

Parish of Cuxton and Halling



December 2023

30p

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

Services December			
3 rd December Advent Sunday Year B Gift Services	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Isaiah 64 vv 1-9 p750 I Corinthians 1 vv 1-9 p1144 Mark 13 vv 24-37 p1019	
10 th December Advent 2 Bible Sunday	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Isaiah 40 vv 1-11 p723 II Peter 3 vv 8-18 p1224 Mark 1 vv 1-8 p1002	
17 th December Advent 3	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Isaiah 61 vv 1-11 p748 I Thessalonians 5 vv 16-24 p1188 John 1 vv 6-28 p1063	
	3.00 Carol Service & Christingle Halling		
	6.30 Nine Lessons and Carols Cuxton		
Monday 18 th December	7.00 pm Scout & Guide Carol Service Cuxton		
24 th December Advent 4 / Christmas Eve	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	II Samuel 7 vv 1-17 p310 Acts 13 vv 16-26 p1107 Luke 1 vv 67-79 p1027	
	5.00 Crib Service, Nativity Play & Christingle Cuxton		
	11.00 Midnight Mass Cuxton		
25 th December Christmas Day	8.00 Holy Communion Halling 9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton	Hebrews 1 vv 1-12 p1201 John 1 vv 1-14 p1063	
31 st December Christmas 1	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Galatians 4 vv 1-7 p1170 Luke 2 vv 15-21 p1028	
Holy Communion Cuxton Wednesdays 9.30		Holy Communion Halling Thursdays 9.30	
6 th December	Isaiah 25 vv 6-10 Matthew 15 vv 29-37	7 th December	Isaiah 26 vv 1-6 Matthew 7 vv 21-27
13 th December Ember Day	Isaiah 40 vv 25-31 Matthew 11 vv 28-30	14 th December	Isaiah 41 vv 13-20 Matthew 11 vv 11-15
20 th December	Genesis 49 vv 2-10 Matthew 1 vv 1-17	21 st December St Thomas	Ephesians 2 vv 19-22 John 20 vv 24-31
27 th December St John	I John 1 vv 1-10 John 21 vv 19-25	28 th December Holy Innocents	Revelation 14 vv 1-5 Matthew 2 vv 13-18

There will also be Holy Communion at St Michael's at 9.30 am on 26th (St Stephen).

Services January		
January 7 th Baptism of Christ / Epiphany 1	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Genesis 1 vv 1-5 p3 Acts 19 vv 1-7 p1115 Mark 1 vv 4-11 p1002
January 14 th Epiphany 2	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	I Samuel 3 vv 1-20 p274 Revelation 5 vv 1-10 p1237 John 1 vv 43-51 p1064
January 21 st Epiphany 3	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Genesis 14 vv 17-20 p15 Revelation 19 vv 6-10 p1247 John 2 vv 1-11 p1064
28 th January Septuagesima / Epiphany 4	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Deuteronomy 18 vv 15-20 p197 Revelation 12 vv 1-8 p1241 Mark 1 vv 21-28 p1002

Holy Communion Cuxton Wednesdays 9.30		Holy Communion Halling Thursdays 9.30	
3 rd January	I John 2 vv 29 – 3v6 John 1 vv 29-34	4 th January	I John 3 vv 7-10 John 1 vv 35-42
10 th January William Laud	I John 4 vv 19 – 5v4 Luke 4 vv 14-22	11 th January	I John 5 vv 5-13 Luke 5 vv 12-16
17 th January	I Samuel 17 vv 30-54 Mark 3 vv 106	18 th January Week of Prayer for Christian Unity	I Samuel 18 vv 5-16 Mark 3 vv 7-12
24 th January Week of Prayer for Christian Unity	II Samuel 7 vv 4-17	25 th January	Acts 9 vv 1-22 Matthew 19 vv 27-30
31 st January	II Samuel 24 vv 1-17 Mark 6 vv 1-6	1 st February	I Kings 2 vv 1-12 Mark 6 vv 7-13

Copy February Magazine: 12th January 8.30 am Rectory

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St John's Draw (October): Mrs Mitchell (62), Mrs Watts (117), Mr Johnson (36).

(November): Mrs Burr (12), Mrs Mitchell (74), Mr Beaney (130)



The Medium is the Message.

I think I first heard this 1964 maxim of Marshall McLuhan in a sermon at St Matthew's Church Wigmore when I was in my teens. His words obviously made an impression!

I think what he is driving at is that what we take in of a communication depends a great deal on the way it is put over and the context as well as on the literal content. I admit that I am struggling here and you may well understand this better than I do (and maybe write a piece for the February magazine!).

In poetry, for example, the form of the words we use can convey a deeper truth than their literal meaning. Instead of *I wandered lonely as a cloud That floats on high o'er vales and hills, When all at once I saw a crowd, A host, of golden daffodils; Beside the lake, beneath the trees, Fluttering and dancing in the breeze*, Wordsworth could have written, *Walking alone one day, I saw a lot of yellow flowers blowing about down by the lake*. It would both have meant the same and not have meant the same. [I often use this as an example of why the traditional language of worship speaks to us in a manner which more modern, more mundane forms of service do not.]

Sometimes we say psalms and sometimes we sing them and the effect on us is subtly different. We might hear the same words in a sermon as we do in a lecture, but they make a different impression on us, depending on whether we think the speaker is speaking *In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost* or merely giving us the benefit of his own knowledge, intelligence and experience.

If we are watching advertisements or listening to a political speech, we are perhaps sceptical. We may be more inclined to believe a political speech delivered by the leader of the party we support than one given by the leader of the opposite party. We may be more or less inclined to believe what we hear on the radio, watch on television, read in the newspapers or discover on the internet. Roughly in that order, surveys suggest that people trust radio news above TV news, radio and TV above newspapers and all of them above the internet. But there are people who apparently unquestioningly accept what they read on certain internet sites and that is scary. We should never accept anything unquestioningly.

It bothered me that people paid attention to what the late Diana Princess of Wales said about AIDs and landmines. Not because she was wrong; I am sure she was right. What bothered me was that people were prepared to listen to a beautiful

princess, but not to doctors, scientists, military strategists and human rights experts, despite the fact that these unglamorous people were much more qualified than she was to say the same things that she said and had been saying them for much longer.

What is even more worrying is that too many people believe and act on utter balderdash because some celebrity advocates, for example, an extreme diet or fitness regime which mainstream medical opinion warns is either totally pointless or even actually dangerous to our health and well-being.

McLuhan's warning was that we are subtly manipulated because we pay attention only to the actual words and do not even notice how the context and the manner in which they are delivered affect our understanding of what is said and, consequently, our behaviour and even our personality, which is at least in part moulded by the information and attitudes we absorb from the world around us.

Suppose three thieves told you not to steal. It's good advice! Let's say that the first thief telling you not to steal was actually a career criminal who had never been caught and was living the high life funded by his ill-gotten gains and had no intention of giving up stealing himself. The second thief, however, had been caught and, having served a long prison sentence, reckoned that robbery wasn't worth the risk. The third had done quite well by stealing and had never been caught, but had now realised that stealing is wrong, that it is against God's Commandments and that it hurts the people who are robbed. Moreover, he is now working hard at an honest job and giving money to the poor in order to pay his debt to society.

Which one would you respect? Which one's advice would you respect? (They all gave the same advice!)

It's all about authenticity. The point of that sermon at Wigmore all those years ago was the authenticity of Jesus. The Christmas Gospel begins: *In the beginning was the Word, and the*

Word was with God, and the Word was God. I love reading these words and those that follow in John chapter 1 out loud at our Christmas services. Jesus is the Word of God. He is also the Medium in which God's Word comes to us. God spoke the Word. The Word is God. *The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.* Authenticity personified, the Medium and the Word are one, the Truth made flesh. What you see is what you get.

As Christians, our duty is to spread the Word. We use different media, but, if we're inauthentic we cannot communicate the Truth.

I wonder sometimes whether the reason that people do not believe us Christians when we speak the Truth of God is that our lives don't match up to the faith we profess? We are the medium through whom God speaks, but who we are, how we behave, doesn't match the message which we are commissioned to personify. We're not sufficiently like Jesus to provide an authentic account of what it means to be a Christian.

Nevertheless, we do our best. The main reason that I was reluctant to stop printing this magazine was that it is a means of communication across the whole parish. I am sorry that the price has had to double to take into account the fact that we are now having it professionally printed. There will be higher production values than when I used to do it. There may even be more and better pictures. So I hope you will continue to subscribe at 60p (£6.00 for the year) for printed copies or free online at <http://cuxtonandhalling.org.uk> or I can email it to you free if you let me have your email address. Please encourage friends and neighbours as well to read our magazine.

It's been a tough year in which the world seems to have lost its way, there is too little integrity about, and sin and death have been all too prevalent. Don't despair, however; there is always hope; there is always faith; there is always love. Jesus is the Way, the Truth & the Life.

Merry Christmas, Roger..

Jokes

What do you get when you cross a dog with a telephone
What type of sandals do frogs wear?
Why did the schoolboy eat his homework?

A golden receiver
Open toad
The teacher told him that it was a piece of cake.

Sharing the Good News of Christmas

Each Christmas St. Michael's Church, Cuxton, St. John's Church, Halling and Cuxton Community Church get together to organise the printing of a Christmas card which is delivered to all residents of Cuxton and Halling. The main aim is to let people know when the various services are over the Christmas period so that people can make a choice where to worship and when. We have been doing this now for a few years and I volunteer myself to do the delivering to the village of Cuxton. I have a few reasons for volunteering.

Firstly, I think that if I do the deliveries, I am doing a lot of exercise. This means that over Christmas I can maybe have an extra mince pie, extra turkey or more chocolate without putting on any extra weight. That's the plan anyway.

Secondly, I like to see how the village has changed. Many residents have had extensions, landscaped their gardens or have had new driveways. It is amazing how much does change in one year.

Thirdly, I like to think that whoever you are and whatever you believe you will receive at least one Christmas card. A lot of people nowadays do not send cards due to the price of the cards, the price of postage and also that a tree has been felled for the privilege. I understand these arguments but I like having the knowledge that all households receive at least one card.

During my time delivering I have certain roads I detest over others due to the amount of steps I have to navigate to finish off a road. Sundridge Hill is top of that list, so are parts of Charles Drive and Nine Acres. The flattest roads are Demelza Close, Stanford Way, May Street and Wood Street, these can be all done quite quickly.

I would like to thank those of you who have letter boxes at waist height. When I see a letter box at the bottom of a door my knees visibly creak at the sight. I'm alright getting down there but getting up now can be a trial. I would also like to thank you for those of you who have boxes on the wall instead of me fighting your dog who seems very loudly to be happy to see me and the said card I am delivering. One dog in Nine Acres follows you barking as you go past the front room to get to the front door; it then follows you back as you descend still barking very loudly. That house will definitely not get any burglars, ever.

I have a new respect for all post men and women who deliver daily and I have observed how they park their van in strategic places and use it as a base which I now also do so that I am not carrying too much weight when delivering.

If you see me delivering please say hi although I do get into a zone when out and can be quite blinkered to what is happening around me.

I ask God to bless everyone of you and wish you all a Merry Christmas and a prosperous and Healthy New Year.

Paula.

Magazine Subscriptions.

Unfortunately, on 8th September, our aging parish duplicator abruptly ceased operations. It is beyond economic repair and we cannot justify the cost of replacing it under current circumstances. It has therefore been decided that we shall have the magazine professionally printed. This will result in a higher quality journal, but unfortunately it will cost more to produce. Unfortunately, the price will have to go up to 60p next year or £6.00 for eleven copies. (There is no January magazine.) I'm sorry about this big jump, but it will still cost less than many church magazines and it will probably run at a loss even at that price. I hope you will still feel it is worth it and continue to subscribe. Maybe, if the production values are higher, there will be more people wanting to receive a copy. We ought to be able to have pictures again. The magazine is free on my web site <http://cuxtonandhalling.org> and I will email you free copies if you ask me to and give me your email address. Roger.

Christmas Blues and Christmas Light

Some time ago, weeks before Christmas, I read a newspaper column in which a woman was complaining about Christmas and saying how she would like to go abroad for the next few months to avoid it. My online comment was, "If you want to avoid 'Christmas', try going to Church." We'll respect Advent and, when we do celebrate Christmas at the proper time, we'll celebrate something worth celebrating.

I can think of three reasons why people might not like Christmas. The first is if they are unhappy and feel that everybody apart from them is having a great time. Maybe they remember much happier Christmases in times past and feel all the more sad because of what has been lost. It's a reminder to all of us to be sensitive to how other people are feeling and to treat them respectfully and kindly. It's also a thought that we have to decide ourselves what to make of how we feel. I've reached an age when I can look back on happy times spent with people now long dead and regret their passing. Nothing can take those times away, however. I'm thankful for what I have had in the past. I know also that my Christian friends who have departed this life are celebrating Christmas with me now in a better place. I also appreciate what I have now and am thankful for the very different Christmases we presently enjoy and I look forward to the future with confidence in God for my life on earth and in heaven.

The second reason some people dislike Christmas is the consumerism. In days gone by, when many people were poor and maybe hungry, a time of feasting and drinking and giving and receiving presents really meant something. It was a foretaste of heaven. But, for many of us today, the problem is not that we're hungry, but that we quite possibly eat and drink more than is good for us throughout the year. For people who worry about their weight, Christmas can be really stressful. And what do you give the person who has everything? One person I knew used really to frustrate her family. Every year they bought her a Christmas present which she would take back to the shop in January – and, being sale time, would get back less money than they'd originally paid for it. I think the answer to eating and drinking a lot at Christmas is to be sensible. Don't so obsess about "healthy eating" that you can't ever enjoy a good meal without feeling guilty, but also be wise and exercise moderation. Greed and drunkenness are not good things and don't make you happy in the long run. As for Christmas presents, it really is the thought that counts. Given that insight, we worry less about the object (the gift) and value more the subject (the person giving or receiving the gift).

Finally, there is the problem of "What does it all mean?" Most cultures have a midwinter festival. The days have been getting darker; the weather has been getting colder, but, around the end of December, there is a change. The year turns and there is a new beginning. The twelve days of Christmas, from the 25th December onwards, are a good way to enjoy those dark days and indeed to use up the meat of those animals which you can't afford to keep through the Winter. You then emerge in January to begin the natural cycle all over again. All this means a lot less in an industrial society with electric light and central heating and everything you want available in the shops all the year round. So what does it mean for us to hold a midwinter festival? Why should we care about the rhythm of the seasons? Human beings, being what we are, have generally tied in their festivals with their religions. Non-Christian religions assign meaning to festivals, as does Christianity, but what would festivals mean if there were no God? We Christians celebrate the midwinter festival as the coming of the Light of the world. Jesus is the Light of the world. He dispels the darkness of evil and death. That is our reason for celebrating Christmas. The Birth of Jesus is the meaning of the festival and it is for this reason that I'm looking forward to eating good food and drinking at yuletide festivities with my family and my friends and giving them gifts and receiving tokens of love from them. I'm also looking forward to our Christmas services, especially our Christmas Communion, when we receive in a small piece of bread Him Who was born in Bethlehem (the very name of which means House of Bread in Hebrew) - Jesus the Bread of life and Light of the world. Merry Christmas.

Thanks

Thank you for supporting our Christmas charities – the foodbank, Poverty & Hope, shoeboxes for Ukraine and Christmas goodies for our neighbours. Thank you also for all you do for the Church throughout the year: maintaining & cleaning buildings, arranging flowers, singing, playing music, bell-ringing, social events, writing & delivering magazines, and so much more, especially for your prayers. Roger.

From Percy Pigeon

Good day to you all. Here is my festive acrostic message.

The _____ angels sing
The period before Christmas
My first name
My mate's first name
The special log

Seasonal songs
_____ New Year!
Red-breasted bird
Holly and the _____
Frozen precipitation

O little _____ of Bethlehem
Away in a _____
_____ Fidelis
While _____ watched

The rector's dog
_____ and lemons

The day before today
_____ Come all Ye Faithful
Gifts are placed _____ the tree

Please remember all avians with festive crumbs. Coo coo.

Reverend Robert William Shaw: A remarkable Rector (Part 2)

Last month, we read the story of the Reverend Robert William Shaw and his building of Cuxton's Rectory. His legacy to Cuxton is far greater than the building of what, at a cursory thought, might be considered to be a somewhat self-serving edifice. Though for over a hundred years, the Rectory remained a centre for many parish activities until its demolition in 1964, perhaps Canon Shaw's greatest legacy was the founding of Cuxton's first permanent school. In 1803, his predecessor-but-one as Rector, Charles Moore, is recorded as having set up: *"... a little school in the parish (where there was none before) and paying myself for the constant weekly schooling of eight or more poor children, giving them shoes and stockings in the winter to encourage them to be regular..."* The "little school" was most likely a "Dame's School". These schools were taught by a "school dame," a local woman who would educate children for a small fee. At Dame's schools, children were taught the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic. Girls were often instructed in crafts such as knitting and sewing. From a drawing held at the Rochester Guildhall Museum, it appears that one such school was located at the Old Post Office Row, which used to be sited opposite the Parsonage. The drawing, (showing the Old Post Office Row to a remarkably faithful degree) was probably made by one of the school's pupils.

Unlike many public servants today, Robert Shaw was a forward-thinking man who was both willing and able to invest in the future and could get things done. When he first came to Cuxton, the population of the village was around 370, but it was clear that local industries, particularly the cement industry, were poised to expand. Foreseeing the need for permanent schooling to serve a growing number of children, Robert Shaw instigated the building of Cuxton's first dedicated school. In 1849, Canon Shaw's school was built on land just to the south-east of the church, close to the main road, and included accommodation for a schoolmistress. At that time, the school could accommodate up to 70 pupils, who then came from both Cuxton and nearby Halling. This was a ^{*}National School and you can still see a stone inscribed with that information if you look along the wall dividing the churchyard from 18 Rochester Road. Halling School did not open in Vicarage Road until 1876, although there had been an earlier school in Halling High Street on

^{*} NATIONAL SCHOOLS

The National Society for Promoting Religious Education is a Church of England body in England and Wales for the promotion of church schools and Christian education. It was founded on 16 October 1811 as the "National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church in England and Wales". Its aim was that "the National Religion should be made the foundation of National Education, and should be the first and chief thing taught to the poor, according to the excellent Liturgy and Catechism provided by our Church." One of the principal founders was Joshua Watson. Historically, schools founded by the National Society were called National Schools. At ground level these schools were implemented by the local vicar and members of the Church of England.

the opposite side of the road from the church. That building is still there, now a house, but has been given a modern frontage.

The Education Act of 1870 drove the building of additional capacity for infants at a cost of £185, which was met by Lord Darnley, Canon Shaw and his friends and also some of the local yeoman (Messrs Wood, Pye and Weekes).

By 1902 the population of Cuxton had nearly doubled and the National Board of Education gave notice that a larger school would be required. There was no room for further expansion at Canon Shaw's school and therefore a new council school was built down in the village. The new school opened in March 1906 and is still in use today (no cheap and nasty "aerated" concrete in *that* building!). The old school remained in use for a while as a Sunday school and church rooms, and the ground floor living accommodation was used by the school caretakers. Children from Halling School also had some classes in this building well into the twentieth century. Like many other of Cuxton's old buildings, however, Canon Shaw's school was finally demolished in 1964.

One building associated with (and presumably built at the behest of) Robert Shaw still remains today – 85 Bush Road, also known as Arrow Cottage. It was built around 1850, on the north-western corner of what was then the glebe land and gardens formerly associated with the Rectory, and today lies just to the left of the school and library driveway. The gable end of the cottage still bears the coat of arms of the ancestral Shaw family (the Shaws of Kenward and Eltham) which is described in "heraldry-speak" as *"Six flighted arrows interlaced saltirewise or, flighted and headed argent, tied together with a belt gules, buckle and pendant or"*. Take a look next time you walk past. The cottage may have originally been built for the grounds man of the Rectory, which in those days was sited in extensive gardens and orchards that occupied the land along Bush Road between Arrow Cottage and the corner opposite the White Hart, right up the bank to the Rectory itself, and which included a stable block. The cottage was bought by a Mr. Pye and then sold to Mr. Henry Baker in 1893. For many years, the local village constables enjoyed rent-free accommodation at Arrow Cottage. They included the splendidly-named P.C. Barnett ("Flo") Peacock, and latterly P.C. Jack ("Hoppy") Hopper, whom some still remember today.



Whilst a resurrected Canon Shaw would probably not recognise the village of Cuxton as we know it today, he would undoubtedly still feel very much at home in St. Michael and All Angels. When he became Rector, the church was in an advanced state of decay, having been neglected for many years. Between 1863 and 1868, Canon Shaw raised the money to fund a complete restoration. He himself donated about £850 toward the project, with a further contribution from Lord Darnley of over £1000, both substantial sums of money in those days. The work included restoration of the Lady Chapel (where the organ is, perhaps rather unfortunately, now located), the installation of the Victorian church windows at the end of the chancel, the building of the western aisle extension and, perhaps most significantly of all, the installation of a working peal of five church bells in the tower (to which a sixth was added in 1964). The appearance of our church today owes much to the efforts of Canon Shaw.

The sound of church bells on a Sunday is a quintessentially English one, a traditional call to summon worshippers to the church for a communal service and (when we ringers get it right!) a glorious sound that celebrates Christian worship. When you hear them, perhaps you could

also spare a small thought for the memory of the energetic Canon Robert Shaw, who did so much to shape our little village of Cuxton in times gone by. Keith Hodges.

Keith took a great deal of trouble to photograph the Harley Memorial behind the organ. This picture did not come out well in an earlier magazine. So here it is again in all its glory now that the magazine is printed professionally.

Carols at the Galton Day Unit

In March 2021, I was diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer which was successfully removed soon afterwards, as it was fortunately caught early. I then underwent chemotherapy at the Galton Day Unit in Medway Hospital for six months, from the end of May to the middle of November the same year. I was, and still am, full of admiration for the nurses who work tirelessly there. Although it wasn't one of the best experiences of my life, I feel very fortunate to have been under their care. I got to know all their names and we had some lovely chats. I had an urge to buy them biscuits and sweets all the time as a thank you and to keep their energy going! I couldn't believe that one nurse could flit between three or four patients without pause (and still get all the doses right too!).

I was so scared when I first went there and it was a gruelling experience to say the least, what with the sickness and debilitating tiredness. I used to sit in the chair for hours, feeling fidgety, doing crosswords, listening to music, watching stand-up comedy on my phone and hearing the clicking sound as the chemo drugs went through me...trying to drop off, then checking how much time had passed! It was still a year of masks and no partners were allowed to go in with you. David, my husband, spent hours in the car park, sending me messages and making short videos of encouragement! I was well-looked after with tea and snacks. There was a garden in the centre of the building which I longed to enter, but being hooked up meant that even a trip to the toilet could get you tangled up – it was either dance around the drip stand or spin it and get free! I didn't like to ask to go out there in case it took up the staff's valuable time. There was a bell inside the chemo room and one outside in the porch. I used to look longingly at the one inside and imagine myself ringing it and the style of ringing I would employ! I had countdowns galore at home, but no matter how many times I visited the unit, I seemed to be no closer to finishing.

I had my first three chemo's (the really hard stuff first), through a cannula in my forearm. I was absolutely horrified at the thought of having a 'PICC' line – a semi-permanent line through the upper arm into the main vein and through to my chest. After my arm swelled up, I admitted defeat and promptly had one installed! Although not pleasant, it was also not quite as bad as I had imagined and certainly made life easier, as I was beginning to feel like a pin cushion with all the chemo plus blood tests! This was where the conversation began.

As I had a newly installed PICC line, one of the lovely nurses, Antonia, plus a staff nurse, were in attendance to make sure it was all working. I didn't even realise the drugs were going in (I could feel it before!). All three of us were chatting and the topic of singing and music came up. Both their partners were interested in performing and I explained I also loved to sing and play musical instruments and that I sang in our church choir. Somehow, we all agreed that it would be lovely to have carols sung for the patients waiting for treatment near Christmas. I said I would see what I could do. Anyway, of course, I did get to the end of my treatment and rang the bell (both of them, in fact). It was one of the most moving experiences of my life and something I will never forget. David and my two boys were there, plus most of the nurses who all clapped.

I started to sing again in the choir in December 2021 after completing all my treatment, including a week of radiotherapy – and yes, there was a third bell! Our choir members, plus some from our congregation (including my husband) all agreed to sing carols unaccompanied at the Galton Day Unit near to Christmas. Although we could only stand in the porch, it went very well and was much appreciated by the staff and patients. One lady was sitting, waiting for treatment and was joining in the singing, which was extremely moving. The nurses came out when they could and stood for a minute to listen before rushing off again. It was wonderful to give something back and I got to see my nurses again! I am so grateful to everyone who came along to join in the singing. We did it all again in December 2022 and we are making some arrangements to sing again this year.

I will be checked for five years and have now reached my second year, with only a couple of scares which came to nothing, so I feel incredibly fortunate to still be here! I have had the best of care from start to finish, including the Breast Care Unit and MacMillan Nurses, as well as the Galton Day Unit. Those nurses are incredible there. Halfway through my treatment, I had to have a blood transfusion which lasted all day. So I would have missed my chemotherapy – which sounds positive, but they always add it on the other end! Some of the nurses stayed late so that I could have my chemo afterwards. I remember walking back down the corridor after the transfusion, saying “I’m coming home to you now!”

We usually sing for about an hour in the porch as the patients are vulnerable but we hope to be able to sing in the reception area one day where more patients can see and hear us. It really is the most wonderful experience and is certainly what Christmas is all about!

Merry Christmas Dawn Gates.

Tommy’s Talking Points

I had plenty of walking on our October outing. It was with a different friend this time – a good walker, but no dog of his own. Neither did we foray into that last uncharted wilderness on Planet Earth, the County of Surrey. Our walk was strictly local this time. You may remember the early October heat wave, when we were able to sit out in the garden as though it were summer – at least until the sun declined behind the trees and the shadows lengthened to engulf the grass and all the places where we usually sit, him reading me watching what’s going on or dozing. That all changed on 16th when we woke up to a sharp frost. You don’t often see Master put on a sweater for our early morning run.

We were to meet our friend at Rochester Station at the end of the morning. So, nothing else to do on a day off, Master decided we might as well walk into town. Cold it was, but quite bright and a very pleasant walk. It was just as well that we did walk, because we met Master’s cousin, whom he does not often see, and we were able to catch up on all the family news – including a forthcoming birth and at least one christening. We were a couple of minutes late getting to Rochester, but that turned out not to matter as our friend’s train had been delayed. Debating where to go, Master thinking about Upnor, our friend said that he had often thought that he would like to visit that church on the cliff you can see from so many parts of the Medway towns. So that was settled - back over Rochester Bridge, right into Canal Road, Master reminiscing about how exciting it was for young boys around there in the days when he was one. There was public access to Strood Pier (despite the sign telling you there wasn’t). People fished from it and dived in the river, coming out smothered in mud (not including Master). Boats departed for Southend and Margate. Master was especially fascinated by the way the landing stage rose and fell with the tide. There were workshops associated with shipping and the timber trade. Redundant railway lines crossed the road long after the workings they were associated with ceased. There was the old parcels office. The Canal Basin was still full of water and you crossed over the lock gates as you headed towards Frindsbury Church. He thinks that he can just about remember the old railway turntable off Station Road, but he might only have seen pictures.

Anyway, nearly all of that is gone and there is a road (buses and bikes only) connecting Canal Road with Commissioners Road and a lot of new houses in what used to be the Canal Basin and its environs. Big Hill up to Frindsbury Church is still there. The cliff, like those in Halling, is man made – the result of quarrying for the cement industry. We had a walk around the church and graveyard, satisfying our friend’s curiosity, before heading down the path which leads to Whitewall. In the old days, the way was uninterrupted, but of course you now have to cross over that main road which leads to the tunnel under the Medway. Traffic lights protect pedestrians making the crossing, but the tunnel itself is closed to people walking, cyclists and horses. Master thinks that it would be better if the tunnel were closed to cars and lorries and only open to people on foot, on bikes and maybe on horseback, and buses, so that people would be encouraged to be more environment friendly travelling from Chatham to the Peninsula.

There are usually lots of blackberries at Whitewall. If there were this year, we were too late. I had plenty of freedom off my lead, however, and quite left them behind very often. I had to be called back sharply when I took the wrong fork. There used to be a pungent sewage farm alongside that path. Either the facility is now closed or they have found a way of eradicating the aroma.

Upper Upnor is very pleasant. We couldn’t go on the beach because the tide was in. We did enjoy the quaint streets and houses, however. Master told his friend that Upnor Castle is well worth a visit –

though dogs are banned. When Master was a boy, the castle was still a military institution with a governor. Now it is open to the public.



More off lead time on the path down to Lower Upnor, where there are many new houses, some still under construction. We wandered along the front, briefly discussing getting on the bus we saw turning round to go back to Chatham. We still felt up to walking at this stage (as I always do), but they knew that it was the last bus that day! Nevertheless, we continued beside the water to see where the *Arethusa* – a four masted sailing barque – was moored from 1933 – 1975. She was a training ship for boys run by the Shaftesbury Homes.

We then wandered back and stopped at the *Ship* public house where we were very pleased that they made dogs welcome, that there was a fire on such a cold day and the men enjoyed Cumberland sausage, a few beers and delectable deserts. Master and our friend and the lady behind the bar talked about Upnor's much busier history. There was quarrying as elsewhere locally, a barge yard, where Master's grandfather worked as a young

apprentice, connections to Chatham Dockyard, other industry, military and naval connections, and a military railway. Master's grandparents used to talk about when Upnor was quite a resort. From the internet: "Old photographs of Upnor show it as a riverside resort of some popularity in the 1920s, with a pier and tea gardens and a miniature train. The old Medway Queen paddle steamer used to pick up and set down passengers at Upnor pier and the arrivals went up into the neighbourhood woods, on Upnor Hill, for picnics." Master remembers a number of houseboats moored at Upnor. The lady behind the bar pointed out that some parts of Upnor have been made to look more ancient than they are. Cobbled streets at Upper Upnor were plain old tarmac a few decades ago!

Traditionally, if you walked to Upnor by Whitewall Creek, you returned via Parsonage Lane. There being so much traffic on Upnor Road now and with the difficulty of crossing the tunnel road, having taken a look at St Philip & St James Church, we crossed the fields to Wainscott – more off lead time for me. They speculated on the age of Upnor Church. It transpires that it opened in 1884 – a beautiful building. So we passed the *Sans Pareil* and got back to Church Green Frindsbury. Our friend remarked on the amazing views from there, including Rochester Castle and Cathedral, also the complexities of the railways emerging through the tunnel from Higham, passing through the station and dividing either to join the coast bound line from Victoria or the old South Eastern Railway route to Paddock Wood.

We walked back down Big Hill and separated at the Strood end of Rochester Bridge, our friend returning to the station, we walking home by the back route past Morrison's and Temple Manor. It was getting dark by the time we made it to the Rectory, but a good time was had by all. Tommy.

Dates

8th December Peninsula Big Band Open Rehearsal 7.30 pm St Michael's Church

4th February Bring & Share Lunch for British Heart Foundation 12.00 Church Hall

St. John's Christmas Tree Festival

Set up from 9.00 - 12.00 am on Saturday 16th December. Viewing from 10.00 am - 2.00 pm Monday 18th - Saturday 23rd December and Sunday Services. To exhibit contact: Jenny Beaney 01634 241599