

The image shows the interior of St. Mary's Church in Hadlow. The church has a high, vaulted ceiling with a greenish-grey hue. In the foreground, a large group of people, mostly young men in dark suits, are seated in wooden pews, facing the altar. To the left, a Christmas tree is decorated with blue lights. The altar area features three tall, narrow stained-glass windows with Gothic arches. A large, modern chandelier with multiple white globe lights hangs from the ceiling. The overall atmosphere is solemn and festive.

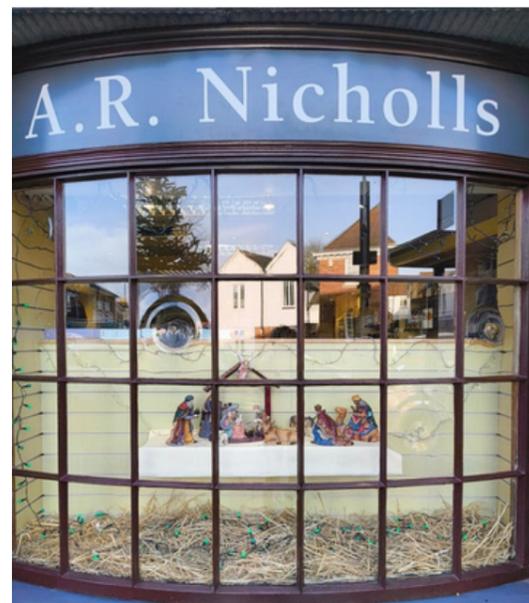
# St. Mary's Church Hadlow

# Welcome to Hadlow

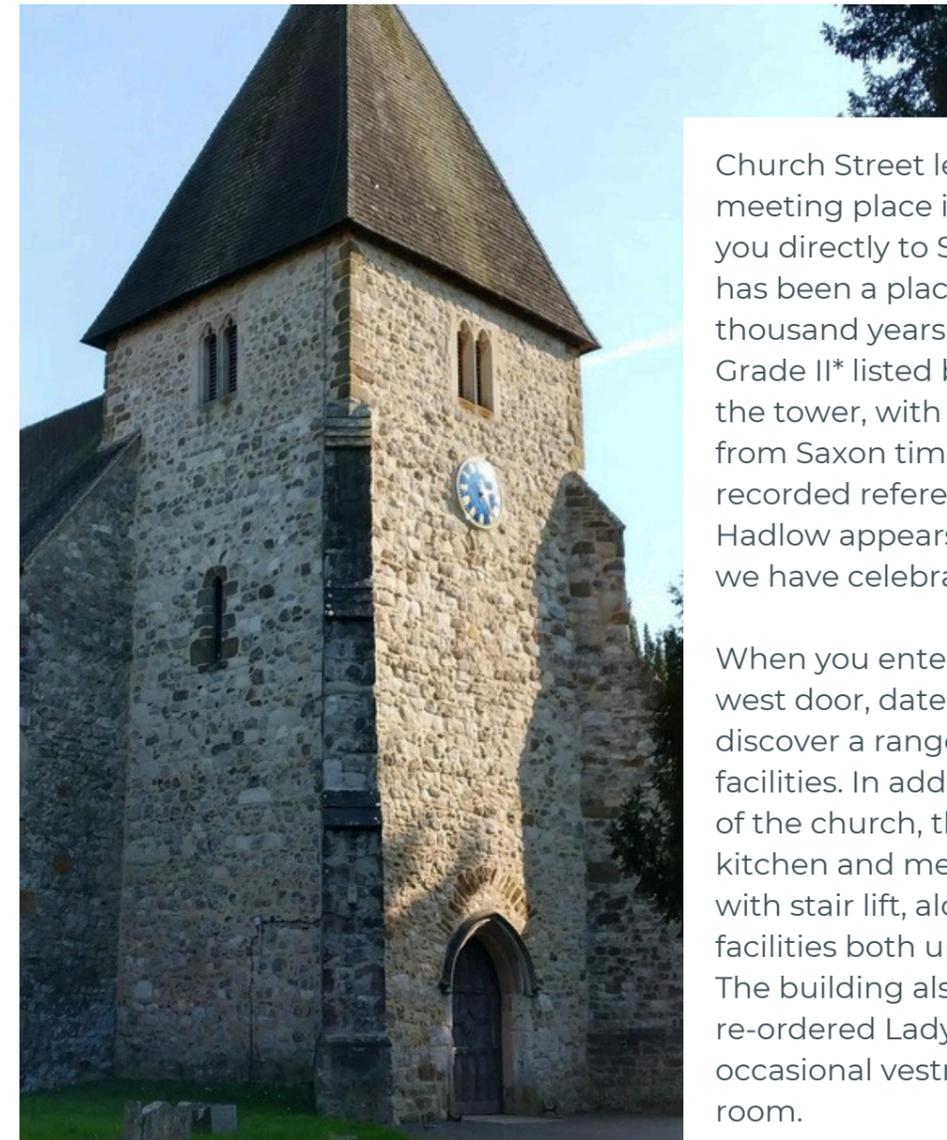
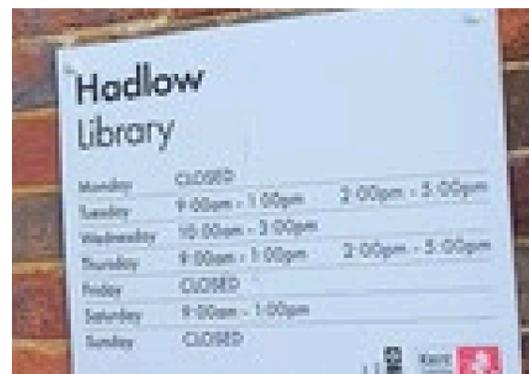
The village of Hadlow lies in the Medway Valley in Kent, four miles north-east of Tonbridge along the A26. It is conveniently located for access to the county town of Maidstone, Royal Tunbridge Wells, and Sevenoaks. Tonbridge has a mainline railway station with services to London and to the south coast, including Dover and Hastings.

Should you ever lose your way, Hadlow Tower is the perfect landmark. This fifty-metre-high Gothic folly is the tallest, best-preserved, and most distinctive of its kind in England, and was once part of the former Hadlow Castle. In the village square you will find a range of facilities, including a pharmacy, bakery, convenience store, post office, barber, hairdresser, vintage homeware and coffee shop, and takeaway. In the centre of the village there is also a dental practice, medical centre, library, and an osteopath.

The village has two pre-schools, a primary school, a secondary school, and Hadlow College, which offers further education in land-based studies. The surrounding countryside provides plenty of scope for walking and exercise. There are also numerous clubs and sports on offer, including bowls, baseball, and a cricket club.



There is a diversity of housing in the parish ranging from fifteenth century cottages and listed buildings through to more modern dwellings with a mixture of private, local authority and housing association accommodation.



Church Street leads off the central meeting place in the village and takes you directly to St Mary's Church. This has been a place of worship for over a thousand years, and the church is a Grade II\* listed building. The base of the tower, with its Saxon arch, dates from Saxon times, and the first recorded reference to a church in Hadlow appears in 975 AD. This year we have celebrated 1,050 years.

When you enter through the old oak west door, dated 1637, you will soon discover a range of more recent facilities. In addition to the main body of the church, there is an upstairs kitchen and meeting room, complete with stair lift, along with toilet facilities both upstairs and downstairs. The building also includes a recently re-ordered Lady Chapel, a vestry, an occasional vestry, and a choir robing room.



Hadlow is an expanding village of around 4,000 people, including approximately 350 residents in the neighbouring hamlet of Golden Green.

In the recently published draft Local Plan, the village is expected to grow by 371 dwellings, with further development proposed across the wider parish.

Of the 93 people currently on the church electoral roll, 66 are resident, with 27 coming from Tonbridge and other areas outside the parish. Attendance on Sundays averages around fifty-five.

However, it is the members of the congregation who truly reflect the spirit of the village. "Open, welcoming and friendly" is how one new worshipper described the St Mary's Church experience.

But isn't that exactly what you would expect from a church that continues to thrive after a thousand years?



# Tonbridge Archdeaconry

It is with great delight that I commend this profile for the parish of Hadlow - a place where an ambitious and welcoming congregation, strong lay leadership, and a significant new diocesan role come together to create a genuinely exciting opportunity for ministry.

The appointment carries an exciting new wider responsibility as part of the Diocesan Vision and Strategy. St Mary's has been chosen as the base for the Diocese's new Rural Champion role, connecting the parish to rural ministry across the whole of Rochester Diocese through its relationship with Hadlow Agricultural College. This gives the parish a significance and visibility well beyond Hadlow.

Another important opportunity is the PCC's project - Vision 2030 - an ambitious plan to reorder the building for twenty-first century worship and community use.

The challenges here are acknowledged by the congregation. The church is seeking to connect more deeply with younger families and the church's outreach will require continued prayer and work. The building project will require energy and fundraising alongside the demands of parish life.

As Vicar here you will have the support of colleagues within the Paddock Wood Deanery, one of six that lie within the Tonbridge Archdeaconry. The Archdeaconry is one of three within the wider Diocese of Rochester. Together, across the Archdeaconry and diocese, we are working to grow missional churches, leaders and disciples that are younger and more diverse across the many different contexts into which God has placed us.



# Rural Champion

As part of the Rochester Diocesan Vision, new Champion roles are being created to support and strengthen key areas of mission and ministry across the diocese. One of these is the Rural Champion, a new role based at St Mary's Church, Hadlow, resourced for one day a week.

St Mary's, Hadlow has been chosen as the base for this role because of its close connection with Hadlow College, placing it at the heart of rural life, education and networks within the diocese.

The Rural Champion will serve rural parishes across the Rochester diocese, offering encouragement, connection and practical support. Working collaboratively with clergy and lay leaders, the role will help share good practice, foster mission-shaped approaches suited to rural contexts, and strengthen links between parishes, deaneries and the wider diocesan vision.

# The Vicarage

The vicarage itself is a substantial four bedroomed house dating from 1987. It is well-appointed and located just along the road from the village square it offers spacious accommodation with its own large secluded private garden. It also has a modern kitchen, utility room, office, and garage.



# Message from the Bishop of Rochester

Welcome to the Diocese of Rochester and thank you for your interest in this exciting role. Our parishes and congregations are the beating heart of the Diocese and are central to our desire for churches to flourish and God's kingdom to grow across all our wonderfully diverse communities.

## **Our vision**

As a Diocese we share the vision that we are Called Together to change, serve and grow the church across the areas of Medway, north and west Kent and the London Boroughs of Bromley and Bexley.

Much work has taken place to understand what these three themes mean for the life of the Diocese and our priorities, and to define what and where resources will need to be allocated to deliver them.

Through prayerful engagement and discernment, what has begun to emerge is an understanding that we are a community:

## **Seeking first the Kingdom of God, and called together by God to change, serve and grow with compassion, courage and creativity.**

- **Change** is about the need for us to adapt in a changing world, so that our churches can play their full part in serving God and drawing people once more to faith in Jesus Christ.
- **Serve** is about the attitude we need to adopt if we are to earn and gain that cherished place in people's hearts and at the heart of our communities.
- **Grow** is about what God wants to bring about in us and through us, as people growing into the likeness of Christ, and as churches where people are being drawn to follow Jesus through our words and through our deeds.

## **Our objectives**

Within this overall vision, our emerging key objectives are to grow missional churches, with missional leaders and missional disciples, that are:

- Growing younger and more diverse,
- Growing numerically, spiritually, financially and in impacting their communities, and in turn are
- Creating a safe and healthy culture for all

This is the latest phase in developing our strategic plans, which are vital to our seeking to grow the kingdom of God across the areas of Medway, north and west Kent, and the London Boroughs of Bromley and Bexley.

Central to these plans is sustaining and growing a flourishing and well-resourced parish structure, so as to enable our local churches to take their full and rightful place at the heart of their communities: serving God and serving the people, loving God and showing his love in and to our communities.

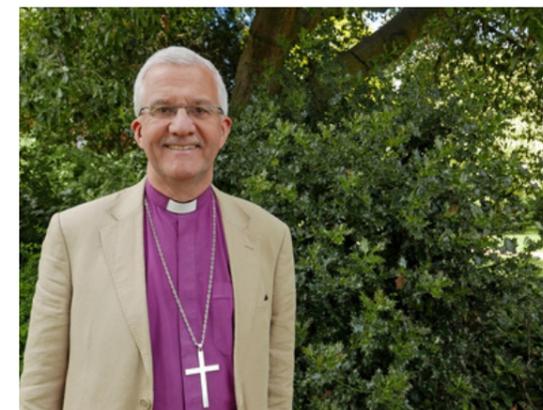
Inevitably there will be some parishes where it is simply not possible for ministry to continue in the same form as previously. In such cases, this may mean that we need to consider the possibility of pastoral reorganisation, but where that does happen it is against the background of our commitment to maintaining as far as possible the number of stipendiary clergy in the Diocese. At the same time, in each and every place we are committed to lay people and clergy ministering in partnership together, and this itself requires us to think creatively about our patterns of ministry. All this is part of seeking to fulfil our shared vision:

## **Seeking first the Kingdom of God, we are called together by God to change, serve and grow with compassion, courage and creativity.**

If this vision excites you and you believe God may be calling you to this role, then we would love to hear from you.

With my prayers and best wishes,  
+Jonathan

The Rt Revd Dr Jonathan Gibbs  
Bishop of Rochester



# St. Mary's Church Today

We have a can-do attitude and are willing to try new things to keep the church thriving.

During the previous vacancy, we saw no reduction in what the church was doing or in attendance at our services. In fact, there was a small growth in the congregation. With an experienced leadership team, we are confident that St Mary's will be in a strong position for whoever is appointed to this role.

St Mary's is currently a single-parish benefice, which is increasingly unusual. Hadlow is known for offering choral, Eucharistic-based worship in a variety of traditional and modern styles. We have a main 10am service on Sundays and a mid-week Communion on Wednesday mornings. We also run Messy Church five to six times a year.

## Occasional Offices

	Baptisms	Weddings	Funerals
2025	6	0	9
2024	11	2	7
2023	11	3	12

## Church Support

A full and supportive PCC with various sub-committees.

All offices filled with experienced people, including two Churchwardens, a Treasurer and a PCC Secretary

An Anna Chaplain who hosts regular coffee mornings and occasional lunches for seniors, and supports the Home Visiting and Communion teams.

A paid part-time Administrator who oversees parish administration and coordinates the monthly village newsletter delivered to every home.

## Church Finances

In recent years we have not been able to meet the full Parish Offer requested by the Diocese, but our financial position remains stable.

Our annual income now exceeds £80,000, and we consistently generate a surplus.

We faithfully honour the amount we commit to each year, and we have been able to make an additional voluntary contribution to the Diocese at the end of each of the last several years.

## The Church and Community

- The organ built by Alfred Monk is one of the finest village church organs in the south-east
- The Church tower has eight bells and there is an active band of expert Bell Ringers
- St Mary's Church has a strong musical tradition with a robed choir
- The previous Vicar led regular assemblies in the local primary school and hosted their annual carol service and harvest festival.
- We have strong links with the local secondary school and college. This includes services of remembrance and carol services.
- We also have links with others in the local community, including the Scout Group, the Parish Council, the village shops and the Roman Catholic Church
- A Hospital Transport Service for anyone in the village who needs help getting to and from hospital appointments
- World Mission links with Kibakwe in the Diocese of Mpwapa in Tanzania, the Delhi Brotherhood and Mission Aviation Fellowship.
- The church hosts a well attended carol service in the village square on Christmas Eve. Now in its 43<sup>rd</sup> year and we still see more people every year.
- We support the village community by working with the parish council, organising and publishing a newsletter that reaches 1400 homes every month.



The congregation values our Eucharistic style of worship, many of whom come from outside the village as a result. But we recognise the opportunity for other forms of service to make worship at St Mary's more accessible to those unfamiliar with church as well as to those from different traditions.

In the last few years we have explored a range of new services including Pet Blessing, Backpack Blessing, Toy and Teddy Bear Blessing and Easter Vigil.

We like to think that we are upfront and honest so I can say that our hope is for a leader who is not afraid to try something new.

The PCC is committed to supporting the exploration of new forms of worship and recognises that not every initiative will succeed, but we value creativity and learning together.



### **Prayer Ministry**

Over the last year we have introduced Prayer Ministry twice a month during our standard Eucharistic service. A small team, led by the Revd Christopher Miles (retired), offers prayer and anointing. We hope to expand this with a prayer request box that the team will review weekly.

### **Lay Ministry**

Over the last few months we have started the process of developing lay leadership and lay-led services. Our Church Warden, John, has recently completed the Diocese short course on Leading Worship and hopes to be authorised to lead some services of the word soon.

We have had authorisation from the Bishop to have one service of the word per month in place of a Eucharistic service.

# Church Activities

There is no hiding the fact that the average age of our congregation is on the higher side but that doesn't stop us from having lots going on. All of these activities are run by volunteers with some support from the incumbent.

## Coffee Pots and Tiny Tots

We have continued to welcome mums, dads, grandparents, babies and children every Wednesday morning from 10.30 – 12 noon. We aim to provide a safe environment where parents and other carers can meet informally while their babies and small children play. Tea, coffee and biscuits are provided for a small donation. Every week, there is a simple craft activity and we finish with a music session of action songs and musical instruments. Many of the families who attend make firm friendships which benefit both adults and children and extend far beyond the weekly meetings in church.

In the summer, a group of families returned to visit us. Their eldest children were about to start secondary school.

They sent us a card:

*'Thank you so much for everything you do to support local families. As new parents we were vulnerable and each sought a small piece of sanity and acceptance. Coffee Pots gave us this and introduced us to each other. You supported us and changed our children's futures. You gave us the 'village' to raise our children. The impact you have had on us is immeasurable.'*



## Messy Church

Messy Church provides a different way of worship for church members and an exciting outreach opportunity. Every craft activity is linked to a theme from a Bible story. We finish with a short act of worship followed by a simple shared meal. All ages are welcome. This year more than twenty children and families joined us to celebrate a very successful Messy Christmas, Messy Easter, a session exploring the creation story and another about God's love and one learning about saints. Although these sessions are run by a small team of regular volunteers, everyone from the congregation is invited to attend and experience this new way of exploring the Bible.



## Holiday at Home

This is a two day event held a couple times a year usually organised by our Anna Chaplain. It is an opportunity for some of the older members of our community to join together and engage in learning and crafts.

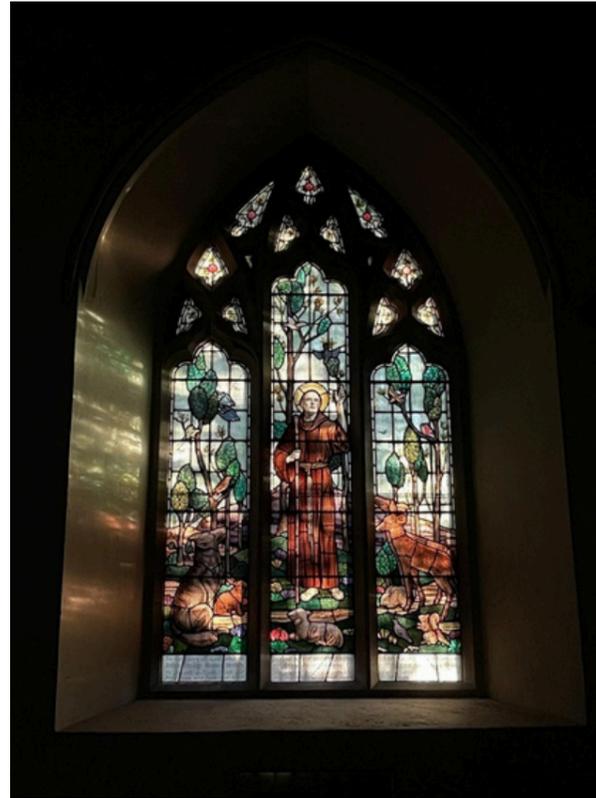


### Hadlow Carers Together

This relatively new group offers warmth, support and a listening ear to those who are carers themselves. Meetings are held twice a month in church.

### Café Plus

A welcoming group of local people who enjoy meeting for chat, craft activities, or simply to share a cup of tea. Sessions run twice a month on Wednesdays from 1 to 3 pm. Café Plus contributes to church life by providing displays and items for events and services throughout the year.



### Fundraising and Social Events

We also hold a range of events that raise funds for the church and outside charities, while engaging with the local community. These include concerts, performances, Scarecrow Trail, quizzes and social events.

### Kibakwe Link

As part of the Diocesan link with Tanzania, a team from St Mary's recently spent two weeks in our link parish of Kibakwe to reaffirm long-standing friendships and continue supporting one another in daily life.

# Vision 2030

Since 2022 we have been developing a project to improve the sustainability and inclusiveness of the church. The aim is to grow the church, adapt the building to suit twenty-first century styles of worship, allow flexible use of the space, ensure an inclusive welcome to all, and encourage participation in meeting the needs of our community.

Addressing the call to protect God's creation and meet Net Zero Carbon targets, we hope this work will help us connect with people of faith and those without, particularly young people and newcomers to Hadlow who care deeply about the environment.



With this, we hope to place the building at the centre of Village life.

In 2025 we issued a questionnaire, distributed via the parish newsletter, to the whole village, seeking further ideas and support for initial thoughts we had generated.

The outcome of this demonstrated strong backing for the project and significant ideas for priorities in the project development.

In addition to this, we have begun fund raising for the project and received in principle support for the first phase from Rochester Diocese and civic members from the Parish Council, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council and Kent County Council.

We recognise that the funding requirement is significant and that applications for grants from relevant parties will be required. To this end we have set up a 'Friends of St Mary's' group to help drive this forward, raise funding and awareness in the locality, and act as a conduit for understanding the views of the wider community.

Further information on the project can be found on the website.

# Our New Vicar



The Vicar of Hadlow is an important leadership role. It requires someone who is able to build teams and to delegate. Hadlow needs an incumbent with a pastoral heart as well as someone who is a good communicator.

We are a rural community in the heart of Kent and are looking for someone who will embrace rural life.

## Expected Qualities and Duties

- Be enthusiastic to include community leaders, the parish council, schools, and others
- Be supportive of women in ministry and inclusivity
- Take festival services for the schools and college as well as act as a chaplain for Hadlow College
- Be present in the community to engage with members of the parish
- Lead Hadlow traditions including Carols in the Square on Christmas Eve and the Walk of Witness on Good Friday
- To embrace the full scope of Generous Giving including time and talents
- Work with other churches and communities to care for the people of Hadlow, expressing God's love for all.
- Be someone who is pastoral and concerned with outreach
- Have a great sense of humour
- Be a collaborative leader who will enable and empower laity to grow in faith and develop their gifts
- Be a good organiser and delegator
- Be able to build a programme of appropriate services for the community
- Be keen to join in village life and encourage people to join in community events and worship with the Church