

Services at St Michael & All Angels Cuxton		
Sunday 3 rd February Quinquagesima	9.30 am Holy Communion	Exodus 24 vv 12-18 p82 2 Peter 1 vv 16-21 p1222 Matthew 17 vv 1-9 p984
Wednesday 6 th February Ash Wednesday	7.30 pm Holy Communion	2 Corinthians 5 v20b – 6 v10 p1161 John 8 vv 1-11 p1073
Sunday 10 th February Lent 1	9.30 am Holy Communion	Genesis 2 vv 15-17 p4 Genesis 3 vv 1-7 p5 Romans 5 vv 12-19 p1132 Matthew 4 vv 1-11 p967
Sunday 17 th February Lent 2	8.00 am Holy Communion	Numbers 21 vv 4-9 p158 Luke 14 vv 27-33 p1048
	9.30 am Holy Communion	Genesis 12 vv 1-4a p13 Romans 4 vv 1-17 p1131 John 3 vv 1-17 p1065
Sunday 24 th February Lent 3	9.30 am Holy Communion	Exodus 17 vv 1-7 p75 Romans 5 vv 1-11 p1132 John 4 vv 5-42 1066
Sunday 2 nd March Lent 4 Mothering Sunday	9.30 am Holy Communion	Ephesians 5 vv 8-14 p1176 John 9 vv 1-41 p1075
Services at St John the Baptist Halling & the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling		
Sunday 3 rd February Quinquagesima	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	2 Kings 2 vv 1-12 p369 Matthew 17 vv 9-23 p984
	11.00 am Holy Communion	Exodus 24 vv 12-18 p82 2 Peter 1 vv 16-21 p1222 Matthew 17 vv 1-9 p984
Wednesday 6 th February Ash Wednesday	9.30 am Holy Communion	Joel 2 vv 1-17 p912 Matthew 6 vv 1-21 p970
Sunday 10 th February Lent 1	11.00 am Holy Communion	Genesis 2 vv 15-17 p4 Genesis 3 vv 1-7 p5 Romans 5 vv 12-19 p1132 Matthew 4 vv 1-11 p967
	5.30 Evening Prayer Jubilee Hall	Deuteronomy 6 vv 4-25 p185 Luke 15 vv 1-10 p1048
Sunday 17 th February Lent 2	11.00 am Holy Communion & Stop! Look! Listen!	Genesis 12 vv 1-4a p13 Romans 4 vv 1-17 p1131 John 3 vv 1-17 p1065
Sunday 24 th February Lent 3	11.00 am Holy Communion	Exodus 17 vv 1-7 p75 Romans 5 vv 1-11 p1132 John 4 vv 5-42 1066
Sunday 2 nd March Lent 4 Mothering Sunday	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	James 5 vv 1-14 p1220 John 3 vv 14-21 p1066
	11.00 am Holy Communion	1 Samuel 16 vv 1-3 p287 Ephesians 5 vv 8-14 p1176 John 9 vv 1-41 p1075

Copy Date March Magazine 8th February 8.30 am Rectory.

On Thursday afternoons we have a **Mother & Toddler** service at Halling at 2.00 and at Cuxton every Wednesday also at 2.00. **Sunday School** is at Cuxton Church Hall at 9.30 (not first Sundays or school holidays). **After School Club**, Thursdays @ St John's.

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

Slimming World meets every Thursday at 7.00 pm at Halling Community Centre. For more information, contact Sharon on 01634 243198.



The Religious History of Humanity

He looked down on the cave men. Already they thought they knew him. Their cave art proved that much. The way they buried their dead they obviously did not think that death was the end. There was a right way to live and a wrong way, and living the wrong way might have consequences, not only on this side, but also on the other. So what they thought about him determined the way they lived their lives. He gave them meaning and purpose. He inspired them to courage and hope and fortitude. Important decisions about what to grow, where to live, when to hunt, decisions about justice between men, were referred to him. Through meditation, certain bodily exercises and the use of various mind-altering substances, the cave men believed that at least some of their number could have communion with him. Maybe they were right. Those believed to be closest to him were revered and their counsel was taken with the utmost seriousness, but they were not normally the chiefs. The chiefs were the practical ones.

As he watched, centuries and millennia passed. Human beings multiplied and set out from their African home to colonise the entire habitable world, through Asia to Australia, from Europe to North and South America. Their culture developed to meet the needs and opportunities of each new home. Some, such as in Australia and North America, continued to live by hunting and gathering and a little rudimentary agriculture. Some learned to take advantage of the Nile floods, to irrigate deserts, to adapt to the extreme cold of the tundra, to populate jungles or vast empty plains. They kept flocks and herds. They sowed and reaped. They built cities. They fought. They developed technologies and achieved great feats of engineering. Mighty civilisations blossomed and flourished and withered and perished in Asia and Europe, Africa, Australia and the Americas.

As human cultures developed, so did their ideas about him. Was there one god or many? If there were many gods, might they not in fact all be manifestations of the one? What happened when a person died? Did his ghost hang around the living? For a time or forever? Were the ghosts of the ancestors a blessing or a threat to the living? Or did the dead go right away, maybe to a place of perpetual bliss or perpetual torment? Were the dead perhaps reincarnated again and again, returning to this world as another person or perhaps even as an animal? Or was the experience of the material world so negative, that a man's greatest hope was to escape the cycle of reincarnation and attain Nirvana, which can only be imagined as nothingness? Did the way a person lived in this world affect how he would spend any life or lives to come? Was there anything the living could do to make things easier for the dead? Is it possible to communicate with the departed?

Humanity's pondering on these questions built the pyramids, helped pay for the mediaeval cathedrals, alternately offered hope or filled people with terror. Different attitudes to God or the gods, the ancestors or the past could spur a civilisation to advance or bind it in chains of history and fear.

Did religion teach practical wisdom for living in the material world? Did it make people good or bad? Did it encourage an escapist withdrawal into spiritual experiences and hopes for the life to come? Or was the world to come in fact truly the only world worth worrying about?

Humanity asked itself questions like why good and evil? What is justice? Why are we here? Where are we going? What is it all for? More often than not, human beings found their answers in their thoughts about him.

He looked down from heaven and he saw cultures which claimed his authority for their laws, his support for their courts, his backing for their rewards and punishments. Many civilisations claimed that their wars were his wars.

In his name, men and women performed great feats of unselfish love. They cared for the sick and built hospitals. They devoted themselves to learning and study. In his name, they founded schools and universities.

How could people win his favour? Some believed by prayer. Some put their faith in good works. Some people thought that he required sacrifices of animals or even human sacrifices. Some were willing to die as martyrs. Some were certain that the heretic and the infidel must be put to the sword.

As he watched, one small middle-eastern nation of twelve tribes developed a fierce monotheism. There was certainly only one God, their God IHWH. He required that his people practise a very definite code of behaviour – God’s Law or Torah. This Torah was a great blessing to the people and the whole world would be blessed if the people kept that Law. This people suffered hugely – invasion, exile, persecution – yet they never entirely lost their faith in him nor their identity as a people.

Later a new religion spread throughout the world. Millions of people of all nations came to believe that one of those Jews was in fact God as well as a human being. They believed that his sacrifice of himself was the only death required. He preached eternal life as something on offer to all those who had faith in him. Those who had faith in him would be filled with his Spirit and, like him, live lives of self-sacrificial love. All those inspired with his Spirit would commit themselves to the well-being of others and the establishment of his reign of justice, mercy and peace.

He watched as this new religion transformed itself from persecuted minority to official religion of the Roman Empire and its European national and imperial successors. He watched as this religion partially imposed its values on the civilisations it touched, while itself becoming corrupted by the world of which it was inevitably a part.

Six hundred years after Jesus, the Middle East gave rise to another great monotheistic religion which swept the world, like the others proclaiming that God is merciful, while, also like them, defiled by alleged practitioners who were anything but.

He continued to watch as in time humanity came to believe that it could do without him. Religion had founded the schools and universities, but they outgrew their founder. Science apparently could explain with no need for God. Human problems were supposedly more effectively solved by scientific medicine and technology than by prayer.

Material prosperity succeeded where centuries of persecution had failed. Once they had a nice warm home, a car and cupboards overflowing with goodies, people gave up on worship. The devil kicked himself when he thought about all those millennia during which he had sent wars, famines and earthquakes only to drive people further into the arms of God, when, as it turned out, you only needed to build an attractive shopping centre in a chalk pit in which decent people could sell decent goods to decent people at fair prices and the whole of South East England would forget about God in just a couple of decades.

Religion might have stood for human values but its persecutions and religious wars were inhuman. At best, people came to believe, religion was an opium for the people and real human advance would only be through economic progress, itself dependent on political change. Religion came to be synonymous with ignorance, intolerance and fear. All you need is love if you can imagine that there is no heaven above nor hell beneath.

He had been invoked as the guarantor that human life made in his image was sacred. He was literally the power behind the throne and therefore of the Queen’s ministers and parliament and all those in authority under her. Marriage was a sacrament rather than a contract. Honouring one’s parents was the first commandment to which a promise was attached.

In the last few decades of western human history, the “unnecessary hypothesis” of God was sufficiently sidelined that human life no longer mattered in itself. It was quality of life that mattered – an argument for abortion, euthanasia and eugenics – a quality which would ultimately be determined by the state and its agents. Once the family was no longer regarded as a sacred entity, the traditional ties which kept people together for mutual support, dignity, respect and discipline, dissolved in favour of more open relationships

from which people could move on when they felt dissatisfied or unfulfilled, with casual disregard for the consequences for other members of the family and for society as a whole.

The secular political absolutisms, such as communism, which initially replaced religion, turned out to be quite as inhumane as the worst perversions of Christianity. By the end of the second millennium Anno Domini people no longer trusted religious or political ideology. Modern Western governments claim the legitimacy of having been democratically elected. Democratic legitimacy, however, depends on the electorate voting intelligently which, in turn, means that they must be in possession of the facts regarding what politicians propose to do and what they have achieved. Unfortunately, freed from the notion that Truth is a moral absolute, modern politicians tell the electorate what it is politically expedient for them to believe, rather than necessarily what is true. Mistakes are covered up. News stories are spun to give government credit even where it is not due. Government statistics turn out to be wildly inaccurate. Manifesto pledges are dishonoured. Thus public trust in politicians and democratic legitimacy are both corroded.

Initially, the notion that there were no absolutes led to greater freedom and toleration. Laws against suicide, homosexuality and abortion were abolished. People were given greater freedom to divorce if they chose. Safe, reliable contraception was just one factor which enabled people to seek sexual and emotional satisfaction in other than the traditional family. It became illegal to discriminate against people for housing or employment on the basis of their race, sex or (later) sexuality or age.

Universal tolerance is, however, an absurdity. It would mean that you would have to tolerate people who refuse to tolerate. It would mean tolerating people who believe that homosexuality is wrong or that a woman's place is in the home or that abortion is morally the same thing as child murder. Hence the confusion of government ministers whose diversity agenda has to include respect for Moslems, Roman Catholics etc., while forcing them to accept that homosexuals have the same rights as heterosexuals, that women should be encouraged (and indeed pressurised) into accepting paid work, and that it is a woman's right to choose whether to bear a child. In fact and in practice a "liberal" orthodoxy is being imposed in which it is as socially unacceptable - or even illegal - to express certain traditional moral or religious views as it was once to utter a blasphemy or a heresy.

Christian values were a powerful motivating force for the creation of a welfare state. Compassion demands pensions for those unable to continue working, medical treatment for the poor as well as the rich, schools for their children, a safety net for those unable to obtain employment. Even from the beginning, however, a welfare state requires that government arrogates power to itself – compulsory national insurance, the requirement to send your children to school. It is not surprising that, over a century, the state comes to see itself as responsible for the well-being of all its citizens and therefore to attempt to regulate every aspect of life. "Health and safety" intrudes into every activity. Government feels the need to tell us what to eat and how much exercise to take. The slogan is "informed choice", but the question is what does government do when people have received all the information and still choose to do what government thinks is bad for them? All too often, government's answer is more surveillance, more regulation and greater powers to impose penalties.

It is worth bearing in mind that the government which keeps so much information on you in its files, keeps you under close observation and regulates your every action (all in your own best interests of course) is a government which officially acknowledges no religious or philosophical authority and was quite possibly deceiving the voters when it obtained its mandate to govern at the most recent election.

Looking at the world now, he sees a people worried about their materialism. The breakdown of faith, family and respect have created a society in which people are afraid. Selfishness rules. Life is meaningless and empty. The authorities seem to have lost the ability, even the will, to accept responsibility for crime and disorder. Over consumption is widely perceived as a threat to the very survival of the planet, yet, lacking any sense of the spiritual, human beings have become so addicted to consumer goods that there is no realistic chance of anything more than cosmetic change. The religious history of humanity was so mixed a blessing that humanity decided that it was better off without religion. Given the current mess, however, surely it is time to think again. He is as ready to hear our prayers today as ever he was in the past. Roger.

From the Registers

Baptisms:

25th November
2nd December

Mia Ela Whatman
Andrew Paul Wyld

Chillington Close
Longfield

Wedding:

15th December

Jo Wilson & Amy Marie Bishop

Cuxton

Funerals:

20th November
20th December
27th December
9th January
10th January

Hazel Fuller
William Thomas Harrison (88)
Blanche Mary Cogger (97)
Dam Jack Brown (84)
Joan Gyde (91)

Chatham
Bush Road
formerly of Cuxton
Gravesend
Downsland House

Blanche Cogger RIP

Parishioners were sorry to hear of the death of Blanche Cogger in December. Married to Len, Blanche had lived for many years in Cuxton as well as accompanying him on moves to Gravesend, Gloucestershire and East Anglia. In Cuxton, as in other places where they lived, Len and Blanche made a great contribution to the life of the Church and the wider community – supporting (and even helping to found) all sorts of clubs and societies, including the 50 Club and the Cuxton Minstrels. Their special love and their special contribution was music, Len singing in the choir and as a soloist, Blanche accompanying him on the piano and sometimes playing the church organ. They are both much missed from our community, but now surely reunited in the presence of the God Whom they served on earth.

Christopher Haydon RIP

We were also saddened to hear of the death of Christopher Haydon, whose memorial service was on 21st December at East Malling. It is some years since Christopher and his family moved from the village, but he is remembered with great affection as a charming and talented young man who took an active part in the life of the church. He had an inquiring mind and great musical talent which he put to good use as a chorister and an occasional organist. Our sympathy goes out to his parents, Christine and Patrick, to Alex and to all the family at this time.

Thanks

This is my opportunity to thank everybody for the services and events of Christmas and of the whole of 2007. Where should we be without music and bell-ringing, people to clean and maintain the church buildings and hall, people who polish brass and arrange flowers, arrange our services and social events and organise all the other things on our programme? Thanks to all of you who donate your time and talents. Thanks also to all those whose contributions enable us to survive (just) financially. And thank you all, who, just by being yourselves part of the Christian community, create the Church in Cuxton and Halling.

I should also like to thank all those who made donations to the Church in memory of Alan Martin and, also, all those who have made Christmas or New Year gifts. Roger.

Carol Singing 2007

On Wednesday 19th December, fifteen of us went Carol Singing around Lower Halling. Joanne accompanied us, playing her flute. It was an extremely cold evening and we were very grateful for the hot cups of tea provided by Mary Acott and Mary Fennemore on our return to the church. Together we raised £175.34, which is to be divided between church funds and Leukaemia Research. A big thank you to all who participated and to those who donated so generously. I think everyone did magnificently. Janice.

Church Hall Draw: November £5 to Rene Barker, drawn by Shirley Crundwell. December £5 to Mary Morren, drawn by Di Maxwell. St John's Draw: November £25 each to Mrs Ballard (35) & Mr Knott (44), £10 to Mrs Wallis (76) – drawn by Mrs Heasman; December: £5 each to Mrs Knell (16), Mr Thorne (82), Mrs Clark (157), Miss Lucas (19) & Mrs Warman (56) – drawn by Mrs Knight.



Halling WI

I haven't sent a report for so long some of this one is almost history. Our November meeting was uneventful. Mary Fennemore was in the chair once again as our new, old president. Business was dealt with and financially we are O.K. thanks to the fine housekeeping done by our gallant treasurer. Our speaker was Stella Redman. She recited some very unusual topical poems that I think she must have written herself. They were funny and entertaining.

On December 7th it was Halling's turn to entertain the District W.I.'s for the annual Carol service in St John's Church. Evelyn Low, myself and Ann Heaseman decorated the church with flowers angels and candles, all 200 of them. Dorothy, one of our church organists, played for us and the District choir sang a couple of less familiar carols. Mince pies had been asked for at our November meeting. You did us proud girls. We had enough for the service. We raffled some. The rest we

used up at the Christingle service. We had dozens of them and I must admit I am sick at the sight of mince pies, but well done everyone. The Carol service went very well. One Aylesford member remarked "You have a super vicar" and a member of West Malling W.I. said to me afterwards, "I could have listened to your rector for another hour". So it seems a good time was had by all. I understand we have the District carols again in 2011.

Once again the end of the year party was a success for Halling W.I., thanks to the hard working committee. Over 50 members and guests sat down to a buffet supper that bowed the table legs. So much food and such a variety. We were ably entertained once again by the Rainham R.A.T.S.. All that is left for us now is to look forward to 2008 with a full and varied programme starting in January with Mrs Margaret Barrow, her subject How her daughter and her husband renovated a derelict old watermill in central France. Phyllis.

Looking for the Harlequin Ladybird

Have you heard of the new visitor to the country? The Kent and Medway Biological Records Centre would like to introduce the harlequin ladybird (*Harmonia axyridis*), the ladybird alien to the UK which is extremely invasive. According to some authors, this species competes with our native ladybirds and might replace our native ladybirds as the grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) did in Kent with the red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*). However, as a ladybird it can still help the gardener by eating aphids. Originating from Asia, this ladybird was first recorded in Britain in Essex, 2004. Since then, Kent has become a "hotspot" for the species. The species is currently being surveyed by members of the public and entomologists such as Helen Roy of the Anglia Ruskin University who says it has been described as "the most invasive ladybird on earth".

We'd like to invite you to track the species by keeping an eye out and telling us if you see one. You can also record your sighting on the national website for the species: www.ladybird-survey.org.

How to recognise a harlequin ladybird

- It is usually bigger than other ladybirds (6-8mm long, which is at least as big as a 7-spot ladybird);
- It may be a variety of colours, which explains its name 'harlequin' which means 'colourful' or 'changing-colour';
- It may have lots of black spots (15 to 20) or 2 or 4 orange or red spots;
- It normally has brown legs.

As a recording centre, we collect, collate and disseminate wildlife information specifically for Kent & Medway. Essentially if we know where species are we can work towards protecting them. You can get involved in wildlife recording by letting us know about the harlequin ladybird in your area or anywhere in Kent & Medway! In addition to the harlequin, we are interested to know about all species (plants, fungi, birds, spiders, etc.) occurring in Kent. Common species such as rabbits and blackbirds are as informative as rare species! To be a useful record, information needs to contain the 4 'W's to meet national standards. These are **Who** (the Recorder's name = you), **What** (the recorded species), **Where** (the record location) and finally, **When** (date of the sighting).

If you think recording may interest you, please do not hesitate to contact us at:

Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre (KMBRC), Tyland Barn, Sandling, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 3BD

Tel: (01622) 685780 / (01622) 685646, Fax: (01622) 671390,

E-mail: info@kmbrc.org.uk, Website: www.kmbrc.org.uk

Nature Notes November and December 2007

November 2007

On the first day of the month the weather was beautiful with warm sunshine and blue skies. I walked Murphy along the path by the river where I heard the calls of redshank and where gulls congregated on the mud flats. It could have been a late summer's day as we basked in the sun's warmth. In the early evening, as the sun was setting, I could hear the rooks that had flown to roost in the trees by the river. On the 3rd I walked across Church Fields where the warmth of the sun beamed down from a blue sky and a gentle westerly breeze blew. Deep red hips and haws and bright pink spindle berries flourished along the hedgerows straddled by old man's beard. I haven't seen so many spindle berries. Mallow, bristly ox tongue and white clover bloomed. I continued up into Mays Wood treading the leaf covered paths and heard crows calling and at the same time watching pigeons flying through the trees. I made my way to the top of Dean Valley where the trees glowed golden in the sunlight and the only sound to be heard was the rustling of the leaves. Yellow and golden maples lit up the path and the occasional white campion and herb robert flowers were to be seen. A pair of crows flew across the valley to North Wood, while gulls hovered over the newly tilled soil and the hedgerows cast long shadows across the field. In the wood I had found various species of fungi. I returned through Six acre Wood and crossed the churchyard from where I saw the glistening river. Several warm days followed when I walked by the river with Murphy. By the 9th, leaves had been blown from the trees leaving many branches bare. The water reflected the blue of the sky and gulls congregated along the edge of the mudflats while calling redshank skimmed upstream. North-westerly winds were blowing by the 13th.

November 1994

November, the month of changing weather, varying from blue skies and sunshine to overcast, misty, murky days. This year, mildness has caused flowers, both wild and cultivated to continue to bloom, while bulbs are pushing their green spikes through the earth. The leaves have finally fallen leaving bare branches bedecked with old man's beard, which from a distance, resembles hoar frosts. Fields have been ploughed and sown. Some reveal rich brown soil while others display green shoots of next year's harvest. Blackbirds chatter in the hedgerows as the evenings draw in and one is made very aware of another year drawing to a close.

November 1996

November began with warm winds and sunshine, and with calves gambolling on the marsh's green pastures. Dog violets and vetch flowered in the woods, while from the branches of the trees, birds sang cheerful spring-like songs. Bristly ox tongue and white melilot could still be found flowering along the verges. By the middle of the month, chill winds were blowing, adding to early morning frosts, but the sun's rays in the afternoons were still radiating a little warmth. During the third week, some snow fell, by which time blue and great tits had come to the garden bird table. Temperatures fluctuated during the final week, and then on the final day of the month, I was rewarded with a rare beauty when I visited Halling Marshes. In some ways words are inadequate. Black clouds almost covered the sky apart from an opening low to the west where the golden, setting sun shone through, lighting up the river, where redshank skimmed, and turning dead grass banks, where greylag and Canada geese browsed, to gold.

November 1997

This month sees the continuation of the warm weather. After an early morning frost, a beautiful sun shines from a hazy blue sky and I find scentless mayweed and one dandelion in flower. Much needed rain falls in the first week while westerly winds blow bringing down the leaves to strew the paths. The sun's light now creates long shadows as we walk on the marsh, and we watch Canada geese grazing on the river's banks and redshank skimming over the water. Because of the mild conditions, midges dance on the air in the sunlight and a brown dragonfly hovers over the hawthorns. Leaves of red, gold and yellow bring a special light to the countryside while golden sunsets transform fluffy clouds to salmon pink. West winds continue to blow and the 16th day of the month is recorded as the mildest for 102 years. After heavy rain, I find clover in flower, new parsley plants and fresh grass springing up. By the 3rd week I find tight catkins on the branches in the copse, then in the churchyard I spy two buttercups in bloom. Mild weather persists until the end of the month, which ends with a beautiful sunset.

November 2007

Winds blew from the north and the east bringing a definite chill to the air, which was especially noticeable when walking by the river. On the 19th, there were showers and sunshine during the morning and the easterly wind blew more leaves from the trees. Chaffinches and tits came to the garden to feed and a cheeky squirrel helped itself to nuts and seed. Murphy chased after another squirrel which scampered across the fence and up into the conifer. The skies became grey during the afternoon and steady rain fell when I took Murphy for his walk. I found a lone scabious in bloom along the river path. On the 23rd, I walked through Mays Wood to Dean Valley, which was bathed in golden sunlight, and silence filled the air. Horses grazed in the fields and on the edge of the path I found white deadnettle flowers. As I walked home, the setting sun created a deep pink in the sky. I repeated this walk on the 29th when, again, the woods were silent and the paths were strewn with damp, brown leaves. A chattering blackbird flew ahead of me and as I returned through the churchyard I saw the Medway Bridge turned to gold by the setting sun. The 30th was grey and very damp and darkness fell early.

December 2007

The first day of the month was beautiful with clear blue skies from which beamed golden sunshine. We took Murphy to Camer Park where the trees still bore autumn leaves and looked so lovely in the sunlight. Some leaves drifted to the earth's floor in the fresh westerly wind. More birds are now coming to the garden to consume the food, which I put out for them. Squirrels also make their presence felt and Murphy tries to catch them. I don't need to tell you the result of that. The days brought relatively mild weather for the time of year and it was pleasant for walking. Cold winds blew off the river on the 7th when we walked Murphy at the Outlet Centre on St Mary's Island. Clouds gathered in the afternoon but they did not shut out the sun. On the 8th, as the sun arose, the sky became a vivid red while the bare branches stood still as statues silhouetted against it. There was not a sound of a bird. Soon the deep red vanished to leave a pale blue sky. A magpie perched in the bare branches of a small elm tree. The blue soon became grey and rain was falling by the time we took Murphy for his walk and it became much heavier later in the morning. On the 13th, a sharp frost turned the garden and the embankment beyond a beautiful fairy tale white. The sun rose and the trees glowed white and crisp and there was not a breath of wind. It was very cold. Blackbirds, a wood pigeon, a missel thrush, two robins, chaffinches and tits came to feed on the seed and ivy berries. The frost remained on the grass all day.

December 1994

The final month of this year. Mild, wet and blustery weather, interspersed with a few frosty periods, have rendered woodland paths muddy and treacherous for walking. Vetch, herb Robert, rough hawk bit, buttercups, daisies dandelions red and white deadnettle have continued to flower, while new plants of arum, cow parsley and dogs mercury have been emerging. In the garden, daffodil spikes are well in evidence while primroses; violets snowdrops and winter heathers are flowering. Heavy showers of rain and periods of sunshine have produced wonderful rainbows, while frosty days with beautiful sunsets have transformed distant woods and ploughed fields to a purple brown. Blue tits and long tailed tits have been making early investigations for nests and morning birdsong has been spring like. Nature's cycle continues. One can only ponder and wonder at the beauty of all created things. God's power is manifested.

December 1996

December began grey and bland, then the days varied between being mild, when gnats danced in the air, and eerie with dense fog, when in the woods, the only sound to be heard was the hum of the electricity pylons which strode across the valley into the woods like creatures from another planet. For over a week there was no sign of the sun, but because of mild temperatures, violets were flowering in the woods and new buds were forming on some of the low growing trees. On the 14th day, when the sun shone again, a beautiful fox came into the garden and ate nuts, which had dropped from the bird table. What a privilege to see such a magnificent creature so close to us. Cold winds returned with sunny skies flecked with salmon pink clouds. Magpies chattered and blackbirds pinked in the hedgerows, while on Halling Marshes, the strong north winds caused white-horsed waves to roll up the river. The month and the year ended with snow and sub zero temperatures, yet a red rose bud was opening in the garden.

December 1997

The final month of the year begins with east winds and overcast skies. A light covering of snow is seen on the second day. By the end of the first week, south-westerly winds are blowing bringing some glimpses of sunshine. When walking on the marsh, we are aware of long shadows cast by the sun, which also sends golden shafts of light over the river. Mild conditions bring the gnats dancing on the air, and elder bushes in Six-acre Wood are sporting new leaves, lulled into a feeling of spring. New crops are emerging from the rich brown earth, a beautiful green, but this will bring problems for the farmers as disease will attack the tender plants in these mild conditions. Wintry weather returns bringing another light covering of snow, beautifying six-acre Wood where I watch squirrels leaping from tree to tree. The shortest day arrives and the weather is mild again. A song thrush sings its beautiful song in the woodland. It is calling spring into attendance. On Christmas Eve strong winds and rain caused damage in parts of the country but we are spared the worst of the storms. Fiercely red skies hail the mornings, rain falls later. The month and the year end in glorious sunshine. We walk on the marsh beneath a blue sky and where the high tide is beginning to ebb, carrying branches towards the estuary. Another year closes.

December 2007

There had been an overnight frost on the 17th but the sun took the edge off the chill in the air which I again felt more as I walked by the river with Murphy. The tide was low and the sun's rays caused the mud flats, where redshank scuttled and called, to glisten. The sun shone from an almost clear blue sky and an easterly wind blew. Soon after our return, grey clouds began to gather and the sun disappeared and the wind strengthened. Two squirrels foraged in the garden while three blackbirds, two male and a hen, flew around the garden. Chaffinches also put in an appearance. There were several days of frost. On the 21st we took Murphy to Holly Hill. The paths, trees fields and hedges were white with frost. As we approached the hill, fog shrouded the fields and hedgerows. There was just one lane, arched by trees which escaped the fog and frost. On our return, the sun shone again. Sunday the 23rd was a "Dickensian" day with grey skies and fog throughout the daylight hours. A pheasant was wandering round the garden in the afternoon. Christmas Day was mild and grey then rain began to fall and this lasted for most of the day and was quite heavy in the afternoon. Mild days with some sunshine followed and west winds blew. On the 29th I took Murphy along the river. The sun, low in the sky, beamed into our faces. On the 31st, a mild, grey morning, a pair of jays came into the garden and fed from the patio. They are the first jays I've seen in the garden for almost two years. Chaffinches, a blackbird, a robin, dunnocks, blue tits, collared doves a wood pigeon and a great tit graced the scene. Another year of nature's observations came to a close. **Elizabeth Summers.**

First Step Drop-in Centre, Rochester
"Practise hospitality" (1 Peter 4:9)

24 Pimpernel Way
Chatham, ME5 OSF
01634 668665

The First Step Drop-in Centre is open every Tuesday and Thursday in the Friends' Meeting House, Rochester, from 11am -1pm, providing Christian hospitality to up to 60 homeless and vulnerable Medway residents. Free food and drink are provided for all those who come, together with the chance to sit and chat in the warm, and to have a shower. Every person is also given a bag of food to take away, and sometimes clothes are available too.

As well as offering this service to the needy of our towns, we also offer local Church members an opportunity to practice Christian giving, by:-

- Volunteering on Tuesdays or Thursdays at the Centre. All our staff are volunteers and we can find a job for anyone willing to serve.
- Regular giving of goods. Our receipt of goods is very seasonal. We have a store, but from time to time it becomes run down.
- Regular giving of money. The ongoing Friends' Meeting House costs are met by a grant from a Charity, but the Centre still needs £500 per month to run. At present funds are very low. We often receive unexpected gifts, which are most welcome, but planning ahead can be difficult. We can provide a Standing Order form for anyone who would be willing to support the Centre financially on a regular basis.
- Many Church fellowships give their collections of food and of money, to the Centre, especially at Christmas and Harvest.

Please contact Dave Carter to explore any of these opportunities, or to find out about more about the Day Centre. We hope you will be able to share with us in this work of Christian hospitality.

Joke: A man turns up to a fancy dress rave dressed in a pair of jump leads. "All right, you can come in," says the doorman, "but don't try to start anything!"



CUXTON WOMEN'S INSTITUTE DECEMBER

Our December meeting was held on a wet and windy night, but nevertheless we had a very good attendance. As usual at this time of year we held our Christmas celebrations. The hall was beautifully decorated with a Christmas tree lit up in the corner and the tables looked very colourful with crackers and festive table decorations made by Val Ryan. The tables were groaning with food, and each member was given a glass of mulled wine on arrival. President Dorothy Drew read out several Christmas cards from other local W.I.s and birthdays for the month and other business was kept to a minimum. We then tucked in to jacket potatoes, ham and salad with various trimmings and finished with bite-sized cream cakes. Our entertainment for the evening was thought out and prepared by Sheila Underdown, who gave us a history of Christmas. She told us the origins of Advent and each table was given an Advent Calendar, with much scratching off of dates! Three members read out Christmas poems and we all sang three carols. Sheila then told us about how Santa Claus began and introduced our own Father Christmas, who came into the hall complete with sack, (a very good-natured husband who did an excellent job!). While Sheila explained about Christmas food, tea, coffee and mince pies were served followed by the raffle, drawn by Santa. One of the prizes was a Calendar with pictures for each month painted by the Art Group. Next Sheila told us about presents and cards, and Santa went round every member and guest with a card and a present. The evening was rounded off by everyone singing "The Twelve Days of Christmas", after which Sheila read a poem, which she had written herself, and which brought home to all of us the true meaning of

Christmas. We all departed for home, by now the rain was torrential, but everyone was in good spirits after such a lovely evening.

The Walking Group went on a walk around West Mailing, starting in the park and ending us in the High Street, where we had coffee. Much refreshed, we continued down Swan Street, and along back streets, ending up at a dead end by the train station. We managed to find our way back to the park and drove down to the High Street again, where we had lunch at the "Five-pointed Star". Excellent food!

Some of us are going to the Carol Service at Hailing, and quite a lot of us are attending Halling's Christmas meeting. We look forward to that.

CUXTON WOMEN'S INSTITUTE JANUARY

Only fifteen brave souls ventured out to our January meeting. Not surprising as it was a bitterly cold night. Also several of our members were away for the New Year. However, it turned out to be a very enjoyable evening. Business was virtually nonexistent, and so anticipating a low attendance, the Committee had arranged a Beetle Drive. Quite a few had no idea how to play this, and so after explaining the rules, the game was played with a lot of fun and laughter. After tea break, Sheila Underdown had a quiz lined up, and again this was not taken at all seriously and a lot of laughs and fun was had by all.

Next meeting: Thursday 7th February 2008 at 7.30 pm. Marks & Spencer Talk, Demonstration, Tasting.

Ann Harris

Dickens' Country Protection Society

The AGM will be held on 17th March (7.30 for 8.00) at Higham Memorial (small) Hall.



The Society has been concerned by the appearance of large walls beside country roads. It was therefore heartened by a recent decision by a planning inspector one such wall must be removed because it is out of character in a rural area. The society hopes that this ruling sets a precedent.

The Society is also concerned about charges possibly to be levied on motorists. Thousands of new homes and businesses are expected to be built in the Thames Corridor. The Government is considering limiting the traffic growth these homes would generate by making private motoring and parking much more expensive – hardly fair on those who already live here and may rely on their cars for every day transport.

Kay Roots.

CHILDREN'S SOCIETY NEWS

Many thanks to everyone who collected money for the Children's Society in 2007. The grand total, which was counted in November, came to £291. This is an excellent effort in view of the fact that our numbers have dropped slightly in recent times.

If anyone else would like to help raise money for the Children's Society by collecting their loose change at home in a box, please contact me on 727424. For those of us who do not feel that we are cut out for running marathons or taking part in sponsored knitting events, it really is a relatively painless way of raising money for a very good cause!
Julia Wells



Cuxton Community Infant School News

Dear Friends of our School,

It does not seem possible that it is already the New Year. We at Cuxton Infants, hope that you all had a good Christmas and would like to take this opportunity to wish you a Happy and Healthy New Year. I know for some of our families, Christmas was a difficult time and our thoughts are with those folk.

Last term was a very busy one for us in school. We collected an abundance of goodies for Blythswood's shoe box appeal. Phil Shorthouse collected toiletries, clothing and toys. We also collected for the British Legion by selling poppies. I was both pleased and surprised by the children's knowledge of the 1st and 2nd world wars. A few said they had spoken with their grandparents about the poppies growing in fields abroad and many spoke of the money helping victim's families. We collected for Children in Need too. Once again our marvellous cook, Sharon, made Pudsey bear biscuits to sell to the children and raised a total of £75.45. With your help we raised £50 for Barnardo's at our Christmas plays and £64.85 for Macmillan Cancer support through holding a coffee morning following Harvest assembly.

I thank the parents who help support these charities. Children need to know about the wider world in which we live and that some folk are not as fortunate as ourselves.

In December we held our Christmas Bazaar, organised by the FCS. There was a variety of stalls, including bottle tombola, pig racing, play your cards right, Christmas beanies, table top hoopla, raffle, chocolate tombola, refreshments, etc. The friends of Cuxton Schools work so hard in organising this event and with your support raised a great deal of money to be spent on much needed items for both schools.

Toby's Christmas Drum, our school play was very entertaining. The Children sang well and read their words clearly and we were very proud of the way they acted and conducted themselves.

At the end of term, having performed the play several times, we had a party, delicious Christmas lunch and a visit by that special person clad in red. We went home with Christmas cards, calendars and probably some glitter and tinsel attached and collapsed!

This term is a quieter one for us in school. The Children are focusing as part of their topic work on Healthy me, exercise and eating. We are having a ready, steady cook day later on in the term with a visiting chef. We will also be having a book week just before Easter when we will be focusing on Poetry. We have been involved with various other schools with a poetry project and I know that some of our Year 2 children have amazed us with their creativity when writing.

Our building plans were finally passed by Medway Council mid December, and now we are at the next stage.

We continue to work closely with the Beehive and Mayday Playgroups. The Breakfast and After School Club is proving to be a success. There are more children attending and the Beehive, committee, staff and volunteers have worked extremely hard in redecorating the rooms, providing new resources and setting up new procedures. The 5'0 club continue to come into school for a weekly roast lunch. It is great to see folk and if you have not visited yet you are most welcome. Also, we are always grateful of anyone coming into school to help with hearing children read, cooking, art activities or gardening. If you have any spare time during the week and would like to come in please let us know.

That's all our news for now, take care, keep warm and have a good month,
Sincerely Sandra Jones, Head teacher Cuxton Infants School.

Quiz Evening For Church Funds

Darryl Palmer is very kindly running another of his quizzes – this time for church funds – at the Jubilee Hall, Upper Halling at 7.30 pm in 29th February. If you are interested in coming along as an individual or bringing a team, please contact Darryl or Mary Acott on 243223.

Family Disco & Karaoke

**Saturday February 9th
in Jubilee Hall, 7.30-11 pm**

Bring your own Nibbles & Drinks

£4 Adults £2 Children £12 Family Ticket

All Ages Welcome



TICKETS FROM SHIRLEY CRUNDWELL
Tel: 01634 724 997

Doctor/Patient Confidentiality

You may have seen that the Government is setting up a national database on which the medical records of all NHS patients will be stored. Like so many government IT projects, this database is late and over budget. The ostensible reason for setting it up is that, if you need medical treatment in any part of the country, doctors will be able to access all your medical records straightaway. It is also part of a wider government policy to hold comprehensive files on every citizen in order to look after us and to control us more effectively. It means that whatever you tell a medical practitioner will no longer be in confidence, information shared only with the health team actually looking after you, but potentially accessible to hundreds of thousands of NHS employees, local government staff, the police and, no doubt, other government departments too. Given that those hundreds of thousands are all only too human, any one of them is capable of making mistakes and the odds are that some of them will be incompetent, some corruptible and some actually criminal. The probability also is that the administration of this database will be (like hospital cleaning) outsourced to the cheapest available contractor – either abroad or some cheapskate British company which keeps down costs by employing two men to do the work of three and paying the minimum wage.

My own concerns are that it is a violation of my privacy and an assault on the professional integrity of my doctor if the

government makes him share confidential information about me without my consent. Given the government's record, I am quite sure that data will be lost, possibly falling into the hands of criminals such as blackmailers, ID thieves and paedophiles. The data may be misused by government or by public employees. (Political promises and safeguards¹ rarely turn out to mean much.) There are bound to be errors in the system which it will be very hard to have corrected. (Have you ever tried persuading a government department that its computer is wrong?) If you are concerned, log on to www.nhsconfidentiality.org for more information and for a pro forma letter asking your doctor not to include your data on the national register.

Roger.

¹ My experience of "safeguards" is that if you ask whether officials have broken the rules, all you get by way of answer is official evasion and downright lies. If you do manage to prove that a public authority has done wrong, the best you can hope for is an insincere apology and a derisory sum of money by way of compensation.