

Services at St Michael & All Angels Cuxton		
Sunday 5 th June Trinity 2	9.30 Family Communion & Holy Baptism	1 Samuel 18 vv 1-16 Luke 8 vv 4-15
Sunday 12 th June Trinity 3	9.30 Holy Communion	Exodus 19 vv 2-8a Matthew 9 v35 – 10 v23
Sunday 19 th June Trinity 4	9.30 Holy Communion	1 Samuel 24 vv 1-17 Luke 14 vv 12-24
Sunday 26 th June Trinity 5	9.30 Holy Communion	Romans 6 vv 1-11 Romans 6 vv 12-23 Matthew 10 vv 40-42
Sunday 3 rd July St Thomas	9.30 Family Communion	Habakkuk 2 vv 1-4 John 20 vv 24-29

Services at St John the Baptist Halling and the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling		
Sunday 5 th June Trinity 2	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Romans 4 vv 13-25 Matthew 9 vv 9-26
	11.00 Holy Communion	Genesis 12 vv 1-9 Matthew 9 vv 9-26
Sunday 12 th June Trinity 3	11.00 Holy Communion & Holy Baptism	Exodus 19 vv 2-8a Matthew 9 v35 – 10 v23
	5.30 Evening Prayer Jubilee Hall	1 Samuel 21 vv 1-15 Luke 11 vv 1-28
Sunday 19 th June Trinity 4	11.00 Stop! Look! Listen!	Romans 6 vv 1-11 Matthew 10 vv 24-29
Friday June 24 th St John the Baptist	9.30 Holy Communion	Isaiah 40 vv 1-11 Acts 13 vv 14-26 Luke 1 vv 56-57
Sunday 26 th June Trinity 5	11.00 Holy Communion	Romans 6 vv 12-23 Matthew 10 vv 40-42
Sunday 3 rd July St Thomas	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Ephesians 2 vv 19-22 John 20 vv 24-29
	11.00 Holy Communion	Habakkuk 2 vv 1-4 Ephesians 2 vv 19-22 John 20 vv 24-29

Copy Date July Magazine: 10th June 8.30 am Rectory.

You will receive a warm welcome at any of our services and, of course, you are equally welcome at St John's and St Michael's whether you live in Cuxton or Halling. The 9.30 at Cuxton on the first Sunday of the month and the 11.00 at Halling on the third Sunday are family services.

On Thursday afternoons we have a Mother & Toddler service at Halling at 2.00.

Sunday School is at Cuxton Church Hall at 9.30 (not first Sundays).

Apologies and Explanation

My computer has been broken down for two weeks now. I am doing this in one day, a day late, on a borrowed computer. So please excuse the errors that arise from unfamiliarity and haste. This computer is actually much better than mine! Please also excuse my inability to access e mails or to supply information that I have only on disk. Some of my saved inserts will also be unavailable this month. I am giving up Diocesan Synod to do this. So please be gentle with me. Roger.

From the Registers

Baptisms:

24th April

1st May

1st May

Brandon Dean Martin
Jack Callum Honey-Green
Joshua Badham

Snodland
Woodbine Cottages
Essex Road

Confirmations:

10th May

Mary Fennemore
Suzanne Hughes
Jade Louise Thorne
Lauren Janette Thorne

High Street
Walderslade
High Street
High Street

Wedding:

14th May

Stephen Michael Ball & Tracey Lynn Linehan

Cuxton

Funerals:

29th April

10th May

11th May

12th May

Ronald Harold Rogers (83)
Joseph Shaw (64)
Allen Graham Creech (70)
Charles Leo Stephen Haines (81)

High Street
Formby Terrace
Low Meadow
Rochester Road

From the Rector

I have just read a most thought-provoking book – *The Purpose Driven Life*, by Rick Warren. It sounds like a self-help book, especially because it is written by an American and designed to be read daily over forty days. It is actually the very opposite of a self-help book. The point is that we cannot help ourselves. It is only when we acknowledge that, when we acknowledge that we are put on this earth for a far higher purpose than self, that we can begin to find those levels of self-satisfaction which (variously) self-help, consumerism and “spirituality”^{*} delude us into believing they can provide.

In Prayer Book Mattins we are invited to pray to God *Whose service is perfect freedom*, and that probably sums up in one phrase what Rick Warren is trying to tell us in forty days’ worth of readings.

^{*} People often talk vaguely about spirituality. What they seem to mean is an attention to religion based on themselves, on helping themselves to feel good and to cope with life’s challenges. The Chief Rabbi calls this an arid religion. He says, “There are two seas in Israel: the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee. The latter is full of life: fish, birds, vegetation. The former contains no life at all. Yet they are both fed by the same river, the Jordan. The difference is that the Sea of Galilee receives water at one end and gives out water at the other. The Dead Sea receives but does not give. The Jordan ends there. To receive without reciprocating is a kind of death. To live is to give.

They are worth reading, however. We don’t just need to know the right words to say in worship. We need to know what they mean and apply them in our daily lives.

That perhaps is another point tending to sum up Rick’s message. The basis of life is worship. Worship is not just what we do in Church. Still less is worship just a part of our Church services. The whole of a service is worship – bible readings and sermon, prayers and Communion, as well as the singing of hymns and worship songs. Putting money in the collection is an important and significant part of worship^{**}! In fact, worship is the offering of our whole lives back to God, work and leisure, family, friends, money, skills, talents, time. All things come from Him and we offer back to Him what is essentially His. And that is the secret of life.

Rick’s first section is *What On Earth Am I Here For?* The answer is that God made you and me in love. He loves each of us individually. It is His purpose that we should love Him with our whole hearts and our neighbours as ourselves. That is what we were made for and when we fail to love we feel unfulfilled. We are not carrying out our

^{**} Giving money symbolises giving all that we work for and all that it can purchase.

function and that is why we feel dissatisfied so long as we are alienated from God and from other people. Moreover this love is not merely for this earth; it is for eternity. Indeed we shall discover, when by God's grace we get there, that the most sublime joys we experience on earth are merely a shadow of the joy which is to come.

He then goes on to enumerate five purposes for a purpose driven life, the first of which is *You Were Planned For God's Pleasure*. This section concerns what I have already said. Life is about worship. Our relationship with God ought to drive everything else we do. We do not come to Church in order to please ourselves. We come to please God. That is obvious enough. It should also be obvious that we don't go to work or buy a house or choose where to live or whom to marry in order to please ourselves. We do all these things (and everything else we do if we are committed Christians) in order to please God. That might sound like a huge sacrifice, giving up our autonomy. In fact, it is the reverse. You only find yourself when you lose yourself. You only find your life when you lay it down. It is in communion with the Creator that we truly experience what it is to live. And you can only find that out by experience, by offering your life back to Him.

The second purpose is *You Were Formed For God's Family*. Christianity is a corporate thing. We belong to Christ. We are members of His Body, the Church. We belong to one another. If God is our Father, Jesus is our brother and we are members of the same family. Families are not always easy to belong to. The people who love us demand our time, our effort, maybe a share of our money. They take from us. But we also receive from them. It is moreover better to give than to receive. Human beings are meant to live in families, in communities. The Church is no less a family. If we are to grow, we need to belong. That means we need to commit – time, effort, resources. If we won't commit, we don't get the benefits of membership and the rest of the family is the poorer for our semi-detached attitude.

Families can be difficult. In all relationships we need to be ready to forgive and to be forgiven. But it is very often through the difficulties, the pain, the mistakes, that we grow. A love that was

never tested might turn out not to be real love at all.

Moving swiftly on, we come to the third purpose, *You Were Created to Become Like Christ*. Jesus is the Son of God. We were created in God's image. When we believe and are baptised, we are adopted as His sons and daughters. We are meant to be like Him. The Christian life is not a complacent respectability. It is a matter of soul-making. We become more like Him through repentance, through fellowship with Him, through prayer, through meditation on His Word, through corporate worship and Holy Communion and all the means of grace He so freely offers and we all too reluctantly receive.

You Were Shaped For Serving God is the Fourth purpose. We are all different. We have different talents and opportunities, different degrees of wealth, different standing in society. This is not by chance. God has made us the way we are. God has given us the opportunities we have. A life based on worship is a life in which these skills and opportunities are offered back to Him in service to the Church and the world, love in action offered to God and to our neighbours. We need to use common sense and the advice of friends, seasoned with prayer, to discern what God wants us to do each day and with the whole of our lives. Obviously we clergy see our jobs as a vocation. But any job can be a vocation if God is calling you to it. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with being rich, if you allow God to guide you as to how you distribute your money. There are things you can do that nobody else can do or nobody else will do. God's Church will be the poorer if you don't offer back to God the gifts He has given you.

Fifthly comes *You Were Made For a Mission*. The Church inherits the task God gave Jesus to accomplish. We are to tell the whole world the Good News. We are to fight against ignorance, poverty, sickness, pain and every manifestation of wrong in the world today. That is the Church's task. It is your task and mine.

The question is are we up for it? Because, if we aren't, not only are the Church and the world the worse for our dereliction of duty, we are poorer people ourselves, living unsatisfied and unsatisfactory lives.

Roger.

Evensong

On April 24th we held a special Evensong at St Michael's to commemorate the life of Derek Church. Derek did a great deal for this Church and for the local Scout Group as well as for the village in general. He always remembered his time in this parish as a very happy period in his life. We were very pleased to welcome his brother Donald and family and friends from far and wide to this service.

Several people said how lovely it was to have Evensong again and we thought we would try putting on a choral Evensong every few months. The next will be on July 24th at St Michael's at 6.30 pm with a Christian Aid theme.

As a priest, it is my duty and my joy to say Evening Prayer daily. The reason we stopped singing Evensong every Sunday in Church was that so few people came that the choir got discouraged. It is of course a perfectly valid act of worship when offered by one person or by just two or three, but we do like to feel there will be a good turnout if we prepare psalms and anthems, invite speakers etc. So really the future of sung Evensong depends on your commitment to coming. Let's see how it goes and make it a really joyful occasion with a full church.

Dean's Visit

We are looking forward to the presence of the new Dean of Rochester at our United Parish Eucharist on 31st July. This will be at St Michael's at 9.30 am.

Bible Study

There is a growing feeling in the parish that we need a regular meeting for fellowship, prayer and Bible Study. Once a quarter the Mothers' Union comes to the Rectory for Bible Study. These meetings are open to all. It has also been decided to hold general Bible Study meetings on those months when there is no MU Bible Study. Friday 24th June at 7.30 at the Rectory will be the next one. Wednesday 27th July at 7.30 is the next MU Bible Study. Friday 24th August would then be the next general Bible Study. All welcome.

2nd July
Barbecue

Rectory Grounds
From 6.00

St John's Draw: £5 each to Mrs Buss (15), Mrs Stevenson (47), Mrs Dallas (126), Mrs Homewood (36) & Mr Mitchell (69).

Church Hall Draw: This has been drawn and winners should have been notified, but the results are presently lost in cyber space. Apologies and hopes to publish them next time. RIK.

The first day of the month started with mist; then the sun shone warmly for the rest of the day. I took Sam through Six-acre Wood, then back across Church Fields. Red and white dead nettle, speedwell, violets, wood anemone, lesser celandines, chickweed, buttercups, shepherd's purse, cow parsley and dandelions bloomed. Primroses and celandines brought beauty to the churchyard. Sycamore saplings were in full leaf and there were flower buds on some of the elders. Blackthorn blossom was breaking into flower. Starlings and tits perched on the telephone wires.

The second day of the month dawned with early mist but, by the afternoon, the sun was shining brightly and birds were singing in the garden. I drove to Halling Marsh with Sam. A pair of shelduck were in the field which was bisected by a small stream. Two magpies hopped nearby. I noticed a small carpet of pale blue speedwell flowers near a willow tree. Red and white dead nettle, shepherd's purse and chickweed bloomed along the verges of the marsh road, while early plum blackthorn flowers were fading. The buckthorn blackthorn was like snow on the slender branches while hawthorn was in full leaf. Other trees remained bare, waiting for their time to burst into leaf. A chilly east wind blew up from the river where gulls circled and called. The following day I walked from the marsh along the dyke to Snodland. Gulls circled over the river and its ebbing tide. New leaves were bursting on the various shrubs; celandines bloomed up on the bank and a small tortoiseshell butterfly settled on a leaf. Flower buds had formed on a dogwood tree. A graceful silver birch tree bore new leaves and catkins. A pair of shelduck glided up river, a pussy, willow was in full bloom and a heron flew over the woodland. As we walked along the dyke the west wind was quite strong and the brown rushes sighed and swayed. As we returned I noticed tiny ground ivy flowers, a clump of violets, celandines on the bank and old man's beard straddling the hedges where I also found some red hips left over from autumn. I heard the chiff chaff and a woodpecker.

The 4th. of the month was grey with afternoon drizzle. We walked along Pilgrims Road where honesty bloomed along the verges, then climbed up into Mays Wood where I found the first bluebells. More leaves had burst their buds, bringing the freshness of spring to the wood where birds sang. In the distance I could hear a woodpecker hammering against a tree trunk. As we crossed Church Fields it felt quite chilly compared with yesterday's warmth. While on the marsh the next day I watched a mallard waddling along the pathway calling for its mate. He flew up over the field to be joined by a female. Two greylag geese flew over the river, circled the field, returned to the river, then disappeared from our sight. The morning of the 7th was bright with some sunshine and quite a strong

westerly wind which was cold. Heavy showers developed during the day; some were of sleet. Sam and I walked late in the afternoon through Six-Acre wood where the paths were wet after rain, then back across Church Fields. The blackthorn flowers were beautiful like snow. More rain fell during the evening. Winter returned on the 8th. with bitterly cold north winds. I took Sam to the country park at West Malling where horse chestnut trees were breaking into leaf. Skies were grey and paths wet after rain which began again in earnest as we returned to the car. There were some bright spells during the afternoon but it remained very cold. A pair of ducklings glided on the lake along with coots, swans, mallards, pochards and moorhens. A pair of mallards nestled on a grassy bank. We awoke on the 9th. to find ice had formed on the pond overnight. There was beautiful sunshine in the morning but it was very cold because of the northerly wind. Cloud formed so that the afternoon was quite bright, but there was no sunshine. I put out seed nuts and bread for the birds. In the late afternoon, we skirted the fields having gone through Mays Wood where a few bluebells bloomed and where there were carpets of wood anemones violets and celandines were also to be seen. It was less cold on the 10th. While we were on the marsh, the river was just beginning to ebb, bringing twigs and small branches with it. Carpets of speedwell lit up the grass with their blue flowers. Daisies adorned the banks where dandelions, buttercups, red dead nettle and blackthorn bloomed. Birds sang melodiously in the evening, I watched, with binoculars, a squirrel in the top branches of the sycamore tree, eating the young buds. On the 11th. as we walked by the lakes at Snodland, some of the paths were dry but others, because of rain, were muddy and rutted. Cherry blossom and red and white dead nettle bloomed. I watched an orange tip butterfly on a vetch flower and then a tortoiseshell butterfly hovering over the grass. Everything was now looking so fresh and green. A bank of blue ground ivy was to be seen while brown pussy willow flowers lay on the ground. I heard the chiffchaff and watched a green woodpecker fly ahead of us. A long-tailed tit hopped in the branches of a willow tree by the water. Along the path on the far side, tree after tree was white as blackthorn blossom. A patch of lesser celandines raised their golden heads to the sky and midges were dancing on the air. Coltsfoot flowers had partially gone to seed while a cow parsley floret bloomed. The sun was very warm. The morning of the 12th was sunny but cloud had developed by midday. As I viewed the woodland beyond the embankment, I was aware of the fresh green leaves which had burst from their buds. I could hear the greenfinch calling from the conifer tree. I saw a wren by the pond in the afternoon. The 13th. was dry but cloudy with westerly winds. The wren again bathed in the pond. I put nuts and seed and bread out

for the birds. Pigeons were taking over and the collared doves looked on as the food was gorged. (I've tried putting separate nuts out for the doves but to no avail.) We later walked along Pilgrims Road then climbed, by steeper paths which Sam selected, back into Mays Wood where fresh green beech leaves and sweet chestnut leaves were unfurling. Bluebells, violets, wood anemones, celandines and cuckoo flowers bloomed. Honesty and garlic mustard bloomed along the roadside verges, and birds sang in the wood which looked so beautiful. We crossed Church Fields, full of dandelions and buttercups. A few drops of rain fell. I found an archangel flower and cow parsley while in the wood. I also observed a large oak, roots of which the splayed out like a foot.

On April 14th. much needed rain fell during the morning. The fresh green of new leaves filled the woodland on the embankment and pigeons perched in the branches. Our two resident collared doves sheltered from the rain in the holly tree. The rain had ceased by mid-afternoon when I walked Sam along the top half of Six-acre Wood where cow parsley plants were growing, some showing small flowers. Violets were blooming. Bluebells, wood anemones and lesser celandines adorned Mays Wood. We crossed Church Fields where the grass was very wet. I walked through this rather than along the slippery parts. Late sunshine brightened the garden and evening skies were clear. It rained for most of the following day, filling the garden pond to the brim. Dark clouds rolled across the sky and quite a chilly wind blew from the west. Birds came to the garden for food. A jay, waiting until a magpie flew away from the bird table, hopped among the flower pots on the patio. We walked through Six-acre Wood then back across the fields where the grass was lush and wet. I noticed a few elder flowers were blooming which is not usual for the may blossom should come before the elder flower. We went into the church for evening prayer then went home as more rain fell.

Fog developed over the night of the 16th. The trees stood motionless and I could hear the mournful call of a wood pigeon. A woodpecker called from the woodland. The sun emerged to give a beautiful morning and the wet grass sparkled like diamonds. I took the Countryside Group for a walk in Six-acre Wood, Mays Wood and Church Fields where I helped them to identify wild flowers. I learned three new flowers myself stinking iris, spurge laurel and broomrape. Sanicle was in bud and ramson leaves emitted their garlic odour. We went as far as the carpet of bluebells which were very beautiful. Soon they would be highly scented. It was a most enjoyable time. The 17th. was a beautiful day with clear blue skies and golden sunshine. Birds sang and the surrounding countryside was beautiful. I took Sam to the lakes at Snodland where rippling water, on which gulls bobbed and a swan glided, reflected the blue of the sky. A fresh westerly breeze blew. White dead nettle bloomed along the edge of the path and wild cherry adorned two

trees. It had a perfume rather like may flowers. May and elder buds had formed. I found some hips and haws left over from the winter. Some blackthorn flowers were fading but on other trees they bloomed in profusion. A blackbird sang in the woodland by the water. Three coots swam across the lake. Coltsfoot flowers still bloomed among those which had seeded. We stood by the water which was clear, with stones on the lake's bed. The following day I took Sam across Church Fields and into Mays Wood then down into Dean Valley which was fresh and green. Bees searched for nectar from the white and red dead nettle and the air was full of birdsong. I found my first herb robert flower and delighted in the fresh green beech leaves like newly emerged butterflies' wings. Primroses bloomed in a glade at the bottom of the valley. Along the quarry road I found wild strawberry flowers and stitchwort. Two peacock butterflies flew together as we reached Swyre Shaw where the beautiful scent of bluebells filled the air. We passed the sunflowers, now dilapidated, their brown heads nodding on straw-coloured stalks. I heard a woodpecker hammering on a tree, then a squirrel darted up a trunk.

On Tuesday the 19th. I climbed up into Mays Wood with Sam. At the top of the hill I observed a fallen yew tree, from the trunk of which a beech tree had grown. On the trunk's roots which were upturned, beautiful bluebells grew. Nature presents its miracles to us. Bluebells bloomed in abundance and clumps of primroses flowered adjacent to our secret paths. The westerly breeze was quite chill as we crossed Church Fields.

On the 20th., while walking in the park at West Malling, I found various clumps of cowslips nodding their beautiful heads in the breeze. The sunshine was beautiful for the rest of the day.

The 21st. was beautiful with golden sunshine beaming down from cloudless skies. I drove Sam to the lakes at Snodland where the rippling water reflected the blue of the sky. Red and white dead nettle, daisies, buttercups, dandelions and coltsfoot bloomed. I was pleased to find another area where coltsfoot were growing. Cow parsley was beginning to flower, some elder bloomed and may buds were waiting to burst into flower. While most of the blackthorn had faded I came across one bush in full bloom. I watched a bumble bee hovering over the grass and a ladybird perched on a nettle. A swan glided on the water and the calls of coots and moorhens could be heard. There were large puddles to be negotiated and parts of the paths were very muddy. A kestrel hovered above. An easterly breeze blew, so when in the shade it was quite cool. The evening skies remained clear with the possibility of some air frost.

The 22nd. was another beautiful day with warm sunshine and blue skies. The east wind was less obvious, therefore not so chilly. We walked across Church Fields and into Mays Wood where the wild flowers raised their heads to the sun. A fox stood on the path watching us, then it ran off along the path and

into the woodland. We made our way down to Purty's Shaw where wild cherry blossom bloomed and petals were scattered over the paths. Six-acre field was bathed in sunshine. We walked along the top part of Six-acre High cloud covered the sky during the evening. I viewed a misty moon when I went to look outside before going to bed.

It was less warm on the 23rd. for the skies were grey. There was some brightness after morning drizzle, but the sun did not shine. We walked to the village along Bush Road and along the valley to Purty's Shaw where bluebells bloomed. The field still looked beautiful with red dead nettle and golden dandelions. We walked up the hill to the Six-acre Wood path, then through the churchyard and home. A bright moon rose up into the night sky. The 24th. was bright and sunny and no rain fell despite the forecast. We had a late afternoon walk by which time the skies were covered with high cloud. We came through the churchyard, along the top path of Six-acre Wood and back across the fields. The blackthorn flowers have faded to a brown mass of dried petals, so we now await the may and elder blossom. Rain fell after darkness had fallen.

Rain fell steadily through the morning of the 25th. By the early afternoon, the rain had ceased but the skies remained overcast. Sam made it quite clear that a walk along the road was not to his satisfaction, so I drove to Snodland where we walked round the Brookland Lake. A wren flew out from the nettles by the side of the muddy path and, as I walked up the hill, I found a hawthorn bush in blossom. I heard a nightingale singing in the hawthorns and elders. As we came along the concrete path, I saw two tiny snails, one with a shell of brown and fawn spirals and the other with yellow and fawn colours.

Rain fell during the morning of the next day; then in the afternoon the sun shone and a strong westerly wind blew. We drove to Halling then walked by the river, which was ebbing and rippled by the wind, to the heathland. A clump of golden dandelions was being investigated by a bee and on a vetch plant perched a ladybird. The creek, where a pair of swans glided, was full of stagnant water. Cut leaved cranesbill and a carpet of forget-me-not bloomed on the heathland and blue and white bells bloomed on a hump of earth. I also found ground ivy, wild garlic mustard and green alkanet. It was in flower along the path leading to the upper field where the wind almost blew us along. The spring light was clear and beautiful.

The 27th was sunny and warm; then soon after midday dark clouds gathered, strong winds blew and heavy

rain fell which was to be repeated throughout the afternoon. We walked along the top path of Six-acre Wood where all was fresh and green. The paths were wet and slippery. A very heavy shower fell turning the paths into streams. I had to walk up on the edge of the crops for fear of slipping. The bluebells looked beautiful in the wood where the leaves shone in the rain. The sun shone on the rain, forming a beautiful rainbow over the river and the village. The sun shone well into evening.

It was grey on the 28th and there was quite a strong west wind, but the rain which had been forecast did not fall. We drove along the lane bedecked with flowers to Birling. After lunch I drove Sam to the marsh where the wind was blowing white horses on the choppy river. We took the inner path where cut leaved cranesbill, daisies, buttercups and chickweed bloomed. We had to return to the riverside path because the other path was overgrown. I found the skeleton of a heron. Later, a beautiful heron flew over to the bank not far from shelduck, mallards, greylag and Canada geese. The wind became very strong and it was quite hard to walk against it on our return. Some drizzle fell during the evening.

The following day was warm with sunshine and variable cloud. We walked round the Brookland Lake at Snodland where white and red dead nettle, daisies, buttercups, dandelions, vetch, may blossom, wayfaring tree flowers, bluebells and cow parsley bloomed. A few puddles remained but otherwise the paths were dry. The chiffchaff was calling, and a nightingale sang and a robin pinked in a hawthorn. A peacock butterfly flew over the brambles. I haven't heard a cuckoo yet. As I returned I found a clump of stitchwort.

The morning of the 30th was dull but not cold. The sun attempted every so often to shine through the cloud, but it wasn't until the afternoon that it succeeded. It became very warm as I drove Sam to Camer Park. It was so beautiful with the fresh green of the large variety of trees. Some horse chestnut were adorned with their spiky flowers. Buttercups, daisies and lady's smock bloomed along the paths. We walked down to the woodland where cow parsley plants, yet to flower, stood tall, and amongst which bluebells bloomed. Lack of early rain in late autumn and winter has caused the bluebells to be less prolific this year. In the afternoon I mowed the grass at the back of the House. David was busy clearing the pond. A frog leapt from the pond; the little creature was covered in mud. The sky became overcast during the evening.

Elizabeth

Summers

London Marathon: Jane Osborne and I from the Church and several other people of my acquaintance took part in this year's London Marathon. It was a great day out. The weather was perfect – sunny, but not too hot and very little wind. The running was wonderful. The crowds were marvellous. It is a terrific experience to run with thousands of people and to be cheered on by hundreds of thousands. We all want to do it again next year. My time was 4 hrs 47 mins – nearly an hour longer than my first marathon, but I was twenty years younger then. Thanks to my sponsors I have £620 to divide between CMS and our Church. RIK.

Halling WI

Our April meeting was very well attended, only one apology. Mary Fennemore welcomed every one and we sang Jerusalem with gusto. Once again we hadn't any birthday flowers to present, but we make up for it in May.

This month we had piles of correspondence.

Two resolutions to be discussed at the May meeting, this year they are very "hands on" and we have had them both before, albeit some years ago. Farm gate milk prices, and Caring for the Community. An invitation to a Poetry evening at Ditton. The District Walk at East Malling and two outings, one to Walmer Castle in July, and one to Hever Castle in October to see the Quilt Exhibition, but from the National Federation for 2006, a sponsored bike ride in CUBA, I don't think many of us will take up the challenge but someone in the country will, you can bet your life on it.

The new batch of Yorkshire Tea has arrived, Yorkshire tea provide every W.I. in the country with teabags every year. We share ours with the Church teas which we have once a month in the Jubilee Hall, and this time we have enough teabags over for all of our members to have 12 teabags each. On behalf of our W.I, I have sent Yorkshire Tea a thank you letter, the tea is very much appreciated.

Our team in the recent District Quiz came joint second, we let ourselves down because nobody knew the cost of a second class stamp, we still don't.

Our funds are stable, but we will be having a coffee morning and our usual ploughman's lunch to boost them later in the year.

Cuxton WI

We were very pleased to welcome two new members at our April meeting, which was well attended. A minute's silence was observed for a former member, Jean Briggs, who died recently.

Our speaker, Monty Parkin, gave his talk before our business. He showed us slides, some very old and in sepia tint, of the village of Kemsing, taking us through all the changes to the village and the surrounding countryside from before World War I up to the present day. He told us stories about

Mrs Fennemore then introduced our speaker for the evening, Mrs Barbara Letchford. Barbara explained to us all in a very amusing manner how she got "hooked" on dogs. Her daughter decided she was too old to have a babysitter any more, a good guard dog would be better. Off they went to a breeder of Keeshonds (a Dutch guard dog, a bit like a Husky). They bought a little girl puppy. It wasn't long, and after quite a few cheques, they had five dogs, lame ones, greyhounds passed their sell by dates and any dog nobody else wanted.

Barbara had even converted her husband who wasn't too happy with the situation at the start. She told us all about judging, and even winning at Crufts. At one point, they were in trouble with the R.S.P.C.A. They were spotted walking the very old emaciated greyhound and accused of ill-treating it but have you ever seen a fat greyhound? Barbarawas an excellent speaker, she was warmly thanked by Mary.

After our refreshment break Barbarb judged our competitions, they were very well supported again this month. She chose for the flower of the month Ann Hayward's Dicentra, (bleeding heart to the layman) and for the competition, something beginning with the letter G, her choice was a Gaiter for a one legged man, (Lily only brought one) it looked old enough to have been worn by the Duke of Wellington, where did Lily find it?

You never know what will turn up, what W.I. ladies can find in their attics, cellars, and sheds. If you want something, I bet the W.I. ladies can find it.

Next month, "Resolutions" our link delegate from Harvel W.I. may be joining us.

Phyllis.

some of the people who had lived there, their jobs, houses and large companies! It was a fascinating talk and enjoyed by everyone especially some of Mr Parkin's dry, witty comments.

Next, we had our social break, which was rather hectic as there were various events and outings to be paid for, and everyone seemed to be dashing about. This was followed by the Business and Reps reports, also a short was read of the Annual

Council Meeting held at Tunbridge Wells in March.

Six of us took part in the first round of the WI County Quiz, but we did not do too well. Still, we learned a few things we did not know before and enjoyed the evening.

The May meeting was the Resolutions. This year there were only two, one about farm gate milk prices and the other recycling. These were discussed at length during the latter part of the evening.

As we did not have time for a speaker, the Watercolour and China Painting groups put on an exhibition of their work, which was much admired. The Craft Group had a stall selling fancy trimmings and other items and also hand made birthday cards. There was also a cake stall,

with cakes donated by members, to raise money for funds.

The plans for our 60th Birthday are completed and we are all eagerly awaiting the event.

The Gardening Group went to a garden in High Halden and were very impressed by both the Tudor Farmhouse and the grounds, which had a huge lake, two large ponds, a tennis court, croquet lawn and some marvellous shrubs and plants, as well as a woodland area. The weather stayed sunny and we enjoyed lunch at a pub on the way down. A great day out!

Our next meeting is on Thursday 2nd June – 60th Birthday Celebration.

Ann Harris.

Dickens' Country Protection Society

The Society has been reading through **Regional Plan** and was dismayed to find there were no policies to protect high grade agricultural land. In the Society's view the conservation of our best agricultural land is of critical importance and the Society does not understand why there is no reference to it in the document which seems to refer to sustainability on every other page.

The **Barn Dance** was a great success and the Society is considering hosting another one some time in the Autumn. So watch this space.

Kay Roots.

Halling Bellringers

We have a nice band of ringers at Halling and four of them are ready for ringing at weddings and other services. Thanks to Tony Gilbert from Burham for his help. Four of the girls were made members of the KCACR at St Mary Magdalene Church Gillingham on April 16th. They were Janet Homewood, Donna Farrow, Julia Hodnett and Patricia Fox.

Peter Silver.

Mothers' Union

Please note that our speaker for June 15th at 10.45 am will most likely be Tony Williams from the Kenward Trust if he can make it at short notice. Sadly our speaker from the Dogs for the Deaf has had to cancel once more due to ill health. It is hoped she will be able to come in the Autumn.

In July we are hoping to have a Teddy Bears' Picnic for Mums and babies at the Rectory – the date to be announced. Help from all members will be appreciated.

There is to be an archdeaconry festival service on October 3rd at 7.30 pm at Christ Church Gravesend. Please put the date in your diary now so that we can have a good representation there. All friends and families will be most welcome to join us for the evening.

On October 19th, there will be a deanery Overseas Evening at St Francis Strood. The speaker will be Richard Jones from Biblelands.

Parish Lunches

For several years now we have held shared lunches at the Church Hall on the first Wednesday of each month. These have been good social occasions and have raised a worthwhile amount of money. These have been largely co-ordinated by Shirley and Peter Crundwell whom we thank for their sterling efforts. The time has come, however, when they deserve a well-earned rest and July 6th will be the last lunch they organise. It would be a pity if these lunches came to an end. So are there any other potential co-ordinators out there? Roger.

Local Government Ombudsman

Having had some experience of complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman and knowing that other people in the village have too, I was interested to read in the paper that the Select Committee which oversees the work of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was carrying out a review of the work of the LGO. I sent in a description of my own experiences but they were too late to be taken into account in the review. I was, however, sent a copy of the Select Committee's report and it made interesting reading.

Of all the complaints the Ombudsman receive of maladministration in local government, they only make a public report of maladministration in 1.6% cases. A further 27.5% are cases of maladministration which are settled locally. In other words, in about 71% cases the Ombudsman finds in favour of the Council and against the member of the public making the complaint.

In 21% cases of complaints to the Ombudsman, there is no investigation at all.

41% of people using the Ombudsman service were dissatisfied according to a published survey. The figure for dissatisfaction should probably be higher because a number of complainants were excluded from the survey at the Ombudsman's request. 11% who had lost their tempers because of the way they were treated were also excluded from the figures.

The above two paragraphs suggest either that the Ombudsman is biased in favour of local authorities or that complainants against local authorities are generally unreasonable. Obviously we must all make up our own minds, but the following points seem to be relevant here.

1. There are three Local Government Ombudsmen. Two of them were formerly Chief Executives of local authorities.
2. These LGOs are appointed by a panel of three people. One of these three is a member of the Local Government Association. The Government refuse to divulge the identities of the other two.
3. Many of the Ombudsman's staff are former local government officers – though the Ombudsman's office will not disclose how many.
4. There is no realistic process for appealing against the Ombudsman's decision.
5. Apparently the LGO does not consider himself to be bound by the Human Rights Act.

Reading the account of the proceedings of the Select Committee and the evidence submitted by members of the public, there seems to be plenty of cause for concern. Local Government has an enormous impact on our lives – schools, street cleaning and lighting, social services, parks and cemeteries, planning, local byelaws, the level of council tax. In theory it is accountable to the public via elected councillors, but local government officers undertake such a huge volume of work that councillors cannot keep tabs on all of them all of the time. Very few of their actions are likely to become election issues. Yet incompetence, inefficiency or corruption on the part of council officers can have a huge impact on the lives of individuals. It was because these officers were thought to be seen to be unaccountable that the Local Government scheme was set up in 1974. The scheme worked well in its first few years. If there is now a feeling that the LGOs have become too close to the councils they are supposed to be holding to account, that is a cause for concern.

In this country, we have a strong tradition of government by consent. We follow the rules, not because we are afraid of punishment, but because we believe the rules are fair and right and that the people making and enforcing them are themselves acting fairly and according to Law. To lose this would mean anarchy or tyranny. So it is vital that we maintain the constitutional safeguards and protect their reputation. Roger.

At Last



It has been a long morning. Mummy is off on holiday to Cypress today. That meant we had to be up at 4.45 am. While it was still dark! In May! Then I had a very early breakfast. At least I got a long walk before Mattins.

After Church we came over to Margaret's and Harry's. Master has been lost for the last fortnight. No computer. He hasn't known what to get up to – except worry, worry about his e mails, worry about getting this magazine done. Now, here we are, a day after copy day and Harry has very kindly allowed us to use his computer.

We have been here since 8.30 and now it is past dinner time. At least this is the last page. He's been typing away at maximum speed (for one finger). I expect they'll be plenty of mistakes.

Harry's been looking after me. Margaret's been in Church working with the flower arrangers putting the finishing touches for Pentecost or Whitsun as Master often calls it. A lot of people seem surprised this is Whitsun (or Pentecost) but it always comes seven weeks after Easter. There used to be a bank holiday at Whitsun, but that got moved when England became a more secular society, and people seem to have lost the sense of when Whitsun is and what it is about. Maybe Easter will go the same way. We still celebrate Christmas on 25th December anyway!

Whitsun (or Pentecost) is the feast when we remember that God gives His Church the Holy Spirit. It is the Church's birthday. It means that God is with us - and in us if we believe in Him. He strengthens and comforts us. He helps us to pray. He prompts our conscience, supports our Bible reading, sustains our prayers and is vital in the Holy Communion. The Church is the Body of Christ is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

It looks like I've let Master get a paragraph into my letter. I caught him preaching at a wedding practice the other night. Whatever next?

Anyway, he told me he wanted 6 ½ inches from me to fill a space. Having helped him to change the computer from centimetres which he doesn't understand to inches which he remembers from school, I see I am nearly there. So soon off to lunch and then I'll have a nice rest while he marries.

Best wishes, Max the Rectory Spaniel.