

Profile of the Parishes of Ewhurst & Bodiam East Sussex 2024

The parishes include the villages of Bodiam, Ewhurst Green, Staplecross and Cripps Corner;
rural idylls, twelve to fourteen miles from the coast, with enthusiastic residents of all ages.

The Parishes

- The two parishes are held in plurality.
- The suspension of presentation of the benefices has just been lifted.
- The patrons of St James's are King's College, Cambridge.
- The patrons of St Giles' are All Souls College, Oxford.
- The service style at all the churches is in the central tradition of the Church of England,

Ewhurst Parish

The parish has a population of 1280 with 150 in Ewhurst Green.

- St James The Great, Ewhurst Green is at the heart of the village physically and emotionally; a beautiful building set in a well-kept churchyard with far reaching views. It has an active church life with involvement in many spiritual and social activities. The church and churchyard are supported and maintained by the wider parish and the church really is at the heart of the community opposite the White Dog Inn. The PCC are committed and there is a good congregation for the weekly services at 9.30am.
- St Mark's, Staplecross is a mission church with a small but faithful congregation presenting an opportunity for outreach, especially to the school and the younger families in the village. Staplecross is a lively village with its own pub, shop and a wide range of community and social activities including a bonfire society. Services are held twice a month at 11.15am alternating with St Giles'.

Bodiam Parish

- St Giles' Church, Bodiam. For a rural church St Giles' has a relatively young and lively PCC many of whom are engaged in community and other activities. Pub quizzes, coffee mornings, post-service wine and coffee are part of the programme. There is an opportunity to build on this and to grow the relationship with Bodiam CE Primary School and Claremont private secondary school. Laughter is a critical part of the mix of church life. There are two services per month a simple friendly family service and a BCP Communion, both at 11.15am. The population of the parish is 388.

We were particularly pleased with the near professional YouTube services produced by our in-house team throughout the Covid pandemic, keeping the Ewhurst and Bodiam spirit alive.

Photos from top:

St James The Great, Ewhurst Green, St Mark's, Staplecross, St Giles', Bodiam - Photo by Shane Steed.

Front cover: Main image: Ewhurst Green early one misty morning photographed from a footpath on farmland in Bodiam. © Stuart Black / Robert Harding Images.



The Place

East Sussex sometimes feels like the South of England's best kept secret but...

- We have an extraordinary quality of environment from the South Downs through the Rother Valley to Rye Harbour. In the county we have: Ashdown Forest, Hastings Pier, the Seven Sisters; and Eastbourne claims to be the sunniest spot in Britain. Sussex wine is now world renowned and vineyards dot the area.
- We have an amazingly rich culture and heritage ranging from Bonfire societies to the Bloomsbury group at Charleston, 20th century art at Hastings Contemporary, the Towner Gallery, Eddie Izzard and others at the De La Warr. Winnie the Pooh, Keane, Paul McCartney and Roger Daltrey of the Who live here. JMW Turner and Quentin Blake painted here; Charles Lamb, Henry James, Virginia Woolf and Rudyard Kipling wrote here, and there is just that little matter of a Battle in 1066. More locally there are two independent cinemas, great music with festivals at Peasmarch, Rye, Vinehall School and Battle and the world class Hastings Piano Competition.
- We have London and Brighton, close enough for day visits. Gatwick airport and the Channel Tunnel and ports are within an hour - Heathrow is not much further. Robertsbridge and Etchingham stations (for Charing Cross) are a short drive away and the A21 is the principal trunk road towards London and the M25.
- There is a good range of private and state schools across the county and in neighbouring Kent. In our own parishes we have Bodiam C of E Primary School, Staplecross Methodist Primary School and Claremont, a private secondary school in Bodiam. The county has two universities and three colleges of further education.
- The parishes have a village store, four pubs, the Hub, a community hub and café, Bodiam Castle, Kent and East Sussex steam heritage railway. Tescos and Waitrose are at Hawkhurst around 3 miles away.



Photos from top:

Kent & East Sussex Railway loco and carriages leaving Bodiam Station © Tim Graham / Robert Harding Images. Staplecross Village. Making hay at Quarry Farm, Ewhurst looking towards New House Farm, Bodiam.

The Person

Will be:

- Thoughtful about the future of rural ministry.
- Working to put the church at the heart of community regeneration.
- Ready to play an enabling part in village life.
- Creative and innovative with pastoral care; a kind listener with an infectious faith.
- Interested in widening the appeal of the church.
- Enthusiastic about working with our schools.
- Ready to acknowledge that wisdom and the Word can be transmitted in five minutes and sometimes on Zoom!
- Continuing the tradition of good quality music.
- A car driver, and IT able ... email etc is a crucial communication tool for organisation, mission and planning.

What we can offer:

- We believe we are not typical rural parishes and are open to change and (some) innovation.
- Support, energy, care, interest and humour from united churchwardens, PCCs and congregations who will work as a team with the new incumbent.
- Active, interesting and growing rural communities with potential for outreach and growth.
- An outstanding quality parish magazine and communications across the parishes.
- A wonderful opportunity for the incumbent to find their own work life balance in the heart of vibrant and enthusiastic communities, based in the beautiful villages of Bodiam, Ewhurst Green, Staplecross and Cripps Corner.



Photo: One of the two Celestary windows at St James The Great, Ewhurst Green. The stained glass was made by Margery May and installed in 1971.
Photo: David Young

The Home

- The Rectory is a charming 1960s brick built cottage in an edge-of-the-village location within walking distance of St James's Church and the popular village pub.
- Set back from the lane with a large front drive with parking for three cars and a useful single garage.
- The house benefits from a south-facing 2/3rd acre garden, with far reaching views. It is mostly laid to lawn and mature shrubs. The retiring incumbent was a keen gardener so there is a vegetable plot and cutting garden.
- The house has a large attractive sitting room/dining room - ideal for entertaining or quiet evenings in - with a wood burner and French windows to the garden, it is the perfect room for all times of the year.
- The downstairs is flooded with light from the many south facing windows and includes a good-sized study, kitchen (with a new oven), utility room, WC and entrance hall.
- Upstairs there are four good-sized bedrooms, two of which enjoy the magnificent views, plus a family bathroom and separate WC.
- As well as the wood burner, the house has oil-fired central heating throughout plus an alarm system.
- The Rectory is in good repair and decorative order after a major overhaul in 2017.
- A fund which is at the sole discretion of the Churchwardens of St Giles' Bodiam, pays for items 'for the comfort of the incumbent', eg mowing and strimming for a less enthusiastic gardener incumbent.



Photos from top:

The Rectory, Ewhurst Green, TN32 5TB seen from the south. The garden at the rear of the property looking south has an uninterrupted view over woodland. The Rectory's south-facing sitting room with wood burner and (out of shot) a dining area with bookshelves and French windows to the garden.

Locally: in depth

Transport links

There are good road links to London and the M25 via the A21 and the coast via the A259 and A27. South Eastern rail service from nearby Robertsbridge or Etchingham stations with direct lines to Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge and London Charing Cross or Cannon Street, and to Hastings and St. Leonard's on the coast. The trains service also links to Gatwick and Thameslink.

There are three excellent garages in Bodiam, Ewhurst and Cripps Corner and a petrol station at Sandhurst.

Local Amenities

- **Ewhurst Green** Sports and leisure facilities at the Herdman Pavilion with Pilates and Yoga classes, and in the grounds, there are outdoor keep fit equipment, a Boules court and a children's play area. It is also used for a popular monthly wine club, parties and other celebrations together with clubs for children's football at weekends. There is a good network of footpaths across glorious countryside within easy reach of the Rectory. The White Dog Inn is opposite the church.
- **Staplecross** Londis store and post office. A Village Hall utilised by the primary school for PE, Women's Institute meetings, monthly Lunch Club, Art Classes and other community events. Bonfire Society, Bowls and Stoolball clubs, Pre-school playgroup in St Mark's Church room, which has a kitchen and toilet facilities and is available for small evening or weekend events; Staplecross Social Club and the Cross Inn pub with restaurant.
- **Bodiam** Recreation ground and pavilion. Annual School Fundraising Day. Regular 'Meet Up' Club. A Parish Room for meetings and activities. There is a local network of walks. Hospitality venues include the Castle Inn, the Hub café and community space and the Curlew Inn has just reopened, Kent & East Sussex historic Railway at Bodiam Station and this is shortly to be extended to Robertsbridge and the mainline service to London and Hastings. Railway enthusiast priests will be particularly welcome as the railway is largely manned and built by volunteers.

Medical services

There is an excellent hospital, the Conquest, about seven miles away in Hastings and four doctors' surgeries in the area: two in Hawkhurst and one in Northiam and Sedlescombe respectively.

Photos from top:

Bodiam Castle looking south from the organic vineyard at Court Lodge Farm. Bird's eye view of Staplecross. Courtesy of Staplecross Bowls' Club and Ewhurst & Staplecross Bonfire Society procession on their way to the public display. Courtesy Ewhurst & Staplecross Bonfire Society .



Locally: in depth

Local Schools

Bodiam Church of England Primary School is a small rural school in the village. It is a voluntary controlled school whose vision for its Christian community is that pupils feel valued for who they are, reach their full potential through high quality learning experiences and are ready for life in an ever-changing world. This vision is guided by the Christian values of compassion, friendship and tolerance with the theological underpinning that 'we love our neighbour as ourselves' (Mark 12:31).

The school has 80 pupils and a special relationship with the wider community in Bodiam through its association with the Parish Church of St. Giles. Pupils attend church regularly for events and celebrations. The Vicar of Bodiam is a foundation governor (ex-officio) and supports the pupils by leading Collective Worship on occasion. There is also a "foundation" governor appointed by the Diocese from Bodiam who is currently a member of the PCC.

The school has a well-established caring ethos and is renowned for its strong pastoral care which contributes to the wonderful family feel which is regularly commented upon. The last SIAMS report remarked, "as a clear reflection of its mission statement...the care and well-being of pupils has a very high priority. It impacts deeply and positively on personal development and on the consistently excellent progress made by all pupils from varied starting points".
<https://bodiamceschool.co.uk/>

Claremont School is a non-selective independent school, and the senior school is based in Bodiam: the junior school is just outside Hastings. Claremont Senior School opened in 2011 and caters for 340 pupils, 100 of whom are accommodated in boarding houses in Battle and St Leonard's. Judged 'Outstanding' by Ofsted the school has a highly successful Football Academy and was recently named 'Independent School of the Year for Performing Arts'. Students move on to higher education and a wide range of major universities. The school plans to offer some of its facilities including the pool to the local community. [http:// www.claremontschool.co.uk/senior/](http://www.claremontschool.co.uk/senior/)

Staplecross Methodist Primary School is a Methodist controlled primary school with 90 pupils although the teaching is non-denominational. In its brochure, the Head explains that the school's aim is to develop each child spiritually, morally, socially and culturally. There are strong links between the school and the congregations at St James's & St Mark's. The Head welcomes this contact with the church. End-of-term, Harvest and Christmas services are held at St. Mark's. <http://www.staplecross.e-sussex.sch.uk/>

There are two local play groups, one at Staplecross based in St Mark's Hall and the other, Bodiam Pre-School at the Parish room.

Photos from top:

Bodiam CoE Primary School, Claremont Senior School, Bodiam and Staplecross Methodist Primary School at the Harvest Festival Service at St Mark's.



St James's: in depth

St James The Great, Ewhurst Green

Ewhurst Green is an attractive village with the White Dog Inn and Herdman Pavilion - a small community space. Yoga, Pilates and the Wine club are regularly held here, as well as providing a facility for football coaching for children.

- **St James The Great** church is on the village green and a chain of prayer has taken place on this site for 800 years. The current building has some 12th century architectural features, but was completed in the 14th century.
- Quinquennial Inspection work was completed in August 2023, with the full amount raised by donations and grants (see Appendix for detail of works).
- The churchyard is well maintained by many volunteers. Even the cleaning is done by rota, the church is open daily and visited by many as seen in the Visitors' book.
- A much needed Tea Station was installed in 2020 and is used to provide refreshments after church, at Talks @ St James's, concerts and other events.
- There is a keen active band of bellringers who ring at Ewhurst and Bodiam.
- For the last few years, we have been very fortunate to have Tongswood Chamber Choir join us for the Carol Service. They add some eclectic carols interspersing with lessons and congregational singing.



Photos from top:

St James The Great from the Green to the west of the church. Easter Flowers, Photo: David Young. Ewhurst Lane looking eastwards. The lane runs through the centre of the village - the church's spire can be seen far right in the photo.

St James's: in depth

St James The Great, Ewhurst Green

Services and the church community

There is a weekly sung 9.30am Holy Communion Service CW & BCP alternating. Vestments are worn. Two mornings a week morning prayer is said by personal choice of the previous incumbent. During the interregnum, we have received strong offers of support from retired clergy in the Rye Deanery and further afield.

The congregation is made up of active retirees and has recently been joined by a younger cohort. Many join in the services as readers, intercessors and servers. The large input from the congregation and wider parish facilitates the smooth running of the church and the well-kept churchyard. This cuts down on parish expenses. A lunch in the church is held periodically to thank the army of helpers.

PCC and administration

During the interregnum the sole churchwarden has been assisted by the Reader. The remaining seven PCC members have all helped, playing to their strengths. We have six meetings a year, four in the church and two in winter months in a warm house. As expected, there is a Safeguarding Officer for both churches of the parish.

Finance

We pay our Parish Share monthly in full. The Parish Giving Scheme is well established, and, together with offerings at church services, rental income from the Pre-School Playgroup at Staplecross, the churches' running costs are covered.

The recent investment in the Quinquennial Inspection work, the organ refurbishment, the lightning conductor upgrade has hopefully reduced the risk of major expenditure until the next QI (See Ewhurst Appendix).

We have recently introduced contactless card giving which is available at services and has been especially helpful at special events.

Part of our charitable giving includes: TARIRO an educational charity in Zimbabwe. After the Talks in St James's, the speaker is encouraged to designate a charity of their choice to which we send donations.

From top to bottom

Richard Karn, one of our three organists at St James's playing the organ which was restored recently. Children from Staplecross Primary School attending the Armistice Day service by the Cavell Van at Bodiam Station. The van brought the body of the Unknown Warrior from Flanders to Westminster after the First World War and earlier, that of Nurse Cavell. Photo courtesy of Kent & East Sussex Railway. Carol Service with Tongswood Chamber Choir 2023.



St Mark's: in depth

St Mark's Staplecross and Cripps Corner

Staplecross is a large village about a mile from Ewhurst Green. It has a primary school, a well-supported village hall, an excellent Londis general store & post office, a thriving public house and several garden centres. Cripps Corner is less than a mile from Staplecross and has an excellent garage/workshop and several small businesses.

St Mark's church in Staplecross was built in the 19th century and has a small but loyal congregation. Attached to the church is a small hall with a kitchen which is used for church events and is hired out to the village pre-school playgroup, providing a useful income to the church. The playgroup use it 4-5 days a week and is inspected by Ofsted.

Services

St Mark's holds two services a month at 11.15am including a Morning Praise and Holy Communion. These alternate with St Giles', Bodiam on the other two Sundays in the month. The running of St Mark's church is currently organised by one member of the PCC who acts as deputy warden.

Future Plans:

- We have been trying to grow the church among families in Staplecross.
- We tried a Christingle service on Christmas Eve and for the past two years have held a Christmas Crib Service on Christmas Eve, with numbers attending growing slowly.



Photos from top:

St Mark's Staplecross from the west. The Bonfire Boyes' Carol Service; Photo courtesy of the Ewhurst & Staplecross Bonfire Society. The Christmas Crib Service on 24 December 2022; Photo: David Young.

St James' & St Mark's: in depth

Church Community and the Parish

There are 73 on the electoral roll, but the weekly congregation averages 35-40 over the year. As in many rural parishes, there is a wide range of churchmanship, but we try to be sensitive to everybody's needs. In our services we are reverential but understated.

We are lucky to have the services of three organists and although there is no choir, several members of the congregation are keen singers and form an occasional choir for Special Services.

What we do well:

- Give a warm welcome to visitors with care, concern and friendship shown for the church family.
- Keep St James's church open daily for visitors whatever their needs.
- Harness a wide range of talents and skills across the parish to help us with the Church and churchyard maintenance both practically and financially.
- Maximise and appreciate what our three organists, Richard, Ian and Philippa provide in services and recitals.
- Organise monthly talks at St James's to reach out to the wider parish.

We could try to:

- Develop further our outreach programme.
- Engage further with the Primary school at Staplecross, while respecting the Methodist Foundation.
- Research the interest and possibility in a different form of service, eg the 5th Sunday at St James's.

Photos from top:

Harvest Supper at Staplecross Village Hall, September 2023. Cantemus Choir gave a concert of Summer Music led by Chris Arnold and the Coronation Party for the whole community with Hog Roast held in the evening of 6th May 2023 at which, Ewhurst PCC was the lead organiser.



St Giles': in depth

The Church

St Giles' sits above the village of Bodiam on the Sandhurst road. It is a Grade II listed building, the fabric of which was constructed of Hastings sandstone in the late 14th century but was significantly restored by RC Carpenter between 1845 and 1856 and features in Pevsner's series "the Historic Buildings of England". It has a glorious stained-glass 'Lily' window of particular significance and the peal of six bells, which are located in an internal bell tower, are considered to be very fine and are usually rung before each service by a local group of bell-ringers. One of the bells is dedicated to the Emperor Haile Selassie.

Given its secluded location, St Giles' is locked during the day but all members of the PCC have a key and the church is opened on request. The Churchyard remains open for members of the local community and is well maintained in naturalistic style. The church has an organ which is in good condition and we have a number of local organists who play at special services. For regular services, there is a very effective computerised organ system, which is operated by members of the PCC and is used to very good effect – many visitors have been surprised to find the organ was in fact housed in a small lap-top and not the organ loft!

A major overhaul of the roof and rainwater ware costing in excess of £40,000 was completed in 2023. Interior decoration and lighting improvement will start in 2024. These have been funded by historic fundraising and two very generous legacies which leave a substantial reserve. A quinquennial inspection is due this year but we will be very surprised if any other than the most minor works are required.

Services There are two services a month. The first is a family service which attracts all ages and a popular feature is the refreshments served after the service, which also serves as an important forum for fellowship. The more formal service is the celebration of the Eucharist on the third Sunday: where vestments are worn.

1st Sunday	11.15am Family Service – average congregation approx. 20.
3rd Sunday	11.15 am Holy Communion (BCP) average congregation approx. 12



Photos from top: The Lily stained glass windows at St Giles' Bodiam, wedding of Zoe and Barnaby Swiffen; Photo: Guy Hearn. Refreshments at the Flower Festival at St Giles' in 2022.

St Giles': in depth

Special Services: in addition to weddings, christenings and funerals, Festival services are held for Easter, Christmas (including Carols by Candlelight which frequently has a congregation in excess of 80) and Remembrance Sunday. Other special services including Patronal, Advent, Lammastide and Harvest are also celebrated. At the personal choice of the previous incumbent, weekly evening prayer was held. Members of the PCC assist at all services on a rota basis. The church is prepared for the service, readers are arranged and the intercessions are usually led by a designated member of the PCC for each service. A team of flower arrangers drawn from the wider community beautifies the church for services.

St Giles' PCC

St Giles' is blessed with an active and cohesive PCC who enjoy the fellowship and friendship of belonging to the St Giles' community. The churchwardens take responsibility for much of the administration, ably and willingly supported by the PCC.

It consists of the incumbent, the two churchwardens, Graham Peters and Rachel Piper, and 5 remaining members including the secretary and treasurer; two PCC members are representatives on the deanery synod. Members have all been chosen for their commitment to St Giles' and also the particular skill set which they bring, and include: an accountant, surveyor, ex-publican, a PA or two, a marine insurance specialist, a retired entertainment and comedy impresario and an investment manager. The PCC also includes some excellent cooks! A member of the congregation, a former nurse and school matron, is the safe-guarding officer and attends necessary training days.

The PCC meets on average 5 times annually, and there are 47 names on the electoral roll.

Finances

Finances are in good shape and St Giles' pays its Parish Share in full. Our regular donors cover our share of the parish contribution and regular church maintenance costs etc. This leaves a surplus for events, repairs and other expenditure. We have been most fortunate recently to receive two very generous bequests which have enabled major building work whilst leaving a significant reserve.



Photos from top: The baptism of George Peters at St Giles' in 2023. Donkeys joined the service on Palm Sunday in April 2023 - they walked from Sandhurst and processed with the congregation to the steps of the church.

St Giles': in depth



Communications

Over the past few years, email has been the principal medium of communication between members of the PCC, the incumbent and the wider congregation. An email is sent before every service to remind parishioners of timings and often the theme. This is particularly useful given that St Giles' does not have a service every week. It is also used to notify parishioners of any other relevant events. Social media are used to publicise major events.

The truly excellent monthly parish magazine has a designated section to cover all matters relating to St Giles' including event promotion and is well read throughout the wider community.

St Giles' and the Community The PCC is very aware that, although not all members of the local community attend St Giles' on a regular basis, the church is still perceived as a fundamental pillar of village life. We are fortunate that fundraising and events have historically drawn donations and participation from the wider community.

The church also participates in outward giving, for example after Harvest Festival, produce is donated to the Seaview homeless charity in Hastings. Donations have been made to the British Legion, Tariro, Rwanda Action and a suicide prevention charity. In addition, we have hosted a number of events which focus on including the whole Bodiam community: a regular and very popular pub Quiz at the Castle Inn, Flower Festival in the Church, annual coffee morning and Community harvest supper at the Hub café.

The Parker and Ashcombe Trust owns four alms flats and a house in Bodiam. The house contains the Parish Room, a subsidised community meeting room. The vicar is an ex-officio member of the trust and also an ex-officio governor of Bodiam CE School. The school holds festival services in St Giles' church - neither post demands much time.



Photos from top:

St Giles' Bodiam and churchyard. Annual fundraising Pub Quiz with the chief organiser, Van Keeling, right - the Castle Inn provides an excellent hot meal and the evening is enjoyed by the congregation as well as the wider community. Adam Piper speaking at the Harvest Supper at The Hub.

Ewhurst Appendix

- Ongoing monthly collection for Rye Foodbank.
- Monthly talks in summer months in St James's on varied subjects, including in 2023: "Restorative Justice" and "A Year in the Life of the Bee"; the Talks on ecological subjects are particularly well supported by the wider parish. Donations following Talks go to speaker's chosen charity. Contactless Giving has boosted this.
- We are fortunate to have a group of loyal and talented flower arrangers who always go that extra mile particularly for special occasions and events.

January 2023

- Extensive Quinquennial Inspection work started to totally refurbish the rainwater goods and stonework identified by architect.
- In the last two years we have spent over £35,000 on repairs to St James's Church. As well as installation of an additional lightning conductor and a major overhaul of the church organ. This has been funded by the generosity of the congregation, the community and a number of grant givers including the National Churches' Trust and the Listed Place of Worship Grant.

May 2023

- Party to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III at the Herdman Pavilion, which was a parish wide event led by the PCC and helpers, 130 tickets sold at a very subsidised price so more people were able to attend.

September 2023

- Fish & Chip Harvest Supper at Staplecross Village Hall.

October 2023

- Tea, Cake & Concert: Organ recital with Ian Verran.

November 2023

- Start of interregnum. Each Sunday Holy Communion service covered by visiting clergy.

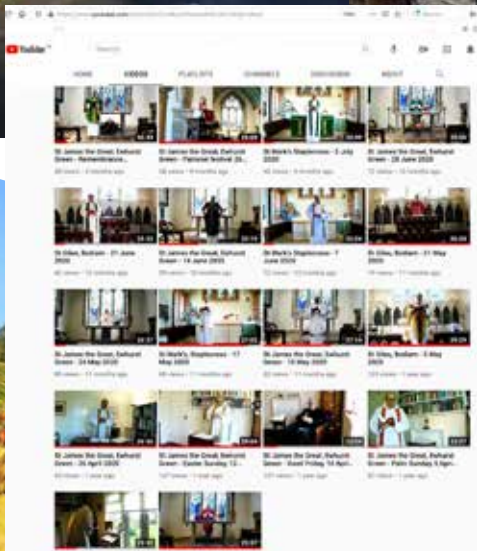
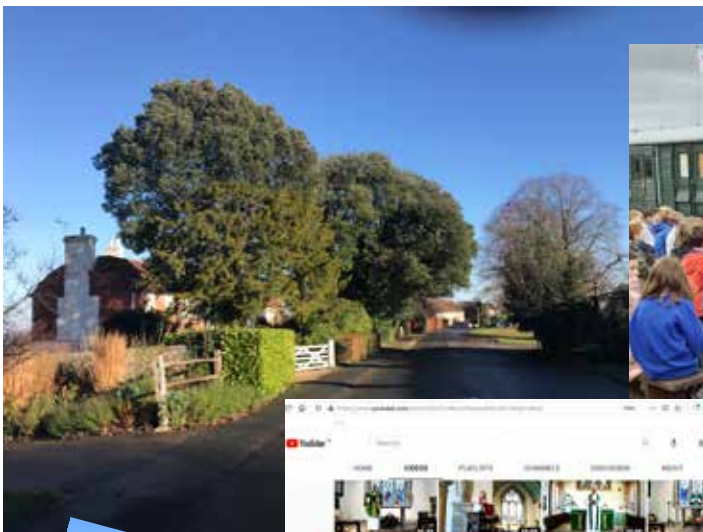
December 2023

- Bonfire Boyes' Carol Service at St Mark's.
- Carol Service at St James's with Tongswood Chamber Choir.

Please also see the Annual Church Meeting booklet enclosed. This is published and distributed ahead of the meetings which are normally held in March or April each year.



Floral arch at the gate to St James's arranged by Fiona Flint and Liz Moore for a wedding.



From top to bottom and from left to right: Ewhurst Green. Armistice Day Service at The Cavell Van at Bodiam Station with Staplecross Primary School, Courtesy of KESR. The view from a garden in Ewhurst Green looking north. St Giles' Church by David Nibloe. New House Farm Vineyard in Bodiam. YouTube recordings during the Covid pandemic. These were recorded by David Nibloe and viewed by up to 250 each week. Cripps Corner Village sign. James & Grace Mitchell's wedding at St Giles'. Levetts Lane in Bodiam, which is close to the church. It was originally built for Guinness's Hop Garden workforce, and has formed a close-knit community Photo © Simon Carey (cc-by-sa/2.0). The Ewhurst & Staplecross Bonfire Society. The Coronation Party - Ewhurst PCC was the lead organiser, but involved the whole community. Aerial view of Staplecross with the Bodsall Green in the foreground, courtesy of the Bodsall Club. Bodiam CoE Primary School.