

Services at St Michael & All Angel Cuxton			
Sunday 31 st January Epiphany 4	9.30 Holy Communion	Ezekiel 43 v27 – 44 v4 p876 1 Corinthians 13 p1153 Luke 2 vv 22-40 p1028	
Sunday 7 th February Sexagesima	9.30 Family Communion	Genesis 2 vv 1-25 p4 Revelation 4 vv 1-11 p1236 Luke 8 vv 22-25 p1037	
Sunday 14 th February Quinquagesima	9.30 Holy Communion	Exodus 34 vv 29-35 p94 2 Corinthians 3 v14 – 4 v2 p1160 Luke 9 vv 28-36 p1040	
Wednesday 17 th February Ash Wednesday	7.30 pm Holy Communion	Joel 2 vv 1-17 p912 Matthew 6 vv 1-21 p970	
Sunday 21 st February Lent 1	8.00 Holy Communion BCP	Readings BCP	
	9.30 Holy Communion	Deuteronomy 26 vv 1-11 p203 Romans 10 vv 8-13 p1137 Luke 4 vv 1-13 p1030	
Sunday 28 th February Lent 2	9.30 Holy Communion	Genesis 15 vv 1-18 p15 Philippians 3 v17 – 4 v1 p1180 Luke 13 vv 31-35 p1047	
Services at St John the Baptist Halling and the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling			
Sunday 31 st January Epiphany 4	11.00 Holy Communion	Ezekiel 43 v27 – 44 v4 p876 1 Corinthians 13 p1153 Luke 2 vv 22-40 p1028	
Sunday 7 th February Sexagesima	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Genesis 1 v1 – 23 p1 Matthew 6 vv 25-34 p971	
	11.00 Holy Communion	Genesis 2 vv 1-25 p4 Revelation 4 vv 1-11 p1236 Luke 8 vv 22-25 p1037	
Sunday 14 th February Quinquagesima	11.00 Holy Communion	Exodus 34 vv 29-35 p94 2 Corinthians 3 v14 – 4 v2 p1160 Luke 9 vv 28-36 p1040	
	5.30 Evening Prayer Jubilee Hall	Exodus 3 vv 1-6 p59 John 12 vv 27-36 p1080	
Wednesday 17 th February Ash Wednesday	9.30 Holy Communion	Joel 2 vv 1-17 p912 Matthew 6 vv 1-21 p970	
Sunday 21 st February Lent 1	11.00 Stop! Look! Listen! & Holy Communion	Deuteronomy 26 vv 1-11 p203 Romans 10 vv 8-13 p1137 Luke 4 vv 1-13 p1030	
Sunday 28 th February Lent 2	11.00 Holy Communion	Genesis 15 vv 1-18 p15 Philippians 3 v17 – 4 v1 p1180 Luke 13 vv 31-35 p1047	
Wednesday Communion 9.30 am St Michael's		Thursday Communion 9.30 am St John's	
3 rd February	2 Samuel 24 vv 2-17 Mark 6 vv 1-6	4 th February	1 Kings 2 vv 1-12 Mark 6 vv 7-13
10 th February	1 Kings 10 vv 1-10 Mark 7 vv 14-23	11 th February	1 Kings 11 vv 4-13 Mark 7 vv 24-30
17 th February Ash Wednesday 9.30 am @ Halling & 7.30 pm @ Cuxton (See above)			
Thursday 18 th February Cuxton	Deuteronomy 30 vv 15-end Luke 9 vv 22-25	Thursday 18 th February	No Communion @ Halling
24 th February Ember Day*	Jonah 3 Luke 11 vv 29-32	25 th February	Isaiah 55 vv 6-9 Matthew 7 vv 7-12

*On Ember Days we pray especially for vocations to ordained ministry and for God's blessing on those preparing for ordination.

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

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

Copy Date March Magazine: 12th February 8.30 am Rectory.

November Church Hall Draw: £5 to Jo Martin, drawn by Gill Bogg.

St John's Draw: £25 each to Mr Silver (77) & Mrs Hayward (80) & £10 to Mrs Fallows (184) – drawn by Mrs Baker.

1662 at St Michael's: It has been pointed out that we have very few Sunday services in this parish conducted in accordance with the Book of Common Prayer. We mainly use *Common Worship*, which has very many merits, but so has 1662 and it would be a great pity to consign it to history. It has therefore been decided that the 8.00 am Communion at St Michael's on the third Sunday of each month will be conducted according to the Book of Common Prayer. Some years ago, I suggested we might do the same with our 8.00 Communion at the Jubilee Hall. At that time, the consensus was to carry on with *Common Worship*, but I should be happy to review this decision if those who now attend that service would wish me to.

If You Were Invited to Dinner at Buckingham Palace How Would You Respond?

If you were an ardent republican vehemently opposed to any idea of monarchy, you would probably decline – hopefully politely. Those of us, however, who respect the Queen and what she stands for would probably feel highly honoured to be invited. We might wonder what we had done to deserve such an honour. We might wonder if we had anything good enough to wear. We would be bitterly disappointed if we were prevented from going by bad weather, poor health or another engagement that we couldn't decently get out of. We would probably accept such an invitation with all due humility and do our very best to get there and to be on our best behaviour.

The ardent republican would refuse the invitation to Buckingham Palace. The monarchist would be honoured to accept. What it is hard to imagine is that anyone would reply to the Queen, *I'll come if I've got nothing else on* or *I'll come if I feel like it on the day*.

The King of Kings invites us to His Supper every Sunday and, indeed, every day.

Christmas

Thanks to everyone who worked so hard for our Christmas worship. The churches were beautifully decorated as always. The choirs sang the carols and Christmas music. We had a nativity play in each church. Thank you children and adult helpers. Thanks to all the people who work behind the scenes to clean, polish, set out cribs and decorate Christmas trees. Sadly the weather seemed to have an adverse effect on attendances at Cuxton, though not at Halling. Maybe this reflects the situation of St Michael's church – though it has been there for more than a thousand years! Sermon for Midnight see *Teaching on* <http://www.cuxtonandhalling.org.uk>

A couple of our long term flower arrangers at St Michael's finished in 2009 – Jo Martin and Shirley Houlan. Thanks to them and to all those who work so hard all the year round to make possible everything we try to do through our parish churches.

Finally, we are still looking for people to help deliver this magazine, especially in Charles Drive and Rochester Road Cuxton. Please contact Margaret Guest on 240644 if you can help.

How the Dog Got his Name

(This was included in a Christmas card sent to the Rectory.)

When God had made the earth and sky, the flowers and the trees,
He then made the animals and all the birds and bees.
And when his work was finished and not one was quite the same,
He said, *I'll walk this earth of mine and give each one a name.*
And so he travelled land and sea and everywhere he went,
A little creature followed him until its strength was spent.
When all were named upon the earth, and in the sky and sea,
The little creature said, *Dear, Lord, there's not one left for me.*
The Father smiled and softly said, *I've left you till the end!*
I've turned my own name back to front and called you DOG, my friend.

Of course, actually, it was we humans who gave things their names, but I've often thought that making the dog to be man's best friend was a striking act on the part of Providence.



What Religion Really Means

What Religion Really Means is the subtitle of a book by Karen Armstrong, the title of which is *The Case for God*. Armstrong's basic thesis is that the root of our

problems is the way we imagine God. To imagine is to form an image and our images of God very quickly become idols. One of the Ten Commandments is *Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image*, and there is a very good reason for it. Any image we have is so much less than God. To worship an image is to demean God. Since we become what we worship, if we worship anything less than God, we diminish ourselves. Human beings are made in the image of God and our ultimate destiny in Heaven is to be like Him when we shall see Him as He is. It is actually very dangerous to imagine God, to form an image of Him and that is just as true of an image formed by words as it is of a statue or a picture. To put Armstrong's point very briefly. We mostly imagine God as a being. We think of him as a great being, a good being. We may think of God as an infinitely greater being than we are, but we would still be wrong. God is not a being; God is being. He is not good; God is goodness. God is not beautiful; He is beauty. He is not wise; He is wisdom. Even here I risk limiting God by attempting to describe Him in human words, to define "God". To define is to set limits. God has no limit. A definition is where meaning finishes. God is utterly different from us, not merely because He is infinitely greater and better than we are, but because He is the only independent reality and all other reality depends ultimately on God.

Let me give some examples of what is called the apophatic method. Apophatic means that we refuse to say; we cannot say. In the Bible, we read that the LORD is my light or the LORD is my rock or the LORD is my shepherd. Obviously, all these ideas are metaphors. God is not a candlestick or a torch. God is not a stone. Neither does He literally sit in a field, minding a flock of sheep. Light, rock and shepherd are metaphors which point us towards God, but they do not describe Him. Still less do they define Him.

This is obvious when you come to think about it. What is rather less obvious is that the same thing applies when we say that God is great or that He is good or that He is wise. We know what a great

man is or what a good man is or what a wise man is. We can say that God is infinitely great, good and wise, but, if we are honest, we have no idea what it would mean to be infinitely great, infinitely good or infinitely wise. So our words, when we speak about God, are actually meaningless. The apophatic method is to refuse to speak of what we cannot speak, to be silent in the presence of the mystery of God.

We can be silent in the presence of the mystery of God if we are humble enough and wise enough. If we are truly silent in the presence of the mystery of God, so the great teachers teach us, we may become conscious that all these metaphors are profoundly true, that God is our Light, our Shepherd and our Rock, that He is great and good and wise at a level way beyond the possibility of human comprehension.

Human beings, however, find it very hard to resist the temptation to imagine God, to recreate Him in an image of our own devising. So, as the Bible says, instead of worshipping the One Who made us, we worship what we have made. Once we have turned God into an image of our own devising, we put ourselves in charge, not only of our religion, but also of our own lives and of the world in which we live. This is a fatal move, because human beings are not up to the job of running either the Church or the world or even our own lives. Competence comes from God alone!

Let me give an example of two common idols which we human beings substitute for the living God. People were surprised when I recently used the word *spew* from the pulpit, quoting the Bible to the effect that the whale spewed Jonah out its mouth. A more disturbing use of the word *spew* comes in Revelation 3 vv 15&16. Jesus says to the Church at Laodicea: *I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.* Jesus threatens to expel the Laodiceans because they are lukewarm. I am not the only preacher to wonder if the present day Church in the western world can be charged with the same offence as the Laodiceans? We are, perhaps, neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm. Western Christianity in the modern age has tended to make a bland idol and to worship that idol in the place of God. A bland idol is unable to command the loyalty of its worshippers and unable to attract

converts. The living God is replaced with an idol so bland that religion is irrelevant.

Let me illustrate what I mean. The western world has lost confidence in the notion that right and wrong are absolutes. We no longer think that justice is something with its own eternal existence, independent of what people believe. We are suspicious of moral claims. Tolerance is the only universal virtue we now recognise. The way people behave and ought to behave is, we believe, determined by culture. Law is not absolute, but culturally relative. So, not only do we no longer attempt to spread Christian values in the world, we no longer live by Christian values ourselves. We derive our values from the society in which we live, rather than from our faith. Faith makes no difference to the way we act.

Closely related to this lack of belief in moral absolutes is the belief that it is always wrong to be judgmental. We find it hard, therefore, to believe that God is our judge. If there is a final judgment, we imagine, God will simply let everyone off. So what people believe and what they do makes no effective difference to their chances of getting to Heaven – even if there is such a place.

Even if there are standards, there is no point in trying to live by them and no reason to feel penitent if we fail.

We have also got used to drawing a strict line between the supernatural and the natural. What is more, we assume that the supernatural is far less likely to be true than the natural. We believe that everything has a natural explanation and that supernatural interventions happen very rarely or not at all. This leaves very little reason to pray for what we need or to give thanks for what we have except that it makes us feel better when we do.

So the idol with which Western civilisation has replaced the living God does not teach us how we ought to live. Belief in Him probably makes no difference to our eternal destiny. Prayer is only useful for the psychological effect it has on the people saying their prayers.

Religion then becomes just one more institution competing for customers in a consumer society. Church is not much more than a branch of the leisure industry and, if people support the Church, they do so because it suits them, rather than from

any sense of the mystery of God. Small wonder that most people regard religion as irrelevant.

The other great modern idol is the opposite of the bland. For fundamentalists and fanatics of all religions, God is the guarantor of their beliefs about the world. They don't humbly seek God's Will. They are sure that they know what God wants and it is the same as what they want. Once you've decided that you are doing the will of an omnipotent and omniscient being, it's no holds barred. People who oppose you are the enemies of God and you can be absolutely ruthless in dealing with them, indeed it is your duty to be absolutely ruthless. You might be a suicide bomber or a grand inquisitor, but you are right to stop at nothing, because you are doing the will of God. Only, of course, such a god is an idol, the invention of his so-called worshippers.

If we put aside all idols, if we adopt the apophatic way of forbearing to speak of that of which we cannot speak, if we approach God with open and humble hearts, we learn that God is love. Whatever is not of love is not of God. God breathes the breath of life into every human being. If we are truly seeking God, we will find Him in other people. There is a compassion with others, a sympathy. We cannot honestly claim to love God if we fail to love all other people made in His image. If we contemplate God with receptive minds, we shall recognise that God is in every created thing, that He made and sustains everything that is. Our attitude to everything in the whole universe is profoundly affected by our proper relationship with God.

We tend to think of faith as the opposite of reason. We speak of belief as though it were a weaker kind of knowing. A creed is something we learn and cling on to, if necessary, in the face of all opposition and evidence to the contrary. But faith is rational. Jesus is the *Λογος*, the divine Wisdom, the divine Reason. The word "believe" originally meant to love, to prize, to hold dear. It is related to the German *liebe* (beloved) and the Latin *libido*. Creed comes from the Latin word *credo*. We render *credo*, I believe, but it comes from *cor do*, which means *I give my heart*. Belief or faith is not a weaker kind of knowing. It is certainly not in opposition to science or rationality. Belief, faith, creed is commitment to God, a loving relationship with Him, which in turn necessarily implies a loving relationship with other people and respect for the whole of creation.

Owe no man anything, says St Paul, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. God is so utterly other that He is beyond our comprehension and the only wise course is to refrain from speaking about that of which we cannot speak, but we can know and love God through Jesus and the Spirit. The Trinity is not a mathematical puzzle, but an unfolding of the

mystery of God to include us in His eternal love. Revelation 3 continues, *Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come into him, and sup with him, and he with me.*

(to be continued).
Roger.

Confirmation 2010

We are not due for a Confirmation service in the parish this year, but I believe that there are several people ready to be confirmed. So I am planning to take our candidates for confirmation on 21st November at Frindsbury. Please let me know if you are interested. Roger.

Correspondence with Santa

A letter arrives at the Sorting Office addressed to Father Christmas. The staff think they had better open it.

Dear Santa,
Can you help, please.? Dad's just lost his job. Mum is very ill. There are six of us kids and it looks like being a miserable Christmas. £100 would really help.
Love, Teddy.

The Sorting Office staff are so sorry for him that they have a whip round and collect £95 which they send as from Santa.

After Christmas, another letter turns up at the Sorting Office.

Dear Santa,
Thank you for the £100 you sent. It saved our Christmas. The only thing is that those thieving rascals at the Sorting Office stole £5!
Love, Teddy.

Dickens Country Protection Society

Planning has become more complicated. The Society was disappointed to see that another form of planning application has been introduced. Applicants can now apply for a *non-material change* and we will only have 14 days to comment. The planners will have to make their decision in the same 14 days. So the opportunity for people to express their views will be restricted. Kay Roots.

[Readers may also have noticed the passage of a new law with respect to major infrastructure projects such as airports, power stations, roads and railways. The effect is to prevent the general public and their elected representatives (MPs and councillors) from influencing the decisions as to whether or not such projects are to go ahead. These decisions will now be made in confidential meetings by ministers and senior officials. Democracy will only come into the process in the discussion of minor details. RIK.]



Seeking Clarity

There seems to be an impression that it is now an offence not to clear up after your dog on virtually any open land – fields and woods, as well as roads, footpaths and parks – irrespective of the wishes of actual landowners. It seemed to me that this was unlikely to be the case, even given the loss of civil liberties and individual freedoms we have had to endure over the last twenty or so years. So I checked with Medway Council and you are not committing an offence if the owner has given permission for you to exercise your dog (or people in general to exercise their dogs) on his land and not to worry about clearing up. This is straightforward. So, I hope you won't allow your dog to foul church land, but if you do, I shan't let the Council prosecute you.

Where I am rather less clear is what is meant by land to which the public has access? Presumably this refers to a legal right of access and I wonder whether the order can therefore be considered to cover private land over which there is only a public right of way, but not a general right of access. If it does not, you cannot presumably be committing an offence under this order if your dog fouls private woodland or farmland, unless the owner has in fact granted a general right of access to the public to the whole area.

Given that the police do not have the resources to patrol the streets where people live and carry out their business, it would in any case seem an odd order of priorities, if the council were sending officers to patrol the open countryside to apprehend people who allow their dogs to do what the wild animals do, especially at a time of austerity when taxes are rising and essential services are being cut. RIK.

From the Registers

Baptisms:

15th November
13th December

Alfie Glenn Kendall
Madison Louise Stanley

Formby Terrace
Marsham Way

Funerals:

11th November
16th November
20th November
10th December
11th December
16th December
21st December
23rd December

Owen Couchman (58)
Albert William George (Jerry) Baker (89)
Yvonne Pearce (81)
Irene Mary Gowers (81)
Martin Peter Cornwell (64)
Harry Leonard Waldock (85)
Millicent Peters (81)
Jean Eves

formerly of Halling
Grove Road
Sundridge Hill
Bradley Road
Pilgrims Road
Bush Road
formerly of North Halling
Pilgrims Road



Halling WI

I think I am writing history. November seems such a long way away. Coming towards the end of 2009, our November meeting correspondence consisted of invitations to Christmas parties, carol services and the new dreadful logo the National Federation has thrust upon us. If the National Federation thinks I am giving up my little silver tree badge and logo, they have got another think coming. Margaret Sullivan was in the chair, and when I arrived, Ann Hayward and our speaker for the evening were up to their eyes in crumpled newspaper. I had got it all wrong, Mr Crook hadn't come to tell us how to make a good cup of tea, (lets face it, you can't go wrong with Yorkshire tea, it never fails) the pair of them were unpacking Mr Crook's collection of cups and saucers, so many and so pretty. He explained how the different shapes told their age or pottery, some even the country they had come from. (Put my Stoke on Trent beakers, way in the shade, You would have needed four of those little cups to fill the huge mugs they have nowadays big enough to bath in) but I don't think many of them had seen a drop of tea, and where on earth did he keep them all? Mr Crook showed us how some of them were almost smashed to smithereens and had been invisibly mended with metal staples, not a drop of Evostick in sight. The competition for the month was a teapot which Mr Crook judged for us. Ann Graves's Covered Wagon teapot won, but I can't recall who won the Flower of the month, could have been me.

On to December, nearly 2010. First we had a lovely Carol Service in All Saints Church, Snodland. It must have been decorated especially for us as it was only 4 Dec, a bit early for a Christmas Tree. We sang the familiar carols but the small District choir sang two carols completely new to me. I heard every word. Well done, girls! We were honoured by the presence of Snodland's newly appointed vicar, the Rev Hugh Broadbent, and Snodland W.I. had arranged the coffee and mince pies. A very pleasant evening.

On to our own Christmas party, once again so much food supplied by our own members, such variety. Margaret Sullivan introduced our guests including Jenny Papadopoulos our W.I. Advisor. After the sumptuous buffet we were entertained by a great singing group from "up north" Gravesend, Biggin Hill or somewhere in that area, who called themselves Front Room, because they started singing in someone's front room. very original, I thought. It was a very happy evening. Thanks must go to the committee, especially Ann Heasman for the table decorations, keeping up the tradition that Evelyn Low had set over the past years. We do miss her.

On to 2010, what does the future hold? Ann Widdecombe at the March Council Meeting. Who knows who we will have for a speaker at Cardiff in June? One thing is certain, we have a speaker from the Mc Millan nurses at our January meeting and the competition is "Your prettiest Christmas Card". Mine are all pretty.

HAPPY NEW YEAR TO YOU ALL

Phyllis.

"The biggest hindrance to Christ's kingdom in this world is not bad men and women, but unworthy Christians. The only thing that will win the world for Christ is Christian lives that live His words and breathe His spirit, For the world can't see Christ; it can only see Christians." Rev'd Stuart Robertson.

Nature Notes November 2009

On the first day of the month, westerly winds drive dark clouds across the sky and heavy rain falls during the morning. Rivers flow in the gutters and spray from a car gives me a soaking as I walk home from church. The rain ceases in the afternoon, enabling me to walk along Pilgrims Road where I observe golden maple leaves, yellow and gold beech leaves, mauve dogwood leaves, pale green rowan leaves and bare branches of an ash tree where cawing rooks congregate before circling in the air. There are glimpses of the sun but dark clouds dominate. I look over towards the river and the beautiful green fields below Bluebell Hill. Golden leaves strew the pavements and verges. The next day is beautiful with clear blue skies and golden sunshine. Heavy showers fall on the third especially at mid day. The rain hammers down on the roof, paths and patio and the droplets bounce up into the air. When the shower ceases and blue sky and sunshine appear, the glistening water drips from the holly leaves and lilac which present a beautiful picture. A great tit then a great spotted woodpecker comes to feed on the nuts while a pair of collared doves enjoys the seeds. Later, I walk to the village, visit a friend and we both walk along Bush Road and back up along the edge of Six acre Wood where the remnants of a yew tree lie sadly on the bank. The noble trunk, however, remains and a few branches survive near the ground. Late afternoon sky is brushed with thin cloud and the setting sun spreads its golden rays across the scene. Three grey days follow then on the 7th I walk across Church Fields beneath golden sunshine and a clear blue sky. Hawthorns have lost their leaves while ivy is full of ripe fruit. Cows are blocking the gate, so I return and walk along the top path of Six-acre Wood. I skirt the field where new crops are growing then make my way along the leaf strewn paths of Mays Wood. The golden leaves light up the woodland floor. As I cross the fields I am aware of fluffy white clouds drifting across from the west. The cows are now grazing away from the gate. The sunlight is glorious and I can feel its warmth as I make my way home. Remembrance Sunday is grey and damp with a chill in the air from westerly winds. More grey days follow. The morning of the 12th is sunny and mild but the

grass is wet from rain and water drops on bare branches of trees on the embankment glisten in the sunlight. I walk through Six acre Wood in the late afternoon and all is silent. Two foxes cross the path ahead of me. I climb up to Mays Wood along a leaf strewn path then cross the fields as the light is fading. Despite grey skies and rain falling throughout the 13th, the scene on the embankment is one of beauty. Some golden maple leaves remain on their twigs and the yellowing lilac leaves are glistening in the rain. Raindrops hang on twigs and sycamore leaves drift down to the earth's floor. Heavy rain falls in the afternoon and once darkness falls the wind begins to rise. The night is stormy and this continues into the next day. The wind strengthens by mid day, rain falls and leaves swirl about the garden. As a result of the high winds the ash trees quickly lose their leaves. I cut the grass for the last time this year. Strong winds are still blowing on the 18th but it is dry and bright. When I open the back door in the late evening for Murphy, I hear the cries of Canada geese by the river. These cries fill the air. It is quite mild on 20th and birds sing in the trees. As I walk along Pilgrims Road I see the beautiful patterns of twigs and branches now that the leaves have fallen. Yarrow and dandelions bloom along a verge. In the garden I watch a bumble bee collecting nectar from a winter pansy. On the afternoon of 23rd, I watch the changing skies and great tits and blue tits feeding. For a while, before the sun sets, I watch salmon pink clouds drifting across a pale sky. A crescent moon hangs in the heavens. The next day I notice that high winds have brought down a dead elm on the embankment. A song thrush used to perch and sing from the elm's branches but now it is no more and I have a view of trees bearing leaves further along the embankment. A brisk westerly wind blows on 27th bringing a chill to the air. A golden sun shines low in the sky. In the late afternoon, as the light is fading, I notice three magpies up in the branches of an ash tree. By the last day of the month the wind has changed direction and veers from the north east it is very cold. The skies are grey and rain falls. Birds come to the garden in large numbers.

Winter the Huntsman by Osbert Sitwell

Through his iron glades
Rides winter the Huntsman
All colour fades
As his horn is heard sighing.

For through the forest
His wild hooves crash and thunder
Till many a mighty branch

Is torn asunder.
And the red Reynard creeps
To his hole near the river,
The copper leaves fall
And the bare trees shiver.
As night creeps from the ground,

Hides each tree from its brother,
And each dying sound
Reveals yet another.

Is it Winter the Huntsman
Who gallops through his iron glades,
Cracking his cruel whip
To the gathering shades?

Nature Notes December 2009

After an overnight frost, the first day of the month is colder than we have experienced for many months. The sun shines brightly from a pale blue sky as I walk along the top leaf strewn path of Six-acre Wood where I hear the solitary call of a great tit. I gaze across the ploughed field to the village which is beautiful in the sunlight. I tread the path along the edge of Mays Wood leading to the fields where horses graze. I feel the warmth of the sun on my face. As I walk through the churchyard I see frost on the grass behind the yew tree where the sun's rays have not penetrated. Clouds drift across the sky in the afternoon and the air is cold. Heavy showers fall the next day then grey skies and northwest winds herald the 3rd. The air "sparkles" on the 4th when I walk to the village along the roads as the woodland paths are too wet. Heavy rain falls on 6th then the sun emerges in the afternoon but only for a short time as the light soon begins to fade. It is mild on 7th and I notice that silver birches still bear autumn leaves. The sun shines brightly the next day when the great spotted woodpecker comes to the garden and later a flurry of great tits and blue tits plus a dunnoek, a robin and two chaffinches.

On 10th golden sunshine beams down from a pale blue sky flecked and brushed with very high cloud. In the afternoon I take the top path of Six-acre Wood where I am aware of the huge roots of trees blown down in the gales of 1987. An ash tree trunk bends at an angle of about 45 degrees over the path while the roots are anchored on the bank. Damp brown leaves are strewn over the paths. I notice a maple still bearing its golden leaves then watch a lone pigeon fly out of the woodland and across the valley. A fox crosses the path in front of me. Later I watch the golden sun dip below the tree line then I walk the paths in Mays Wood. In the fields I see dandelions in flower and lichen covering hawthorn branches. Salmon pink brushed cloud drifts across the pale sky from the west. The river is mirror smooth. The next day I watch blackbirds foraging on the holly berries. The 13th is grey, wet and cold. On 15th the garden is enveloped in white frost. I watch a golden ball of sunlight rise above Bluebell Hill and see mist drifting above the river. As the sun rises, its beams light up the garden where birds come to feed on nuts and fresh seed. Water is readily available as there is little ice on the pond. The frost remains on the grass all day despite the sun's rays. On the morning of 16th I watch the pale blue sky which begins to glow with golden light before the sun rises above the tree line of Bluebell Hill. The grass is white with frost, the trees stand still as statues and birds come to find food. The sun rises filling the garden with its winter light. By mid day grey cloud has covered the sky and the first snow flakes begin to fall. This continues sporadically through the afternoon and into the evening. The next evening, by 11pm the garden, paths and trees on the embankment are white with snow. Silence has fallen, the special silence which snow always brings. The next day breaks to reveal twigs and branches, paths and grass laden with snow. A ribbon of golden light beyond the grey drifting clouds brings beauty to the sky. Patches of very pale blue sky appear and cloud becomes a salmon pink. Birds congregate in the lilac branches then fly to the feeders where nuts and seed and fat balls sustain them.

The sun lights up the world of snow and clouds scud across the sky. In the afternoon, after clearing the steps, I play in the snow with Murphy for he has not been able to go out. As the light fades the trees stand like statues silhouetted against the clear sky. The western sky glows salmon pink. Snow still covers the trees' branches which crackle when the wind blows for the snow has frozen. The next day when the sun rises, water droplets on the branches of the trees glisten. Many branches and twigs remain snow laden. I pour some water on the frozen pond to create drinking places for the birds but it soon freezes again. I replenish the bird food and birds soon come to devour it. A great spotted woodpecker comes in the middle of the morning. Frozen snow which had partly thawed yesterday crackles beneath my feet. The next afternoon when the sun begins to dip down below the trees, it casts a pink glow on the snow covered hills beyond the river. Evening chill comes as the skies are clear and a bright moon shines in the night sky. The 21st heralds the shortest day. On the evening of 22nd, David draws my attention to the front grass, covered in snow and sparkling with jewels of frost, a beautiful sight. A half moon shines brightly in the dark sky. South west winds blow on 23rd and there is a slight thaw. It is still dark when I get up on Christmas Day but eventually the golden sun rises. It is rather grey, however, when I walk to church and it feels cold with dampness in the air. In the afternoon when the sun is shining from a clear pale blue sky, I drive to the river with Murphy. At first we watch a rabbit scuttle along the path then a fox crosses the road ahead of us. The river sparkles in the sunlight which fades as the sun sets below the tree line, leaving the sky with a pink glow. After overnight frost on 27th, some of it lingers where the sun's rays do not penetrate. I walk in glorious sunshine down to the village, along Bush Road and up to Mays Wood. Birds are singing just as they are in the garden, the robin's song being predominant. As I walk up the hill to the wood, I observe a wild rose branch arching over the path and it bears red hips. I see more hips in Church Fields, where I feel the faint warmth of the sun on my face. Two dandelions are in bloom. The churchyard still bears some frost. Birdsong fills the morning of 29th while the 30th hardly seems to get light. The 31st is grey and cold. I walk to the village and am aware of the northeast wind driving clouds across the sky. Birds come to feed when the afternoon brightens for a while. Darkness falls and another month and another year draw to a close.

Before I melt,
Come, look at me!
This lovely icy filigree!
Of a great forest
In one night

The Snowflake Walter de la Mare

I make a wilderness
Of white;
By skyey cold
Of crystals made,
All softly, on

Your finger laid,
I pause, that you
My beauty see.;
Breathe, and I vanish
Instantly.

Elizabeth Summers

News From Cuxton Infants' School

Dear Friends of our School,

We hope you and your families had a good Christmas break. The children have all returned to school having had an enjoyable holiday, and were terribly excited today when we all wrapped up and those that wanted to went out and played on the top field in the snow for a short time. They were even more delighted to spot foxes prints in the snow and followed them to the fences of neighbouring gardens! I hope we do not have to close as on the last day of term the snow took all Medway schools by surprise. Whilst pretty, it does cause upheaval!

We had a busy first couple of terms in school and I can now reflect on the events that have taken place, the children's achievements and our work with the community. The children have been busy supporting the wider community. Having collected tins for Caring hands, the homeless charity and shoes for Africa, we then collected with the help of our parent's scarves, hats and gloves for the children in Serbia. Blythswood friends knitted some teddies in a bag to go with these donations. We collected for The British Legion Poppy Appeal and also for Children in Need. I thank the parents who support these charities and help their children learn about the wider world in which we live and learn that some are not as fortunate as us.

We were delighted to receive a cheque for all schools (we receive a small proportion of this) as we are the school in Medway who have collected the most re-cycling waste. I am extremely pleased with this result, as Mr Hall our last caretaker was a great advocate of re-cycling and Mr Thomas continues with this work. The children were very knowledgeable – year 2 especially about waste materials and re using, repairing and saving the planet, pollution etc! – Although I have to add with a smile, some were very keen to buy a Lamborghini with the money we received! We then had a conversation about amounts of money needed to buy fast cars and fuel etc!

In December we held our Christmas Bazaar, run by the FCS, who continues to work extremely hard in support of both schools. There were a variety of stalls, including bottle tombola, pig racing, play your cards right, Christmas beanies, table top hoopla, raffle, refreshments, and that famous visitor clad in red. My thanks to the FCS for all their hard work. They are now helping us raise money for a stage.

Our Christmas play at the end of the term was Christmas around the World, with our children telling stories of Christmas traditions in different countries. All acted and sang well, and brought smiles and tears to audience's faces (and sighs of relief from staff!)

Christmas is always such a busy time both for you at home, and us in school. Cards, calendars, paper chains, decorations, glitter, glue, parties! - by the end of the term we were ready for a well deserved rest.

During Terms three and four, we host class assemblies; look forward to a pantomime, an African drumming workshop and being part of the Medway schools Music Festival. We also look forward to celebrating Mothers Day with our Mums by holding a Mothers Day assembly for them. It is once again that time of year again when we welcome prospective parents of children starting school in September 2010 and their parents to two open mornings.

We now 'come under the remit' of Bligh Children's Sure Start Centre, and have been involved with various activities, including community cafes, a visit to the science museum for families and advice sessions re health, employment, allowances etc. We now have football for 3-5year olds running on a Friday afternoon! So watch this space!

The Children, staff and I wish you a happy, healthy and prosperous new year and I look forward to writing to you again with details of our activities.

Sandra Jones, Headteacher, Cuxton Infant School.

MAGAZINE ADVERTISEMENTS 2010/2011.

I am now in the process of sorting out the advertisements in the Parish Magazine which will commence in May 2010 and run until April 2011. If you are interested in advertising with us please contact me by the 19th February 2010 at the latest.

Margaret Guest - 01634 240644.

St Michael's Christmas Tree 2009

Usually, this tree stands upon a small, strong table to the right of the proscenium arch. This year, however, the tree was some eleven feet tall and stood on the floor. It had been grown in Cuxton for 23 years in the garden of Miss Pamela Schofield. We wish to thank her very much for this kind donation to the Church's Christmas decorations.

Malcolm Curnow.

Max's Tail Piece.



Back in November Master was writing his piece for *Halling View*. He wrote, *I've just read an article suggesting that maybe we ought to be looking forward to some white Christmases quite soon. Apparently the effects of global warming might be more than counterbalanced by a decrease in the number of sun spots (which apparently make the earth warmer.) I have no idea whether or not this is true and I am not sure that anyone else has. Only time will tell and there isn't much we can do about it either way.*

When he wrote those words, he did not really expect them to come true this year. In fact, if you remember, before all this snow and ice, the weather was unseasonably warm, but very wet! I think I prefer the cold. The mud in the woods is frozen and I don't come in from my walks soaked and filthy. More about that later. First, though, do you think Master is some kind of weather prophet? If so, perhaps he ought to write something for the next *Halling View* about barbecue summers. He might have more luck than that young man from the Meteorological Office last year, but, just as likely, he won't because the weather is pretty unpredictable. So it's certainly not worth worrying about.

I find that there are three main kinds of snow (how ever many words the Inuit have for it). Dry snow and frost are good for rolling in. Wet snow forms snow balls in the long hairs on your legs. You have to comb them out with your teeth when you get home and Master has to throw them outside or in the sink if he doesn't want pools of water on the floor. The unpleasant kind of snow is in between dry and wet. Medium snow forms icy lumps in the soft parts of your paws and they stick in and make you limp. Master had to deice me several times on yesterday's walk.

Snow is very beautiful and therefore a manifestation of the glory of God. At Morning Prayer, Master has been enjoying the bit of the Benedicite which says, *O ye Dewes, and Frosts, bless ye the Lord: praise him and magnify him for ever. O ye Frost and Cold, bless ye the Lord: praise him and magnify him for ever. O ye Ice and Snow, bless ye the Lord: praise him and magnify him for ever.* As Mattins is said roundabout dawn at this time of year, it also seems appropriate that the next verse is, *O ye Nights, and Days, Bless ye the Lord: praise him and magnify him for ever.*

Master thinks that another plus of this cold weather is that it might kill off some of the slugs and snails in the garden, though presumably these terrestrial molluscs might disagree with him.

One of the disadvantages is of course that so many things have closed down or been cancelled. Driving in the snow is dangerous and it is quite right that people have avoided driving as much as possible. For the elderly and infirm, of course, walking in the snow would be unwise. For the rest of us, however, walking in the snow is bracing and we in the Church have not cancelled any of our public worship. Essential services must be maintained at all costs. Please let Master know if you need him to visit you at home.

A different kind of snow. On 2nd February it is traditional to decorate with snow drops. Best wishes, Max.