Rotherfield with Mark Cross
Parish Profile 2026

Contents:

Introduction from the Bishop of Chichester	**3**
Mission	**4**
Our Parish	**4**
Who we are	**7**
Services	**8**
Our New Incumbent	**10**
House Groups, Prayer, Messy Church, Puppet Ministry, Bell ringing & Music	**11**
Church Buildings	**14**
Finances	**17**
Social Events & Friends of St Denys'	**18**
Rotherfield and Mark Cross Villages	**20**
Local Schools & Pre-Schools	**22**
Our Church in the Community	**24**
Working with the Deanery & Diocese	**26**
Prayer for the future	**27**

Website: https://www.stdenysrotherfield.org.uk
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/stdenysrotherfield

Introduction from the Bishop of Chichester

Proclaiming the Mystery of Faith

In 2025 this diocese celebrated the 950th anniversary of witness and evangelisation from a mission base in Chichester, building on the earlier mission founded by St Wilfrid at Selsey. 2025 also marked the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea with its reminder of the formative claim upon us of the catholic creeds.

These anniversaries are more than historical footnotes. They speak powerfully about the richness of faith and mission that is our inheritance locally and universally.

Inspired by that inheritance, we seek to be a household of faith that is endlessly curious about how the Holy Scriptures and the sacraments of the New Covenant enable us to know, love and follow Jesus Christ in today's noisy and distracted world.

If God is calling you to join us in the task of proclaiming the mystery of faith in some part of this diocese, we pray that the contribution of your gifts and experience will enrich our witness and deepen your own discipleship.

We take very seriously the call to diversity and radical inclusion as characteristic of the Church's mission. For this reason, we welcome applications from ordained women and Global Majority Heritage clergy, who are under-represented in those who serve this diocese.

+Martin

Mission:

As a rural Christian community, we seek to proclaim Jesus Christ and his teaching in all that we do: in our worship and the lives that we live. We are here to encourage and support everyone to discover the joy of knowing God and engaging in service, prayer, Bible study and worship at every stage in their lives.

We are delighted to be part of the wider community and many people in our congregations are involved in the various clubs and groups that are part of our life here. We aspire to be salt and light in our community of Rotherfield, Mark Cross and the surrounding area.

"He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."
Mark 16: 15

Our Parish:

The Parish of Rotherfield with Mark Cross is an open, inclusive, evangelical parish.
It underwent a Pastoral Reorganisation in January 2025 to become a single Parish, having previously been a joint Benefice, that of St Denys', Rotherfield and St Mark's, Mark Cross.

The Parish has a leadership structure that currently consists of the following:

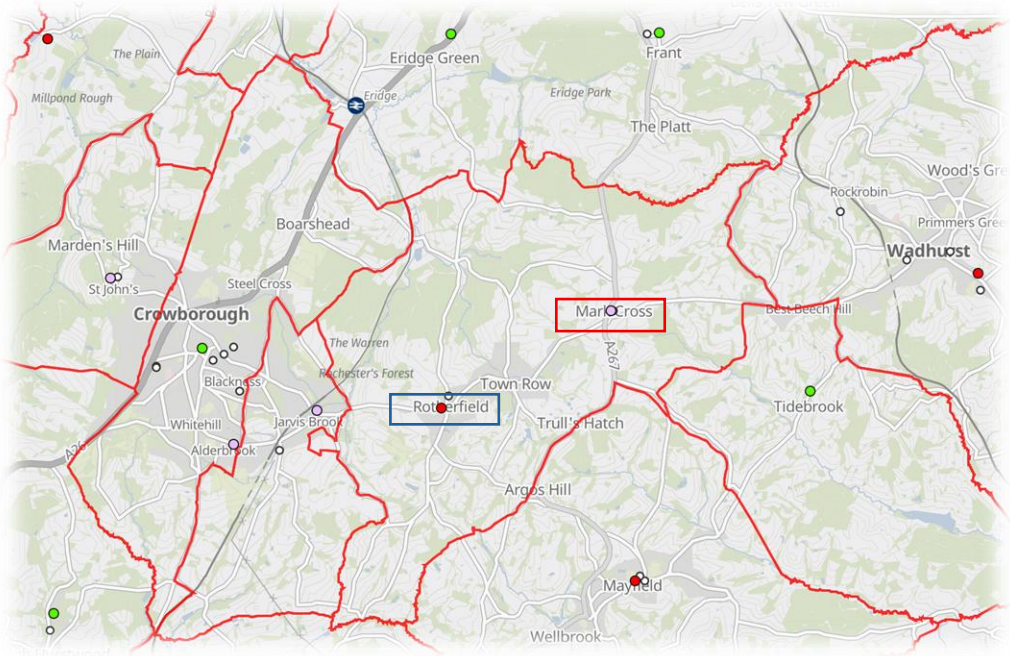
Individuals:
A Lay Minister (Reader) – Licenced to the Parish
Three Churchwardens
A paid Verger at St Denys'
A paid Organist - 2 Sundays a month at St Denys' and 1 Sunday a month at St Mark's
A paid Parish Administrator (4 hours per week) - currently funded by a grant payment from the Rotherfield Trust
Safeguarding Officer
Health & Safety Officer
Electoral Roll Officer

Parish of Rotherfield with Mark Cross

Committees:

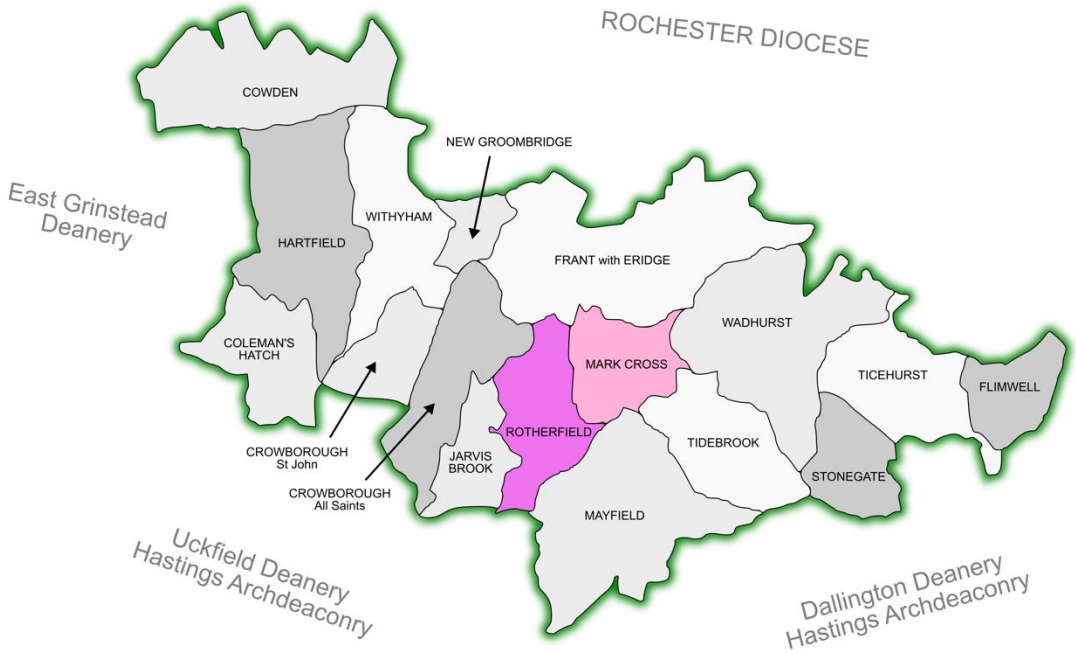
PCC
Admin Team
Worship Committee
Finance Committee
Family Service Planning Group
Parish Mission Group
Events Committee

The Parish of St Denys', Rotherfield with St Mark's, Mark Cross is located in the North-East corner of East Sussex.



Parish of St Denys' Rotherfield with St Mark's, Mark Cross

The Parish is in the Deanery of Rotherfield, which consists of 16 parishes:

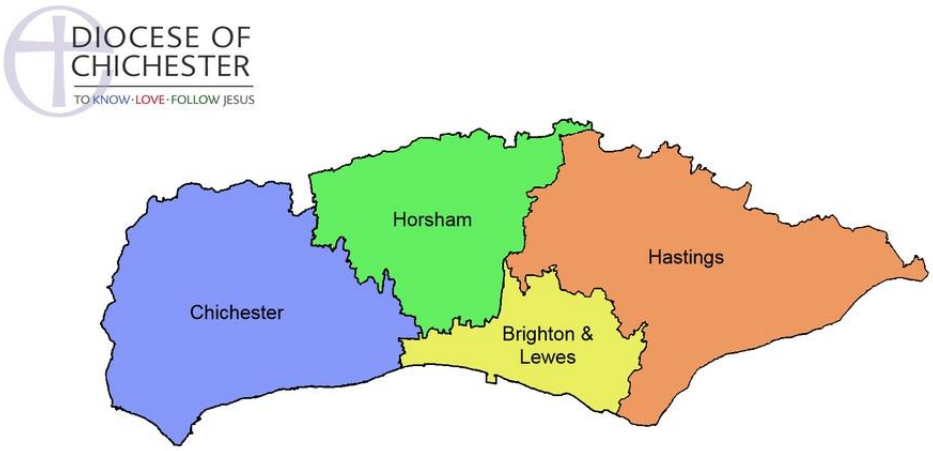


The Rural Dean for the Rotherfield Deanery: The Revd Judith Wilkinson
Priest at St Michael & All Angels, Jarvis Brook

The Rotherfield Deanery is one of six deaneries within the Hastings Archdeaconry.

The Archdeacon of Hastings – The Venerable Russell Dewhurst

This is one of four Archdeaconries in the Diocese of Chichester:



The Diocesan Bishop of Chichester — Currently in vacancy

The Suffragan Bishop of Horsham — The Right Reverend Ruth Bushyager
(responsibility for West Sussex)

The Suffragan Bishop of Lewes — The Right Reverend Will Hazelwood
(responsibility for East Sussex)
Acting Bishop of Chichester during Vacancy

Parish of Rotherfield with Mark Cross

Who we are:

The parish of St Denys', Rotherfield and the adjacent parish of St Mark's, Mark Cross have been working as a single benefice since 2002. This was led by the Rector until his retirement in October 2023 ably supported in recent years by our Lay Minister (Reader) who is currently leading most of our worship and overseeing all administrative aspects of the Benefice during the interregnum. In January 2025, the Benefice was restructured to become the single Parish of Rotherfield with Mark Cross.

There has been a place of worship on the current site of St Denys' church since the late 8th century and parts of the current building, including its beautiful wall paintings are medieval. Being Grade 1 listed poses certain challenges, not least the cost of upkeep, but the church is a much-loved focal point for the village and is well supported by both the present congregation and the wider parish. St Mark's church building is now also used as a community centre for Mark Cross village and so is also well used. Both churches have strong links with the village primary schools (Mark Cross Primary School is a CEA school), with members of the church regularly visiting to lead activities or short acts of worship. Pupils at the schools also attend special services and are invited to create decorative items for special events or church festivals from time to time.

Sunday morning services are varied, with a regular pattern across the month. Whilst there is a good number of more senior worshippers, who have attended St Denys' or St Mark's for many years, we are beginning to see an increase in younger members of the congregation. As of 31st December 2025, the numbers on the electoral roll were 112. The number of children attending the Family Service and our Breakfast Service (introduced in 2023) is increasing. This, together with the church now running a Baby and Toddler group, has resulted in a steady stream of child baptisms recently.

The parish runs Messy Church afternoons, currently once a month. These include a short act of worship, craft activities and a simple meal.

There are four House Groups, which meet at different times in the week to enable as many to join as possible. These usually follow a common course and there are always opportunities for further exploration through discussion. These groups also provide a time to give mutual support of group members and the wider community, through time of prayer.

Many of our congregation give generously, not just financially, but also of their time and expertise. There are a good number who regularly participate in services – reading the lessons, reading and/or writing the intercessions, acting as servers, sides-persons or running refreshments. Many also regularly donate items of food and other household goods, to support the work of FSW charity, contribute to the Romanian shoe-box appeal and sponsor a Ugandan school pupil.

The church will usually pull together a larger team for one-off activities such as annual church spring-cleaning, making Christingles, churchyard maintenance and mowing of the wildflower meadow, etc. Individuals also offer to take on particular tasks, when a need arises. In addition, the church regularly runs fund-raising events, which bring in many from the two villages and beyond. As well as providing much needed funds, these also provide valuable opportunities to bring others into church.

Services:

Our services are an equal mix of Eucharistic and Service of the Word. Across the parish services follow Common Worship or Book of Common Prayer. The table below outlines our current general pattern throughout the year, though there are occasional necessary exceptions. This pattern was developed to provide a varied pattern of worship to appeal to all members of the church congregation. During the vacancy, the number of services is reduced from that under our previous incumbent, but worship takes place each Sunday at least once across the parish.

		First Sunday	Second Sunday	Third Sunday	Fourth Sunday	Fifth Sunday
08:15	St Denys'				**Breakfast Church**	
10:00	St Denys'	**Family Service**	**Parish Communion** (CW) with Sunday School	**Morning Praise** – (All-age Service)	**Parish Communion** with Sunday School *OR* **Morning Worship** (CW)	**Morning Worship** (CW) ** *OR*
	St Mark's					**Matins** (BCP) **
11:15	St Mark's	**Family Service**		**Matins** (BCP)		
15:30	St Denys'		**Messy Church**			
18:00	St Denys'	**Choral Evensong** (BCP)				**Prayer around the Church**

** alternates

The largest congregations, currently about 30-40 in number, are at the 10:00 am service of Common Worship Holy Communion or Service of the Word at St Denys'. At St Mark's congregation numbers average about 8.

Our Family Service is planned by the Family Service Planning Team with Puppet Tree performing at nearly all St Denys' Family Services throughout the year. Morning Praise is an All Age Service, unique to St Denys'.

With the exception of Holy Communion and baptisms, all services at both churches are currently being led by the Lay Minister (Reader). Prior to the interregnum period, preaching and leading at services across the month was equally shared between the Rector and the Lay Minister (Reader). It is hoped that this pattern will continue.

Wednesday morning services

In addition to Sunday services, there is a service of Holy Communion every third Wednesday in the month at 10:30 am at St Denys'. This is a said service following the Book of Common Prayer.

Other services

Services outside the normal pattern include Plough Sunday, St George's Day Parade Service (with Rotherfield Scout groups and Royal British Legion), Holy Week services, Easter Sunday, Rogation Sunday, Animal Thanksgiving Service, Harvest, Remembrance Sunday (with Rotherfield Scout groups and Royal British Legion), Christmas Carol Services, Christingle Services on Christmas Eve and the Christmas Day service. The Christmas services are well-attended by local people for whom these may be their only attendance of the year. Average total attendance at the Christingle services can be in the region of 300.

There are several baptisms each year – in 2025, there were 11. We encourage these to take place as part of our Family Services.

There are three weddings a year on average, usually at the photogenic Grade 1 Listed St Denys' Church.

Funeral services sometimes include burials in the local parish cemetery (consecrated) or later, a burial of ashes in the Garden of Remembrance. In 2025 there were 17 funerals, Thanksgiving Services and interments. Cremation Services take place at Tunbridge Wells Crematorium and occasionally at the newly built crematorium in Horam. Our Lay Minister (Reader) is licenced for funeral ministry and under the previous Incumbent shared taking these services.

Morning Office (Daily Prayer), under the previous Incumbent, took place in St Denys' four mornings a week.

Our New Incumbent

We are praying for:
Someone who will help us to grow in faith, worship and prayer as a church family and be active in mission and service in our community. Someone who is called to pastoral ministry, who will embrace what we are and be willing to lead us in moving forward.

Who we are seeking:

Responsibilities

- Take a prayerful approach to collaborative leadership, working closely with the Lay Minister (Reader) and actively encourage lay leadership in all aspects of parish life, including worship.
- Guide our churches to develop and move forward, both spiritually and practically.
- Provide faith-led support and guidance to all and to lead the churches forward in mission and outreach.
- Maintain a varied schedule of church services to meet the needs of all members of the congregation – to provide a balance between traditional styles of worship and the more contemporary.
- Embrace village life, seeking opportunities to develop the special role of our church within the rural community and its work with families and young people.

Characteristics

We are looking for someone who:

- has a prayerful, scripture-based, faith in Jesus Christ, committed to serving Him through ministry and inviting others to know Him.
- is an effective and inspiring communicator - within the church, to individuals and to the wider community. Someone who can show how Christian teaching is relevant to our modern world.
- enjoys working with people of all ages.
- will enjoy engaging with village life and appreciate the special role of our church in a rural community.

The PCC is open to Prayers of Love and Faith being said within the Parish.

Parish of Rotherfield with Mark Cross

What we will provide for our new incumbent:
Our new Incumbent will be supported by and work with our Lay Minister (Reader) and a team of volunteers who undertake roles of leadership in our churches.

The Rectory is a detached four-bedroom property that has recently had a new heating system and double glazing installed. It will be redecorated according to the successful applicant's wishes. Further details on page 16.

House Groups, Prayer, Messy Church, Puppet Ministry, Bell Ringing & Music:

House Groups
There are currently four house groups that meet in Rotherfield. Each one takes place in the home of the volunteer group leader and provides an opportunity to study the Bible in a relaxed and comfortable environment. There are three groups that meet during the day and one in the evening, to enable anyone to join. Most groups meet fortnightly, following a common course, which may focus on one or more parts of the Bible, as well as other source materials such as religious paintings. Guidance is often provided in the form of a published booklet and/or video and is used to prompt discussion within the group. Through lively debate, fellowship and the sharing of thoughts, group members experience the mutual support of fellowship and prayer.

Prayer Ministry & Prayer Chain

Prayer Ministry has been offered on one Sunday in the month during services for those who would like to pray with someone or be prayed for. The parish also operates a prayer chain for those in need of prayer who can email or text prayer requests confidentially to a member of the prayer team.

Messy Church

The parish has been running Messy Church for 12 years. It is an established part of our provision for children and families within the two churches and of our outreach programme to our village communities. It is lay-led and is well supported by our church family.

Messy Church takes place monthly, on a Sunday afternoon in St Denys' Church. We have a committed and loyal team of around 15 -18 helpers, some of whom have been with us from the beginning.

We welcome whole families, a number of whom have little other contact with church. We publicise as widely as we can, through the schools, pre-schools and nurseries in Rotherfield and Mark Cross (who are all very helpful with this), on Facebook and by distributing fliers and posters.

Messy Church is a fun-packed afternoon, with parachute games (always popular), lovely craft activities led by our creative craft leaders and a delicious meal shared by all. Central to it is our Celebration Service, themed around a Bible-based message. We aim to make this as interactive and as lively as we can!

Puppet Tree

St Denys' Church is the home of Puppet Tree, our puppet ministry team. Launched in May 2004, Puppet Tree has seen many changes of puppeteers during its 22-year existence but has always managed to put on quality performances at all the monthly family services. These usually consist of a sketch and a song.

Sketches are used either to tell a bible story, in which case the puppets wear biblical costumes, or to illustrate the theme of the service. The songs are performed by the puppet band at the end of the service, using CD's of pop music to which Christian words have been added.

In addition to performing at St Denys' Church, Puppet Tree has been invited to perform at many other churches in Kent, Sussex and Surrey, as well as in assemblies at four local primary schools and at a Care Home in Crowborough. A full list of all the places where Puppet Tree has performed can be found on the History page of our website www.puppettree.org.uk. The website also contains much more information along with a video of a song being performed by the band.
Part of our mission is to help other churches see the value of using puppets in services and we are proud that we have been instrumental in enabling four other churches to form their own teams. Two founder members of the Puppet Tree also run a weekly after-school puppet club at Mark Cross Primary School, which has resulted in some children joining the church puppet team.

Bellringing:

St Denys' is blessed with a fine peal of eight bells, which are rung on most Sunday mornings, for weddings and on other special occasions throughout the year. There is a strong team of bell ringers, from the village and neighbouring towns and villages. As well as regular weekly practices, the team also visit other churches to gain experience of ringing different peals of bells.

Music

Music plays an integral part in the worship at our services. St Denys' church has a Hugh Banton electronic organ and a Bechstein grand piano. Traditional hymns and more contemporary worship songs are used at the different services, as well as some recorded music and video action songs. We are fortunate to have a very competent and talented retained organist, who plays for most principal services as well as weddings and funerals on request. St Mark's church has a single manual electric organ, although most Sundays a variety of backing tracks is used.

Prior to the pandemic in 2020, St Denys' had an active choir, singing regularly for services. After Covid numbers dropped, for a variety of reasons, especially in the lower voice parts. With the choir so small and unbalanced, the services of a rehearsal choirmaster could no longer be justified, and the choir effectively closed down. Former members still support the Choral Evensong service, unrehearsed, singing the Responses, Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis but not the Psalm. The members will also support a call for a choir at a wedding or a funeral whenever possible, to provide a lead for the hymns.

Rotherfield Baby and Toddler Group

This is a playgroup for babies and pre-school children, held in the village hall and now run by the Parish. This provides a vital opportunity for young mothers to meet together and help their children develop through cooperative play with others. As a direct result of the church's involvement in this group, several children have come forward for baptism and now regularly attend one of the family services.

Church Buildings:

St Denys'

The present sandstone building dates from about 1060 and stands in the centre of the village. Its spire, reaching a height of 165 feet, is a familiar land-mark for miles around. The oldest part of the church is the north-east corner of the building and is believed to have been erected on the site of the original wooden buildings. Known as the Nevill Chapel, it is named after the Nevill branch of the Abergavenny family, the Lords of the Manor from 1450. The rest of the building dates primarily from the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries, with later additions such as the 15th century tower and porch. The 15th century spire was destroyed in the Great Storm of 1987 and two years later was replaced by one of steel construction.

The newest part of the church (2000/2001) comprises a Clergy Vestry and kitchen located in the south-west corner of the nave and a Utility Area/WC in the north-west corner. Ramps for disabled access have been provided. The Nevill Chapel has been restored to its former glory following the removal of the clergy vestry and old pipe organ. The three-manual electronic organ is positioned at the end of the choir stalls with the speakers located above the Nevill Chapel screen and at the west end of the Nave. A public address system incorporating a loop system for the hard of hearing is installed. Tapestry kneelers were designed and worked by local parishioners, and many commemorate village and family links.

The south aisle is the most recent part of the church to be updated, raising the floor to make a welcoming refreshment area and altering the existing clergy vestry to add a fully functioning kitchen.

St Denys' Church is well known for the marvellous wall paintings which still decorate large areas of the interior and date from the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries with texts of a later date. For several centuries they were completely covered over, and it was only in 1893 during restoration work to the nave that a fall of plaster revealed fragments of decoration. Further investigation resulted in the discovery of a number of substantial early paintings and the realisation that they must have once covered almost every available surface. Since the 1890's many of the paintings have faded badly, but the rest of these that can still be clearly seen are on the chancel arch, the west wall and in the Nevill Chapel. In several places in the nave there are some small areas of wall painting indicative of the whole church having once been decorated.

St Denys' is also well known for its East Window. The earliest stained glass in the church is at the top of the east window in the Nevill Chapel where fragments of 14th century glass can be seen, some of the earliest known in Sussex.

It is the late 19th century Pre-Raphaelite glass in the fine 14th century east window of the chancel that is of special art-historical interest. It was mainly designed by Sir Edward Burne Jones. It was made in 1878 by William Morris.

St Mark's

The earliest documentation referencing the village of Mark Cross dates from 1296. At that time, and for several centuries after, the spiritual needs of the few villagers were met at St Denys' church.

The building of what is now St Mark's church was built in the mid-nineteenth century as a National Voluntary School. Not long after this, the school outgrew the building and a new one was built next door. This enabled the original building to be repurposed into a church. A new parish of Mark Cross was created from parts of the civil parishes of Mayfield, Rotherfield and Wadhurst.

In the early 20th century, Mark Cross village had expanded significantly and a village hall was built. The church and hall were both well-used and St Mark's was full every Sunday, with a flourishing Sunday School for children.

Thanks to a significant legacy, the church received a major upgrade in the 1990s. This enabled facilities to be improved, with a more modern interior and the creation of a small side-chapel.

In 2019, a more major reorganisation of the church took place. The village hall had already been closed and the viability of the church building was in doubt, due to significant structural problems. The decision was taken to change St Mark's into a community centre, with the original side-chapel being retained as a permanent chapel.

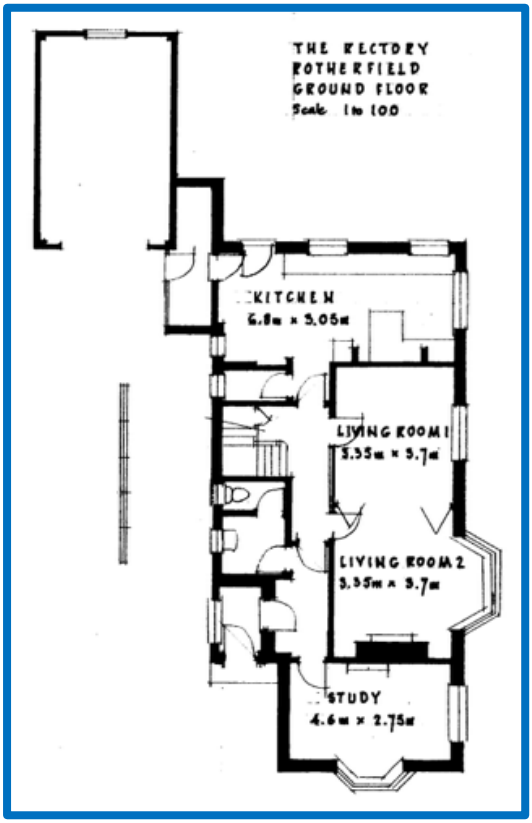
Today, St Mark's continues to be an active church, with the building in regular use for Sunday services as well as a variety of village activities.

The Rectory:

The Rectory is an attractive detached property on the Mayfield Road in Rotherfield village, a ten-minute walk from St Denys' Church.

It comprises:

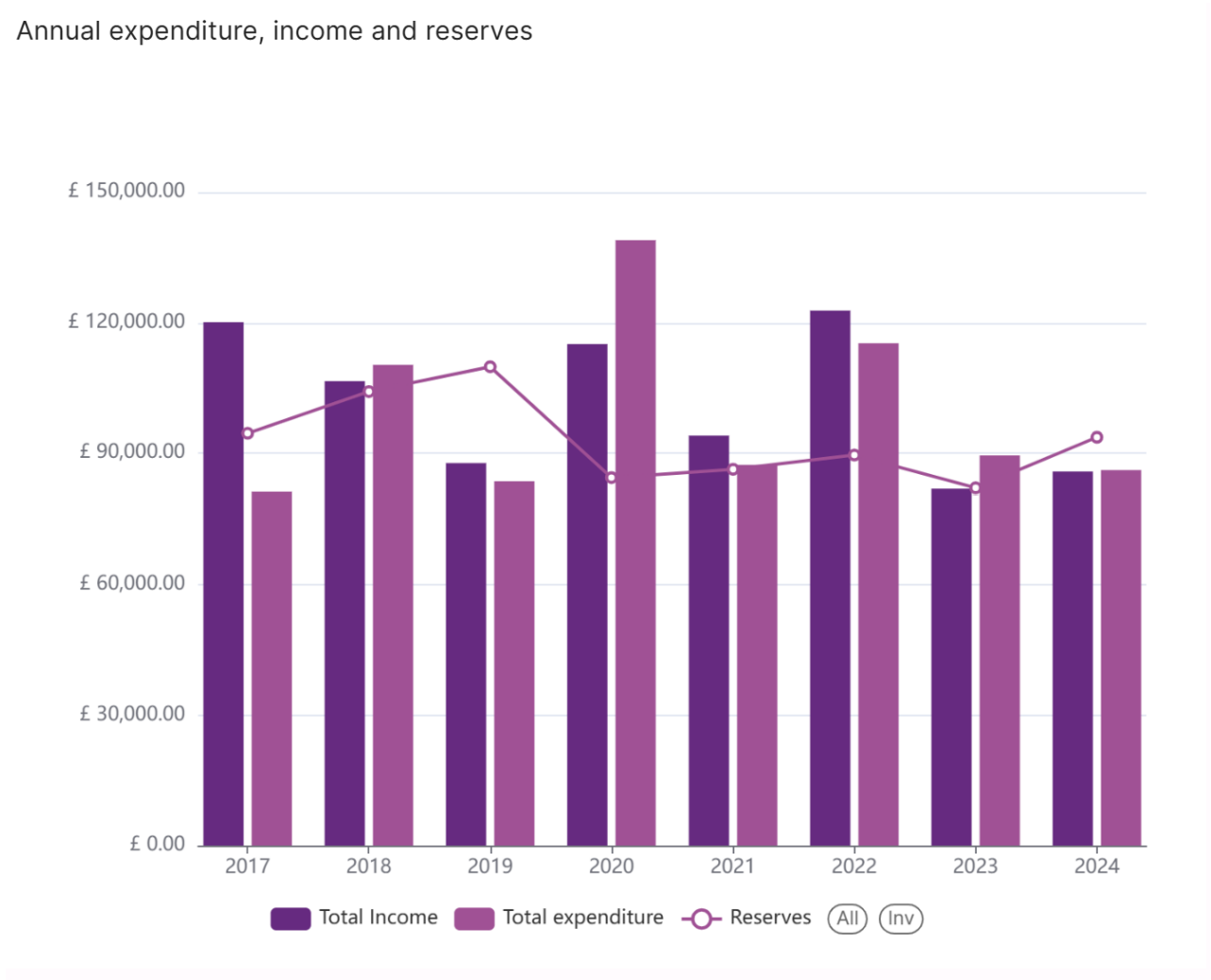
- Four Bedrooms
- Bathroom
- Downstairs Cloakroom & Toilet
- Kitchen
- Utility Room
- Lounge Diner
- Study – (with separate access)
- A Garage
- Large parking area
- Private wrap-around garden



Finances:

St Denys':

St Denys' is not a rich church, despite a number of wealthy residents living in the parish. However, when funds need to be raised for various purposes they always appear.



There is a Finance Sub-committee which assists the Treasurer in preparing the annual budget which is then put to the PCC for review, revision if appropriate, and approval.

The major part of parishioners' giving is now paid by direct-debit, channelled through the Parish Giving Scheme but sufficient other gift-aided income is received to enable the small income gift aid recovery facility also to be operated. The church has two contactless card readers for card donations and payments to be made. Across the Parish, church members are encouraged in generous giving with our annual 'Renewal of Giving' focus. Through teaching on generosity and sharing our mission and ministry goals, we seek to help people towards making a regular financial commitment to our churches and to reviewing their giving on a regular basis. We see this as a response to God's generosity to us.

The parish is a charity but is exempt from registering with the Charities Commission within the meaning of section 30 of The Charities Act 2011. Its governing document is the Parochial Church Councils (Powers) Measure 1956. An effect of this is that VAT is recoverable on some parish expenditure.

St Denys' Church has a grand piano in good condition and this enables occasional recitals and performances to take place which also generate some income for church funds.

St Denys' Church is also Grade 1 listed, therefore works are always more expensive than expected. However, the Friends of St Denys' group raises funds towards building maintenance and repairs, contributing over £3,000 p.a. This helps to maintain the attractiveness of the Church building as a landmark in Rotherfield village.

Social Events & Friends of St Denys':

Friends of St Denys'

This group of church members organise fund-raising events during the year. These have included quiz evenings at the village hall and golfing days which are well attended by villagers, family and friends. The group also commissions and prints Christmas cards each year for sale in the village and runs a 100 Club.

Events Committee

This group is responsible for organising a range of activities that take place in church or in the village. These include the monthly Soup Lunch, the annual Plough Sunday and Harvest lunches, as well as overseeing the provision of refreshments after services. It also organises larger one-off events. In recent years these have included angel festivals, Christmas markets, plant sales, table-top sales, village open-gardens and barn dances. The team works hard to raise money and to draw visitors into the church. It makes a significant contribution towards supporting the church and the community.

Soup Lunch

A lunch of home-made soup with bread and cheese followed by coffee/tea and biscuits is provided once a month. This is held in the St Denys' church refreshment area, providing an opportunity for informal fellowship and is attended by a goodly number of senior members of the community.

Craft Group

This meets fortnightly throughout the year to explore different craft activities. Sessions are open to anyone interested in crafting, irrespective of previous experience or expertise. There is a good regular attendance from members of the church, the local community and beyond. The group also have a stall in St Denys' church, selling cards and small gift items that have been made either at these crafting sessions, or by individual members of the group. Proceeds from these sales help to fund small projects within the church.

Flower Guild

This is a group of keen professional and amateur flower arrangers from in and around Rotherfield, who meet ahead of the major church festivals to decorate all parts of St Denys'. At other times of the year (except during Lent and Advent), individual members of the guild place floral arrangements in the key focal areas of the church for Sunday services. Similarly at St Mark's there is a small team of dedicated ladies who decorate the church with beautiful flowers.

The font at St Mark's

In the Sanctuary at St Denys'

Cultural Events

In addition to the events organised by the Events Committee and Friends of St Denys', the church is regularly used as a venue for other special events. These include concerts given by local choirs and music groups, lectures and flower festivals. All these have proved of great interest in and around the village, attracting large numbers of visitors.

Some of the 40 wedding dresses and floral arrangements on display in church for the Bridal Style event in 2022.

Rotherfield & Mark Cross Villages:

Rotherfield is one of the oldest Saxon settlements in the High Weald of Sussex. The name is thought to derive from the Anglo-Saxon redrefeld meaning cattle lands. Rotherfield has been designated as a conservation area because of the quality of the buildings, including the Grade 1 listed St Denys' Church.
Rotherfield is a thriving community, with a good selection of services, including a doctors' surgery (linked to the one at Jarvis Brook) and a pharmacy. The village store opposite the church has a PO counter and there is a further store in Yew Tree Lane. There are two public houses, two cafés, two hairdressers, two garages as well as separate car sales and other businesses.

The village hall is modern with good facilities, including a stage. It is well-used by a variety of village groups and is also available for hire by individuals. Alongside the hall is a community playing field, used by local football, bowls and cricket teams, and a children's play area, maintained by the Parish Council. There is a further amenity space, the Millennium Green designed to provide a natural space in the centre of the village.
There are many groups and societies who meet in the village: The Rotherfield Players put on three productions each year, including a very popular pantomime, there. There are several other interest groups, including an active WI, art group and horticultural society.

Christmas lights in Rotherfield village centre

Mark Cross is located to the east of Rotherfield. The village takes its name from the "March" or boundary of three parishes, Rotherfield, Mayfield and Wadhurst. Records show tenant holdings in the area of "Merc Cross" or "Mercrosse". The parish extends for roughly 4.5 square miles embracing about 3,500 acres of which one quarter is woodland.

Mark Cross village has a large public house and a thriving garden centre, with a very popular café. The hall is part of the St Mark's church building, which is leased to the Mark Cross Community Centre and used for regular activities and private hire. The village has an active WI and book club.

Christmas tree outside St Mark's Church

Rotherfield is approximately three miles from the town of Crowborough, which is well served by a range of supermarkets and other shops and amenities. There is a small hospital with a walk-in minor injuries unit, a private hospital, several doctors and dental surgeries, opticians and alternative treatment therapists. The train station at Jarvis Brook operates hourly services to London Bridge.

The larger town of Royal Tunbridge Wells is about seven miles away. This has several shopping areas, with a comprehensive range of stores. There is a main NHS hospital at Pembury, with full A&E department as well as two private hospitals. Trains from here (and also nearby Wadhurst) run between Hastings and London Charing Cross. There is a regular bus service which serves both Rotherfield and Mark Cross, operating between Royal Tunbridge Wells and Heathfield.

Local Schools and Pre-Schools:

Mark Cross Church of England Primary School

Mark Cross Church of England Primary School is a happy and welcoming school with a 'family feel.' Visitors often comment on the distinctive warm and positive ethos that seems to ooze out of every corner of the building and from every member of staff. As a Voluntary Aided School, its aim is to serve the community by providing an education of the highest quality within the context of Christian belief and practice.

The Head of School writes:

> *"We are positioned in the very heart of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and are part of The Weald Federation. We are blessed with glorious views, nature and farmland on our doorstep. Looking after our local environment and our planet is extremely important to us, as is providing an education of the highest quality within the context of Christian belief and practice. We encourage an understanding of the meaning and significance of faith and promote Christian values through the experience we offer to all our pupils. Our curriculum is exciting, intriguing and relevant, providing pupils with opportunities to challenge themselves and develop the skills they need to become life-long learners. We are very proud of our school and the determined, kind and enthusiastic group of children and staff who work incredibly hard every single day."*

Assemblies are led once a week alternately by the Incumbent and a member of the Family Service Planning Team. Since the retirement of the Rector, the alternate sessions have been led on a temporary basis by the Vicar of Frant. The Lay Minister (Reader) also leads occasional seasonal assemblies.

Rotherfield Primary School

Rotherfield Primary School is a one form entry school, with a capacity for 210 children across seven classes. The children are allocated to one of four house teams upon admission for intra school events and competitions.

A pupil's time at Rotherfield Primary School is seen as the educational foundation of their lifelong learning journey.

The school encourages all pupils to become confident and enthusiastic learners by the time they leave, so that they remember their time at Rotherfield with great fondness, with memories of life enriching experiences and enduring relationships.

Our Lay Minister (Reader) leads assemblies at Rotherfield Primary School once every term (six times a year) and assists with some RE Lessons. The school come to St Denys' twice a year for their Harvest and KS2 Carol Services.

Secondary Schools

There is a good choice of secondary schools in the area. The nearest are the Beacon Academy and Grove Park (special school) in Crowborough. There are large comprehensive schools in nearby Heathfield and Wadhurst and a private school for girls in Mayfield. In Royal Tunbridge Wells there are several comprehensive schools, including Bennett Memorial Diocesan School and separate grammar schools for boys and girls, as well as independent schools.

Rotherfield Pre-School

The purpose-built pre-school has been rated as outstanding by Ofsted 4 times! It is located in the Recreation Ground close to the village centre and has been an integral part of the village since 1960. The pre-school is fortunate to have access to playing fields, a playground, and a wooded area for forest school-type activities.

The pre-school is very proud of its transition to school program, in conjunction with the local primary schools. As a pre-school, they provide more than just childcare - they also prepare children for school. Following the Early Years Foundation Stage, they work with the children to help them gain core skills.

The motto of the pre-school is, "Making it great, for every child, every day". They do this by allowing the children to explore, play and learn as they wish, with supportive, caring and experienced staff always on hand to assist them.

The previous incumbent went weekly to read stories to the children. The pre-school has its own Harvest and Nativity Services at St Denys' led by the Lay Minister (Reader). They also visit the church regularly on their visits around the village. For Remembrance Day and Remembrance Sunday, the pre-school make poppies that are placed in the church or at the War Memorial

Pennies Nursery

Pennies Nursery is situated in the village of Mark Cross and offers exceptional care for children from three months to five years old. The nursery offers a large outdoor facility and home-cooked food to support the healthy development of each child.

Our Church in the Community:

There are a number of groups within the villages of Rotherfield and Mark Cross, which work closely with the church:

Rotherfield St Martin

This is a community-led charity set up by a former member of St Denys' church, which aims to prevent isolation and loneliness among older people. It provides a wide variety of activities and a range of support to encourage the senior members of the local community to meet, remain active and continue to enjoy life in their own homes.

A number of the churches' congregation support activities, including the weekly lunch club. The Charity Manager writes:

> *Rotherfield St Martin (RSM) was founded twenty years ago as a church in the community project. Its ethos is simple - to combat isolation and loneliness in older people. The charity runs daily activities and practical services but above all offers friendship to those that need it. Over the last 20 years the charity has expanded and supports upwards of 250 people and is therefore now recognised as a community-led charity with its work spanning many factions of the community. The charity still has strong bonds with the church, often working together to support a vulnerable member of the community. The charity has been recognised both locally and further afield for their work and its Founder received the British Empire Medal for her pioneering vision. "*

Rotherfield Scout Group –

Members of all three packs attend church and participate in the services at St Denys' to mark St George's Day and Remembrance Sunday as well as other civic services. Recently, the local Cub Scouts visited the church one evening to find out more about the various parts of the building, and their role in services, as well as visiting the ringing chamber to hear about the bells and to try out the chimes.

Installation in St Denys' Church for Remembrance Sunday 2022, using over 400 paper poppies made by the Beavers, Cubs and Scouts.

The previous Incumbent was Chair of the Rotherfield Scouts Trustees, this position has now been taken by our Lay Minister (Reader).

Rotherfield & Mark Cross Bonfire Society

Members of the Rotherfield and Mark Cross Bonfire Society are represented at church on Remembrance Sunday and hold their annual Carol Service in St Denys' in December.

Rotherfield and Mark Cross Farming Communities

The church maintains good links with the local farmers. On Plough Sunday, members of the farming community are invited to participate in the service and a light lunch is held in church. On Rogation Sunday, the church holds a rural, roving service, starting in the centre of Rotherfield village, before moving on to some of the farms in Rotherfield and Mark Cross.

Rotherfield Parish Magazine

The Parish publishes a monthly magazine, which provides details of upcoming services and other church activities, together with news of events within the parish. Regular features each month include a reflection from the Rectory or Readery and items of interest about the church. Members of the parish are encouraged to provide contributions about the village, puzzles or anecdotes.

The magazine is supported by a range of commercial advertisements from local businesses. This not only subsidises the cost of printing and distribution but also provides a good source of revenue to support the church.

The magazine is available for purchase in both churches and the village shops at just £1 per edition. There is also a team of volunteers who hand-deliver to subscribers around Rotherfield and Mark Cross and an electronic version is also available on subscription.

Working with the Deanery and Diocese:

The Parish has for some time been involved in Diocesan training. In recent years, it has supported the training of our current Licenced Lay Minister (Reader). Between 2019 and 2022, the Parish supported the training of a Curate, who has now gone on to lead her own parish near Hastings.

The Parish also actively supports the Family Support Work programme, a diocesan-based charity which aims to provide services to families who need help and support with day-to-day living. Donations of food, toiletries and other household products are collected in church throughout the year, as well as items brought to the Harvest Thanksgiving service. In early December there is a collection of new toys and games, donated at the Toy Services, which are then distributed to families who might not otherwise be able to provide Christmas gifts for their children.

Four members of our Congregation have been recognised by the Diocese for their work in the community and each have received The Order of St Richard.

The Deanery Synod of Rotherfield meets four times a year. Currently, there are three representatives on the Synod, who regularly attend meetings and report back to the PCC.

From interest in a presentation made at one meeting, St Denys' Church has been challenged to work towards becoming an Eco-church. With advice from other local parishes, the churchyard has been transformed into a wildlife meadow.

The Parish follows the guidelines and principles of the Church of England Safeguarding strategy, delivered by the Diocese. All members of the PCC and leaders of other church groups, especially those involving children or vulnerable adults, are trained to the appropriate level on the scheme - the Safeguarding Officer, Lay Minister (Reader) and Church Wardens receiving the higher-level training. Our Safeguarding Officer is proactive in ensuring that the parish keeps up to date with the latest legislation and diocesan directives. She is very supportive of individuals and groups, giving advice and assistance with all aspects of safeguarding, as required. The parish is now listed on the Church of England Safeguarding Dashboard.

St Denys' and St Mark's support the annual Shoebox Appeal, run nationally by the Amen Trust, providing a collection of essential items and small gifts for families living in poverty in Romania. Each year the Parish sends off over 30 completed shoeboxes to the charity.

Prayer for the future:

Heavenly Father, call to this your Parish and ours, a true shepherd,
a person of God, a Minister of Christ; and make us, with them,
a Parish joyful in worship and united in mission, working, caring,
praising, loving,
to the glory of your name; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen