

Services at St Michael & All Angels Cuxton			
6 th May Easter 6	9.30 Holy Communion	Isaiah 55 vv 1-13 p742 Acts 10 vv 44-48 p1105 I John 5 vv 1-6 p1228 John 15 vv 9-17 p1083	
10 th May Ascension Day	7.30 pm Holy Communion	Acts 1 vv 1-11 p1093 Luke 24 vv 44-53 p1062	
13 th May Easter 7 Sunday after Ascension	9.30 Holy Communion	Ezekiel 36 vv 24-28 p868 Acts 1 vv 15-26 p1092 I John 5 vv 9-13 p1228 John 17 vv 6-19 p1085	
20 th May Whitsunday Pentecost	8.00 Holy Communion	Epistle & Gospel BCP Whitsunday	
	9.30 Holy Communion	Ezekiel 37 vv 1-14 p868 Acts 2 vv 1-21 p1093 Romans 8 vv 22-27 p1135 John 15 v26 – 16 v15 p1083	
27 th May Trinity Sunday	9.30 Holy Communion	Isaiah 6 vv 1-8 p690 Romans 8 vv 12-17 p1134 John 3 vv 1-17 p1065	
3 rd June Trinity 1	9.30 Holy Communion	Deuteronomy 5 vv 12-15 p184 II Corinthians 4 vv 5-12 p1160 Mark 2 v23 – 3 v6 p1004	
Services at St John the Baptist Halling & the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling			
6 th May Easter 6	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	James 1 vv 22-27 p1213 John 16 vv 23-33 p1084	
	11.00 Holy Communion & Holy Baptism	Acts 10 vv 44-48 p1105 John 15 vv 9-17 p1083	
10 th May Ascension Day	9.30 Holy Communion	Acts 1 vv 1-11 p1093 Luke 24 vv 44-53 p1062	
13 th May Easter 7 Sunday after Ascension	11.00 Holy Communion	Ezekiel 36 vv 24-28 p868 Acts 1 vv 15-26 p1092 I John 5 vv 9-13 p1228 John 17 vv 6-19 p1085	
	5. 30 Evening Prayer Jubilee Hall	Deuteronomy 34 vv 1-12 p214 I Timothy 1 v18 – 2 v15 p1191	
20 th May Whitsunday Pentecost	11.00 Holy Communion & Stop! Look! Listen!	Ezekiel 37 vv 1-14 p868 Acts 2 vv 1-21 p1093 Romans 8 vv 22-27 p1135 John 15 v26 – 16 v15 p1083	
27 th May Trinity Sunday	11.00 Holy Communion	Isaiah 6 vv 1-8 p690 Romans 8 vv 12-17 p1134 John 3 vv 1-17 p1065	
3 rd June Trinity 1	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	I John 4 vv 7-21 p1227 Luke 16 vv 19-31 p1050	
	11.00 Holy Communion	Deuteronomy 5 vv 12-15 p184 II Corinthians 4 vv 5-12 p1160 Mark 2 v23 – 3 v6 p1004	
Holy Communion at Cuxton Wednesdays @ 9.30am		Holy Communion at Halling Thursdays @ 9.30 am	
2 nd May S Athanasius	Acts 15 vv 1-6 John 15 vv 1-8	3 rd May	Acts 15 vv 7-21 John 15 vv 9-11
9 th May Rogation Day	Acts 17 v15 – 18 v1 John 16 vv 12-15	10 th May Ascension Day	Acts 1 vv 1-11 Luke 24 vv 44-53
16 th May	Act 20 vv 28-38 John 17	17 th May	Acts 22 v30 – 23 v11 John 17
23 rd May	James 4 vv 13-17 Mark 9 vv 38-40	24 th May John & Charles Wesley	James 5 vv 1-6 Mark 9 vv 41-50
30 th May Josephine Butler	I Peter 1 vv 18-25 Mark 10 vv 32-45	31 st May Corpus Christi	I Corinthians 11 vv 23=26 John 6 vv 51-58

1st May is S Philip & S James HC @ St Michael's@7.30 am

Copy Date June Magazine Friday 11th May Rectory 8.30 am.



Christian Aid Envelopes

We are no longer able to collect these door to door but they are included with the May magazine. You can bring them to church and put them in the collection plate. Alternatively, you can post them direct to Christian Aid at Freepost Christian Aid or donate online. Please go onto <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/> for further information.

If you receive this magazine in time, you can still go to the Christian Aid Supper at Strood Methodist Church, Cliffe Road, 7.00 for 7.30 pm on 27th April.

20/20 Vision



Our articles about Maidstone & District Route 20 have attracted quite a lot of comment. The bus photographed at Upper Halling shown in last month's magazine could not have carried on through West Malling to Maidstone. It would have been too tall to go under the railway bridge near West Malling station. Special lowbridge buses were needed for route 20. From 1964, Daimler Fleetlines like this were available and I'm sure I remember them being in use on route 20. Before such rear engined vehicles, lowbridge buses had a side gangway upstairs which made part of the ceiling of the lower deck lower. This meant that the seats had to be in fours instead of twos and people remember having to scramble over other passengers and being careful not to bang their heads. The reason rear engined buses could be lower without this inconvenience was that there was no drive shaft running under the floor from the engine to the rear axle. The lower picture, taken at Halling School Corner in 1950 is the kind of vehicle which would have been used for routes with low bridges before the advent of such as the Daimler Fleetline. It is bound for Cuxton according to the destination indicator. This one could be a Daimler CV5G.

Observant passengers may remember that the highbridge version of the Leyland Atlantean had a notice in the cab warning drivers which bridges they couldn't go under. (One was Sackville Arch which is at Bexhill, but I can't remember which others.) Older readers might also remember when North Street Strood has been closed by flooding and buses to Frindsbury and beyond have been diverted via Gun Lane, only to get stuck under the railway bridge, which is lower there than the one in North Street. Just to complete that picture, I'm told that the horse buses used to terminate at the "Old Gun", where the drivers would often have a beer. In the Summer, the combination of spilt beer and horse manure is said to have been very attractive to flies and generative of an interesting aroma. A few years later, the Chatham tram system divided at the bottom of North Street – some trams going to Frindsbury, others up Strood Hill. There was a man standing there to change the points.

A couple of Cuxton people remember 39 buses as well as 20s coming this way. This surprised me because I remember 39s running from Gillingham to Lower Rainham. I'm now told that the 39 ran all the way from Lower Halstow to West Malling vis Lower Rainham, Gillingham, Chatham, Rochester, Strood, Cuxton & Halling. Mystery solved!

Thy Kingdom Come

This is one of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer which Jesus taught us. People all over the world are being asked to use this prayer especially from Ascension Day (10th May) – Pentecost/Whitsun (20th May). See <https://www.thykingdomcome.global/>

"As we pray 'Thy Kingdom Come' let us consider what God might be calling us to do in our churches, our homes and in our own lives. We hope to support you on this continuing journey in helping us all becoming witnesses for Jesus. Keep an eye out for new resources throughout Thy Kingdom Come to help people share their faith", the Archbishops of Canterbury & York.



The Christmatisation of Easter

I wasn't the only person this year who noticed how like Christmas Easter is becoming. Just as Christmas goods come on sale as soon as Hallowe'en is o'er, so hot cross buns and Easter eggs appear in the shops before New Year's Day. Out with the old, in with the new. There are Easter cards, Easter trees and Easter food. Turkey has become a popular Easter dinner and some stores had a special Easter stollen cake on sale. Easter egg hunts have become ever more popular and are very successful (especially if, unlike the Church, you don't choose to hold them on a cold, wet day). Like Christmas, Easter is becoming more and more a family fun festival which is also a commercial opportunity.

So, what's not to like? Families ought to be allowed to have fun together. There's nothing wrong, surely, with making a reasonable profit out of the goods and services which help them to enjoy themselves. Hopefully, like Christmas, a happy Easter might even make us think of people less fortunate than ourselves and do something to make them happier too.

However, these are my concerns and perhaps they should be yours as well. These two festivals seem to be losing their specifically Christian content, at the same time becoming increasingly secular and going back to their pagan roots. Santa is more significant than Jesus in December. Now Santa is St Nicholas, but how many people think of that and what is the resemblance between the C4 Bishop of Myra (in modern Turkey) and Father Christmas with his workshop and elves in Lapland? Turkey? I think not. Nicholas came from the country and never roasted the bird which comes from America! Father Christmas also owes a lot to Shamanism, not to mention Coco Cola, which like turkey (the bird, not the country) also comes from America.¹

Similarly, the Easter bunny or hare seems to be taking over from Jesus as the main character in the

Easter story. It reminds me of the child who was asked which book mattered most at Christmas. He replied, the Argos catalogue.

So, by bringing forward Christmas to November and Easter to January, yes, you get people into the right spirit. A cynic might say, "the spirit for spending their money." Christmas swallows up Advent. Easter pushes aside the end of Christmas and also Epiphany. Lent and Holy Week disappear. The cross on the hot buns becomes just a pretty pattern. It's even suggested that Easter should be fixed at a date to suit the tourism industry and lose its connection with the day on which the Lord's Resurrection is celebrated throughout the world and the Jewish Passover which is the context of the Easter story.

Advent is about death, judgment, hell and heaven. The first three of these four last things aren't very cheerful topics, but they are real and they need to be considered. The joy of Christmas is, *So God loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* We shall all die. We shall all be judged for the way we have lived. Sin, the world and the devil, hell, are all real. We do have to confront these truths. *The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* The joy of Christmas is the gift of God. That is the true meaning of Christmas. Shallow merry-making for the last two months of the year isn't Christmas and it can't satisfy our real needs as human beings. Evil in the world, the troubles we have to face in our lives are real and God supplies us with the resources to deal with them. It's no answer to pretend that they don't exist or to forget about them in a surfeit of partying. We have to face up to them, to offer them up to God and to receive from Him the grace we truly need to live our lives. Christmas without Advent is meaningless. There is no mercy without judgment. Redemption means nothing unless we recognise that, without Christ our Redeemer, we are slaves to sin and the fear of death. I struggle to insist on keeping Advent every year and keeping Christmas only when Advent is complete. It doesn't make me popular, but I shan't give up. It matters that we take things seriously. If we don't, we have nothing to offer the world in its deepest needs.

¹ Does anyone remember that old tale about the political disaster which followed from someone dropping his Christmas dinner? The downfall of Turkey, the overthrow of Greece, the destruction of China, a disaster befalling Brussels all come into it. Is there any more? Tell me if some sage out there knows his onions.

In the same way, Easter needs Lent and Holy Week. We need to examine ourselves, to recognise where we fall short of being the people we are meant to be. We are meant to be people of love, of love for God and for one another. That's all that matters in the end, that we are people of love. The Beatles were right. "All you need is love". God is love. So we need to repent of our sins, our failure to love. It really matters what kind of people we are. In Holy Week, we see just how much God loves us. God loves us so much that Jesus died for us in agony on the Cross. His Death atones for all our sins. His Death is a full, perfect, and sufficient, sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world. He died in our place. He died that we might live.

Once, when I was young, I attended a Good Friday service and thought to myself, "Well, this isn't very jolly. It's not going to attract many people!" Afterwards, I realised I'd missed the point. Thinking about someone being crucified isn't very jolly. But terrible things do happen in the world, many of them the result of downright human wickedness. On the Cross, Jesus suffers with us and for us. He is our Redeemer. It isn't very jolly, despite Monty Python's "Life of Brian." Without the Cross, however, there would be nothing for us in our deepest need and we Christians would have nothing to offer the world. Easter is such a wonderful celebration because of the Cross. *Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!* Through faith in His Blood, we are risen with Him. Easter isn't the happy ending, that our best

friend didn't die after all. Easter is the completion, the fulfilment. He has died and thereby He has conquered death. He has taken all the sin of the world on His own sinless person and has thereby destroyed sin's power to destroy our lives. *Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!*

I expect I shall be thought a curmudgeon for trying to hold off a shallow celebration of Easter in Lent and Holy Week, delaying the consumption of hot cross buns till Good Friday and of Easter eggs till Easter Day, but I'll still do it. You don't need a shallow generic Spring Festival with Christian overtones. What you need is faith in Christ crucified so that you may know the deepest depths of the joy of His Resurrection!

Let me join in St Paul's prayer for us all. Roger.

Ephesians 3:14-19

¹⁴For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

¹⁵Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,

¹⁶That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;

¹⁷That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

¹⁸May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;

¹⁹And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

Psalm 24 (An Ascension Day Psalm).

Domini est terra

The earth is the Lord's, and all that therein is : the compass of the world, and they that dwell therein.

2 For he hath founded it upon the seas : and prepared it upon the floods.

3 Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord : or who shall rise up in his holy place?

4 Even he that hath clean hands, and a pure heart : and that hath not lift up his mind unto vanity, nor sworn to deceive his neighbour.

5 He shall receive the blessing from the Lord: and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

6 This is the generation of them that seek him : even of them that seek thy face, O Jacob.

7 Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors : and the King of glory shall come in.

8 Who is the King of glory : it is the Lord strong and mighty, even the Lord mighty in battle.

9 Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors : and the King of glory shall come in.

10 Who is the King of glory : even the Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end. **Amen.**

Mothers' Union — Children's Society Talk

Julia Wells, our Church Representative of the Children's Society, arranged for a speaker from the Children's Society to give a talk to the Mothers' Union in March. We had the pleasure of meeting a Greek Cypriot Student who introduced herself as Bee, short for Burcu Kuter. While studying for her Master's Degree in Psychology at King's College, London, Bee had participated in the work of the Children's Society. She described the wonderful work undertaken to help reach out to vulnerable children who are desperately in need of support. Many children are neglected, living in poverty or in fear of violence. Children should not be experiencing such difficulties in life. The Children's Society helps to nurture the children through their problematical childhood. We all agreed with her thoughts that all children need to feel loved and to have someone in their lives to approach in times of difficulty.

This is also the very core of the Mothers' Union which was founded by Mary Sumner to help families and nurture children. Through the sterling work of Julia Wells over the last 20 years in distributing collection boxes and collecting in the money, our church has made £ 6,804.53 from our boxes and £11,444.77 from the Christingle Services for the Children's Society. In appreciation and recognition of Julia's work, the Children's Society sent Julia a commemorative certificate, which was presented in church on 4th March at St Michael's. Well done Julia! We shall continue to support you by having a collection box and contributing to the Christmas Christingle collection at the Nativity Services. JAB



Women's World Day of Prayer

Traditionally the Women's World Day of Prayer is always on the first Friday in the month of March and St. Michael's Church was due to host the service at 7.00 p.m. on Friday 2nd March. Due to heavy falls of snow, the service was postponed to a 10.00 a.m. service on Friday 9th March at St. John's Church. This suited everyone and many expressed their appreciation of the convenience of a daytime service and the ease of accessibility at St. John's. We have decided to keep the service to the daytime which is the practice already in many churches.



The service is always most enjoyable with a coming together of members of the Cuxton Community Church with St. Michael's and St. John's. The service was set by people in the country of Suriname, with the theme "All God's Creation is Very Good!" There is always a part for anyone who wishes to participate and we involve members of all churches. As usual, Gill Feraday accompanied us on the organ with challenging, lively hymns and we appreciate her contribution over the years. Thank you for your wonderful support Gill. As usual, St. John's did us proud with refreshments afterwards.

We were asked by the WWDP Committee to express our thoughts on changing the name to "World Day of Prayer" as the prefix "Women's" does put men off attending! It can also give the impression of being an older woman's service to the younger women who are thinking of attending. Apparently in the 1930s, when the idea was first started, it was just World Day of Prayer and the word "Women's" was added later. Having the word "Women's" in the title can be beneficial to women in the less developed countries, where they are still experiencing discrimination and inequality. We all expressed our views and the vote was equal for and against. One suggestion was that the title should be "World Day of Prayer organised by women". We would welcome your thoughts on the subject. Jenny, Mary M. and Buffy.

Did You Hear About the Arabic Version of "The Flintstones"?

Apparently, the Saudis don't like it but Abu Dhabi do.

I burned my Hawaiian pizza. I should have cooked it on aloha temperature.

ST MARY'S OLD CHURCH
(DOWN BY THE RIVER)
BURHAM ME13XY
PRESENTS:

QUIZ NIGHT

SATURDAY MAY 12TH

7:30PM START

£2 A HEAD 6 TO A TABLE

BRING DRINKS AND NIBBLES

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Prayer Group for Halling

What does God want from His Church? What are His plans for the future of our parish? Where can we find the resources to play our part? What would we ask of Him? Of what do we need to repent? How much do we have to be thankful for? Rev'd Ruth Bierbaum will lead this group, probably at her house. Those who couldn't come could submit prayer suggestions for our church to the group and receive pointers to use in their prayers at home. Please contact Ruth on 01622 722180.

House Group in Cuxton

Most likely Wednesday mornings once or twice a month at 11.00 am in the Rectory. Please get in touch with me if you're interested. Wednesday 2nd May we'll have our inaugural meeting before the parish lunch.

Confirmation

Please contact Rector if you are interested in being confirmed this year.

Easter

Thank you again to everybody who contributed to our Easter celebration: the bells; the music; maintaining, cleaning and decorating the church buildings; arranging the flowers, sacristan, wardens and servers and all who join our prayers and praises at the breaking of bread and dividing the word.

One funny thing was that at St Michael's, on the second Sunday of Easter, during the last hymn, I noticed we were singing the wrong words to the right tune and they didn't make sense in context. So we had to sing the right tune again with the right words, though one person suggested it was the wrong tune.

This year, the Orthodox Church celebrated Easter a week later than us in the West. Our Bulgarian friends held a midnight service over the weekend of the 7th and 8th of April. St Michael's was packed with members of their fellowship met together to celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord. It is wonderful to share our building with this vibrant fellowship.

Because 25th March was Palm Sunday, Lady Day fell this year on 9th April and it was a wonderful privilege to welcome members of the Mothers Union from Gravesend, Rochester and Strood to join us as we celebrated Gabriel's appearance to Mary to tell her that she would be the Mother of the Son of God and her acceptance of God's Will for her life. We were especially pleased to welcome Julia Jamieson, the Rochester MU diocesan president.

We beseech thee, O Lord, pour thy grace into our hearts; that, as we have known the incarnation of thy Son Jesus Christ by the message of an angel, so by his cross and passion we may be brought unto the glory of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



Sissinghurst Castle Garden

Sissinghurst Castle Garden has had a varied history, ranging from being a prison to a workhouse to a family home. Throughout its history there has been a close association with farming.

It was bought in the

1930s by Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson who set about turning a virtual ruin into a family home with an amazing garden. It is because of their endeavours and the work of National Trust that we are able to enjoy the Sissinghurst Estate today. The 460 acre estate is set in the lovely Wealden countryside and includes a working farm with various crops, cattle, sheep and pigs as well as paths to enjoy walks or cycle rides.

From the car park there is a very short walk down past coffee and garden shops then onto the visitor reception and information area. Adjacent to

reception is the Oast House which currently has a photographic exhibition, 'The International Garden Photographer of the Year'. This exhibition has some very interesting images and displays of dried and fresh flowers.

Straight ahead, from reception, is the familiar tower situated in the garden. The buildings at the entrance to the garden have special rooms. To the left is a library and reception room. To the right are smaller rooms which house an exhibition of artefacts from the estate and provides an indoor space for introductory talks to the public from volunteers. Walk through the nearby arch and explore the gardens which are divided into 'rooms', eg the White garden, The Lime Walk, The Orchard and the Purple Border. At this time of year there are spring flowers in bloom and there is a visible focus on pruning and preparation for the next season. The vegetable garden remains open all year round producing salad and many vegetables for the restaurant. There are hard pathways in all areas of the garden so it is easy to wander even during the uncertain and inclement weather of spring.

The orchard is out of bounds in early spring to allow the plants and grass to recover and renew before summer. This means that the quaint white gazebo at the end of the orchard, built in 1969 in memory of Harold Nicholson, can only be viewed from the boat house or the other side of the moat outside the gardens. Facing into the orchard is South Cottage. This was home to Vita Sackville-West's bedroom and Harold Nicholson's book room. Guided tours of the cottage are given by volunteers. It contains some exceptional rooms

and gives great insight into the lives of Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicholson.

There is a house at the edge of the white garden, the Priest's House. This property is rented out by the National Trust for holidays. Priest's House is a detached brick property, believed to be part of the original Elizabethan mansion but it has had considerable renovation although there are many original features.

The tourist guide issued at visitor reception maps out two walks. The shorter walk, about 1 mile, starts near the entrance to the garden and follows the pathway between the well stocked gift shop and the garden beside Priest's House. Turn right behind the Priest's House and follow the path parallel to the moat and boathouse. At a cross-section of paths near the white gazebo turn right and walk across the bottom of the orchard to a gate. This gate opens into a meadow that leads down to the lakes. There is a well signed path around the lakes through the leafy woodland and eventually over a stream. The path follows a route across a sheep field, up a slight incline and back onto a hard pathway. This leads past the Sissinghurst Castle Farmhouse and back towards the entrance to the garden. The longer walk is approximately 3 miles. It is circular, takes in more of the estate and includes some stunning viewpoints.

The granary restaurant serves a variety of food and drink. Many dishes include ingredients from the vegetables garden. As with many National Trust restaurants there are homemade cakes and scones served all day with tea, coffee and soft drinks. A most enjoyable day out! Holly Croft.

Forthcoming Attractions

27th April 7.00 for 7.30 pm Strood Methodist Church (£7.00).

28th April 10.00 am: Vestry Meeting & APCM Church Hall.

28th April 7.00 for 7.30 pm: Barn Dance Jubilee Hall (£8.00 includes food. Bring drink).

12th July 7.30 pm: Cantium Singers @ St Michael's.

11th November: Centenary of Armistice which ended fighting in the First World War.

Disabled Lavatory for the Church Hall - Your Help Needed

The Coop are giving us a grant for this from their community fund. If you would like to help and are a Coop member, please register by calling 0800 023 4708 or on <https://membership.coop.co.uk/register>

Then, every time you spend money on Coop goods at the Coop, they donate something towards our fund. Users of the hall will see that the work began in Easter week and will probably be complete by the time you read this, but we've still got to pay for it!

From the Registers

Baptisms:

18th March

Isabelle Hope Leader

Bearsted

Max Ryan Leader

Summer Rose Leader

8th April

Emily Ellen Birch

Chatham

Funerals:

15th March

Lita Foster (90)

Bush Road

6th April

Sylvia May Crow (87)

formerly of Halling

St Michael's Draw April: £10 Mrs Morren (19), £5 each Mr Crundwell (14) & Mr Curnow (30).

St John's Draw March: £5 each Mrs Parris (54), Mrs Catchpole (79), Mrs Terry (125) & Mrs Clarke (180) – drawn by Mrs Haselden.

The Pilates Element

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

Emily Pollington, member of FHT, qualified instructor.

Pilates classes are held in the church hall on Tuesdays from 7.00-8.00 pm. For more information, please contact instructor Emily Pollington, 01634 256942, 07940233296, emilypollington@btinternet.com Also on Facebook.

Easter Egg Hunt

There was some trepidation and even talk of cancellation (never on my watch!) because bad weather, even snow, was forecast for Easter Monday. It was damp, but it wasn't too bad. There's no such thing as bad weather, only unsuitable clothing. So we went ahead with what has become a traditional event in the Rectory grounds. Some of today's parents were yesterday's children. We had great fun looking. This year we tried a new idea – finding bunnies with letters (not lettuce) to exchange for eggs once a word had been completed (Celebration if you didn't get it!). There was also a lot going on in the hall (warm & dry) with handicrafts, refreshments and a raffle. Thanks to everyone who worked so hard to create another splendid event. Spare eggs were donated to the food bank.

The Seasonal Steps of our Sires - May
The first of May is May Day or Garland Day rejoicing at the beginning of Spring as Nature bursts forth from her winter period of sleep. For the Celts it marked the beginning of summer when livestock could be moved from protected valleys to the hills where they could graze on new growth in the better weather. Villagers

would meet on the green for May Day revels and dancing, a time of celebration that came long before the Red Square parades, the singing of the 'Nationale', or the newly imposed Socialist bank holiday and the singing of the Red Flag. It is also the feast of S Philip and S James. The weather was getting warmer and long sunny days were not far away.

The Maypole is a symbol of virility. Traditionally the pole stood at the centre of the community, brightly painted in rings and spirals, and adorned with ribbons and greenery, sixty to eighty feet high. The smaller version we see today for dancing around and the platting of colourful ribbons is a nineteenth century invention coming from southern Europe, as is the crowning of the May Queen with hawthorn blossoms; she represents Flora, the Roman goddess of Spring.

Fifty days after Passover (and Easter) is Whitsun when the Church in England celebrates Pentecost, the time when the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles after Jesus was taken up to heaven (Ascension Day or Holy Thursday). Whitsun was often a time for celebration and merrymaking, and was accompanied by bell ringing, white flowers, lilac and hawthorn decorations in church. Between Easter and Whitsun was the time for baptism and it is thought that the word Whitsun came from White Sunday after the traditional white baptismal robes of those being baptised.

May 29th is Oak Apple Day, a day of national rejoicing when Charles II was restored to the English throne after the period of Commonwealth. Charles hid from pursuing Roundheads after the Battle of Worcester in an oak tree near Boscobel House at Wolverhampton. A sprig of oak is the Royalist badge and, until recently, everyone was expected to wear this token on the day. In Victorian times houses, churches and even railway trains were decorated with oak and if you were challenged to reveal your token and were not wearing it, you could be pinched or stung with nettles, and some children therefore called the day 'Pinch-Bum Day'. It is said that Charles had to be pinched by his companions whilst hiding in the oak tree so that he remained awake. The Chelsea Pensioners, of Charles II's royal hospital, are served, traditionally, with beer and plum pudding on Oak Apple Day - very pleasant and very English! A children's rhyme from Northumberland states:

"Twenty-ninth of May, Royal Oak Day; if you don't give us a holiday we'll all run away."

My grandmother was fond of saying: "Ne'er cast a clout 'til May is out" meaning don't be too quick in getting into summer clothes as summer's warmth is not quite here. JGB



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What Do You Like Best?

I'm always interested in the feedback I receive regarding this magazine, what interests people. When I first came here, thirty years ago, one of our most popular features was the monthly recipe. Our then contributor had a great enthusiasm for cookery and the recipes were so well written that they were a pleasure to read even if you weren't a cook yourself. After she left, we continued for a while with recipes, but eventually we ran

out of ideas. There was some benefit for me, however. Where I admitted ignorance about food, I was sometimes given samples!

Around that time, we published in the magazine an account of the campaign around the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (HS1). There was quite a bit of interest because we published information that the authorities hoped would remain unknown or be forgotten about, drew attention to official mendacity and incompetence and published the opinions of ordinary people rather than official spokesmen. That wasn't always popular, but it did provide a public service.

Local history is always a popular topic and we'd welcome any further contributions. People enjoy shared memories and newer members of the community like to find out about what life used to be like here. It's astonishing, when you come to think of it, how much has changed within living memory. When our older inhabitants were young, many of their dads were away fighting a war, there was food rationing and bombs were being dropped. After the war, in a way, these villages were much more self-sufficient than they are now. Most people worked locally – generally on the farms or in the cement or paper industries. Cuxton and Halling both had far more shops where you could buy everything you needed and both villages were under the protection of their own resident police officers. Neither did they have to share a rector. On the other hand, a lot of people were much poorer and life was harder and less comfortable even for the relatively well off in the days before central heating, computers, fridges & washing machines, and mass car ownership.

From the sixties and seventies, the mechanisation of agriculture and the decline in the cement and paper industries, as well as the building of a lot of new housing (advertised to Londoners as a good place to get better quality living accommodation at a lower price and in a more pleasant environment than in the metropolis) led to a boom in commuting. Mass car ownership gummed up the roads and places to park and made local shops and businesses less economically viable. We've grown used to consumer goods and a range of products that would have astonished our forebears. Now many local residents are retired with more leisure, but potentially with more need of support.

Some people think that we have lost our on neighbourliness while becoming materially better off. What do you think? The only problem with publishing local history is that people remember things differently and there is sometimes sharp disagreement. It's all healthy, though, so long as we remain polite.

For a long time, Nature Notes was a popular feature with its detailed and well-informed accounts of our local flora and fauna. Unfortunately, our nature correspondent is currently indisposed, but Tommy and I try to fill in a little bit.

Speaking of Tommy, many people like his contributions the best of all. That's a change. Thirty years ago, quite a lot of people objected to my allowing my dog to write in the magazine. I think they thought he might say things I couldn't get away with. People also objected to my including jokes. Yet we used to have some very good humorous articles about what various parish organisations had been getting up to. It's a pity we don't get so many of those now. I'd publish them if we did.



The two big surprises in recent weeks have been the response to the article on my wearing shorts and what we've had to say about local bus services. I can't remember ever having had so much support as I received over the shorts article – with people ringing up or stopping me in the streets or shops to say they agreed with me. Likewise, there's been a lot of interest in the bus articles and some very helpful information and pictures from readers. Thank you all for your interest. Roger.

This is a 20 bound for Gillingham in Strood High St, I guess around 1950. I think the bus is a Bristol. RIK.



Tommy's Talking Points.

This is me surveying my domain. You can see our new bird bath and the stone frog which dwells in it. No stone tadpoles so far. This was taken on a Sunday when another of Master's friends brought his spaniel to see us for Saturday dinner. Thereby too hangs a tale. When Bobby died all those years ago, Master was deliberating about whether or not to have another dog. You can't replace us! Anyway, he went down to see this friend a week or two later and he had two young spaniels, one of whom in particular made a great fuss of Master. Yes, Master did need another dog. Meanwhile, a parishioner's son had seen a litter of springer puppies for sale at Biggin Hill. Bobby was a cross collie/labrador and Master was open to the idea of a different breed so as not to seem to be replacing him. Master and his mother duly inspected the puppies and put a deposit on one of them. Had he had more money with him, he might have gone for two. We are all so endearing. Maybe just as well, however, that he only got one. We are also very demanding. This one was Max, whom many of you knew. How come he got another springer after Max? That's because he had to type something into the search engine to reduce the number of suggestions. But I'm quite different from Max as you know. I shan't say more. Comparisons are invidious!

The bird bath also attracts foxes who like to come and drink. Now the evenings are lighter and the curtains are left open, I watch from indoors and start a tremendous hullabaloo when I see one. It does his nerves no end of good!

Notes from my diary. The snow came back. After the "beast from the east" I told you about last month, the weather became much milder for a week or so. He was back in shorts and tee shirt and even sitting in a deckchair in the garden when he had some spare time. I like that because I get to be out there with him and can keep an eye on the people passing and any wildlife like foxes or badgers or cats which live in or pass through my domain. However, there was still some lying snow even in those balmy temperatures and one lady taking her dog out reminded us of the old saying that it was waiting to be joined by some more. She was right. That night the temperature dropped and, in the morning, we were walking in the snow again. So it continued over the weekend. As I write, the wind is still very strong, but, as it is neither raining nor snowing, he has decided to wash his alb and surplices for Easter. They look funny on the line, all white against the background of snow on the ground. By comparison, I look almost cream! Does he really need five white robes? Aren't one or two surplice to requirements?

I did want to tell you about one of those milder days between the two periods of snow. We went up into the fields behind Cuxton Church just before six in the morning. Looking back, the whole Medway Valley was filled with mist and only the high ground on the other side could be seen. It was so wonderful that Master brought us back that way to see it again just after seven on our way to Church, but it was nearly all gone by then. You have to get up early to capture the best of the day.

Finally, Master observed some pussy willow at the end of March. It was growing on quite a big tree at the lowest point of the top path which transcends Dean Valley, just below where they tried quarrying it for chalk. Maybe it was there for some time and he just hadn't noticed it. His attention there has been focused on not slipping over in the snow or mud and, more recently, admiring the new born lambs. When the harsh winds returned, they and their dams couched down against the boundary fence and the trees behind it. These winds were so dry though that they seemed to dry up the second lot of snow without it melting and the paths stayed surprisingly dry and the lambs have subsequently been having a great time frolicking on the grass.

We did manage our re-arranged Saxon Shore walk. They decided to start an hour earlier – which meant getting up in the dark again because the clocks had just sprung forward. We took the train to Strood, met Master's friend at the station and walked round to the bus stop for a long wait. When it came, we boarded the bus for Cliffe, a great journey on the top deck looking out across the country or sleeping under the seat just as you prefer. It was a fine, dry day and later the sun came out quite warm. People had said that the route eastward from Cliffe was poorly sign-posted and that we should probably get lost, but all was fine. We soon crossed the fields to Cooling Castle, where they admired the remaining fine

mediaeval structure with its perpendicular arch in the castellated gatehouse. The castle was built in the C14 to protect us against the French and it was besieged briefly in 1554 by Sir Thomas Wyatt of Allington Castle in revolt against Queen Mary Tudor's marriage to King Philip of Spain, the eventual upshot of which was the launch of the Armada and its defeat in 1588 in the reign of Mary's sister Elizabeth. Sir John Oldcastle was a famous owner of Cooling Castle. His family came from Herefordshire, for which county he served as a member of parliament. He was a Lollard, which meant that he inclined to the Christian beliefs of John Wycliffe. Lollards believed that the bible should be available in English and questioned certain other dogmas of the monolithic Roman Catholic Church. For his faithfulness to his beliefs, Oldcastle was martyred in December 1417.

A little way farther on, we came to St James Church Cooling. Sadly, this church is now redundant, but it is very beautiful and has a holy atmosphere. We saw the children's graves which inspired Dickens to write the opening scene of "Great Expectations." You can see for miles across the mainly flat countryside in all directions. Thirty years ago, Master got lost here with the deanery youth walk in chest high nettles. He didn't have me to guide him then!

[Young people from several churches had met up to walk around the deanery. Friday evening they walked from Higham to Cliffe and slept in a school. The plan was the next day to walk via Cooling to St Mary Hoo, where cars would be waiting to take Master and those walkers who were in our choir back to Halling for a wedding. Having got lost at Cooling on a very hot day and struggled through all these nettles, the young people really couldn't get beyond High Halstow. There were no mobile 'phones in those days and Master had to run on ahead to find the cars at St Mary Hoo, not being entirely sure where it was or how to get there. He couldn't do it now! All went well, however. There was even time to shower before marrying. The cars then took them back to rejoin the party sleeping in the Methodist Church (now closed) at Hoo St Werburgh and they finished the walk on the Sunday.]

The signposts still didn't let us down when we left Cooling this time till we got to Northward Hill nature reserve and bird sanctuary. The route was perfectly obvious to me, but the men first took us a quarter of a mile down the wrong track, before accepting that I was right. I didn't mind the extra run! There's a lot to see at Northward Hill – a lot more if you come without a dog, because we canines aren't allowed in the more sensitive breeding areas. There are long views down to the Thames, myriads of plants and, of course, birds! From here onwards, there are thousands of daffodils and Master thinks it might be worth returning in a few weeks when the old-fashioned cherry orchard will be in bloom. Currently, sheep safely graze under its branches.

We skirted to the north of High Halstow and diverted from the advertised route to see St Mary Hoo, another redundant church, but this one not open to the public. We sat by a duck pond for a rest and a sandwich. It is a beautiful place. If a hamlet is a small settlement without a church and a village must have a church, is a place with a redundant church a village or a hamlet?

We had to walk down a bit of main road to the Fenn Bell, which unfortunately for us, is closed Mondays and Tuesdays. We crossed the Ratcliffe Highway, delved down behind a garage and walked round some interesting, but very muddy, back ways. These brought us out into the open once more, but now with the Medway rather than the Thames in our sights. We were soon in Hoo and took the bus to Rochester, where they had a pub lunch and I had a snooze. Then, back to Strood and train home.

Since then we have had Easter and the Easter Egg Hunt in Master's garden. That was great fun for all concerned, despite the weather. Since Easter, there have been a lot of wet and grey days. The result has been that the paths are still very muddy and slippery. Master has to be careful walking and I come home filthy every time we go out. He's getting worried that he can't cut the grass because it's too wet. It will be a real struggle for him if it grows much longer before the first cut of the year.

On the other hand, the anemones are coming out in the woods. Bluebells are beginning to appear. The daffodils are an incredible display, punctuated in our garden by tulips and hyacinths. There are dandelions in the fields and a multiplicity of primroses in churchyard and cemetery. Where Master sits of an evening, he can see through the window the japonica coming into pink bloom and the washing up is cheered up by the sight of the forsythia through the kitchen window. He feels very blessed to live where he does and so am I. Tommy the Rectory Spaniel.