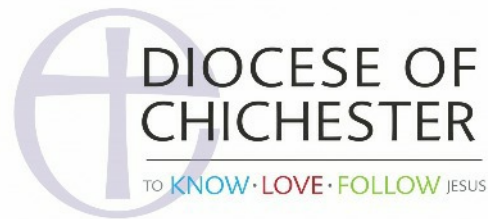




St Thomas
the Apostle
Groombridge



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CHICHESTER

TO KNOW · LOVE · FOLLOW JESUS

The Parish of St Thomas the Apostle New Groombridge

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Groombridge

Nestled at the foot of Groombridge Hill, the village lies across the counties of East Sussex and Kent with the river Grom forming the boundary line. The older part of the village lies in Kent, and The Parish of St Thomas the Apostle, New Groombridge lies within East Sussex and is within the Diocese of Chichester. The whole community of around 1700 people is within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, situated four miles west of Royal Tunbridge Wells.

Old Groombridge also has another church, St John's which is in the Parish of Speldhurst within the Diocese of Rochester.

We seek an incumbent working on a 0.5 basis:3.5 days per week (half stipend plus housing). Further details may be obtained from the Archdeacon.

High Weald AONB

The AONB is the fourth largest AONB in the country and was formed in 1983 because of the exceptional medieval landscape, evidence of which is clearly visible to this day. The area offers many lovely walks which can be taken directly from the village.



“We are an inclusive, rural church with a love of God and love of neighbour – we seek to put this into our lives and community.”

St Thomas’s is a church for everyone to experience the love of God. It provides:

- A quiet contemplative space for **reflection, meditation** or **prayer**;
- A place for **celebration, sadness** and **support**;
- A place of **worship** and **fellowship**;
- **A place for all** visitors; the regular, the occasional and for those who are yet to come.

St Thomas’s is here for everyone when they need it. St Thomas’s is more than just a church building – it is a **church family** – here to provide support to every member of the wider community of Groombridge.

Part of St Thomas’s outreach includes supporting charities such as:

- Continuing support of Family Support Work and collecting gifts for the Food Bank;
- A charity for Remembrance Sunday;
- Kenward Trust.



During Covid the church worked with the WI and Parish Council through a joint project to support those in need of any kind. This showed the strong sense of care for each other that exists within the village of Groombridge. We believe that there is a real opportunity for a new vicar to build on this outreach to support and develop our mission.



“It’s like being part of a big family; very welcoming to all ages, caring and supportive.”

The Eucharist is at the heart of worship at St Thomas's, a church with a liberal catholic tradition. The Parish is within the Rural Deanery of Rotherfield and the Archdeaconry of Hastings.

The population of the Parish is about 1600. There are 135 members on the Electoral Roll. Church attendance is generally good. During October 2019 the attendance at the monthly Family Eucharist was 93, and for the main weekly Parish Eucharist during the rest of the month the average attendance was 65. The number attending has dropped since the pandemic but is slowly recovering; the average for October 2021 was 43. There are normally a number of under 16s at all Eucharists although they principally attend the monthly Family Eucharist.

Attendance at all services has historically risen considerably at Christmas, Easter and other festivals such as Remembrance Sunday, and at these times the church is often completely full.



“A place where people are welcomed and where services are sincere and relevant to us all.”



Reverend Trevor Harrison
Curate



Richard Saunders
Reader



Reverend Sue Diggory
Retired Priest



Jane Garland
Reader in training



Jan Batchelor
Richard Hunt
Church Wardens



Beverley Hollands
Safeguarding Officer



Sarah Cooper
Parish Administrator



Emma Lester
Verger



Roslyn Thomas
Sunday School / Youth



Sunday Services

- 8 am: Said Eucharist (although this is not taking place during the vacancy)
- 9.30 am: Sung Eucharist. (Family Eucharist takes place every first Sunday and occasionally Cafe Eucharist)

Weekdays

From time to time there has been a demand for weekday services, including the Eucharist but at present these are limited to Morning Prayer, lead by the Curate, at 8.45 on Thursday mornings.

Saturday

- 8 am: Prayers on Saturday

The Church observes, through services, the Church's year at Christmas, Easter, Harvest, Remembrance and other festivals and holy days as appropriate.

During 2020 church services were continued online on a weekly basis with a separate educational and interactive film made for children. As services are followed on a screen, educational films are still used, either made by Sunday School or sourced elsewhere. They are particularly well received at the monthly Family Eucharist.



- Christian meditation, weekly on Monday evenings
- Lent Course (run online last year)
- Advent reflection (series of films made last year for daily reflection during advent)
- Confirmation Classes (in March 2020 there were 29 candidates (24 under the age of 18) and a separate service was held at St Thomas' Church
- Communion before Confirmation
- Alpha course – last one in 2020 for younger men

There are also four home groups, each of which is unique and deeply valued by those who choose to participate. The members of each home group have decided themselves how they should run and what they wish to study. Most importantly within each group, members provide support for each other in times of trouble and share times of celebration.

Developing understanding of faith is a continuing part of the work of St Thomas's for all ages.



There is a dedicated pastoral care team comprising lay members of the congregation and the ministry team.

The pastoral team which includes those with bereavement training, visits those who are sick or in need of any kind. Families are also visited prior to baptism.

As part of pastoral care, the church holds various catered social events at church festivals and other times and holds a regular Café Eucharist. Coffee/tea and other refreshments are served after services throughout the year.

In addition members of the church are integral to running and helping with village initiatives and clubs run for the benefit of older members of our community. Throughout Covid winter 2020/21 the active Hospitality team have looked after the isolated, elderly and ill in our community, delivering food parcels, hot meals and through weekly phone calls. In many cases the team reached out to those outside our church community.



“There is a great sense of community in the church that makes you feel supported and cared for, anyone who needs help will receive it without reserve.”

Looking After Children and Young Families and Youth Group

Tiny Fishes

In August 2021 two early learning groups were amalgamated into Tiny Fishes. Over 30 families from the village and surrounding area have attended. Over 20 children with parents have attended on occasions. The emphasis is on friendship between families and play for babies and toddlers. Each session ends with a short worship session of singing, a story and prayer. It is part of the outreach of St Thomas's, and it is run by a member of the church. Volunteers from the church also help.



Sunday School at St Thomas's

A lively and fun Sunday School centred around the children, which is run by a small but dedicated team, all volunteers. In 2020-21 there were 42 children on the register and the last Christmas Eve Nativity in Church in 2019 had a cast of 40+ children.

Sunday School is open to all children of pre-school and primary age and meets during the 9.30am service in term time. Teaching focuses on the Gospel reading, explored through games, activities, drama and crafts. The main teaching resource is Roots.

Children actively participate in Family Services and all the key festivals of the church. The Church is used as a resource to offer after school clubs to Sunday school children for crafts and activities linked to festivals such as Lent, Mothering Sunday etc.

Through 2020 activity packs were delivered to families weekly and the children enjoyed taking part in making films at home which were accessed through YouTube. In early 2021 'live' Sunday school was held on Zoom and since May the Sunday School has been meeting again in person.

Groombridge Pre-school

The pre-school is independently run but has links with the church. It is a small, happy pre-school situated within the Village Hall. Committed to make every child feel welcome and every parent to feel happy and confident that their child is in a caring environment. It has an outdoor play area, good parking and opens five days a week.



Groombridge St Thomas CoE Primary School

The church has close links with St Thomas's Primary School, a school for up to 218 pupils.

The vicar has traditionally had close links with the school and leads a school Eucharist once a year. The school uses the church building to hold its Harvest, Christingle, Carol Service, Easter, and Leaver's Services. The previous incumbent led some well received Christian meditation classes and the church is sometimes used during RE lessons, particularly when the pupils are learning about church furnishings and symbolism. Some joint teaching with the vicar and head on, for example, the Trinity has also been part of the outreach of the church.

The school is keen to expand and develop the existing strong relationship between the school and the church in the future.

The school is consistently rated as Outstanding.



'Flourishing in the love of God, we love others as ourselves.'

St Thomas's Youth Group

St Thomas's runs a social meeting group open to secondary age pupils. Those who attend have grown up in the church and come up through Sunday School. The focus of meetings is fellowship, sharing and cooking food together. In 2019 the youth group offered taught courses for both Lent and Advent and again held in 2020 a youth Eucharist for All Saints Day.

By offering activities such as boating on Dunorlan Lake and a recently started weekly 'After School Drop In Café' at the village hall, the group is beginning to reach out to young people who are outside the church.

Our first summer youth camp was held in 2019 for 11 young people, camping, locally ending with an early morning Eucharist in the woods.

In 2020 – 2021 there were 16 young people on the register who regularly attended meetings.

Local Secondary Schools

A good number of year 6 pupils from St Thomas's primary school move on to Bennett Memorial Diocesan School, an Ofsted "Outstanding" school in Tunbridge Wells. Others choose to attend selective grammar schools in Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge. In addition there is the highly regarded Beacon Academy in Crowborough.

Buses operate from the village to serve all these schools.



“The church has the ability to engage with all levels of the community through a number of...clubs and activities.”

A copy of the Annual Report and Account for 2020 can be found here: <https://www.stthomashgroombridge.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Annual-report-and-financial-statement-201231.pdf>

Parochial Church Council (PCC)

There is an active PCC. The PCC currently operates with four working groups which are:

1. Worship and Learning
2. Governance
3. Pastoral and Hospitality
4. Church and Churchyard

Safeguarding

The church has a very experienced safeguarding officer who has ensured that everyone has completed all the relevant safeguarding courses and received their DBS checks. The church passed its 1 SQP with flying colours and the examiners indicated that the church was meeting Stage 2.

Finance

A copy of the accounts for 2020 can be found at <https://stthomasgroombridge.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Annual-report-and-financial-statement-201231.pdf>

As can be seen from the annual accounts ending December 2020, the church had a deficit on its income and expenditure account of £3,531 but has reserves of c £62,000. During 2020, collections fell by c £5,000

In 2019 the Governance working group looked carefully at the financial state of St Thomas's and recommended to the PCC that a Stewardship campaign was begun which increased income by some £6,000 per annum. Ensuring income is continuing to increase will need to remain a focus for the PCC.



We seek a priest of a liberal catholic persuasion who recognises the centrality of the Eucharist in worship and can help us to grow our church within the wider community.

We hope our new vicar will:

- Have a **warm personality** bringing a **strong spiritual vision** and leadership to all, a calm presence in a busy community;
- Be an **excellent communicator** who will want to be part of all activities within the church and village, embracing everyone who lives here;
- Be **willing and able to work across all age ranges**, continuing to support the older generation whilst able to bring the joy of worship to children and younger members of our congregation;
- **Work collaboratively** with lay and ordained colleagues;
- Be a **good listener** who can bring together a broad range of views;
- With the help of the existing team, continue to **bring pastoral care to all** in our village;
- Ideally have some **experience of leading collective worship** in schools and working on a governing body;
- Be willing to **develop music** further within church services;
- Finally, **act as a shepherd** to a diverse flock and be a visible presence in our village.



“Connecting with all ages and all levels of faith.”

Groombridge is a lively friendly village.

There is a good pre-school, an outstanding primary school and first-rate secondary schools close by.

The village has a thriving centre with:

- general store, bakery, Post Office, garage, hairdresser and two pubs;
- doctor's surgery and dispensary with main surgery in Hartfield;
- village hall;
- guide hut;
- soon to be finished, Men's Shed.

The village also has become a hub for local tourist attractions, including Harrison Rocks, Groombridge Place, Spa Valley Railway, the Forest Way Country Park. The village is adjacent to the Ashdown Forest.

There are many societies and groups in the village catering to a wide variety of interests and hobbies:

- Art Class;
- Sports Clubs: Bowls, Cricket, Tennis;
- Lunch Club;
- Dramatic Society;
- Film Society;
- History Group;
- Horticultural Society;
- Book Clubs;
- Poetry Club;
- Women's Institute;
- Beavers, Cubs and Scouts;
- Rainbows, Brownies and Guides.



The Church Building

The church was designed by Norman Shaw and opened in 1884. It remained largely unchanged until, in 2009, a gallery was built at the west end, creating a community room underneath, the Green Room, with a glass partition wall separating it from the main church. In October 2010 the pews were removed and replaced with chairs. The floor was levelled and carpeted, allowing the layout to be varied for services and outreach events.

The building is in a good state of repair and was redecorated during April 2020. The last quinquennial inspection report was dated 27 October 2017 and all works have been completed. The building is heated by gas fired central heating with independent electric heating in the Green Room. The gas boiler was replaced in July 2019.

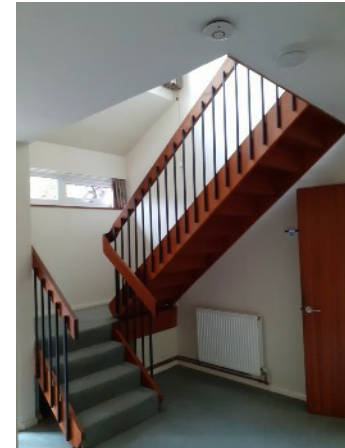
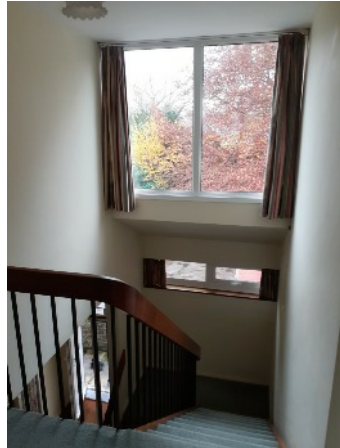
There is a small kitchen for tea and coffee preparation, but it could benefit from an upgrade.

The Churchyard is some ½ mile distant on the edge of the village.

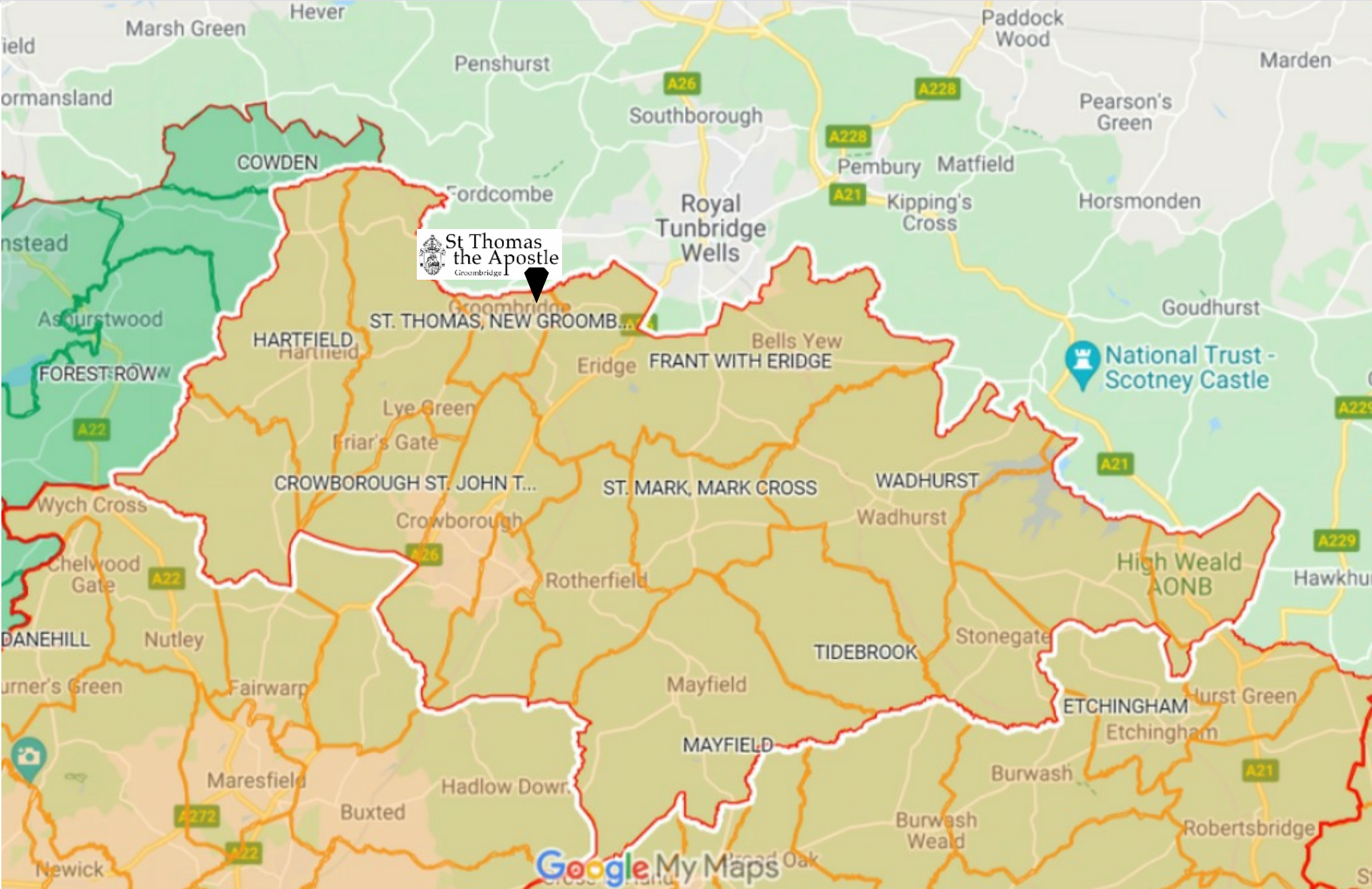


The Vicarage, built in the 1960's, is a light and airy home offering flexible family accommodation. It is sited next door to the church, in the middle of the village and is within easy walking distance of all village amenities.

All rooms have aspects onto the garden with a double height entrance hall. There are four bedrooms and a dressing room plus a family bathroom. Downstairs, there is a good-sized study for the vicar, sitting room with open fire and side access on to the garden, dining room, fitted kitchen, utility room and cloakroom. There is an adjoining single garage and additional parking. There is a private entrance through the garden to the church. The garden has ample space for outside seating, with a greenhouse, vegetable garden and shed.



The village is in close proximity to Tunbridge Wells and Crowborough and all their amenities, including the historic Pantiles, assembly hall, Trinity Arts centre, excellent schools, leisure centres and a wide variety of shops. It is well placed to reach London and the coast, both being less than an hour away by train.



Church website: www.stthomasgroombridge.org.uk

Diocese Website: www.chichester.anglian.org

School website: www.groombridgest-thomas.e-sussex.sch.uk

Parish Council: www.withyhamparishcouncil.org.uk

District council: www.wealden.gov.uk

High Weald AONB: www.highweald.org

Ashdown Forest: www.highweald.org

St Thomas the Apostle services on YouTube

www.youtube.com/channel/UCPsmRgn1GxbM2Cy6xadO35w

Parish magazine - Church and Village editors@churchandvillage.com