

Services at St Michael & All Angels Cuxton			
2 nd February Candlemas		9.30 Family Communion	Malachi 3 vv 1-5 p961 Luke 2 vv 22-40 p1028
9 th February Septuagesima		9.30 Holy Communion	Isaiah 58 vv 1-12 p744 I Corinthians 2 vv 1-16 p1145 Matthew 5 vv 13-20 p969
16 th February Sexagesima		8.00 Holy Communion	Epistle & Gospel BCP
		9.30 Holy Communion	Genesis 1 v1 – 2v3 p3 Romans 8 vv 18-25 p1135 Matthew 6 vv 25-34 p971
23 rd February Quinquagesima		9.30 Holy Communion	Exodus 24 vv 12-18 p82 II Peter 1 vv 16-21 p1222 Matthew 17 vv 1-9 p984
26 th February Ash Wednesday		11.00 Holy Communion followed by Lent Lunch	Joel 2 vv 12-17 p912 Matthew 6 vv 16-21 p970
Services at St John the Baptist Halling and the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling			
2 nd February Candlemas		8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Malachi 3 vv 1-5 p961 Luke 2 vv 22-40 p1028
		11.00 Holy Communion	Malachi 3 vv 1-5 p961 Hebrews 2 vv 14-18 p1202 Luke 2 vv 22-40 p1028
9 th February Septuagesima		11.00 Holy Communion	Isaiah 58 vv 1-12 p744 I Corinthians 2 vv 1-16 p1145 Matthew 5 vv 13-20 p969
		5.30 Evening Prayer Jubilee Hall	Genesis 2 vv 4-25 p4 Revelation 21 v9 – 22 v5 p1249
16 th February Sexagesima		11.00 Holy Communion	Genesis 1 v1 – 2v3 p3 Romans 8 vv 18-25 p1135 Matthew 6 vv 25-34 p971
23 rd February Quinquagesima		11.00 Holy Communion	Exodus 24 vv 12-18 p82 II Peter 1 vv 16-21 p1222 Matthew 17 vv 1-9 p984
26 th February Ash Wednesday		9.30 Holy Communion	Joel 2 vv 12-17 p912 Matthew 6 vv 16-21 p970
Holy Communion 9.30 am Wednesdays @ Cuxton		Holy Communion 9.30 am Thursdays @ Halling	
5 th February	II Samuel 24 vv 1-17 Mark 6 vv 1-6	6 th February Accession HM Queen	I Peter 2 vv 11-17 Matthew 22 vv 16-22
12 th February	I Kings 10 vv 1-10 Mark 7 vv 14-23	13 th February	I Kings 11 vv 4-13 Mark 7 vv 24-30
19 th February	James 1 vv 19—27 Mark 8 vv 22-26	20 th February	James 2 vv 1-9 Mark 8 vv 27-33
26 th February Ash Wednesday	9.30 Halling Joel 2 vv 12-17 p912 Matthew 6 vv 16-21 p970	27 th February @ Halling George Herbert	Deuteronomy 30 vv 15-20 Luke 9 vv 22-25

St John's Draw (November): £5 each Mrs Burr (11), Mrs Chidwick (26) & Miss Mitchell (73) – drawn by Mr Smitherman. (December): £10 each Mr Silver (77) & Mrs Fuller (78) – drawn by Mr Silver.

St Michael's Draw (December): £10 to Mr Silverthorne (1), £5 each to Mrs MacDonald (2) and Mr Feakins (3). (January): £10 Mrs Cheesmer (14), £5.00 each Mrs Maxwell (11) & Mrs Sadler (33).

What Happened to Dr Percy

The Very Reverend Dr Martyn Percy is Dean of Christ Church Oxford – which is both the college chapel and cathedral for the Diocese of Oxford. In 2018 Dr Percy was accused of “immoral, scandalous or disgraceful conduct”. He was made ill by the allegations and suspended from his job. It took a year for him to be exonerated. Nearly all the accusations (with one very minor exception) were proved to be both false and malicious. The college spent £500,000 on the case – money which could presumably have been spent on something much more worthwhile.

Thanks for Christmas

We once again had an excellent Christmas in the two churches and those who make these things possible are all to be thanked. The Church is the people and without the people there would be no Church. The bells, the choirs, the musicians, the flower arrangers, those who prepared and took part in the nativity plays, those who made the Christingles, the people who delivered the cards and leaflets extending our Christmas greetings and advertising our activities, the people who keep the buildings clean and in good repair, those who clean the brass, launder the linen, the sacristans who set things up for our services, all deserve our appreciation, as do all those who by their presence and their prayers contribute to the life and work of the Church of every denomination in Cuxton and Halling as well as those from the Orthodox Communion who share our worship at St Michael's.

By popular request, we held another Christmas Tree Festival at St John's. The effect of all those trees and their illuminations was tremendous. Different individuals and organisations had provided their own themed trees – thought-provoking and interesting – and there was also a prayer tree on which some people wrote down their Christmas prayers. We prayed with them, *Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf* – which I think means that, if lots of us pray about something or someone, there will be lots of us to give thanks when God answers our prayers.

A new departure was a tableau as part of the Christmas Tree Lighting and Carol Event at Cuxton. Some of us (all adults) changed into the costumes of people in the Nativity at Cuxton United Reformed Church and walked to the library where the event was held and took up our positions in the tent which represented the stable. Another excellent collaboration between Cuxton Parish Council and the Fresh Expressions group. Thanks to all who took part, especially the band and the donors of the refreshments. From personal experience, I should observe that a Persian king's robes (or someone's no longer needed lounge curtains) are not much defence against the cold of an English winter!

Also new to us was X Kids (Messy Church) at Halling. For two hours on Saturday 21st, we welcomed children with their adult carers for Christmas crafts, Christingle making, trying on nativity costumes, singing and making music, prayer and the Christmas story, and tea. We all enjoyed it so much that we are repeating the exercise on Saturday 25th January at St John's (not with a Christmas theme this time!) at 2.00 pm. All children welcome but you must bring a parent or another responsible adult carer.

And a Couple of Poems

Before our Mothers' Union Christmas dinner in the White Hart on 18th, we shared poetry, music and thoughts which appealed to individual members. A couple of the poems we thought worth reproducing here.

A Middle Aged Prayer

Lord, Thou knowest me better than I know myself, that I am growing older and will some day be old.

Keep me from getting talkative and particularly from the fatal habit of thinking I must say something on every subject and on every occasion.

Release me from craving to try to straighten out everybody's affairs. Make me thoughtful, but not moody, helpful but not bossy.

With all my vast store of wisdom it seems a pity not to use it all, but Thou knowest Lord, that I want a few friends at the end.

Keep my mind free from all the recital of endless details, give me wings to get to the point. Seal my lips from my many aches and pains. They are increasing and my love of rehearsing them is becoming sweeter as the years go by. I ask for grace enough to listen to the tales of others' pain, help me to endure them with patience.

Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally it is possible that I may be mistaken.

Keep me reasonably sweet; I do not want to be a Saint, some of them are hard to live with. But a sour old woman is one of the crowning works of the devil.

Little Jesus, wast Thou shy
Once, and just so small as I?
And what did it feel like to be
Out of heaven, and just like me?
Didst Thou sometimes think of there,
And ask where all the angels were?
I should think that I would cry
For my house all made of sky;
I would look about the air,
And wonder where my angels were;
And at waking 'twould distress me –
Not an angel there to dress me!
Hadst Thou ever any toys,
Like us little girls and boys?
And didst Thou play in Heaven with all
The angels there that were not too tall,
With stars for marbles? Did the things
Play Can you see me? through their wings?
And did Thy Mother let Thee spoil
Thy robes with playing on our soil?
How nice to have them always new
In Heaven, because 'twas quite clean blue!

Didst Thou kneel at night to pray,
And didst Thou join Thy hands this way?
And did they tire sometimes, being young,
And make the prayer seem very long?

Little Jesus by Francis Thompson

Help me to extract all the possible fun out of life - there are so many funny things around us. I do not want to miss any of them.

Written by a 17th century Nun, recorded 1970 by Shirley Crundwell.

And dost Thou like it best that we
Should join our hands to pray to Thee?
I used to think, before I knew,
The prayer not said unless we do.
And did Thy Mother at the night
Kiss Thee, and fold the clothes in right?
And didst Thou feel quite good in bed,
Kissed, and sweet, and Thy prayers said?

Thou canst not have forgotten all
That it feels like to be small;
And Thou knowst I cannot pray
To Thee in my father's way –
Then Thou wast so little, say,
Couldst Thou talk Thy Father's Way?
So, a little Child, come down
And hear a child's tongue like Thy own;
Take me by the hand and walk
And listen to my baby-talk.
To Thy Father show my prayer
(He will look, Thou art so fair)
And say, "O Father, I, Thy Son,
Bring the prayer of a little one."

And He will smile, that children's tongue,
Has not changed since Thou wast young.

Caesar

There is in the Rectory garden a metal plate commemorating an obviously much loved dog and presumably marking his grave. Sometimes you can see it easily. Sometimes it is hidden by vegetation. The inscription is not easy to read. I have known it was there since I came to Cuxton thirty three years ago, but it is only recently that conditions of light (and possibly the good wash provided by the incessant rain this autumn) have made it possible for me to read it. It reads: Caesar September 23rd 1933 – Helped By Pal. Presumably, Caesar was Canon Toone's dog. I don't suppose there is anyone in the village now who remembers Caesar. I should be glad to hear from you if you do. There is a deep bond between man and dog. Dogs give us unconditional loyalty and love. Dogs are one of God's great gifts to human beings. It has been interesting to read recently articles about how bringing dogs into different kinds of establishment has brought troubled human beings comfort and joy. It is well known how pat dogs bring love and delight to elderly people in care homes or in their own homes. Children have always rejoiced in dogs being brought into school. Lately, there have been lovely reports about how dogs can help emotionally troubled children in care or special schools. Homesick university students are comforted by specially brought in canine friends. There has also been news of prison officers taking their own pet dogs into prisons because of the wonderful calming effect they can have on violent offenders. I know how much I have valued the three dogs who have shared Cuxton Rectory with me and how popular they have been and are with so many people. Roger.



From the Rector

I was really impressed just before Christmas when I was shown the new buildings and facilities at Halling School. They are splendid and a tribute to those who planned and constructed them and their completion makes all the inconvenience of the building work worthwhile. Cuxton School, of course, went through a similar process just a few years ago.

Education is evidently very important and worth investing in, but what is education and what is it for? In the early days of both Halling and Cuxton schools, many of the parents and children seem to have resented compulsory education. From the parents' point of view, their children would be of more use going to work and earning money to help support what were often very poor and large households. Children would frequently be taken out of school for seasonal employment such as hop-picking – even though the school holidays were arranged to allow some time for these kinds of activity. Simple tasks could be learnt on the job. Those lucky enough to be put down for a trade or a craft would serve a long and thorough apprenticeship under their employer. What was the point of going to school? From the children's point of view, there were many more exciting ways to spend the day than sitting at a desk learning reading, writing and arithmetic. On some occasions, headmasters just gave in and closed the school so that pupils could go to something exciting happening in the neighbourhood.

So why should we feel differently? What is education and what is it for? Education is not the same thing as training. It is not job training, though job training can be an aspect of education. Would doctors go to medical school, engineers take degrees in engineering, clergy learn theology. Primary and secondary school do help us to acquire those basic skills like reading, writing and arithmetic that we need if we are ever going to learn to do most jobs in modern society. You have to be able to read the instructions and the health and safety notices, to calculate the quantities needed and to enter the results in your notebook or on your tablet even in most manual jobs. So school does help to prepare you for work.

Work skills are, however, only a small part of what education is about. Much more importantly, we need to acquire life skills. Courtesy and good manners are essential if we are going to fit in with other people and enjoy smooth relationships with family, friends and neighbours. Our consciences need to be developed. We need moral values. We should be able to look after ourselves – to be reasonably fit physically, mentally and spiritually. We need to be able to look after other people. There are many skills we could acquire which may never earn us any money, but make us happier, more contented and more useful members of society. Music, drama, the arts, model making, gardening, sport, dance, literature, knowledge of other people's languages and cultures, are all examples of talents we could develop which would contribute to our personal fulfilment and our place in the lives of other people. We ought to be able to do basic tasks like cleaning, tidying up and cooking. We do need to know how to interface with bureaucracy, to manage our money, to programme the dishwasher, etc.. Not everyone can do everything. We need therefore also to know how to co-operate and to help one another.

Commentators tend to advocate teaching children all these skills and seem to suggest that schools should be responsible for equipping all their pupils with all of them. That is wrong on two counts. One is that education is not only something done to children. Education is life long. Education is a good in itself which we ought to seek to acquire. Education is not supposed to be something done to us. It is something we reach out for as long as we live.

And schools are not the only bodies responsible for our education. Especially when we are young, our parents and the rest of our families educate us, providing these life skills without which we lead unfulfilled lives and are a burden to others. Friends and neighbours, the whole community, help to form us. We educate one another. The Church is a very important part of our education. The Church does run and support schools and she teaches the faith. Much more importantly, however, the Church nurtures our relationship with God. The knowledge of God is the most important knowledge of all. It is the knowledge of God which forms us as people and that is what education really is. Education is not simply skill training. It is not comprehended in the acquisition

of life skills. Education is about personal formation. It is about fulfilling your potential, becoming the person you are meant to be, fitting into society as a blessing to others.

Education includes learning information and acquiring skills, but these are not really the point of it. Education is not so much about what you know and what you can do. Education facilitates the person you are becoming.

So all education is to be valued. It is never to be sneered at. Any opportunity to learn more (whether information or skills) is something to be seized. Education is self realisation. That is why it is supremely important. And the knowledge which matters more than anything, the knowledge which provides the context in which we know anything, is the knowledge of God and the knowledge of God is eternal life. Roger.



Blythswood Shoebox Appeal

Dear friends of St John the Baptist Church and St Michael & All Angels Church,

Thank you for bringing a smile this Christmas Thank you so much for being an important part of Blythswood Care's 2019 Shoe Box Appeal. Your involvement has made a difference. For 26 years, the kindness of people like you has allowed shoebox gifts to reach people of different ages, with different backgrounds and different stories to tell. Our Shoe Box Appeal started in 1993 with 300 boxes being given to people in Romania. Last year, more than 107,000 shoeboxes were given to people in need of care and support across Eastern Europe.

This winter, our shoeboxes are being delivered across Eastern Europe and Pakistan. People like you have been filling gift-wrapped shoeboxes with items carefully chosen to show you care. Every gift in every shoebox makes a difference. It can provide practical support, but more than this, it lets somebody know that they've been thought about, that they are valuable, that they are loved — what an amazing gift to give and to receive! The impact can last longer than the festive season; it can bring a smile, it can transform a life. I'm pleased to enclose a certificate of appreciation that you can display — this is a small thing to show appreciation for your kindness and generosity. Thank you on behalf of Blythswood Care and especially on behalf of those you won't meet, but whose lives you're helping make better with your great support. Thank you for bringing a smile this Christmas. Wishing you every blessing for 2020, James Campbell Chief Executive.

Foodbank



Thank you for your continued generosity in bringing goods for the Foodbank. Sadly, they are still very necessary. Generally speaking, basic foodstuffs in packets or cans with plenty of time before the use by date are welcome. Please, no more baked beans, however. Everybody thinks they are a good staple, which they are, but currently the Foodbank has enough baked beans to float a battleship. Please bring your contributions to either of our churches.

Sleep

There has been a good deal of talk lately about the probability that people are not getting enough sleep these days. People even lie awake all night worrying about it. It is not entirely a joking matter, however. Sleep deprivation can have serious deleterious long term effects on our health and people who have not had enough sleep can make silly mistakes in their daily lives, not least when driving or operating machinery. Being overtired has the same effect as being drunk. An expert, speaking on the radio, gave some useful advice (though taking it would be difficult for some people). Go to bed at a regular time. Sleep in a dark room – not too hot or too cold. Don't look at screens. Exercise in the day time helps you to sleep at night, but not just before bed as it will keep you awake. Don't eat or drink too much in the couple of hours before going to bed. Don't drink strong coffee after lunch time. Caffeine takes nine hours to clear the system. Alcohol before bed might make you unconscious, but that is not the same thing as healthy sleep and does you no good. The expert admitted, however, that the worst enemies of a good night's sleep are emotions like worry and depression. He suggested that meditation sometimes helps. I at once thought how prayer is better still. Commit your anxieties to God. Seek to align your will with His Will in love for all humankind and be at peace with the world in which we live. Confess your sins and know that you are forgiven. Be thankful for what you have received. Pray for people in need of any kind. Faith, hope and love. They are the key.

From the Registers

Baptism:

24th November

Joy Alexandra Pierce

Pilgrims Road

Confirmations (at Frindsbury):

24th November

Dawn Silverthorn

Bush Road

24th November

Jack Lewis John Joyce

Harold Road

Funeral

20th December

Beatrice Joan Macklin

Rochester Road Halling



CUXTON AUTO SERVICES
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Malcolm Petts
Service Manager/MOT Tester
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Forthcoming Attractions

25th January: XKids St John's 2.00 – 4.00 pm.

26th February (Ash Wednesday): HC Halling 9.30 & Cuxton 11.00, lent lunch in church hall 12.00.

24th June 2020 (Nativity of St John the Baptist): 11.00 Holy Communion St John's followed by pudding party.



BOOK SALE FOR CHURCH FUNDS

Since May 2019, we have had a permanent book sale in the church hall which is raising money for church funds. We are happy to say that it will be approaching £400 very soon! Please feel free to come along and browse. There is always new stock being added. We suggest a donation of £1 for hardbacks and 50p for paperbacks, children's books, DVDs and CDs. Any donations of good quality books, DVDs and CDs are always welcome. You can leave them on the bookshelf, in the hall or at the church. Thank you to everyone who had donated or purchased so far.

World Day of Prayer 6th March 2020

This year's World Day of Prayer is entitled Praying with Zimbabwe. The service in this parish will take place at St John's Church Halling at 10.00 am.

Lady Day 25th March

We shall be welcoming Mother's Union members from other parishes to join us for our celebration of the Annunciation at St Michael's on Wednesday 25th March at 11.00 am (followed by lunch).

Sports Question

Why was Cinderella useless at football?

Because her coach was a pumpkin.

The CDM and the ECHR

In the December issue I drew attention to some of the many criticisms that have been made of the Clergy Discipline Measure. Having taken a personal interest in this, it seems to me that it conflicts with rights guaranteed by Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights. I may, of course, be wrong and should be glad to publish a correction if I am.

Article 6 § 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights– Right to a fair trial

“1. In the determination of his civil rights and obligations or of any criminal charge against him, everyone is entitled to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal established by law. Judgment shall be pronounced publicly but the press and public may be excluded from all or part of the trial in the interests of morals, public order or national security in a democratic society, where the interests of juveniles or the protection of the private life of the parties so require, or to the extent strictly necessary in the opinion of the court in special circumstances where publicity would prejudice the interests of justice. ...”

B. Extension to other types of dispute

34. Article 6 is applicable to disciplinary proceedings before professional bodies where the right to practise a profession is directly at stake.

My criticisms are these. The CDM inclines to privacy, confidentiality and even secrecy, contrary to the defendant's right to a fair and public hearing. A fair trial requires that proper procedures are followed. The phrase “reasonable time” implies that the timetable laid down for the proceedings will be adhered to. In fact the CDM effectively permits those who administer the process to exceed those time limits without explanation or justification. Only the person complained against (the respondent or defendant) has to play by the rules. The ECHR requires that all sides in a dispute have “equal arms”. They must be given the same opportunities to present their case. Under the CDM, the person making the complaint has as long as he likes in which to prepare his case and can approach whomsoever he will for corroborating evidence. He may also have had advice from such persons as rural deans and archdeacons. In contrast, the defendant or respondent receives no help from the Church (except an offer of counselling and advice to employ a lawyer) and is prohibited from any action which could be interpreted as interfering with the case (such as discussing it with people named by the complainant) and is given only three weeks in which to prepare his defence. Moreover, if any attempt the defendant makes to gather evidence can be construed as embarrassing to the person making the complaint (even if the complaint is malicious and false), this too can be treated as an offence. Finally, whereas British justice normally starts with the presumption of innocence so that it is for the prosecution to prove his case and the defendant has a right of silence, the CDM effectively treats the respondent as guilty from the moment the complaint is made and it is strongly implied that he will be found guilty and suffer accordingly if he fails to prove his innocence. One almost has the impression that innocence is no defence under the CDM. Roger.

Christmas Tree Festival — St. John's Church

St. John's Church certainly shone brightly for the Christmas Tree Festival on the weekend just before Christmas. It was an opportunity for people to meet up with old acquaintances and to make new ones. A big "Thank you" must go to local groups who participated: “Bo Peeps”, Halara, Halling Gardening Society, Sapphires (WI), Slimming World (Sharon), Rainbows, Brownies and Guides, The Church Choirs, “Saints Alive” (Sunday School), Mothers’ Union, Peter Lingham (for the usual donated Church Tree) and to those who displayed individual trees. On the afternoon of Saturday, 21st a new children's group, "XKids" was launched in St. John's by Rev'd Ruth, assisted by Anne Abraham and others. The church was full of children involved in many fun Christmas craft activities. The children participated in a short little service led by Ruth with music by Donna's family and accompanied by Dorothy on the piano. On the Sunday even more children and parents attended a full Christingle Service. What a lovely way to start Christmas! Thank you from everyone to all those involved. Jenny.

HR Query

What does Father Christmas do if his elves misbehave?

Gives them the sack.

Allington to Maidstone

This winter seems to be very wet or cloudy or both. There is a lot of surface water on many fields and footpaths. This makes walking rather tricky and muddy. When the sun is shining it is a shame to avoid going outdoors so today I am going to start my walk at Allington Lock and take the riverside path into Maidstone. Much of the footpath is tarmac although it has puddles, many



decaying fallen leaves and is muddy in places. This walk is approximately 3.5 miles. My starting point is Allington Lock. This is located near the modern village of Allington, close to the A20 and downhill from the church dedicated to St Laurence which closed in 1969.

Allington Lock (and Allington Sluice) is a popular place within the Maidstone River Park. Below the lock, the River Medway becomes tidal. The riverside footpath runs into Maidstone and beyond. There is a variety of craft moored along the riverbank. Some are modern launches with motors and sleeping accommodation, others are small rowing boats made of wood or fibreglass, there are canal boats with small gardens alongside the moorings and there are Dutch barges, eg The Emmanuelle, which used to transport cattle feed and cereals.

Beside the lock, The Malta Inn, is well known and has a popular restaurant and bar with outside dining facilities (idyllic in the summer). Nearby, Kent Life is a heritage park farm with Kentish gardens, family play areas, an ice cream hut, a farmyard, hoppers' huts, farm animals, a play barn, Dotty's tea room, activity rooms and a vintage village which includes Cuxton Chapel formerly situated here in Bush Road, Cuxton.



My walk takes me along a tarmac riverside path. The path is a little wet in places but is easy to

negotiate and is tranquil. There are various birds on the river such as mallards, coots and swans. I saw just one juvenile swan with a pair of adults. I wonder if this was the youngest of the brood of eight cygnets photographed for the June 2019 article. Not far down the footpath I can see Allington Castle on the opposite side of the river. It is a stone-built moated castle which has Grade 1 listed building status and is privately owned. Allington Castle has an interesting history. It was once occupied by a community of Carmelite friars and nuns before returning to being a private residence in 1999. Further down the footpath I see

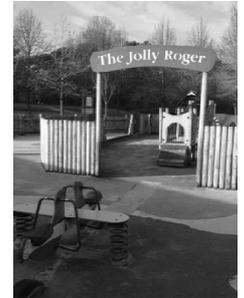


more houseboats and a large marina, Allington Marina. There are boats moored along the riverbank, others are out of the water on trailers, some are for sale, others are undergoing repairs or being refurbishment. There are three different boat houses. Moving on, I find more houseboats. Some are moored and secured for winter but several are in use today. There is smoke rising from chimneys. On my side of the river, to the left of the path, there is rough ground and marshy meadow land. Beyond the meadows there is much new building for houses and apartments. Further along the river there is another boatyard. This is the 'home' of the launch, the Kentish Lady and the Allington Belle. These vessels give one hour river boat trips between Allington and Maidstone or three hour cruises with food during the warmer months. A short walk further along the footpath takes me to the foot-bridge over the river and leads into Whatman Park. At this point I turn left away from the river pathway and walk up to and over the bridge into Whatman Park. This park was opened in 2001 as part of the Millennium River Park. It has some natural woodland, a wildflower meadow and nature reserve. The park also contains adventure play areas, dedicated fitness areas, bench seating, open grassland, well designed floral borders, a skateboard park and open-air performance areas which hold a variety of events throughout the year.



At the far side of the park I cross another footbridge, over the river, and find myself on a footpath at the back of Maidstone United Stadium. There is no match today so all is quiet and I descend to the riverside path and walk towards Maidstone. I see the railway bridge over the river

just by Maidstone West Station and ahead, to my left up on the main road, is Fremlin Walk. Now, I know that I am in Maidstone and it is time to look for refreshment before returning home. A very enjoyable walk at any time of the year and a great favourite of mine. Holly Croft



IT'S A CRACKER!!

As the Christmas festivities are fading into the background and we're faced with sitting in another grey and grim old grimy January or February day, I thought I would spread some cheer by revisiting those jokes you may have found in your crackers over Christmas and New Year so you can once again groan!! After all, you probably only saw the joke for a few seconds before depositing in the rubbish. I have graded this offering into 1*, 2* and 3* just for convenience but you can rate them any way you like. Enjoy! Happy New Year! JB.

1* Jokes

What is Santa's favourite sport?
 What do you get if you cross a chicken with a bedside clock?
 What do you get if you eat Christmas decorations?
 What did Father Christmas do when he went speed dating?
 What's a snowman's favourite game?
 What happened to the man who stole the Advent Calendar?
 What's furry and minty?
 What is Santa's wife called?
 What do you call just married spiders?
 What do you get if you put a sheep in a sauna?
 What does Santa say as he walks backwards?

Have you guessed it – the North Pole Vault!
 An Alarm Cluck!
 Tinsillitis!
 He pulled a cracker!
 Ice spy with my little eye!
 He got 24 days!
 A Polo bear!
 Mary Christmas!
 Newly webs!
 A woolly sweater!
 Oh, Oh, Oh!

2* Jokes

What is the best Christmas present in the world?
 Why did the golfer bring two pairs of trousers to the game?
 What did Santa ask Rudolph about the weather?
 What do elves eat for breakfast?
 Why couldn't the skeleton go to the Christmas party?
 Who is Santa's favourite singer?
 What do reindeer hang on their Christmas trees?
 Why is there no water at the North Pole?
 Why did Scrooge buy everyone budgies for Christmas?
 What's bad-tempered and goes with custard?
 What type of shoes does Santa wear travelling by train?
 Who hid in a bakery at Christmas?
 What did the grape do when it got stepped on?

A broken drum – you can't beat it!
 In case he got a hole in one!
 Is it going to rain dear?!
 Frosted Flakes!
 He had no body to go with!
 Elf-is Presley!
 Horn-aments! (Antler-ments don't make sense!)
 No well, no well!
 They were going cheap!
 Apple grumble!
 Platforms!
 A mince spy!
 It let out a little wine!

Why does Santa have three gardens?

So he can ho, ho, ho!

3* Jokes

What do you call a bunch of chess players bragging about a game in a hotel lobby?

Chess nuts boasting in an open foyer!

Knock, knock. Who's there? Arthur! Arthur who?

Arthur any mince pies left?

What is a librarian's favourite song?

Silent Night!

Why did Santa put a clock in his sleigh?

He wanted to see time fly!

What model of car do elves drive?

Toy-otas!

What do you call an old snowman?

Water!

What do you call a lobster who won't share his presents?

Shell-fish!

Why are Christmas trees so bad at sewing?

They're always dropping their needles!

What does Santa suffer from when stuck in a chimney?

Claus-trophobia!



Tommy's Talking Points

We've not been on any of our long all day seaside or country walks since we went to Rye. This picture is just wishful thinking on my part. I'm game, but the human beings in the party are less keen on the cold, the wet and the darkness. In fact, it is a double whammy for me. He has been going out on his day off to places I can't go like London restaurants. One day he was quite pleased, however. The Transport for London website is usually good for telling you how to get around in London. When he asked it, however, for a route to walk from St Pancras Station to a restaurant in Marylebone Lane, after a long pause, it told him that the journey was impossible. He did it anyway. Human beings can still beat the commuter. The friend he was meeting is a mathematician and suggested that, with all the side streets, there is probably an infinite number of walking routes from the station to the eatery and that this concept was beyond the tfl computer!

He did enjoy, back in the Summer, an organised walk around Fitzrovia as part of the celebrations of the now defunct Middlesex Hospital where he studied in the 1970s. He was very gratified that the party seemed to be more interested in the beautifully restored hospital chapel and its memorials to great personalities who had done so much in the past to care for and cure the sick than they were in the public houses the guide wanted to show them where famous people got drunk in the mid-twentieth century. The Middlesex Hospital Medical School Motto was *Miseris succerere disco*, which means (in context) *I learn to heal the sick*, and not *miserable sucker at the discotheque*, as some people seemed to think it meant. (A school thought a trendy motto for modern teenagers could be *Audio, video, disco* – I hear, I see, I learn.) Nevertheless, he is shortly meeting another former student for lunch in Charlotte Street, where they used to live in the shade of the Post Office Tower, and then drinks in the Fitzroy Tavern where many famous people did get drunk during the first half of the last century, also raising large sums for good causes, especially poor children, and cocking a snook at convention, which Master thinks is always a good thing to do. Give people freedom and let them choose to be good, rather than assume the worst of people and force them to conform to your standards.

Christmas was good. I do love to meet people, especially children. They do love to make a fuss of me and I do love a fuss. There were also extra walks. We walked to XKids at Halling, where there were so many children having a good time. I wonder if I shall be taken again on 25th January. Halling Church was also hosting the Christmas Tree Festival and already decorated for Christmas. I am told that Max used to run off with the woolly sheep in the field behind the manger, but I would never do anything like that. Then we had the Scout and Guide Carol Service at Cuxton. That was another opportunity to meet lots of children. It is good to see the Church full at these times, but Master says that, if people really think about the Christmas message, they will want to be active Christians all the year round. Part of leading an active Christian life is

to worship in fellowship with other Christians, to pray and praise together, to hear God's Word and to participate in Holy Communion as Jesus told us to do. I expect he's right. He usually is (or thinks he is). Church is a good place to make friends too, whether you are a dog or a human being.

The family came on Christmas Eve with Lolly and half of them stayed till Boxing Day. I have something of a love / hate relationship with Lolly. I enjoy playing in the garden and going for walks with her. Whenever there was a quiet interlude in the Christmas festivities, Master would take her and me for a quick trip round the woods. I'm sure he wasn't just trying to get out of the washing up! However, I am jealous. I don't intend that she should share my food, my toys or my Master. Master is rather ashamed of the fact that Lolly is a little bit afraid of me. She was a grown up dog when I came here as a puppy and she is bigger than me. Master thinks I ought to look on her as a mother figure and treat her with more respect.

Christmas morning, we all opened our presents. I embarrassed him last year by being ungrateful for most of what people had given me. I didn't want to play with the toys and I wouldn't chew the chews (unless Lolly wanted them). Master says that we should be grateful for the fact that people have tried to be kind to us, not complain because we didn't get what we want. Actually, I'm not really a great one for toys. Neither was Max and I still have a lot of his toys piled up in the corner. He only really liked tearing up soft toys (like the Bethlehem sheep), but Master wouldn't let him do that in case he swallowed the stuffing. I'm also set in my ways about which biscuits and chews I am prepared to accept. However, wonder of wonders, I really liked the special chews and the new toy I was given this Christmas. The chews are long gone, but I'm still playing with the toy, especially at teatime, when he think he's going to be watching Netflix in peace.

Even though we aren't having whole days out, we are still enjoying walking around the locality. One of his friends joined us the day before New Year's Eve and we went out around the valleys before lunch in the White Hart. Now the leaves have fallen, it is never too dark to walk in the woods he knows so well. So we're still going out early morning and most late afternoons. There has been a lot of anticyclonic gloom when it is very hard to see. It is a good thing that he eats plenty of carrots. There has also been a lot of rain and sometimes it is very slippery. He has to watch out on the slippery slopes, though they don't worry me.

Sunday 29th December, we had a very beautiful experience at the bottom of Dean Valley. It was nearly dark. The sky was clear. The last rays of the sunset coloured pink the western sky. In the foreground hung a sliver of crescent moon and beneath it what appeared to be a bright star, but was in fact the planet Venus. Master was most moved. Tommy.

Psalm 19. *Caeli enarrant*

THE heavens declare the glory of God : and the firmament sheweth his handywork.

2. One day telleth another : and one night certifieth another. 3. There is neither speech nor language : but their voices are heard among them. 4. Their sound is gone out into all lands : and their words into the ends of the world. 5. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun : which cometh forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a giant to run his course. 6. It goeth forth from the uttermost part of the heaven, and runneth about unto the end of it again : and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof. 7. The law of the Lord is an undefiled law, converting the soul : the testimony of the Lord is sure, and giveth wisdom unto the simple. 8. The statutes of the Lord are right, and rejoice the heart : the commandment of the Lord is pure, and giveth light unto the eyes. 9. The fear of the Lord is clean, and endureth for ever : the judgements of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. 10. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold : sweeter also than honey, and the honey-comb. 11. Moreover, by them is thy servant taught : and in keeping of them there is great reward. 12. Who can tell how oft he offendeth : O cleanse thou me from my secret faults. 13. Keep thy servant also from presumptuous sins, lest they get the dominion over me : so shall I be undefiled, and innocent from the great offence. 14. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart : be alway acceptable in thy sight, 15. O Lord : my strength, and my redeemer. 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.