

NATIONAL UNITARIAN FELLOWSHIP

NEWSLETTER



Issue 410

November 2013



Harvest Festival at Bridgwater

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*In the flow of religious thought and practice,
Unitarians represent openness and inquiry in the spiritual quest*

Reg. Charity No. 1040294

Secretary's Notes

Ken Smith



With this last Newsletter of 2013 we have to say good-bye to our editor, Joan Wilkinson . Her term of office has seen the publication take on a 'new look' in terms of presentation while maintaining the high standard of content that it has had for many years. We are extremely grateful to her for her dedication to the production of the Newsletter over the last eighteen months. Joan wishes to give more time to the production of video material, examples of which have been appearing regularly on the NUF website, and also to the development of UK Unitarian TV group; the recording of the NUF meeting with student ministers at this year's GA (still available on our website) is an example of their work.

I shall take on the role of editor for the few next few issues but I hope to recruit a team of members to share in this task.

Joan and her husband, John, have made great efforts over the years to make sure that the NUF, and Unitarians more widely, are not 'left behind' by changes in technology. However, we still have a library of over 100 audio tape cassettes that go back many years. Enquiries into the possibility of transferring them to a more modern and accessible medium revealed the commercial cost of this to be high in relation to their possible future use. Accordingly, we have decided to offer these cassettes to members for their own use; if there are members who have the necessary equipment to transfer them to CD/MP3 which might make them more widely available I would be pleased to hear from them. It will take me a while to list them all and sort out those that are of sufficient quality to process but I hope to have a list of the first set ready by the time you read this.

I would like to thank all those who have kindly contributed material to the Newsletter during my time as editor. I hope that readers will be equally as generous for my successor. The role has been a satisfying one, allowing me to get to know more members, discover more about the wider Unitarian community and learn new skills. If anyone is interested in being involved in producing the Newsletter, please do get in touch with Ken Smith.

Joan Wilkinson

President's Letter

Rev Bob Pounder

Dear Friends,

Since the Newsletter is to appear in November, I have been asked to say a few words about Remembrance Sunday. For most of my adult life this annual event has troubled me. I don't have a pacifist background and I recall from my earliest days the violence that was inflicted upon me and which, sadly, I in turn inflicted on others. As a young man I joined the Royal Navy and served on HMS Ark Royal, an aircraft carrier that flew fighter jets and bombers. Close family members fought and died in the two world wars and two ancestors fought at the Battle of Waterloo. No doubt millions can say much the same thing.

However, if there is one thing I do not like to see in a church it is flags - particularly regimental flags and the Union flag, flags that are there, in my opinion, to justify and sanction war, no matter how just the reasons the prosecution of that war may have been. I dislike the militaristic triumphalism of it all, the self-righteousness of state sponsored violence when all we are doing as humans beings is murdering each other. Oh yes, we can talk about the evils of Hitler and of fascism and how it had to be fought - as though ideas of racial purity were unique to 1930s Germany. Actually, some of our own prominent Unitarians, in line with the imperialist ideology of the time, wrote about the 'higher races' presumably meaning white and Anglo-Saxon people. In Britain and the US, the rise of the Nazis was promoted and supported as a bulwark against Stalin's USSR. And Hitler was supported, encouraged and financed by capitalist interests in Britain and in America: a truly toxic mix.

You might think given my past that it's hypocritical of me to rail against war, but as I get older I am increasingly convinced about the futility of war and violence in all its forms. I honour the names on a cenotaph - and the unnamed civilian victims of war - men, women and children. But in the end we have to say that there is no future for humanity in the killing and bombing that is an everyday feature of life on this planet. We need to learn from the past and to move on. The Church sanctions war but I am with Tolstoy who wrote, "The perversion of Christ's teaching by the teaching of the Church is more clearly apparent in this than in any other point of difference".

All good wishes,
Bob

From Our Minister

Rev Tony McNeile

I have changed over the years. I was brought up in an age before the end of Empire. At my school we thought we were the elite - not just as a school but as a country. We laughed with disdain at the foreigners and presumed we had the power to both organise and change the world as we saw fit. We believed that the British Empire was the greatest achievement of civilisation. Those who rose against us were to be threatened with the gunboat and we would send the troops in. It took a long slow process of change to see the vanity of those ideas and assumptions. I have to thank the almost accidental trip into the Unitarian Movement for being an early part of that change.

Amongst the Unitarians I found people who belonged to a different world. They were modest characters but strong, ones who no longer had empire minds. They had that old Liberal philosophy that cared about the suffering in the world and tried to do something about it. Equality of the sexes already existed. They could rub along with anyone from anywhere. These were people of the new world but who had come from an old tradition. It was quite a revelation and an honour to rub shoulders with such principled people and they influenced me greatly. Those Unitarians of old set a new standard in religious thought and practice.

In this day and age we worry greatly about the diminishing number of Unitarians. 'Where will be in ten years time?' we ask. And some people think the answer is 'Gone'! But I don't. As long as there are people who will stand apart from the herd and speak truthfully about the follies of modern life, who have a faith that is rooted in a universal love for the world and its peoples and who actively see in the faces of strangers a brother or a sister then there will always be Unitarians. If we follow them we shall not be the last, for others will follow us. As is so often said, 'Be the change you want to see.'



Worship Piece

We were on holiday and went to look at a local Temple. There was no set worship service going on - just a succession of people coming and going - passers by really. They would stand prayerfully in front of the table, place a small coin in the pot, give a single pull on the little bell rope, bow and walk away to their everyday world - worship done, recognition of their religion and their gods for a moment in the day.

We no longer keep our churches open so that anyone who was passing by could call in to acknowledge their religion and pay their respects to their God.

Those who visited that temple carried their religion with them. Their prayer was at the front of their lives and very much part of who they were and what they did.

With our churches shut but for Sundays we can still acknowledge our faith and guide our lives by it - if we are mindful of our faith. Our temple does not have to be a building, it can be the great cathedral of the earth beneath the dome of the open sky. Its furniture is the view we cast our eyes upon and the music is the hum of life. Anytime anywhere we can say a prayer of thanks, ring the bell that is in our minds and be grateful for life.

Prayer

Let my thoughts flow away beneath the sacred bridge I am standing on. Look into the distance and see loved ones and friends, beckon to them and acknowledge the greetings returned. Wish them well, send them love.

In this moment release the spirit within and let it run for joy, dance and sing. Let the heart rejoice for life is life.

Whatever distress and whatever discomfort I suffer in the stream of life, let me find those moments when I can stand on my sacred bridge and see the love that fills my life.

November : Did you ride the train?

'Did you ride the train to Auschwitz-Birkenau?'

I asked God.

'Were you there?'

'Did you not see' replied God,

'the love in the old eyes of the rabbi,

his sole luggage a basket of challah loaves,

which he broke and blessed and gave

to the children crying in a corner, whose only

companion on that train of destruction was hunger.

Did you not hear the sweet voice of the young mother

who sang 'Oseh shalom' to her fretful baby,

whom then she kissed and held close to her heart?

Yes,

I was there.

When the living and the dead entwined were thrown

from that train into the bitter morning,

were you not moved by the compassion of strangers

supporting the woman, the child, the maimed,

all unknowing on the left hand way to death?

Did you not sense the hope in the eyes

of the young man ordered to work,

and the faith in the heart of the old man

that his God would not desert him?

I was always there.'

said God.

'Cursed, reviled, blamed, cast out, forgotten,

I am there when old enemies touch hands,

when a smile lights up the darkness of despair,

when a cup of water and a crust is shared,

when children looking up at the rising sun

chant and sing amongst the rubble and the dust.

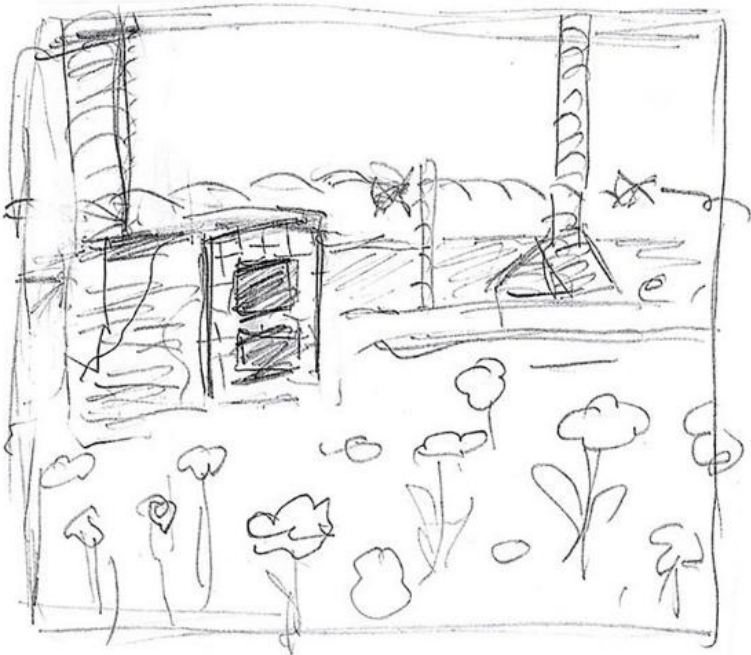
At the bedside of the dying, in the cradle

of new life just born,

I am there.'

Once in this place broken victims, innocents
with eyes made vacant by hungry fear,
waited for the bitter taste of oblivion.
Dark chimneys, long cold now, spring from
fresh mown grass and flowers of yellow and red
weave a living tapestry across the meadow.
Beneath the soft grey haze of a Polish sky
the land lies quiet, at peace,
for Love unbidden is come again.

Naomi Linnell



A Conversation on the Forum

Keith Brown & Naomi Linnell

(KB) I was interested to read Ken Smith's article about the Golden Treasury of the Bible, which is available as a PDF on the Publications section of the main Unitarian website.

As someone brought up in a household deeply suspicious of matters religious, the Bible is a book I have pretty much avoided over the years, associating it with the doom and gloom of Christianity. In that sense Unitarianism has helped open my eyes to it as a historical document of both myth and history, and I am grateful for that and more comfortable in exploring it now.

When I look at the historical theological texts available on the GA site, I am struck, as a relative newcomer, at both their relative radicalism and consistency in their approach to Christianity: no supernatural stuff, Jesus as a human being not god, the concept of the potential for the kingdom of God to reside in every person. Yes, they tend to have a view of God, which might be considered culturally and historically conditioned by their backgrounds, but they tend not to pull their punches. Thus, I find it surprising that there seem to have been divisions about Christianity within Unitarianism. I find no difficulty in enjoying the books of the humanist William R. Murry (e.g. "Becoming More Fully Human"), and yet relishing something like Alfred Halls, "Beliefs of A Unitarian", parts of which, yes, do seem dated. I'm surprised Unitarians don't make more of their version of Christianity, its rich history and its relevance today. Sometimes Unitarians seem to get very uncomfortable where Jesus is concerned and are perhaps terrified that they will become somehow tainted as just another weird Christian church.

Or, more provocatively, is it because we can't cope with Jesus as a flawed person, who had some great things to teach us, but who consorted with common workmen, and prostitutes and the sick, and who didn't have a Phd in comparative religion?

(NL) Yes, I think you make some very good points. My religious background is almost the exact opposite of yours. I was a believing, worshipping, orthodox Anglican for decades. When I first slipped out of the C. of E. I was very glad to find Unitarianism not merely as the enlightened reasoned spiritual path that I had encountered previously as a piece of ecclesiastical history, but rather as a heterogeneous group of spiritual seekers united by common purposes and mutual tolerance.

In this company I personally have never felt the need either to deny my Judaeo-Christian roots or to abandon my devotion to the man Jesus, my chosen spiritual teacher. That many Unitarians do is, of course, a choice they must make if conscience or whatever else drives them along that particular path, which points them in that direction. So long as, and to me this is what crucially holds us all together, each one of us is free to follow his or her own individual path without incurring overt criticism from those who do not think alike. From time to time, such criticism of self proclaimed Unitarian Christians does arise, and this I do find a tad irritating, but then some Unitarians have come to the movement from extremely illiberal and hurtful Christian denominations and backgrounds.

If you are interested in the values of the Unitarian Christian Association to which some of us belong, their website is at www.unitarianchristian.org.uk. The UCA publishes a quarterly journal, *The Liberal Christian Herald*, copies of which can be found in the Archives pages of the site. It is very well edited and presented and one of my close atheist friends seems to enjoy it nearly as much as I do. If nothing else, it provides us with hours of robust but happy discussion.

(KB) Yes, as Forrest Church wrote in "A Chosen Faith", "For each of us to grow in faith and understanding, we can do no better than to cultivate and develop the particular meanings reflected in our own traditions and cultures." So that in our culture the teachings of Jesus must have an honoured place in our theologies, even if only because of our history. Therefore, for me every Unitarian is by definition a Christian, by which I mean that we all have access to the Jewish and Christian thought, which can be brought into our Unitarian theological mix.

I am very drawn to Church's "Cathedral of the World" concept and so see Christianity as one of the windows into the cathedral, refracting the light in different patterns upon the floor. Over time, the spiritual seeker may move from window to window, enjoying the different coloured reflections and patterns, but the light is always there, for anyone to return to. It will always be a part of the great Unitarian spiritual conversation. So by definition, the term Unitarian Christian has no real meaning for me, since we all can explore this light. I worry that separate groupings might result in people's spiritual journeys being as if in railway carriages, travelling along parallel tracks, and waving to those on the adjacent tracks, but unable to really communicate. I would make the same observation about the "Earth, Spirit Network" or other groups.

I suspect that, as Forrest Church claims, Unitarianism has expanded beyond a liberal Christian faith to one best described as non-Christian, but as more than Christian. Back in 1962, Alfred Hall noted how he "felt that he has been kept outside other religious communions, not because he has believed too little, but because he has believed too much. Instead of looking up to Jesus as the only Saviour of the world, Unitarians regard him and all good men as saviours. Instead of accepting a few miracles recorded in the Bible, they reverence the great 'miracle' of Creation and of all life. Instead of saying that the Bible alone contains the word of God, they hold that every true and uplifting word is inspired by him (or her or it: my addition)."

(NB) Since as well as enjoying membership of the UCA I am also a member of the Unitarian Earth Spirit Network, the thought of making a perpetual journey strung several feet between two moving carriages is a painfully uncomfortable one. I would much prefer to imagine myself sitting at ease on a large patchwork cushion enjoying both the distinctive and peculiar design and texture of each patch, while admiring the exquisitely fine and discrete stitchery which joins the many disparate pieces into one secure and comfortable whole. Or to put it another way, each individual Unitarian group has the capacity to appeal as one attractive facet of a larger faith or understanding, which does not authoritatively impose restrictive boundaries on any of us or direct us along precisely defined narrow exclusive paths, but opens up a broad welcoming landscape with room enough for everyone to breathe and to freely explore - each to discover his or her own spiritual niche. This, in fact, has largely been my experience, and I am very grateful for it.

(KB) I really like your patchwork cushion concept, that's brilliant! Perhaps not a million miles from Forrest Church's cathedral of the world. I acknowledge that the sceptic in me might have overpowered the optimist as far as special interest groups are concerned.

It's a very elegant and perhaps deserved riposte. The Forum is sometimes good at provoking a rethink or development of ideas and so I've found this discussion helpful.

(NL) Thank you, I have thoroughly enjoyed our discussion. For Unitarians like myself, who, for whatever reasons, are unable to enjoy membership of a gathered congregation, these kind of encounters on the Forum are not only a great pleasure but also crucial for our wellbeing. I daily thank God for Tim Berners-Lee and his Marvellous Mechanical Wonder-Web.

Ken Smith writes in response, as the author of the article about the Golden Treasury of the Bible in the last *Newsletter*: it is gratifying to have these appreciative comments. I intend in a future article to explore further the specifically Unitarian approach to the Bible and will refer to some of the writings available on the main Unitarian website. The UCA promises the appearance of a new publication soon, exploring the Unitarian perspective on Christianity. I would commend one of their previous publications, 'The Man they call the Christ' by David Doel. I hope that in the future they might consider re-publishing some of David's other books or perhaps digitising them for availability on the website.

Editor's Note:

The Man they call the Christ by David Doel is available from the NUF Book Collection.

The lengthy discussion taken from the Forum is included as an excellent example of how some of the different perspectives of the Unitarian movement can be addressed resulting in a way which supports our claim of being united in our differences.

I would encourage more members to join the Unitarian Internet/Forum by going on to the website at: www.nufonline.org.uk and following the directions there.

Why I became a Unitarian

Ian Martin

In the last edition of the Newsletter, and on the Forum, members were asked the above question. The following is a response from Ian Martin, our member living in Thailand.

The 1960s was an exciting time with a revolutionary spirit. Many young people questioned the society of the time, mostly at the political level.

My "rebellion" took the form of anti-clericalism and in a rejection of religion. However I began to move in a more positive direction and accept the position that truth was not exclusive to any one religion but could be found in all religions.

The Unitarian Church was the place where I could find my spiritual home. I began attending on a regular basis and although I moved abroad I remained in contact with a congregation. I joined the NUF in order to strengthen my ties to the Unitarian movement.

Diary of R.E. Summer School August 2013 - Living at the Edge

Howard Wilkins

Sat 17th En-route I drove to see Joan in her care home where their Summer Fete was being held. Then on to Great Hucklow, with memories of previous Summer Schools, half days out to Calver, with its imposing 19c textile mill and the historic Stoney Middleton village trail.

Check in early meeting new and old friends and help move tables for an Engagement Group, the raison-d'être of Summer School. At last Happy Hour followed by a cooked meal and food and drink at last. Then a 'getting to know you' session with games, arranging ourselves in order of distance travelled, then birth date, spiritual beginnings and current spiritual position and all without speaking. To end the day a silent walk to the chapel, in its beautiful and historic surroundings, for the epilogue.

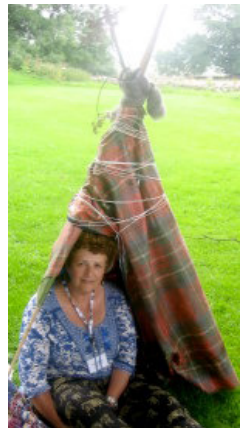
Sun 18th Eased gently into the day with a meditation by Rev Liz Birtles. Michael Dadson led the Sunday service about 'being at the edge', the edge of the world; the edge of the sea; the edge of our experience. Memories of days and people past returned as we sang lustily. Met a new friend on the 'getting to know you walk' – a doctor as was my grandfather. We had much to talk about.

After lunch the work really started with my chosen Engagement Group for the week – 'On the Edge of Nature'. Like Thoreau at Walden we built shelters using string, sticks, osiers, and plastic bags – an 'edgy' experience.

"Loitering within tent" Thoreau pitched in with the pine but how can I with no DIY store? Call a friend; but will they have the right object, or will they object to being asked?

In the evening 'Mindful Colouring' and losing myself in intricate patterns and living the experience intently.

Mon 19th Mindful Meditation lying on the floor arthritic hip permitting! The first theme speaker for the week, Rob Gregson, spoke on how we experience changes of environment, 'living on the edge'. Our Engagement Group took a walk contemplating nature, the geology, the prehistory in the stones, all on the edge of the world. We contemplated the long-lasting effects on the environment of lead mining, with some fields being so contaminated young livestock can no longer be grazed there.



I sing, sing, sing of the natal lava that pushed me foetus-like onto a waiting landscape.

I sing of the warmth that begat me, moulded me, enfolded me, nurtured me, and forced me up, and out to blearily emerge into a prehistoric sun.

In the afternoon we discussed the last two of T S Eliot's *Four Quartets*. In the evening I spoke to a group about dementia, the care of my wife Joan having given me much experience on caring for a loved one suffering with it.

Tues 20th John Naish gave the morning's theme talk. What a mind blowing life. In the Engagement Group we had a gentle walk, wrote poetry and shared it with each other. I wish I thought my poetry was as good as everybody else thinks it is , but you can't argue with a professor. Painting was on the agenda for the afternoon and in the evening we shared our favourite poetry.

Wed 21st For the theme talk, Kate Buchanan spoke about her life on the edge. Afterwards, our Engagement Group walked to the nature reserve and wrote poetry about mining, dragonflies and dew-ponds.

Thoughts in a nature reserve: Shimmering Dragon Fly –a stately iris –a nascent dew pond – a flare of Rose Bay Willow Herb – stillness – peace – the bleating of sheep – regal Reed Mace – unruly Ragwort – the breeze stirs – the sound of the wind on the glider above – lambs calling mu..m – the whoosh of my blood circulating – buzzing insects and I hold the universe in my mind.

At last packed lunch and a free afternoon to walk with two friends to the industrial heritage, canal and chapel left by Arkwright at Cromford Mill. An evening sharing favourite music, what bliss.

Thurs 22nd Rev Jim Corrigan, ex-journalist, spoke about his life on the edge. To the neglected school garden we went with the Engagement Group for more versification and sharing. After lunch friends and I watched John O'Donohue and Satish Kumar videos.

Fri 23rd Only one more day of delicious joy on the edge and our last theme speaker Winnie Gordon and a life on the edge worldwide. All things must return to nature so more poetry and deconstructing of our shelters with an afternoon of light weeding or de-nettling followed by an evening of party.

Sat 24th Packing up and I leave, taking many good memories with me.

The hamlet settles on the landscape – hugging the hillside – enfolding the community in its warm embrace.

The second year of training

Jo James

“What Is Religion And How Should It Be Studied?” is the title of my current assignment for the Advanced Diploma I'm reading, a research qualification and the second of the two external theology courses that are a requirement of my Unitarian Ministry training. I've now completed the first course, the Theology Certificate offered through the Department of Theology at Oxford. The Advanced Diploma is through the Faculty of Divinity in Cambridge. I think this is what is meant by 'higher' education.

“What Is Religion And How Should It Be Studied?”... is rather occupying my mind as I sit in the Chapel of Manchester College, Oxford as the day begins, as it does every week, with an act of worship devised by one of my colleagues in the current intake of Unitarian ministry students. It is a beautifully crafted devotion beginning with a piece of piano music and continuing with a short meditation on a well told wisdom tale.

The chapel at College is designed by William Morris at the height of the Arts and Crafts revival, the movement inspired by the enlightenment idealism shared by so many Unitarians in the nineteenth century. These Unitarians had brought their Dissenting Academy from Warrington in Cheshire via York and London to Oxford as a bold affirmation that non-conformist academic education deserved recognition alongside the best academic institutions in the world. The first women ministers to be formally ordained to preach in Britain were trained here and a portrait of one of them hangs in the room we sit in to listen to the first tutorial of the day.

Our tutor inspires discussion of his theme in such a way that learning seems to be a dialogue or a discourse and not a set of principles to be taught and learned. In the afternoon one of my colleagues and I read out an essay and each is critiqued by our peers and tutor. At the end of the day we students drink tea and talk. Some of my colleagues are reading for MA's in Biblical Theology, and Pastoral Theology alongside our Unitarian studies. We are all required to participate in placements with host congregations and are also working on extra curricular courses; in meditation, spiritual direction, etc. All of us also lead worship at our home and other congregations and participate on committees, working groups, district associations. We seem to have plenty to talk about. This part of the day is an important part of our work in ways that would be hard to evaluate. I drive home wondering; 'What Is Religion and

How Should It Be Studied?'

My daughter is three and a half. She has just started at nursery school and looks very grown up in her uniform. As I drop her off next morning she says "Daddy, I want a hold". So I pick her up and cuddle her close before we say goodbye for the day. As I walk away I feel a visceral sensation of a stretching but not quite breaking of the sinew of love, an only just bearable pain.

"What Is Religion and How Should It Be Studied?"

Before I can get down to work on the assignment I need to speak to someone on the phone; I'm preparing a funeral for this coming weekend and I've an appointment to speak with the partner of the deceased about the service. He is incredibly brave, composed as I'm sure I could never be, and we talk about the man he has lost, and so clearly loved, so that I can attempt to do some justice to my portrait of him in my service. Many of the family are Catholic although no longer practising, but some of the family and many friends are Nichiren Buddhist and I want to serve both those faith traditions. Ultimately though I aim to minister to the simple human pain of this untimely and tragic loss. After the conversation I sit quietly for a while before beginning to look through some proposed readings, and make the first of my notes towards the service.

I'm also leading the Sunday service at my home congregation this weekend so I start planning the outline of that service too, on the theme of 'prayer and prayerfulness'.

I need to get to my essay before its time to pick up my daughter again. I look at the title; "What Is Religion and How Should It Be Studied?"...

It's the thought that counts

Rev Tony McNeile

I finished my training as a minister and spent some time in Cheshire before moving to Bolton. I remember being so nervous when I had to conduct my first funeral. Luckily for me it was for a wonderful old gentleman who had had a very interesting life. His family were so proud of him and spoke eloquently about his life and achievements.

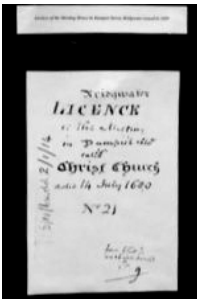
A few months later I had to visit the same family as the old gentleman's wife, their mother had died. What a contrast! When I asked about her they said, 'Well there's nothing really. It was dad who was so special.!' I felt stunned.

Their Mum's name was Beatrice – and her name means 'Making Happy', and that is what she had done over all those years, quietly getting on with life, looking after the family, making them happy. She had cared for her wonderful husband, she had cared for the children and brought them all up without any fuss or bother. She had been that person in the background who had quietly been the mainstay of the family.

When we next met, the family remembered their Mum in a different way. Yes she had indeed spent her life making sure they had been happy children and that they had lived in a happy home. She devoted her life to making them happy. It was a lesson to me too – never to say of anyone's life that it was 'nothing really'.

UK Unitarian TV at Christ Church Unitarian Chapel, Bridgwater

Joan Wilkinson



The Bridgwater congregation had invited the UKUTV team to join them to film their Harvest Festival. The theme was sharing, with the collection in aid of "Water Aid" and the non-perishable produce being donated to the local "Food Bank". The service was lead by Eleanor Dixon, who readers may have read about in the 14 September edition of "The Inquirer", as having being awarded Honorary Life Membership in appreciation of over 50 years service to Unitarianism both in the West Country and nationally.

We sometimes forget that the roots of many of our oldest chapels are grounded in Presbyterianism, and this was the case with Christ Church Unitarians. Reverend John Norman was ejected for not conforming to the new Prayer Book introduced by the Act of Uniformity of 1662. Norman took his followers with him. He was imprisoned for 18 months and died in 1668. However he had established a following, who were also prepared to go to prison. But we do know that their was a building in existence in July 1683, which was demolished and the present building erected in 1688, and granted a licence to preach in 1689 (see photograph above). This building remains the oldest dissenting building in Bridgwater but there have been several alterations since.

Although English Presbyterians continued to describe themselves as Presbyterians as late as about 1850 the name *Unitarian* began to be used from 1791 in the West Country even though *Unitarian* theology remained illegal for a further 20 years or so. After 1823 most of the West Country Presbyterian and

General Baptist congregations were describing themselves as Unitarian.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, although not a member of Bridgwater congregation, warrants a mention. The famous poet often attended between 1797 to 1800, walking from his cottage in Nether Stowey. At this point in his life he was considering the possibility of becoming a Unitarian Minister but was encouraged by members of the Wedgewood family to write. I am photographed sitting in the old box pew, where Coleridge sat.



Information taken from the Chapel's leaflet.

Book Reviews

Life can be worth living, by Julian Huxley. London: C.A. Watts, 1939. 8pp.

Julian Huxley wrote this article to explain from a religious humanist viewpoint how life could be worthwhile, and like many articles it was republished frequently (in this case, as a recruitment leaflet for the Rationalist Press Association). He also wrote "Religion without Revelation" which went through four editions, and "Essays of a Humanist".

Huxley believed that life might be worth living, and men, either individually, as groups, or collectively, can achieve a satisfying purpose in existence, despite many factors to the contrary. This purpose does not derive from the universe or our own existence, nor was the scale of values which he believed in, absolute or transcendental – they derived from the interaction of human nature with the outer world.

He believed that there were many questions which were unanswerable, and therefore quite useless and a waste of time and energy to address. Even in science we must learn to ask the right questions.

Huxley was agnostic regarding God or immortality. "We are confronted with forces beyond our control, with incomprehensible disasters, with death" and with essentially religious experiences. Out of these bricks of actual experiences are woven the theistic religions. Consequently, seeking salvation in the afterlife was useless; however, it was worthwhile in this life - achieving harmony between different parts of our nature, and also some satisfactory adjustment between ourselves and the outer world, including Nature and Society.

If God and immortality be repudiated, the believer objects, then what is left? Huxley answers, in fact a great deal is left. Without belief in God or immortality, men and women may still have a as great a motivation for a full and purposeful life, and as great a sense of the worthwhileness of existence, as do the most devout believers.

Huxley believed this was more achievable, because of advancing knowledge. We are no longer obliged to accept the catastrophes and miseries of existence as inevitable or mysterious. Likewise, our inner sufferings can, sometimes, be understood and remedied: children need not grow up burdened with guilt, fear and cruelty. This hope for human betterment preaches hope and inspires for action.

Colin Mills

Imagine my surprise to discover two more Unitarian novelists from the York Unitarians and pick up two novels whilst on a recent visit there.

Eileen Scott's '**Soredia Inheritance**', first published in 1999 is an examination of the tension between pure science and applied science within the ethically dubious pharmaceutical industry. What are the boundaries between truth, morals and the need to exist in a market economy based on the need to make a profit? This is no cold examination but a real page turner where relationships matter, not only between people but with the earth that supports them. It is both mystery, romance and a morality tale. A gripping read. The scientist behind the novelist shines through. It is available on Kindle from Amazon.

Michael Scott's '**2055**' published in 2010 is a book of prophecy reminding me of Jeremiah in the Old Testament. It shows what the future will be like, when the earth can no longer sustain human life that has become physically and morally corrupt to the point of near extinction. However, this is not a hopeless book but rather works through to demonstrate that there could be a second evolutionary phase of homo sapiens based on a spirituality not of religion as we currently see it. This novel has to be read much more slowly than the first, as we engage with the profound questions about what personal and community survival might mean. Again though, an excellent read with the scientist's understanding adding plausibility to this work of fiction.

The book is available from Fisher King Publishing.

Joan Wilkinson

Diary Dates

23 Nov: **2013 Channing Lecture** – ‘More Than Merely Christian: Emerson’s Wider Vision for Unitarianism’. The speaker will be Rev Dr Patrick T O’Neill. The lecture is scheduled for 3pm at Golders Green Unitarians, Hoop Lane, London NW11 8BS. Tickets are £5.

6 - 8 Dec: **Hucklow Christmas Party Weekend**. Enjoy the company and ambience of Christmas. Also light ‘switch on’ in the village. All the fun of good company at The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow. Contact Stella Burney at: 01298 871218 or info@thenightingalecentre.org.uk .

13 - 16 April: **2014 GA Annual Meetings**. The 2014 Annual Meetings are due to take place at Whittlebury Hall, from Sunday 13 to Wednesday 16 April 2014.

Videos on the UK Unitarian TV channel of YouTube

IARF Conference youtu.be/pBhtFfvqWku	Harvest Festival Service from Bridgwater youtu.be/3EDqQ7aqCuY	Harvest Festival Service from Dukinfield youtu.be/0f-HhBN4Pzs
Music at York: youtu.be/QlI2pZ9e_bU	Why go to Bridgwater? youtu.be/RFzqymdk-X4	Why go to Altrincham Church? youtu.be/wKXGSt_XzpA
Why go to York? youtu.be/-bDKb_JU6_M	History of Bridgwater Chapel youtu.be/4cgrdyI5U6k	Elizabeth Hornby, her music and faith youtu.be/GrNeviOkMPA

Ken Smith will be editing the January *Newsletter*. Please let Ken have your contributions and letters by 14 December at the latest. You will find Ken’s address on the back cover.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish all our readers a Happy Christmas.

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