

# The Parish of Sedlescombe with Whatlington

**One Parish – Two Churches  
Diocese of Chichester  
Archdeaconry of Hastings  
Deanery of Bexhill and Battle  
Vacancy: House for Duty Priest-in-Charge**

## Summary – Overview

The Parish is in East Sussex near to the small town of Battle, in the Deanery of Bexhill and Battle, being the most easterly of the Deanery Parishes. The nearest large town is Hastings & St. Leonards although the local authority for the area is Rother, which is centred in Bexhill-on-Sea.

The churches of St John the Baptist (Sedlescombe) and St Mary Magdalene (Whatlington) have formed a United Benefice since 31<sup>st</sup> January 1922, although each church remained largely independent of the other with separate PCCs. The Bishop is seeking to appoint a priest-in-charge on a House for Duty basis. It is hoped that suspension of presentation will be lifted so that the appointed person become incumbent.

From the beginning of 2019 the two PCCs agreed to come together to form a single Ecclesiastical Parish with two churches. This move was led by our last Priest-in-Charge and the two PCCs have come together and are working well as a single entity. This continues to be a work in progress, with an ongoing willingness to enhance co-operation and bring the congregations closer together.



The two churches serve adjoining, but distinct, villages in rural areas adjacent to the A21 London to Hastings road. Country lanes connect the two civil parishes and make a direct route between the two churches, which are some 1.7 miles apart.

Both villages are on bus route; in addition Battle railway station, some 3 miles away, offers a frequent electric train service to Tunbridge Wells & London, as well as to Hastings, with connecting services along the coast.

The two civil parishes each have a village hall and various clubs and groups, with those in Sedlescombe being on a larger scale reflecting the larger population.

Both churches have active and engaged congregations, maintaining a visible presence in village life and beyond, which the PCC is keen to develop.

The Rectory, located opposite St John the Baptist in Sedlescombe, which has recently been renovated, is a spacious four bedroom property with a double garage and large garden set in peaceful countryside.

The PCC Electoral roll currently stands at 83 of whom 27 are Whatlington church members. In the case of both churches many members come from outside the geographic Parish.

We offer a warm welcome to the right applicant and look forward to supporting you in your ministry and participation in the community.

## Section Two – About our churches

Both churches share largely the same churchmanship and seek to be open and welcoming places of worship. We also benefit from regular help, particularly at Whatlington, from a retired Priest living just outside the Parish. There is a further retired lady Priest living in Bexhill who is licensed to take services in both churches as and when required, and who may do more if needed.

We use the Common Worship liturgy and the most recent version of Hymns Ancient and Modern. The two churches came together as a single ecclesiastical parish with two churches from the start of 2019 with the two formerly separate PCCs joining together. Both churches have two wardens, and all PCC roles are filled with all the principal administrative work covered by members of the council, though as with any voluntary committee we always welcome new talent.

The PCC is strongly committed to ensuring both churches retain full use of their facilities and to maintain active worship every Sunday, we are optimistic that our hard work and enthusiasm will be recognised and supported by the diocese to promote the Christian faith in our parish.



### Sedlescombe

Sedlescombe Church has raised funds to improve the existing heating with the provision of underfloor heating in the main body of the church, replacing the wooden pew platforms with tiles.

The PCC has been negotiating with the diocese, and a developer, to sell part of the land to the north of the Church in order to provide a car park. After years of hard work, the first scheme fell through. However, a new scheme is progressing and looks promising. It will, hopefully, also provide funds to cover all the necessary Quinquennial repairs and provide a sum for future repairs.

Congregation age range is 45 – 90 years of age, usually, but with a wider range at seasonal festivals

Bells are rung before service on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday by an active team of ringers.

The church has a small kitchen from which refreshments are served after all services, Covid-19 permitting, and also a WC.

The Friends of Sedlescombe Church Heritage Trust is a standalone charity which raises funds to support the maintenance of the church fabric. It is run by a committee of volunteers from the village, with the last Priest-in-Charge and a Church Warden being two of the five Trustees.

Sacristan - St John the Baptist has a regular Sacristan who sets up and puts away for Communion, together with two other trained members of the congregation.

Lay ministers – There are three lay ministers to assist with Communion

The congregation is welcomed on entry by the wardens or sidesmen on duty and assisted to find seating. All are invited to join us in refreshments after the service

Organist - there are two organists who are able to cover most services with a back-up sound system and CDs if needed. The churchyard, a village amenity, is open with its maintenance looked after by a team of volunteers drawn from both the Church and the wider community.

The church building dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century with additions and alterations having been made through the centuries, The tower is 15<sup>th</sup> century, the chancel is Victorian. There are semi-fixed pews and a large stone pulpit. The Church is Grade II\* Listed.

Fundraising is an important part of our life in Sedlescombe, organised by a small group of our congregation; it is also part of our outreach, being well supported by the local community. Activities, held at the village hall, include a monthly coffee morning and mini-market, Christmas Fair, Table Sale, Jumble Sale.

We also hold Lent Lunches, Easter Flowers and Teas, Flower Festivals, the Harvest Lunch & Patronal Festival celebrations.

## Whatlington

As the smaller church this has learnt to be relatively self-sufficient, being used to the Priest having to leave promptly after the 09.15 service in order to get to Sedlescombe. The Priest-in-Charge takes every third Family Service, with the others being taken by a retired Priest as arranged by the wardens. There are five key holders who are active members of the congregation, the wardens generally look after setting up for services putting things away afterwards. There are two Lay Ministers to assist with communion, with a third person partly trained prior to lockdown. We have no formal 'welcome team' but always make sure we speak with people to welcome visitors and new faces. The age range of the congregation is mid-forties to early eighties.

Whatlington has a Viscount digital organ and two organists, a husband and wife who play without charge. When they are away the organ has the facility to play pre-recorded organ music via a special unit. We have three people able to operate this and so are never without music. The church also has a sound system with a CD and USB player as well as a hearing aid loop.

There is a small kitchen from which we provide refreshments after the Family and Evening services. We run a Refreshments Rota which works well and encourages people to get involved. Church cleaning is carried out by volunteers who come together as required to give the building a good clean.



Whatlington can comfortably seat eighty people, with an absolute maximum capacity of 120. The church dates from the 11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> century and is Grade II\* Listed. The building suffered a serious fire in 2010 resulting in an £800,000 award-winning restoration rolling away the Victorian restoration of 1862 and bringing the building back to a more simple form. The large Victorian pulpit was passed to new ownership after the fire and the Lectern now serves for preaching.

There is underfloor heating and fully flexible seating with a mixture of Luke Hughes pews and chairs. The church has a small kitchen and a 'universal' WC, there is a small vestry. The Victorian tower houses a ring of three swing chime bells, the oldest dating to 1350; the Tenor bell has an electro-mechanical hammer working on a timer.

Taken overall, the church is in good order having benefitted from the restoration and should not require any major work for some time.

The churchyard is open and well maintained with a mix of paid and voluntary labour, we try to encourage wildflowers and to manage the area for biodiversity.

The church always tries to make a full weekend of activities for the Patronal, other special services and events help both to encourage additional people and to raise funds.

Whatlington Church is in discussions with a benefactor who hopes to enable a car park and access driveway to be provided on adjoining land which they own. If successful the church will need to raise funds to provide a new path through the churchyard. Currently car parking is limited and provided for with a small private area adjoining the church which we are allowed use. There is a larger car park at the nearby Village Hall which the church has shared use.

Whatlington church has been described as a "flexible, beautiful, peaceful space", which we are keen to open up further to the community for other activities.

We have established a mutually supportive relationship with a 25 strong local choir, which uses the church for rehearsals and provides support for special services in addition to an extra income stream.



### Section Three – The Broader Context

The principal focus of the Deanery is in the Bexhill area, where approximately half the churches are located. There is scope for much better cohesion than currently exists.

The PCC comprises nine members representing both churches and a wide range of abilities and experience. All key roles are filled with two Churchwardens at each church making a council of 13 lay members. We provide two members of the Deanery Synod.

In 2019 the Parish met its Parish Share in full. However, although the financial position of both parishes is good, constant fundraising is necessary for both churches to thrive. More details regarding the Parish Share can be found on page 6. It should be noted that everyone expects to get value for money in all things and many of the parishioners are on fixed income.

Both churches remain financially solvent and were paying the full Parish Share prior to the Covid-19 Pandemic. The consequent lockdown of the churches and the village facilities has caused fund raising activity to cease, and as a consequence, income has fallen considerably.

St Mary Magdalene (Whatlington) benefits from having received a generous bequest restricted to the maintenance of the fabric and churchyard, with a further bequest pending which underwrites the church's financial position.

Church services were re-started as soon as allowed, and there has been a pick-up in income through giving, although fund raising remains challenging.

The Parish operates an email contact list which is used to send out a monthly list showing services at both churches. During lockdown we developed a full order of service, to be sent out to a sub-list of subscribers with specially recorded music files attached. Both churches maintain pages on [achurchnearyou.com](http://achurchnearyou.com), Sedlescombe has a website [sedlescombeparishchurch.com](http://sedlescombeparishchurch.com) and Whatlington has a Facebook page.

The PCC is actively involved in pursuing the provision of car parking facilities at each of the churches.



Left: A view of the interior of Whatlington Church, taken on Patronal Festival, viewed from the gallery.

It shows the flexibility of the seating, longer pews are stacked to the sides for display, the shorter ones accompany the tables.

Right: This new stained glass window was given by the people of Sedlescombe in thanksgiving for the Millennium of our Lord Jesus Christ in the year 2000 A.D.

It was designed and made by Alan Wright B.A., H.N.D.

The left panel shows St John the Baptist, patron of the Church, who was sent by God To prepare the way for Lord Jesus. He is shown surrounded by water, reminding us That he baptised in water those who repented their sins. The theme of water is Continued below with a depiction of the village pump.

The right hand panel shows our Saviour Jesus Christ. Flame surrounds his head Reminding us of St John's words, "He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" We remember that the Holy Spirit came upon the assembled disciples on the day of Pentecost "as tongues of fire". The day of Pentecost is sometimes called the "birthday of the Church".





### **Section Three – The new Priest-in-Charge**

We welcome both male and female applicants and fully support the ministry of women priests.

Our new Priest will ideally be:

Someone who can articulate and defend the tenets of the Christian faith and be able to work with the wardens to give leadership and direction to the parish, continuing the work of forging closer ties between our two churches.

Keen to develop outreach and pastoral care across the parish and to build on the sound foundations already in place to develop the church both spiritually and numerically.

Able to demonstrate leadership and administrative skills in a collegiate way, generating the vision of an active and growing church community

A flexible, friendly, and open person with the enthusiasm to help to maximise the potential for growth, able to lead by example, reaching out into the wider communities in both villages, building links and raising the profile of the church.

Someone able to embrace and develop the varied service patterns, using their varied talents to the equal benefit of both churches and within the wider Deanery.

Flexible to encourage traditional marriages and baptisms in both churches, embracing tolerance and understanding of peoples individual circumstances.

Able to foster good relations with the URC Chapel in Sedlescombe.

To maintain and develop the church's involvement with Sedlescombe school.

To be flexible when circumstances require for bereavement support and funeral arrangements.

### **Sedlescombe C of E School**

There was a close relationship with Sedlescombe school under the previous head teacher and the last P in C was a foundation governor, also taking regularly assemblies. Since the change of head teacher it has proved more difficult to maintain this relationship, though the PCC is keen that we should do so. The school has now joined the Diocesan Academy scheme and it is to be hoped that this will have a positive impact on the relationship.

Sedlescombe Church of England Primary School	218 Children
Ofsted Rating (2017)	Good
SIAMS Rating (2017)	Outstanding

The Barnsley Trust is a standalone charity, initially set up many years ago by the Rev'd George Barnsley, to support the school; our last Priest-in-Charge was one of three Trustees.

## The Rectory



The Rectory is located in Sedlescombe opposite St John the Baptist Parish Church which has recently been renovated and has double glazing throughout. It is a spacious four-bedroom property with a double garage and large garden set in peaceful countryside.

The property comprises:

- A gravel driveway and Parking Spaces for two cars, in addition to a detached double garage.
- A newly renovated porch leads to a central corridor connecting to all of the downstairs rooms and the staircase to the upstairs bedrooms.
- Immediately on the right-hand side there is a good-sized study.
- A door leads into a large lounge which has French doors into the garden and a door into the kitchen diner.
- The kitchen diner has been enlarged by means of a single storey extension and is of a good size.
- There is a downstairs WC.
- Upstairs there are four good sized bedrooms and a family bathroom.
- Outside there is a large garden which wraps around the property and has extensive views over the valley beyond.



## Section Four - About the Parish

The Ecclesiastical Parish encompasses two separate civil parishes of which Sedlescombe, with a population of 1605, is much the larger compared to Whatlington, with its population of 320 giving a combined population of 1925.

Both villages are set within AONBs and have easy access to the seaside. Both are also well placed to reach the Sussex Downs to the west and the Romney March to the east, with many places of historic interest and visitor attractions close at hand. Away from the main roads this part of the world remains a relatively quiet backwater.



**Sedlescombe** village is a classic picturesque English village, set around a pretty village green with many historic, listed properties and has a small flock of geese who roam free and act as impromptu traffic calming. The green, with its Pump House, forms the focus of the village, with the Brickwall Hotel, thriving village shop & Post Office, and the Queen's Head public house all arranged around it. This area is a designated Conservation Area.

The local doctor's surgery is situated nearby together with the Church of England Primary School and a small car park.

The village is also fortunate to have a playing field, children's playground, antique shop, a small car lot, a vineyard and a garage along the B2244, the former Roman commercial road which crossed the River Brede.

Sedlescombe has a village hall, a modern facility which hosts local groups and clubs as well as church events, expertly run by an active committee of volunteers from the village.

St John the Baptist Church stands within the churchyard, next to the B2244 some distance from the green, past the village hall; the rectory stands opposite the church.

The majority of property in the village is owner occupied, with property values having risen in recent years, there are however some more affordable properties as well as a significant number available for rent from the local Housing Association. There is a certain amount of local employment within the village though majority of the working population travel outside the village.

There is a large and successful garden centre within the civil parish on the A21.

**Whatlington** is a smaller village and rather spread out in comparison, stretching along the A21 and down the C293 Whatlington Road towards the town of Battle. The village has a 15<sup>th</sup> century public house, a garage, and a country hotel in Leeford Place. The village hall stands beside the River Line in the old centre of the village near to the former watermill and a short distance from the church. The hall is run by an active committee who work hard to make it a success.

There is no social housing in the village and the majority of properties are owner occupied with most of those in employment travelling outside the immediate area for work.

Both villages have easy access to the town of Battle with a range of independent shops and small supermarkets. The town stands around the Abbey and the gatehouse dominates the High Street.

Battle railway station is on the Hastings to London, Charing Cross railway line with a frequent train service, fast trains take 1hr 20 to reach London and the station is something of a commuter hub for the surrounding area.

The main London to Hastings A21 gives easy access to the nearest large town, Hastings where all the usual amenities can be found with a large Sainsbury's on the outskirts.



## Secondary Education in the area

There are Local Authority Community Colleges in Battle and Robertsbridge, and Academies in Hastings. All have good reputations and several provide transport links. There are also a variety of private schools in the area. The majority of secondary aged students in the parishes attend Claverham Community College in Battle.

Further Education is provided by Colleges in both Hastings and Bexhill or further afield in Eastbourne and Tunbridge Wells.



Left: Sedlescombe Green looking north-east.

The village pump dominates the Green and is the likeliest place to find the geese. The Brickwall Hotel and Queens Head overlook the top of the green.

The Parish church is further up the main road on the outskirts of the village.

Right: Woodman's Corner, location of the Royal Oak, with the A21 to the left and the C293 on the right, leading towards the church

