

January 29th

Memory Verse

God is light

and in him is no darkness at all.

1 John 1:5b

Something to read from history¹

In 1534 King Henry VIII declared himself to be Head on Earth of the Church of England.² He did this to separate the Church of England from the Roman church, not from any love he had for the principles of reformers such as Martin Luther, whose works he detested, but because the pope would not grant him the divorce he sought. In 1536 King Henry VIII began the dissolution of the monasteries. The monasteries or religious houses were settlements of men (or women in which case they were often called convents) originally for the purpose of withdrawing from the world to study the word of God and give aid to the poor. By 1536 these institutions, being of human rather than divine origin, had become very corrupt from their original purposes. The monasteries were also a reminder of the power of the Pope since the monastic heads were answerable to him. It was also true that the monasteries were the wealthiest institutions in the country. Henry's father had left him well off but Henry's lifestyle, had led to a lack of money. Monasteries owned over a quarter of all the cultivated land in England. By destroying the monastic system Henry could acquire all its wealth and property whilst removing its Papal influence. The idea was not new. Thomas Cromwell, the king's advisor, had already helped Cardinal Wolsey dissolve some monasteries in the past.

How much the character of the monks themselves had degenerated into greed and immorality can be seen from the story of Boxley's Cistercian Abbey in Kent which was surrendered to the king's commissioners on **29th January** 1538. The abbey and all of its possessions passed into the hands of the king and the monks and abbot were awarded pensions. All that remains of the Abbey today can be seen in the picture.



Boxley Abbey was not only on the route taken by pilgrims from London to Canterbury.³ It was also a centre of attraction in its own right. Many Canterbury pilgrims stopped there to see two particular wonders, the Rood of Grace and the Statue of St Rumbold.

St Rumbold was the subject of a silly story. He was supposed to have lived just three days, been born with the ability to speak, and to have preached a sermon before his death. His statue at Boxley Abbey was appropriately baby sized and light enough for a child to pick up – under certain circumstances. If a suppliant was to be heard by the saint he had to pick up the statue from its plinth. This could only be done by a virtuous person i.e. one who had made a sufficiently large donation to the Abbey. Other people found, on trying to lift the statue, that it was so heavy they could not do so.

The Rood of Grace was a crucifix fixed to a pillar in the Abbey. It had the habit of moving its eyes or its mouth (as though speaking) – to anyone who had done the right thing – presumably money again!

1 Image: By David Anstiss, CC BY-SA 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=6056546> Information from <https://www.pressreader.com/> and other sources

2 We will be looking at the background to this in the lesson for February 27th.

3 The shrine of Thomas Becket was a place of pilgrimage since his murder there. See the lesson for October 6th.

In addition, pilgrims could also view what they were told was St Andrew's finger which was preserved in a reliquary or richly ornamented box.

I'm not sure what happened to St Andrew's finger on 29th January but the other two money spinners were investigated by Thomas Cromwell's agent, Geoffrey Chamber. He found that the rood contained hidden levers and wires that could be operated by the monks. He also found a catch which could be engaged to hold the statue of baby Rumbold on its plinth or detached to allow it to be moved.

These frauds were taken to Maidstone to be exhibited to the people to show what tricks had been played on them by the monks. The baby statue seems to have gone missing en route but the inner workings of the Rood were demonstrated in Maidstone market place. The local people were angry when they found out what deception had been practised on them and Chamber noted that if he had not dissolved the monastery already they would have cheerfully pulled it down with their own hands. The rood was then taken to London where it was again demonstrated and publicly destroyed.

Something to think about for older children

What is wrong with withdrawing from the world into a closed community in order to pray and study God's Word?

A medal



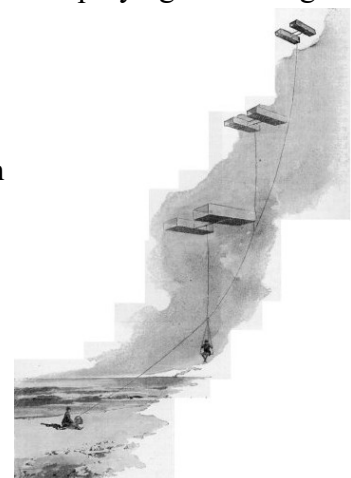
Queen Victoria⁴ introduced the Victoria Cross on 29th January 1856. this medal was to be awarded for “.. most conspicuous bravery, or some daring or pre-eminent act of valour or self-sacrifice, or extreme devotion to duty in the presence of the enemy...”

The medal was introduced during the Crimean War. Until then there had been no official standardised system for recognising acts of heroism, although officers could be awarded one of the lower ranks of the Order of the Bath. There have been 1,355 recipients of the Victoria Cross since it was introduced. The most recent was to Corporal Joshua Leaky of the Parachute regiment for his bravery in evacuating a casualty and inspiring the rest of his team under heavy fire in Afghanistan in 2013. His heroic actions in retrieving and deploying machine guns under fire saved lives.

Some science history

Lawrence Hargrave (1850-1915) was born on 29th January in Greenwich but emigrated when he was 15 with his family to Australia, where his father became Attorney General of New South Wales.

Hargrave was a good mathematician and worked as an engineer on Australian ships. His famous for his work on developing box kites, with the aid of which he was able to lift himself into the air. Convinced that man would one day be able to fly, he endured ridicule and criticism saying, “The people of Sydney who can speak of my work without a smile are very scarce.... I know that success is dead sure to come, and therefore do not waste time and words in trying to convince unbelievers.”



4 Image: By Arghya1999 - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=80374505>

Hargrave's kites proved useful in meteorology, as they could carry heavy loads and reach high altitudes. They continued to be used for military and rescue purposes up to the 1930s. Hargrave also worked on rotary engines and gliders and studied wing surfaces.



Box kites are still used for fun today. They fly well and you can make one yourself. Many good hobby books have full instructions for making your own kite.⁵ You need fine weather to fly any kite, of course, so January is probably not the best time to try it!

5 Or see here: <https://scoutlife.org/hobbies-projects/projects/53339/build-and-fly-a-box-kite/>