

**Stalybridge Unitarian Church is a  
Free Christian Congregation.**

**A member of The East Cheshire Union of Unitarian and Free  
Christian Churches.**

**A member of The General Assembly of Unitarian and Free  
Christian Churches.**

**A member of The North Cheshire Unitarian Sunday School  
Union**

**A corporate member of The Unitarian Christian Association**

# **THE CHALICE**

**STALYBRIDGE UNITARIAN CHURCH  
MAGAZINE**

**SEPTEMBER 2006**

**THIS ISSUE OF CHALICE IS KINDLY  
SPONSORED BY  
A MEMBER OF THE  
CONGREGATION WHO WOULD  
LIKE TO REMAIN ANONYMOUS**

## MINISTER'S LETTER

Dear Friends

Many of you will have seen an article that appeared in national newspapers recently about the Chief Constable of North Wales being a druid. As I have undertaken my visits over the last few weeks a number of people have asked about modern day druids and expressed concern about the possible links to paganism. I will try my best this month to clear up any misunderstandings about this subject.

Historically, druids were an order of Celtic religious specialists, which existed in Gaul and the British Isles. Very little is known about them as the only contemporary evidence comes from Roman sources. It is thought that they acted as priests, seers, healers and arbitrators but there are no detailed records of their activities or of the festivals they celebrated as the druids themselves left no written records. Their cultic centre in Britain was Anglesey (Ynys Mon) and the scene of their cultic rites was the oak grove. They had nothing whatsoever to do with Stonehenge, which was already millennia old by the time of the druids. They practised animal and human sacrifice and there is no reason to doubt the Roman authorities on this. The Romans destroyed the druid power base on Anglesey in AD 61 and the druids disappeared as a distinct force after this, although it has been suggested that in Ireland this pagan priestly caste were simply absorbed into Christianity, giving early Irish Christianity its distinctive 'Celtic' flavour. Although all sorts of pagan ideas, beliefs and practices became sublimated in Christianity, it is misleading to suggest that many Christian festivals are based on age-old druid ceremonies. Christian festivals such as Christmas, Easter and Candlemas are not based upon pagan ceremonies; they are biblical in their basis and are celebrations of important milestones in the life of Christ.

Modern druids are a different thing altogether. Antiquaries of the 18th century produced a completely imaginary reconstruction of the druids which has since been used by various groups claiming to revive ancient traditions. The whole thing is in fact a complete fabrication begun by an itinerant stonemason named Edward Williams who conducted the first druid ceremony on Primrose Hill in London on 21st June 1792. He claimed to have discovered the ceremony in an ancient Welsh manuscript; in fact he composed it himself.

Perhaps the most familiar manifestation of modern druidry is at the Welsh Eisteddfod. The Gorsedd (gathering) of Bards is an association whose members consist of poets, writers, musicians, artists and individuals who have made a distinguished contribution to Welsh language and culture. It has no roots in antiquity however and is the creative invention (as their own literature describes it) of Edward Williams.

The head of the Gorsedd of Bards is the Archdruid, who is elected for a term of three years, and is responsible for conducting the Gorsedd ceremonies during Eisteddfod week. These Ceremonies are held to honour literary achievements amongst Welsh poets and prose writers and are not religious ceremonies. This is a perfectly acceptable cultural activity that even the Archbishop of Canterbury has been associated with and this is what the Chief Constable of North Wales has joined.

There is also however another manifestation of modern druidry dating from the 1970s. Unlike the Welsh Gorsedd and its affiliates that is a cultural activity, many of these more recent groups claim to have a spiritual basis. Today, all sorts of neo-pagans call themselves druids but it is no more than a fantasy on their part to suggest that anyone in the 21st century is or can be a druid in the ancient mode. These groups offer publicly witnessed rites of passage such as druid weddings or blessings for children and offer prayers for the sick and dying. Their own publicity states that we celebrate the cycle of the seasons through drama, ritual, story and song, drawing on folk tradition and mythology appropriate to the time and place. We share bread and mead within the sacred circle, in honour of our gods and ancestors, in honour of the earth and each other.

It is clear from this statement that this form of druidry is not compatible with Christianity, including Unitarianism. One of the hallmarks of Unitarian and Free Christians is our tolerance. We would never say that a person is wrong in following whatever religious path they choose to follow. That is their choice; let them get on with it. There is no absolute right however for people to be able to do that within a Unitarian congregation. Not all the choices people make are compatible with Unitarianism. Unitarianism is not (as some would have us believe) a place where anything is acceptable. Within our denomination, as within all communities, there must be limits. There is only one true God, the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the honouring or worshipping of false gods is most certainly beyond the acceptable limit. I hope that this has answered some of your questions and concerns. I am indebted to a number of my colleagues including a distinguished former President of the General Assembly for providing information for this letter and I gratefully acknowledge their assistance.

Wishing you every blessing.

Andrew.

## WARDEN'S NOTES

I was wondering what to write about this month when a strange thing happened. We were just getting ready to go to bed at about midnight when I heard a knock at the door. I opened the porch door to find a young man outside who informed me that he had just woken up in our back garden and could I arrange a taxi for him. He was quite dishevelled and had obviously had a drink or two so I'm afraid I told him to clear off.

After he had walked off I wondered whether I had done the right thing. Was it un-Christian of me to send him away? Should I have helped him? He never threatened me or anything like that. I must admit that if I asked someone for help I would hope to get it. On the other hand I hope that I never wake up drunk in a strange garden!!

Life is not so simple these days, we are more aware of the possibility of criminal or terrorist activities. So what do we do in these days of uncertainty where some people want us to live in fear. Everybody will react differently but I am determined to carry on living as normally as possible. If we stop behaving normally then the criminals and the terrorists have won.

This week some people "mutinied" on a plane because there were two Asian gentlemen sat on it. They forced the airline to remove these two gentlemen. This is a disgrace, I have lived in countries where white people were in the minority and I never felt that I would be persecuted simply for being white. Whatever happens we simply can not allow people to take the law into their own hands. Security at airports is at it's highest ever, surely then if everybody is searched in exactly the same way then that should be good enough.

The best thing to do is to be alert but be normal. We must not become hysterical. It is important to remember that the majority of people of all races, religions & persuasions who live in the United Kingdom just want a peaceful life. That's not too much to ask is it?

As my late night visitor did not appear to steal anything, I hope he got home safely.

Ken Howard

## UNITARIAN YOUNG PEOPLE'S GROUP

Leaders for September

3rd Sept: Clare Bullock  
10th Sept: Ruth Mills  
17th Sept: Sue Howard  
24th Sept: Clare Bullock



All young people, whether regular attenders or visitors, are more than welcome to join us at our UYPG meetings which take place during morning service (after the 2nd hymn) every Sunday, apart from the 5th Sunday. If you have any queries, please contact Clare Bullock on 0161 303 8872.

**STALYBRIDGE  
CHURCHES JOINT  
HARVEST FESTIVAL  
SERVICE.  
6.30 PM SUNDAY  
24TH SEPTEMBER.  
AT STALYBRIDGE  
UNITARIAN CHURCH**

## **FUND RAISING AND SOCIAL GROUP**

By the time you are reading this Chalice, we would have already had the Italian Night on 25th August and let's hope it gave our intrepid travellers a taste for Rome!

Looking forward now, our first event in September will be our usual Whist Drive to be held on Friday 1st September starting at 7.30pm at church. Please feel free to come along for a good entertaining evening out. You may even win one of the prizes and you will certainly enjoy a cup of tea and a cake!

Our October Whist Drive will be held on 13th October which is a week later than you may expect but a few people will be away on the Rome trip on the first week so we have made it a little later!

For a little later in September we shall be holding our Harvest Supper on Friday 22nd September starting at 7.30 pm. Please enter your name on the list on the notice board if you wish to attend. The cost will be £4,00 per head. As it is actually a couple of days before our harvest service, we are asking anyone who can to bring their harvest gifts along at 7 pm on the Friday or else early on the Saturday morning. Our decorating ladies have another engagement on Saturday morning, so need to get finished earlier than usual!

Although you may think it is a little early, I just want to mention our annual Bazaar which this year will be held on Saturday 4th November starting at 11 am. We will be asking you all for your usual donations and it is especially important this year as we had to cancel our Summer Fayre due to the dry rot problem, so we need double the effort in November. Please make a note of it in your diary so we can all make it a really special event.

We are pleased to inform you that our friend Joyce Aldridge from our Flowery Field Church will be coming to give us a musical evening on Friday 20th October. She will be bringing two singers with her so it promises to be a good night. Please watch the notice board for further details.

Our next fund raising meeting will be held on Monday 16th October at 8 pm at church and anyone is welcome to attend.

Sue Howard

## **LADIES CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY (WOMEN'S LEAGUE)**

The Ladies Monthly Tea will be held on Wednesday 6th September at 3 pm when the hostesses will be Mrs Edith Howard & Mrs Averil Buckley. All ladies are welcome.

The Manchester District Women's League Autumnal meeting will be hosted by the ladies of our Mossley church. The event will be held at Mossley Methodist Church on Saturday 23rd September starting at 11.30 am. Lunch will be provided at a cost of £2.

Once again we will be visiting Great Hucklow for our **ANNUAL CHRISTMAS LUNCH**. This will take place on Wednesday 6th December. Please put your names and those of your friends on the notice board in the porch. If it is more convenient please ring me on 0161 3307072. I shall need a deposit of £5 per person by the end of September.

Margaret Hallsworth

## **THE NIGHTINGALE CENTRE GREAT HUCKLOW**

It has been confirmed that this visit to Hucklow will take place from Friday 29th June to Sunday 1st July 2007. We have to confirm the booking within the next few weeks so it is extremely important that you put your name on the list in the porch as soon as possible

## **ROME TRIP**

Some of our members are joining our Minister and members of other churches on a trip to Rome. Our thanks must go to Andrew for organising this trip. We hope they all have a great time.

## **SPECIAL SERVICES AND EVENTS 2006**

Fri Sept 22nd	7.30 pm	Harvest Supper
Sun Sept 24th	11 am	Harvest Service
Sun Sept 24th	6.30 pm	Stalybridge Churches Joint Harvest Festival Service at Stalybridge Unitarian Church
Tue Sept 26th	7.30 pm	NCUSSU AGM at Dukinfield
Sat Oct 14th	2.30 pm	ECU Autumn Meeting at Hyde Chapel
Sun Oct 29th	11 am	Ladies Service
Sat Nov 4th	11 am	Bazaar
Sun Nov 12th	11 am	Remembrance Day Service
Sun Dec 24th	2.30 pm	Juvenile Membership Family Carol Service
Sun Dec 24th	6.30 pm	Candlelit Carol service
Mon Dec 25th	11 am	Christmas Day service

## £1 A MONTH CLUB

If anyone has not renewed their membership or wishes to join for the first time, then please contact me. I am at church most Sundays, but if you do not see me there I can be contacted on 0161 344 0942 or at 45 Church Street, Dukinfield, SK16 4PR. Last month's winner was Carolyn Jackson (number 26).

Beryl Bradbury

## CHURCH GARDENS

Thank you to the small band of people who helped to tidy the gardens around church. Your help was much appreciated.

## HARVEST FESTIVAL ARRANGEMENTS

Our Harvest Festival Service will take place on Sunday 24th September at 11 am.

**We are honoured to have been chosen to hold the Stalybridge Churches Joint Harvest Festival Service at our church on Sunday 24th September at 6.30 pm. We need a really good turn up for this service to show our credentials to the other Stalybridge churches.**

Our Harvest Supper will take place on Friday 22nd September at 7.30 pm. Because of the busy weekend, your gifts for the harvest festival will be gratefully received at church on Friday 22nd September from 7 pm onwards. If you can not bring them on Friday then they must be brought early on Saturday morning to give the ladies chance to complete the decoration of the church before lunch time

## STEWARDS FOR SEPTEMBER

3rd: Bill Atkin  
10th: Don Andrews  
17th: Ken Howard  
24th: Stuart Hinchliffe

If anyone would like to become a steward please contact the warden

## WEB SITE

We are pleased to inform you that Colin and Philip Horsfield have already done a lot of work to update our website. The Minister is working together with Colin and Philip to ensure that all the content is correct. This work is still ongoing but if you have access to the internet please check it out at;

[www.stalybridgeunitarians.org.uk](http://www.stalybridgeunitarians.org.uk)



Some members and friends of church during our recent visit to Etherow Country Park

## **CHURCH FLOWERS FOR SEPTEMBER**

- 3rd Mrs K Spiby in memory of the Schofield Family
- 10th Mrs P Hadfield & family in memory of  
Jack Hadfield
- 17th Mr David Dawson in memory of  
Mr & Mrs Harry Dawson
- 24th HARVEST FESTIVAL

## **DRY ROT APPEAL**

I am sure most of you are aware that the repair of the recent outbreak of dry rot cost us approximately £3000. Add to this the loss of revenue from the cancelled Summer Fayre and you can understand that this has been a major financial outlay.

The Church Committee has once again felt it necessary to appeal to members and friends of the church to make donations to cover as much of these costs as possible.

We regret that we have to do this but this expenditure was not budgeted for and we hope we can rely on all our members and friends to help us out.

If you feel you can help please send your donations to the treasurer (address at front). Please make cheques payable to Stalybridge Unitarian Church.

Thank you

Ken Howard

## SEPTEMBER

- Fri 1st 7.30 pm Whist Drive
- Sun 3rd 11.00 am Morning Service and UYPG including naming ceremony for Joshua
- Wed 6th 3.00 pm Ladies Society monthly tea
- Sun 10th 11.00am Morning Service and UYPG
- Sun 17th 11.00am Morning Service and UYPG (this will include a Communion Service)
- Wed 20th 7.30 pm ECU Delegates Meeting at Flowery Field
- Fri 22nd 7 pm onwards Donations for Harvest Festival received
- Fri 22nd 7.30 pm Harvest Supper
- Sat 23rd 9.00 am Church decorated for Harvest Festival (must be completed as early as possible)
- Sun 24th 11.00 am Harvest Festival Service
- Sun 24th 6.30 pm Stalybridge Churches Joint Harvest Festival Service at Stalybridge Unitarian Church.
- Tue 26th 7.30 pm NCUSSU AGM at Old Chapel Dukinfield
- Wed 27th 8.00 pm Church Committee meeting
- Sat 30th TRIP TO ROME COMMENCES.
- Sun 1st Oct 11.00 am Morning service and UYPG conducted by Ken Howard