



Foy News

Autumn 2025

The Foy Society

is a fellowship of women and men who, in a spirit of free inquiry, seek to understand the nature of present issues and problems - political, social and religious.

Founded in 1924 as The Fellowship of Youth, in 1957 we became known as the Foy Society. We had gradually taken on the role of an inter-generational group.

Despite the fact that most of our members are Unitarians, all are welcome to join and participate, whatever religious background. Our discussions and interaction thrives on a rich texture of input. Please feel free to join us.

Cover picture: John Hewerdine, Foy News Editor for 18 years.

P3 Presidents Piece - Dot Hewerdine

P6 2025 Unitarian General Assembly Meetings -Hewerdine's notebook

P8 Editorial Privilege - An update on Education in Kharang, India

P11 2025 Foy Conference - Matthias Pilger-Strohl

P15 Thoughts about AI and P16 "The Robot" - David Shaw

P18 "I am Not a Robot" - by Vicky Hewerdine

P19 What is the Future of GA Zette? Review by Louise Reeve

P22 Locomotion Unitarians, and the History of the Stockton & Darlington Railway

P24 Ramblings from Room 10 - Richard Varley

P27 Peace Fellowship and its Potential for next Foy Conference

P29 **Obituaries** Janet Ford by friend, Ant Howe

P32 David Copley by brother, Derek Copley

P36 Dawn Buckle by Rev Andrew Parker

P37 News of Members - Membership Secretary, Hazel Warhurst

P38 The Barn at Flagg, Helen Mason, Chair of the Trustees

P39 Annette Percy - Early Contact with Eastern European Youth

P42 Foy News - The Future - The Editor & Jasper Hewerdine



Contents

President's Piece



Not Quite

Dot is strictly our
Past President
but is
Greatly Honoured
by being
asked to stick
around for a
little longer....

This morning when we woke, the sun was shining and lighting up the beautiful Autumn leaves on the trees opposite on the other side of the canal. I love the Autumn colours especially when they glow so richly. It warms my heart and gives me energy and hope for the future. An hour later and, sadly, the sky has turned grey, the rain has started and still continues to fall, muting the glorious Autumn colours of earlier. So, no crisp Autumnal walk for me. What better way to spend a grey, cold, wet Sunday afternoon than by sitting by the fire writing for this last, as we have known it, issue of Foy News!

I would like to heap praise* on the Editor for the last 18 years of impressive Foy News issues. That's 37 issues, each one full of interesting articles, information, news, poetry and comment, excellently illustrated with designs, drawings and photographs most, though not all the latter, taken by the Editor himself.

It has been an enormous task requiring great commitment and dedication to keeping the voice of Foy alive and public. It's a bit of a cliché to say "it will be a hard act to follow!" But it is true in this instance as it is true of so many of the Foy members who have given of their time and skills for the last 102 years!

In his Ramblings, Richard Varley speaks of the need to encourage younger people to become active, not just in Foy but also in our Unitarian Congregations.** He mentions Unitarian College (UC) and Foy's commitment to fund raising to support the Junior and Inter residential weekends which are managed by the College and becoming increasingly popular.

Yesterday, I attended the Ordination Service for newly qualified Minister, Rev Tina Gandhi, at her home church of Walmsley. It was a joyous, uplifting and inspiring occasion. Tina is one of 5 newly qualified Ministers who will be presented for formal recognition



Many of them, together with other Ministers and Ministry students who have accompanied Tina during her training were at her service yesterday and will be present at other Ordinations over the next few months. Their energy and enthusiasm is contagious.

So, back to Foy News!

There are conversations ongoing about the future of Foy News as communications in this new world of sophisticated technology change. It is unlikely that continuing in its current format will be an option in the future. Ideas are being pursued about more use of social media, circulating material “in the moment” and gathering it together for the occasional full compilation, as received, without the editing and design process. If you have ideas or want to be part of these conversations,

please contact John Hewardine on john@hewardinefamily.co.uk.

Enjoy this last, in this format, excellent Foy News and have a cosy winter!

Dot Hewardine

Acting Foy President

*Oh alright, I will heap praise upon John Hewardine, Editor Extraordinaire, for the amazing job he has done for the past 18+ years; partiality unashamedly acknowledged!

**The average age of Unitarian Ministry students has significantly reduced since UC began to offer training more accessible to younger, working Unitarians seven years ago.

It is also worth noting that UC runs many courses for Lay people using a similar process which enables working people to access them more easily. These can lead to formal recognition on the new GA Lay Register. Several of these courses are over-subscribed and the College is having to run additional ones to satisfy the demand. Check the College website,

www.unitarian-college.org.uk for more information.

2025 Unitarian General Assembly Meetings

Your Editor was there with his own notebook, a camera, so here is a series of photographs which recall some of John's close encounters. Please don't look too carefully at the flame of the Chalice in the foreground below. It had to be lit...



The Banner Parade started things off in the usual way.

I show you the image with our beloved Nightingale Centre banner, as Dot has only just retired from being a member of the Nightingale Management Team.

I have to admit to adding a flame to the unlit candle



Cathie Masztalerz reports on The Nightingale Centre



Peter Flower, a student at Unitarian College, Speaks in a session organised by the College



Foy members in a business session with Ant Howe, College Senior Tutor (right)



David Warhurst shares GA ICO consultation concerns



Helen Mason delivers The College Report



A business session with National President, Geoffrey Levermore



Marion Baker Installed as an Honorary GA Member



Send a Child to Hucklow stall



Foy Society Display



Jeff Teagle, also a new, Honorary Member, with Sue

Editorial Column-Inches

Over the years, I have rarely done an 'Editorial', being happy to let readers share the load, by sending me articles about activities which they enjoy, not just reports of what might be described as, "Foy Centred", but often, "Off the Wall". As this is my last edition as editor, I am using my privilege, as editor, to share with you one of my own, "Off Centre", albeit Unitarian, passions".

A Dream Comes True

It is almost sixty years since I first set off to work with **Margaret Bar** in India. As most of you know, Margaret was a British Unitarian Minister (a devotee of Mahatma Gandhi) who made her life in a remote tribal area, just north of the border between Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) and the Shillong, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, area of Assam, in NE India. Margaret died in India 51 years ago.

Margaret's main life-contribution was education, and Gandhi's philosophy of improving the quality of the lives of people living in the villages of India, became her main goal. There is still a huge gap in the balance of the Indian Economy. The rich have become wealthier and the poor have remained at the bottom of the economic ladder. Over recent years, a minority of the population, living in cities like New Delhi, Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Kolkata are the ones to have enjoyed the fruits of India's improving and escalating economy. The rest (in remoter areas) have been, economically, standing still and (with the effects of inflation) have become relatively poorer. The cost of a kilo of rice has doubled in the past five years, and the tribal communities have had a raw deal.

As a teacher, Margaret always encouraged her successful graduates to use the skills they had acquired in the schools, many of which she founded, to return with their talents to the villages, rather than being tempted to stay in the larger towns and cities, where they might earn a better wage and higher salary. Several schools were founded by Margaret and some of them bear her name, but, after her death, a bigger, senior school was built in her memory. This was in the village of Kharang, more specifically the Hamlet of Mawsynjri, where Margaret had made her home, in the 1930s.

Meghalaya is in an area of incredibly high-rainfall and there are villages there, like Cherrapunji which, whilst I was there in 1968, recorded a world-record rainfall in just three months of heavy Summer rains. The surrounding area, along the Bramaputra River has annual disasters, caused by the river changing its course, according to the pattern of rainfall of the season. After fifty years of this weather pattern, with a minimum of maintenance, the school at Kharang is now in a sorry state and was due for a make-over of the highest order!

My reason for sharing this story with you today, is that I recently persuaded the British Unitarian "India Fund" to part with most of its accumulated cash to help restore the Annie Margaret Barr Senior School, worse for wear after over fifty years of its massive annual rainfall. The refurbished school building is not to be a new construction, but much of the existing structure is so dilapidated that it will have to be re-built. A popular misconception is that it is a girls school. We don't know where that came from, but this is certainly not the case. Neither is the school only for Unitarian children. Children of all faiths were always welcomed by Margaret Barr and long may this continue in this Unitarian-run establishment.

Unlike the nearby City of Shillong, the rural location of the Annie Margaret Barr Memorial High School does mean that by far the majority of the children are tribal Khasis, or from the nearby Jaintia Hills. Children of families from all religious backgrounds are welcome. In fact, half the population of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills belong to one or other of the many Christian faiths which abound. Most of the present students belong to a tribal branch of the Hindu faith. Very few of the children are from Muslim, Buddhists, Jains or Sikh families. When I stayed with Margaret Barr (who had opened her own home to orphans in the 1950s), at bedtime, the children took turns to select and read a prayer from a book Margaret had compiled. It contained short readings from a whole range of World Religions.



Work is now underway to restore the living Memorial to Margaret Barr

Over the intervening years, my thanks have gone to the British Unitarian Women's League for having supported the General Assembly, "India Fund", for so many years, even after Margaret Barr's death. They adopted Margaret and all that she stood for, and have continued to fuel the possibility of giving those people the support they deserve.

I would number many of the tribal Khasis amongst my closest Unitarian friends and certainly place them as "The Most Deserving". The, "India Fund". Is still open for you to make financial contributions, and so I hope you will continue supporting this worthy group of our indigenous Unitarian sisters and brothers, in one of the poorest parts of the Indian sub-Continent.



The school head, Bah Nangoi Suting, has just sent me this photograph of the "Topping Off" of the roof of their new Assembly Hall.

We hope to show you progress on some of the other improvements they will be making to the school. The, "India Fund". Is still open for you to make financial contributions. I certainly endorse the need for us to continue supporting this loving community, in one of the many relatively poor parts of our World.

Long may we continue to make a difference

John Hewerdine

This Year's Foy Conference



on the subject of AI

It has become something of a recent tradition in Foy, to invite a person, who has not been to one of our conferences before, to give impressions of the gathering (not necessarily a blow-by-blow report).

This year we had a participant from Germany, Matthias Pilger-Strohl. Matthias has now become a Foy member.

He sent us the following:

Since my first conference of the IRF (International Religious Fellowship) in 1977, the name of "Foy", was around whenever it came to the member groups of IRF. To my young inexperienced eye, Foy appeared to me as the "older" British Member Group of IRF. UYPL, being the one for the younger folk. As I was 17, I saw myself a little closer to UYPL...

Over the years, I realized Foy members not being the older, but the elder people and a carrying column of IRFs activities – and many of their members became most important friends of mine, until today.



Matthias speaks in one of our sessions

True Fellowship – in Youth !

So, it was no question for me from Germany and Sherry and Martin Niederer from Switzerland to book when in 2024, the Foy Society invited not only its own members, but also those from IRF to come to their celebration weekend over Easter 2024 . Where? At Great Hucklow, of course! How often did I hear this mystical name, as well as a place called, "the Barn", being in a village called "Flagg!" The way British IRF members spoke about those places led me to expect something with lots of tradition, flair, and a good portion of magic...

Lots of mails were exchanged, and then it was the day of travelling, flying in via Manchester, finding out about the trains going to "Hope" (what a wonderful name

as entrance to a conference!), to be picked up and then: There it was: Great Hucklow, the place to be if you are British Unitarian, isn't it?



It was easy to feel welcomed and be part of the group for about half of the participants belonged to both IRF and Foy. I felt very much at home, although it took a while until I understood all the ways of Great Hucklow. We sat together with reflections over the past, enjoying today, and looking forward to days and years to come, both organisations with some worry lines on our foreheads.

But quickly, I could not tell any longer who was IRF or Foy or both: The whole crowd felt like friends. Sounds too cheesy? But that is what I felt. It was a friendly circle, open, even for people from the Continent.

I learned a lot about the Unitarian Faith in the UK, about changes, struggles and chances; about worries for getting older and generally less in number, as Unitarians with churches and communities closing, a lack of young people too. But also there was a will to go on, and keep this unique way of gathering alive, for both the Foy and IRF.

When I left on Easter Monday, I wondered about what I had just experienced. What made this meeting as special as formerly IRF conference was, and the same with IRF "Oldies" Reunions...

I realize: There are not many occasions giving me the feeling to be accepted, as I am. Friendly, everyone a character, not always with same opinions, but with respect. With problems among the people, once in a while of course, but with the will to overcome. I felt so comfortable.

When it came the time to leave, it occurred to me to ask whether I could become a member of the Foy Society, and they agreed. So, I take the pride to probably have become the first Foy member not being a Brit... And as a Foy member,

an invitation for 2025 was to follow. Great Hucklow was now familiar and it felt like coming home.

The theme for my first Foy Conference was "Artificial Intelligence" (AI), and I learned a lot about it during the week. All parts were prepared and given by members of Foy, and it was impressive how many skilled leaders there are!

We had a good balance of pros and cons, realizing that it is no longer just science-fiction when computers can go beyond their programming, but making me ask, "Does that mean they could take over to rule the world? At least, it continued to seem possible, and yet....



Amongst others, we had a session showing how good AI generated pictures can be, and how skilled you must be to find the tiny differences that prove that a picture to be AI produced. As well as "playing" with ChatGPT, showing how this program can even presume to be creative, by generating a poem, just in the same way as an important British author. Those who knew poetry were amazed how good it was. At the end, the strange feeling of the possibility of being overpowered by AI stayed with me, although I also learned that it is possible to discover the give-away features of AI, if you are trained for it. Wouldn't this mean that we can integrate AI with both possibilities and challenges, into the school system?

We also attended the Sunday Service in the Unitarian chapel where we sat with natural intelligence (hopefully!) and human emotions, together with the church's local members, to listen to a relevant service. Again, I enjoyed tea with all participants afterwards, and Flagg – after being in Britain for a second visit, I could tell that I was there. What a beautiful place the Barn is, I must say! The Unitarian churches of Britain can be proud and happy to have such places.

I was glad to have been part of these two events – seeing old friends and getting new ones. Sad I was, to learn that there are thoughts about how Foy might not survive. Originally named Fellowship of Youth, but now known as, "The Foy Society". Members now, in the majority, are older than 60. Would it need changes, e.g. not meeting in person but via zoom meetings, or giving up the Foy News, although It is already available online! How do we get people interested in Foy, and what about putting "Youth" back in our name?

Looking back, I have some ideas about those questions, but the most important one is the "Youth" element. The word, "Youth", can be interpreted as "young, not necessarily by age, but more by actions". In fact, I know many people around their twenties being much older in their opinions, attitudes, and feelings, than those I met at Foy, even though most of the current members are retired. "Youth" is more than age, it is a way of thinking: open for new things, interested in new people, generating energy and by standing by others, still perhaps searching for "the meaning of life".

Well, if I have a look to Generation Z, I doubt whether a lot of them really are open minded, tolerant and interested to get beyond their horizons. I am convinced that a healthy young person goes into the world with open eyes, open heart, and open mind. This is what I found at Foy, no matter what age people are. And it was nice to have a mix of ages, including families with small children as well as "oldies but goodies", with all their experience



So, after all that, I am very much looking forward to the next Foy gathering which I, for sure, will book again. One thing that became very clear at the end of our sessions about AI, **nothing** can replace a personal meeting. **Nothing**. No Zoom meeting, chat, e-mail, voice mail, or whatsoever. We need the personal contact. We need real meetings. That is true for Foy, as for IRF and IARF.

Thanks for having organized the conference,
and thanks for becoming Closer Friends!

Matthias Pilger-Strohl

Offenbach, Germany

Some further Thoughts about AI

and how it might have been around longer than most of us realized!

The AI conference started your editor thinking about a current feeling that AI is not something new, when arguably we have been using other ways of achieving the same results, for some time. As a photographer, I know that there were sophisticated ways that professional retouchers were, in the nineteen fifties and sixties, sometimes charging astronomical fees, for changing the backgrounds in photographs, often using photo-montage, to get many of the effects which are now attributed to AI.

As a student of (in the early days, mostly monochrome) photography, I would spend days and nights in the darkroom, working to achieve effects like the removal of the background, or substituting the background from another image, to re-locate a fashion-model in a more exotic location. Now we can do such things, relatively simply (with AI) in a few seconds. Digital imaging has now been around at a fraction of the cost of the innovative software which the BBC started to employ thirty years ago. Now, working on a laptop computer makes the Impossible tasks forty years ago available to us all.

David Shaw, who helped lead our 2025 conference, sent me his own version of this time-warp, in the following email. I quote:

“Following the Foy Conference on AI I have been toying with the idea of sending the following along for your consideration for Foy News. Your email has just given me the nudge!

It is a poem/reflection that I wrote for a service I once led at Great Hucklow Chapel and I am pleased that I (or rather Liz) managed to find it in a box in the garage!”

The Conference made us both think about the poem and here it is. It is almost as though I was thinking about AI before I knew it existed!”

The Robot

David's poem is printed below. It also sounds to the editor as though he could have also been anticipating the latest Wallace and Grommit feature film.....

*His eyes flashed and his ears twirled
His arms stretched and his body curled.
His insides sparkled with the latest chips
And easy agreement came to his lips.*

*The latest 'must-have' stood tall and proud,
Ready to obey whatever he's told.
In the garden he'd weed, cut grass – and rake
Whilst indoors the machine would make and make.*

*T'was a wonder – a God-send – the gadget for all
But under the casement – a designer's flaw.*

*Not only to obey and do –
But thinking and pondering and wondering, too.
The robot would try his hand to turn
And from success and failures the machine would learn.*

*He knew of people – friends at heart.
He knew when close and when apart.*

*He learnt about 'maybe', 'perhaps' and 'must';
He learnt about failure and then about trust...*

Then, he learnt about silence one fateful day
When his loved owner went away -
Away to a land from where there's no return.
Now whom could he watch? How could he learn?

Beyond the nuts and bolts that made him whole -
There was more - much more -
He was an electronic soul!

He lamented he searched but with his owner not to be found.
His power wound down and he fell to the ground.

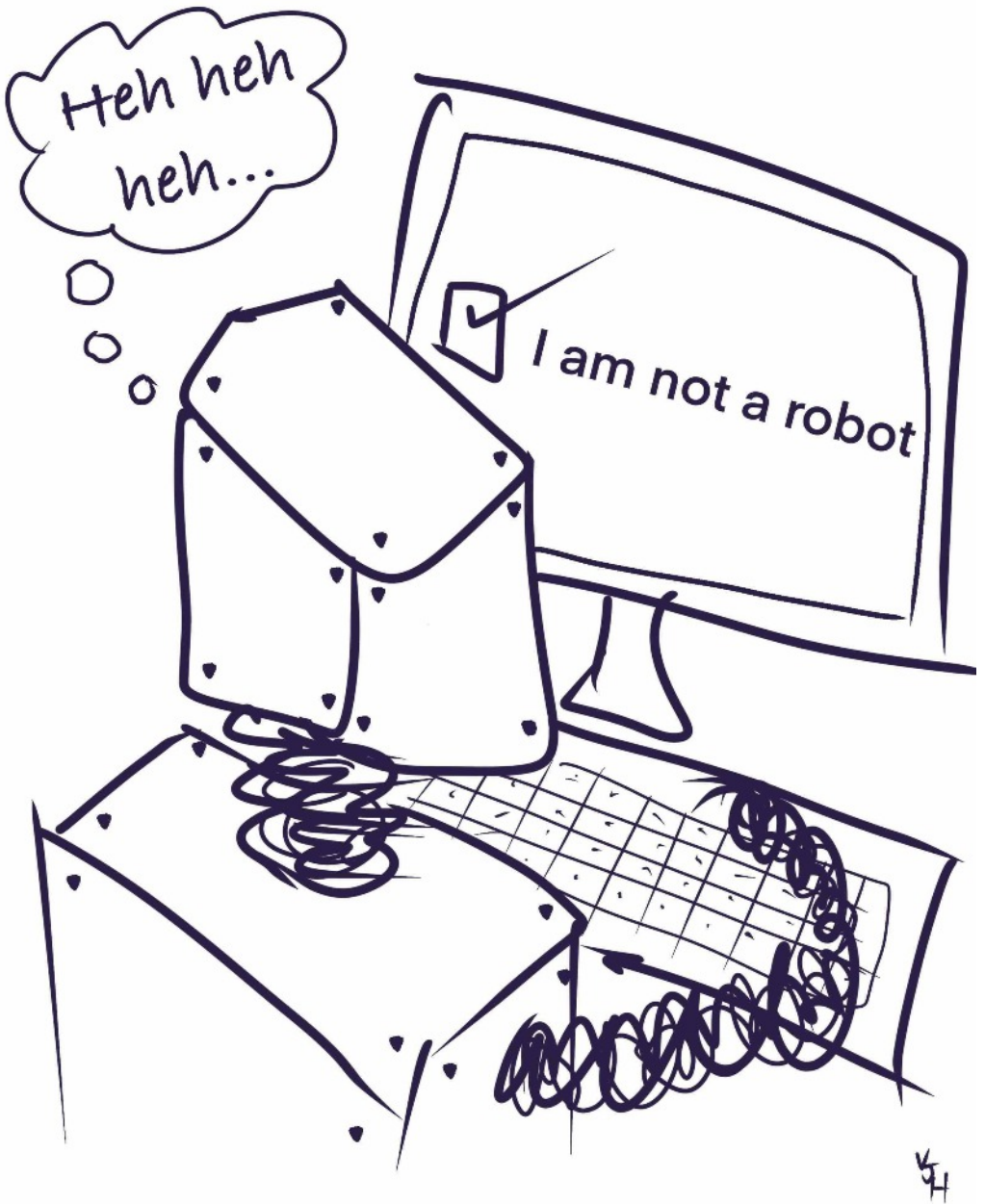
There was something missing.
Something heaven-sent
And he crawled on the floor
In deep lament.

And try as he could - he couldn't sleep.
And here was his design-fault as he fell to a heap.
For try as he could he could not cry.
For the robot had not been programmed - to weep.
So soulful -

Yet he needed something to express his grief.
It was a feeling so strong - he needed relief.
Weeping failed him hour after hour -
So he crawled on the floor
And drew a large flower.

David Shaw

Thanks David, for writing this well before, AI came into the arena to try and take the credit. Ed.



Has GA Zette finally run out of steam or is it just Taking a break

David Warhurst

Since the 1960s, GA Zette has reported on the goings-on of the General Assembly Annual Meetings, led by young Unitarians and supported by Foy Society. Often, younger Unitarians stayed up all night producing a printed Zette to be sold over breakfast! However, it has become harder to sustain this model of producing the Zette.

Contributor Louise Reeve (Northern Unitarian Association) and long-term editor and supporter David Warhurst met several times before the 2025 Annual Meetings to consider what the future might hold, including the possibility that it was time for the Zette to reach a natural end. We realised that to reach any conclusion, we needed to answer the most fundamental questions; do attendees still want it, and, if so, in what format? This report sets out the findings from our survey, meetings, and discussions, and suggests some ways forwards.



GA meeting in Birmingham where Future of Zette was under discussion

Survey Findings

We decided that the way forward was to hear from Unitarians about what they did and didn't value about the Zette, to get some idea of whether enough people still want it for it to be worthwhile pursuing, and what format would both be useful for people reading it, and viable given the resources we've got available to

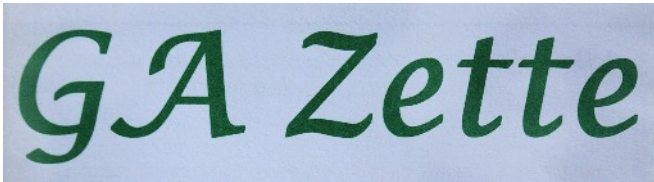
produce it. To this end, we invited Unitarians to take part in a short survey, available both online and in paper before, during, and after the Annual Meetings – from 10-30 April. Full findings are at the end of this article, here is a summary:

- **81%** of those who replied had **attended the Annual Meetings** in the past, 66% were attending the 2025 meetings, and 49% said they planned to attend in future.
- **87%** said that they had **heard of the Zette** and knew what it was.
- **66%** of those who had been to the Annual Meetings in the past said that they had **bought most or all of the Zette copies available** for the meeting they had attended.
- The most common answer from those who took part, **80%**, (52 out of 65 – 16 people did not answer) said that they thought that catching up on meetings and workshops which happen during the Annual Meetings which they could not attend was the most valuable aspect of the Zette. The next most common option, 69%, was ‘reporting on the events of the Annual Meetings, including decisions about the future of UK Unitarianism’. We received some ‘other’ comments, including positive ones about giving young people a role and enabling those who cannot attend to find out about what is going on. More negative comments included those wondering if it had value and if people “just read it looking for drama”, and one who felt it was more like a student publication and out of step with “contemporary Unitarian culture”.
- 60 people answered the question about **possible future formats** for the GA Zette. Of these, the most popular response when people were asked ‘what would work for you? Please choose all that apply’ was ‘Continuing to produce it as a **daily summary of events, but make it mostly online**, to be accessed via smartphones or tablets – we may be able to print editions on request for people who cannot access it any other way’, with 62% of those who answered taking part.

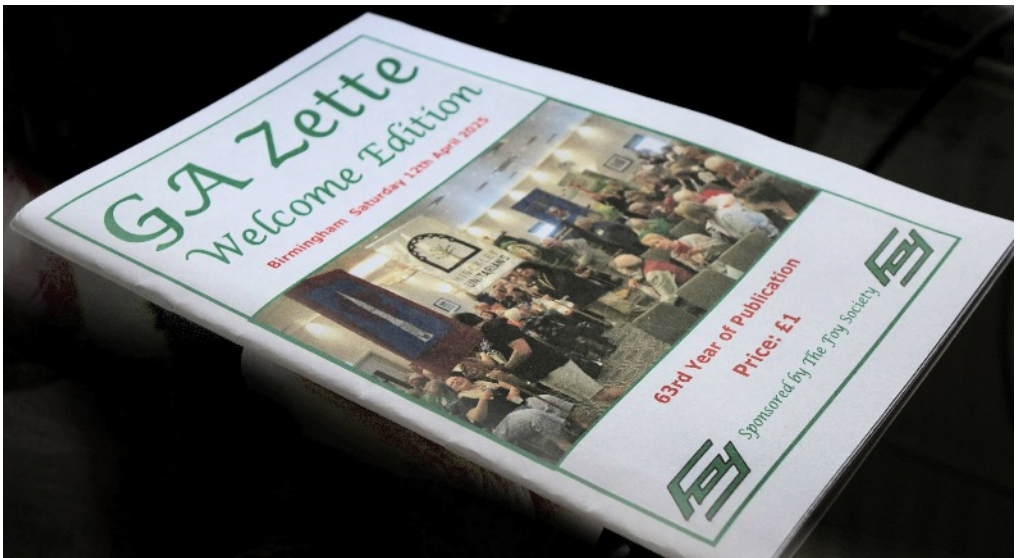
Future Directions Suggestions included adapting the Zette to be more digital-friendly to engage younger audiences, and to consider its role as what several people saw as a necessary critique of GA activities. There is a consensus that while the Zette’s previous format has been very useful, it may now need to evolve to remain relevant and to enable it to be produced given current resources.

What Next for Foy's Interest in the Unitarian GA? What People Want, and the Need for Editors

It seems clear that overnight production of several printed Zettes during the Annual Meetings is no longer a viable model, given changes in both the nature of youth involvement in Unitarianism, and the more compressed nature of the meetings. Switching to online as the default method of access, with the option for print if people need this for accessibility or other reasons (such as not having a smartphone or tablet), and perhaps a printed copy at the end, is probably going to be the way forwards.



The findings of the survey and comments on Louise's blog make it clear that there is an appetite for live reporting on the GA, both from those unable to attend, and from those present to catch up workshops they have been unable to get to. It seems, therefore, that this edition might be the last of its kind. Let's see what the future holds in adequate reporting of the Annual Meetings of the Unitarian General Assembly.



The Stockton and Darlington Railway

and its Unitarian Origins

On 27th September
1825 a steam hauled
passenger train ran
on the new Stockton
and Darlington Railway,
from Shildon via
Darlington to Stockton,
a distance of 26 miles,
to great acclaim.



Photographs, David Warhurst

This is credited worldwide as the beginning of passenger railways as we know them (more on this later). This year marks the 200th anniversary of that great achievement of which, rightly so, we are very proud in the north east. So, we have been celebrating with numerous events culminating with a re-enactment of that first journey by running a replica of the 1825 train on the same route over three days from 26th to 28th September.

The train was hauled by a 50 year-old replica of the first engine, **Locomotion**. This was made for the 150th Anniversary Cavalcade in 1975 at which Hazel and I were present. It's now a classic in its own right and performed faultlessly throughout the run, which ended on an embankment adjacent to Roseworth Park in Stockton, where we, and hundreds of spectators, had a great view of the train in a really festive atmosphere.

In a fascinating talk on 22nd October at the Newcastle Lit and Phil, **Paul Lindsay Dawson**, of our Wakefield Church, revealed what some of us already knew, that the S&D was beaten to it by the **Middleton Railway**, in Leeds, which commenced steam-hauled operations in 1812 , 13 years before the S&D!



But, was it really the first steam-hauled passenger train?

Even more amazing, and not known to most of the Unitarians present at the talk (including me) is that Paul revealed that the Middleton Railway was largely engineered by Wakefield and Leeds Unitarians, **John Blenkinsop** and **Matthew Murray**. **Rev William Turner**, brought up in Wakefield, was inspired by this and went on to minister to Newcastle Unitarians in Hanover Square. His congregation included many who had interests in coal mining, as well as science and technology. For example, **John Buddle**, perhaps the foremost colliery viewer of his age, who was involved with the development of early railways in Britain and overseas, and **George Stephenson** and his son, **Robert**. Rev Turner inspired his congregants, like Buddle and Stephenson, to get on with it.

So, we now know that Unitarians were pivotal in the development of the railways but why have we not heard of this before now? I am a Chartered Member of the Institution of mechanical Engineers of which George Stephenson was the Founder President in 1847 and yet, as a lifelong Unitarian, I had no idea he was, 'one of us', so to speak!

The answer, said Paul, is that another Engineer of the day, **Timothy Hackworth**, who learned his trade with Stephenson and went on to become S&D Locomotive Superintendent, was a *devout Wesleyan Methodist*. After his death his family pursued a relentless campaign to claim many of the key inventions for Hackworth and, in particular, to erase all mention of the part played by 'heathen' Unitarians from the history books, with so much success that I haven't found any reference to Unitarians in any of the writings about the early railways, whereas the part played by Quakers such as the Pease family, and Methodists like Hackworth are frequently mentioned.

It's high time that we put the record straight and shouted from the rooftops about our great Unitarian engineering ancestors!

Let's hope Paul's excellent and entertaining lecture has set the ball rolling.



Ramblings from Room 10

Idle thoughts of a not so idle fellow

Richard Varley

I apologise for starting on a pessimistic note, but I fear for the future of Foy. At the last AGM, three members of Foy Council sought to stand down, but there were no nominations for the vacancies. The President and Secretary reluctantly agreed to continue whilst our Foy News Editor had declared that he was willing to edit the next, this edition, whilst introducing a successor to the role. This is proving a possibility and it may well include a change in direction as to how Foy moves forward in terms of recognising modern communication.

It is interesting to bear in mind that several recent GA Presidents and Honorary Members who have achieved such roles have, previously, been members of UYPL and are members of Foy. Since UYPL wound up in the nineteen-eighties, a natural progression to Foy has dried up. One only has to recognise the number of Foy Council members who are over 70 years old, including some octogenarians, to appreciate the problem. Foy has a proud history of acting as the movement's 'ginger' group, successfully promoting many significant motions to GA Annual Meetings.

When I Chaired the Youth Committee, alongside the RE Committee, initially there was a GA Youth Officer, following which the role became part of the REYD Officer's responsibilities. They gave tremendous support to UYPL during the sixties and seventies, when I was an active member; the days when the UYPL was active. Now the GA combines the roles of Youth Officer, Safeguarding Lead and coordinating the Torbay project. It has taken Unitarian College to promote, and fund, youth events at Great Hucklow; surely part of the General Assembly's and Youth Officer's remits. Foy is currently exploring ways in which funding, to support such work, may be raised. Perhaps Unitarian College is moved to give support to encouraging and supporting such work by recognising the need to lower the age profile of congregations to support the future of the Unitarian movement that we cherish. Of course, leading congregations provides

employment for the ministers that they are training. The GA really does need to more actively demonstrate the importance of encouraging more youth activity. There are indeed a number of active young Unitarians, but not enough by a long shot.

Much of that we read in newspapers, and the press in general, makes gloomy reading. It made a welcome change to be given a copy of a quarterly publication titled 'Positive News'. The editorial includes the words, and I quote: "it would be easy to look to the abuse of power, and the anguish it causes, to the climate breakdown or to the dominance of technology, and the myriad, uneasy ways it's impacting our lives. But what about taking your steer, instead, this year from our steadfast power to care, to create, to contribute, to overcome obstacles and move forward with hope? If that's your intention, you're in the right place, as this issue features an energising collection of people and projects". So there are a variety of good news articles.

For example it reveals that millennial fathers spend, on average, triple of the amount with their children compared to the 1960s; a Michelin-starred chef whose team is made up of people who have experienced homelessness; a UK institution which is working to support its least



disadvantaged students; a community conservation project is helping to bring European eels back from the brink via artistic and scientific means: they have asked readers when they have experienced the kindness of strangers are a very few examples. It is good and uplifting to read such a publication.

While he was spending eighteen months in Australia, some while ago, our son found out about what I thought was a very good idea. He parked by the side of the road, but found it cost him a fine. Not double yellow lines, or a restricted parking area; he parked against the flow of traffic. Something not allowed 'down under'. Anyone who has driven a right hand drive car on the continent, knows the problem with pulling out into the flow of traffic. It helps if you have the assistance of the front seat passenger to your left, if you have one, to assist you, as they have a better view. It would be handy if we had the same rule, particularly in certain situations. By a convenience store, near where we live, the road is on a gentle bend, which means that if you park against the flow of traffic you have an even worse view when pulling out. The simple answer is to park a short way down the road and indulge in an unfashionable activity; walk a little further!

We hear quite a bit about endangered species. One was highlighted recently. No, not an animal or other living creature; non less than the semi colon. Studies have shown that use of the semi colon, in English books, has declined by almost 50% in the last 25 years. The decline is attributed to the lack of grammar education; the rise of digital communication with smartphones and emojis; the increasing use of AI; and some prominent writers, who think it is pretentious or unnecessary. It leads to the question as the distinction between the colon and semi colon. An AI (!) overview says that a semi colon should be used to join two closely related independent clauses or to separate items on a complex list. A colon should be used to introduce a list, explanation, or example that follows an independent clause, or to offset a quotation. There you have it!



Seen at The Unitarian General Assembly

“He used to own a Boat,
but all he sails in now
is a chair”

As a tail end, we have continued to be on line shoppers since May 2020. One of our drivers said the majority of people who had started during Covid, have continued since. We have been impressed by the politeness of all the drivers, without exception. Only once were they significantly late (20 minutes) because of unexpected road congestion nearby and a couple of times slightly late; on each occasion we received a phone message to let us know about the delay.

We occasionally call into the supermarket itself to buy a few extra or special items and sometimes get a voucher for some future use. One we received, quite simply offered a discount on fuel with the additional comment; “for in store use only”....!

Richard Varley



What Does the Unitarian Peace Fellowship offer The Present Generation ?

At this time, when we are considering inviting The Peace Fellowship to join us in holding a conference on Peace, I have taken a leaf out of Dotty Haughton's book. Dotty sent me some extracts from their Newsletter:

A simple question of, "How do I live out the peace witness in my everyday work and life?" Rev John Carter, UPF Chair

As congregations we can, as has been done in several Chapels around the British Isles, including Old Chapel at Great Hucklow, erect a peace pole at our church, chapel or meeting house. This should be, if possible, visible to the public.

As an individual and a congregation we can join Amnesty, Liberty, the Unitarian Peace Fellowship and subscribe to the Penal and Social Affairs newsletter. Ann Howell, the GA's Social Action Officer, said that we should work for justice and peace. We should acknowledge the hideous threat posed by nuclear testing and warfare by joining CND. It is possible that people from Liberty, Amnesty and CND would be happy to come and talk to your congregation as part of a Peace Fellowship service. We need to put notices up outside our churches just as we put up LGBT banners

"No peace among the nations without peace among the religions.
No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions"

As a congregation we can invite all our local worshipping bodies of whatever faith to our annual Peace Fellowship Service, to be followed, if you have room, by a shared lunch.

We could donate the collection from our peace service to The Centre for Reconciliation, Lincoln, which is working towards improving relationships between members of different faiths. We need to ask them to publicise their attempts so that we can try them as well.

Cody Coyne commented about the enrichment, which comes from interfaith engagement, and the sharing of differing viewpoints. He thought we should invite other faiths to use our spaces.

Liberty is an independent membership organisation. We challenge injustice, defend freedom and campaign to make sure everyone is treated fairly. We are campaigners, lawyers and policy experts who work together to protect rights and hold the powerful to account. Together we've been making the UK a fairer, more equal place since 1934.

Join us. Stand up to power.

Amnesty We are people from across the world standing up for humanity and human rights.

CND is a movement of people campaigning to get rid of nuclear weapons in Britain and worldwide.

The Penal and Social Affairs Panel

A Unitarian group that has been active in promoting social justice issues for the last thirty years, expanding from its original focus on prison reform to stay abreast of the key issues affecting our society.

But will any of these actions stop Putin bombing Ukraine? Of course not.

So, is there anything we can do?

When there was the anti-apartheid movement we were asked to boycott South African products. Russian exports to the United Kingdom were valued at 22.27 billion dollars. Most of these imports do not end up on the high street so a similar boycott is of no use. But you could check nonetheless.

We can, however, write.

We can email Putin: <http://services.government.ru/en/letters/>

We can write letters to:

The Embassy of the Russian Federation to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 6/7 Kensington Palace Gardens, London, W8 4QP

The Ambassador: 13 Kensington Palace Gardens, London, W8 4QX

The Consular Section: 5 Kensington Palace Gardens, London W8 4QS

If enough congregations wrote then we could ask the Quakers to do the same

We could then ask the Methodists, the Baptists, the Sikhs and the Muslims.

Dotty Haughton

Ed: Thanks Dotty for bringing these points to our attention. Yes perhaps it is time for us to be in dialogue with the Unitarian Peace Fellowship and to make Peace, the theme of our next Foy Conference

Obituaries

Janet Ford 1942-2025

Eulogy delivered at her funeral by her friend, Ant Howe

For those Foy Society friends who remember Janet Ford, here is the eulogy I gave at her funeral:



Janet, more recently, at the 2010 General Assembly in Nottingham

“I was honoured some time ago when Janet asked me to give a eulogy at her funeral, and it is a privilege to be here to speak today about my friend Janet. I can’t remember exactly when I first met her (I think it was at Stockport Unitarian Church) but when I went to my very

First Unitarian General Assembly Meetings, and was looking a bit a lost and feeling overwhelmed, Janet took me under her wing. In those days, she sold the GA Zette each day and seemed to know everyone (or certainly knew everything about them!).

During my years of training for the Ministry Janet was incredibly kind to me. She had me round to her house regularly, and she cooked more meals for me than I can remember – she was an excellent cook of course – and I spent many an afternoon or evening in her company. I remember her buying a new canteen of cutlery which she proudly produced on one occasion to use during the meal. “I wouldn’t get this out for just anyone!” she said. Her small home on Pickford Lane was full of Janet’s things, and always spotlessly clean. Her large collection of Unitarian plates and mugs adorned the walls and shelves. The crockery was later donated to Great Hucklow and much of it is used at the Old Chapel there. She always seemed to be having something done to the house.

I remember her being particularly proud of her new bathroom! Although I lived on my own, and thought myself capable of looking after myself, Janet always seemed to want to give me tips on the best and most efficient ways of doing things. “No messing” she’d say. I remember that being one of her favourite phrases, as was ‘disgusted’ when anyone had done something with which she didn’t agree (which was quite often!) She could tell a good story – usually consisting of Unitarian gossip – and she’d sometimes have me roaring with laughter with her observations. Janet was a woman

who spoke her mind. She was fearless in that department. I remember thinking 'ouch' on more than one occasion when Janet spoke up at Unitarian meetings – but I also had a quiet admiration for her! If she liked you, she was incredibly loyal and would do anything for you. I feel fortunate that I was among those she liked! I met her towards the end of her working life when she was working at the hospital and also doing her voluntary work with the police. I know she was very proud of her voluntary work and the award she received for it.

She also used to tell stories of her days working in catering – and she continued to put her catering skills to good use, producing buffets for Unitarian occasions. Janet's lifelong association with Old Chapel Dukinfield was, at some times, more strongly maintained than at others. But she always referred to it as 'her mother church'. She waited many years to become chapel warden – and finally achieved it. Over the years she served on many Unitarian committees at a district and national level. She was proud of having served on the GA Council - always said she'd been involved in some of the most major decisions affecting our movement in recent years. I don't know if she was exaggerating slightly - but she was certainly a loyal and hard worker for our Unitarian and Free Christian cause. Janet was a member of the East Cheshire Union Council for almost forty years, serving as secretary twice during that time and twice as President. She was an impressive fundraiser for a range of Unitarian causes - notably the Millennium fund.

Usually I'm quite a nervous passenger, but I always felt quite safe when Janet was driving. She spoke often of her daughter Rebecca. I remember her telling me what an excellent teacher Rebecca was and I could tell she was proud of her. When the grandchildren Emily and Alice came along, Janet never went anywhere without pictures of them - which she'd produce for all to see and she'd tell us all how they were getting on. She was a proud grandmother, albeit at a geographical distance. I know that Janet loved her trips out to New Zealand to see her family and friends there. She made the trip over there a number of times until lessening mobility made it too difficult for her.

When I was Minister at Kingswood, Janet would invite herself to stay at the Parsonage a few times a year. I remember us sharing a bottle of wine one night and both getting a little tipsy - and Janet telling her most funny Unitarian stories. Her religion, it seemed to me, was a mix. She embraced some of the changes and innovations in our movement, but resisted others. I remember her reciting a list of Unitarian beliefs that she'd learnt at Sunday School and which she said guided her life. I can't remember it all, but it began with: "I believe in God, who is spirit, love and power". She'd never call me Ant - always Anthony.... And she once said to me "When you preach I feel like I've had religious instruction" - which I think was a compliment! When I used to lead Sunday evening Services at Old Chapel, Janet, her friend Ian Peace, and sometimes Rev David Doel and I would go out for a drink afterwards to the Astley Arms. I remember one evening Janet being in high dudgeon about something that

had been said or done at Old Chapel. Janet was in full flow, until David Doel raised his hand and said quietly "Let us drink red wine, for it reminds us of the love of God!" - which is one of the only times I have seen Janet lost for words!

Janet's mobility was lessened in later years, though her mind remained sharp until quite recently. Strokes put her in hospital a few times. She'd phone me from the hospital, usually telling me how well she was being looked after (once she'd got everyone in order!). I happened to be in the north west on one of the occasions when she had been just been discharged from hospital that day. It was one of the only times I've seen Janet down and tearful.

The enormity of having to manage at home again seemed to hit her. She kept saying "eeeeee dear. I dunno....". I said I'd make her a brew and a sandwich and went into the kitchen. Janet soon recovered herself and started shouting instructions on where everything was and how to do it properly! The move to an apartment was a necessary one and, I think, a good one for her. I visited her a couple of times in her apartment at Beatrix Potter. She seemed to settle well there in her last years and, in typical Janet fashion, there was some things and people she liked and some that she didn't quite so much!

I know that she valued being able to log into the weekly Heart and Soul gatherings online and which kept her connected to her Unitarianism. Sam has been a great help, support and friend to Janet - especially in recent times as Janet's health and mobility lessened. Some time ago, when I led a Service at Old Chapel she made a monumental effort to come along. I took her home afterwards - and I think that was the last time I saw her in person. She'd said for years that she wanted me to be asked to preach the GA Anniversary Sermon - and I'm sorry that she was too frail by that time to be there when I did get to do it. Janet was one of those women who I thought might just go on forever, although I know that she was ready for her rest. She was one of life's characters who, when at her best, could be enormous fun, tremendously loyal, and a good friend. You certainly knew where you stood with her, and she'd be the first to tell you what she thought!

I don't think I ever spoke to Janet about her beliefs about what happened after death. Janet may have trusted in a "God who is spirit, love and power" - - and who knows what she might have to say to God if they meet! Janet, at full capacity was a force to be reckoned with! She was one of those formidable northern Unitarian women who've kept our chapels going for so many years. Today, our love and prayers are with Janet's family and friends - and most especially with Janet's sister Helen, daughter Rebecca, grandchildren, Sam and Janet's extended family. For Janet, the struggles of the last few years are over. I'll always be grateful for the kindness she showed me - and that she only ever told me she was disgusted with me once!

Ant Howe

David William Copley 1944-2025



David leads us on the 2017 Winter Walk from Great Hucklow

by Brother Derek

David was born in Nuttall Road, Bradford on the 1st March 1944. The family story is that if it wasn't for double British summer time during the war he would have been born on the 29th of February. A shame really because it would no doubt have amused him. The family was very much involved in Cambridge Place Congregational Church. It was the centre of their social and religious life. All their family and friends were linked to the Church. Dad though got a new job in Altrincham, and they had problems finding a Church that suited them, by them we mean mother. Eventually at a suggestion from one of dad's employees they ended up at Dunham Road which gave them a similar involvement to Cambridge place and it suited mum.

Now talking about Dave is complicated because there are so many different aspects and trying to do it chronologically is pretty well impossible. Plus, everyone has their own memories and even more will surface and timescales are so difficult so I will look at different aspects of Dave's life. I am bound to miss out something which some will regard as important, and I will also probably miss some people out. I apologise whole heartedly for this, it is not a slight on you, unless you are a golfer called Richard which Robert might or not mention.

We were a great family. Mum, though she could be difficult and a bit tricky was devoted to us, she also was a super cook. Dad was kind, calm and very competent. David was in the middle with Doug - the first in our whole family to go to university - the elder and me the little one. Dave went to Navigation Road Primary school and then Wellington Road boys. Dave's forte was art so off he went to art college in Northwich. He either went by train or in a friend's beetle. No seat belts in those days. They used to drop me off at Alty prep on the way. The last time for the beetle. They were very lucky. Dave reckoned he was thrown out of the back window on the second summersault.

They all survived relatively unscathed. He then went to Manchester college of art where he became very adept a silk screen printing and pottery. As a family we had some traits, there were the jumpers that mum knitted. I didn't realise until many years later how distinctive they were. Dave relished the beatnik look they gave him.

We were all good swimmers, it helps your dad being a swimming baths manager, and we all swam in many galas, particularly for 5th Alt our scout troop at Dunham Road Chapel was very much a centre for us and when we moved to Salford, Dave and I would get the bus with mum to go to evening service. Dad and eventually mum transferred their allegiances to Cross Street Chapel. Dave and I never did.

One aside about beards, very few people have seen Dave without a beard. He grew quite early after leaving school. He did shave it off when we were at Salford, It really scared mum, she just didn't recognise him, and I found it difficult to talk to this strange person. It grew back straight away, never to be removed again.

Dave moved out of home a couple of times, but it wasn't really until 1978 that he left, for good to 13 Derby Street with Vi. After Vi left Dave was on his own for a number of years. He still took his share of the Sunday evening YPL group meeting which became strangely limited to the front room! Why, became apparent when Helen came on the scene. I got this panic phone call to help him clear the house. Many, many trips to the tip with mainly newspaper cleared it plus Quentin Crisp was right that after five years the dust doesn't get any deeper. It took some cleaning. Helen arrived and all was well, and it was the start of a new era. More on that in a bit.

Dave was very involved in Sunday school and scouts at chapel. He became a cub leader, Baloo or as we called him, Yogi Baloo. The troop being led by Arthur Bowen and of course Skip Jackson. The largest part of Dave's life was his involvement in YPL. Altrincham had a very vibrant YPL. So much went on, group meetings, dances, outings weekends away and of course the drama festivals. Others who

were involved will remember much more and those involved. The first play I can recall, a little hazily, was performed at Liverpool, Dave was some sort of resistance fighter I think. I remember Bridget Plummer having a major role and I'm fairly sure Veronica Needham was in it. The play that really stayed in my mind, and Dave often referred to it, was Five Birds in a cage. Frank Pinder's line, "Take it of the OOK and lower by the pullies", being quoted time and time again.

Dave went to many IRF meetings around Europe. I was only old enough to be involved in the last one at Sharpness but many of his old YPL and IRF friends were there, Gorden Lothian, Geof Kent and of course John Hewerdine.

Dave threw himself into youth work with Hucklow events, NELICUMDA events and the Chapel youth group. It was one of these events at Denton where we discovered why he was loosing so many golf balls, he couldn't see far. Glasses sorted that out. Winter walking was one of his good ideas and it still carries on now. Altrincham was always the focus and we still claim to have the longest running YPL group in the world. Dave was a major part and as I grew older we became mates as well as brothers. The group at Altrincham was vital. We did everything together, parties, events, outings, holidays. He was hosted weekly by the Lavers and Dave would often baby sit Katie, Sophie and James to their delight as it meant late bed time.

Despite all this going on, Dave had time for work. His first proper job was at Fielden Electronics in Wythenshawe. He had a niche job, hand painting bespoke dials for custom made machinery. Dave did like his job but he wanted more and found the ideal job as a technician at Didsbury college of education. He covered the art and geography departments, sharing the art with Jim. He loved it there and helped in all sorts of ways. His head of department. Miss Haliday was quite a renowned artist and he enjoyed helping her set up exhibitions of her work. He has a numbers of her works. The geography department became his major focus and he eventually had a sort of hybrid technician lecturer post which seemed to have been created for him.

It was at Didsbury that he met Vi who worked in the library and they married at Cross Street in 1978. He used to joke that he had worked in a college of education, a polytechnic and a university. All the same place naturally. One noticeable incident was when he caught some burglars. His office on the fourth floor overlooked Didsbury Park which wasn't a park but a road with big houses. He saw strange goings on in one and called the police and the burglars were apprehended, duty done.

Dave always enjoyed taking part in sporting activities and hobbies. Less so enthusiastic about watching, apart from one notable exception, golf. When he was younger he played cricket at Timperley club. He also liked skating and even tried ice hockey. One of his friends David Jackson played for Alty Aces and Dave gave it a go, he bought himself hockey boots but he couldn't always use them in normal skating because they didn't have brakes. He was also a very good ten pin bowler. He played in a league for many years and was a consistent high scorer. His main passion was golf, he was a very good player and I could tell many weird and wonderful tales. However I have asked Robert to say a few words here. He has played much more with him than I have and anyway he is a better golfer than me.

So much could be said about David, we all have many stories and anecdotes - most of them actually true. Yes he did rescue a Frisby from the sea in France in his underpants and yes we did have to lift the blue reliant van out of a ditch, visiting John Hewerdine in Little Durnford. He did cut a wonderful sight prancing over the meadows with his butterfly net capturing specimens, and his knowledge of butterflies and moths was boundless. Who else would have owned and loved the totally antisocial and fairly vicious cat – Mulligan. Dave was easy to like and people did. He had the happy knack of getting on with everybody.

He never held grudges, he never carried on arguments. Argue he would, even when he realised he was wrong, (often). But when an argument was finished it was finished. Everywhere Dave went he had friends and people just liked him. His best friend was Helen and Helen looked after him with great devotion. She supported him in whatever he did and took the brunt of running their home and in later years the driving. As things gradually became difficult she made sure Dave didn't miss out and in the final period as the cancers really took hold she was his devoted nurse. At the end she was there to hold his hand and say goodbye.

Dave leaves behind many great friends, most of which haven't been mentioned but we all know who we are and we will miss him. Though he started to forget, eventually almost everything, he was still Dave. Some things he held on to. Interactions became difficult but he could still relate to people, particularly children. He could still joke with Young William about their shared name even towards the very end. Finally though he quietly disappeared, I miss him and I always will. Helen will desperately miss him and so will everyone who new him. There will always be a David shaped hole in our lives. Good bye my brother, goodbye Helen's beloved husband.

Derek Copley

DAWN BUCKLE

1928-2025

Dawn was born and brought up in Stand, Whitefield where she attended Stand Grammar School for Girls. From an early age she showed a talent for public speaking, singing and acting which was encouraged by her family and teachers.



daughter Gail was born the following year and in 1960 they settled in Dukinfield where they remained dedicated members of Old Chapel for the rest of their lives.

In 1960, Dawn began training to become a teacher, qualifying in 1963. She taught Physical Education at schools in Ashton and Denton before becoming a Senior Advisory Teacher for gymnastics and dance in the City of Manchester before going on to Bretton Hall College in Wakefield as a lecturer. After retiring, she worked as a free-lance Schools' Inspector and also studied for a master's degree in education. Dawn also had a lifelong fascination with creative dance, a passion she passed on to her daughter Gail and her granddaughter Mara.

Following retirement in 1999, Dawn became more involved in national Unitarian organizations. She was a member of the Worship Sub-committee, became a lay worship leader, was Chair of the Education and Training Commission and played a significant part in the training of many ministers at UCM. Dawn was President of the General Assembly in 2004/05 and was elected to the first Executive Committee.

The deterioration in Roy's health resulted in Dawn becoming his full-time carer for a number of years and not long after his death in 2023, Dawn herself became ill. Despite her declining health, she was overjoyed to welcome her first great grandchild, Harry, born in October last year.

Dawn always tried to live life to the full; to use her talents to the best of her abilities and to love her family and her friends. All who knew her will agree that she fulfilled those aims well.

Rev Andrew Parker - Duckinfield Old Chapel

News of Members

Hazel Warhurst



In early July we received the sad news that **David Winder** had died on 7th June. David was a member of Foy and IRF in the 1960's so was not well known by many of the current membership.

He was part of the Winder/Beard Unitarian family being the brother of the late Joy Mason (nee Winder) and the Uncle of Helen Mason, Director of Unitarian College. I sent our condolences to his wife Pat and daughters Suzie and Lizzie. Jeff Teagle remembers that he had a great interest in design and engineering for Hot Air Ballooning.

Also, we send our deepest sympathy to **Barbara Rowland**, following the recent announcement, that her partner of 26 years, John Barkham, died on 22nd October. His funeral will take place on November 11th in Norwich. Details on request.

We send caring thoughts to members who are struggling with health issues and can no longer enjoy their usual activities. It is always hard to adjust to these limitations when we feel as though we ought to be able to carry on as usual.

Congratulations to those who have celebrated significant birthdays this year. Please send any snippets of Good News whenever you hear them and I will make sure they are passed on to you.

Hazel Warhurst

Update on The Barn, at Flagg

Dear friends,

Here s an extract from a kind letter for thanks from Flagg Village Hall for our recent £1k grant. Good to hear about their plans. I am waiting for a roofing quote to replace the flat roof on the bathrooms which are leaking. Otherwise,

fingers crossed, I think all is well.

Helen Mason xx

Extract from Sue Naylor's letter:

It is a Huge Amount and we are very grateful. The main priority is to improve the Heating, it is totally inefficient. Our hall needs a facelift too and Rachel has lots of ideas for fundraisers etc.

Thank you all again,

Sue Naylor

Flagg Village Hall secretary.

Membership and Subscriptions



Individual reminders will be going out shortly to those who may have forgotten to pay this year. I will be asking some people with whom we have had no contact for a while, if they wish to be removed from the address list.

Membership is still only **£7.50 for an individual** and **£10 for a couple**.

If you feel able to pay a little more than the basic subscription, please consider adding a donation for the Flagg Chapel Fund which assists young people attending Unitarian events and appropriate conferences.

Payment of subscription by Bank Transfer is preferred, but if this is difficult then by all means write a cheque and make it payable to **"The Foy Society"**. The Treasurer's address is on the back page of Foy News.

To pay by Bank Transfer here are the details of the Bank account:-

Santander plc

Account name: The Foy Society

Sort code: 09-01-50

Account number: 05454689

Into the Great Unknown

Annette Percy reflects on her first visit to Czechoslovakia sixty Years ago

On 30th December 1965 I boarded a train from Frankfurt to Prague. Since the summer of 1964 I had been charged with developing contacts with young Unitarians behind the Iron Curtain. In the beginning, it was a matter of writing letters to Unitarian ministers in Prague, Budapest and Cluj/Koloszvar to ask for information about youth activities in their churches.

In March 1965 I had moved to London to work with Grenville Needham (Neddy) in the Youth Department at Unitarian Headquarters. John Kielty was the General Secretary and he had been in IRF before World War Two and was supportive of these initiatives. The IRF Conference in 1965 was held at Wiston Lodge in Scotland and we succeeded in getting two people from Eastern Europe to the conference – Boris Merhaut who was an older member of the Unitarian congregation in Prague who happened to be in the UK and Marek Antonczyk from Warsaw who had written to the Information Department after seeing an “Are you a Unitarian without knowing it?” advertisement in The Sunday Times and subsequently joining the NUF.

That summer I had been on the organising committee at Wiston and had been appointed IRF Secretary as well as continuing my quest for contacts behind the Iron Curtain. Boris Merhaut told me that I could not do the latter job without visiting the countries in the East and, since I was to attend the IRF EC meetings in Offenbach between Christmas and New Year, he invited me to Prague.

The EC meetings in Offenbach began on 27th December and concluded on the 29th.

We were accommodated in the Jugendhaus at the church and on the morning of 30th December Helmut Manteuffel (then minister in Offenbach and IRF President) drove me the 11 km to the station in Frankfurt. It had snowed overnight and the ground had already been frozen so we arrived at the end of the platform just as the once in 24 hours train was about to leave. Helmut pushed me into the train, threw my luggage after me and waved goodbye as the train pulled out of the station. At this point I realised that my seat was in the very first carriage, one of the only two carriages going through to Prague.

I had boarded the train in Frankfurt at 8.17 a.m. and the rather slow express train

trundled through West Germany until dusk. After the last station at Schirnding, the Iron Curtain was not visible in the dull winter light but the train went into a deep cutting with a series of watchtowers on either side and we emerged at the Czech border station of Cheb. Border officials came along the train and stamped visas with green rubber stamps. They were not at all officious and one of them wished me "a very pleasant stay in Czechoslovakia". Not many passengers had crossed the border but once we were dealt with the train filled up with Czechs. As we pulled out of the station I got my first view of Czech children, playing ice hockey on a large frozen puddle and making the best of things.

On New Year's morning I found a traditional chocolate pig by my breakfast plate to wish me luck for the New Year. About 9.30 Dr Antropius and Zdenka arrived and we set off for the Prague Unitarian Church where I was greeted by the minister, Dr Dušan Kafka, and was asked to say a few words of greeting from British Unitarians! The service took place in the hall at the front of the building, and since this was used during the week by the Theatre Faculty of the University there were tip-up seats. There was a congregation of almost 200 and the service was led by Rev Václav Rubeš, a retired minister, who welcomed me to the church and to Prague and I made my little speech which was translated into Czech by Dr Kafka. Rev Rubeš talked about the New Year and I could catch the warmth of his tone though I couldn't understand one word. There was a lovely atmosphere, warm and friendly, and after the service it was embarrassing to see little old ladies with tears in their eyes who wanted to shake hands with me because I was someone from the West.

I had lunch with Dr Antropius and family and in the afternoon I was invited to a tea-party in Unitaria in my honour. There were 18 or 20 people there and I was asked a lot of questions about Unitarianism in Britain and Britain in general. Then the church treasurer played some folk songs on his Czech bagpipes and everyone sang. About seven of the people present were in their early twenties and belonged to the Youth Circle which met every week to practise yoga, have deep religious discussions and practice English. Everybody present signed a book about Prague which was then given to me as a souvenir of my visit. Later in the day I was invited to the home of Ivanka Koželka, another member of the Youth Circle, whose mother was Dr Kafka's secretary. Ivanka and Zdenka ran the Youth Circle. Ivanka was engaged to an Indian student who had been in Prague for five years. Jaganath spoke perfect Czech. He too was a member of the Youth Circle.

On Sunday morning I was up bright and early to go to a service at the Czechoslovak Hussite Church in Vinohrady, a more bourgeois area of Prague, which in the previous autumn had been deprived of potatoes when those who lived in more working class areas had got them. The church had been built in

1935, and was architecturally very pleasant but it was icy cold and I was told that they just could not afford to heat it, something which was evident as the service began and everybody's breath hung in the air. I was here because I was meeting Dr Kaňak, the Dean of the Hus Theological Faculty to whom I had been introduced in the spring of 1965 when he was in England doing research on the relationship between Hus and Wycliffe. After the service I was invited to the Kaňak's for lunch.

After that more sightseeing with Dr Antropius and Zdenka and then with Boris who always managed to show me more of the deprivations of living in a Communist State. In the evening Dr Antropius and Zdenka took me to the ballet at the Smetana Theatre. They had been given three tickets by Zdena Bronislavská, a member of the Youth Circle who was a ballerina. We saw Copellia and Scherezade – Zdena B was dancing in the latter. The costumes and the scenery were lovely and the whole atmosphere was luxurious, not at all like poor old Prague with plaster falling off its houses, holes in the road and an atmosphere of not being cared for.

The following morning I was leaving and there was quite a party at the station to see me off: Dr Antropius, Boris and Eliška and Dr Kafka. All had brought me something for the journey – an orange, some sandwiches and even a scarf into which Dr Kafka said I could weep. It was depressing to see the number of West Europeans on the train and the Czechs all left behind on the platform. But Dr Kafka had suggested that, since the young people could not come out to the West I might like to take a party of IRFers to Prague in the summer and they could be given hospitality by the members of the Youth Circle. I promised to try to come back in July – and I did.

Then I was accompanied by two more British, four Dutch and three Swiss members of IRF. We enjoyed a week's hospitality with the members of the Youth Circle and then, joy of joys, six of the young Czechs were allowed to come with us to the IRF Conference in Offenbach.

In 1967 there were six Czechs at the second IRF Conference in Stoos in Switzerland and in 1968 the conference at Woudschoten in the Netherlands was attended by Saša Federer from Prague and Zsuzsana Genersich from Budapest. Saša Federer was elected to the IRF Executive Committee but the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia took place on 21st August that year and by the end of August he and several other members of the Prague Youth Circle were in Basel in Switzerland being cared for by our Swiss IRF friends.

Annette Percy

Ed: A longer version of this edited piece can be provided, if you request it from me.

The End of Foy News



as we know it...

by the retiring Editor
& Jasper Hewerdine

It is hard, after editing Foy News for 18 years, to tell you that this could be the final edition. I keep telling myself that it is not my responsibility to ensure that something, which has always been close to the hearts of us all, cannot be sustained.

In stepping down as your editor,
I offer you something which our
grandson Jasper submitted to me,
for you to read:



“The Future of FOY news

As we look to the future of FOY news, with John Hewerdine stepping down as editor, the questions we must consider are what the pathway forward is for FOY’s publications, and how we can maintain the legacy of FOY news, whilst adapting to the digital age.

A key element of the modern social media environment is the increased demand for regularly posted small pieces of content. Therefore, one way forward, that I believe has the most potential, is to set up accounts on several major social media sites, such as Instagram, Bluesky, Ticktock etc, and regularly post content on these platforms, as well as the current Facebook account, as and when it is available. This allows us to engage followers with regular content throughout the year and also brings the opportunity for FOY to release short statements about real world events taking place, which provides the opportunity for non-members to get an idea of what FOY is about, and what we stand for.

If we take the social media route, there will need to be someone, or a group of people, administering these accounts, and I would be happy to play a role in that. This content could also be posted on a Foy blog, which could be on the website, and which would provide another forum for regular updates to be posted. These regular updates could also be emailed out to members, as email offers many opportunities for sending out regular updates via tools like Action Network.

Whilst it is important for FOY to broaden the methods we use to distribute content and news, it is also important that all members are included in this and are able to access FOY publications. That is why I would also suggest that these regular posts that are released via social media could still be compiled into a twice annual paper edition that is made available to Foy members who feel more comfortable with a paper copy, as well as sending out emails for those who find these more intuitive. There is also a possibility of simplifying the process for compiling publications, by using newsletter tools, or AI, although I am cautious of these tools due to their environmental impact, as well as potential issues of plagiarism.

I hope that some combination of these ideas can continue the legacy of Foy News, whilst expanding our horizons into the new digital era, and any suggestions from members as to the way forward would be welcome.”

Jasper

“

Our Next Foy Society Annual Conference



No details of the next conference are yet available but we are looking into two suggested themes. One possible theme is “Peace”, (see page 26). Another would be Mental Health and Neuro Divergence, as suggested by Tim Baker. If you are able to help by making suggestions, or take the lead in exploring either subject, please be in touch:

dot@hewerdinefamily.co.uk

More details, as available, & Bookings through our Conference Secretary
Joan Partington coljopartington@gmail.com

Nightingale Centre 1st-4th May, 2026

Some Useful Contacts

Treasurer and Printing:

David Warhurst,
18, Priory Way,
Ingleby Arncliffe,
N. Yorkshire. DL6 3LR



01609 882442

Flagg Contact:

Neill Warhurst,
Flat 2, 9, Grosvenor Road,
Scarborough,
N. Yorkshire, YO11 2LZ



01723 365589

Membership Sec:

Hazel Warhurst,
18, Priory Way,
Ingleby Arncliffe,
N. Yorkshire. DL6 3LR



(mobile) **07765005870**

General Sec:

Richard Varley,
60, Weggs Farm Road,
Northampton,
NN5 6HD



07919 533933

Conference Sec:

Joan Partington,
"Sandcroft",
Townhead, Hayton,
BRAMPTON,
Cumbria. CA8 9JF.



01228 670565

Editor - Foy News:

John Hewerdine,
Whittle Wharf,
Whittle Springs,
Chorley,
Lancashire. PR6 8AE



01257 269502

Editor's email : john@hewerdinefamily.co.uk