

IS GOD CALLING YOU TO BE OUR NEW VICAR?

We are looking for a Vicar who will be a good pastor to our churches, and who will nurture and develop the spiritual gifts within our congregations. Can you help us to reach out in new and relevant ways to our village communities in service, neighbourly care and witness? Can you lead us in inspiring and thoughtful worship, and deepen our discipleship?

THE BENEFICE OF HEADCORN AND THE SUTTONS

We are a group of four villages in the beautiful Weald of Kent. The Benefice was formed in 2007, and we have had two incumbents since then. We have grown closer together over the years through co-operation and friendship.



ADMINISTRATOR

We have an Administrator who works for 12 hours per week, mainly from home, but also from an office in Headcorn Church Vestry. The Benefice Ministry Rota is coordinated by the Incumbent with one of our churchwardens. Each rota covers a period of four months.

MINISTRY SUPPORT

There is a good group of active retired clergy in the Deanery, who are very willing to lead worship in our Benefice when asked. There is also a Lay Ministry Group, all eight of whom are involved with non-eucharistic worship leading. We have one member of our congregation in his first year of training as a Licensed Lay Minister.

BENEFICE SERVICES

Every fifth Sunday we come together for a Benefice Service at one of our churches in rotation.

CHURCHWARDENS

The six churchwardens are in frequent touch with each other and have regular meetings to discuss Benefice matters

A BRIEF LOOK AT OUR FOUR CHURCHES

HEADCORN

1: THE MISSION OF OUR CHURCH

Our Logo is 'following Christ together', and this appears on our Notice Sheet each week and in our Magazine each month.

Over the coming years we want to continue to build up a loving, prayerful and confident congregation that will be a powerhouse for witness and service.

We are looking for effective ways to integrate our young families into the main church congregation.

We live and worship in a medium-sized village, where there is a generous overlap between church and community. There are many joint activities with the village, including the annual Christmas tree festival. There is good care for the elderly with a weekly lunch club held in the village hall. Our Men's Breakfast and Women's Breakfast groups tackle issues relating to the world of work and social concern.

Sunbeams is our group for babies, toddlers, mums and other carers and meets every Friday.

Messy Church gives us exciting new contacts with young families in our village, and we are at present re-shaping the way we run this group.

Our Magazine Committee produces an attractive edition each month which is popular both in the church and in the wider village community.

Our Pastoral Group coordinates care for those who are ill, housebound, and in nursing homes.

Into this exciting mix of achievement and potential, we will welcome our new priest, to walk alongside us, and to inspire us with vision and leadership.

2: THE WIDER CONTEXT OF THE PARISH

Headcorn is one of the largest villages in the area with 6,000 residents. There is a well-mixed population of young families, working-aged people, and the retired. Housing is a mixture of owner-occupied and rented.

There are a significant number of commuters, as Headcorn has a main-line service to London Charing Cross every half-hour, and the journey time is approximately one hour. There is also a direct train service to Canterbury and Dover. There is a regular bus service to Maidstone and Tenterden.

Headcorn Primary School is situated close to the village centre and has recently been rated 'Good' by OfSTED. The village has a popular pre-school and a nursery has just been started. The nearby towns of Maidstone and Ashford have a mixture of boys' and girls' Grammar Schools, Comprehensive Schools and Sixth Form Colleges. The historic and picturesque towns of Tenterden and Cranbrook are also nearby with Comprehensive Schools.

The Village Hall is a thriving centre for many activities, with over 30 clubs and societies. The village has many sporting facilities including golf, cricket, football and tennis clubs. The old Methodist Church is now called the Heart of Headcorn and also has many community groups.

'Churches Together in Headcorn' include the Baptist, Catholic and Methodist congregations as well as ourselves. We have special times together in Lent and Holy Week, at Christmas, and during the Week of Prayer for Unity.

3: OUR WORSHIP

As well as all the major festivals the following is a summary of our regular services:

1st Sunday of the month: Café Church

A relaxed lay-led service lasting about 30 mins, preceded by light refreshments served from 9:30am. We also celebrate special festivals – Harvest, Mothering Sunday, Pet Service, Christingle – on first Sundays at 10am.

Other Sundays: Parish Communion at 10am

We use Common Worship, and a robed choir leads us in our singing.

Members of the Pastoral Group take Communion to our housebound communicants as requested.



We are busy through the year with baptism, wedding and funeral services, and the statistics about these can be seen in the Statistical Appendix at the end of this Profile.

There are 12 members on the PCC, and we meet five times a year apart from the Annual Parochial Church Meeting. Our finances are sound, and we have paid our Diocesan Share in full for many years. We are very grateful to the Friends and Fundraising Group of Headcorn Church who raise a significant sum each year and help us with many aspects of fabric repairs and ongoing maintenance costs. A summary of PCC accounts can be seen in the Statistical Appendix.

News about our church can be found in the regular monthly Magazine and on our Benefice web-site. <http://www.handschurches.org/>

4: OUR CHURCH BUILDING

The Parish Church stands at the west end of the village High Street, and is surrounded by the graveyard, which is not yet closed. The church is approached through a lychgate, built in 2000 to commemorate the new millennium.



The church dates largely from the 14th and 15th centuries and is in good order. We are currently in the process of modernising the kitchen servery, accessible toilet and choir vestry at the back of the church.

The tower has a ring of eight bells, which are also in good order. They are well maintained by the bellringers, with help when necessary, from the County Association.

5: THE VICARAGE

The Vicarage is situated in Oak Lane, towards the eastern end of the village. It was purchased and converted for use as a vicarage about twenty years ago, and is a pleasant, modern four bedroom detached house, with a reasonable sized garden and good parking facilities.



ST MARY'S, SUTTON VALENCE

Sutton Valence village lies between the parishes of East Sutton and Chart Sutton on the top of and on the southern slope of a steep escarpment running roughly east to west (the Greensand Ridge). The dominant building is Sutton Valence independent school which is on top of the hill overlooking the oldest part of the village. The busy A274 runs north to south and divides the village geographically, with the Church on the west side and the village on the east. North of the village and on the west side of the A274 is the well-supported village infant and primary school, directly opposite the co-educational independent school. An active, independent pre-School operates in the Youth Centre on the north side of the churchyard.

The village is in a conservation area and supports a 'castle ruin' (in reality, a small 12th Century Keep). Farming is a major industry and there are two popular pubs, a hairdresser, a (new) barber's shop and there is a rumour of a new cafe which will also sell second-hand books in the centre of the village. There are also three garages, two of which have shops. The village had a population of 1,863 in the 2021 census, although recent house-building will have increased this figure.

There is a large, well-equipped, and, consequently well-used village hall to the north of the village centre, two play areas (discounting the schools) and two areas of allotments, all well used. To the North there is a private nursing home. To the south of the village on the hill is a large social housing area some of which have been bought privately. This housing area is separated from the Church by both hill and A274.

Headcorn and Staplehurst train stations are a few miles to the south with regular services to London in one hour as well as Canterbury, Ashford International (although currently no 'international' trains stop at the station) and the Kent coast. Maidstone, the county town of Kent, lies six miles to the north so Sutton Valence has a relatively high proportion of commuters, both locally and to and from London. A bus service operates from Sutton Valence to Maidstone in one direction and to Headcorn and Tenterden in the other.

THE CHURCH

There are no Churches of any other denomination in the Parish, although Sutton Valence School has its own Chapel and a full-time lay Chaplain.

St Mary's Church is to the west of the main road just south of the primary school. Behind the Church is the youth centre which houses the local very successful pre-school. This building is owned by the Diocese and Scouts jointly and is run by a management committee.

The Church building is early Victorian (1830s) on the site of older Church buildings. It is in very good condition with dedicated funds for its maintenance, thanks to a sizeable legacy restricted to upkeep and maintenance of the church building. It easily seats 200. It has a vestry, two tower rooms – one on the ground floor and the other at the level of the glassed off west end gallery. This houses parish archive documents used to put on monthly local archive exhibitions set up by a parishioner. There is a kitchen with power and water, and a toilet dedicated by Rt Rev Trevor Willmott, then Bishop of Dover, on 18th December 2016, after a great deal of hard fund-raising work master-minded by a parishioner.



New lighting has also been installed throughout the Church. There is a good Victorian organ, much used. Responsibility for decorative maintenance of the Sanctuary rests with the Diocese of Rochester. A number of pews have been removed from the rear of the nave, making a useful area for coffee, meetings etc. there is also a comfortable seating area in part of this space with toys and child-size tables and chairs.

The regular Sunday service is the 10.00am Common Worship Holy Communion from specially prepared seasonal Orders of Service booklets. These services are sung, with hymns and a service setting. Bible readings and intercessional prayers are given by members of the congregation. The numbers at the Sunday morning service average 15 – 25, rising to between 50 and 100 for special services on Remembrance Sunday, and at Christmas (especially, in recent years, at the Christingle Service held on Christmas Eve afternoon – 2024 pictured) and Easter, when the congregation has a larger proportion of younger people. The age profile of the Sunday congregation reflects that of the village, and tends towards the more elderly and retired, although encouraging numbers of younger people and their parents are now being drawn into regular Church services through some outreach efforts.

MISSION AND OUTREACH

Home communion for the infirm has not hitherto been properly formalized, but contact has now been made with the Nursing Home, including the holding of regular monthly services, and with individual parishioners in their homes. This has been greatly appreciated by all those involved.

‘Preparing the Christingles’

Mission Action Plan

The PCC has put together a Mission Action Plan, with the aim of improving and developing our Ministry, Worship, Discipleship, Fellowship, Care, Inclusiveness and Celebration at St Mary’s Church. The general aims are to grow the spiritual life of the Church, to improve Worship and increase average attendance, to grow our ministry with families and children, and generally to make St Mary’s Church more relevant to the wider community. To seek to ensure that we are on the right lines, we have completed a SWOT Analysis assessing the internal and external factors that contribute to our relative advantages and disadvantages. The Analysis is aimed at highlighting our strengths, but also, and more critically, our weaknesses, as well as the barriers to the implementation of the plan.

In brief, we believe that our Strengths are the wonderful building, in good repair, with some relatively new facilities (kitchen and toilet installed in 2016), a small group of very active members of the congregation who keep it so, two Lay leaders for Services of the Word, held, at present, on one Sunday

each month, growing congregation numbers, consistently back to levels last seen about ten years ago, and magnificent church flower arrangements (although perhaps we should say ‘thank you’ more often).



Apart from not saying ‘thank you’ often enough, we perceive our Weaknesses to be a lack of car parking and the very busy main road separating the church from the larger part of the village, no Sunday School, and no children attending services on anything like a regular basis, a lack of ‘doers’ and a dependence on a very small, though willing, group, a lack of an active Church link with uniformed organisations, limited benefice ‘togetherness’ apart from joint services on fifth Sundays (so only three or four times a year), and no stipendiary ministry apart from the Vicar, so a lack of outreach and visibility of clergy in the village.

To balance the weaknesses, there are Opportunities, either pre-existing or ones we can create. We now lead short services in Sutton Valence Carehome once a month, taking the reserved sacrament. We intend to re-establish links with the village primary school (broken when a former head teacher declared that it was not a church school and broke previously active links), a new incumbent in in 2025/6 (hopefully), and several new and active members of the congregation.



We perceive the Threats as coming from the financial situation following the loss of a substantial part of the income from the telecommunications mast (see below), the ever-present risk of the closure of one of the three Sutton Churches given the ageing population (itself a threat), the debilitating effect of a possible lengthy period of vacancy, and, while the small group of active members of the congregation keep the place upright, this very smallness is a threat. We see this five year MAP as definitely “work in progress” and to an extent, aspirational. Measurement of progress against the Plan is on the agenda for each and every PCC meeting.

As part of establishing links with local uniformed organisations, the local Suttons Cubs group recently came into church for their Faith badge. Among other things, they were let loose on the organ, discovering what sounds different stops can make (all under the close supervision of the church organist!). We were also able to provide some gardening experience for older pupils of Sutton Valence School in the churchyard, again under close supervision!

FINANCE AND GIVING

St Mary’s, like other churches in the Benefice and indeed the wider church community, continues to face many financial challenges in the coming years not least of which are reducing collections, donations and fund raising as well as increased running costs, including our parish share.

Unlike other churches in the Benefice, however, we have been severely impacted by the significant reduction in our legacy mast income. The annual mast income of £10,000 is set to reduce to £3,250 p.a. in 2025, with a one off initial receipt of £3,500 as a transitional concession. The PCC are reviewing all options to mitigate this situation but we will inevitably have to rely on the local community and the goodwill of the Diocese to support our church.

As we move into 2025 we have a relatively healthy current account despite experiencing our first deficit in 2024. Regular banker's orders and collections plus related tax refunds were marginally down year on year. Donations, fund raising and fees earned were also down.

Costs were up in the year including our Parish share, a commitment that we met in order to support the important work of the Diocese. Like other Churches, St Mary's has relatively high, inflation driven, fixed costs in terms of insurances, clergy and benefice expenses and utilities and our parish share, along with everyone else's, will inevitably increase each year. It is encouraging that the Diocese are looking into the allocation methodology of the Parish share which may yield savings.

We are very fortunate to have a sizeable residual legacy, the majority of which is placed in a Diocese-managed fund. However, this legacy is restricted and it can only be used for repairs and maintenance to the Church fabric of the building, its permanent fixtures, and the Churchyard. There is also a small deposit account, which is also restricted, from which St Mary's has a commitment to maintain certain graves in the churchyard.

Despite an ongoing difficult financial position, the PCC continue to support the good work performed in the community and maintain the historic structure and fixtures and fittings of St Mary's church and look forward to the appointment of a new Vicar to lead not only our financial sustainability but our worship within our community.

Fund raising from functions such as the Christmas Fair, coffee mornings, organ recitals by the church organist and other local organists, as well as other musical events, has continued to bring in useful income. We aim to hold more musical events, in particular, to try to offset some of the loss of mast rental referred to above.



ST PETER AND ST PAUL

EAST SUTTON



If you walk from Sutton Valence to Ulcombe, you will pass the beautiful and ancient church of St Peter & St Paul, East Sutton.

This small church sits on the Greensand Ridge, perched on the hill overlooking the Weald of Kent.

There was a wooden church on this site in about 1086 AD. It is now a building of Kentish Ragstone, mostly 13th Century which has been extended over time. It features 14th C additions of the North and south chapels, while the tower and porch are 15th C. We have a window with inserts of medieval glass and a large brass of the Filmer family. The church was once the chapel for the Filmer family who resided in East Sutton Park opposite. We have visitors from all over the world wanting to see their family origins. East Sutton Park is now a rehabilitation female prison. Our church cleaners are volunteers from the prison.

We have working gas lights and a new set of lights in the roof funded by one of the congregation. There is a Norman font and a Jacobean pulpit. The church is Grade 1 listed.

The tower has 6 bells in good condition. There is a combined team of bell ringers, visiting campanologists come from all over to ring them.

A closed churchyard surrounds the church, this is being maintained by the generosity of a villager and has recently been planted with hundreds of daffodils. A toilet has recently been installed at the far end of the graveyard, by a substantial donation from a local family.

Across the road is the 'new' graveyard and War Memorial, and the path leading to the memorial has been re planted.

Working parties are organised when necessary to clean gutters and clear fallen trees etc.

The church is part of a small hamlet, although the parish extends some distance south, there are approximately 150 homes and about 400 people. There are several large farms, an assortment of businesses and good commuter links. A popular golf runs alongside the graveyard with another golf course in the south of the parish!

At present, there are 40 on the electoral register, from these there is a small group of attendees.

The local village hall 150 m along the lane was once the school. Events are held there.

The church is popular for marriages, baptisms and funerals, we have a Ladies choir for these events.

Although the congregation is small, at Christmas time we can be nearly at capacity, the church holds about 110 people. There is a band of flower arrangers and a kneeler group, now making pew cushions. The choir sings at special events, not only at East Sutton but combines with the other churches for some services.

The PCC works well together. We have a set of skills between us and support each other. The churchwardens have been brought together by the Interregnum.

Fund raising throughout the year takes the form of coffee mornings and afternoon teas. Carols by Candlelight, Ride and Stride and the Christmas Fayre.

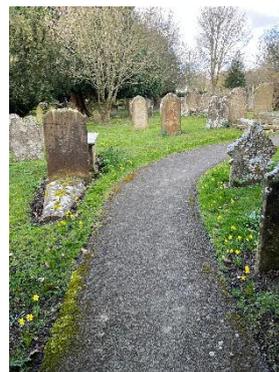
Services are on a monthly rota

2nd Sunday 8am Holy Communion

3rd Sunday 11am Themed Family Service and Holy Communion

4th Sunday 6pm Evensong

5th Sunday 10 am Joint Benefice service (rotating)



Harvest Festival, Remembrance, Carol Service, Christmas Day Family Service and Mothering Sunday

We are fortunate to have 3 people to play the organ and Lay readers and retired clergy, who are serving us well during the Interregnum.

Our church and congregation are small but there is a big heart here, we are friendly and welcoming. It is a hub in a village with little centre and it is supported by people who are generous in their giving.

East Sutton church has its own personality, a feeling that it has been a holy place for so long and people pay homage to its antiquity and beauty.

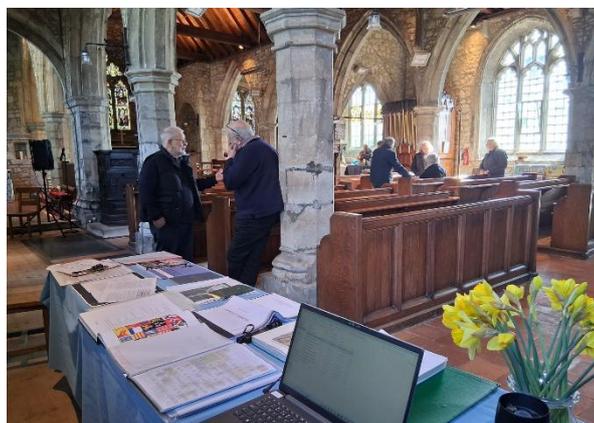
FINANCE

Our annual income is currently about £15k for the general 'Freewill' account, with an additional 34.5k in a designated 'Fabric' fund from covenants, donations and investments.

Approximately 75% of the income is donated either from covenants or church collections, plus associated Gift Aid. The majority of the balance arises from fundraising events and parochial fees, of which the latter may vary each year.

The major item of expenditure is the Parish share 311,600 in 2024. Insurance costs £3.3 pa. we have been running at a small deficit for some years.

General funds, currently run total about £1.5k and there is £37k in the Fabric fund. There are smaller, restricted funds, some dating back centuries, totalling £22k.



ST MICHAELS

CHART SUTTON

St Michael and All Angels Church sits proudly on the Greensand Ridge looking South with magnificent views of the Weald of Kent, the famously named 'Garden of England'



It is adjacent to Chart Place, Sutton Valence Preparatory School and a farm complex exhibiting architectural styles adopted from the lucrative Dutch wool trade era.

A significant part of Chart Sutton parish is given over to farming including apples, cherries, strawberries, cereals as well as livestock. The fruit sector especially attracts many overseas workers who are housed on site

Community activities in the parish are largely centred in the Village Hall which very recently has undergone a major refurbishment bringing it into the 21st Century with external heat pumps, solar panels and EV chargers. Activities include yoga classes, dog training, art classes, dance classes, pilates, short mat bowls, a sewing group, various committee gatherings including Parish Council and Benefice meetings. It also hosts a couple of services each year

There is also a Memorial Playing Field which is regularly used for sports and community activities as well as a children's play area.

The Village Green hosts our carol singing and sale on the green activities which assists in our desire to promote church and village integration

The Church

The site has been used for Christian worship for over a thousand years. The current church building dates from the late 18th Century although the tower survives from earlier years. The building is generally in good condition with no major items of concern contained in its quinquennial report.

It was rewired a few years ago and the carpets have been replaced. A contract has just been entered into for new heating pads to be installed into the pews at some considerable expense. There is a Church clock which works and strikes. The tower contains six bells which are regularly rung by the active bell ringing team (being a joint team with East Sutton) and also visiting ringers. The musical accompaniment is provided by a modern electric keyboard and portable CD player.

Services

Services are currently limited to two evensongs per month, plus a number of services held by the School during term time. In addition there are some Holy Communion services often linked with special occasions such as Easter and Christmas. In September each year, a 'Battle of Britain' remembrance service is held by the Headcorn Branch RAF Association in commemoration of a pilot who crash landed in the village. There is a memorial ground in one of the orchards nearby where the plane landed.

In addition, Two services a year are held in the Village Hall , one a carol service and the other a pancake service prior to Lent , both involving refreshments and both of which attract good attendance from the village.

The Benefice also run a Friday night compline service which is hosted by St Michael's , plus short monthly Bible discussion group.

Finances

The Church finances are solvent with £27,000 on deposit at the Bank. The Parish Share has been paid in full and on time for many years

There are a number of fund raising events in the Parish involving our small Village Green, and various parishioners' gardens where parties are held.

The Future

The PCC is keen to develop further the Church's engagement with the local community which in recent years has diminished somewhat. There are various reasons to believe that the future could be bright at Chart Sutton with its potential developed as follows

- The generosity of the local residents is significant as witnessed by the heating being primarily funded by them
- Sutton Valence School including the Preparatory School located next to the Church value the facilities provided by our Church as evidenced by these words from James Thomas the Headmaster :

' It is such a joy and privilege to be able to use St Michael's Church so often with our pupils from Sutton Valence Preparatory School. It is a beautiful spot steeped in history and our many services there throughout the year are enhanced by their taking place at this spiritual gem . It feels like an integral part of our lives and is hugely appreciated by staff , pupils and parents. '

We would like to further develop this relationship and give the pupils of the junior school at Sutton Valence the opportunity to have the experience of developing their Christian faith in an authentic setting

- The acoustics in the Church are good and suitable for concerts given by choirs and instrumentalists .. Parking is limited at the Church but the School has offered us facilities in their large car park nearby.
- Much of the village focus is on the churchyard and the family graves of local residents . We run monthly maintenance sessions during the summer which encourages local villagers to come and help
- A more pro-active line could be adopted to reach out to some of our less accessible inhabitants eg the fruit pickers who hitherto have largely kept themselves insulated from our community
- Chart Sutton is not situated in a poor or deprived area of our Country and there are pockets of affluence in our community. Many of these residents are not connected to the Church and we would love to try to connect more deeply with these residents and the wider community

