

Services at St Michael and All Angels Cuxton		
Sunday 2 nd May Easter 5	9.30 Family Communion	Acts 11 vv 1-18 p1105 John 13 vv 31-35 p1082
Sunday 9 th May Easter 6	9.30 Holy Communion	Acts 16 vv 9-15 p1111 John 14 vv 23-29 p1082
Thursday 13 th May Ascension Day	7.30 pm Holy Communion	Acts 1 vv 1-11 p1092 Luke 24 vv 44-53 p1062
Sunday 16 th May Easter 7	8.00 Holy Communion BCP	Readings Sunday after Ascension BCP
	9.30 Holy Communion	Acts 16 vv 16-34 p1112 John 17 vv 20-26 p1085
Sunday 23 rd May Whitsun	9.30 Holy Communion	Acts 2 vv 1-21 p1093 John 14 vv 8-17 p1082
Sunday 30 th May Trinity Sunday	9.30 Holy Communion	Romans 5 vv 1-5 p1132 John 16 vv 12-15 p1084
Sunday 6 th June Trinity 1	9.30 Family Communion	I Kings 17 vv 17-24 p358 Galatians 1 vv 11-24 p1168 Luke 7 vv 11-17 p1042
Services at St John the Baptist Halling & the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling		
Sunday 2 nd May Easter 5	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Daniel 6 vv 1-23 p890 Mark 15 v46 – 16 v8 p1023
	11.00 Holy Communion	Acts 11 vv 1-18 p1105 Revelation 21 vv 1-6 p1249 John 13 vv 31-35 p1082
Sunday 9 th May Easter 6	11.00 Holy Communion	Acts 16 vv 9-15 p1111 John 14 vv 23-29 p1082
	5.30 Evening Prayer Jubilee Hall	Zephaniah 3 vv 14-20 p947 Matthew 28 vv 1-20 p1000
Thursday 13 th May Ascension Day	9.30 Holy Communion	Acts 1 vv 1-11 p1092 Luke 24 vv 44-53 p1062
Sunday 16 th May Easter 7	11.00 SLL & Holy Communion	Ezekiel 36 vv 24-28 p868 Acts 16 vv 16-34 p1112 John 17 vv 20-26 p1085
Sunday 23 rd May Whitsun	11.00 Holy Communion	Genesis 11 vv 1-9 p12 Acts 2 vv 1-21 p1093 Romans 8 vv 14-17 p1134 John 14 vv 8-17 p1082
Sunday 30 th May Trinity Sunday	11.00 Holy Communion & Holy Baptism	Romans 5 vv 1-5 p1132 John 16 vv 12-15 p1084
Sunday 6 th June Trinity 1	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Genesis 8 v15 – 9 v17 p9 Mark 4 vv 1-20 p1005
	11.00 Holy Communion	I Kings 17 vv 17-24 p358 Galatians 1 vv 11-24 p1168 Luke 7 vv 11-17 p1042

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 June Magazine: 14th May 8.30 am Rectory.

Wednesday Communion at 9.30 am at St Michael's		Thursday Communion at 9.30 am at St John's	
5 th May	Acts 15 vv 1-6 John 15 vv 1-8	6 th May	Acts 15 vv 7-21 John 15 vv 9-11
12 th May Rogation Day	Acts 17 v15 – 18 v1 John 16 vv 12-15	13 th May Ascension Day	Acts 1 vv 1-11 p1092 Luke 24 vv 44-53 p1062
19 th May	Acts 20 vv 28-38 John 17 vv 11-19	20 th May	Acts 22 v30 – 23 v11 John 17 vv 20-26
26 th May	I Peter 1 vv 18-25 Mark 10 vv 32-45	27 th May	I Peter 2 vv 2-12 Mark 10 vv 46-52

St John's Draw (March): £5 each to Mrs E Head (1), Mr S Head (4), Mr Thorne (32), Mr Pratt (98) & Miss Crowhurst (158) – drawn by Mrs Stevenson.

Church Hall Draw: £5 to Mrs knight – drawn by Mr Maisey.



If the Christian faith is true, can there be any such thing as unchristian education? Discuss.

How would you like that as an exam question? One obvious answer is, *Yes, obviously there can be unchristian education, education which denies or marginalises Christian faith.* Rather more subtly, you could argue the opposite, that, *since God is the Origin of everything there is, of all knowledge in fact, to know anything is to have some knowledge of God and that therefore no education can be unchristian.*

I don't intend to attempt to answer the question in either of those ways. To me what *education* means is preparation for life. I shall argue that to know God is life and that, therefore, the only education worthy of the name is Christian education. Real life is eternal life and eternal life is to know God and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent.

There is a certain amount of controversy about faith schools. Generally speaking, church and other religious schools have higher standards both of behaviour and of academic success than the schools Tony Blair categorised as *bog standard comprehensives*. By attending church or synagogue, mosque or temple, parents are able to escape the basic state provision and get their children into what they believe to be better schools. The rich do the same thing by "going private". The moderately wealthy buy houses in the catchment areas of good schools. In areas like Kent and Medway, the smart or well-coached get into more highly regarded schools by passing the eleven plus. Critics complain that all these forms of selection entrench privilege, are socially divisive and unfair to average children of parents who don't go to church and can't or won't pay for education. Supporters of selection say that it is a basic freedom to educate your family in accordance with your own beliefs and point out that equality is an impossible dream, given the diversity of human beings.

There is the suggestion that some parents pretend to religious belief in order to get their children into faith schools, just as some parents lie about where they live in order to appear to be in the right catchment area. I've always been a bit of a maverick with reference to church schools. It

seems to me that they should welcome children from unchristian families. Christian families presumably read the Bible to their children, pray with them and bring them to Church. It is the others who need the ethos of a church school in order that they may come to have the faith which their parents lack.

This whole sterile debate depends on the notion that there is such a thing as a standard education, which some schools are better at delivering than others. From this perspective, the real point about faith schools is that they are selective. They get to exclude disruptive pupils; pupils whose parents are not prepared to back the school over issues like attendance, discipline and homework; and pupils who are unlikely to benefit from the curriculum on offer. It is of secondary importance to many parents that church schools provide a bit more religious education than state schools and that assemblies are slightly more specifically Christian. The role of the church school, for many people, is to provide the same kind of education as the state school, but to a higher standard. The religious ethos is a means to that end, rather than a wholly different way of looking at what education really is. The underlying philosophy (as with the Government's proposed new rules for sex education) is that there is a basic secular education, defined in ways on which every rational person can agree, and that religious education is an optional extra for some pupils whose parents belong to that eccentric minority which takes God seriously.

I want to answer the set question much more radically. If the Christian faith is true, I would say, it is impossible to provide education (preparation for life) without taking God into account. God is not only the subject of study in RE or the object of worship in assembly (if assemblies are in fact acts of worship). The study of God (Theology) must underlie every other subject – mathematics, science, music, art, PE, ethics, politics, etc. – because God is the Ground of everything and nothing is intelligible apart from its relation to God. Moreover, if the Christian faith is true, human beings are made in the image of God and the key to understanding humanity is Divinity.

Let me explain what I mean. Pythagoras and the other ancient Greeks, who founded the discipline of Mathematics, saw the wonders of maths as

profound truths about the mystery of religion, which is to say, about the nature of the Universe. Mathematics is dependable, true and reliable because it reflects ultimate Truth, the truths of religion. Separate maths from faith, as most modern mathematicians do, and ask yourself what maths is really doing. Is it an aspect of Truth or is it a mere convention, a self-referential system, which describes nothing beyond or other than itself?

Music is closely linked to Mathematics in the relationship of harmonies. Those early Greeks saw music too as a means by which we can humbly approach the divine. Surely the origins of music are in worship and some of the greatest music ever written must be church music. The secular classical music of C18 and C19 picks up and reinterprets the forms of sacred music. My personal belief is that modern “classical” music lost its popular appeal when it lost the Way. It cut itself off from its roots in faith and became unintelligible to ordinary people who are, after all, made in the image of God.

Much the same could be said about painting and other forms of art. Classically, much art is religious. The proportions of paintings and statues reflect mathematical truths which were traditionally regarded as expressing the very essence of reality. If Christianity is true, the Essence of Reality is God and His essential manifestation is Jesus Christ. Secular art traditionally draws its inspiration from sacred art. Then, in the post-modern period, art cuts itself off from its classical and religious roots and becomes a minority interest, the property of a cultural elite who despise the masses, people who themselves are said to *fail* to understand what it is all about.

This is surely most apparent in architecture. Nearly all the world’s greatest buildings are surely religious and classical secular architecture draws its inspiration from the religious. “Modern” and “Post-modern” architecture offend because there is no underlying sacred philosophy. Traditional churches are ultimately based on the structure of the Temple in Jerusalem which was built in accordance with the vision of Heaven God granted to Moses on Mt Sinai. The threefold pattern is a reflection of the ultimate reality of the way we can only approach God in Jesus Christ. Maybe, this is why so many people instinctively dislike

“modern” churches in which the comfort of the worshippers, audibility and visibility are preferred to an architecture which reflects the mysteries of the faith.

Mathematics and Art are traditionally conceived of as being about Truth and meaning. If the Christian religion is true, Truth and meaning are located in God, revealed in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit. Truth and Beauty subsist in Him and I do not see how the Christian can suppose that any intellectual discipline or artistic endeavour can exist without God. In which case, Theology is indeed the Queen of Sciences.

Coming to what we mean by Science, it has been suggested that the reason why we westerners overtook the much more inventive Chinese, is that the Monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam instinctively look for pattern and order. It is because we believe that the Universe is the creation of a Mind in some way analogous to (though infinitely greater than) ours, that we look for the pattern and order in the Universe which we express as scientific laws.

The Laws of Science are the Laws of God just as the Ten Commandments are. They are both expressions of the Law of Love – the divine nature, which is chiefly made manifest in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Science is awed by what it seeks to understand. Properly conceived, the wonders Science uncovers are reasons to be thankful, manifestations of the power and love of God as Jesus is.

God is Reality and human beings are made in His image. If the Christian faith is true, our real life is eternal life, eternal life in Jesus. This is relevant to the way we treat our bodies – PE, health education and ethics – and to the way we treat other people – ethics, politics, business studies – and to the way we manage God’s world – home economics, gardening, agrarian studies, ecology. If God is real, then He is in everything. If we believe in God, our faith determines how we think, what we say and how we act. God is everything or He is nothing. If the Christian faith is true, the only true education is a Christian education. If an unchristian education can by any stretch of the imagination be regarded as adequate, Christianity is not true.

I usually only write in the parish magazine what I am confident I can defend. Here I have gone out on limbs, flown kites and ridden hobby horses. I’d be glad to receive and, perhaps, to print any responses. Roger.



The Real Issue

One or two people have expressed surprise that I said I would use my position as Rector to protect members of the public whose dogs foul church land from prosecution by Medway Council. Don't I care about fouling? Of course I do. But this isn't about dog fouling; it's about:



- The freedom of children to play conkers or throw snowballs;
- Your right to decide for yourself whether you need to put up scaffolding to paint an upstairs window, rather than having the decision taken for you by some EU bureaucrat;
- Christians having the same right to wear a cross as Moslems have to wear a veil and Sikhs a turban;
- Pancake races without a health and safety officer present to tell the participants, *Walk, don't run*;
- Freedom to hold a singsong in a pub, club or old folks' home without a licence from the local authority;
- Being able to offer your mate's kids a lift to football practise without first being CRB checked;
- The ability of a greengrocer to sell curved bananas by the pound, if that's what his customers want, rather than straight ones by the kilogramme;
- The presumption that you can do what you want with what is yours unless you are harming someone else;
- Retaining the right to ride a bike without wearing a helmet and other innocent pleasures which bossy bureaucrats and "campaigners" would like to take from us.

In short it is not so much about dog fouling as about the kind of society we want to live in. Do we want to live in a country where everything we do is regulated and we are kept under constant official surveillance to ensure that we comply with the regulations? Or do we want to live in a free country in which we can exercise choice and personal responsibility? If we choose to live in a free country we have to accept that some people will do some things we don't like. But that seems to me to be far better than living lives entirely limited and controlled by the state, in which case life would be scarcely worth living at all. Roger.

Cuxton and Halling Parish Magazine

Apologies to those who may have received some issues late or not at all this year. We are very short of people to deliver the magazine and would be grateful for any volunteers for this straightforward job once a month. I am now doing two rounds! If you can help, please let Margaret Guest know (240644) or me.

Doing two rounds, I notice some interesting things about the way the magazine is distributed. There seems to be quite an element of chance about who becomes a regular subscriber. We hope these magazines are interesting and informative and would like to increase the circulation. If you are someone who delivers the magazine, perhaps you can get some new subscribers on your road. If you take and enjoy the magazine, suggest taking it to your friends. If you see the magazine occasionally and enjoy it, become a regular subscriber. There are 11 issues each year at 25p each or £2.50 for the eleven. Please contact Margaret for extra subscriptions. They are a good read and the profits from the magazine help the church.

Back in the 1930s, the Halling magazine was 2d (1.2p) or 2/= (10p) for 12. Not only was there no concession for a whole year's subscription, but the vicar suggested that subscribers might like to donate 2/6 (12.5p)! I believe the charge for a stamp for a postcard was then one halfpenny which was ¼ price of the magazine. So, if we had put the magazine up in the same proportion as the postal service, we should now be charging £1 per issue, £11 per annum or inviting a donation of £13! Roger.

Church publishes prayers for voters ahead of the General Election. The Church of England has published prayers to help voters as they consider their options in the forthcoming General Election. The prayers remind voters that they can make a difference, ask that the concerns of all may be heard and seek protection from despair and cynicism.

Lord, we give thanks for the privileges and responsibilities of living in a democratic society. Give us wisdom to play our part at election time, that, through the exercise of each vote, your Kingdom may come closer. Protect us from the sins of despair and cynicism, guard us against the idols of false utopias and strengthen us to make politics a noble calling that serves the common good of all. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.

<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/generalelection/>.

From the Registers

Baptisms:

21 st March	Hazel Eleanor Baker	Poplicans Road
28 th March	Blake Anthony Simpson	Low Meadow

Weddings:

6 th March	Gavin Whyman & Hayley Reynolds	Cuxton
27 th March	Kris Vedat & Kelly Cheeseman	Halling
10 th April	Matthew Roche & Jodee Lofthouse	Cuxton

Funerals:

15 th February	Thomas Edward McSweeney (78)	Low Meadow
17 th February	Sonya Fairbairn (77)	Lambarde Close
25 th February	Robert Thomas Parker (79)	Nine Acres Road
1 st March	William Philip Baxter (48)	Strood
22 nd March	(Ralph Henry) Victor Still (95)	Vicarage Close
24 th March	Leonard George Duke (65)	May Street
1 st April	Elsie May Burrows (85)	Bush Road

Please accept my apologies for the omission of register entries from the April magazine. Roger.



Halling WI

The Golden Triangle mystery has been solved at our March meeting. Mr G Harris's talk "The Golden Triangle". What was it going to be all about? A posh geometry lesson, or how to play primitive musical instruments, none of those. Mr Harris was going to talk about three Indian cities, New Delhi, Jaipur, and Agra, all around 50 miles apart from each other in the far North West of the Indian continent. He started our "tour" in New Delhi with a slide of a market, "just like Rochester on a Saturday morning" so he said, When had he ever seen Rochester looking like that? The slide was so vivid you could almost smell the place, curry makers, tut-tuts, bicycle rickshaws and scruffy sacred cows mooning among the scruffy market stalls and not a dog bin in sight. We were then "taken" to some very upmarket palaces and richly adorned mosques, lovely sculpture, painting and carvings with semi precious stones encrusted in between the golden sandstone, made us feel as if we would love to visit. Next slide, the most awful rubbish tips covered in dogs, donkeys, vultures and poor little children, all very undernourished, scavenging to see what they could find among the filth. Imagine having your hair cut sitting on the kerb in Maidstone High street, and most of the time the orphans and beggars sleep by the side of the main roads with just an old sack to keep them warm. We moved on to Jaipur, the pink city. If

you live there you have to paint your house pink, if you don't, the council or the powers that be will paint it for you and send you the bill. Here also were rich palaces, albeit a bit run down, a good scrub down would have improved them, but inside, hundreds of prayer mats and ceilings covered in hundreds of tiny shiny mirrors, sparkling like diamonds (They do like looking at themselves in India and the women are beautiful.) Jaipur did have an elephant taxi service to take you to the palaces in the hills. On to Agra, famous for the Taj Ma Hal, one of the wonders of the modern world, immaculate in the sunshine, surrounded by water. It would make a lovely hotel, much more useful than a tomb. The chap who had it built for his wife's tomb, had every intension to build an exact replica in black marble for his own last resting place, but the money ran out. So he is in the Taj along side his wife. I asked Mr Harris who kept the place in such good condition. Some years ago it was in a pretty run down state, but the then British Ambassador of the time, a Lord Curzon, paid to have it restored. It is now looked after by the Indian Government. It had been a very enlightening talk of part of that great country, but much too near the hot spot of Pakistan for any of us to visit. Although Mr Harris wanted to get away, he did judge our competitions. Ann Heaseman's piece of Mimosa won the Flower of the Month. We only had two. Mr Harris was quite impressed with what we had

done with the eggs. Betty had used a Chocolate one What a good idea! Margaret Sutherland turned hers into a Scotsman complete with bagpipes. Ann Graves had put a piece of her lawn in the top of hers, a real punk rocker, but Ann Heaseman won with her little white egg decorated with tiny butterflies. After our refreshments we had to have our business meeting (I personally don't like "back to front" meetings). I read the previous month's minutes in the absence of our secretary which Margaret signed as a true record, We had one or two pieces of correspondence, an invite to Cuxton's party, and a notice of a

forthcoming outing. Our finances are stable, but we could only have three tickets for the Polish Evening as it was well over subscribed. Betty and I decided to drop out.

Next month's speaker, Mr Dennis Chambers on "Ghosts of Kent", could be a bit spooky but at least the nights will be lighter. The competition, an Easter Bonnet, large or small, with a bird or two, a robin or a rooster (even a Barbie doll, who knows? Lets see what you can do this month.

Phyllis.

THE DIOCESAN GATHERING

You are invited to join us on

Saturday, 8th May 2010 (11am-3.15pm*)

at: Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School

(Maidstone Road, Rochester, ME1 3EL)

Join us for a day hosted by Bishop Brian, as we think about loaves and fishes – or how we can turn a little into a lot.

There will be workshops on offer to inspire you to think about how you can use the loaves and fishes in your church.

To book a place please ring 01634 560000, or email suzanne.rogers@rochester.anglican.org

** Tea/coffee will be available from 10.30am;*

the first session starts at 11.00am.

Please bring a packed lunch

Look out for further details in Rochester Link

The Answer to our Financial Problems

Barry Langford, our speaker from Mission Aviation Fellowship, told me that last year they identified a £700,000 deficit in their finances. They asked all their members to pray and £800,000 came in in donations. So, are we going about our finances the wrong way round?

I strongly suspect that we do get things entirely the wrong way round in the C of E, behaving as though the Church were a human organisation like a small business, a voluntary society, a charity, a local authority or a government agency. In fact, of course, the Church is better understood as the Body of Christ, the Bride, the Vine or the Temple of the Holy Spirit. The difficulties we experience in PCC meetings probably owe much to this fundamental misunderstanding.

Yes we do have to do practical things to raise money, clean floors, mend roofs, etc., but these are not what we are here for. The Church exists to glorify God, to proclaim the Good News to the world, to build up her members into Christ-like people and to act as light, leaven and salt to transform the kingdoms of this world into the Kingdom of our God and His Christ. If we are prayerfully doing these things, God will, I am sure, supply what we need (time, money, talents). We and our efforts may indeed be the answers to our own prayers, but if our church life is based on fund-raising, buildings and parish politics, we will never have enough resources to do more than survive, if that. See Haggai 1. It was only when the Jews stopped worrying about the practical, worldly things and devoted themselves unreservedly to the service of God that, paradoxically, they would have a sufficiency of worldly things. Roger.

The Church at the Fun Day

As Halling Fun Day will fall on a Sunday this year, there is a suggestion that there could be an open air service on the field after the fête and before the concert. Watch this space!

September Celebrations

Have you ever celebrated something special at St Michael's? Maybe you were married here or had your children christened. Maybe there is something else special which has happened in your life here. Perhaps you have photographs or other artefacts to remind you of these occasions. 26th September is *Back to Church Sunday*. 26th September is also the date of the Festal Evensong to celebrate the fact that John Bogg has been our organist and choirmaster for 20 years. 29th is Michaelmas. 3rd October is Harvest Festival.

We want to make this week a celebration of what St Michael's means to you and we'd be glad of anything you are prepared to lend to us for an exhibition in the church and hall that week. There will definitely be a Patronal Festival Eucharist on the Wednesday and a Harvest Supper on the Sunday. What else will happen that week depends on the ideas you have. So please note these dates in your diaries, turn out any old snaps or whatever and put on your thinking caps for ideas for a celebration.

If this goes as well as it should, we'll do something similar at Halling in 2011.

Confirmation 2010

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



Dickens' Country Protection Society

Thanks to all who attended the AGM at which some useful discussion took place concerning items the Society is currently pursuing. Officers and 5 committee members were re-elected, leaving 1 vacancy on the committee.

CUXTON FLOWER ARRANGERS

On a cold and snowy January evening in 1969 the first committee meeting of the Cuxton Floral Art Club took place. Previously a branch of Cuxton Horticultural Club, they had decided to become affiliated to the Kent branch of the National Association of Flower Arrangement Societies, NAFAS. The club grew and at its zenith we had as many as thirty to forty members. Meeting twice a month, many events were organised. We had practical evenings where members could practice their art and demonstrations so members could get new ideas. We became more skilled and able to enter competitions put on by our club and other clubs in the area. Church flower festivals were very enjoyable; there are few places as grand as a church where you can let your imagination fly. With so many friends from other clubs involved they also became social events. We have many happy memories, some funny ones and some poignant. Flowers, a friendly face, the chance to chat and a cup of tea has helped many shattered person through a difficult time. However all good things come to an end. Society changes, people are busy, and do other things to do in their leisure. Our membership has dwindled and sadly Cuxton Flower Arrangers will be closing at the end of July. We would to say thank you to Cuxton for having us for the last forty one years.

Several members of CFA were also church flower arrangers and there was always cross-pollination with shared skills and inspirations. We really appreciated the flower festivals put on in the parish church, which, in my opinion, excelled for sheer exuberance any others I have seen in village churches anywhere. I'm sure ex CFA members will still be very welcome to display their talents at flower arranging in the church. Please contact Margaret. Roger.

Quizzes in the Church Hall

May 29th (for CMS mission partner Andrew Daunton-Feare) & September 11th (for Christian Aid) at 7.30 pm. Teams 6-8. £6 entry includes food but not drink. Please contact Rector for details and bookings.

Nature Notes March 2010

The 1st is a beautiful day of blue skies and golden sunshine. We drive to Blue water and along the way I see delicate catkins swaying in the breeze. The warm sunshine causes the crocuses in the garden to open their petals to the sky. The next day is beautiful and there is hardly a cloud in the sky. In the morning I walk up the path to Church Fields where a few red hips are still on the wild rose bushes. The river sparkles and the warmth of the sun is to be felt on my face. Great tits call from the woodland. I take the path, soft with mud, up into Mays Wood and along to the top of Dean Valley. There are no Spring flowers but bluebell plants are emerging through the brown leaves of the woodland floor. The sun lights up the valley where sheep are grazing and the trees, the branches of which are coated in green lichen, appear to be in green bud. Catkins hang in their yellow beauty from hazel twigs and birdsong fills the air. I take the lower path along Purty Shaw, the other side of which is furrowed and full of water, climb the hill and return through Six acre Wood and the churchyard. The 3rd is rather grey and a cold north east wind is blowing. Eventually there is some pale sunshine but it brings no warmth. In the middle of the afternoon I drive Murphy to the river which is high with choppy small waves. The grassy tussocks have recently been covered with water and a swan has settled on one of them and is preening its feathers the wind is quite strong and drives into our faces as we walk along the river path. Grey clouds scud across the sky where a pale sun shines. On the morning of 5th frost lies on the grass as a golden sun rises. In the afternoon a pheasant struts around the garden. It flies away for a while before returning along with two grey squirrels which are then chased by Murphy. They all beat a hasty retreat. Bitter winds continue to blow and on 8th we awake to another frost. On 10th I watch a dunnoek gathering nesting from between the cracks of the paving stones on the patio. The pheasants return. The cold, grey weather continues as Murphy and I walk by the river on 11th. Gulls circle overhead calling as they fly. There are no signs of wild flowers on the banks as there were this time last year. There is some sunshine during the afternoon of 12th but dark clouds bring heavy showers. The 13th is a pleasant day when I walk with a friend to Bush, Dean Valley, Mays Wood, North Wood and round the paths back to Bush Road. Pussy willow and catkins herald Spring, while bare trees, the trunks of which are coated in green, stand tall and still against the sky. I listen to the great tit's call and drink in the silence of the beautiful countryside. Along a verge in Bush Road I

notice a clump of dog violets and speedwell, the petals of which are partly closed. The sun shines warmly the next day when the pheasants pay their daily visits. The warm weather brings a peacock butterfly to the garden on 15th. The 17th is warm with the sun shining from a hazy blue sky. We walk by the river where black he month draws to a close. headed gulls strut on the mud flats. The water ripples and sparkles in the sunlight but there are still no sign of flowers. On the 19th I release a queen wasp which has been hibernating behind the window blind in the bathroom. On 21st I walk up the path to Six-acre Wood where elders have unfurled their leaves and the air is full of birdsong. I watch two blackbirds as they fly across Six-acre field then climb the hill and walk round the edge of Mays Wood where spindle berry trees are waiting to burst into leaf. Bluebell plants have emerged, dog's mercury is in flower and bright green moss lies along fallen tree trunks and at the foot of trees. As I walk along the paths in Church Fields, I notice wet grass sparkling in the sunlight and dandelions bloom there. Spring is really here now and my heart is refreshed, my spirits lifted. The next day, in the garden, I watch a wood pigeon and a collared dove pecking at the seed on the edge of the wall. The pigeon then looks around, cocking its head from side to side then continues its pecking. Lilac buds wait to burst as the sun lights up the garden. Fog greets the morning of 23rd. It eventually clears and for a while the skies brighten but grey skies soon return. A magpie comes for some bread. Grey clouds persist then rain falls in the afternoon of 25th. The gutters become small rivers. A hen pheasant struts round the garden then hops onto the flower pots before dropping down onto the grass. The 27th is bright with sunshine and variable cloud. I walk through the churchyard to Six-acre Wood. Primroses, celandines and daisies bloom in the grass and daffodils bloom on the bank of the wood. I listen to birdsong which fills the air. Hawthorn is in first leaf and in Mays Wood I see white violets, celandines and a few wood anemones. As I cross Church Fields I see chickweed and dandelions. The hawthorns are only in bud because of their exposure to the wind. Showers fall in the afternoon. A handsome cock pheasant struts in the garden and is joined by greenfinches on 29th. At Bluewater the next day I see beautiful weeping willows while other trees remain bare. Winter returns on 31st for cold north winds blow. Plenty of birds come to the garden for food, especially the greenfinches. The skies remain grey all day as the month draws to a close. Elizabeth Summers.

"When" by Glyndwr Iwan

When golden sun shafts split the sky,
And clouds of birds go raining by;
When bearded boughs are shaven clean,
And buds of hawthorn lather green;
And lambs bob up in seas of grass;
When dawn breaks out-a rash of light-

And feverish larks infect the night;
When drops of fresh-brewed water fall,
And thirsty meadows drink them all;
When Life wakes, wide-eyed, after rest,
Of all the seasons –that's the best!



Cuxton WI

There were only 26 members present on this evening. The rest were either on holiday or getting ready for their Easter break. We learned that we had been awarded £200 from Cuxton Parish Council which in these hard times is very generous. We are going to put the money towards a small PA system for speakers etc. Aging is hitting us all with speakers needing aids and our members having a job always to hear, so any help will be very welcome. Our own finances are far from sound as poor interest rates hit us all. Pat Reynolds has kindly offered to hold a coffee morning on 29 April at 45 Ladywood Road at 11 am and this should raise some extra funds. There is also a bring and buy stall so do come along and join us. £1 entry covers coffee etc.

A report of the Annual Conference at Tunbridge Wells was read. It was a most enjoyable day with two excellent speakers. Mrs Jean Haynes was a lady bailiff and told us of her life among the criminal world. She was opposed by many men who felt that she was too slight for her role as a bailiff but she won through, helped by her band of

"Boys" as she calls them. These I am sure are quite hefty men who can supply her with anything she needs from JCBs to Jumbo jet pilots. Our afternoon speaker was the Rt Hon. Ann Widdecombe MP. She told us of her life as a MP, author and TV personality. Both ladies were excellent and had us laughing throughout their talks - just what we needed after this awful winter.

Despite or maybe because of the recession our Trading stall did very well last month and anyone who has some good quality items may like to bring them in and make yourself a little money and help the WI at the same time. Next month will see us have our Annual Resolutions meeting combined with the AGM - so lots of business. But it gets it all over in one meeting and leaves us with good speakers etc for the rest of the year. Only one resolution this year but a very good one: namely - Clear and accurate labelling of food from source to mouth! Will be interesting to see what impact the combined forces of the WI have as they certainly seem to have a powerful voice. So we shall wish them good luck as we enjoy some cheese and wine at the end of the evening. Sheila.

My Trip To Edinburgh

Is Religion Natural?

I had been looking forward to spending a few days in Edinburgh after Easter with my friends from the Science and Religion Forum. As well as hearing the speakers and taking part in the debate on this interesting subject, I wanted to see the sights of a city I had heard much about, but never visited.

Unfortunately, it all started with a disappointment. I collapsed the first evening in a pool of blood and teeth and spent the next 20 hrs in the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. I am telling people I got into a drunken fight because that sounds a lot better than the truth - low blood pressure, probably brought on by tiredness. How can a man get tired working a one day week unless he is an absolute wimp? Investigations suggest I have a slightly odd shaped heart and an oddity in my eeg. This possibly explains my inability to see the point of chick flicks, but is probably not dangerous. A couple of days after I came out of hospital, I ascended Arthur's Seat (>800 feet). So there can't be much wrong!

Back to the Conference. Even scientists who don't believe in God are coming to the conclusion that religion is natural for human beings. As I've mentioned before, all the evidence, from prehistoric times to the present day, suggests that at least since people started leaving records we can interpret (art, sculpture, burial customs, etc., and {very much later} writing) almost every human culture has been religious - in the sense that people have believed in God or gods, an afterlife, the supernatural and the sort of *cause and effect* relationships, which imply that the Universe functions under the direction of a supernatural mind (or minds?) in some sense like our own.

Further research shows that quite young children very quickly latch on to religious ideas. They recognise *cause and effect*. They look for meaning. They keep asking, *Why? Why? Why?* and will accept God as an ultimate explanation. They recognise a distinction between bodies and minds or souls. They have little trouble believing in an afterlife. Either human beings are born with these basic concepts or the potential to develop them, or we very quickly learn them from the culture in which we are brought up. If there is no God, you have to explain these facts either by suggesting that religious people are for some reason better adapted to survive and are therefore the fittest selected by Evolution or else that religion is some sort of evolutionary by-product. (When Russian scientists domesticated foxes by breeding them for more dog-like dispositions, their fur became more like dog hair. There is an accidental genetic link between wild/tame and fur/hair in the dog family and there may be similar accidental links in the human family between successful/religious and less successful/atheist!.)

For religious people, it seems obvious that human beings are naturally religious because God made us in His image to enjoy eternal life in the eternity of His love. Technically, you could speak about the universality of conscience or prevenient grace. What it all means, put simply, is that it is natural for us to know God. We get religion very wrong, however. Some of us are atheists or agnostics. Some of us engage in persecution, religious wars or suicide bombing. Some of us are religious bigots. Human nature rebels against God. We are naturally religious, but we need God to show us the Way. Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Only through faith in Him can we become what we are meant to be.

Finally, a psychologist present pointed out that the transmission of religious ideas to other people and to our children would depend on taking part in the rites and ceremonies of religion. I think he was right. When I was a young man, people used to say *You can be a Christian without going to Church*. I talk to people of that generation who hardly ever darken our doors and am delighted to find that their faith still means much to them. They have, however, failed to pass the faith on and their children and grandchildren, who never participated regularly in the services of the Church, look to me increasingly like a lost generation. It makes you think. Roger.