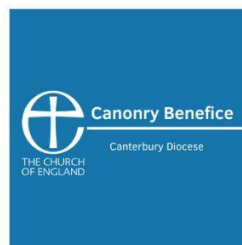


**ST NICHOLAS CHURCH, ASH**



# **2026 BOOK OF REPORTS**



**To show the life of our worshipping  
community at St Nicholas, Ash**

Welcome to our Church! We are a thriving, living church which supports the community and embraces everyone. We are a joyful, encouraging and peaceful church there to support you with key life events and with your faith. We are delighted to bring you this book of reports from all those who are involved with the different spheres of church life. I hope you agree it is an inspirational read that demonstrates all we've all been getting up to and how much happens behind the scenes to bring light and life to the church community and beyond.

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## 1. Vicar's Report by Reverend Caroline Turvey

***“Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” Matthew 6:33***

One of the privileges of mentoring curates for the Diocese is watching them move into new incumbencies. I attended a licensing service this week and was reminded not only of the vows of canonical obedience made by clergy, but also of the promises made by congregations to their priest.

As we enter APCM season, two years into ministry together, it feels timely to revisit these promises. They invite us to reflect on what it means to be church: our priorities, our shared calling, and the vision we hold for the future.

### **Sharing the Good News**

The first question asked at a licensing is this:

“Will you share with me in the ministry of making new disciples to which we are called together?”

The response is:

“Together, by God’s grace, we will share the good news of Christ with the world and make new disciples.”

It is significant that this comes first. It speaks of baptism, new life, and the invitation into faith through Jesus Christ. This is not an optional extra to church life; it is central to why the Church exists.

So, we must ask ourselves: are we making this our priority as a Benefice? Are we welcoming people well? Are we invitational with friends, neighbours, and family? Are we making Christ known beyond the walls of our churches?

People are searching. Through our recent Start Course, I have met individuals who genuinely want to explore faith and know more about Christ. There remains a hunger for hope, meaning, and belonging. As a church, we must be ready to respond.

Buildings matter, and maintaining them matters too. But buildings exist to serve people, not the other way around. If we care well for people, nurture faith, and make room for new disciples, the future of the church will follow. Let’s ALL keep to the promise to share the Good News of Christ.

Perhaps this year we could each commit to praying intentionally for five people we would love to see come to know Christ. Prayer changes hearts, often beginning with our own. If we become a praying, invitational church, who knows what God might do?

## **Learning Together – Home Groups**

The second promise concerns the proclamation of God’s Word:

***“Together, by God’s grace, we will go deeper into God and share the good news of Christ with the world.”***

Home groups across the Benefice provide spaces where faith can deepen, scripture can be explored, and confidence can grow. These groups are places of nurture, encouragement, honesty, and prayer.

Faith grows best in community. Learning together strengthens us to live and share the gospel more naturally.

This year, I encourage every member of our churches to consider joining a home group or even beginning a new one. If you would like to try a group as a taster, please speak to Beth or Rev Caroline.

## **Fellowship, Worship, and Shared Life**

The third question concerns Holy Communion:

***“Will you share regularly with me in this sacrament, that we may grow in unity and love?”***

The response is:

***“Together, by God’s grace, we will seek to transform communities and be the living Body of Christ.”***

Over the past year, we have seen many signs of life flowing from church into our communities: music events, shared meals, school services, pastoral care, community gatherings, Messy Church, wedding preparation days, warm spaces, carol services, Holy Week worship, and practical acts of care such as meal trains.

These are not simply activities to fill a calendar. They are opportunities to embody Christ’s welcome and make visible the love of God.

I have noticed that when newcomers arrive, they often leave quietly and quickly. A warm welcome can make the difference between someone returning or feeling unseen. Hospitality is not a task for a few; it is part of the calling of the whole church.

We will soon offer further welcome-team training, and I encourage people to consider whether this could be part of their ministry.

The Mission Action Plans completed by each parish at the end of 2025 give us shared direction. They are not documents to file away but commitments to revisit regularly. They help ensure our meetings, conversations, and decisions remain shaped by mission rather than habit.

Likewise, the ChurchSuite database is there to support connection, communication, and organisation. It enables us to be more invitational, better connected, and safer in how we care for people.

### **Keeping Christ at the Centre**

At the heart of all this lies a simple but searching question: what is church ultimately for?

Church exists first to worship God, to make Christ known, and to form disciples. When these remain central, everything else finds its proper place.

It is easy for any church community to become focused inwardly - on familiar patterns, personal preferences, or maintaining what feels comfortable. Yet the call of Christ continually leads us outward: toward welcome, generosity, humility, and mission.

The question before us is not simply whether we attend church, but whether we are becoming more like Christ together.

If Christ truly remains at the centre of our common life, growth follows - not only in numbers, but in depth, generosity, courage, and love.

### **Thank You**

Thank you to all who serve faithfully across the Canonry Benefice.

Thank you to our churchwardens, safeguarding officers, ministry team, volunteers, and all who quietly sustain the life of the church through acts of prayer, administration, hospitality, pastoral care, and practical service.

Thank you to Beth, our Parish Administrator, whose dedication and organisation make so much possible. Thank you to Anne in her curacy, and to all who continue to serve alongside us.

Ministry is never the work of one person. It is shared responsibility, shared faith, and shared calling.

As we look ahead to the coming year, may we remember the promises we have made not simply as words spoken at a service, but as a pattern for how we live together as the Church.

**“Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”**

## **2. Review of the year by the Churchwarden by Jacqueline Wilkinson**

The full report is included within the Financial Review, available as a separate document at the APCM. Highlights include:

### **Worship and Prayer**

- Average congregation numbers have increased, and children continue to regularly form part of the congregation.
- Morning Worship continues on the 1st Sunday of the month led by curate Anne Talbert and the 5th Sunday continues to be a Benefice service which is held on rotation around the parishes. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday, on odd months, we have two services, 9am Said Communion and 10.30am Family Communion. Both have been well supported.
- The church remains open throughout the day, thanks to volunteers who lock and unlock, to enable people to engage in quiet prayer, reflection and meditation.
- There is a prayer table as one enters the church where people can write prayer requests, which are the focus for the weekly prayer group. There is also a prayer station midway in the chancel with pebbles for reflection.
- In 2025 Benefice Home Group was started, both are well supported with lively discussion.
- Throughout the year celebrations at major festivals continue to involve larger congregations – notably Remembrance Sunday and Christmas Eve.
- Harvest Supper held in church on a Friday evening was well supported by the village.
- Stations of the cross were in the church for Easter. We continued with our procession on Palm Sunday following a Donkey through the village and singing praises.
- Sparks continue to meet in the Molland Chapel during services on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sundays.
- Cartwright & Kelsey and St Faith's continue to use the church for services and also visit at other times of the year to learn about the church.
- We welcomed the Ash Scouts, 9<sup>th</sup> Deal who celebrated 80 years of scouting in Ash.

### **Mission and Outward giving**

- Christian Aid Coffee Morning
- The Remembrance service raised money for the British Legion.
- The village and congregation gave generously at Harvest with goods going to the Salvation Army. Also, St Nicholas day donations went to a local organisation for young mothers.

- We held our annual memorial service for bereaved families.
- Bell ringers continue to make contributions to church and village life, new members are doing well and we welcome guest groups.
- Well-supported summer fair with a celebration of flowers and tower opening
- Successful Winterfest
- Easter children's event – 200 visitors!
- Light party for Children (November)
- A concert and 2 choirs singing raised funds for the church.
- The book stall in the church continues to be used by the village and raised funds for the church.
- Ride and Stride
- Benefice Yearly Wedding Preparation Day (March)
- The Friends of St Nicholas and The New Ash Players hold their meetings in church
- St Faith's hold their summer concert in church.
- Support the publication of a Parish Magazine
- Members of the church are governors at the local CofE church.
- Weekly visits from Reverend Caroline or Pat Coles to the school for collective worship
- A wreath making session was held in the church
- During 2025 we had 1 Wedding Vow Renewal, 5 Funerals/memorials, 3 Interments of ashes and 2 Baptisms.
- Average congregation numbers are 49 with greater numbers at special services.

### **The Parochial Church Council**

- The PCC has continued to meet regularly every other month discussing and managing the fabric of the church and churchyard, the services within the church, safeguarding and fundraising, to ensure the continued opening of St Nicholas.
- The minutes are put in the porch to ensure the congregation are informed.
- Our Deanery synod representatives are Pat Coles and Fiona Ridge and information from these meetings are fed back to the PCC.
- Information from Benefice Forum meetings is also fed back to the PCC. The vicar's Report is given to all PCC members and this is also attached to the board in the porch to allow all the congregation access to information.

### **The Canonry Benefice**

- Members of the PCC continue to play key roles on the two Benefice Teams- The Benefice Forum and the Admin & Finance group.

## **The Friends of St Nicholas Church**

The Friends, consisting of both regular and non-church attendees, continue to raise money for the fabric of the church through the Art Exhibition and other fund-raising events held during the year. The PCC are very grateful for their continued support.

### **Membership Information**

- PCC members who have served from 1st January 2024 until the date this report was approved are:
- Incumbent- Rev Caroline Turvey, March 20th 2024
- 1<sup>st</sup> Year Curate- Anne Talbert, 2025
- Church Warden- Jacqueline Wilkinson from April 2022.
- Honorary Treasurer- Andrew Collings
- Honorary Secretary- Sarah Miller
- Representatives on the Deanery Synod- Pat Coles, Fiona Ridge
- Elected until May 2026: Nick Hassall
- Elected until May 2027: Louise Cousins
- Elected until May 2028: Peter Ewart, Pat Coles, Jenny Taylor, James Pigott

### **3. Safeguarding Report by Jennifer Taylor**

Safeguarding is at the very heart of all we do. It is therefore a standing agenda item each time the PCC meet & the PCC is committed to safeguarding remaining a central part of St Nicholas' Church ministry & our mission to promote a safer culture for all.

I am the Parish Safeguarding Officer & also the DBS officer at St Nicholas. My contact details are clearly displayed on the porch noticeboard so anyone with concerns can always get in touch with me. Also displayed are the details of our safeguarding policy.

I am pleased to report that PCC members & those that lead groups affiliated to our church are up to date with their training. Training is revisited every 3 years. A month prior to expiry they are notified & encouraged to revisit the modules that are due to expire. We are due an audit during this year to ensure training is up to date.

We review on an annual basis our 'Lone Working Policy' & continue to remind all that when alone in church to bring a mobile phone with them & let someone know when they're coming to church & again when they've returned home.

All Churches in the Benefice marked Safeguarding Sunday on 16th November when as a congregation we were reminded that safeguarding must remain at the centre of all we do.

We greatly appreciate the support of our church community & I would like to thank everyone for their help in ensuring our church remains a safe & welcoming place for all

Thank you to everyone for all your help and support

#### **4. The Church Building & Churchyard by Jacqueline Wilkinson**

- Purchased a mobile screen, funded partly by a donation and John Downes Trust.
- Repair of tower window, tower steps, a window in church and a wall, funded by The Atwood
- New noticeboards outside church and safety bars on the Tower, funded by The Friends.
- East Wall rebuilt and Ash tree felled (due to safety concerns), funded by Jack Foat Trust.
- A hornbeam has been replanted as directed by DCC.
- Replacing a section of paths to allow tree root movement, Oak limb reduced, cherry tree monolithed, and repointing a section of drainage, all from general funds.
- An Ash tree felled due to ash die back, funded by Jack Foat Trust
- Churchyard mowing funded by general funds, The Friends and Jack Foat Trust
- Churchyard maintenance continues with a small group of volunteers.

#### **5. Stewardship**

Current team – Andrew Collings, Jacqueline Wilkinson, Hilary Johnston, Christine Goatham plus lots of other volunteers helping at events.

Events April 2025 to March 2026

1. Christian Aid Coffee Morning 5 th April 2025 – this event was well supported and raised £511.55
2. Christian Aid Sunday 11 th May 2025 – with prayers, devotional and gift envelopes raising a further £140.
3. Stewardship giving letter - A Review our Giving letter was distributed to those on the electoral roll during August 2025 and led to an increase in giving. This is planned again for 2027.
4. Stand up banner - A stand up banner was produced highlighting the weekly cost of running St Nicholas church and ways to give including a QR code. The banner also gave information about the ministries of the church.
5. Other generous church giving has included:

- a. Salvation Army harvest donations
- b. British Legion collection on Remembrance Sunday
- c. Cantercare gifts on St Nicholas Sunday
- d. Food bank regular giving

Plans for April 2026 to March 2027

St Nicholas Ash Charitable Giving for 2026

- a. Christian Aid – Ash Village Hall coffee morning on 4 th April 2026 raising £640.08
- b. Christian Aid Sunday – with envelopes and prayer booklets being distributed on 17 th May.
- c. Salvation Army – Harvest Sunday gifts
- d. British Legion – collection on Remembrance Sunday
- e. Cantercare – gifts and collection at lunch - St Nicholas' Day
- f. Food bank regular giving

The Stewardship Team with thanks.

## **6. Leading the church into Growth by Reverend Caroline**

In June 2026 a group of us will go on a LYCIG Growing church course. An opportunity to join with other groups from churches all over the diocese both to learn and share ideas and experiences. The course was broken into various sessions with many speakers. For encouraging and equipping our churches into growth, seeing the possibilities in what we can do with God to bring light and life to our communities.

We still have 3 spaces left - for lay and ordained people. Speak to Reverend Caroline if you are interested.

A group attended in July 2024 and we brought back ideas to use within our church and we are excited to see what comes from this year's event.

## **7. The Benefice Wednesday Prayer Group**

Open to anyone, the Wednesday prayer group began at the beginning of 2025, meeting from 10am for an hour or so at The Vicarage each week.

It has really flourished! It begins with coffee and biscuits, briefly sharing news. Myself or another member will open the prayer-time with a bible reading, a poem, or some other focus. Everyone is welcome to share a thought or prayer arising from this opening; we are often asked to pray for an issue in the Benefice, a particular problem, thanksgiving, prayer for individuals in a time of illness or personal struggle. We often pray for wider issues in the world.

There are also times for silent listening to the Spirit in the scriptures or in other words and in ourselves.

Everyone in this open group feels the growth and enrichment of our Christian Faith through praying and practicing the presence of God among us. There is something empowering about praying with others and we believe it will be of seen and unseen benefit to our Benefice with space always for prayerful strength and support.

Anyone is welcome.

We also have a prayer box for prayer and praise requests which is being used more and more by people who pop into church and these requests are faithfully prayed for at this group.

From this group has sprung a Benefice Prayer morning in the Autumn which Pat Coles and Barbara Way led, where we painted, wrote poems and took time out to relax in God's presence.

We also hired the Living Well retreat Centre in Nonington for a Benefice Prayer Oasis Day with the aim to enable people to see that there are so many different ways to pray and to encourage confidence in praying individually and in a group setting. We invited Pete Lloyd-Williams to lead worship with his guitar, learning new songs, which enhanced everyone's experience in beautiful surroundings. We will do this again.

By Reverend Caroline

### **8. Pastoral Care Team by Sarah, Nick & James**

The pastoral care team have been working with Ash parishioners and villagers as and when we are needed. Also working with Sandwich food pantry to help people who cannot afford food and general household provisions. We have had one emergency visit this year.

Nick is taking a course to enable him to take funerals and James and Sarah completed a bereavement support train course.

We have linked with PC Bowler to try and help the homeless in the village which is ongoing.

The pastoral care team with the invaluable help of Sue Chandler started the **"warm space"** In November 2025. This was in response to the cost of living increases and our concern for the more vulnerable in our community.

We aim to provide physical and emotional warmth to those most in need in our parish and village. Our volunteers are there to chat, laugh and if need be cry with those who come to visit us every Thursday from 11-2. We have linked with Age concern in sandwich to provide leaflets on a wide range of issues and sign posting to various organisations such as the food bank, sandwich food pantry, age concern, citizens advice, porch light, catching lives, meals on wheel, Rising sun domestic abuse charity etc.

We provide cake, tea, coffee and soup with a cheese roll. All this is donated by our volunteers via the meal train. We would like to take this opportunity to say a huge thank you to the church family who volunteer and also villagers who have stepped up to help our community venture. Visitor numbers have varied but are gradually increasing and we have a number of regulars most are not church goers. We have had some very positive feedback from visitors.

Pc Bowler visits once a month to meet up with villagers and listen to any concerns.

We have had wonderful visits from residents and staff at Olea Grove. The residents are children under 16 who are unaccompanied asylum seekers. They play table tennis in the church, visit the tower and have a chance to use the church for prayer and contemplation. They bake cakes and biscuits to help with warm space.

We also have children from Sandwich Tech visit once a term. Many thanks to Alice Vennart for organising this. The teenagers come and clean the church for us. After they have finished cleaning we provide tours of the church and graveyard, visits to the tower, and table tennis. They are a joy to have in our church, enthusiastic and happy cleaners as well very enthusiastic cake and biscuit eaters!

We have also had visits from Trevor Bartlett from Dover district council, Age concern, Sandwich food pantry, Deal food bank . We have run one quiz and opened the tower and celebrated St Georges day.

Guest numbers vary but we have had 8-10 regularly and a high of 29 which meant we had to use the church to fit everyone in.. The cost of warming the space and heating food etc we use approx 88 units of gas and electricity each week this is for heating the porch area and not the church. This may need to be reconsidered if numbers continue to increase.

Due to the increasing numbers of visitors and the joy of helping and supporting our village we are continuing warm space as a permanent fixture. A Warm welcome throughout the year. We are lucky to have secured a grant from Dover District council, the Deanery and The United Industrious Lodge 31 in Canterbury. We are overwhelmed by the generosity of our parishioners and villagers who provide the food and volunteers for this venture. If anyone would like to help with food and or volunteer please come and join us and or VISIT WARM SPACE we would love to see you.

**Meal Train** We have supported 8 people with individual meal trains. A meal delivered 3 x per week for approximately 6 weeks to someone or a family who are struggling with LIFE. We also use the Meal Train every week for warm space. This could not happen without our wonderful volunteers who provide a meal that can be heated. They deliver it and (hopefully) collect their empty containers afterwards. THANK YOU ALL.

We would LOVE more volunteers for the Meal Train and for Warm space.

We are always happy to help anyone in need so please let us know if anyone needs help. Anyone who'd like to join our team you'd be most welcome. Our email is : **asnpteam1@gmail.com**

### **9. The Deanery by Pat Coles and Fiona Ridge**

Our Deanery meetings are a place where we gather together with the wide range of other parishes and benefices across our Deanery area. We are your parish representatives to the Deanery.

Our meetings enable us to spend time worshipping, chatting, exchanging ideas and support with others, both clergy and lay people, from across the Deanery. This year, Rev Estella Last, our Area Dean, left our Deanery to become ArchDeacon of Maidstone. Rev Stefan Thomas has now been licensed as our new Area Dean until 2029. Our Lay Chair is from our church in Chillenden, Paul Allen.

During the past year the focus at the Deanery meetings has been on how we release our Deanery and individual churches/benefices so that they can be ready for Missional and Ministry Priorities that help us align with the 3 Bold Outcomes of our Diocese. The Deanery meetings have enabled us to create a Draft Deanery Plan document that Deanery members have been discussing as a way forward to help us to meet the challenges in this.

#### **Our ambitions as a deanery:**

The representatives on our Deanery Synod articulated that in our churches we aim to:

- See people grow in discipleship
- Serve our communities well
- Resource ministry for all our people, young and old
- Ensure our buildings are fit for the future and for their purpose
- See growth in our teams

These ambitions align with the 3 bold outcomes of our Diocese:

1. Every Parish, Benefice and Deanery showing signs of revitalization
2. Double the number of children and young disciples
3. 200 new worshipping communities

We are constrained by a number of challenges, and the Deanery Plan focuses on how we might address these challenges and what support might be needed in order to revitalise the missional life of our worshipping communities.

Such as:

#### **1. Lifting the financial burden-**

Additional support is needed such as:

**Access to materials, resources, training etc for increasing giving**

**Support for treasurers, gift aid secretaries etc**  
**Reducing the trend of ever increasing parish share**

**2. Getting the best from our ancient church buildings-**

Additional support needed such as

**Access to expert advice, support for fabric and building projects, and for grant applications**      **Advice and Support toward Eco Church / Net Zero Aims**

**3. Resourcing Ordained and Lay Ministry**

Additional support needed:

**Access to face-to-face training and networking for volunteers and church officers**

**Reducing the burden of compliance in areas such as health and safety, parish policies, and on individual safeguarding officers**

**4. Reorganisation and Revitalisation and moving of different parishes**

**Possibilities we have been thinking about,**

- Pastoral reorganisation to reduce the size of several Benefices with the creation of an additional Benefice (ideally full but if necessary half-time post);  
or
  
- The enabling of the Little Stour post to be full time; or
- The creation of Team ministry straddling two benefices with additional half time post; or
  
- Moving a church to a neighbouring benefice if it makes sense to do
- Amalgamation of smaller parishes; or
  
- Any combination of the above;

These ideas have been put to the Diocese.

Deanery meetings enable us to find out what is going on in other churches, and to learn from each other.

It's great to be able to get into mixed parish groups to discuss these things with people who have different experiences and ideas, that help us to learn from each other.

We also discuss aspects like Finances and how the parish share impacts each parish, and our messages and concerns in any area are also fed back through to the Diocese.

Overall, it's great to know that our own benefice is part of a wider group of people with lay and clergy meeting together to motivate, encourage and inspire each other as well as support one another with ideas, tools and other practical support.

### **10.Fellowship Group**

Our fellowship group is eight strong and generally meets at Piglet Place in staple. The main focus of the group is Good Christian fellowship a hot drink and biscuits followed by a time of prayer then discussion about the week's topic. The topics are very often current and some can be challenging however all views are listened to carefully and we share experiences. We can't always change things but we can have a better understanding of how we approach the subjects within a Christian context using the Bible and its texts as guidance.

The group have met every month since before Covid and during Covid, we all met on zoom. The loyalty and shared commitment of the fellowship group has enabled us to become a close knit group and over the years we have had various opportunities to join in Events such as the ride and stride and raise money with a church porch sleep out! (Some time ago now). We are hoping to be involved in more community events as a group In the future.

Each year in the summer we have a social event which is either a barbecue or pizza making and at Christmas we have an obligatory social with mulled wine and mince pies.

I am very pleased to be part of this group as I hope all our members are and I encourage the Church community to Form more fellowship groups and experience this extracurricular church activity, just as some of our members join in at Bacon Buddies

By Nick Hassall

### **11.Home Groups**

The Morning Home Group which meets on Tuesday mornings started as a Lent course in 2025 with a few people. It was a late-starter and so concluded a few weeks after Easter!

We then had a break for the summer but decided we would meet in the Autumn again, on a fortnightly basis. We decided to look more closely at the gospel of Mark, and then finish in Advent with the Christmas readings from the first two chapters of Luke and Matthew.

We then met again in January and onto the 2026 Lent course in February, when we again met weekly until Easter.

We now have four dates booked in May and June to look at different ways to pray - on Tuesdays 12th May, and 2nd, 16th and 30th June.

We start with tea, coffee and often biscuits starting at 9.30 am and finishing at 11 am.

More information from Revd Barbara on 07703 183980.

By Reverend Barbara Way

The Tuesday evening homegroup started from the 2025 Lent group. The group meets fortnightly and enjoys praying, bible study, worship and social events at the end of each term. Studies have included passages from John's gospel including looking at the Light of the World, The Way of Love and The Living Water.

The group also explored 5 studies from the book of Ephesians. The studies are opportunities to grow in our lives as Christians as we share and learn together. It has been lovely to get to know each other more and enjoy being together. It is an open friendly group and new members are very welcome.

By Hilary and Andrew

### **12. Breakfast Groups**

Bacon Buddies usually meets on the last Saturday of every month at 9am. This is a men's group open to all men who want to get together for breakfast, a cuppa and a chinwag. We average around 10-12 folk, but have had as many as 20. There is no agenda, simply a chance to offer a warm welcome and an opportunity to chat, listen and chew the fat about subjects that matter to menfolk! The views and opinions shared are diverse and interesting, but always respectful and thoughtful. We share lots of laughs and hope that the group will continue to grow. Special thanks to Nick and Stuart for hosting and catering.

By Dan Turvey

Women's breakfast launched in 2025 and is a welcoming, gathering with croissants, coffee and chat. Held at the Vicarage it is a space for chatting about everything and anything and offers a relaxed start to a Saturday. The same rules apply as with the Bacon Buddies – kindness, listening and respectful – plus smiling is essential and enjoying wholesome food!

By Reverend Caroline

### **13. Flower arrangers**

The Ash Flower Arranging Team provide floral displays fortnightly throughout the year apart from the Lent and Advent time. We have a roster which is organised at the beginning of the year. The roster informs the flower arrangers of when their duties are, which enables us to plan our gardens and look for flowers suitable for arrangements both at the local markets and in the supermarkets. The Flower Arrangers generally pay for the cost of these flowers but we do have access to funds for reimbursement if needed. Our team is slowly shrinking in numbers so it is anticipated that in the future we may not be able to fulfil our fortnightly arrangements as we've been able to do in the past.

We were able to create a Summer Celebration of Flowers for the St Nicholas Church Summer Fete on the 14th of June. The fete attracted many people into the church; the floral displays were much admired and added a lovely welcoming atmosphere in the church. The floral displays allowed people to wander around the church which possibly they wouldn't have done as they were heading for the fete activities which were held outside in the church yard.

The Ash Flower Arranging team was asked by the Ash Parish Council to design a suitable floral memorial for VE Day which was held on the 8th of May. The design was created by Francis Outrim and her husband who designed a 'V' shape out of wood which was covered in chicken wire; the flowers of blue, red and white colours were arranged appropriately and provided a stunning visual memorial which was laid at the bottom of the Ash War Memorial.

The Ash Flower Arrangers once again hosted a Christmas wreath workshop which was a great team effort under the mentorship of Christine Brown and Val Hale. During the workshop, the other flower arrangers were able to make up Christmas wreaths and table top decorations for sale at the Christmas Winterfest fair which was held the following week. Both the wreath workshop and the Christmas event raised money for the church. We are mindful of the eco-friendly trend to reduce the use of Oasis; we are experimenting with using more gravel and chicken wire and considering purchasing artificial flowers which we can blend into the arrangements.

We recently had a flower arranging afternoon tea get-together and that was a great time for us to share our experiences together as a team and discuss flowers and other life matters!

#### **14. Bell Ringers**

It has been another busy year at Ash.

Ringling takes place, Fridays, Sundays, and at Eastry on Mondays, and the fourth Saturday of each month, which is a joint practice for Ash, Sandwich and Gt. Mongeham towers. The practices are enjoyed by all those that attend - they aim to provide help to try to advance each tower's capabilities and for ringers to get to know each other.

We attended the service in church on Rogation Sunday, where Caroline blessed the ringers and our new bell ropes, along with the farmers.

The tower has been open to the public on three occasions this year.

We rang for VE day celebrations, half muffled for Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day and tolled a bell for a funeral. There were no weddings at Ash this year, and Ash hosted the District 10 bell practice in November.

This year, visitors came from Bury St Edmunds, Hertfordshire and the University of London, Society of Change Ringers. The Society of Royal Cumberland Youths rang a very nice full peal on the 10 bells.

One local quarter peal of Plain Bob Doubles was rung.

I attended an ART teaching training course at St. Laurence in Thanet.

Malcolm and Derek attended a Steeple keeping course run by Brian Butcher (the KCACR Bell Restoration Officer at Kingsnorth to gain some knowledge of what needs to be done on a regular basis to the bells to keep them in tiptop condition. (Steeple keepers report)

A thorough joint clean of the Clock room has taken place - it is now very tidy. Our old ropes are stored in two plastic boxes, and the Christmas Spire lights are in their own box. A woodworm check is in progress, we shall be kept informed about this. The clock is no longer the responsibility of the ringers – an automatic regulator is to be fitted to allow the clock to run smoothly. For security, the padlock to the clock room has been replaced by a combination lock.

Our social gatherings this year have been well attended and enjoyed by all. They included a Sausage Sizzle, the Harvest Supper and Quiz in church, the Ash Dash, a pre-Christmas get together and, for the first time, a Fourth Saturday outing this February, followed by a meal.

After a very long year, Airlie is back ringing with us once again. Gregg and Mark have been out of action after medical procedures, but we look forward to their return when they are able. Sue, an established ringer, joined us last August and in December she took part in a quarter peal after a good few decades of non-ringing.

Sadly, Teresa, Carol and Dominique made their decisions to cease ringing, although we remain in contact with all three on a social level.

This year, we entered a team in the District call change competition at Littlebourne. Our average age of 78 probably made history! Nigel, Chris, Sue, Bob, Marilyn and Malcolm, gave it our best. Ringing first, and having Stuart Palin assist us with calling the changes from outside of the circle, the ringing was very commendable. 11 teams entered and we were in first position for most of the time, until teams 9, 10 and 11 rang - St. Dunstan's, Ospringe and St. Stephen's. Ash was awarded 4 th . position but there were very few marks between 2 nd , 3 rd , and 4th places. It was a great effort, of which we can be proud. The detailed results were:

St. Stephen's 91%, Ospringe 85%, St. Dunstan's 82%, Ash 81%

By Marilyn Barden

**St. Nicholas, Ash – Steeple/Bell Report 2024 - 2025**

**Background**

In Spring 2024, the condition of our bell chamber emerged as a cause for concern, on a number of fronts. The bells were augmented and rehung in 1978, and there was little evidence of any major maintenance work having been done since that time. Weather conditions and the passage of time had resulted in a significant level of rust on the metal frame and headstocks, and the floor beneath the frame (made from untreated chipboard) had deteriorated to the point where it had become a safety concern. At our 2024 AGM, it was agreed that a detailed inspection should be undertaken, and quotations obtained for any necessary remedial work. This was entrusted to Trevor Arnold of Maypole Bells in Lynsted, and the inspection was carried out in April 2024.

### **Scope/Cost**

Following the inspection, the following remedial work was recommended :

- Rub down and repaint the metal frame, headstocks and metal fittings
- Replace 3 stays which were cracked
- Effect repairs to 2 of the clappers (worn staple bolts and a cracked staple hinge)
- Adjust clappers, tighten bolts, grease where appropriate
- Lay new decking floor beneath the bells, leaving the old floor in situ (as this was 'sandwiched' between the frame and the joists, it could not simply just be replaced)
- Replace lock on lower tower door

Quotations were sought, with Maypole Bells being the most competitive at just under £6,500, against the nearest local quote of ca. £15,000! There was little interest from companies in other parts of the country, due to the accommodation and subsistence costs for their operatives for the duration of the work, which would have inflated the cost to an unviable level.

At the 2024 AGM, we also agreed that we would seek quotations for a new set of ropes. A number of manufacturers were contacted, and prices were all very similar (ca. £175 per rope +VAT), but with Maypole Bells at an advantage as they are not VAT registered. The Maypole Bells quotation for 11 ropes (including a new chiming rope) is therefore £1,925

Against this background, it was agreed that we should go with Maypole Bells for the work in the tower and the ropes. Opinions/references were sought from existing customers of his, and a site visit was arranged to see his operation and choose sally colours. The orders were finally placed in July, following receipt of Diocesan approval for the work to be carried out.

### **Funding**

For the remedial work, a £2,000 grant was received from the KCACR Bell Restoration Fund, with the balance being covered by the PCC. The cost of the new ropes will be covered by

means of a donation to the PCC from the Ringers' Tower Fund. The Ringers would like to express their gratitude to the PCC for their support for this project, and the additional work which has been carried out over the past year on the staircase and ringing room ceiling repairs.

## **Progress**

The work in the bell chamber was completed to a very high standard in September 2024. Maypole Bells proved to be a diligent and helpful contractor, and we are delighted with the end result. Hopefully, the bell installation should not need any further major work for some years now.

## **The Completion**

Our lovely new bell ropes, made by Trevor at Maypole Bells were delivered to the tower on March 7<sup>th</sup> and a team of ringers, four Ash, one Goodnestone assisted Trevor with the fitting. They do look splendid. New ropes are a new challenge for the ringing team as they need to "bed in". This will only come with ringing the bells but shouldn't take a lot of time. As with the bell work, the ropes will not need replacing for many years.

## **St. Nicholas, Ash – Bell Ringing Teaching/Training 2024 - 2025**

The exercise to try and recruit new blood to the tower was born out of fear that ringing at Ash might cease, with the sad loss of Brian Lawrence in 2020, several ringers moving away and sometimes only 3 or 4 of us turning up for ringing on a Sunday. She set out to try and build a sustainable band, with the first initiative being a short presentation in the Church in October 2023, followed by a 'taster' session in the belfry. We were delighted that the original 'Gang of Four' were interested enough to want to start their ringer's journey - we thought that this was a manageable number, and that we would be doing well if at least two of them eventually became regular ringers. As we all now know, this project then developed a life of its own, and 4 learners became 13, including two from Sandwich.

Teaching learners from scratch on this scale presents a number of challenges, not least of which is the limited amount of rope time each learner can expect during a normal practice night, when the needs of our established ringers also need to be taken into account. For this reason, a dedicated learners' practice was established on a Monday evening, and that practice was also soon divided into two sessions – one for bell handling, and the other for bell control as the learners started to progress. As with any skill, different individuals develop at different speeds, and the Monday practice allowed us to tailor sessions for each individual's needs, with the goal of moving them on to join our regular Friday practice as soon as they became competent to do so.

Progress was steady during 2024, but with only one qualified teacher in the tower, the overall pace of development remained an issue, as did the patience (or lack of it) of a nearby resident who took a dislike to the sound of single bells being used for practice on

Monday evenings ! In the interests of harmony and after discussion with the PCC, we set ourselves the target of bringing all our learners to the point where they could join the Friday practice by the end of March 2025. This necessitated drafting in some help on the teaching front, and we have been very fortunate to have had the assistance of Stuart Palin (KCACR Canterbury District Ringing Master and fellow Cathedral ringer) for the first quarter this year on a Monday. His help has been invaluable, and I am delighted to report that the majority of our learners have now been integrated into the Friday practice, and the two remaining Monday sessions will enable us to integrate the remaining three ringers by the end of the month.

My thanks to all our learners for their dedication, perseverance and loyalty, and to our established ringers for their patience and support as this exercise has unfolded - we now have a thriving band, all capable of handling a bell safely and competently. Our learners are starting to make a valuable contribution to Sunday service ringing, and with the invaluable support we have received from the PCC in terms of bell refurbishment and tower repairs, the future of ringing as a service to the Ash.

### **15. The Friends of St Nicholas Church**

The May Bank Holiday weekend 2026 saw our major fundraising event of the year – the hugely popular Ash Art Exhibition and Sale. We were fortunate that Carrie Horwood, from Cats Eye Carving of Sandwich and Staple, cut the ribbon for us to open the 22 nd Ash Art Exhibition and Sale with this year being a bumper crop of 502 exhibits of which 149 sold to a record 905 paying visitors, making it a varied and interesting exhibition, with the usual excellent food available at our café. The help and support of the church and the countless volunteers who donate their time and talents in so many ways are what makes this a hugely successful and enjoyable major event in the Ash social calendar, this year raising -, well we are not quite sure yet but we know it will probably exceed last year's total when all the figures are in.

We held our AGM in September and reported our fundraising income (for our financial year to the end of June 2025) to be just over £14,700. The Treasurer was pleased to report that we had supported the PCC with a grant for the churchyard maintenance and paid for the installation of safety rails for the tower.

Since then, we have funded repairs to the tower steps and the clock, provided a further grant for the churchyard maintenance and paid for new noticeboards, new bell stays and, most recently, trolleys for tables and chairs to enable safer and easier use and storage.

Our other events were the Shuffleboard evening in October, the Monthly Coffee Morning in December and the Race Night in February. In addition, we provide the Bar for the New Ash Players Panto (NAP) in January, which not only raises our profile with new audiences, but is also a great fundraiser. We are grateful to the NAP who allow us to retain all the profit from the Bar, and it is a good example of village organisations working together.

All these events contribute to our funds which help support the work needed for the Church to function not just as a place of worship, but as a village hub where many local events can be held, which benefits the whole community.

We also rely on our Annual Subscriptions. We hope you will agree that the 'Friends', which is a registered charity, is worth supporting on an ongoing basis. We ask for a minimum donation of £5.00 per person, unchanged since we were formed in 1994 (we are now in our 32 nd year). Many of our Members generously pay much more and Gift Aid their donations which also adds to our funds. If you are not yet a member, please consider joining - Your support would be appreciated.

Any queries re membership or payment, contact Hazel; email at [treasurerfstnicholas@gmail.com](mailto:treasurerfstnicholas@gmail.com)

Our AGM will be held in September and everyone is welcome to attend.

With thanks for your continuing support.

The Friends of St Nicholas Church, Ash Committee

### **16.Ride and Stride**

The annual Ride and Stride event is organised by the Friends of Kent Churches and involves volunteers either cycling or walking on their chosen route, taking in as many local churches as they wish and, through sponsorship, raising much-needed funds. These proceeds are distributed by the Friends in the form of grants to those churches seeking assistance with urgent repairs to their fabric. The event takes place on the second Saturday of September.

St Nicholas, Ash has always supported the scheme. Not many of our parishioners actively take part but we usually encourage sufficient volunteers to cover the manning of the porch of our church during the day, enabling us to provide a warm welcome to the many cyclists and hikers who check in at Ash.

### **17.Ash Cartwright and Kelsey School**

There has been a school in the village since 1721. The school has long standing links with St Nicholas Church. We are lucky to have such an historic and beautiful Church in the village. Being a Church Aided school, the warm and supportive relationship between Church and school is crucial to the community. This year we have had very close links with the Church. Pat Coles or 'Grandma Pat' as the children call her, has led Thursday morning worship at the school and has shared this responsibility with Reverend Caroline. We had our Easter, leavers and Harvest services at the Church and will also use the Church for our Easter Service. We held our first Ash Wednesday 'ashing' at the school, led by Reverend Caroline. We used our beautiful nature garden and invited children from years 4 and 5 to take part.

The children have also visited the Church to support their education. When year 5 learn about Victorians, the Heritage group take them to the church graveyard to see the grave of the young Victorian school teacher who sadly died. Our youngest children, including our Fledglings nursery, visit the Church for special early years services with Reverend Caroline. They particularly enjoyed their Christingle service.

We do have spaces in our nursery from September 2026. If you have a child who will be turning 3, please get in touch to arrange an individual tour.

By Fiona Crascall, Headteacher

### **Governance at Ash Cartwright and Kelsey School by Beth Barber**

Several members of St Nicholas, Ash are Governors at Ash, Cartwright & Kelsey Church of England (Aided) Primary School. It has an important role in the community of Ash and a valuable relationship between the church and school.

Foundation Governors (the name given to governors appointed by a PCC/Diocese) are Sarah Beaumont, Pat Coles, Carl Watson. Our administrator Beth Barber is a parent Governor and Vice Chair. James Piggott has just joined the Governing Board also. Pat Coles is the Archdeacon's Nominee Foundation Governor. Bill Vennart was a long-standing Archdeacon's Nominee Foundation Governor right up until his death in January last year. His contribution to the school community was enormous and he saw the school through significant milestones and developments.

Good governance within a Church of England school requires strategic understanding and support for the Christian ethos and how this underpins and informs every area of school life. There also needs to be input into policies on RE & collective worship and to understand the purpose of the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) inspection and what it is looking at and for.

The majority of the pupils live in the Parish and the school has worship as an integral part of its daily life. There is a weekly collective worship, led by Pat Coles and Reverend Caroline plus there is a church service at the end of every term plus additional visits to the church on special occasions or to support class topics. These include Harvest, Christmas, Easter, Ash Heritage, St Nicholas Day, Year 6 leavers services and so on. And looking forward, Reverend Caroline is working with the Headteacher on additional events, such as a special service on Ash Wednesday.

Governors are a part of school life and enjoy regularly attending events such as concerts, fetes and assemblies.

If anyone is interested in becoming a Governor, it is very rewarding! A mix of skills is valuable on a governing board so if you have anything you feel you could bring to the team, please do enquire via the school or chat to one of the people mentioned above.

## **18. St Faith's Prep School**

St Faith's continues to be a hive of energy and enthusiasm supporting children to achieve their potential and develop their understanding of the wider world. This year our connections with the community continue to grow as we invited the local Guiding community to hold Thinking Day on the school site and are working with other local groups, hoping they can share our fantastic Sports Hall facility in the future. Our connections with the beautiful St Nicholas church are as strong as they have always been. As well as visiting St Nicholas for teaching and learning experiences, as a school we come together in the church for our annual Carol Service, Festival of Light and Easter Service and raise collections to support the good work of the church. We welcome others to join us at events or to simply look around the school. In the coming year we look forward to working hard to forge further connections with community groups and events.

By Helen Coombs, Head

## **19. Sparks Sunday School**

Jo is our Sparks Sunday School leader and we continue to offer sessions when we can during the Sunday services. We continue with less sessions than we would like and are really eager, and praying for this team to grow because parents would like their children to have a regular group for their children and we can consistently offer the children a warm welcome.

Each session we have a Bible story linked to the week's sermon, and then a craft to demonstrate the message, along with discussion and prayer.

Both the children and the wider congregation seemed to benefit from this, with the children being able to get involved, and the congregation seeing a more youthful presence back in our church.

In November the church hosted a Light Party, celebrating all things light including, most importantly, Jesus as the Light of our Church. This was extremely well attended by the local children, who all got stuck in with the activities, singing songs and a brilliant story.

Our Christmas Eve crib service was wonderful and the church was packed out with the children, dressed in fabulous costumes.

This year the highlight has been the Easter Trail on Good Friday, with 200 people gathered in our church building to re-discover the Easter story. It highlighted the close connections between our school and church as these children really knew what they were talking about. It was joy and we need to do more of this.

Thank you to all that helped with our children's events.

## **20. Messy Church**

It is always a joy when ministry simply grows from the shoots already planted and we see something flourish really quickly.

It has been amazing to see so many people from the school PTFA get involved with our new venture welcoming children into our church, to learn about Jesus, church and faith in a gentle and age-appropriate way. It can be disheartening when we don't see as many families and children come to church on a Sunday morning, but this group has shown that there is a real desire for their parents to have that relationship with the church, but maybe in a different way. Messy Church is a church, not a craft club, that helps people encounter Jesus as Lord and Saviour, based on hospitality, creativity and celebration. We have been inundated with requests for the children to come to this and have had to limit the numbers able to attend to 35. Amazing!

Thank you to our Church Volunteers, our PTFA leaders, especially to Catherine Tungate and Claire Farbrace who have spear-headed and taken the lead over this. Messy Church is resource heavy - it needs a lot of people to look after our children and to bring our faith to life through story, craft and.....mess!!!

We look forward to enriching the lives of those who attend with God's love into the coming year.

Reverend Caroline

### **21.Administration by Beth Barber**

I am responsible for supporting St Nicholas Church with administrative duties and any marketing and communication that helps raise the profile of the church, and the Benefice that it is part of.

It is a wonderfully varied role and I get to meet lots of people and groups within the community.

I like to think that every spreadsheet, rota, or administrative task quietly strengthens the church's ability to serve, care, and reach people!

My duties include:

- Providing administrative support to the Vicar and other clergy
- Providing administrative support to the church warden and church teams
- Managing bookings for life events, in particular weddings
- Producing the weekly e-newsletter
- Producing the weekly pew sheet
- Raising the profile of the church through Facebook
- Overseeing day-to-day operations of the church office
- Submitting information to the Parish Magazine
- Liaising with schools and youth groups

- Being the point of contact for initial enquiries – which can be on any topic!

And very importantly, along with all the church teams, rolling up my sleeves to help when needed!

### **Highlights of the last year:**

- Working with the vicar, Reverend Caroline Turvey into her second year with us to support her in delivering aims, vision and ministry.
- Working with the church wardens to assist with day-to-day church life and special events.
- Building relationships with the various church teams/volunteers – they are a great bunch!
- Web development with Ben Briggs, who has kindly volunteered to update our web page and to Peter Hydon doing background work with our ChurchSuite system.
- Use of social media to raise awareness, share resources and raise the profile of all aspects of Church Life including all the groups that have featured in this report!

**Thank you for reading our Report- if you are interested in becoming involved please let us know!**

Reverend Caroline: [canonryvicar@gmail.com](mailto:canonryvicar@gmail.com)

Churchwarden: [ash\\_chwarden@thecanonrybenefice.org.uk](mailto:ash_chwarden@thecanonrybenefice.org.uk)

Administrator: [thecanonrybenefice@gmail.com](mailto:thecanonrybenefice@gmail.com)

Website: [www.thecanonrybenefice.org.uk](http://www.thecanonrybenefice.org.uk)

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/StNicholasAsh/>

<https://www.facebook.com/friendsofstnicholaschurchash>

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61559503021241> (Sparks Sunday School)

<https://www.facebook.com/thecanonrybenefice>



Photo: Oasis Prayer Day - just one example of how our Church community join together.

Thank you to everybody who contributes to the life of this church. We are so grateful for all that you do. We are aware that we need to build up new ministry teams, especially catering, fundraising, social events and we would like to see more children and families come to church regularly. If you read this report and feel that there is something you could get involved with, please let someone from the team or reverend Caroline know. We look forward to seeing where God is moving and another year of church growth, joy and fellowship.

Thinking of donating towards keeping this beautiful church open to support our community?

<https://thecanonybenefice.org.uk/contact-us/finances-and-giving/> or scan the QR code.

