

# National Unitarian Fellowship

Affiliated to the General Assembly of Unitarian  
and Free Christian Churches

*Established 1945*

# Viewpoint



**Social Responsibility**  
**Honouring All Creation**

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## **Introduction**

This edition offers two very different perspectives on *Unitarians and Social Responsibility*. Both our contributors, Rev Feargus O'Connor and Bronwyn Lowe write with passion on their particular commitment to the welfare of society in the widest sense.

In the main contribution Feargus writes on our rich Unitarian heritage and its continuation in the ongoing work towards the welfare of animals in both the UK and USA. Bronwyn's focus remains firmly on the fabric of the chapel, of which she is a member, in Dukinfield, and how it can be made to serve the community both for worship and social provision.

I hope both articles will prompt readers to find a point of connection and perhaps feel prompted to submit something they support and feel strongly about, through individual, chapel, local community or global commitment.

*Joan Wilkinson*

## **Unitarians honouring the interdependent web of all creation**

### **By Rev Feargus O'Connor**

It must be candidly admitted that no religious tradition in the West can claim a creditable record of vindicating the rights of animals and protecting and cherishing our fellow creatures who share our home planet with us. In the limited space available I shall consider only a few representative British and American Unitarians who deserve our recognition for their pioneering witness for the welfare of all our sentient fellow living beings.



## **Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797)**

The 18th Century Unitarian feminist pioneer Mary Wollstonecraft, famous for her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, argued that kindness to animals was essential to a child's education because children who were not taught such kindness to innocent and vulnerable fellow creatures were more likely to grow into adults who went on to commit violence against people.

The transition, as they grew up, from barbarity to animals to domestic tyranny over wives and children was an easy progression, she argued. Justice or benevolence would not be a powerful spring of action unless it extended to the whole of creation. William Hogarth clearly discerned this, as can be seen in his famous prints *Four Stages of Cruelty*. Is this not remarkably prescient in the light of authoritative relevant research?

## **Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743-1825)**

Another member of the same Unitarian congregation was Anna Laetitia Barbauld, whose sensibility and concern for the weak and vulnerable are clearly in evidence in a poem she dedicated to her friend, Joseph Priestley, the Unitarian minister and scientist who himself expressed a wish that our fellow animals might enjoy an afterlife.

The Mouse's Petition

\* To Doctor PRIESTLEY.

Found in the trap where he had been confin'd all night.

Oh! hear a pensive captive's prayer,

For liberty that sighs;

And never let thine heart be shut

Against the prisoner's cries.

If e'er thy breast with freedom glow'd,  
And spurn'd a tyrant's chain,  
Let not thy strong oppressive force  
A free-born mouse detain.

Oh! do not stain with guiltless blood  
Thy hospitable hearth;  
Nor triumph that thy wiles betray'd  
A prize so little worth....

Or, if this transient gleam of day  
Be all of life we share,  
Let pity plead within thy breast,  
That little all to spare....

So when unseen destruction lurks,  
Which men like mice may share,  
May some kind angel clear thy path,  
And break the hidden snare.

### **Frances Power Cobbe (1822-1904)**

Lines with which I am sure another Unitarian, born three years before her death, would surely concur?

That humane and compassionate spirit was shown by the indomitable Irishwoman Frances Power Cobbe, who worked with the English Unitarian reformer and pioneer of girls' education Mary Carpenter in caring for Bristol's street children and, like Mary Wollstonecraft and Anna Laetitia, Frances was a determined campaigner for women's rights.

She was instrumental in getting a change in the law that allowed battered wives to separate from their husbands, but it was her single-minded struggle against vivisection, that systematic cruelty to defenceless animals in laboratories, that gave her lasting fame.

Who can fail to enjoy this portrait of Frances by the American Unitarian novelist Louisa May Alcott?

‘The door suddenly flew open, and in rolled an immensely stout lady, with skirts kilted up, a cane in her hand, a flyaway green bonnet on her head and a loud laugh issuing from her lips.... “M’ dear creature, if ye love me, a glass of sherry!” ...

I had imagined a severe lady, and was much surprised to see this merry, witty, Falstaffian personage, one minute talking earnestly and gravely on the suffrage question, the next criticising an amateur poem in a way that convulsed her hearers. When she went away talking hard till out of the gate, it was as if a sunbeam had left the room.’

Frances was a prolific writer and pioneering journalist. Indeed, her presence in the offices of the *Echo*, writing leading articles, was evidence that she was probably the first woman ever to work professionally in the offices of a national newspaper and she became one of the first regular women preachers in Unitarian pulpits.

But, as one observer noted, Frances ‘gave her time to Theists, to work-house inmates and to women, but she gave herself to animals’. She was the founder, with the support of the revered humanitarian reformer, Lord Shaftesbury, of the first anti-vivisection society in the world. She undertook over thirty years of tireless labour in defence of laboratory animals and devoted herself wholeheartedly to this cause until her death in 1904.

So, what made Frances so passionately committed to the struggle against experiments on living animals? It was surely the realisation that cruelty to the vulnerable and the defenceless was morally repugnant as well as degrading to those who perpetrated it. It came from direct personal observation of such cruelty and lack of humane feeling. Frances describes in her autobiography her own experience of observing experiments on animals cold heartedly 'sacrificed' in the name of science.

'In that laboratory we sacrificed daily from one to three dogs, besides rabbits and other animals, and after four months' experience I am of the opinion that not one of these experiments on animals was justifiable or necessary....'

An ardent dog lover ever since her childhood days, Frances goes on to describe the cruel and heartless experiments inflicted on defenceless dogs:

'I think the saddest sight I ever witnessed was when the dogs were brought up from the cellar to the laboratory... they seemed seized with horror as they smelt the air of the place, divining, apparently, their approaching fate. They would make friendly advances to each of the three or four persons present, and as far as eyes, ears and tail could make a mute appeal for mercy eloquent, they tried in vain....'

We might here call to mind some words of Charles Darwin, himself brought up by his Wedgwood mother under Unitarian influences.

'Everyone has heard of the dog suffering under vivisection, who licked the hand of the operator; this man, unless the operation was fully justified by an increase of our knowledge, or unless he had a heart of stone, must have felt remorse to the last hour of his life'.

Frances Power Cobbe's campaign against such organised laboratory cru-

elties continues to this day. Today we witness new horrors which even Frances herself could little have dreamed of, such as the genetic engineering of our fellow sentient creatures and other utilitarian heartlessness.

We can be comforted that some of Frances' fellow Unitarians are honouring her memory by responding to the Gandhi Schweitzer Universal Kinship Appeal of Animal Free Research UK (which I set up and which has raised over £49,000) and so doing what she would most have wanted: carrying on the campaign for humane medical research and saving other dogs, cats, rabbits and our fellow primates from callous cruelties perpetrated in the name of science. Today we are able to do something positive to help advance the cause of scientific knowledge and alleviate human suffering and disease without sacrificing animal lives.

### **Thomas Timmins (1841-1898)**

My next representative Unitarian animal advocate few have heard of. His gravestone proclaims:

In loving memory of Rev. Thomas Timmins (Apostle of Mercy),  
Founder of the American Band of Mercy Movement  
and also of the Universal Mercy Band Movement.

He was engaged in many philanthropic works;  
he was a faithful minister, and a devoted husband.

Those who read Lewis G. Regenstein *Replenish the Earth: a history of organized religion's treatment of animals and nature – including the Bible's message of conservation and kindness to animals* (SCM Press, 1991) will see in this sentence, a clue to the role Thomas played.

'Toward the end of the nineteenth century, a clergyman, Reverend

Thomas Timmins of Portsmouth, England, helped organize what appears to be the first mass effort in America to teach kindness to animals.'

Early in 1882 he resigned from his Unitarian church in Portsmouth and went to America for a rest cure.

A mutual friend introduced him to George Thorndike Angell, who was a founder of the Massachusetts Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals (the MSPCA). Thomas told Mr. Angell about a Band of Mercy he had started in Portsmouth to encourage children to be kind to animals. It was modelled on the Band of Hope and with cards, badges, banners and a pledge which stated:

'I will try to be kind to all harmless living creatures, and try to protect them from cruel usage.'

The Band of Mercy's five-pointed star badge carried the significant words:

Glory to God

Peace on Earth

Good will to all

Kindness to all harmless living creatures

Angell was so impressed that he uttered the word 'Napoleonic!' He immediately adopted the Band of Mercy idea into the work of the MSPCA and became the first American to sign the pledge.

Encouraged by his wealthy benefactor, Thomas mounted an active and energetic campaign. Within two years there were three and a half thousand American Bands of Mercy in New England alone with nearly a quarter of a million members.



The Universalist minister and suffragist Olympia Brown, the first woman recognised as a minister of a religious denomination (1863), told Thomas: 'Brother, that is about the quickest and smartest bit of good work I ever saw done!'

When he returned from his exhausting American 'rest' cure Thomas re-named his movement the Universal Mercy Band Movement, set up headquarters in London and in September 1885 began work as its energetic secretary. From what we know of his gargantuan work rate it comes as no surprise that Thomas died prematurely. He surely deserves to be far better remembered and honoured?

I now turn to American Unitarian animal welfare advocates who equally deserve to be recognised and honoured.

### **Henry Bergh (1811-1888)**

Henry Bergh was a New York Unitarian who was founder of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) and instrumental in founding the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. He was one of the first campaigners to successfully challenge the prevailing view that animals were property with no innate rights of their own. Because of him it came to be accepted that abuse of animals was an offence not only to religious morality and human sensibility but also established law.

Born to a wealthy New York family, Henry attended Columbia College, travelled to Europe and took over the family business. After his father's death in 1843 he cashed in his inheritance, became a man of leisure and moved to Europe, where he wrote several unsuccessful plays.

In 1863 President Lincoln appointed him to the American Legation in Russia. While in that country Bergh witnessed distressing and often cas-

ual abuse of animals on a massive scale. This and similar experiences in other countries profoundly moved Henry. In 1865, on route back to the United States, he stopped in London to consult the president of the RSPCA.

On returning home to the US he saw equally appalling abuses. Horses were denied regular watering, regularly beaten and released into the streets to starve when they were no longer considered useful. Nor were domestic animals treated much better. They were often denied regular food or shelter and subject to physical abuse. Dogfights, cock-fights and bear-baiting were common forms of 'entertainment'.

Henry used his wealth and considerable social influence to raise public awareness of the suffering of animals and enlisted support from powerful New York politicians, business people and religious leaders in the founding of the ASPCA.

Among these was his own minister, Henry Whitney Bellows, minister of what is now the congregation of All Souls, New York. In 1866 Henry gave a public lecture citing statistics and examples relating to animal abuse. This led to the inception of the ASPCA. Laws granting a charter for the society and punishing cruelty to animals were passed by the New York State Legislature two months later.

When asked about the founding of the ASPCA Bergh replied: 'This is a matter purely of conscience; it has no perplexing side issues. It is a moral question in all its aspects.'

It is worth recording that Henry prudently asked Bellows to provide the names of women as potential patrons and this considerably increased Unitarian support for his work. He used his charm and determination to win over even the Universalist showman P. T. Barnum, whose circus acts he considered cruel and degrading to animals.

Serving as ASPCA President from 1866 until his death, Henry was tireless in advancing his cause. He daily intervened on behalf of mistreated animals on the streets of New York. Wearing a special badge, he arrested and prosecuted violators of the state anti-cruelty laws. An early entry in the ASPCA files records:

‘New York City, April 1866: The driver of a cart laden with coal is whipping his horse. Passers-by . . . stop to gawk not so much at the weak, emaciated equine, but at the tall man, elegant in top hat and pats... explaining to the driver that it is now against the law to beat one's animal.’

Instrumental in getting the Federal government to ban cruelty to animals used for interstate transport, he made lecture tours outside New York and personally inspired the foundation of a number of local anti-cruelty societies elsewhere in the US.

Acting on the belief that ‘mercy to animals means mercy to [humankind]’, he went on to co-found the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

After long years of devoted service to the cause Henry died in 1888. He is buried in Green Wood Cemetery, Brooklyn, New York. It is pleasing that a century later his memory was honoured not only by hundreds of animal lovers and a New York police band but an impressive contingent of dogs. Special permission was granted for them to enter the cemetery to pay their canine respects to the ‘Great Meddler’!

It is noteworthy that Henry acted not from motives of sentimentality but because of the teachings of his Unitarian faith. In the words of one admirer, Diana Beer: ‘For Henry Bergh the ethical recognition of animal suffering was a religious duty. It was a struggle between right and wrong.’

‘Until we have the courage to recognize cruelty for what it is, whether its victim is human or animal, we cannot expect things to be much better in this world.’

So wrote Rachel Carson, considered a leading founder of the modern environmental movement and herself sympathetic to Unitarian Universalism. Henry would be pleased to learn that fellow Unitarians were still carrying on this struggle but he would be unhappy that such a witness was still necessary.

‘We acknowledge and affirm the kinship and interdependence of all beings and adopt an ethic of interspecies compassion as an integral component of liberal religion’, declare Unitarians for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, now known as the UU Animal Ministry: a dedicated band of concerned Unitarian Universalists who believe that the movement to end animal abuse presents us with one of the most pressing moral issues of our time.

Human beings are in danger of losing our connection to the natural world. We live in cities that insulate us from the rhythms of creation. The misuse of science and technology has led us to believe that we are exempt from the laws of Nature.... A human-centred religious tradition has fostered the notion that the Earth and her creatures have no other function other than to serve human wishes.’

This our US co-religionists wish to challenge with passion.

‘These are dangerous beliefs—beliefs which not only justify cruelty toward other sentient beings, but which have also brought about the destruction of the environment and ultimately imperil our own survival. Because the fate of non-human animals is tied to our own, we have little to lose and everything to gain from our activism in response to the current ecological crisis.

As people of faith, we cannot stand idly by or look away as, every day, animals by the billions are imprisoned, hunted, trapped, clubbed, harpooned, poisoned, mutilated, shocked, burned, irradiated, subjected to unspeakable pain and torture, and even pushed to the edge of extinction in the name of science, commerce, entertainment or sport—often for no other reason than to satisfy human vanity.

Drawing on our Unitarian Universalist principles and upon rich religious and philosophical traditions, we aim to deepen our awareness of this moral issue, reaching out to other religious and ethical individuals to shape a vision of liberation that will include all creation.’

Such is their moral imperative, and such is their vision. But they wish to move from the mere celebration of the ‘interdependent web of existence’, which UUs acknowledge, to adopt practices that affirm species interdependence in their everyday personal, social, economic and political lives. They seek to encourage others to explore and adopt a more humane lifestyle: focusing on ethical consumerism, vegetarianism, the use of cruelty-free products and the development of alternatives to the use of animals in research and products testing.

Acting in this ethical spirit Unitarian Universalists as a national body passed in 2010 the Statement of Conscience, Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice.

Unitarian Universalists aspire to radical hospitality and developing the beloved community. Therefore, we affirm that the natural world exists not for the sole benefit of one nation, one race, one gender, one religion, or even one species, but for all. Working in the defense of mutual interests, Unitarian Universalists acknowledge and accept the challenge of enlarging our circle of moral concern to include all living creatures.

We need to love the world through reverence that fosters observant

attention to the intricate relationality of life. Reverence is a form of love that needs to be learned and affirmed.... The task given to us here and now is to do what we can to advance reverence for life and deepen the promise of love.

May we UK Unitarians be truly inspired to witness and to act boldly to live that religious ethic.

*Rev Feargus O'Connor*

### **Humane cancer research: advancing medical knowledge and saving lives**

Breast cancer is the most common cancer affecting women and it has been predicted that 1 in 8 women will be diagnosed with this disease during the course of their lifetime. Treatment may involve traumatic surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy or hormone treatment. Over 11,000 people die each year from breast cancer in the UK alone.

An internationally known breast cancer specialist, Dr Valerie Speirs, professor of experimental pathology and oncology at the University of Leeds, is leading a three-year study, jointly sponsored by Animal Free Research UK and Breast Cancer UK, which will focus on the potential causes of breast cancer. It will specifically examine the impact of endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs), found in materials like pesticides, metals, additives and contaminants in food and personal care products.

By supporting this appeal funding vital humane breast research by Professor Valerie Speirs you will help save human and animal lives. If you wish to send a donation please either donate online or send your cheque, made out to Animal Free Research UK, to: Gandhi Schweitzer Breast Cancer Appeal, Animal Free Research UK, Suite 8, Portmill House, Portmill Lane, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG5 1DJ. Thank you.

Joan Cook, President of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

Rev. Celia Cartwright, Vice-president of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

Rev. Charles VanDenBroeder, immediate past General Assembly President

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Rev. Sue Woolley

Dr David Wykes

This appeal is in the spirit of our 2015 General Assembly resolution encouraging humane medical research. Since our Unitarian Dahar Keable Humane Research Fund was launched in 2016 £22,830 has been donated by UK Unitarians to Animal Free Research UK, mainly to the charity's cancer and diabetes appeals.

### **Relevant note on animal experiments in the UK**

Other studies may involve using 300-400 mice, each implanted with pieces of human tumour and killed at the end of the experiments. Professor Speirs and her research team will use human tissue samples from national and international tissue banks. Not only will this save many animal lives, but the results will relate directly to human breast cancer.

Every minute of every day 7 animals are used in experimental procedures. According to the latest Home Office statistics for the last year for which data is available (2016), there were almost 4 million experiments on animals. Around 18,000 involved specially protected species, ie, horses, donkeys, dogs, cats and non-human primates. There were 4932 procedures on 3,530 dogs and 3,569 procedures on 2,440 primates.

### **Making our chapel work for the community**

#### **By Bronwyn Lowe**

In June 2014 our Chapel here in Dukinfield got a sharp wake up call. Our Property Trustees thought they had been taking the upkeep of our Chapel very seriously, but when a small crack appeared in the ceiling, further investigation led to the closure of our beautiful building pending restoration work – phase one of which would cost over £400,000. This as you can imagine





sparked many a conversation, and for me personally something of a dilemma. I have always been brought up to believe that it was essential that we keep a strong Unitarian presence in the town, but at what cost?

Our Chapel building is inextricably linked to the history of our town and the education of its young people, so it was important that from a historical point of view we should try everything possible to preserve our heritage. Social action has always been at the forefront of my thinking and following



the inspiration of our forefathers here in the town it seemed only fair that we should honour their work by restoring our Chapel. But as in so many cases we are a small congregation and growing older by the minute! It was decided that for right or wrong we should restore our Chapel for worship, and after receiving Heritage Lottery fund monies we reopened for worship in 2017. However, the story as they say didn't stop there. As usual in these kinds of projects more work was uncovered than previously suspected. Further investigation work proved that dry rot was rampant in parts of the chapel, the lower roofs and guttering still needed attention, the stained glass desperately needs renovation work, so what should we do? The conversations were held again, and it seemed that only a further grant from Heritage Lottery would do.



But we began asking the hard questions – what are we doing this for, other than for historical reasons? Who would benefit? Who will come

after us to take on the care of the building? I was not alone in thinking that we needed to make our building fit for the future, whatever that may be. Our town is in desperate need of places for groups to meet – places that are large enough for activities, and cheap to rent. We have a lovely Community Hall at the side of Chapel where our Sunday School meet, we meet for social activities and fund-raising events. But our Chapel is used one day a week for worship and is open for rites of passage (we have many of these because of the large beautiful building we have).

What will the future hold for our children however with two buildings to support, and a small congregation. If we are to take our social action seriously we need to make our buildings fit for future purpose, and with this in mind, we are at present putting together another bid for Heritage Lottery Funding for £1 million (not a lot if you say it quick!) But there is method in our madness. By linking the two buildings together we get a multipurpose complex, and with slight alteration to the interior of the Chapel without destroying its appeal we can give space for groups to meet, open out space for concerts, conferencing space, whilst we are achieving some kind of sustainability. We are hoping to make our spaces Dementia friendly and hope to work alongside our local authority in this. We would love to work alongside our local museum, and along with support from our friends from our local history groups provide another place in the town for exhibitions and the like. It sounds like a lot of work, but I think if we are to make a real difference to the lives of those who we live close to, and give support to those who are in need, we need the tools and the space to do it. I am looking forward to the future now with new eyes. Yes, it will be hard, but as Colin Powell says; “A dream doesn't become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination and hard work.”

## **Comments -**

We welcome your comments on this issue. With your permission your comments might also be included in the NUF Newsletter.

Please send your comments to the editor:

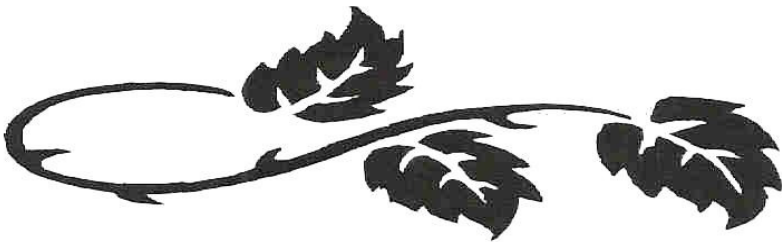
Joan Wilkinson,  
10, Shirley Close,  
Castle Donington.  
DERBY DE74 2XB

*or email to [joan@yorkshiregirl.org.uk](mailto:joan@yorkshiregirl.org.uk)*

# National Unitarian Fellowship

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*Established 1945*



Seeking information about the  
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Web site: [www.nufonline.org.uk](http://www.nufonline.org.uk)

or

email: [nuf@nufonline.org.uk](mailto:nuf@nufonline.org.uk)