

A photograph of St Stephen's Church in Hackington, featuring a prominent stone tower with a wooden spire, set against a blue sky with light clouds. The church is surrounded by lush green trees and a well-maintained lawn with several gravestones in the foreground.

St Stephen's Church Hackington

Rector

Parish Profile
May 2025



Who are we?



We are a gently liberal catholic parish. The congregation is Inclusive, open and very welcoming; accepting of the ministry of women and keen on a challenging and enriching level of preaching and learning.

We want to see people encounter God in worship, in the Eucharist and in their daily lives. We want to grow in our ministry and reach all ages. We look forward to nourishing common causes with our neighbouring parishes, and to working with our new priest on our journey of discipleship, which will enable us to be a warm, welcoming, spiritual family, bringing the message of Christ to all.

Like many churches we experienced testing times during the Covid pandemic but discovered the blessings of online worship, we continue to live stream our Sunday services. Inevitably, our numbers did dip but we have recently experienced encouraging growth and a lowering of the average age. The congregation

is older than the surrounding local community with fewer young volunteers.

We want to see:

- worship placed at the centre of our parish life, as it has been for more than a thousand years, through liturgy, music and prayer;
- our congregation nurtured and developed through pastoral care, preaching and teaching;
- extended outreach to the wider community to include ministry to all parts of the parish and to the children and young people in our schools and universities.
- St Stephen's working more closely with other churches in Canterbury to share the love of God in our local community.



Where are we?

Our parish includes the old village of Hackington, which has been surrounded by densely populated housing estates during the past 50 years, becoming part of the urban development of Canterbury. The campus of the University of Kent lies to the north-west of the parish. The city's three universities have their own chaplaincies and we have some students in our congregation.

The old village centre includes the church, the Manwood Almshouses, Ye Olde Beverlie Public House, the Church Hall and the Rectory (built in the 1960s and including four bedrooms and a study). The population at the last census was 10891, 47% listing themselves as Christian in the census, and 57% are within the age bracket 18–29. The electoral roll stands at 75.

The parish is diverse, with some areas of the housing estates being deprived and bordering on Urban Priority Area status. Other areas, are wealthier and well-established. Many houses, originally built for families, are now in the low value rental market.

St Stephen's Infant and Junior Schools are close by the church; they are parts of two different secular multi-academy trusts. Previous Rectors have been governors at both schools and conducted assemblies but links are weaker now—this is an area for development. The schools visit the church building and churchyard for curriculum purposes and there is scope for developing this.



▲ *Billy the Donkey leading our Palm Sunday Procession*

The Archbishop's School is a Church of England Foundation Secondary school in the parish and the Rector is ex officio one of four Foundation Governors with others appointed by the Archbishop, Diocese and Cathedral. The school's chaplain, the Rev'd Dawn Watson, has a good relationship with local clergy and has preached at St Stephen's. The church is used by the school for worship occasionally. There are opportunities for volunteering with the chaplaincy team for supporting disadvantaged students through the mentoring scheme. There are two independent churches that meet in schools within the parish: Vineyard meet in the Archbishop's School and belong to Churches Together; the other is an FIEC church.



Our worship

Our regular services are:

Sundays:

- 10.30 am Sung Eucharist (CW)
- 6.00 pm Choral Evensong (BCP)

Wednesdays:

- 10.00 am Holy Communion (CW)

A small ecumenical satellite congregation meets monthly at Barton Mill Court, a sheltered housing complex for the elderly.

A series of service booklets provide an easy-to-follow liturgy for the festivals and seasons of the church's year.

Baptism: open policy. St Stephen's Church accepts those who request baptism so long as it is practically possible. Over the last five years there has been an average of 10 per year.

Communion: for some years our practice has been to communicate baptised children before they have been confirmed, following the House of Bishops guidelines.

Weddings: over the last five years there has been an average of 2 weddings each year. Divorcees are normally welcome for marriage, subject to discussion with the incumbent.

Churchyard: the Churchyard is closed for full interments but still available for burial of cremated remains. There are about 12 funerals or interments of ashes each year.



Our Ministry

Canterbury Diocese, the oldest and second poorest diocese in England, covers East Kent and includes some of the most deprived parishes in England (C.U.F. Index). Oversight of the diocese is delegated to the Bishop of Dover, the Right Reverend Rose Hudson-Wilkin.

A retired priest in the congregation is currently acting as 0.2 Interim Parish Priest. Our curate is a Self-Supporting Minister, who is expected to be priested in June 2025. Her Training Incumbent is the current Interim Priest in Charge, but this will be subject to review at the time of a new appointment. She will remain in the parish long-term.

- We have a **Pastoral Group** which co-ordinates the pastoral care, visiting the sick and lonely and giving them practical support; it organises baptismal visits, wedding arrangements, and bereavement visitors. The prayer sub-group organises an emergency prayer chain.

- Our **website** and **Facebook** pages are kept up-to-date to make information widely available and to show what we are doing each week. We live-stream our 10.30 a.m. and 6 p.m. services most weeks so that those who are unable to attend in person can join our worship. Over the past year, around 1,500 hours of our services and other videos were viewed on our YouTube channel, where we have just under 350 subscribers. The electronic 'Pews News' is sent out weekly to 143 recipients and is also posted on Facebook.
- There has been a Lent Group meeting each year, and Parish Retreats and PCC Away-Days have been arranged.
- We have had an active branch of the worldwide **Mothers' Union** here for well over 100 years. We actively support MU projects to improve family life, both in this country and abroad.

▼ *A recent Confirmation service at St Stephen's with the Bishop of Dover*





◀ *Easter activities for children*

▼ *The Acorn Café draws in people from across our community*

- Ministry with **younger children**; the Seekers group during Sunday morning worship in the hall, is currently suspended pending recruitment of additional leaders. Nutkins play group, a Mothers' Union activity, is also suspended for the lack of children.
- **Outreach** in the name of Christ to the needy is an essential part of our work. We support actively two charities working with and for the homeless: Porchlight and Catching Lives. We also support the Community Larder run by our neighbour parish of All Saints, which is used by some of our parishioners.
- The **Acorn Café** meets each Wednesday morning and welcomes people from across the area. There are usually over 35 people each week, including residents and carers from a nearby assisted living community, 'Without Exceptions'. Similarly, our monthly **Tea@3** attracts people from the area.
- A monthly **Theology Group** meets to hear high-quality speakers and to engage in lively discussion to explore our faith and to challenge preconceptions. These are mostly held via Zoom and typically have 12–15 attendees.
- We consider our custody of God's creation to be a vital part of our Christian life. We have received a Bronze Award from **Eco-church** and are working to improve this to Silver.
- The **Churchyard Working Party** meets each month to enhance the churchyard and improve the experience of those visiting St Stephen's. We have created a Quiet Garden below the East window of the church, where people can sit to enjoy the peace and ecology of the space.



[Click here to listen to our choir singing 'My soul there is a country' by Parry in Rochester Cathedral](#)



Music

Music is central to much of the worship at St Stephen's. We have a choir of adults and children, affiliated to the Royal School of Church Music, who sing at Sung Eucharist and Choral Evensong services each week. Many people have come into our congregation through association with the choir, including students studying at the city's universities. The high profile of music in the parish is much appreciated by the congregation. The choir sings a huge variety of anthems (around one hundred each year) and service settings from plainsong and renaissance polyphony through to contemporary repertoire by composers such as John Tavener and John Rutter, including some pieces written especially for us.

- The choir regularly deputises in our own cathedral and in the last three years has also sung the services at Exeter, St. Albans, St. Edmundsbury, Rochester and Chichester cathedrals.
- The choir is often called upon to sing for Diocesan and community services throughout the year.
- The organ was rebuilt about 10 years ago to give a more versatile instrument and we have adapted some of our choir stalls, giving the choir the opportunity to sing from different places in the church building, creating a more flexible liturgical space.
- Our Director of Music has run a weekly after school singing club that has brought new children into the choir. A number of these children have gained places in the Canterbury Cathedral choirs.

Members of St Stephen's Choir rehearsing in Southwark Cathedral

Finance

There are no two ways about it, finances have been difficult over recent years. Income was already lagging behind our expenditure prior to the pandemic but we have adapted our finances to the changed conditions by encouraging the use of standing orders, introducing online giving and a card reader. We have also joined the Parish Giving Scheme.

We have made progress with parish share arrears as we currently have a temporary part time priest in charge post. The parish pulled together to raise over £16,000 for an Advent appeal in December 2024 which has enabled us to obtain matched funding from the Diocese to reduce our parish share arrears by over two thirds, now approximately £18,000.

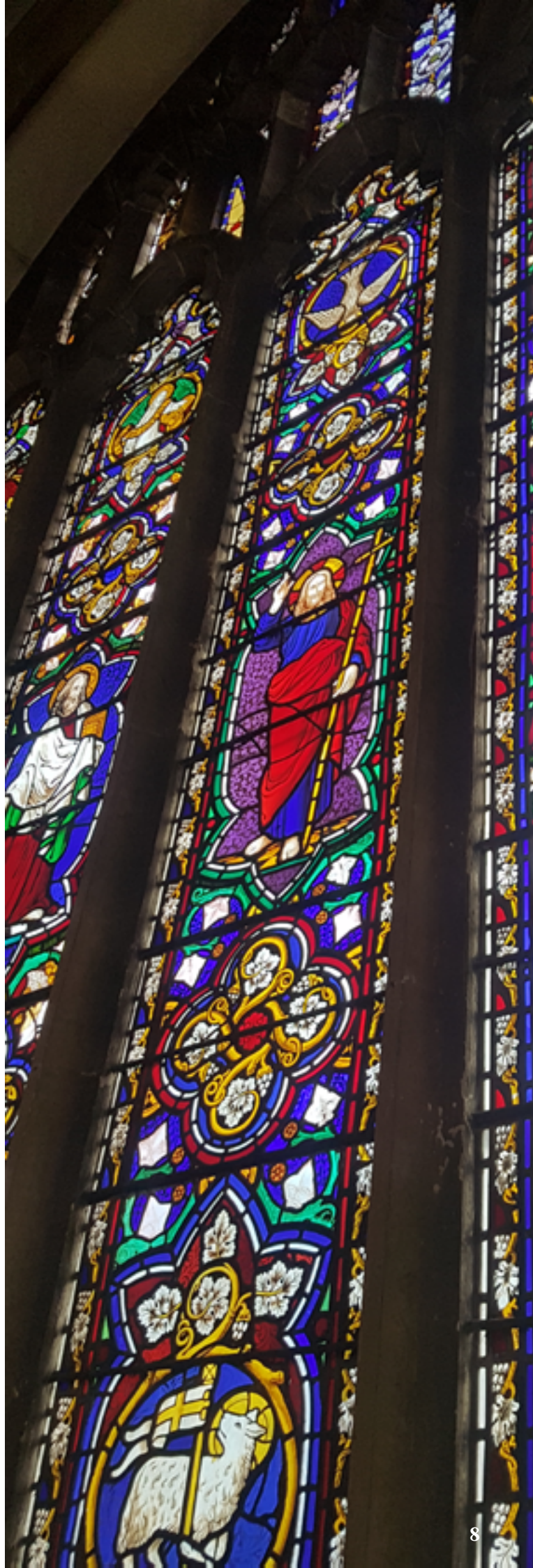
There are other things that we could do to increase our income as we have assets that we could use to generate income from the wider community. This could include letting the committee room more or using it in an alternative way such as for a café. We could use the church building more as well and encourage wider community engagement with the church such as through weddings or concerts. If we could increase our congregation size and encourage more younger people and families, we would have more manpower to implement some of these options.

Despite being stretched financially, St Stephen's has always made opportunities to raise funds for those in need and regularly supports the local food bank project, local homelessness charities, Christian Aid and ad hoc appeals for local or national need.

The church hall has always been an important bridge to the local community. As well as providing functional space for a reasonable cost, it is essential to bring in funds to support the church finances. We have spent some funds on maintaining the hall in recent years but cannot afford major projects at present.

We have a Friends group which aims to raise funds from the wider community for the fabric of the church which has been going for over 25 years. The next project is to contribute to repairs required to the stained-glass windows. We also have some additional restricted funds, largely for the maintenance of the fabric of the church and the churchyard.

Detail from the East Window ►



Church Buildings



▲ *St Stephen's Church Hall; the church is at the end of the path towards the left of this picture*

The present church is about nine hundred years old with later developments. Work required by the last Quinquennial (2022) has been completed and the church has been made more accessible.

- The church stands within an attractive 'closed' churchyard maintained by Canterbury City Council, with some congregational assistance. There are areas for interment of ashes.
- The PCC has been seeking the provision of toilets for the church in conversation with the DAC. There are toilets in the church hall which is quite close but to maximise the potential of the church for the local community it is important that toilet facilities are provided at the church.
- The tower has a ring of eight bells rung by our team of championship ringers shared with the neighbouring church of St Dunstan. The tower is known in the county as being a centre of excellent training, catering for all ringing abilities. Holiday practice sessions are held, providing an outreach to young people.
- The nearby Church Hall has a kitchen, meeting room and Parish Office, toilets (including a disabled toilet and baby-changing facility) and a large hall, that is used extensively by local community organisations.

Parish Organisation

There are nine elected members of the PCC, with a good age-range. One of the Deanery Synod representative places is vacant. Members have met their Safeguarding training obligations and careful records are kept. Meetings are held six times a year with Standing Committee meetings in between.

A Safeguarding Officer is in post.

The Property Committee includes several people of wide experience in maintenance of buildings and property and they keep the Grade I listed church and the hall in an attractive and very good decorative and structural state.

The Social Network organises catering for events such as soup lunches, teas and quizzes.

The Friends of St Stephen's have been very successful in raising money for the maintenance of the building by hosting events several times a year, welcoming people from across the Canterbury district.

*St Stephen's Church in snow, with
St Stephen's Infant and Junior Schools beyond*

Are you the right person for us?

When PCC members were asked to pray about who God might bring, the following characteristics emerged—that our new Rector:

- Has the vision and enthusiasm to reach out to all areas of the parish, drawing those on our fringe into a closer relationship with Jesus and the Christian faith.
- Comes with pastoral skill and the ability to listen and have the time to do so.
- Is comfortable with and encourages team working.
- Is comfortable with the inclusive ethos of the parish.
- Is a person who lives by the teaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, showing love, compassion for others and prayerfulness.
- Will engage with our local schools and take an active role in their life.
- Will appreciate the place of music, both traditional and modern, to enhance the beauty of the liturgy.
- Will engage with families and young people and make them more aware of the church and what it has to offer, encouraging them to explore faith and Christian values.



Our challenges and opportunities

- **Children's Ministry:** there is an urgent need to revitalise our ministry to children. Attendances at the Christmas services and events show that there are families in the parish who would welcome a connection to the church for their children.
- **New forms of worship:** the church has run Messy Church in the past. We would like to develop some new venture of this sort to expand our appeal to people in the parish.
- **Schools' Ministry:** an improved relationship with the three schools would open the possibility of encouraging families to consider the church as a community that would benefit their children.
- **Finance:** building on the recent positive review by the Generous Giving Advisor we continue to strive to maintain our financial viability.
- **Identity:** developing the character and identity of St Stephen's in a Deanery of 'gathered' congregations, rather than local parish churches, leading to us having sufficient volunteers to develop church activities.
- **Development:** seeking means to increase the number of families in the congregation and being open to a wider range of uses for the church building.
- **Looking outward:** continuing to support the neighbouring All Saints Parish's Community Larder and taking up opportunities in the deanery, such as Volunteering with the Archbishop's School chaplaincy team or supporting students through the mentoring scheme.

▼ *A special service for Advent Sunday*



The Deanery of Canterbury

We are ten parishes and a Cathedral working to support one another in mission and ministry across the city and immediate district of Canterbury.

Chapter and Synod are both well attended and widely appreciated and we enjoy good relationships across the full diversity of Anglican tradition, viewpoint and expression.

Over the last three years, our Deanery Leadership Team and Mission and Ministry Team have been facilitating reflection, planning and resourcing of deanery planning, working closely with both diocese and parishes.

The Deanery Mission Plan has just been adopted.



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