

Unitarianism: A religion?

York Unitarians meet every Sunday at 11am in St Saviourgate Unitarian Chapel for worship. But who or what do they worship? And what do they believe? These are questions that have no answer because Unitarians have no dogma and everyone is busy working out her own spiritual path. We are a mix of atheists, agnostics, humanists, Buddhists, Pagans, Christians and nothings, none of whom believe that they have the absolute answer to any of the unanswerable questions that we all ponder. Perhaps our most common trait is scepticism and we attend the chapel to hear and discuss each other's beliefs or lack of them. In medieval times we would have been executed for heresy. The services, which always have an advertised theme, would appear familiar to anyone who has attended church, being a mixture of hymns, prayers (but to whom or do we mean Whom?), meditations, readings from a wide variety of sources, music, and an address. They are led by a variety of different people—often a member, sometimes an outside speaker. The congregation contains scientists, musicians, poets, artists, teachers from York's schools and universities, builders, students, nurses, even doctors. Politically we tend to be left wing. After the services we always spend an hour or so chatting over coffee and we get along splendidly. We have a Healing and Spirituality Group, a weekly Meditation, a monthly Poetry Group, and a monthly Play Reading Group. Every year we adopt a local charity and raise money for it. We have frequent and varied concerts, a beautiful piano and excellent acoustics.

The beautiful chapel itself, built in 1692, is very interesting, being the only church in England built in the form of a Greek cross, the first large brick built building in York without a wooden frame and York's first place of dissenting worship. Building in brick was a relatively new technology at the time and they didn't quite get it right as we discovered in the early 1990s when having reroofed the roof, a corner of the tower subsided by over an inch and our architect reckoned the whole thing would have collapsed within a week. Fortunately he was able to put jacks up in time to prevent such a catastrophe. Maybe there is a Unitarian Guardian Angel? It turned out that the reroofing had stopped the water which had been keeping the course of bricks that the tower was supported by, moist, and the dry bricks had begun to crumble.

If any of this has aroused your curiosity, please come along! You are welcome to contact Simon, David or Janet first if you have specific questions.

Simon Hardy: sjsh1@york.ac.uk

Dave Pearce: david.pearce@york.ac.uk

Janet Eldred: janet.eldred@york.ac.uk