



Musical entertainment

Over the next few months we have three different musical entertainments for your diary – all will help raise money for our Restoration Fund and we hope you will come to enjoy the fun and bring friends and family with you.

The first event is our **Spring Concert on Saturday 12th May at 6pm**. It will be a mix of music, poetry and prose focussing on Spring and we are lucky enough also to have the professional group of singers – Equinox – joining us. There will be refreshments afterwards and we invite donations to the fund.

Then we have **Classics and Cream Tea on Saturday 30th June at 2.30pm**. Cellist Yalda Davis and Pianist James Recknell will be playing a selection of classical pieces by Fauré, Françoer, Beethoven, Granados, Elgar and Cassadó in the Meeting House and then we will serve cream tea on the green outside – we have booked sunshine!

The **Tranon Music Group** will be bringing their orchestra to play for us on **13th October** and again there will be refreshments afterwards. Please join us for some entertaining music and to support our Restoration Fundraising.

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Easter celebrations



A group of us gathered round the organ after the Easter service – some in Easter bonnets – despite the lack of sunshine (which came later in the month). We also enjoyed the chocolate eggs – thanks to all who donated them.



Rosemary Hamilton with her traditional basket of chicken and eggs. Congratulations too on her recent big birthday event!

Unitarian General Assembly reports

The GA Meetings – a veteran attendee’s view

The first Annual Meetings of the General Assembly of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches – the “GA” – with which I was involved were in 1966, when I wrote a sketch for the youth presentation, went to a meeting of the notorious ‘Sex Committee’, and attended the Essex Hall Lecture at Essex Church, Kensington. I was only there briefly, though. My first full GA Meetings were in 1968, when I was there as National President of the Unitarian Young People’s League (UYPL) and, in that capacity, spoke at the youth presentation. In the fifty years since I have attended almost (but not quite) every “GA”. It was thus with some experience of these things that I attended this year’s GA Meetings – held near Daventry from Wednesday to Saturday, 4th-7th April. Also there from Ipswich were Tessa & David Forsdike and Lewis & Cat Connolly. Fifty years of GA Meetings might be expected to make one rather cynical and though there is always something which grates a bit, I am always surprised by how much I still get out of them and this year was no exception.

A “GA” breaks down into four basic aspects: the plenaries (i.e. the business meetings), worship, sectional meetings (of the various affiliated societies and other related bodies), and the personal interactions. The plenaries can sometimes be less than riveting, but they have their enlivening moments of humour and of passionate debate. This year we passed resolutions disapproving of austerity measures and nuclear weapons, approving of equality, and appointing two distinguished Unitarians as Honorary Members of the General Assembly. These are the Rev. Dr. Ann Peart (former Principal of Unitarian College, Manchester, amongst other things) and Alan Ruston, our foremost denominational historian. A resolution was also adopted reducing future GA Meetings from three nights to two. The final plenary saw the installation of the new GA President, Joan Cook of Edinburgh, and Vice-President, the Rev. Celia Cartwright.

One session was given over to the keynote address given by the Rev. Dr. Paul Razor, a distinguished academic and Unitarian Universalist minister from the United States. His subject was ‘Faith Without Certainty in Uncertain Times’ and he gave us a fascinating discussion of how our Unitarian principles of freedom of conscience and the use of reason in

religion can be brought to bear in the world as it is now – and make it better!

Worship is a major aspect of the GA Meetings. The ‘main event’ in this regard is the Anniversary Service – the anniversary in question being that of the General Assembly’s formation (from two predecessor bodies) in 1928. Held on the third (and final) evening, it was conducted by the Rev. Kate Whyman and the preacher was the Rev. Danny Crosby. His sermon, entitled ‘Another Place’, was delivered with great aplomb, not to mention humour and song! This inspiring service included the recognition of three new ministers – the Revs. Lewis Connolly, Bob Janis-Dillon and Andy Phillips.

Every day’s business began with worship, but even earlier was the daily morning service (although that isn’t always the right word!). Thursday morning’s worship, led by Michael Allured, was centred on poems by Mary Oliver. On Friday morning, Richard Bober led half-an-hour of guided meditation. On Saturday morning we had the Communion Service – led by Stephen Crowther and “Inspired by the Socinian Eucharist”. It is always worth getting up for this pre-breakfast spiritual start to the day!

One of the highlights of the “GA” was an exuberant ‘Star Wars’-themed Opening Ceremony, a blend of worship and entertainment presented by members of BUYAN – the young adult network – on the first evening. The young people’s desire for a recognised presence and an independent voice within our movement struck distinct chords with those of us there who are veterans of earlier Unitarian youth organisations – notably UYPL, which existed from 1934 to 1984.

The many and varied simultaneous sectional meetings require some hard choices. Among the ones which I attended were those of the Historical Society (the Rev. David Steers on the 450th anniversary of the Edict of Torda), and the International Association for Religious Freedom a.k.a. IARF (Paul Razor again, on the regulation of religion by government in six European countries). I also went to the meeting looking at the proposed radical changes to the ways in which we train people for our ministry.

The social side of the meetings included an evening being entertained by tribute band Planet Abba (!), but it is the many informal conversations with all

sorts of people that constitute the most important social activity. Personally, the one I appreciated most was over lunch with three old UYPL friends, when we planned the memorial service for another of our number, Geoff Kent, who died recently in the United States. Geoff was one those UYPLers who took part in a work-weekend at the Ipswich Meeting House in 1964.

This is not, of course, a full account of those busy and crowded few days, but I hope it is enough to show what a valuable and enjoyable experience it is to go the “GA”, even if you’ve been to fifty others!

Cliff Reed

The GA – a newcomer’s report

Introduction

I was invited to go to this GA meeting as the delegate and representative of the Ipswich congregation and to vote on the various business motions. This was my first ever attendance at a GA and I was not sure what to expect.

First Impressions

There were over 300 people attending and 50 of them were also there for the first time. It felt like a cross between an AGM and a conference, with plenary meetings of delegates to vote on the motions and workshops and meetings going on in side rooms. It was good to see so many Unitarians together from all over the UK and some from abroad too, and all were easy to approach and to talk to. With so many Unitarians in one place, it was evidence of the wide diversity of backgrounds and of opinions we hold, which was stimulating and refreshing.

Business motions

My brief from the congregation after a post service meeting was to vote ‘for’ all the motions. Privately I was also told to expect that the wording of the motions was likely to change during debate so for support I sat with Cliff Reed and Lewis Connolly (on the back row!). I voted according to my brief and all were carried except number 6, calling for virtual Unitarian communities to be recognised with changes to the constitution to allow new forms of membership. This was referred back to Fulwood Old Chapel, Sheffield for review and to be brought back to the next GA in 2019.

I did feel as a non political ‘animal’ that the business and voting took up a disproportionate amount of time. Next year the whole meeting will be one day shorter (with the aim of making it more affordable and attractive to more people), so the motion and voting work will need

to be managed even tighter.

Workshops/Talks

The very first talk – the John Relly Beard Lecture – was given by Matt Carmichael and was entitled ‘Rekindling the Spirit of Community’. This was fantastic. Matt is an inspiring speaker and moved the whole audience (which was packed to the edges and the floor). He examined the need within us all for a sense of community, using various references from Plato to modern authors. I am particularly interested in finding out more about his Delta Course, which focuses on spirituality free from religious strictures and will be keen to share more on this topic as soon as I have more information.

In between the plenary sessions, I also managed to attend the following workshops and talks –

‘Faith without Certainty in Uncertain Times by Paul Rasor (keynote speaker)

Women’s League AGM

2020 Group – ‘Just visiting? Attracting and retaining new people to your community

First Timers reception

Penal and Social Affairs Panel – ‘What is Fake news?’ with journalist John Lloyd.

Hibbert Trust – ‘Using technology to enhance congregational life’.

The bookshop

The Opening Celebration and Anniversary service



Rev. Lewis Connolly (far right) with the two other Ministers accepted onto the GA Roll and the President Rev. Charles VanDenBroeder (far left)

Personal Conclusions/Reflections

The theme of the whole meeting seemed to focus on ‘community’ and it felt good to be part of a wider community of Unitarians. I made contact with several people, some local, some based further

afield and know that I will be able to call on them and to pick up our discussions when we meet in the future. Along with the other two members of our congregation (Ministers Lewis Connolly and Cliff Reed) I hope to bring back some new ideas to support our Meeting House. We hope to meet other delegates from our local area in the next few weeks to discuss how we can take our ideas further and what may be most helpful to work on together, so that we can build our local community and act on some of the suggestions we encountered at the GA.

I was honoured to be present when our Minister Lewis was accepted officially onto the Roll of Ministers. I would like to be able to attend another GA one day without having the responsibility of being our voting delegate, which would leave me freer to attend more of the workshops, to build more connections and to enjoy it more! I thank our congregation for your confidence in me and your support to make it financially possible for me to attend.

Green issues

There was increased awareness at the GA of the need to respect our planet and several people raised concerns about the use of paper and some waste. One very positive way we contributed to saving the planet was to invite delegates to bring any spare toiletries from their room on the last morning, which we collected at the reception desk. I brought these back with me and have taken a huge sack of toiletries to Tiffers (the charity for Homeless which we save for), so they will be used. Next year Mark Hutchinson plans to be more involved in working with the hotel and planning committee to reduce any waste and to recycle as much as possible. I have volunteered to help him.

Tessa Forsdike



People, a Building, a Loo – yes a LOO!

The Ipswich Congregation is pretty on the ball when it comes to fundraising, and the coming year will be the biggest challenge we have faced to raise money for the restoration of our historically important and much loved Grade 1 listed Meeting House.

Besides being a big challenge, it will be the first time for many years we will be raising money for the benefit of a building and not for the benefit of people. This doesn't sit comfortably with me and I consider it important that fundraising for the building does not completely override social responsibility.

I recently received from the national Unitarian Women's Group, information on 'Toilet Twinning', a water & sanitation initiative. This gave me an idea. Whilst having our main fundraising for the restoration project, I as an individual will find little 'people centred' projects for which to raise money. Hence, my first project is 'Toilet twinning' and I need to raise £60 to twin one toilet in the Unitarian Hall with another where Tearfund decides it is needed.

Tearfund works across 25 countries & has worked out that the average cost per household for a water & sanitation programme in a village is £60. Their approach is to work in partnership with local groups, to look, for example, at links between open defecation and ill health, hygiene education within villages & why children fall ill in the rainy season, so that the community sees the need for improved sanitation. People generally build their own latrine which means they are more likely to continue to use it & maintain it, ensuring the project is sustainable.

To raise money I have purchased the DVD 'Life on the Deben' which I am prepared to loan out to individuals for a minimum donation of £5. The film is of the wildlife, history & research along the 25 miles of the river from Debenham to the North Sea. If you wish to borrow it, please add your name to the list on the notice board.

You too can also raise money from this by inviting friends in for afternoon tea, cake and a film ... encouraging a donation to the restoration fund, your chosen 'people' charity...or for toilet twinning!

It will be interesting to see what other little initiatives can be developed by individuals throughout the year. Check out the website - www.toilettwinning.org

Linda King

Further Thoughts – in memoriam for Rev. Phillip Hewett

I felt I must correct some statements in the last issue of our newsletter – ‘with Margaret (who predeceased him), Phillip had two sons’. This is not so. The couple, when in Vancouver much later in this Ipswich story, adopted a baby son and daughter. I was well acquainted with them both before any Ipswich ministry. In fact Nicholas and I married on the same day in the same year as Phillip and Margaret in London, though in different Unitarian churches. They brought their children over to Ipswich for holidays when we inhabited the manse at the beginning of Nick’s seventeen years serving the three Suffolk churches. Later in Phillip’s ministry in Vancouver, Margaret became very ill with chronic rheumatoid arthritis and spent long sessions in hospital.

Another claim in the previous article said ‘Phillip came to the Ipswich congregation that was few in number and low in morale’. I encountered the congregation in 1957 for the first time. High in age it was, but not low in morale. I have memories of money raising events, some remarkable age-defying women and Mr. Collet the octogenarian treasurer, lover of books and our rent collector too. Maybe the idea of being ‘low in morale’ came from headquarters in far away London where someone had the idea of selling the Grade 1 listed building?

As they say in Yorkshire ‘Think on!’

June Teape

‘Unitarians: Together in Diversity - A Survey of the Beliefs, Values, and Practices of Contemporary British Unitarians’ by Sue Woolley (£9.50)

Dating back 450 years and still evolving, Unitarianism is a faith which imposes no creed or dogma on its followers. It is a community of individuals, each on their own spiritual journey, each guided by their own reason and conscience. So what, if anything, binds us together? It sometimes seems easier for us to express what we don’t believe, rather than to positively affirm what we do believe. Sue Woolley, District Minister of the Midland Unitarian Association, set out to discover what contemporary British Unitarians actually believe, and how they give expression to their faith in their daily lives. In considering the range and depth of present-day Unitarian beliefs, values, and spiritual practices, Sue Woolley explores what it is that holds Unitarians ‘together in diversity’.

Available from the Lindsay Press – and Linda King has a copy if you want a look before buying one.

A Tale of Two Unitarians

First a bit of historical background. The Wars of Religion raged on and off throughout France between 1526 & 1598. Languedoc, of which our department Ariège is part, was fiercely Protestant during that period; it was, after all, the land of the Cathars (but that’s another story!).

Our house, built in 1428 as part of a Catholic religious order’s dwellings, was burnt down by the Protestants at some time during the Wars of Religion leaving only the cellar and ground floor stone walls. The upper stories were rebuilt during the 16th century in the style of the time & some of the original timber colombage can still be seen on the rear of the house.

The village of La Bastide sur l’Hers, which is about the size of Hoxne, has, along with a Church (RC), Mairie, post office, general store, butchers and hairdressers, a Protestant ‘temple’ and a Protestant cemetery, both still in use. Indeed it was Protestantism and the Protestant work ethic, along with waterpower and raw materials, which led to our area, including our village, to be an industrial area from the early 18th century until the 1960’s. In our village it was jet for jewellery and horn and wood for combs. A couple of small workshops are still making horn combs and other small items for the tourist trade. The neighbouring towns were textile towns and still have some small factories operating. So Protestantism ruled!

In 1905 France declared itself a secular state and the law of that year remains extant. Religious organisations and churches have to register with the local Prefecture and obtain a licence. This law was not intended to suppress religion but to control its power over the State – the Roman Catholic Church growing during the 19th century was very rich and powerful. Indeed the law guarantees freedom of conscience and the free exercise of worship.

Unitarianism in France is, however, of very recent origin. In 1980, the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Paris was formed and registered with the state to meet the needs of English speaking UUs.

A French Unitarian Association was formed by ten people in 1986 and registered with the state but dissolved in 2006 as unsustainable. In March 2008 the Council for French Unitarians and Universalists was formed and registered and subsequently represented on the ICUU (International Council of Unitarians & Universalists). In June 2008 an online French Unitarian church was launched which seems to have survived until early 2015. During that period it appears that

A Tale of two Unitarians – cont.

there were a number of ‘fellowships’ but we have not been able to find out what has happened to them. The only active Unitarian church that we have been able to trace is in Nancy, some 900km from us, but we are unable to confirm whether that is still active.

So, can one be a Unitarian in France? Legally yes, but as a practising member of a Unitarian congregation it seems not. What then could we as one time very active Unitarians do?

We have, of course, met a lot of French men and women who don’t know that they are Unitarians. These have often turned out to be our best friends, including one man who went home and looked up Unitarians on the Internet. And that we suppose is how we are following our Unitarian ideals. Within a community of French friends who are very like-minded; who are interested in caring for the environment; are inclusive with regard to race and sexual orientation; are free of dogma and show a tolerant and humane attitude toward mankind. Sorry if that sounds a bit pompous but it is difficult to put into words something that one feels with the heart.

We have also made a point of making ourselves part of the greater community in the village, putting in appearances at all village events and joining the ‘club for retired rural gentlefolk’. In addition Sheila is an active member of a ladies ‘creative’ group (though I’m sure they would welcome a man if there was a creative one who was interested – I’m not very ‘creative’!). In summary then, we miss our Unitarian communities - you all at Ipswich and our association with Framlingham and with Norwich and we miss worship services. But this has been compensated by a wonderful welcoming community here and the opportunity of stretching ourselves with ‘foreign’ experiences.

Best wishes to you all,
Raymond (Ray) & Sheila Seal

It is great to hear from Sheila and Ray - from their home in France – we miss seeing them too.

Still on the theme of contact with ‘old’ friends – Miranda McIntosh has been at home for a few months now and is making slow and steady progress. She would love some visitors and the best time to pop in is either 11am or 3pm – please ring first on 01473 822596 so everyone doesn’t go on the same day. Miranda is holding a Community Yard Sale on 20th May and the proceeds will go to our Restoration Fund. Thank you Miranda – every contribution helps!

Data Protection Update

We confirm that we hold all members’ contact information securely, use it only to inform you about relevant Meeting House matters and do not pass it on to anyone else. We are writing a formal policy document, which is available to anyone who asks.

Hope in Rwanda



At our service on 22nd April, recognising the 24th commemoration of the 2nd genocide, Interfaith Minister Emily Ford read us a message from Rev. Clement Uwayisaba of the Unitarian congregation of Rwanda. Some of us gathered for this photo and we send our best wishes in return to the Unitarians in Rwanda.

Birthdays

Happy birthday in May to – Lewis Connolly on 3rd; Simon King on 16th; Gerrie Hudson on 28th; Ben Harvey on 30th.

Events in May

1st May to 30th September – opening of our Meeting House to all visitors
6th – National Naked Gardening Day
8th EAUWG Meeting at Bury St Edmunds MH - 11am
12th Spring Concert 6pm at our MH
13th to 19th – Christian Aid Week
13th – Sponsored Walk in Christchurch Park for Christian Aid – contact charlescroydon@yahoo.com
01473 214116/07854 776870
16th – Death Café at the Quaker Meeting House 7pm
25th Film evening at Quaker Meeting House – 7pm – film is ‘The Woodsman’.

Services in May

All services in May will be led by Rev. Lewis Connolly
13th – collection for Christian Aid
20th – post service discussion – all welcome to join in.
Our Anniversary service is/was being held on Sunday 29th April, with a shared congregational meal afterwards – all welcome.

East Anglian Unitarian Women's Group.

The next meeting of the EAUWG will take place at 11am on Tuesday 8 May at the Unitarian Meeting House, Churchgate Street, Bury St Edmunds.

A friendly environment for women from Unitarian congregations in East Anglia or from the Unitarian Fellowship to meet together for discussion and conversation.

New participants will be very welcome.

For further details please contact Linda King email: lindapendal@gmail.com or c/o Unitarian Meeting House, Friars Street, Ipswich. IP1 1TD



Here is a photo of the women (and men) who attended the recent EAUWG workshop in March.

Speaking of Light and Love - a weekend retreat for those involved in spiritual leadership of all kinds. Exploring our roles, our sense of calling and our work by being deep in this beautiful wood together. 29 June - 1 July 2018 at Hazel Hill Wood, near Salisbury. Led by Revs John Harley, Lindy Latham and Paul Holdsworth.

For further information and booking form, go to www.beherecreate.co.uk or email John at johnnigelharley@yahoo.co.uk. Rev John Harley

Unitarian? What's That? Questions and Answers about a Liberal Religious Alternative' by Cliff Reed (£2.50) -Cliff Reed's popular booklet was designed to introduce enquirers to the Unitarian faith by means of a simple question-and-answer format, based mainly on questions that people have actually asked when encountering Unitarianism for the first time. The Lindsey Press has published a new edition which takes account of changes in the law concerning same-sex marriage; and individual Unitarian perspectives on gender and sexuality. The booklet is ideal for congregations to give to first-time visitors.

Opening the Meeting House to Visitors

Each year we open our Meeting House to any visitor on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays (as well as on Sundays for our services) between 1st May and 30th September. We are justly proud of our Grade 1 listed building and want to share it with others who may want to admire it, spend some peaceful time in it or to find out more about Unitarianism and our congregation and community.

To be able to offer this opportunity we need people to open up, to put the banners outside on the railings, to be ready to chat to visitors, to hand out leaflets and generally to offer a warm welcome to all who choose to come through our doors. We open between 12 noon and 4pm, usually asking volunteers to cover a two hour session, so either 12 to 2 or 2 to 4.

There is a sign up rota on the notice board in the entrance lobby of the Meeting House, which covers the whole period. Please sign up there so that we can cover all the dates. Rosemary Hamilton, who manages the rota, will be very grateful and she will be pleased to clarify any questions you have about doing this. Many people who have first visited the Meeting House in this way have later become more interested in our community and in Unitarianism, so please prepare your most welcoming smile when you come to do your share of this rota.

Disclaimer

We welcome contributions from all members and friends of our congregation. Views expressed in the articles are those of the individual and not necessarily those of our congregation or of our Unitarian community

Contacts

Contributions for the next newsletter to Tessa please before the deadline of Friday 25th May 2018 – to ipswichunitarian@gmail.com or post to 48 Crabbe Street, Ipswich IP4 5HS

To contact our Secretary, Riena Jackson, ring 01473 210064/email mjack76748@aol.com

To contact our Minister, Lewis Connolly, ring 01473 422528/email

revdlewisconnolly@gmail.com

Thought for the month

"The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails." - William Arthur Ward