

A Report on St James' Church for Stanstead Annual Parish Assembly Meeting to be held at Stanstead Village Community Centre, Stanstead on 18th May 2026, by Mandy Edwards.

I am writing this Report as former Churchwarden for many years of St James' Church, with the aim of informing the Village about their beautiful little well-loved church, how it is faring and what has been going on within its ancient walls.

When our previous vicar, the Reverend Patrick Prigg, moved on from St James' in 2022, it took a while to replace him. As it turned out, the process that had to be followed by all the Churchwardens in the Benefice (which includes the churches of Stanstead, Glemsford, Hartest, Somerton and Boxted) to find and employ a new vicar is not straightforward, and we had nearly a year of keeping our churches ticking over and still managing to hold services by asking vicars of other churches to help when they could. It was not an easy time, but finally, in 2023, we appointed the Reverend Mary Styles, who had previously been a vicar in Somerset.

Mary has been such good news for our Benefice! She has gently introduced some changes, and started new traditions, such as a Good Friday mini-pilgrimage to each of our churches, services of Compline (contemplative evening prayer taken by the Churchwardens), and Lammas, an open air service to celebrate the wheat harvest.

Mary has overseen a resurgence of interest and caring for St James', and once again we have a team of people to clean the church and provide beautiful flowers. We have a Parochial Church Council once more. We have also moved towards maintaining the churchyard in a more ecologically-friendly way, with help from the Parish Council, and a field visit and survey from Suffolk Wildlife.

That was the **good** news. I'm afraid there is also **bad** news and **sad** news. First, the bad news: a corner of the church roof is in need of repair. We are about to make it safe and weather proof, but eventually we will have to carry out expensive repairs. This is obviously a concern.

The sad news is that our lovely Reverend Mary is leaving us for a position nearer her family, and of course although we will miss her hugely, we are also glad for her sake and wish her all the best. She will finish here at the end of June, and then the Churchwardens will swing into action to fill the vacancy. At least we have a better idea of the procedure this time!