

Trail follows Wilfrid's footsteps up Meon Valley

TEN churches in the Meon Valley have been linked together in a pilgrimage trail following in the footsteps of a seventh-century saint.

The Meon Valley Pilgrimage Trail was launched last month with a walk along part of its route and a service.

Two new guidebooks are now available to help provide the spiritual context and history of the 28-mile route, from Titchfield Haven on the coast to East Meon in the heart of the South Downs.

It's part of the bishop's Kairos initiative, which encourages parishes across our diocese to find new ways of engaging with their local communities.

The launch involved ramblers hiking from Titchfield Haven to St Peter's Church, Titchfield – following part of the route originally taken by St Wilfrid. There was then a service of thanksgiving at St Peter's, led by the Archdeacon of the Meon, the Ven Peter Hancock.

The Rev Jim Foley, vicar of Droxford, Meonstoke, Corhampton and Exton, said: "There are many beautiful and ancient churches along the banks of the River Meon, and it was thought that the pilgrimage trail might be a means of enabling more people to enjoy these wonderful places of worship, and to understand a little more of their spiritual history."

St Wilfrid is an important figure in the history of the Meon Valley. He was Bishop of York, but was exiled to the south coast in 681AD after a row with the then Archbishop of Canterbury.

He founded several churches, including St Peter's, Titchfield, Corhampton Church and Our Lady, Warnford, as he travelled up the Meon Valley, converting the Saxon and Jute tribes. He may also have founded St Nicholas, Wickham, St Mary and All Saints, Droxford, and St John the Evangelist, West Meon.

These first churches would have been wooden buildings which have not survived, and which were later rebuilt

in stone. St Peter's, Titchfield, is the one exception where traces of Saxon stonework from Wilfrid's church in 685AD remain to this day.

The two guidebooks produced are a general guide, which follows the story of the Christian faith in the churches of the Meon Valley from St Wilfrid to the present day, and a walkers' guide, which describes footpaths and bridleway routes between the churches.

Those footpaths link together the churches at Titchfield, Wickham, Soberton, Droxford, Meonstoke, Corhampton, Exton, Warnford, West Meon and East Meon. Both guides are available from the churches involved.

Links are marked as office opened



Top: Bishop Kenneth outside the new offices with (left) deputy mayor Cllr Robin Sparshott and PHA chairman Ben Stoneham; bottom: Bishop Kenneth and Ben Stoneham unveil the plaque at the official opening of the building

IT was a good moment to reflect on the links between our diocese and Portsmouth Housing Association.

Bishop Kenneth and the chairman of PHA, Ben Stoneham, unveiled the plaque to officially open Peninsular House – the offices shared by both organisations.

And guests were reminded that PHA was founded in 1973 by a priest from our diocese, Bill Sargent, whose concern about poor housing was translated into action.

Now the organisations jointly own the five-storey building at the entrance to the cross-channel ferry port, and both share in a variety of projects across the diocese.

"The association between the diocese and PHA goes back a long way," said Ben Stoneham at the official opening.

"It was the vicar of St Mark's, North End, Bill Sargent, who had the initial vision, and the first

PHA house was in Dawson Road, Fratton.

"Bill Sargent's energy and determination set us on course for the 5,000 properties we now run, with a value of £600m. That's a phenomenal achievement.

"The diocese and PHA work closely in the Roberts Centre and the Portsmouth Foyer, which was set up by a former vicar of St Mary's to work with young people on housing and training needs.

"And I'm pleased to say that the person who initiated the diocese's move here, Andrew Robinson, is the son of one of Bill Sargent's former curates – Ron Robinson, who is now back working as a priest in the city."

And Bishop Kenneth said: "I'm delighted that the move to Peninsular House means that for the first time, all the aspects of the diocesan administration are working together in one place.

"This will greatly enhance our support for the 142 parishes across south-east Hampshire and the Isle of Wight that make up our

diocese. And our close partnership with PHA will continue the work of the past 30 years."

The official opening coincided with the installation of new signs on the side of Peninsular House, which are visible from the M275 and lit up at night.

The opening also happened the day before the diocese's open day, which saw scores of wor-

shippers visiting the new diocesan offices on the first floor of Peninsular House.

They were able to see the modern, open-plan office space, staff room and conference room, as well as chatting to staff about their work. Guests were impressed with the greatly enhanced working environment enjoyed by staff.

Giving up, but still behind the average

WORSHIPPERS in our diocese are giving more to the Church than ever before - but are still lagging behind the national average.

New figures for 2004 show that our churchgoers who belong to a planned giving scheme gave an average of £7.02 each week to the Church - as the national figure hit £8. The Portsmouth figure represents three per cent of average incomes, compared with 4.5 per cent in the top diocese, Sheffield.

But the Portsmouth percentage was higher than the equivalent figure in Winchester and Chichester dioceses, which both registered 2.7 per cent in 2004. It also represented a significant rise on 2003, when our own figure was also 2.7 per cent.

Parish resources adviser Gordon Uphill said: "Church members do give generously to the Church and many other charitable causes, and it's great that worshippers in our diocese are giving more of their average incomes to the Church.

"But it's still somewhere short of the five per cent of disposable income recommended by general synod since 1978. The average weekly giving in all our collections is just £3.77 per head, which hardly pays for a week's newspapers."

The five per cent figure recommended by general synod is based on the Christian tradition of tithing - or giving away 10 per cent of income. The recommendation was to give half of that amount to the Church and give the other half to other charitable work.

Gordon can advise you on how to increase giving in your parish by running a stewardship campaign. Contact him on 023-9289 9655 or gordon.uphill@portsmouth.anglican.org