

The National Unitarian Fellowship

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and Free Christian Churches

News and Views



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

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The following were broadcast on the community radio station Bolton Fm in the first week of June which included the commemoration of the D Day Landings.

Some thoughtful words from our minister Reverend Tony McNeile

I still hear my mother's voice as we walked around Lewis's department store in Liverpool, 'don't touch anything'; I was terrified. I thought my brushing shoulder could crash down the whole china department, but I wanted to touch. You don't really shop by just looking. The power of touch feeds the brain, eyes might be attracted but it is touch that feels the quality and perceives the value. Could you buy a coat or shoes without first touching and exploring that quality? You can't go into a bookshop and buy a book without picking it up, feeling it physically, browsing through the pages to discover if it is worthy to be a possession.

Touch has power beyond the reach of the fingers. The king touches the shoulder with a sword to recognise service and loyalty, the priest lays a hand on the head in blessing or healing. The handshake is a symbol of trust and friendship and a gesture to honour an agreement. Touch creates a bond.

Touch has a spiritual quality because it is linked to love. Love can be withdrawn or withheld by denying touch. Love can reach out with a caress or a hug to comfort, to reassure, to welcome. Love is in the touch that strokes the cat or the dog.

Love carries the spiritual power of touch from person to

person in coloured light.

If love has no touch everything might be broken.

I am Tony McNeile a Unitarian

More Minister's Musings from Reverend Tony McNeile

A chance encounter ...

I was walking through the town centre a few weeks ago, minding my own business when I had a collision when a lady came out of one of the shops and hadn't seen me. I hadn't seen her. She apologised profusely and said she hadn't heard me. 'It's okay' I said, 'no damage done I hope'. Then she started to tell me her story. 'I am almost blind', she said, 'my sight has gone over the last three years and I am in my 70s. It is very hard trying to adjust to a new way of living, I rely very heavily on sound'. She went on to tell me of the support she gets but now and again she did need to venture out on her own and that is when she feels most vulnerable. I admired her confidence and her will to succeed in coping with this disability that had come upon her. I tried to imagine how I would feel in such circumstances, I imagined I would be quite helpless being clumsy at the best of times.

It made me more aware of how difficult it is to cope in the world if you have a disability. Somehow or other people find an inner strength and a way to compensate. Sometimes the other senses become sharper. Perhaps we need to be more aware of the people around us as we wander around the shops.

Welcome

Welcome to the summer edition of News and Views from the NUF. While the word summer is something of a misnomer to describe the months of rains we seem to be enduring, in spite of our being told that these are the warmest months on record, let us be optimistic and believe that the the low pressures bursting in from the Atlantic will be overcome by high pressure from Spain and we can all go to the beach!

Meanwhile, please enjoy these offerings. We look forward to hearing from you with your own contributions about where you live and what it is famous for. Please don't forget the photography competition - to feature on the 2025 NUF Calendar. And I hope you will be able to attend the NUF Annual One Day conference in September.

....and on cats and contemplation

One of the cats that wanders around our neighbourhood is large, fluffy and brown. It wanders into the backyard as if it owns the place. The other day I watched it settle down on top of the dividing fence between the two gardens managing to lie stable on the narrow batten of wood. It seemed to be quite

content.

We wondered if it had found a good place to watch the bird feeder but no bird in its right sense would have gone to the bird feeder with the cat so nearby. The cat might have stopped for a few moments of doing nothing or to contemplate on some issue of importance to cats.

The old monastic religious orders set much store by contemplation. One form of Buddhist meditation focuses on an object, a patterned plate or a flower, contemplates it and tries to re-create the image in the mind's eye. The religious orders used contemplation as a means of clearing the mind of everyday thoughts and focusing on the divine. They made space for contemplation as part of their worship.

In our fast-moving living world, contemplation often takes a back seat, there doesn't seem enough time to stop for anything and the world rushes round in our heads without a break.

Taking those few moments of doing nothing as the cat did could make all the difference, you don't have to sit on the fence.

....and a bit of common sense

I got into trouble at school once. The teacher set a test posing the question 'sight is one of the five senses, what are the others?' I knew them all, taste, smell, touch, hearing, common sense and sixth sense. His response was that 'common sense wasn't one and I didn't have any, and there was no such thing as sixth sense'. I was made to and write that out fifty times.

Actually I did believe in a sixth sense and still do, as we grow up and develop common sense, we realise there is more than just the five senses to help us get through life. We say that animals have a sixth sense. They know things without

the five senses having to tell them, they know about changes in the weather without having to tap a thermometer, they know about fire coming before they hear it or smell it. Human sixth sense is more developed we have that magic sense called intuition. Intuition is a kind of knowing more than what seems normal or everyday. Intuition tells us if someone is sad or ill without a question being asked. Intuition tells us if we are being told the truth or not. When it comes to problem solving, intuition is there to help. Composers are given their songs and their music, writers are given their stories. The sixth sense is our gateway into the spiritual and unconscious world. It is worth testing.

....and remembering

Some wars pass into the pages of history. Wars within an empire fought by regular soldiers on distant shores. There was heroism and glory. The dusty standards adorned with honoured names hang in churches and museums to remind us of a glorious past.

Some wars will never be forgotten, they are etched into the national psyche and conscience. One is the First World War of 1914, remembered with such sadness year by year because every town and village remembers its men who were slaughtered in the trenches of Europe in a war between ambitious nations.

The other is the Second World War. June commemorates the 80th anniversary of the D Day landings. The mission was to liberate the countries that had been overrun by a regime which at its heart was evil. The evil in one man had stirred and unleashed the worst traits in the human character, traits that good honest people leave undisturbed in the depth of their psyches.

D day carried the spear that would slay the dragon that

had been released into the world. It was a battle that had to be won, it was a battle to restore the norms of civilisation and the rights of all people to live peaceably and pursue their fortunes free from fear.

We pray for peace in our churches, week by week, under the hanging standards of the Regiments. Often peace has a price to pay.

I am Tony McNeile a Unitarian

We asked you to tell us about a place where you live or where might have significance for you. Patrick recalls his childhood village where his mother had also grown up whilst Sarah shares the delights of her new home.

A little bit of old England by Reverend Patrick Timperley

This article is partly about Oxford, which is not a city I know very well but a place I have enjoyed visiting - and partly about the village in Leicestershire where I grew up (and where my mother had grown up before me), a place called Thurcaston.

If you go to Oxford, to the north side of the city centre, where the main road widens out into an area known as St Giles, there is a large stone monument in the middle of the road, referred to as 'The Martyrs' Memorial'. The memorial was erected in memory of Church of England ministers (two bishops and one archbishop) who were tied to stakes and then burned to death near to that location in the 1550s. This was the period during the reign of the Roman Catholic Queen Mary I when the religious views of these Church of England ministers had become unacceptable.

Growing up in Thurcaston in the 1970s, I wasn't aware of the Martyrs' Memorial in Oxford, but my family was connected

to the parish church in the village, an old building dating back to the 12th century, and where my grandfather was a sidesman. I understood that we were members of the Church of England, which meant that we were not 'chapel people' (Methodists) but also we were not Roman Catholics (because they followed the Pope in Rome and we did not).

The idea that we were not Roman Catholic might have been especially strong because on the wall of the parish church in Thurcaston was a memorial to a parishioner named Hugh Latimer. Born around 1485, the son of a smallholder, Latimer did very well at school, went to the university at Cambridge, was ordained as a priest and ultimately became a court preacher in the royal household of King Edward VI.

During Latimer's lifetime there were many changes in religion and society, notably the increasing use of the Bible in English for reading and preaching. The Church of England was of course coming into existence when Henry the Eighth split away from the Pope over a divorce dispute and the closure of the monasteries and the appropriation of their funds.

Hugh Latimer went through the full shift of his church from Catholic to Protestant and became a popular preacher. He was appointed Bishop of Worcester, but there was a tragic twist in the tale in 1553 when King Edward VI was succeeded by the Roman Catholic Queen Mary. Latimer's views on the sacrament of Holy Communion were deemed to be heretical and he ended up being executed at Oxford, at around the age of 70. He is one of the bishops commemorated on the Martyrs' Memorial.

The story of Hugh Latimer is a salutary reminder that it's not so very long ago in England that we indulged in punishment, torture, and execution on the grounds of religion.

Just along a lane from the church in Thurcaston is an old

timber-framed house with a thatched roof. The name of this house is Latimer Cottage because it was understood to have been the childhood home of Hugh Latimer. Whether that's true or not was never quite certain, though it looked old enough!

When I was growing up in the 1970s Latimer Cottage was occupied by three unmarried elderly siblings. the Misses Sedgwick and Gerry Sedgwick. It all seems so long ago now, really a bygone era, how society has changed; I didn't realise I was that old! But what I remember is that there was a lovely garden full of flowers next to the old house - and thinking of it now, that tranquil space of clipped hedges and climbing roses seems a million miles away from a death in Oxford, and the cruelty and theological intolerance of the 16th century, the personal pain and suffering which came to Hugh Latimer.

The Martyrs' Memorial is indeed still there in St Giles in Oxford, but so is the cottage garden in Thurcaston reminding us (as it seems to me) that in the end, whatever our travails and our sufferings, peace will come to us all.

Sarah Tinker shares her experience and appreciation of relocating to Epping Forest and an invitation

A New Area to Love – Reverend Sarah Tinker

Many of us have a story to tell about the year 2020. Some are painful stories of loss, of illness, of difficulties and complications with long-reaching effects. I count myself very fortunate indeed to have a cheerier tale to tell. Whilst still working full time as minister with Kensington Unitarians in Notting Hill, I no longer needed to be living there ‘over the shop’. So I moved - to my partner John’s home in Woodford, on the edge of Epping Forest in the far north east of London, where our capital city adjoins the county of Essex.

There was a whole new area to get to know and what a remarkable area Epping Forest is. Once part of ancient woodland, preserved as a royal hunting ground, Epping Forest now runs for some 17 miles, north to south, sometimes wide, sometimes narrow, with roads, housing and Transport for London’s Central Line tube crossing the forest’s woods and heathlands; to have such an open expanse on the northeast edge of London is remarkable. The fact that parts of this ancient forest are still in existence can be credited to many people’s efforts, even Queen Victoria played her part. It is regarded as one of the first environmental campaigns and it led to the City of London buying the land and committing to run it for the public benefit as a way to stop big landowners from enclosing the forest land for their own use. It became known as ‘The People’s Forest’.

Two thirds of the forest is now designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and in that first lockdown of 2020 I came to know and love some trees that were new to me, especially hornbeams. They are one of the species of ancient trees that Epping Forest is known for, along with oak, beech and a few remaining examples of the service-tree. There are over 55,000 ancient trees in this forest, more than any other single site in the United Kingdom. There are more than 100 ponds and lakes to discover too, but some I’ve only come

across once and then never found again. There is even a lake called appropriately the Lost Lake! It is easy to get lost in Epping Forest as a newcomer and quite hard at times to get your bearings, especially if you can't see the sun through the now high branches of once pollarded trees. Sometimes I can only orientate myself by listening for the tube trains trundling along in the distance on their way to or from Epping or central London.

There are, of course, many pressures on the forest today, situated so close to such built up areas. Traffic is a risk to the deer and other wildlife; the problem of fly-tipping is a serious issue. It is dispiriting to see bags of builders' rubble dumped by the side of a quiet lane, though it's always quickly cleared away by the forest rangers. I joined the forest volunteers as a litter picker but am surprised how little litter is left by visitors generally. Barbecues occasionally cause grass fires when the summer grassland is tinder dry. Parking now has to be paid for, much to some locals' annoyance. The land has to be managed rather than simply left for nature to take its course. Longhorn cattle are now used to graze the grasslands to stop the growth of scrub, the many holly bushes are periodically cut down to make space for other pioneer trees like the silver birch to flourish. It's a pleasure to see the care with which the forest is managed, though decisions are sometimes contentious – culling fallow deer periodically and trying to eradicate the muntjac deer that so damage young trees.

By the end of 2020 I had decided to retire from ministry and to settle in Woodford and even after a few years of living here I can still get lost in Epping Forest. If you happen to be in the area, let me know; I could take you to see the remains of an Iron Age ring fort or to find where the Greenwich Meridian crosses a hillside or to visit Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge with its panoramic views of forest and grassland. I could definitely find our way there and with a bit of luck get us back to

the Tube line for the journey home.

I wonder if any of you have had the experience of getting to know a completely new area later in life? Or is there an area of land that really feels like 'home' for you? For me, that home landscape is still the Peak District, where it reaches the southwest corner of Sheffield but Epping Forest is a loved second home.

Some words of inspiration from Wirral Unitarians

Some news from Wirral Unitarians and a word of appreciation from two of their members, Richard and Helen Merritt

Wirral Unitarians is a small congregation with the current attendance just about managing double figures, but in April 2024 we organised our 50th Sunday afternoon 'Charity Classics' concert. In our usual place of worship, Heswall Quaker Meeting House, we provided a varied mix of music ranging from Bruch trios for clarinet, viola and piano, Gluck's 'Dance of the Blessed Spirits' (on flute) to 'Bless the House' and 'Stormy Weather' sung by a local baritone with much else in between.



This concert series has involved over 130 local amateur musicians over the years and raised around £15,000 for local charities. Richard Merritt added that he had personally done nearly all the necessary accompanying which he says has been an enjoyable experience! Wirral Unitarians have, in recent years been without their own building and concerts have helped with the congregation's visibility. Richard added that every programme sheet has included a short explanation about Unitarianism.

Richard went on to thank Tony McNeile, our NUF Minister (who needs no introduction), for his 'continuing hard work for the movement very much appreciated'. Richard added that 'as a member of a small congregation NUF is one of the ways of connecting with a wider range of Unitarians and their thinking'

Thank you to Richard for his kind comments, I am sure we all agree with his sentiments and congratulate Wirral Unitarians for their significant efforts in both fundraising and raising the profile of our movement.

Luck by Ian Lowe

Ian is a member of Park Lane Chapel, Ashton in Makerfield

Christmas has come and gone, and as usual, this has meant more books for me. What else can you get for a grumpy old man who finds pleasure in sitting in the corner with something to read, cutting himself off from the rest of the world? So I've had a book and book tokens while Susan looks on helplessly as my book pile grows. The bookshelves have been filled for ages with books that I just can't throw away, in case I want to read them again - and sometimes I do. Books haven't always played such a dominant part in my life. One of my earliest memories is of a Christmas when I was very young and my Auntie Mary bought me an ABC book. On one of the pages was a colourful picture of a Knight and his lady. I still remember that she was called Phoebe, and name which I had immense trouble with. Feeling that he had an academic on his hands (mistakenly as it turned out) my dad bought me a present of a series called 'The Classics', but apart from these there were few books in our house. I was taken to the library but made my own way down there after seeing 'Children of the New Forest' on television but didn't get along there very often.

Books then really didn't have a grip on me but I loved the cinema, cowboy films particularly, which led my mother to respond by buying me 'Buffalo Bills Wild West Annual' as a Christmas present. It was quite well written and with his colourful pictures of the wild West I was hooked. Noting this my mother kept buying this series until it became quite embarrassing in my teens and I had to hint that I was a bit too old for them. The problem was that as I matured, my tastes in literature didn't.

Salvation came when my mother saved some coupons and I sent away through copy of Morris West's 'The Shoes of the Fisherman'. this was a revelation and I began to experience

literature. I hungry devoured anything that he had written and of course moved on to other writers. Probably what others regards as great literature but still elude me but I find real pleasure in reading.

I think that life is made up of lucky accidents which happened to some people. The accident may be where you were born, the ambition which your parents have for you, the friends whom you meet and so on. I have been lucky in all sorts of ways and learning to enjoy reading through Auntie Mary's book choice and my mother mother saving the soap coupons is one of them. I said I think that we should look at everyone and see what they might have been with just a little more luck.

Reverend Phil's Book Reviews

Thank you once again to Reverend Phil Silk for his excellent book reviews Phil is an avid and diverse reader and he shares his perspectives on a wide range of books

Silence in an Age of Noise by Erling Kagge, translated from Norwegian by Becky L Crook; Penguin Books; 2016;128p plus notes. Given this, I was pleased to explore types of silence and the various ways we can find it and use it. I was further pleased to learn of the author, one of the few people to have been to both the North and South Poles and also to have climbed Everest. He loves silence and wants to share his experiences with others so we, too, can appreciate it and let it speak to us, often in wonder.

Beyond Recall, by Robert Goddard; Corgi Books; 1997; 413 p The title is particularly relevant to this intriguing, post war tale.

Two families become involved in exploring disturbing truths they share in the present, which lead to important discoveries of events in the past. He writes well.

The Girl on the Train by Paula Hawkins; Doubleday; 2015; 316 pages. The film was on television recently but I missed it. Tough book to portray as it is told by the three main females in timed sections (dates and am/pm etc) and not in direct order. The men are talked about and they all live near a railroad, hence the title. Love, personalities, mysteries; not a great deal of action, but complex, puzzling. I am not sure the forward helps.

One summer by David Baldacci; Pan Books; 2011; 352p This is different from my previous experience. Instead of a violent cops and robbers(or spies)mystery with plenty of suspense, this is an unusual family story. Starting with a husband and father due to die very soon, he makes an impossible recovery, despite his wife being killed in an accident. He recovers enough to take care of his three children who had been sent to live with members of the family. He finds it hard to make a new life for them but is helped by a neighbour. Happy ending for a change.

Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life by Karen Armstrong; Bodley Head; 2011; 182p plus Notes and suggested reading. You probably know of the author, as she is a former Roman Catholic nun who left and became a scholar of world religions. Then she won an award which she used to create the Charter for Compassion with the help of the Dalai Lama (among others). She has a wonderful vision of helping us all develop our empathy for everyone- and the rest of planet earth. The web has more details on her work. She has written many books and this one follows the AA path of 12 steps to develop

and embody compassion. She starts with an inspiring review of human culture from early man to today finding universal development from the early brain which prioritised survival by instinct to the growing ability to realise and achieve the importance of teamwork as a better way to not just survive, but to flourish: I-you-we. Then she presents 12 ways to increase our ability to become a healing force, to retrain our mental habits to form kinder, gentler and less fearful ways. It is a path each of us can follow to the benefit of all ... but not to perfection. Life is always changing and we will always need to overcome difficulties, even failures, but with compassion for ourselves and the support of others, we can all improve the quality of life for ourselves and others. This could make a good adult education program but can be useful for each individual. Yes, I do recommend this wholeheartedly and perhaps than any other.

A Hidden Wholeness: the Journey Toward an Undivided Life (Welcoming the Soul and Weaving Community in a Wounded World) by Parker J Palmer; 2004, Wiley and Sons; 186p plus Notes and Index. This is a very inspiring book based on many years exploring way to develop rich and rewarding lives. One particular method he promotes is being part of 'circles of trust'. The new Unitarian book on 'engagement' groups-SOUL DEEP by Allured and Dean refers to him). First he presents his understanding of the individual self, a social and spiritual person. Responding to the many divisive pressures and experiences we all face, he seeks to strengthen the 'soul – that life-giving core of the human self, with its hunger for truth and justice, love and forgiveness.' He presents images of integrity and unity, then explores ways we can achieve wholeness but he is very aware of the many difficulties we face along the uneven, incomplete way. He has found the experience of groups of trust helps us learn to listen well and to help each other improve our ability to build

healthier selves. Not all groups do this. He focuses not on group goals, but on honest sharing in a non-judgemental, supportive way. I was particularly aware of his warning to us not to try to advise or help individuals, 'to confront or correct' but to create a safe space where each individual is encouraged to discover their own selves and solutions. One chapter should particularly appeal to Unitarians: 'Living the Questions.' Then he ends by linking this group approach to everyday life; non-violence in everyday life.' Worth reading more than once!

Pigs In Heaven by Barbara Kingsolver; 1993 by Faber; 342p
What an unusual title and story told by a poetic novelist who features characters with an unusual plot and approach to the subject of family. It seems slow and even confusing but she particularly shares the lives of modern Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma. Featuring a stolen child, it retells the past and traces discovery of present problems. There is a classic solution, but we could easily have a sequel. I was continuously impressed by the imaginative language used to create comparisons and insights, enriching ordinary situations. I was also impressed at the author's knowledge and humane approach. The treatment of the American Indians does indeed suggest a surprising analogy to other genocides.

Perfect Match by Jodi Picoult; 2005, Hodder and Stoughton; 389 plus some discussion material.

This is the third book that I have read by her, and even better than the other two!. She takes an important, complex issue and dramatises it with power and a remarkable ability to get inside the characters' thoughts and feelings. In this case, the rape of a 5-year-old boy leads to struggles to sort things out. She leaves it up to the reader to decide how to respond, even at the end. She can certainly tell a story and has some remarkable, effective figures of speech. Impressive, disturbing, memorable.

Phil also shares his review of two new Lindsey Press books

Right Relationship in the Real World: Learning to Live by our Unitarian Values; Lindsey Press 2004; Commissioning Editor Jane Blackall; paperback 138 pages and ***'Soul Deep: Exploring Spirituality Together'***: an eight-week course for small groups by Michael Allured and Kate Dean; Lindsey Press 2024; paperback 160 pages.

Hooray for Hucklow Summer Schools and the Lindsey Press for publishing *Right Relationship in the Real World*, based on the two post-Covid gatherings in 2022 and 2023! The conferences are generally inspiring occasions, face-to face and now even online, and they can change lives. This book combines the texts of the talks given in 2022, on the theme “Right Relationship: Practising Love, Peace, and Justice in Everyday Life”, with the talks given in 2023, on the theme “Real Life: Telling the Truth of Our Lived Experience”. At the end of most chapters there are questions to ponder. We are encouraged to reflect on what living in “right relationship” might require of each of us in our closest connections with friends and family ... in our congregations and wider communities (local and online) ... with people near and far with whom we rarely come into direct contact, and whose life experiences are very different from our own, but with whom our existence is interdependent ... and with Earth itself. Topics in 2022 were introduced by Sarah Tinker and Jane Blackall, followed by a wide range of contributions: “For Those Not in the Room” by Nicola Temple; “Building Right Relationship with our Embodied Self” by Arek Malecki and Laura Dobson; “Being in Right Relationship With Those Who Diverge From Assumed Social Norms” by Tor Glinwell and Alex Brianson; “Right Relationship, Racism and Reparations” by Winnie Gordon; and “Right Relationship: Repair as a Sacred Task” by Cody Coyne. I was impressed by the amount of interchange between the varied

speakers. Well done, planning committee. The theme talks in 2023 were all given by Louise Baumberg: 'Stories of our Lives'; 'ME? or WE?'; 'What We Can't See -- Invisible, Misunderstood, Marginalised, and Vilified'; 'Making Space'; and 'Back To Reality'.

Soul Deep explains how engagement groups can help us 'arrive at a deeper understanding of [ourselves] and each other'. The exercises are designed for small groups of six to eight (12 maximum) in eight two-hour sessions. But the process requires careful preparation by the facilitators, a commitment to attendance by the participants, and a shared set of values and intentions. Detailed discussions of these intentions help to make the experience fulfilling. Each session has a fairly standard structure, but individuals are free to choose not to do a particular activity, guided by the sensitive management of the leader. Some groups may decide to continue meeting after the eight sessions, so further suggestions are offered. I can suggest many other topics to explore, such as gender equality, will power, democracy, wonder ... I think this course should be part of training for ministry and lay leadership – at least. Individual congregations could offer a course and make it open to the wider community. The GA and districts could help to provide facilitators through training and congregational placements.

These two books share theory and practice which can benefit new engagement groups, other kinds of group, and individual readers, Unitarian or not. I found them both to be stimulating, sometimes challenging, and mostly encouraging. The ideas, the passion, and the very personal involvement of the contributors certainly reached me.

Dates for your Diary

Don't forget the NUF annual one day conference in Manchester on Saturday September 28th. Our speakers are Reverend Andi Phillips on the goods and bads of Artificial Intelligence which is coming into our lives and Reverend Dr Claire McDonald will be talking about congregations and art in the community. Please encourage friends to come along. Registration is £10 and includes refreshments and a buffet lunch. Our 2023 annual meeting was an excellent day so don't miss out.

Don't forget

Summer is on the way and we hope you will enjoy the summer sun and the holiday time you have planned. Don't forget we are collecting photographs for the NUF 2025 Calendar. We'd love to have one from you. It would be nice if there is a Unitarian connection but the Judge will decide on the merit of entries that suit the month/season. Who knows the calendar could become a collector's item?

Poems

Follower

by Seamus Heaney

My father worked with a horse-plough,
His shoulders globed like a full sail strung
Between the shafts and the furrow.
The horses strained at his clicking tongue.

An expert. He would set the wing
And fit the bright steel-pointed sock.
The sod rolled over without breaking.
At the headrig, with a single pluck

Of reins, the sweating team turned round
And back into the land. His eye
Narrowed and angled at the ground,
Mapping the furrow exactly.

I stumbled in his hob-nailed wake,
Fell sometimes on the polished sod;
Sometimes he rode me on his back
Dipping and rising to his plod.

I wanted to grow up and plough,
To close one eye, stiffen my arm.
All I ever did was follow
In his broad shadow round the farm.

I was a nuisance, tripping, falling,
Yapping always. But today
It is my father who keeps stumbling
Behind me, and will not go away.

Ithaca Poem

The Poem Ithaca by Constantine Cavafy: Since Homer's Odyssey, Ithaca symbolises the destination of a long journey, the supreme aim that every man tries to fulfil all his life long, the sweet homeland, the eternal calmness, and satisfaction.

Many artists and literary people have been inspired by this interpretation of Homer's poem and have given to this small island of the Ionian Sea a special sense. Famous poets have been inspired by Ithaca and have used its name metaphorically on their works.

The most famous poem about Ithaca has been written by the renowned Greek poet Constantine Cavafy and is entitled "Ithaca". There he makes an allusion of the legendary journey of Ulysses to the journey of every man through life and suggests that each person is looking for his own Ithaca, his personal supreme goal. However, in the end, it is not the goal but the journey that matters, because this journey makes us

wise and gives people the richest good: experience,
knowledge, and maturity.

This poem was written in 1911 and has been translated into
many languages since then. Its lyric words and message are
touching.

As you set out for Ithaka
hope the voyage is a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery.
Laistrygonians and Cyclops,
angry Poseidon- don't be afraid of them:
you'll never find things like that on your way
as long as you keep your thoughts raised high,
as long as a rare excitement
stirs your spirit and your body.
Laistrygonians and Cyclops,
wild Poseidon- you won't encounter them
unless you bring them along inside your soul,
unless your soul sets them up in front of you.
May there be many a summer morning when,
with what pleasure, what joy,
you come into harbors seen for the first time;
may you stop at Phoenician trading stations
to buy fine things,
mother of pearl and coral, amber and ebony,
the sensual perfume of every kind-
as many sensual perfumes as you can;

and may you visit many Egyptian cities
to gather stores of knowledge from their scholars.
Keep Ithaka always in your mind.
Arriving there is what you are destined for.
But do not hurry the journey at all.
Better if it lasts for years,
so you are old by the time you reach the island,
wealthy with all you have gained on the way,
not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.
Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.
Without her, you would not have set out.
She has nothing left to give you now.
And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you.
Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,
you will have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.

Translated by Edmund Keeley/ Phillip Sherrard

The poem is from www.cavafy.com

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Next issue : Autumn 2024

Could you write for the News and Views. Do you have stories about where you live and what it is famous for?

Could you write about chapel activities ?

Could you write about yourself and your community?

Contributions should be emailed to nuf@nufonline.org.uk

Handwritten or typed articles can be sent to Tony McNeile

Deadline for next issue is 30 September 2024