

Services at St Michael & All Angels Cuxton		
31 st March Lent 4 / Mothering Sunday	9.30 Holy Communion	Joshua 5 vv 9-12 p219 Luke 15 vv 1-31 p1048
7 th April Lent 5 / Passion Sunday	9.30 Family Communion Archdeacon preaching	Isaiah 43 vv 16-21 p728 Philippians 3 vv 4b-14 p1180 John 12 vv 1-8 p1079
14 th April Lent 6 / Palm Sunday	9.30 Holy Communion Meet Church Hall	(at hall) Luke 19 vv 28-40 p1054 Isaiah 50 vv 4-9 p737 Philippians 2 vv 5-11 p1179 Luke 23 vv 1-49 p1059
18 th April Maundy Thursday	7.00pm Passover Meal	
19 th April Good Friday	8.45 Mattins/Litany/Ante-Communion	
	10.00 Family Service	
	5.00 Evening Prayer	
20 th April Holy Saturday	8.45 Mattins/Ante-Communion	
	5.00 Evening Prayer	
21 st April Easter Day	9.30 Holy Communion	Isaiah 65 vv 17-25 p752 Acts 10 vv 34-43 p11-4 I Corinthians 15 vv 19-26 p1156 Luke 24 vv 1-12 p1061
28 th April Easter 2 / Easter 1	9.30 Holy Communion	Exodus 14 vv 10-31 p71 & 15 vv 20&21 Acts 5 vv 27-32 p1097 Revelation 1 vv 1-8 p1233 John 20 vv 19-31 p1089
Services at St John the Baptist Halling and the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling		
31 st March Lent 4 / Mothering Sunday	11.00 Holy Communion	Joshua 5 vv 9-12 p219 II Corinthians 5 vv 16-21p1161 Luke 15 vv 1-31 p1048
7 th April Lent 5 / Passion Sunday	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Hebrews 9 vv 11-15 p1207 John 8 vv 46-59 p 1074
	11.00 Holy Communion Archdeacon preaching	Isaiah 43 vv 16-21 p728 Philippians 3 vv 4b-14 p1180 John 12 vv 1-8 p1079
14 th April Lent 6 / Palm Sunday	11.00 Holy Communion	Isaiah 50 vv 4-9 p737 Philippians 2 vv 5-11 p1179 Luke 23 vv 1-49 p1059
	5. 30 Evening Prayer Jubilee Hall	Exodus 10 vv 1-29 p67 Luke 19 vv 28-48 p1054
18 th April Maundy Thursday	9.30 am Holy Communion	I Corinthians 11 vv 17-33 p1152 Luke 23 vv 1-49 p1059
19 th April Good Friday	12.00 Three Hour Devotion	
21 st April Easter Day	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Colossians 3 vv 1-7 p1184 John 20 vv 1-10 p1089
	11.00 Holy Communion & Holy Baptism	Isaiah 65 vv 17-25 p752 Acts 10 vv 34-43 p11-4 I Corinthians 15 vv 19-26 p1156 Luke 24 vv 1-12 p1061
28 th April Easter 2 / Easter 1	11.00 Holy Communion	Exodus 14 vv 10-31 & 15 vv 20&21 Acts 5 vv 27-32 p1097 Revelation 1 vv 1-8 p1233 John 20 vv 19-31 p1089

CHRIST our passover is sacrificed for us : therefore let us keep the feast; Not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness : but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 1 *Cor.* v. 7

Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more : death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once : but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin : but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Rom.* vi. 9

Christ is risen from the dead : and become the first-fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death : by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die : even so in Christ shall all be made alive. 1 *Cor.* xv. 20.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. *Amen.*

Holy Communion Wednesdays 9.30 Cuxton		Holy Communion Thursdays 9.30 Halling	
3 rd April	Isaiah 49 vv 8-15 John 5 vv 17-30	4 th April	Exodus 32 vv 7-14 John 5 vv 31-47
10 th April	Daniel 3 vv 1-28 John 8 vv 31-42	11 th April	Genesis 17 vv 3-9 John 8 vv 51-59
17 th April Holy Week	Hebrews 9 vv 16-28 Luke 22 vv 1-71	18 th April Maundy Thursday	I Corinthians 11 vv 17-33 Luke 23 vv 1-49
24 th April Easter Week	Acts 3 vv 1-10 Luke 24 vv 13-35	25 th April Easter Week	Acts 3 vv 11-26 Luke 24 vv 35-48
1 st May S Philip & S James	James 1 vv 1-12 John 14 vv 1-14	2 nd May S Athanasius	Acts 5 vv 17-33 John 3 vv 31-36

Copy Date May Magazine 12th April 8.30am Rectory

Forthcoming Attractions

30th March 7.30 pm Church Hall: A Musical Evening with Albert Marshall – popular music from the ‘fifties to the present day.

22nd April 2.00 pm Rectory & Church Hall: Easter Egg Hunt, craft and stalls £2.00.

27th April 9.30 am: Holy Communion @ St John’s followed (@10.00) by Vestry Meeting & APCM.

18th May 7.30 pm Church Hall: An Entertaining Evening of Anecdotes and Music.

18th July 7.30 pm St John’s: A Musical Evening with the Cantium Singers.



Would You Like to Live For Ever?

Maybe, maybe not. *Change and decay in all around I see.* If we’re going to get more and more frail as we get older, develop more and more aches and pains, and become more and more helpless, we might not want to go on for ever. Even so very few people say they want to die. The 99 year old wants to be 100.

Even if we could live for ever without getting old and frail, living for ever as we are now could be unappealing, not to say boring. Do you want to be the guy who says, “I’ve been working at this bench for 527 years and I still haven’t got the foreman’s job”? To be around for ever and never to change probably wouldn’t be much fun after the first few centuries, just a bit boring.

What we mean by everlasting or eternal life is something different. Time and space don’t exist in eternity. Perfection doesn’t change. It has no need to. There is no decay in heaven. Given that there is no time there, there is no getting bored.

S Paul says that we shall be changed, changed once and for all. He is talking specifically about Christians, not people in general, but what does he mean by changed? Changed from what? He says *this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality*, and, then when it

has, *Death is swallowed up in victory.* Hard to understand? Yes, beyond human comprehension, but let’s have a go.

All good things come from God. He is eternal, immortal, incorruptible. God is perfect. God made you and me. He gives us the Word of life. If we walk with God, we live for ever. To walk with God is to obey His commandments – which is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbours as ourselves. If we did that we should live for ever because we should be one with God Who is eternal love.

But we don’t. No human being does except Jesus. We rebel. We don’t love God with all hearts. Neither do we love our neighbours as ourselves. We are sinners. We are selfish and self-centred. All human beings are like that, except Jesus. So we alienate ourselves from God. We cut ourselves off from the eternal. We are justly judged for our sins. We shall surely die. In this world, we mostly have to work hard in order to live. Eternal death (whatever that means) awaits us when this life is over. No wonder most people don’t want to die even though they don’t want to go on growing old for ever. Only Jesus deserves not to die. Our case is hopeless.

Or, rather, our case would be hopeless if it were not for Jesus and for what God accomplishes through Him. Jesus lives a sinless life. He is entitled to live for ever. He is at one with God.

Eternity belongs to Him. He deserves to abide for ever at God's right hand.

But the One Who does not deserve to die does in fact die. He dies at the hands of ordinary human beings – people like us – who do deserve to die. And here we enter the realm of mystery and use language we cannot understand because it points us towards eternal truth. His death is the propitiatory sacrifice so that our sins are forgiven in Him. He is the atoning sacrifice such that in Him we are at one with God, at one with eternal love, at one with eternal life. He is the redeeming sacrifice, which buys us back from slavery to sin, the world and the devil. He dies in our place so that we should live with Him for ever. He is our Saviour, our Saviour from death and the fear of death, our Saviour from all that is evil.

Because the Immortal dies for us, we mortals are changed into immortals in Him by grace, through faith and Death is swallowed up in victory. In Christ we are changed once and for all from creatures subject to change and decay, destined for eternal death, into immortal sons and daughters of God, joyfully anticipating an eternity in the Presence of God.

All that is hard to understand, but this isn't. God loves us so much that He gave us His Son. What is required of us is that we put our faith in Him, that we repent of our sins, that we are baptised in His Name. Couldn't be simpler. And the result? Eternal life. Roger.

I Corinthians 15: 50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. 51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. 54 So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. 55 O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory? 56 The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law. 57 But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

Regular Giving

The best reason for giving is a loving and generous heart. This is true whether we are making gifts to friends and families, to charities or to the Church. We have so much. We want to share what we have with those whom we love. It is our desire freely to offer back to God what He has so freely given to us.

The next best reason, in my opinion, is that we see a need. Our grown up children need help with their weekly budget. A friend is down on his luck. We are filled with compassion for the plight of strangers and we have the opportunity to help them perhaps directly, maybe through a recognised charity. We believe that our Church is doing God's work and we feel that it is our duty and our joy to support it. Again it is all of love. In fact the very word *charity* means *love*.

How much should we give? Surely, potentially everything we have, everything we are. The Bible speaks of a tenth, a tithe.

But what of the mechanics of giving? How can we give most effectively and efficiently? As cash becomes less dominant and as carrying it presents something of a security risk, it is suggested that some people might like to make their financial offerings to the Church by standing order. If you would be willing to do that, forms are available in church or from the wardens, treasurer or rector, who can also give you the church bank details, if you would like to set this up online. If you are a taxpayer and willing to *gift aid* your offering, it is worth 25% more to the Church. Jack Payne is the man to talk to about *gift aid*.

O LORD, who hast taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing worth; Send thy Holy Ghost and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee; Grant this for thine only Son Jesus Christ's sake. *Amen*.

From the Registers

Funerals:

13 th February	Raymond John Underdown (86)	Strood
14 th February	Heather Doris Homewood (94)	Upper Halling
20 th February	Georgina Violet Chidwick (60)	Hanes Dene
5 th March	Elsie Joan Blackmore (91)	Pilgrims Way
5 th March	Graham Edward Williams (76)	Kent Road.

Some Words of Cardinal Basil Hume

First thoughts about death are normally ones of fear and dread. It is partly having to face the unknown, partly the recoiling from the final agony, as we lie helpless and perhaps wired up to all those machines competing for access to our body. On a bad day there is that common fear which tells us that there is no future, only a blank, nothing. We are no more. And then another thought comes to trouble us and it is how quickly we are forgotten. Then in a very bad moment I think about the relief my demise will bring to some people. I do worry about the insensitive and clumsy ways I have handled some people, about my selfishness. No I won't go on listing my faults here. "Don't forget" I once heard a great abbot say – "when you are dead somebody will be relieved".

But there is another voice that speaks within us. It is not the voice that brings news that depresses and frightens. It has another message. "You have loved so many persons in your life; are you to be frustrated and denied that which you have sought throughout your life?" It is not so. Some instinct, a positive and optimistic one, speaks of hope leading to life after death. In the animal world the instinct for survival is strong. It is so with humans as well. We want to go on, unless overwhelmed by depression or weariness. Our fear is that we may not. That instinct beckons us. Our mind says "It may be; it must be". Then faith finally takes over and with triumph declares "It is so". Yes, there is life after death. The instinct for survival is a true one; it does not deceive. How could it be otherwise since it is God given? Faith brings the reassurance which instinct was seeking.

The vision of God is that for which we were made. To see Him as He is, face, to face, that is the moment of ecstasy, the ever present "now" of total happiness.

I now have no fear of death. I look forward to this friend leading me to a world where my parents, my brother and other relatives are, and my friends. I shall see those who fashioned me in my monastic life, I shall see Abbot Byrne Anthony, Kenneth, David, Barnabas, Hubert, James, Denis, Robert, Peter, Walter, John and many others. I look forward to that. Cardinal Basil Hume, OSB.

Halling Historical Society

Halling Historical Society is for the appreciation of the life and times of Halling, the Medway Gap, and Kent; both past and present; to remember the old and celebrate the new.

Secretary: Philip Badman, Tel: 07754-616210, E-mail: hallinghistorical@gmail.com, Facebook: halling historical society. Affiliated to: Kent History Federation & Kent Archaeological Society.

Meetings are held every two months in the Jubilee Hall @ 7.30 pm. Annual membership £10. Visitors are asked to pay £2.50 per meeting.

18th April: 'Old Father Thames' Stuart Robinson - from pre-Roman times to now - the super-highway to London - source of employment for centuries - events of the river. . .the frost fairs, famous last journeys, - sport on the river.

Future Meetings: 20th June Romans in Medway; 15th August Canterbury Cathedral; 17th October The Kent Parish of Cobham; 12th December The Life & Times of Edith Cavell.

Ask the Doctor: What should you do if you have hot flushes? Answer: Call a plumber!

The Pilates Element

Pilates is a body conditioning exercise programme suitable for all ages and abilities. My classes are friendly, fun and enjoyable.

Emily Pollington, member of FHT, qualified instructor.

Pilates classes are held in the church hall on Tuesdays from 6.30-7.30 & 7.30-8.30 pm. For more information, please contact instructor Emily Pollington, 07940233296, emilypollington@btinternet.com Also on Facebook.

Please book through website <https://the-pilates-element.pilatesnearyou.co.uk/>

Nic Boniface Counselling & Therapeutic Services (Medway)

Offices in Rochester & Rainham

Making the decision to step into therapy can evoke many feelings. I appreciate that starting the therapeutic process can be a really brave decision!

If you need someone to talk to, in an environment within which you feel safe, we can build this together supported by the Framework of the British Association of Counselling & Psychotherapy, of which I am a registered member.

If you would like to discuss counselling or counselling supervision, please contact me on:

BonifaceTherapyServices@gmail.com

07865 470014

Pilates is a wonderful way to exercise and it's really great to get local people working out together as they all have a chat before class so it's great for helping with social isolation. I would run a class for people on a Thursday morning if there were sufficient demand. Please contact me if you are interested. Emily Pollington.

Quotations

John Zizioulas: A person cannot exist without communion, but every form of communion, which denies the personhood is inadmissible.

Sister Wendy: Prayer is the utterly ruthless test of our sincerity. It is the one place in all the world where there is nowhere to hide. That is its utter bliss – and its torment.

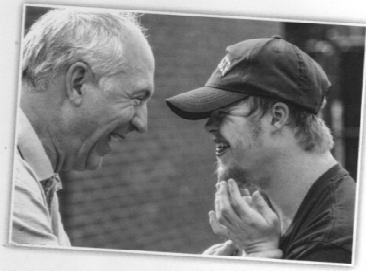
Meeting the Venerable Andrew Wooding-Jones.

Andrew became the Archdeacon of Rochester last September. He is coming to preach at our 9.30 & 11.00 services on 7th April, which will be an opportunity to meet him if you have not yet done so.


He also intends to attend one of our PCC meetings in the near future. He writes, "As Archdeacon I have a formal statutory right to enquire of and visit PCCs I would very much like to visit the PCC but I want my visit to be 'informal'. It would be good to hear how plans to use the legacy the church has received are progressing and also to hear how the PCC are planning to engage missionally with those moving into the parish with the new developments around you? I would find it useful too to get a sense of how confident you are feeling as a Council?" I think he is referring to the legacy Rev'd Ron Smith left for St John's but there are also others left for St Michael's. We have always said that members of the general public are welcome to attend our PCC meetings as observers. The invitation is seldom taken up. Maybe you feel like I do that PCC meetings are like warfare in the old saying *soldiering is 99 percent boredom and 1 percent sheer terror*, but this meeting could be interesting, helpful, informative and even enjoyable! RIK.

Shared Lives

Would you like to do something that's really worthwhile as well as being rewarding, flexible and based from home? Make a real difference to someone's life by sharing yours.



Find out more about becoming a Shared Lives Carer visit:
medway.gov.uk/sharedlives or phone 01634 337100

 @MedwaySharedLives


Serving You

You could think of Shared Lives as fostering for grown ups. The idea is that you take into your home to live with you an adult who is having trouble managing alone. The person concerned might be a teenager or of any age up to extreme old age. The person might stay with you for a brief period, perhaps convalescing or while they sort their lives out. Or it might be a longer term arrangement. It would be like looking after a family member. You would not be expected to provide specialist care. Obviously, you have to be vetted and prepared for this role. Care is taken to ensure that you and the person coming to stay with you will be compatible and, of course, the

arrangement can be ended if either party is unhappy. While you wouldn't want to do it for the money, you of course receive an allowance which can be between £1500 & £1900 per month. If you are interested, please call 01634 337100 or log on to medway.gov.uk/sharedlives.

St John's Draw: £10 each to Mr Johnson (36) & Miss Mitchell (73) – drawn by Miss L Thorne.

St Michael's Draw: £10 to Mrs Pitt (10), £5 each Mrs Beaney (5) & Mrs Grundwell (25)

Questions Asked

Atlas Cub Pack visited St Michael's on 27th February to see the church and to observe how the bells are rung. As always, they were enthusiastic, well-behaved and interested with plenty of questions to ask. It was a couple of questions asked by leaders that I thought I'd mention here. One asked me to explain the mystery of the numbers. I was a bit non-plussed at first. He explained that when he was a boy he had never worked out how people always seemed to know the number of the next hymn even before it was given out. Only later had someone pointed out the board with the hymn numbers on it. It just goes to show that we shouldn't assume that people will know what they've never been told. Even that didn't help, however, at Halling on Quinquagesima when I forgot to mention that we would be omitting the first four verses – resulting in some of us singing verses 1-4, while others sang 5-8, and then those of us who sang vv 1-8, all of them, ran out of music, though we all came back together for v9, the doxology, without which human life would be impossible!¹ The hymn was *Blessed City, Heavenly Salem*, which some people think is too long, but which is too sublime, in my opinion, to cut!

The other question concerned why there are two brass plaques with the Ten Commandments on them too high up the back wall to read? They were originally at the front of the church and lower down, either side of the east window. Above the window, there was a similar plaque with a biblical verse on it, which has disappeared and nobody seems to remember what it said. Can any readers help us out here, please?

The three plaques are supposed to have been removed on the advice of the quinquennial architect many years ago, but what was the logic? Maybe he thought that there was no need to display the Ten Commandments at all. We all know them and never break any of them! Did he really think that? If that were so, by all means take them down, but why then re-erect them on the back wall? On the other hand, he might have thought that the plaques we had were unsuitable. The lettering is old fashioned and hard to read and the text is a traditional translation of the bible (the Great Bible of Henry VIII, transmitted via the Book of Common Prayer). But if that were the problem, surely the thing to do would have been to replace the old plaques with new ones with easier to read lettering and a more modern bible translation. Shifting the old ones to the back and setting them too high up to read seems fairly pointless, unless they just couldn't bear to throw away something for which they could no longer see a use. I'm afraid that the moral I draw from the story is: *Don't slavishly take the advice of anyone, no matter how qualified he may be. Think for yourself!*

¹ We are made for the glory of God. The doxology is the glory at the end of a psalm or hymn.

Have you realised that Moses was probably the first person to download a file from the cloud onto a tablet?

Hever Castle

It is early spring and we are experiencing some warm and sunny weather. So, it is a great opportunity to get out and explore the wonderful Kent countryside and places of interest. I want to travel a little away from Cuxton and visit Hever Castle and Gardens. Hever is 32 miles away. Depending upon the traffic, it is approximately a 45 minute drive. Hever Castle dates back to the thirteenth century and was once the childhood home of Anne Boleyn. She was the second wife of King Henry VIII and mother to Queen Elizabeth I. The castle is crenulated, has a moat and is reputed to be haunted. Its rooms are panelled and contain fabulous furniture, tapestries, antiques, books and amazing portraits. A great deal to see, learn from and admire.



The car park and entrance to Hever Castle and Gardens is in Hever Road off the B2027. From the entrance and pay booths I walk down the hard

footpath towards the shop and Moat Restaurant. As is my custom, my first port of call is the restaurant for a latte and a savoury snack (NB no cheese scones available!). I consume these whilst sitting outside in the sunshine reading the information leaflets. At first glance, I begin to realise that there is rather a lot to see and do even at this time of year. There are several gardens, play areas, the castle, a Japanese Tea House Folly, some miniature houses, refreshment outlets, a military museum and sign-posted walks. Apart from a brief look in the castle and various gardens, today, I decide to focus upon a walk around the lake and explore the Snowdrop Walk.

The literature on the snowdrop trail contains some interesting snippets. For example, snowdrops are poisonous to eat! I suppose the bulb could be mistaken for its relative, the onion - maybe! Snowdrops are a symbol of consolation and hope, purity and cleansing. According to folklore, it is unlucky to bring a single snowdrop into the house.

This could invite death into the home. Perhaps a bowl or bunch would be safer. Over the past six years more than 80,000 bulbs of various varieties have been planted in the gardens at Hever. To me, snowdrops suggest that we may still have some wintry weather but spring is definitely on its way.



From the restaurant I walk passed the front of the castle and over the little wooden bridge to view the first of many snowdrops along the edge of the stream.

They are plentiful and look gorgeous punctuating the green grassy banks. Mallards and swans swim freely in the streams, moat and ponds. The footpath soon leads out and away from the manicured gardens and into more open land. The vast tranquil lake has a defined path around it.

The first leg of my journey is known as Chestnut Avenue. It was originally planted in the early 1900's but suffered damage in the great storm in 1987. It is gradually being re-planted with Spanish horse chestnut. There are some water features and pill boxes on route to the Japanese Tea House Folly. Towards the far end of the lake there are bustling reed beds. These tend to grow where the water is slow moving and there is plenty of silt. There are crested grebes busy foraging for food whilst robins and blue tits flutter around the bushes and trees near the water's edge. At the end



of the far end of the lake there is a mechanical weir. This was constructed to help control the level of water in the lake. The River Eden, of which the lake is part, continues its course

eastwards in a series of meanders until it flows into the River Medway near Tonbridge. There are some well positioned seats at this end of the lake with delightful views stretching up the lake to the

castle. From this point I wander along the footpath amongst pine trees (Corsican and Scots) and Swamp Cypress with aerial roots along the ground. Walking onward back to the castle on this circular route, the footpath follows the lake to the Edwardian boathouse used for boat hire (all closed up for now) and then to the Guthrie Pavilion, a Garden Exhibition and then the Loggia. This section of the grounds leads me to the sunken garden, Italian garden, the Guthrie Pavilion and the half moon pond. Every aspect of this area shows gardening care and skill. Each border is very neatly trimmed, daffodils are beginning to

open and camellias are flowering in sheltered spots. There are pretty purple and yellow pansies enjoying the sun.

This brings me to the end of today's journey and I return to the restaurant for a late light lunch and drink. A chance to reflect on the glorious snowdrops, busy water birds on the lake and small birds in the bushes, the manicured gardens and the sunlight upon the lake. A lovely day out and a taste of more to come as the seasons evolve.

Holly Croft.

Cleanliness is Next to Godliness

I'm rather proud of the fact that both our churches are kept so beautifully clean, tidy, in good repair and decorated with flowers. The people who attend to these things on a voluntary basis are entitled to our thanks. We are, however, getting short of volunteers at St John's and the churchwardens would be delighted to hear from you if you could offer to help with the cleaning, usually on Saturday mornings. The more volunteers, the less work for each one. St Michael's would probably also welcome additional people to go on the cleaning rota. We're also grateful for donations towards the cost of flowers which are so beautifully arranged in both churches. Please give any such donations to the flower ladies, the wardens or the rector.

The Commissioning Service of the Mothers' Union Worldwide President

I was privileged to attend the Choral Evensong and Commissioning Service of the new World Wide President of the Mothers' Union in Southwark Cathedral on Tuesday 26th February 2019. I accompanied our friends Rev. Steve and Valerie West, from Trinidad, who travelled over to this country, especially to attend the service to commission the first World Wide President of the MU from overseas, Sheran Harper. We sat with members from local branches in the Rochester Diocese. Before the service we kept meeting up with friends from all over the world. There was a lot of hugging and laughter before and after the ceremony. Our Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, praised the work of the MU and was most approachable after the service to have his photograph taken with many members of the MU. The service was a beautiful traditional evensong but as the clergy and choir processed out, the steel band played and everyone broke into clapping, singing and even dancing.

The new World Wide President, Sheran Harper, was born in the United Kingdom and grew up in Guyana. She is a Physiotherapist, who opened and managed new Physiotherapy Departments in hospitals across Guyana and lectured on Rehabilitation Therapists Training Programme for the Government. She has been a member of MU since 1987 and for the last 17 years has devoted herself to serving MU at Parish, Diocesan, Provincial and Worldwide levels. She has visited over 16 countries for MU, primarily as the Worldwide Parenting Programme Trainer. She has advised Government regionally on matters relating to the family and the reduction of violence in the home. We know that Sheran Harper will lead the MU in their work of transforming communities and the lives of families, women and men, through practical grassroots support, empowerment, and by challenging systems that perpetuate injustice at the local, national and international level. To find out more visit mothersunion.org. Jenny.

The Cuxton and Halling Mothers' Union enjoyed a well presented talk from the City of Rochester Society. Pam Gibbon, the first lady Chairman, gave a most interesting talk on the work of the Society. She was assisted by her son-in-law, Philip Dodd, a writer, editor and publisher who has been on the Executive Committee of CoRS for seven years. He lives in the old vicarage of St. Margaret's Rochester, where Dame Sybil Thorndike grew up. One of the recent chairmen, John Allison, lives in Cuxton!

The City of Rochester Society was founded in 1967 to fight a council scheme to drive a bypass through the heart of historic Rochester. For 50+ years the Society has continued to fight for the heritage and quality of life of Rochester and the surrounding towns, which includes ours. The history of Rochester is closely connected to the history of the Cathedral when Christianity came to the city. We all came away strongly wishing to preserve our heritage. Jenny



World Day of Prayer – St. John's Church - 1st March

On Friday 1st March we celebrated World Day of Prayer. This is a global movement taking place in over 120 countries on Friday, 1st March. At St. John's Church, Halling, this was a coming together of friends from the churches of Cuxton and Halling and also friends Rev. Steve and Valerie West from Trinidad.

Members from the United Reform Church and St. Michael's Church, Cuxton, together with those from St. John's Church, Halling, who hosted the service, took various reading parts from the service booklet set out by the people of Slovenia.

The hymns and songs were very uplifting. A table was set to represent a banquet and five guests (representing ladies from Slovenia) sat round the table to tell their stories, for which they needed our prayers. We all took away a red carnation as a gift. The theme of the service was "Come – Everything is Ready" (St Luke's Gospel Chapter 14) and was based on the parable Jesus told of a man who gave a great banquet and when he invited his friends they all gave excuses for not coming. He then invited people off the streets who readily took up his offer. Are we ready when Jesus calls us? JAB.

Easter Egg Hunt

**Easter Monday – 22nd April
2.00 pm Rectory Grounds &
Church Hall
£2.00 per hunter.**

Christian Aid Supper

**Cuxton Church Hall
April 12th 7.00 for 7.30
£7.50
Speaker: David Muir.**

The Seasonal Steps of our Seers – April

Easter is not only the most important time in the Christian calendar, it's also the one that moves about year on year and this year it's a late festival. However, I covered the Easter festivities in last month's article so I'll leave it out of this one.

As everyone knows, April 1st is All Fools' Day, a day for pranks, jokes, hoaxes and horseplay. The origins are lost in time but throughout Britain the customs and rhymes are similar. In Scotland it is known as Huntingowk Day, a derivation of 'hunting the gowk' (cuckoo).

Huntingowk's past, and you're the ass.

Up a tree and down a tree you're a fool as well as me!

In the morning break period, teachers often got their own back on this day by sending an unsuspecting student for a 'long weight', a tin of 'chequered paint' from the Art teacher or a 'left-handed screwdriver' from the woodwork master. Stink bombs are set off, books (or sometimes worse) are balanced on door tops and messages stuck on people's backs using post it notes. There are oft-repeated cries of 'Your shoelace is undone' or 'There's something stuck on your back' and when you fall for a joke, you are roundly teased as an 'April Fool'. April Fool jokes must of course stop at the stroke of noon or the prankster becomes the fool! And the jokes must be done in good humour or not at all!

Set for friends your nonsense snare; catch them and be caught in theirs. Eleanor Farjeon.

April 23rd is St George's Day which is England's national day although one that is not, to our shame, nationally remembered. St George is England's Patron Saint and is a little obscure. It is thought that he may have been a Roman Christian from Cappadocia in Asia Minor, who lived in the 3rd century and he is said to have rescued the Princess Cleodolinda from a fierce sea dragon. Having defeated the dragon against all odds, George accompanied the princess back to the city, she leading the animal by her girdle. The king and his subjects were so amazed by St George's feat that they all converted to Christianity. Superseding Edward the Confessor as patron saint of England in the 13th century, the victory of the Battle of Agincourt was attributed to him and great feasting and celebration were affected on his saints day.

*St George he was for England, and, before he killed the dragon,
He drank a pint of English ale out of an English flagon.*

The day of St Mark, the author of the second gospel, is April 25th. He is also associated with the foundation of the city of Venice. So eager were the Venetians to have St Mark protecting their city, it is believed that they even went to the extreme length of stealing his body from the environs of Alexandria and bringing it back to Venice. St Marks winged lion can be found all over the city, on buildings, bridges and statues, with one paw resting on a bible.

April is the month in which the song of the cuckoo is eagerly awaited, indicating that spring is truly on its way. It is also a month of uncertain weather and the coming of the cuckoo was linked to the folklore of the weather. A late spring is crucial to the farmer, since it meant that little spring grass was available for livestock, and there was a risk of late frosts ruining crops.

*When the cuckoo sings in an empty bough
Keep your hay and sell your cow!!*

JGB

THE CHURCH ORGAN

Following the 'improvements' to the church in the nineteenth century with the creation of a side aisle and brazier heating, it was decided that a new organ should be installed for the enhancement of worship. In 1881, the company of James Alderson Forster and Joseph King Andrews was approached to build an organ in the side chapel next to the chancel in place of a barrel organ. Forster and Andrews had been employees of organ builder J C Bishop of London but by 1843 they had set up a business in Hull and became one of the most successful of the north of England builders. They built all sizes and shapes of organs but the one in St Michael's is typical of a small church organ that can be found all along the Medway gap. So we can speculate that a salesman was engaged to recommend that style of organ in this area.

After nearly 140 years, and even with regular tuning sessions and checks to the fabric of the instrument, it has now become time to take on a major overhaul of the Victorian inner workings of the instrument. Some of the great wooden pipes are showing signs of splitting due to the extremes of temperatures in the church building, some of the metal pipes are collapsing due to age and the incredible amount of lever work that makes things happen (there being no electrical circuitry) need adjusting, overhauling and, where necessary, replacing if we are to expect that the instrument will give vital service for future generations of local people who use the church.

The organ is featured with two ways of pumping air into the instruments. We are able to use a hand-pump so that air can be pumped manually into the instrument. We last used that when there was a lightning strike on the electricity pole outside the church at the beginning of a wedding and the tower captain was dragooned in to pump the bellows so that the hymns could be played - not an easy job to do! Most of the time we use an electric pump which someone had the foresight to install and makes the job much easier. Luckily there is not too much wear to the bellows so we expect some lightweight patching to those will suffice.

The company who looks after our organ is F H Browne and Sons in Ash, near Canterbury who employ skilled craftsmen including cabinet makers, mechanical and electronic organ action, leatherworkers, tuners and voicing specialists. They recently did an extensive overhaul report and their estimate for the work needed will involve an outlay of just shy of £20,000 including VAT. We are confident of reaching our required target by holding activities and

concerts on behalf of the organ fund which we will be publishing very soon and it is hoped that we may receive donations from members of the parish who also could sponsor a note or a stop. We will keep you updated of our efforts to allow the instrument to be available for further generations of Cuxton parishioners.



Tommy's Talking Points

The middle of February was amazingly mild. On the Sunday, only two weeks after the snow melted, Master and I went for a beautiful walk right up to Holly Hill and back through Dean and Bush Valleys. The sun shone warm and bright. It was just like Summer except that our nearest star went down so early, the air chilled late afternoon and it got dark soon after we arrived home, just light enough to say Evening Prayer in the garden which he likes to do when we don't go to church.

The next day, Monday, was when we had planned another one of our special walks with Master's friend. We went out early as usual and there was some excitement because we were followed home by another dog. We phoned the owner and she came and collected her while Master had breakfast. Then train to Strood, where we met Master's friend, and made a good connection at Sittingbourne for Queenborough. Seeing Sheppey across the Swale, as we walked the Saxon Shore from Rainham to Faversham last year, had piqued their interest in the Island. Master's friend had never been and Master himself had not been there for four years, not in fact since he picked me up. I was born at Walden Bay near Leysdown. So it was like going home for me.

Queenborough was very interesting – a mixture of fine old buildings and some quite harsh industrial plant, some of which was apparently derelict. We saw where the castle used to be, demolished by Oliver Cromwell and then sadly missed when the Dutch invaded the Medway in the reign of King Charles II. We saw the Georgian Town Hall and some lovely looking houses. The church was unlocked and so dog friendly as to have a water bowl by the font. It is a beautiful C17 building with old plaques detailing past benefactors to the Church and to the poor of the parish. There is stained glass and a painted ceiling above the chancel. Thirty years ago, a plan was discussed to twin our parish with Queenborough but it never came to anything – too far away, too little scope for socialising or working together. In the 1960s, however, the congregational minister used to row across from Queenborough to take services at Grain. So there is a connection with our deanery even though Sheppey is in a different diocese.

We then walked along by the water towards Sheerness. At first there were excellent views of Grain, but then the walk was divided from the river by an enormous car park, where vehicles imported from the continent are stored pending registration and distribution in this country. We arrived at Blue Town. Master said that he had been to a place called Blue Town in Jordan near the Iraq border. The weather is warmer and drier there and the historic buildings even more remarkable, but he thought that the one on Sheppey was probably a much less hazardous place to live.

Our own Blue Town was pretty good – a bit like Queenborough in its mixture of industrial, some dereliction, and what is left from a much more prosperous history. The main road has some very quaint buildings on one side, including a music hall and theatre, but is dominated by the wall of the old naval dockyard (closed fifty years ago) on the other side. There is a gas jet where home-going dockyard mateys could light their tobacco, matches being forbidden in the dockyard itself. We saw the yard in which thousands of concrete garden ornaments are displayed for sale. Our first bird bath came from there. Given that Master remembered barely being able to carry it to the car, he didn't buy another ornament to take home on the train. We also saw the impressive row of houses where the officers used to live, the derelict dockyard church, which is being restored, and the remains of the military hospital, now the offices of the steel works.

And so on to Sheerness on Sea. There were a few people about on the beach. Master laughed at the enormous number of health and safety warnings. They boast about the purity of the water for swimming in

but imply that the beach is so hazardous (It's much like any other shingle beach.) that it is hard to imagine anyone being brave enough to cross it to the sea. But Swale Council is like that, he says. They were one of the first to ban dogs from beaches in the Summer.

We headed inland, seeking a pub which served food. There were lots of pubs in Queenborough and Blue Town, but hardly any in Sheerness. When we passed it, the "Royal" appeared to be too posh to admit dogs. They even have a dress code for humans. Somewhere else we found wasn't doing hot food, but they very nicely offered to make sandwiches, but Master and his friend were hoping for something hot. So we went into yet another hostelry, only to be advised to try the "Royal", which we did. Not only did they let in dogs (with their scruffily clad masters), they saved scraps from the Sunday roasts for dogs coming in in the week. So I dined on beef. They were very kind to all dogs. A man we'd seen at Queenborough was also in the "Royal" and, recognising Master, asked after me. He had to point me out under the table.

The little rain which fell that day came down while we were in the "Royal". So back to the station and home by train. Given his impatience with poor connections, I suppose it was inevitable that we rounded off our day with a walk from Rochester!

After that, the warm, sunny weather returned. It was incredible for February. Apparently, England was warmer than many Mediterranean resorts. We had numerous walks in the woods and fields around Cuxton and Halling in bright sunshine with Master dressed as if for June. (It makes no difference to me. I wear fur all the year round – politically correct or not). It just seemed strange that things were so bare when the weather was almost summery. There were no leaves on the trees, though there were catkins, which have been there all Winter, and some of the stronger bright green shoots just thrusting through. The grass in the fields was short and thin. You could plainly see the underlying soil, especially where animals have grazed. Apparently cattle like to eat the long grass and sheep the short. So letting them take turns, gives both of them more of the food they like and promotes the diversity of the ecology of the meadows. Master did wonder whether, having had Summer in February, we should expect snow in June?

Now, as I am writing this, it is March and things are back to normal. It is lighter in the mornings and evenings, which we both like. It has got colder, but there are signs of Spring both in the countryside and in the garden. The Japanese quince is in bloom. The Forsythia is on the verge. There is an abundance of daffodils, including a large number of miniatures. Also crocuses, which have always been a bit iffy in our garden. There have been snowdrops in the churchyard for weeks and now there are primroses. We've heard woodpeckers in the woods and birds singing all over. Soon I expect there will be nests. Master says that the grass will soon want cutting. It could of course get very cold again and all this growth could be damaged by frost, but he says not to worry about the rhubarb which is sprouting. Apparently rhubarb comes from Siberia and can cope with any amount of cold. No wonder it does so well in Yorkshire.

Master contests the notion that Yorkshire people are hardy. He says that when he cycled with a church group to Whitby, the southerners he rode with were all in shorts and tee shirts, while the natives sat on the beach in overcoats, scarves and cloth caps. It was June! He said that, if they thought that was cold, they should have tried the beach at Ramsgate where he lived before he came here.

Maybe the cold is affecting his brain. On Shrove Tuesday, they changed all the colours in St Michael's to purple for Lent. They even covered the crosses. Lent is supposed to be a sombre season. However, the next day, the first day of Lent, he forgot to change his vestments and only noticed when the service had started that he was wearing green. Being somewhat obsessive, he slipped out to the vestry to change while the collection was being taken. Perhaps taking the collection doesn't take as long as it should at St Michael's because he had to hurry and I took the chance to exit the vestry and head into the nave to meet my friends in the congregation. For all I knew it was all over. So it was for me when I was caught and sent back for another twenty minutes. Yes, says Master, Lent is a solemn season, but there still ought to be plenty of laughter. The Christian life is all about joy!

Tommy.