

CHARING & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY  
[www.charinghistory.co.uk](http://www.charinghistory.co.uk)

**CDLHS In Our Historic Times**  
**edition 13      JANUARY 2021**

**in between**



**Happy New Year!**  
**Very best wishes**  
**for the year ahead**

“Traditions are slippery things. Christmas has been changing its shape as centuries go past” *Lucy Worsley*

In this issue we look at some of those post Christmas traditions, and with thanks to Mike Sharpe and Steve Beck, have two interesting articles, ‘Listening to Kentish Voices 120 Years Ago’, and ‘The Oast House Cowl used as a Bus Shelter in Charing.’

## **Good News!**

Our next Zoom lecture will be on  
**Thursday January 14th 2021 at 7.30 p.m.**  
in your own home

It will be given by **Dr Michael Carter**

a senior properties historian at English Heritage.  
He is especially interested in monasteries in the late Middle Ages.  
His numerous publications include *The Art and Architecture of the  
Cistercians in Northern England. c.1300-1540.*

The title of the talk:

### **'The Last Days of Boxley Abbey'**

This paper will discuss a newly discovered source describing the  
dissolution of Boxley Abbey in January 1538.  
Financial accounts, submitted by the royal commissioners charged  
with bringing monastic life to an end at this **Kent Cistercian  
monastery**, cast important new light on the assets of the monastery,  
its possessions, assets and servants and also the individuals involved  
in the dissolution, the fate of some of the monastery's vestments and  
plate, and the profits obtained by the royal authorities.

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and

on 25th January we are also invited to join Lenham  
for their Zoom talk  
'Old Bunyard's Kent Pride'  
– 'An Adventure in Kentish History', by John Bunyard

***Full details to follow***





## New Year's Eve, Charing *about 1900* (ish)

"I well remember one New Year's Eve bell ringers, my father was one of them. There was Mr. Ward, Mr. Good and various ones and they went up to the belfry to ring the old year out and the new year in. And they always used to take up a drop of drink, and somebody mixed it. Since I've got older, I've wondered time and time again how they ever got down the steps to come out. Well, Mr. Good fell



through the plate glass window at, -opposite the bakers, there's a big window there isn't there, next to the estate agent? Well, that's where he lived and he didn't touch drink at all! But of course, he was so drunk, he didn't realize it had been done.

Oh! There was a cry out over that, you know, with the wives particularly. My father was quite helpless.

We heard the glass being broken when they came home, And my father, my mother took him and we'd got a shed and she just took him and pushed him into the shed and let him lay there and covered him with a sack. She used to say to us afterwards "I never thought your Dad would be alive. I didn't stop to

see if it covered his face!" But she'd got such a horror of drink you see, but they were all the same there wasn't one that they could pick out. After that they never rang the bells anymore. No! See that's when they started having the midnight service at Christmas not to ring the old year out and the new year in.

*Hilda Barnard (born 1890) Oral History*

## New Year Resolutions

These have a long tradition. They are believed to have originated with the Ancient Babylonians about 4,000 years ago. The Babylonians believed it was human destiny to serve the gods. 'Akitu' was a 12 day religious new year festival. It involved looking back over the past, asking forgiveness for wrongdoing from the gods, then making commitments for their future behaviour. This, they believed would gain favour with the gods, and would bring them prosperity.

Julius Caesar made January the first month of the year in 46 B.C. in honour of Janus, the two-faced god. Romans believed that Janus symbolically looked backwards into the previous year and ahead into the future. The Romans offered sacrifices to Janus and made promises of good conduct for the coming year.

In 1740, John Wesley, founder of Methodism, created the 'Covenant Renewal Service', most commonly held on New Year's Eve or New Year's Day. These were understood to be known as 'watch night' services, they included readings from Scriptures and hymn singing, and were a spiritual alternative to the more traditional rather noisy, and boisterous, new year celebrations.





## The New Year Begins ... but when ...

The original Roman calendar changed from one of 10 months following the moon, to one which followed the sun, thereby introducing 2 new months; January and February. Prior to that the new year began in March.

This calendar was used less in Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire; the new year was celebrated on either the feast of Christmas, December 25th, or as in England, the Annunciation, (Lady Day) March 25th. In 1582 Pope Gregory introduced the Gregorian calendar which refined the Roman calculations for greater accuracy and alignment of the seasons. It also reinstated January as the first month. Catholic countries generally adopted the calendar.

In England, March 25th continued to be celebrated as New Year's Day, as there was enduring Protestant resistance to adopting a 'popish calendar'. In 1750 'The Calendar (New Style) Act' was passed. This acknowledged inaccuracies with the existing calendar and the changes were implemented in 1752, making January 1st New Year's Day.

This changeover had involved a series of steps:

- December 31, 1750 was followed by January 1, 1750 (under the "Old Style" calendar, December was the 10th month and January the 11th)
- March 24, 1750 was followed by March 25, 1751 (March 25 was the first day of the "Old Style" year)
- December 31, 1751 was followed by January 1, 1752 (the switch from March 25 to January 1 as the first day of the year)
- September 2, 1752 was followed by September 14, 1752 (drop of 11 days to conform to the Gregorian calendar)

Scotland had adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1600, so a dual system of dates was often used-hence the references to 'new and old style.'

## The New Year Begins ... but when ...

continued

So, the year 1751 was a short year, lasting just 282 days from 25th March (the existing beginning of the year) to 31st December. The new year 1752 began for the first time on 1 January.

There was also the problem of aligning the calendar in use in England with that in use in Europe. That meant correcting it by 11 days: known as the 'lost days'. So, Wednesday 2nd September 1752 was followed by Thursday 14th September 1752.

Many people were suspicious as this meant changes to the traditional times of saints days and festivals, and some believed that their lives would now be shorter by those 11 'lost' days. Apparently the two political parties were in fierce disagreement. Their opposing slogans of "The new style: the true style," and "Give us our eleven days!" as in Hogarth's painting, added to public disquiet.

The introduction of the new calendar and the loss of the eleven days in 1752 meant the tax year date was changed to 5th April in 1753, to avoid losing 11 days of tax revenue. In 1800 the tax year was extended by a day to 6th April, where it remains today. The differences in calendars meant historians have to be particularly careful. Here are a couple of interesting examples.

- In The Tower of London there is some graffiti scratched into a cell wall by someone imprisoned in January 1642 for his role in the Battle of Edgehill (which took place on 23 October 1642).
- A tombstone in Salisbury Cathedral, which commemorates a baby boy who was born on 13th May 1683 and died on 19th February of the same year. (This makes no sense unless you know that the civil year ran from March to March.)

And on the humorous side;

W.M. Jamieson in his book, 'Murders Myths and Monuments of North Staffordshire', gives a tale about William Willett of Endon.

"Always keen on a joke, he apparently wagered that he could dance non-stop for 12 days and 12 nights. On the evening of September 2nd 1752, he started to jig around the village and continued all through the night. The next morning, September 14th by the new calendar, he stopped dancing and claimed his bets! "



## The Twelve Days of Christmas

In the C9 , showing the importance of the church's feasts, King Alfred the Great made Christmas Day and the following days until Epiphany, January 6th, holidays. No free man was compelled to work during that period.



pic. Wikicommons

It's believed that the carol, 'The Twelve Days of Christmas' developed from a game, maybe even, a drinking game on Twelfth Night. Each verse repeats and adds to the previous one. It was first found in print in 1780, in a children's book, '[Mirth without Mischief](#)', mentioned as part of a 'memory-and-forfeits' game. It is sung to a traditional English tune dating back to the 1700s, and some historians actually believe to have French origins. Attempting reasons for the odd

assortment of gifts have given rise to much debate, over

the years, including the theory that it began as a C16 Catholic song where each number and gift held a secret meaning, enabling it to be sung publicly, without retribution. That it came from an oral tradition might account for the oddness of 'a partridge in a pear tree'; partridge in French is '*une perdrix*', pronounced 'pere-dree', which sounds very similar to 'pear tree'. It is known that 'four calling birds' originated as 'four collee birds,' or coal-ee birds, which was a regional nickname for blackbirds.

### When is the Twelfth Day? When is Twelfth Night?

It's complicated ....

The two are not necessarily on the same day. The twelfth day can, depending when you count from, be considered to be January 5th, or January 6th. 'Twelfth Night' can be describing the night of the twelfth day, (so, could either be January 5th, or 6th), or describing the eve of the twelfth day, on January 4th, or 5th.

Twelfth Night was from the Middle Ages, until Victorian times, an occasion of great celebration, and with its own traditions and food, (see next article). In current UK tradition Twelfth night, (on whichever date) is the night Christmas decorations are taken down. Marking the end of Christmas period, it can be a bit 'sad' as without the lights, Christmas cards and decorations, things can seem empty and bare. In Tudor and Medieval times, however, Christmas greenery and festivities , in some form, would have continued right through until February; until the feast of Candlemas, on the 2nd, which was the date that Shakespeare's play 'Twelfth Night' was first staged in 1602.







## Twelfth Night Celebrations

Medieval Twelfth Day, or Twelfth Night celebrations were often the culmination of the Christmas period, they had become a mixture of Roman and pagan traditions with Christian belief. Gifts were often given, much feasting and drinking were indulged in, as well as rowdy merriment. A 'Lord of Misrule' was appointed to organise the festivities involving roleplaying and often rough, games. Versions of many of these games continued to be played (except during Puritan times) until Regency times.

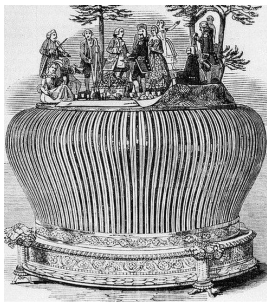
By Tudor times celebrations, at least at court, were less rowdy and more organised. On Twelfth Night in 1512, something very exciting happened at court, an entertainment that a chronicler described as "a thyng not seen afore in Englande". It was a "masque". In 1516 Henry VIII had an extravagant feast, an elaborate pageant and an energetic mock battle, all directed by 'the Master of the Revels'. Elizabeth I preferred dancing, and masqued balls, often with elaborate fancy dress became the important ingredient. English Heritage mentions a popular 'Cushion Dance', where "a man laid a cushion before his wished-for partner; she knelt on it, kissed him and joined in the dance. Then she chose her next partner in the same way."

Twelfth Night was again the climax of festivities in Regency times. The same elements of dressing up, drinking, eating elaborate food, playing organised games and joining in masqued balls are described. In 1835, Leigh Hunt, in his 'London Journal,' describes Twelfth Night, "All the world are kings and queens. Everybody is somebody else, and learns at once to laugh at, and to tolerate, characters different from his own, by enacting them. Cakes, characters, forfeits, lights, theatres, merry rooms, little holiday faces, and last not least, the painted sugar on the cakes, so bad to eat but so fine to look at, useful because it is perfectly useless except for a sight and a moral,—all conspire to throw a giddy splendour over the last night of the season, and to send it to bed in pomp and colours, like a Prince."

## Twelfth Night Traditions

### The Cake

From Medieval times, a special 'Twelfth Cake', often called a 'King Cake' was an essential part of the Twelfth Night celebrations. A slice was given to all members of the party. The man whose slice contained the bean became King for the night, and whoever they were, for the rest of the evening 'ruled' the festivities. In Tudor times, the man finding the bean was known as 'The Lord of Misrule' and he decided the order and rules of games and dances. In households everyone was also given a slice of Twelfth cake, so servants could reverse roles with their master. (Centuries later a Queen was found by the slice containing a pea.)



*Queen Victoria's  
Twelfth Cake  
1849*

Originally, the Twelfth Cake would have actually been a spiced and fruited bread. By the early 19th century, the cake was more of a rich plum cake, and its decoration more and more elaborate, becoming the centrepiece of the party. Confectioners displayed them as the focal point in their shop windows. The cakes were decorated with sugar frosting and gilded paper trimmings, often topped with delicate figures made of either plaster of Paris, or sugar paste.

As twelfth night celebrations declined, owing in part to the pressures of working hours, the celebratory, popular rich cake became the 'Christmas cake.' However, since 1795 the Twelfth Cake tradition has been kept alive at Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. This is thanks to former pastry chef, and actor, Robert Baddeley, who left £100 to be invested to provide wine punch and Twelfth Cake each year on Twelfth Night. The tradition, of the cake being both huge, and elaborate, continues, though the bean and pea do not. .

### The Wassail

Wassail, originally "waes hael," means 'be whole', 'be healthy'. The term is thought to stem from Saxon times when the Lord of the Manor would say this to greet his people at new year. Centuries later, served from huge bowls on Twelfth Night, it would be said as a toast, then shared, and the toast in reply would be 'Drinc hæl', or 'Drink and be healthy'. It's thought the tradition of 'toasting' another's health goes further back to the Greeks, ('toast' named from the Roman practice of adding bread to alcohol in order to reduce acidity.)

The wassail drink was a sort of hot punch. It was made from mulled ale, cream, roasted apples, eggs, cloves, ginger, nutmeg sugar, and bread. As the mixture heated, the apples disintegrated and floated to the top, making it frothy.



## Twelfth Night Traditions continued

**Wassail Drink traditions** The wassail drink was sometimes nicknamed 'Lambs Wool,' which some have suggested, comes from the likeness of the frothy top to fluffy lambs wool. Others believe the nickname stems from a drink served at the ancient Celtic pagan festival of 'La mas ubal', that is, 'The Day of the Apple Fruit,' and being pronounced *lamosool*, over time it was corrupted to 'Lambs Wool.'



believed to be about 1850 (Historic UK)

There are two customs associated with the wassail. The first, from at least the Middle Ages, gives rise to the carol, 'Here we go a wassailing', which involved singing and taking the large wassail cup door-to-door to share the drink with neighbours, in return for something, which was often food ('figgy pudding') or from the richer, money. Whilst

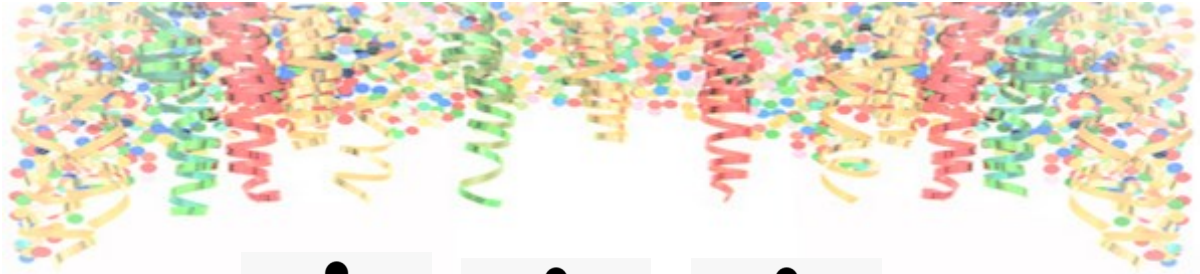
begging was not allowed, as it involved an exchange, wassailing was. The neighbours believed that joining in would bring them good fortune the following year. This practice happened in other parts of the world, too. Today it has developed into carol singers visiting before Christmas.

The second stems from an ancient apple tree ritual to ward off evil spirits and ensure a good crop the following year. In the middle ages the practice involved visiting orchards at dusk on Twelfth Night, where a particular apple tree was chosen for the special ceremony. Some of the wassail cup contents were poured onto the roots, then the soaked toast was hung among the branches as an offering for the guardian of the apple tree which was often believed to be a robin. Then the wassail was shared amid cries of "waes hael" and "drink hael".



Pic from a current Wassail group's website: The Hackney Wassailers

Different customs and songs evolved in different areas. Sometimes, linking to the Twelfth Night king tradition, a Wassail King and Queen, were chosen. The Queen was hoisted into the branches to put the toast in place; or instead the smallest boy in the crowd, called the 'Tom Tit', would. Then there was much shouting, whistling and banging to drive away evil spirits, in places muskets were fired.



## Epiphany

Historically a particularly important feast throughout the world, celebrated on January 6th, it brings an official end to the Christmas period. It commemorates the visit of the three kings, or Magi, bringing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh for the baby Jesus.

This feast was the basis of many historic traditions, and is commemorated in many countries of the world today. The 'King Cake, or 'Twelfth Cake', making offerings and electing a bean king, incorporate the feast day with ancient rituals. (Perhaps most recently, the inclusion of a paper crown in Christmas crackers.)

Since at least the C11 it has been the tradition for English monarchs to make offerings 'symbolizing their spiritual kinship' with the Wise Men, at St James' Palace. James IV is believed to have given three gold crowns. It is believed that the gifts were offered, in person, during the choral communion service. Until 1859, the spice gifts were presented in silk bags, placed in a silk-covered box. The third bag contained a small roll of gold leaf this was later replaced by newly minted gold sovereigns. Today, the tradition continues, though as the Queen holds Christmas at Sandringham, the offerings are given by members of her staff on her behalf.

*(now with thanks to Wikipedia .....)*

In many parts of the world today, Epiphany is still the traditional day for gifts. In Latin America it is the three kings, not Father Christmas who brings gifts. In France, *Le Jour des Rois*, is still celebrated with King Cake. In Spain, Philippines and Mexico children leave their shoes out to receive gifts of sweets and treats. (Apparently, instead of English children leaving a carrot for the reindeer, with Father Christmas' mince pie, children in Spain and Puerto Rico leave hay and grass for the 3 kings' horses.

In Spain and Poland festive processions with bands celebrate the feast day, and in Slovakia and the Czech Republic children dress up as kings. In Ireland it is not only the day when holly is burnt on the fire, as ancient custom, but it's also the day when many women have a restful day, or meal out.



## Listening to Kentish Voices of 120 years ago

Charing history is fascinating. Being able to reach back, sometimes hundreds of years, or several generations, is great inspiration for interpreting our everyday world.

While many of our newsletter articles and talks focus on the built environment, or the intriguing artefacts that have been preserved, one source now accessible online has given me new enthusiasm for 'capturing the past'.

How did our Charing ancestors sound? Has the distinctive 'Kentish dialect' disappeared from modern speech under the pernicious influence of media fashions?

Many folk considering that question might remark that 'the older generation' speaks with sounds and patterns of expression that aren't shared by modern younger people who possess a 'broader outlook'.

It's not that we're posh, or ill-educated, or that we use different slang. We could be said to have escaped, through luck or judgement, from the 'Yankee drawl', the glo''al stop' of Estuary English, and the 'rising interrogative?'. We might even sound insufferably old-fashioned when we address a group using the words 'chaps' or 'ladies' rather than 'GUYS'..!

Such contemplative souls might even go to the written records of Kentish speech, like Alan Major's wonderful [Kentish As She Wus Spoke: A Guide to the Kent Dialect](#) (S B Publications, 2001 ISBN 978 18577 0244 6). Or perhaps to the work of the great Victorian British dialectologists, who assembled exhaustive dictionaries and dialect maps.

But a fascinating audio archive exists, at the British Library online: <https://sounds.bl.uk/Accents-and-dialects>

And an even more fascinating story emerges, of how voice recordings of over 100 years ago have preserved the way ordinary people presented the accents and vocabulary which they themselves (arguably) picked up during their childhoods in the High Victorian age.

My example is from Hunton, Kent, 10 miles due west of Charing:

<https://sounds.bl.uk/Accents-and-dialects/Berliner-Lautarchiv-British-and-Commonwealth-recordings/021M-C1315X0001XX-0473V0>

If you're reading this online, and can follow the link, be prepared for a reading of the Biblical parable of The Prodigal Son, lasting about 4 minutes. It's great! Because it's a well-known text, delivered in a very artificial manner (more of which below), it's immediately apparent that in the olden days some people said 'father' in a different way to what's heard now – almost anywhere.

The historical record shows that Albert Tucker, born in 1883 in Hunton, is the voice on the recording, and the 'performer' of the text. He occasionally paraphrases – can you spot the word he uses instead of 'clothes\*'?

There are over a hundred similar recordings in this online resource, sorted by county.



## Listening to Kentish Voices of 120 years ago

### Continued

Most of the fieldwork on British dialects had to wait for the advent of the portable tape recorder with electric microphone in the 1950s. There is a great deal of valuable material from these records and transcripts, often combining dialect studies with oral history and personal autobiography.

However, what's special about this British Library archive, to me at least, is that it was collected from 1916 to 1918, in the First World War, by a



*photo credit Humboldt University of Berlin)*

German professor. He gained the co-operation of British Prisoners of War (PoWs) to record these sounds.

There is even a photo of one of the technically primitive recording sessions taking place – a Tommy in uniform,

reading from placards held in front of him by one of the professor's assistants, and shouting into a megaphone pointed directly at an Edison-type gramophone recorder. The dates and locations have been recorded too, and the materials survived both World Wars and the tribulations between and after them. Hence their presence in the Berlin Sound Archive, and their ability to be shared with 21<sup>st</sup>-century 'English' speakers like you and me.

There are only two examples from Kent, but it is enlightening to stray into the Sussex and Essex files and pick out similarities and differences. And then to reach throughout Britain and Ireland, and see which quirks of accent have been preserved through time, and which have been lost. And even to think about how historians in future might view us now, speaking as we do, through the traces we lay down.

*\*Albert Tucker uses the word 'clobber' for clothes – whether from word-blindness or mischief I wouldn't like to say.*

*It's a salutary exercise to try recording your own voice on your own computer – just audio, perhaps using the 'Voice Recorder' function. Like me, many people may find themselves less than word-perfect reading from the Bible (Luke Chapter 15, verses 11-32, Revised Standard Version).*

*Mike Sharpe 28.12.2020*

## Oast House Cowl used as a Bus Shelter in Charing

Some months back we were contacted by a member, Gail Greig, regarding a very unusual bus shelter in the local area. The initial mention of this came from a book *Hops and Hop Picking* by Richard Filmer in which he states that an oast house cowl was used as a bus shelter in Charing during the 1800s.

The book further states that *"Traditionally the wooden cowls were made by the wheelwright and later examples were about 9ft (2.7m) in height with some as high as 14ft (4.3m): a disused cowl was once used as a bus shelter in the village of Charing in Kent."*

After some research, Gail actually found a photo of this, and it is shown here. She had searched for an image and eventually found one in Kent Archives, with the image came the description of the shelter being *"on the A20 between Charing and Maidstone"* and she was wondering if we knew where the bus stop had been situated.

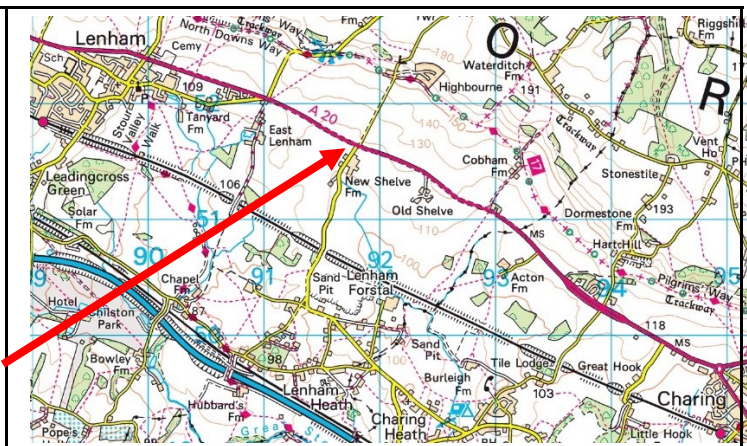
This revelation led to some further research, and with the help of Alan Witt and members of the M&D and East Kent Bus Club, some more details became apparent.



The initial suggestion was that it was located just past Charing Motors, heading towards Maidstone, at the junction of the road to Egerton and Charing Heath. This was the fare stage for Hart Hill Crossroads.

However, since then, there has been greater take-up with a second suggestion that it was at New Shelve Farm, which was also a fare stage (and thus more likely to have a bus shelter at that time, when rural bus stops were often just "known" rather than marked). Interestingly, one of the members of the club actually knew the current owners of New Shelve Farm and has shown him the picture.

They agree that it is possibly at the junction of the A20 and Forstal Road (see map).



He suggests that the cowl, being an informal arrangement, was to allow the lady of the house some shelter whilst waiting for the bus!

As for a date, we haven't got any further in than the 1920s-1930s, primarily from the style of dress the lady is wearing, the mass introduction of telegraph poles, and the appearance of the lorry, but what is certain is that is definitely not the 1800s.

Ashford Bound  
Bus Stop

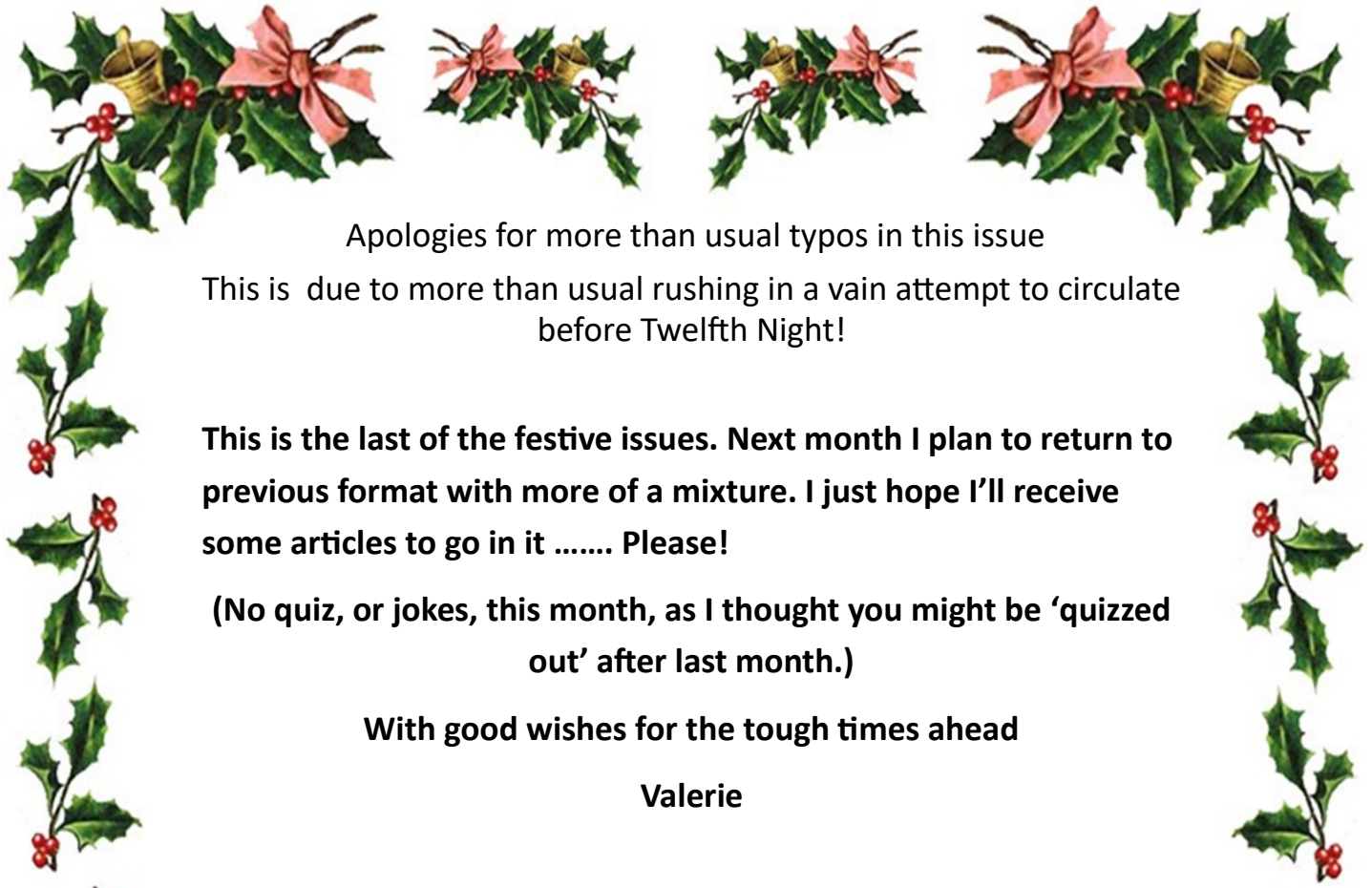
Maidstone Bound  
Bus Stop



What we can't really ascertain is whether it was on the Ashford or the Maidstone bound side, but from the extract from Google Streetview of the two bus stops today, I will leave readers to make up their minds. If any reader has any more information, we would be pleased to learn more.

With thanks to Gail Grieg and Alan Witt.

Steve Beck



Apologies for more than usual typos in this issue

This is due to more than usual rushing in a vain attempt to circulate before Twelfth Night!

**This is the last of the festive issues. Next month I plan to return to previous format with more of a mixture. I just hope I'll receive some articles to go in it ..... Please!**

**(No quiz, or jokes, this month, as I thought you might be 'quizzed out' after last month.)**

**With good wishes for the tough times ahead**

**Valerie**

**Please send any ideas, thoughts or contributions to me at  
[newsletter@charinghistory.co.uk](mailto:newsletter@charinghistory.co.uk)**



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