

**ST NICHOLAS, SANDHURST
PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL**



ANNUAL REPORTS 2025-2026

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Administrative information:

St Nicholas Church is situated in Church Road, overlooking the Rother Valley, outside the main centre of the village of Sandhurst. The Mission Church is a second, more modern church, in the centre of the village. It is part of the Diocese of Canterbury.

The PCC is a charity excepted from the registration with the Charity Commission.

PCC Members who have served from April 2025 until the date this report is approved are:

Rector: David Commander (has served since October 2013)

Associate Priest: Ylva Blid-Mackenzie (has served since 3rd July 2021)

Churchwardens: Catherine Elliott
Robert Houlden

ALM: Lyn Hayes

Representatives on the Deanery Synod:
Catherine Elliott
Zena Kemp

Elected Members: Ann Jukes
Anne Tylden-Wright
Zena Kemp

Co-opted Members: Robert Johnson (Treasurer)
(Co-opted 2nd June 2025) Jenny Kingsland

Acting Secretary: Cathy Baker

Banks: CAF Bank
NatWest

Independent Examiner: David Rodgers, 10 Millers Meadow, Sandhurst, Kent TN18 5BE

Electoral Roll Officer: Richard Cutchey

Structure, governance and management:

The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules. All church attendees are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and to stand for election to the PCC.

Objectives and Activities:

The PCC has the responsibility of co-operating with the Rector, and in promoting the mission of the Church in pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical ways in the parish. It is responsible for the maintenance of the fabric of St Nicholas and the Mission Church, and the fabric and furnishings within them. St Nicholas is in ecumenical partnership with the Methodist Church.

There were six meetings in the year - held on 2nd June, 14th July, 15th September and 17th November 2025 and 19th January and 9th March 2026. The average attendance was 85%. Revd David Commander is the Chairman. Robert Houlden is the Vice Chairman.

Churchwardens' Report 2025-2026

The year passes so quickly that it is sometimes hard to report on all that has gone on in the year. It is exciting to have a new Archbishop of Canterbury and to look forward to having her guidance in our Diocese as well as the wider Church.

I want to start by recording our collective thanks to Bob Houlden who is stepping down as Churchwarden. Bob has been a Churchwarden for the past 12 years with the compulsory sabbatical 2-year break which was unnoticeable. He has been a tower of strength and organisation. There is nothing he does not know about the church building and the processes that are needed to ensure repairs and grants to maintain the building. He cares deeply about the church and the churchyard. Our church building is better maintained than when he started. He thinks nothing of climbing the church tower to put up the flag, ladders to check the roof and digging in gate posts. It is due to Bob and Sharon that our church is open to visitors every day. We are fortunate to have Bob's oversight, with Anne Tylden-Wright, over many years. Thank you Bob and Sharon and we hope we can continue to have your support in different ways in the coming years.

The Churchwardens would like to thank the PCC and various members who meet regularly to ensure the smooth running of the church's business. I would like to mention Robert Johnson, Treasurer, who works hard to ensure our income and expenditure are under control and to make funds available for the events we have. This has been challenging when we are asked to provide big increases for our Parish Share.

There are countless members of the congregation and wider community who help with coffees and cakes, flowers, the choir members and the sides-people who welcome us into the church. We have been lucky to have had the St George's, Benenden Bellringers to ring our bells at various events. We would like to

thank Cathy Baker, our Benefice Administrator and PCC Secretary, who provides us with a vast array of support in coordinating diaries and printing all the Pew Sheets and leaflets. We are grateful to you all.

I see that last year we thanked Elizabeth Cutchey after many years as Magazine Editor. Guess what ... she needs to be thanked for stepping in after Dennis Flower had to resign. We are grateful to Elizabeth for resuming her role and for her new ideas. I know she would appreciate others volunteering to submit articles for the magazine, which also acts as a Parish newsletter.

Since January, we have been holding some services for St George's, Benenden whilst they carry out their building works this year. It is lovely welcoming members of St George's and a helpful reminder of the wider Benefice of which we are part.

None of what we do would make sense without the leadership of Revd David and all he does for our Parish. David has stepped down from being Area Dean, having led it superbly for three years. He has been aided by the fabulous Revds Rosemary and Ylva. Their ministry nourishes and feeds us. We are sad that Ylva is leaving at the end of May 2026 but wish her well in her future ministry.

Lyn Hayes is a remarkable lady who has worked hard across the Parish and the school as well as running several services during the year; we are fortunate to have her. Thank you Lyn.

David is so brilliantly supported by Helen who is always a happy presence in the community due to the Toddler Group as well as other events. Thank you Helen.

My thanks to Bob for all he has done, and does, and I will miss his leadership.

Catherine Elliott
Churchwarden
April 2026

Gift Aid Secretary's Report 2025-2026

It is a pleasure to share my first annual report as Gift Aid Secretary with you.

First, I want to extend a big thank you to Catherine Elliott, who worked tirelessly as Gift Aid Secretary before me and made my transition into the role much easier with her support and guidance.

The main role of the Gift Aid Secretary is to collate all donations that qualify for Gift Aid relief and ensure they are submitted to HMRC so the church receives the extra support. For every £100 donated we gain an additional £25 from HMRC - so every bit really does count!

I am happy to report that HMRC's Gift Aid repayment to our church has gone up by around 3% in 2025-2026 compared to the previous year, which is roughly on par with inflation. This means we will be receiving £5,635 for this year's Gift Aid donations.

Special thanks to Robert Johnson for his invaluable help and for keeping the donation records accurate and up to date.

As ever, St Nicholas depends on the generosity of our regular donors and your continued support is truly appreciated. If you have any questions or would like a Gift Aid declaration form, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Rest assured, all donor and donation details are kept absolutely confidential.

Terry Hannocks

Gift Aid Secretary

13th April 2026

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Fabric Report - St Nicholas Church 2025-2026

St Nicholas Church

In my 2024-25 Fabric Report details of the repairs to the sanctuary stained-glass windows were mentioned as a tiresome bureaucratic delay, well I am pleased to say that all was resolved satisfactorily, and work has now commenced with an estimated completion date of May 2026. Grants have been obtained from National Churches Trust and Friends of Kent Churches, which will cover 50% of the total cost. Unfortunately, we have lost the ability to automatically reclaim VAT on such works due to the government ceasing the Listed Places of Worship grant scheme. Fortunately, Easthope Stained Glass who are repairing the windows are not registered for VAT and so there will be no VAT charged.

We were finally able to have the listed mounting block repaired by James Parker, although we do have an ongoing struggle to reclaim our £1,000 excess through the insurers and loss adjusters.

Just before Christmas we had an unfortunate fall of masonry onto the tower floor narrowly missing a bellringer during practice. This could have had dire consequences for the ringers, but it was fortunate that no one was injured. The piece of masonry fell from the small tower turret window and smashed into smaller fragments on hitting the tower floor. The cause is believed to be due to the failure of an original sandstone headstone aggravated by tower vibrations due to ringing. The window has been supported by wooden shuttering, to allow bellringing to resume, and will be repaired by Traditional Stone Ltd, stonemasons, toward the end of April 2026. All the necessary faculty procedures have been completed and permissions granted by the DAC and Archdeacon.

Mission Church

The beading surrounding the exterior double-glazed windows has been repaired or replaced where necessary.

Future Projects

The organ is due for a major overhaul and thanks to excellent targeted fund raising this project should be able to proceed in 2027. It might have been scheduled for 2026 but due to major works having closed St George's we cannot afford to have our organ out of action for any length of time as many of their services and weddings will be taking place at St Nicholas Church in 2026.

Discussions have taken place with the DAC and their advisors relating to the replacement of our heating facilities leaving various alternatives for further investigation, but again due to disruption at St George's we cannot undertake such work until 2027.

Discussions relating to the improvement of our social meeting areas at St Nicholas are ongoing and are again constrained by the St George's situation. The possibilities are to remove several rows of pews at the back of the church, but a currently preferred scheme would be to leave the pews as is and to re-incorporate the choir vestry into the tower area.

Continued vigilance and maintenance of our church vestments mean that repairs will take place from time to time to keep them in good order.

Bob Houlden
Churchwarden

9th April 2026

Weald Deanery Synod Report 2025-2026

We have two lay representatives from the Parish of Sandhurst on the Weald Deanery Synod: Catherine Elliott and Zena Kemp.

Julia Collard, of St George's, Benenden, is Deanery Secretary. Julia's report for the Benefice of Benenden & Sandhurst is as follows:

Following the recent reorganisation by the Area Dean and Lay Chair, there are three meetings during the year: spring, summer and autumn as the Deanery Synod, when asked, preferred not to travel during the winter.

The last meeting, in February 2026, introduced the Deanery to the Venerable Revd Estella Last, newly appointed Archdeacon of Maidstone, and Iain Blythe, Diocesan Secretary.

It was very interesting learning what an Archdeacon does - take particular responsibility for the welfare of clergy and their families, for church buildings and for the growth of mission and ministry within their archdeaconries. They play a significant role in the appointment, oversight and pastoral care of clergy; they induct and install ministers, conduct visitations of parishes, and care for churchwardens in their office. They also provide advice and support for lay ministers and church officers regarding mission, ministry, church fabric, faculties, pastoral re-organisation, parsonages and church buildings.

Iain Blythe is also fairly new to our Diocese and he explained in his view the Diocesan strategy is to support the local church. That underlines that anyone employed by the DBF is there, not to request Parish Share or send out the Briefing, for example. They are there to support our parishes, our clergy and our congregations.

Iain explained his biggest challenge is Safeguarding. The Diocese must ensure that every aspect of church life is safe and it is obvious that we have to put this at the centre of all we do. We have an excellent team who are engaging more and more in support of what goes on at local level. There is now a Safeguarding update at every meeting of Diocesan Synod and at every Committee meeting.

People in Weald Deanery were part of the finance review last year and that will continue going forward. There is still much to do to reduce the burden of Parish Share but Iain hopes the sense of direction is clear and expects it to only rise by 1.5% at the end of this year.

At each Synod meeting we have a report from the hosting parish and local updates. This coming year, 2026, is the year the laity are invited to stand for election/or re-election. So, if you are interested in learning more about the Church's work at a higher level than the parish, please consider putting yourself forward for election at the APCM.

Revd David finished his three-year term as Area Dean on 9th March 2026. Revd Nicky Harvey from Marden is now Area Dean. The Lay Chair would like to retire and the Deanery Secretary (Julia Collard) is retiring. A new Deanery Treasurer is still required.

Julia Collard
for the Benefice of Benenden & Sandhurst
March 2026

Church Flowers Report for 2025-2026

St Nicholas always has Altar flowers, however for Festivals or Special Services, including weddings, we do try to provide whatever is required. Thank you, to all the flower arrangers who have risen to the challenge and have done wonderful arrangements throughout the year. If there is anyone who would like to help with the church flowers please do get in touch.

Anne Tylden-Wright

March 2026

Safeguarding

- Children and Vulnerable Adults Report 2025-2026

There is nothing special to report for 2025-2026, however it should not be forgotten that Safeguarding is a difficult and often complex task and should be left to be investigated by the appropriate agency i.e. the Police and Social Services. We should always remember our community are the “spotters” and should always report our concerns for the professionals to investigate, if appropriate.

The Annual Diocesan Safeguarding conference was held via Zoom in January 2026. All training courses have continued online, which was fine for all those technically minded but not much help for those who are not!

Cathy Baker continues in her role of Disclosure Officer, which makes checks far quicker and easier. Thank you Cathy.

Anne Tylden-Wright
Safeguarding Officer
March 2026

St Nicholas Children & Youth Report 2025-2026

Toddler Group

The Wednesday morning toddler group continues each week in term time. Numbers can vary but generally there are at least 5-6 adults bringing their own children or childminders/grandparents. Some weeks there are many more and the hall is buzzing with chatter and the noise of children playing. We receive many comments about how welcoming the group is and to be greeted with a “would you like a tea or coffee?” is music to their ears. Cake time is a popular feature of the morning and thanks goes to those who bake for us. Many thanks also to those who help me; Zena, Beryl, Sally, Jennie, Jane and Anne (and of course Revd David who often helps set up the chairs after morning prayer)

Connect Four

We continue to meet every month (on the 4th Saturday). It is an informal time of worship for the Benefice which is open to everyone but the relaxed atmosphere appeals to younger families. We worship through singing, scripture and prayer. There is always a craft activity and of course tea, coffee and cakes!!! We would love to see more people join us. So, if you find yourself free at 4pm on a 4th Saturday, do pop in. You will be made very welcome.... and given tea/coffee and cake!!

Helen Commander

April 2026

Fund Raising Report for 2025-2026

As predicted in last year's report this has indeed been a busy year. Fundraising is becoming increasingly important as the funds are needed to fill the gap between income and expenditure and we are grateful to everyone for their support which helps keep our church in funds and open.

2025 events have continued with a Paws in Pews service with eye-catching posters produced by children from the school. We were lucky again with our June Teas in the Churchyard being a wonderfully sunny day and making around £800. There are some fantastic cake bakers in our community, and I think we all leave having fed on delicious creations and having admired the churchyard in all its beauty.

We held two concerts in May which could not have been more different but were both fabulous. The Invicta Wind Orchestra filled the church with music which roused us all and had us tapping our feet and singing along. Thanks to Revd Ylva, a Swedish Choir came after singing at Canterbury Cathedral and said our acoustics were even better! It was wonderful to meet them and listen to their beautiful singing.

Alex Thorbek and Juliet Atherton produced a memorable weekend with fantastic creations for our Scarecrow Competition. The creativity and imagination made it hard to choose a winning entry. The dog walker was mistaken for a real person, and the horse and rider seemed to bring it to the next level. We are so grateful to them both for such a fun and quality event which also raised funds. Another time, we should make more of the publicity as some entries were worthy of a national competition!

In November the Mini Market was well supported and helped to raise over £900. Thank you to all our wonderful contributors and helpers on the day. Katherine O'Neil printed another beautiful Calendar raising over £900 which is a fabulous contribution to the organ fund. Thank you to Katherine for all her energy and hard work.

Catherine Elliott
Churchwarden
April 2026

Electoral Roll Report - April 2026

The Electoral Roll was amended, as at April 12th 2026, in accordance with the “Church Representation Rules”.

There are 34 people on the Electoral Roll of which 30 are resident within the parish and 4 non-resident.

Richard Cutchey
Electoral Roll Officer
13th April 2026

Discipleship & Mission Group 2025-2026

The group is a Benefice group, comprising six people from both parishes. The name simply defines the objective of the group... to grow our churches in discipleship, and how our churches engage in mission; i.e. how to grow the Kingdom of God in this place that God has placed us.

The group meets quarterly, in person, and also monthly, on Zoom, for prayer time together. We took the rather radical approach of praying together to find out what God was calling us to do! In the last few months these meetings have regrettably fallen by the wayside due to other work commitments and pressures. This I need to address and reinstate the regular prayer meetings as they have been very beneficial.

Lyn and Ylva, who have led many Pilgrimage Walks, have produced a “manual” to help others who might take on leading future walks. The group will also be working on a resource for a spiritual journey and an historical/architectural journey around our two parish churches for visitors. We are also considering how might be the right way to reach out to those who currently do not attend church about God, faith, Christianity.

Lyndall Bywater (the Diocese’s Changing Lives Prayer Network Co-ordinator) encouraged us last year in our individual prayer time and our extemporaneous prayer within the group. We then invited Lyndall back to encourage us in our intercessory prayer. This was very good; we subsequently arranged another session for the Weald Deanery; it was attended by over twenty people.

If you would like to be involved in the D&M group, then to find out more please speak to Lyn Hayes, Cathy Presgrave, Zena Kemp, Victoria Bray or myself.

The “Home Groups” continue in both parishes; one meeting in Sandhurst on a Monday evening, the other in Benenden on a Tuesday evening. Both are open to anyone from either parish; just go to the one that is on the most convenient evening for you! These groups are a good way of building relationships with one another... as well as exploring something of our relationship with God. They help us all to grow in our understanding and our Christian faith.

Revd David Commander
Rector
April 2026

Sandhurst Magazine Report 2025-2026

I managed to retire as Editor of the Village Magazine for six months, but following Dennis Flower's unexpected decision to retire from his Editorship, I am back.

We have managed to fill every month's copy fairly easily, and even have a new monthly article on Health & Lifestyle, very kindly supplied by Deborah Keech. I hope people are finding it of interest.

We are still looking for an Editor and also into ways of making the magazine more attractive/interesting. Hopefully we will have more information on this idea in the not too distant future.

Elizabeth Cutchey

Editor

April 2026

Bellringers' Report 2025-2026

We are fortunate to have the St George's, Benenden Bellringers band who come along once a month to practise ringing our bells.

The Benenden Bellringers also come to ring at weddings and other services on request. Unfortunately, there was an issue with some falling masonry near the bell tower in December 2025. Bob Houlden arranged to have it fixed in time for Palm Sunday 2026 when the bells were pealing again and welcoming everyone to church. It is such a wonderful sound when our bells ring out across the village.

The bells are also rung when groups visit from across the South East. Visiting ringers seem to enjoy both the bells and our lovely church and are often amazed to find the church open when they arrive.

Catherine Elliott
Churchwarden
April 2026

Worship Committee Report for 2025-2026

The pattern of general service arrangements for St Nicholas and the Mission Church has remained the same this past year, with alternating 8 o'clock and 10 o'clock Communion services at St Nicholas. The 8 o'clock service being a Said BCP Communion service, and the 10 o'clock being a Communion service with hymns. The 10 o'clock service on the 4th Sunday of the month is a Sung Eucharist service – "Appleford" Setting. We also hold a midweek BCP Communion service at the Mission Church most Tuesdays throughout the year, and an informal family service once a month. This means, not including the "specials" (i.e. Christmas carol services, and Holy Week services), we are providing approximately 100 services at which to come and worship throughout the year. As a small rural parish, we are blessed to be able to do this thanks to our Ministry Leadership Team.

"Connect Four" – is now in its fourth year. The service is held on the "4th Saturday of the month", at 4pm, in the Mission Church. There is a core group of families who regularly attend, but only one of these regular families lives in Sandhurst.

During Advent and Christmas there were a number of "specials", including "Carols on the Green", a Primary School Christmas service, the Parish Carol Service, and a "First Communion of Christmas" service. The latter was again held at 9pm rather than beginning at 11.30pm. Numbers do not seem to have been negatively affected by the timing of the service.

Our thanks to Ian Verran for playing the organ and to our choir for leading our worship on two Sundays of the month and at Christmas particularly. The Parish Carol service this year was well supported by the Tongswood Choir as well as an augmented Church Choir. Our sincere and grateful thanks go to all those people who already carry out the variety of duties that are involved in providing the different services. However, it would be much appreciated if more

people were willing to help the church and congregation by offering to read lessons, assist with the chalice, act as a sides-person, or to offer to lead the intercessions. Should you feel prepared to do any one of these, please let me know.

Our thanks also to Lyn Hayes who chooses the hymns for us for the 10 o'clock services every month. This requires balancing: the type of service, the scripture readings, the timing within the "Church Year", the wishes of the service leader, what is available in our hymn resource, which tune to use, and what is known by the congregation and by the small choir. It is one of those tasks where it is impossible to please everyone!

We are also losing a member of our Ministry Leadership Team this year, as Revd Ylva continues to discern where God is calling her in her future ministry. We thank Ylva for her service with us through her three-year Curacy and the nearly three-years following her curacy.

We would also like to see numbers at our Sunday services begin to grow. This requires commitment on all our parts: to attend regularly and frequently; and to invite others to come along. More people in a service generates a more positive atmosphere; this, in turn, encourages more people to attend. We all have our part to play in regularly worshipping together, growing our church, and ensuring it is here for future generations.

Revd David Commander
Rector
April 2026

Sides-people 2025-2026

The following were elected unanimously at the APCM on 28th April 2025:

Anne Tylden-Wright
Helen Commander
Jennie Kingsland
Margaret Sargent
Maureen Sadler
Robert Houlden
Zena Kemp

Communion Assistants 2025-2026

The following were elected unanimously at the APCM on 28th April 2025:

Anne Tylden-Wright
Helen Commander
Lyn Hayes
Richard Cutchey

Bible Readers 2025-2026

Helen Commander
Katherine O'Neil
Kirrie Wratten
Margaret Sargent
Shirley Everett
Zena Kemp