

Services at St John the Baptist Halling & the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling			
31 st January Candlemas Sunday	11.00 Holy Communion	Malachi 3 vv 1-5 p961 Hebrews 2 vv 14-18 p1202 Luke 2 vv 22-40 p1028	
7 th February Quinquagesima	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Exodus 3 vv 1-6 p59 John 12 vv 27-36 p1080	
	11.00 Holy Communion	Exodus 34 vv 29-35 p94 II Corinthians 3 v12 – 4 v2 p1160 Luke 9 vv 28-36 p1040	
10 th February Ash Wednesday	9.30 Holy Communion	Joel 2 vv 1-17 p912 Matthew 6 vv 1-21 p970	
14 th February Lent 1	11.00 Holy Communion & Holy Baptism	Deuteronomy 26 vv 1-11 p203 Romans 10 vv 8-13 p1137 Luke 4 vv 1-13 p1030	
	5.30 Evening Prayer Jubilee Hall	Jonah 3 vv 1-10 p928 Luke 18 vv 9-14 p1052	
21 st February Lent 2	11.00 Holy Communion & Stop! Look! Listen!	Genesis 15 vv 1-18 p15 Philippians 3 v17 – 4 v1 p1180 Luke 13 vv 31-35 p1047	
28 th February Lent 3	11.00 Holy Communion	Isaiah 55 vv 1-9 p742 I Corinthians 10 vv 1-13 p1151 Luke 13 vv 1-9 p1046	
6 th March Lent 4 Mothering Sunday	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	II Timothy 4 vv 1-18 p1203 John 11 vv 17-44 p1078	
	11.00 Holy Communion	Joshua 5 vv 9-12 p219 Luke 15 vv 1 – 31 p1048	
Services at St Michael & All Angels Cuxton			
31 st January Candlemas Sunday	9.30 Holy Communion	Malachi 3 vv 1-5 p961 Hebrews 2 vv 14-18 p1202 Luke 2 vv 22-40 p1028	
7 th February Quinquagesima	9.30 Family Communion	Exodus 34 vv 29-35 p94 II Corinthians 3 v12 – 4 v2 p1160 Luke 9 vv 28-36 p1040	
10 th February Ash Wednesday	7.30 pm Holy Communion	Isaiah 58 vv 1-12 p744 II Corinthians 5 v20 – 6 v10 p1160 John 8 vv 1-11 p1073	
14 th February Lent 1	9.30 Holy Communion	Deuteronomy 26 vv 1-11 p203 Romans 10 vv 8-13 p1137 Luke 4 vv 1-13 p1030	
21 st February Lent 2	8.00 Holy Communion	Epistle & Gospel BCP Lent 2	
	9.30 Holy Communion	Genesis 15 vv 1-18 p15 Philippians 3 v17 – 4 v1 p1180 Luke 13 vv 31-35 p1047	
28 th February Lent 3	9.30 Holy Communion	Isaiah 55 vv 1-9 p742 I Corinthians 10 vv 1-13 p1151 Luke 13 vv 1-9 p1046	
6 th March Lent 4 Mothering Sunday	9.30 Family Communion	Joshua 5 vv 9-12 p219 Luke 15 vv 1-31 p1048	
Holy Communion Wednesdays 9.30 am St Michael's		Holy Communion Thursdays 9.30 am St John's	
3 rd February	II Samuel 24 vv 2-17 Mark 6 vv 1-6	4 th February	I Kings 2 vv 1-12 Mark 6 vv 7-13
Thursday 11 th February	Deuteronomy 30 vv 15-20 Luke 9 vv 22-25	Wednesday 10 th February Ash Wednesday	Joel 2 vv 1-17 Matthew 6 vv 1-21
17 th February Ember Day	Jonah 3 vv 1-10 Luke 1 vv 29-32	18 th February	Isaiah 55 vv 6-9 Matthew 7 vv 7-12
24 th February	Jeremiah 18 vv 18-20 Matthew 20 vv 17-28	25 th February	Jeremiah 17 vv 5-10 Luke 16 vv 19-31
2 nd March	Deuteronomy 4 vv 1-9 Matthew 5 vv 17-19	3 rd March	Jeremiah 7 vv 23-28 Luke 11 vv 14-23

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Christmas in Halling

I think I can just about get away with writing one more Christmas message as the Christmas season doesn't finish till 2nd February – Candlemas. On Advent 3 last year, I was reminiscing in my

sermons about the times when in Cuxton (1987, I think) and in my previous parish in Ramsgate (probably 1986) that we performed the nativity play as though the events were taking place in our own time, in our own locality. The point about this is that we really must not just think of Christmas as just a wonderful story about things that happened a long time ago, a long way away. It is not even enough to regard Christmas as inspirational, to help us lead better lives today. The Christmas story is for every time and for every place. More than inspirational, the birth of Jesus is transformational. The baby born in the manger transforms all time and all space, even eternity itself. Jesus quite literally makes all the difference. So it is vital that we recognise Him and His love in our own time and in our own place. Not just what difference Jesus made to Mary and Joseph and the wise men and the shepherds, what difference Jesus makes to you and to me, here and now, today in Ramsgate, Cuxton or Halling. Jesus makes all the difference because *So God loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

Inevitably, I was challenged to do for Halling what I had done for Ramsgate and Cuxton and to tell the Christmas story for us today. At least I resisted the temptation to do what I did at Ramsgate when I put it into verse. After the wise men had been redirected by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, I wrote:

So, off they went to Ramsgate; they drove down
Thanet Way;
And as they passed through Faversham, a star lit
up Herne Bay.

I don't think I'll make poet laureate, but here's my effort for the 2015 Halling Carol Service. I hope you can do better.

Mary lived in a bedsit in Sidcup. She hadn't much, but she was engaged to a self-employed craftsman, called Joseph and that made her very

happy, because they were very much in love. Joseph still lived with his parents and they couldn't get married yet because they couldn't afford a deposit for a mortgage, private house rentals were beyond their means and the waiting list for social housing was so long that they had given up hope.

One day, Mary was sitting alone in her bedsit. She was excited about the wedding, but worried about how they would make ends meet. On the TV news, there were people with problems far worse than theirs – wars and terrorism, dreadful crimes being committed, natural disasters, refugees, millions of people ground down by chronic poverty, disease and ignorance. It sometimes shook Mary's faith in God.

Suddenly, an angel appeared. God had heard the cry of the world. He was going to send His Son to be the Redeemer – to proclaim the Kingdom of God, to judge the world, to warn the wicked of the inescapable consequences of their wickedness and to promise salvation to all those who called on the Name of the Lord. Mary was to be the mother of this baby.

Joseph was deeply disappointed to discover that his young fiancée was expecting a baby, but the angel appeared to him too and explained that this child would be the Saviour, God with us. Mary's landlord was less easily satisfied. He didn't want a baby in the house. He didn't want an unmarried mother who would probably be on benefits and might not pay the rent. He gave Mary notice to quit.

But where could they go? They had very little money. Their only transport was a clapped out 15 year old Citroen Xsara. Yet this baby they were going to have was so special. Joseph said, "How about Halling?" He'd never been there, but it wasn't too far. "In the old days," he said, "it was an important place with a bishop's palace and many important people came there and stayed." His own ancestors had been something to do with the palace and maybe they might find that he still had family there. Perhaps they would help them.

So, on December 24th, thrown out by Mary's landlord because the baby was almost due, they packed all their belongings in the old Xsara and set off down the M20 with just about enough

petrol to make the journey. Unfortunately, owing to Christmas refugees blocking the Channel Tunnel, Operation Stack was in force. They crawled down the motorway, the fuel gauge creeping towards empty, the engine getting hotter and hotter and making alarming noises, until Mary suddenly started to feel very queasy. Terrified, Joseph turned off the motorway and looked at his map. "The Black Boy Inn", he saw at Upper Halling. "They'll put us up for the night," he said and set off round Ladds Lane. But, when they got there, there was no more inn. It was now a private house. The Xsara made a clunking sound in the car park and then a sigh and the engine stopped and refused to go again. They tried knocking on doors all down the Street. With double-glazing and TVs blaring, most people didn't even hear them. Those people who did hear were afraid to open up to strangers after dark. Joseph called 999 on his mobile, but there were long delays because it was, after all, Christmas Eve. At last, they collapsed in a dry barn and Mary gave birth, Joseph doing his best as stand in midwife.

Over at Townsend Hook at Snodland, there were a few men working the night shift, fed up because they alone had to work Christmas. Suddenly, an angel appeared to them and told them that the Saviour of the world had been born and they could go and see Him in a barn in Upper Halling. They could hardly believe it, but, all of a sudden, the whole sky was filled with angels singing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" – the very same words you can find inscribed behind the altar in both Cuxton and Halling churches! So they thought they had better leave their papermaking machines and go and see what the angel had told them about. They were just in time to join the ambulance crew in worshipping the new born Son of God.

Meanwhile, in New York in the United Nations building, which overlooks the East River, there was a colloquium going on, a symposium, a gathering of top politicians, Nobel prize winning

scientists, theologians, senior military personnel and police, philosophers and artists, to discuss the insoluble problems of the world and to find solutions for them. Suddenly, they saw a new, bright star shining above the East River. Its sheer beauty conveyed hope and promise. They were irresistibly drawn to follow it. Impelled by they knew not what, they came to London and 10, Downing Street. Did David Cameron have the answer to all the world's troubles? "No idea," he said, but he summoned all the wise men from MI5 and MI6 and they said that there was a lot of internet activity around a supposedly miraculous event in Halling. "Try Halling," he said, "And don't fail to report back to me if you find anyone at risk of being radicalised."

So off they went to Halling; they caught the high speed train;

And as they passed through Ebbsfleet, they saw the star again!

[Sorry, couldn't resist.] When they arrived at Upper Halling, they found the young child, with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold and frankincense and myrrh. The Saviour is to be worshipped as our King and we must offer Him everything we have, our very selves in His service. The Saviour is our God and the Way in Whom alone we may come to God and love Him and worship Him and live in Him in all eternity. The Saviour is the One Who loves us so much that He condescends to suffer and to die for our salvation, setting us an example that we must take up our cross and follow Him, giving up the whole world in order that we might not lose our own souls.

I'm sure you can do better than that to imagine Jesus born here and today and how you would respond. So over to you. I'd like to hear your ideas, if you're willing to share them. Maybe some could be published in this magazine. Roger.

St John's Draw November: £25 to Mrs Potter (120), £10 each to Mrs Botten (160) & Mr Tower (146) – drawn by Mr Maxwell.

St John's Draw December: £5 each Mr Head (8), Mrs Chidwick (30), Mrs Acott (48) & Miss Mitchell (73) – drawn by Mrs Barrow.

St Michael's Draw (November): £10 each Mrs Bogg, Mr & Mrs and Mrs Cheesmer – drawn by Mrs Haselden.

St Michael's Draw (December): £20 each Mr Ellwood, Mrs Pitt £20 & Mr Hills plus the Christmas Bumper. Mr Gracey £40 – drawn by Mrs Beaney.

Motor Yacht *Sylvia* (now called *Wendy Ken*)

The harbour master at Ramsgate saw the horrors and the heroism of Dunkirk reflected in the ships that came home - in their crew and their passengers. He never forgot the way the *Sylvia* returned, loaded with soldiers, many of them wounded. She had been machine-gunned, set on fire and on the port side above the waterline was a hole which the soldiers had plugged with their tunics to keep the water out. Even so, they had to take turns on the pump all the way back.

He congratulated the skipper who promptly announced that he was going back. The harbour master begged him not to, but the sailor looked him straight in the eyes and said: "I have seen the sea red with human blood, severed arms and legs, a sight I shall never forget. The Lord is with us, the sea is calm and if she goes down, I shall go down with her." So he went.



The following day, the harbour master recalled, "there was a lot of noise and a hooter blowing as ships from Dunkirk were waiting to unload. The noise came from the *Sylvia*, full of troops. We rushed her in to get the weight off her, as the water was right up to her engine. Had she gone another mile or had the sea been rough, she would have sunk. When she was moored, the skipper walked out of what was left of her wheelhouse and I never saw him again."

But he did see the *Sylvia* return, years later, fully restored and rushed out to tell her new owner the story and to thank him for saving her. Then the harbour master's story was proudly entered into the log. Latterly, she has been berthed at Port Medway, but she left Cuxton at the end of 2015.

Jubilee Hall Hire: Claire Stotesbury 01634 244289, claire-mad@hotmail.co.uk



Remembrance Sunday 2015-12-17

Our poppy collection amounted to £22.65 at St John's and £124.38 at St Michael's. Thank you everybody who contributed.

Why Gift Aid?

We received £5640 last year from the Inland Revenue because UK taxpayers were able to gift aid either one off donations or their regular giving to the Church. Obviously, this makes a huge difference to our church finances. So if you are in a position to do this, please use one of the gift aid envelopes in church or contact Jack Payne on 716368.



Garden Maintenance

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From the Registers

Baptism:

29th November

Elora Molly Milu Maskell

Kent Road

Wedding:

28th November

James Austin & Rose Eliza Fuller

Halling

Funerals:

26th November

Amy Dyson (80)

Pilgrims Road

16th December

Maurice Kenneth Carter (78)

High Street

PAT CHALKER

26.9.1943 - 15.6.2015

A tribute to a much loved person to mark her birthday.

Pat was a beautiful lady who was devoted to her family. She has left behind a wonderful legacy in her two sons and her grandchildren, Allison, Ryan, Liam and Lucy, whom she loved so much. Pat was very well known in Cuxton and, over the years, took part in many events in the village. A vibrant person with a sunny smile who was always willing to help others. Supportive of her husband and friends. Pat knew the true meaning of loyalty and courage. Pat may be gone but she will be long remembered by her wealth of friends. She will remain cherished in our hearts forever as we have our wonderful memories of all the fun we had together ~ your dear friends ~ June & Carole.

NATURE NOTES NOVEMBER 2015

The first day of the month is dull and damp yet the air is quite mild. There is no birdsong but a few tits come to feed from the containers. The next day covers almost the whole of the country with grey skies. In the afternoon, I walk across the fields to Mays Wood. Mist hangs over the trees and fields. Leaves fall silently from their twigs reminding me of poppies falling from above the arena of the Royal Albert Hall at the Festival of Remembrance. As I walk the leaf-strewn paths all I hear is silence and my footsteps. There is no sound of any bird. There is some early sun shine on 3rd when I walk round the lake at Bluewater with Murphy. Autumn leaves are falling. Horse chestnuts are bare. Young catkins are attached to hazel twigs. The skies remain grey and it is quite mild. The next day Murphy has a visit to the vet; then we take him to the lake where beautiful autumn leaves dominate the scene. These lovely colours brighten the next day's surroundings. I feed the birds. I have seen no chaffinches or greenfinches in the garden. Grey clouds slink across the sky. The evening brings some rain. There is no sunshine on 7th but it is mild with grey clouds bringing early darkness. Fireworks frighten Murphy right up until 12.30 at night. Flowers are still blooming in the garden - polyanthus, elephant's ears, blackcurrant, sage and valerian. Evening primrose flowers are still blooming. The 11th is mild and at Bluewater I see a clump of oxeye daisies, lucerne and sanfoin in bloom. Flowers are blooming in the garden

as if Spring has occurred. The 12th is another mild day with sunshine as I walk Murphy round the lake where I see yarrow, bristly ox tongue and a single floret of field cranesbill. The sun continues to shine into the afternoon but darkness has almost fallen by 4.40pm. The 14th is grey and rain falls. It is still very mild. I watch blue tits and great tits come to the feeders and a magpie attacks a fat ball. Rain falls during the day and well into the evening. There is some warm sunshine on 15th with variable cloud. Birds, especially tits and a robin come to feed. The Autumn leaves are gradually falling from the trees. Silver birches and sycamores on the embankment are revealing more of their branches. In the garden, the rose of Sharon is in full bloom and the tutsan (Hypericum) shrub is putting out more leaves as if it were Spring. The fuchsia continues to bloom. I walk round the lake with Murphy on 18th. Quite a strong wind drove white clouds across the blue sky lit up by the sun. High winds had blown papers across the garden during the night and heavy rain had fallen. The afternoon is rather grey but there are a few glimpses of the sun. A crescent moon hangs in the night sky. On 20th I walk through Six-acre Wood, skirt the fields and enter Mays wood. I cross the fields and observe the beauty of the pale blue sky brushed with cloud. A beautiful rainbow forms in the sky when light rain falls from grey clouds. It is a beautiful sight. Hawthorns and elders have lost their leaves. Cold northerly winds blow the next day

driving grey clouds across the sky, and rocking slender silver birches backwards and forwards. A dusting of snow falls in the morning but none settles. There has been a sharp frost during the night and the air is very cold. We walk Murphy round the lake when the sun shines from a blue sky washed with white cloud. When darkness falls, the air becomes very cold again. On 25th, we walk round the lake again where I see

sanfoin and clumps of daisies. A full moon shines in the evening. On 26th I watch rooks flying back to their roosts after a day in the woodlands. The 28th is a grey, windy day. Trees and shrubs by the lake are gradually losing their leaves. A solitary ox eye daisy blooms at the edge of the newly mown path. The final two days of the month are grey and damp.

NATURE NOTES DECEMBER 2015

The first three days are grey and damp; then the sun shines on 4th. We walk Murphy at Bluewater when there is a short period of sunshine. The 5th is grey and windy. I watch trees on the railway embankment, especially silver birches, swaying backwards and forwards. It is a windy night which disturbs the rooks and I can hear their chirpings. The 6th is wet with westerly winds driving clouds across the sky. There are some Spring flowers in the garden. The 8th to 11th are dreary, grey days. On 13th, rooks are assembled on the electricity wires. I see a red admiral butterfly in the garden. Then I see it again on 15th. We drive to Bluewater on 17th when the sun tries to shine through the clouds. I walk with Murphy in a small open air car park. Birds were singing at 11.30pm. Is it the street lights attracting them coupled with the mild temperatures? There is some sunshine on 19th when I go to Halling church to see the display of Christmas trees. They are beautiful. Darkness falls soon after 4.30 pm. There is some sunshine during the morning of 20th. Later, westerly winds drive grey clouds across the sky. When the sun shines, the grey clouds are lit up. The night is dry with a bright moon. The Winter solstice falls on 22nd. The 23rd is a beautiful day of blue skies and golden sunshine. I walk to the village to post Sam's story to friends. He was such a lovely companion and I missed him but writing his story helped. I walk to the church for the Christingle service on 24th. A full moon shines in the evening sky. On 25th there is some early brightness but rain falls later. The

26th and 27th are grey days. There is severe flooding in the north of the country. On 28th there is sunshine and blue sky flecked with white cloud. I walk up to the fields where dandelions, daisies and buttercups are in bloom. I hear birdsong in Mays Wood as I tread the muddy paths. I skirt the field where new crops are growing and continue along the path in Six-acre Wood where on a branch of elder, new leaves have burst. High grey clouds begin to cover the sky. It remains mild. There is some sunshine during the morning of 29th. Skies are not clear but it is bright. In the late afternoon I get some fresh air in the garden. The light is fading and the rooks are coming home to roost. They crowd the sky, cawing loudly as they fly. It is a magnificent sight and a glorious sound. It is grey on 30th but with some brightness. I walk at Bluewater with Murphy. There is quite a strong wind blowing but it remains dry. Later, at home, I watch the rooks again. In the morning, I had watched them fly towards the woodland. In the early evening, back they flew, beautiful to watch and to hear. On the last day of the month and the year, the sun is shining from a cloud-flecked sky as I walk round the lake. Daisies are blooming in the grass and I see my first snowdrops. The sun shines on the red willow twigs, lining the banks of the lake. They have a special beauty. We eventually drive home with the brightness of the sun shining through the car's windows. There is a heavy shower of rain in the evening. Another month and year closes. Elizabeth Summers.

Christmas 2015

I should like to thank all those who, in both our churches, did so much to make Christmas special once again. Don't you think there is something magical even in writing the date December 25th? The buildings (as always) are well-maintained and beautifully cleaned. Then the lovely flower arrangements, the cribs and the Christmas trees. This year at Halling was especially wonderful with the Christmas Tree Festival. You missed a treat if you didn't see it. I can send you some pictures by e mail if you would like – especially of the nativity play. Then there were the bell ringing and the music and singing in the choir for the crib services and the Nine Lessons and Carols as well as the Midnight Mass and all the regular services.

Once again, this year, we had carols in the open air and mulled wine outside Cuxton URC on the Saturday before Christmas, with a Christmas tree provided by the parish council. Global warming? It is the first time I have sung carols outside wearing shorts. The snow we had one year at Eastbourne was much more

seasonal. The weather this year was more Genesis 6 than Luke 2! The same evening Pastor Kevin Felix-Hollington of Halling Baptist Church conducted a carol service in the Community Centre.

On Advent 4, at Halling we told the story as if it were happening today (as you will have seen on p2) and the Nine lessons and Carols at Cuxton was sublime, each year more so! Congratulations to the organisers of the Scout and Guide Carol service, who put together a very good event at extremely short notice. The Cuxton Nativity started with Robert Raikes and his vision to educate poor children through Sunday Schools. The story of Jesus is both the inspiration for those who believe to care for others and the means of bringing those who do not yet know Him into a consciousness of the love of God.

And then there were all those Christingles to make, light and eat. Well done, everyone. Roger.

The Twelve Days of Christmas

I think we've printed something like this before, but it's worth looking at again. Supposedly, it is a way of teaching Roman Catholics the faith when they might have been persecuted at the Reformation, but there is very little in it that protestants wouldn't also believe. God is, of course, our true love. Via a bit of Christianised pagan mythology, the partridge in the pear tree is Christ. The two turtle doves are the Old and New Testaments. The French hens are faith, hope and charity. The calling birds are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The gold rings are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy – the Law of Moses or Torah. The geese a laying are the six days of creation. The swimming swans are the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit or the seven Sacraments(*). The milking maids are the beatitudes (Matthew 5 vv 3-10). The dancing ladies are the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5 vv 22&23). The ten lords a leaping are the ten commandments. The eleven pipers are the faithful apostles (excluding Judas). The twelve drummers are the twelve clauses of the Apostles Creed, which all baptised people should know by heart.

*This is the only real question for protestants. We limit the term sacrament to the two ordinances which Jesus gave us as *not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, but rather they be certain sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace, and God's good will towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our Faith in him* – Baptism and Holy Communion. The other five sacraments of the Roman Church we practise but we don't call them sacraments or regard them as necessary to salvation – confirmation, penance (confession), orders (ordination), matrimony and extreme unction (anointing with oil). It follows that Baptism and Holy Communion are not optional but obligations for all Christian people, without which our Christian discipleship is incomplete.

And So to the New Year

Our vestry meeting (when we choose our churchwardens) and our annual parochial church meeting (when we elect all the other elected posts, examine our accounts and generally review our church life) will take place at 10.00 on 30th April this year in the church hall. It is an opportunity to thank all those who hold office in the church. Several office holders have indicated their desire to stand down this year. So we shall be looking for new people. If it is God's work, He will be calling people to do these jobs and providing them with the resources they need. Could it be you whom He is calling. It's something to pray about and perhaps to consult your friends or me. You might also think you have identified someone else whom God may be calling. If so, pray about it and share it with the person concerned. If there are more candidates than we obviously need, we'll cast our votes prayerfully at the meeting, seeking God's Will for the parish.

What we mustn't do is parody Isaiah 6⁸ *Here am I; send someone else*. Neither must we fall for the line, *everybody could do it, anybody might do it, somebody should do it, but nobody actually does it*.

Psalms 121: I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills : from whence cometh my help. My help cometh even from the Lord : who hath made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved : and he that keepeth thee will not sleep. Behold, he that keepeth Israel : shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord himself is thy keeper : the Lord is thy defence upon thy right hand; So that the sun shall not burn thee by day : neither the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil : yea, it is even he that shall keep thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out, and thy coming in : from this time forth for evermore.

CHILDREN'S SOCIETY BOXHOLDERS' COLLECTION 2015

It seems a long time since we counted the contents of the collection boxes but the total raised last year was a splendid £448.03. I would like to thank everyone very much for their contributions and encourage you to keep collecting. The work of the Children's Society is more valuable than ever in this country, given that last year alone there were nearly 25,000 teenagers identified as being at risk of abuse or neglect. The charity has a wealth of experience in offering practical help and emotional support to these young people so our contributions are being put to very good use. Unfortunately, the number of boxholders has decreased across the country in recent years, so if anyone would like to join us in raising money in this way, please contact me and I will provide you with a box. Thank you. Julia Wells 727424.

A Nice Little Job

Is there somebody out there, please, who would be willing to organise the magazine advertisements next year. The job entails negotiating with advertisers and potential advertisers, accepting their copy and billing them. If you can help, please speak to Margaret Guest or the Rector.

Saints Alive! Christmas Presentation.

When Jack Payne passed us a book on the life of Robert Raikes (founder of the Sunday School movement), little did we know that this book would inspire the Saints Alive! (Sunday School) to enact the story as a drama, before the Nativity Play at the Christmas Eve Christingle Service. People have remarked how much the children seemed to enjoy dressing up as Victorians. The younger girls had mop hats and shawls over their angel costumes and the younger boys had caps and dark clothes over their shepherd costumes. There was little problem in getting the children to pretend to be naughty in rehearsals but on the day they were too good! Jeanne Harris, our churchwarden, had a part telling the children to be quiet in church but they were too quiet!! Mary Pitt also made a wonderful contribution to our play, suggesting the girls be put in the "ducking stool". Dawn and Emma (two Mums) accompanied the singing of "This Little Light of Mine" with their guitars. John Bogg, as usual, led us through the Nativity Play with the carols guiding us into each part. A big "thank you" to the Saints Alive! children, who gave exceptional performances and to the older children who took lead roles and helped the younger ones through their parts. If anyone wants to join us, we meet every Sunday in school term time, except for the first Sunday of the month, which is a Family Service in Church. Jenny and Trudy.

Happy 70th Birthday Mary Morren

By the time this magazine has gone to print, we shall have celebrated Mary Morren's 70th Birthday. This gives us an opportunity to thank Mary for her contribution to church life over the years. With her brilliant artistic skills, Mary is always there to give advice on displays etc. Mary created the lovely crib scene which is displayed under the altar every Christmas in St. Michael's Church. This has given much pleasure to the children (and adults) over the years. Mary also created the design for our annual Easter display at St. Michael's. When you look in the Remembrance Book you will see the names written in her beautiful writing and also if you have had a child christened, you will have received a card, written by Mary, celebrating your child's first anniversary of the Christening. Mary you are brilliant at remembering everyone's birthday, and this time we have much pleasure in remembering yours. Happy Birthday! JAB.

The Silence of the Council

I once read in a newspaper that local authorities have lists of people whom they regard as such a nuisance that they refuse even to respond to their concerns. I think I may have earned for myself a place on Medway Council's list of undesirables who don't even warrant an answer to the issues we might raise. Here are some of the reasons I believe I might be on their list of pests to whom they do not deign to respond.

Last Summer, I contacted the council to point out that the footpath alongside the A228 from Cuxton Church towards Halling had become so overgrown that it was unsafe for pedestrians, especially those with pushchairs or wheelchairs. I received no response, not so much as an acknowledgement. Months later, some work was done but the council is still a long way short of the legal standard, which is that the path should be clear to a breadth of 1m (40") and a height of 2m (6' 8"). They didn't even thank me for

suggesting that they employ fewer men with clipboards minding other people's business and more men with shovels attending to the council's own business. Ironically, in previous years, they have threatened to prosecute me for letting my front hedge overhang the footpath – though it has never been anything like as bad as the sections for which they are responsible. Of course, the vegetation in my garden is subject to their legally dubious tree preservation order. I wonder if I am the only man ever to have been threatened with prosecution both for pruning and for not pruning the very same trees?

On the advice of the Information Commissioner, I contacted the council, telling them not to include my name on the open version of the Electoral Register, which they sell to purveyors of junk mail. Again, no answer. They are breaking the law if they include anyone on the open register who has asked not to be.

I thought that Neil Davies, the chief executive, might be concerned that the council officer prowling around Cuxton gardens at night is now a convicted sex offender. No response either from him or from the council's complaints team. In fact, of course, there were at least three officers involved in trespassing in my garden in connection with the TPO. When this first came to light, Medway's response was to deny it and to attempt to discredit the testimony of honest witnesses. They really don't care when their officers break the law. [See also cutting down trees in the bird nesting season and parking the warden's van on the footpath.]

As you know, tree supremo Michael Sankus has instructed us that we must plant 12 field maples at a cost of £752 in return for his permission to cut down some dead, dying and dangerous specimens in my own garden. However, the government booklet recommended by the council says that we don't need his permission and we don't have to replant. Either Mr Sankus is trying to pull the wool over our eyes or words don't mean what they say! I've tried to get clarification both from him and from the complaints department. I've been blanked by both. I wonder how he will get on in court if he prosecutes me for disobeying him when he won't even communicate with me? I think he will look rather silly!

Finally, I told you last month that Neil Davies receives £183,905 in basic salary. We're not allowed to know how much we are paying Mr Sankus, but I can tell you it is in the range £35,643 to £40,985. I think you are entitled to this information if their demands cost you money or if you are struggling to pay your council tax or if the council tell you that they can't afford to provide essential services. Roger.

Tommy's Talking Points



I've decided that I like Christmas. We had the family here on and off over several days. I love children. It's wonderful having company all the time. We also had my friends Lolly and Simba to stay – the other two family dogs. I didn't actually get a walk Christmas Day, but this was more than made up for by romping with Lolly up and down the garden. It was very dark morning and evening and Lolly is black, but somehow you always know that she is around. Boxing Day, we had a relatively short walk, but it was daylight and we went somewhere we don't often go and I was let off my lead, which I'm not when it's dark and we can mainly only walk on the road. We took the toddler and the baby and we saw lots of other people's Christmas decorations as well as people out walking their dogs. I wonder why you hardly ever see non dog owners walking? I had some nice presents – toys and chews. I also got to live on goose, turkey and ham for several days. They are much nicer than dog food and I got more than my share because Master had toothache and couldn't manage anything tough.

Even when everybody had gone home, Master still treated it as a bit of a holiday for him. This meant he got up later and took me out later. So I had some good walks in the daylight in the woods and enjoyed my freedom. We're much less likely to go in the woods in the dark, especially if it is very wet. One morning, he risked it and fell over a fallen branch. After he picked himself up, he felt a draught. When we got in, he thought it was just as well that it happened in the dark because his trousers were torn.

I'm not yet trusted to come to many services (unlike Max and Bobby) but I did make it to the Scout and Guide Carol Service. The children made a big fuss of me. I do love church and always bound up the path to be first in. People are so friendly and loving. I even get fed biscuits and bacon and egg at the Epiphany brunch. You can still see my ribs, however, which is the test of canine fitness. Tommy.