

Kent Ride and Stride 2023

We never expected 09 September 2023 to be the hottest day of the year! However, just over 700 ventured forth into the heat and participated as fundraisers for the Friends of Kent Churches, either riding, striding or welcoming at Kent churches of all denominations. Many more were involved with supporting the event through sponsorship and local organisation – thank you to everyone.

We had a big drive at increasing publicity prior to the 2023 event with over 200 eye-catching boards and banners displayed throughout the county. A number of churches are now celebrating the event by decking the church approach or the church itself with their own personalised Ride and Stride decorations. St John the Baptist Tunstall was one of several churches proudly displaying their own bunting and St Botolph's Northfleet had a beautiful yarn-bombed bike outside the church. The bike also had a notice encouraging sponsors and acknowledging, with appreciation, a recent grant they had received from the Friends of Kent Churches enabling them to restore their Chancel.



St John's Higham



Yarn bombed bicycle at St Botolph's Northfleet



Sue Thomas and friends at St John the Baptist, Tunstall

Rosemary Dymond, our County Organiser, starred on a local radio interview (very early one morning!) and Heather Mills led on promoting Kent Ride and Stride on various social media channels. Heather has continued posting throughout the year, increasing our social media followers. For anyone who missed Heather's daily Facebook Advent Calendar posts showing various and interesting aspects of Kent churches it's a treat that you can still view! (visit facebook – Kentridestride).



Rosemary Dymond at tropical Milton-next-Gravesend
Note the Palm trees!



Heather and Suzanne Mills from Christ Church, Willesborough enjoying some shade!

More churches have organised groups enjoying a day out together – bell ringers, choirs, walking groups -tiny tots to older wobblers. What a great way to get to know each other better and to encourage individuals who might not venture forth alone. One congregation organised a Ride and Stride themed Quiz night to raise money.

Although the numbers participating in 2023 were almost identical to 2022 we raised a whopping £15,000 more in 2023! The final figure raised was £140,018.86.

A trend over the past three years has been for the numbers of striders to increase whilst the rider numbers have slightly decreased. The striders in 2023 reached a record 45.5% of those out and about visiting churches. Are we getting older or are the roads more daunting? As the strider numbers have increased this year it seems fitting to focus on a trio that documented their journey for their Parish Magazine and our Facebook page.

Ray, Margaret and Peter from All Saints Foot's Cray planned their walk in advance and made an early 8.00am start to beat the heat. Map in hand, they set off for St John's Bexley and returned via St James' North Cray to All Saints. They enjoyed the river as well as more open countryside and shady bridle paths, meeting dog walkers and a grandfather introducing fishing to his young grandson. They then had a surprise guided tour around St James' churchyard which included a Norman gravestone before welcome refreshments back at All Saints. Just over 6 miles walking and raising £741 they wrote "What a lovely way to raise money for a good cause"



Ray, Margaret and Peter (we are missing the photographer!) from All Saints, Foot's Cray enjoying their walk

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The next Ride and Stride takes place on the 14 September 2024. We all hope for a fifth consecutive year of good weather, but preferably not record-breaking heat! We'd like to break our fundraising records during the 75th anniversary year of the Friends of Kent Churches. Our goal is to raise at least £150,000 so encourage everyone you know to take part and make sure to sponsor a participant.

The Nightingale Trust has very kindly offered to give an extra £20.00 sponsorship to the first 25 riders to visit Wormshill St Giles and Murston Old Church (restored by the Trust). Further details will be sent out in the church packs in July but you can start planning your route now to incorporate these churches in your ride/stride!

Susan Hooper
Ride and Stride Treasurer