

# Welcome to the Castle Group of Churches

Part of the North Downs Deanery  
in the Diocese of Canterbury



## Our Profile

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Cover Page: Brent Gymer, The Castle View, mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, oil on canvas.

# Welcome

The Castle Group of Churches extend a warm welcome to you as you read this profile and sincerely hope that you are considering applying for the position as our vicar.

We hope that you are the person for whom we have been praying and we look forward to meeting you in person soon. We would like to give you an overview of our Group before getting down to more detailed information.

The Castle Group comprises the Parish of Otham with Langley and the Parish of Leeds, Broomfield and Kingswood.

Our churches offer different types of worship, from the traditional Eucharist to more contemporary and informal styles including Messy Church. Our varied styles of worship accommodate different preferences.

All of the churches in the Castle Group offer a warm welcome to adults and children alike. There are children's groups and clubs, regular social events and Pastoral care. We are keen to be an integral part of the wider community with events for young and old alike.

The Castle Group of Churches is situated to the east of Maidstone, Kent at the foot of the North Downs which is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).



**St Nicholas' Church  
Otham**



**St Mary's Church  
Langley**



**St Nicholas' Church  
Leeds**



**St Margaret's Church  
Broomfield**



**Kingswood Village Hall**

# Who are we and who are we looking for?

We are a group of five churches; our congregations have enthusiasm and commitment to our faith and mission within our area. We are sure that once our vacancy is filled, we will be able, with leadership and guidance, to grow our church and build on the success already achieved. Our aspiration is to connect with our community and support God's mission at home and in our places of work.

## Qualities of our new Vicar

- ✚ A person capable of identifying, encouraging and using the gifts, talents and skills of the people in the parish.
- ✚ A person who is comfortable with our differing styles of worship and is happy to work in that environment.
- ✚ A person who will build on our children's work and encourage growth in this area of mission.
- ✚ A person who is flexible in their approach with imagination and enthusiasm to develop what exists and take our mission forward.
- ✚ A vision for developing the use of our church buildings to encourage and involve members of the wider community.
- ✚ A person who has good administrative and IT skills and will use these to further the delivery of our mission within the parish and beyond.
- ✚ A person who will further develop relationships with the rest of the Deanery.

If, after reading our profile, you feel that God is calling you to new ministry in The Castle Group of Churches and would like further information, please contact the churchwardens for the group

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Or the Archdeacon of Maidstone The Venerable Estella Last  
[archdeacon.maidstone@diocant.org](mailto:archdeacon.maidstone@diocant.org)

## Safeguarding

The Castle Group feels strongly that in their churches and in all of their activities everyone should feel safe. We take the safeguarding of children, young people and vulnerable adults seriously and have appointed two Parish Safeguarding Officers to help implement the House of Bishops Safeguarding Standards, ensuring our churches are places of safety for everyone.

# Vision for The Castle Group of Churches

On 29 September 2024 about a dozen people from the group gathered for the morning to pray, discuss and discern what our priorities might be for the next 18 months to two years as we approached a vacancy in the post of vicar. We were led in worship and then shared thoughts about church life and what we might be and do as we move forward, seeking to fulfil the mission of God to draw people back to him. Our priorities, either spiritual or practical, were identified. This image shows the major points and agreed actions:



- Develop a statement of faith and description of our shared belief
- Set up communications groups for a) prayer and b) activities
- Always ask “can we do this together?” before starting any activity
- Explore options for helping people respond to God’s prompting and do some training
- Look for opportunities to join in with existing community activities
- Be intentional about signposting people to the right church for them, across the whole group
- Arrange regular meetings for
  - o Social activities
  - o Those who take part in services, churchwardens and ministers
  - o PCCs and others to continue the development of our joint life together

# Parish of Otham with Langley

## Our journey so far

Much has already been accomplished in the name of God at both Otham and Langley with a range of activities and initiatives that have drawn a variety of people into our church life enabling them to feel both comfortable and valued. It is important to us that mission remains at the heart of our church life being driven by the united congregations of Otham and Langley through prayer, action and faith. We want to be churches of our communities not just church buildings in the area.

We are enthusiastic and experienced congregations with a range of gifts and talents with lay participation at Sunday services. Monthly Messy Church started in 2014 at Otham, with a break during the Covid lockdowns and regularly has 18 children and their parents. Elev8 is the children's church at Langley. There's a Bible Study home group which meets weekly.

Additionally, we are part of Bearsted Area Churches Together (BACT) and join for Lent Lunches with a speaker (Anglican/RC/Methodist). We also contribute Easter Eggs to the annual Easter Egg Hunt held around Bearsted Village Green.

Above all it is our hope that we can continue to grow in knowledge, confidence and a desire to become worthy disciples of Christ.

## Mission in our community



**Otham with Langley Fete**

Otham and Langley Fete and Remembrance held on Otham Village Green organised jointly with Otham Village Hall; Soup and Snowdrops days; weekly Coffee and Chat; Stretch and Relax; Afternoon Tea held monthly for anyone in the Parish; BACT Easter Egg hunt; Ride



**Messy Church,  
Otham**



**Afternoon Tea at Otham**

and Stride; Flower Festivals; Carol Services and the Christmas Eve Crib Services. Concerts and quizzes also attract the wider community.

We have a Pastoral Team available for anybody who lives in the parish. The team offer a listening ear, provide emotional and practical support, visits or referral to other agencies. There are two Care Homes in the parish which are visited regularly with services held at Harvest, Remembrance, Christmas and Easter.

Our contact with Madginford Primary School and Langley Park Primary Academy (CofE) has been very successful, taking the Church to the school and teaching about the love and care Jesus has for everybody. The head teachers have been very welcoming and are very keen for this relationship to be rekindled. Sunrise Day Nursery, adjacent to Langley Church, come to the church for their own Nativity Service and Madginford School brought pupils to Otham Church to undertake the Church Trail, a quest to find items of interest around the church, followed by a brief service. Due to the significant housing development in the area a Church Missioner, Captain Graham Bibby, was assigned to work in the area with our Parish and achieved an excellent working relationship with all of the schools in the area. Sadly, his time with us ended a short while ago but he laid excellent foundations for the future.



**Sunrise Day Nursery**

There is an emerging realisation that as well as maintaining the faith and life of the church, our future is bound up with those outside our church community and our mission is to engage with them. This message needs to be owned and acted on by all for it is too important to be left to individuals or small groups.

## **Otham Church: A brief history**

St Nicholas' Church, Otham is a beautiful, historic Grade I Listed Building. The Domesday Book records a church in Otham in 1086. More details in Appendix A.

Over the 900 years of the life of the church, there has been continual change both in the structure and the internal ordering. Electricity arrived in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and an extension for a toilet with disabled facilities was built in 2003. The Open Church Project Phase One (heating, flexible seating and step free access into the church) and Phase Two (enclosing the Lady Chapel with glass to enable prayer, meetings or creche, plus a ramp for disabled access to the altar) were completed in 2009. Phase Three was modified due to financial constraints and the kitchen-in-a-cupboard was installed in 2019.



**Parsonage Place to the south of Otham Church**

The church has six bells now (see Appendix A) and a team of bellringers, young and old.

The recent development to the south of the church, Parsonage Place, has created a new community on our doorstep. The developers of Parsonage Place, Bellway Homes, provided Otham Church with a much-needed car park.

Otham is a fairly traditional church that seeks to engage with God through organ led hymns and liturgy. Communion Services are held on three Sundays with Morning Prayer on the fourth Sunday in the month. The congregation is full of people who are journeying together to discover more about God. You can expect a warm welcome, a worshipful service, refreshments afterwards with a chat and an opportunity to make new friends.

We are extremely fortunate to have The Friends of Otham Church (FOC), a charity founded in 2001 to help preserve this special place for the local community, families, young people and future generations. Its objective is to attract people, churchgoers or not, who love this wonderful building, a place of worship for more than 1,000 years.

**Completed Projects include:**

- A new organ and a piano
- Contribution to new and refurbished bells
- Solar lights to illuminate the path to the church
- Contribution to the cost of major repairs
- A new path from the car park to the church

- Contribution to a new kitchen
- Guide to a popular church trail
- New churchyard shed for storage
- A new church "Welcome" sign

**Fundraising Events include:**

- Concerts & recitals, refreshments provided
- Visits to places of interest
- Bridge Afternoons.
- Garden Safaris.
- Annual trip to a Prom Concert at the Royal Albert Hall
- Afternoon teas
- Garden Parties
- Talks



**FOC Tote Bag sale at the Fete**



**New "Welcome" sign at Otham**



## Langley Church: A brief history

St Mary's Church Langley is a lovely Grade II\* Listed Building, an important William Butterfield (architect) design. More details in Appendix B. A toilet was built in the church during the 1990s and a new kitchen installed in the choir vestry in 2018. The clock on the tower is a WWI War Memorial and Langley Parish Council recently paid for its renovation.

St Mary's has achieved a Bronze award from the Eco Church organisation, part of A Rocha. The Eco Church award scheme aims to celebrate the ways that church communities have been engaging with caring for the earth as a key part of our Christian faith.



Our congregation is very friendly, and the services aim to engage with all ages. St Mary's worship style is relaxed and informal, the services are all Morning Celebration, sometimes including Holy Communion, because we are thankful and celebrate the Good News of Jesus Christ.



**Full immersion Baptism at Langley**

Our first full immersion Baptism took place in the church in 2021. (Photo left)

A VE Day concert and celebration of peace in Europe took place in the church and we shared a meal in the churchyard. (Photo below)



**Celebrating VE Day at Langley**



**Snowdrops in Langley Churchyard**

Soup and Snowdrops events at Langley attract Galanthophiles<sup>1</sup> from far and wide. It is a truly amazing sight, showing the incredible beauty of God's creation. (Photo left)

Our newly formed Friends of Langley Church will be a great asset, with fundraising planned for the future to help maintain our beautiful, historic church.

<sup>1</sup> The Botanical name for snowdrops is Galanthus, and Galanthophiles the name of their devoted admirers

# **Parish of Leeds, Broomfield and Kingswood (LBK)**

## **Our journey so far**

The parish covers the villages of Leeds and Broomfield and the more recent development at Kingswood. There are two parish churches, St Nicholas' at Leeds and St Margaret's at Broomfield and a Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP) at Kingswood which meets in the Village Hall. The LEP is supported by the Church of England, Methodist and Baptist churches. Together we are known as the LBK churches. The Parish has a good relationship with Leeds Castle with gifts of Christmas Trees for both churches.

Kingswood church is administered by a separate inter-denominational Church Committee which meets every month.

In St Nicholas' Church Leeds and St Margaret's Church Broomfield we are working hard to make the regular services more engaging for people of all ages. We look forward to working with our new incumbent to expand this work.

There are typically five to eight weddings in the parish each year, the allocation between Leeds and Broomfield churches varies. Leeds has a greater capacity, Broomfield sits in a picturesque location.

The Friends of Leeds and Broomfield Churches is a community charity which raise funds to support both churches with significant contributions given recently. Previous events have included Winter Fairs, Curry and Soul evenings and beer festivals.

Ride and Stride, organised by The Friends of Kent Churches, is embraced by all three congregations. It takes place every September and brings funds shared between the charity and LBK churches.

## **Mission in our community**

### **Leeds Church**

St Nicholas' Church, a Grade I Listed Building containing Grade II Listed Memorials, is situated in Leeds Village, Kent. It is an incredible building steeped in history. More details in Appendix C. It has a large nave with wood block flooring and chairs, creating a flexible space inside the church which we want to utilise to help build community and to offer our worship. £26,000 has just been spent putting the roof of the nave and aisles in good order. We have a regular pianist for our services and the building has excellent acoustics.



**St Nicholas' Church, Leeds**

There is a new retirement village, Ledian Gardens, in the village and some residents come to our services. Our previous vicar visited monthly which proved popular, we want to develop this relationship and work with our new vicar to achieve this.

The church has a great relationship with Leeds and Broomfield Primary, a small voluntarily controlled Church of England School rated as “good” by Ofsted. The school, immediately across the road from the church, has services in the church at Christmas, Easter and Harvest and regular assemblies on Wednesdays and Fridays attended by parents and carers.

At Christmas we join residents carol singing through Leeds village, collecting gifts for the food bank on our way. We end up at the church, with the beacon lit, still singing. We move into the church and are joined by Father Christmas who brings gifts for the children.

The church has 10 bells (see Appendix C) and a bell ringing team. There is a small, well-equipped kitchen and a toilet with disabled facilities. The Parish Council supports the publication of the Church and Village News, produced monthly and distributed to all residents. The churchyard at Leeds is large (4.5 acres) and remains open for burials.

## **Broomfield Church**

St Margaret’s Church is a stunning Grade II\* Listed Building, situated in a beautiful rural setting. More details regarding in Appendix D. Stonework repairs costing £72,000 have



**St Margarets Church  
Broomfield**

taken place recently and the Quinquennial Report was good. The church has a small but lovely community which meet once a month at 3.30pm. Services are informal, aiming to engage with all ages and children are always very welcome. There is a small chamber organ and an organist is hired as needed although recorded music can be used. St Margaret’s is a popular choice for weddings and for baptisms due its idyllic location. The church bells have recently been increased from three to six and ringers come from the Leeds

team. Broomfield has a small churchyard which remains open for burials. It is lovingly tended by the Verger who opens the building for services and events and deals with the cleaning assisted by three volunteers. The church has no water supply or toilet facilities meaning it is difficult to hold social events. So, Broomfield joins Leeds and Kingswood for such gatherings.

There is the annual well dressing at St Margaret’s Well (a nationally registered event), outside the church, strongly supported by the children from the church. Our Carol Service is very well-attended and both events are followed by refreshments, strawberry scones or mince pies according to the season.



**St Margaret's Well**

## Kingswood Church

Kingswood Church meets in the village hall every Sunday morning. It provides a rota of services each month, Baptist, Methodist and Church of England, with the CofE service being a family Holy Communion on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the month. There is a children's group (see below) but like our other churches the adult congregation is mainly elderly. Financially it is self-supporting and makes a contribution to each of its sponsor church organisations including Leeds and Broomfield PCC.



**Our Church in Kingswood Hall**

The Secretary of the Kingswood Committee sits on the Leeds and Broomfield PCC and was licenced as a Reader in 2020. He acts as the Focal Minister and is training for ordination on the Dover Pathway.

Weddings and funerals for Kingswood residents are held at Broomfield Church, which is the parish church for Kingswood. Baptisms for Kingswood residents can be held in Kingswood Hall or in Broomfield Church.

There are a number of social and church activities held in the village hall and in homes including Tuesday Lunch Club for older people, Friday morning Ladies Group, Home Group who are currently viewing episodes of the Chosen.



**Craft work at Kingswood Hall**

More details in Appendix E.

Additionally, there are groups for children and young people, Climbers (ages 3 - 9) meet on Sunday during term time. They take part in the Cafe Service on the 1st Sunday and attend the beginning and end of every other service. On Friday, Kingswood School Crusaders years 3-6 meet after school and Friday evening CANS (Church Activity Nights) youth club takes place for years 6+ in the village hall.



**Kingswood Village Hall**

## Partnership in mission with Deanery and Diocese

Whilst recognising that mission occurs largely at the local level, the diocese provides support, guidance and statistics and information that enables and encourages planning for mission across the deanery, aligned with the diocesan strategic imperatives. Known as the “Three Bold Outcomes” these focus on revitalising parishes, growing the participation of our young people, and creating new worshipping communities.

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The Deanery Synod, supported by the Area Dean and Lay Chair, facilitate discussions which explore options for resourcing mission and collaborative working where appropriate.

Missional Learning Communities bring together deanery officers to share challenges and support across the diocese. The North Downs Deanery partners with Maidstone and Ashford deaneries for this process.

# Life in The Castle Group of Churches

## Electoral Roll 2025

Otham with Langley 49

Leeds, Broomfield and Kingswood 20

## Pattern of Worship/Services

### Otham with Langley

Otham 9.30am Service every Sunday.

Holy Communion on 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday,

Morning Worship on 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday

3.30pm Messy Church, 1<sup>st</sup> Monday of the month

Langley 11.00am 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays.

Morning Celebration on 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday,

Morning Celebration with Holy Communion on 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday,

*with Leeds* 10am Cafe Service 4th Sunday

5th Sunday Joint Service

### Leeds, Broomfield and Kingswood

Leeds	1st Sunday	9.30am	Morning Worship
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Broomfield	2nd Sunday	3.30pm	Celebration
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Leeds	3rd Sunday	9.30am	Holy Communion
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Leeds with Langley	4th Sunday	10am	Cafe Service (being trialled from August 2025)
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Kingswood (CofE)	4th Sunday	11am	All Age with Holy Communion
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	5th Sunday		Joint Service
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Note: Apart from the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday, Kingswood has lay-led Anglican, Methodist or Baptist services on other Sundays.

Occasional Services across the churches: Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday Meditation, All Souls, Remembrance Day Services, Christingles, Carol Services, Crib Services, Midnight Communion, Christmas Day Services.

## Statistics

	Churches	Schools	Population	Ages			
				0-4	5-19	20-69	70+
LBK churches	3	2	2642	5%	15%	61%	19%
Otham with Langley	2	2	8260	7%	18%	61%	14%

Parish	Electoral Roll	Usual Sunday Attendance		Baptisms	Weddings	Funerals
		Adults	Children			
LBK churches	20	20	7	4	5	16
Otham with Langley	49	52	5	6	8	8

## Finances

### Otham with Langley

Otham and Langley's finances were hit by the interregnum with our regular giving dropping significantly and for a while we were unable to afford our full Parish Share though some of our other regular givers have responded positively to help fill the shortfall. We are also forging closer ties with LBK Churches who were generous in paying £22,500 to help offset our deficit for 2025.

### Leeds Broomfield and Kingswood

The regular income of the parish covers all the routine running costs of the parish, and the parish share is always met in full. Leeds and Broomfield benefit from the Lady Baillie legacy (previous owner of Leeds Castle) for upkeep and repair of the two ancient churches. However, fund raising is still required to cover building repairs. Friends of Leeds & Broomfield Churches (independent from the churches) contribute to this effort in the form of grants. The Parish also pays the salary of the part-time Administrator for The Castle Group.

2025	Income				Expenditure
	Regular giving, fees and fundraising	Legacies	Investments/ reserves	Total	
LBK churches	26,210		5,526	31,736	53,659
Otham with Langley	68,670		501	69,171	69,665

## Staffing in The Castle Group

**Retired Clergy:** Two priests with Permission to Officiate gave their unstinting support to the previous incumbent. They have been stalwart in ensuring services have continued during our interregnum and will work closely with our new vicar.

**Lay Leadership:** We have two licensed Readers who are supported by a small team of five locally authorised ministers. All these people have been a great asset, taking lay led services and preaching.

**Parish Administrator for The Castle Group:** The administrator is employed part-time (10 to 18 hours a month) and maintains the diary for church bookings as well as providing administrative support to the vicar across the two parishes and five churches.

**Churchwardens:** There are two wardens for Otham with Langley and there are two vacancies. A number of senior people at Otham take responsibility for various churchwarden roles. LBK churches has one warden.

**Pastoral Team:** The team leader has completed a Pastoral Lay Ministry Course, and the team has three additional members across Otham and Langley.

**Children's Work:** Messy Church at Otham and Elev8 at Langley have appointed leaders and a team of helpers.

Safeguarding Officers, Treasurers and PCC Secretary positions are all appointed and active.





# The Vicarage

The Vicarage is situated in a quiet cul-de-sac (Kings Acre) within easy walking distance of St Nicholas' Church in the heart of the Downswood. It is a modern (1980's) 4 bed property with lounge, dining room, kitchen and downstairs cloak room. It has double glazing, gas central heating and gardens to the front and rear. An extension was built in 2011 providing a study with a separate entrance, ideal for keeping family life and work apart. In the photo below you can just see the separate study entrance behind the car on the drive.



**The Vicarage, Kings Acre**

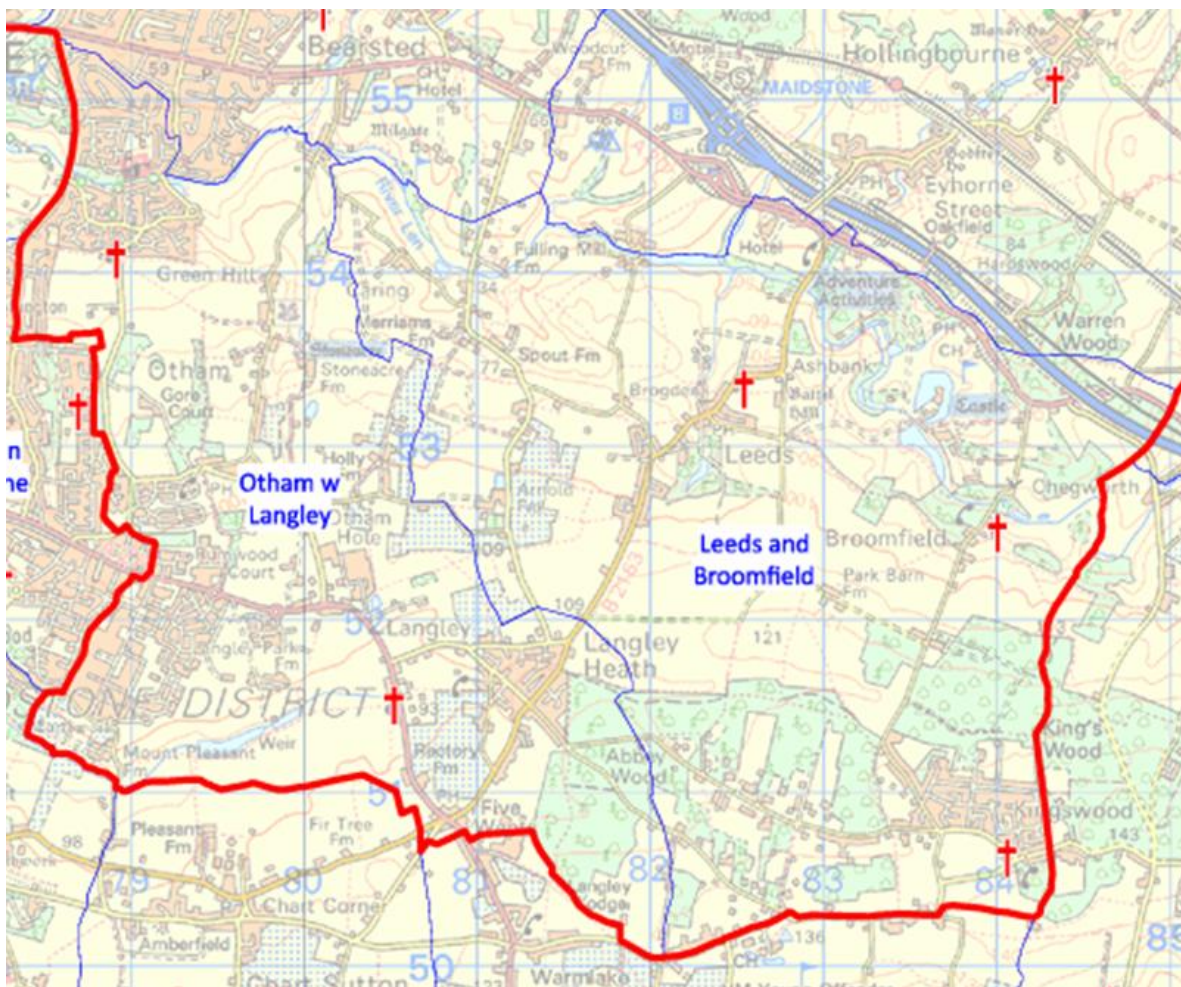
All of the churches are within a short drive from the Vicarage. You may expect the following journey times from Kings Acre:

<u>Church</u>	<u>Distance</u>	<u>Journey time</u>
St Nicholas' Church, Otham	0.2 miles	1 minute
St Mary's Church, Langley	3.4 miles	10 minutes
St Nicholas' Church, Leeds	4.2 miles	12 minutes
St Margaret's Church, Broomfield	4.9 miles	12 minutes
Kingswood Village Hall, Kingswood	4.6 miles	12 minutes



**Aerial view of The Vicarage, Kings Acre**

# Map of the Parishes of Otham with Langley and Leeds and Broomfield. Kingswood is at the bottom right of the area outlined in red.



This map was compiled for the Diocese of Canterbury by Alistair Sutherland in May 2024 with digital data from Field Dynamics. It contains parish data supplied by the Commissioners of the Church of England, church location data from A Church Near You, and Ordnance Survey data reproduced with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of HMSO. ©Crown copyright and database right 2024. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey licences nos 100040148 and 100019918. Please note that some legal parish names may be abbreviated for clarity.



**Our parishes are just to the south-east of Maidstone, the County Town of Kent.**

# The Local Area

## Parish of Otham with Langley

There are four village halls in the Parish, one located in Otham Village, which is quite small and larger halls in Downswood, Madginford and Langley. The halls are available for hire. The new developments provided a supermarket, carvery and other amenities.

There has been extensive housing development in the Parish over the last decade or so in the Sutton Road area. This has increased the population of the Parish significantly

## Otham

Otham Village is the original habitation that Otham Church served. It is very pretty, with many historic houses including Stoneacre, a Medieval Yeomans House and garden, now part of the National Trust. Otham Village Green has fabulous views of the North Downs AONB. In medieval times the village had thriving stone quarries (no longer active) and extensive agriculture.



**Stoneacre, Otham**

In the 1980s the residential development of Downswood was built on one of the quarries. There are a number of small shops, pharmacy/takeaway/convenience store. A local Doctors surgery has satellite consultation rooms there. The Orchard wedding venue is also within the Parish.

The Madginford area of Bearsted is part of the Ecclesiastical Parish of Otham with Langley and lies just north of Downswood. Madginford was built in the late 1960s and has a primary school rated as “good” by Ofsted and a fine selection of local shops.

## Langley



**Oast Houses, Langley**

There is a good pub and restaurant, The Potting Shed, close to Langley Church.

The historic part of Langley village is mainly around the perimeter with 1950s properties in the middle. The church is situated on the west side of the village. To the east is woodland owned by Leeds Castle estate; this area of woods runs from Langley into the village of Kingswood.



**The Potting Shed, Langley**

## Parish of Leeds, Broomfield and Kingswood

### Leeds

The fabulous Leeds Castle sits close to Leeds Church and is within the Parish. You can find out more about this historic Castle and gardens, its wildlife, maze, playgrounds and Dog Collar Museum at <https://leeds-castle.com/her-castle/history-of-the-castle/>

The castle was once the major employer and landowner for the village, although much of the estate has now been sold off. The castle and its immediate grounds are a major national tourist attraction and while most residents of Leeds commute to Maidstone or beyond for employment, the influence of the castle is still significant. Relations with the church are good. The grounds of Leeds Castle can be accessed via Public Footpaths. A day ticket allows access to the whole site for a year.



**The George Inn, Leeds**

Leeds and Broomfield CofE Primary school is opposite the church, as detailed on page 11. The George is a delightful pub in the village serving excellent food. Leeds also has a very successful cricket club, a Women's Institute and a local dramatic society.

### Broomfield

Broomfield is a rural village 6 miles south-east of Maidstone, and consists of 29 scattered dwellings, the same number as in the Domesday survey. Apart from St Margaret's Church there are no community facilities, instead the village shares the facilities at Kingswood.



**Village Sign**

### Kingswood



**Village Sign**

Kingswood is a semi-rural village some 7 miles south-east of Maidstone. It is made up of approximately 600 dwellings, most of which are part of a large housing area established in the 1970s, with about 1,600 residents. There is a primary school, rated as "good" by Ofsted, which is part of the ASPIRE Federation. There is also a general store and post-office, takeaway and physiotherapist plus a well-equipped village hall which, among other activities, caters for a Pre-school group and Kingswood Church. There is a thriving Leeds and Kingswood Scout Group which meets in their own hut in Kingswood and includes Scouts, Cubs, Beavers and Squirrels.

## Slightly further afield

There are several large supermarkets nearby. Bearsted and adjacent areas provide all of the main facilities - shops, doctors' surgeries, petrol stations, Post Offices, restaurants, pubs, takeaways and dentists. The main line Bearsted Station connects to London and Dover. Trains to London are regular and take just over an hour.

There are a number of primary schools within the boundary of The Castle Group as detailed earlier. Kent's secondary education system includes a mix of grammar, comprehensive, and academy schools, as well as specialist and independent schools. A significant portion of secondary school places (about 30%) are within grammar schools.

Access to France is easy via the M20 and either through the Channel Tunnel or by ferry. Gatwick (approximately a 50-minute drive) and Heathrow (approximately a 1½ hour drive) are easily accessible.

Kent has two Cathedrals, Canterbury and Rochester and a wealth of historic buildings and castles.



**Canterbury Cathedral**



**Rochester Cathedral**

Maidstone United Football Club, Gillingham Football Club and Kent County Cricket Club are all a short distance away. There are many sports clubs and leisure facilities in the area.

### **Kent County Cricket at Canterbury**



## History of Otham Church

The Domesday Book records a church in Otham in 1086. A diocesan survey carried out in 1992 found that the main structure of the nave is indeed Norman and dates from the late eleventh century. So this is the church of Domesday which would have been rectangular with a small chancel at the eastern end.

Over the centuries repeated changes have been made to the church and these can be discovered by walking round the inside and the outside of the building. The first change was the addition of the tower in the late 1100s and built, like the nave, of the freely available local ragstone. However, it wasn't until the 1400s that the upper wooden part of the tower was built and this allowed the bells to be hung, the largest of which has been ringing since 1400 and is one of the oldest in Kent. When the tower was added, the chancel was extended eastwards.

The next change came early in the 1300s when a fine new doorway was inserted into the north side of the nave (although of considerable architectural interest, this was later blocked up by the Victorians). Around this time, the western end of the Lady Chapel was built. 200 years later, the eastern end of the Lady Chapel was added and the altar moved eastwards to its present position.

This caused a problem with restriction of space in the chancel which was further extended.

At this time the inside of the church would have been open, and it is unlikely that there would have been any seating apart from a few benches and perhaps a stool for the priest. There may have been wall paintings depicting Biblical stories but the main difference from today would have been the rood screen which separated the nave from the chancel. A 14<sup>th</sup> century font is set on a chamfered base with a face, two calves' heads and a leaf. Memorials in the chancel are to Thomas Hendley (d. 1590), Levinus Buffkin (d. 1622), John Hendley (d. 1676), Thomas Fludd (d. 1688) and William and Dorothea Henley (d. 1762 and 1785). In the Chancel chapel are memorials to Elizabeth Hendley (d. 1697) and Bowyer Hendley (d. 1742). The churchyard contains two Grade II Listed Monuments.

The church wardens' accounts which survive from the 1660s show a continual struggle over the next 300 years to find the finance to maintain the church fabric. In 1864-5 extensive repairs, including the rebuilding of the western end of the nave and removal of the gallery were carried out. The roofline was changed and some alterations to the chancel were made. The floors were tiled, a new pulpit installed and the whole appearance of the



**14th-century doorway  
on the north side of  
the nave**

inside changed by the installation of pews in the nave and chancel. It was around this time that most of the stained glass was donated. The internal Memorials were repaired and renovated in the 1980s with the work led by the College of Arms (or Heralds' College).

One of the bells in the tower is one of the oldest in Kent (C. 15 century). In 2012, John Taylor augmented the three existing bells with two cast by Alfred Powell in 1925 for Campton, Bedfordshire and a new bell cast by himself in 2011. A coach full of parishioners went to Taylors foundry to watch our new bell being cast.



**Bell being cast**

For nearly 1000 years of the life of the church, there has been continual change both in the structure and the internal ordering, continuing to the present day. Electricity arrived in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and a ragstone annex was built off the entrance porch and a toilet with disabled facilities was installed there in 2003. The Open Church Project was started in 2007 to provided us with a warm, flexible and sacred building that was fit for purpose. Phase One created a flexible space, pews and internal steps were removed; a ramp was installed allowing wheelchair access to the altar; a new heating system was installed and the church entrance had steps removed for easy access. Phase Two saw the Lady Chapel enclosed with glass screens, creating a space for meetings, a creche etc. Phase Three, an extension for a kitchen and large meeting room, had to be scaled back due to finances. However, the kitchen-in-a-cupboard was completed in 2019.



**Otham Church Interior, Open Church Project  
Phase One & Two Completed**

## History of Langley Church

There has been a church in Langley since Anglo-Saxon times and was included in the entry for Langley in the Domesday Book of 1086. During the 13C the title to Langley manor to which the church has always been attached passed to Sir Roger de Leybourne of Leybourne Castle and it was during this time that the first church was destroyed by fire and a new one built with a west tower added in about 1350 and north aisle in the late 15C. The font which is still in use today dates from this period as does the piscina in the north wall of the vestry. The font cover, though, was designed by William Butterfield.

When Sir Stephen Glynn described St Mary's in the early 1850s he discovered a 'small church in a woody churchyard' and was very disparaging about its interior. The Reverend William Bouverie Pusey who became Rector in 1842 was certainly not happy with the church and set about building a new church, the third and present church on the site, at his own expense. A Faculty was granted by the Consistory Court of Canterbury on June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1854 to allow the church to be taken down and a new church erected. "The ancient church of Langley being damp and insufficient for its size with inconveniently placed pews". Part of the glebe and some land from Langley Park Farm was released to form a new graveyard. Reverend William Bouverie Pusey was the younger brother of Dr Edward Bouverie Pusey one of the founders of the Oxford Movement. This movement was a reaction to the spread of 'Liberalism' in theology. One of Pusey's friends was William Butterfield, a leading architect of the time. He designed the new church which was built in 1855 on the foundations of the previous church as well as the school next to the church which was built first in 1853. The new church was dedicated in December 1855. The consecration was performed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Bird Sumner.

The most prominent features of this Butterfield church are the chancel and sanctuary which are decorated with alabaster and colourful floor tiles. Beneath the nave cornice is a line of text in black and white, a quotation from Psalm 150. The chancel roof is more elaborate with finely decorated rafters and the sanctuary roof is decorated with monograms - IHC for Jesus and M for Mary. In the sanctuary the lower parts of the walls are panelled with pink/grey marble surrounded by decorative tiles in red, gold and black. The same colours are used on the floor.

Mr Butterfield commissioned John Hardman of Birmingham to make the stained-glass windows to his design. Only one of these remain - the tall West window which depicts the Fall of Man, the Expulsion from Eden, the Deluge and the Offering of Isaac. Above these, in a quatrefoil the Annunciation is shown. By 1874 it was reported that the stained glass needed restoring and the small windows should be made to open to promote ventilation. These windows were restored by the original artists though the restoration was unsuccessful or tastes changed as most of the windows were replaced in the early 20th century.



Regrettably Rev Pusey had the silverware melted down and refashioned. A plate and paten were made from a flagon and a paten given by Mrs Elizabeth Fullager in 1703 and a large plate and flagon were made from the flagon and cup given by Nicholas Crips who died in 1715.

The lectern was donated by Sutton Valence school in memory of one of the Lucy brothers killed in World War II.

The tower houses one of two bells remaining in Kent made by John Hatch (father of the more famous Joseph Hatch) in 1599. There were 3 bells but one was sold to pay for the third to be recast in 1874 (disappeared in the mid 19C) and the 3rd was cast in 1621 by Joseph Hatch but recast by John Ware (Warner and sons) in 1874. The clock in the tower was given by the villagers in memory of those killed in World War I and has recently been restored at the expense of the Parish council.

The present East window was made by James Powell in 1911 depicting both the Blessed Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ with St John and St Barnabas in the side panels.

Rev Pusey died in 1888 and his grave is in Langley churchyard. The new Rector was Henry Prentice and he was keen to promote the musical life of the church and in 1891 the choir was surplised and a choir vestry formed at the west end of the church. In August 1894 a new organ was installed. This was a Joseph Walker instrument, a standard village organ of the period with tracker action and hand pumped. Rev. George Walker Lawson was the new Rector and he was keen to make improvements and in 1904 a new vestry was built on the north side of the building.

Mr W S Forster, who lived at Rumwood Court, had been a generous benefactor of the village and when he died in 1911, parishioners and friends installed 6 tubular bells in the church tower. A memorial window to his wife, Catherine, who died in 1908 is on the south wall of the chancel. When Mr Collison of Belmont died in 1925 two more tubular bells were added to the peal to complete the octave.

A toilet with disabled facilities was added to the north side of the church in the 1990's and the choir vestry turned into a kitchen in 2018.

## **William Butterfield**

William Butterfield - master of the Gothic Revival (GR) - worked primarily as an Ecclesiastical architect; he's credited with designing almost 100 gothic style churches and was a pioneer of this style. The GR style highlights the medieval past which sometimes embraced a heritage before the Anglican Church existed. His designs used different building materials to add colour and pattern to his buildings emphasising the material's unique qualities. Internally most GR designs tend to be sombre and monochromatic but not Butterfield, he created tapestry of colour using mainly beautiful marble and tiles.

## History of Leeds Church

St Nicholas' Church is a Grade I Listed Building in the village of Leeds, Kent, close to Leeds Castle. It originally had just a rectangular Anglo-Saxon nave about the size of the present nave and now has a tower, nave with two aisles and a chancel bounded by North & South chapels. The arcade of the north aisle is the sole visible remains of the Saxon church; the tower is Norman and the nave aisles date to about 1400. The chapels and chancel are 14th Century, with much 16th century modification and the chancel is separated from the nave by a remarkable 15th century rood screen which extends across the whole width of the nave and side aisles – the full width of the church. From 1115 until 1540 (the dissolution) the church was controlled by Leeds Priory. It is a Grade I Listed Building, on the “Heritage at Risk” register of Historic England due mainly to the poor state of the tower stonework.



**Leeds Church Interior**

The tower contains the clock, made in 1730 by William Gill of Maidstone, and 10 bells in an 18th Century wooden bell frame. The latter is one of the oldest 10-bell frames in the country, much visited by visiting bellringers, and the church was the base of the famous 18th century ringer James Barham

The church has a small modern kitchen and full disabled toilet facilities. The Butcher Library, in the upper tower room, contains a comprehensive collection of books in Kent and is available to scholars or members of the parish.

The churchyard is some 4.25 acres in area and is open for burials. It contains a number of Grade II Listed Tombs, the memorial to 18th century ringer James Barham, and three commonwealth war graves. There is also a very large, ancient yew tree.



**James Barham Memorial**

## History of Broomfield Church

St Margaret's church, in the small Kent village of Broomfield, is not recorded in the Domesday book but its existence was acknowledged by Robert Crevecoeur in 1119. The building a Grade II\* Listed Building. It consists of a Norman two-part nave and chancel with a late medieval western tower and with the relatively modern additions of a vestry and western porch. The Norman church would have comprised a plain nave and chancel. That chancel was remodelled in 1879, removing all Norman traces. Local Kentish ragstone is the predominant building material; no Maidstone tufa limestone was employed, unlike Saint Nicholas' Leeds where tufa is a significant feature.



St Margarets Church, Broomfield

Electric lighting was first installed in 1954, and in 1963 the Victorian coke-fired boiler and central heating was replaced by bottled gas convector heaters. By 1985 these were supplemented by three infra-red electric heaters, but the building was showing signs of dampness and in 1991 a completely new system of electric heating was installed.



Stained Glass in  
Broomfield Church

The central lancet window in the north wall features pieces of yellow-stained late mediaeval glass, believed to be rescued from the ravages of the Commonwealth period.

The tower contains 6 bells, rung from ground level

The churchyard is open for burials and in regular use. The tombstone of the famous Kentish bellfounder Joseph Hatch lies in the churchyard near

the south wall.

The yew tree at the West end of the church has been certified by the Yew Tree Campaign to be 1000 years old. Also of interest is St Margaret's Well at the junction of the church entrance path with The Street. There is a record of the well dating 1507, and it has been dressed and blessed each year since 1989, for our Patronal Festival on or near 20th July.

## History of Kingswood Village Hall

Around 1938, a few like-minded people in the parish erected a wooden building on land given by Mr. Apps, to serve as a village hall. This small wooden construction, under an asbestos roof served the community well. Sited off Gravelly Bottom Road, on land in front of what is now Rowan House, it was the heart of the then village. A venue for parish meetings, whist-drives, dances and even a library. During the war it was invaluable to the community to coordinate their war efforts. A now faded certificate hangs in the new village hall from these times. It commemorates the adoption of HMS Maidstone during warship week, March 1942.

After the 1939-45 war, laws were enacted requiring planning permission for all buildings. As materials became available, permission could be obtained for development along the mud tracks (now known as Whitehall Drive and Charlesford Avenue). Parcels of land were sold mainly to small developers and gradually the tracks in Kingswood became the framework for the roads we have today. Apparently, a Mr Charles Ford, who lived in Ashford and worked in Whitehall, owned some of the land.

With the new developments came new services, electricity and mains water arriving in 1948. The only public amenity, the wooden hall in Gravelly Bottom Road, was found to be inadequate for the now growing population. It was therefore decided to raise the necessary funds to build a new village hall. During the next ten years, the committee organised fund-raising events. discos, fetes, Old Time Music Halls, Pantomimes, Auctions, Jumble Sales, Sedan Chair Races, Pantomime Horse Races, sponsored walks and a sponsored knit-in were among the many events. The Kingswood and Broomfield News was started to inform and maintain the ongoing efforts of fund raising. A very successful lottery was also operated which raised considerable funds over a long period.

In April 1980 the new hall was opened, much closer to the main group of houses. This new hall was substantially brick built with all the facilities unheard of in the old hall. A kitchen, small function room, large main hall for badminton and a good size stage, plus an effective heating system. Even a proper car park. Another benefit, not realized at the time, was the community spirit engendered by the joint effort to raise the funds. In May 1981 Kent Enterprises awarded, in a competition, a certificate of commendation in acknowledgement of their achievement.

During 1987 the parish was visited by two ladies from a city in the United States of America called Broomfield, just north of Denver, Colorado. These ladies had travelled to England to find their namesake and propose a sister city in the United Kingdom. A proclamation promoting friendship and communication between the 'Broomfields' hangs in St Margaret's Church.