

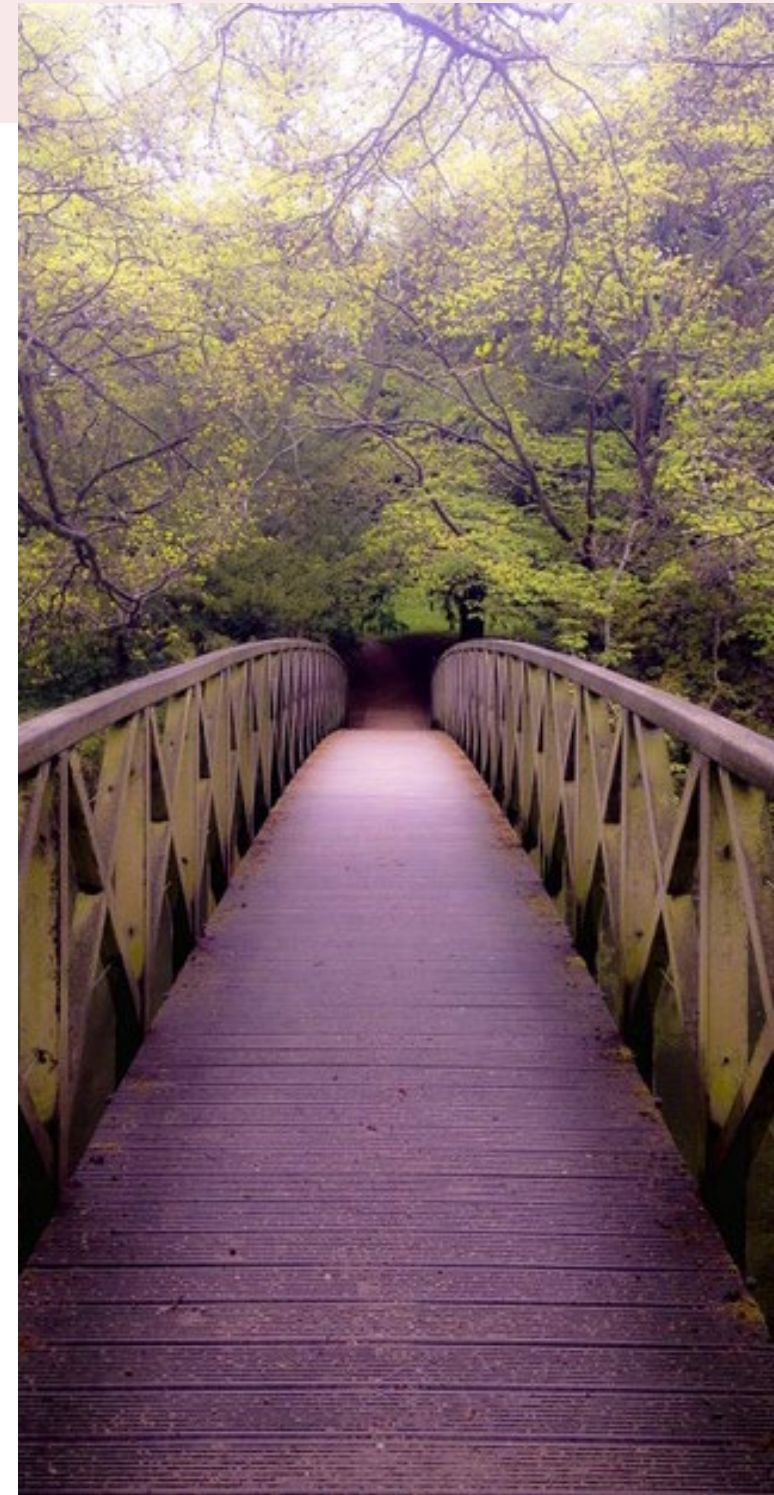
BENEFICE OF PENSHURST, FORDCOMBE AND THE CHIDDINGSTONE CHURCHES



*I heard the voice of the Lord, saying,
"Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"
Then said I, "Here am I; send me".*

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PENSHURST, FORDCOMBE AND THE CHIDDINGSTONES, HIGH WEALD OF WEST KENT

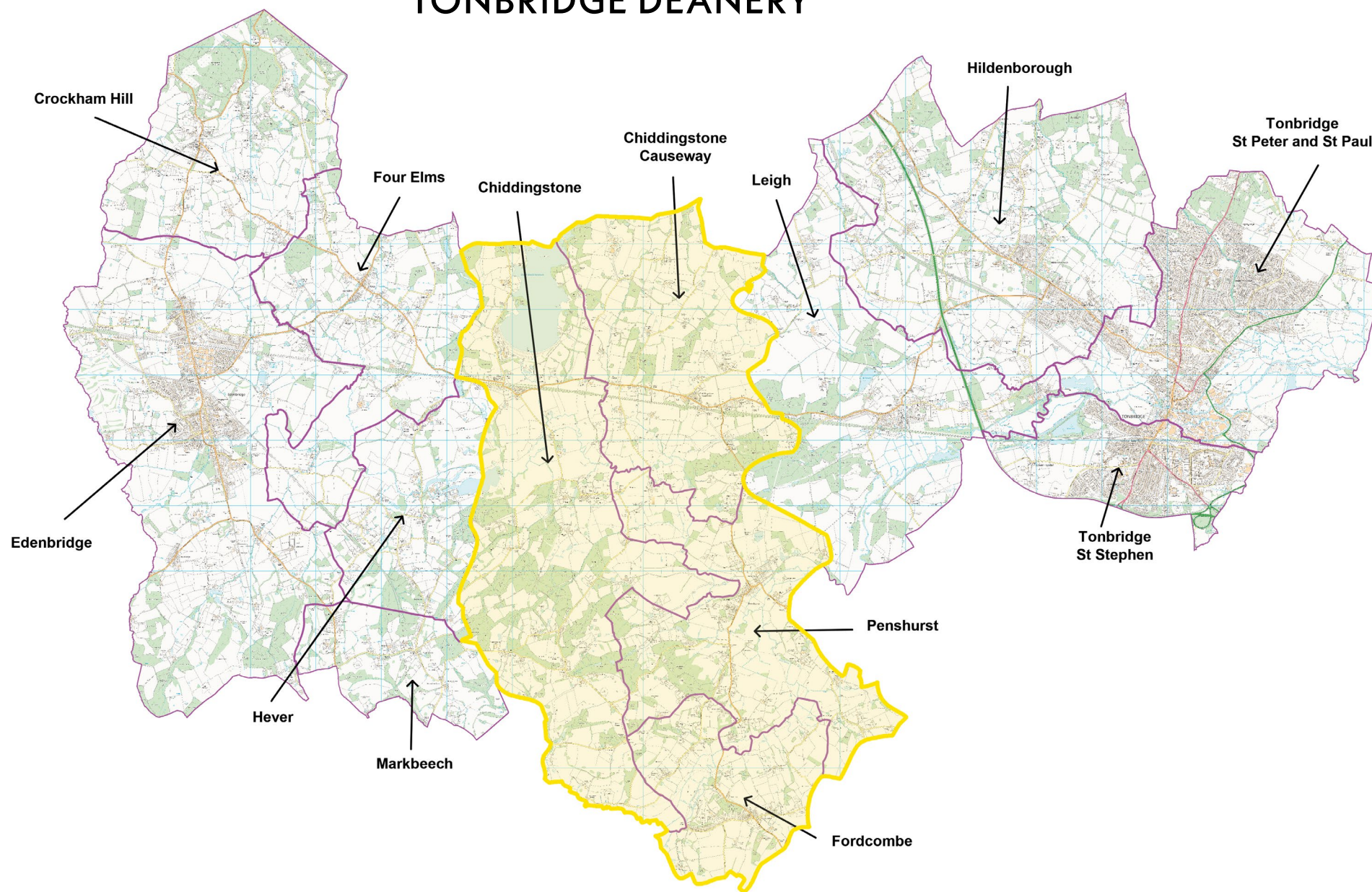
The villages of Chiddingstone, Chiddingstone Causeway, Penshurst and Fordcombe run from north to south along the ridges and valleys that border the rivers Eden and Medway before they merge in Penshurst and continue eastwards towards Tonbridge as the river Medway. The landscape produces a patchwork of rolling farmland and woods, designated as **the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Special Scientific Interest**.

The towns of Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells run in parallel, five miles to the east; **Edenbridge** a similar distance to the west. All these towns offer excellent rail links to London, while the M25 runs just to the north, providing an easy link to the motorway network. So, while the landscape of the villages may be mainly rural, the population is mixed in age and occupation and the villages offer a cross-section of life in a relatively prosperous corner of south-east England.

They are home to an historic house (Penshurst Place), castle (Chiddingstone), annual literary and arts festivals, sports clubs, choral society, farmers' market, amateur dramatics, dance and yoga classes, annual fêtes, a duck race and many other active clubs or events.



TONBRIDGE DEANERY



INTRODUCTION BY THE ARCHDEACON OF TONBRIDGE, DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER

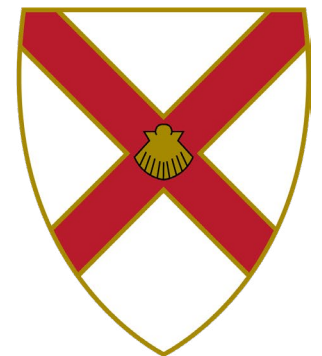
Called Together – the vision for the Diocese of Rochester

Called Together is the strategic vision for the Diocese of Rochester, launched in November 2017. We discerned its core themes after engaging widely across the Diocese, seeking to hear what God is calling us to in this place and time. Its three themes – *Growing Disciples, Enriching our Communities,* and *Resourcing our Mission and Ministry* – will direct our priorities until the end of 2022. Every parish in the Diocese is invited to support the shared vision in a way that fits their local context, working towards the same goals.

In line with this Diocesan vision, we have reviewed the provision of lay and ordained ministry in the Tonbridge Deanery and have agreed a pastoral reorganisation with a number of our parishes. The policy of the Diocese is to value rural churches, to keep them open and to grow sustainable

models of collaborative ministry so that lay and ordained Christians can combine to serve their communities. This vision lies behind the creation of this new benefice of Penshurst, Fordcombe and the Chiddingstone Churches. I am delighted that its members have embraced its creation, which presents an exciting opportunity for the first Rector.

**THE VEN JULIE CONALTY,
ARCHDEACON OF TONBRIDGE**



THE BENEFICE AND PARISHES

The new benefice of Penshurst, Fordcombe and the Chiddingstone Churches has a **population of 3,500** and the first combined electoral roll will be over 250. It comprises :

- **Four villages and three parishes** (the two Chiddingstone parishes have worked as one)
- **Four churches plus a chapel;** St John the Baptist, Penshurst and St Mary The Virgin, Chiddingstone are quite large, listed mediaeval churches, in good shape after recent projects to overhaul their fabric and modernise their facilities; St Luke's in Chiddingstone and St Peter's in Fordcombe are smaller Victorian churches; All Saints' Chapel, Poundsbridge is a cemetery chapel beside Penshurst's present burial ground.
- **Three church primary schools**
- **A church hall**

The patronage of the new benefice shall be exercised jointly by *The Archbishop of Canterbury*, *The Bishop of Rochester* and *The Rt Hon the Viscount De L'Isle*.



ST MARY THE VIRGIN, CHIDDINGSTONE



ST LUKE'S, CHIDDINGSTONE CAUSEWAY



ST JOHN THE BAPTIST, PENShurst



ST PETER'S, FORDCOMBE



There is a base of traditional parish work, which two part-time, paid parish administrators help to arrange. Much of the parishes' communication and administration is already online.

Penshurst and Chiddingstone attract many weddings because they are close to popular reception venues: **the benefice will host around 30 weddings in a normal year.** Baptisms and funerals will each reach a similar number.

Sunday services have been mainly eucharistic and sung by a robed choir; each parish now has a family service once a month; there is a **new joint benefice service on 5th Sundays.**

We see a new rota of Sunday services across the benefice as an early, important task for the Rector and Assistant Priest to design – finding the best fit for the objectives of the ministry, the congregations,

the geography of the churches and the two clergy available on Sundays. [The present schedule of services can be seen on each parish's website – see *Useful Links Page*]

The new benefice starts life with three PCCs, but all have resolved to agree a detailed scheme for a joint council, hopefully to be implemented by the time a new Rector arrives.

The three primary schools in the benefice are all Church of England schools and the Rector would be expected to be governor in one or more of these and to lead collective worship regularly in the schools. The relationships between church and school vary from close to more distant, but each presents the new Rector with an opportunity to reach young families.

MISSION AND MINISTRY IN THE BENEFICE

There are similarities between the parishes' present pattern of worship, which could be described as of a moderate Anglican bent – tolerant, neither overtly Anglo-Catholic nor evangelical.

THE COMING-TOGETHER OF OUR PARISHES, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OUR LONG HISTORIES, PRESENTS AN EXCITING OPPORTUNITY FOR THE NEW RECTOR TO SHAPE A FRESH MISSION FOR THE CHURCH IN OUR VILLAGES.

Our vision is to work together in the new benefice to grow our church so that it is at the heart of our communities.

We think there is a real opportunity for the new Rector to build on the pastoral work in the villages that is marked by **a strong sense of looking after each other in times of need, within the congregation and the community.** This has grown noticeably during the COVID epidemic and during the interregnum between ministries that each parish has recently experienced.

Our aims:

- We would like to **welcome people from all faiths, traditions and denominations** and, particularly, we want to advance the spiritual growth of our children and young people by **embracing our schools and local families.**
- We are united in wanting to **ensure our support and care of older parishioners** by increased lay involvement.
- While our village churches will continue to be distinct, we hope that an integrated administration will **enable exchange of ideas and enhanced financial and fundraising opportunities.**
- We have a vision of **active service to our communities and the wider world.**

One of the challenges for a new incumbent is to meet the spiritual needs of our older and traditional congregation whilst growing the more outgoing and lively worship of our younger families.



Bottom right: Family service COVID-secure carols around the bonfire.

THE BENEFICE TEAM



Interim Associate Priest: presently the Revd William (Bill) MacDougall. Bill was licensed in September 2019 to work Sundays plus 3 days a week, with a 0.5 stipend, on an initial contract for two years.



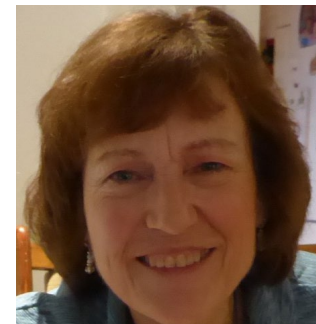
Licensed Lay Minister Dr Sally Musson, who is also licensed to St Peter & St Paul, Tonbridge.



Pastoral Assistant Carol Benton, who is licensed to conduct funeral services.



Part-time Administrator Louise Sanders - Chiddingstone



Part-time Administrator Margaret Atkins - Penshurst

WHO ARE WE LOOKING FOR?

We pray for a priest who will strengthen the roots of our faith, who will help us to bring the good news of God's Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to all and who will help us grow his church in this community. We hope a new priest will:

- With **vision and energy** refresh our church and embed it at the heart of our community, enhancing the Christian fellowship of our parishes.
- **Expand our outreach to families**, using our local church schools to act as springboards toward the involvement of parishioners.
- **Continue to support the older, traditional part** of our communities with traditional liturgical worship.
- Be a **good communicator** who enjoys involvement with the parishioners in a wide variety of both spiritual and social activities.
- Have a **warm personality** and a sense of **humour**.
- Be a **good listener** who can bring together a broad range of views.
- **Work collaboratively** and **mentor** both lay and ordained colleagues in their development.
- **Provide pastoral care** to our community, with the help of the existing team.
- Bring, ideally, some **experience of school governorship** and of leading collective worship in schools.
- Provide **leadership on safeguarding** and encourage all to contribute toward creating a safer church.
- Above all, **embrace the thriving nature of the community**, acting as a shepherd to a widespread and diverse flock.



LOOKING AFTER CHILDREN AND YOUNG FAMILIES

Pre-school provision in the benefice includes:

- **Well Place Day Nursery and Pre-school**, on the Penshurst estate, is privately-owned and rated Good by OFSTED; it looks after children from age 3 months to 5 years, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. all year round.
- **Chiddingstone Nursery School**, situated in a converted stable in the grounds of Chiddingstone Castle and owned by a charity, takes children from 2-4 years old and has been rated as 'Outstanding' by OFSTED for 12 years. The nursery has a close relationship with the church.
- **Chiddingstone's Toddler Service**, for mums, carers and pre-school children takes place once a month in the Parish Room at St Luke's and is led by a pastoral assistant.
- **Sallywags Playgroup**, for mums and toddlers runs every Wednesday in Penshurst Village Hall. It is organised by a local PCC member and is very popular, attended by families from villages all around.





There are three primary schools, all Church of England schools:

- **Chiddingstone Church of England School** provides a family-orientated education for 210 local children. Underpinned by strong Christian values, it has close links with St Mary's Church, an association that has contributed to its Outstanding rating by OFSTED, its expansion and its status as an Academy.
- **Penshurst Church of England School** accepts pupils from the wider area, as well as Penshurst, and has a present roll of 125. It offers a range of sports and enrichment clubs as well as an Early Morning Club and After School Provision. Rated Good by OFSTED, it expresses a Christian ethos and encourages all to act as 'Good Samaritans' showing compassion and courage. Both the school leadership and the PCC are keen to improve working links.

- **Fordcombe Church of England School** is small by primary school standards with 105 pupils, so pastoral care is highly personalised with each pupil known to all teaching staff. The school's aims are to offer pupils the skills and knowledge that give pupils the best possible start in life, fostering a love of learning in a secure environment that promotes self-worth and Christian values. The school is rated Good by OFSTED.

There are **many well-regarded secondary schools and a further education college** in the area, including four grammar schools (retained by Kent), the Bennett Memorial Diocesan School and Sixth Form in Tunbridge Wells, other faith based and comprehensive schools.

THE RUNNING OF THE PARISHES



FINANCE

Each PCC's church finances have been closely controlled by their treasurers and are in reasonable health. **Reserves have been able to absorb the impact of the COVID losses**, because the lockdowns have inevitably affected income from collections, weddings and fund-raising events. **Core planned giving from members, however, has remained remarkably strong.** The combined Chiddingstone parishes and Penshurst have comparable income, expenditure and reserves, such that their treasurers believe a merger of interests should be possible to achieve.

FUND-RAISING / FRIENDS OF PENSURST CHURCH

Each parish has had its own approach to fund-raising; we hope that the new benefice will lead to productive exchanges as to what can work best. **One opportunity is to benefit from Penshurst's experience of setting up The Friends of Penshurst Church ['FoPC']** as an independent charity to raise funds for the fabric of the church. This has allowed it to reach parts of the village that otherwise would not have been reached – and not just its money, but its energy and creativity. FoPC has its own board of independent trustees, which always includes one PCC member. The trustees have agreed to discuss how FoPC's arrangements can be changed to cover

other churches in the benefice, although its present reserves [£60,000] will need to be restricted to spending on the fabric of Penshurst church.

COMMUNICATIONS

Each parish has been trying to improve its database of supporters and **making greater use of digital communication, including social media and websites**, to keep in touch with their members and other supporters.

SAFEGUARDING

Each parish has appointed a PCC member as its Safeguarding Lead and has adopted a safeguarding policy. These vary in strength and Penshurst is presently reviewing its coverage.

COVID

The churches have responded in slightly different ways since the COVID-19 lockdown. Morning services from Chiddingstone have been recorded and **broadcast via YouTube, with links from Facebook, Twitter and A Church Near You.** Penshurst broadcast some addresses by the Rector, hymns recorded by the choir on YouTube and **live-streamed its Act of Remembrance via Zoom.** Fordcombe church has been closed for much of the COVID period due to roof repairs.

WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO COME AND LIVE HERE?

You will find, in this benefice, a genuinely warm welcome.

- This is a **beautiful** part of the country to live in, yet **close to London**.
- There is a relatively **modern Rectory** with a garden and four bedrooms.
- There are **excellent nursery, primary and secondary schools**.
- The **churches are in good repair**, their **finances are stable** and there is good support from PCC members and administrators; so you should be able to concentrate on leading your ministry.
- The new benefice offers a chance for **exercising leadership skills and innovation**.



LIFE IN OUR VILLAGES

- The two Chiddingstones and Penshurst each have **thriving village shops**; there is a **popular farm shop** on the edge of Fordcombe; and a **monthly Farmers' Market** at Penshurst. There are **seven pubs** across the villages, **two cafés**, and **two tea rooms**, all catering to the many visitors and walkers in the area, as well as to villagers.
- **Each community has a village hall**, although none is church-owned. Penshurst Village Hall houses a doctors' surgery and pharmacy for the villages, part of a larger medical practice based in Tonbridge.
- **The National Trust owns the centre of Chiddingstone** (its school, shop, pub, village hall and a few Tudor houses), while a local trust controls Chiddingstone Castle. **Penshurst's village centre is dominated by Penshurst Place and Gardens** (home of the Sidney family) which **draws 85,000 visitors a year**. The surrounding estate is an important employer, running the village shop and post office, a gift shop, café, farm and various rental properties.
- **The Chiddingstone Churches and Fordcombe church each produce a monthly village magazine** (the Penshurst equivalent is not run by the church but always prints any church-originated content). Two villages (Chiddingstone Causeway and Fordcombe) run **church fêtes**; the churches take part in wider community fêtes elsewhere.
- The **larger churches in Chiddingstone and Penshurst are well-used for non-church events**. Recent, pre-COVID Penshurst users, for example, have included Penshurst Choral Society, Penshurst Festival, Tunbridge Wells Music Festival, English Speaking Union, Merry Opera and Matchbox Opera.
- **For the sports enthusiast**, there is cricket, stoolball, tennis, boot camps, rugby, annual fun runs and the infamous 'Real Football' match with hundreds of players.



PENSHURST RECTORY

Penshurst Rectory was built in 2005 in the south-west corner of the large gardens of the former Rectory, now called The Old Rectory. It stands **near the church and in the heart of the village**. It shares the first ten metres of its driveway with The Old Rectory, but thereafter enjoys its own curtilage, garage (for two cars) and **south-west facing garden**.

Downstairs, the hallway leads on the right to a separate study or parish office and on the left to the family's private quarters. These consist on the ground floor of a **kitchen, sitting room and dining room** (which can be joined or divided by a partition); **small utility room and w/c**.

Upstairs, **it was designed with four bedrooms, but one was sub-divided to create a fifth bedroom** for the previous Rector who had six children. The **main bedroom has an en-suite bathroom**; there is one other **family bathroom**. There is a generous attic.

The boiler burns oil to produce **under-floor heating**. The hob in the kitchen is electric. There is a small wood-burning stove in the sitting room (used by the former incumbent's family as a dining room).



ST JOHN THE BAPTIST, PENSHURST

The church, a grade 1-listed building, is first mentioned in 1115 and has been added to in almost every century since. The parish undertook a major project, starting in 2009, to make the building more flexible for worship and community uses. The appeal for this raised £750,000, with the help of the Friends of Penshurst Church. **The church was redecorated, its drainage improved, heating reconditioned, lighting re-designed, some pews removed and space provided for fellowship after services or exhibitions.** A hidden kitchen was installed and a new stone extension houses two w/cs (one for the disabled). The success of the project has refreshed the building and produced a greater appreciation of the church's importance in village life.

The Sidney family are responsible for the maintenance and decoration of the Sidney chapel in the south-east corner and of the crypt below. The churchyard outside the church was closed in 1857 when it became full; the present burial ground lies almost a mile away, outside All Saints' Chapel at Poundsbridge.

In 1897, at the height of the English Gothic revival, George Bodley and Thomas Garner were commissioned to design and install a full wooden chancel screen, which the parish tried to remove as part of the recent project. The Victorian Society has fiercely resisted this. The ensuing dispute led to sittings in the church of a Consistory Court in 2013 and the Court of Arches in 2014. Although the PCC's arguments prevailed, the Court of Arches imposed stringent conditions for the move which we have not yet managed to meet. It remains in place.

All Saints' cemetery chapel lies at the south-eastern corner of Penshurst, alongside its present burial ground. The chapel has hosted one communion service a month and is not licensed for weddings or funerals. The PCC decided in 2020 not to insure its rebuilding value.



Bottom right: All Saints' Chapel at Poundsbridge.

ST MARY THE VIRGIN, CHIDDINGSTONE

Chiddingstone is an unusually widespread village (the second most sparsely populated in Kent) due to its origins of pig-dens developing into farms, with only small village centres. **Uniquely within the diocese, the parish has two thriving churches which share the main services** (half a year each) but the parishioners join together as one congregation whether at St Mary's or St Luke's. **Similarly, the two PCCs hold one joint meeting.**

Although an early Saxon church is believed to have existed, pre-Conquest, for the densmen and their families, the present church of St Mary the Virgin has 13th century origins but was substantially rebuilt in the 14th century with the fine west tower, stair turret and four pinnacles being added in the 15th century. Following a lightning strike in 1624, which destroyed all but the tower, the church was rebuilt and rededicated in 1629. There is a peal of eight bells in the tower which were all rehung in 1991.

More recently, enhancement of St Mary's facilities has included the addition of a small chapel in the base of the tower, toilet facilities, and an area for preparing and serving light snacks, tea and coffee for meetings, concerts, visiting groups and regular gatherings after services. Also, a built-in laptop, remote controlled projector and a screen have been installed for use within services, by guest speakers and, importantly, by the school. **Quinquennial repairs carried out in 2019 have ensured that the church remains in very sound condition.** Outside, there are two separate churchyards, the original 'enclosed churchyard' and the 'new churchyard' further up the High Street which was opened in 1919.



ST LUKE'S, CHIDDINGSTONE CAUSEWAY

St Luke's, Chiddingstone Causeway was built in 1898 when the local community grew with the development of the cricket bat and ball industry carried on by Duke & Sons in the village, and large congregations justified a proper church to replace the small chapel of St Saviour.

The Hills family, local landowners, commissioned John Bentley, designer of Westminster Roman Catholic Cathedral, as its architect; St Luke's is the only Anglican church that he designed. The church is well constructed in Bath stone in the late Gothic style with many notable features. These include a beautiful Altar window, the work of the leading Impressionist Wilfred de Glehn RA, his first ever stained glass commission.

St Luke's Parish Room is a purpose-built free standing oak building. It provides a home for the Sunday School, Youth Groups and Church Office, as well as a hall for socialising after Services, offering baby and disabled facilities. **The Parish Room is available for hire to the wider community for meetings and talks, exhibitions and clubs in the area.** The building is suitable for events of up to 40 people and has kitchen and toilet facilities. The room is next to the church, with ample parking.



ST PETER'S, FORDCOMBE

St Peter's was constructed as a chapel of ease in 1848 in plan as a simple rectangle, the walls of fine stone ashlar (large, square-cut stones) quarried locally with roofing tiles of Westmoreland slate. At the altar the central mosaic panel of the reredos representing the crucifixion was installed in 1849. The four panels depicting the archangels were a later addition in 1906, added so that an onlooker would not guess that they were not all created at the same time.

The chapel became a church in 1870 and in 1883 a north wing was added to accommodate a vestry and the organ. Natural light in St Peter's is provided by windows having diverse glazing. The east window, "Christ surrounded by Saints", shows St Augustine, who brought Christianity to Kent; St Dunstan, a memorable Archbishop of Canterbury from 960 to 988; the Virgin Mary; and Jesus' reputed favourite, St John. Above this is a mandorla window of a dove representing the Holy Spirit.

The nave has a series of windows designed by Walter Lonsdale in 1883 of the story and teachings of St Peter.

St Peter's is closely associated with the Hardinge family, twenty three of whom lie in the churchyard. Members of the family commemorated at Fordcombe include Viscount Hardinge of Lahore, Governor General of India 1844 - 1848 and Alexander, 2nd Baron Hardinge, of Penshurst, who was Private Secretary to King George V, King Edward VIII, and King George VI, and was therefore at the epicentre of the 1936 Abdication crisis

Essential work on the roof was undertaken in 1999; this year a plaster fall from the ceiling has required a closure of three months.



USEFUL LINKS

Diocese of Rochester	www.rochester.anglican.org
Chiddingstone Churches	www.achurchnearyou.com/church/16936
Fordcombe Church	www.fordcombechurch.org
Penshurst Church	www.penshurstchurch.org

SCHOOLS

Chiddingstone	www.chiddingstoneschool.co.uk
	www.chiddingstonenursery.co.uk
Fordcombe	www.fordcombe.kent.sch.uk
Penshurst	www.penshurst.kent.sch.uk
	www.wellplace.co.uk

OTHERS

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/chiddingstone-village
www.penshurstplace.com
www.chiddingstonecastle.org.uk
www.facebook.com/fordcombevillage
www.causewayhall.co.uk
www.penshurstvillagehall.co.uk
www.penshurst-online.co.uk