

Services at St John the Baptist Halling & the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling		
2 nd March Quinquagesima Please return last year's palm crosses.	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Exodus 24 vv 12-18 p82 Matthew 17 vv 1-9 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
5 th March Ash Wednesday	9.30 am Holy Communion	Joel 2 vv 1-17 p912 Matthew 6 vv 1-21 p970
9 th March 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 4-25 p185 Luke 15 vv 1-10 p1048
16 th March Lent 2	11.00 Holy Communion & Stop! Look! Listen!	Genesis 12 vv 1-4 p13 Romans 4 vv 1-17 p1131 John 3 vv 1-17 p1065
23 rd March Lent 3	11.00 Holy Communion	Exodus 17 vv 1-7 p75 Romans 5 vv 1-11 p1132 John 4 vv 5-42 p1066
30 th March Lent 4 (Mothering Sunday)	11.00 Family Communion	I Samuel 16 vv 1-13 p287 John 9 vv 1-41 p1075
Services at St Michael & All Angels Cuxton		
2 nd March Quinquagesima Please return last year's palm crosses.	9.30 Family Communion	Exodus 24 vv 12-18 p82 II Peter 1 vv 16-21 p1222 Matthew 17 vv 1-9 p984
	7.30 pm Holy Communion	Isaiah 58 vv 1-12 p744 II Corinthians 5 v20 – 6 v10 p1161 John 8 vv 1-11 p1073
5 th March Ash Wednesday	9.30 Holy Communion	Genesis 2 v15 – 3 v7 p4 Romans 5 vv 12-19 p1132 Matthew 4 vv 1-11 p967
16 th March Lent 2	8.00 Holy Communion	Epistle & Gospel BCP Lent 2
	9.30 Holy Communion	Genesis 12 vv 1-4 p13 Romans 4 vv 1-17 p1131 John 3 vv 1-17 p1065
23 rd March Lent 3	9.30 Holy Communion	Exodus 17 vv 1-7 p75 Romans 5 vv 1-11 p1132 John 4 vv 5-42 p1066
30 th March Lent 4 (Mothering Sunday)	9.30 Family Communion	I Samuel 16 vv 1-13 p287 John 9 vv 1-41 p1075

Wednesday Holy Communion 9.30 am St Michael's		Thursday Holy Communion 9.30 am St John's	
March 5 th Ash Wednesday Service at Halling	Joel 2 vv 1-17 p912 Matthew 6 vv 1-21 p970	March 6 th Service at Cuxton	Deuteronomy 30 vv 15-20 Luke 9 vv 22-25
March 12 th Ember Day	Jonah 3 Luke 11 vv 29-32	March 13 th	Isaiah 55 vv 6-9 Matthew 7 vv 7-12
March 19 th S Joseph	II Samuel 7 vv 4-16 Romans 4 vv 13-18 Matthew 1 vv 18-25	March 20 th S Cuthbert	Jeremiah 17 vv 5-10 Luke 16 vv 19-31
March 26 th	Deuteronomy 4 vv 1-9 Matthew 5 vv 17-19	March 27 th	Jeremiah 7 vv 23-28 Luke 11 vv 14-23

Copy Date April Magazine: 14th March 8.30 am Rectory
<http://www.cuxtonandhalling.org.uk>

Saints Alive! meet at St Michael's at 9.30 am on Sundays during school terms. The first Sunday of the month is a Family Communion.

All are invited to join us for lunch on the first Wednesday of every month in the church hall at 12.00.



Choice

Is choice a good thing? My first instinct is to answer, Yes. Choice is a good thing. I like making up my own

mind about things. I don't like being told what to do. Political parties often talk about choice as a good thing. "Vote for us," they say. "We believe in the extension of personal choice." The right to choose which school your children go to is not only supposed to be your basic right to do what you believe to be the best for your own family; but it is also supposed to be good for schools. Every school wants to be chosen. So every school strives to be the best in the area. So all schools will improve.

Local communities should have the right to determine how they develop. People should have a choice about their environment. If people feel that they are responsible for fields and woods, commons and orchards, housing estates and commercial and industrial premises, public space as well as private, they will treat the places they live in with respect, refraining from littering and graffiti, preserving the best and working to improve the substandard.

Rising prosperity and global commerce have brought us great freedoms to choose what we eat and what we wear and what we do for entertainment and leisure. Supermarkets are cornucopias of competitively priced high quality goods of a variety unimaginable only a few decades ago. What wonderful choices we have!

Political and religious freedoms are said to be basic human rights – the freedom to believe and the freedom to express your beliefs in words and actions. Totalitarian societies are stunted. Their people are oppressed. They don't grow. We value our freedoms, freedom of speech, freedom to practise our faith, freedom to do what we want, so long as we do not hurt other people.

And yet, we don't believe in perfect freedom and it is my impression that western societies such as our own are becoming less tolerant than perhaps they used to be. For example, we believe that every school pupil should have an equal chance in life. Inevitably some schools are better than

others. So we worry about pushy parents gaining an advantage (an unfair advantage?) for their own children by exercising their rights to the schools of their choice. The rich pay for private education. The comfortable buy houses in the catchment areas of good state schools. Parents who are desperate for their children to pass the eleven plus or the entrance examinations of good private schools may coach their children or pay for private tuition. Apparently some people even go to church merely in order to get their children into church schools! The choices these parents make inevitably contribute to the disadvantages experienced by those children whose parents cannot or choose not to pay more or to coach, or who do not know how to play the system, or who are unwilling to try to do so. In the interests of fairness, a lot of people would want to restrict parental choice so that all children from all backgrounds have an equal chance in school.

We are frequently told that we need a lot more housing to be built. We are told that the nation needs big infrastructure projects like airports, high speed rail and new motorways. We are told that we need wind farms and nuclear power stations and fracking. Very few people want any of these developments on their own doorsteps (although most of us are happy to take advantage of them when they are built on someone else's doorstep). So, in what is believed to be the national interest, central government takes away the rights of local communities to decide how they want their own areas to develop.

Freedom to eat what we like? Increasingly we are warned of an obesity epidemic: cancer, cardiovascular disease, type II diabetes. We are warned what to eat and what not to eat. We are "nudged." There is huge pressure to legislate, to take away our choices to eat salty, sweet or fatty foods. In the same way our choices about smoking have been limited "for our own good." Pressure groups demand restrictions on the availability of alcohol. Similarly there are compulsory motor-cycle helmets and seat belts in cars and all the paraphernalia of health and safety regulations. Even the choice of what to wear is not unlimited. Some people would like to ban the burka. Others would like to make it compulsory to keep covered up in the sun. Is choice a good thing? Or is it in our own best interests if our

decisions are taken for us by experts and by the state, which seems dangerously close to claiming for itself omniscience and omnipotence and even omnipresence through CCTV and other forms of surveillance?

What about political and religious freedoms? Racism, sexism, homophobia. What happened to freedom of speech? It seems to me that, in the interests of social cohesion and of the rights (especially of minority groups) not to be offended, society is increasingly inclined to limit what people may say and do. Our e-mails, social media sites and telephone calls are monitored for any evidence of sympathy towards terrorist groups or interest in paedophilia and perhaps even of political incorrectness.

In what is believed to be the interest of the wider community, we have also considerably restricted the rights of individuals to do what they want with their own property. Listed building status, conservation areas, tree preservation orders, etc., empower the agents of the state to dictate what you may or may not do with your own property (even in quite trivial matters) in what those agents of the state consider to be the best interests of the wider community, although there is little democratic accountability.

So maybe we don't think choice is such a good thing after all. Maybe we think that ordinary people are not to be trusted, that, left to our own devices, people like you and I will behave badly or stupidly. So we need to be told what to do by the experts. We are much better off if the state runs our lives for us than if we are allowed to make our own mistakes.

This month's picture of Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal is about choice. I can't explain the logic, but in the Book of Deuteronomy, Mount Gerizim represents good and Mount Ebal represents evil. The children of Israel are just about to enter the Promised Land. They have been wandering in the wilderness for forty years since they escaped from slavery in Egypt and passed through the Red Sea and received the Law on Mount Sinai. Moses will die before they cross

the Jordan, but, before he dies and before the Israelites take up residence in their new home, a land flowing with milk and honey, Moses tells them what's what. They do have a choice, a very real choice. They can choose evil, symbolised by Mount Ebal, or they can choose good, symbolised by Mount Gerizim. They can disobey the commandments of God or they can keep them. They can reject God's covenant or they can live by it. They can be unfaithful or faithful. They can walk in the broad way which leads to destruction or the narrow way which leads to life. The people of Israel have a very real choice – Ebal or Gerizim. What they need to know is that, if they choose evil, Ebal, they are also choosing death, whereas, if they choose good, Gerizim, they choose life. Evil or good? Death or life? Their choice. And yours and mine. Good or evil? Life or death? God or the devil? To keep God's commandments or to disregard them? To follow the broad way (with the many who pass that way), the way which leads to destruction, or to find and to follow the narrow way, the way which leads to life, Jesus Christ, Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life?

I can't really answer the questions I asked in the first part of this article about how much freedom of choice we should have in matters of education, the environment, diet and other personal preferences, political and religious freedom of speech, the balance between our own interests and those of the wider community, but I do know that we all have one very important choice to make. We all have one vital choice. Each one of us is responsible for the choice that he or she makes. It is the same choice which Moses put before the children of Israel as they were about to enter the Promised Land. Are you for Christ or against Him? You have to be one or the other. Life or death? It's your choice and no-one can take that choice away from you: not the Church, not the government, not the council, not your parents, not your teachers, not even the rector. Your choice. Are you for Christ or against Him? Do you choose life or death? Choose life and live. That is the only choice in life which really matters and it is all yours.

Roger.

O GOD, who art the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom; Defend us thy humble servants in all assaults of our enemies; that we, surely trusting in thy defence, may not fear the power of any adversaries, through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

From the Registers

Baptism:

2nd February

Phillip Stephen Remo Tower

Chatham

Wedding Blessing:

18th January

David and Linda Sweet

Halling

Funerals:

13th January

Raeburn Cross (90)

Bush Road

31st January

Jamie Paul Cockburn (40)

Riggall Court

7th February

Kenneth William Charles Simner (84)

Woodhurst Close

13th February

Doris May (Nicki) White (81)

Maidstone

Not Just Names – Centenary of the Outbreak of the Great War

Thomas Harris VC MM

Last month's magazine article about Thomas Harris mentioned the possibility of a "re-union" of his many relatives. It is now planned to hold this event, which will include a presentation about the recent history of the Harris family, in the Community Centre on 26th April 2014.

If you are a relative of Thomas Harris and would like to attend please contact me by e-mail at jaypay6663@hotmail.co.uk or by telephone on 01634 716368 for more details. If you are not a relative but know a Harris family member who doesn't take the magazine please tell him (or her) about the event.

Thomas Harris was one of nine brothers and sisters. My grandfather was one of his brothers. Since he had eight children it seems a fair assumption that there may be quite a lot of this family of Harrises around. Indeed in planning this event I have met some of whose existence I was previously unaware. Thank you. Jack Payne (formerly Jack Harris but adopted at six weeks old).

Please continue to send in information about the people commemorated on our First World War Memorials. We shall be marking the centenary at Halling on 27th July at 11.00 at our Holy Communion service, president the Bishop of Tonbridge. We shall be marking the centenary at Cuxton on 3rd August at 6.30 at Evensong, preacher the Archdeacon of Rochester. We also hope to welcome the mayor or deputy mayor at these events and they will both be followed by a reception.

Christian Aid

A Division of The British Council of Churches



Help Required

Shirley Crundwell is unable this year to be our Christian Aid co-ordinator and we desperately need someone to undertake this role. The co-ordinator recruits collectors for each road in the parish (many are regulars),

distributes the envelopes to the collectors and organisers the count when all the money is in. It is quite a big job and a very important one, but it is not too difficult for someone with a bit of time to spare and a willingness to help other people. Christian Aid Week this year is May 12th-19th.

St John's Draw: £5 each to Mrs Mitchell (63), Miss Heighes (88), Mrs Garrott (122 & Mrs Clark (157) – drawn by Mrs Cheeseman.

St Michael's Draw: £10 Matthew Wells, £10 Trudy Fenton-Scott, £5 Janice Cheesmer, £5 Mary Pitt – drawn by Tobiah & Jayden.

Annual Meeting & PCC Secretary

Our Annual Parochial Church and Vestry Meetings will be held at 10.00 on 26th April at the Church Hall, Cuxton. Please make sure you are on the electoral roll. We shall elect two churchwardens for each parish church and ten members of the Parochial Church Council, five for Cuxton and five for Halling, plus our representatives for deanery synod. Elizabeth Maisey wishes to resign as PCC secretary at the APCM and the next PCC meeting after will have to appoint her successor. It could be you. The secretary is normally but not necessarily a PCC member.

Food Bank

There is a food bank in Medway (<http://medway.foodbank.org.uk/>) which exists to help people who find themselves temporarily without the resources to buy food. This might be because of a delay in getting paid, administrative problems with the benefits system, an unexpected bill (maybe, for example, the roof starts leaking or the washing machine gives up the ghost) or for a whole host of reasons. If you would like to contribute, you can bring packets or tins (with long sell by dates) to any of our services. We envisage a steady trickle of a few items at a time rather than a bonanza like harvest. You might have something over or buy something specially. It is also likely that during the course of the year other reception centres for goods will be set up. I'll keep you informed.

Confirmation 2014

We are not expecting to hold a confirmation service in the parish this year, but we have at least one candidate and I shall be running a class later in the year, probably leading to a confirmation service in another church in the Autumn. If you are interested in confirmation this year, please ask me. The commitment is the commitment you made at your Baptism – faith in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, repentance of sins and renunciation of evil. If you are not already a Christian and wish to become a Christian, you will be baptised at the confirmation service. You are also welcome to attend the classes if you are “just looking” at this stage. Please contact me if you are interested. You need to be at least twelve (or ten if you know what you are doing). There is no upper age limit. I've known people to be confirmed in their nineties. It's never too late. Roger.

Joke: The mother of a computer programmer sends him to the shops. “Bring back a pint of milk and, if they have any eggs, get a dozen, please,” she says.

The programmer returns with twelve bottles of milk. When his mother asks him why, he replies, “They had eggs”.



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A Thought on I Corinthians II²

² *For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*

“We must not overlook, that Paul does not say ‘to know *any thing of or concerning* Christ,’ but to know HIM HIMSELF, to preach HIM HIMSELF. The *historical Christ* is also the *living Christ*, who is *with his own till the end of time*: He works personally in every believer, and forms Himself in each one. Therefore it is universally CHRIST HIMSELF, the crucified and the risen One, who is the subject of preaching, and is also Wisdom itself: for His history evermore lives and repeats itself in the whole church and in every member of it: it never waxes old, any more than does God HIMSELF;- it retains at this day that fullness of power, in which it was revealed at the first foundation of the church.” (Olshausen cited by H Alford in his Greek Testament.)

Parish Website

<http://www.cuxtonandhall.org.uk>

During December and January there were problems updating this site. These seem to have been resolved. So hopefully all the information on there is now up to date. Check out the website for information about the churches, contact details, history of the buildings, forthcoming attractions, statements of Christian belief, parish magazines from June 2005 to the present and teaching. Under teaching you will find daily bible reading notes and a selection of sermons. You are welcome to download anything you find on the website for your own use. That is what is there for! You can often find the magazine on the website before printed copies are available and sometimes the sermon for next Sunday.

Bluebell Wood Charity Walk 3rd May 2014



This will take place on Saturday 3rd May this year, starting from the Browdens Road car park opposite the Jubilee Hall at 10.00. The distance is approximately 4.2 miles (6.5 km) and will take around 2½ hrs to complete. Please bring your own refreshments. Buses leave Lower Halling at c9.15 going and Upper Halling 1.15 & 2.15 coming back. To sponsor online go on to www.justgiving.com/lawrybluebell. To obtain a sponsor form or for more information, please call Pat Lawry on 01634 240892. Any cheques should be made payable to The Eve Appeal.

This is the 7th annual walk and in the last six years just over £14,000 have been raised for the Eve Appeal. This charity supports the gynaecological cancers research programme at University College London. These cancers remain difficult to treat. So it is a cause well worth supporting. See also www.eveappeal.org.uk.

PARISH CONFIDENTIAL PRAYER CHAIN



Would you like to become a link? We have a small group of people willing to receive prayer requests, which they treat entirely confidentially, and we would like to extend the chain. The chain works through phone and e-mail and sometimes we see encouraging results. Christians of any denomination, who are to pray for others in sorrow or joy, would be most welcome to join in, to become a link. If you would like to join the prayer chain or receive prayer, please contact elizabeth@rabhutch.demon.co.uk or phone Buffy (Maisey) on 01634 727 126.

The **Deanery Quiet Day** was well attended last year and there was some positive feedback, so we have organised another day this year at Aylesford Priory. The date is Saturday 14th June and the Day will be led by Fr Peter Damien of the Franciscan Order. More details will follow, but please let people know so that they can put it in their diaries now. Just to say that we will not have a Parish quota system this year, but we will be asking you for numbers nearer the time. There will be no charge for the day, but donations are welcome for tea/coffee.

Lay **Deanery Synod** members (elected this year's APCM) will elect the lay members of **General Synod**, in the next General Synod elections in 2015. Likely subjects for General Synod's consideration are: Issues related to marriage, gender and sexuality; How we pay for ministry; Ecumenical and Anglican communion

relations: Interfaith relations; Mission and Evangelism in our multi faith society; Christian Ministries with Young People; Social justice.

Be Properly Represented is an initiative by 3 former General Synod members who are not standing again. Its overarching aim is to promote active engagement in the processes that lead to the election of General Synod members so that, between them, the elected members fairly represent the whole diocese (geographical spread, age, gender, race etc.) respecting the spiritual depth and intellectual breadth of the Church of England. The **BPR** initiative has three strands in order to: Encourage a wide range of clergy and laity to stand for election to the General Synod; Ensure that Deanery Synod members know that they are the people who elect members to the House of Laity of the General Synod, and that they exercise their right to vote. Raise awareness among all church members in parishes and deaneries, so that they can ask questions, make nominations and take an active interest in Deanery, Diocesan and General Synod elections.

A few facts: Rochester has 5 lay members and 4 clergy members of the General Synod. There are 7 men and 2 women. Their ages range from 47 – 79. Most live in the Tonbridge Archdeaconry. None live in the Rochester Archdeaconry. In the 2010 elections 99 clergy out of a possible 288 and 214 lay deanery synod members out of a possible 532 did not use their vote.

What can you do? Think about standing for Deanery or General Synod. Look around, think about people you know who would be good Deanery Synod or General Synod members and encourage them consider standing. Ask those who are standing for election what they think about issues that concern you, so that you can use your vote wisely. Remind Deanery Synod members to use their vote in the General Synod elections in 2015.

How can we help? If you are interested in standing for General Synod please: Get in touch with one of us. . Pray about it and ask close friends what they think. **3. Come to the Synod Enquirers lunch on 29th March 2014 at Bishops court, 12.00 – 2.00pm.** There we will give a brief talk on what is involved, how to stand for election etc, and answer any questions that you might have. This will not commit you to anything, and may even convince you that it's that last thing you want to do! **To sign up for the lunch contact Bridget Langstaff.** Email: bridget.langstaff@btinternet.com Mobile: 07816 828439, canongordon.oliver@gmail.com and brian@mchenry.co.uk.

Quotations:

Canon Martyn Percy: But the church does not exist to grow. It exists to glorify God and to follow Jesus Christ. After which it may grow; or it may not. But it is imperative that faithfulness is always put before any search for success.

But the biggest problem facing the church, is “coping with the overwhelming abundance of God”. (Hardy & Ford, *Jubilate: Theology in Praise*.)

Nature Notes January 2014

The following poem is thought provoking – “Holiness” John Drinkwater.

If all the carts were painted gay	If all the houses looked as though	I think this gaiety would make
And all the streets swept clean	Some heart were in their stones,	A spiritual land,
And all the children came to play	If all the people that we know	I think that holiness would take
By hollyhocks, with green	Were dressed in scarlet gowns	This laughter by the hand
Grasses to grow between;	With feathers in their crowns,	Till both would understand.

On the first day of the month, rain falls and at times it becomes quite heavy. Grey clouds march across the sky from the west. Birds come to feed despite the rain. The air is relatively mild. The next day, golden light begins to fill the sky as the sun rises over Bluebell Hill. The pale blue sky is cloudless and the bare

branches are black against it. There is a slight breath of wind moving within the branches of the holly tree and birds fly overhead. I walk with Murphy at Bluewater where, on the lake, moorhens and coots are gliding. Long tailed tits are flying between the shrubs and catkins have burst into flower. The 3rd and

4th are wet and windy days. Strong winds drive grey clouds across the sky from the west. Birds are singing in the evenings. I watch the rooks as they fly home to roost and their cawing fills the air. I enjoy the sound. On 6th frost coats the grass. I walk again at Bluewater with Murphy and the grass paths are sodden because of so much rain. Strong winds blow during the night and into the next day. Heavy showers fall. The evenings are drawing out very slowly. On 8th, again at Bluewater, coots chase across the lake which is mirror smooth. Spray rises up into the air. A solitary heron stands on the edge of the straw coloured reeds which are reflected in the water. Daisies raise their heads to the sun, catkins dance in the breeze and snowdrops adorn the banks. On 9th, when driving back from Larkfield, I'm aware of the golden sun as it sets and the paleness of the blue sky adorned with light grey and salmon pink clouds. Earlier, white clouds had formed mountainous banks in the sky. The night sky is clear and the moon and stars shine brightly. The following day, I watch the sun rise over Bluebell Hill and the skies clear to give a beautiful day. The air is quite mild In the garden. I feel the warmth of the sun on my face and listen to beautiful birdsong. I walk to the churchyard where clumps of delicate snowdrops bloom. Fog hovers over the river on the morning of 12th and frost covers the grass, trees and roofs of houses. The sky is tinged with salmon pink cloud. There are a few glimpses of the sun as I walk to church. Grey clouds drift and cover the sky by mid-day and there is dampness in the air. I hear birdsong in the garden. On 13th, the sun shines brightly from a blue sky, as I walk round the lake at Bluewater with Murphy. The catkins are beautiful as they sway on their twigs in the westerly breeze. A pair of mallard ducks and a coot glide on the smooth water. Clouds gather in the afternoon and there is an occasional shower. It is almost dark by 4.45pm. Rain falls during the evening. A misty moon hangs in the night sky on 14th. The 15th is overcast but on 16th the sun shines brightly from a beautiful blue sky as I walk Murphy round the lake. Catkins dance on their slender twigs in the westerly wind. As darkness falls, I hear the raucous cries of rooks coming home to roost. On 17th, I drive to Addington as heavy rain falls which causes traffic to drive spray into the air. Puddles, like small lakes, have formed along the route which is not an experience to be enjoyed. In the afternoon I watch chaffinches, a robin, dunnoek, blue and great tits, a

blackbird and a magpie come to the garden. The sky is a beautiful pale blue, with grey and salmon pink clouds drifting across from the west. Silver birches stand tall on the embankment the other side of the railway. The 18th is a bright day when birds sing in the garden. I am more aware of lengthening evenings. A jay visits the garden the next day. A jay comes to the garden the next morning then in the evening there is a beautiful sunset. Fog and frost greets the morning of 20th. Then the sun shines to give a pleasant day. The air is very cold. Fog hovers over the river and surrounding trees and shrubs the next morning. This eventually clears to reveal sunshine and blue skies. In the afternoon I walk up the church path to the fields where green lichen covers branches of hawthorn branches and bright red hips are still attached to the twigs. The sun is setting, turning grey clouds to a dusty pink. I walk along the edge of Mays Wood, down the muddy path to Six Acre Wood where I hear a lone blackbird's song. There are new leaves on elder bushes. Skies clear for a while. Then, as the light fades, rooks fly to their roosts and more cloud envelops the skies. On 22nd it is still quite light at 4.45pm. Rain pours from leaden skies the next morning but skies brighten later. In the late afternoon, as the sun sets, the trees and shrubs on the embankment turn to gold in the sun's beautiful light. The sky is streaked with deep pink cloud. More rain falls in the darkness of the evening. I walk with Murphy round the lake at Bluewater on 24th. Almond blossoms, catkins, daisies and snowdrops are beautiful. A pale sun shines from a blue sky brushed with some grey clouds. The sun shines well into the afternoon. The evening air is cold. Stars shine brightly in the night sky of 27th. We walk round the lake again on 28th as the sun shines brightly and white and grey clouds drift across the pale blue sky. The area is definitely showing signs of Spring. In the afternoon, more rain falls on already soggy ground. And it continues well into the evening. The 29th is a very wet day and this continues into 30th when I watch a great spotted woodpecker as it feeds on the nuts. The beginning of 31st is dry but the sky is overcast with grey clouds bowling across the sky from the west. Soon after mid-day, rain begins to fall continuing into the evening. At Bluewater I see two young swans on the lake. They have probably flown over from another area of water. Another month closes.

Elizabeth Summers.

O ALL ye Works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord:
praise him, and magnify him for ever.
O ye angels, bless ye the Lord: praise him, and
magnify him for ever.

O ye Heavens, bless ye the Lord: praise him, and
magnify him for ever.
O ye Waters that be above the Firmament, bless
ye the Lord: praise him, and magnify him for ever.



Cuxton WI

At last we have some news to tell you. We had a meeting in December but that was our Christmas Celebration and although it was a very enjoyable evening there is not a lot to tell. The buffet was excellent. I bought in this time to give all the helpers a rest and the group of singers were very entertaining singing many songs that we knew. Since then we have had RAIN and more Rain but last Thursday 32 brave members turned up for the evening meeting as we had not had one in January. We learnt of the sad death of Sylvia who, although we knew that she was ill, her death came as a very great shock to all of us as we had not realised the extent of her illness. It was so sad as after the death of her husband just a year ago she had begun to rally and was joining in several clubs in the WI as well as volunteering as a much needed tea lady. We shall all miss her cheery smile.

The speaker was Ann Carter who gave us a really interesting talk about "The English" from the days of King Alfred – he of the cooking disaster! She interlaced her talk with extracts from poems and books and built up a very clear picture of English life as far as the 20th Century. Some of it made us realise how lucky we are to live in such a civilised country even if it does rain.

All our in house clubs are doing well. Cookery are preparing dishes from various countries starting with France although the cowards have banned frogs legs and snails! Craft are busy covering note pads and exploring new embroidery stitches. Water colour and China painting classes are busy and Poetry has been steadily working through the alphabet with poets names and have now reached V to Z . The walking group do not meet in December or January. They all come to me for lunch in January and we try to arrange our walks and dates for the year. I nearly fell at the first hurdle this year as with most of us at an "age" I try to avoid water, fields and woods in February. Still I think I've found a suitable route and we'll will enjoy a meal at a local pub at the end.

Our next meeting is in the Church Hall on Thursday March 6th at 7 30pm and the speaker will be Malcolm Withnail, who will tell us how to Improve the Vegetables and Fruit in our gardens. So come along all you keen gardeners and see if he can help us to a good harvest. If you have a surplus perhaps you could be kind enough to donate to the food bank in the Church for those who have hit hard times. Sheila.

(Yes, please, for donations to Foodbank, but tinned and dried food please as the time delay makes fresh and frozen impractical. Roger.)

Praying Fair

One of the things a lot of people find shocking is that people on both sides in the two World Wars of the last century were praying to the same God for victory. Obviously He couldn't give both sides what they wanted. So what was the point of praying? And surely killing people couldn't be God's Will, could it? The first point to make is that it was certainly wrong for Christian peoples to be at war with one another. Christ's commandment is that we should love one another. So there is something very wrong when we make war, especially when we make war on other Christians. *Give peace in our time O Lord.* If you accept as I do, however, that there are times when the world has gone so badly wrong that there is no alternative to fighting for justice, then I think you have to accept that it is legitimate to pray for victory. *Because there is none other that fighteth for us, but only thou, O God.* If you believe that you are right to fight, then it is right to ask for God's blessing on what you are doing. If you feel unable to ask God's blessing on anything you are doing, you should not be doing that thing. "Ah, but," you say, "the enemy are also praying for victory because they believe that they are fighting on the side of right." Most likely there is some right and some wrong on both sides in any conflict. When we pray, we are not praying that God will do what we want Him to do; we are seeking to align our will with His Will. *Thy will be done.* We fight because we believe it is right to fight. We pray because we believe it is right to fight. But we may be wrong. So we pray: *nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.* If we do believe we are fighting for the right and if we seek God's blessing on what we are doing, we will do everything we can to minimise the suffering we cause to the enemy and to bring the war to a speedy conclusion and a just peace. If we cannot in good conscience pray for victory, then we ought to be pacifists.

I think it is generally true in life that we ought to pray for God's blessing on any enterprise we undertake – business, education, family life, whatever. If we cannot in good conscience ask God's blessing on what we

do, we ought not to do it. If we do seek God's blessing, then we have to behave accordingly, to be a blessing to others. In business, for example, if we pray for success, we mustn't exploit our workers, cheat our customers or recklessly damage the environment. We must expect to use any profits we make unselfishly and charitably. If we pray for success in examinations, it must be because we intend to use our qualifications in the service of others as well as ourselves. If we pray for a successful conclusion to a romantic engagement, it must be because we seek to be a loving husband or wife to the object of our affections, not just to exploit them for own pleasure.

It is only in games and sports where I don't think it is appropriate to pray for victory. If we pray for God's blessing on a game, it surely means praying that everyone has a good time and friendships are strengthened by all the players and spectators having a good time together. It doesn't mean asking God to give our side an unfair advantage over the competition!

I started thinking along these lines because there was a by-election coming up. I know who I hoped would win, but I didn't think it was fair to pray for that candidate's success. Rather to pray that the electorate would choose the best person to serve the constituency and the nation. *Thy will be done*. Praying fair. In other circumstances I might pray for a particular election result if I really strongly believed that one candidate was the best or another candidate (say from a party which advocated violence) was wholly unacceptable, but it would always have to be in the context of *Thy will be done* and praying fair. Roger.

News from the Cuxton Community schools

Dear Friends of our school,

It has been extremely busy in the Cuxton schools since Christmas. The Junior school continues to make progress. Staff are working extremely hard. Children are engaged in their learning, being challenged and their behaviour is very different as a result. The environment is brighter and reflects the good work that is taking place. Walls are covered in children's work- Viking masks , maths activities and creative writing and arguments and debates. We have had many positive comments from visitors and parents and I am very proud of the way folk are working as a team to ensure this school is turned around.

The infant children are happy and engaged in their learning. Our youngest children are a confident cohort who have been excited by many activities taking place, e.g. a trip to the park to look out for the shark on the way in the junior school pond and finding the dragon on the top field! The creative writing and the art work that have evolved from just these small topics have been tremendous. We have seen some excellent writing from our older children too who have written about Cuxton and London and produced 3D models of famous landmarks. Each class is performing an assembly for their parents. So far we have been entertained across both schools with:

Year 3, Henry the Eighth and his many wives,

Year 6 the Ancient Egyptians

Year 5/6 Recycling and the Energy Police!

Year 1 Fairy tales and Goldilocks and the Three Bears

Year 2 the Pied Piper of Hamlyn

Children have learnt words, spoken clearly, used a microphone, worn costumes, shown their work and their class to their parents.

After half term we look forward to further assemblies and Mothers' Day Celebrations, a trip to Reculver and the Infant schools Medway Music Festival. (Last year we could not go because of the snow!). I hope to have more news for you next time. Sandra Jones, Head teacher.

Hymn Writers 12b Graham Kendrick (et al) 2 2nd August, 1950

"....the so-called 'Worship Song' which is the thing you hear on Radio 4 on Sunday mornings, feebly crooned like a Cliff Richard tribute number to the sound of guitars and Eileen on the flute. Although it's radio, you can see the shy smiles, feel the warm hugs; this is Fellowship, capital F. But it's not hymnody." So says Michael White in an article (20th October, 2013 – Sunday Telegraph) in which he makes the case for the hymn under the headline "Let's be Upstanding for our Hymns of Praise" following the publication of a new edition of John D Julian's 'A Dictionary of Hymnody'. This volume first appeared in 1892 when, he says, Victorians went to church by default, "believed the

sermons and sang the hymns and knew the words.” Too enormous to appear in print, the new edition, taking several decades to complete, will be launched on-line in conjunction with Bristol University. But, who will be reading it? And, who will need access to it. Certainly in our Cuxton and Halling churches, as in other parishes, we mainly have the hymns we need within our own hymn books. John Rutter, composer-in-residence to the Church of England, and prolific writer of all things Christmas, has said hymn tunes are “a complete art form, like the English madrigal” and, one might suppose, the sea shanty. The purposes of these types of music are now, it seems, confined to history. All that the modern church seems to have at its disposal is the “Worship Song” the last real hymn having been written in the first part of the last century. So for the hymn in its true sense, we are left with – “the day Thou gavest, Lord, has ended!” Michael White goes on to say in his article that nobody sings at weddings or funerals any more, and the bride and groom have difficulty coming up with suitable music for their joyful day. They do not seem to have had the 1950s/60s benefits of church on Sunday and school assembly the rest of the week where hymns were a paramount part. Like the Rector (who said in his sermon last week that he had planned the hymns for his funeral) I, too, have sketched out what I would hope to have at mine and surprisingly one of those would be generally put under the worship song heading. The immediate post-war years (1940s) seem to have tolled the death knell on hymns as the country seemed to look forward for something different and, as we rose out of the greyness of those years, the established practices that had already taken a knock during the 1920s and 30s seemed to take an even bigger one as the era moved towards the Millennium and with new practices in education and increased laxity in the way people thought about themselves in their society, changes were bound to happen and the church, maybe, took a direct hit. I believe that we could miss the point here if we are too general in our description of the song of praise. Firstly, there are many more hymns written than appear in the major hymn books even by celebrated hymn writers like Wesley, Watts or Luther. Only those that are very well done get anywhere near print for general usage. There has to be Christian conviction in the words, set to suitable and supportive tunes and harmony, and they must be important in illustrating and emphasising the word of God. The hymns we sing during a service are subservient to, but illuminating of, the theme of the service. We don’t just pick our favourite hymns but, of course, that could be the bonus! Like hymns, only the good, well-constructed and relevant “worship songs” will survive and some of those can be quite well received. The work the choir is rehearsing for the Easter celebration, called ‘Beauty for Brokenness (God of the Poor)’ by Graham Kendrick, is one such piece which I have no doubt will last into time because of its message, tenderness of sincerity and its construction however unsuited it is to mass singing. John Rutter asserts that a hymn should be “monumental and (the tune should be) memorable.” Worship Songs, even good ones, being pop- or folk-derived, don’t really suit mass singing in the way “*O God, Our Help in Ages Past* does.” But then again, neither are our churches full of singers for a Sunday service like they were when that hymn was written, so what is used needs to be suitable and relevant. Another factor regarding especially the words of hymns is keeping pace with the change of expectation as fashion and language changes in society. Some hymns fall to the changes in the syntax of the language. Some phrases used in hymns are very old-fashioned in how they express the message. Some allude to out-of-date political thinking. The National Anthem is a case in point – ‘O Lord our God arise, scatter our enemies, and make them fall; confuse their politics, frustrate their knavish tricks; on thee our hopes we fix; God save us all’ – not entirely equal to the way we express ourselves today and maybe too confrontational in today’s world. Another hymn talks about ‘hobgoblin and foul fiends’. And then there’s that delightful hymn by Mrs Alexander with its verse from All Things Bright and Beautiful – “The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate. God made them high and lowly, and ordered their estate.” Again, not entirely suitable for today’s way of thinking. And then there are adjustments that could be made for gender. “Rise up, O Men of God” says Michael White has “fallen foul of gender politics, requiring consequent adjustment” and even worship songs have too, such as “*Brother*, Let me be Your Servant”. Perhaps it may be better for us all to think about what the hymn is actually saying to us and not about political correctness (although I’m afraid I still have trouble with the hymn that talks about trees clapping their hands – what’s that all about!). And perhaps we should get rid of the title ‘worship songs’ which tends to stigmatize against those that are called hymns.

Certainly modern hymns are less assertive than they used to be. ‘Onward Christian Soldiers’ which is very positive in its outlook has given way to maybe more thoughtful and reflective themes as the way this country is viewed in the world changes and the way religion is viewed by the masses. What comes through in the hymns of Graham Kendrick and his thoughtful contemporaries is a development of the Christian message to be used in the support of worship. He alludes that he is having a great time composing music and words for us to use not only as an aid to worship but to give a good understanding of the Christian faith in our daily life and, although some say that his music is becoming

outdated and others deride it by saying it's just *worship songs*, the fact is that it does touch many people of all sections of the Christian religion and in that respect brings us all together. The words are understandable and the melodies are very easy to sing and in those two respects that is a bonus in today's world.

We cannot just stagnate. Some say that "For All the Saints" was the last real hymn to be written. The music set by Ralph Vaughan-Williams is the tune that is mostly used for this hymn and he died in 1958. What on earth has been going on since then? Massive changes in outlook, the way we live and think of others, and we've also gone global. These changes affect everything, and that includes religion. The reaction to the construction of the hymn has also changed in the way the words and music reflect the values of rest of society. Graham Kendrick is one of those whose words and music reflect how he sees these changes and the way music and song have fragmented into many different styles since the turn of the twentieth century. Religion changes in the same way as everything else, but now it's faster and more dramatic than it has been in the past. Kendrick is trying to keep abreast of these changes while in the same time keeping faith with himself and his religious outlook. JGB

*Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair, Lord, in your suff'ring world this is our prayer.
Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace; sunrise to sunset your kingdom increase.
God for the poor, friend of the weak, give us compassion we pray
Melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain. Come change our love from a spark to a flame.*

STAMPS – Thank you everyone who is supporting this. Many of you have sent in loads of stamps and I am just about ready to send the next consignment on behalf of OCD UK. Please bring your used (and even unused) stamps into us. We are still collecting them –they are appreciated and for a good cause!! JGB



Max's Tail Piece

What weather we've been having lately, all this rain and wind! I haven't been up the woods much because Master says I get too muddy. So does he! One Saturday we had had a nice walk in the woods. Just as we got to St Michael's for Evening Prayer at 5.00, it started to rain hard. Then there was lightning and thunder. Master was glad we were safe in church. Then the wind got up, a tornado I think. A great big "preserved" tree came down in our garden, blocking the drive and damaging the gate. I wondered why, in a world in which games of conkers are banned for health and safety reasons, the council puts preservation orders on dangerous horse chestnut trees, which could kill anyone they fell on? Some people have also asked Master whether the council will be paying for the clear up and the damage? He thinks not. Master says that council officers are neither accountable nor responsible. The public just have to put up with their little ways.

He's just come in grumbling and laughing at the same time. He's been shopping and they won't let him have the stuff he wants. There was a power cut yesterday and they said that they couldn't sell anything which is supposed to be kept refrigerated. He pointed out that people didn't have refrigerators when he was young (showing his age again), that things like butter and cheese don't go off in a few hours at room temperature and that drinking sour milk doesn't kill you, but all to no avail. Then he said that, if they couldn't sell it, they might as well give it away. But they wouldn't do that either. All this good food which was still perfectly good to eat would have to be destroyed! So he's laughing at the excessive caution, cross about the waste and really fed up that he'll now have to go shopping twice in two days. After all, if you go to the shops every day, you don't need a fridge – which was the reason for buying one in the first place!

Finally, some good news. He's bought some socks which never need washing. What's more they were very cheap. The trouble is that the reason they will never need washing is that they go into holes the first time they are worn. I'm not sure about the ethics of putting unwashed socks in the dust bin, however.

Let's hope the rain stops soon. It's so much worse in many parts of the country. I expect I'll be back in the woods soon, whether it stops or not. He's getting fed up with just walking up the road and back. We'll get more time in the garden too when he can't use the wet as an excuse for idleness. Max, The Rectory Spaniel.