



THE WAKEFIELD UNITARIAN

The Newsletter of Westgate Chapel, Wakefield

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website: www.ukunitarians.org.uk/wakefield/

Westgate Chapel was opened in 1752.

Its congregation was established in 1662 and became

Unitarian in view in the eighteenth century.

**It has taken a leading part in the economic, social,
educational, political - and spiritual - development
of Wakefield and its vicinity.**

OCTOBER 2010

Thought for the month

In a letter to *The Times*, published on 18 September, Canon Dr John Elford, of Liverpool, commented that the debate about the Pope's (hardline) views was leading to contrasting opinions from the traditionalists and secularists. He wrote of another way 'to be found in liberal Christianity and other liberal religious traditions'. These, he said, have 'an impressive record of achievement in seeking peace among the nations'; he referred also to their promotion of gender and sexual equality, genuine ecumenism and inter-faith relations (and) widely acceptable forms of religious education.

Sound familiar?

Services in October, at 3pm

3 October	Kate Taylor *
10 October	The Reverend Bill Darlison
17 October	Jim Timiney
24 October	The Reverend Robin Boyes
31 October	Chris Pilkington
*Harvest Festival	

Rota of Welcomers

3 October	Nancy Denison
10 October	Pat Howard
17 October	John Goodchild
24 October	Ralph Denby
31 October	Nancy Denison

As always, if you are unable to act as welcomer on the day indicated, you are asked to arrange an exchange.

Our Harvest Festival, Sunday 3 October

Contrary to the announcement in last month's *Wakefield Unitarian* our harvest festival will take place at 3pm on Sunday 3 October. It will be led by Kate Taylor

and will take the form of a traditional harvest service. No lunch is planned after all. We need fresh fruit and vegetables to decorate the Communion table. It would be helpful if items could be brought to the Chapel about 2pm on Saturday 2 October but they can, of course, be brought just prior to the service itself. We hope to take all the gifts to the Rainbow Cafe in Portobello. This year we are not collecting any non-perishable foods as Barnardo's have ceased their Christmas food parcel distribution.

The Westgate Forum, Tuesday 5 October at 10.30am in the Vestry

The Westgate Forum will meet on 5 October when we shall discuss Advertising.

The Yorkshire Unitarian Union Annual and Quarterly Meetings, York, Saturday 16 October, 10.30am

The YUU Annual and Quarterly meetings take place at St Saviourgate Unitarian Chapel, York on 16 October. This is a whole-day event, gathering at 10.30am. At 11am we shall have a talk by Sue Woolley, the district administrator for the Midland Unitarian Association about her work in that role and about the GA District Associations project. After a lunch break (bring your own), we shall have opening worship at 1.30pm, the AGM at 2pm, and the Quarterly Meeting at 3pm. The YUU is looking for a vice-president who will, in the normal course of things, follow David Arthur as president in 2011. There will also be elections for other officers and for five members of the Executive Committee.

Glasgow Unitarians' Anniversary, 3 October

You may like to know that the Bi-Centennial Service of Glasgow Unitarians will take place within The Trades Hall, Glassford St, Glasgow, on Sunday 3rd October 2010 at 2.30pm. Following the service there will be a Civic Reception and Afternoon Tea offered by Glasgow City Council at Glasgow City Chambers

Meeting with the Development Manager for the English Cities' Fund Merchant Gate Scheme

John Goodchild and Kate Taylor had a meeting at Chapel on Monday 20 September with Emma Cordingley, the Development Manager for the English

Cities' Fund Merchant Gate scheme. The meeting had been initiated by Emma, who had never been in contact with the Chapel before (!) to explore our (many) dissatisfactions with the impact of the scheme, and its implementation, on the Chapel and its grounds. Words were not minced!! She was told, for example, about the delays in the reglazing of the windows, the damage to the trees, the inappropriate siting of the replacement tree, the damage to the tunnel, the careless treatment of the notice board, the fracture of stone paving slabs, and of the various broken promises, and the overall deficiencies in communication... She promised remedies but four days later nothing further had been heard of her. She was at pains to emphasise how much the Westgate area had been improved!!!

Meeting with a representative of the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust

There was a much happier meeting at Chapel on 21 September with Mrs Elizabeth Hardcastle of the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust. This had been initiated by Pat Howard, with the support of the Chapel Committee and, in particular of Ralph Denby and Tony Scott (Tony is himself a long-standing member of the Trust). Kate Taylor joined the other three to explore the Chapel grounds with Mrs Hardcastle. She was, in fact, much pleased with what she saw, in particular with the plants and shrubs in Pat's rockery and with Rosemary Arthur's planting at the bottom of the Chapel drive. She advised that we should be trying to nurture bees and to attract butterflies and birds. She much approved the various 'lawn weeds' which we have but advised that we really need a decent clump of nettles for butterflies to lay their eggs. We also need far more ivy along the western wall to provide berries for birds in the late autumn. The wealth of other berries means that we could be a useful facility for migrating birds. She then suggested we place bird boxes as high as we can on some of our trees, making sure that they do not face south.

The Big Society – The September Forum

It became clear, as we explored what David Cameron's Big Society might be, that we did not really understand it, that we did not think it would work, and that we did not want it! One of us described it as a 'Go Nowhere Plan'.

Was the Big Society an aspect of the traditional Conservative policy of lessening the involvement of the state? Yet the notion of 'Power to the people', particularly if it meant something rather like co-operative movements, seemed more left wing. But then it occurred to us that what is most likely happen is that entrepreneurs will set up businesses to provide consultancies for Big Society Institutions, or to

manage them on the Trustees' behalf. That seemed to us a devious Conservative scheme to extend capitalism.

Would it not, in any case, prove to be an 'opportunity' for the middle classes rather than extending participation to the public as a whole?

Little detail has so far been made public about what Big Society Schemes might embrace. We recognised that they would be largely dependent on volunteers and would take over the running of something currently administered via public bodies, controlled by local or national government. The examples we had in mind were post-offices, libraries, museums and schools.

How much historical knowledge does the present coalition government have, we wondered. Hospitals, Libraries and Museum Collections had been founded in the past (often by Unitarians) by philanthropists and volunteers. They tended to be either inadequate in their service to the public or intended for private members only. Municipal Libraries had developed following the Public Libraries Act of 1850 whereby local authorities could apply modest sums from their rates to the provision of a library service. This was a good thing. Knowledge became available to all. The conventional movement from an organisation dependent on voluntary effort to one financed from the public purse, and backed by an effective administration, seemed to us a good thing.

We talked about schools and the possibility of Big Society Organisations providing academies or taking over small and hugely uneconomic village primary schools. We were wholly unclear as to where the money was to come from, or whether the teaching staff would be permitted to belong (a necessary protection we thought) to a Trades Union like the NUT. How far would they have to follow the national curriculum? Could other schools, like Reg Vardy's academies, teach bizarre notions like Creationism.

It was urged that local authority support was a good rather than a bad thing. All sorts of tasks like repainting and building repairs were safely and routinely carried out via the experts in the education office. Education advisers were very helpful. Important features like Careers Guidance were supported by the professionals employed for the authority as a whole. From where would in-service training be obtained for the schools run by the Big Society?

David Cameron appears to believe that the money currently held in dormant bank accounts would get his Big Society off the ground. Some of us were not at all happy about taking money which would otherwise, strictly, belong to a particular individual or organisation. And what when this happy source ran out....?

We talked about the anticipated volunteers. It seemed to us that their extent would be greatly dependent on the willingness of retired people to get involved. Why should they want to? Many of us serve as volunteers in a variety of spheres but not as the managers of any major enterprise. Surely they would need training whether

to staff a library or a post-office. Would they take kindly to this? How would it be financed? We compared the likely commitment of someone who is paid to work and with a volunteer. How reliable would the latter prove in matters of time-keeping, for example. We thought there might be an initial burst of enthusiasm and then a steady dropping off and dropping out. Who would check their cv's? What if people volunteered who were on the look-out for opportunities to embezzle?

Who, we wondered, would monitor schemes run by the Big Society and how would success be measured? By the amount they saved ratepayers? By customer satisfaction? By the income they generated?

No doubt, like other voluntary bodies, Big Society projects would become registered charities. We envisaged a considerable increase in the work-load of the Charity Commission but we saw it as a very useful safeguard.

We felt that we needed to know much more about the funding of the Big Society and what, really, is 'big' about it?

We had far more questions than answers.

The General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches: Nominations for the Vice-President 2011-2012 and for members of the Executive Committee

Nominations are sought by Friday 15 October for a lay person who is willing to serve as Vice-President of the General Assembly from 2011-2012 and as President in the following year. As a congregation we are entitled to nominate someone but time is a little short. If you have any suggestions, please let Kate Taylor know very quickly. The person you nominate need not be from our congregation but you should have his or her consent before bringing a name forward.

Nominations close on 18 October to fill four vacancies on the General Assembly's Executive Committee. If you wish to stand please note that the GA is looking for qualities of leadership, decision-making, financial awareness, and team-working, as well as good communication and the ability to represent others. Again, if you wish to come forward yourself, or to nominate someone else, please let Kate know very soon!

Richard Harries on 'How should the Church engage with Society today?'

Richard Harries, former Bishop of Oxford, spoke at the Mirfield Centre on 6 September about the principles which, as he saw it, shaped Church of England

guidance on issues affecting society. His thesis was one that would not have embarrassed a Unitarian. Effectively he said that Anglican theologians apply the insights of reason drawing on experience, and that bearing in mind the realities of the situation on which they comment, they take a pragmatic approach to the teachings of Jesus. He gave, as an example, Jesus's teaching on forgiveness but said that we really needed a criminal justice system to deal with offenders, rather than letting them go.

He began by asking how Archbishop Temple's social ethics can be applied today. He provided some background information about the lack of Christian ethics as a part of training courses for the ministry in the past and referred to theological colleges turning to universities for validation (he seemed to say in 1974) and to universities offering Bible studies but not social ethics. He then described how in the Church of England, ethical perception had been 'issue dominated'; theologians had reacted to major issues perhaps to the detriment of the formation of an underlying ethic. Thinking has been dominated by the issues without a clear theological formulation.

He referred to two important traditional principles – of proportion and discrimination. He talked about the use of force and the concept of a just war. Proportion and discrimination applied here: you could be a 'nuclear pacifist' without being a pacifist more generally. He also noted that the idea of a 'just war' predates Christianity and is not an exclusively Christian concept.

He regarded discussion between theologians and experts in the secular field as essential to the formulation of ideas about morality.

In the past, he said, issues of economic and social justice had been much neglected by the Church of England because it lacked key figures with expertise. He also noted the absence of an authoritative voice in the present economic crisis – no trained theologians with the economic understanding. He contrasted this with the 1930s when R H Tawney, the economic historian, and Archbishop Temple had worked together. They brought heavy weight support for the formation of the welfare state.

It was necessary to distinguish between a general principle, such as 'love one another' and a specific one – do not replace Trident.

He talked about medical ethics. He referred to Gordon Dunstan, a historian of the medieval world who made a major contribution in revolutionising the way ethics is done in 1958. The role of the theologian, he argued, was to sit with the scientist and to understand rather than simply to oppose. He referred, of course, to how this moral relativism (he did not use the word) differed from the absolute rules of the Church of Rome. Reason should reflect on the experience of a wider group of Christian people. He gave the example of the Church of England's adoption of artificial contraception in the 1920s and 1930s when bishops took a positive view

based on the experience of married Christians who needed to plan their families. This led him to talk about same-sex relationships.

The role of experience was significant in the field of economic justice and was reflected in the Church's opposition to Thatcher's policies.

He spoke about the issues of the developing world and the need for the Church to ask about how government policies impact on the most marginalised. He talked about the radical teaching of Jesus but about how the Church also takes moral teaching from classical writers. He referred to the tension between the teaching of Jesus and the actuality of the structures and institutions of the world in which we live. We should not give up on Jesus's convictions but should implement his teaching only as far as we can. He talked about the Suez crisis and the conflict between Lord Hailsham and Archbishop Fisher.

He was asked where the 'prophetic element' was and said that whilst there were occasions when the Church needed to be prophetic, this could be misguided and dangerous. He said that moral issues must take precedence over religious issues, citing female circumcision.

I asked him what difference there was, given his emphasis on reason and experience, and his pragmatic view of the teachings of Jesus, between a Christian ethic and a humanist one. He seemed to accept that there was very little difference at all. His main distinction lay in the attitude to suffering which Christians can see as spiritually beneficial.

Kate Taylor

The Unitarian path is a liberal religious movement rooted in the Jewish and Christian traditions but open to insights from world faiths, reason and science, and with a spectrum extending from liberal Christianity through to religious humanism. (Prologue to The Unitarian Path by Andrew Hill.)

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Hon Secretary and

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The Engagement Group

An 'Engagement Group' consisting of Unitarians and non-Unitarians, is organised by Mel and Steve from Westgate Chapel. The group meets every month, choosing a different location and theme for each meeting, but actively engaging with one another following engagement group principles (see website: <http://www.unitarianengagementgroups.org.uk/>). We explore and discuss spiritual themes, and the beliefs and attitudes which shape our lives. Newcomers are welcome, and should contact Steve (boudicca7@talktalk.net) or Mel (melpx@hotmail.com), either at Chapel or by email.

