

GRAFFHAM

PARISH NEWS

FREE

NOVEMBER 2025



SPECIAL COMPILATION REPRINT

Celebrating 150 years since the
rebuilding of our St Giles Church



Our parish church through the centuries

1597: The earliest identified depiction of the church is from the Three Manor Estate Map of the village, until recently West Sussex Records Office's oldest map (left).



1804: The first proper picture of the church identified is this watercolour by Henry Petrie. He painted and sketched hundreds of churches in Sussex, most of which are now held by Sussex Archaeological Society's Sharpe Collection. This shows the church before it was restructured in the 1870s – and before what are now The Old Rectory and Church Cottage were built (in 1805) and the Buchanan memorial and lychgate erected.



1805-1831: This watercolour, by an unknown artist, is again before the church's rebuilding. Graffham Infant School (built in 1832) is not seen, but today's Old Rectory and Church Cottage (built in 1805) are depicted. It would be several more decades before the field this (east) side of the church became its extension burial ground. Note that Graffham Down is far less wooded than it is today. This painting was recently uncovered at The Rectory.



1912: One of the earliest photographs of the church, a picture postcard from less than 40 years after its rebuilding. Other than a few large trees in the churchyard, little has changed today.

Graffham Parish News special reprint



2025: St Giles as we know it now, in this photograph taken on a sunny day in July. The main difference from the 1912 postcard (left) is the addition of the lychgate, marking the year 2000.

November 2025

Graffham Chronicles: St Giles' transformation

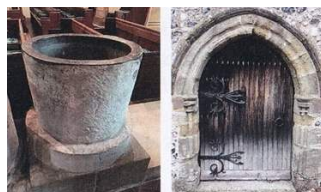


Our parish church St Giles was rebuilt a century and a half ago this year in memory of the village's Lord of the Manor, Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, one of the leading lights of the Victorian era. In the first of a series of three articles marking this milestone for our community, editor Michael Blunt and local historian Pauline Goodwin look back at the building's history.

There's been a church in Graffham for a thousand years, although much of today's St Giles dates back only a century and a half. It was substantially rebuilt and expanded in the 1870s in memory of the village's Lord of the Manor, Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, a leading light of the Victorian era and son of the legendary anti-slavery campaigner William Wilberforce.

In its entry for Graffham, the Domesday Book of 1086 noted simply: "There is a church." There's believed to have been a wooden Saxon house of worship before then, though Christianity was late reaching this part of the South Downs. For sure, today's font is considered to be Saxon. When excavations were dug for St Giles' renewal a century and a half ago, the partial footprint of a Norman church was uncovered and used as foundations for the new structure. The pillars inside today's church date back to those Norman times. The west doorway is from the 1300s while the entrance to the vestry is from a century later. The tower's oldest bell is dated 1621. The first rector of Graffham recorded was William de Wilmyngton, who served from 1278 to 1294, while the earliest entry in our parish registers is from 3 May 1655. So, the history of St Giles is long even though much of its early days are unrecorded.

After our village's highly respected, well connected and much loved Lord of the Manor Bishop Samuel Wilberforce died in 1873, his family and friends established a fund for memorials in his honour. Many were established, in London and in his former dioceses of Oxford and Winchester. Among the projects they agreed to support in 1874 was the restoration and enlargement of



St Giles' font is Saxon while its west door is medieval.



St Giles was rebuilt in the 1870s as a tribute to the village's squire Bishop Samuel Wilberforce.

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the church at Graffham, described as ‘a parish annexed to’ the Wilberforce’s home estate Lavington Park, which extended then across what are now Seaford College’s grounds along with Lavington Stud and Estate plus Westerlands, Nonnington, Tagents and Haylands Farms, including most of the villages of Graffham and East Lavington.



Architect G E Street, who designed the renovated St Giles in the mid 1870s.

A sum of £2,885 was allocated – equivalent to around £400,000 at today’s values but which went much further in those days. G E Street, who served under Wilberforce as architect to the diocese of Oxford, was appointed to draw up the design. Although he specialised in churches, he is best known for London’s Royal Courts of Justice. William Shearburn, of Dorking in Surrey, was the project’s builder. Architectural archaeologists describe the quality of his craftsmanship as high.

The building had benefitted from some renovation a couple of decades earlier, when the rector had been

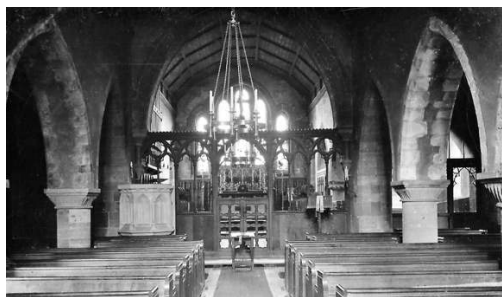


1805-31: Is this how St Giles’ interior looked before its rebuilding? This painting, uncovered in The Rectory, appears to be a match to the watercolour of the church’s exterior (inside front page).

Wilberforce’s great friend Henry Manning, who was to later convert to Roman Catholicism, going on to lead the denomination in England. All the same, it was agreed that a more radical restructuring of the building was needed.

Street aimed to maintain its medieval appearance, so he retained the late 12th Century two-bay arcades and their pillars with their square, multi-scalloped capitals, adding a third, smaller arch at the eastern side to extend the nave to the east. At that eastern end, a new chancel and north vestry were erected. Today’s

Lady Chapel was built, too – as a private area for the Wilberforce family back then. The current window with its five lancets under triple rear arches was inserted in the chancel’s eastern wall, with stained glass by the prolific London firm of Clayton and Bell. Among its other commissions were for the west window of King’s College Chapel in Cambridge, London’s Albert Memorial and Westminster



1912: This postcard shows St Giles just a few decades after its restructuring, with the rood screen between the nave and chancel and, on the right, the private area for the Wilberforce/Sargent family, now the Lady Chapel. Note also the candelabras in those days before electricity reached the village.



2025: As it looks today. Scaffolding was recently erected in much of this area for cracked plasterwork to be repaired and its west walls given four coats of limewash so St Giles was looking at its best for the special service on 2 November to mark the 150th anniversary of its rebuilding.

Cathedral, and Truro's Cathedral. The building's exterior was faced with unusually dark and superbly knapped flintwork and fine, hand-chiselled Pulborough stonework. The oak pews could seat 300 – almost the entire parish population then.

Upon the work's completion, St Giles was rededicated on All Saints Sunday 2 November 1875 in a grand service led by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Archibald Campbell Tait, the first Scot to hold the post. At least four other bishops also attended – from Chichester, Winchester, Rochester and Ely – along with many other members of the clergy, all in their vestments, and the village choir 'strengthened by the addition of some of the boys from Chichester Cathedral'. So many friends wanted to attend that a special train was run for them, from London Victoria to the now closed railway station at Selham, next to today's Three Moles pub, with the Wilberforces providing transport between there and Graffham.

G E Street intended to restore the 13th Century tower once the main building was completed – but it was still in place a decade later, when it was declared

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1875: A stone tablet just inside St Giles' south door records the church's rededication after its rebuilding at a service led by the Archbishop of Canterbury and four other bishops.



1950s: The weathercock on St Giles' spire and shingles on the tower roof damaged by time and woodpeckers were renovated – at a time when 'health and safety' was not such a big thing.

Pictures courtesy of Graffham Archive, West Sussex Record Office, Sharpe Collection, National Portrait Gallery, Colin Barker and others.

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unsafe. He had died by then so his son A E Street oversaw its replacement in 1889 in lighter and rougher flintwork with triple-lancet openings and a big broach spire. The original weathered 13th Century west doorway was set into this new tower.

Smaller changes have been made to St Giles since then – the screen between the chancel and nave removed, the Wilberforce private area converted into a Lady Chapel, the graveyard around the church closed and the new burial ground across



2000: The Bishop of Horsham Lindsay Urwin blesses the new lychgate installed to mark the new millennium.

Throughout, St Giles has remained at the centre of the lives of our vibrant village and the generations who have called this special place home.

the road opened at the dawning of the 20th Century, electricity and running water installed, the old harmonium replaced with an organ which has more recently gone all-electric, the ring of bells increased to a full six plus a sextant, the lychgate added at the south entrance to the churchyard to mark the year 2000, and heating systems upgraded, most recently with the first eco-friendly 'pew heating' in the diocese in 2022.

Graffham Chronicles: The man behind St Giles



Our parish church St Giles was rebuilt a century and a half ago this year in memory of Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, one of the leading lights of the Victorian era – and our village squire. In the second of a series of three articles marking this milestone for our community, editor Michael Blunt and local historian Pauline Goodwin look back at Wilberforce's life and family.

Samuel Wilberforce, in whose memory our parish church St Giles was rebuilt a century and a half ago this year, was one of the most prominent, influential and, at the time, best known Englishmen of the 19th Century – and Graffham and East Lavington's highly respected and much loved Lord of the Manor.

He was born in London on 7 September 1805 as the third son of William Wilberforce, the celebrated campaigner against the slave trade. Ordained as a priest in 1828, he became Archdeacon of Surrey at just 34 and then chaplain to Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's consort.

After briefly serving as Dean of Westminster, he was appointed Bishop of Oxford as he turned 40, on the recommendation of Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel. While there, he founded what is today Ripon College, Cuddesdon, which remains one of the country's top theological institutes. After a quarter of a century in that role, he became Bishop of Winchester in 1869. When he died, it was said that 'the Church of England has lost her greatest bishop for a century and a half'.

Hailed as one of the greatest public speakers of his generation, he gained the unfortunate nickname 'Soapy Sam' because of his habit, particularly during debates, of wringing his hands, which gave the impression that he was washing them. Others suggested the moniker reflected what they saw as a certain slipperiness in his arguments – particularly in the famous 'Oxford evolution debate' of 1860 in which he spoke against Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* theories. He was a prolific writer, too,

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A drawing of Samuel Wilberforce in his thirties – and a Vanity Fair cartoon of him as 'Soapy Sam'.



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penning almost 6,500 letters a year, along with books and articles. He became our village's squire through his marriage in 1828, shortly before he took holy orders, to his second cousin Emily Sargent, the eldest of four sisters who all married clergymen and were reputed to have been great beauties. Their father was John Sargent, Rector of both Graffham and also the then separate parish of Woolavington, from 1805 until his death in 1833. He in turn was son of another John Sargent, at one time MP for Seaford, who acquired the estate through his marriage to Charlotte Bettesworth. When her father passed away, with both his sons dying young and his younger brother shot dead on Graffham Down by a highwayman, the family estate ended up being passed to Emily – shortly before her death in 1841, aged just 34. Their Lavington Park House home is now Seaford



Bishop Samuel Wilberforce became Graffham and Lavington's Lord of the Manor through his wife, Emily Sargent.



College's Mansion House, with their estate covering what is today the school's Lavington Park along with Lavington Stud and Estate plus Westerlands, Tagents, Nonnington and Haylands Farms, including most of the villages of Graffham and East Lavington.

Although his ecclesiastical commitments took him away from his home for much of the time, he took an active interest

in his estate here and was said to have been well regarded by his tenants. One contemporary described him as “a good old-fashioned squire” with “irresistible charm of manner, allied to a real and heartfelt tenderness and affection in his relations with his fellows”. He “had a word for every man, woman and child he met, for he knew them all, and even the cattle were greeted as old acquaintances”. He loved showing visitors his favourite views and trees.

Samuel and Emily had five children, the fourth of whom, Ernest, went on to become Bishop of Chichester while the youngest, Basil, was to serve as Archdeacon of Westminster. Samuel's young brother Henry, also a priest, married Emily's younger sister Mary. Their relative through marriage Henry Manning wed another Sargent sister, Caroline, after a three-month courtship, though she died four years



Lavington House (now Seaford College's Mansion House) in 1902, when it was still owned by Samuel Wilberforce's son Reginald.

later, aged 25, in 1837. Manning succeeded John Sargent as Rector of both Graffham and Woolavington, serving from 1833 to 1851. On his departure, the then two separate church parishes were combined into one, as they remain today. With his mother-in-law continuing to lord over Lavington House, the Rev Sargent had built what is now Graffham's Old Rectory and Church Cottage as his family home and lived there until his death in 1833. Manning moved in there too after he married Caroline. On standing down as rector here after 18 years in the post, Manning converted to Roman Catholicism – as did all three of Samuel Wilberforce's brothers, William, Robert and Henry, along with Samuel's eldest daughter Emily, named after her mother. Despite having been married, Manning went on to become prelate of England as Archbishop of Westminster. Until he died in 1892, aged 83, he secretly wore around his neck a chain with a locket containing Caroline's picture.

Pictures courtesy of
Graffham Archive, West
Sussex Record Office,
Sharpe Collection,
National Portrait Gallery
and others



Henry Manning,
who married a
sister of
Wilberforce's
wife – and went
on to become
Roman Catholic
prelate of
England.

This religious schism within the family – brought about by what was known as the Tractarian or Oxford Movement – undoubtedly caused great personal angst to Samuel. Many also believe it may have cost him being appointed Archbishop of York or even Canterbury. As it was, he died, aged 67, in 1873

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St Peter's, Woolavington, now Seaford College's chapel, where Wilberforce and many of his family are buried.



Samuel's son Reginald – the last Wilberforce owner of Lavington.

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in a fall from a horse in the Surrey Hills while he was visiting his friend William Gladstone, Prime Minister at the time. His body was taken to Abinger Hall and, it is said, laid out on the billiard table there, as one of the few items of furniture thought able to bear his weight.

He had been offered a tomb in Westminster Abbey, like his father, but preferred to be laid to rest alongside Emily at Lavington's St Peter's Church, now Seaford College's chapel, where his bishop's crozier has remained since.

He was succeeded as the village squire by his eldest surviving son Reginald, who became a barrister after serving as a soldier. When an ensign in the 52nd Light Infantry, he made a name for himself as the third man into the Kashmir Gate during the Siege of Delhi following the Indian Mutiny in 1857. He moved into Lavington House with his wife and their eight children, attended by 12 servants with 33 men and four boys looking after his 1,000 acres of farmland. He sold the estate 30 years later, in 1903, to whisky baron James Buchanan (later Lord Woolavington), who was to become another generous benefactor to our village. By then, the Wilberforces had shuffled into Beechwood House before moving to Woodmancote, near Henfield, where Reginald was buried in early 1914, aged 75.

The last close member of the Wilberforce family locally is believed to have been Reginald's daughter Emily Susan, who lived at Keepers in Norwood Lane until her death in 1964, aged 83. She was buried here in Graffham, in the cemetery across the road from the church that had been rebuilt in honour of her grandfather Samuel who died eight years before she was born.

Move down the family tree two further generations, however, and one of her grand nieces – a great, great granddaughter of the famous Bishop Wilberforce and his wife Emily née Sargent – still owns a house here and is part of our community today.

Graffham Chronicles: The day St Giles reopened



Our St Giles Church was rebuilt a century and a half ago this year in memory of Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, a leading light of the Victorian era – and our village squire. In the third of a series of three articles marking this milestone for our community, local historian Pauline Goodwin looks back at the day England's great and the good gathered for its rededication.

One hundred and fifty years ago, on a wet All Saints Sunday 2 November 1875, an incredibly special event took place in Graffham – so special that a train was specifically chartered from London Victoria to the village's then nearest railway station, at Selham, to carry England's great and the good to it.

This unique ceremony had twin purposes – firstly to rededicate and celebrate the newly renovated structure and secondly as a remembrance to Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, one of the Victorian era's leading lights and son of the legendary anti-slavery campaigner William Wilberforce. He was also our Lord of the Manor. He had died falling from his horse while visiting the Surrey Hills two years before, on 19 July 1873 at the age of 67. The rebuilding of our church was commissioned as a lasting tribute to this highly regarded and widely loved man.

The renovations transformed and enlarged a more modest building that dated back to Saxon and Norman eras into how we know it today. It cost £2,885 – £400,000 at today's values – with designs drawn up by architect G E Street, who is best known for London's Royal Courts of Justice and who was among the guests at the service.

Many of the 80 members of the clergy and a large number of laity who joined Streeter that day from across England travelled to Graffham on that special train, all to pay their respects to their late friend. They were led by the Archbishop of Canterbury himself and no less than four bishops – of Winchester, Rochester, Chichester and Ely.

The train left London Victoria at 9.30am, taking some two hours to reach Selham. The station, across the lane from

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Samuel Wilberforce, one of the leading lights of the Victorian era and our Lord of the Manor – for whom the rebuilding of St Giles Church was a memorial.



Selham Station, pictured here in 1954, the year before passenger service there ended. It had been opened for just three years when it received the chartered train carrying England's great and good to the special service at St Giles 150 years ago.

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today's Three Moles, had been opened by the London and South Coast Railway three years before , on a new line linking Pulborough and Midhurst. It closed to passenger traffic in 1955.

The guests were transported across the two and a half miles onwards from Selham to St Giles by a fleet of horse-drawn coaches, although the poor weather meant the visitors could not see the views at their best, as the 4,400 word report on the day's events in the *Horsham, Petworth, Midhurst and Steyning Express* recorded: "Unfortunately, rain set in about 11 o'clock, and did not cease during the remainder of the day, causing discomfort to all, and thoroughly obscuring the lovely woodland scenery of the district, now in full glory of its autumn tints." One of those coaches

would have been driven by the father of my grandmother, Henry Boxall, coachman to the Rector of Graffham with Woolavington at the time, the Rev Rowley Lascelles. So that special service is not just a distant event detached from our lives today, but it has bloodline connections to at least seven families living in Graffham today, and seven more in nearby villages – all descendants of



The service generated much media coverage.

coachman Boxall! What's more, a great, great granddaughter of Bishop Samuel Wilberforce himself still owns a house here and is part of our community today.

The clergy and St Giles' choir, supplemented by choristers from Chichester Cathedral, gathered at the Rectory, by St Giles, where they were

received by the Rev Lascelles, before donning their robes. At 12 noon, their procession choir started, entering the church and progressing up the nave chanting the 48th Psalm. It was a most fitting choice, considering St Giles' setting by the Downs, as it includes the line "*His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the Earth*". Indeed, all elements of this service were chosen with infinite care to reflect the freshly restored beauty of St Giles, its surroundings and the admirable and compelling character of Bishop Samuel Wilberforce.

Music played a key role, adding to the sense of occasion. St Giles' regular accompanist Mr Smith played the harmonium. (The pipe organ was not installed until the early 20th century.) Four hymns were sung – *We Love the Place Oh God, Oh Holy Spirit Lord of Grace, The Church's One Foundation* and, as the clergy and choir processed out of the church, *Oh God Our Help in Ages Past*.

A collection was taken during the third of them, raising £61 – worth almost £9,000 at today's values. This money was donated to the church tower fund. Renovating that part of the building had been left for later. It would be another 10 years before that 13th Century structure was renewed – after being declared unsafe.

Other music at the rededication service included four psalms, chanted in the simple Gregorian style, in keeping with the uncomplicated style adopted for the entire service. Besides Psalm 48 intoned by the procession entering the church, they included Psalm 84 *How Lovely was Your Dwelling Place*, reflecting the beautiful position of St Giles, Psalm 122 *I was glad when they said unto me let us go into the house of the Lord*, and Psalm 132, which includes the line "*This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.*"

All prayers were intoned by the Rev A H Glennie, Succentor of Chichester



The Rectory, in the early 1900s, where the clergy and choir donned their robes before the service.

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Cathedral. This use of intonation, or stylised melodic prayer, and not the more conversational spoken prayer, contributed towards the sense that this was a special event, adding to the sense of formality and reverence, while also acknowledging the ages for which the church had stood on this site. The Bishop of Chichester, Richard Durnford, then proceeded with the order of service for reopening the church – as issued by Bishop Wilberforce himself in 1872, while he served as Bishop of Winchester.

The lessons were read by two of his sons, both also members of the clergy – Rev Ernest Wilberforce, then of Seaforth, Liverpool, who would go on to succeed Richard as Bishop of Chichester, and Rev Basil Wilberforce of Southampton, who



The Bishop of Chichester Richard Durnford (left) led the service, which was also attended by the Archbishop of Canterbury Archibald Campbell Tait, who paid tribute to his late friend and colleague Samuel Wilberforce at the luncheon afterwards at Lavington House.

and ministers and knew “the inmates of the penitentiary and the workhouse”. Who was seated where has not been recorded, but it is likely that the Wilberforce family occupied the private area created for them as part of the church’s renovations – what is now the Lady Chapel.

Contemporary reports said the newly expanded building in its entirety could seat 300, with the church “full to overflowing” for this service, although fitting in 200



Bishop Wilberforce’s crozier was mounted in a case set by the altar at St Peter’s Church, which is now Seaford College’s chapel – where it remains to this day.



A postcard of St Giles from just a few decades after its rebuilding.

today is a feat. At the service's end, the congregation filed out of the church and into a fleet of carriages provided by the Wilberforces to take them to their family home, Lavington House (today Seaford College's Mansion House), where a marquee had been set up, close to St Peter's Church (now the school's chapel), where Bishop Wilberforce had been buried. Inside, the late bishop's crozier, or shepherd's staff, was mounted in a case set beside the altar – where it remains today.

After a sit-down lunch under canvas on the lawn, the Archbishop of Canterbury – Archibald Campbell Tait, the first Scot to hold the post – rose to make his address. Although it was two and a half years since Bishop Wilberforce's death, he noted, "his absence, yet unseen presence, has been uppermost in our minds". Samuel Wilberforce had left a void not easily filled, the archbishop said, talking at length about his late friend's accomplishments – "his marvellous eloquence of speech, his power of persuasion unequalled in our day, the like of which we shall probably not see again and his physical power of activity which enable him to be in every place where his presence was needed".

His Grace sat down amidst loud cheers from the gathering before the assembled crowd broke up with many conveyed back to the chartered train at Selham Station for its return journey back to London. A momentous day in Graffham's history was over – but today's St Giles stands as a lasting memory.

Pictures courtesy
of Graffham
Archive, West
Sussex Record
Office, National
Portrait Gallery
and others.

Weekly church services

1st Sunday	10.30am	Parish Eucharist	St Giles Church
2nd Sunday	10.30am	Parish Eucharist	St Giles Church
	6pm	Evensong	All Saints Chapel
3rd Sunday	9am	BCP Holy Communion	St Giles Church
	10.30am	Church Family Eucharist	St Giles Church
4th Sunday	10.30am	Parish Eucharist	St Giles Church
4th Sunday¹	6pm	Taizé Prayer ¹	All Saints Chapel
5th Sunday	10.30am	Parish Eucharist	St Giles Church

- See stgilesgraffham.org, *Graffham Parish News* or Facebook's @stgilesgraffham for any changes.
- All residents and visitors are welcome to all services.
- St Giles Church is at the far south end of Graffham Street, near the Downs.
- All Saints' Chapel is opposite Graffham Village Shop.
- Both St Giles Church and All Saints' Chapel are open daily.

¹ Taizé Prayer is held on the 4th Sunday in Jan, Mar, May, Jul, Sep, Nov

Weekly, monthly and occasional church activities

Tuesdays	10am	Pilgrims study group	All Saints Chapel
	7.30pm	Bellringing practice – all welcome	St Giles Church
Wednesdays in term time	10.15am	Teddy time ¹	Pavilion
Various Wednesdays (see monthly diary)	12.30pm	Food with friends ²	The Rectory
Various Thursdays (see monthly diary)	3.30pm	Messy Church	Pavilion
1st Saturday	9.30am	Come and sing ³	St Giles Church
2nd Saturday	10am	Bellringing practice	St Giles Church
4th Sunday alternate months	6.30pm	Taizé Prayer Service	All Saints Chapel

¹ Baby and toddler group – no need to book, no fee, just turn up!

² Food with friends – all village residents who live alone are encouraged to take part, not just churchgoers.

³ Come and sing – dust off your vocal cords with some old favourite hymns and learn some new ones.

Help keep our doors open for 150 more years

Maintaining St Giles today does not leave much change from £1,000 a week – which is a great deal for a small parish like ours to raise. Any donation you feel able to contribute would be so greatly appreciated. You can do so using the card reader device in the church, or online – just point your phone camera at this QR code or go to bit.ly/stggive2 You can give regularly or in other ways if you wish via stgilesgraffham.org/giving/ And, however you donate, please remember that Gift Aid means the government adds to 25% to anything you donate. Bless you!

