

# St. Thomas The Apostle Groombridge

## Parish Profile



<http://www.stthomasgroombridge.org.uk/>

This Parish Profile has been prepared by members of St Thomas' PCC as an introduction to the Parish of St Thomas the Apostle, Groombridge.

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## Mission Statement

Our mission is to increase the spiritual and Christian belief throughout the community, to strengthen the faith of believers, and to spread the gospel through fellowship and outreach.

*“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

*John 13: 35*



## 1. Village of Groombridge

Groombridge is a village of some 1600 souls in an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty four miles west of Royal Tunbridge Wells. The main and newer part of the village lies south of the River Grom within the county of East Sussex, the Parish of St Thomas and the Diocese of Chichester.

Old Groombridge lies north of the river within the county of Kent, the parish of Speldhurst and the Diocese of Rochester. The church of St John's serves this small community. Within the old village is Burrswood, a Christian hospital, place of healing and church of Christ the Healer. With a staff of 330, Burrswood cares for the whole person – body, mind and spirit: [www.burrswood.org.uk](http://www.burrswood.org.uk).

Within the village are a general store, bakery, Post Office, garage, doctor's surgery and dispensary, hairdresser, two pubs and an Abbeyfield care home. The population is predominantly white middle class, of which 19% are retired. The village has a great sense of community which is very supportive to its residents and with strengths in pastoral care. There are many active clubs and societies ranging from sports, social, spiritual and children's activities. Many of the activities take place within the Village Hall, Guide Hut and Green Room within St Thomas' Church. Sports facilities include cricket, stool ball, football, tennis, bowls and climbing at Harrison's Rocks. Local attractions include Groombridge Place, Spa Valley Railway and the delights of the adjacent Ashdown Forest, home of Winnie-the-pooh.

## 2. St Thomas' Parish

The Parish of St Thomas is within the Rural Deanery of Rotherfield and the Archdeaconry of Lewes and Hastings. It is centred on St Thomas' Church and covers new Groombridge and outlying hamlets in East Sussex.

The population of the Parish is about 1600. Church attendance is strong. St Thomas' electoral roll is 130. Typical attendance at the main weekly Parish Eucharist is 80-90, rising considerably at Christmas and Easter.

Adjacent to the church is St Thomas Church of England Primary School: [www.groombridgest-thomas.e-sussex.sch.uk](http://www.groombridgest-thomas.e-sussex.sch.uk). With a roll of 210, it has a very high reputation within the county. The 2006 and 2009 Ofsted and Church School ( Section 48 ) Inspections classified the school as outstanding. The incumbent priest is an ex-officio Foundation Governor and takes an active part in school affairs. School worship is regularly held in church. The priest routinely leads worship in school and at an annual school Eucharist. The head teacher and priest meet regularly to plan worship at major events such as St Thomas' Day, Easter and Christmas, where the children participate in services with readings, drama, music and the school choir.



St Thomas' School

## 3. Services

The main Sunday service is the Parish Eucharist at 9.30am using Common Worship, with normal attendance of 80-90 as stated earlier. This is a sung service with organ accompaniment and small choir. Sunday School meet in the school during the first part of the service and the children come into church at the time of the Communion for a Blessing.

A Communion service is also held at 8.00am each Sunday, including 1662 once a month.

We have adopted Fresh Expressions, with our main event being a bimonthly Café Eucharist held in the church or school. This attracts some 100 to 130 people. It is an all-age gathering with lots of families and centred on a simple form of Eucharist and breakfast.

Occasional Sunday evening services include Evensong and Taize.

Weekday services include Holy Communion at 10.00am on Tuesday and Prayers on Saturday at 8.00am.

Our churchmanship tradition is best described as broadly catholic. The presiding priest would normally wear an alb and chasuble. The sacrament is reserved.



Café Eucharist

## 4. Other Activities

The recent reordering of the church has given us a great facility to increase our outreach into the community. We are thus able to run quite a range of activities bringing people into a warm and welcoming environment:

- **Little Fishes**, meeting fortnightly for mums and toddlers
- **St Thomas' Sunday school**
- **St Thomas' Youth Group**
- **St Thomas' Fellowship**, monthly meeting open for all with speakers on topics of local interest
- **Junior Choir**
- **Messy Church**, fortnightly children's session with bible story and arts and craft
- **St Tom's Coffee Stop**, weekly, for parents dropping off children at St Thomas' school
- **Bacon Baps for Blokes**, monthly get together for men to enjoy a natter
- **Computer Club**, weekly meeting to share computer skills
- **House Groups**
- **Prayer Groups**
- **Lunch for one**



St Toms Coffee Stop



Coffee Morning



Confirmation 2011



Computer Club



Messy Church



Messy Church



Youth Group



St Thomas' PTA sale

We produce a monthly “St Thomas Groombridge Church and Village” magazine which includes news and announcements from the churches and village organisations, together with a diary for the coming month. 630 copies are distributed to almost all houses in the village.

We run a number of fund raising events throughout the year, including a Christmas fair, Lent Lunches, Winter Ball, Coffee Mornings, concerts and garden parties. We are a Fairtrade church.

## 5. The Team

After a 10 month interregnum, we are delighted that our new incumbent priest in charge has been appointed. The Rev Sharon Francis was licensed on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2012. She and her husband John are now resident in St Thomas’ Vicarage.

St Thomas is a small parish that depends on the active support from volunteers. Two retired clergy and a reader support Sharon Francis. Many dedicated members of the laity run or support the church activities mentioned earlier and participate in services – readings, intercessions, etc. The PCC plays an important part in decision making, meeting 6 times a year.

## 6. The Church and Vicarage

St Thomas’ church was designed by Norman Shaw and consecrated in 1886. It is of simple design with a raised chancel, small south transept containing the pipe organ. The maximum capacity is 150 within the nave, balcony and room below. At the west end there is a toilet and small kitchen. There is a good sound system, including hearing aid loop. In addition a projection system enables all services and hymns to be displayed on screen.

In 2009 a balcony was built at the west end, creating a community room underneath with a glass partition wall separating it from the main church. In October 2010 the pews were removed and replaced with chairs. The floor was levelled and carpeted. This gives great flexibility to vary the layout for services and outreach events.

The building is in a good state of repair – all works identified in the last quinquennial have been completed. The church was completely redecorated in 2010. The building is heated by gas fired central heating with independent electric heating in the Green Room. Both systems was upgraded in 2011. Upgrades to the kitchen would be beneficial.

The Churchyard is some ½ mile distant on the edge of the village, with plenty of space for future burials. The yard is maintained by external contractors.

The Vicarage was built in the 60’s. Downstairs are lounge, dining room, study and kitchen. Upstairs are 4 bed rooms, dressing room and family bathroom. All rooms are heated by gas fired central heating. Its garden backs on to the church.



## **7. Financial Information**

Parish funds are raised through parish giving, donations, tax refunds, fundraising and surpluses on parish activities.

Our finances for 2011 ran at a small surplus of £240. This figure included the expenditure of £7,021 on a new gas boiler and electric heating in the Green Room.

Our finances for 2010 and 2009 ran at a deficit of £2,195 and £30,708 respectively. However these figures include an expenditure of £82,000 on church reordering, repairs and redecoration, for which we drew £30,000 from reserves in 2009, the remainder being raised by donations and fundraising. These refurbishments have now been completed and paid for.

Our 2011, 2010 and 2009 Diocesan contribution requests of £33,035, £31,923 and £31,607 respectively have been paid in full.

The church building is now in a good state. However, we expect to institute a new stewardship campaign in the near future.

## **8. Mission Action Plan**

In line with practice within the Diocese, St Thomas' PCC established a Mission Action Plan in 2007 and routinely maintain it with updates and new initiatives. The current version of this plan is included in Appendix 1.

## **9. Aspirations for the future**

We are an active and successful church and Christian community in Groombridge. However, we are not complacent and have many aspirations and challenges for the future:

- To establish our new priest at the centre of the church community in Groombridge
- To continue to enhance and realise our Mission Action Plan
- To increase spiritual and Christian belief by spreading the gospel throughout the parish and bringing people into the church through our many outreach activities
- To strengthen the faith of believers through fellowship, house groups and the teaching and inspiration of our new priest
- To continue to grow the weekly congregation at church worship
- To explore further opportunities for Fresh Expressions
- To capitalise on the reordering of the church in our worship and outreach programmes
- To strengthen our outreach programmes, particularly in the areas of youth work and music
- To sustain and develop the strong links between church and school
- To strengthen our links with Burrswood
- To strengthen our church finances through a renewed stewardship campaign.

## 10. Appendix 1 - Mission Action Plan

### St Thomas the Apostle, Groombridge

(village population 1,600. Electoral Roll 130. Usual total weekly attendances at Church – about 100) ER needs updating as there are many more eligible now

#### Update on Mission Action Plan at November 2010

##### Notes about our MAP.

- We had an away day for the PCC in October 2007 in order to discuss this.
- We identified what was important and key for the future of this parish – young families.
- Our MAP therefore has two sections – young families and the other mission & outreach work.

We originally posed the questions, “Where do you go in Groombridge to find young families?” and “Who will carry on the Church in Groombridge when we have stopped?” As we have a Church Aided Primary School, the answer to both was clear -

#### AT THE SCHOOL GATE

**Therefore we focus on making strong links between PCC/Congregation and the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) & School. We do not forget the older members of the Church Family and there are activities happening and planned for them.**

**(This is the Action Plan part – the focus - this is what we plan to do. What follows is what we have done about it and what we will do next)**

After several meetings, supper and other contacts with PTA, parents and school we have undertaken the following.

- The PTA/School takes a stall at our Christmas Fair and we take one at the school's May Fair.
- We attend one another's Quiz Nights and other fund raising events.
- The Chair of PTA drops in at St. Thomas' Coffee Stop every Thursday – she frequently brings other young mums.
- PTA committee use our new room in church.
- Class Reps use the room for their coffee mornings each term
- One day each fortnight an assembly is taken by the incumbent in church in order to fulfil SIAS requirements for a strong Anglican link.
- We started a Junior Choir, (autumn 2010) aimed at the children in our Aided School.
- As a result of these contacts we started **Messy Church** in 2010.

The whole of **Messy Church** is planned and organised by a team of about a dozen young mums and dads from our Aided School. **Messy Church** meets fortnightly in church and is based soundly on Biblical stories followed by craft activities.

In July 2010 we held a **Messy Church Family** day and we had all our activities outside in the church grounds with a picnic. About 50 attended.

Attendance at **Messy Church** is between 25 & 30 children per session.

The co-operation from this team has been wonderful, enthusiastic and very willing.

All members of the team attend church regularly but not every week, and we have started to include this younger element onto the PCC. The planned move is to appoint from these younger members the next round of Deanery representatives in 2011.

This is all very much in accordance with *Mission Shaped* work – Messy Church is a good

example. Ask people to help with an initiative and the spin-off is that they become involved in the Church Family here, and attend church. We now have a good congregation, well mixed between young and old with the young being drawn in to help more and more. The church is comfortably full every week.

Mission & Outreach is also addressed as below.

### **The new church room.**

- Little Fishes – our mums & toddlers group – meet fortnightly in the new room
- “St. Tom’s Coffee Stop” opens every Thursday morning to serve coffee & biscuits to mums and toddlers delivering their children to our school.
- “Bacon Baps for Blokes” on one morning per month for the men of the parish – coffee, bacon rolls, tea, chat and fellowship on offer
- Computer club runs every Monday – beginners at 9.15am and more advanced projects at 10.15am
- Music Club meets once a month
- The Tunbridge Wells Stamp Club used our room for one meeting and will look again at using it regularly
- PTA held a clothing sale evening in church in the Spring Term 2011
- The new Family Support Worker for the deanery is exploring the use of our room for her work.
- Electric Blanket checks by local authority used our room and the spin off is that they are planning further use for “surgeries” and we are joining by offering a form filling time to help those who find this difficult.
- Meetings for “Old Hands” Confirmation group – all those adults Confirmed in the last 12 years.
- Fund raising for Beacon School music group – rather like Holly Shorten did for her trip. Charlie Hutchings wants to raise his fare to the Gambia using our church for a music evening/concert.
- All Messy Church, Junior Choir, Confirmation, Coffee Stop, Bacon Baps, Computer Club, PCC, and prayers on Saturdays are held in the new room.

### **Fresh Expressions**

- We have Cafe Eucharist – attracting at least 20/25 non-Church goers each time, plus the regulars – it has been up to 130 in total. Held in our Aided Church School.
- Little Fishes – mums & toddlers - tea, songs, prayers and fellowship.
- Sunday School – running at about 35 children on roll
- Youth Mission activities. – new look in late 2009. Plans include a talk by one member about her month abroad on relief work. Youth ‘Hot Potatoes,’ a BBQ, & a boating trip.
- Messy Church.
- Junior Choir to include performances in Sunday services.

**Spirituality** is not neglected;

- We held “Hot Potatoes” with Richard Jackson coming to answer the questions.
- We have produced booklets and had teaching on ‘Christianity in 10 Minutes’,
- ‘Holy Communion for Amateurs,’ ‘the Presence of Christ at the Eucharist’, and ‘Encountering God in the Eucharist.’
- Occasionally we have an organ recital instead of the sermon.
- We have produced two simple Offices for use at small gatherings and Prayers on Saturday, and written a Taize Eucharist for quiet worship. 1662 Evensong in November 2010.

- Adults Confirmed within the last 10 years are meeting to explore the faith further.

### **Notes about the building.**

It has taken over 6 years to get this through but we finally got the Faculty and the work is finished. Walls have been decorated, pews have gone, and chairs are in place. Carpet is down.

### **Future**

1. Have new lighting throughout the Church
2. Start, with some vigour, to get the full use of the now open plan church under way.

### **Looking at:**

1. Efficient heating – several projects like Little Fishes and the Tuesday Afternoon Club have been suspended due to a very cold church.
2. Carpet bowls, indoor games like croquet, target bowls, Chess & Scrabble Club, youth activities, electronic darts, computer surfing, and social events for which we need more tables and storage space.
3. A games afternoon for senior citizens – scrabble, cards, draughts, chess plus sandwiches, tea & cake.
4. A Coffee Morning is planned for Jan 2011 to raise money for Family Support Work but also to provide opportunity to see the refurbished church
3. We talked of establishing a bi-monthly concert-in-the-round in church?
4. A Passover Meal is planned for Maundy Thursday 2011 in the open-plan church.
5. A Christmas Tree festival is in hand for Christmas 2010. This is in direct accord with our MAP, aimed at young families and the children's organisations in the village.
6. A Flower Festival at our Patronal weekend – July 3, 2011.

In the autumn of 2010 the PCC have undertaken to take over responsibility for the MAP and to look at new ways for mission & outreach as well as taking over the planning for the future of our MAP itself.

In all this - *To God be the glory – great things he has done.*

### **NOTES** at November 2010.

- All this should be based on *Mission Shaped Church* and its attendant books like *Mission Shaped Youth*, *Mission Shaped Children*, etc. Mary has one of the books in this series.
- Planned giving to world action charities needs some attention. Overall we try to give away a % of our disposable money.
- A focus is needed on Youth Mission and this to include Youth spirituality, not just social events
- Youth could be combined with a Lay led start to the Parish Eucharists – a good time when there is a shortage of clergy to lead worship.
- Much more and regular use of the new open plan church.
- A revival of House Church (house groups, prayer groups, Bible Study groups) – in other words Cell Church. This is where 'Old Hands' are leading and we hope to establish that in 2011.