



The Benefice of Barham Downs with Adisham and Aylesham

Diocese of Canterbury

Benefice and Parish Profiles July 2026



The Benefice

Situation

The Benefice of Barham Downs with Adisham and Aylesham sits on either side of the A2 a few miles south-east of Canterbury. It is in the East Bridge Deanery of the Diocese of Canterbury and comprises the six parishes of:

- [Holy Innocents Adisham](#)
- [St Giles Kingston](#)
- [St John the Baptist Barham](#)
- [St Margaret of Antioch Womenswold \(or Wymynswold\)](#)
- [St Mary the Virgin Bishopsbourne](#)
- [St Peters Aylesham](#)

The Benefice is seeking to appoint a priest to work in coordination and cooperation with the Mission Priest centred in Aylesham.

The Mission of the Church - Our Vision

We want to be a church, rooted in prayer and filled with the Holy Spirit, which seeks to:

- Know God – growing in faith, and in our knowledge and love of God as individuals and as a church family;
- Share the love of God – welcoming, loving and accepting of all; proclaiming the good news in the church, in our community and in wider society.
- Grow the Kingdom – creating a culture of growth. using the God-given gifts of each of us to build our part of the Kingdom of God.

To achieve this vision, we are focusing on the following priorities and are looking forward to prayerful discussion of these with our new priest.

Our Priorities

Growth

We are fully committed to our Benefice achieving The Three Bold Outcomes for the Diocese of Canterbury, to

1. Show signs of revitalisation in each church in our benefice,
2. To double the number of children and young disciples, and
3. To have new Christian communities within our benefice.



Representatives from our Benefice attended the recent Leading Your Church into Growth event at Seasalter and are starting conversations with individual PCCs to identify where God is at work.

Prayer

We recognise that prayer and in particular discerning where God is leading us is at the heart of church life.

Church Family

Our church family includes people of all ages and personalities from a wide range of traditions and at different points on their spiritual journeys.

We recognise the need to be:

- united in vision and purpose,
- growing in faith together,
- ensuring that everyone feels valued,
- able to share our own gifts and talents,
- accepting of all people, as part of the body of Christ.

Community

Each of our parishes has its own separate character. Each is deeply rooted in the life and history of its community. In five of the six parishes ours is the only church. We want to continue to be a blessing in our communities, sharing the love and light of God, and providing support for those in need in all generations.

Children & Young People

We want the whole benefice to develop our ministry to children and young people.

Schools

We want our priest to work with us in supporting and developing the Christian ethos in our two primary schools.



Further Information

Please refer to:

Barham Downs Benefice webpage

<http://www.barhamdownschurches.org.uk/http://www.barhamdownschurches.org.uk/> & St Peters Aylesham webpage <https://www.stpetersaylesham.co.uk/>

Parish Profiles

A detailed parish profile for each of our parishes is shown in the following pages.

Mission Priest Aylesham

We are blessed in the Benefice to have the Rev Nick Ratcliffe as an Assistant Curate and holding the title of Mission Priest. In practical terms Nick operates largely independently but the Rector remains the incumbent of the parish of Aylesham with all the responsibilities that carries.



Our New Priest

To address these priorities, we are seeking a priest with the following attributes:

- Committed to Lead the Churches and Benefice into Growth.
- A person of contagious faith, actively pursuing his/her own relationship with God.
- A person of prayer, ready to share with us in discerning God's will for our communities.
- A passion for rural ministry.
- Willing to encourage different worship styles and inclusive understanding of the Gospel for different congregations, identities and traditions
- Lead by service and example with the ability to collaborate and delegate.
- Able to identify, encourage, develop and support the faith and ministry of others.
- Able to appreciate and encourage the spirituality of children.
- Willing to work with us in our commitment to promoting a culture of safeguarding and to be rigorous in applying best practice in safeguarding across the benefice
- A creative and engaging communicator.
- A warm, welcoming and visible pastor
- Possess a UK driving licence.
- Willing and able to coordinate and cooperate with our Mission Priest in Aylesham

It would be desirable

- To demonstrate an appreciation of the opportunities presented by the use of various forms of music.
- To have experience in multi-parish benefice ministry, or equivalent.

What We Offer

- Believers keen to grow in faith
- Willingness to consider new ideas
- Active lay ministry (detailed in the parishes sections in the Profile)
- A Church of England Primary School and an Academy Primary School
- Historic Church buildings generally in good order
- Welcoming and friendly churches and communities



- Part-time Benefice Administrator
- Beautiful rural area

THE RECTORY

Barham Rectory is the parsonage for the Benefice. It is close to Barham church on a quiet road in a conservation area. Built in the 1950s, it is a comfortable family home with four bedrooms, bathroom and toilet upstairs, and three reception rooms (one of which is currently used as a study), kitchen and toilet on the ground floor. There are mature and manageable gardens to the front and rear. The back garden is fenced and private with good views to open country. The driveway has parking for several vehicles and there is a garage with power.





RECTOR

The Benefice of Barham Downs with Adisham and Aylesham

A Message from the Bishop of Dover



Welcome and thank you for taking an interest in the role of Rector of The Benefice of Barham Downs with Adisham and Aylesham. The Parish Profile sets out the needs and priorities of the parish, the kind of priest they are looking for - and a little of what the team here hopes the future may look like. Of course, a key part of your discernment process in coming to this role will be gaining a sense of the bigger picture of us as a diocesan family, our vision, and priorities for the future.

Who we are

Founded in 597 by St Augustine, Canterbury Diocese is the oldest diocese in England and has a special place in the life of the national and worldwide Church. With its iconic Cathedral it forms a focal point for the life of the whole Anglican Communion, offering a spiritual home and place of pilgrimage for people from every nation and walk of life.

Kent is renowned as the 'Garden of England' and this rural heart is core to our identity – yet the communities we serve are very diverse. Our Diocese stretches from Maidstone to Thanet, from the Isle of Sheppey to the Romney Marsh. We have 350 miles of coastline with historic ports and seaside resorts, alongside rural communities, market towns and commuter-belt urban developments. Affluent areas often sit alongside pockets of major deprivation, offering an exciting and challenging mission context.

Our vision

By God's grace we want to be a people who are...

- *confident & creative disciples of Jesus Christ*
- *rooted in scripture & drenched in prayer*
- *living gratefully, giving generously, caring for creation & sharing the gospel*
- *growing in number & expectations – of God & ourselves*
- *motivated by justice & love, open to the Spirit & ready for adventure!*





Therefore we will...

'Therefore we will...' is a recognition that words without actions are empty. In 2023, Diocesan Synod agreed to three bold outcomes which flesh out how our vision will be achieved by 2030.

Three Bold Outcomes

1. Double the number of children and young disciples.
2. 200 new Christian communities.
3. Every parish, benefice and deanery showing signs of revitalisation.

Every deanery is currently working on updating their deanery plans from the versions that fed into our 2022 strategy document [which you can find here](#). Our strategic planning across the diocese is a dynamic process - and it's exciting that parishes are considering our vision and the bold outcomes vision for themselves, exploring together what actions they will commit to take, what their local 'Therefore we will...' might look like.

As well as the three bold outcomes our diocesan synod has committed to a net zero carbon action plan. When General Synod and Diocesan Synod adopted this goal, it was clear that it would be very challenging. However, the significant changes in global weather events in recent years have underlined the urgency of tackling the amount of carbon we produce. The leadership shown by the Church of England is important and the action plan takes a positive approach to working towards this ambitious target.

At the heart of all we do is a commitment to transformation for ourselves and our communities: *Changed Lives* → *Changing Lives*. If you are the right person for this role, we will be looking for you to join in with what God is already doing and play a crucial part in making our vision a reality.

Our Safeguarding Ethos

As a diocesan family, we are also deeply committed to our calling to build a safer, more welcoming church for all. We will never be perfect, but we can work together to make our churches safer. At the heart of this ethos is the conviction that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility – and that it needs to be at the heart of everything we do. You can find out more about our approach to safeguarding [here](#).





Our commitment to you

We know that supporting healthy, flourishing ministers (lay and ordained) is crucial for a healthy, flourishing diocese. Therefore, we offer the 'Canterbury Diet' to all our new incumbent ministers – this is an intentional programme for ministerial development, health, growth and faith. A similar lay programme is in development too. We offer pastoral supervision and spiritual accompaniment, an invitation to be part of residential training programmes focused on learning, leading and mission, action learning sets, as well as a range of specialised training events, and other regular opportunities for growth in prayer and spirituality.

In short, I hope that you will be as excited by our vision, priorities and opportunities as we are. Be assured of our prayers as you consider your next step in ministry.

+ Rose

The Rt Revd Rose Hudson Wilkin
Bishop of Dover and Bishop in Canterbury





The Canterbury Diet for Incumbents and Priests in Charge

The *Canterbury Diet* has been designed to support the wellbeing and development of Priests in the Diocese of Canterbury. Each element offers a building block for healthy and effective ministry.

You are encouraged to attend to these three Golden Threads throughout:

Golden Threads

How are prayer and spiritual practices being developed?

How am I learning and reflecting on ministry practice?

How are we attending to good relationships and collaborative ministry?

After licensing the Incumbent meets with the Director of M&M who introduces the priest to the

Canterbury Diet

and offers a

Pastoral Supervisor

with whom she/he meets not less than six times per year

Ministers acquire a

Spiritual Accompanier

and meet regularly, recommended 6-8 weekly

In the first two years the Incumbent or Priest in Charge attends the

Ministry Training Programme

Monday to Friday residential courses generally held in Ashburnham

Week One : **The Minister as Learner** (soon after licensing)

Week Two: **The Minister as Leader** (six months later)

Week Three : **The Minister as Missioner** (a further six months on)

Participation in the bi-annual

Ministerial Development Review

Meet with Consultant Reviewer, complete a Personal Development Plan;

meet with Archdeacon a few months later and update the PDP,

with opportunity to review Pastoral and Spiritual Accompaniment.

Meeting with the bishop concludes the MDR

As able, participate in professional ministry courses:

Working with Conflict

Working with Change

Practical Skills Course

the first are two by one-day courses, offered regularly at advertised times through the year,

the third an annual one-day course

Continuing Ministry Development Events

E.g. Courses on whole person care, environmental care, preaching the lectionary





And a note from the Archdeacon of Canterbury

If you are reading this you will already be thinking about whether God is calling you to take up the role of Rector of Barham Downs with Adisham and Aylesham. The benefice is predominantly rural and the parish churches occupy a central place in the history and present-day realities of the villages. The benefice is not without its struggles and, in line with many rural communities here and elsewhere, there are pressures of finance and also of recruiting volunteers. A new Rector will need to address both of these as part of their leadership of the benefice in mission and ministry.

The former mining town of Aylesham, which is expanding rapidly at present, is part of the benefice, but operates largely separately day to day. The resident Mission Priest, the Reverend Nick Ratcliffe, leads the church and its mission and outreach in Aylesham under the Rector's authority. There has been a relationship of mutual support over the years which we hope will continue. The Rector remains the incumbent of the parish with the consequent responsibilities. There is a question as to whether the future of Aylesham is within the wider benefice or not and this will need to be addressed in due course. Whatever happens, though, you will have in Nick a colleague and a partner in the gospel.

This post requires a priest with maturity and energy, with vision and with a sense of the possible.

The benefice is within the East Bridge Deanery which, with the exception of Aylesham, is comprised of rural villages grouped into four benefices. The Area Dean is the Reverend Stefan Thomas who, prior to his appointment as Chaplain of The Living Well (the diocesan centre for healing and wholeness) in neighbouring Nonington, was the Rector of the Barham Downs benefice.





Diocese of Canterbury
CHANGED LIVES ➔ CHANGING LIVES

Bishop Rose has outlined what the Diocese of Canterbury has to offer in the way of support, training and equipping for our clergy.

This is a great benefice and a good post. I would be pleased to have an informal conversation with anyone who is interested in applying. Please contact Caroline Hemington (01227 473597 or chemington@diocant.org to arrange a time).



The Venerable Dr Will Adam

Archdeacon of Canterbury

archdeacon-canterbury@diocant.org



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www.canterburydiocese.org

The Church of Holy Innocents Adisham

History

Adisham is proud of its historical origins, in that it was given to the monks of St Augustine in 623 with a Minster church being established on the site of an old preaching cross which marked the way between Dover and Canterbury. Since then, there has always been a worshipping community here and each generation has put its mark on both the building and the worship. Holy Innocents' Church has recently undergone a significant reordering and modernisation (2013-2015) with a view to making it more of a community space - as it historically was. We can now host many more events including concerts, parties, coffee mornings etc while still maintaining a sacred space for worship.



Adisham currently

Adisham has a mixed demographic with families living alongside the retired, students and working people. There is little employment within the village nowadays so its inhabitants mostly commute to their jobs but with the advent of better web connectivity more people are spending at least some of their time working from home.

The village also has a varied collection of activities which bind the community and mix our interests. These include book clubs, dance class, choir (not linked to church), Little Kickers, Arty Crafty group, Big Breakfast.

Holy Innocents' Mission



Our worship at Holy Innocents' Church has a mix of formal and less formal occasions. We currently have Holy Communion once or twice a month and lay-led morning prayer twice a month as well as various school services (some led by the children) and, occasionally, a home group.

Also, we increase our visibility by holding some service outdoors in key village spaces; e.g. Good Friday on the village green, Remembrance

Sunday in the churchyard and a family-focused Carol Service on another green. We also run informal worship (Tea at Two) in the Village Hall, which includes cake.

Holy Innocents currently has no formal group for the young. However, there is a thriving C. of E. primary school (currently with an Outstanding Ofsted rating), with the Curate and one of the lay leaders making weekly visits for services and general support. Our regular pastoral and mission connections also include a produce stall at a monthly "Big Breakfast". Moreover, we run Cafe Ad Hope - a coffee occasion in the church for those who struggle with life.



We try to work alongside the rest of the village (particularly the Village Hall) to join forces for social and fundraising events, thus increasing opportunities for mission and making informal contacts
Eg Summer Fair,



Christmas Shopping Night. Despite there being no shops in the village to act as "chance" focal meeting points, the church is actually being seen more as a place to meet.

In summary, the Mission of Holy Innocents' is to be an integral part of the life of Adisham.

And we look forward to meeting you!

Details and Directory

- Adisham Profile Usual Sunday Attendance: 13
- Electoral roll: 31
- Village population: 600
- Churchwardens: Mrs Mary Rance 07925 462703 Lisa Cavanagh 07835 172784
- School: C of E Primary with outstanding Ofsted -100 on roll
- Supported housing: 1 learning-disabled home
- Public transport: daily bus and hourly trains to Dover/London
- Pastoral care ALMs: Mrs Pauline Terry and Mrs Mary Rance
- Worship leaders: Several lay-leaders plus three retired clergy
- Organists: Mrs Heather Armstrong and Mrs Sarah Taylor
- Weddings: number varies but averages one a year
- Baptisms: also, variable but around 1 or 2 per year
- Fully paid-up Parish Share
- Buildings in decent repair



Barham Downs with Adisham and Aylesham Benefice Profile (July 2026)

- Active Friends group
- Churchyard maintenance group

The Church of St Giles Kingston

Summary

A faithful and hospitable Christian church meets in the medieval building dedicated to St Giles. This living church has deep roots, strong community goodwill, and ambition for growth. St Giles is the sole worship centre in the rural Anglican parish of Kingston. It serves ~500 residents in the village, hamlets and farmsteads. The church's Electoral Roll comprises 24 persons. Average Sunday attendance is 18. The church seeks a priest who can help us build a confident Christian presence for upcoming generations.



Conditions

Kingston is a rural, largely white, middle-class and ageing community - though younger families are gradually moving in. Demographic and socio-economic analyses are being prepared, to help focus our mission strategy. Many villagers express strong goodwill and support for church events and the upkeep of the building, despite their non-attendance at worship services: our prayers embrace them.

Real Estate Assets in the parish

- St Giles Church: A Grade I listed 11th-century building with a 13th-century font, surrounded by a large graveyard with scope for many



more burials. All are beautifully maintained by volunteers and relevant contractors. The premises are open daily for peace, prayer and reflection. They are popular with locals, ramblers and tourists.

- Kingston Barn: A community hall with recreation field, car park and cottage. These were gifts to the church from a former Rector and are managed by a Trust. They facilitate toddler groups, choirs, exercise classes, hobby clubs, family parties, seasonal events, and meetings of Café Church, PCC and Parish Council.
- Private commercial enterprises, including: The Black Robin pub and restaurant; Kingston House (care home for adults with special needs); and The Quiet View (a garden for contemplative spirituality). Several small employers provide land-based services. Much of the parish land is arable or wood land, managed commercially by contractors.

Community Life

- A fortnightly coffee morning offers informal support and social connection.
- An annual fete and other seasonal gatherings are popular.
- The Friends of St Giles raise funds that enable the PCC to maintain the church building.
- A monthly village magazine (for Kingston & Bishopsbourne) strengthens community cohesion with its reports and notices of events, trade advertisements, snippets of history and a Christian comment to ponder.

Challenges

- The church congregation recognises that its explicit Christian witness has weakened; that it needs imaginative expression of its Christian message to match contemporary lifestyles, moral perspectives, musical tastes and learning preferences – and thereby to grow and replenish its congregation
- Without fresh, younger leadership, the worshipping church is unlikely to survive a decade.

Traditions

Kingston's traditions blend historic Anglican worship practices, simple hospitality, and a deep sense of place shaped by centuries of Christians pursuing practical righteousness.



Needs

The community in Kingston is changing and we believed that there are God-given opportunities developing in the Parish. We need to develop our confidence and ability to help Christians to grow in maturity and build a strong resource for ongoing witness, encouraging outreach and participation, responding creatively to changing patterns of attendance and the evolving expression of spiritual needs in our community.

The Church of St John the Baptist Barham

INTRODUCTION

St. John the Baptist, Barham is a family of believers, focused on the mission and ministry of the church, seeking to know God and share the love of God in the community. We seek to develop a deeper relationship with God through word, sacrament, worship, fellowship and service.

Barham is a village with a church, a pub, a shop, a school and a village hall. St John's aims to play a key role in the spiritual life of the village providing opportunities for people to encounter God's love. Our vision is for the church, welcoming all, a strong visible presence at the heart of the community. Many parishioners feel a sense of belonging to the church family even if they are not regular worshippers. Several members of our congregation come from outside the parish boundaries.



We recognise the unique opportunity presented by rural parish ministry to be a beacon of light and hope to the whole community, as well as the need to provide for a wide range of styles of worship. At present the worship tends towards a more traditional and liturgical spirituality. We believe that to engage better with children and families we need to include some opportunities for contemporary worship styles in some of our services



We are not looking for a new priest to do all of the work, but for someone who will encourage the church members and wider community to identify and use their God given gifts and talents to become the workers who fulfil the mission. As Jesus put it in Luke 10:2 “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

CHURCH FAMILY

There are 77 people on the electoral roll. Average attendance for Sunday services is around 50 adults and these numbers increase noticeably at festivals and special services. The Wednesday morning service attracts around 20, many of whom come only to that service. Others belong to the church through activities throughout the week.

The monthly Teatime @ St John's was initially aimed at primary age children and their families. However, it has also proved to be popular with people of all ages. Attendance can be up to 35.

We would look for our new priest to work with the church and community to build new opportunities to bring God's Good News to people of all ages.

THE WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY

The list of current church services and other activities below is intended to be illustrative of the range of ways in which we seek to both deepen our faith and share the love of God with the community (recognising that there is much overlap between these two things). It is not intended to be prescriptive for the future; apart from that we recognise the need to continue to cater for both traditional and more contemporary spiritual traditions. As the largest parish within the benefice, many of the services and activities below are provided with and for the whole benefice, not just the parish.

SERVICES

Sunday services tend to be traditional and liturgical with some more family-orientated worship. Generally, each month there are two sung Eucharists with full choir and an early morning BCP communion on the one of the remaining Sundays. Every Sunday in July and August, January and February, we have a joint benefice family communion service in one of the five churches. Most services are followed by coffee and biscuits.



There is a weekly communion service on most Wednesday mornings. These are less formal than the Sunday Eucharists. There is a time of fellowship with refreshments afterwards. In addition, there are many seasonal services and celebrations. Occasional services are provided in a residential home for adults with learning difficulties, for residents in an area of retirement housing and residents in a nearby caravan park.

We recognise the need to strike a balance between preserving the forms of service which have held together older members of the congregation for many years and the use of more modern language and music in order to make services more meaningful for many of those who are younger.

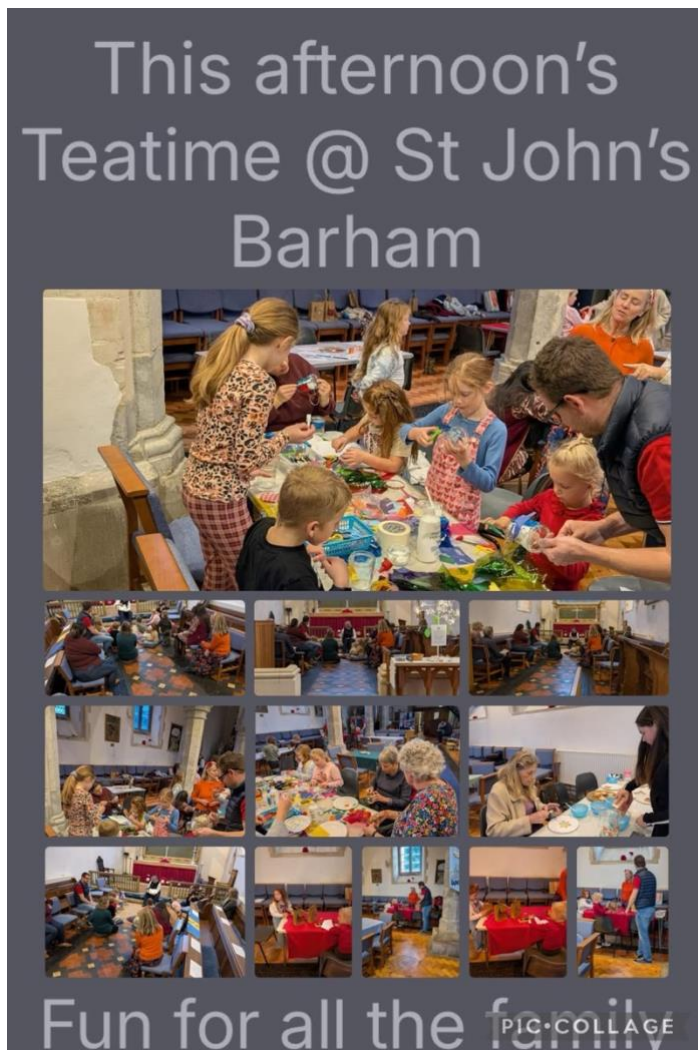
PRAYER

A twice monthly Benefice prayer meeting was recently launched at St John's. We recognise developing our prayer life is a priority both individually and together.

HOUSEGROUPS

There are currently no church house groups and no study and discipleship programmes. We see these as areas to be developed

CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRY



The launch of Teatime@ St Johns during 2025 has brought children, parents and other from within the Parish and beyond. It is a gentle session of crafts, Christian story, music and food. Numbers attending have grown since its launch. An unexpected aspect is that the adults are as engaged by the activities as the children. This suggests that there is more opportunity to engage the whole community in all-age activities.

BARHAM CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL

St John's has links with Barham Church of England Primary School. Maintaining these links and nurturing the Christian ethos and values of the school are key responsibilities of our priest.

The 2023 SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) reported that Barham Church of England Primary School is living up to its foundation as a Church school and is enabling pupils and adults to flourish. Also, that the school's Christian vision permeates the lives of pupils through values of kindness, confidence and curiosity. However, the report found three particular areas requiring attention: to implement a coherent policy for spirituality so that opportunities for spiritual development are clearer to staff and pupils; to ensure that planning and assessment in RE promote further



challenge, depth and discussion; and to provide opportunities for children to engage actively with social issues on a national and international scale.

Recent changes in the school's staffing have somewhat loosened the ties with the church. We hope that the new priest will be able to work with the church and school to reverse this.

The new priest will be an ex-officio member of the School's Governing Body. There are two other foundation governors appointed by the Diocese of Canterbury and by St John's PCC.

BAPTISMS, WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS

As well as our regular services, we enable our community to celebrate and thank God at the milestones of the journey through life. During 2025 there were 4 baptisms, 3 weddings, 6 funerals in church, and a further 6 funerals at the Crematorium on behalf of parishioners. Families are offered pastoral support and invited to our annual All Souls Service following funerals.

There are more forward bookings for weddings in 2026 and 2027 than seen over recent years. Also there seems to be more interest in baptisms, particularly from primary age children themselves.

MUSIC

We have a robed choir which leads worship at the twice monthly Sunday Communion services and Evensong in the Cathedral. Singers from the other churches in the Benefice sometimes join for special events. The choir is led by our Organist & Choirmaster. One of the successes of the choir has been in attracting younger members in the 10 to 25 age group.

The Kent College School Junior Choir leads worship at some festivals (Christmas, Easter and Harvest). On these occasions the church is always full as the children's family come to support.

BELL-RINGING

In 2004, a Gallery was reinstated in the Tower as the Ringing Chamber with access by the modern staircase. The peal consists of five bells and is rung regularly by an active team of bell-ringers.



FINANCES

Having lived through many years of plenty the church finances are now going through a time of lack. We have not paid the full parish share for a couple of years and money is a real matter of concern for the PCC. The PCC recognise church finance is a significant responsibility we are keen to engage with Stewardship and Responsible Giving campaigns to put finance on a secure footing and ensure that our main focus remains on the mission and ministry of the church.

OUTREACH

St John's outreach tends to be centred on the major events in the Christian calendar including a Palm Sunday service in the village hall, special Easter, Harvest, Remembrance, Crib and Christmas services. The church also brings together some village activities including the lighting of the Christmas Tree on the Green and carols sung around the tree.

The church usually has a team at the monthly pub quiz and the proceeds from this are often kindly donated by the pub to the church fund.

The Barham and Wymynswold Parish Magazine, coordinated and distributed by the Church, has a monthly letter from the priest curate or Reader, as well as information about church services and events.

We believe that there are untapped mission opportunities.

THE WIDER CONTEXT

STAFF, STRUCTURE & MANAGEMENT

The Church has one member of paid staff - the Organist & Choirmaster. We also contribute towards the cost of the Benefice Administrator (8 hours per week) who either works from home or in the Barham Church vestry.

We have one churchwarden who is ably assisted by the PCC and an experienced Reader (LLM). Many of the activities described in the previous section are run by, or with the support of, members of the church family.

In addition to the priest there are 14 members of PCC, including a Treasurer, Secretary and two Deanery Synod representatives (one of these is Lay Chair).

There is an active Friends organisation which brings together members of the church family and sympathetic members of the community. It plays an



important role in raising funds for the maintenance of the church fabric and contributing to major capital projects.

SAFEGUARDING

There is a Parish Safeguarding Officer who oversees safeguarding for five of the churches in the Benefice. By June 2026 St John's has made 81% progress toward meeting Mandatory Requirements. Key outstanding actions are to ensure that all who need training complete that training. The PSO has provided some face-to-face training for those who struggle with on-line content. There are no known safeguarding issues.

THE PARISH

Barham is a picturesque village, of about 750 dwellings and 1,400 residents, in the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty 6 miles from the city of Canterbury and close to the A2. There are a few new piecemeal housing developments. There is a vibrant village community with a pub, shop, village green, recreation ground with tennis courts, and many social activities and clubs. Thanks to National Lottery funding an extension and refurbishment of the Village Hall, including a community shop, was completed in 2015. Barham is a close knit and welcoming rural community.

For more information about Barham see <http://www.barham-kent.org.uk/>

THE CHURCH BUILDING

Our medieval church building, with a prominent green copper spire, overlooks the village. Some reordering about 10 years ago created a small kitchen and toilet in the church, as well as a vestry, also used as the Benefice Office. A new organ was also installed at this time. In 2014 the pews were removed and replaced with chairs to provide more flexible space (particularly important as we have no parish hall). The sound and AV systems were upgraded during the past decade.

The Quinquennial Review of 2025 found the church structure and fabric generally in sound condition, some repairs are required to keep the fabric in good order.

For more information about the church building see the Benefice website.



The Church of St Margaret of Antioch Womenswold

Mission

- Vision and priorities – hopes and plans for the future
We are a friendly and welcoming church. Looking to the future, we would seek to expand our congregation while maintaining a loving church which is alive and full of the Holy Spirit. We would endeavour to ensure the church's future as the centre for worship for the village, 2 hamlets and a residential caravan site. We also wish it to be a testament to Christianity and an important pilgrimage church in East Kent.

Strengths, weaknesses opportunities and challenges

- We have a stable regular congregation but would like to expand this to include families on a more regular basis. Families and non-regular church goers are welcomed to our festival services where we try to make sure they are included in the service.
- We have an active Friends organisation. This encourages the wider community to attend concerts and help with garden openings etc.
- We need to be more imaginative in encouraging children to come to church.

Unfulfilled potential

Womenswold parish consists of Womenswold, Woolage Village and Woolage Green and Ropersole Caravan Park. Although the congregation has members from 2 of these 3 villages, the church no longer has members from Woolage Village. Newcomers to the villages could help expand our congregation and need to be encouraged to visit the church and meet the parishioners. In the future we could consider holding more events outside the church, in the past we only had one such event, a rogation walk followed by compline.

Community Links

- The church regularly gives the collections from the harvest service to Farmline and the Carol service to Porchlight. We also support the Pilgrims Hospice by allowing the church and car park to be used as a staging post for the Annual fund-raising long-distance walk.
- The Cross Keys special school in Womenswold regularly visit the church as a quiet place for the pupils and have held services there.



- The Parish council now hold their regular meeting in the church which has forged close links between the Parish council and the church, many of whom are not regular church members.
- The church is now used as a polling station which has brought many people into the church who were unaware of its existence.
- The church is a regular venue for a small local choir.



Womenswold Church Building

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Womenswold Parish

Womenswold is more scattered than the other parishes in the benefice, with no village hall or primary school. It consists of Womenswold village and the hamlets of Woolage Village and Woolage Green, and the Ropersole Caravan Park



Pilgrims in Church

Womenswold or Wymynswold is a very small, picturesque village centred around the Grade 1 listed church of St Margaret of Antioch. It is located on the Via Francigena, an ancient pilgrimage route, and is still used by modern-day



pilgrims who follow the route of the modern North Downs Way from Canterbury to Dover.

Womenswold consists of 24 homes together with Denne Hill Farm and business centre and Nethersole farm and business units. The original village school closed in 1980 and is currently Crosskeys Learning Centre. The inhabitants of Womenswold used to be mainly retired however recently the number of families in the village has increased.

About 1 mile away is **Woolage Village** which was originally built in 1912 to house miners moving to Kent to work in the now defunct Snowdown Colliery. It consists of 59 houses, some occupied by retired people and the rest by families. There is a recreation ground with a children's playground which has been newly refurbished.

A further mile south of the village is **Woolage Green**. This village was originally a farming community and currently consists of 37 dwellings, a farm and a static caravan site. The houses are clustered around the village green which has recently been redesigned to include a picnic site.

Ropersole Caravan Park is situated on the A2 with only footpath access to Woolage Green. To visit Womenswold a car journey of approximately 5 miles is required. It is difficult to establish links with this community though posters are regularly displayed and magazine delivered

All children from the parish travel to schools in the area, most attend Barham Church of England primary school and then on to secondary schools in Canterbury, Dover or Sandwich.

There are no social problems.

Worship

Services are held on the first and third Sunday of every month at 9.30am. One is a Holy Communion Service and the other is a Songs of Praise. Both are accompanied by the organ. The congregation enjoys singing hymns and enjoying coffee afterwards. These services are usually held in the chancel. Our regular attendance is 17 with 19 in our worshipping community.

When there is a fifth Sunday in the month there is a benefice service and Womenswold takes its turn in hosting this.



Festival services; Harvest Festival, Carol Service etc., are held in the nave and this is when the wider community attends

There have been a small number of Baptisms, weddings and funerals over the last few years.



Baptism

Events

The Friends of Womenswold church hold a number of events throughout the year which have enabled the church to be reordered, including heating, lighting, a kitchen and a toilet. A number of concerts have been held in the church which has excellent acoustics and a good organ. The most ambitious was an event to celebrate the life and music of John Marsh, an 18th century resident of the parish. This involved a small orchestra, choir, organ and readings from his prolific diaries. These concerts are well attended from the surrounding area. Most concerts have a retiring collection and therefore anyone is able to attend. We have also held talks and have had a very varied mix of music, from rock through jazz to classical and opera.

There is also an annual garden party with music from Rags2Riches which is held in a beautiful garden, raising funds for the church. Womenswold have a reputation for excellent cakes and entertainment, and their events are well supported.



Concert at Womenswold

PCC

There are 2 church wardens, a treasurer, secretary and 5 other members of the PCC. This meets 4 times a year. All members of the church community are involved in the church service taking turns greeting, acting as vergers, reading the lesson or leading the prayers. There is a separate flower rota. There are 16 people on the electoral role this year.

Womenswold also has an organist and a deputy organist

Finances

The finances are well managed and we are in a sound financial position. Womenswold has paid its portion of the Parish share every year. The church is in good order and therefore does not anticipate any immediate financial issues.

The Church

The first church in Womenswold was recorded in the 11th century Norman tax records. The present-day church originates from the 12th century and is built from Kentish ragstone faced with flints. The church was dedicated to St Margaret of Antioch, a 3rd century Saint of Asia Minor made popular by the returning crusaders. At this time, the nearby land (Denne Hill) was owned by the Knights Templar. The church today is still known as a 'pilgrimage church'.

The church is entered via a brick porch dated 1729 into a 12th century aisle-less nave with a square late 13th century tower at the Western end. The small



transept (14th century) on the North side houses the two-manual organ built by F.H. Browne of Deal in 1894. The large chancel also dates from the late 13th century and is the part of the church that retains most of its original features. The church contains a number of interesting monuments and beautiful stained-glass windows. There is a 2 manual and pedal pipe organ which was restored in 2003. It is a surprisingly large instrument for the size of the church and is in good order. This is used to accompany services and concerts.

A number of improvements have been made to the church during the last 10 years. In 2005 the chancel was reordered (funded by the Friends). The choir pews were removed and replaced with comfortable seating making a versatile space for services, meetings and concerts. This also exposed some medieval coffin shaped stones and an interesting floor memorial.

The quinquennial survey had highlighted that urgent repairs were needed to the string course of the tower. Thanks to a generous grant of £60,420 from the Heritage Lottery Fund together with a donation of over £6000 from the Friends, the string course was restored together with repairs to the flat roof of the tower. Five pews were removed from the rear of the church which enabled the font to be moved opposite the door improving access to the church and providing a social area. The church was also decorated.

The Friends next project was to improve the heating which increased congregation numbers in the winter months. Under pew heating was installed in the nave and radiant heater in the chancel. This has enabled events to be held all the year round.

The Friends have finally achieved the major project to replace the redundant boiler chamber with a toilet and reorder the vestry as a usable kitchen. This has enabled the church to be hired out for use by the Parish Council, Electoral officer, and other organisations, bringing in a useful income for the church.

The church is open every day and is visited by the pilgrims from the Via Francigena, who appreciate the peace and quiet and the pilgrim stamp.

The Church of St Mary the Virgin Bishopsbourne



INTRODUCTION

The church of St. Mary the Virgin is also known as Richard Hooker's Church. Hooker became Rector of Bishopsbourne and of Barham in 1595. It was here that he wrote the final parts of 'On the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity'. He is buried in the chancel. It is therefore a Church of significant historical and ecclesiastical importance.

Although Bishopsbourne is a rural agricultural area, it is predominantly a "dormitory" village, with adults working locally and in London and children initially attending Barham and Bridge Primary Schools. Attendance at Services is low. We would welcome a Priest with a love of rural ministry and someone to whom pastoral care is a priority. We are a welcoming and inclusive Church, and are keen to grow our congregation and encourage younger people to join us. Having a lavatory and efficient heating would help.

OUTREACH & INCLUSION

The Remembrance Service by the memorial outside the Church is well attended, and, in the past, the Harvest Supper. Currently the Community is encouraged to attend fund raising Concerts, Coffee Mornings, and other



events. Fortunately, St. Mary's has a fine organ and would like support in increasing our choir.

The Brownies also meet in the Conrad Hall and Rev. Stefan did join them sometimes.

A Pet Blessing Service was introduced last year and will be continued this year, as part of the aims to encourage younger disciples. At occasional "Do-it-Yourself" Evensong, members of the Congregation are encouraged to read prayers as well as lessons.

Whilst wishing to continue with the beautiful, mystical language of traditional Services, inspiring people of all ages with the words of the Book of Common Prayer, additionally, we wish to include more wide-ranging musical and child orientated Worship: generally joyful praise and thanks to our loving God.

St. Mary's is popular for Marriage Services, with the magnificent window dedicated to Richard Hooker, the Burne-Jones window, the stunning school of William Morris tiles and tranquil rural setting.

PCC & FINANCES

Fortunately, there are two new members of the PCC, but it is hard to find a time convenient to all. Finances are very stretched with few regular donors. Meeting commitments to the Benefice running costs and the Parish Share to the Diocese, seems impossible. Repairs listed in the last Quinquennial Survey of 2024, are still being dealt with, and grant aid sought. Research continues to find answers to the need for a lavatory and improved heating. The Bishopsbourne Church Appeal charity has recently been set up to continue with fund raising, to meet requirements from grant giving bodies for the Church to meet some of the costs, as well as to fund some repairs if possible.

WISH LIST

Apart from managing to complete the repairs, install a lavatory and improve the heating, it would be marvellous to have at least 2 Services a month and possibly a second Evensong. Also, a children's area, possibly by the font, and more focus on bringing The Word to children and young people.

The Church of St Peters Aylesham

A Church Growing in Faith, Community and Mission

Introduction

St Peter's Church is a growing Anglican church at the heart of Aylesham. Built in 1928 to serve the newly established mining community, the church has faithfully served the village for almost a century and continues to play a significant role in both the spiritual and community life of Aylesham today.



Over recent years, St Peter's has experienced significant growth and renewal. What was once a small congregation has developed into a thriving and increasingly diverse church community, with growing numbers of children, young people, families and adults becoming involved in worship, discipleship, community activities and service.

St Peter's is first and foremost a mission church. Whilst part of the Barham Downs Benefice, the parish benefits from a dedicated Mission Priest whose ministry is focused predominately on Aylesham. Supported by a growing PCC, expanding lay leadership and a committed volunteer team, the church seeks to share the love of Christ, serve the community and help people grow in faith.

Vision

Our vision is "To be a Prayer-led, Holy Spirit-guided and Worshipping Church with a focus on Children, Young People and Families."

This vision shapes everything we do. Rooted in the Anglican tradition, we seek to be welcoming, accessible and outward-looking, helping people encounter the love of Christ and grow as disciples.

Prayer lies at the heart of our life together. We seek to listen for God's leading, place prayer at the centre of decision-making and encourage people to discover and use their gifts in service of God's mission.



Church Family

The Electoral Roll currently stands at 70 and the wider Worshipping Community at approximately 189 people. Average Sunday attendance is now over 60 people, a significant increase from the approximately 14 regular worshippers attending the church in 2019.

The church family is diverse in age and background. Alongside long-standing members of the congregation, many newer worshippers have joined the church through community activities, children's and youth work, Alpha courses and personal invitation.

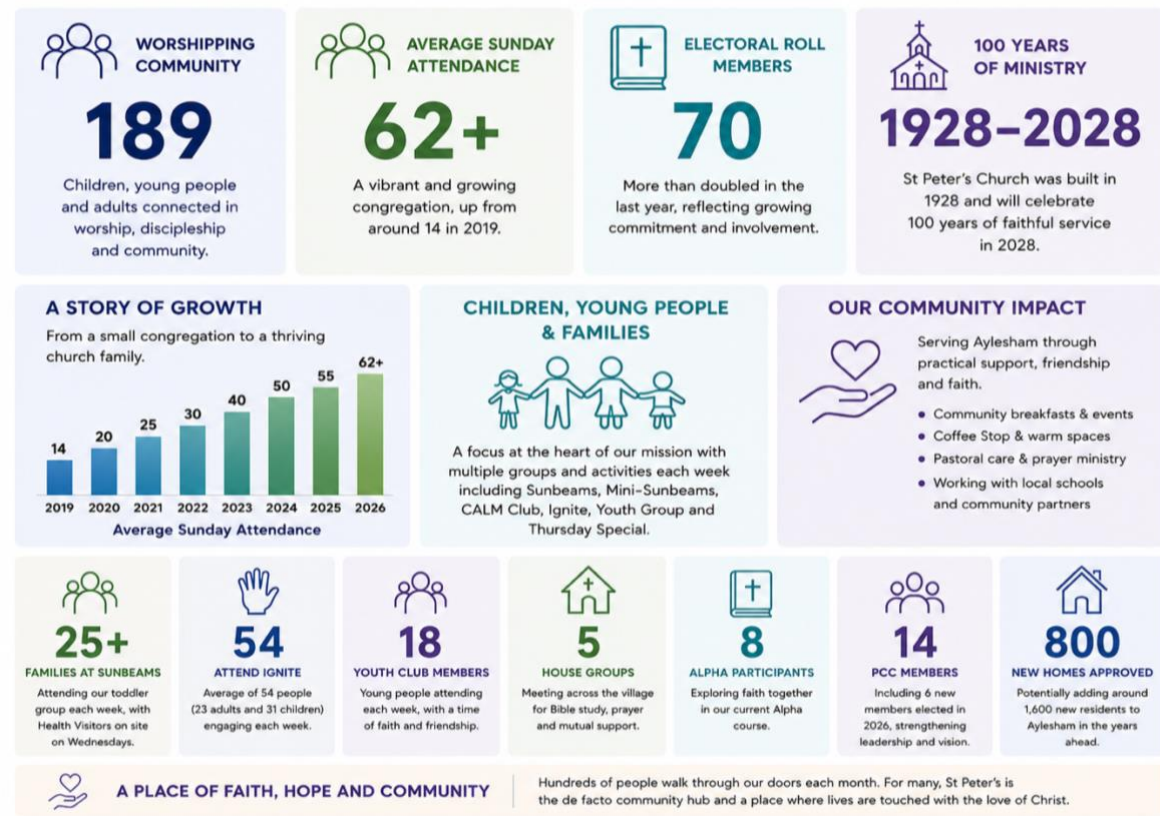
Visitors frequently comment on the warmth of welcome they receive at St Peter's. We seek to be a church where people of all ages can encounter God's love, develop lasting friendships and discover their place within the life of the church.

Five house groups meet regularly across the village, providing opportunities for fellowship, Bible study, prayer and mutual support. Alpha courses, prayer ministry and discipleship opportunities continue to help people deepen their faith and become active participants in the life of the church.



Mission and Growth

The story of St Peter's over recent years has been one of significant growth and renewal. Growth has not simply been numerical; it has been reflected in growing participation, emerging leaders, increased volunteering and a renewed



confidence in the church's mission and calling.

We have seen increasing numbers of families engaging with church life, people exploring faith through Alpha, new lay leaders emerging and greater involvement in ministry across the church.

The transformation has been significant. Before the appointment of Rev Nick Ratcliffe as Mission Priest, St Peter's was a much smaller church facing difficult decisions about financial priorities and resources. Today, the church is growing, financially stable and looking to the future with optimism and confidence. Alongside growth in attendance and ministry, we have seen increasing investment in the church's buildings, programmes and people.

At the 2026 APCM, six new PCC members were elected, reflecting both the growth of the congregation and the increasing willingness of people to play an active role in the leadership and future of the church.



We believe St Peter's is at an important point in its journey. Whilst retaining the warmth and sense of community associated with a village church, it is increasingly becoming a larger and more complex organisation, with paid staff, expanding ministries and significant opportunities for mission. As both the church and village continue to grow, we are seeking to ensure that our leadership, governance and resources develop alongside them, enabling us to serve the community effectively and sustain that growth for the future.

Community Outreach

In many ways, St Peter's has become the de facto village hall and community hub for Aylesham. Throughout the week, hundreds of people pass through the building, many of whom have little or no prior connection with the church.

The church hosts a wide variety of activities including Sunbeams Toddler Group, Mini-Sunbeams Baby Group, CALM Club, Ignite, Thursday Special, Youth Group, community breakfasts, Coffee Stop, house groups and seasonal events. The building is also used by local schools, community organisations, support groups and local residents.

For many families, these activities provide their first point of contact with the church and often become a gateway into wider church life. Mission is not viewed as something separate from church life; it is woven into everything we do.

PCC and Leadership

As the church has grown, so too has its leadership capacity. Increasing numbers of people have stepped forward to serve in leadership, ministry and governance roles.

The PCC has expanded significantly in recent years and now benefits from a broader range of skills, experience and perspectives. The election of six new PCC members in 2026 reflected both the growth of the church and the increasing commitment of the congregation to its future mission and ministry.

St Peter's is also a registered charity and continues to strengthen its governance arrangements to support an increasingly active and outward-looking church.

About Aylesham

Aylesham is a welcoming and close-knit village with a proud mining heritage and a strong sense of community identity. Originally established in the 1920s to serve the East Kent coalfield, many residents today still have deep family roots within the village.



Whilst the collieries have long since closed, parts of Aylesham continue to experience levels of deprivation above the Kent average. At the same time, significant housing growth has brought many new families into the community, creating both opportunities and challenges for mission and ministry.

As both the village and church approach their centenary celebrations, there is a strong sense of pride in the past and optimism for the future.

The Church Building

Built in 1928, St Peter's Church is unusual in design and highly adaptable. Unlike many traditional parish churches, the building provides flexible space for worship, children's work, meetings, social events and community activities.

The building enables mission. As one of the largest community facilities within the village, it hosts a wide range of church and community activities throughout the week and is frequently described as both a place of worship and the village hall for Aylesham.

Recent years have seen significant investment in maintaining and improving the building, including major roof replacement works. Future aspirations include improving accessibility, energy efficiency and creating additional space to support growing ministry and community use.

Our ambition is simple - to ensure the building remains fit for purpose for the next century of worship, mission and community service.