

# **St Mary Magdalene Church, Cowden**

## **Parish Profile - May 2023**

**Diocese: Chichester**

**Archdeaconry: Horsham, provisionally transitioning to Hastings**

**Deanery: East Grinstead, provisionally transitioning to Rotherfield**

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Approved by  
St Mary Magdalene, PCC 30<sup>th</sup> May 2023

# The Parish of St Mary Magdalene

Cowden is on the Kent / East Sussex border lying between Tunbridge Wells and East Grinstead, Edenbridge and Crowborough. In total there are approximately 800 resident, who live in the village centre, the surrounding area and a number of geographically dispersed working farms. The old High Street has Grade II listed cottages and village houses and there is a pub called The Fountain.

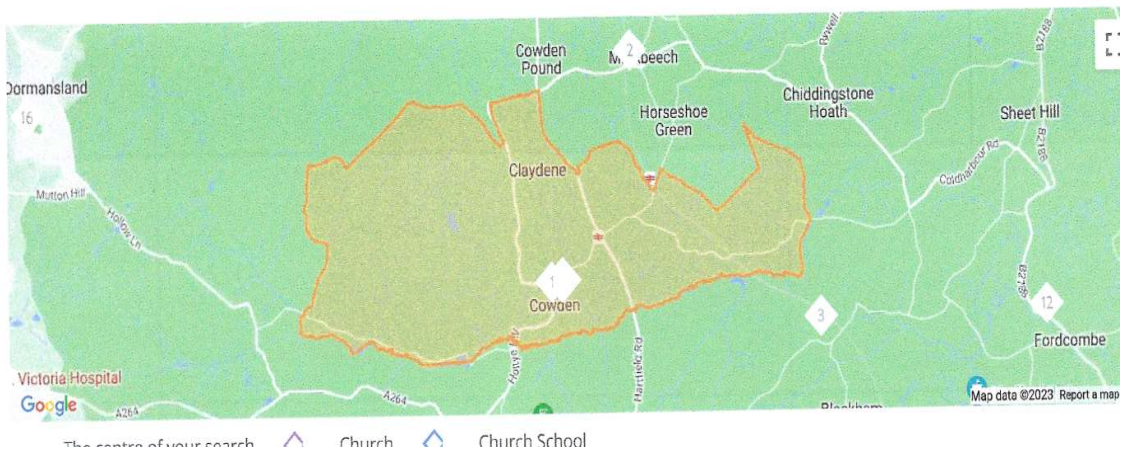
The Electoral Roll for the Parish currently stands at 35 members and the average attendance on a Sunday in 2022 was 25.

Our 12th century Grade I listed church offers a tranquil and a peaceful place to worship God and is open during daylight hours 7 days a week. Many in the village who are not regular worshippers, find it an oasis of peace, calm and quiet.

Our vision is ***To show God's love to those around us and be faithful to God's word. To be a welcoming and loving Church for the whole community.*** ([MISSION ACTION PLAN final.docx](#))



A CHURCH NEAR YOU MORE + LOGIN



## Our Church Family

We have a wide range of members across different age groups. Nearly all members live in the Cowden postal district which includes the northern part of Hartfield parish. Many members are long standing residents although some more recent arrivals. Some members of the church family are actively involved in various other village activities and the church has a good relationship with the wider community as reflected in Christmas activities, Remembrance Day and other special events.

Parish Communion is currently held on the first Sunday of the month following Messy Church which we started up in 2020 and is attended by a small number of young families who join in enthusiastically. We celebrate Sunday Morning Worship on the other weeks.

There is a multi-denomination Bible Study Group. Members from other local churches who live in the village also attend; which provides a great opportunity to get to know each other better and pray for the village.

Rev'd David Tidswell was appointed as Sequester in 2020 and has led the Parish through interregnum. The PCC, currently chaired by Rev'd David Tidswell, is a small team of six and includes the Church Treasurer and Church Warden.

The Annual Statistical Parish Return for 2022 can be found here [Annual Statistical Return 2022 .pdf](#)



- **Children's Areas.** There is a small play area with ample colouring facilities available near the vestry, together with a range of Christian books for children. This opportunity is much appreciated by parents and grandchildren while attending church services.
- **Music.** A church organist plays for us twice a month and when absent we utilize, 'ISing' and 'No Organist No Problem' on the computer.
- **Books.** At the back of church, there is an arrangement of a small number of Christian books which are available for anyone to take away and keep.

- **Flowers.** The church is decorated with flowers throughout the year. For special occasions, the flower team always put on an appropriate show.
- **Bell ringing.** There is an active Church Bell Ringing Group with the bells being rung before the majority of services. The number of bell ringers now stands at 10 and has risen steadily over the last few years. The Group practice every Monday evening and as well as Sunday services will ring for special occasions - national days (Kings Coronation / D Day celebrations), weddings & funerals. Further details about the Bells and the Ringers at Appendix B.

For special services, for example, Easter, Harvest, Remembrance, Carol Service, Christmas Day – the village congregation is always boosted by those who attend irregularly, and visiting families. The Remembrance Day service is very well attended by the local British Legion Branch members. Many travel quite a distance to hear the names of their family read out and the Edenbridge Brass Band play for the moving service, when their trumpeter plays the Last Post and Reveille.



A Prayer Box is available at the entrance to the church, into which anyone in the Parish can request prayer for friends / family / events. There is also a Prayer Box inside the church. Prayer requests are shared with Revd. David Tidswell.

At the end of all services refreshments are served and the majority of the congregation stay to enjoy fellowship with one another and get to know each other better. This is always well attended and very popular.



## Church Evangelism

The PCC are always seeking opportunities to reach out to the village, whether by events organised by the church or with wider village events. A monthly **Community Drop In** is held in the local Memorial Hall, approximately 5 minutes' walk from church, for those who enjoy a coffee / tea, biscuits and good company. It is well attended by many who do not come to church or only occasionally; and it is a great opportunity to promote church activities.

The congregation collected groceries and toiletries for Edenbridge **Foodbank** at Christmas and Easter. This was promoted on the village Facebook page resulting in many contributions from the village and has proved to be a great channel to practically demonstrate God's love to those in our neighbourhood.

At **Christmas** we aim to provide events and services that will be of interest to all ages. In 2022 we distributed 25 small real Christmas Trees to households in the Parish and asked them to decorate them as they wish then return them to church. The result was a stunningly beautiful arrangement of trees in the choir stalls which were all lit up for the Christmas services. The children enjoyed making a Christingle and learning what it means early in December. We enjoyed a traditional Nine Lessons and Carols and on Christmas Eve, carols around the Christmas Tree in the churchyard. At both events we shared refreshments afterwards, which enabled us to strengthen relationships. The Christmas Day service is always well attended.



On **Mothering Sunday**, for many years, has been marked by giving rose button holes to all the ladies present at the service, and sharing a Simnel cake, especially decorated for the occasion.

We work hard to get the real meaning of **Easter** over to all in the Parish by holding a number of events and services designed to remind all of the significance of Easter. On Palm Sunday the owner of a local stables provided a donkey for a procession from the Memorial Hall to church. Many in the centre of the village saw the procession and Palm crosses were distributed. The children from Messy Church and others joined in the procession. It is a visual, practical way to remind all about Jesus entry to Jerusalem. On Good Friday we have a meditation with appropriate Bible readings and hymns. Finally, on Easter Sunday, following the Family Celebration service, the children enjoy an Easter egg hunt in the churchyard.



In September, we support **'Ride and Stride'**, with a welcome at the gate and the church open.

In the run up to our **Harvest Festival Sunday**, church members and parishioners collect food items, which are used to decorate the church, and then delivered to Edenbridge Food Bank. Following our Harvest service, we have enjoyed a simple lunch of bread and soup, followed by dessert. It was a great time of fellowship and getting to know each other better. Those who attended were invited to donate what they would normally spend on a Sunday lunch and this was forwarded to Tearfund.

National and Royal **celebrations** are always celebrated. For the King's Coronation, in our Sunday service we used the hymns, prayers and Bible readings that had been heard in Westminster Abbey the previous day. The church was beautifully decorated and at the end of the service we toasted the King. The Bellringers had rung a quarter peal on Saturday. This was followed by a well-attended village street party after church on Sunday.



For the **Queens Platinum Jubilee Celebration** we planted a Myrtle tree in a new small round garden in the churchyard. Many from the village joined us for tea and scones. A parishioner gave a short speech about the Queen's life and we all enjoyed a glass of bubbly and gave three cheers for the Queen. The Bellringers rang a special tribute. On the Sunday we had a service to give thanks for the Queen.



In August 2022, we had an open air **Pet Service**, which was well attended by many of our four legged friends and their owners!!

We have held a number of **Songs of Praise services** over the years, when the congregation have chosen the hymns or songs and many have given a word of testimony as to why that hymn is so important to them. All have been followed by a lovely tea when we enjoyed fellowship together.

Members of the PCC are active in the village on other groups that arrange events. For example, the Church Warden is on the organising committee for the Village fete, where we manage the cake stall. For the last three years a group in the Village have organised, prior to Christmas, a 'Village Get Together', at which there has been games for the children (& young at heart!!) and an opportunity to talk to those in the community

over a glass of mulled wine and mince pies. Both these events have proved to be excellent opportunities to promote church events.

Other events held.

- **Harvest Barn Dance** – Pre the covid pandemic we held a barn dance with supper in the Memorial Hall with a local caller and small band. It proved to be a well-attended (approximately 60 – 70) family event with children enjoying the dancing along with their parents. The evening concluded with an invitation to the Harvest Festival. This year we are planning a Harvest themed film evening for children in the church.
- **Carols in the Pub** – This has been a huge success with the locals joining in some traditional carols. The evening finished with an invitation to the Carol Service and Christmas Day Service.
- **Young Conservation Society** – In 2018, the Conservation Society had a very successful Saturday morning in the churchyard, finishing with refreshments in the church. The event was attended by 10 – 12 children from the village who learnt lots about creepy crawlies, and small mammals.

### **Future Events**

Our Mission Action Plan ([hyperlink](#)) provides details of what we have planned for the forthcoming year. Highlights include, a further Open Air Service in August which will focus on God's creation, a special All Souls service with a 'Memory' tree being placed in the Porch the week before the service for all in the village to use. Many of the small Christmas trees used in 2022 have been planted out in people's gardens and will be 'recycled' to decorate the church in December 2023. Provided there is sufficient interest, a children's holiday club will take place during one week in August. A professional Opera company will be coming at Easter 2024 to give their rendition of Handel's Messiah.

### **Promotion of the Church**

In today's fast moving society we recognise that the need to use many channels to promote Church life. Regular use is made of the Village Facebook page and village noticeboards as well as the Church noticeboards. Events are also promoted on A Church Near You.

One PCC member represents the church on the Editorial Team of the Village Magazine [hyperlink](#). This is published every other month and distributed to all households in the Parish, free of charge. Revd. David Tidswell contributes to Cowden Matters [Cowden Matters Full Copy JuneJuly23.pdf](#) and the Church Diary for the relevant months is also included.

## **Local Community / Services**

Cowden is a rural Parish, based on the Kent / Sussex border. The church is located in the heart of the village, where the Memorial Hall (*equivalent of a village hall*) and the local pub can also be found. There are approximately 800 residents, however, only about 300 of them live in the village centre, the rest are dispersed in properties throughout the Parish.

There is a train station just outside the village which offers a regular service to London. Consequently many residents can commute to London, with Canary Wharf or the City being a popular destination.

The majority of properties were built turn of the century or earlier, with only a small number of new properties built in the last few years. In the Parish there are some working farms, predominantly arable with some sheep.

The village is situated close to local tourist attractions, such as, Hartfield (Winnie the Pooh), Ashdown Forest and the castles / gardens at Hever, Chiddingstone and Penshurst which attract visitors from around the world.

It takes approximately 30 to 40 minutes to drive to the M25.

There is no school in the village and children in the village attend Infant / Junior school at Hever, Penshurst, Chiddingstone, Hartfield, Balls Green and Edenbridge. They go to secondary school at Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge, Oxted, Crowborough and East Grinstead. There also a number of private schools in the area.

The village is popular with walkers, being on the Weald Way and the start of many attractive circular walks, while cyclists often favour our scenic route and pause for refreshment at the pub.



In the village there are some active clubs which include:

- Cowden Conservation Society
- Horticultural Society
- Short Mat Bowls Club
- Age UK
- Cricket Club
- Lawn Tennis Club
- Art Club
- Book Club

## Church Finance

Currently St Mary Magdalene is just managing financially. We trust in the Lord to supply. A copy of the accounts for 2022, presented to the APCM in April 2023 is here [2022 Cowden PCC Financial Statemnets.pdf](#). The majority of the regular parishioners give through the Parish Giving scheme.

The Village Fete organising group have been very generous and donated a sum of the proceeds every year to help the church.

## Church Building

A brief history is included at Appendix A. A children's guide to the church is being finalised at the time of writing. The bells are also of historic interest (Appendix B) and attract a number of visiting ringers.

The Quinquennial was completed in 2019 and the PCC have agreed an Action Plan coming out of the Recommendations. The PCC are in the process of submitting a Planning Permission application to Sevenoaks District Council for an outside toilet.

In the churchyard there is one Commonwealth Grave, which attracts visitors from around the world. It is the responsibility of the Parish Council to cut the grass in the churchyard, who also manage the new village cemetery area. Twice a year a churchyard tidy up is held, which is attended by many from the village and team work and regular coffee breaks provide a good opportunity for fellowship.

## The Rectory

The Rectory is a 5 bedroomed modern house in a secluded location behind the church. It has a ground floor office and a small garden and double garage.



## APPENDIX A

**A Brief Church History – laminated copies available in the Church for visitors to use as the walk around.**

**WELCOME** to this ancient and beautiful church building, parts of which date from the 13<sup>th</sup> Century and possibly the 12<sup>th</sup>. A place of peace, sanctuary, faith, comfort and prayer. Stepping through the porch and South Doors, stand, look around and reflect in tranquility.

*Jesus said, "I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in..."*

Turning right into the aisle, look to your right at the **Memorial Window**. Dating back to about 1320, architecturally this is an example of the early English decorated period. Also known as the Thanksgiving Window, the stained glass was donated by thankful parishioners in 1947 in gratitude for the preservation of Cowden during WWII. At the top there are arms of both Canterbury and Rochester and each Saint represented has a particular relevance to this Rural, Kentish Parish. From left to right, St. Bridget (women), St. Nicholas (sailors, children, travellers), St. Walstan (farm workers, agriculture), St. George (soldiers and airmen) and our Patron Saint, St. Mary Magdalene who holds this church in her hand.

As light streams in through the window, we remember that

*Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world"*

Walking on, notice the **Pulpit** which is Jacobean in style and bears the date 1628 with the initials JV, (the incumbent at the time was JOHN VALE). In 1884 the Pulpit was lowered by some 25 inches. The wooden stand on the right held a sand glass for timing sermons. From here the Word of God has been preached since 1322, words of life, love, wisdom and solace.

*"Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."*

By the Chancel steps, notice the small inlets or 'pincinas' let into the walls. These were used to drain the water used to wash Communion vessels. They also provide evidence of an earlier chancel arch and Rood screen.

Glance down at the floor and notice the unusual iron memorial plate to **John Bottinge**, dated 1662.

Many feet have passed here walking towards the Communion Table, coming in joy, in sadness, in need of comfort or peace and renewed strength as they by faith receive bread and wine.

*"Do this in remembrance of me"*

The glass inset into the **East window** tell the story of Christ's crucifixion and are copies of illuminations made by Lucas van Leyden in 1620 from earlier drawings and were 'placed' in the window prior to 1852.

On the **two gold inscribed panels** are The Ten Commandments and The Lord's Prayer, two luminary texts for Christian belief and way of life.

*"Be still and know that I am God"*

Moving away and midway along the **North Aisle**, two boards name the Incumbents. Stretching back almost 700 years, these men and now a woman, have faithfully served in this Parish with love and devotion.

*Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep"*

At the base of the Bell Tower in the West end of the church, is the stone-carved **Font**. Most likely dating back to 1853 but it could be a replica of an earlier original. Amongst the carvings look for two **Green Man** effigies, one is upside down. This common image has its origins in pagan worship, (there is another Green Man effigy set into a roof rafter in the Chancel). Here over the centuries infants, children and adults have come to be Baptised, declaring their faith they have been welcomed into the Christian Family.

*"Those who accepted his message were Baptised"*

In the **Bell Tower Area**, look up and east to admire the impressive wooden arches and pillars supporting the tower and spire. Cowden has six bells, the oldest was cast in about 1400 and the heaviest, the tenor, weighs just over 8 cwt. On Sundays, the bells ring out, filling the village with their joyful sound praise, invitation and welcome to worship. Before you leave, take time to stand or sit in quiet reflection.

*"Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."*

Walking outside, away from the church, glance up at the **tower** off the perpendicular and made very unusually of wooden shingle tiles. The **spire** at the top shoots up into the sky like an arrow of prayer and inspiration, inviting us to look up, away from our everyday routine and to know there is someone unimaginably greater than us.

More detailed information about the historical and architectural details are in the Church Guide, by the South entrance door.

## APPENDIX B

### Cowden Church Bells and The Bellringers

There are currently ten members in the Cowden band of bellringers, and we come from all walks of life. We enjoy ringing the bells for a large variety of reasons including being of service to the church and village community, keeping a quintessential English art alive, the challenge of learning something new, the social aspect (including visits to The Fountain (local village pub) after practice!), outings to different parts of the country, seeing different churches and ringing new bells and of course the physical and mental exercise! We are very active within the Tonbridge District of the KCACR (Kent County Association of Change Ringers). One of our ringers is the current Chairman and another is the Editor of Look To, the national Bellringers quarterly newsletter. Most of us ring in at least one other tower every week. We arrange several outings a year, including one residential trip which allows us to ring at towers much further afield and often involves ringing at a 12 bell tower, such as Peterborough Cathedral where we rang for Evensong in September 2019. Whilst we enjoy travelling around ringing bells in different churches, Cowden is often included in the ringing outings of other bands, or we might get a request to use our bells to ring a quarter peal or even a whole peal. During 2019 we had ten visits from other bands of bellringers. These visitors always leave a small donation which we put into our tower fund to put towards expenses such as new ropes.

Our practice night is on a Monday from 7.50-9.00pm and, as is usual amongst bellringers, we are friendly and welcoming and have regular visitors from other local towers. We enjoy the challenge of ringing quarter peals for special occasions such as the Kings Coronation, royal weddings, St. George's Day, anniversaries of particular events etc., but also just for the fun of it or we might arrange one for a ringer to achieve his or her goal of ringing a quarter peal of a particular method.

We ring almost every Sunday for the morning service and several of the ringers will already have rung at another church, in particular Edenbridge, for an earlier service. On the odd occasion when we do not have a minimum of five ringers, one of us will ring the Ellacombe so that the bells still ring out.

The bellringers are also on the church cleaning rota!



The bells in Cowden church are a fairly light ring of six, the tenor being just over 7cwt. The oldest bell was cast by an itinerant founder c.1410! Funnily enough we always teach learners on this bell – and warn them not to break it! We ring on the ground floor at the back of the church, within a magnificent oak frame which forms the base of the (crooked) spire. The bells were restored and re-hung in a new metal frame in 2000, the bells not having been rung for 27 years, due to the spire being unsafe. The push to get them ringing again for the millennium was due to the enormous effort by Dione Corbett (Emeritus Church Warden), and an ex-bellringer, Hilary Bavey.