaeological investigations suggest there may be a Saxon church dating from the seventh century under St Mary's Church in Fratton.

Experts already knew there was a Norman church from the 12th century under the existing building - the earliest known church site in the city. This latest find suggests the site could have been the cradle for Christianity in Portsmouth 500 years earlier than that.

Church leaders now hope the find will help them develop the site for use in the future. An ambitious four-year plan to provide better facilities for the community has now been unveiled, including re-developing the tower, organ and worship area.

The church will be holding an open day between 10am and 2pm on September 13 to show people the archaeological findings, give them a chance to dig for themselves in a mock-archaeological display, and explain the re-development work. Visitors can also climb the tower to enjoy

views of the city, and examine old marriage and other registers.

Archaeologist Kate Longcliffe, a member of the St Mary's congregation, dug a trial trench at the north side of the church and then used sophisticated radar equipment to find out what was under the existing Victorian building.

Experts already knew there were three previous churches on the site, including a Victorian one 50cm below the existing floor and a post-Norman church 90cm below the present floor level. The ground radar found another structure at a depth of 1.5m below the existing floor.

"The outline suggests a pre-Norman structure," she said. "We also know that St Wilfrid, who created a monastery at Selsey, sent a priest called Eappa to the Portsmouth area to convert the locals between 681-684 AD.

"An internal trial excavation could answer the question of what age this structure is and whether it is related to St Wilfrid and Eappa. If so, it would be a very exciting find, as it would give us the clearest view of the history of Christianity in this city that we have ever had."

The church is now working with English Heritage, Portsmouth City Council and our diocese to determine the next steps. Another trench will be dug

inside the church to investigate next Easter or next summer. Only one part of a church built by St Wilfrid and his priests - a fragment of a crypt under Ripon Cathedral - still survives to this day.

The find coincides with the launch of the St Mary's Project, a seven-part scheme to re-develop the church building to serve its community in line with its historic values.

It is likely to involve the refurbishment of St Stephen's Chapel on the south side; the provision of new community rooms; repairs to the tower; the re-development of the west end to provide office space and a welcome area; the re-ordering of the worship space at the east end; a full restoration of the historic Walker organ; and a new car park to the north of the church - between now and 2007.

The vicar, Canon Bob White, said: "The present congregation want to remain true to the values of the Victorians who wanted this building to be a 'silent witness to God' and a centre for the community.

"But we need to address its poor facilities, comply with new legislation about disabled access and make it a more welcoming place for school visits, concert audiences and others."