

# A century of faith in the Italian style

**THE twin Italian-style towers which peek out from behind a veil of trees are a familiar sight to passing motorists.**

But few of those driving past on Sunday would have been aware of the major milestone celebrated at the church of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour at Gillingham.

It's 100 years since the Roman Catholic church, just off the A146 near Beccles, was consecrated and opened in a ceremony organised by John George Kenyon, who had it built.

On Sunday, his grand-daughter Mary Bramley, one of the church trustees, was behind centenary celebrations arranged to mirror those which took place in 1898.

Members of the congregation at the church were joined by invited guests, including the Rt Revd Alan Clark, the retired Bishop of East Anglia, for a celebratory mass at the church followed by breakfast at Gillingham Hall.

John Kenyon had the church built after inheriting Gillingham Hall from his aunt in about 1890.

Years earlier, Kenyon had adopted the Roman Catholic faith and went to Rome, where he became a papal zouave (infantryman), fighting with French troops to keep the Pope's territory independent.

But he and his colleagues succumbed to nationalist leader Garibaldi's military pressure in 1870 - and Kenyon spent six months in the Regina Coeli prison in Rome after being captured.

Mrs Bramley, 76, explained that her grandfather had given financial support to the building of St Benet's Minister in Beccles



**POPE'S DEFENDER: John Kenyon, who built the church.**

- but wanted to build a church on his own land.

He commissioned architect Francis Banham, whose grand-daughter Pamela Marriner, from Southwold, attended Sunday's celebrations, to build the church in an Italian style.

"He loved Italy; just down the road is the Norman/Saxon church and he didn't want to copy that," said Mrs Bramley.

It is known that Kenyon, who died in 1914, marked the opening of the church with a service followed by a celebration, which included a military band.

On Sunday, the centenary celebrations followed along similar lines, with a service held partly in Latin, and music afterwards provided by a band from Loddon.

"I think he would have approved," said Mrs Bramley.

"There is nobody left in my family now who can remember him - but I believe he was a very strict and religious man. He devoted his life to the faith."



**LATIN LITANY: Mary Bramley at Gillingham Church, built by her great grandfather**

Picture: DANIEL KE