

November 2018  
*The Rector writes:*

## ‘ST MARTIN OF CHELSFIELD - WOW!’



It was towards the end of August 2013 that I first came to St Martin's. The Archdeacon had invited me to apply for the vacant post at the last minute and I had not had a chance to look at the church or parish apart from information in the parish profile and on the website. But written words and pictures provide only information, and do not give a real feel of the place. So I arranged a couple of days off and came to stay with son Matthew (then living in Beckenham) and made plans to do an incognito recce. So early next morning I arrived at Chelsfield station and walked up the hill, with the spire of St Martin's pointing the way. Made my way across the field path and into the churchyard and entered the church porch. Tried the door handle, and to my surprise (most churches I knew were kept locked during the day!) the door opened. I stepped inside and **WOW** – the sense of spirituality and peace of the place was palpable. You could feel the essence of prayer steeped in the walls over 900 years, this was indeed 'holy ground'. I sat and soaked in the stillness in silent prayer for an hour or so – and in that time decided that if I were to be offered the living, no matter what the issues or problems, this was a place where I could serve God. As I closed the church door I could not resist a further **WOW**.

Earlier this year we were visited by a lady from the 'Small Pilgrim Places Network' – an organisation to which we are affiliated. She was somewhat surprised to find in the London Borough of Bromley an oasis of peace and spirituality. As she walked into the church, she couldn't help herself, **WOW** this is wonderful, was her comment. On leaving she encouraged us to think about developing the church as a spiritual resource for quiet days and prayer.

I wonder how many other **WOWs** have been uttered over the years at St Martin's. In almost 1000 years it has seen many changes, to its building, its furnishings, its parish boundaries and its worship. It has seen many ministers in its time, and countless parishioners and visitors. I am convinced that there must have been many who have discovered the St Martin's **WOW** factor!

Over the past year, my articles have drawn on the life of St Martin of Tours. Martin was one of my favourite saints long before I arrived in Chelsfield. The story of the soldier giving up his cloak first enthralled me as a child in Sunday school. But since I have been rector of a church that bears his name, I have endeavoured to find out more about him. My main source has been Christopher Donaldson's book – 'Martin of Tours (The shaping of Celtic spirituality)'. Donaldson was himself the vicar of St Martin of Tours, Canterbury and drew heavily on the biography of Martin written by Sulpitius Severus.

In his summary, Donaldson reminds us that:

'The story of St Martin is the story of the passion and energy of a people encountering the simplicity, heroism and joy of the early church, and responding to it in conversion. Today, hundreds of churches are dedicated in remembrance to and bearing the name of this wise and generous saint, whose dynamic leadership of the community he founded directly inspired the mission of the church. His creation of Christian communities marked the beginning of a dynamic new era for western Christianity and ignited a flame that continues to burn brightly to this day.'

'**WOW**' that is some legacy, isn't it?

As we prepare to embrace a new chapter in the story of St Martin's, Chelsfield may we continue to be inspired by St Martin's story, and find solace and strength in the prayerful and spiritual place that bears his name. This should enable us to continue Martin's work of mission and ministry as we seek to grow the church in this modern age in which we live, that future generations might still have the opportunity to open the door of the church and be heard to utter '**WOW**.'

Yours in Christ  
Reverend John, your Rector.