

### Looking to the Future – Halling View Autumn 2019

Local history is always a popular feature of village magazines. Older people like to remember. Younger people and people newer to the area like to learn what life used to be like. Then there is the more ancient history. How did we get to where we are now? Natural resources like clean water, reasonably fertile soil, chalk. Communications – first the river, then ancient trackways cresting the downs, then the railway and then the modern roads we have today. The enterprise of local people – mixing locally grown grapes with blackberries to make the wine go further, the inventions in Kent of commercial paper making and Portland Cement, hop picking, cereals and other arable crops, livestock farming. The coming of the Gospel in Saxon times and the different churches there have been and are in the village. The policies of the rich and powerful – kings, bishops, wealthy landowners, industrialists, whose decisions affected the lives of everybody for good or ill. The effects of plague and the challenges of the control of infection, the coming of immunisation and other public health measures, doctors' surgeries in the village. The workhouse, the poor rate, charitable endeavour and the coming of the welfare state. Education, at first for the minority and then for all – schools first of all in the High St and then in Vicarage Road and now on the present site in Howlsmere Close. The coming of council housing after the war to accommodate a growing population and to replace some very poor cottages, the building of the new estates in the last 30 years. Local history is always fascinating and I'm glad to publish people's memories in the parish magazine.

But we can't always be looking back. We don't live in the past even though the past has had a big part in making us what we are today. What of the present and the future? In the last Halling View, I had a go at writing about eternity. That's not so easy; we only have glimpses of eternity.

And it's not so easy writing about the future. I'm old enough to have experienced the failure of numerous prognostications. Books about the future when I was a boy had us all travelling about by hover board or helicopter. Mass transit in cities was by efficient monorails. 'Phones were video phones. Very little of that has yet come true, but nobody seems to have foreseen mobile 'phones or the coming of the internet, or even the home computer. I don't think many people foresaw the growing equality between men and women or the way attitudes would change with regard to moral values. Dystopias had us surviving on tubes of food like early spacemen and dressed all the same in shiny metallic suits.

Back in the eighties, they talked about the end of history. Communism had collapsed and a benign capitalism would rule the world. Democracies would always out perform rigidly controlled societies. China anyone? And religion would fade and die, which it hasn't, and, in its more militant forms, poses a threat.

In the present, environmentalists warn of global warming, mass extinctions and levels of pollution inconsistent with health. Our politics appear to be turmoil in the present day, let alone the foreseeable future.

On the other hand, they are developing new treatments for nasty diseases. People are living longer than would have been the case even thirty years ago. Technology continues to innovate, making our lives easier in many ways and offering us ever more ways to entertain ourselves.

When I came here 32 years ago, I didn't know what to expect, but, whatever I did expect, isn't what we've got today – better in some respects, worse in others. There's a lot we don't know, quite a lot we can't know. So, in the end, we just have to get on with it, doing the best we can. As a Christian, I have confidence in God, that it will all work out and that we cannot do better than to live our lives, as far as we can, in accordance with His Will. I think the last couple of verses of the biblical Book of Ecclesiastes summarise it nicely: Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil.