



THE YORK UNITARIAN

St. Saviourgate Unitarian Chapel, York, YO1 8NQ

August 2020

FROM THE EDITOR

This year's St. Saviourgate Unitarian Chapel AGM - after the chapel service on Sunday 16 August - will mark an important change in the Chapel's legal status. It will be when *York Unitarians CIO* properly takes over!. The significance of this change is that - instead of having separate and different trustees for the building and for the financial endowment; and a separate Chapel committee - attending to regular activities, - now and in the future the elected Chapel committee members for the time being will also be the trustees of both the property and the endowment.

There is a story behind all this - first of all that all the last appointed building trustees are deceased; and secondly that there was no 'fail safe' custodian trustee (such as the British and Foreign Unitarian Association) to whom the property would accrue should the congregation fail.

Thankfully, our very helpful Chapel solicitor, Roderick Ramage, was able to convince the Charity Commission that it was unreasonable to search for the legal heirs of the last appointed building trustees, the last of whom was deceased by 1932. A survey of trustee attendances at Chapel AGMs over several years was provided as evidence.

The solution to the problem, Roderick argued, was for the Chapel to become a Charitable

Incorporated Organisation [a CIO] - a new 'incorporated' form of charity which had not previously been available. As a CIO the elected members of the Chapel Committee, for the time being, would also be the trustees both of the Chapel building and other property and of the Chapel permanent endowment (the Chapel Charity). This is now the case and the present elected Committee members are now also the trustees - but not for life - and only so long as they remain elected Chapel Committee members!

Behind all this there are some necessary big 'thank you's' to make - first of all to Roderick Ramage for his time and his friendly advice; but also to a small group (Sue Catts, Nick Morrice and Margaret Hill) who struggled their way through the lengthy and complicated CIO application form and related administrative issues.

More particularly thanks are due to Alfred Fletcher and the late Revd. Sydney Knight both of whom, at retirement in the 1980s, settled in York and probably saved the Chapel and its congregation from fading into non-

existence. To Alfred, in particular, as secretary of the former trustees, very special thanks are due for the hours and hours he must have spent sorting out chapel affairs and organising essential repairs to the fabric. It is difficult for us to appreciate the amount of volunteer work which this must have involved.

Andrew M. Hill



A MONTH OF SUNDAYS

at 11.00a.m.

Sunday 2 August
Stephanie Bisby
Strangers and friends

Sunday 9 August
Laura Dobson
Exile, Homecoming and Belonging

Sunday 16 August
Stephanie Bisby
A slight change of plan
12 noon Annual General Meeting

Sunday 23 August
Myrna Michell
Tomorrow's highway

Sunday 30 August
Chris Carr
Our faith in unusual times

FROM THE CHAPEL COMMITTEE

- The Chapel Committee held a 'zoomed' meeting on Sunday 26 July with apologies from David Zucker. Nick Morrice took the chair.
- Service from Sunday 2 August will be held in the Chapel. For the special conditions required please see p.6.
- The Chapel's postponed 2020 AGM will be held in the Chapel following the service on Sunday 16 August.
- David Zucker organised a recent positive trial 'zooming' from the Chapel. Further trials will be undertaken.
- During the quiet of 'lockdown' Peter Exley has been able to complete required tasks from the last Historic England quinquennial survey of the building (pointing of boundary walls and painting of railings, etc but see page 3).
- An application has been received regarding the Chapel's ministerial vacancy.

MEDITATION GROUP

The Meditation group will be back in chapel again from 6th August. We will be restricted in the amount of time we can spend in chapel and there will be no drinks available so please bring your own if you wish to have one. There will be hand sanitizers available to use within chapel. If you prefer to use your own please bring it with you. Face masks need to be worn. We will not be meeting in the Upper Room as there is not enough space up there for social distancing to be adhered to. Instead we will be doing the meditation in the chancel area. We will be sitting on the polypropylene chairs that will be clearly spaced out. These will be wiped down with sanitizer after use. There will be no cushions available so if you wish to use one please bring your own with you. The meditation session will be from 11am as usual for 45mins. Chapel will be open for about 10mins before the session for people arriving. People will be asked to leave the chapel once the meditation is over. Social time may be possible in the garden area depending on the weather conditions or those who wish to can adjourn to a local café.

Dee Boyle

HEART AND SOUL

The last session of Heart & Soul will be on August 2nd at 4pm via Zoom. The theme will be 'Finding a Balance'. This will be the 12th session that we have had while we have not been able to meet in person at Chapel. The Heart & Soul sessions will be having a break now but if people would like it to start again in Autumn please contact Dee to let her know that you are interested.

POETRY GROUP

The Poetry group that usually meets at Marta & Simon's house have been holding their monthly sessions via zoom over the last few months. They will continue meeting via Zoom until the Government guidelines change allowing more people from different houses to meet together in someone's home. Please contact either Marta or Dee if you need details of the sessions.

THE UNITARIAN PATH IN ONE SENTENCE

The Unitarian path is a liberal religious movement rooted in the Jewish and Christian traditions but open to insights from world faiths, reason and science; and with a spectrum extending from liberal Christianity through to religious humanism

COME AND SEE THE CHAPEL NOW

During lockdown, Peter Exley has been working at the Chapel, and taking advantage of no-one coming into the Chapel. First he re-pointed the front wall, and then he re-painted the fence in its original colours.

BEFORE

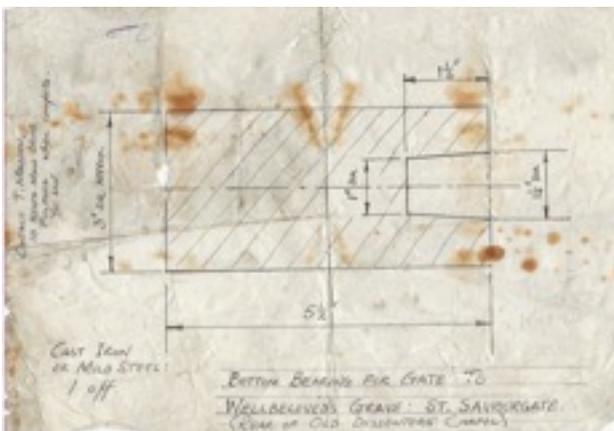


AFTER



Close up of the gate, railings, and wall. Peter has also re-pointed, with lime mortar, the side wall adjacent to No. 33 which is an original garden wall. He has also made the entrance to the chapel wheelchair friendly.

Below is the restored gate in the Wellbeloved courtyard behind the Chapel (right) and on the left is the drawing of the fittings from the Chapel records from which Peter worked.



WHAT IS FREEDOM?

a sermon by David Zucker on Sunday 19 July

JOSEPH

I wrote this service just before lockdown when in the following week, Jews all over the world would celebrate Passover. You will recall that Joseph, Jacob's favourite son, who was given a coat of many colours, was sold into slavery in Egypt. Falsely accused of raping his master's wife he was imprisoned. However, because of his ability to interpret dreams he came to the attention of Pharaoh whom he advised to maintain grain stores to defend the population against famine. Joseph becomes a Thomas Cromwell type figure – a sort of Prime minister.

With famine hitting the Levant, Joseph allowed the people from the North, including his family to settle in Egypt, where they prospered. Pharaoh died and there was regime change.

The good which Joseph brought to Egypt was then forgotten, the Egyptians felt threatened and they enslaved the Israelites. What then followed was the first recorded slave rebellion in which, the Israelite slaves unionised behind Moses and Aaron, eventually negotiated their release. Of course, they were helped by a few plagues sent to assist the Israelites negotiating position but if we try to separate the myth from the history, I suggest that I am not too far away from the historical position. We do have evidence that about 3700 years ago there were Canaanite Pharaohs, and indeed one called "Yacoub" who controlled lower Egypt, who were expelled about 1600BC.

PASSOVER and SLAVERY

However, I digress, the point about Passover is that slavery and bondage were so appalling to the Israelites that those times, 3600 years ago, are seared into the consciousness of the Jewish people, the descendants of the Israelites, so that the story has passed from one generation to the next.

The story of a people or peoples settling in another country, being made welcome and then being resented, is a story that can be told over and over again. But it is upon slavery and the loss of freedom that I want to focus.

When I first offered to take this service, close as it was to Passover, I had in mind focusing only slavery.

The word "slavery" conjures up images of shackles and transatlantic ships – depictions that seem relegated firmly to the past. But more people are enslaved today than at any other time in history. Experts have calculated that roughly 13

million people were captured and sold as slaves between the 15th and 19th centuries; today, an estimated 40.3 million people – more than three times the figure during the transatlantic slave trade – are living in some form of modern slavery, according to the latest figures published by the UN's International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Walk Free Foundation.

Women and girls comprise 71% of all modern slavery victims. Children make up 25% and account for 10 million of all the slaves worldwide.

The number of slaves in the UK is not known but it is known that it can be measured in the 10's of thousands – cockle pickers; fruit harvesters; cannabis farms; nail bars and of course domestic workers. The list goes on.

FREEDOM

To understand slavery, we need to understand "freedom". What is it?

When I was a barrister, I had a criminal client who begged me to make sure that he received a custodial sentence. He could not cope in the outside world. Inside prison he was free of the pressure to survive, to pursue material things. His needs were met. He was warm. He had three meals a day. He had companionship.

A nun may choose to absent herself from the world, as we know it, and take an oath of silence and complete obedience.

A freedom fighter may choose incarceration to make a political point.

A man may choose to become a soldier and accept unquestioningly the lawful orders given to him.

You may think therefore that freedom comes from having choice and in part you would be right.

However, this is problematic.

FREE TO CHOOSE?

Our society is based on the Judaeo-Christian notion that we are free to choose between good and evil. In the garden of Eden, before Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they only knew the difference between right and wrong, not good and evil. Good and evil are about morality, right and wrong are not. A bee finds its way back to the hive because it knows the right way, it does not make a moral choice. The right way to London from here is South. That fact is just that, a fact. It is neither good nor evil.

For our disobedience, eating the fruit, we are punished by being banished and cast out into the world. Perversely you may feel the punishment is more akin to being given liberty than incarceration. Strict obedience to law for Jews will

bring salvation, for traditional Christians acceptance of Jesus Christ.

Freedom is, of course a meaningless word, just like the word "heap". If I say, I have a heap, you would not know what I was talking about. I have to tell you what the heap is, a heap of apples; a heap of manure, a heap of whatever. So too with freedom. If you tell me, you are free I don't know what you mean. I would be bound to ask, "Free of what?" or "Free to do what?"

That in turn is problematic. No man is an island (well unless he chooses to be a hermit which itself is meaningless unless there is a society to cut oneself off from). If, as we are, social animals, then freedom must come at a price. Freedom is a contradiction.

Laws and social conventions mean that I cannot share a bed with whomsoever I please, nor take what I like, irrespective of to whom it belongs, nor say what I like – so I am not free. My freedom is curtailed. I may have greater freedom than you, but it is never absolute. As soon as I make a choice (assuming I am free to choose) I forgo the opportunity to do something else in that moment. I may be in prison on my own but, through my knowledge or lack of it, have greater or lesser freedom to ponder or create. I could no more write fables like Aesop than carve a statue of David in the manner of Michael Angelo. I could be free to speak out, but rightly cannot incite racial hatred, and even if I were so disposed I do not possess the oratory skills of Hitler, Mussolini or Stalin who used the freedom attaching to their power to take away freedom from others, which brings me to the fundamental question that I seek to lay before you. How should we as Unitarians exercise freedom?

THE BIBLE

Laws are fundamental to the way any society works: it is not surprising that the Bible (both Testaments) is so focused on it. For me the main distinction between the Old and New testaments is the manner in which we are enjoined to apply law whether literally or pragmatically, but a commandment to apply law pragmatically is itself a law!

Having referenced the bible I should tell you that there are some significant challenges within it:

"When you draw near to a town to fight against it, offer it terms of peace. If it accepts your terms of peace and surrenders to you, then all the people in it shall serve you at forced labour. If it does not submit to you peacefully, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it; and when the Lord your God gives it into your hand, you shall put all

its males to the sword. You may, however, take as your booty the women, the children, livestock, and everything else in the town, all its spoil. You may enjoy the spoil of your enemies, which the Lord your God has given you." (Deuteronomy 20:10-15 NRSV)

"You who are slaves must submit to your masters with all respect. Do what they tell you—not only if they are kind and reasonable, but even if they are cruel. For God is pleased when, conscious of his will, you patiently endure unjust treatment. Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. But if you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you." (1 Peter 2:18-25 New Living Translation NLT)

Please be assured that it's not all bad. The Old Testament requires slaves to be set free in the seventh year and not to be treated cruelly and not all new testament texts on slavery suggest that cruelty towards slaves is permitted but abolitionism is not to be found in either testament.

WHAT IS FREEDOM?

Where am I going with all this? To be honest when I first looked at this I was completely lost. I was seeking a moral position to share with you.

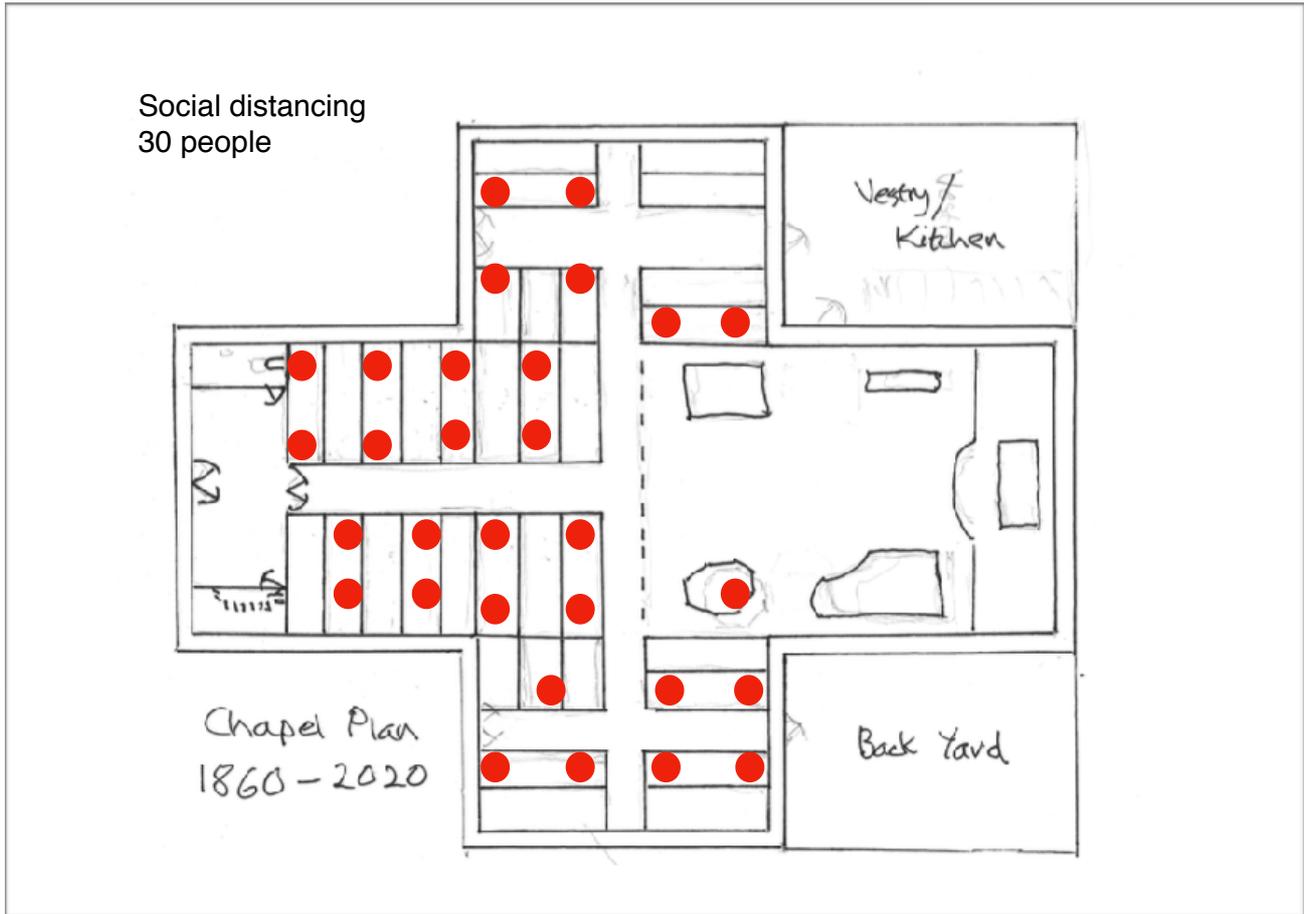
I have come to this view and I am grateful to Nick Morrice for his insight and suggestion that I look to the Buddha.

What is freedom? It is the moment-by-moment experience of not being run by one's own reactive mechanisms. Does being run by one's own reactive mechanisms give you more choice? Usually not. When you aren't run by reactions, you see things more clearly, and there is usually only one, possibly two courses of action that are actually viable. Freedom from the tyranny of reaction leads to a way of experiencing life that leaves you with little else to do but take the direction that life offers you in each moment. Hence, the illusion of choice is an indication of a lack of freedom.

In society, freedom is not there for the taking, but it is there for the giving, by forgiving, being kind and not taking offence. As I said in opening if we all choose to serve one another we are all made free. As Nelson Mandela said, "For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others".

But for the self, freedom is in the way we control our mind. It is the one place no one else can enter. The Buddha said: "No one outside ourselves can rule us inwardly. When we know this, we become free".

SOCIAL DISTANCING IN THE CHAPEL IS POSSIBLE



The Chapel is large enough for the required social distancing

- 30 people. Our average attendance is slightly less.
- 2 people may sit, socially distanced in every other pew.
- You are asked to wear a face mask to protect yourself and others.
- If you have a virus symptom please stay at home

Sound and Music

- The Chapel has an excellent sound system; and also a 'deaf loop'.
- Recorded music may be played using the Chapel's sound system.
- Live streaming is possible using smart phones.
- The Chapel has copies of the Unitarian Music Societies CDs of hymns in the green and purple hymn books.
- Singing will not be permitted and hymnbooks cannot be used.
- The piano and/or clavinova may be used

Zooming

- The zooming of Chapel services is being trialed.

Giving/ Collections

- Please give generously to the chapel by paying with standing orders through your bank if at all possible.
- Bowls for collections will be available in the vestibule and in the chancel.

Drinks and chat

- After service drinks and chat are possible with small, socially distanced groups in the Chapel front yard - but please bring your own refreshments.

Small groups

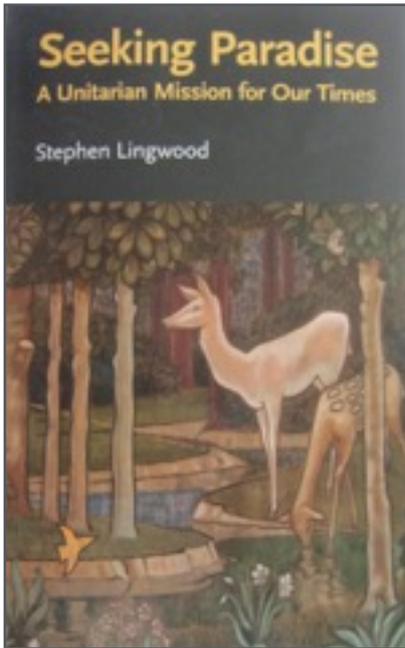
- Small socially distanced groups - such as the meditation group - may meet in the chancel area of the Chapel.

Hygiene

- All surfaces and equipment must be wiped down afterwards.
- We have two toilets in the vestibule and the vestry (wheel chair accessible). Please clean and wipe down all hard surfaces after use.
- Paper towels and hand sanitisers will be available.

SEEKING PARADISE: A UNITARIAN MISSION FOR OUR TIMES

a review by Barbara Barnes



This new publication is now part of our chapel library, its home, when I can return it, on the shelves of Unitarian books in the lobby. It offers not just a critique of Unitarianism past and present but suggests a mission for Unitarianism for the future.

Lingwood, like Martyn Edwards in last month's Inquirer, is concerned that the clear message of Unitarianism in C19 has become a kind of agnosticism which is similar to views held by many in other progressive churches and in society. He states that while "thinking that one knows the mind of God can lead to fanaticism, thinking that God is too abstract or impersonal to be known can lead to an uncommitted and weak wishy-washy liberalism." At heart, he is asking what is the purpose of Unitarianism?

Language is merely representation yet the title "Seeking Paradise" did not attract me as a reader. Moreover, there is discussion on "mission" and "evangelism", concepts which may strike alarm in some of us. Yet, after reading the whole book, I am satisfied that the author adheres to what most would see as the essence of Unitarianism, with its core of universalism, pluralism and continuing revelation from reason, study of texts and others' lives and that of our own. Nevertheless, his case for 'a Unitarian Mission for our Times' is challenging and timely and, in many ways, inspirational.

There is a lot to absorb in this book, helped by questions for reflection and debate after each chapter. One chapter focusses on the importance of dialogue (comprising 'nurturing', 'inviting' and 'pioneering' dialogue) within and beyond our church community, something

tricky to do in lockdown. We can make a start, however, by way of encouraging as many of our members to read this book with a view to having that dialogue, perhaps by way of group study, as soon as this is practically possible.

Barbara Barnes

ABOUT PEOPLE

- We have been delighted that York Unitarian Sue Catts, now living in Melbourne, Australia has been able to join us for our 'zoomed' Sunday services. Meike Dux-Harrap has also joined us from Germany.
- Also welcome have been the congregation of Mill Hill Chapel in Leeds; a group of Bradford Unitarians and others from Bury, Leicester and Scotland.
- Our best wishes go to Joyce Fletcher who is recovering from an unfortunate tumble.

ONE VOICE or: I WISH!

And I shall start a choir,
for all and everyone -
the tentative, the confident,
all waiting for a song.

Experienced, or new
can now step out from hiding;
eyes wide, they head along the road
with no fear now dividing.

Before me, people, jostling,
breathe deeply of each other,
lean in to chat, just say hello,
beginning to recover;

rub shoulders, stand and smile,
with open eyes and faces.
At last there's laughter left and right;
another's voice will grace us.

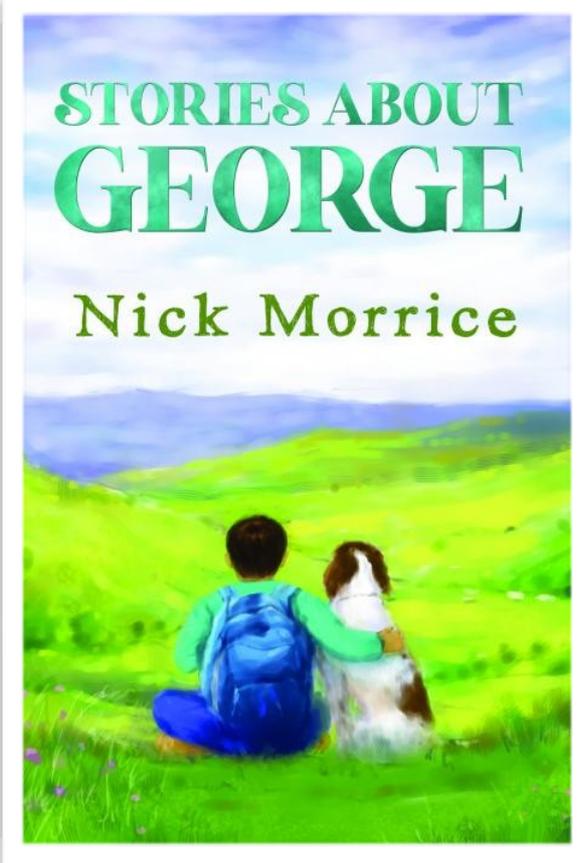
And eyes will shine in hope,
your heads nod as you listen,
feet shifting till you find the groove -
then feel and breathe the rhythm.

So, we will sing unchained,
no longer mute, unheard;
in one voice lifting high and wide
and soaring like a bird.

Myrna Michell, July 2020

STORIES ABOUT GEORGE

a new book by Chapel member Nick Morrice
about to be published after 30 July £8



George Bond, a high-spirited eleven year old, dreams of becoming a warrior and leading a more adventurous life. With the help of his close friends, adventures seem to come their way naturally, but their warrior abilities are taxed to the limit as they take on villains and thieves, wild water, angry farmers and a haunted house.

George's vivid nocturnal dreams come to life in increasingly bizarre ways. They take him to worlds in which famous and mythological figures, from Leonardo da Vinci to James Bond, the Minotaur to the Buddha, make unexpected appearances. Uncle Stanley's time-machine transports all six warriors to distant lands and times, in the past and future, where they have many extraordinary and life-changing encounters.

These twenty stories about four boys and two girls, starting in the Yorkshire Dales but extending into faraway exotic countries, will undoubtedly entertain and inspire young readers.

USEFUL CONTACT DETAILS



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Barbara Barnes, Dee Boyle, Laura Cox,
Elizabeth Faiers, Simon Hardy, Andrew
Hill, Jenny Jacobs, Joan Sinanan, and the
Officers

St. Saviourgate Unitarian Chapel Charity
(registered charity: 230167) Trustees:
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A CHURCH WHERE EVERY MIND IS FREE AND EVERY SOUL IS WELCOME