



The Reverend Thomas Stevens

CUXTON'S OWN CHARITABLE TRUST

The Thomas Stevens Trust

This trust was founded more than 100 years ago by the Reverend Thomas Stevens to provide 'Bread and Coal for the needy of Cuxton'.

The present trustees interpret that to mean we can provide funds for '**Food and Heating**' (in the form of coal, an electricity or gas bill or we can even provide a food hamper).

We have funds available.

We need your help: We are asking for nominations for people that would benefit from our assistance. The criteria are as set out above and they must also be resident in Cuxton.

If you know of an individual or a family that could use our help, please contact any one of the trustees in the **strictest confidence**. We do not publish names of those we help. We need to allocate some of our generously donated funds. It would be a real shame to lose this Trust and its benefits for Cuxton.

The Trustees:

Malcolm Curnow

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Flick Foreman

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Roger Savage

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In addition: *Would any residents like to become a trustee? Please do get in touch. Thank you.*

Services at St Michael & All Angels Cuxton			
3 rd March Quinquagesima	9.30 Family Communion	Exodus 34 vv 29-35 p94 II Corinthians 3 v12 – 4 v2 p1160 Luke 9 v28 -36 p1040	
6 th March Ash Wednesday	7.30 pm Holy Communion	Joel 2 vv 12-17 p912 Matthew 6 vv 16-21 p970	
10 th March Lent 1	9.30 Holy Communion	Deuteronomy 26 vv 1-11 p203 Romans 10 vv 8-13 p1137 Luke 4 vv 1-13 p1030	
17 th March Lent 2	8.00 Holy Communion	Epistle & Gospel BCP Lent 2	
	9.30 Holy Communion & Holy Baptism	Genesis 15 vv 1-18 p15 Philippians 3 v17 – 4v1 p1180 Luke 13 vv 31-35 p1047	
24 th March Lent 3	9.30 Holy Communion	Isaiah 55 vv 1-9 p742 I Corinthians 10 vv 1-13 p1151 Luke 13 vv 1-9 p1046	
31 st March Lent 4 / Mothering Sunday	9.30 Holy Communion	Joshua 5 vv 9-12 p219 Luke 15 vv 1-31 p1048	
Services at St John the Baptist Halling & the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling			
3 rd March Quinquagesima	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	I Corinthians 13 vv 1-13 p1153 Luke 18 vv 31-43 p1053	
	11.00 Holy Communion	Exodus 34 vv 29-35 p94 II Corinthians 3 v12 – 4 v2 p1160 Luke 9 v28 -36 p1040	
6 th March Ash Wednesday	9.30 am Holy Communion	Joel 2 vv 12-17 p912 Matthew 6 vv 16-21 p970	
10 th March Lent 1	11.00 Holy Communion	Deuteronomy 26 vv 1-11 p203 Romans 10 vv 8-13 p1137 Luke 4 vv 1-13 p1030	
	5.30 Evening Prayer Jubilee Hall	Genesis 22 vv 1-19 p22 I Corinthians 3 vv 1-23 p1145	
17 th March Lent 2	11.00 Holy Communion & Holy Baptism	Genesis 15 vv 1-18 p15 Philippians 3 v17 – 4v1 p1180 Luke 13 vv 31-35 p1047	
24 th March Lent 3	11.00 Holy Communion	Isaiah 55 vv 1-9 p742 I Corinthians 10 vv 1-13 p1151 Luke 13 vv 1-9 p1046	
31 st March Lent 4 / Mothering Sunday	11.00 Holy Communion	Joshua 5 vv 9-12 p219 II Corinthians 5 vv 16-21 p1161 Luke 15 vv 1-31 p1048	
Wednesday Holy Communion at 9.30 am Cuxton		Thursday Holy Communion at 9.30 am Halling	
6 th March Ash Wednesday at HALLING	Joel 2 vv 12-17 Matthew 6 vv 16-21	7 th March S Perpetua at CUXTON	Deuteronomy 30 vv 15-20 Luke 9 vv 2-25
13 th March Ember Day	Jonah 3 vv 1-10 Luke 11 vv 29-32	14 th March	Isaiah 55 vv 1-13 Matthew 7 vv 7-12
20 th March S Cuthbert	Jeremiah 18 vv 18-20 Matthew 20 vv 17-28	21 st March Thomas Cranmer	Jeremiah 17 vv 5-10 Luke 16 vv 19-31
27 th March	Deuteronomy 4 vv 1-9 Matthew 5 vv 17-19	28 th March	Jeremiah 7 vv 23-28 Luke 11 vv 14-23

The Ven Andrew Wooding Jones, Archdeacon of Rochester will preach at the 9.30 & 11.00 services on 7th April.

All are welcome to the parish lunch at 12.00 in the church hall the first Wednesday of every month.

Copy Date April Magazine: 8.30 am 8th March Rectory

Never Miss an Opportunity

A mother mouse was taking her six babies for a walk when a great big cat jumped out of the bushes. “Woof! Woof!” exclaimed the mother mouse and the cat ran away. “Now,” said she to her children, “you see why it can be worth learning a foreign language.”

From the Rector



Forsake me not, O God, in mine old age, when I am gray-headed: until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to all them that are yet for to come. That is the

sixteenth verse of Psalm 71 and I read it every 14th of the month as part of Morning Prayer. Possibly, it means more to me as I get older. Probably, most of us, at all stages of our lives, wonder what the future might hold for us? What do you want to be when you grow up? they asked us when we were children. Our answers might have been quite unrealistic! From a very young age I felt there was a possibility that I was called by God to do what I am doing now, but I took science “A” levels and, when I asked myself what I could do with Chemistry, Physics and Biology, which would also be a caring profession, I thought of becoming a doctor. Two years of medical school followed after I left Gillingham Grammar, but here I am. God had other plans for my life.

I think that is important. God has plans for our lives. So, in the end, we don't have to worry. We shouldn't feel disappointed. God is looking after us. What we have to do is to trust Him and to seek His Will. I really enjoyed those two years of medical school and I believe that they were part of my preparation for ordained ministry – as were the odd jobs I did in the year between the Middlesex Hospital and theological training: gardener at the Tower of London, clerical assistant in the Department of Health & Social Security at Chatham, odd job gardener, factory hand making the equipment window cleaners use on high buildings, and various voluntary work in youth clubs, etc.. There is a purpose in our lives.

Perhaps your ambition is to advance in your career and get on at work. For most people, finding someone to love is a priority. You might have other projects in which you'd like to achieve something and succeed – making a nice home, bringing up your family, seeing that your children are all right when they leave home. Some people hope to climb mountains, win marathons, build scale models of the *Victory* or win the prize for the best kept garden. The future beckons us, but it can also intimidate us.

Old age has its own particular challenges. We may not be as fit as we once were. Shall we always be able to look after ourselves? Our income is likely to be less than when we were at work. Is it enough to live on? Whatever shall I get up to in retirement? Am I still needed as I become more frail and dependent on others and less able to do things for them? There may be things we hoped to do one day and now probably never will. That is why I encourage people to seize every opportunity to do what they would really like to do and not to risk always regretting that they didn't when they could have. Will we be lonely as friends and loved ones die and perhaps we can't get out any more to meet people and have to give up our interests?

I've made all this sound very depressing, but perhaps it isn't quite so bad as that. Many people find so much to do in retirement that they wonder how they ever had time to go to work. In old age, we might be free to take up new interests and meet new people. We may continue to enjoy good health for decades after we have packed up earning a living. Even if we don't, some sick and housebound people are amazing in the way they relate to visitors and to the professionals who look after them. Some patients do as much to cheer up their nurses as the other way round! You can always pray even if you can't get out of bed. There are people who find that a less active life gives them more time for contemplation.

Despite this, however, old age does present very real challenges, some of which are quite intimidating or even overwhelming. It isn't surprising if, like the guy who wrote the psalm, we worry about aging. (That's the great thing about the psalms. They are honest with God. The psalmist tells God what he really thinks not what he thinks he ought to think, which would be pointless anyway, because God knows what we are really thinking. We can be honest with God too and so we should.) He prays that God will not abandon him and God never will abandon us. We can always have faith in Him.

But it's the second part of the verse which has been getting under my skin lately *until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to all them that are yet for to come.* This is where I'm failing and Christians in this country generally are failing. Too many younger people

know very little about God and they don't believe in Him. We older people have failed to show His strength to this generation and his power to them that are yet for to come. I worry about declining attendances in church. Yes, low numbers do make me wonder if we shall be able to carry on. But that isn't really the point. If God didn't matter, it wouldn't matter if all the churches closed. If the Christian faith were something which was once popular like Old Time Music Hall but is now only a minority interest, it wouldn't matter if redundant churches went the same way as unprofitable theatres.

What really worries me about low numbers in church is that we are failing to reach people with the Good News. Because what we have is good news. And yet people seem to be indifferent or even hostile to our message. Once, when Jesus had said something challenging, many people stopped following Him and He asked His apostles, *Will ye also go away?* Peter replied, *Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.*

Life must be so empty without God. If you think about it at all, you must believe that you are here by chance. There is no reason why you should exist. You don't matter except to the people who choose to love you. There is no-one to turn to in prayer, nobody to thank for this wonderful world. Right and wrong are arbitrary human inventions. There is no justice in the world apart from what men call justice. With a very few exceptions, we shall all be forgotten in a couple of generations. Everything we have achieved will turn to dust. There is nothing to look forward to when we die. No wonder so many young people are depressed!

Only belief in God makes sense of our lives. Only God makes sense of the universe. To know God is to have eternal life. To think that you know that there is no God is the path to despair. To believe that there might be a God but to treat Him with indifference or contempt is to play with fire. If we are to know God, we can only do so because God makes Himself known to us. *He gave us eyes to see them, and lips that we might tell, how great is God Almighty, who hath made all things well.* He gives us the gift of prayer. He gives us the Bible. He gives us the opportunity to meet together for worship, promising to be present when we meet in

His Name. He works in us to make us His in the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. These are some of what we call the means of grace and we neglect them at our peril. They are not optional extras. They are intrinsic to our Christian life and the faith gradually dies when people don't bother. Our own personal relationship with God diminishes. The Church is weakened by the absence of Christian people to do God's work.

Do we pray? Many of us do even if we don't come to church, but have we taught our children and grandchildren to pray? How would they know, if nobody guides them? Do you know the bible stories? You probably do remember at least some of them if you were taught them at school and Sunday School. But do you read the living Word of God in the bible every day now? (There's plenty of help if you find it hard.) Have you passed on the bible stories to the next generation. Do you ever tell people what God has done for you, what He means to you?

If you don't attend church regularly, coming together with other Christians to worship, why not? What could be more important? We're all very busy. We don't like the vicar. The congregation are all hypocrites. Church is boring. It's too old-fashioned or (alternatively) we don't like the changes they've made since we were young. But are any of those good enough reasons not to meet with Jesus where two or three are gathered together in His Name, to pray together, to sing to God, to receive His forgiveness and His blessing, to hear His Word read, preached and taught, to receive Jesus in the bread and wine of Holy Communion? What do you do to encourage other people to go to church – any church if they don't like ours? What do we do to encourage people to be baptised in faith and to bring their families and to become regular communicants, doing every Sunday what Christ commanded us to do.

That's what worries me that we are depriving the generations to come of the knowledge of God because we have failed to do before we die what the psalmist said he wanted to do before he died *until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to all them that are yet for to come.* Roger.

From the Registers

Funerals:

16th January

Adrian Kennard (66)

formerly of Halling

18th January

Eric John Jarvis (88)

Bush Road

Psalm 145. *Exaltabo te, Deus*

I WILL magnify thee, O God, my King : and I will praise thy Name for ever and ever.
2. Every day will I give thanks unto thee : and praise thy Name for ever and ever.
3. Great is the Lord, and marvellous worthy to be praised : there is no end of his greatness.
4. One generation shall praise thy works unto another : and declare thy power.
5. As for me, I will be talking of thy worship : thy glory, thy praise, and wondrous works;
6. So that men shall speak of the might of thy marvellous acts : and I will also tell of thy greatness.
7. The memorial of thine abundant kindness shall be shewed : and men shall sing of thy righteousness.
8. The Lord is gracious and merciful : long-suffering and of great goodness.
9. The Lord is loving unto every man : and his mercy is over all his works.
10. All thy works praise thee, O Lord : and thy saints give thanks unto thee.
11. They shew the glory of thy kingdom : and talk of thy power;
12. That thy power, thy glory, and mightiness of thy kingdom : might be known unto men.
13. Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom : and thy dominion endureth throughout all ages.
14. The Lord upholdeth all such as fall : and lifteth up all those that are down.
15. The eyes of all wait upon thee, O Lord : and thou givest them their meat in due season.
16. Thou openest thine hand : and fillest all things living with plenteousness.
17. The Lord is righteous in all his ways : and holy in all his works.
18. The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him : yea, all such as call upon him faithfully.
19. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him : he also will hear their cry, and will help them.
20. The Lord preserveth all them that love him : but scattereth abroad all the ungodly.
21. My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord : and let all flesh give thanks unto his holy Name for ever and ever.

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.

Confirmation 2019?

We shall not be hosting a confirmation service this year, but, if there is anyone who wishes to be prepared for confirmation, we shall arrange to take part in a service in another church. At confirmation, you reaffirm your commitment to the promises made at your baptism – to live by faith in God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit – and the laying on of the bishop's hand is a sign and seal of God's gift of His Holy Spirit. If you have not been baptized already, you will be baptized at the same service. We meet beforehand for a course of preparation. When I know who would like to be confirmed, I shall arrange these classes at a time convenient to the participants. Commitment is expected and participants should attend the classes and Sunday worship unless there are real reasons to miss out occasionally.

World Day of Prayer Service

This will take place this year at the Church of St John the Baptist Halling at 10.00 am on the Friday 1st March. The focus is on Slovenia.

This was formerly known as the Women's World Day of Prayer. All the churches come together for prayer and fellowship and it is open (of course!) to both men and women.

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 6.30-7.30 & 7.30-8.30 pm. For more information, please contact instructor Emily Pollington, 07940233296, emilypollington@btinternet.com Also on Facebook.

Please book through website <https://the-pilates-element.pilatesnearlyou.co.uk/>

Nic Boniface Counselling & Therapeutic Services (Medway)

Offices in Rochester & Rainham

Making the decision to step into therapy can evoke many feelings. I appreciate that starting the therapeutic process can be a really brave decision!

If you need someone to talk to, in an environment within which you feel safe, we can build this together supported by the Framework of the British Association of Counselling & Psychotherapy, of which I am a registered member.

If you would like to discuss counselling or counselling supervision, please contact me on:

BonifaceTherapyServices@gmail.com

07865 470014

Pilates is a wonderful way to exercise and it's really great to get local people working out together as they all have a chat before class so it's great for helping with social isolation. I would run a class for people on a Thursday morning if there were sufficient demand. Please contact me if you are interested. Emily Pollington.

Reader's Observation

One reader of last month's account of the Mediaeval Fayre at Halling in 1983 recalled that Bishop David Say used the 1549 prayer book to celebrate Holy Communion on the Sunday. Some people had asked him to use a mediaeval rite, but that would have been in Latin and would not have been entirely in keeping with what the Church of England believes. 1549 was as far back as he would go. It is Archbishop Thomas Cranmer's first prayer book in English and it reflects the influence of the Protestant Reformation. Henry VIII's son, Edward VI, was King of England by this time and a protestant himself. Cranmer issued a more radically reformed prayer book in 1552, but his sister Mary, when she became Queen, reverted to the Roman Catholic service. Her sister, Elizabeth I, tried to find a compromise which respected the integrity of the Reformation. The prayer books of her reign were in English and included features of both the 1549 and 1552 books. When parliament won the Civil War almost a century later, they banned the prayer book altogether. On the Restoration of King Charles II, the prayer book was updated and reissued in 1662. This is substantially the Book of Common Prayer which we still use as well as Common Worship which was published in the year 2,000, following eighty odd years of revision and experimentation which some of you may remember as the prayer books of 1927 & 1928, series one, two and three, and the Alternative Services Book. We still have a large number of ASBs which we no longer use, but you're welcome to take one if you'd like to. They contain some good prayers. We use both the 1662 Book of Common Prayer and Common Worship. I'm quite a fan of 1662, but I also think that Common Worship is better in some circumstances. To me 1662 is like going by bike, more enjoyable, and Common Worship like going by car – more practical and convenient. Roger.

Cleanliness is Next to Godliness

I'm rather proud of the fact that both our churches are kept so beautifully clean, tidy, in good repair and decorated with flowers. The people who attend to these things on a voluntary basis are entitled to our thanks. We are, however, getting short of volunteers at St John's and the churchwardens would be delighted to hear from you if you could offer to help with the cleaning, usually on Saturday mornings. The more volunteers, the less work for each one. St Michael's would probably also welcome additional people to go on the cleaning rota. We're also grateful for donations towards the cost of flowers which are so beautifully arranged in both churches. Please give any such donations to the flower ladies, the wardens or the rector.

An Honest Love Letter

My Dearest,

To me you mean everything. I would hike a thousand miles for you, cross the wildest desert, swim the widest ocean, climb the highest mountain. There is nothing I wouldn't do for you.

See you Tuesday (if it isn't raining). SWALK.

Full Tilt around Offham!

Walking during the winter is not so easy but when we have sunny days I feel that going out in the countryside is a 'must'. Today, it is cold outside with a chill wind and is slippery underfoot but wearing several thin layers, my trusty jacket and sturdy waterproof boots I set off for Offham. Offham is close to West Malling and is less than a 20 minute drive from Cuxton. The village gets its name from the Saxon landowner, Offa, and 'ham' means a village or homestead. Hence, 'Offham'. The village is famed, today, for its medieval quintain which stands on the village green.



The quintain has a tall wooden post with a freely rotating arm on top. One end of the arm is flat and the other end carries a heavy pack. A horseman, carrying his lance, used to charge and aim to strike the flat end of the arm. If the horseman was too slow after his strike then the arm would swing round and the heavy pack would knock him off his horse. This ancient sport is known as 'Tilting at The Quintain'. Occasionally, local horse riders undertake this sport during the village May Day celebrations.

My walk begins at the car park on Teston Road, opposite Offham Methodist Church. There is a delightful little recreation park next to the car park. I walk through the gate into the park, turn right and follow the tarmac path to the gate at the bottom corner, go through gate and cross the lane to an enclosed footpath. I follow this footpath



alongside Moorlands Wood then across farmland. There is a lovely view of the hills bathed in sunshine. The fields look

pretty barren at the present but are renown for salad crops later in the year. At the outer farm buildings the footpath meets a T-junction. I turn



right and head for the road and a church. Bathed in sunshine, today, is The Parish Church of Offham, St Michael and All Angels. It is quite different from our church in Cuxton. Inside it is

bright and airy with beautiful stained glass windows. After visiting the church I walked down the lane back towards the Quintain passing the primary school and then fork right at the cricket ground into North Meadow. At the Quintain I cross the Teston Road and head down the lane. The road is still a little slippery from the overnight ice and frost. On the left is a gorgeous pond with a duck house.



After a short distance the footpath starts on the left at a right hand bend in the lane. I follow the path that branches right almost immediately then follows woodland down to the track known as 'Lord's Walk'. At the junction of pathways I turn left along Lords Walk. Parts of this route are muddy but it is a fairly wide and well maintained footpath. There are workers clearing foliage and

falling damaged or dead trees. Just before a working quarry I take a footpath to the left which opens out onto fields and leads past the hidden remains of the Chapel of St Blaise and onto Blaise Farm. The path changes to concrete before arriving at Tower Hill. There are some delightful cottages and gardens on route up the hill to Teston Road. Rather than return to the car park, to the left, I turn right and walk less than a mile on the Teston Road to Spadework. Spadework is a registered charity which provides care, training and work experience to adults with learning and other disabilities. The complex has a garden centre, licensed cafe and farm shop. It is open to the public seven days a week. The staff in the cafe



are cheerful, well supervised and they provide a varied menu. The dishes include several of my favourite treats, for example, cheese scones and coffee or thick soups with chunks of fresh bread. Very appropriate sustenance for chilly winter days. After a suitable repast and rest I wander around the little farm shop and garden centre then I retrace my steps along Teston Road to the car park and remove my muddy boots before driving home. A very pleasant day out. Holly Croft.

Quotation

Martin Luther: The Holy Scripture is the word of God written (as I might say) lettered and formed in letters, just as Christ is the eternal Word of God cloaked in human flesh.

If you'd like guidance on reading the bible daily, see <http://cuxtonandhalling.org.uk/teaching.htm>, or pick up the bible notes in church or ask me to deliver you a copy or email an electronic version. Roger.

St Michael's Draw February: £10 to Mr Bogg (22) & £5 each to Mr Silverthorn (1) and Mrs Beaney (5).

St John's Draw: £5 each to Mrs Mitchell (61), Ms Heighes (40) & Mrs Cheeseman (134) – drawn by Mr Smitherman.

Friday, 1st March 10.00 a.m. World Day of Prayer at St. John's Church, Halling

Cuxton & Halling Mothers' Union

Wednesday, 20th March 10.45 a.m. Talk on Books by Jack Payne (Bring a book to discuss)

Saturday, 23rd March 11.30 a.m. Triennial Commissioning Service for President, Julie Jamieson and Trustees of the Rochester Diocese.

Monday, 25th March 10.00 a.m. Lady Day Service for Rochester Archdeaconry in St. Michael's Church, Cuxton – refreshments in Hall

Wednesday, 17th April 10.45 a.m. Speaker – Gill Speed, Head of Care & Training at "Spadework"

Saturday, 27th April 9.30 a.m. Rochester Diocesan MU Members' Meeting, Paddock Wood

Wednesday, 15th May 10.45 a.m. Mothers' Union A.G.M.

Wednesday, 19th June 10.45 a.m. Trip to Kenward Trust, Yalding, for Lunch & Shop and optional Alpaca walking

Monday, 22nd April 2.00 p.m. EASTER EGG HUNT in RECTORY GARDEN Activities and refreshments in Church Hall

Story

A man and a dog come out of the pub and get run over. At the Pearly Gates, the man is allowed in, but the dog is sent back to earth for the tail he had left behind. The dog asks the pub landlord to fix it on him. The landlord replies, "Sorry, I'm not allowed to retail spirits after we're closed."

The Seasonal Steps of our Seers – March

St David (or Dewi in Welsh) is the patron saint of Wales, and this is celebrated on the 1st March. A second century monk, he founded the Abbey of St David's in Pembrokeshire following very strict rules, but for all of that was extremely popular and his shrine was a major pilgrimage centre from 12th century. The national emblem is the leek or the daffodil but the origin of this is obscure. A popular theory is that David led the Welsh to victory over their Saxon foes wearing a leek so that he stood out from others in the battle (although others credit King Cadwallawn for this). The daffodil could have been chosen because its name looks like the Welsh name Dafydd but again this is lost in time.

The 17th March is St Patrick's Day, the patron saint of Ireland which is a national holiday there. Son of a Roman tax collector living in what is now south-east Wales, he was captured by raiders and sold into Irish slavery. After six years he escaped to Gaul where he entered the priesthood but was determined to return to Ireland to convert his captors to Christianity and within ten years had established churches all over the country. He died there in 461 AD. The emblem of Ireland is the shamrock; according to legend St Patrick used a clover to convert the pagan King Loigaire to Christianity by showing him how the three separate leaves united by one stem resemble the Trinity.

Mothering Sunday is a long-established celebration falling on the fourth Sunday in Lent which this year (2019) falls on the 31st. In medieval times it was the day on which people visited their 'mother' church, the cathedral of their diocese. Only in the mid-17th century did it become a day for acknowledging mothers, perhaps becoming confused with Lady Day (25th March) which celebrated the Mother of God. On Mothering Sunday often special church services are held, and the practice of visiting one's mother to give presents of flowers or cakes is the norm. People working in service away from home would often be granted the day off to visit their mothers at home. Traditionally Simnel cakes are baked for both Mothering Sunday and Easter, and Victorian tradition dictates that there should be eleven marzipan balls atop the cake representing the apostles (Judas not being included).

*I'll to Thee a simnel bring 'gainst Thou go a-mothering,
So that when she blesses Thee, half that blessing you'll give to me.* Robert Herrick

I know that Easter is falling in April this year because it is late (2019) but I will include it here in preparation. The fifth Sunday in Lent, which begins on Ash Wednesday, is Passion Sunday, the time when the church begins meditation on the sufferings of Christ. Sometimes it is known as 'Carling' Sunday from a derivation of the word 'care' or mourning in Middle English, and churches will be draped suitably in purple. The following Sunday is Palm Sunday which celebrates Christ's entry into Jerusalem riding on a donkey, people strewing his path with palm branches to honour him. Crosses made of palm leaves are still blessed and distributed in churches today, this custom practised since at least the 5th century (although banned during the Reformation).

*The people of the Hebrews with palms before Thee went:
Our praise and prayer and anthems before Thee we present.* Hymn: All Glory, Laud and Honour

The Friday before Easter Day is Good Friday - the day of Christ's crucifixion. No church bells are rung and the church itself has been stripped of its cloths and adornments. The church is quite bare, with no decoration at all. It's not all bad news, though, because this is the day that we can enjoy hot cross buns. This wonderful cake has its beginnings in pagan times when the cross and circle were the representation of the sun. The bun, the circle, was crossed by two cuts at right angles making four sections to represent the four seasons. Over time this has been developed into the representation of the cross of Christ.

Easter Day falls between 21st March and 25th April, the date depending on the first full moon of spring. It is calculated as the first Sunday after the full moon on or after the 21st March, but if the full moon falls on a Sunday, then Easter day is the following Sunday. Easter celebrates Christ's resurrection, and the defeat of sin, darkness and death; churches are redecorated and bells are rung triumphantly. Eggs are the ancient symbols of spring, re-birth and renewal of life which is the reason eggs, including the chocolate variety, are given as gifts at this time. The traditional meal for Easter is lamb and the recipe often includes rosemary – the herb that represents the Virgin Mary, the blue rosemary flowers indicating the supposed colour of her robes.

*Loveliest of the trees, the cherry now is hung with bloom along the bough,
And stands about the woodland ride wearing white for Eastertide.* A E Houseman.

Tommy's Talking Points



I was going to say that we haven't been anywhere special since I last wrote, but that doesn't mean that we haven't had a marvellous time. Master is fond of singing *This is the day, this is the day the Lord hath made* every day, because it is true that God made every day, not just the special days and they're all wonderful.

So let me say what a great time we've had walking and, in my case, running in our local woods and fields. Of course, it's been very dark in the mornings and even late afternoons. It doesn't affect me, but it gives Master pause for thought. We go slower. So we don't go so far or sometimes we're a bit late getting back. It was very mild up to and long after Christmas and it didn't rain much. So that was good for him. I don't care so much. Dogs are closely related to wolves and they often live in places where there is deep snow and it is often very cold. He likes it when it's warm enough to wear shorts because it's more comfortable walking and he gets on quicker (though he can't keep up with me).

We did, however, have some much colder weather when the woods were frozen. Then we've had some snow, though not so much here as elsewhere, even in Kent, or as we had last year, and a lot more rain. Rain and snow make the paths slipperier and it's better for 5' 10" bipeds when the ground is actually frozen solid. Now the days are getting longer and we're getting back towards normal.

I had quite a lot of garden time when he undertook to tidy our neglected shrubbery. He thought an afternoon would be enough, but it took a whole week. Then we had an enormous bonfire which burnt for hours.

Even though it's winter, I still get burrs in my hair, which he has to tease out, especially if they're near my ears. Ear infections are common in spaniels, unpleasant for us, expensive for him. Where burrs really congregate is my tail, which sometimes has the consistency of a flu brush and takes a lot of patient unpicking. I also get very wet and muddy. He has two minds about cleaning me off. He says it results in a wet and muddy towel and a dog not noticeably less wet and muddy. So it depends on how cold it is and whether I'm likely to be on the furniture. Even I don't like being wet as well as cold and even he doesn't like dirt on the upholstery.

In the Summer, our Saturday morning walk is usually up behind Forge Cottage, under the railway and through the woods towards the mausoleum. He goes that way so that we come back past the shops and he can pick up his paper which is sometimes delivered later on a Saturday than he has patience to wait for. He used to worry when there were cows in that big field up there, but he doesn't anymore. I take no notice of them and they take no notice of me. It was the same when they had all those sheep grazing in the fields where there isn't usually any livestock and he had to climb over hurdles to get in and out. I had to be lifted, though I could jump if I wanted to. I did, however, have one or two startling experiences with electric fences! Anyway, coming back to the mausoleum, I love that walk. I run on ahead. I explore the woods. I run and leap and bound, justifying my breed as a springer spaniel. But we haven't been up there much in the Winter. The paths get very slippery and it has been so dark and he has always been good at getting lost in Cobham Woods. One friend bought him a compass after Master had lost both of them and the friend's family on the way back from the mausoleum. So, he's stayed in bed longer and we've taken a shorter walk to the paper shop.

You should have seen us last Sunday afternoon, however. It was such a beautiful, bright sunny day. The snow hadn't entirely gone and some of the paths were still frozen. So he decided we would go up that way. The views are superb from Brockles as I believe it is called. I just love racing racing round that field and Cobham Woods. I ran on far ahead and had to be called back. It was very slippery and he struggled on the uphill and downhill paths. They don't worry me. I just keep running. If I slip, I just keep going. We passed the Toe Memorial and came back into the fields leading down to the tunnel at the top of Whiteleaves. I really had a good time, frolicking in those fields, while he picked his way gingerly through the mud. It was definitely a day for a good towelling off when we got home.

Tommy.