

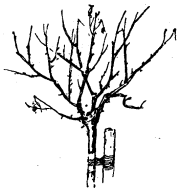
Services at St Michael and All Angels Cuxton		
March 6 th Quinquagesima	9.30 Family Communion	Exodus 24 vv 12-18 p82 II Peter 1 vv 16—21 p1222 Matthew 17 vv 1-9 p984
March 9 th Ash Wednesday	7.30pm Holy Communion	Joel 2 vv 1-17 p912 Matthew 6 vv 1-21 p970
March 13 th Lent 1	9.30 Holy Communion	Genesis 2 v15 – 3 v7 p4 Romans 5 vv 12-19 p1132 Matthew 4 vv 1-11 p967
March 20 th Lent 2	8.00 Holy Communion	Epistle & Gospel BCP
	9.30 Holy Communion	Genesis 12 vv 1-4a p13 Romans 4 vv 1-17 p1131 John 3 vv 1-17 p1065
March 27 th Lent 3	9.30 Holy Communion	Exodus 17 vv 1-7 p75 Romans 5 vv 1-11 p1132 John 4 vv 4-42 p1066
April 3 rd Mothering Sunday	9.30 Family Communion	I Samuel 16 vv 1-13 p287 Ephesians 5 vv 8-14 p1176 John 9 vv 1-41 p1075
Services at St John the Baptist Halling & the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling.		
March 6 th Quinquagesima	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	II Kings 2 vv 1-12 p369 Matthew 17 vv 1-23 p984
	11.00 Holy Communion & Holy Baptism	Exodus 24 vv 12-18 p82 II Peter 1 vv 16—21 p1222 Matthew 17 vv 1-9 p984
March 9 th Ash Wednesday	9.30 am Holy Communion	II Corinthians 5 v20 – 6 v10 p1161 John 8 vv 1-11 p1073
March 13 th Lent 1	11.00 Holy Communion	Genesis 2 v15 – 3 v7 p4 Romans 5 vv 12-19 p1132 Matthew 4 vv 1-11 p967
	5.30 Evening Prayer Jubilee Hall	Deuteronomy 6 vv 1-25 p185 Luke 15 vv 1-10 p1048
March 20 th Lent 2	11.00 Stop! Look! Listen! & Holy Communion	Genesis 12 vv 1-4a p13 Romans 4 vv 1-17 p1131 John 3 vv 1-17 p1065
March 27 th Lent 3	11.00 Holy Communion	Exodus 17 vv 1-7 p75 Romans 5 vv 1-11 p1132 John 4 vv 4-42 p1066
April 3 rd Mothering Sunday	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	James 5 vv 1-20 p1216 John 3 vv 14-21 p1066
	11.00 Family Communion	I Samuel 16 vv 1-13 p287 Ephesians 5 vv 8-14 p1176 John 9 vv 1-41 p1075

roger@cuxtonandhalling.org.uk <http://www.cuxtonandhalling.org.uk>

On Thursday afternoons we have a **Mother & Toddler** service at Halling at 2.00 and at Cuxton on the last Wednesday of each month also at 2.00. **Saints Alive!** (formerly Sunday School) is at Cuxton Church Hall at 9.30 (not first Sundays or school holidays). **After School Club**, Thursdays @ St John's.

Copy Date April Magazine: 11th March 8.30 am Rectory.

9.30 Holy Communion St Michael's		9.30 Holy Communion St John's	
Wednesday 2 nd March	James 4 vv 13-17 Mark 10 vv 32-45	Thursday 3 rd March	James 5 vv 1-6 Mark 10 vv 46-52
Thursday 10th March	Deuteronomy 30 vv 15-20 Luke 9 vv 22-25	Ash Wednesday 9th March	II Corinthians 5 v20 – 6 v10 p1161 John 8 vv 1-11 p1073
Wednesday 16 th March Ember Day	Jonah 3 vv 1-10 Luke 11 vv 29-32	Thursday 17 th March St Patrick	Isaiah 55 vv 6-9 Matthew 7 vv 7-12
Wednesday 23 rd March	Jeremiah 18 vv 18-20 Matthew 20 vv 17-28	Thursday 24 th March	Jeremiah 17 vv 5-10 Luke 16 vv 19-31
Wednesday 30 th March	Deuteronomy 4 vv 1-9 Matthew 5 vv 17-19	Thursday 31 st March	Jeremiah 7 vv 23-28 Luke 11 vv 14-23



By the Grace of God I Am What I
Am
(I Corinthians 15 v10)

I have been asked to talk on the subject of vocation, more particularly on my calling to the priesthood. It is my conviction that all Christians are called. Jesus chose you and called you. Every one of you, every baptised person, has a specific vocation – the good works which God has called you to walk in. This is my conviction, but it is not mine alone. It is a very biblical doctrine. It is what Jesus says and what St Paul teaches and it is taken up and echoed in our prayer books. *You have not chosen me*, says Jesus; *I have chosen you*. St Paul describes you and me, all Christians, as God's *workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained, that we should walk in them*. He writes to Christians when he is himself in prison for the faith, *I therefore the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called*.

On the 25th March, the Feast of the Annunciation (HC St Michael's 7.30 am), we think about Mary's vocation, the call of the Blessed Virgin. It is interesting to speculate. Could Mary have said *No* to the angel? God's plan for the salvation of the entire Universe depends eternally on the incarnation of His Son. So could Mary have said *No*? What would have happened if she had said *No*? I'm sure she could have. God respects our free will. Mary could only become the Mother of God because she was prepared to say to the angel, *Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word*. Mary had to accept her vocation for God's eternal plan to work. So were there other girls in reserve to whom God could have sent the angel if Mary had refused to cooperate with God? Were there, maybe, other girls who had already rejected God's Will for their lives and refused to become the Mother of Jesus when God sent Gabriel to Mary? I doubt it. We can't know, but what I believe is that Mary freely chose to become the Mother of God and God knew from all eternity that this particular girl would accept this ineffable vocation. Mary's free choice to become the Virgin Mother of the Son of God is intrinsic to God's eternal plan for the salvation not only of mankind but of the whole created order.

So what about your calling and mine? Let's start with mine as I was asked to tell you all about it. To be honest, it was always a possibility in my mind from childhood that I was called to ordained ministry. I was privileged to be taken to church, encouraged to pray myself, prayed for and prayed with, and taught the Bible stories from a very young age. I can remember as a small child in Southfleet Church having a feeling that God was calling me to this ministry. As I grew older, I put it out of mind. It might have been imagination to think that God was calling me to the priesthood. I wasn't sure how my family and friends would react if I said I wanted to be ordained. No-one else in my immediate family was a clergyman – though I had a great uncle by marriage who was a Pentecostal pastor. I did not feel worthy to become a minister of religion. So at school I chose the subjects I was good at and did three science A levels. I then considered what I could do with science qualifications for the benefit of other people and decided I wanted to become a doctor.

Nevertheless, I was always very drawn to the Church. I was confirmed at what was then a young age for Confirmation. As a teenager I taught in Sunday School and, because Sunday School was held at the same time as Parish Communion, I got into the way of first attending at 8.00 said Prayer Book Communion services, which played a tremendous part in my spiritual formation. At school and college I joined Christian unions. As a sixth former I took a lot of school assemblies. I belonged to Christian youth clubs, where I learned to preach extempore and lead worship. I also enjoyed the fellowship of churches other than our own, free churches as well as Church of England, when I attended Sunday worship with other Christian friends and family members.

When I was a youngster, Protestant Christians were still rather suspicious of Roman Catholicism, but, as a teenager and a young adult, I first acquired Christian friends who were Roman Catholics, then shared in Roman Catholic worship and then learned to value Roman Catholicism as an authentic part of God's Church, indeed by far the largest part of God's Church, while remaining firm in my Church of England beliefs that Holy Scripture contains all things necessary to

salvation and that no human being, not even the Bishop of Rome, can be infallible!

I do believe that we are one Church with Christians of every denomination. I do believe that we are blessed by their fellowship and that we can learn a lot from them. I am, however, a faithful Anglican and I step back from Rome and Orthodoxy where they go beyond what can be proved from the Bible and I am unsatisfied by the so-called free churches which seem to me to be lacking in their appreciation of the Sacraments and too careless in rejecting what God has revealed to His people in times past, what Catholic Anglicans call Church Tradition.

Anyway, I entered my twenties with considerable experience of the Church of England and other Christian churches, a sound basic knowledge of the Bible, a regular worship habit, a firm faith (albeit a naïve one) and a desire to serve God by *doing my duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call me*. I'm afraid I also found that traditional religion worked very well for me – the Authorised Version of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, plus Hymns Ancient and Modern, not necessarily Revised. Tradition has given me a firm personal foundation, but I wonder sometimes if it holds me back a bit from progressing. Dealing with tradition is like peeling an onion. You start with the dry wafery bits that have obviously got to go, but where do you stop? You can keep slicing away the layers until there is nothing left to go in the frying pan and all the goodness of the onion is in the brown bin!

Pursuing a career in medicine, when I left school, I studied for two years at the Middlesex Hospital Medical School. Again I spent a lot of time in Christian Union and other Christian activities. I attended a variety of local churches, mainly All Souls Langham Place where I experienced classical evangelical preaching at its best at their mid-morning and evening services. I still had to go to 8.00. however. I couldn't do without my Sunday Communion and often took part in the weekday Eucharists in the hospital chapel, even when there were only the chaplain and I to make it happen.

I wasn't bad at the traditional medical subjects like Anatomy and Physiology and I scraped

through in Biochemistry, but it soon became clear that I was likely to fail Sociology. I rather resented having to do this subject at all as I couldn't see its relevance to Medicine and, as a course, it seemed to lack the rigour of proper science subjects like physics, chemistry and biology, which I had studied to A level. I think I felt that, as it was taught in the University of London in the early 1970s, Sociology was an attempt to provide an academic justification for a particular political ideology, which was basically anti-religion and anti traditional British culture.

Anyway, it became clear that I was likely to fail Sociology, without which I could not continue my medical course, and I was forced to reconsider *that state of life unto which it shall please God to call me*. I thought and prayed hard about ordination. My friends at medical school (even those who were not Christians) encouraged me to go for it. You know where St Paul talks about doors closing so that we are guided by God to another course of action? Well that was how I came to feel. The door to a career in medicine was closing. It was up to me to decide what else God wanted me to do, and more and more things happened to make me believe that He wanted me to be a priest.

On the Feast of the Transfiguration (6th August) 1975 I attended Bredhurst Church and the vicar spoke in his sermon about vocation to ordained ministry. I think I felt what St Paul means when he says *the love of Christ constraineth us*. Like Mary I was free to say *No* to God, but on the other hand I just had to say *Yes*. When I told old friends and family members that I intended to pursue a vocation to ordained ministry, whether or not they thought I was right, they were not surprised. My old headmaster said it was what he had always expected.

I went to see the curate and the vicar and the diocesan director of ordinands. I had to write a couple of essays (one supervised by Richard Allington Smith whom some of you will remember as Rector of Cuxton.) When the bishops of the diocese had decided that I might have a vocation, I was sent to a selection conference. A group of young men thinking about ordination met for a few days in a convent rest house to pray with and be interviewed by a group of selectors – senior clergymen and lay

people. These recommended that I apply again in two years, but I didn't want to waste any time. So I arranged to start studying Theology at King's College London the next October. (They were more willing to be flexible about entrance procedures in those days!) Whilst there I attended another selection conference and this time I was recommended for ordination. I graduated from King's after three years Bachelor of Divinity, Associate of King's College. That's what my BD AKC means. I did a post-graduate year at Ripon College Cuddesdon, near Oxford. At King's I learned a lot more about the Bible, Christian doctrine and Church History. I came to value daily Communion enormously. I learnt to cherish the Church as the Body of Christ and that schism (division of the Church) is a very serious matter, not to be entered into lightly because of disagreements within the fellowship. I possibly didn't learn as much as I should have done at Cuddesdon; I was just too impatient to start work as a minister.

Various holiday jobs in the Tower of London gardens, the Department of Health and Social Security, office work and factory floor work in industry and temporary grounds man at the Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre broadened my experience of life outside the Church.

I was ordained deacon in 1980 and priest in 1981, serving a curacy at All Saints Orpington till 1984, taking responsibility for St Christopher Newington (Ramsgate) and acting as officiating chaplain at RAF Manston till 1986 and becoming Rector of Cuxton and Halling on January 2nd 1987.

Dr Rowan Williams: Scripture, with all its discord and polyphony, is the canonical text of a community in which there are limits to pluralism."

Rochester Theological Society

**Wednesday 2 March 2011 at 7.00 pm
Rochester Cathedral**

Celebrating the 400th Anniversary of the King James' (Authorised) Bible: its British background and world-wide impact

There will also be an exhibition of Bibles in the Cathedral Library from 6.00 – 6.30 pm with drinks available from 6.30 pm. The cost for the evening is £5.00 per person.

Further information from Canon Michael Insley (020 8623 1204) or Sharon Francis (01892 890109)

So that is how I believe God called me to be where I am today. The circumstances of my life guided my path. I had advice and support from friends and family. I had the support of the fellowship of the Church. I was guided by the Bible. I shared all my thoughts with God in prayer. He closed some doors to me and opened others. I believe God spoke to me. I believe it was God Who called me to be a priest, but finally, it fell to me to say *Yes*.

Sometimes I wonder if I am doing the right thing when I find myself unable to elicit the response I had hoped for in terms of church growth, but, so far at any rate, I feel confirmed in what I am doing when I pray and read the daily Bible readings and receive the support of Christian friends. I tend to think that it is probably my vocation to be Rector of Cuxton and Halling for the rest of my employed life, but one always has to open to the prompting of God's Holy Spirit.

So much for my vocation. Now what about yours? I am sure that God has prepared good works for everyone of us to walk in. There is a unique contribution to the Kingdom of God which only you can make. You can't thwart God's plans by failing in your vocation. As Mordecai said to his niece Esther, when she was afraid to speak to the king to save her people from genocide, if she failed in her duty, deliverance for the Jews would come in some other way, but she and her household wouldn't share in it. God can work His purpose out with or without you and me, but what a privilege it is to be part of His plan, to do the good works He has prepared for us to walk in and to have a personal share in the building of the Kingdom of God.

Roger.

Salaam, Shalom and Hello.

I'd like to personally invite you to a special unique study tour of the Holy Land, taking place from 24/10 -2/11 2011. What makes this tour so unique?

First of all, most tours of Israel/Palestine focus much more on the past than the present. While it is fascinating to visit historical sites such as the Via Dolorosa, the Pool of Bethesda and the Garden Tomb – and our tour will go to many places like these – it's equally exciting to visit sites that are significant to people living in the Holy Land today. On our tour, we will visit places like the bustling city of Haifa as well as the Knesset and a refugee camp. We'll also meet parliament members and human rights workers.

Secondly, this tour will help you go behind the headlines. You'll meet and pray with Palestinian Christians and Messianic Jews as well as people who are working for reconciliation within the Middle East. In doing so, you'll gain a greater understanding of the current climate in the Holy Land and the people living there.

Perhaps the biggest difference between our tour and some others is our heart for mission. CMS has a network of longstanding friendships and connections in the Middle East. I think you'll enjoy meeting some of our partners. As you get to know them, it will help fuel your prayers for peace in the Holy Land.

The cost of the trip is £1300 per person in double occupancy (Single occupancy is £1430)

- Non Refundable Registration fees £250
- Dead line for registration is April 10, 2011 (We have limited places as we like smaller groups, so please do not wait for the last minute).
- Full Payment has to be made by September 1st 2011.
- **The price includes** all transportation, flight and land, 3 meals a day, entrance fees to sites and honorarium to speakers. It does not include tips for driver and guide. We will have a fully licensed guide with us the whole time.

Please contact me for any further information. I look forward to travelling with you, May the Lord bless and keep you.

Sincerely Tanas Alqassis (CMS contact).

CMS Transculture Manager – Europe, Middle East and North Africa

Mobile: +44(0) 78 04 83 42 49 Office: +44(0) 18 65 78 74 24 Email: Tanas1506@yahoo.com



Halling WI

Hurrah, We have managed to have our first meeting of 2011 without disruption by snow, wind, rain, hail, fog and ice just a lovely moonlight night. It was a bit nippy though. Margaret welcomed everyone including a smattering of husbands who had come to help boost the numbers for our speaker for the evening. Then came the big laugh. As our December meeting was cancelled because of the adverse weather conditions, as was our carol service and our W.I lunch, Ann Hayward, our secretary, started to read the NOVEMBER minutes, already history. Was she reading Halling W.I. minutes? Oh yes but she was reading the OCTOBER minutes. "Oh dear I had better start again" she said. As for signing them as a correct record most of us couldn't remember whether they were correct or not. They were ancient history.

The correspondence was a bit sparse, as most of it comes the day after our meeting but Ann Hayward and I accepted the invite to Aylesford and Eccles party in February weather permitting. Ann Heaseman reminded us about the design for

the Olympic Pennant. It is hoped that every W.I in the Country will make one so that all the competitors in the Olympic games next year can be presented with one. We would start craft afternoons again on the 8th March, continuing with Painting on Glass. Margaret presented the competition cup for 2010 to Ann Hayward, and the Flower of the Month cup to Ann Heaseman.

Our speaker for the evening was Veronica Wiseman, fund raiser for The Air Ambulance. What an eye opener! The cost to run the Air Ambulance is so great, without any funding from the government, although the NHS do loan the doctors and paramedics. The Ambulance operates 7 days a week, on average 6 calls a day at £1000 a call out. It is in the pipe line to start night flying but the night camera for the helicopter costs £7500. Veronica said it will happen. Veronica told us some amazing rescue stories and was warmly thanked by Ann Graves.

Our speaker judged the competitions. We only had two jugs, one little blue one shaped like a cow and my half gallon stoneware jug which is

heavy enough empty. I have a job to lift it when it is full of beer. The little one was first. Flower of the month was won by Sylvia Mitchell with a little snowdrop.

you don't have to dress up as one, but it would be a laugh. A fairy, in any shape or form. New members will be most welcome. We had three last year. Let's make it four or even five in 2011.
Phyllis.

Next months speaker will be our local girl Ann Carter and the competition will be A FAIRY. No

Thanks For Your Support In Paying Our Debts

Donations continue to come in towards paying off our parish share debt. The hope is that every adult in the parish will donate £5 to keep us financially viable. So far we have collected £1,306. No extra donations since last month so far. So there is still a long way to go, but thanks to all those who have donated so far. Any further donations please to rector, treasurer or churchwardens. Any cheques should be payable to *Cuxton and Halling PCC*. If you can *Gift Aid* your donation, that adds about 25% to its value. Our financial situation is truly terrifying.
Roger.

Forthcoming Attractions 2011

4th March: Women's World Day of Prayer Service 7.00 pm at St John's.

1st May: 6.30 pm Evensong to celebrate 110th anniversary of Cuxton (now Cuxton & Halling) Mothers' Union. Preacher Rev'd Kenneth Clark, Vicar of Stone and Archdeaconry Chaplain.

25th May: 7.30 pm Pastor Norman Hopkins of Waterford House Evangelical Church to speak on 400th anniversary of the Authorised (King James) Version of the Bible at St John's. (Pastor Hopkins has already attracted notice as a speaker at Halling Historical Society.)

24th June (Nativity of St John the Baptist): 7.30 pm Confirmation and Patronal Festival Eucharist at Halling. Any interested in being confirmed to speak to Rector without delay.

25th June: 7.30 pm Brook Orchestra Concert at St John's
{Also this weekend a Halling Exhibition is planned to take place in the church.}

9th July: Parish Barbecue. (It is anticipated that it will be possible to hold this in the Rectory Garden again this year. The indications are that the coalition government will repeal the rather ridiculous requirement for a licence from the local authority for such modest events. Let us hope that they will get round to doing so in time to help us. Otherwise it's members only, i.e. just baptised Christians, an odd situation. If you think it's absurd, contact Medway Council or our MP Mark Reckless.)

August 4th: 7.30 pm Concert by Mean Time (early music group) at St Michael's. (It is hoped that parishioners will be found to offer group members overnight hospitality.)

September 29th Michaelmas: 7.30 pm Patronal Festival Eucharist with Rt Rev'd James Langstaff our new diocesan bishop.

Annual Meetings 2011

The Annual Parochial Church meeting and Vestry Meeting will take place on 30th April at St John's at 10.00. We need to elect four churchwardens, three deanery synod members and five PCC members from each village. Ideally the PCC election will include someone prepared to act as treasurer. I believe that most office holders are standing again, but even they do stand and are re-elected, we shall still need two new deanery synod representatives and a treasurer. Roger.

Is Multiculturalism Beneficial?

An open debate to be held at Bush Road Chapel Hall on Thursday 24th March at Bush Road Chapel Hall Cuxton at 7.30 pm.
All Welcome.

From the Registers

Funerals:

27 th January	George Henry Mills	Downsland House
27 th January	Richard James Victor Beale (81)	Northfleet
3 rd February	Doris Rosina Biggs (89)	Vicarage Close
4 th February	Eileen Rose Knight (82)	Cuxton Rectory
17 th February	Rosalind Herbert (52)	Twydall

Eileen Rose Knight RIP and Rosalind Herbert RIP

On behalf of my whole family I should like to thank everyone for your support during the illnesses my mother and sister have suffered and in their subsequent deaths. I have been overwhelmed by the kindness of so many people: prayer support; sympathy cards; many, many offers of help. I should like also thank all those who attended my mother's funeral service on 4th February at St Michael's and to thank all those who have made donations in her memory to the Wisdom Hospice (>£200 so far) and to our own parish (>£500 so far). Your kind words about her mean a very great deal to me and to the whole family.

They were both very well cared for at the end of their lives by The Wisdom Hospice and by the various community nurses who visited them in their homes. I cannot praise highly enough the support provided for my sister by the Motor Neurone Disease Association. The Hospice, the MNDA and Macmillan Nurses all depend at least in part on voluntary donations for the work they do for people in great need. They are all charities to consider when we are thinking about how to allocate our giving.

Since I became Rector in 1987, my family has been involved in the life of our church, attending special services and social events. Rosalind was confirmed at Halling in 1993. Since she came to live here in 1998, my mother has taken an active part in the life of the church and the wider community. When I wrote my eulogy for her service, I realised it was probably too long. So I sat down to edit it and found myself adding rather than subtracting material. There was just so much to say about Eileen. Other people at the service seemed to agree. So, thank you all of you. Roger.

Ian Swaisland RIP

22.09.29 – 07.01.11

The funeral of Ian took place at Eastbourne Crematorium on the 1st February. His sister Peggy Cowan and children Lucy and Richard were the main mourners.

Ian was a stalwart of Cuxton Social Club for many years. He captained the cricket team for more than twenty years following his father Alf Swaisland.

Wilde Rabbit Pye

In our last magazine we referred to Bob Brooks who had written to the *Daily Telegraph* to record that school dinners in Cuxton were served during the War by Mrs Wilde, Mrs Rabbit and Mrs Pye. I wondered if anyone remembered Bob Brooks and he wrote to me! He is the son of Sid and Edie Brooks of Deanbank Pilgrims Way and he is still in touch with a number of Cuxton people. He would be pleased to hear from any other old friends from those years and you can write to him at 34, Furze Road, Worthing, West Sussex, BN13 3BH.

Andrew Daunton-Feare

This Summer Andrew will be on his last furlough before retiring from his work in the Philippines. He will be preaching at the 11.00 service at St John's on 26th June and the same afternoon there will be a slide presentation of his work and tea also at St John's. This will form part of our *Celebrate Halling* weekend.

St John's Church Draw: £5 each to Mrs Homewood (36), Mrs Smith (49), Mrs Yates (149) & Miss Crowhurst (158) – drawn by Mrs Fennemore.



Cuxton WI

Our February meeting was well attended with 36 members and 1 visitor and the meeting started with the sad news of the death of Eileen Knight who used to be a member of our W.I. Our speaker was Mr. John Yarrow who entertained us with tales of his career as a wedding photographer and the

different weddings he had attended and how he had become a wedding photographer after a career in the Police. The competition for a favourite photograph was won by Val Shaw. Our next meeting is on 3rd March and the speaker is Barbara Beavis on Gruyere Cheese. The competition to be an unusual cheese knife.

Pat Reynolds.

Nature Notes January 2011

To introduce the new month's notes, I have chosen the poem "Blackbird" by John Drinkwater. In the Winter months, I always enjoy listening to blackbirds chattering in the hedges and shrubs as the sun goes down and the light fades.

He comes on chosen
evenings,
My blackbird bountiful
and sings
Over the gardens of
the town
Just at the hour the
sun goes down.

His flight across the
chimneys thick,
By some divine
arithmetic
Comes to his
customary stack
And couches there his
plumage black,

And there he lifts his
yellow bill,
Kindled against the
sunset, till
These suburbs are like
Dymcock woods
Where music has her
solitudes,

And while he mocks
the winter's wrong,
Rapt on his pinnacle of
song,
Figured above our
garden plots
Those are celestial
chimney pots.

Despite the gloom and dampness of the first day of the month, I hear birds singing through the day. It is a very early sign of Spring. The rain falls during the morning when I feed the birds. The squirrel also eats its fill in between scampering among the lilac and holly branches where collared doves shelter from the rain. The next day the temperatures have dropped creating a cold and gloomy day after early morning brightness when the sun has risen over Bluebell Hill. Salmon pink clouds have been driven across the sky by northerly winds. The morning of 3rd is bright and cold but by the afternoon the skies have become overcast. When the sun rises on 4th there is a short spell of brightness but soon, clouds envelop the sun. A pale sun shines in the afternoon and when the sun sets small clouds become salmon pink. On 5th I watch long-tailed tits, five in all, feeding on the nuts and fat balls. Other birds flock to the feeders, patio wall and the grass where food has been scattered.

I have watched three programmes on BBC2 "The Bear Family and Me" featuring Gordon Buchanan. What wonderful insights Gordon has revealed into the lives and behaviour of bears. I would not have missed these programmes, for they have shown that bears are not as dangerous as people believe.

Rain has fallen persistently through the night of 5th and through the daylight hours of the following day. I walk to church for the service of Epiphany in pouring rain. The spray from passing traffic causes me to

hurry along. Gutters are full of fast flowing water. The garden is becoming water-logged. Birds brave enough to endure the rain come to feed while others take shelter in the branches of the holly tree. As darkness falls the rain ceases. The morning of 7th is grey but mild with temperatures of nine degrees centigrade. Heavy rain falls as we drive to Cobtree Manor Park with Murphy. Fortunately, I have a window when the rain ceases and I walk Murphy on grass which is sodden and slippery. Droplets of sparkling water hang on the twigs of trees and shrubs. Rain falls again as I return to the car. Spray is whipped up by passing traffic along the motorway. Eventually there is some brightness after midday.

On the 8th grey clouds are driven across from the west in the early morning, after overnight rain. The wind is quite strong. Eventually, the clouds disperse, to reveal blue sky from where a golden sun shines. I plant tulip bulbs, dead-head pansies and prune shrubs. I feel slight warmth on my face. Grey clouds gather again, and there is a damp chill in the air, until skies clear again in the late afternoon. The wind ceases and the trees stand still as statues, their branches black against the pale sky. The next day, white frost lies on the grass and roofs of houses, and there is a chill in the air.

On the 10th long-tailed tits visit the garden. They are very attractive birds. On the 12th the garden becomes very soggy as heavy rain falls for most of the day. On

the 13th, another mild day, we take Murphy to Cobtree Manor Park where I see tight green buds waiting for Spring. The ground is very soggy and I nearly lose my footing on at least two occasions. Then next day, more rain falls and, as we drive home from Bluewater, spray from passing vehicles lashes the windscreen. The night sky is clear, with stars and a bright moon.

The first snowdrop appears in the garden on the 15th again long-tailed tits flock to the feeders and the air is full of birdsong. Next day, when I walk along Pilgrims' Road, I see delicate catkins swaying on hazel twigs. Rooks fly across the sky as the light begins to fade. Heavy rain fall that night, and continues through the morning of the following day when I walk over sodden grass in Cobtree Manor Park with Murphy. (He doesn't seem to mind!) we take a leaf-strewn path in the woodland where I see beautiful catkins; a bright scene compared to the leaden skies.

On the 18th how wonderful it is to see golden sunshine beaming down from a clear, blue sky! A few small white clouds drift across from the northwest. The night skies are clear and stars shine brightly; the air is cold, with frost forecast. On the 21st the skies are grey and some light rain falls. Long-tailed tits, great tits and blue tits flock to the feeders while a cock blackbird pecks at the bread. A robin samples a fatball. We drive to Addington and, on the way, I see early signs of Spring on weeping willows. By midday, the sun has broken through, lighting up a once grey world.

In the afternoon of the 22nd I watch a blackbird pecking bread and a squirrel foraging in one of the flower pots. On the 25th the air is considerably colder because of northwest winds which drive grey clouds across the sky. Crocuses are in flower in the garden.

Dark clouds, driven across the sky by a very cold northeast wind begin the 28th. I replenish nuts, seed and a fatball for the birds; it is good to hear more birdsong in the garden. The afternoon brings some pale sunshine, but it does not linger long. Murphy and I walk along the road, and I enjoy being out, despite the cold wind. How good it is to see the daylight lengthening.

Saturday the 29th. It is grey and cold, but dry. I put out plenty of food for the birds, then spend an hour on the RSPB Garden Birdwatch. The birds seen are 2 blackbirds, 2 robins, 4 great tits, 5 blue tits, 1 wood pigeon, 2 magpies, 1 greenfinch, 1 wren, 2 dunnock, 1 coal tits, 2 collared doves, 3 chaffinches, 1 marsh tit and 8 long-tailed tits.

The next day is bright, but cold, because of persistent northeast winds. Sun lights up the churchyard and birds sing.

Early morning of the last day of the month.....cold and grey when we walk Murphy at Bluewater. It is brighter by midday, and afternoon skies are a clear winter blue with sunshine brightening the garden. The sky at night is filled with stars.

Elizabeth A Summers

Future Plans

12th April is the 30th anniversary of the official opening of our parish hall. (Does that seem possible?) Watch this space for details of our celebration. 21st April is Maundy Thursday and we shall be celebrating a Passover Meal in the Church Hall. Any village organisation wanting to exhibit at St John's 24th-26th June please contact Mary. We hope to hold a quiz for parish funds on 15th October!

February 2011 News from Cuxton Infants

Dear friends of our school,

Our main news to share with you is that on the 31st January and 1st February, we were visited by two inspectors from OFSTED, whose job it is to monitor all schools and report on standards of learning, teaching, safeguarding, leadership and care, guidance and support of children. They also look at policies, data, attendance, health and safety. Actually their agenda is huge! I am very pleased to say, we came through the process very well, scoring good in most areas and outstanding in two areas. We are seen as a GOOD School and we are all extremely proud! The full report can be seen on the OFSTED website or on our school website.

Apart from all staff in school being extremely busy, and governors, the children have been busy learning. Next week we have our book week where we are thinking particularly about non-fiction

books and dressing up as famous people from the past. To link in with our topic on Toys we are visiting the Museum of Childhood, a fantastic resource, which the children are very excited about. We are also holding a book fair each day. We end this week with Aladdin , a pantomime / theatre group; there will be much cheering and 'its behind you!' I am sure.

That's all from the Infants for now. I will update you next time on topics for next term. We will also be learning more over the next month of our school budgets and Medway councils allocation from central government.... An interesting time! I think Medway have already said schools will be doing more for less! Lastly we will learn of admission numbers for September.

If you have access to a computer do look at our website, if not wait for the next news! Take care, Sandra Jones. Head teacher.

Multiculturalism and a Secular Society

Three things have made me think about multiculturalism and a secular society in the last few weeks.

The first was the case of the Christian couple who were in trouble with the law because they refused to allow two homosexuals to share a bed in their hotel. The couple concerned were old enough to remember a time when homosexual acts were illegal in this country. How could it be that something which was so wrong fifty years ago that it was against the law is now so right that it is illegal to discriminate against people who choose to live like that? Were we wrong in the past to outlaw homosexual practices? Are we wrong now to give people the same right to practise a homosexual life style as we give to others to marry? Do right and wrong change over time? Is there any such thing as right and wrong in an absolute sense? Or is one person's opinion as good as anyone else's? Maybe it is a question of culture. Homosexual practices are perhaps wrong in some cultures, celebrated in others and a matter of indifference in yet others?

This last view, cultural relativism, is one of the foundations of multiculturalism. The basic principle is that there are no absolute rights and wrongs but that the way people are expected or compelled to behave is a reflection of the culture they live in. This seems to work fine when people live with people like themselves. If nations are uniformly Christian or Moslem or communist or whatever, everybody is expected to conform to Christianity, Islam, Communism or whatever and would expect sanctions to be employed against them if they went against the rules or conventions. Such a monolithic society can tolerate small numbers of dissidents. For example, when Christian England compelled shops to close on Sundays, Jewish shops were allowed to close on Saturdays instead. When an increasingly secular United Kingdom permitted abortions, catholic doctors and nurses were exempted from having to perform them. When a *health and safety* dominated culture made motorcycle helmets a legal requirement, Sikhs in turbans were permitted to opt out. When the divorce law changed so that marriage was no longer regarded by the state as indissoluble, the Church of England was allowed to opt out of marrying people whose divorces it regarded as theologically unsustainable. Such a monolithic society can also tolerate people of other cultures living in ghettos or enclaves such as Jews or travellers.

Cultural relativism as a principle collapses when cultures merge. You could argue that the proprietors of a hotel have as much right to their view that double beds are only for heterosexual married couples as that homosexuals on holiday are entitled to share a bed. How do you decide whose right should prevail? Which culture ought to win out? There is a further complication in that both sides would insist that their position is not merely a matter of opinion. Most homosexuals these days insist that theirs is not a life style choice. They would say that it is just the way they are that they are attracted to people of the same sex and that they therefore have the right to sexual fulfilment in the only way they can get it. On the other hand, the Christian couple base their objection to the homosexuals sharing a bed on their religion. Isn't the practise of your religion a basic human right?

In this case the law sided with the homosexuals against the Christians. I cannot help wondering, however, whether the state would have taken the same view if it had been a Moslem hotelier who had refused a

double bed to a homosexual couple. On paper of course the Law applies equally to everybody of whatever creed. In practice, however, as I of all people know only too well, the rules are interpreted and enforced very selectively in this country. Blind eyes are turned when the authorities do not want to take on some individual or group which is breaking the rules while, at other times, the same authorities insist that *it is more than their jobs worth* to overlook the most trivial transgression committed by some person or organisation the authorities wish to hound.

And this was the second thing that made me think about multiculturalism. The prime minister has recently made a speech in which he suggested that multiculturalism has been a disaster. Communities, particularly immigrant communities, have been encouraged to be separate rather than to integrate. The result is that our common values have come under threat. There is a justifiable suspicion that the state is turning a blind eye to certain people breaking the law just because it is not their culture to live the British way and even that taxpayers' money has been lavished on organisations whose basic philosophy is that Western culture is evil and ought to be overthrown.

Mr Cameron believes that we should be more robust in defending and fighting for our values. But this raises the question of what our values are. For more than 1,000 years one of the biggest determinants of our values in this country has been the Christian religion. If we set aside Christianity, where do our values come from? What are secular values?

Should we obey the Law simply because it is the Law? Can a dictator or a parliament define right and wrong and if so on what basis? Is the Law right by definition? We need to beware of arbitrary rulers.

Or does government derive its legitimacy from democracy? We know from Hitler's Germany, that what the majority wants in a country can be completely evil. Politicians mislead electorates so that we do not really know what we are voting for. We have a European Court of Human Rights that can overrule elected governments. But where does the Court of Human Rights get its legitimacy. If there are absolute and fundamental concepts such as Justice, where do they come from and how do we know what they are?

This brings me to my third idea. On 6th February we celebrated the 59th anniversary of the Accession of our Queen. The English constitution, insofar as we have a constitution, is firmly grounded in the Christian faith. What we say is that the Queen derives her authority from God and is therefore entitled to our allegiance and obedience, but that she is also answerable to God for governing this kingdom in accordance with His Laws. Our constitution, as it stands, maintains that power and the principles on which it is exercised come from God and the same principles of government therefore apply to all God's children, the whole human race.

If we, as a nation, no longer find this view credible, what do we propose to put in its place? If not from God, from when does the state derive its authority?
Roger.



Max's Tail Piece

It's been a tough time at the Rectory with people I love getting ill and dying. I haven't understood why people haven't enjoyed what they usually used to enjoy. For me it's sometimes meant fewer walks as Master has been too tired or busy to take me far. Other times it has been more walks or car trips, because he tries not to leave me alone in an empty house. I find it all very confusing, but it is good that we have one another. I know Master is very grateful for all the friendship he has received. I'm sure all those trips up to the church have done him good too. I know he needs a bit of rest and craves a return to normality and will continue to value your friendship and support. Master likes his routine!

There has been one bright spot, however. We are now regularly visited by a puppy. When he was first born, he was very small. He is growing fast, but he'll never be as big as I am. Maybe he is a more practical breed!

We do have some fun playing together! He's tiny relative to me and likes jumping up to pull my long ears. I chase him round and gently pin him down. He must like it because he's always back for more. He likes my basket too. It's big for me, having originally been meant for two dogs. The puppy is just a lump in the middle. We dash about the house getting under everyone's feet.

Sometimes I admit we can be a bit of a nuisance but I think the human beings like seeing us happy. It makes them happy too! Happy people, happy animals and happy things spread happiness. So it's good to be able to do that when otherwise people might be unhappy. Behaviour and moods are catching. Try to make the world a happier place by what you do too.

Max the Rectory Spaniel.