

Our 850th birthday party...probably!

AN Isle of Wight church will celebrate its 850th anniversary this year – or at least the parish thinks so!

Worshippers at St Blasius, Shanklin, have organised a year-long programme of special events to mark the fact that the church is at least 850 years old. But they can't be sure.

The programme includes a special celebration week in May, with a garden party, barn dance and service of thanksgiving.

Other anniversary events will start this month – including a spring flower festival over Mothering Sunday and a united service.

Priest-in-charge the Rev Alan Swanborough said: "Tradition has it that the church was built in the reign of King Stephen, but we don't know when.

"We've chosen this year to celebrate because it will be 850 years since Stephen died, so it should be at least 850 years since the church was built.

"It was originally a private chapel to the lord of the manor, when there was nothing much

here apart from the manor and a few cottages. But 150 years ago, the then lord, Francis White-Popham, gave the church to the parish."

The year's events kicked off on the church's Patronal Sunday in February, at which a new window was dedicated and the White-Popham window re-dedicated.

On March 14, the Archdeacon of the Isle of Wight, the Ven Dr Trevor Reader, will preach at a united service at the church – the latest in a series of ecumenical events.

The spring flower festival between March 19-22, will see the church open daily between 10am and 4pm. Refreshments will be available on the Friday and Saturday (apart from during a wedding from 1.30pm-2.30pm), and after the morning service on Sunday.

A new church guide and history should be available, and there will be a display of historical documents relating to the church and town.

Future plans include the Archdeacon preaching again at the Palm Sunday morning serv-



St Blasius Church, Shanklin: anniversary year

ice on April 4; a concert by the Isle of Wight Youth Stage Band at 7.30pm on May 1; and a concert by St John's Newport Church Choir at 7.30pm on May 12.

The official celebration week starts with a visiting preacher and barn dance on May 16 and a light operatic-style concert by Savoyards at 7.30pm on May 18.

A garden party will be held on May 20, another guest preacher will visit on May 22 and there will be a Songs of Praise-style service on May 23.

The Worcester Male Voice

Choir will visit on June 4; there will be a summer fayre on July 21; another concert on August 21; and the bishop will visit for a confirmation service.

Families who need a break

DO you know a disadvantaged family who need a holiday? You could help give them a break on an 'Away From It All' (AFIA) holiday.

Run jointly by the Mothers' Union and the Board of Education, AFIA holidays involve activities for children, adults and families together at the Lodge Hill Centre, near Pulborough in West Sussex. They have been run successfully for the past six years.

This year's is happening between July 31 and August 7. Organisers are asking parishes to recommend families that are financially or socially disadvantaged. They may not have had a holiday for some time and need a break.

The centre has organised activities for children aged between eight and 16, and adults. And the Mothers' Union team organises a full programme for the under-eights, which allows parents to have time alone. There is also entertainment and an outing.

AFIA holidays are partly financed through the Mothers' Union and partly through parish sponsorship. Families are also asked to make some contribution. Anyone who would like to nominate a family or get more information can contact Kay on education.kay@portsmouth.anglican.org or 023-9282 2053.

Library named after bishop



The Rev Andrew Ashdown presents the cheque to Canon Isaac Anokye, acting principal of the theological seminary

PART of the new library block at a Ghanaian theological college will be named after Bishop Kenneth - in honour of our fundraising efforts.

We raised £8,698.24 towards the new library block at Cape Coast Theological Seminary in Ghana, one of two causes to benefit from Bishop Kenneth's Lent Appeal last year. And the former chairman of our Inter-Diocesan West Africa Link (IDWAL), the Rev Andrew Ashdown, handed over the cheque to rapturous applause by staff and students.

The college is the centre for training Anglican clergy in Ghana, but also trains students from other parts of west Africa. It also operates an exchange scheme with our diocese.

Andrew said: "My last official duty was to be invited to celebrate Eucharist at the college. It was a privilege and joy - High Mass with lively singing and African drums."

And acting principal, Canon Isaac Anokye, said: "We cannot express our thanks deeply enough for Portsmouth's generosity."



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"How great are God's riches! How deep are his wisdom and knowledge! Who can explain his decisions? Who can understand his ways? As the scripture says, 'who knows the mind of the Lord? Who is able to give him advice? Who has ever given him anything, so that he had to pay it back? For all things were created by him, and all things exist through him and for him. To God be the glory for ever! Amen. (Romans 11: 33-36)