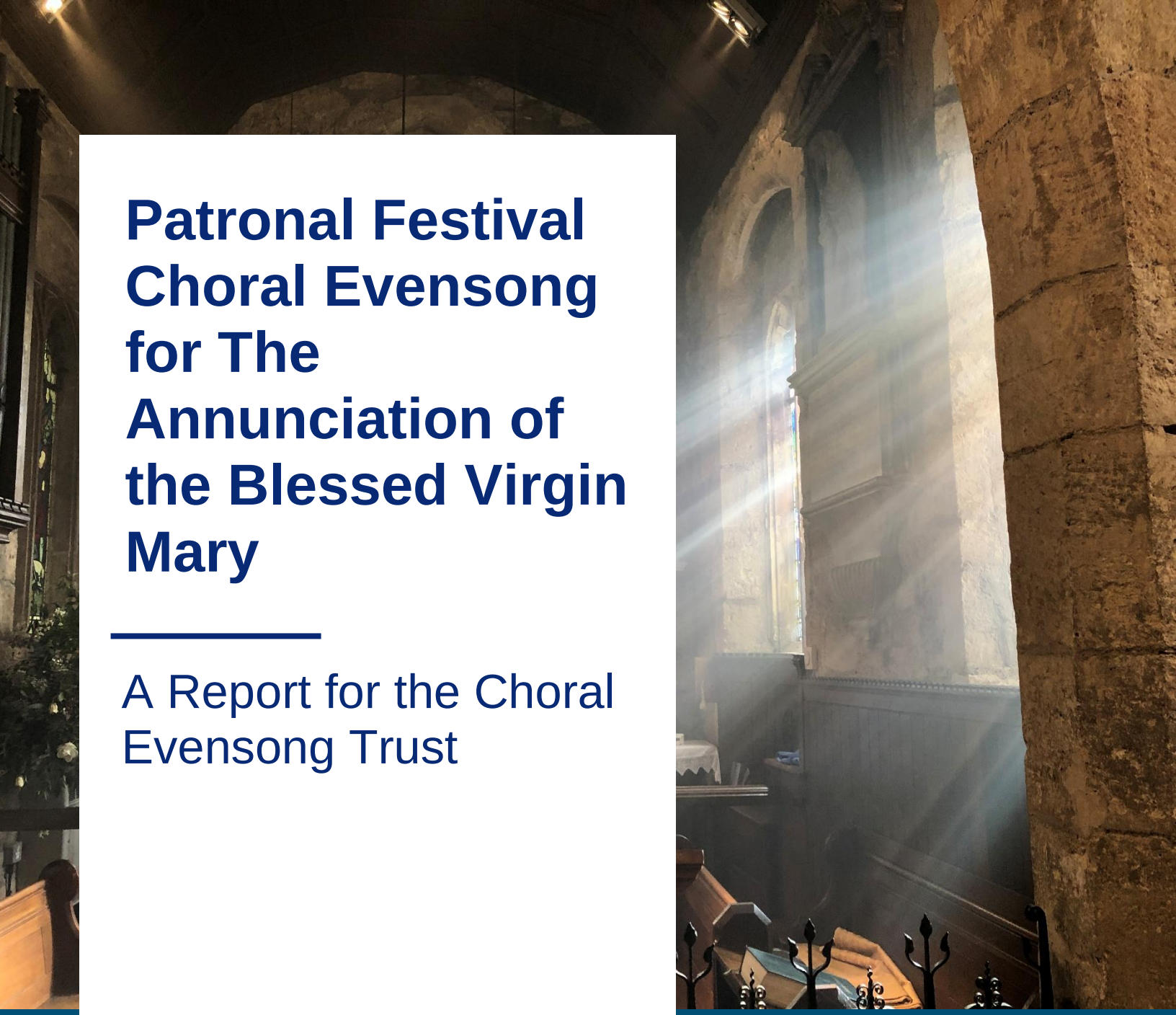


Patronal Festival Choral Evensong for The Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

A Report for the Choral Evensong Trust

APRIL 10

St Mary's Church, Charlcombe

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CHARLCOMBE, BATH
SAINT MARY'S

Choral Evensong

Teaching New People an Old Tradition



Rev'd Philip Hawthorn with a full St Mary's

On 25th March 2026 37 people – a combination of clergy, church regulars, and curious locals – met at the ancient church of St Mary in Charlcombe to celebrate the church's patronal festival – The Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The church has been welcoming worshipers and wanderers for over 1000 years and has experienced radical changes from medieval monasticism to the turbulence of the Reformation to the modern-day questions posed by secularisation and falling church attendance. Over the past 15 years, since our current Incumbent, Rev'd Philip Hawthorn, joined the church, St Mary's has seen the Choral Evensong tradition slowly peter out and die as a result of diminishing attendance and a choir that was becoming ever thinner in numbers. The celebration of the church's patronal festival, and the grant from the Choral Evensong Trust, enabled us to introduce and teach this ancient Anglican tradition to a new group of worshipers and wanderers.

Due to an unfortunate series of events, including illnesses, we had to take a more creative approach to the music than we had initially envisaged as a result of not having enough singers to form a choir. We also had the misfortune of our organist falling ill with Covid only a few days before the evensong, however we were blessed to have another organist, Andrew Russell, step forward at short notice to fill that gap. Rev'd Philip took the lead on organising the service, and solved the musical issues with a creative solution: the congregation would be the choir (this change was reflected in the later stages of our advertisement for the service). Rev'd Philip started the service by teaching those gathered the choral elements of the service with the aid of our organist. The service primarily followed the wording of the Book of Common Prayer (1662) and was ordered in such a way as to give the distinct feel of a choral



Rev'd Philip Hawthorn teaching Choral Evensong

evensong. We made use of one of the singers who was able to attend, a soprano, who sung a solo piece for us.

In conversations with attendees afterwards it was reflected back to us that the way we had done the service, and especially Rev'd Philip's instruction at the beginning, had been exceptionally useful for people in helping them to understand the tradition and follow the service. Most who attended had either not attended any form of evensong since their school days or had not attended one at all, and all asked mentioned that they would attend any future choral evensong services put on in the Benefice. We believe that the willingness to attend future choral evensongs is in part a result of this event being more interactive and instructive, enabling those who attended to go into any future service with a greater appreciation of what is happening before them.

Overall, we were very pleased with the turn out. On an average Sunday we can have between 10-15 people at St Mary's (a turnout of over 20 would be considered quite good for the church). A total of 37 people was certainly above what we had anticipated. To advertise the event, we put up posters in both churches in the Benefice, advertised on social media, including on local community pages, shared invites and posters with other local churches, and included the event on a leaflet that was distributed in a letter drop across the Benefice. We had hoped to be able to discuss the event on local radio, however that did not happen. The single biggest factor for our high turnout was almost certainly word-of-mouth – conversations with church goers and curious locals who stopped by our churches on walks played a significant role in encouraging people to attend.

Festivities

A Community Reception



Attendees enjoying the post-service Reception

After the service, canapes, charcuterie, cake, Crémant and sparkling non-alcoholic drinks were served for attendees in a gazebo outside the church. Most of the attendees stayed for the reception, and it served as a wonderful opportunity to build community between people, especially as we had such a variety of attendees. Many of the attendees stayed for at least an hour after the service, despite the wind, cold and dark, due to the hospitality, welcome and community that was offered.

Most attendees were aware that the reception had been made possible thanks to funding from the Choral Evensong Trust (we mentioned this in all of our communications surrounding the event and on the Order of Service) and many expressed to us their delight and thanks that such a grant had been made available to the church.

A Note of Thanks

The Ministry Team, Wardens, PCC and church members of St Mary's Charlcombe would like to express their sincere and heartfelt thanks to the Choral Evensong Trust for enabling this event to take place, it was one of the most successful events that we have held at St Mary's in some years and has inspired new conversations about the worshipping life of the church.