

Services At St John the Baptist Halling & the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling		
27 <sup>th</sup> November Advent Sunday Year B	11.00 Holy Communion <b>The Word Revealed</b>	Isaiah 64 vv 1-9 p750 I Corinthians 1 vv 1-9 p144 Mark 13 vv 24-37 p1019
Friday 2 <sup>nd</sup> December	7.30 WI District Carol Service	
4 <sup>th</sup> December Advent 2	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Romans 15 vv 4-13 p1141 Matthew 11 vv 2-11 p976
	11.00 Family Communion & Gift Service & Holy Baptism	Isaiah 40 vv 1-11 p723 II Peter 3 vv 8-15 p1224 Mark 1 vv 1-8 p1002
11 <sup>th</sup> December Advent 3	11.00 Holy Communion & Holy Baptism	Isaiah 61 vv 1-11 p748 I Thessalonians 5 vv 16-24 p1188 John 1 vv 6-28 p1063
	5.30 Evening Prayer Jubilee Hall	Philippians 4 vv 4-7 p1181 Matthew 14 vv 1-12 p981
18 <sup>th</sup> December Advent 4	11.00 Holy Communion	II Samuel 7 vv 1-16 p310 Romans 16 vv 25-27 p1143 Luke 1 vv 26-38 p1026
	3.00 Crib Service & Christingle	
25 <sup>th</sup> December Christmas Day	8.00 Holy Communion	Hebrews 1 vv 1-12 p1201 John 1 vv 1-14 p1063
1 <sup>st</sup> January Naming of Jesus	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Numbers 6 vv 22-27p141 Luke 2 vv 15-21 p1028
	11.00 Holy Communion	Numbers 6 vv 22-27p141 Galatians 4 vv 4-7 p1170 Luke 2 vv 15-21 p1028
8 <sup>th</sup> January Baptism of Christ	11.00 Holy Communion	Genesis 1 vv 1-5 p3 Acts 19 vv 1-7 p1115 Mark 1 vv 4-11 p1002
	5.30 Evening Prayer Jubilee Hall	Isaiah 42 vv 1-9 p727 Ephesians 2 vv 1-10 p1174
15 <sup>th</sup> January Epiphany 2	11.00 Stop! Look! Listen! & Holy Communion	I Samuel 3 vv 1-20 p274 Revelation 5 vv 1-10 p1237 John 1 vv 43-51 p1064
22 <sup>nd</sup> January Epiphany 3	11.00 Holy Communion	Genesis 14 vv 17-20 p15 Revelation 19 vv 6-10 p1248 John 2 vv 1-11 p1064
29 <sup>th</sup> January Epiphany 4	11.00 Holy Communion	Deuteronomy 18 vv 15-20 p197 Revelation 12 vv 1-5 p1241 Mark 1 vv 21-28 p1002
5 <sup>th</sup> February Septuagesima	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Numbers 13 vv 1-33 p149 Philippians 2 vv 12-28 p1179
	11.00 Holy Communion	Isaiah 40 vv 21-31 p724 I Corinthians 9 vv 16-23 p1150 Mark 1 vv 29-39 p1003

Wednesday 9.30 Holy Communion at St Michael's		Thursday 9.30 Holy Communion at St John's	
30 <sup>th</sup> November St Andrew	Isaiah 52 vv 7-10 Romans 10 vv 12-18 Matthew 4 vv 18-22	1 <sup>st</sup> December	Isaiah 26 vv 1-6 Matthew 7 vv 21-27
7 <sup>th</sup> December	Isaiah 40 vv 25-31 Matthew 11 vv 28-30	8 <sup>th</sup> December	Isaiah 41 vv 13-20 Matthew 11 vv 11-15
14 <sup>th</sup> December	Isaiah 45 vv 6-25 Luke 7 vv 18-23	15 <sup>th</sup> December	Isaiah 54 vv 1-10 Luke 7 vv 24-30
21 <sup>st</sup> December	Zephaniah 3 vv 14-18 Luke 1 vv 39-45	22 <sup>nd</sup> December	I Samuel 1 vv 24-28 Luke 1 vv 46-56
28 <sup>th</sup> December Holy Innocents	Jeremiah 31 vv 15-17 I Corinthians 1 vv 26-29 Matthew 2 vv 13-18	29 <sup>th</sup> December	I John 2 vv 3-11 Luke 2 vv 22-35
4 <sup>th</sup> January	I John 3 vv 7-10 John 1 vv 35-42	5 <sup>th</sup> January	I John 3 vv 11-21 John 1 vv 43-51
11 <sup>th</sup> January	I Samuel 3 vv 1-20 Mark 1 vv 29-39	12 <sup>th</sup> January	I Samuel 4 vv 1-11 Mark 1 vv 40-45

18 <sup>th</sup> January – Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.	I Samuel 17 vv 32-51 Mark 3 vv 1-6	19 <sup>th</sup> January	I Samuel 18 v6 – 19 v7 Mark 3 vv 7-12
25 <sup>th</sup> January Conversion of St Paul	Acts 9 vv 1-22 Matthew 19 vv 27-30	26 <sup>th</sup> January	II Samuel 7 vv 18-33 Mark 4 vv 21-25

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	6.30 Nine Lessons & Carols	
19 <sup>th</sup> December	7.00 pm Scout & Guide Carol Service	
24 <sup>th</sup> December Christmas Eve	5.00 Christingle, Nativity & Crib Service	
	11.00 Midnight Mass	Isaiah 9 vv 2-7 p693 Titus 2 vv 11-14 p1199 Luke 2 vv 1-20 p1027
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**Diamond Jubilee HM Queen**  
**Monday 6<sup>th</sup> February 6.30pm**  
**Festal Evening Service**  
**Preacher Ven Simon Burton-Jones Archdeacon of Rochester**  
**In the presence of the Deputy Mayor of Medway/**  
**Reception to follow in Church Hall.**

[roger@cuxtonandhall.org.uk](mailto:roger@cuxtonandhall.org.uk) <http://www.cuxtonandhall.org.uk>

Holy Communion daily at 9.30 at St Michael's 25<sup>th</sup> December – 1<sup>st</sup> January except 29<sup>th</sup> December when it is at St John's.

October Church Hall draw : £40 to Dorothy Taylor, drawn by Elizabeth Summers.

St John's Draw: £5 each to Mr Marler (5), Mrs Homewood (36), Mr Brown (52) & Mrs Cheeseman (135) – drawn by Mr Brown

### Christmas Unwrapped

Do you know the Christmas story? Do you think all the people you know know the story? If you log on to <http://www.christmasunwrapped.org.uk/> you can see a three minute video which tells the story beautifully. You can also read the story for yourself.

If you would like to share the story with your friends, you can get stickers to stick on your Christmas card envelopes with the above website address. The stickers are free and can be ordered from the website or by calling 01793 418330 and quoting 79904. It would be great for children.



### Christmas Dinner

Our Christmas dinner in the Church Hall will be on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> December (not 7<sup>th</sup>) at 12.00.



### Christmas Minimarket (Christmas Coffee Morning)

This will take place at 10.00 on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> December at the Church Hall with all the usual attractions plus ???



### From the Rector

I've always shared Christmas with family (for getting on for half my life here at Cuxton Rectory). I remember Christmases at Betsham when I was a small child, opening presents in bed before the days of central heating. Christmases at Wigmore became something of a legend with grandparents, great uncle and great aunt and my sister and I still children. My father was a paradox in this respect. He didn't go in much for company, but he was a great host. I always went home for Christmas in my college days. Even when I was a young curate, my vicar let me go after I had taken the 8.00 Christmas morning. I can remember one morning my sister picking me up from Orpington to drive to Wigmore with a light powdering of snow. Over the years, of course, the family changes. We all get older. Children grow up. People die. Young men marry into the family. Children are born. The dynamic changes from year to year. Christmas decorations, some new, some family tradition. Good food and drink. For many years we had a family tradition of not having turkey, which I've always said is all right but nothing special. Then there was the year we had duck. It's surprising how little meat there is on a duck. We said venison was too dear (deer). I think goose is my favourite, but it has to be cooked just right and you have an awful lot of

### **J Williams Tree Care**

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goose grease to deal with. I like the early dark afternoon with cosy rooms, bright lights indoors and gathering dusk enfolding the garden. Some years Christmas is mild, even sunny. Other years have been bitter. And snow is a wonderful bonus unless you've decided to travel.

This year, of course, will be very different. We will have a family Christmas, but our family is very much changed. It is the true meaning of Christmas that sustains me.

It sometimes seems that, as every year goes by, Christ is that bit more squeezed out of Christmas. We can't have the Holy Family in our public displays because bossy bureaucrats say they might offend non-believers. The domestic Christmas gets busier and busier with the need to visit relatives we no longer live near, the shops re-open boxing day and many people have to go back to work. With so many parties to go to and so many presents to unwrap, Jesus clings on ever more precariously to the annual celebration of His Birthday.

But, for me, it is the great Truth which we sing about in the carols that makes sense of everything. Some carols are just nonsense, though no less fun for that. Some (like *I saw Three Ships*) use imagery that you need to be an expert to decode. But some, which I can remember people singing

when I was a very small child, are really hymns which celebrate the Christian hope beautifully and simply. So, when you sing or hear the carols this year, think about what the words mean. Believe in what they say. Act on what you believe. Roger.

*Let us remember before God all those who rejoice with us, but upon another shore, and in a greater light, that multitude which no man can number, whose hope was in the Word made flesh, and with whom in the Lord Jesus we are for ever one.*

Eric Milner White.



### Church Army

I have been parish representative for Church Army for some years now and I hope you have read some of the leaflets which I leave in both churches. Please feel free to take a copy to read and 'inwardly digest' as my college tutor used to say. I like to support Church Army as they do something to back up the Christian message in a practical way.

Although they have moved their head office from Orpington to the north (it probably allows them to spend their money more productively), nonetheless they still have a presence in Kent. I have heard them speaking to school assemblies when invited, and some of you may have heard Gill Martin speaking about her work in the Darnley Road area of Strood, attached to the Church there. Some call her Sister Gill. She does very good work in the community many of whose members are disadvantaged in some way or another.

Several of you have collecting boxes which you kindly give me every now and then and I count and bank your kind contributions and send off a cheque to Church Army with my own contribution. If, despite these straightened times, you could fill a box with your loose change, I know Church Army is always grateful for donations, large and small. Please let me know if you would like a collecting box or send me a message via Roger. If we get enough of them in use, I could designate a day for their return each year.

The magazines left in the church tell you about the work to which our money contributes but if you would like to read more, you can read their newsletter by logging on to [www.churcharmy.org.uk](http://www.churcharmy.org.uk). Should you wish to sign up for their In Touch newsletter which I find interesting and inspiring, I have been given a slightly longer address, viz. <http://www.churcharmy.org.uk/it>. Please remember them too in your prayers.

Gillian Feraday.

### The Word Revealed

Betty, Yvonne & I sang at the Diocesan Choirs Festival in Rochester Cathedral on Saturday, 30<sup>th</sup> October. The programme this year was from "the Word Revealed" produced to be used nationally in churches and cathedrals to commemorate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the King James Bible. Led by the brilliant Scott Farrell, our repertoire included some hymns we knew, one we didn't (Teach us to love thy scriptures Lord) and one (You shall go out with joy) to a lovely new tune. The anthems were beautiful too and it was wonderful to have all four singing voices to listen to. We practised for over 2 hours in the afternoon, then had a break with a cup of tea in the Cathedral refectory before we all changed into our choir robes and lined up to process through the Cathedral to our seats, ready for the early evening service.

Although we had attended a rehearsal at Platt about a fortnight before and sung through all our musical contributions, it was not until the readings etc. were interspersed with those hymns etc. that we got the whole picture of what the service was about. Several readers related the history of the English Bible and our singing renditions praised God for his Word, guiding us through our lives.

Filling the centre of the Cathedral with so many amazing singing voices was truly a sound worth hearing. I think even the choral director, Scott Farrell, was impressed – though he tried not to tell us until the end!!! Also very worthy of a mention is Charles Andrews, the young genius playing the organ. Our new Bishop joined us for the latter part of the final service. It was definitely one of the most informative and moving services I have ever attended and to be able to take part in that awesome building with so many very talented people was a great privilege. Gillian Feraday.

We hope to use an adapted form of this at our 11.00 service on 27<sup>th</sup> November.

### CHILDREN'S SOCIETY NEWS

This year the Children's Society boxes were opened several weeks earlier than last year so it was an even greater achievement that the total came to a tremendous £370.64. I would like to thank everyone for their contributions and thanks also to Sue Cockburn for helping to count out the coins. We also have two new box holders to add to our numbers so who knows, we may even do better next year! If anyone else would like to join us, please give me a ring and I will provide you with a box. Julia Wells 727424

### Nature Notes October 2011

October by Christina Rossetti

I've brought you nuts and hops;  
And when the leaf drops, why, the walnut drops  
Crack your first nut and light your first fire,  
Roast your first chestnut crisp on the bar;  
Make the logs sparkle, stir the blaze higher,  
Logs are as cheery as sun or as star,

Logs we can find wherever we are.  
Spring one soft day will open the leaves,  
Spring one bright day will lure back the flowers;  
Never fancy my whistling wind grieves  
Never fancy I've tears in my showers;  
Dance, night and days! And dance on, my hours!

The first day of the month is very warm with clear blue skies and golden sunshine and it is hot. I spend time in the garden. A few birds come to feed but they spend more time in the shelter of the trees. The skies remain clear well into the evening. A crescent moon hangs in the sky. The temperatures of 29.9C are the hottest on record for this time of year. The beautiful weather continues, so on 3<sup>rd</sup> we walk with Murphy in Cobtree Manor Park where the trees look beautiful. Some are already losing their leaves, especially poplars the carpets of which we walk through. Dark red berries hang on the rowan tree twigs while horse chestnuts look withered and dry. Buttercups bloom in one grassy area and leaves float to the ground. Along the route home, the trees display colours of red, yellow and gold. I listen to cawing, roosting rooks when darkness has fallen. By 4<sup>th</sup>, temperatures have fallen considerably. The next day, a blustery west wind drives grey clouds across the sky but with the sun shining from the blue, I walk along the road where leaves are falling, mallow blooms and black berries hang on the privet. Elders have lost many of their leaves while fruit has formed on the ivy. Old man's beard straddles the brambles against the churchyard wall. Up in Church Fields I see hips, haws, spindle berries and golden lichen on elder branches. There is a small crop of sloes. I gaze across the river where I see rectangular plots of deep brown earth amongst the golden stubble. Cows and horses graze close to my path. The solitary wych elm displays some bare

twigs. Dandelions, hawkweed, bristly ox tongue and blackberries are to be seen on and below the hedgerows. I walk in Mays Wood where the wind sighs in the trees and the magnificent beech tree at the top of Dean Valley displays Autumn colours. I see three badgers' setts on the ploughed field. I walk along by Purty's Shaw and through Six acre Wood, the churchyard and home. The 6<sup>th</sup> is another blustery day. The next day a cold North West wind drives billowing grey clouds across the sky as I walk with Murphy round the lake at Bluewater. A few flowers bloom - bristly ox tongue, yarrow, clover and lucerne. Trees are losing their leaves. The sun tries to break through but this is just a glimpse. There is some brightness before heavy showers fall. There are beautiful colours in the evening sky - blue, grey, white and pink. The garden has been washed with the rain. A warm, west wind blows on 9<sup>th</sup> and afternoon sunshine lights up the colours of the autumn leaves. Warm west winds continue the following day when I walk with Murphy in Cobtree Manor Park. Falling leaves moving almost like animate beings scurry across the grass. The 14<sup>th</sup> is a beautiful, sunny day with clear, blue skies. I drive to Addington where the autumn leaves glow in the sunlight. The next day brings mist which hangs over, trees, shrubs, grass and flowers and a special silence reigns except for a bird calling from the holly tree. As the sun rises, the mist disperses, the blue sky is revealed and the world awakens. Dew-encrusted spiders' webs lie on the top

of ivy plants. We walk at Bluewater where grassy areas have been cut but verges round the lake have been left for wild life. A few bristly ox tongue, clover and dandelions bloom. When the light fades the following evening I am aware of cold autumn air. Heavy rain falls during the night of 17<sup>th</sup> and the next morning is grey, but as the sun rises the skies become clear blue except for a few wisps of white cloud. After a visit to the vet with Murphy, we take him to Bluewater. The sun is beautiful but a chill wind blows from the North West. A few clover bloom in the grass but the main colours are displayed in the form of leaves and berries. The lake ripples in the wind. The sun shines brightly on 19<sup>th</sup> but a cold wind reminds me that winter is not too far away. A frost is forecast. After two days mild weather returns. The middle part of 23<sup>rd</sup> becomes pleasantly warm but with quite a strong southerly wind. In the afternoon, I walk along Pilgrims Road with the sun in my face to the footpath leading to the Warren. As I climb, I'm aware of beautiful beech trees on the field's slopes. I see clover, creeping buttercups, bristly ox tongue and a single flower of viper's bugloss. I walk through Mays Wood on a leaf-strewn path. So many trees still bear green leaves. In Church Fields, buttercups, mallow, bristly ox tongue and dandelions bloom. Deep red haws and bright pink spindle berries hang on their delicate twigs. I drink in the view across the Medway Valley bathed in golden sunshine. The warm weather

has brought harlequin lady birds which settle in large numbers on the outside walls and in places in the house. Southerly winds on 26<sup>th</sup> drive grey clouds across the sky which is tinged with pink as the sun rises over the hill. The garden trees and those on the embankment are still and there is a single call of a robin. I watch the sun as its beams are golden between the leaves of a sycamore tree, the leaves of which are gradually changing colour. Along the route to Bluewater, golden coloured leaves on maples, and oaks glow in the sunshine. Billowing dark clouds bring a heavy shower as I walk with Murphy, then I am rewarded by the sight of a beautiful rainbow. Later, in the garden, I watch chaffinches, a willow tit and a greenfinch feeding on the nuts and seeds. Heavy rain falls in the evening. There is no sunshine on 27<sup>th</sup> but the autumn leaves light up the scene. The clocks go back an hour in the early hours of 30<sup>th</sup> which means darkness falls earlier. The next day, while waiting at traffic lights to go on to the M20, I see gorse displaying golden flowers. Temperatures are misleading plants for bulbs have pushed through the earth in the pots on the patio. While at Cobtree Manor Park I see leaves drifting down to the ground where there are deep carpets of leaves. Along the route, especially the Halling by-pass, reds, yellows, mauves and golds beautify the scene. There is no sun but the colours bring the brightness. Another month ends.  
Elizabeth Summers.



#### Cuxton WI

Last month it was Scotland Yard and this month it was murder and skulduggery! Forget all those romantic notions you may have about smugglers being benign adventurers who risked life and limb for the good of the community. Nobody benefited from their nefarious ways except perhaps the local inn keeper who sometimes gave them accommodation. There were three notorious gangs in Kent - the north Kents, the Aldingtons and the Hawkhurst gang who were the most bloodthirsty of them all. The Norths were the ones around in our district and they made much use of the creeks and marshes in the lower Thames areas, the Thames being a different river than it is today with lots of small islands and marsh creeks for them to hide in. Not a good time to be living in the villages as some of the gangs were so powerful that nobody was allowed to go out of their homes day or night. Thank goodness we had already fortified ourselves with a good cuppa beforehand.

Our business section had told us of forthcoming events - the Annual Carol Service this year in St John's on Dec 2<sup>nd</sup> at 7.30pm. In March the Annual Council meeting at which we know will be entertained with some excellent speakers. The Home Economics Days in April featuring a talk on Knole House, cup cake bouquets and Ikebana which for the ignorant like me is Japanese flower arranging!

All our in-house clubs are thriving and the next trip out is to London to see the Lion King. We are hoping to do something special to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Anniversary next year probably combined with our annual June party. So, lots to look forward to. I hope this may be of interest for some of you and encourage you to come along and give us a try. Our next meeting is on Thursday Dec 8<sup>th</sup> but this is members only as it is our Christmas celebration. So hurry up and join us for next year. Sheila.

#### Preaching on Honesty

The preacher asked his congregation to read up on Mark 17 because he would be preaching on it the following week. The next Sunday he asked who had read Mark 17 and several hands went up. So he preached on honesty. There are only 16 chapters in Mark!

### From the Registers

#### Baptisms:

16 <sup>th</sup> October	Marie Ella Holdstock	High Street
16 <sup>th</sup> October	Luca Lance Holdstock	High Street
23 <sup>rd</sup> October	Stanley David Rayner	Rochester
30 <sup>th</sup> October	Martha Louise McLaren	Higham

#### Funeral:

11 <sup>th</sup> November	Derek Ronald Goldsmith (72)	Charles Drive
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### Beware of the Con

CONMEN claiming to be engineers working for vacuum cleaner firm Dyson have been calling householders in Medway. The scam starts with a telephone call in which it is said a service is due and offering to carry it out at a special offer price of £20. However the fake engineer will then claim parts need replacing and carry out unnecessary work which could invalidate the manufacturer's warranty. They will also charge more than £100 for the call-out. Dyson says it does not cold call offering servicing or repairs and offers advice on its website. Anyone who has been approached should contact the company on 0800 298 0298 or Consumer Direct on 08454 04 05 06

### GIFT AID

I have recently taken over as covenant secretary and would like to remind readers about the benefits of gift aid. The Gift Aid scheme means that those who are tax payers and make donations to the church- either by regular payments, for example to the collections in church, or by one off payments, e. g. as gifts, can receive an additional 25p. for the parish for every £1 donated. About 25 church members used gift aid for their offerings to the parish last year, and as a result we were able to claim back from the Inland Revenue an additional amount of over £3000 for church funds. This is a significant sum and could be further increased if more church members felt able to join the scheme. If you attend church (or would just like to support us financially), are a taxpayer and do not already "gift aid" perhaps you could do so next year. You could make it a new years resolution!

If you do so ,as well as benefiting the church, it is possible that you could obtain further tax relief for yourself if you are a higher rate taxpayer, or benefit from the Higher Age Allowance in your tax affairs.

One-off contributions can also be gift aided and there are special white envelopes at the back of each church for this purpose.

I set out below the general "rules" for gift aid contributions:

### GIFT AID

If you are a UK taxpayer for every £1 you donate to a registered charity that charity can currently claim back from the Inland Revenue

25p for every £1 donated provided that the giver:-

1. Pays tax equal to the tax claimed back from the Revenue in the tax year by the charity  
and
2. the Giver completes a Gift Aid Declaration form to be held by the charity which allows the charity to make the claim for repayment."

If you have any queries or would like to join the scheme please contact me on 01634 716368 or obtain the form from me or one of the churchwardens. For one off contributions the white envelopes can be found at the back of each church. Jack Payne, Covenant Secretary.

### For Thought

*The conversion of mankind, and the liberation of the world (the ends of much contemporary liturgy, are futile unless the worship of God is their end. Gavin Dunbar.*



### Halling WI

Thought I had better pull my finger out and do the W.I. report as we didn't have one last month. We were a bit thin on the ground, member wise at our October meeting, sickness, foreign travel and boiler problems were to blame, it happens like that sometimes. Margaret got us under way and we still sung Jerusalem with gusto and at least the "birthday girls" were there to get their buttonholes. Minutes were read and signed, I suppose they were right, I wasn't there last month I was in foreign parts. Correspondence consisted of mainly Christmas party invites. Our speaker, was our old friend Barbara Stevens. She is a very lively lady, and what we don't know about Charles Darwin now, can't be worth knowing. He wasn't so bright as he is made out to be even if he did write The Origin of the Species, marrying a cousin! Can you wonder he was always poorly, as were some of his offspring? How can showering in ice cold water cure you of anything, more like give you pneumonia.

Barbara not only told us about Charles (she lives just around the corner from Downe House where Darwin lived) but lots lots more, she really does entertain, but she has been to our W.I. three times now and sometimes I think I have heard that joke before. Barbara judged our competitions, I won "flower of the month" with my "last rose of summer" but they are still blooming in my garden along with the primroses, What's up with the weather? Ann Graves won the ornament competition and we had quite a few this month.

Oh dear, our speakers for November have let us down, so yours truly will step into the breach, somebody once said to me you can talk about anything, the subjects will never run out in my lifetime.

Halling W.I. is hosting the Mailing District W.I. Carol service this year at St John's church on Friday 2 DEC at 7.30 pm. Every one will be welcome, then it will be Christmas and 2012 will soon follow, how time flies when your having fun, and kept busy. Phyllis.



### Max's Tail Piece

We had an extra walk on Tuesday evening. Master took me to the Jubilee Hall to the meeting about closing Halling Fire Station. There were so many people there that we had to stand at the back with a lot of others. Three representatives of the Kent & Medway Fire and Rescue Service all gave what was much the same talk, explaining that there are not many fires in Halling, there isn't much risk of fire in Halling, that the Halling fire engine is often called to fires in other places and that engines from other fire stations can easily reach Halling. So, they said, we don't need a fire station in Halling. A representative from the Fire Brigades Union said all this needed to be thought about again because of all the new housing going up both sides of the river. Your elected representatives, your member of parliament and ward councillor were on your side, but Master cynically believes that these decisions are really made behind the scenes by officials and bureaucrats and that elected representatives don't get much say. "Don't forget," he said to me, "Medway officers published the council's decision on our TPO the day before the committee meeting at which elected councillors got the chance to vote on it!" He thinks that officials have taken 2 ½ years deciding what they want to do and are only holding the public consultation when they think it's too late for the plan to be changed. They're sure they're right and don't need to listen to public opinion. Master reminded me that we've heard on the radio these last few months about fire service bureaucrats wasting millions on new computerised control centres which are not now going to be used and new fire engines in some parts of the country which have turned out to be unusable. One new design of fire engine has even caught fire itself.

Lots of people had questions, but they all got the same answer. The people on the platform just repeated the statistics they'd already quoted. So at about 8.30, Master said to me, "We're going home. We're not going to learn anything more by staying. It's not as if there was going to be a vote or anything. And we've got to walk back to Cuxton in time for supper and bed!" (He's never very patient at meetings.)

Me being only a dog, it struck me as odd that there wasn't going to be a vote. Britain is supposed to be a democracy. These officials are public servants. Your taxes are paying for the fire service, including their wages. Shouldn't they be asking you what kind of fire service you want rather than telling you what you are going to get. Perhaps I'm just being naïve.

Max, the Rectory Spaniel.