



North Kent Methodist Circuit

grapevine

CIRCUIT NEWS AND PREACHING PLAN



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Issue Thirty Six
Winter 2025-26

Winter Grapevine

I was fascinated to read Bonni-Belle's summary of John Wesley's adventures in the area that is now the North Kent Methodist Circuit. (Bonni-Belle kindly prepared this in order to welcome representatives from across the South East Methodist District when they met at Gravesend Methodist Church in September for the Representative Synod.) I was particularly interested because, with my young daughters, we have recently been reading a fabulous children's book named *Gospel's Story* that tells the story of John Wesley from the perspective of... his horse, Gospel. It's written by Gary M Best, a leading Methodist historian and Warden of the New Room in Bristol, which is definitely worth a visit - and not just for the excellent café! At the New Room, among many other things, you can still see the stable where John Wesley's horse would rest.

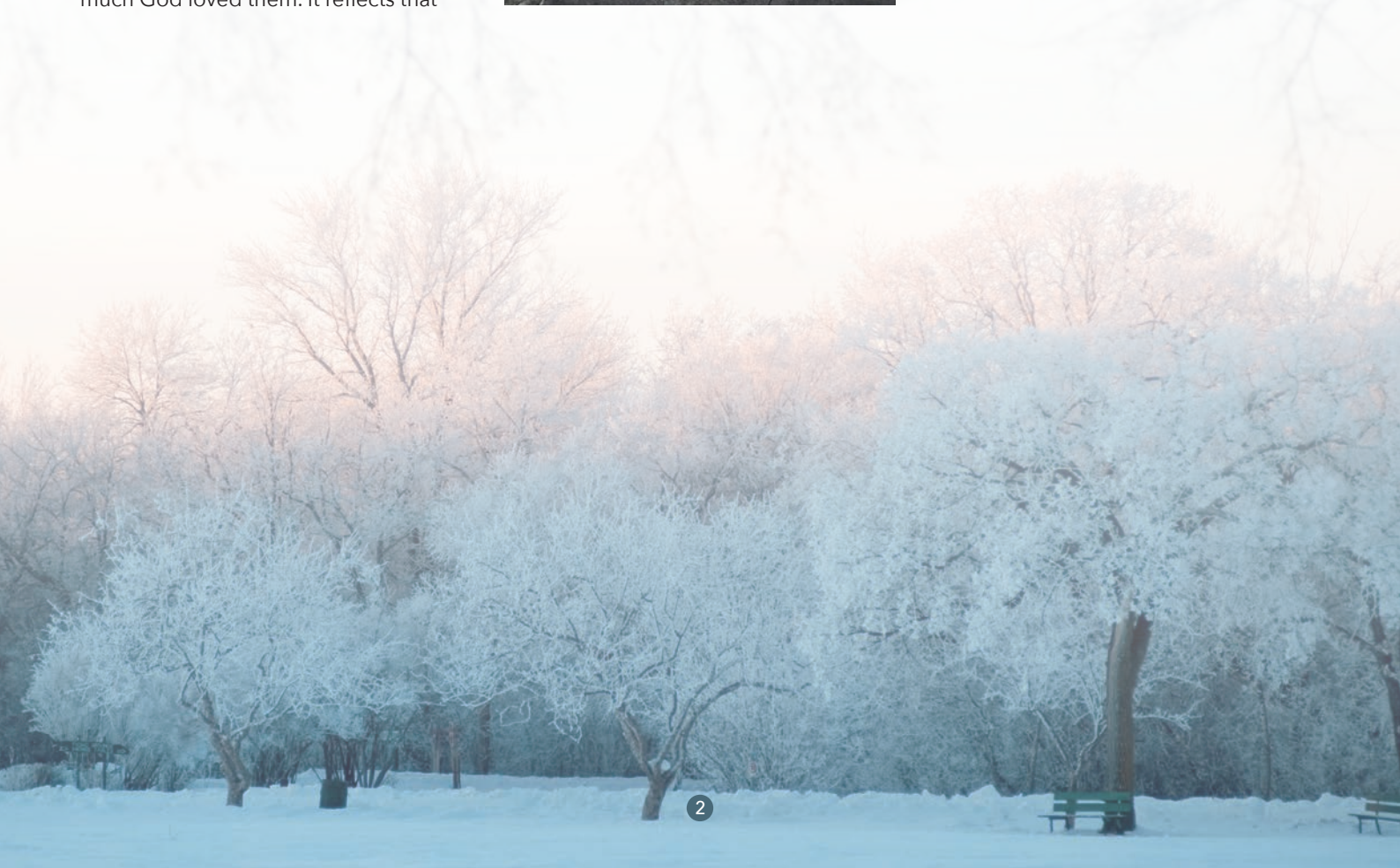
Gospel's Story talks about how John Wesley (one of the founders of Methodism) travelled all over the country in order to tell people how much God loved them. It reflects that



he did not always receive a warm welcome - as Bonni-Belle has also mentioned. But his desire to spread 'scriptural holiness throughout the land' never allowed him to give up, and he travelled (some have estimated) around 250,000 miles to make God's love known.

In this issue of *Grapevine*, we see reminders of how, as a church, we are gathered and sent. We gather in our buildings for worship and fellowship - our buildings are also a fantastic resource that allow us to serve our communities, as you'll see from articles on Sittingbourne's lunch club, Tonbridge Road's after-school Drop-In, and the Hope Street Centre in Sheerness. But God gathers us together in order to fill us up with the Spirit and send us out into the world, to be salt and light in our communities. And getting out there can be great fun - as you'll see from the adventures of Gravesend, The Brent, Spital Street and Dene Holm on the beach!

Every blessing, Rev Naomi



High Sheriff of Kent Visits The Hope Street Centre in Sheerness

The High Sheriff of Kent, Jonathan Neame, visited us at The Hope Street Centre in Sheerness on Wednesday 21st May together with his wife Lucie. It was a pleasure to host them, and we were delighted to share news about the work we do and introduce other charities that have their offices at our Centre to them. High Sherrif spoke to a number of our staff, leaders and volunteers with attentive interest and posed thoughtful questions to learn about ways to support community and safety on the Island of Sheppey. Our favourite moment was being able to recommend one of our volunteers in recognition of their many hours of dedication. Claire, community champion from ASDA Sittingbourne, was awarded the High Sheriffs Award which was a complete surprise to her!

Here's what they wrote:

"Yesterday we spent the morning at The Hope Street Centre in Sheerness on the Isle of Sheppey, a not for profit community hub providing a safe space to socialise, a place for support groups to gather and providing opportunities to volunteer and learn new skills. We met Centre Manager Abby and her small team and learnt about all the great things they do along with the challenges they face with local services and resources on the Island. We then met some the projects housed in the Centre starting with The Pyramid Project helping individuals to realise their true potential through self-help workshops and resources promoting self-belief, social inclusion, meaningful employment and well-being. Then onto The Forward Trust who help people with drugs and/ or alcohol issues and their families who want to make a positive change. We met Charlie at the Banking Hub who provides much needed banking

support and services. And lastly, we met Claire Fosbeary, an Asda volunteer who helps out at many of the groups run at or by the centre. With her she brings "a ray of sunshine" and a dedicated and helpful spirit to everything she does so I was delighted to present her with a High Sheriff's Award in "recognition of great and valuable services to the community". Well done, Claire. The Hope Street Centre could do with some help with sourcing and approaching trusts and grant givers on whom they rely. If you

have some time to help out please DM me here and I will put you in touch. Thank you to everyone who works and volunteers at the Hope Street Centre and for everything you do for your community.
@theforwardtrust
@sittingbournecommunity #volunteer
#communityhub #highsheriffkent
#highsheriffkentaward2025
#isleofsheppey #sheerness"

IG@highsheriffkent, 22nd May 2025



Visits to North Kent recorded in John Wesley's Journal

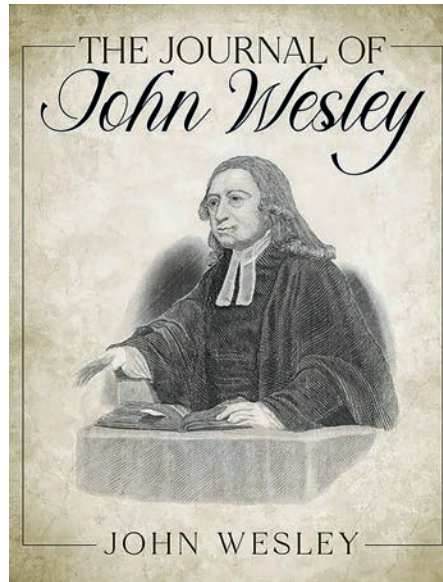
Bonni-Belle Pickard, August 2025

These are some edited highlights from Bonni-Belle's research - feel free to contact her for the rest!

According to John Wesley's Journal, a goldmine of information from the 18th century, the Father of Methodism visited parts of what is now the North Kent circuit at least 27 times over a 38-year span from 1751 through 1789.

Wesley's first recorded trip through N Kent was a stop-over in Rochester on 11 November 1751 on the way to Canterbury. After that, sixteen years passed before Wesley returned for an 'appointment' in Sheerness in December 1767, where he 'led prayers' to a 'large and serious congregation' in a chapel at the fort. By his account, the crowd was so large that 'the chapel was hot as an oven,' and when he went out into the fresh 'sharp' air afterwards, the change of temperature meant he lost his voice completely. The following evening, he merely preached for an hour in a much smaller room, but still he found a group of about 35 members who "knew in whom they believed." Wesley's fondness for Sheerness was evident as he made another eight visits to the Isle of Sheppey, all in the winter.

In 1778, Wesley had apparently fallen out of favour with the Governor of the fort at Sheerness, as he was refused use of the fort chapel and had to make do with the small preaching room that the Methodists used. But another eight years on, Wesley reports that the Sheerness congregation had built its own Preaching-House "but by means never heard of. The building was undertaken a few months since, by a little handful of men, without any probably means of finishing it.



But God so moved the hearts of the people in the Dock, that even those who did not pretend to any religion, carpenters, shipwrights, laborers, ran up, at all their vacant hours, and worked with all their might, without any pay. By this means a large square House was soon elegantly finished, both within and without; and it is the neatest building, next to the new chapel in London, of any in the south of England." [Property Stewards - take heart!] Wesley continued to visit Sheerness three more times, with his last visit in 1788.

Another favourite N Kent town of Wesley's was Chatham, which he visited first in February 1768, preaching at the naval barracks chapel. He also describes this chapel as 'hot as an oven,' but this time his voice held out with his audience being of about 200 sailors who were "'all ear' [for his message] scarce allowing themselves to breathe."

Over the next twenty years, Wesley returned to Chatham nearly every year. He often speaks of those congregations as 'loving' as well as 'serious' and being at 'peace.' His last

visit to N Kent was in December 1789 when he preached to "far more than the House could contain: and it is no wonder, considering that the spirit and behaviour of the people confirm the doctrine they hear."

Meanwhile, Wesley had also travelled at least three times to Sittingbourne, in Decembers of 1771, 1772, and 1784, usually on his way between Canterbury and Sheerness. Of his initial visit, he remarks on "having preached to a small, but much-affected, company" there. We also hear that Wesley visited Gravesend during these winter visits of December 1771, 1772, and 1773.

These small glimpses into the John Wesley's interactions with N Kent remind us of the evangelistic fervour with which the early Methodists sought to spread the Gospel message far and wide. Though Gravesend and Chatham and Sheerness and Sittingbourne might initially have just been places Wesley passed through on his way to Canterbury, his interest in sharing the Good News with those who need it 'and need it most' meant he took whatever opportunity came his way to share with those willing to listen and especially with those who might not otherwise have the opportunity in a society where Christianity was often regarded as only for the well-to-do. His compassion for the 'poor' comes through in his descriptions of the crowds, especially in Sheerness (Isle of Sheppey). The disputes of his age, including those with fellow workers such as George Whitefield, remind us that churches of all ages face challenges of how to work together peacefully; it is a human situation from which ecclesiology is not excluded.

Growing Good at Tonbridge Road



Earlier this year, visitors from the Church Urban Fund came along to the Drop-In, Tonbridge Road's after-school club, to meet the volunteers and young people and to hear their stories. The Church Urban Fund produce Growing Good, a Lent course that Tonbridge Road used in 2024 and that partially inspired the establishment of the Drop-In. Here's what CUF wrote...

In 2024, Tonbridge Road Methodist Church and friends from Bearsted Methodist Church used Growing Good as their Lent course. Led by the Revd Naomi Oates, the group found themselves particularly drawn to the themes of local presence and community connection. Together they began to explore new ways deepen relationships, develop ideas and meet needs they could see in their local community.

The group had noticed kids from the local school sitting on the church wall at Tonbridge Road. There had been previous discussions about opening up the church to them and creating a welcoming space specifically for their needs. While the

idea had been considered before, it had not been developed considering capacity and priorities. However, the Growing Good course offered a valuable opportunity to revisit this vision, prompting reflection on how a partnership with local schools might be built, and sparking renewed enthusiasm for volunteering and community engagement. A participant shared "we were becoming a bit inward looking and a lot of activities were for church members so it was a good idea to be more outward looking."

Encouraged by conversations during Growing Good, Revd Naomi Oates reached out to local schools with information about plans to start an afterschool club. A local school chaplain responded, describing this as a real answer to prayer, and worked alongside volunteers at Tonbridge Road to shape the club's format and organise the required sign-up forms. The Drop-In was launched in September 2024 and now runs every Monday and Wednesday. It has connected with young people who had never been into the church

before. The Drop-In team are committed to creating a space at Tonbridge Road Methodist Church for these young people.

In addition, momentum has grown around another community initiative that aligned with Growing Good's themes of presence and participation, the bi-monthly litter pick. After volunteer Linda responded to a council call for local litter-picking efforts, the team has expanded to include participants ranging from as young as 4 years old to those in their 80s. The activity has created meaningful opportunities for connection, with conversations and a shared sense of care for the church building and its grounds. Passersby have expressed their appreciation, and the team is eager to welcome more people as word of the initiative spreads. As a volunteer shared "doing things around the outside of the building shows there's life here beyond Sunday!"

You can find details of the Growing Good Lent course here: www.growing-good.org.uk

Summer in the Northern part of the Circuit

This will have been the second year we have held united services across come of the churches in the Northern part of the Circuit during the summer month of August. Each week we travel to a different church, giving all the hard working church officers a much deserved break! We produce a colourful flier & poster to be displayed at each location, so anyone visiting will know where we are.

This year the attendance was outstanding with around one-hundred & thirty people receiving Holy Communion on the first Sunday of the month at Gravesend & well over sixty people joining us for services at The Brent, Spital Street & at Dene Holm. The fellowship, meeting friends from other churches & worshipping as a bigger community was much commented on. The singing & music at the different locations was a roof lifter, a huge thank you to all who attended & supported the churches involved. Well done.

During our worship we looked at, a new focus, keeping going, when it gets tough, the awesomeness of God & growing in confidence of caring. We thought about what we have a lot of, I brought my collection of flip-flops along, having just returned from holiday, eighteen pairs last count! Do we give freely without conditions? At The Brent we had a stare at your neighbour test, a music quiz & spoke about how music & singing hymns keeps us going, we also took part in a tug of war, that resulted in a broken finger for Joyce. We hope you are recovering Joyce. The service at Spital Street saw us explore what surprises us about God, the volcano didn't work. The fourth & final service at Dene Holm, we thought about social standing & looked at what was the correct etiquette when meeting royalty, we wore masks depicting the royal family & worked out the pecking order, Karen Dudley's mask still had the eyes covered so she got slightly

concerned about not seeing anyone, but looked lovely as the Princess of Wales.

For those amongst you with a sharp eye, the fifth Sunday in August, the churches travelled down to Broadstairs for a relaxing, sunny day at the sea. Over one hundred of us travelled in two coaches from Gravesend & The Brent, people were free to do as they wished on arrival, most camped out on the beach, with packed lunches & fish & chips. It was a fabulous day of fellowship & just relaxing together. Some but not all went in for a swim, next year there will be a swimming parade at 2pm. We have much to give thanks & praise for as we return to our own buildings & communities, a great summer made possible by all those who joined together.

Rev Alex Terrett



Lunch is Served



Our eldest granddaughter was born on Tuesday 10th November 1998, and so 5th November, a few days earlier, our very first Luncheon Club in Sittingbourne, is an easy date to remember.

The idea originated on a youth weekend at the Methodist Church in River Nr. Dover with encouragement from Nancy and David Sheasby. Nervously and with lots of planning we gained support from Church Council, although, there was some scepticism but also plenty of support.

The church at that time, was not the practical building it is today, more of an "ugly duckling," with a small kitchen, in which there were two domestic gas cookers and room for only three to work comfortably. Not ideal to cook a two-course lunch, for an expected thirty plus customers, especially as we soon realised the shortage of pots and pans, and the need for last minute shopping. Enthusiastic support from a good number of church members overcame those problems but the memories of those early days horrify me now. Dare I mention the day, when we dropped an apple crumble which landed upside down on the floor. One of our helpers, who worked in catering, quickly scooped it up and delicately returned it to its baking tin. While we remained open mouthed, Margaret our professional helper declared it was "nothing" compared with what happens in commercial kitchens.

Other mishaps come to mind. We use large black thermos jugs for our

gravy and white for custard. Yes, you've guessed it; occasionally the wrong jug was collected from the kitchen, and someone's roast was covered in custard.

Linda Brown and I were the original cooks and were later joined by Val and Pauline, and when Carol transferred to Sittingbourne, she also joined the team.

In 2008/09 the church decided to completely renovate and modernise the rear buildings, which had survived the bombing of the church during the war. We were very grateful that this produced a large commercial kitchen that many restaurants would be envious of.

Before Covid, we were serving between 60 and 70 lunches to church members and groups of local people who appreciated a well-prepared meal at a very reasonable price. Our Christmas lunch often attracted 90 to 100, as we included other groups from the church family. Following Covid, we had to rethink as Val and Pauline were unable to continue as cooks. We also lost Linda from the kitchen following her accident, so we reduced our lunches to once every two weeks. We have a great team of helpers who, prepare the room, wait on table, and wash up. Linda now provides that essential role of pastoral care. Sue helps in the kitchen and has been there from day one; her husband Colin along with John man the sinks and dishwasher. Paul and Kathy, Annette, Rachel, David, and Jean serve. Malcolm helps prepare the room and welcomes our customers at the door. Our tea boy and treasurer is Derek who succeeded

Alan Thorn, who was treasurer in the original team and is now a very welcome customer.

Our menus have increased in variety over the years and include roasts, casseroles, sausages and a firm favourite of cottage pie. We celebrate Easter with traditional roast lamb and Christmas with turkey and all the trimmings. Fruit crumbles and Christmas pudding are firm favourite deserts, all served with ice cream, custard or cream.

Since Covid our membership has dropped but is now recovering slowly and we regularly provide 45/50 lunches. Over the past 27 years we have had well over 200 members through our doors, and we can count at least 30 different church members as helpers. In return we have been able to contribute sizeable sums to church funds. We set out to provide the opportunity for many of our community, who are lonely, to share a meal together and the fellowship of one another and of the church. We believe we continue to do that. New friendships have been formed, birthdays celebrated, holidays shared, and our great volunteers provide that outreach that they might not realise.

Over the past few years, we now have members arriving earlier, staying longer, enjoying the chatter and laughter and above all, expressing their appreciation for all the hard work that has provided a good wholesome meal.

That appreciation is all that's needed.

Pat Goodger

North Kent Circuit

Preaching Plan December 2025 – February 2026

		DECEMBER				JANUARY				FEBRUARY			
		7	14	21	28	4	11	18	25	1	8	15	22
BEARSTED	10.30	LA	READ	6pm ZACHAR cs	US @ SMC	ZACHAR cov	LA	PICKARD	SHEPHERD	READ	ZACHAR hc	LA	R GREY
CHINESE	13.30	CHAN hc	LA	CHAN	LIU	CHAN cov	LA	CHAN	CHOI	CHAN hc	PICKARD	CHAN	D LAI
DENE HOLM	11.00	TERRETT cs	PATERSON	G GRAY	TERRETT us @ Grave'd	LA	ROWE	LA	TERRETT cov	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	DOWNS	TERRETT hc	ROWE
ECCLES	10.30	SHEPHERD	PICKARD	WILDING	LA	NEWELL	LA	LA	OATES hc cov	LA	SHEPHERD	ZACHAR	OATES hc
THIRD AVENUE	10.30	SELMES hc	LA aa - nativity	SELMES 6.30pm cs	WILLING	WATTON	SELMES cov	SKIPP	SELMES	LA	ROBB	SELMES hc	SELMES aa - Thinking Day
GRAVESEND	11.00	S SMITH ts	LA	TERRETT cs	TERRETT us - Big Sing	TERRETT cov	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	LA	DOWNS	TERRETT hc - Baptism	G GRAY Home Missions	BURCH	DOWNS
HARTLIP	18.30	SELMES hc	SELMES cs	LA at 10.30am	GERMAN	LA	SELMES hc cov	LA	10.30am @ St. Michaels GERMAN	SKIPP	SELMES hc	GALLAGHER	M SMITH
HEXTABLE	10.30	cs Toy Service	OATES ss nativity	4pm OATES Christingle	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	LA	9am bc OATES hc cov	BURCH	G GRAY	LA	9am bc ROWE	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	PACKAM ps
HOPE STREET	10.30	LE MASONRY Greening Ser.	PATTERSON	LE MASONRY hc cfc	LE MASONRY	LE MASONRY	LA	ZACHAR cov	LE MASONRY	LE MASONRY	CASSELL	THOMPSON	LE MASONRY hc as
KINGSWOOD	11.00	LA Café	LA Nativity	LA 6pm Cringle	ANGLICAN hc	LA Café	MYLES	BAPTIST	ANGLICAN hc	LA Café	MYLES	BAPTIST	ANGLICAN hc
LARKFIELD	10.00	9am bc 10.30 WILDING	LA 3pm LA cs aa	OATES cs aa	R GREY aa	9am bc 10.30 OATES cov	SHEPHERD aa	LA aa	WILDING aa	PICKARD	NEWELL aa	LA aa	PICKARD hc aa
	15.00	BURHAM us					WILDING Café	BURHAM us			WILDING Café	BURHAM us	
NEWINGTON	9.30	ZACHAR hc cov	M SMITH	ZACHAR cs	US @ SMC	STEVE M	LA	GALLAGHER	ZACHAR hc us St. Mary	M SMITH	LA	STEVE M	ZACHAR hc us St. Mary
ST. LUKE'S	10.30	KICHENSIDE	BURCH	SELMES cs	LA us @ Strood	LA	PICKARD	SELMES hc cov	LA	TROTT	SELMES hc	STUNELL	WATTON
HOLY TRINITY	10.00	PICKARD @ St. Davids hc	ANGLICAN @ St. Williams	WATTON @ St. Albans	ANGLICAN @ St. Williams hc	METHODIST @ St. Albans	ANGLICAN @ St. Davids hc	WILLING @ St. Williams	ANGLICAN @ St. Albans hc	METHODIST @ St. Davids	ANGLICAN @ St. Williams hc	METHODIST @ St. Albans	ANGLICAN @ St. Davids hc
SITTINGBOURNE	10.30	ADOFO	ZACHAR hc	M SMITH cs	ZACHAR us hc	CAN-TAMAKLOE	ZACHAR cov	ADOFO	WATTON	ZACHAR hc	LA	ADOFO	LA
SPITAL STREET	10.30	HUDSON-BEDDOWS Scout Ann.	CHAN hc	LA 4pm cs	S SMITH	BURCH	CHAN cov	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	CHAN	LA	CHAN hc	LA	CHAN
STOKE	18.30	-	STUNELL	-	-	-	STUNELL	-	-	-	STUNELL	-	-
PENINSULA STROOD	10.30	ROBB	LA	TROTT	LA us @ St. Lukes	SELMES hc cov	ROBB aa	STUNELL	PICKARD	SELMES hc	WILLING aa	TROTT	LA aa
TONBRIDGE RD	10.30	OATES Christingle ts	LA Nativity	OATES 6pm cs	SHEPHERD	WILDING	LA	OATES hc cov	R GREY	LA	OATES hc	PICKARD	SHEPHERD
THE BRENT	10.30	LA ts	TERRETT cs	PICKARD	TERRETT us @ Grave'd	LA	TERRETT cov	DOWNS	ROWE	BURCH	TERRETT hc	LA	TERRETT
UNION STREET	10.30	AT WEEK ST. URC	AT WEEK ST. URC	6pm TON. ROAD cs	AT LARKFIELD	AT WEEK ST. URC	AT WEEK ST. URC	AT BEARSTED	AT TON. ROAD	AT WEEK ST. URC	AT WEEK ST. URC	AT TON. ROAD	AT BEARSTED
ONLINE SERVICES	10.30	PICKARD	HEXTABLE	OATES	THIRD AVE	PICKARD	OATES	HEXTABLE	THIRD AVE	PICKARD	OATES	HEXTABLE	THIRD AVE

aa All-age / as Assessed Service / bc Breakfast Church / cfs Cloth for Cradle / cc Café Church / cs Carol Service / cov Covenant Service
hc Holy Communion / ps Preaching Series / ts Toy Service / us United Service

For the Spring issue: Please send contributions as a Word document, no longer than 500 words, to bonni-belle.pickard@methodist.org.uk to arrive by 15th December 2025. If you can, please attach a suitable high quality image, but do not embed it in a document.