



THE YORK UNITARIAN

St. Saviourgate Unitarian Chapel, York, YO1 8NQ

May 2020

FROM THE EDITOR

I've been catching up - during these days of confinement and social distancing - on a few of my many unread books; many of which I've inherited and hold on to for sentimental reasons; and others which I keep just in case they are necessary either for reference or for research purposes but which in these days of electronic information storage are redundant. Do I really need my large two volume *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* when - with my library card identification number - I can now access on-line the complete, multi-volume 'non-Shorter' edition? It really is time I began trying to off-load parts of my library so that, at my demise, it makes things easier for my family. What I really need are one or two precious individuals who would appreciate being the eventual recipients of either a large number of books of worship material and/or an even larger collection of books about Unitarian and Nonconformist history.

One unread book (published in 2002 and bearing an Edinburgh address label) which recently - in these unsociable days - I have managed, at last, to start reading I have had, unread, for at least 13 years. But it is very long (500 pages with appendices) and very heavy and very inconvenient to hold - especially in bed - but turns out to be quite fascinating.

The book is by the writer Jenny Uglow and all about *The Lunar Men* a group of late 18th century entrepreneurs who pioneered the modern world and met monthly at the full moon when there was sufficient moonlight for riding home. Joseph Priestly was one of them, Erasmus Darwin (Charles's grandfather) was another, Matthew Watt another, Josiah Wedgwood (the potter) another and several of them with Unitarian connexions.

A similar 'Lunar Society' today would surely include Alexander Graham Bell inventor of the telephone who in 1901 aged 54 came across a Unitarian pamphlet and wrote to his wife Mabel "I have now discovered that I am a Unitarian Agnostic"; and the Unitarian Tim Berners Lee progenitor of the World Wide Web.

One cannot help wondering what our present 'social distancing' and 'lockdown' experience would be like without the achievements of this more

recent 'Lunar Society' - the Atlantic cable, telephones, the internet, e-mail, skype and zoom.

How remarkable that we are managing 'zoom' Sunday morning gatherings - each of us being present-together and contributing from the insularity of our own homes; and a special 'thank you' to Laura Cox for managing the technicalities of these Sunday morning 'zoom' gatherings.

Andrew M.Hill



**A MONTH OF SUNDAYS
at 10.30a.m. on Zoom**

Sunday 3 May
Dee Boyle
Are Jedi Unitarian?

Sunday 10 May
Nick Morrice
Gardeners' Question Time

Sunday 17 May
Elizabeth Faiers
Do you pray and, if so, why?

Sunday 24 May
Revd. Celia Midgley
"From the troubles of the world . . . "

Sunday 31 May
Adrienne Wilson and Myrna Michell

The Zoom ID numbers for each Sunday will
be sent out by e-mail
in advance of each Sunday

OTHER EVENTS IN MAY
There are no other events in May.
All recitals, concerts etc.
have been cancelled or postponed

**YORK UNITARIANS CIO
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

The AGM on 29th March had to be postponed when the UK Government put us into "lockdown". The intention is that as soon as restrictions are lifted, we will set a date for the AGM giving the required 21 days notice to members.
Margaret Hill, Secretary.

ABOUT PEOPLE

- The Pastoral Care team are endeavouring to keep in touch with anyone who needs them, concentrating on people who live on their own, or who may need help. Contact *Claire Lee* [clairelee_6@hotmail.com] if you know anyone in need of help.
- Our special thoughts are with *Janet Eldred* following the recent death of her father.

- *Lesley McKeown* (see her poem elsewhere). writes: "Oh thank you Andrew I would love that! Return my greeting to St Saviourgate, forever missed!" Lesley now lives in the north of Scotland.

- *Myrna Michell* is launching a magazine of poems and other literary creations called 'Un-lock'. Those with contributions should contact Myrna directly at ringofvoices@gmail.com.

- The Scott Award established under the wills of Chapel members the late *Michael* and *Eileen Scott* is an annual art competition and exhibition open to all students to encourage and reward creative and artistic work. This year it's taking place online. Pictures, videos, recordings, etc, along the theme 'Inspired by Others' are required by 30 April 2020. [Find out more about the Scott Award.](#)

- *Peter Exley* has been making regular 'check up' visits to the Chapel to comply with insurance requirements.

FROM THE TREASURER

The end of the tax year has given Adrienne the opportunity to update the Gift Aid reclamation on our subscriptions and donations. In our financial year 11.1.19 to 30.12.19 we are claiming Gift Aid on £13,260.29 - £9,357 of which is paid through BACS (standing orders).

In the current financial year 1.1.20 to 5.4.20, the end of the tax year, we have claimed on £2871 of subs paid by BACS, and £588.09 paid in cash through collections and coffee money. But note that the latter source of income only appears when we physically meet.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all of you who donate through BACS, not forgetting all of you who contribute in so many other ways to the life of York Unitarians. I hope you are keeping safe and well and that we will soon be able to meet again at the Chapel.

Nick Morrice, Treasurer

WE THE PEOPLE

by Brinley Price

Some folk are panicking
And others in denial;
To normal life we cling
Or snatch in shopping aisle.

Some go the extra mile
Or at the window sing,
Or walk alone and smile
To view the flowers of spring.

Some feel bereavement's sting
Or sense no more death's smile
Since they have taken wing
As countless coffins pile.

Some government revile,
Others would still be king,
But if we wait a while
This pain new birth might bring.

HEALING THE WORLD

by Lesley McKeown

Leslie is a former York Unitarian now living in the north of Scotland and a member of the Forres Unitarian group

Ice melts
Seas rise
Animals die
Forests cleared
Gases pollute
Traffic jams
Wars prolong
Insults fly
Ties are broken
Virus strikes
The world quakes
Time slows
Our world shrinks
Insecurity reigns
Reality dawns
Love awakes
Nature smiles
Air clears
Birds enjoy
Water sparkles
Quiet restores
Heightened senses
Imaginations stretched
Play and song
Time to care
The world heals.

PRAYER

by Nicky Jenkins for the epilogue at the cancelled Ministers' pre Unitarian General Assembly meetings gathering

May we be sent a comforter
One that swaddles us in cotton wool
One that gives us a rest from the conflict within us.
The Spirit of Truth is our comforter, our helper
May we be
May we be as intended, fully human, fully fallible, fully vulnerable
May we trust that we are enough

That we have the skills and compassion to walk alongside others
To provide support, though we stumble
To provide comfort, though we are in despair

To provide structure to the events of people's lives though we are in chaos
May we find new ways of delivering solace to the bereaved
And justice to the marginalised.
May we use the gifts we have whether in word or music or prayer
And keep the commandments
To love God and each other

AT THIS TIME

**of frustration, disappointment and uncertainty
we gather in ways hardly possible before.**

**At this time of outdoor sunshine and warmth
we explore pastimes more suitable for indoor pursuit.**

**At this time of struggles to remain independent
we learn the grace of dependency.**

**Great loving spirit
move below and above us -
identifying our whereabouts;
be beside us and about us -
supporting our uncertainties;
and breath within us, around us
and among us -
enriching our thankfulness.**

So may it be. Amen

MOTHERHOOD

*the sermon by York Unitarian, Laura Cox
for Mothering Sunday
but actually given on Sunday 5 April*

QUESTIONING AN ASSUMPTION

For a long time, I always assumed I'd be a mother. It was almost like a reflex – someone would ask, 'Do you want kids?' and I'd say 'Oh, yes, absolutely. I can't wait to be a mum.' But a couple of years ago, after meeting a number of very independent, single women, I began to question this assumption. I'd been so certain that I wanted children but I had never really stopped to ask myself why.

I realised it was because I wanted to have a family. I wanted to have my own little tribe to bake for, to teach to read, to drop off at the school gates. I wanted to bring up little humans who would make the world a better place. And, of course, I'd been taught that it was just what you did.

You go to school, get a job, find a man, have a baby. Even in the liberal West, young women are still expected to enter conventional, monogamous, heterosexual relationships, and produce offspring.

CAPITALIST SOCIETY

Capitalist society is geared towards promoting the nuclear family. You are expected to find a partner and have children, and so the cycle goes on. This is because it's the most efficient way to produce more workers who are less reliant on state resources. Even LGBTQ acceptance comes with this condition – look at gay marriage. Yes, it's amazing that gay people can get married if they so choose. But we have to be aware of the fact that society is most comfortable with homosexuality when it conforms to social norms.

THE POPULATION PROBLEM

Speaking of embedded prejudices, as far back as I can remember, I was brought up with a distinct awareness of 'the population problem'. . . , that, simply put there are too many people in the world using up too many resources.

Whenever there was a charity advert on TV, my father or grandfather would say something along the lines of

'well, if they stopped having children, they would be able to feed themselves'.

I recognised that these comments were xenophobic, and inspired by an enduring colonial 'us' and 'them' mentality. But I was very young, and the comments left an impression on me nonetheless. Why didn't people stop having kids, I wondered?

A COMPLEX PROBLEM

It took me a long time to understand that the population problem is far more complex. In many developing communities, having a *lot* of children is the norm, due to high child mortality, cultural and religious considerations, and economic need. More children means more hands on deck. So, the problem isn't that there are too many people . . . The problem is the *wild* inequality between societies.

Recently, I learnt that 99% of the world's wealth is owned by 1% of the global population. I'll say that again – 99% of the world's wealth is owned by 1% of the population. (Jeff Bezos makes up a considerable proportion of the 1% alone.)

On top of that, the carbon footprints of people living in the "developed world" are far higher than those in "developing" areas. As of 2017, the average American has an average annual carbon footprint of 16.6 metric tonnes, according to the US Department of Energy. The average Ethiopian, on the other hand, has an annual carbon footprint of 0.01 metric tonnes. For context, the global average is 4 metric tonnes. Make of that what you will.

At the same time, there is no denying the steep increase in the world's population and the problems that are already caused by global overcrowding – not because of the number of people, but of the way those lives are led. Rather than accuse the rest of the world's countries of having too many kids, there seemed to me to be another option.

SUSTAINABILITY

When I first became interested in sustainability, I began to think about how I could reduce my impact on the planet. It dawned on me that one of the ways I could do this was by not bringing more people into the world – especially when those children would be at least half-white, half-western, and therefore consume a disproportionate amount of resources.

For me, bringing more children into the world when there are already so many without safe, stable homes doesn't make sense. But I still want to be a mother. [*continued on next page*]

ADOPTION

So, I began to look into the adoption process. When you look online, you would honestly think it was easy. The government breezily states that anyone over 21 can adopt, as long as they provide a stable and suitable home. I then visited City of York Council's website. The Council works with *One Adoption*, an organisation that guides people through the adoption process.

It is certainly not as simple as surpassing the age of 21 and having a spare bedroom. There are the usual requirements you'd expect – a stable job, enough space, no serious criminal convictions. But certain lifestyle choices (like smoking) are also potential blockers. There's a cost element here, too. There are two types of adoption – public and private. Private adoption is generally more expensive but both can cost thousands. There's also the financial cost of travel, legal fees, and any time taken off work.

Although it is constantly repeated that there's nothing stopping single people from adopting, it's still fairly rare. According to the British Association for Adoption and Fostering, between March 2018 and 2019, 88% of children were adopted by couples. There are some obvious reasons why – single people might be less financially secure, they are less likely to own a home, and don't have the emotional or logistical support of a partner.

Some single people may want to adopt, but feel they can't due to cultural expectations or the worry that they won't provide enough stability for the child. Despite the Council's assurances that single people are just as able to adopt, there is still this social stigma to be aware of. And, of course, there's the fact that a lot of single people simply like their freedom and independence.

So, let's just say that a single woman, desperate to be a mother but unable to for whatever reason, decides to adopt. The process itself involves an initial expression of interest, attending information sessions, being visited by a social worker, carrying out stage one training and assessment, formally expressing interest through a documented procedure, and ultimately being judged by a stringent adoption panel. The government's website estimates that the adoption approval process takes around six months. This doesn't include the matching process or the trial period in which children and potential adopters find out if they are a good fit.

It's easy to see how someone wanting to adopt, and indeed someone wanting to be adopted, can end up waiting for years. Don't get me wrong – this is for the best. Rushing into adoption is a very reckless decision that could have a seriously negative impact on all involved – not only is it distressing for the child but it takes up the time, energy and resources of adoption agencies and local authorities.

FOSTERING

Fostering, of course, is another option. For starters, it removes the cost burden. Some agencies provide generous budgets to foster parents. According to *By the Bridge*, a private fostering provider, the pay-out for fostering an 11 year old child works out at an annual salary of almost £30,000. But given the fact that fostering comes with many of the same risks of adoption, and arguably even less certainty, perhaps this is justified.

You'd be forgiven for thinking that the process involved with fostering a child is less arduous than the one for adoption, but the online discussions on [netmums.com](https://www.netmums.com) suggest otherwise. One comment stuck out:

It is a very long process and you do seem to be a general runaround for the first few months. We were picking children up from all over the place and dropping them off everywhere and sitting in on visits, attending lectures, and seminars. It was very exhausting and I considered giving up on many occasions.

Again, general perceptions surrounding the foster care environment are far from positive. The first time I encountered the idea of fostering was in the TV show, *Tracey Beaker*, where a young girl gets up to all sorts of mischief in a foster home she calls *the Dumping Ground* to the despair of a care worker called *Elaine the Pain*. Not exactly high praise.

Another important point to note is that fostering is designed to be a temporary arrangement. The ultimate goal of most foster placements is to eventually reunite the child with their biological parent or parents. Imagine if a single woman found a foster child she brought up as her own, and then had to hand them back to their real mother. You have to be an incredibly, incredibly strong person to come back from that. *[continued on next page]*

All this leaves the potential adopter or fosterer in a very difficult situation. The sheer number of hard ethical decisions are enough to put anyone off, not to mention the bureaucracy. Everyone I've spoken to about the decision to adopt or foster looks at me bewildered. In our culture, you find a partner, and you get pregnant. This is an expectation that very much still exists, despite all our so-called liberal advancement.

Either way [adoption or fostering], the number of children in any kind of care is growing. Arguably, we've never needed mothers more. So maybe it's time to rethink motherhood.

RETHINKING MOTHERHOOD

The title of mother shouldn't only belong to those who can give birth. There are ways to be a mother without having children. In fact, one of the most motherly people I know has no children, and is very unlikely ever to do so.

My point is... Motherhood doesn't have to conform. Motherhood is not linear. There is no one route to motherhood.

What is common to all is the fact that every mother has a crushing responsibility to nurture and care for the children they take under their wing, whether they are biologically related or not. This is why mothers are so important – they form the foundation of our being. The mothers we meet throughout our lives – whether they are the very first face we see, or someone we connect with later in life – have a huge impact on our journeys of personal growth.

They may not always be positive figures in our lives. We may often find ourselves saying or doing something that makes us think, 'Gosh, am I becoming my mother?!' But today, I hope we can all find a mother to be grateful for, whoever they may be.

FUNERALS:PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES

York Unitarians Committee was pleased to support York Interfaith Association's intervention regarding York City Council's somewhat extreme decision regarding funerals in present circumstances. As a result of the interventions by faith groups the Council modified its decision. The correspondence between David Zucker, as chair person of the Chapel congregation and the leader of the City Council is available for reading. However, Chapel members and friends will recognise the option and/or the possibility, should the circumstances occur, of holding funerals and memorial services in our own Chapel.

UNITARIAN GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2020

Present circumstances led to the cancellation of this year's Unitarian General Assembly in its usual form. In its place an imaginative programme of Zoom gatherings was organised. On a recent Sunday morning 3 York Unitarians - Myrna Michell, Adie Wilson and Claire Wilton, who 'zoomed' in shared their thoughts and their impressions.

BEING TOGETHER 1

Myrna Michell writes: I tuned in mainly on the Tuesday and Thursday, knowing that I could watch or listen to recordings of talks that I missed. I was keen on the breakout conversations where we were randomly moved into virtual rooms after a presentation. I found myself very ready to share, and these occasions helped me to 'get out of my own head'. There is great joy in seeing the faces of others, known and unknown. We are witnessing to the prime need of togetherness.

One of the best of those breakout topics was about Family Ministry. There were contrasted experiences of how to support young people within a congregation, and the expectation focussed mainly upon Sunday involvement. However, if a building lacks suitable space, we might create non-Sunday occasions. Some years ago, Claire Wilton and friends led a few of us into St. Nicholas Fields, for a picnic and family-sized activities. We remember these things as they bring age-groups together in real-life situations. Someone in the breakout group insisted 'we should be ready'. Once we show willing, this can open up possibilities.

I missed the Keynote speaker, Alistair McIntosh, and today my laptop failed to deliver the talk: there was more 'frozen' than speech... How technology helps but also infuriates!

The Anniversary Service is a highlight of the Annual Meetings. Seated alone on the sofa, I would not have missed this audio-only service because of its depth and sincerity. Led by Unitarian Ministers Bridget Spain, in Dublin, and Jo O'Sullivan, in Cork, the essence of their message sank in better perhaps because I was not diverted by the 'big occasion'.

I am still keen to catch up with 'Innovation in worship'.

And finally, I could not summon up the strength to don a wig or funny hat to join in the evening home-alone-disco!

BEING TOGETHER 2

Adrienne Wilson writes: For those of you who don't know, I am a self-confessed Unitarian groupie. I used to go to GA meetings every year and I loved every minute-even the business meetings. I would attend everything from morning worship onwards, and finish up exhausted but rejuvenated. I regarded the people I met there as extended family. All credit to our Essex Hall team who managed to create the virtual meetings for us which they called "Being Together". And it had all of the best bits:

- Morning worship. I attended Zoom meditation from the worship space at Rosslyn Hill led by Shana Begum, an extraordinarily self-assured young woman, and it was very calming.
- A range of workshops. I attended a panel discussion on Congregation and Culture and was particularly impressed by Paul Parker, Recording Clerk of Quakers in Britain.
- A book launch. Stephen Lingwood's *Seeking Paradise: a Unitarian Mission for our Times* was well chaired by Jo James our minister at Leeds. The book is one that would lend itself to group discussion and is reviewed in the current *Inquirer*.
- Stephen also featured in a very practical workshop entitled Communication and Spirituality about outreach. Natasha Stanley spoke about rewriting the website for Manchester District Unitarians <https://unitariansmda.org.uk/>. She is able to field a huge rate of enquiries in a very personal way and convinced me that if we want to reach out in York we probably need a new website.

We also had the keynote speaker who was impassioned but over my head, and the Anniversary Service which was really rather fine and worth a listen. But I want to highlight one feature of the workshop on Innovative Worship. We heard from the Octagon, Norwich who have no minister, but have started a Friday night gathering aimed at younger people called "Creedless". We also heard from Jane Blackall at Kensington about Heart and Soul Circles. Jane started these inspired by a book *Simply Pray – 12 Steps to Building a Prayerful Life* by Johannes Hart. She started these groups to meet a need that she personally felt wasn't being met by Sunday worship and coffee hour. A group of 8 - 12 people meet monthly in a circle for about an hour of structured, scripted interactive prayer and music, usually on a theme. She maintains

that the structure and repetition provide a safe space for intimacy. In real life the session ends with home-made cake; hospitality is an important feature. I had known about and been intrigued by Jane's sessions for some time. There were actually nine sessions over the three days. I participated in one that Jane led on the theme of refuge, and I am participating in one this evening on the theme "Holding hope" led by March Hutchison. The website address is www.heartandsoulcircles.org.uk

I wish to reiterate my thanks and appreciation to Essex Hall for putting this together, particularly to Liz Slade our new CEO and to Rory Castle Jones who is our delightful young Welsh Communications Officer.

BEING TOGETHER 3

Claire Wilton writes: I joined the Family Ministry zoom workshop which was facilitated by Gavin Howell, the GA's Youth Officer. Gavin was keen for participants to think not just about children and young people, but families of all ages.

First, we were encouraged to think about the needs of families in our congregations. This is something that I've given a lot of thought to recently, and in fact earlier in the year I asked our families what they would like to see us provide at Chapel for them. The second part of the workshop was to think about how we could meet those needs.

The main thing I came away with was the germ of an idea. I would like to see our York Chapel offer some all-ages practical activities that take place outside our usual Sunday service time. This could be anything – litter picking, seed planting, a film screening, some social action, a walk or a picnic... anything that enables children, young people and their families to engage with York Unitarians. This idea chimes with some of the feedback I received from our families.

What we offer young people does not need to be labelled "youth provision" – it can comprise of activities that appeal to children and young adults as simply "people". In the light of our Sparklers numbers dwindling over the last 12 months, this could be a compelling new direction.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT

This year there will be a presidential team – joint carriers of the Presidency consisting of Anne Mills, (president elect) Sue Woolley (Vice President elect) and Celia Cartwright (past president) who will support Unitarians as things get back to something like normality.

THE NIGHTINGALE CENTRE GREAT HUCKLOW



Many members and friends of the York congregation are familiar with the Unitarian Nightingale Centre at Great Hucklow in nearby Derbyshire. York Unitarians have attended Summer Schools, Unitarian Music Society conferences, Unifest and Junior weekends and other residential conferences and other events at the centre.

Also, in all recent years our Christmas retiring collections have been for the Send a Child to Hucklow Fund (SACH) which sponsors holidays for children which otherwise would never get a holiday.

In the present circumstances the centre is facing not just the cancellation of events and conferences and coping with the resultant loss of income; but also with the knock-on effect for the centre's staff.



Friends of the Nightingale Centre and particularly our friends among Stockton Unitarians, the Northern Unitarian Association, the Foy Society and the Unitarian Music Society have together launched and contributed to a special appeal to help keep the Centre going. Contributions may be sent to Stella Burney The manager at the Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow, Buxton, Derbyshire SK17 8RH.

USEFUL CONTACT DETAILS



York Unitarians CIO 1181531,
St. Saviourgate Chapel,
St. Saviourgate, York YO1 8NQ
www.york.unitarians.org.uk

Chairperson: David Zucker
<davidgzucker@gmail.com>

Secretary: Margaret Hill
© 01904 693427
<mhill.york@gmail.com>

Treasurer: Nick Morrice
© 01904 765424
<nickmorrice@gmail.com>

Chapel Committee Members:,
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:
Elizabeth Faiers (Treasurer), Simon
Hardy, Jen Atkinson, Andrew Hill (Chair),
and Claire Wilton.

Colton's Hospital Trustees
Elizabeth Faiers (Treasurer), Dee Boyle,
Trevor Gant, Marta Hardy, Simon Hardy,
Nicky Jenkins (Chair), Joan Sinanan,
Richard Thompson, Geoffrey Williams,
(registered charity: 221281)

York Unitarian editor:
Andrew Hill
© 01904 693427
<amckhill@gmail.com>