

Pompeii's ruins or a warm welcome?

Are you good at remembering anniversaries? Maybe you missed this one: It was 276 years ago this month since the ruins of Pompeii were rediscovered by Spanish engineer Rocque Joaquin de Alcubierre and his team. As any school pupil will remember, the city had been buried under millions of tonnes of volcanic ash after Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79 AD. Happy Anniversary to the archaeologists.

I remember a group of tourists coming into church before evensong. They looked around with interest at the ancient stones and memorials, the stained glass windows and the old brass lectern. Then one of them approached me and said, "Excuse me. Is this place still used?" Looking around at the ancient stones, I think the tourist felt like Rocque Joaquin de Alcubierre – he had just discovered archaeological evidence of a parish church! The church was actually very active and the group happily stayed to negotiate the perils of evensong.

I wonder what people think when they visit our churches. Hopefully your church is open to visitors.

Simon Jenkins commented that a church that is closed except for an hour on Sunday has become the meeting place of a sect. True. I know that he doesn't have to maintain them or



insure them but our churches are for all in the parish and beyond and so should (wherever possible) be open and welcoming. I love it when I see a board outside, swinging in the breeze, that says 'Welcome! Church Open'. That is only bettered by 'Welcome! Church Open. Coffee and cake being served.' Generally, people make up their minds within a few seconds when they walk into a church. Is this for me? So here's the friendly challenge: Is your church an archaeological heap to be discovered or a warm and welcoming community?



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