

MU NOW

MAGAZINE OF THE MIDLAND UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION

'WORSHIP' issue



Fazeley Street Mission in 1904
See *Memories*, page 36

From the 'Record of the Priestley centenary' website
<http://www.meargreen.co.uk/Priestleycentenary/>

ISSUE 26

SPRING ISSUE

APRIL 2009

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Thank you to everyone who supplied their newsletters and articles for us to use in compiling this edition of MU Now. You make our task much easier.

Our next edition is due for publication in August 2009. Secretaries, please send your entries for 'Around the Churches', with photos if possible. For those congregations that produce a newsletter, please ensure you send us a copy too. Individual contributions - in any form - would be warmly welcomed. If any members would like to send in brief profiles of themselves for publication we would be happy to include them.

Please send articles, news, letters and photos by **30 June 2009** to:

Jenny Buckland

Or (preferably as attachments) to our email account at:
munoweditors@googlemail.com



From the Editor's Desk

Change, progress; scary or exhilarating? For those of us fortunate enough to enjoy long lives, at what stage does 'how things have always been done' become more important than 'how they could be done in the future'? Surely, most of us in our youth were up on our soap boxes wanting to change the world. When do we start saying "we have always done it like this?"



For me, even if I live as long as many of my family, my future is obviously far less than my past. When do we start to cling to what we know, probably because it gives us comfort and security and we feel affronted because someone wants to change what we thought was good and right.

I know everyone is not like this, but I expect many of us have joined organisations where the suggestion of change has provoked opposition and serious rifts. This can be for good reason; you need to trust those wishing to make changes. They need to be thoughtful and considerate, and all new ideas explained carefully. We also need to be able to listen with open minds, with give and take on both sides, and newcomers need to show restraint.

Why am I dwelling on this? I know that some of our groups face an uncertain future, and the future will not be easy, but surely Unitarians are the people who can evolve and change, and that is why some of us joined.

Some of you will be aware of the name change of the Midland Union to Midland Unitarian Association, and the more observant of our readers will have noticed the change on the front cover. I am sure you will agree that emphasising Unitarians in our name is a change for the better. Some of us hoped to include District in the name, but were willing to agree that brevity was all important.

For our next edition, we will be asking '**What inspires you?**' We hope you will be inspired to write to us. For the December edition, our theme will be '**New Beginnings**', for the new year, our new name, whatever you wish to write about!

With best wishes, Jenny. ☺

MU Announcements

Goodbye Midland Union - hello Midland Unitarian Association!

At our AGM on 21st March 2009, at the Great Meeting House Unitarian Church, Coventry, the meeting decided that our 'trading name' (what we are known as) should be changed from 'Midland Union' to 'Midland Unitarian Association', MUA for short.

Four names had been put forward for consideration: 'Midland Unitarians', 'Midland Unitarian Association', 'Association of Midland Unitarians' and 'Midland Unitarian District Association'. After a discussion, and an initial straw poll of those present, the last two suggestions were dropped, and the meeting voted for one of the first two options.

The reasoning behind this was that our former short title 'Midland Union' gave no indication that we were Unitarians. Our full name 'Midland Union of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches' will remain the same for Charity Commission purposes, but we will henceforth be known as 'Midland Unitarian Association', which we think shows clearly both that we are a Unitarian organisation and that we are a District Association.

Sue Woolley, MUA District Facilitator

And a change of personnel ...

The Midland Unitarian Association is extremely fortunate to have such competent, enthusiastic and dedicated officers. I have watched a succession of Presidents, and all have brought something special as their contribution. As a reminder of her two years as President, Alison has an elegant large Dartington glass water jug (she is not a rose-bowl, however beautiful, person). This presentation was not a total surprise but the huge orchid in a smart pot, selected by Sue Woolley certainly was, and I can assure everyone Alison is delighted with it. We welcome Rev. Peter Hewis and Bronwen Taylor in their new roles as President and Vice-President.

It is always sad to say goodbye to people who have served the MUA so well, and we thank Gavin Lloyd and Peter Forder. We hope John Chandler will soon feel part of the team, and look forward to hearing a "new voice".

Jenny Buckland

MU Executive changes

New President - Rev. Peter Hewis (picture overleaf)

Peter has served on the Executive Committee since 2002 since joining Harris Manchester College, Oxford as Chaplain, Ministerial Training Tutor, Bursar, and Fellow. He is now a retired Minister. His previous Ministries included Bethnal Green, Hinckley and two exchanges Ministries in Knoxville, Tennessee. Peter is a Past President of the General Assembly and serves on the General Assembly Ministry Commission. He was also Secretary of the Ministers' Benevolent Society. He lives in Yarnton near Oxford. He became Vice-President in 2007.

New Vice-President - Bronwen Taylor

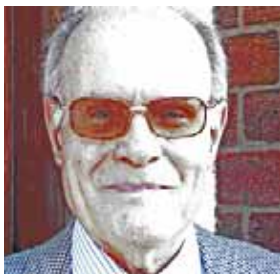


Bronwen is a fourth generation Unitarian with links to non-conformism dating back to 1733. Originally from Manchester, she is still a member of Cross Street Chapel and worshipped at John Pounds Unitarian Chapel in Portsmouth during her student days. She has been a member of Shrewsbury Unitarian Church for the last 13 years and membership Secretary for the last 10 years.

She retired from school teaching in 2008, after 41 years in the profession. After leading Services for the last 7 years, she now intends to complete the Worship Studies Foundation Course. She enjoys hymn writing, having written 14 so far, 2 of which have been selected for the new GA Hymn book. Bronwen has lived in Bridgnorth for nearly 35 years.

John Chandler - new elected member of the Committee

John lives in South Birmingham and has been a member of our Kingswood congregation for the last twelve years. He initially worked in the retail and insurance sectors before joining the Civil Service, where he served for twenty two years until his retirement in 1992.



President's Musings

A fine Unitarian Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm" and that is absolutely correct but enthusiasm is useless without the hard work to back it up! At our annual meeting I felt that a new surge of enthusiasm was present amongst our district and that is largely due to sheer hard work and a real belief in what we have to offer as Unitarians.



Our finances are healthy thanks to Sandy Ellis, our administration is splendid, we have attractive leaflets and publications coming from our General Assembly, in several of our churches we have new and younger members. Thanks to the efforts of Sue Woolley and Julian Wright most of our churches now have an attractive and informative web site; many new people are coming after finding us through the web pages. We are slowly surveying and renovating our churches. There is also a willingness to publicise and spread our faith. Of course there are still some weak churches but we are going in the right direction and trying to help each congregation. We have a revitalized Association of Lay Preachers and Service Leaders with sixteen members and even our AGM has had better attendances than for many years! We have two people going forward for Ministerial and Lay Pastor training. The quality of church newsletters is extremely high and a couple of our churches have created choirs.

Where our congregations need help and are weak we must heed the Biblical words appearing on the cover of the April Cotswold Group Newsletter. "We who are many form one body and each member belongs to all the others." *Romans Chapter 12.*

Perhaps from time to time members of a strong congregation can join for worship in one of our weaker congregations and help to spread some enthusiasm.

Peter Hewis.

Reflections of our Past President

The last two years as MU President has been both an amazing and a humbling experience. I have learnt a huge amount about the District, how it works, the people involved – yes, that means you; and about myself.

We must be proud of our District, and we have much to offer both to our members and also to other Districts. This magazine is an instance – a quality product which is interesting, readable, challenging, but also a “safe” forum for ideas. Thank you to the Editors, and all who contribute. Please keep it up!

Our post of District Facilitator is unique and is being watched with interest across our movement. We are fortunate to have Sue Woolley in post, and her first year has seen changes which make a difference. Just look at our Notice Boards and Websites, raising our profile and making us more accessible.

Sue has also been a prime mover in providing the Worship Studies Foundation Course which those attending found so helpful; the Workshop on Pastoral Care which was an eye-opener and a challenge; and soon we will have a Workshop on best practise in leading small Groups. If you have ideas for further Workshops, I'm sure Sue would like to hear them.

We are a varied community and I have been privileged to visit all the Groups, either individually or as part of a larger meeting. I would like to say a big thank you to everyone for welcoming me and making me feel included, and to the Executive Committee for working with me and supporting me.

This issue of MU Now is focussing on Worship. The dictionary reminds me that this means ‘worthship’ – something integral to our lives. It is a realisation of what we are ourselves; a recognition of what others are; and a vision of what we can become – both singly and together. There's a challenge!

In closing, I send my best wishes to Peter for his Presidency. I know you will support him as you did me. May our community grow in strength and vision as we move forward together and realise our dreams.



Alison Thursfield

Sandy's words of warning ...

Get your Charity Commission Annual Return in on time !

The Charity Commission is clamping down on those Registered Charities who fail to submit their Annual Returns on time. You have ten months after your financial year end to submit the Annual Return (plus – if applicable – a set of your report & Accounts.) If you fail to do so, you will receive three reminders, one every four months. If you are still in default at the end of that time (i.e. twenty two months after your year end), **YOUR CHARITY MAY NOW BE REMOVED FROM THE REGISTER !** And don't be lulled into a false sense of security if you haven't received a paper form in the post. Nowadays, you are expected to submit the Return online using the Charity Commission website at www.charity-commission.gov.uk and to do that you must apply for a password. If you are the Contact person notified to the Charity Commission and also advised them of your email address, you may apply for a password on line and get an immediate response. Otherwise, the contact person has to telephone them and it takes slightly longer to obtain a password. It is then very easy to fill in the details of the return on the screen, but you **MUST** do it before the final date. Take note also, that you **MUST** enter the date of birth of EVERY Trustee because if you omit just ONE, this counts as a non-submission of the whole Return !

As an additional incentive to submit Returns on time, the page on the website showing your Charity details to anyone who enquires (easy to do by just entering your charity name or registered number at www.charity-commission.gov.uk) now displays in RED if you are late submitting both the Return and the Accounts. It even shows the number of days late it was! And it continues to display your delinquency for the next FIVE YEARS! And if you are a Trustee to more than one Charity, it now shows the name of each of those Charities and whether any of them is delinquent opposite your name!

So the moral is: Finalise your Annual report & Accounts PROMPTLY after each Financial Year end, hold your AGM to appoint your Trustees, **DON'T FORGET** to ask for all their dates of Birth, Make sure you have a password and then get on line and submit your Annual return !

Public Benefit Statement required in Annual Report !

You will be aware of the Charity Commission requirement that every Charity – whether individually Registered or not – has to prepare both an Annual Report and a set of Accounts at the end of each Financial Year. In the case of Individually Registered Charities, these are submitted direct to the Charity Commission and in the case of Excepted Charities, which derive their charitable status from their Affiliation to the General Assembly, they send me a copy of their Reports and Accounts which I submit to the General Assembly which acts in place of the Charity Commission.

The Annual Report explains how the activities carried out during that year have helped to achieve the charitable aims of the charity as defined in the Object Clause of your Governing Document and up until now, Religious Charities have been presumed to provide a Public Benefit. However, the latest Charities Act has abolished this presumption and every Charity will be required to explain in their Annual Report how their activities provide a public benefit. The important key principle is that 'it should benefit the public or a sufficient section of the public'.

The implications for larger Charities are complex, but those applicable to our Midland Union Congregations are pretty straightforward. Thus, examples of activities acknowledged as providing a Public Benefit are as follows :

Raising awareness and understanding of religious beliefs and practices such as : promoting the study of religious teachings and practices and scriptures; providing religious instruction; support of Ministers and Lay Leaders including the provision of stipends, housing allowances & pensions.

Religious Devotional Acts such as : Visiting the sick

Missionary & Outreach Work such as: Prison, Hospital & University Chaplaincy; the encouragement & support of pastoral work;

Religious Communication such as : Sermons, Religious Seminars and Meetings: The provision of religious material on the Internet.

Advancing Religion Generally such as: Supporting religious societies and institutions.

A more specific example of a small congregation's provision of a Public benefit in promoting religion , would be 'Providing a place of worship for all to attend'. Provided that any member of the Public may attend and be made welcome, carrying out this one activity meets the requirement of public benefit.

Sandy Ellis has more details if you want them ...

A tax on the font water of our struggling churches

This was the title of a recent article by Christopher Howe in the Daily Telegraph. He explains that, for the first time, some churches in England are having to pay water bills, **even though they may use no water**. This is what happened to our Park Lane church in Wigan which is faced with a 20 per cent increase on its outgoings. A trustee of the chapel. said "It is unthinkable, but faced with limited resources we could go out of existence."

The reason that churches without running water or lavatories are having to pay the charges is that a calculation is made on the area they occupy, including asphalted car-parks. The justification is that any water that runs off the land finds its way into sewers maintained by the water company.

The new charges are being made by United Utilities. Severn Trent have also given notice of new charges. "United Utilities does not make any money out of the change in policy," a spokesman said. "Some of our customers will see an increase in charges, some will see a decrease." The difference, say objectors, is that the decrease will not be noticed once spread among the millions affected, but increases imposed on a few hundred churches certainly will be noticed. A church in Cheshire with a congregation of only 20, expects its bills to rise from £100 to £645 over the next three years. "If we can't afford our electricity bill, we can stop using electricity," said its vicar, "But with this surface water, you can't cut it off. It's a listed building, so we can't sell it or change it. It's almost a tax on churches."

There is nothing "fair" in treating every building in a region in the same way, for they are not the same. Water companies do not, for instance, simply cut off aged widows who cannot pay. They have obligations to their shareholders, but money cannot be the only criterion of action for a public utility.

MU District Facilitator: winter update

Hello again. The winter months have been quite busy for me. Here's a summary of what I've been doing, around the Midland Union.

You should now be getting quite used to seeing the monthly **Midland Union-wide Preaching Plan**, with **Bits & Pieces** on the back, which contains news of past events around the Midland Union, and details of forthcoming events. If you aren't seeing it, ask your Pulpit Secretary! Thanks to all the congregations who send me their newsletters – Northampton, Cotswold Group, Oxford, Kidderminster, Kingswood, Warwick, Coseley, Birmingham UNM, Shrewsbury and Coventry. As I said last time – please keep them coming!

Leading worship around the Midland Union: By the time you read this I will have led six services around the MU during the first three months of 2009. My diary for the rest of the year is filling up, so if you would like me to take a service in your church / chapel (particularly in the second half of the year), please get in touch. As a GA-qualified lay preacher, I am also available for rites of passage, should you wish it.

Spring Training, on the topic Creating a Vibrant Spiritual Community through Small Groups Ministries, will be taking place on Saturday 2nd May, again at Kingswood. It will be led by Rev. Jim Robinson of Hampstead. It is open to all, not just lay preachers or worship leaders. Please get in touch if you are interested in booking a place.

Publicity, Publicity, Publicity: some progress has been made in ensuring that every congregation has an up-to-date, relevant website (or a page on someone else's). Coseley's website went live in December 2008 and Coventry's in March 2009. The MU website is still your number one source for up-to-date information about the Midland Union. The news and events page is also being kept up to date – if there is anything you would like me to include, please send it.

And Again Publicity: I spent the last three months of 2008 conducting a Publicity Survey of all our congregations on behalf of

the Midland Union. The idea was to see how easily a stranger to Unitarianism would be able to find out about our congregations. The reports (one for each congregation) were sent out to secretaries in January, and I am hoping to meet with all of you to discuss the findings.

Ministry Training: I am delighted to report that I have been approved for Ministry training by the GA's Interview Panel, and will be starting my studies at Harris Manchester College Oxford in October 2009. I will also be doing an online theology course, at Lampeter.

I look forward to seeing many of you in the near future.

Sue Woolley, District Facilitator, MUA



Beauty Tips for all

Audrey Hepburn wrote the following when asked to share her 'beauty tips'. It was read at her funeral years later.

'For attractive lips, speak words of kindness.

For lovely eyes, seek out the good in people.

For a slim figure, share your food with the hungry.

For beautiful hair, let a child run his/her fingers through it once a day.

For poise, walk with the knowledge that you never walk alone.

People, even more than things, have to be restored, renewed, revived, reclaimed and redeemed, never throw out anyone.

Remember, if you ever need a helping hand, you will find one at the end of each of your arms.

As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands, one for helping yourself, and the other for helping others.'

(From Kingswood's newsletter)

Highlights from around the Churches

Cheltenham joins the happy band determined to keep builders in business, says Jenny Buckland. 'A leaking roof, crumbling masonry, deteriorating mortar and peeling paint will keep us occupied for a while. Fortunately, inside all is well in every sense. Good attendance at varied services with new members, several shared lunches and other activities including a puppet workshop for special needs children, and mid week meetings, keep us optimistic about the future.

In **Gloucester** we enjoy the wonderful facilities and peaceful garden of the Friends Meeting House, but the manse roof has to be replaced, so whoopee for the builders. Thankfully we can still worship peacefully and joyfully.

Ministers who take on a Group Ministry need a health warning; can you cope with AGMs? Following 3 church, 1 Group, 1 District and the GA AGM, our minister Don Phillips should need a holiday, but he popped it in the middle, and it has been a joy to share with him some of his experiences in India. I am still trying to comprehend how volunteers at the Golden Temple feed 30,000 people, every day, with cooked vegetarian food and freshly baked bread. Perhaps they avoid some of the bureaucracy and health and safety which has stifled much volunteering in Britain. Their worship by doing is a worthy example.' Don tells us more on page 25

Peter Forder reports from **Evesham** that, having officiated at the keyboard of Oat Street Chapel's fine Nicholson pipe organ for 27 years, David Barnett took well-earned retirement at the end of 2008. He continues; 'Fortunately however, live music continues to be a feature of most Sunday Services (courtesy of the talent to be found within the Congregation) either from the organ or our newly acquired Kawai digital piano. Whilst the digital piano has yet to feature in any of the Monday evening social events, such an appearance may only be a matter of time given its extraordinary versatility. The social events (five are held annually) continue to be well supported, thanks to the generosity and hard work of long-standing Members (brother and sister) Chris Grove and Sally Attwood. The Christmas Party and St. Valentine's Supper, the two most recent events, provided

not only food, fellowship and fun but also over £830 for Chapel Funds. It is intended that such occasions will, in due course, be brought before a wider audience when the now renamed Oat Street Chapel website has undergone its current refurbishment. Those wishing to monitor progress will be automatically redirected to the new address: www.eveshamunitarians.org.uk. This new website address mirrors those of our neighbouring congregations and, by being explicitly Unitarian, is, it is hoped, likely to increase its accessibility to internet search engines.'

Kingwood celebrated Christmas in style, welcoming record numbers of people to chapel, and raising £750 for the Send A Child to Hucklow Fund over the Christmas period. They have two new ventures - a re-formed branch of the Unitarian Women's League had its first proper gathering in February (see report on page 20) and Sunday School started in March, attracting 5 children on its first day and 7 the following week. Friday 13th February saw members descend on the Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow for the weekend. Many of them have a tale to tell, of trying to get the car through the snow and onto the car park. Some required a push, and one who shall remain nameless had to change his clothes because he got covered in mud. But they all had a wonderful time, though the beauty of the snow on the hills was possibly even more beautiful when next to the fire looking out!

At **Warwick**, Malcolm Sadler has had his other hand operated on and that was '.off the piano' for a while. In his Minister's letter, Ant Howe thanks Malcolm for his ongoing commitment to providing beautiful music for services each Sunday - something he has been doing for close on 50 years now! He also says that it has been encouraging to see numbers attending worship rising slightly. 'These small signs of growth tell us that our liberal religious witness is still very much needed. It has been a real joy to welcome Ken to our services who tells us wonderful stories of his life and who shows us that you are never too old to discover what Unitarianism has to offer. I know that he has become one of our greatest supporters and he tells many people about us. We also record our deep affection for Sied de Whit who passed away in December. Sied contributed much to the life of our chapel and will be sadly missed.' (Ed: Elsie Mae Griffiths' words in his memory are on page 35.)

Shrewsbury spent much of February celebrating the bicentenary of Darwin's birth. Charles Darwin attended Shrewsbury Unitarian Church as a child, and also attended the Unitarian minister Rev. Case's school. As part of Shrewsbury's Darwin 200 celebrations, the Church was open on Darwin's birthday, 12th February, when there was to be a giant birthday cake in the Square, and a guided Darwin walk around the town. They also hosted a lecture on 17th February, entitled *Darwin and the Dinosaurs* and delivered by Professor Michael Benton of Bristol University.

At **Kidderminster**, a large congregation - up from the year before - enjoyed the Candlelight Carol Service, a favourite annual event. A friend from Baxter U.R. Church did a reading and Kidderminster Operatic Society contributed with a selection of seasonal songs. Arthur Jones (9) played a flute solo 'Away in a Manger' accompanied by his grandfather on the keyboard. Two cheques for £800 each were presented to representatives of the County Air Ambulance and Kemp Hospice (our two charities for 2008). This year's charity is the Wyre Forest Branch of the Alzheimers Society which has an office/drop in centre in New Road, Kidderminster. The Pearsall Room is now looking better than ever having been redecorated and new carpeting installed. However, the hall problem remains to be tackled and an initial dry rot survey has been carried out. The surveyor's report is awaited before further steps are taken.

Oxford Unitarians have formed a new choir. It meets at 10 a.m. on Sundays, to sing not just hymns but also other pieces that could be integrated into morning worship. Membership is open to all: "we aim to be eclectic, inclusive and inspirational." Oxford's special collection at Christmas raised £245 for the *Send a Child to Hucklow Fund*, which provides holidays for children from poor families at the Unitarian Nightingale Centre in Derbyshire; and a collection in February for the *Ministerial Students' Fund*, contributing to the expenses of trainee Unitarian ministers, raised £105. The Chapel Society Committee, looking for opportunities to foster friendships and deepen the spiritual life of the congregation, has found the perfect venue for occasional short retreats. St Ethelwold's Centre is an inter-faith retreat house with a beautiful garden on the bank of the Thames in Abingdon: peaceful, accessible, and not expensive. Oxford's first one-day retreat there will be on a Saturday in August.

Rev Simon Ramsay tells us of **UNM Birmingham's** Christmas Fayre. 'Our reason for holding such an event was in response to statistics that suggested that the Ladywood area of Birmingham had the greatest number of children that were from a deprived background or from families with very low incomes.

I think that in retrospect if all of those concerned with the project knew exactly how much work this would take they would have thought twice. The fayre was a great success. Although the smooth running of the fayre relied upon us all working together there are a couple of people that deserve specific mention. Bini and Winnie were the chief organisers and without their hard efforts the fayre would have almost certainly never taken place. I would also like to thank Darren, who although he is not a member of the congregation, worked tirelessly by raising donations, wrapping presents and organising stalls. I would also like to thank those members from other congregations that came to Birmingham especially to help out. Many others who gave a lot of help - I will thank them personally.

On talking to some of the long standing members of the congregation I understand that it is quite a long time since UNM has done anything on the scale of the Christmas fayre. It seems to me that we must be in quite a healthy position to have enough people willing to put the requisite efforts in for the fayre to succeed. Unitarianism, in its golden era, was primarily concerned with social initiatives for the poor by providing free schools, food and clothing. Although the Christmas fayre was not really on the scale of the initiatives of our forebears it is good to see the same spirit alive and well within our church. The Christmas Fayre has given each of us an opportunity to express our Unitarian faith through our actions.

Opportunities to serve others in church are wide and varied, some would say limitless and unrelenting, but we, the ones volunteering to serve, never end up impoverished by the experience but rather are enriched by it. As a church we can pat ourselves on the back in the knowledge that there are many families in Ladywood and across Birmingham, whose children have decent presents and a food hamper for this Christmas. We have gone a little way to show the people during the 'credit crunch' that they are not entirely alone and that there are people that care for them.'

Dates for your diary

Asparagus Lunch

When: Wednesday 13th May 2009

Where: Oat Street Chapel, Evesham

Time: 11:30 a.m. for coffee in the Gatehouse
Service at 12 noon, Asparagus lunch at 1:00 p.m.

Our annual celebration of the ministry we all share.



Creating a Vibrant Spiritual Community - Small Groups Ministries

When: Saturday 2nd May 2009

Where: Kingswood Meeting House, Hollywood B47 5DQ

Time: 10.00 am – 4.15 pm

The session will be led by Rev. Jim Robinson of Hampstead. This workshop is organised by the Midland Unitarian Association of Lay Preachers and Service Leaders.

Ministers' Meeting 'Hymn Sing'

Where: Kingswood Meeting House, Packhorse Lane, Hollywood B47 5DQ

When: Saturday 13th June 2009

Time: 2:00 - 4:30

A chance to learn new hymns from the new hymnbook *Sing Your Faith*, with the support of Kingswood's choir, and organist Peter Flower.

MUA Publicity Workshop

Where: UNM Birmingham

When: Saturday 20th June 2009

Time: 9:30 - 4:00

Led by Sue Woolley.

MUA Summer Outing

Where: Quarry Bank Mill and Styal Estate, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 4LA

When: Saturday 27th June 2009

Time: Meet at Quarry Bank Mill in the Mill Yard at 11.30 a.m.

The Norcliffe Unitarian Chapel is part of the Styal Estate; Rev. Alex Bradley has offered to lead a short service for us in the afternoon.

More details on all these events from Sue Woolley (Malcolm Sadler for Asparagus Lunch). Put the dates in your diaries now!!

Midland Unitarian Association events

Midland Unitarian Association AGM

21st March 2009

At The Great Meeting House Unitarian Church, Coventry.

38 members from 13 of our 18 congregations, plus two visitors (Mrs. Joyce Ashworth, President of the Unitarian General Assembly and Mrs. Lis Dyson-Jones, MUA link member on the GA's Executive Committee) came together on a beautiful Spring day at Coventry's Great Meeting House Unitarian Church.

The business part of the meeting went very smoothly, and then we came to item 19 on the Agenda, choosing a new name for the Midland Union of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches. After a spirited debate (see page 4), we decided on Midland Unitarian Association.

After a congenial lunch and a short service led by our new President, the Rev. Peter Hewis, who took the life of famous conductor and Unitarian Sir Adrian Boult as his theme, we enjoyed a stimulating and interesting talk by Rev. John Harley, the General Assembly's Youth Coordinator. He was full of good ideas for involving children and young people in worship and other activities in our churches and chapels, and those present made good contributions too. John emphasised the need to have at least one adult present who has been CRB checked, and that it was better to have adults working in pairs. Keeping a log of activities was also recommended. He finished his talk by giving us some information about the GA's Chalice Award Scheme for children and young people.

We all went home with a lot to think about, and inspired to be more inclusive to our younger members and attenders.

Sue Woolley, MUA District Facilitator

From Kidderminster's newsletter, *The Record*.

Creating something, whether it is a painting or a piece of embroidery, some music or perhaps just making a magnificent snowman brings one closer to the divine. It is the making, rather than the results that brings us joy.

Royal visit to the 'small Chapel with a big heart'

Kingswood Meeting House had only a short while to organise the visit of HRH Prince Richard of Gloucester, to culminate their tercentenary celebrations. Negotiations with police, local dignitaries and royal aides entailed much hard work for Rev Ant Howe.

On his arrival at the chapel, the Duke was met by Ant, Joyce Ashworth (President of the General Assembly), former Minister Rev Keith Hill, Bob Edwards (Chapel Chairman) and Philip White (Chair of Trustees). He also took time to meet the KSOR – our band of volunteers who keep the chapel grounds and graveyard looking so beautiful.

The Duke progressed into the chapel, where he viewed a 'History of the Chapel' display, met representatives of the newly formed Women's League, the local Women's Institute, and Brownies, Rainbows, Guides and Boys Brigade, and heard the choir sing, led by the organist Peter Flower. Whilst inside the Chapel he asked a number of questions about Unitarianism, and our form of worship, commenting that 'Kingswood is a small chapel but with a big heart'. The Duke was very interested in the musical life of our Chapel and asked a number of questions about the hymns we sing.

In the schoolroom he mingled amongst and talked to members of the congregation while enjoying tea and cake. After a brief walk in the grounds he unveiled a plaque which commemorated the past ministers – and the present one! who have served the chapel so well over the years.

He left to the sound of the choir singing 'Finlandia'.



Unitarian Women's League

Birmingham District Women's League met on 28th February in Birmingham for their Annual General Meeting.

It was good to have 6 members from the newly formed branch at Kingswood (see report below) with us, and also Rev. Penny Johnson (National WL President).

After a 'bring your own lunch', 'Miranda' made an appearance to help Penny get through her service!

At the AGM the President (Janice Ashley). Treasurer (Florence Wood) and Secretary (Ann Hughes) were all re-elected with thanks for their hard work. Barbara Russell reported on the Central Committee Meeting held two days earlier; and Rev. Ann Latham reported on the preceding year's meetings of the Midland Union.

The District meets next in mid-October for their Autumn Meeting.

Anyone interested in joining our meetings should contact me at 0121-525-1123 or email Annhughes999@aol.com

Ann Hughes - District and National Secretary of UWL

UWL - Kingswood branch

Kingswood Meeting House in Hollywood, near Birmingham has bucked the trend again. The number of Women's League Branches has diminished in recent years, but Kingswood has re-formed its Branch of the League which was closed many years ago.

On Thursday afternoon February 5th 2009 they held their first Meeting which was attended by 17 people despite the severe wintry weather conditions.

The Meeting was lively and led by President Jo Chandler. Members discussed the way they wished their Branch to go. Subscriptions were also discussed and amounts were agreed. Several interesting ideas were put forward for future Meetings.

After a most amusing talk by Jo on the 'Credit Crunch' and how it was dealt with in the days of yore members enjoyed tea and biscuits.

Then once more out into the snow the happy crowd trudged homeward looking forward to their next Meeting on March 5th.

Nina Caddick

Report from Adelaide

Rev Peter Godfrey sent us this report of his recent visit to Australia.

I am writing this on the 3rd. March. It is a special day for Adelaide, South Australia, because it is the first time it has rained since early December. Of course the water people are saying it is not enough and much more is needed to refill the reservoirs. Nevertheless it is a great delight for all gardeners. Everywhere was looking very brown. Water restrictions were very tight- for example in some areas people could only water on Wednesday and Saturday evenings and then only by hand.

Sheila and I got our of Heathrow two days before it was closed by snow and we arrived here to a temperature of 40C. This lasted for about a week and we had to be very careful what we did. Fortunately many homes and all shopping malls have air conditioning. It was marvellous for swimming but not wise to spend too much time in the direct sun. We both like to play bowls but it was too hot until last week.

We first came to Adelaide when I retired in the UK twelve and a half years ago. I came here for six months as interim minister. We became very, very fond of Adelaide and its people. The city has wide streets, with many trees and is surrounded on all four sides by open parkland. To the north and south there are vineyards: to the east the Adelaide Hills covered in trees ('the bush') and to the west forty miles of sandy coast.

The members of Adelaide Unitarian Church gave us a wonderfully warm welcome - and have done on the six occasions we have been back since 1996, once for a further period of interim ministry and on the other occasions for holidays. Midland readers will know some of the people who welcome us. For example Rev. Allen Kirby who has ministered in England and Scotland, and his friend Dermot Finn, and Tom and June Marriott. Tom often took services in the Midland Union and he and June send their special greetings to all those who remember them.

Each time we visit we quickly get into the life of the congregation. Within a day or two of arriving I was talking about the history of 'Faith and Freedom' to fourteen church members and introducing one of the articles in the latest issue for discussion. This led to making a half hour broadcast on the subject of the journal. The following week Sheila spoke to the Women's League about the history of the League and her experiences as a member and former President. Sheila presented the League with copies of the League's special centenary book. It was fortunate that Sheila had brought the book with her because I was asked to write the obituary of Elspeth

Vallance for The Inquirer and the book has some interesting extracts from her letters.

I took the service on the last Sunday in the month when the minister, Rev Jo Lane, does not take the service. It was the National Day of Mourning for those who had died in the Victoria State bush fires. Everyone had been horrified by the fires and the amount collected to help sufferers is quite remarkable. Fortunately there have been no serious fires in South Australia but the state is on constant and full alert - today's rain will have come as a big relief. Leaves and wood on the ground had been tinder dry.

In addition to attending services in Adelaide we attended the monthly service at Shady Grove. This is the little Unitarian chapel in the Adelaide Hills founded one hundred and fifty one years ago. It is a very, very beautiful spot and it is always heart-warming to be part of a service there, and to enjoy the lunch afterwards. This time the service was taken by Rob McPherson who has recently been accepted for training for the Unitarian ministry from next October.

The Adelaide Unitarian Church is well supported with congregations almost always over fifty. There are plans for some building developments and much fund-raising is going on. In this connection Sheila and I joined eight other people, plus the two crew members - Pauline and Craig Rooney - for a trip in their catamaran. We were a bit apprehensive but were less so when we found the boat to be quite luxurious. Even so, in the open sea it was rolling sideways and dipping up and down at the same time. As the trip included drinks and a three course meal it was decided to turn into the wide river that is part of Port Adelaide. The following week there was a 'cabaret' at a nearby ballroom. There was wonderful support for this VERY lively evening and nearly two thousand pounds was raised.

I have a relative married to a farmer in the Victorian outback. He has recently retired at the age of eighty-four and leaves the farming to his grandson. Unfortunately my relative is very poorly and has been in hospital for two years. They live just over two hundred miles from Adelaide. Returning from visiting them we travelled along the Mallee Highway and covered one hundred and fifty miles without any vehicle overtaking us and before we caught up with anything else - rather different from our M5!

We get back on 15th. March and look forward to seeing you all soon.

Peter Godfrey

Coffee break (Part 1)

Here's something I found on Dr Richard Wiseman's blog ... His research examines quirky areas of psychology, including deception, humour, luck and the paranormal. He is also the author of *The Luck Factor*, a book exploring the lives and minds of lucky people, and *Quirkology*, which examines the curious science of everyday life, including the psychology of lying, love, and laughter.

Can you work this puzzle out?

Imagine that you have been captured and suspended in a tree. The rope is anchored on the ground and a candle is slowly burning through the rope. Worse still, there is a hungry lion waiting for you to drop to the ground so that he can eat you. You don't have the energy to flip up and untie the rope, reach up to the branch or even swing over to the trunk. Help is on the way, but it is going to take an hour to get to you, and the candle will have burnt through the rope by then. What can you do to prevent yourself being eaten by the lion?



<http://richardwiseman.wordpress.com/>

Answer on page 33

Worship - your views

Worship

I once heard a Unitarian regale a story about atheists bowing their heads in prayer, to him it showed that atheists are really believers at heart. As an atheist myself, naturally I disagree. Instead, his story reminded me that no matter how hard I try, I still make the sign of the cross reflexively at all relevant points of the Catholic mass no matter how much my beliefs do not coincide with theirs. What someone has been trained to do in worship, may bear no resemblance to what they believe, or the value they place on the worship.

I enjoy all sorts of worship. I can find value in quiet meditation and reflection sessions, and in hymn sandwich Sunday services. I also find solace in the much maligned "happy clappy" hymns (my honest to goodness favourite hymn ever is "Shine, Jesus Shine") even when they are at odds with my personal theology, or lack of it. I was brought up Catholic, and even though I essentially believe nothing that the Catholic Church teaches, the liturgical mass still holds a place in my affection. I hope that there are forms of worship I would enjoy that I haven't even tried yet.

Worship isn't about the rational and the logical. It certainly can be rational and logical, but its appeal to the heart and soul is more important than its appeal to the mind. Good worship connects the worshippers to each other and to the wider world. Really good worship does so in a way that does not require the suspension of disbelief, or the adherence to the worship leader's particular world view – it fits into your life like a hand in a glove, and warms and enriches your whole being.

Angela Maher

A prayer by Barbara Russell

O Lord of life, we thank you for our life and for all the gifts therein. As the year wakens, waken our spirits, as the sun strengthens, strengthen our hearts, as the petals open, so open our minds to the wonders around us. Blow with the blast of your grace the clouds from our souls and by your power, may we grow towards you as the flowers grow towards the sun. Amen.

Sikhism and hospitality – a way of worship

India is, of course, a vast and diverse land. It's a secular state professing tolerance of all religious traditions. Though as history has often demonstrated, religious tensions do from time to time arise and sometimes lead to violence. Most of the population of India, about 80% overall, is Hindu and the rest are divided between Islam, Sikhism, Christianity, Jainism, Buddhism and Judaism in percentages that vary greatly through the different regions of India.

One of the highlights of our recent trip was a visit to the Golden Temple in the North-Western city of Amritsar. The Golden Temple is a magnificent Sikh Gurdwara dating back to the beginning of the seventeenth century - it is the centre of Sikh worship, the holiest place, and a place of pilgrimage for Sikhs the world over.

From the first glance you get of the Temple as you enter it; it is magnificent. The Golden Temple itself actually is gold plated, and set in the centre of a vast manmade tank of holy water, a place for bathing for ritual purification, which is in turn completely surrounded by other temple buildings. Worshippers reach the actual Golden Temple via a marble causeway across this body of water, which, like the marble pathways around the water, is partly carpeted so that wet feet can proceed safely over the marble surfaces. The temple buildings surrounding the water are mostly concerned with the traditional Sikh hospitality. They include free hostel accommodation for pilgrims (in reality, for just about anyone who needs it) but are mostly devoted to preparing and serving the food that Sikhs give out to visitors every day.

Hospitality, and caring for people, is at the core of the Sikh religion and the Golden Temple organisation serves on average 30,000 meals, free of charge, every day – and it's all done with volunteer labour except for a handful of employed specialist staff. How on earth do they do it - a high-tech mass production kitchen perhaps? No. There were some machines, a 30,000 loaf a day bread making machine for example, but the overwhelming majority of the work is done manually by lots of Sikh hands, men and women, people who simply turn up when they have the time and the inclination, and work on preparing food. Lots of little circles of people squatting on the

ground in the open chopping huge quantities of carrots and other vegetables, or rolling out dough for that enormous bread machine. They even let us tourists join in and help for a little while.



Preparing carrots at The Golden Temple, Amritsar

To a Sikh this hospitality and food preparation is just as much a part of worship as are the rituals that take place in the temple itself. We were left with an overwhelming feeling of the generosity of the Sikhs. The generosity that allowed the temple to be built and plated with gold in the first place; and to be re-plated whenever the old gold becomes too shabby; the generosity that enables the organisation to give out 30,000 meals, and goodness knows how many cups of tea, every day; generosity with money and gifts, but most of all generosity with personal time and effort - and all done as a matter of course. It's just what's regarded as absolutely normal.

Don & Linda Phillips

Worship – the thing that makes us a Spiritual Community

I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that without our meetings for worship, we would not be a spiritual community. All the other things we do together – discussion groups, rambles, meetings – could be done by any other social group. But our meetings for worship are what make us Unitarians. As Cliff Reed writes in *Unitarian? What's That?* “worshipping together is at the heart of all that we do. ... In worship we affirm the faith and values that we share, while being respectful of our differences.”

There was an interesting letter in *The Inquirer* dated 7th February 2009, under the strapline “It’s time to get beyond the ‘hymn sandwich’”, by someone called Roger Chapman, from Sunderland. He was arguing that the traditional ‘hymn sandwich’ type of service, comprising hymns, prayers, readings and an address is outmoded and in need of replacement. He wrote: “the traditional lines of Christian worship relative to today’s society are dead on their feet, ... there is a need for a post-modern approach”, although his letter didn’t make very clear what that approach might be.

I am certainly not opposed to innovative, interesting services, which use “different” elements such as music, dance, ritual, candles and so on, to focus our attention. In fact I would love to see more of them. But I also believe that the ‘hymn sandwich’ approach doesn’t *have* to be boring and predictable – that is down to the skill of the worship leader. Most services in MU chapels include some or all of the following: opening words, chalice lighting, hymns, prayers, readings, an address, possibly a musical interlude, and closing words or a benediction. But my goodness, it is possible to be stimulating and original and inspirational within those parameters!

For example, I led a service at Northampton for the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights last December. Based on some super material sent round by the GA’s Worship Panel, it included a reading of all 30 articles of the Declaration, accompanied by the lighting of a tealight for each one; no less than *six* hymns, a variety of short readings and prayers, and no address. And it went down very well! I’m telling you this, not to blow my own trumpet (Heaven forbid!) but to show that the ‘hymn sandwich’ format does not have to be predictable or same-y.

The most important thing about worship is that it should “seek to engage the whole person, as well as the whole community in what goes on. Thus while the spirit and the soul are addressed, so too is the mind – the faculties of thought and reason. Even the body is included – singing is, after all, a physical activity!” (Cliff Reed again) It is the time when we come together to be taken beyond our everyday lives. I found some lovely opening words (by Elizabeth A. Parish) in the UUA Worship Web Resource Library, which explain what I mean:

“Come ye into this house of worship! Come in and find peace and rest, inspiration and aspiration, fellowship and love. Come in and find light for your darkness, a friend’s touch for your loneliness, and music for your soul. Come in and let your heart sing for all the blessings that are yours this day.” Amen

May the worship in your Unitarian community do all of these things.
Sue Woolley



Worship

Worship (finding worth) for me is an awareness and an appreciation of:

- the magnificence of the world
- the strength and peace which can be found within
- the love which makes life worthwhile

and thankfulness.

I can worship alone on the hill but better still to share with other like-minded souls.

Isabel Pebody



Caring and Sharing:

So much need, so much suffering, so much fragile hope. Teach me to care, Guide me to share, To give from my heart, For giving means living more richly.

Kate Taylor

Transitive or intransitive worship?

Extracts from a sermon preached by Rev David Usher in Oxford college chapel on Sunday 1 February 2009, taken from Oxford's March/April newsletter and published here with David's permission.

Recently I was challenged by a stalwart of my local parish church. "You don't believe there is a God, do you?" she said. I could tell that she thought she was setting me up for something. Oh well, I thought to myself. Here goes. "No, I don't," I replied.

"So what is the point of your worship?" She sure thought she had me there. It is a common misconception. And it is a misconception with a long history.

Many people conceive of God as some sort of actual being which exists in the usual understanding of that word. A being which thinks and acts and has emotions and makes decisions. A being just like us, only more so than we could ever imagine. In other words, God having created man in his own image, man has been returning the compliment ever since. God, in this literalist realist understanding, is just like a person, presiding in his heaven, but taking an interest in what is going on down here on earth, grieving when we mess up, delighting when we get it right.

... If your image of God is that of a celestial King with unlimited power to determine the course of your life, a jealous and tyrannical monarch who wants to be kind and loving, but who is just as likely to strike you down if he thinks you are stepping out of line, then you are going to do what it takes to appease him.

And so worship is typically an act of sycophantic appeasement. It starts with flattery: *God, you are wonderful. Look at all the great things you have done. We love you, God. Three cheers for God.* And God, being like us and therefore vain and proud and endlessly susceptible to such fawning, falls for it. And when we have made sure that God is well and truly buttered up, when God has taken the roll call and knows that we have been in church and therefore knows what devoted subjects we are and how we should be rewarded for our loyalty, well then we can get round to what we really came for: *we can ask for stuff.*

I realise that this mocking and disparaging caricature of God and worship is rather Dawkinsish. But, as far as I can tell, that is a fairly

accurate summary of worship in many people's minds. Keeping God happy. Keeping him on side. Worship, in this understanding of the word, is a transitive verb. It is a verb which needs an object. You worship something. Worship as adoration. Worship as propitiation. Worship as intercession.

But that is not my understanding of God, and therefore not my understanding of worship. My interlocutor was correct. I do not believe in God, if that means believing that there is a God, real but somewhere and somehow outside of normal existence. I do not believe *that* God exists. And a god which does not exist does not need to be kept happy by my telling him how powerful and wonderful he is.

One of the curses of being a minister is that when people find out what I do, often they feel the need to justify to me why they don't go to church. "Of course, I believe in God", they say earnestly, "but I don't go to church". And if I am feeling mischievous I reply, "How interesting. You believe in God and don't go to church. And I go to church, but don't believe in God."

So what on earth am I doing, worshipping? For me, worship is not a transitive verb. Worship does not require an object in order to be grammatically correct. In fact, quite the opposite. Worship with an object has for me ceased to be worship in its pure and proper sense. Worship is the act of reminding myself of values that the world would otherwise make me forget. An act of spiritual discipline which, at its best and when it is most effective, keeps my soul healthy and alive. Keeping a soul healthy and alive requires work and attention. It does not just happen. We have to practise.

Long ago I ran a marathon. I had to do a lot of training. Most weeks, I was running 50 miles or so. I got pretty fit. I could never have completed the race if I had not done that training beforehand. I could not expect my body to respond to the challenge without having prepared it. I might have the potential to be a musician. But I can't just pick up an instrument and start playing. First, I have to practise. I might have the potential to speak another language. But I will not be able to do that unless I put in the time to study and practise. I might have the potential to be spiritually alive and healthy, but I won't be unless I do the work, unless I keep reminding myself of the

values and ideals which will make me so, unless I hold myself accountable.

If you don't want to run a marathon, that's fine. If you don't want to play a musical instrument, that's fine. If you don't want to speak another language, that's fine too. If you don't want to be spiritually alive, even that is fine. But then don't be surprised, if you are suddenly called upon to run a long distance, or you are asked to play music, or you are stranded in another country and you are found wanting. And don't be surprised if life suddenly challenges you and you do not have the spiritual resources to cope. Don't be surprised if you discover that your soul is cramped and undeveloped.

I want to worship because, for me, it is the act of growing my soul, the practice of keeping myself in touch with the way I want to live. As I feel my body growing flabby if I do not exercise it, and I do not like that feeling, so I feel my soul growing flabby if I do not exercise it by holding it accountable to the highest that I know: if I do not reacquaint myself with that which is holy.

Part of that worship is intellectual. It is the formulation of beliefs which can make sense, which help me to explain the world and my place in it. Part of it is emotional: giving voice and vent to my fear or anger or joy or love. Part of it is aesthetic: the experience of beauty, in the world of nature or the world of human creativity. And part of it is relational the sharing of those private things in the company of others. Hence, here now with you, and not alone elsewhere.

I invite you to consider what worship is for you. Is it a transitive verb? Are you paying homage to a something or a someone? Or is it intransitive? Are you placing yourself in the company of the holy, keeping your soul healthy and aware and alive?

..... David Usher

Worship should reach out to all - "Hands, touching hands, reaching out, touching me, touching you" as Neil Diamond's lyrics say.

Bear in mind that "**there is a broken heart in every pew**".

Fundamentally it is the heart and soul of people we are dealing with; we are making connections.

Words of David Shaw, spoken at the UCCN weekend in February.

This is from the Minister's letter in Kidderminster's The Record

Time does not stand still. It marches on, and if we really think about it we should be glad that it does for even that moment will lose its charm if it is indefinitely extended. The interest in life lies not in sameness but in contrast. A well known saying, "All sunshine makes a desert", speaks much truth. Even a special moment would lose its awe, joy and wonder if it were to last for ever; a sameness would cause it to become mundane.

As William Barclay once wrote:

"It is hunger which gives food its taste - thirst which makes water nectar. It is loneliness which gives friendship its value. It is the dark of night which gives the dawn its glory. It is the contrast between light and dark, the good and not so good, that gives life its sadness and joy. It is the very kaleidoscopic, changing quality of life that gives it its wholeness".

Wise words, from a Christian Minister and academic with the common touch.

The special moment is special because it is a moment and not a permanent condition. Life has to go on - the moment has to pass. Special moments are meant to be savoured, then stored in the memory chest, to be dusted and re-experienced when desired or needed.

Life cannot stand still nor go back but let us remember that it is the window of the moment that can open the doors of life - the vision of which is eternal. Each moment is precious, when or wherever.

I close my letter with these words, author unknown.

"Let us treasure every moment, know the value of each deed and discover greatness in small things. May we see in the passing, the Eternal; in each sunbeam, Love; in each raindrop, Wonder; In each leaf, Beauty; and in every human soul, God's Living Spirit."

This, I believe, is what the coming natural and spiritual spring season of renewal is all about. Life goes on, is constantly renewed - and thanks be. A happy Easter and Spring Equinox to each and all.

Ann Latham

Coffee break (Part 2)

From page 23

How do you escape? ... you sing 'happy birthday' to the lion. 😊
At the end of the song, he will automatically go over to the candle and blow it out. If you don't believe me, here is a picture of exactly that....



A little boy went up to his father and asked: 'Dad, where did my intelligence come from?'

The father replied. 'Well, son, you must have got it from your mother, cause I still have mine.'

(Ed's note: Change the genders on this one as you wish!)

A man is recovering from surgery when the Surgical Nurse appears and asks him how he is feeling.

'I'm OK, but I didn't like the four letter-words the doctor used in surgery,' he answered.

'What did he say,' asked the nurse.

'Oops!'

Poets' Corner

I may never see tomorrow

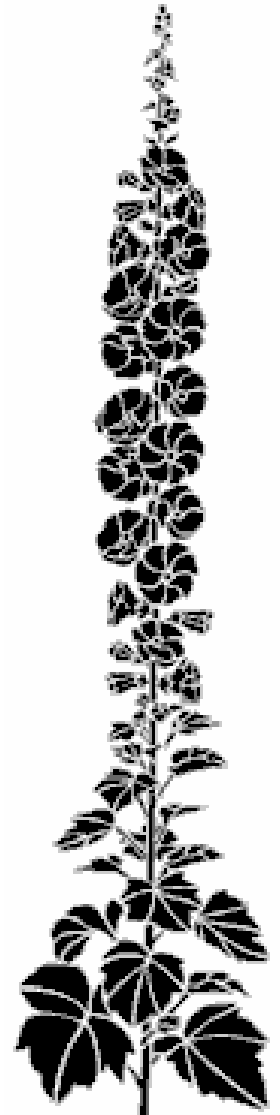
Author unknown.

I may never see Tomorrow;
There's no written guarantee,
And things that happened yesterday
Belong to history,
I can't predict the future,
I cannot change the past,
I have just this present moment
I must treat it as my last.

I must use this moment wisely
For it soon will pass away
And be lost to me forever
As part of yesterday,
I must exercise compassion, Help
the fallen to their feet,
Be a friend to the friendless,
Make an empty life complete.

The unkindest thing I do today,
May never be undone,
And friendships that I fail to win
May nevermore be won.
I may not have another chance
On bended knees to pray
And thank God with a humble heart
For giving me this day.

*Read at Sunday Service
On board 'Black Prince'
in the Mediterranean
November 2008*



It's the turn of Ant Howe's congregations to be inspired this time!

Elsie Mae Griffiths' words were written in memory of Sied de Wit and printed in the Warwick newsletter, and Jo Chandler's words were read out on Christmas Eve at Kingswood, when she lit the chalice candle.

Forever closed
That guiding hand
Which led us along-
"The open Way"¹

Where minds were probed
And thoughts revealed
With tempting words-
To nourish and expand
Such inspiration shall we miss
With sad awareness of our loss.

Words in memory of Sied de Wit member at Warwick

Elsie Mae Griffiths

A Poem for Ant

Jo Chandler

You see God in me!
How can that be?
In my smile?
In what I do?

I see God in your smile
And in the way you speak.
In the way you listen, and the way you are,
The hand you offer in friendship.
Your humour and your wit

But see God in me.....I don't think so, not a bit.
I'm really not that good

----You think I am, that's great,

I didn't know that you see God in me
The same way that I see God in you,

It really makes me glad, that even though I think I am -
It's amazing, you make me feel that, ~ I may not be that bad.

Memories

The story of the Fazeley Street Mission

From the 1904 Brochure celebrating the Joseph Priestley centenary – a link is on the MUA Website

'At the Annual Meeting of the New Meeting Sunday Schools, September the 17th, 1844, a resolution was passed to the effect that increased efficiency be given to the schools by establishing an evening school, and a plan for visiting the parents of the children and other poor persons in the district, and that it was particularly desirable to appoint a paid agent.

The matter came before the Vestry Committee and the Congregation, and this was the origin of the New Meeting Ministry to the Poor, now known by the title above. A house in "the Gullet" was taken in 1845, and licensed for worship in 1846. It became too small for its purpose, and a house in Bailey Street was taken in 1847, and for the same reason a move was made to Lawrence Street in 1848, where there were a chapel and classrooms

In 1888, the Mission moved to its present quarters in Lower Fazeley Street, which had hitherto been occupied by the Free Christian Society (founded in 1861, by Sunday School Teachers from the New Meeting). The freehold was purchased in 1903, by subscription.'

The subsequent story :

The Sunday School activities were extremely successful during the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century in supplementing the inadequate public education system. Children were taught reading, writing and arithmetic as well as following religious studies and by 1900, the Unitarian Sunday Schools in Birmingham had more than two thousand pupils. The sponsoring Church of the Fazeley Street Mission was the Church of the Messiah in Broad Street, which moved to Fiveways in 1973 and changed its name to Unitarian New Meeting. The forty nine names on the World War I section of its War Memorial include that of the former Sunday School Superintendent and of several former Sunday School Teachers as well as of some former Sunday School pupils.

The 'paid agent' referred to was a Unitarian Minister. He and his successors were extremely diligent in pursuing the duty imposed upon them of 'visiting the parents of the children and other poor

persons in the district'. The 1917 Church Annual Report includes an apology from the then incumbent - due to difficult circumstances he had been able to make only 1700 home visits that year !

Improvements in living standards and State Education, with dwindling support for churches after the Second World War, led to the closure of the Fazeley Street Mission in the 1950s. The building lay derelict for many years, but has recently been renovated. A recent letter from the organiser Kate Manion to David Mearman, via his cousin Michael Mearman who manages the 1904 Priestley web site, (and to whom we are grateful for uncovering this development) explains :

“Yes, the building has been derelict for decades but it has recently been redeveloped as an and arts and media cluster and we reopened the doors just two weeks ago. I’m really fascinated in its history so it is just wonderful to see a picture of its past.



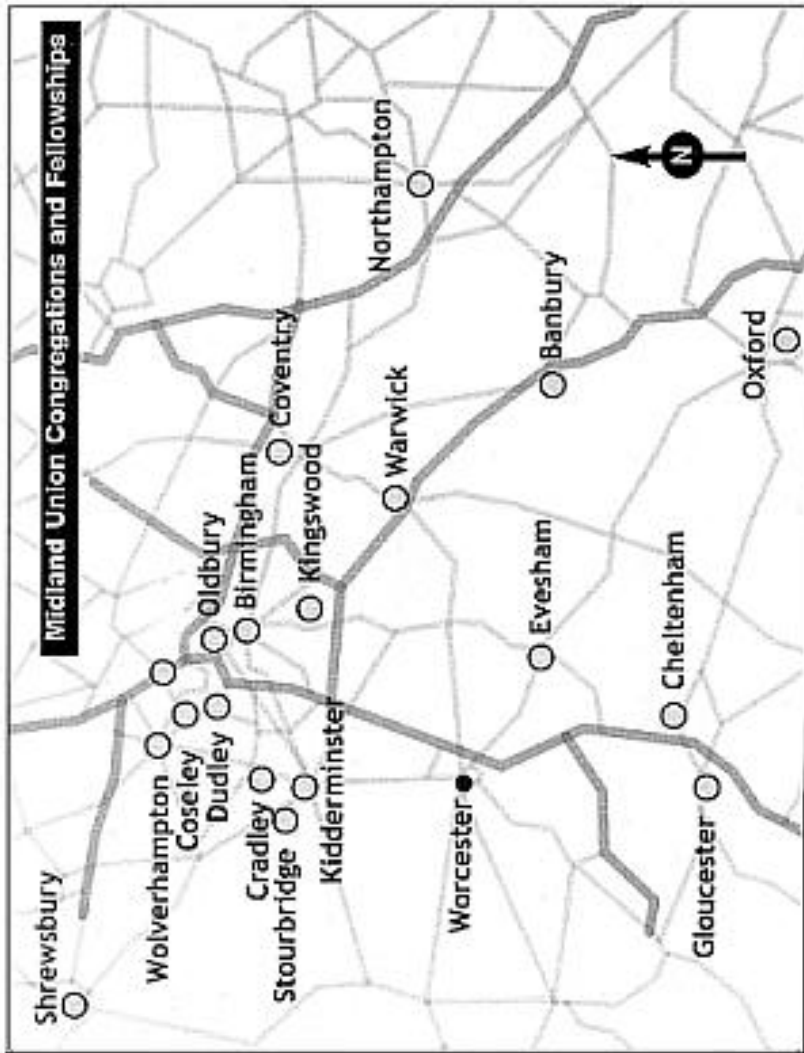
The CHURCH OF THE MESSIAH DOMESTIC MISSION is now the gallery reception entrance. The adjoining Sunday school holds our office (Fazeley Studios admin office) and a facility for creative conferences. If you ever want to come and have a look at the building out of curiosity or bring anyone else down you are very welcome.”

Kate kindly supplied the picture of the building as it appears today :
Sandy Ellis

LIST of CONGREGATIONS

Name	Contact	Details
Banbury	Elaine Normura	
Birmingham	Jill Hudson	
Cheltenham	Jenny Buckland	
Coseley	Helen J Emery	
Coventry	Janice Ashley	
Cradley	Rhona Homer	
Dudley	Barbara Russell	
Evesham	Lesley Harris	
Gloucester	David Wright	
Kidderminster	Roger Mathews	
Kingswood	Nina Caddick	
Northampton	Sue Woolley Note #1	
Oldbury	Pamela Rose	
Oxford	Catherine Robinson	
Shrewsbury	Marguerite Rossell	
Stourbridge	David Mearman	
Tamworth	Sandy Ellis	
Warwick	Malcolm Sadler	
Wolverhampton	Barbara Russell	

Note #1: Sue Woolley is also Secretary and District Facilitator of the Midland Unitarian Association.



The Midland Unitarian Association website can be found at
www.midland-unitarian-association.org.uk



“When I admire the wonder of a sunset or the beauty of the moon, my soul expands in worship of the Creator.”

(Mahatma Gandhi)

Now you’ve reached the end of this issue, tell us what you think of it!
 Please write or email us with your ideas, letters and comments.

Contact details are inside the front page.

The SUMMER 2009 Issue will be published in August.
 Please can we have your contributions on the theme of
‘What inspires you?’

by **30th June 2009** for inclusion in this issue.

The theme for WINTER 2009 will be **‘New Beginnings’**

We welcome contributions from **all** our readers.