

Services at St Michael & All Angels Cuxton			
4 th June Pentecost	9.30 Family Communion	Acts 2 vv 1-21 p1093 John 20 vv 19-23 p1089	
11 th June Trinity Sunday	9.30 Holy Communion	Isaiah 40 vv 12-31 p724 II Corinthians 13 vv 11-14 p1167 Matthew 28 vv 16-20 p1001	
18 th June Trinity 1	8.00 Holy Communion	Epistle & Gospel BCP	
	9.30 Holy Communion	Exodus 19 vv 1-8 p76 Romans 5 vv 1-8 p1132 Matthew 9 v35 – 10 v8 (or 23) p974	
25 th June Trinity 2	9.30 Holy Communion	Jeremiah 20 vv 7-13 p779 Romans 6 vv 1-13 p1132 Matthew 10 vv 24-39 p975	
Services at St John the Baptist Halling & the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling			
4 th June Pentecost	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Acts 2 vv 1-21 p1093 John 7 vv 37-39 p1072	
	11.00 Holy Communion	Numbers 11 vv 24-30 p148 Acts 2 vv 1-21 p1093 I Corinthians 12 vv 1-13 p1153 John 20 vv 19-23 p1089	
11 th June Trinity Sunday	11.00 Holy Communion	Isaiah 40 vv 12-31 p724 II Corinthians 13 vv 11-14 p1167 Matthew 28 vv 16-20 p1001	
	5.30 Evening Prayer Jubilee Hall	Isaiah 6 vv 1-8 p690 John 16 vv 5-15 p1084	
18 th June Trinity 1	11.00 Holy Communion	Exodus 19 vv 1-8 p76 Romans 5 vv 1-8 p1132 Matthew 9 v35 – 10 v8 (or 23) p974	
Saturday 24 th June Nativity of S John the Baptist	9.30 Holy Communion	Isaiah 40 vv 1-11 p723 Galatians 3 vv 23-29 p1170 Luke 1 vv 57-80 p1027	
25 th June Trinity 2	11.00 Holy Communion	Jeremiah 20 vv 7-13 p779 Romans 6 vv 1-13 p1132 Matthew 10 vv 24-39 p975	
Holy Communion at St Michael's Wednesdays at 9.30		Holy Communion at St John's Thursdays at 9.30	
7 th June	I Peter 1 vv 18-25 Mark 12 vv 18-27	8 th June	I Peter 2 vv 2-12 Mark 12 vv 28-34
14 th June	II Corinthians 3 vv 4-11 Matthew 5 vv 17-19	15 th June Corpus Christi	Genesis 14 vv 18-20 John 6 vv 51-58
21 st June	II Corinthians 9 vv 6-11 Matthew 6 vv 1-18	22 nd June S Alban	I Corinthians 11 vv 1-11 Matthew 6 vv 7-15
28 th June S Irenaeus, Ember Day	Genesis 15 vv 1-18 Matthew 7 vv 15-20	29 th June S Peter	Acts 12 vv 1-11 Matthew 16 vv 13-19

Copy Date July Magazine: 9th June 8.30 am Rectory.

Quotation

"Acceptance of the Christian brotherhood, with all its abundance of joy, brings with it far more than this. It brings intellectual and moral awakening that can be seen and noted in a "visible change": it brings, with the knowledge of the fatherhood of God, a sense of the equality of man, the sacredness of life and the dignity of work, and, most of all, the whole life is raised by the Christian ideal of purity. A hard struggle, very many failures and falls, but quite unquestionably a gain on the whole field, is the acquisition, not of civilisation, but of Christianity" Hutton W.H. (1903) The influence of Christianity upon the national character: Illustrated by the lives and legends of the English saints. London: Wells Gardner, Darton & Co. Ltd.

Joke

A boy complained that every day he was covered in cream and chocolate sauce and people kept putting cherries on his head. It's tough being brought up in the gateau!



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Do You Live to Work or Work
to Live?
OR

Why is Sunday the Strongest
Day?

I've always enjoyed my food and, when I was a child, I was sometimes asked by an older lady with a very much more modest appetite than mine whether I lived to eat or ate to live. I think I can honestly claim to come into the second category, but I see the temptation to lapse into the first – so long as we're talking about proper food, rather than salad.

There has been quite a lot of discussion lately about whether parents should be fined for taking their children out of school in term time in order to take them on holiday or perhaps to family gatherings such as weddings or funerals taking place abroad. The discussion has concentrated on whether tour companies are behaving badly in charging so much more for holidays when schools are on vacation, whether it harms the education of the child concerned to miss school time, and whether unauthorised absences put unfair pressure

on teachers to help absentees to catch up, thereby possibly damaging the whole class.

My focus will be on the second of these questions. Do unauthorised absences damage the education of the children concerned? To a large extent, that depends on what you mean by education. It is certainly true that children who have missed out on lessons are likely to do worse in examinations than children who attend school regularly. But are examinations what education is about?

You go to school. You pass your exams. You get a good job. You make plenty of money. You buy lots of stuff. You die. You can't take it with you. More scripturally, *We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out.* Children go to school younger and younger. Nurseries are increasingly expected to be part of the education process. Primary school children get homework. The leaving age is put back to eighteen. There are moves to lengthen the school day with breakfast clubs at the beginning and supervised after school activities at the end. Some schools even want to cut out breaks. Things like music, art and drama, not to mention religious

education, are squeezed in order to concentrate on the basics, the subjects which prepare youngsters for the job market.

We're told that our children and teenagers are among the most prone to depression in the developed world.

Now, don't misunderstand me. We have to work in order to live. We do need to be taught the skills we require for work. But do we live to work or do we work to live? Are our children factory fodder, or office fodder or call centre fodder? Or is there more to life than earning a living?

Education includes job training. We do need jobs. Education is, however, much more than job training. Education is about fitting us to fulfil our potential as human beings. If what passes for education has only, or even mainly, the jobs market in view, it is letting pupils and students down very badly.

What do we live for if you agree with me that we don't live just for the sake of paid employment? My answer would be three closely related ideas.

As individuals, we seek personal fulfilment. We ought to have fun. We ought to be able to achieve what are to us worthwhile goals or at least to have the opportunity to try to achieve these goals. We should have the freedom to pursue our own personal interests, to study the things we care about, to participate in sport, for enjoyment not just because it's good for us. We should have personal integrity. We should be at peace with ourselves.

Secondly (not in order of priority), we ought to have good relationships with other people. We should have time to spend with our families and

friends, time to enjoy ourselves together, time to experience things together and to learn together. We should have time to care for one another in good times and bad. We should have time for love – not only for romance (though that is important) – but also for our parents and children and brothers and sisters and for good friends. Friendships matter so much more than business contacts.

Thirdly (and most importantly), we need to know God. Everything else falls into place if and when we know God. Faith is His gift to us, but we need to use it. "Use it or lose it," they say. We need the time and space for prayer and for regular worship and for reading the Bible. We need to be nourished by the Sacraments and the fellowship of the Christian congregation. To know God is to have eternal life. Jesus came to bring us life in all its fulness.

We don't live in order to earn money and to acquire stuff. We only truly live in relationship with God in Jesus Christ and, if we are right with God, we are right with other people in all those vital human relationships, and we are right with ourselves in the only Way we can be. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

According to the silly joke, Sunday is the strongest day because all the rest are week (or weak) days, but the reality is that Sunday is the strongest day because the time we spend with God, the time we spend with the people we love and the time we spend resting and recreating ourselves does far more to make us stronger and better people than any amount of money or stuff. Religious Education has been called the fourth "R" (after reading, riting and rithmetic) but it's really the first, the one "R" on which all the rest depend. Roger.

Psalm 16: Preserve me, O God : for in thee have I put my trust. O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord : Thou art my God, my goods are nothing unto thee. All my delight is upon the saints, that are in the earth : and upon such as excel in virtue. But they that run after another god : shall have great trouble. Their drink-offerings of blood will I not offer : neither make mention of their names within my lips. The Lord himself is the portion of mine inheritance, and of my cup : thou shalt maintain my lot. The lot is fallen unto me in a fair ground : yea, I have a goodly heritage. I will thank the Lord for giving me warning : my reins also chasten me in the night-season. I have set God always before me : for he is on my right hand, therefore I shall not fall. Wherefore my heart was glad, and my glory rejoiced : my flesh also shall rest in hope. For why? thou shalt not leave my soul in hell : neither shalt thou suffer thy Holy One to see corruption. Thou shalt shew me the path of life; in thy presence is the fulness of joy : and at thy right hand there is pleasure for evermore.

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24th June - Our Patronal Festival

What do you do to celebrate a patronal festival. The first Halling Fun Day and several subsequent ones were held on 24th June or the nearest Saturday to celebrate the birthday of St John the Baptist. When it falls on a Sunday, we commemorate him at our normal service. Other years, weekday evenings, we've invited the bishop and celebrated with a Confirmation service. Probably, our church was dedicated to S John the Baptist because it is near the river and, for over a thousand years, John has been the patron saint of Halling. This year his birthday is a Saturday and we'll hold a sung celebration of Holy Communion at 9.30 am. I don't know how many people will come on a Saturday, but it's an important day in the life of our community and Church isn't only for Sundays. So we'll have to see. Maybe some people who don't normally come on Sundays will join us for this one off special occasion. I'd love to see you there.

A visiting team of bell ringers will ring in celebration at 11.45 am till about 12.15.

And Cuxton

We had been hoping that the bishop would come on 29th September for Cuxton's Patronal Festival this year and lead a Confirmation service. Unfortunately, this will not prove possible after all. We are hoping he may come on some other day in the Autumn. If not, we'll take any confirmation candidates to another parish. Please ask me if you are thinking of confirmation this year. Roger.

Forthcoming Attractions

10th June: Christian Aid Walk. Contact Rector for details.

1st July 6.00 pm: Barbecue at Rectory.

Annual Barbecue

1st July

Rectory Grounds

From 6.30 pm tickets £7.00.

Flora and Fauna

The first cuckoo I heard this year was on St Mark's Day (25th April). I was in the woods early in the morning, up behind Court Farm. The bluebells have been amazing once again this year, with great swathes of them covering the woodland floor, and also quite a few of them in gardens and the churchyards where you also find much smaller numbers of white and even pink bluebells. The anemones have lasted very well. Stitchwort has been observed. White has also been well represented by wild garlic, which you can recognise by the aroma. I saw a few specimens of pink milkmaid once again this year. The fields are yellow with rape. There are nightingales very close to the new houses where the paint factory used to be. Woodpeckers have been very much in evidence, though heard much more often than seen. There are quite a lot of badgers around, though I have hardly ever seen a fox since I have had Tommy. There are white dead nettles and the yellow ones called archangel. There are plenty of young stingers coming along too. They are an excellent food source for caterpillars. So don't destroy them. They are also good for human beings to cook and eat (like spinach) when they are young, provided you wear gloves to pick them. Then there is the froth of young cow parsley and its relatives coming out beside the paths. I wouldn't try eating this, however, as it is the same family as hemlock. Pure white may blossom appeared on the hawthorns from April onwards. The red or pink is usually slightly later and the same seems to apply to white and red horse chestnut candles, which make the conker the most spectacular of English trees at this time of year. I wonder if my bonsai conker tree will ever have flowers on it, or even miniature conkers? Meanwhile, the gap in the yellow frequencies of the spectrum, left by the disappearance of the celandines' unusually brave show this year, has been more than amply filled by a striking display of dandelions and carpets of golden buttercups in the meadows. In the gardens, there is a plethora of apple blossom, presaging a good crop unless this very cold unseasonable weather kills off the flowers before they are pollinated. This is a wonderful time of year, but aren't they all? Roger.

Quiz Night

St Mary's Church Burham ME1 3XY: 7.30 pm 10th June.

Entry £2.00. Teams up to 6. Please bring own food and drink. Proceeds for the maintenance of this closed church. Tickets from Philip Badman 247314, pbadman11@gmail.com or find on Facebook.

Easter

Once again, thanks to all those who contributed so much to our Lent and Easter. Saints Alive put on a presentation for Mothering Sunday about how the Mothers' Union came into being to support Christian family life. They also created once again a beautiful Easter garden for St Michael's. There were lovely flowers in both churches and choirs leading us in the wonderful Easter music. Our home team rang the bells for St Michael's on Easter Day and we anticipated a bit at St John's. A peal was rung on Holy Saturday, not usually done until the vigil is over, but this was the fiftieth anniversary of the first peal the conductor had ever rung which had also been at Halling. So it was special for him and special for us too. Several people commented on how good it was to hear the bells rung like that. The heroes who simply do the cleaning and maintenance tend to unsung. So here we thank them too for their efforts throughout the year.

Why Do We Have Four Readings in the Easter Season?

We have to have a Gospel reading at Holy Communion. Jesus is the Word of God. The four gospels proclaim Who He is, what He has done and what He teaches. He is also the Bread of Life Who feeds us in the service of Holy Communion. Word and Sacrament, two of the most important means of grace by which God communicates Himself to us and gives us the gift of everlasting life and supplies us with everything we need for our life on earth. There is always also at least one other reading: from the Old Testament, one of the epistles, the Book of Acts or the Revelation of St John the Divine. We usually have an Old Testament reading and a New Testament reading in addition to the Gospel. You can't neglect the Old Testament. It sets out the eternal Truth in its basic form. The New Testament depends on the Old Testament for its more complete revelation of the Truth of God in the Word of God made flesh in Jesus Christ. At Easter, we are mandated to read from Acts. In the Book of Acts, the Risen Christ sends His Holy Spirit on His Church. It is through the Holy Spirit that we know God and are enabled to do God's work in the world. You can't do without the Holy Spirit. We are also offered readings from the epistles or Revelation proclaiming the glorious Easter truth. These are too wonderful for me to omit. Hence, four readings through Easter.

From the Registers

Baptisms:

30 th April	Harry West	Snodland
30 th April	Ella Adams	Snodland
7 th May	Sarah Louise Gill	Greenhithe
7 th May	Lucy Victoria Gill	Caterham

Funeral:

19 th April	Betty May Hodkin (96)	Meadow Crescent
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Updates on Local History

We have now received information that the dentist at Halling in the 1940s was Mr Allen. His premises were on the corner of Marsh Road and the High Street. Apparently, you could observe him at work from the branches of a neighbouring cherry tree if perhaps you were a schoolboy who thought he'd like to see his headmistress undergo an extraction.

The "Rose and Crown" on the corner of Cemetery Road and the High Street used to stage boxing matches.

Tommy referred to Dickens' Swiss Chalet opposite Gad's Hill Place where the famous novelist used to write and which is now at Rochester, but one of our readers pointed out that it was also for a time in the grounds of Cobham Hall where some parishioners may remember having seen it.

Any other memories we could publish? We still have copies of Mrs Bennet's "Cuxton Remembered" and the centenary history of Halling School on sale at £1. Apply to Rector. In church there are histories of both churches and these are also available on our parish web page.

St John's Restoration Fund: £5 each to Mrs Mitchell (63), Mrs Shaw (102), Miss Crowhurst (158) & Mrs Brunger (159) – drawn by Mr Bogg.

St Michael's Draw: £10 to Mr Silverthorn (1), £5 each to Mrs Booth (35) & Mr MacDonald (26)

Defibrillators Save Lives

A cardiac arrest is when someone's heart suddenly stops beating. Performing cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) may save the person's life and, the sooner it is administered, the more chance it will be successful. It would be good if more people were routinely trained in CPR so that anyone at the scene of a cardiac arrest would know what to do.

Better still, where available, is a defibrillator. This is an electronic device which is capable of reacting to the patient's heart condition and, where appropriate, administer a suitable electric shock to get it going again. Public access defibrillators can be used by any member of the public and are located at places to which the public has access. You don't need any training to use one in an emergency.

Cuxton Parish Council are investigating the possibility of having a public access defibrillator in the village.

An Impossible Question

2. How many hours do you estimate all church volunteers contribute to the church each week (this includes lay ministry hours)? 

Every year, the churchwardens are asked certain questions at the visitation when they are sworn in for the following year. They are all quite hard except number one, What is the name of your parish? But even that isn't as straightforward as it looks. We were only supposed to submit one return for the parish, but, in fact, we submitted two – one for Halling and one for Cuxton. We exist in a kind of limbo between the legal reality that we are one parish and the practical reality that we are two churches. All the questions required

interpretation, and, dare I say it, guesswork, but this one, number two, seems to me to be quite impossible to answer. Who are our volunteers? What is the church? What counts as a contribution to the church?

I don't suppose any one of us knows the full extent of all the people and all the things they do to keep our churches going and to further the work of the church in the world. I know that our buildings are kept in good order and cleaned and nicely decorated with flowers. I don't know all the people who do these jobs. Some of them don't come to church. I've no idea how many hours how many people contribute and neither have the wardens. Christians don't advertise their good works. (Matthew 6). If you lead a service, sing in the choir or ring the bells, you can't help other people knowing, but, if you try to help somebody in trouble or if you give generously to good causes, you don't talk about it and it would be obtrusive if anyone in authority were to question you about it. Many, many people pray. For all we know, prayer is the greatest contribution we make to our church, but, by and large, we don't know about other people's prayers. Anyway, Matthew 6 again, it's not the amount of prayers you say that matters, not so much the time you spend on it, as your faith in the eternal God. Faith is constant and that is why S Paul can talk about praying constantly. We don't pray at an hourly rate in order to earn God's favour for ourselves, for the church or for other people. As Christians, we live lives of prayer. We offer Him *our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice*. We walk with Him every hour of every day in a constant relationship of prayer and Christian service.

What is meant by our volunteers? Generally speaking, we think of voluntary work as unpaid work, but that really isn't good enough. People paid by the church generally aren't paid much. They often work longer hours than they're paid for and many of them would do the same work anyway even if they weren't paid. I know I would. The true meaning of working voluntarily is working willingly. There is no reason why you shouldn't do willingly the work you are paid for. The opposite of voluntary work is not paid work; it's slavery.

There is a paradox about what we do as Christians. We live our Christian lives willingly and yet we cannot help ourselves. The love of Christ constrains us. So paid church workers should be counted as voluntary workers and that includes the rector!

But what is church work? You'd have to ask first, what is the church? If we think of the church as a human institution, church work is working for or on behalf of that institution. It's polishing the brass or taking part in an act of witness or visiting the sick on behalf of the church. But that's far too narrow a definition. The church is the Body of Christ. Jesus says that whatever we do to other people, it's like doing it to Him (Matthew 25). We're working for Jesus, we're working for the church, whenever we perform an act of kindness. We don't have to be doing it officially as an authorised minister or under the guidance of the rector or because the PCC has taken an initiative. Whatever we do in our lives – at church, at home, at work, at school, on the golf course or the football field – we are serving the Lord Jesus. If we are Christians we are members of the church, and the church's task is to do the work which God the Father gave to Jesus – to bring in His Kingdom of justice, mercy and peace, nothing less than the redemption of the cosmos. S Paul says *And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him*. (Colossians 3¹⁷).

It isn't possible to quantify the work we do for the church or for Jesus, partly because our devotion to Him is unlimited, and also because the church mustn't make the mistake that so many human institutions make, which is to think that what can't be counted doesn't count. That's as stupid as thinking that value is the same thing as price. See my editorial on working to live rather than living to work.

We should never forget that what we do to earn our living is part of our Christian service. We are working for Jesus and for the church and for the world if we are pursuing a worthwhile career. You don't have to be a vicar or a nurse to serve God in your daily work. Any occupation which serves the community is also serving God. That's why we should pray for guidance from God when we are job seeking. It also means that some ways of earning a living are not open to Christians – porn actor, gangster, mercenary probably.

On the basis of Colossians 3¹⁷ and Christian teaching generally, it also follows that we have to do our daily work to the highest ethical standards. That might cause problems for us if we work for financial organisations or energy companies which exploit the ignorance, naivety, loyalty or sheer niceness of their customers in order to make unfair profits or if we are in advertising or public relations or politics and we are required to keep from telling the public the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. We might have to balance our duty to earn a living and support a family against our duty to treat the general public honestly and fairly.

Caring for our family and friends is also part of our Christian work, our contribution to the church and to God's work in the world. The woman who devotes her entire life to bringing up her four children and has no time or energy left for anything else is no less contributing to the church and to God's work than is the woman whose children have grown up and left home and who now has the time to sit on PCC and any number of committees. The old man who tidies up his frail neighbour's garden is no less contributing to the church than the old man who tidies up the churchyard.

To put it briefly, what I am saying is that, for Christian people, our whole lives are contributing to the church. We seek to serve God in everything we do. I would say that an essential part of that whole life commitment is to meet up with other Christians weekly for worship, for Holy Communion, for common prayer, for fellowship, for sharing the Word of God. Your Christian service might well include becoming a minister, sweeping up the carpets, sitting on committees, running the Sunday School or bible class, but it might not. Your Christian service might be the voluntary work you do in the community – guide leader, councillor, keeping the footpaths open. It might be the work you are paid for. It might be the way you look after your family. It could be the way you treat your neighbours or your colleagues. It might be telling people why you believe in Jesus. It might be fetching neighbours' shopping because they can't get out. It might be praying in the secrecy of your own room.

Your contribution isn't measurable. If you live up to your calling as a Christian, it's unlimited and unimaginably diverse. *And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.*

Teach me, my God and King,
in all things thee to see,
and what I do in anything
to do it as for thee.

A man that looks on glass,
on it may stay his eye;
or if he pleaseth, through it pass,
and then the heaven espy.

Roger.

All may of thee partake;
nothing can be so mean,
which with this tincture, "for thy
sake,"
will not grow bright and clean.

A servant with this clause
makes drudgery divine:
who sweeps a room, as for thy

laws,
makes that and the action fine.

This is the famous stone
that turneth all to gold;
for that which God doth touch
and own
cannot for less be told.



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Christian Aid

The amount raised by the Christian Aid bring and buy on 3rd May was £117.85. Don't forget the Christian Aid walk on 10th June. Join in (Upnor to Hoo and back) or sponsor somebody who is taking part.

If you have an uncollected Christian Aid envelope, you can bring it to church and put it in the collection or post it to 35-41 Lower Marsh, Lambeth, London SE1 7RL or log on to caweek.org.

An Edwardian Misunderstanding.

The lady of the house wanted to pay a small sum of money to a tradesman. So she called through to the kitchen, "Have you any coppers in there".

The maid replied, "Only, three miss, and one's my brother and the other two are my cousins.



CUXTON VOICE

If you weren't at the social club on April 22nd, you missed a great night out. The hall was packed when the Fresh Expressions of Church group presented a singing contest based on "The Voice" TV show, titled "Cuxton Voice" and compered by Robin Bourner. Medway's local singing star, Jamie Johnson, who was a recent finalist on the TV show, opened the evening with a range of his songs and a bird's eye view of his experiences of appearing on the TV competition.

Then each of the contestants sang for us and we were amazed at the high standard of talent. There was a good variety of genres displayed and 2 contestants accompanied themselves on the guitar. The age range was from 80 years to 17.

During the interval, Rob and the contestants entertained the audience with a lively and enjoyable jam session.

Our panel of judges, Sarah Baker, Jenny Beaney and Ray Maisey, had a hard task choosing between such talented singers, but selected Katie McKay as the winner. Her voice was outstandingly powerful and she sang with great feeling. She delighted us with her renditions of songs from musicals. She is now 19 years old and we could all see a bright future for her on the stage. The Rev. Roger Knight presented her with a trophy representing a golden mic and a cheque.

The silver mic went to Zak Warren, who gigs locally with his guitar and voice. He is still a student at Rochester Math School and at 17 already has a huge personality. Apparently, he performed at the Rochester Castle Gardens Youth Concert at the age of 13.

At the last moment before our show, we discovered that we clashed with a wedding party involving prominent members of the social club. However, the club president, Pete Murray, gamely stood by his promise to take part and gave a moving performance before setting off for the party.

We are grateful to the club for joining with us in presenting the show, which was one of the first events held in their hall after its recent impressive refurbishment. The judges also deserve a huge thank you for taking on an unenviable task so professionally, but above all our thanks go to all the contestants and their supporters, who gave us an evening to remember.

Elizabeth Maisey.

The Power of Swearing

If you were an actor playing the part of a murderer or a thief or an adulterer, you would just have to pretend to do those terrible things. You'd be in serious trouble if you actually did them! If, however, you were playing the part of someone who swears or blasphemes, you would actually have to swear or blaspheme on stage. That surely presents any would be actor with a moral dilemma if he or she is offered a part in a play which includes bad language or blasphemy. It is also morally questionable to take a part in a play in which other characters use bad language if even if yours doesn't. You can't really profit by other people doing what you wouldn't do yourself.

But why are certain words regarded as taboo? A recent study showed that if people swear, they can put up with more pain than if they don't and, if they swear, they can actually do things they're not strong enough to do if their speech is pure. Why do these words have power?

Very often swear words only mean the same thing as other words which we can use in polite society. Remember the story about the gardener interrupting a ladies' tea party in the Big House to ask if it is time to put manure on the rhubarb. The vicar's wife asks the lady of the house, "Can't you tell him to call it fertiliser?" To which the lady of the house replies, "It's taken me twenty years to get him to call it manure."

Even so, some people still die of diseases because they can't bring themselves to tell their doctors about embarrassing symptoms or something going wrong with unmentionable parts of the body. It is rather silly if we do that. On the other hand, a doctor might sometimes have to use a vulgar word or a euphemism rather than the proper medical term in order for the patient to understand.

What counts as swear word changes over time. We no longer say words that were quite acceptable not so very long ago, but some words we use to frown upon are now used relatively freely. I was quite surprised to hear the prime minister use a word I would not have expected to pass the lips of a vicar's daughter.

Context also matters. A swear word in a joke is much less offensive than if it is used deliberately abusively. If you swear at your boss, you might be in trouble. If you swear at someone lower down the scale than you are, you are a bully. For teenagers, swearing might be an act of self-assertion or rebellion against parents and teachers. Swearing is part of bonding in some social groups. I remember a woman being astonished at the mild language of a group of clergymen watching a football match! As with other aspects of language, like accent, grammar and vocabulary, swearing or not swearing is a marker of where you belong, which community you are a member of, or came from, or aspire to belong to.

Yet, whatever power swearing has, seems to derive from the fact that it is at least naughty. It is at least potentially offensive to others. We feel slightly guilty or perhaps defiant when we swear. So, I can't help feeling that is right to try to avoid swearing ourselves, while not judging others who see things differently. There is aggression in swearing and society would be better off, I think, without it. Roger.



Tommy's Talking Points

The days are getting longer and the weather is getting warmer and life is lots of fun. I nearly caught a squirrel the other day. I chased it right into the kitchen, but Master chased us both out again and made me leave it alone when I nearly had it on the lawn.

There is more for Master to do in the garden and I help him. When he hoes up the weeds, he throws them into a bucket and I pull them out again and scatter them round the garden for him. When he hand weeds, I try to grab the same weed in my mouth and we tussle for it. Sometimes, I accidentally bite the hand that feeds me. He's very patient till I get bored with the gardening and wander off round the garden. He doesn't quite trust me to stay in the garden and tells me that, if I don't stay where he can see me, he'll make me go inside. I don't really believe him unless he gets really cross, because I know he loves me too much and likes to have me with him and to see me free and enjoying myself. Sometimes I get down to the bottom wall and enjoy being fussed over by our neighbours and random passers by. I got painted green when our neighbour's fence was painted.

Speaking of freedom, I'm afraid I do still sometimes get too excited in the woods and run off after friendly people, friendly dogs and sometimes for reasons Master can't discern at all. You humans just don't respond to exciting scents. If you did, Master and I might spend more time in the woods when he's got some free time, rather than him watching TV or reading and expecting me to lie still. He gets worried when he can't find me and I know I shouldn't do it really. I can't even pretend to be deaf when I don't respond to him calling me. He knows I can hear the rustle of the biscuit box from miles away.

He does, however, think freedom is important and that implies trust and trust implies a readiness to take the risk of being disappointed. He was disgusted to read in the "Times" that the UK is the second worst country (after Finland) in the EU for nanny state over regulation of our private lives. His online response was, "It's quality of life that counts, not quantity. If I'm forced to eat only salad, drink only water, keep my shirt on in the sun and wear a helmet when I ride my bike I might as well be dead." He got four recommendations!

Seriously though, Master says, freedom must be pretty valuable on the cosmic scale. The fact that God gave us freedom is the best answer to the question, how can God be both all powerful and infinitely good, given that there is so much evil in the world? God could have made us robots who keep the Ten Commandments automatically without any choice in the matter. But He didn't; He made us free to choose. We have abused that freedom to terrible effect, as He must have foreseen. Freedom must be very valuable if this sinful world is the price God is prepared to pay for giving us it. The Summary of the Law is love. That's what God wants of us – that we should be people of love. Love can't be compelled. Robots can't love. Only free beings can love. If we love we keep the Ten Commandments freely for the right reason.

So I'm still free to run in the woods. One man who runs when we do before most people get up said he likes the thought that Master is out there too in case he has an accident. I think he means for first aid rather than for the last rites! Tommy, the Rectory Spaniel.