

## Small Pilgrim Places 15: St Martin of Tours, Chelsfield and St Margaret's, Wychling



St Martin of Tours, Chelsfield

Just a couple of miles off the eastern section of the M25, and close to the Kent border, stands the Church of St Martin's in the parish of Chelsfield. Dedicated to the 4th century Bishop of Tours, it is surrounded by extensive gardens and graveyards, a tranquil haven on the edge of the London borough of Bromley.

On one of the blisteringly hot days of early August I sat on one of several thoughtfully-placed benches in the garden and ate a picnic lunch under the welcome shade of a yew tree. Then, stepping through the 15th century porch I entered a simple, uncluttered interior dating from the 12th century, built largely of flint under a wooden shingle roof, with timbers exposed and visible from the nave.

At the east end are three lancet windows above the altar, the central one depicting a very human and approachable standing Christ, dressed plainly, in the act of blessing and offering a broken loaf of bread. This stained glass was created in 1945 by Moira Forsythe, replacing a Victorian window blown out by a wartime enemy bomber. Another window, in the chancel's south wall, shows the well-loved story of St Martin on horseback sharing his cloak with a beggar.



A very human and approachable Christ



St Martin shares his cloak with a beggar

At the rear of the nave a door leads to a modern extension where I found a Memory Cafe in full swing, and the rector John Tranter. He took me across the churchyard and adjoining parched field to a viewpoint offering magnificent views across Orpington towards the City; we could easily pick out the Shard, the Post Office Tower, Canary Wharf and other landmarks on the horizon. Walking back for tea and cake at the Memory Cafe, John shared his vision for St Martin's as a haven for city-dwellers, offering a quiet space and time for those who live only a few miles away but whose busy working environment is largely devoid of stillness and contact with nature.

A few miles eastwards, on the edge of the North Downs and not far from the Medway, stands another flint-built church under a wooden shingle roof. St Margaret's,

Wychling, dating from the Norman period, is one of the most isolated churches in the Diocese of Canterbury, tucked away among woodland and fields and barely visible from the nearest narrow lane.

I approached the church across an area of trees and grass. The grounds of this Eco Church are managed for wildlife, and it has adopted an overall ethic of "Living lightly". There is no electricity or water here, and historic gas lights are still in use.



St Margaret's Church, Wychling



St Margaret's chancel

Entering through an attractive timber porch, I found the nave flooded with sunlight, the east window being glazed with plain glass. I noticed leaflets about "God's Acre" on display by the south door, as well as notices about outdoor "Wild Church" meetings with campfires through summer months. Various prayer resources include a bowl of water and little glass pebbles in the chancel, along with an invitation to drop a pebble in the water as a prayer for healing. In a delightfully serene church dedicated to Margaret of Antioch, patron saint of nurses, such a prayer resource seemed very fitting.

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