



NEWS & VIEWS

GLASGOW UNITARIANS MAY 2012



Open your hearts to the wonder of worship.

Open your minds to the eternal quest for meaning and truth.

Open your eyes to the miracle of creation.

Open your arms to the embrace of your fellow men and women.

Open your souls, and let the divine sweep in.

Rev David Usher



Hawthorne blossom near Rudson

by David Hockney

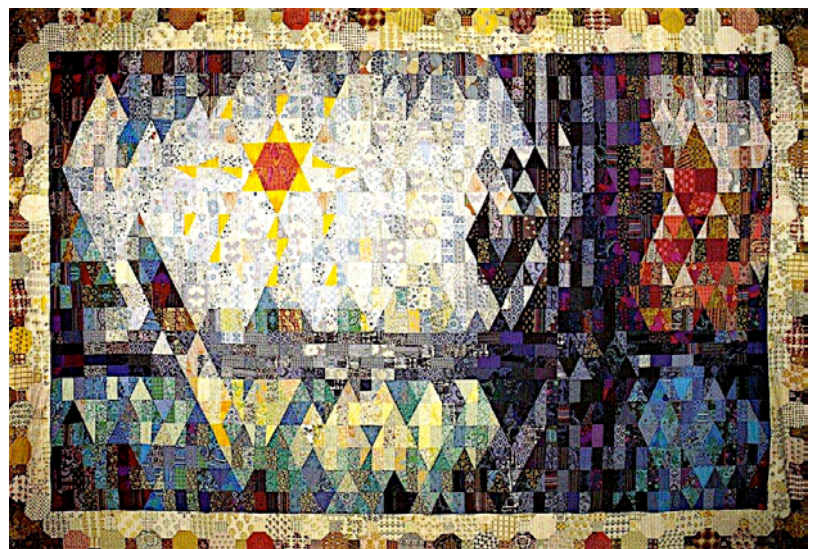


Fires of Love

***Embrace the purifying flame,
throw off the cloak of inhibition.
Stoke the good fires of Beltane
and let flames fuel love's fission.***

***The sun climbs high to summer
glory,
unfolds the leaf and swells the bud,
delivering all of nature's dowry
and a promise, now misunderstood.***

Ian R Thorpe



CHURCH NEWS

At the AGM, Sunday 22nd April 2012, **Roddy Macpherson** announced that he would be stepping down as convener of the Committee of Management, and retiring from that team after ten years of energetic service. **Barbara Clifford**, too, wishes to retire from the committee. We thank them both for their dedication and goodwill. Since then at a recent meeting of the Management Committee, new office-bearers were agreed. The new Convener will be **Alastair Moodie**. **Ruth Gregory** will continue as Treasurer and **Janet Briggs** will take over as Secretary.

Conveners of the various sub-committees were confirmed as follows: *Finance* – **Ruth Gregory**, *Property* – **Chuck McProud**, *Ministry* – **Iain Brown**, *Pastoral Care* – **Margaret Paxton**, *Outreach* – **Jim Millar** and *Social* – **Janet Briggs**. While the Conveners are Trustees, reporting to the Management meetings, all will welcome the involvement of members and friends, both in the form of suggestions and as practical help. Janet and Chuck are the new Fire Wardens who will cover periodic checks on all equipment and lights, and will prepare safety training information for the many groups who use our building. Chuck is also qualified to perform annual checks on all our portable appliances. **Barry Bell** has agreed to join the Management team. He is already active in the Finance sub-committee and as a leader of worship. He took part in the Hibbert Consultation on the future for Liberal Religions and regularly keeps in touch with a large number of UK Unitarians by telephone and internet.

PERSONNEL

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On Tuesday 22nd May at 7.30pm there will be a meeting to consider our IDENTITY – our collective self-image and the one we wish to project to enquirers. Clearly it is important that many voices are heard. Only after this can we consider signage to the front of our Centre.
(see more details on calendar back page)

SAD NEWS

Joan Wylie passed away on 22nd April. Joan was very active in Unitarian circles in Lancashire. She became the second wife of our oldest member, **Harry Wylie**, who is now 101 and lives in Christchurch, on the South coast of England. The couple visited us last year.



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IN MY VIEW *Continuing our responses to Vision Days*



by **Lyanne Mitchell**

Unitarians have been endeavoring to *define* themselves for as long as I have been a member of this movement. Last month's issue of N&V presented six definitions devised by the Unitarian Communication Co-ordinators Network, 4 years ago. I like the last one on the page best (see page 7 April issue)- although they all have merit in different ways. I also can identify with a slightly edited version of the statement from 1927 on the GUC Dramatic Club's programme - '*This church stands for perfect freedom of thought. The condition of membership is not acceptance of any form of creed. Its unity is not in the letter, but in the spirit.*'

Jim Millar began this debate in N&V by underlining the importance for Unitarians to decide if they wish to define themselves as 'Christian' or not. Again, this has been debated and discussed regularly within the Unitarian movement. The first UCCN definition (see page 7 April issue), expresses our position well, I think.

I must come clean - there is something in me that is saying...."To DEFINE ourselves, may be to CONFINE ourselves?" I have consistently expressed the view that our creedless faith, means that we can all speak freely as *individuals* but we hesitate to express who we are as a collective movement. It will not fit easily into a catchy sound-bite. Our freedom to think and speak for ourselves inhibits our ability to speak for us all. If we define ourselves collectively - is that so very different from having a creed?

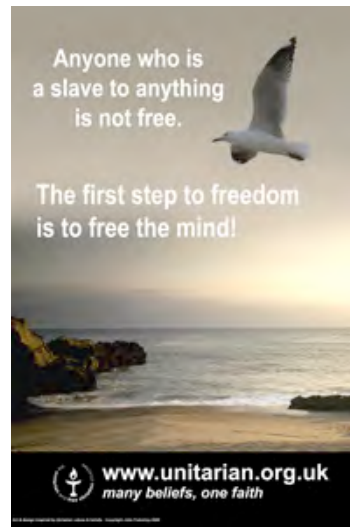
Iain Brown suggested we embrace our 'multiple identities' - ie Liberal Christian, Religious Humanist, Neo pagan / Earth Spirit. He suggested we should promote each of these strands. I agree with him to some extent - but if others are like me, many of us are a *blend* of these identities, and each one has a Unitarian *slant*. They are not separate, but linked.

Alastair Moodie throws up some challenges for us as both a fellowship / church and a movement. The *lack* of an identity; The *lack* of a cohesive message; The *lack* of focus; The *lack* of leadership. His arguments are logical and analytical, but I would like to respond with a rather more positive overview. Instead of focussing on what we *lack*...please can we focus on what we *offer*? Why do people choose to come to our church fellowship? What are they seeking in our services? The 'people's page' on our website presents a collection of positive statements on this to visitors to our site.

Here is my attempt, building on comments from my fellow members, to put forward what I believe GUC has to offer :-

- 1 Freedom from creed and dogma. We offer a blend of Unitarian identities - liberal Christian, Humanist, Earth Spirit / Pagan - along with the opportunity to develop, think and express individual ideas and beliefs.

- 2 Whether a 'dissenter' from a previous religious affiliation or a 'seeker' who yearns to find meaning in life, free from dogma.....all will be sincerely welcomed and offered the hand of friendship.
- 3 We focus on providing a unique fellowship of like minds and spirits. We offer no definitive answers to the big questions - we relish the questioning process and the journey together as 'spiritual explorers'.
- 4 GUC employs no full or part-time minister. Instead, we offer a team of mainly Lay Worship Leaders who provide food for thought, drawing from their own spiritual and professional backgrounds. We regularly invite guest speakers from other liberal faith traditions.
- 5 We accept the need to evolve and grow as we relate / respond to life and to one another. This is essential and inevitable in a creedless movement.



I believe that becoming a Unitarian is an 'experiential' process. It is virtually impossible to sum us all up collectively in one tidy statement. The most important message we need to urgently communicate is that a liberal, open-minded church / fellowship like ours EXISTS in Glasgow. It extends a welcome to all who wish to think for themselves and extends an invitation to come and visit us and to experience our services of 'worth-ship' in all their variety.

How do we do this? On Tuesday Evening 22nd May there will be a whole church discussion on our identity. I very much hope we can then move forward from *discussing definitions* to *taking action*.

Let's gather up our courage and energies to decide what we want to say - clearly and with one voice. Let's use all our resources, such as they are, to first identify, and then make contact with potential fellow seekers like ourselves - offering not only the freedom to explore their own beliefs but also our friendship and support within this unique fellowship.



MAGDALA

In the 6th century Pope Gregory declared that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute, perhaps confusing Mary with an unnamed woman who washed the feet of Jesus. In 1969 the Vatican apologised for the mistake.

Ancient Magdala is crumbling
like a woman of sand
slipping into the sea's embrace
like the watered-down memory
of her most famous lady

Tell me where you have laid him and I will take him away

Mary was used to lifting
a hundredweight or more
in her scale spangled creel
along the Galilean coast.
All the fishwives could sing
silver songs in the market place
or fight like gladiators in the
arena of social justice

They were the first to be slit and
gutted by Rome's imperial knife.
It took seven devils and a
gagging order to silence Mary.

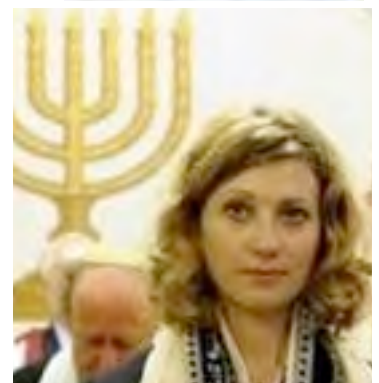
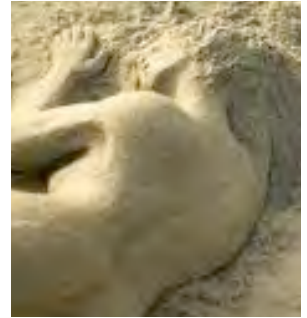
The twelve were with him and also some women who had been cured

The women helped to pass round the
loaves and fishes. It's not about
fast food, he told them - or
even sharing with your neighbour.
It was then she understood.
The newly-priested men and women
had served at the green altar
in his temple without walls

On the third day she met him in the garden

But Rome was resurrected too.
This time the palette knives were out
veiling her with penitence....
Towards the third millennium
young women were seized and sacrificed
to the god of Profit in hell-fired
laundries called the Magdalens

The spirit breakers have moved on.
And somewhere in the diaspora
a fishwife sings in a new synagogue
where the Rabbi's name is Mary



The Arc of the Universe Is Long But It Bends Towards Justice

On April 4, 2008, Senator Barack Obama, speaking on the 40th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, declared: ***"Dr. King once said that the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice. It bends towards justice, but here is the thing: it does not bend on its own. It bends because each of us in our own ways put our hand on that arc and we bend it in the direction of justice...."***

It is fitting that we remember Dr. King by considering this favorite phrase of his and President-Elect Obama's and its place in our nation's history. These words evoke mystic chords of memory, stretching back to the dawn of the American revolution and foreseeing the promise of tomorrow.

On March 25, 1965, having completed the third march to Montgomery, the city that gave birth to the civil rights movement, [Dr. King spoke these words on the steps of the Alabama State Capitol](#): ***"I know you are asking today, "How long will it take?".... "I come to say to you this afternoon, however difficult the moment, however frustrating the hour, it will not be long, because truth crushed to earth will rise again. "How long? Not long, because no lie can live forever. "How long? Not long, because you shall reap what you sow.... "How long? Not long, because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."***

Dr. King's words echo those of the 19th-century Unitarian minister Theodore Parker. In his 1853 sermon on "Justice and the Conscience," Parker declared:

"I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice."

In borrowing from Parker, Dr. King drew inspiration from a source that reaches back to our nation's birth. Theodore Parker was born in Lexington, Massachusetts in 1810. His grandfather, John Parker, commanded the Minute Men at the Battle of Lexington. As an adult, Theodore Parker hung on the wall of the library in his house in Boston the musket his grandfather had fired at the start of the revolutionary war.

An abolitionist, Parker secretly raised money for John Brown's assault on Harper's Ferry and sheltered runaway slaves, even writing some sermons with a loaded pistol at his desk to protect the fugitives in his care.

The arc of the moral universe is long. When Parker first spoke of the arc of the moral universe bending towards justice 155 years ago, he did so to share a dream of a nation that few then held. When Dr. King echoed these words four decades ago, he did so to comfort and encourage those who were dedicated to making that dream a reality. When Senator Obama used these same words, he did so as a call to action to perfect that nation.

And when President Obama may speak tomorrow and in coming years of bending the arc of the moral universe towards justice, let us remember that the inspiration for those words flows in a real sense from the birth of our nation.

The Women's League meeting at the Annual Meetings.

Like several other Affiliated Societies, the Women's League uses its meeting at the Annual Meetings to conduct its formal AGM. Like a few other Affiliated Societies do, this necessary task has been streamlined to basic essentials to allow for presentations of more general interest. The gathering started by singing the President Barbara Clifford's choice of a playful hymn, "Here I am, all alone" and then quickly moved down the agenda, which had strict timings that encouraged the business to keep moving – so much so that the meeting finished 15 minutes early!

There is a new President, Ann Harrison of Birmingham, and a new President-elect, Joan McFarlane of the Manchester WL District. The accounts show a very healthy balance although there was a £900 deficit on the year, more than half of it due to the loss on the annual conference. Secretary and Treasurer were re-elected. Next year there will be consideration of some constitutional amendments to make the Central Committee smaller. During the past year £8,000 was raised for the League Project, *Combat Stress*, and a cheque for this amount was presented by Barbara Clifford to Alison Dart, a representative of this charity that works with ex-military who develop mental problems (primarily PTSD) due to their service experiences. The usual thanks and greetings from branches were quickly heard, although news from Adelaide that they were about to close their Branch after 100 years of affiliation was received with sadness.

There were two brief talks: Barbara Clifford reflected on her year as President, thanking all those who helped make her visits enjoyable and interesting, and then turned briefly to her concerns for the future: if the League (the GA's largest Affiliated Society with 700 members) cannot change to attract a new generation of members, it will die out with this generation. Attraction is a mix of DO-ing and publicity and unfortunately much of the work done locally is not considered newsworthy even though it is important and several of our congregations would struggle to survive if women stopped doing this work.

The Presidency then transferred, it fell to Ann Harrison to introduce Rev Peter Godfrey to talk about the coming year's Project, Send a Child to Hucklow (SACH). He was the prime instigator in founding SACH 50 years ago and he had a fund of stories and examples to entertain and educate. He expressed gratitude to the WL for making SACH its League Project for the coming year.

Ann Harrison then made her closing remarks and led us in singing her closing hymn, "We sing our faith".



Officers WL - Susan Holt (Treas), Susan Wildman (Sec), Ann Harrison (Pres), Barbara Clifford (Past President)



Conserving the Earth's Resources

Recently I found in the refrigerator in the Centre basement six bottles of milk! They were two 2 litres, one 1litre, and three half litre; two of these were unopened and none was likely to be used, in fact most were past their use-by date. A few days later I threw out about 4-5 litres of milk.

This may appear trivial as waste of resources has become a part of our way of life in the last 50 years. Yet pressure is constantly growing on the limited resources of the planet as the population of the world continues to grow and most people expect a rising standard of living, which means generally consuming more. Of course eventually prices will rise substantially as various resources run low and this will slow consumption but it will be those on low incomes who will suffer as the prices rise beyond their means.

In the case of milk (and even more beef) vast amounts of grain are fed to the animals and the cows are also pushed to their production limits. The grain is mostly imported from countries where it, or equivalent foodstuffs, could be grown for human consumption, a better use of resources.

The containers are also made from oil and although they can now be recycled in Glasgow that is very much a second best to not manufacturing in the first place.

So, I suggest that milk brought in by ourselves or by members of groups using the Centre, which remains unused be taken home. The exception would be if you are going to use it yourself in the Centre during the week.

No doubt you can think of other ways of conserving.

George Paxton

Mother Nature is confused
by strange March days
Too hot - too soon.
My bike and I go flying round
The coastal road to Ettrick Bay.

Tractors churn brown sloping fields,
Mobbed by seagulls in pursuit.
And there it is - alone and still
Sitting in a field of clods.
A green and orange digger...
Driver-less ...
Its giant metal jaws bowed down
As if in prayer to the naked soil.

Human beings' mechanical slave.
Disabled...
Paying homage to Mother Earth.

SPRING PRAYER



Lyanne Mitchell

INSIDE THE LENS

TAOSM

Bad stuff happens

BUDDHISM

This bad stuff has happened before.

ISLAM

If bad stuff happens, it is the will of Allah.

CATHOLICISM

Bad stuff happens because you deserve it.

PROTESTANTISM

Let bad stuff happen to somebody else.

JUDAISM

Why does bad stuff always happen to us?

UNITARIANISM

???

**Two responses
from last month's issue**

What's so bad
about it?

Janet Briggs

How would we *define*
'bad stuff' ?

Lyanne Mitchell

Rev. Peter Owen Jones, who made the BBC programmes “**Round the World in Eighty Faiths**” was invited to give the John Relly Beard lecture which opened our annual general meetings at Keele. He is an Anglican clergyman, though his experiences have changed his interpretation of the regular wording of the Anglican liturgy.

He began by telling us briefly of a couple of his encounters. One was with Coptic Christians in rural Ethiopia. He described this as a beautiful land, with very physically beautiful people. They took him to a temple in Tigre, hollowed out of one of the many tors, and painted inside with stories of Jesus. He was there in time for the most important service of their year, the Harvest Festival. About six hundred people, men, women and children came for the celebration, which lasted throughout the hours of darkness, from 6pm to 6am, with singing and prayers and feasting. He had contrasted this with the ‘tin harvest’ that has become commonplace in Britain, as we become increasingly remote from the countryside. Someone there asked him, “*When, in the West, did you forget how to share?*” Nothing stays the same, he reflected.

He also visited some independent islands off the Eastern coast of Australia, describing them as paradise islands, with a stone-age culture. They took him to see their active volcano, and as he stood on the rim of the crater, inhaling the strong smell of sulphur, he realised that he had encountered no safety fence, or health and safety notice that we consider so vital in Western culture. The people there drink kava, to produce hallucinations through which they engage with the spirit world. People seek the numinous, and weave ritual around it.

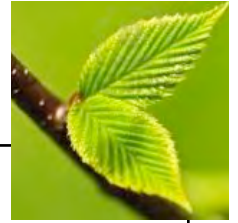
Peter suggests that religion as we knew it was turned on its head in our lifetime, when we first saw pictures of our blue planet, taken from the darkness of space. This vision makes divisions meaningless. The environmental movement is the first truly global movement. Most religions began, and many still are, about our relationship with the environment. And now we can see clearly that the welfare of our planet is our foremost concern. He has come to consider the Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as the most damaging of all, because they are so anthropocentric.

A new spirituality is emerging in the West that is pluralistic and experimental. Any sense of the sacred is informed by personal experience, and a sense of wonder at all life. In the end, is a new beginning.

He said that he admired the openness of the Unitarian approach, saying that it deserved to be more widely known. But, he cautioned, we need to learn to speak as a movement with one voice, or those who would be attracted would become confused. Peter Owen Jones recommended us all to read “*The Spiritual Revolution*” by David Lacey.

Janet Briggs

Renewables: An Easter Hymn



Here life and death play 'catch as can',
 across the stretch of space.
 Where stars disintegrate and die.
 New life forms take their place
 The building blocks of future stars
 Inhabit death's dread core;
 released, a new reality
 gives life its head once more

Here Mother Earth spawns death and life
 as she stirs in her sleep –
 Tsunamis, earthquakes, fire and storm
 Make countless thousands weep.
 Yet at heart renewal lies;
 New energy supplied
 gives future generations hope,
 death's fiefdom cast aside.

So the Spirit hid within,
 its Light and grace and power
 demands our every last resource
 right to our final hour.
 A star collapsed upon itself
 and scattered to the winds
 begets a lingering chain of love
 new-fledged from human dross.

But what of those who're brushed aside
 In evolution's train
 who bear the brunt of suffering,
 bereavement, grief and pain?
 A community of love awaits
 To heal, restore and bless
 The Spirit of Life may reign supreme
 and rest In peace there, at the end.

Adapted for Unitarians (2012) by Iain Brown
 from a poem, probably by Ian M Fraser,
 Church of Scotland

*Editor's note - Iain has asked me if a suitable
 tune can be found for this hymn. I am
 working on it!*





Bringing God back to Earth

by John Hunt. *Published by O Books 2004.*

Contributed by Dorothy Moodie

I first read “Bringing God Back to Earth” about 4 years ago and I’m glad the request to provide a book review for News and Views prompted me to read it again.

John Hunt’s experience as a publisher means that he is admirably well placed to write a book of this kind. His career began with a Christian publishing house but developed into publishing a wider range of material, bringing him into contact with authors from a variety of spiritual disciplines. Throughout the book he draws on the wealth of his lifetime in literature, as well as offering his own personal thoughts.

The book begins with a discussion on why and how we believe, and it goes on to consider the role of social and cultural influences on both the individual’s concept of god as well as on the organisation of beliefs into identified religions. The focus is mainly on the Judeo-Christian traditions, tracing the transition through the Old Testament from a local god on earth to a concept of a universal god. Christian belief traditions are considered similarly in the context of their time, with the influences of other contemporary and preceding cultures and traditions. The author laments the corruption of Jesus’ teaching by the Christianity which followed his death:

“The teaching of Jesus built on the best spiritual insights of the time, of all time. It re-interprets God up in the heavens as God living amongst us. In our lives we make Him real. In our actions we create Her kingdom. Later Christians turned this inside out. They interpreted Jesus himself as God coming to earth. They reversed the religion into the pagan ones of the time, putting God back up in the heavens, giving Him a family, turning Him into a fearsome judge and monarch who threatened to destroy humankind for not recognizing Him as such.”

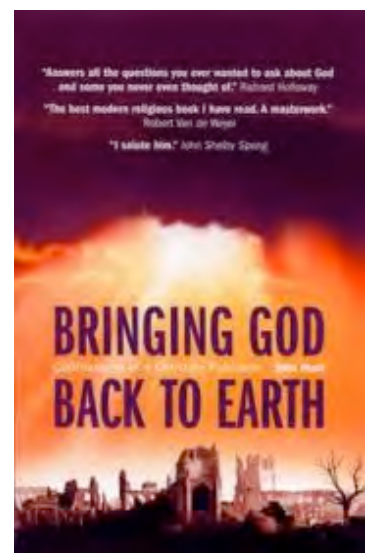
Having considered how people create and assimilate their ideas of god, both individually and collectively, the author goes on to consider some of the effects religion has had on peoples and cultures. There is a sobering reminder of some of the atrocities committed in, through and for establishment religion, and the ongoing dangers posed by fundamentalism.

I recommend this book not only for providing a lot of thought-provoking material, but also for the skill with which it is written. John Hunt writes in an engaging and personable style and he manages to wrap up important ideas succinctly, for example:

“Religion ceases to be credible when the institutions that have grown up around it hang on to a story for too long”

“What matters is expressing the awareness of God in the simplicity of a loving life”

In the latter part of the book, he considers the possible future of religion, and specifically of Christianity. The religion we need, he says, has as its defining characteristics *“the search for truth, the appreciation of beauty, and the practice of love”*. I think this is a fine definition of a worthwhile religion, and a way to a meaningful life.





Fresh Sparks in Scotland Sat 19th May 2012

Unitarian Church,

7 Castle Terrace, Edinburgh, EH1 2DP

A Day of Creative Workshops for:

Children / Parents / Children's Leaders / Potential Children's Leaders

led by Rev John Harley - National Unitarian Youth Coordinator

10.00 a.m. - 12.30p.m.

Storytelling and Sock-Puppet Making Workshop (for children up to 12 years)
Finishing with Puppet Show. Come and join us for fun, games and creativity.

Lunch - Please bring your own lunch. Facilities for making tea / coffee will be available

1.30p.m. - 4.00p.m.

Developing Skills in Leading RE and Creative Workshops for Children

Youth leaders and adults who want to work with children are welcome.

We will look at some existing RE schemes and wonder how sessions can be structured so that children can be affirmed and inspired.

Children's outing in afternoon - A Trip to Gorgie City Farm

led by Rev Maud Robinson and parent volunteers

Children can meet all sorts of farm animals and smaller animals and touch and stroke them, if they'll let them!

Register before 12th May by contacting maudrobinson@gmail.com/0131-659 7600



May Diary

MAY SERVICES at 11am

May 6th Iain Brown - *On Unitarian History*

May 13th Lyanne Mitchell - *Spiritual Nourishment*

May 20th Guest Speaker - Alastair McIntosh,
Quaker environmentalist, author of 'Soil and Soul'
Hosted by Alastair Moodie -

May 27th Ralph Catts - *Making something
out of nothing!*

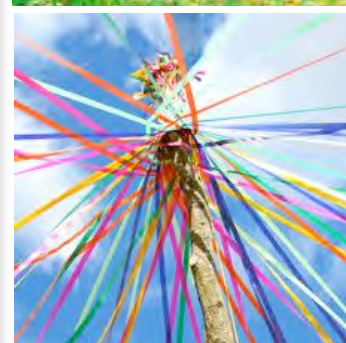
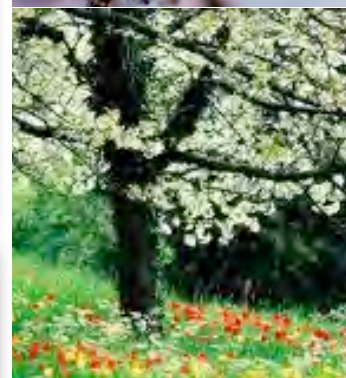
Music

Tom

Margaret

Lyanne

Lyanne



OTHER EVENTS IN MAY

Sat 5th May - **Oor Wee Words** - *Theme Cinco de Mayo*
(in honour of Mexican Independence Day)

Sat 19th May - *theme: Ring of Fire* (in honour of the Lao New Year and the peoples of the Pacific Rim, where life is often lived on the edge). Both meetings - Mitchell Library Herald Cafe @ 10:30 am.

May 14th Management Committee 7pm

Sat 19th May - **Fresh Sparks in Scotland - St Marks, Edinburgh** 10am to 4pm - (see insert flier for more details)

22nd May - **Congregational Discussion on 'Our Identity'**
7.30pm. Who do we think we are? And how do we describe ourselves? *Chaired By Roddy Macpherson. Opening speakers will be those who have written on this subject for N&V or in the Inquirer (5 mins each) The discussion will then be open to all who wish to speak.*



COFFEE & FLOWERS

May 6th Jane and Norman
May 13th Barbara and John
May 20th June and Chuck
May 27th Janet

