

Parish of Cuxton and Halling



December 2024

60p

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

Holy Communion Services December 2024		
1 st December Advent Sunday Gift Services Year C PURPLE	9.30 Cuxton Holy Communion 11.00 Halling Holy Communion	Jeremiah 33 vv 14-16 p796 I Thessalonians 3 vv 9-13 p1187 Luke 21 vv 25-36 p1057
8 th December Advent 2	9.30 Cuxton Holy Communion 11.00 Halling Holy Communion	Malachi 3 vv 1-4 p961 Philippians 1 vv 1-11 p1178 Luke 3 vv 1-6 p1029
15 th December Advent 3	9.30 Cuxton Holy Communion 11.00 Halling Holy Communion	Zephaniah 3 vv 14-20 p947 Philippians 4 vv 4-7 p1181 Luke 3 vv 7-18 p1029
22 nd December Advent 4	9.30 Cuxton Holy Communion 11.00 Halling Holy Communion	Micah 5 vv 2-5a p933 Hebrews 10 vv 5-10 p1207 Luke 1 vv 30-45 p1026
25 th December Christmas Day WHITE	8.00 Halling Holy Communion 9.30 Cuxton Holy Communion	Hebrews 1 vv 1-12 p1201 John 1 vv 1-14 p1063
29 th December Christmas 1	9.30 Cuxton Holy Communion 11.00 Halling Holy Communion	I Samuel 2 vv 18-26 p273 Colossians 3 vv 12-17 p1184 Luke 2 vv 41-52 p1029

Monday 16th December Christmas Services at St Michael's
7.00 Scout & Guide Carol Service

Sunday 22nd December 9.30 Holy Communion (Advent 4)
6.30 pm Nine Lessons & Carols

Christmas Eve 5.00 Crib & Christingle Service

Christmas Day 9.30 Holy Communion

Sunday 29th December 9.30 Holy Communion (Christmas 1)

Sunday 22nd December Cuxton Community Church
10.30 Christmas Service with Holy Communion (no service 25th)
(followed by refreshments)

Sunday 22nd December Christmas Services at St John's
11.00 Holy Communion (Advent 4)
3.00 Carols, Christingle & Impromptu Nativity Play

Christmas Day 8.00 am Holy Communion

Sunday 29th December 11.00 Holy Communion (Christmas 1)

Peninsula Big Band Concert @ St John's
Saturday 15th December 7.30 pm

Christmas Tree Festival at St John's
Sunday 14th - Monday 23rd, 10.00 am - 2.00 pm

There will continue to be Holy Communion at 9.30 am at St Michael's on Wednesdays followed by coffee in the church hall. The Thursday Communion at St John's will cease for the foreseeable future.

St John's Draw (October): £5 each Mrs M Fuller (78), Mrs S Botten (160) & Sam Head (16).
Church Hall Draw (November): 1st Carole Nunn, 2nd Dick Kerkham, 3rd Joyce Haselden.



From the Rector

A short time before CoViD, I received a telephone call from someone with whom I had not been in contact for forty years. He had been studying Spanish at Kings College London when I was studying Theology. We'd been quite good friends, members of the Christian Union and the same Bible Study group, but obviously we had drifted apart. Anyway, he said that he would shortly be in this area and it would be good to meet up, which it was. We had a nice meal in the *White Hart* and an interesting conversation, both reminiscing and catching up. He reminded me that even then I had had problems with the Church of England and had asked semi-seriously whether there was any room for disillusioned Anglicans in the Baptist Church to which Tony belonged? The Church of England can be very frustrating at times! What we profess to believe is very precious, but we so often fall short of the standards our faith demands. But then so do all Christians. If you find a perfect church, they say, don't spoil it by joining it. We shall not be made like Him till we see Him as He is.

Anyway, I asked Tony how he had tracked me down. Obviously, he had searched on the internet, but how, I wondered, had he known which Roger Knight was the one he was looking for? He responded that it was simple. He knew right back in the time when we were students that what I wanted in life was to be a country rector in Kent – and so I have been and so would I have continued to be if it were up to me.

How did all this come to pass then? Even as a small child, there was the possibility in my mind that I might be called to the ministry. As I grew into my teens, however, I thought that this sense of vocation might well be illusory. I was not good

enough to be a clergyman. I thought family and friends might not approve. I was a *churchy* youngster. I was sent to Sunday School and taken to Church at Southfleet – to the Congregational Church as well as the Church of England. Hence the fact that I am not totally committed to the Church of England as though it alone were the one true Church. Later on, I taught in Sunday School and took myself to the 8.00 services of Holy Communion celebrated according to the rite in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer at St Matthew's Wigmore. I was a bit of an autodidact. I taught myself from the Bible and the Prayerbook. Hence both my independence of thought and my unwillingness to go along with what others think simply because they are in a majority. My social life rather revolved around the parish church at Wigmore and I also belonged to a youth club run by a group of Pentecostals, a denomination I had been taught both to respect for their commitment and to be wary of because of their emphasis on emotion. The group I belonged to, however, were very biblical, which fitted in very well with my evangelical Anglicanism. The leaders could participate in a said prayerbook Eucharist just as I could sing choruses and listen to enthusiastic presentations of bible stories. It was in that group that I learned to be ready to preach at a moment's notice. Many years later, I took the leader's funeral in a Church of England Church in Lancashire. We sang *When the Roll is Called up Yonder*, rather to the horror of the staid Anglican organist, but which I think expresses very nicely our faith in the Resurrection. I also very often took assembly when I was at Gillingham Grammar School.

However, I had really put aside the thought of ordination by my mid teens. I did what I would advise any young person to do and chose A level options in the subjects that I was good at and enjoyed. In my case, these were Physics, Chemistry & Biology. What could I do with science A levels which would involve me in caring for people directly? I decided to study Medicine and become a doctor. I had two very happy years at the Middlesex Hospital Medical School. I made some good friends, with some of whom I am still in contact. I attended the college Christian Union and worshipped in several churches in central London, not all of them C of E. I also attended meetings of the Roman

Catholic Society, which was good, because Protestants were still suspicious of Catholics at that time and it was good to demonstrate that we could enjoy Christian fellowship and worship together. I learned a lot about the Christian faith in those days, both from the rather high church hospital chaplaincy and from our evangelical parish church, All Souls, Langham Place. I have learned to value what the broad spectrum of Christianity has to offer – Catholic & Protestant, Orthodox (since our Bulgarian friends began to worship at St Michael's), Evangelical & Charismatic, even Liberal. Our belief and practice are derived from God's revelation of Himself in Jesus made known to us in the Bible and in our Christian fellowship and experience, our understanding assisted by Tradition & Reason, and by the operation of the Holy Spirit in our hearts today. We need both Word and Sacrament, prayer and fellowship. We need to be attentive to God in the world around us and in our hearts within us. We must not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, because He is especially present when two or three meet together in His Name. Our worship may be spoken or sung, silent, expressed in art or drama, traditional or contemporary, following a fixed and possibly ancient liturgy or spontaneous, so long as it is offered in spirit and in truth. *O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.*

In the second year, I experienced setbacks in my medical studies and was forced to reconsider what my vocation might be. A lot of people directed me towards ordination, including many of my fellow medical students. People at home, including my old headmaster, when I asked him for a reference, said that they had always thought that I would become a vicar or rector. I was very torn between these two possible callings. On the Feast of the Transfiguration (August 6th) 1975, I attended the service at St Peter's Bredhurst. The vicar (Bill Penny) preached about his own call to become a priest. Taking all these indications, I concluded that ordained ministry was God's plan for my life and offered myself as a potential candidate.

I do not think that my years at medical school or my science studies were wasted. I believe that they were all part of God's plan to make me the man that I am and to prepare me for ministry. Likewise the jobs I did between leaving medical

school and studying Theology: gardener at the Tower of London; clerical assistant in the Department of Health & Social Security, odd job gardener, gardener on the Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre site and metal worker at a light industrial facility in Dartford.

In the Autumn of 1976, I commenced a course in Theology at King's College London. I learned a lot, but found it very difficult spiritually. Academic Theology is somewhat semi-detached from *the faith which was once delivered unto the saints* on which my whole life is based. Again, I experienced fellowship and worship in a number of churches as well as the college chapel. I became a regular worshipper at East Dulwich United Reformed Church, taught in Sunday School there and sometimes preached.

My final year of training was at Ripon College Cuddesdon, a pretty village about eight miles from Oxford. By this time, I was getting impatient to commence my ministry and I was counting off the days until my ordination as a deacon which took place on 22nd June 1980 in Rochester Cathedral. I became the curate at All Saints Orpington after an interview with Bishop David Say and another with Bob Lunnon, the Vicar of Orpington. When I moved in, I managed to lock myself out of the van and let myself back in with a wire coat hanger. Bob commented that this was just the kind of skill required in a new curate.

I had a wonderful time at Orpington. I was at last doing what I believe I am meant to be doing – leading worship, preaching, teaching, offering pastoral care, seeking to share my faith with others. From July 12th 1981, when I was ordained priest (again at Rochester), I received God's grace to preside at Holy Communion, an enormous privilege. All Saints is a big and diverse parish, including fairly prosperous parts around the station, a busy high street, two housing estates and quite a lot of open countryside towards Crockenhill and Chelsfield. There was an additional church on one of the estates, an ecumenical partnership with the Methodists. Nearly all the Orpington churches of what ever denomination worked closely together and we were involved in all kinds of projects with the council, with other statutory bodies and with voluntary organisations. There was a church's

housing association and we opened a hostel to provide temporary accommodation for homeless teenagers. There was plenty for a curate to do. It was at Orpington that I took up running as a hobby.

It was a matter of fulfilling our vocation as Christians. I recently read an article by a retired priest in which he asks whether - given that ordained ministry is a calling from God and that it is God Who supplies us with the grace we need to do this work when we are ordained - the Church really has the right to take away from us the opportunity to serve for no better reason than that we have attained a particular age, an arbitrary limit laid down in an out of date piece of legislation? The Church wouldn't even have the legal right to discriminate on grounds of age if she were not exempt from the Human Rights Act. Why a Church facing a shortage of ordained ministers would want to get rid of those who are able and willing to carry on is another question.

I loved Orpington and might have stayed longer, but the job I had my eye on was not likely to become vacant any time soon and I leapt at the chance when the former Vicar of Orpington, Richard Third, by then Bishop of Dover, turned up at a weekday Evensong at All Saints and offered me the position of curate at St Laurence in Thanet with special responsibility for the Church of St Christopher Newington and also to be officiating chaplain at RAF Manston. When I arrived in Ramsgate, I was also asked to be chaplain to the Ramsgate & Broadstairs branch of the Royal Airforce Association.

St Christopher's is a 1950s dual purpose church and hall on a large post war housing estate. By comparison with Orpington, the congregation was small and money was much tighter. There was a close fellowship, however, and people worked very hard.

We had a big youth club and a good choir. People were very faithful. I read recently that a tangerine is not a small orange. It is something different. In the same way, a small church is not a failed big church. It is something different and we should not allow bishops and diocesan officers to judge

us by our statistics and to condemn us just for being relatively few in number. What matters is that we are faithful.

I enjoyed living in Newington where there were good relations with the local school and the *Flowing Bowl* was a short walk from the clergy house.

It was, however, very different from Orpington. The latter was bustling. If you went out for a run in the early morning, you'd see hundreds of commuters standing at bus stops or heading for the station. The pace was much slower at Newington. When I went there, most of the people were retired, unemployed or miners on strike. A lot of people still didn't have phones, miners and ex miners were entitled to free coal (so long as someone like the local priest periodically certified that they were still alive) and the school day started much later. One year, the local secondary school came bottom of the national league for academic attainment, but, when *Friends Reunited* came into existence it was that school which topped the national figures for linking up with old class mates online. Which would you rather have - A levels or friends?

It was at Newington that I began preparing daily bible reading notes especially for my congregation. We also had a prayer partnership scheme by which we agreed to pray for another member of the congregation chosen at random for a year.

I had some good experiences with the RAF & RAFA, including being the passenger in a two-seater Spitfire flying over East Kent and out over the Channel. I used to preach at the annual Battle of Britain services at Ramsgate.

I liked living on the Isle of Thanet, close to the places in which I had had many happy childhood holidays and I could take my dog Ben running on the sands and even swimming in the sea. The picture is Ben on the Christian Aid walk at Orpington.



Much as I liked Ramsgate, however, I had become frustrated at merely being a curate and not having the independence I should have as an incumbent. I met Bishop David Say at a meeting at Aylesford Priory and he invited me to return to Rochester Diocese. Battle of Britain Sunday (21st September) 1986 I had tea with friends in Faversham and set out to drive into Canterbury where I was to preach at the East Kent Battle of Britain service at the Cathedral. A car crossed the central reservation in Rheims Way, ramming mine amidst and rendering me *hors d'combat*. It was thus that I was staying with my parents at Wigmore when Alan Vousden moved to Bromley and Bishop Say telephoned to suggest I apply to be Rector of Cuxton and Halling. Michael Turnbull, then Archdeacon of Rochester, interviewed me on behalf of the Dean and Chapter (joint patrons of the parish with the bishop). I had also to meet the churchwardens, which nearly didn't happen. I still couldn't drive and my arm was in a sling. I saw that I could catch a bus from Hempstead to Cookham Wood and foolishly told myself that it would only be a short walk over the motorway bridge and down the road to Halling where the wardens were waiting for me. It proved to be much farther than I thought and I was very late. Eventually, one of the wardens, Walter Hayward, picked me up. He said he knew that he'd got the right man because there couldn't be many clergymen walking down Sundridge Hill with an arm in a sling. If I'd been on an interview panel and the candidate had turned up late, I'd probably have rejected him out of hand, but our four wardens were kinder than that (or just desperate for a rector) and we spent the day together with Joan Charlton & Gladys Stevenson and finally having dinner at Brian & Betty Topham's house. So everything was agreed. The Bishop asked me when I could start. I said, "Any day after New Year's Day". He said "2nd of January" and so my institution and induction took place on that date in 1987 at St John's Church. A few days after that it snowed so heavily that some villages had to have supplies brought in by boat or helicopter. The strong community spirit in this parish was much in evidence as people looked out for their more vulnerable neighbours. I had black snow on my roof because I managed to set the chimney on fire. It was also the year of the hurricane when we lost most of the avenue of limes in Halling Cemetery.



Ben had died not long before I left Ramsgate. I had acquired Bobby as a puppy and he came here with me and is still fondly remembered by many people as he accompanied me everywhere – churches, schools & people's homes as well as woodland walks. Bobby was famously such a good dog and everybody loved him.

When Cuxton & Halling became one parish in 1976, Halling Church was in a poor state of repair. One suggestion was to let it close and that Halling people should come to St Michael's. Wiser counsels prevailed, however, and the whole parish embarked on a phenomenal fund-raising campaign to pay for the restoration and re-ordering of St John's so that it would continue to provide a focus for the people of Halling as it has done for more than a thousand years. This work was nearing completion when I arrived. We were now able to hold a service of Holy Communion every Sunday in both churches at a time when people might be expected to attend. I still think that this is the most important thing that we have achieved in all the time I have been here. The Sunday Communion with a Gospel sermon is the beating heart of the community. Never forget that Holy Communion is the service which Jesus commanded us to perform.

So much has happened in the intervening nearly four decades. There've been political campaigns regarding the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, quarrying in Dean Valley and the possibility of a waste incinerator on the site of the Rugby Cement works. Formerly a major employer, this closed in my time and St Andrews Park now occupies the site. There was much interest when the chimney finally came down. There has been a lot of house building in Halling. The school has moved. Much of Cuxton School has been rebuilt. They are both academies now, rather than coming under the Local Education Authority. In the past, members of our congregations and I have been governors.

The Rectory grounds have hosted church fetes, barbecues, open air music events and the annual Easter egg hunt, as well as the Mothers' Union Teddy Bears' Picnics. We've had flower festivals and concerts in both churches and Christmas tree festivals at St John's. There've been country

walks, quizzes and all sorts of social events. Members of our congregation have contributed to the community through involvement in local politics, scouts & guides and other voluntary groups. Where would we be without our organists, choristers, flower arrangers, cleaners and ringers?

A faithful few sustain Saints Alive! (Sunday School). New members always welcome. We had to close our youth club, but for several years numbers of us, including teenagers and families with young children, attended Spring Harvest, quite an experience.

A thriving Mothers' Union has been a great blessing to the parish over many decades.

The Rectory is full of memories for me. We've had many happy family Christmases here. You made my mother very welcome when she came to live with me in 1998 and she became very involved in the Church and in the WI and village life in general.

A number of us went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 2000, the last year of the last millennium.

I've used the word *privilege* a lot, but I can't forbear to use it one more time to say what a privilege it has been to officiate at so many christenings, weddings and funerals. I am sad that I am not permitted in the future to provide this service for those of you who would like me to.



I know it's not all been plain selling. There are some things I'm not at all good at and I realise that I rub some people up the wrong way. I'm sorry for those occasions on which I have caused offence and very much hope that divisions may be healed so that we can all be one in Christ whatever our differences and that our relationship with God is not impaired by any disagreements among ourselves.

Max took over as Rectory dog from Bobby in 2001.

What can I say about the people of the parish? Your friendship has meant so much to me. Without you our two churches would not exist, let alone thrive as they do.

Is it because I'm English? I've said a lot about what we've done, social events, community activities, etc., but I haven't said so much about what really matters most of all: our worship, our fellowship, our prayer life, our participation in the Sacraments, our attention to the Word of God, which are the foundation of all that we do and say and are the reason why there is a Church at all.

Tommy took over from Max in 2015.

Thank you all and thank you God for 38 wonderful years.



Every blessing for the future and a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you all,
Roger.

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A Tale of The Tomb of Caleb Parfect (1686-1770) - and his "Missing" Wife...

One of the few things I can remember from my schoolboy Latin textbooks was the following piece of doggerel, which had been inked inside one of them by an uninterested pupil.

*"Latin is a language/As dead as dead can be
It killed the Ancient Romans/And now it's killing me..."*

It came back to me while I was looking into the story of the tomb of Caleb Parfect, who is recorded as being the Rector of St. Michael's from 1719 until his death on 21st September 1770 at the age of 85. His incumbency lasted for just over fifty years, in practical terms making him our longest-serving Rector (though at 38 years, our outgoing Rector Roger Knight's own marathon wins him a creditable fourth place).

Caleb's altar tomb was once located in the chancel of St. Michael's and was described by church architect and historian William Pettit Griffith in 1841 as follows:

"...On the north side of chancel stands a large altar tomb with Purbeck base and cornice and black marble die & top slab, on which is the following in Roman capitals:

CALEB PERFECT A. U. HUIUS ECCLESIAE RECTOR HAUC(?) SEPULCHRALEM CELLULAM (NENNIM(?) LICEAT UNQUAM VIOLARE VEL INVADERE) CONSTRUXIT SIBI ET SUIS AN. DUI. 1735. EODEMEQUE AN. RELIQUICA ELIZABETHAE ET BENEDICTAE (QUARUM ILLA CESSERAL VITA 7 KAL JUNII 1721. ASTAT 34. HAEC 12 KAL APRULIS 1726 ASTATE 3) EJUS UXORUM PIENTISSI MARINSE(?) ET TRIUM PARUN BORUM IN HUNC TURMLUNE(?) TRANSTATE(?) SUNT TENET ETIAM UMERES(?) PRAEDICTI CALEB PERFECT PASTORIS, SANE EXIUM QUI ARLIS LUNJIS SALUTUM SEMPUR IN OCULIS HABUIT, CURANIS EJUSELEM BONIS OMNIS GENERIS OFFICIO PER QUINQUAGINTA ANNUO EXHIBUIT SUPREMANAD PUTIOS AQUARUM VIVENTIUM ANHELANS, OBIT SEPTR 21 1770 ASTAT 85

On each side of tomb are also Latin inscriptions..."

(The question marks are where I have struggled to decipher Mr. Griffith's handwriting...)

Unfortunately my schoolboy aversion to the disciplines of Latin means that I am now at a disadvantage when it comes to interpreting this inscription. However (and with some help from others) I think the gist of the first paragraph is:

"Caleb Parfect the rector of this church has built this sepulchral cell (which no-one should ever be allowed to violate or invade) for himself and his family, in the year of Our Lord 1735..."



The tomb of Caleb Parfect, as of 2023...

The tomb was originally located roughly where the eastern choir stall is today. I think the Reverend Parfect may have placed it where one of the Marsham's memorial floor ledgers was, an area which has since been rather crudely concreted over. Caleb's successor thrice-removed, the Reverend Robert William Shaw, clearly did not care for memorials to past Rectors cluttering up his chancel. During his mid-19th century "Victorian Restoration" of St. Michael's, Caleb Parfect's tomb was to suffer the same indignity as that of another long-serving Rector, John Buttyll (which I described last month). Despite the proscriptions engraved upon Caleb's tomb, it was dismantled and rebuilt outside in the southern churchyard, just to the west of the south church door. It was never designed to be placed outdoors and as might have been expected, prolonged exposure to the weather has left it in a

ruinous condition.

William Griffith was quite clear about the tomb's materials of construction but no trace of "black marble" can be seen on it today. As Mr. Griffith was an architect by profession, I don't think his description would have been in error. Perhaps the valuable black marble was re-appropriated and substituted for with a plain stone ledger, on to which the words of the original inscription were re-engraved and of which only traces remain today. The Reverend Caleb Parfect was one of the more interesting characters to have served as the Rector of St. Michael's, as well as being one of the most durable. An account of his deeds would fill this magazine several times over and I doubt if I could do the subject justice anyway. For those who are interested, I would direct you to the two references^{2,3} at the end of this article (and if you are reading this "on-line", the link will take you directly to local antiquarian Peter Joyce's thesis). I feel that the final paragraph of the inscription, which the Reverend Caleb Parfect presumably wrote about himself for posterity (minus the date!) gives us an insight into his invincible self-esteem, however. My interpretation of it reads:

"...The aforesaid pastor, Caleb Parfect, who in the eyes of everyone for fifty years exhibited his supreme good care in every kind of office and longing for the well of living waters, died September 21 1770 aged 85."

The inscription states that the tomb was constructed in 1735, some thirty-five years in advance of its intended occupant's final demise. I find this degree of forward planning rather odd but perhaps at the age of fifty, the Mr Parfect was already contemplating the "well of living waters" given that the average life expectancy in the 18th century was around 40 years (although it was 60 for the aristocracy). Of all the conundrums posed by the tomb inscription however, perhaps the most puzzling is found in the middle paragraph, which defies my bumbling attempts to decipher. The first part appears to refer to an *"Elizabeth ... (whose life ceased on the 7th of June, 1721 aged 34...)"*.

Who was Elizabeth? After a lot of “digging” (metaphorically, I must emphasise) I am certain that she was Caleb’s first wife. Elizabeth does not get a mention in accounts of the life of Mr Parfect which, to be fair, are more concerned with his work than his personal life. To cut a very long and convoluted story short, parish records from St. Nicholas in Sulham and nearby Faringdon, both in Berkshire, show that Caleb married an Elizabeth Frankling in 1713⁴.

In 1707, Caleb had enrolled at Balliol College Oxford, completed his BA in 1710 and was ordained deacon by William Talbot, Bishop of Oxford. It seems likely that it was around this time he first met Elizabeth. In the following year he became a schoolmaster at Uppingham School in Rutland, where he remained until 1719. During this time, Faringdon parish records⁴ suggest that Elizabeth bore four children in quick succession: Rebecca (1716, who died in infancy), Elizabeth (1717), John (1719) and Mary (1719) – (though see Note* below).

In 1719, Caleb was appointed as a minor Canon at Rochester Cathedral and in September that year was nominated to the living of *perpetual curate* of St Nicholas at Strood. (The living of St. Michael’s at Cuxton also seemed to come his way at this time, but the Bishop of Rochester did not formally appoint him to both livings until 8th June 1722). Caleb and his family moved to Rochester and according to the parish records of St. Nicholas, another daughter of Caleb and Elizabeth was baptised there on 5th March 1720. This second Rebecca was also fated to be short-lived: records show she was subsequently buried on 21st May 1721.

Elizabeth died shortly afterwards. A curiously curt note in the St. Nicholas parish register records the burial of a “Madam Parfitt” on the 1st June 1721, which closely matches the date inscribed on Caleb Parfect’s tomb.

Biographies of Caleb Parfect tell us that he wed Bennet Walsall (whose father John was the attorney for the Sir John Hawkins Charity and a prominent figure in the Rochester community) less than a year later on 20th March 1722 at Rochester Cathedral. The baptism records of St. Nicholas at Strood show that she also went on to bear four children in quick succession: Anne (31st Jan 1723), John (22nd July 1724), Martha (18th Jan 1726) and Bennet (27th March 1727). Sadly, the burial records of St. Nicholas tell us another tale that was not unusual for the times: Caleb’s and Bennet’s baby daughter Anne was buried on 18th February 1723, at less than three weeks old. His wife Bennet was buried four years later on the same day as the baptism of their daughter of the same name, presumably claimed by the trauma of childbirth. Baby Bennet also failed to see her first birthday: she was buried on 2nd November 1727.

When his second wife Bennet died, Caleb’s unmarried sister Hannah moved from her Somerset home to become Caleb’s housekeeper and effectively a surrogate mother to her twice-widowed brother’s five surviving young children (Elizabeth, John and Mary by his first wife Elizabeth, and John and Martha by his second wife Bennet). Caleb went on to marry Bridget Poley on 29th December 1730, also at Rochester Cathedral. It seems the wedding was a rather grandiose affair, as would have befitted a well-connected lady whose paternal grandfather was Sir Richard Head, 1st Baronet of Rochester (c.1609-1689) and a former MP for Rochester (1667-1679). His union with Bridget was to remain childless. Judging by her entertainment expenses (records of which are kept in Medway Archives) it seems that unlike Caleb’s first two unfortunate wives, Bridget had an enjoyable life in a “PR” role supporting her husband’s work with the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) and his role in the management of workhouses for the poor. How fortunate Caleb and Bridget were to have the services of the selfless Hannah. Hannah Parfect remained devoted to her brother until her death in 1763. She was buried inside St. Michael’s and ironically, her ledger stone (unlike her brother’s memorial) survived the tenure of the Rev. Robert Shaw. It can still be found under the arch between the Lady Chapel and the nave.

Caleb Parfect’s personal history is certainly confusing, but the picture I have seems to fit most of the local facts (including Caleb’s bequests to his children in his detailed will). For that, I would like to thank Catherina Clement of the Medway Archive Centre at Strood for her help with Caleb’s early family tree.

But if there are any Latin scholars out there who can make proper sense of the Reverend Mr Parfect’s memorial, do please get in touch...

References:

- 1) *In Pursuit of the Perfects* by Pat Manning and André Perfect (ISBN 0-9540202-4-3, 2007)
- 2) *Two Gentlemen of Strood* by Odette Buchanan (City of Rochester Society, 2011)
- 3) *The Reverend Caleb Parfect: Person, Power, Publishing* by Peter Joyce (Master’s thesis, 2019 – link [here.](#))
- 4) Online genealogical search sites Ancestry.com and FindMyPast (both currently available free to use at Medway Libraries). Copies of the 18th century parish registers for St. Peter and St. Paul (Shorne), St Nicholas (Strood) and St. Michaels (Cuxton) are also available to view online via Medway Archives.

Note* I am a little suspicious of the Farington parish records: those for Rebecca and Mary only state a year of birth rather than a date, with Mary’s being given in the same year (1719) as the birth of her brother John (clearly recorded as 3rd March 1719). Even for someone like Caleb, who kept his first two wives in a state of perpetual pregnancy, this seems a feat of fecundity too far. I think Mary may have been born earlier, one reference¹ giving her year of birth as 1714. She was buried at St. Michaels on 23rd

June 1778 but the burial register does not give her age. However, a parish record from Silton, Dorset, records the birth of a Mary Parfect on 4th May 1708 with her father named as a Caleb Parfect, though “our” Caleb would have only been aged 17 at the time (unfortunately, her mother was not named). Apparently there was a separate branch of the Parfect family with links to the Dorset area¹, but the genealogical waters are somewhat murky.

The Choir of St. Michael's.

Colin Martin (in his book, *Cuxton: Its Past and People*) tells us that the first mention of the choir in the records of St. Michael's dates back to around 1760 during the later years of Reverend Caleb Parfect's incumbency, when a choirmaster was appointed. In many parish churches at this time, accompaniment to the choir was provided by a "parish band" playing a variety of instruments such as the violin, cello, clarinet, flute and bassoon. These musicians would often sit in a gallery at the west end of the church, giving rise to the later term, "west gallery music". Curiously, the Church of England only accepted hymn singing officially in 1820, following a controversy arising from

the singing of hymns at a Sheffield church. The tradition of the wearing of vestments by parish choir members also started at around this time. The early Victorian period of the 1830s saw the rise of the “Oxford Movement”, a group of influential clergymen who sought to restore elements of traditional worship that had been lost during the Puritan Interregnum. The music of the cathedral, by composers such as Thomas Tallis and William Byrd, now began to make its way into the parish church. In 1838, the Reverend Robert Shaw instigated the building of an “organ gallery” in the nave (though the gallery was subsequently taken down in the 1860s). I've also recently learned that he purchased a barrel organ at the same time, at a cost of £53/10s. Manufactured by the London firm of J.



Canon John Toone with some of the St. Michael's choir, 1915

Walker & Sons (which is still trading today), it had two barrels that were each “pinned” with a repertoire of eleven tunes. At some point afterwards it was moved from the gallery and put in the Lady Chapel, necessitating the removal of the altar tomb of John Buttyll (see November 2024's magazine). The organ was last serviced in 1852 at a cost of £1/15s. Not long after that, it appears that a harmonium was used to provide accompaniment to the choir instead. Perhaps the Reverend Shaw and his congregation had finally got bored with the same 22 tunes!

In 1881, Canon Colson was to oversee the installation of the Forster and Andrews organ, which still serves the church today. The project cost £225, which equates to around £213,000 today (calculated on a “per capita GDP” basis). Canon Colson's successor, John Toone, was particularly keen on a strong choir. He kept detailed records of choir membership and attendance during his tenure from 1901 until he passed away in 1934.

In 1901, he listed the names of the choir members as:

<i>Men:</i>	<i>Boys:</i>	<i>Girls:</i>
<i>William Clifton</i>	<i>Matthew Cogger</i>	<i>Caroline Large</i>
<i>Arthur Shadbolt</i>	<i>Nelson Hawkes</i>	<i>Alice Croucher</i>
<i>Alfred Woolmer</i>	<i>Arthur Larkin</i>	<i>Winifred Woolmer</i>
<i>William Usbourne</i>	<i>Thomas Ashby</i>	<i>Gertrude Burchfield</i>
<i>George Cogger (died 1918</i>	<i>William Ablett</i>	<i>Edith Bowles</i>
<i>serving with Royal Navy)</i>		
<i>Albert Ashby</i>	<i>Stephen Bonneywell</i>	<i>Rose Ashby</i>
<i>George Crittenden</i>		
<i>Thomas Larkin</i>		

Choir boys were paid for their contribution. Canon Toone made the following note regarding choir fees in 1911: “...That choir boys receive a present of two shillings for full attendance at church service and evening practice for three months. One penny to be subtracted for each absence from service or choir practice during the quarter or for any occasion on which the boy has to be reprimanded for inattention...” In those days, there was no vestry. The choir had to don their robes in the cramped space behind the organ. One story tells that Canon Toone used to keep a little table there with a bowl and a flask upon it, to enable him to gargle between hymns.

In the 1920s, choir membership rose to nearly thirty people with at least 17 of those being regular attendees for Sunday service. Some mention of girls singing in the choir at Easter or Christmas services was made during the time of Reverend Robert Shaw and (as evidenced above) a few girls and ladies did make up part of the choir membership up until the early 1920s, but certainly up until WW2 the Sunday service choir was primarily a boy's choir.



In the 1920s heyday of the choir, regular bell-ringer and choir suppers used to be held in the "Long Room". This was an ancient timber building that used to be behind the White Hart and was often used for social functions until it was finally demolished in the mid-1970s.

In his mini-biography of long-serving organist Roland Oliver that featured in the March 1980 edition of the parish magazine, Jim Cogger also mentioned the "Cuxton Amateur Players" group

which was formed by members of the choir in 1934. In his book, *Cuxton – A Kentish Village*, Derek Church tells us that they put on shows comprising one-act plays, sketches and musical items and even a one-act opera. The sketches were often written by choir members themselves, around a main theme which set out the stall for other items. One year, a caravan featured on stage and the songs and sketches were along the theme of "life on the road". The stage, scenery and lighting were also devised and built by the resourcefulness and ingenuity of the choir members and their supporters. The *Chatham, Rochester and Gillingham News* for April 24th 1936 carried this review of one such concert:

"Amateur Players. – An excellent variety concert was given by the Amateur Players in the Council School on Wednesday of last week, before a crowded audience. The programme opened with the chorus, "Sing as we go," by the entire company. There followed a short sketch, "Heard in the Train," by Messrs. Ken Woolmer and Harry Langford, which proved most amusing. The sketch, "A Suit Case" was most entertaining. Those taking part were: H. Langford, K. Woolmer, E. Rogers, A. Pries, V. Manooch, R. Swaisland, L. Cogger, L. Blake, J. Cogger and D. Randall. After the interval vocal items were given by Messrs. K. Woolmer, L. Cogger and E. Rogers. Cameo sketches were given by Messrs. A. Pries, L. Blake, E. Rogers and V. Manooch, and a musical play, entitled "A Very Busy Night," by K. Woolmer, R. Swaisland and L. Cogger. The pianist was Mr. R. Oliver. Lighting effects were by Mr. J. Cogger, junior. The concert was in aid of funds to provide a stage for future productions..."

I would love to have seen that show – if only I had a time machine! The concerts were held at the Cuxton school, with the Cuxton Fire Brigade turning out in full uniform to act as doormen. The choirboys sold programmes and chocolates, with the money raised being passed on to help the funds of the church, the fire brigade and Cuxton's social club. Sadly, the concert party was wound up at the outbreak of the Second World War.

Some choir members were particularly long serving: as an eight year-old, Ken Woolmer joined in 1910 and was still singing in 1975. To commemorate fifty years of his active service in the choir, in 1960 he presented the churchwardens with the two staves that still currently reside by the tower arch. In a similar vein, in the St. Michael's and St. John's church magazine for August 1981, Mr. M.A. Harrison recorded that:

"... On 24th May, Jim Cogger was presented with the R.S.C.M. (Royal Society of Church Music) Bronze medal for 60 years loyal service to the choir of St. Michael's. It is not often that one is able to celebrate a Diamond Jubilee and we congratulate Jim and wish him many more happy years with the choir. A special hymn was sung by the choir to mark the occasion..." [We also celebrated Jim's 70th anniversary. Ed.] In terms of longevity if not actual length of service, it is unlikely that anyone will surpass that of current choir member, Jack Payne, who at the time of writing is 92 and still a stalwart chorister. Today, choir membership numbers only five or six regular members, but nevertheless they are still an essential part of the sound of today's service.

Rather like the bell-ringing team, it is hoped that more people will come forward to join the choir and help maintain the tradition of choir singing at St. Michael's. It is one of the few local churches that are blessed with the sound of a choir, the playing of a proper church organ and the ringing of church bells as an accompaniment to its Sunday services. Do come along to a Sunday service and enjoy the experience while you can! Keith Hodges.

From the Registers

Baptisms:

3rd November

Amelia Rose Bennett
Charlotte Grace Bennett

Bicknacre

PERCY PIGEON'S PERCEPTIONS

Good day to you all. I hope you are all well and enjoying autumn and planning for your festivities. I have to confess that Philippa and I are slowing down now. Philippa says my waddle is more pronounced and I think her memory is not as sharp as previously. We are very warm and cosy in our new paper-straw lined box in the disused garage. We do miss our roost in Six Acre Wood and, of course, our old C.A.T. but the on-going 'tree maintenance' means we are safer here. We shan't have any squabs this year. There is a regular food supply nearby but our appetites are now not what they once were. It's no fun getting old. At the same time of course my monthly tree-mails for you are ending, as Tommy and his master retire from the rectory and leave its house and gardens to the wildlife, the briars and the top perimeter - until such time as any new rector arrives. We have really enjoyed watching Tommy and Max and their master over the years, and I shall miss writing for them. We wish them a long and happy retirement. I shall also miss their crumbs and hope that you will remember to put out your scraps for us and all the avians in the villages. We need water too and the hair from your combs and the fluff from under your beds are also valued at this nest-building time of year. So be good to all avians, to each other and to yourselves. Remember Percy Vere.

Coo coo coo

On The Ropes: Bell-ringing activities for October 2024.

Sunday service ringing at St. Michael's was reasonably well-supported during October. Alas, we didn't manage to get a team together for Sunday service ringing at St. John's this month, although we did hold a Wednesday practice session there on the 30th which went really well. The feedback from Halling village residents was largely positive and it's something we plan to do on a last-Wednesday-in-the-month basis in future.

Sunday 5th saw a member of Clan McDonald "call" their first round of Bob Doubles, which went very well. This involves calling "bobs" (called changes in the established sequence) at *exactly* the right time during the ring, a considerable feat of mental dexterity to my admittedly unremarkable mind. On the 13th we had the luxury of the services of seven ringers, but unfortunately three of them had other commitments to the extent that we couldn't get a team down to St. John's to ring afterwards. On the 20th we had a team of five for our six bells, which meant ringing "minimus" methods. We did try some "plain hunt" on five without a "cover", but my own limited ability soon brought that to a clanging halt! We were, however, joined by a visitor by the name of Mark, who could ring call changes and plain hunt, so we were able to get all six bells going for a few rings. On Saturday the 26th, four of our regular parish ringing team joined up with representatives from several other local towers to support the St. Margaret's of Rochester's "out-ring". Organised by Jane Vousden (daughter of erstwhile St. Michael's Rector, Alan, whom some of you will doubtless remember and who - Jane tells me - is still as hale and hearty as ever) we visited five churches in the Herne and Westgate areas of darkest Thanet. Each church and its associated tower were as different as thumbprints but all were enjoyable to visit, although the eight-bell tower of All Saint's at Birchington did involve a somewhat perilous-seeming ascent of a ladder to get to the ringing floor. This, of course, was no obstacle to those of us who are used to maintaining the bells of our own parish churches of St. Michael's and St. John's, but caused some apprehension among one or two of the other ringers in our peripatetic band.

Many of you will remember the halcyon pre-Covid days of the St. Michael's "out-ring", which for many years was so well-supported by its own ringers, their families and friends that a 40-seater coach was hired to ferry the entourage around the chosen venues. These post-Covid times have seen a drop in the number of regular ringers at our parish to the extent that such an exercise is no longer viable. Other towers have the same problem, but by banding together it at least gives their depleted teams a chance to ring together. 'April Day'.

Questions of Sport

How do we know that Adam was a great runner?
Why don't grasshoppers play football?
Why was Cinderella dropped from the team?

He came first in the human race.
They prefer cricket.
She ran away from the ball.



Tommy's Talking Points

Despite it being scheduled for the feast day of the patron saint of lost causes, we were able on 28th October to enjoy the walk which we had had to postpone in September on account of the torrential rain. To get the motoring part of the story out of the way first, I should say that when Master said, "We are going out in the motor car," I was reluctant to leave my comfy armchair and then I hid under the table. Sure enough, things were not straightforward. Master had checked the AA route planner and it told us to take a different route to Ightham Mote from the one we had taken on our two previous visits. Master obeyed, only to find that the road on this route was actually closed and he had to find the way back to our former route, which we did and arrived in time to find that Enzo and friends had got there just before us. When we had concluded the walk, Master commenced the return journey with a wrong turning. It was getting dark and spitting with rain and we got very lost in the lanes around Ightham, eventually coming home via Sevenoaks. He then couldn't find his key and we had to drive to Gillingham to pick up the spare from Lolly's house and, because the motorway exit was closed, come home via Cobham tired and hungry. I'm sure we wouldn't have lost the key if we'd gone out on St Peter's Day! The next day, in daylight, he found the key nestling among the dead leaves which congregate around the base of the driver's seat. Perhaps he should have the car valeted.

The walk was, however, worth the driving. It's always good to see friends and Enzo and I are now friends as Master & I have always been with Enzo's people. The walk was the third suggested walk from Ightham Mote, the one to Old Soar Manor. Amazingly, we didn't get lost this time. The directions were clear and conformed to the topography. As always, the countryside was inspiring – autumn colours remaining on most of the trees, though many were already quite bare. Some of the paths were a bit muddy, which is no problem for us quadrupeds. In fact Enzo revels in wallowing. He is, after all, an Italian water dog. I don't mind a bit of mud myself though you couldn't really characterise me as a water spaniel. The humans struggled a bit with the mud. (Master was wearing his new shoes for their first outing!) They had, however, to help us dogs over some of the stiles, which were a bit high to climb over and I didn't really feel like jumping, though I could if I wanted to. We were kept on our leads where there might be sheep, but otherwise we ran free up hill and down dale through woods and open countryside. There was much of interest in the way of intriguing scents and new territory to explore.

When we got to Old Soar Manor, we discovered that September was the last month of the Summer when it would be open. Perhaps that was our lost cause. It looked impressive from the outside, however, as did many fine residential properties in the vicinity. We stopped at the Kentish Rifleman where the humans had a drink – non-alcoholic for the drivers, despite the temptation of Harvey's bitter. Master tells me that the ginger beer was good.

They lunched on some very fine rolls on a seat opposite carved out of a tree trunk to mark the late Queen's Golden Jubilee. We were surprised to see a bus in such a rural location, especially as it was an enormous double decker.

We completed the walk in half an hour less time than the guide book thought we would and paused at the cafe at Ightham Mote while they enjoyed cups of tea. Another great day out. I expect it will be next year before we go again. We didn't take any pictures on this occasion. It was rather murky and damp. So this is me in our splendid rectory garden taken in June three years ago. Tommy, the Rectory Spaniel.

Valediction

Thank you all once more for almost 38 marvellous years. This will be the last magazine for now. Thank you contributors, deliverers & subscribers. Give thanks for the past & the present in parish life. Pray for the present and the future. Trust God. Roger,

THE Lord bless us, and keep us; the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon us, and give us peace, now and for evermore. *Amen.*