



# St Mary-le-Tower

Civic church of Ipswich

# Parish Profile



# From the Vicar

## The Reverend Tom Mumford

Since arriving in Ipswich in October 2021 I have been overawed by the potential of this parish church and its people. St Mary le Tower is situated in the heart of the town and has an important place in Ipswich's history, being the place where its ancient charter was first read. It has been Ipswich's civic church since 1200. The Tower's place in the history, and location at the heart of Ipswich, gifts it such potential to be a centre for mission, a beacon of Christian hope and a community of prayer, love and service. In the coming years I want the Tower to be known by Ipswich as *its* church and *its* home. I want it to be a church that people come to Ipswich to visit and a church that those who live here feel proud of. I hope it will be a place where people are able to come and find peace and stillness in a busy world. And a place where people will be able to experience the warmth and love of God in prayer.



# The Tower



The first church, endowed with 26 acres and probably built of wood, flourished in the time of Edward the Confessor as recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086. Holy Trinity Priory was then founded in about 1177 (on the site of what is now Christ Church Mansion) and for 360 years its Augustinian secular canons served the Tower church and parish. By 29th June 1200, when King John's Charter was received in its churchyard, the second Romanesque church shown on the Borough Seal had replaced the former Saxon building. St Mary le Tower has been the town's civic church ever since. The current church, the fourth on this site, was finished in the 1860s. The Tower has had a range of traditions over its long history, from the pre-reformation catholicism, to Puritanism in the 17th century, and to the Anglo-catholic Tractarians who built the present building. Today, however, the Tower's worship is within the Anglican High-Church choral tradition.

The Tower has long has a strong musical tradition and those who attend worship find this enables them to better experience God in prayer. The choral tradition also attracts a range of ages, with currently more than 30 young people under the age of 18, approximately half children and teenagers.

Daily prayer is said at the Tower as part of its vocation to support and pray for the town as its Civic Church. On a Sunday there are four services including 8am Book of Common Prayer Holy Communion, Choral Matins and Choral Evensong. The main service of the day is the Sung Eucharist at 10:30am. Across the day, the Tower welcomes on average around 150 worshippers and has seen modest but encouraging growth in the last year. The regular congregation consists of a mix of ages and backgrounds, most of whom come from outside the geographical parish and many from outside of Ipswich.

As well as the church building, the largest in Ipswich, the Tower has two other buildings on its site (Tower House and Church House) that are used for the church's mission and outreach. The church's vision and strategic plan was launched on Easter Day 2022. In this contains details of its mission and plans for the next five years.

# The Parish



The Tower's parish is essentially the town centre of Ipswich, starting just north of the church along the bottom of Christ Church park, going all the way down to the quay and docks. In terms of resident population, the parish is relatively small with not more than one and a half thousand residents. However, during the day, being in the heart of Suffolk's county town, the population of the parish swells to being one of (if not the) biggest in the diocese. This presents the church with a fantastic opportunity for mission.

What is often forgotten when thinking about the Tower as a Civic Church, known nationally for the quality of its music tradition, is that The Tower is set in a very poor area. According to Church of England deprivation stats, the parish is the fourth most deprived in the diocese and in the bottom 12% of the country. The recent vision and strategic plan sets out ambitions to address this reality as part of our mission.

# Community Life



St Mary-le-Tower is a parish church with a thriving and diverse congregation with people of all ages. We seek to live out the Christian faith through our worship and service of our town and parish. We seek to love our neighbour, being welcoming and inclusive of all. We aim to provide for the spiritual needs of the town, and all who come, whether just as visitors to the building or as sharers in worship.

## During the week

During the week the Tower is a hive of activity.

Following Morning Prayer at 8:30am the church is open most days for visitors and those wishing to find some peace and a place to pray. On Tuesday lunchtime we host a regular free concert series that in 2022 celebrated its 50th anniversary. On Wednesday mornings the gardening volunteer team work to beautify the churchyard, we host our weekly Top-Up shop (begun June 2022) and Warm Space (begun November 2022).

There is also a weekly service of Holy Communion. Evenings are also busy with regular rehearsals and practices of our bellringing team (national finalists) and the different parts of our choir. There are also regular meetings of small groups for study, prayer and Christian enquiry throughout the year. The Tower also plays host to a number of different events and organisations and is one of the premier venues in the centre of Ipswich.

Tower House, which is owned and managed by the church, provides an additional buzz of activity on site. A former merchant's mansion house, Tower House hosts a number of charities and not-for-profits who seek to serve the community with a range of services.

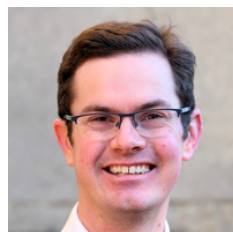
## Some of the team

As well as the Vicar, there are a number of people who exercise a daily mission and ministry at the Tower.

Below are just a few of these fantastic people.

In no particular order, from left to right:

David Matthews and Jo Jones, Churchwardens, Chris Borrett, Director of Music, Jim Robinson, Verger.



# A Place to Flourish

As part of its vision and strategy, launched on Easter Day 2022 following the arrival of its new Vicar, the Tower has a newly refocussed mission and ministry as Ipswich's Town and Civic Church.

Its new *mission statement* says that the Tower seeks to be 'a welcoming, inclusive, and open church, offering peace and sanctuary in the heart of Ipswich, flourishing through prayer, faith, and positive action.'

Without doubt, the Tower is an exciting place to be, and a place where it feels God is powerfully at work. We cant wait to find out what the next few years has in store for us and our town as we become a flourishing church enabling God's people to flourish.

All are welcome on this journey!







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[www.stmaryletower.org](http://www.stmaryletower.org)



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