

**Thought for the week**

By Justin Lewis-Anthony Rector, St Stephen's Church, Canterbury

THIS time of year articles appear in the newspapers talking about stress and "getting away from it all".

Peoples' lives are so busy and difficult that summer holidays are not luxuries, but practically a necessity. Unwind, de-stress, relax. Pity the people for whom organising and going on holiday is also a cause of stress!

There are few of us who aren't concerned by travel, whether it's just packing for a holiday, moving house, moving country. We leave what is familiar behind and go to somewhere where we don't speak the language, don't know the geography, don't understand the customs.

I remember coming to Canterbury and realising I didn't know where I could buy a bag of nails! When travelling I often think of Abraham, whose story we find in Genesis. He was sent by God to leave his home country, and his family, and to travel to a far-off land "that I will show you". He didn't even have a destination! And he was seventy-five when he began his God-appointed travels.

The only way you can cope with such a thing is in faith, knowing that the promise of God, to be with you in the travelling, and to be with you in the foreign land, is trustworthy and true.

This is the promise of Abraham: there is no place so strange or alien that we can't know God. And if we know God is with us, we have no need to be stressed!

Happy holidays!

# Murder mystery surrounds Canterbury Belle Matilda



INDULGED: The Canterbury Belles

**Way we were**



JUNE is the month for Canterbury Belles – we should grow more, as how many cities have a flower named after them (OK, London Pride but which others)? To our Victorian predecessors Canterbury Belles (with the extra 6) carried different connotations, as it was applied to the Canterbury sisters Amela and Matilda Hacker, daughters of John Hacker, a local stone mason.

John did well in business and he was able to buy several local properties, including four in Blackfriars. The girls never married and were indulged by their father, but as years passed their behaviour grew distinctly odd. They would promenade together on the front in Margate and Ramsgate, wearing identical silk dresses, lace shawls, gaudy sashes with large buckles and a brooch with bright-coloured stones. To top this off, each sported a felt hat with feather – all regarded as more fitting for teenage girls than women in their fifties. Bystanders referred to them as the Canterbury Belles.

By the 1850s John was able to buy the imposing double-fronted Wincheap House in Wincheap – now Jalsha Indian Restaurant. At the census of 1861 John refused to give the names of his two daughters, and lied about their ages – for Matilda, then 50 years old, he entered 25 years beside the blank space for her name!

With the loss of her father in 1863, and her sister ten years later, Matilda's behaviour grew

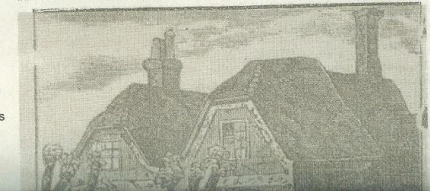


BLOOMS: Canterbury Belles

hands were missing. Defective work over the following weeks, based mainly on jewellery found on the skeletal corpse, and other jewellery that had been pawned, suggested that these were the remains of Matilda. Hannah Dobbs, a servant at 4 Euston Square, was tried for Matilda's murder at the Old Bailey in June 1879. A key witness was Walter Cozens, Canterbury builder and founder of what is now CHAS (Canterbury Historical and Archaeological Society) – hence my initial interest in the case. He was

collecting rents for Matilda and sending cheques on to her using an Oxford Street P O Box. Dates of clearances of post from this box left a good indication of just when Matilda died. Hannah was found not guilty, and no culprit was ever found. The case received wide press coverage, including a detailed account in the New York Times.

More details of Matilda, her family, the court case and its aftermath are available on the CHAS website – canterbury-archeology.org.uk



PROPERTY: Wincheap House in the 1870s

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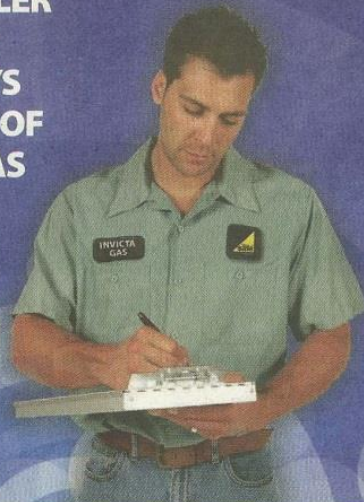
that we can't know God. And if we know God is with us, we have no need to be stressed!  
Happy holidays!

INDULGED: The Canterbury Belles

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With the loss of her father in 1863, and her sister ten years later, Matilda's behaviour grew increasingly bizarre. Under her father's will, once her sister had died Matilda enjoyed all the rents due on the Hacker properties.

Despite this, she steadfastly refused to pay rates on the Canterbury properties, and after a spell in Westgate prison the police seized jewellery to pay her debt. Matilda's response was to stay away from Canterbury, living in lodgings under false names. By the 1870s she was lodging at 4 Euston Square under the name of Miss Huish.

In May 1879, a partly decomposed corpse of an elderly woman was discovered in the coal cellar of 4 Euston Square. A rope was coiled around her neck and her

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aftermath are available on the CHAS website – canterbury-archeology.org.uk



PROPERTY: Wincheap House in the 1870s



LANDLORD: John Hackers properties in Blackfriars



MODERN: Wincheap house now

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