

## **The Apple Tree Room**

The Apple Tree Room is now weatherproof with the approved guttering and weather boards fitted. We now move to the interior work starting with insulation and flooring. This work will be undertaken by ECJ Builders - who completed the exterior. We have approved electrical and plumbing contractors, Everett Electrical and Everett Plumbing to complete the interior work. It is estimated that we require £38k to complete this work. Landscaping, fence installation etc will be undertaken by ourselves with materials provided for free by Notcutts.

We are seeking grants from the National Churches Trust, The Benefact Trust and the Diocese's Missional Property Fund. There have also been pledges of funds from members of the congregation. We await to hear about our grant applications before we call on these pledges.

This interior work will take 6-8 weeks to complete so 2026 is seen as our target completion year for this venture - one way or another. The sooner, the better.

Richard Dove Churchwarden

## **Baby and Toddler**

We've continued to have a fantastic time with an energetic group of pre-schoolers. As ever, it's wonderful to see the children develop from wide-eyed babies to confident toddlers (and beyond) who know all the words and actions and who leave the church each week confidently surrounded by God's love. Inevitably we lose children as they head off to school - though they're always welcome back during the holidays - and we've seen a number of new (and very little) faces as people move to the village. In response, we're considering a new regular morning slot to better fit in with the children's lunchtime naps.

Nick Ashbee

## **Bell ringers**

Our strong band of bellringers ring for Sunday morning services and for weddings and special occasions. We welcome other ringers from local towers to Thursday practice nights, when we often have up to 14 attendees. Albert Gordon (whose daughter, Julia, has started learning), Robin Hughes, and Jeff Rowley are very experienced ringing teachers who have helped our four enthusiastic learners from East Malling make good progress, two of whom, Paul Rodman and Suzanne Ballard have been elected as members of the Kent County Association of Change Ringers. East Malling ringers assist at Boxley and Aylesford for Sunday morning services. We also help out at weddings and funerals locally if requested. Our ringers attend other towers during the week for their practices and this helps increase ringing experience as all bells are different.

Weddings - the bells were rung for 5 weddings this year

Special ringing

30 minutes of rounds, call changes, plain hunt, whole pull plain hunt and Bob Doubles was rung to commemorate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE Day on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2025 by a band of 11 ringers and to mark the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VJ day on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2025, 8 ringers rang 30 minutes of rounds, call changes and plain hunt.

The bells were rung half-muffled before the Remembrance Sunday service and all 6 bells were used to ring in the New Year (2026) at midnight on 1<sup>st</sup> January.

### Quarter peals

A band of ringers from the Hadlow area rang a quarter of 1440 of 5 spliced minor methods (London, Wells, Cunecastre, Lincoln and Coldstream) on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2025 (organised by Phil Jarvis)

Ringers from All Saints Maidstone, rang a quarter peal of 1320 Cambridge Surprise Minor on 6<sup>th</sup> September 2025 to mark the East Malling Beer Festival and to celebrate the birthday of Karen Lebon (organised by Mike Birkbeck)

### Visitors since last APCM report

Seventeen Beavers from the Blacklands colony, with 3 leaders and 2 parents, visited the church and bell tower on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2025.

Ringers from Ash-next-Sandwich included our tower and bells in their "Ash Dash".

Other visitors have included ringers from Otham, Barming, East Farleigh, Milton Regis and Boxley, four residents from Gransden Road, East Malling and the wife of a West Malling ringer.

Afternoon tea and tower tours were held on 20<sup>th</sup> July.

### Tower maintenance

Our team continue to monitor the safety and good repair of the bells, as well as looking for leaks in the roof. We clean all floors of the tower regularly.

Richard Yates, assisted by Sue Payne and Robin Hughes, fitted a new battery for emergency lighting in the ringing chamber.

The Tower captain is now Jeff Rowley who took over from Sue Payne at the Bell AGM in October 2025. Sue stepped down after about 20 years as captain.

Sue Payne, previous Tower Captain

## **Choir Report**

The choir has had another busy year, singing at Sunday services both at East Malling and at Larkfield. We also sang at various weddings and funerals, often augmented by members of Aylesford church choir and by 'choir friends' from the village. As in previous years, we sang at Evensong for the local branch of the Red Cross of Constantine, as well as singing at the Carol Service for the Knights Templar, both groups very much appreciated our musical contributions.

At Christmas, the choir sang beautifully, moving seamlessly from the energy of 'Joys Seven' and 'Tomorrow shall be my Dancing Day' to the elegant simplicity of 'O come O come Emmanuel'. As ever, superb contributions from Nick Bland on the organ, our own brass ensemble and a selection of soaring descants made our Christmas services something truly special.

Our choral offering for Palm Sunday this year was Haydn's Little Organ Mass, and Mozart's Ave Verum, both set in a Service of Reflection. The Little Organ Mass was new repertoire for many of us, but the choir rose admirably to the challenge and delivered a wonderful performance of both. Again, we were delighted to welcome 'choir friends' to sing with us, and have Nick Bland accompany us, for which we are always very grateful.

As ever, I would like to thank every member of the choir for their wonderful singing throughout the year. And of course, a huge thank you to Sue, for being an amazing deputy.

Anna Ashbee, choir director

## **Church opening and the Biscuit Club.**

On most Wednesdays, following the Morning Prayer service, the church remained open from 10am to 1pm, overseen by a group of volunteers who welcomed visitors and offered refreshments.

Some visitors had come to see the architecture or seek quietness. Some had come to renew old associations with the church, or to contact the Vicar. Others came needing comfort and encouragement which we were privileged to offer. One visit was appreciated so much that it subsequently led to a very kind legacy. Days without visitors were rare.

Meanwhile, our group carried out any general maintenance jobs required in both the church and the Apple Tree Room. It also provided opportunity for fellowship, mutual support and consumption of biscuits, for which it seems to have become renowned, hence the label of 'Biscuit Club'.

At Christmas, the 'Club' was involved in a formally advertised outreach, led by Rev. Mandy, offering mulled wine and mince pies.

Anyone who wishes to join us on Wednesday mornings would be most welcome.

David Chambers, Churchwarden

## **Deanery Synod Report**

The Malling Deanery Synod has met three times during the year. After prayers, each meeting begins with an introduction to the parish where the meeting is being held. The February meeting was held at St. Lawrence Mereworth. Rev. Gary Townsend outlined the work of the parishes of Mereworth, Wateringbury and West Peckham. Matthew Girt, the Diocesan Secretary, shared the Diocesan Vision.

The May meeting, held at All Saints church, Snodland, was addressed by Bishop Jonathan who continued with the Diocesan Vision and answered some questions.

The October meeting was held at Holy Trinity Larkfield, when Rev Canon Pamela Ive spoke about vocational courses available in the Diocese, after Rev. Mandy Clampin had given a thorough introduction to the parish and her vision for the Benefice.

Other topics in the year have included healing and wholeness courses, environment and Eco church initiatives, safeguarding and clergy moves – Rev. Mark Montgomery moved from St. Gabriels Kings Hill to Paddock Wood benefice, Rev. Kelly Parsons had moved to Otford.

Deanery Synod posts are open for election at this year's APCM.

Sue Payne, Deanery Synod Rep.

## **Report on the Fabric and goods of the church of St. James the Great March 2025-February 2026**

There were sporadic leaks in the roof of the tower and, on one occasion, at the west end of the nave north arcade. There is also a damp area at the south side of the chancel arch and a suspiciously discoloured area high on the wall of the north aisle was confirmed as damp when a small piece of plaster fell.

There is some satisfaction in that these events were limited despite January and February 2026 being among the wettest on record.

The policy to apply sealant to damaged areas of the roof membrane and the gutters in general, continues. Removing plant debris from the roof and clearing the drainage hopper heads and downpipes is done as required.

The external Sacristy door was replaced by one constructed of solid oak, supplied and fitted by Suffolk Country Oak. The previous door had become fragile and been further damaged in an attempted break-in. The accompanying iron gate, also damaged in the attempted break-in, being no longer necessary, has been removed.

The southern-most main West door, which had become difficult to operate because the hangings were worn, was freed by raising it. This was done by insertion of 10mm steel rings in the hinges.

Emergency lighting batteries have been replaced on the tower staircase and in the ringing chamber.

A satisfactory gas safety inspection took place on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2025 and a safety certificate was issued. The heating boilers were also serviced, but four of the system's circulation pumps were found to have seized and subsequently were replaced. The operating parameters of one of the boilers required resetting in October, possibly because of a power surge after an outage.

The latest Quinquennial Architecture Report drew attention to the condition of the Twisden Monuments on the chancel walls, so a professional conservation inspection was commissioned. A very detailed and interesting report was produced by Arte Conservation Ltd. and may be consulted if anyone is interested.

The sound system was further improved by the addition of a 12-channel audio mixer, kindly donated by Ros Connors of radio station Gateway 97.8. This allows individual control of the microphones. The unit has been placed halfway along the nave in a free-standing desk, kindly supplied by Richard Yates. This allows the operator to be fully aware of all service proceedings.

The short wooden ladder accessing the bell floor of the tower was modified by a carpenter (known to the bellringers) following comments in the Quinquennial Architect's report.

In July, Rev. Mandy's name was added to the list of parish incumbents (our first lady vicar) and the board was re-positioned on the nave north wall. The contact details on the freestanding church notice board were also updated. Our thanks to John Weddell for these additions.

Minor repairs to the south porch roof were kindly carried out by the contractors tiling the roof of the Apple Tree Room.

Work on the Apple Tree Room continued as funds became available and there is now a water-tight and secure building awaiting internal fittings. Details are described in a separate report.

Elsewhere in the churchyard, trees along the south boundary wall were cut by professionals (Tree Monkeys), with Borough Council approval, as was a conifer which had encroached on the church chancel wall.

On the north boundary, two split-trunk Prunus trees each shed a large branch in storms and it is planned that these trees, along with a third, will be felled.

In March 2025 the brown rubbish bin and a black one disappeared suspiciously. The contents of the brown bin had been left behind. Replacements were eventually obtained and we now have two brown and two black bins. They have all been professionally labelled thanks to signwriter John Weddell.

A section of railing alongside the footpath at the east end of the churchyard became detached (circumstances unknown) and has been re-secured with chains.

A churchyard working party took place on 11<sup>th</sup> October and a skip was filled with plant material.

As in previous years, the grass and edgings were carefully and sympathetically maintained by the Parish Council contractor, to whom we record our gratitude.  
David Chambers, Churchwarden

# Flower Arrangers Report

We are currently 10 ladies with help from a long-standing member when her health allows. Our number is slowly dwindling, in the main due to the aging of our team members. We do take action to encourage new arrangers and do not place any requirements on their skills, we are happy to train novices.

The organisation and time required prevents us from holding flower festivals but on occasions we do support Holy Trinity church. We can provide wedding flowers if requested, for which we ask for the cost of the flowers and a small donation towards our funds. We also, on request from members of the congregation or wider community, put in place Memorials; again, we ask for the cost of the flowers.

We provide a suitable plaque for such Memorials.

Our arrangers are split into two teams and we work on a rota basis which means, on average, each lady arranges once a month. In addition, all our arrangers come together to decorate the church with flowers for the four main festivals; Easter, Pentecost, Harvest and Christmas. We do not place flowers in church during Lent or Advent (except for the Advent Candle Wreath).

Each week we ensure there are two arrangements in church, but often, with overlap, there are more. Watering mid-week and preserving and re-vamping existing arrangements keeps the costs down and helps with more flowers on show.

Our main fundraiser, to support those who claim for the cost of flowers and for general necessary expenditure such as oasis and repair or replacement of pedestal stands, is to host a session of the Summer Afternoon Teas in church; we also run a plant stall at that time mainly supplied by one of our flower arrangers. The cakes are supplied by the flower arranging teams. Occasionally we receive donations from members of the congregation.

For information on Weddings contact:

Sue Payne on 07922171546 or email: [paynes48@hotmail.com](mailto:paynes48@hotmail.com)

For Admin and general enquiries contact:

Barbara Trimmer on 07946543017 or email: [barb.r@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:barb.r@hotmail.co.uk)

## The Friends of St James'

The Friends of St James the Great continues to grow in membership to support, in the words of the Constitution, 'the maintenance of the fabric and fixtures of the Parish Church and churchyard of St James the Great, East Malling'. A house-to-house leaflet distribution campaign during the past year has boosted numbers and encouraged activity, and we now have more than 120 members. We run regular coffee mornings on the first Saturday of each month for fundraising, and organise a popular annual Quiz Night (the next is in May) as well as planning a programme of events in future months including a visiting choir for a Concert in June, an evening of Folk Music in September, and a poetry evening, the date of which is being negotiated with the Poet Laureate, Simon Armitage. These latter events are all taking place in church, and for this reason we are funding new tables for use in church and in the Apple Tree Room, together with an outdoor storage facility for them. We have maintained a close interest in the progression of the Apple Tree Room, and although we are unable to contribute to any part of the capital project we hope to be able to assist with any interior furnishing which may be required. We have also made a loan to facilitate the exterior completion of the Apple Tree Room by the provision of guttering and other means of ensuring that the

building has been kept water-tight through the winter months, and are also planning to contribute towards the landscaping

We continue to be grateful for all who give generously of the time, not least the committee members, to ensure that The Friends can continue with their aim of assisting St James' Church as best we can – and, of course, new members are always welcome and encouraged!

Richard Dove, chairman

## Outreach

This year, we continued our pattern of craft cafes, with our Easter Cafe held on Good Friday and our Christmas Café on the first Sunday of Advent. Both were very well attended, and we were delighted to welcome many people to the church who are not regular attendees at Sunday services. We really enjoyed opening up the church to everyone in the community for these events, and I am very grateful to everyone who led craft activities, made cakes, moved furniture and generally made these events so successful.

We also opened the church for afternoon teas during the summer. These weekly events are always very popular, both with 'regulars' and with passers-by, as proven by the fact that we raised more than £1000 over the course of the summer! Thank you to everyone who hosted afternoon teas – it's a great opportunity not only for socialising but also for raising the profile of the church in the village.

We also trialled new informal worship occasions, in the form of Café Church and Pizza & Praise. Having run both for a while, it appears that combining the two formats could be the most effective way forward. The combined format is aimed at families and young people, and mixes refreshments (the pizza is always popular!) with bible readings, crafts and music. Thank you to all helpers who have supported these events, which are an important part of our outreach programme.

Anna Ashbee

## Safeguarding Report

The Parish of St James the Great, East Malling remains fully committed to implementing the House of Bishops' safeguarding policies and good practice guidance. The Parochial Church Council (PCC) has formally adopted the House of Bishops' Promoting a Safer Church: Safeguarding Policy Statement. This adoption is recorded in the PCC minutes and is reviewed annually to ensure continued compliance and good practice.

The parish safeguarding notice is prominently displayed in church alongside:

- A copy of the Safer Churches handbook
- Contact details for the Vicar, Parish Safeguarding Officer, and Diocesan Safeguarding Officer
- Diocesan tri-fold information cards - "Worried?" cards for young people, including QR codes linking directly to diocesan support and guidance

Safeguarding remains a standing agenda item at every PCC meeting. Regular safeguarding reports are provided by the Parish Safeguarding Officer,

Mrs Michala Neaves, or the Deputy Safeguarding Officer, Mrs Susanne Canham. This ensures ongoing monitoring, accountability, and timely action on any safeguarding matters.

All members of the PCC and clergy are currently up to date with their required safeguarding training and DBS checks. Renewals will be completed in accordance with Church of England safeguarding protocols and diocesan guidance. Safer recruitment principles continue to be followed for all roles involving children, young people, or vulnerable adults.