The eighteen forties, in a small town,

Rail lines from London crept their way down.

A new industry with jobs for all.

Later, a clock tower, standing tall.

It watched as men travelled through the gate,

Checking for sure they wouldn’t be late.

Six hundred passed through, morning and night,

Came from afar to get to the site.

Houses were built, at first, just a few.

Fairly fast, a community grew.

A school, bathhouse, a pub to pop down.

Named Alfred Town, but known as New Town

Rail routes expanded, out to the coast,

Ashford, the centre, able to boast.

The town was expanding, people came,

By horse and carriage, and now by train.

In sixty years populations grew.

Men built the trains, but women too.

Only nine girls, pre-world war one,

Thirteen hundred men, fathers and sons.

Eight hundred of these, were then called upon,

To fight for their country, some so young.

Women were asked now, to fill the gap,

This place with a target on its back.

Gladys Sparkes, starting out, at eighteen

Struck down, by an enemy, unseen

The only civilian casualty

That Ashford, in this war, would see.

But, so many lost in both World Wars,

Those who survived them, left with deep scars.

As good times and bad, all came and went,

The railways thrived and spread through Kent.

After the war came investment in roads,

Government cuts caused stations to close.

Newtown Works, sadly, wasn’t shielded,

With fewer lines, less stock was needed.

Then by the sixties, so much was lost,

When part of it closed, to families’ cost.

The rest of the site stayed twenty years more,

Before crumbling and closing the door.

The railway lived on, fought it’s way through,

Bright innovations brought something new.

A tunnel proposed, England to France,

Controversy rose, but they took the chance.

The nineteen nineties, success was seen,

As tunnellers met, under the sea.

Freight went through first, followed by cars,

Drove onto the train, and off into France.

London to Paris, just two hours,

Companies soon saw speed as power.

Looked at Ashford and London alike,

Stations were built, new, clean, and bright.

The works were left empty, for years forlorn,

But never forgotten, each person torn.

This community has fought hands down,

For this, the heritage of Newtown

They’ve stood strong together, through the years,

During the joy, laughter, sadness and tears.

Fresh ideas have come to the site.

So!

Maybe, this story still has more bite....

Sharon Barton

(Rivers of Life Community Church)