

# ST NICHOLAS'S CHURCH KIDBROOKE

## PARISH PROFILE



### 1: Summary

St Nicholas's Kidbrooke is a suburban parish in south-east London, centred on a small church built in the early 1950s. Our regular congregants are a mixture of local residents, some of whom now live elsewhere but return to this church because of past associations, and others who simply find the style of worship here helpful and the community supportive. We nevertheless see ourselves as a neighbourhood church, primarily concerned with serving those who live within the geographical parish.

We are looking for a man or woman to be our next Vicar, living in the vicarage adjoining the church; this is a spacious family house contemporary with the church, and is currently undergoing the customary vacancy refurbishment. We understand from the Diocese of Southwark that the post will be salaried on a part-time basis, the exact details to depend on the circumstances and wishes of the person appointed.

The impact of the church in the local community is far greater than the size of its regular congregation might suggest, and we believe that over the last 20 years our previous vicar began an expansion of mission and service which is set to continue. We can offer our new vicar experienced support in many administrative and practical areas, and we are confident that the post represents an excellent opportunity to pursue parish ministry alongside other work or study.

Our Mission Action Plan vision for the future:

*To be, and to be recognised as, a lively, warm and caring church that engages with wider concerns and reaches out to the local community, whatever their age or background, providing spiritual guidance and social support to all both on Sundays and throughout the week.*



2. Interior: photograph taken by Apollo Stained Glass to illustrate their new east end windows flanking the mural.

3. St Nicholas's seeks to be visible to, and engaged with, the surrounding community at all times. During the pandemic we held a number of services outdoors.

*'St Nicks church and community welcomed me into their fold when I was at my lowest and needed support.'*

*'The church has changed my life.'*



## 2: The wider context

St Nicholas's is a parish within the Charlton deanery and the Archdeaconry of Lewisham and Greenwich, which in turn belong to the Woolwich area of the Diocese of Southwark. This diocese covers a fascinatingly varied section of Greater London, upon which many influences have left a mark: the fact that within living memory some of this area did not regard itself as belonging to London at all, so that its local centres retain a strong sense of individuality; the impacts of seafaring and the military past; the geographical realities that it is very awkward to cross the river this side of Tower Bridge and that we do not have the Underground, which lead south-east Londoners to feel somewhat detached from the rest of the metropolis.

While Kidbrooke might appear to be a largely nondescript suburban area, it is steeped in history. A medieval church of St Nicholas was abandoned after the village was depopulated by the Black Death, Hasted's *History of Kent* noting that its last rector, one Simon de Barlings, was appointed in 1348; thereafter, the area was considered an 'extraparochial hamlet' attached to Charlton, and became known as the 'Liberty of Kidbrooke'. In the sixteenth century, the Manor of Kidbrooke came into the hands of Brian Annesley, whose troubled family history (along with that of his youngest daughter Cordelia) is held to have inspired Shakespeare's *King Lear*; in due course, Cordelia inherited the estate and married Sir William Hervey, a naval officer whose name is commemorated in a road in the north-east of our parish. Shooters' Hill Road, which marks our northern boundary, follows the line of Watling Street, the route likely to have been taken by pilgrims to Canterbury and, in imagination, by Falstaff on his way to conduct the robbery in *Henry IV* or the temporarily triumphant king at the end of *Henry V*. More recently, Kidbrooke School (now the Halley Academy) was nationally famous as a pioneering purpose-built comprehensive notable for its educational and architectural ambition alike.

The present St Nicholas's began as a daughter church of St James's Kidbrooke, built shortly after a major council estate was constructed on formerly agricultural land and given the dedication of the long-abandoned medieval church. In 1985, it became part of a 'Kidbrooke Team Ministry' along with St James's and another church established in a shop unit on the now-demolished Ferrier Estate. In 2001, however, the District Church Council actively sought to become an independent parish: this request having been granted by the Diocese, the inaugural General Meeting of the new parish took place in May 2002, and on 31 March 2003 Tim Linkens was installed as its first, and so far only, vicar.

For most of the last two decades the parish has had only a single ordained minister, but we have many contacts amongst local retired and non-stipendary clergy, who have been generous in covering the vicar's holidays and other occasional absences as well as the majority of services during the current vacancy. In addition to the previous vicar's personal contacts, we have been helped by a long list of recommendations from our Area Dean, and although the previous occupant of this post has moved on, there is no reason at all to think that her successor will be any less supportive. The congregation welcomed the ordination of women to the priesthood, and greatly appreciated the ministry of the Rev. Julie Wallace between 1996 and 1999. In general, however, the parish values inclusivity in all its forms; we believe not only that there are significant issues on which Christians can hold opposing views with equal integrity but also that such disagreement, conducted in a respectful and proportionate way, offers a pathway for spiritual growth.

There are currently no formally licensed or commissioned lay workers, but we do have three lay service leaders who regularly lead appropriate sections of the Communion service as well as Services of the Word when no ordained minister or licensed reader is available. Our current Mission Action Plan identifies more formal arrangements for this and other roles as a longer-term aspiration, but our immediate MAP priority for greater engagement with young people will be supported by congregation members with appropriate experience in teaching or through youth organisations. All PCC members, and others in the congregation with any form of pastoral responsibility, are DBS checked as a matter of course.

Financially, the church is in a sound situation (explained in more detail below), though we are conscious that our projected 2023 contribution to the Diocese of £25,500 falls far below the cost of providing a minister, and we would like to see the parish develop to a point where we were less heavily subsidised. This objective is not separately identified in our MAP, but is implicit in our intention to increase our regular congregation.

### 3: The vicar we need

The qualities we consider essential in our new vicar largely derive from our key priorities as a church:

- i. We would like to continue as a church in relationship with a wider community, 'permeable' in the sense that we value and encourage people who intermittently take

part in our different activities or with whom we only occasionally come into contact, as we do those who attend services but are not yet ready to commit to confirmation. We are therefore looking for a vicar who can share in this approach, understanding the merits of what has been called ‘the ministry of the jumble sale’.

*‘They try to organise events to involve everybody. It’s a very welcoming community.’*

*‘The church is like family to me and I want people around also to enjoy this.’*



4. Our chancel north side window – the story of Ruth underlines our belief that the Kingdom of God is open to all.

ii. A related priority concerns the language and conduct of services, in which our aim has been to present sacramental worship in a manner that places the fewest obstacles in the way of someone coming in to church for the first time, or for the first time for many years. For this reason we use the service options with the simplest language and format; formal robing is confined to special occasions; and we try to ensure that services are led as far as permissible by lay people who look and sound like those in the congregation. (The variety within the congregation means that almost anyone will look and sound like somebody in it, so this is not in fact a difficult objective.) We also aspire to conduct all age or family services in which children and young people are placed at the centre of our worship rather than merely allowed to be present. We are therefore looking for a vicar who is comfortable with this overall approach; the detail of how it is put into practice may change, just as it has repeatedly changed in the past.

*‘The atmosphere was informal, but so welcoming I felt at home immediately, and I have stayed since.’*

*‘A church that makes you feel welcome from the first day.’*

*‘As a family, we were so glad that our children were quickly embraced and were able to serve in the main service as well as to enjoy the kids’ groups.’*

iii. We would like to develop our engagement with young people, especially teenagers, and would hope to find a vicar confident in relating to this age group. For this and wider reasons, we hope for an incumbent who can turn disagreement, challenge and argument into constructive dialogue.

iv. We are looking for a vicar who will delegate effectively, retaining oversight of the various tasks that have to be done but taking advantage of the parish’s

significant strengths in some administrative and practical areas to focus as far as possible on the things that only ordained clergy can do.

We hope that these four points give a fair picture of the kind of vicar who would be at home in this parish. Other qualities we might hope for will be those essential in any parish priest, and we understand that overall objectives can be delivered in many different ways.

#### 4. The Parish

The parish of St Nicholas's occupies an area to the east of Blackheath in Greater London, and was formed from part of the nineteenth-century parish of St James's Kidbrooke in response to post-war developments. The dual-carriageway southern approach to the Blackwall Tunnel (effectively a motorway) now splits the former parish in two, so that the division appears entirely inevitable. As a place to live, St Nicholas's parish has both attractions and disadvantages: on the positive side, there is abundant public green space around, with Blackheath, Greenwich Park, Shooters' Hill and Woolwich Common not very far away and a large local authority park, Hornfair Park, just beyond the northern boundary. The parish also contains a number of private sports grounds. Several bus routes touch upon the edges of the parish, and one crosses it, between them providing reasonable access to Lewisham, Eltham, Greenwich, Woolwich and other local centres. On the negative side, the area is about as far from a railway station as it is possible to be in London, the local station at Kidbrooke being outside the parish boundary and some 15 minutes' brisk walk from the church, and the introduction of the local bus route brought about the closure of most of the shops on the former council estate itself, although there is still a substantial rank along the Shooters' Hill Road. The council-run community centre on the estate has also closed, together with the lost shops depriving the parish of its natural informal 'centre', and medical services are limited.

Housing is largely a mixture of 1930s semi-detached properties, traditionally owner-occupied and of above-average size, and post-war social housing, some now privately owned, which mainly consists of terraced or semi-detached houses with gardens. These houses, built for the resettlement of people from bomb-damaged or otherwise condemned Inner London areas, are of good quality, and the area in no way shared the problems of the later Kidbrooke development on the high-rise Ferrier estate, which has been demolished; the ex-council houses are amongst the least expensive three-bedroom properties in London, and are naturally attractive to young families. Some have seen substantial and thoughtful investment by their owners. In the north-west corner of the parish is a small enclave of large and expensive mid-nineteenth century properties built during that period's extension of Blackheath into Kidbrooke, where the *Topographical Dictionary of England* (1848) refers to the recent construction of 'several gentlemen's houses and neat villas'. This area is still home to many highly qualified professional people, and our church might in future wish to consider whether it could and should include them more purposefully in its culture of invitation.

Conversely, there is still a considerable amount of social housing, including some low-rise flat and apartment buildings, whose occupants could well be at the opposite end of the income range. We also believe that some privately-owned properties are being let as houses in multiple occupation, an arrangement which can of course vary between complete propriety and potentially dangerous exploitation of the vulnerable.

When last updated, the parish population was stated as 5,698. The 2011 census lists 2,299 households; there has been no significant housing development since then, so this figure is likely to be more or less right. At that time 21.6% of the population were aged under 18 and 15.8% over 65, figures which again correspond with current everyday perceptions. The 2011 'white ethnicity' figure of 65.7%, however, is now probably lower, and certainly does not correspond with the make-up of our congregation; in addition, many local residents now are of Eastern European background, and are therefore used to approaches to Christian religious expression different from our own.

The C of E's latest interpretation of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation places the parish as no. 2,353 on a scale where 1 is the most and 12,307 the least deprived (by way of comparison with neighbouring parishes, St James's Kidbrooke is at 2,873, St John's Blackheath at 7,042 and St Michael's Blackheath at 7,816; on the other hand, St Luke's Charlton is at 1,433 and St Barnabas' Eltham at 1,330). The St Nicholas's statistic should give rise for concern not so much because it clearly points towards a degree of relative overall disadvantage (albeit one far from the worst) as because the parish ends up in that position despite the well-above-average affluence of its north-western corner and the apparent prosperity of the pre-council estate roads; this in turn suggests that there are almost certainly pockets of real deprivation, with which we have not really managed to engage. The pandemic and cost-of-living crisis will not have made the situation any better.

That said, there is no lack of will in the congregation to offer practical help and social support, and to an extent we already have the means to provide it. The issue is more one of encouraging those living in the parish who may need assistance to see the church as a friendly, non-judgemental and supportive source of help; this is an element of our Mission Action Plan, and we would encourage our future incumbent to see local problems of this kind as an opportunity rather than an obstacle.

*'No-one is left out, all are welcome...this little church is full of goodwill and the Lord's spirit.'*

*'I value the strong multicultural congregation.'*



5. Reaching out to passers-by: our outdoor Nativity scene.

## 5: About the church

St Nicholas's is strong in lay leadership, with three regular lay service leaders, a highly capable Junior Church team and a very effective Social Committee. Parish administration is sound: the PCC includes a treasurer with business experience, a Gift Aid officer who is involved in running two other charities, a very efficient secretary, and safeguarding officers with appropriate backgrounds. Other PCC members look after practical matters, whether by applying their own skills or by making informed decisions about contractors and suppliers. The PCC employs a professional accountant to prepare its formal accounts.

The engagement and commitment of a range of PCC and congregation members means that the whole burden of administration does not fall upon the churchwardens or, indeed, the incumbent. While we are pleased with this state of affairs, we are conscious that several of our most active parishioners are retired, and that it would therefore be desirable for many different reasons to involve some younger people.

### The church as a worshipping people

The Sunday congregation normally numbers between 30 and 40, and is notable for its diversity in terms of social and economic background as well as age, ethnicity and national origin. There is one formal service only, at 10 a.m., which in normal circumstances is a Communion service using a simplified liturgy devised during the pandemic. During this period Communion alternated with a Service of the Word, held outdoors when the weather permitted; we hope to conduct outdoor services again during the warmer months, and are using the Service of the Word when necessary during the period of vacancy.

Junior Church normally takes place fortnightly, at the same time as the main service; the children and their adult leaders rejoin the rest of the congregation for communion and usually give a presentation based on their activities at the end of the service. When there is no Junior Church, the main service is called 'Family Communion', and we try to include content appropriate for all ages.

Worship in other forms takes place at different times; we are currently holding a Vigil for Peace followed by night prayer on a weekday evening, and our Tuesday morning toddlers' and parents' group periodically incorporates Messy Church.

In terms of churchmanship, we regard ourselves as firmly in the Anglican mainstream. Communion is central to our church life, as is challenging preaching, but ritual tends towards reverent simplicity. Recent practice has been for clergy to robe only on special occasions, and for services to begin informally.



6. Robes and processions feature in special events, such as this last Harvest Festival before lockdown.

7. Baptisms are often celebrated at St Nicholas's because of long-standing family connections.



### The church and the community

St Nicholas's promotes and supports a range of community activities, through which we engage with many people who are not regular church attenders. These activities are effectively managed by our Social Committee with the help of a number of volunteers.



8. Not always quite this full, but a by no means unusual scene in our hall!

Regular activities arranged or facilitated by ourselves include 'Pebbles' (a group for parents and toddlers) and a lunch club for senior citizens. Other events open to the wider community include quiz nights, an annual International Evening, Ladies' Nights, a summer and Advent fete and community meals on special occasions such as the late Queen's diamond jubilee and the forthcoming coronation. Our MAP includes an aspiration to encourage those who take part in our social activities to engage with our worship life as well, though we must of course do this in a sensitive and invitational manner. Organisations benefiting from the use of our premises



include the 46<sup>th</sup> Greenwich scout group (whose headquarters is leased from the PCC) as well as some who use our hall (sometimes at below-commercial rates) such as Alcoholics Anonymous.

We have good contacts with the local primary school (Kidbrooke Park), of which the previous vicar was a governor, and hope to build upon these contacts as part of our MAP. The Halley Academy has proved more resistant to our approaches, whether because of a managerial distrust of religion in all its forms or simply because the Academy is strictly focused on its main business; it is hoped, however, that relationships established with primary-aged children and their families will continue informally once the children reach secondary age. In the past we have also had constructive relationships with two residential homes (Minnie Bennett House and Hider Court); these have fallen by the wayside largely because of the pandemic and changes in personnel, and would probably be well worth reviving. A particular casualty of the pandemic was an annual Light of Remembrance service organised by ourselves, the management of Minnie Bennett House and the Blackheath and Charlton Baptist Church for the families of all whose funerals had involved the churches' clergy or who had lived at Minnie Bennett.

*'Pebbles, the mother & toddler group, is welcoming to all and many mums have found help and support to stop them feeling lonely or isolated. The Seniors' Lunch Club is also welcoming, and one member told me it was the highlight of their fortnight: a home-cooked meal and company.'*



9. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it: the candles left burning after a Light of Remembrance service.

### The Church: building and resources

St Nicholas's is fortunate in that its church (consecrated in 1953) is small, of the right size for the usual congregation, not listed, and soundly constructed so that it does not make excessive demands on either time or money. Its design and construction were probably supervised by Thomas Ford, the Diocesan Architect for Southwark, who lived in Eltham from 1930 and was responsible for a great deal of new church building and post-war restoration in the area.

At St Nicholas's, both church and hall underwent substantial improvement under the previous vicar. Many of the church furnishings are those installed in 1953, apparently

salvaged from an older bomb-damaged or redundant church, but the chancel has been remodelled by removing the fixed choir and clergy stalls to create a flexible space; at the same time, folding ramps were installed to allow wheelchair access both to the altar rail and through internal doors from the church to the adjoining hall. Separate modern gas-fired heating systems have been fitted in the hall and the church; the main church windows have been replaced by double-glazed units of similar appearance in UPVC frames. The church lighting has been completely modernised and the wooden fence of the church garden replaced by a metal one. Refurbishment of the hall included refitting of the kitchen and toilets and the provision of an accessible toilet and baby change facility. There is currently a subsidence problem affecting the exterior kitchen wall: dealing with this is a priority in our MAP, and will be linked with further improvements in the kitchen, which is heavily used and essential to our current activities and future plans.



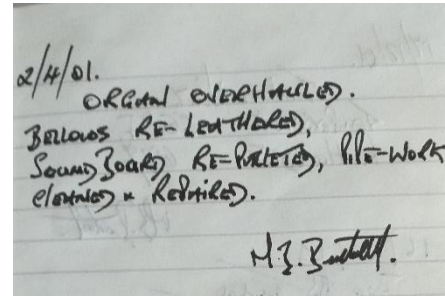
10. The church contains some striking original works of art, including this east-end wall painting by Hugh Powell representing St Nicholas and his acts of charity. The flanking windows by Apollo Stained Glass were designed to complement this painting.

Chiefly known as a stained glass artist, in 1953 Powell was working in partnership with C. J. Edwards, who designed our west window.

The single-manual organ, built by Bevington & Sons in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, is appropriate both to the size of the church and the use we make of it. The organ was moved here around 1970 from the former chapel at the Royal Herbert Military Hospital, where legend maintains Florence Nightingale played it; a thorough overhaul was carried out in 2001 by Michael Buttolph and the instrument is unlikely to require any extensive work for at least another 25 years. Our upright piano, an ex-ILEA Danemann School Piano, is indestructible by anything short of military hardware.



11. Organ and piano.



12. Tuning book record of the 2001 overhaul.

Financially, the church is in good order, helped by an annual income of just over £14,000 from a phone mast in our bell turret. Donations by standing order contribute over £10,000 a year with Gift Aid, and plate collections have been remarkably generous; other income comes from hall lettings, both to regular groups and for one-off bookings. Total income last year was £53,242, giving a surplus of £4,074.

## 6. The vicarage

Roughly contemporary with the church, the vicarage provides generous family accommodation, although there is no disguising its age. On the positive side, it allows enough space (for example) for each of a couple to pursue their own work and interests, and for parish business to be carried on without too much impact on a family.



13. The vicarage, with part of the church garden. The house has its own private garden and off-road parking for two cars.

## 7. Conclusion: a few more thoughts from congregation and community

*'The church is open to new ideas, has a strong and committed base, and is keen to grow in faith, in worship and in numbers.'*

*'There is genuine care for one another regardless of age (children are very welcome), gender, colour etc.'*

*'a great and friendly church.'*

*'The congregation is diverse and welcoming to all.'*

*'I have come to love St Nicholas's Church ever since I moved to Kidbrooke.'*

*'I value the fellowship...'*

*'I enjoy all the services.'*

*'We have a Sunday school, lunch club, social events...'*



14. View to the back of the church – organ, list of clergy, window by C. J. Edwards depicting the baptism of Christ, consecration plaque, font, memorial book (with altar hanging cupboard beneath), memorial candle ring.

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