# MU NOW

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# THE MAGAZINE OF THE MIDLAND UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION

ISSUE 54

**SUMMER 2018** 

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www.midland-unitarian-association.org.uk

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# From the Editor

Welcome to the Summer 2018 issue of *MU Now*. This issue contains some very interesting contributions, including an unusually large District Round-up. It has been a lively Summer, in many MUA congregations.

The *Good News Litany* by John Corrado was submitted by Rev. Peter Godfrey, in response to Stephen Lingwood's article on 'Unitarian Evangelism' in the last issue.

#### Submissions to MU Now

We are particularly looking for stories on local activities, or with a local interest, in addition to articles on the theme. Please send your contributions to me at revsuewoolley@gmail.com or to 5, Martins Road, Piddington, Northampton NN7 2DN.

#### THANK YOU!

The theme for the next issue is "New Year, New Hope" and the deadline for submissions will be **Friday 4**th **January**.

It may seem a little premature, but as this is the last issue that will be published in 2018, I would like to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Peaceful New Year.

sue Woolley

## **President's Piece**



#### ONCE MORE WITH FEELING!

Life, and seasons, seem to come around again and again with amazing regularity. I swear it was May the week before last. On my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday my mother imparted this pearl of wisdom "Enjoy life now,

because it's a downhill slope from here on. The older you get the faster it goes"

Having worked in the education sector for much of my adult life the new year, for me, begins on 1<sup>st</sup> September. And so I like to ponder about life, the world, and the universe –why the second wood never follows the first wood, and why neither sit near the jack on the bowling green? Why can't I make a decent casserole? Why can't small boys and politicians see sense? Why do the dogs not understand that today is a work day and that walks and cuddles are going to have to wait til later? Why can we grow plenty of ground elder in Hollywood, but not hollyhocks? And the biggie – why can't human beings make peace the world over and live contentedly until the end of days?

I haven't found any answers to the above questions yet, but it's led to some interesting conversations in strange places. Especially when walking the dogs – all the owners know all the dogs' names but very few of us know the owners' names! This was highlighted in recent(ish) times when I conducted a funeral and, much to my surprise, one of the local dog owners was there. He was as

surprised to see me as I him. And I thought it only polite that at this point we should exchange names.

I say recent(ish) times, because life goes by so quickly that I sometimes have a hard time keeping track of it. This puzzled me in my younger days when I seemed to be able to keep track of life without a diary. When working as Secretary to the Sports Editor of the *Sunday Express* in Manchester in my twenties, other people's inability to keep track of time was a regular occurrence in my life. During the off season (when there was no soccer) life was very slow and I got many odd jobs to keep me occupied. One was to track down books that people had read about in the book review column. "It was about three months ago, and it was about so and so" was the usual query. So I spent many happy hours reading through Graham Lord's columns until I tracked it down. The usual time span was up to three years ago — and on one memorable occasion nearly six years beforehand!

It is in September that the Jewish community celebrate their New Year and one of their customs (so I read) is to empty their pockets and cast whatever is there into water. I think this may be a bit more metaphorical now – look into your life and cast out whatever burdens you and start over again. The Ancient Israelites seemed quite hot on this idea with their Jubilees –letting go of debts owed and owing every seven years. Letting prisoners out of jail. Forgiving and forgetting. And then there was the big Jubilee every 49/50 years.

Well, I had my big Jubilee seven years ago and I changed my life radically at that point, coming to work here at Kingswood Meeting House. And it is about to undergo a big change itself, as we are installing underfloor heating in the Chapel which will be

closed for approximately four weeks. It will be much kinder to the old Chapel walls, and more efficient in its use of power and keeping us all warm through snow and ice. The building won't look any different inside, just a heat exchange unit on an exterior wall. A bit like my recent visits to a chiropractor, we hope it will keep us going for a few years yet. If we remember them and if they don't go by too fast.

And if all these memories seem a bit of a *non sequitur* – that's just how life happens. There are those things that stick out in our life's history. But it seems more helpful to let go of memories that hold us back rather than assist our forward momentum. It's all a bit of a jigsaw puzzle. I'm a corner and edges person myself. I like my framework, and then I sort what's left into piles of colour before I piece the picture together. I hope you have lots of lovely colour in your lives to piece together – if not, it's never to late to start painting.

So mother, I tip my hat to you. For not only is life going downhill quickly, it's got roller-skates on and go faster stripes painted on its sides. . . . But I sure am enjoying the ride!

With love, **Diane**.



# District Minister: Summer Update

Hello again. Here's a summary of what I've been doing, around the Midland Unitarian Association, and elsewhere.

I am sad to report that the members of the **Banbury Unitarian Fellowship** have voted to close the doors. The ill-health of the remaining members was the prevailing reason. We will be having a farewell meal at the end of September, after which I will continue to support them pastorally.

Leading worship around the Midland Unitarian Association: My diary for 2019 is now being sorted out. I have heard back from most of the congregations I visit and look forward to seeing all of you as and when.

The **Autumn Training Day,** on the topic of *Putting the Worth into Worship* will be taking place on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> November, at Kingswood Meeting House. It is being led by Rev. Ant Howe, Kingswood's minister, and promises to be a fascinating day. Please let me know if you plan to attend.

There was a small turn-out this year for the national **Worship Studies Course Foundation Step** – only four people, three of them from outside the District. But those four got a lot out of it. We (the MUA committee) are reviewing when we plan to offer it again.

I am a fully qualified **spiritual director**. I have started to offer direction sessions, on a one-to-one basis. Please contact me if you are interested.

Sue Woolley, District Minister, Midland Unitarian Association

# **MUA Executive Committee Key Messages**

The Key Messages below, from our May and July meetings, have already been shared in the February issue of *Bits & Pieces*, the monthly news-sheet sent to all congregations. Only the messages which have not been overtaken by events are here:

- 1. <u>Chaplain to Mayor of Kidderminster</u>: Rev. Winnie Gordon is now Chaplain to the Mayor of Kidderminster.
- 2. Model Contracts: It was agreed that it would be good practice for the District Minister to hold blank copies of model contracts (e.g. for the employment of lay workers, the hiring of sub-contractors, the letting of premises) so that congregations planning to do any of these things would have an approved contract to hand. If any congregations are willing to share such contracts which they have used / are using, please contact the District Minister (details below).
- 3. <u>MUA Annual Lunch</u>: this will be held at Kingswood Meeting House, on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> November, with Guest Speaker Rev Daniel Costley.

Diane Rutter: tel: 0787-1215-920; Sue Woolley: tel: 01604-870746; e-mails: dianerutter2004@yahoo.co.uk; revsuewoolley@gmail.com

# Good News Litany by John Corrado, Submitted by Rev. Peter Godfrey "following Stephen's article on Unitarian evangelism"

We believe there is a place at God's table for each and every child of earth.

Hey, ain't that good news?

We believe the giver of life has been given many names and loves the givers of all of them.

Hey, ain't that good news?

We are more interested in getting heaven into people now, than getting people into heaven later.

Hey, ain't that good news?

We believe religious scriptures are open doors rather than sealed vaults.

Hey, ain't that good news?

We believe there is still some holy writ yet to be written.

Hey, ain't that good news?

We believe true evangelism is more preaching practised than practiced preaching.

Hey, ain't that good news?

We believe peace and justice are not just words we form with our lips but realities we shape with our lives.

Hey, ain't that good news?

We believe in one race – the human race.

Hey, ain't that good news?

We believe we are one with stars and tress and tigers and rivers and all the stuff of life.

Hey, ain't that good news?

We believe our lives are all about growing – hearts that love, minds that seek, and hands that serve.

Hey, ain't that good news?

Amen!

# **District Round-up**

#### **Oldbury Rose Service 2018**

Summer 2018 has been truly spectacular and Oldbury Unitarian Church (now meeting at Dudley) took advantage of the season to hold its traditional Rose Service on 1st July.

We arrived at the church to be greeted by the perfume of lilies – a sure sign that Pam Rose (Oldbury) had been there previously to decorate the church. The first flowers that I noticed was a delicate arrangement of blue and yellow, possibly because it is my favourite colour combination, and it had worthy rivals in a display of rich red roses and another arrangement of pink and white carnations.

The Rev. Penny Johnson had been invited to lead the Service and was quick to spot how the traditional opening hymn *Forward though the Ages* .... would provide a strong link to the theme for the afternoon.

The words chosen for the candle lighting were by the Rev. Sue Woolley, after which we were welcomed by Penny to the Service of Worship.

Penny had introduced a new dimension to the event – the giving of flowers. Each member was asked to bring a flower and although Pam invited us to "Come forth and bring your garlands..." the offerings were, in fact, collected and placed on the altar-table.

Penny picked up the words "through the ages" and with the help of photographs provided by Pam, spoke of how the Rose Service had developed and grown – and changed - through the ages! The

Crowning of the Rose Queen – in the days when there were enough children to provide a retinue - became the simpler Flower Service, now the Oldbury Rose Service which has become a tradition itself.

After a short prayer reminding us that the summer sun - welcome though it is - sometimes can mar, the warmth of God's presence in our lives brings nothing but good, Gavin Lloyd (Oxford) invited us to join him in his Alternative Lord's Prayer, in which we ask God - the power of ultimate goodness -'that we may not be tempted beyond endurance'

The hymn *Daisies are our silver...* took us back to our age of innocence, and was followed by Gavin's splendid reading of A.E. Housman's evocative poem *Loveliest of Trees...* 

Penny had chosen Eleanor Farjeon's *Morning has broken*... to remind us of the wonder of creation, both days - -and gardens!

Ken Johnson set our hearts happily dancing through "Hosts of golden daffodils...." after which the more sombre words of Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *Flower in the Crannied Wall*... tells of the ongoing search to know "What God and Man is."

David Mearman - our organist from Stourbridge - had made a studied choice for the interval music – the *Entr'act* from Schubert's *Rosamunde*!

Penny spoke of her appreciation of flowers, not only for their beauty – in the famous words of Jesus "Consider the lilies of the field....." but also for their consistency. If you planted a tulip, she said, you got a tulip. - It might not be quite the tulip you imagined - but it would definitely be a tulip not a lupin or a raspberry bush! This, she continued, is how our faith should be.

To emphasise this theme, Penny had chosen a reading by Gwen Frostic *Along a path where gentians* grow.... This was beautifully read by Evelyn Cowley. The passage says that gentians, be they blue or white, tiered or single, are still gentians, and of the pine tree, wind-battered, that "still retains - and ever shall - the characteristics of its kind."

During the closing hymn, which exhorted us to "Look after this Earth..." we were asked to take a flower, different from the one we had brought, and remember, with gladness, the communal service we had enjoyed.

Penny closed the service with a touching benediction by Jacob Trapp.

The community spirit continued round the tea-table, where Penny thanked all contributors and we thanked Penny for leading us through a truly delightful afternoon.

Thanks to Penny's generosity of waiving her fees, we were able to send £106.00 to Hucklow.

#### Barbara Russell

[**Editor's Note:** Barbara sent me some lovely photos to go with this article, but sadly they were photocopies of black & white photos, and I was unable to scan them.]

# Rev. Mark Hutchinson to become minister of the Cotswold Group

Rev. Mark Hutchinson, who completed his ministry training at Unitarian College Manchester this Summer, is to start his

ministry with the Cotswold Group this October. This is his message to the Cotswold Group congregations:

"Many faiths talk of pilgrimage, usually embraced as a journey to a place of special significance. It is of course a spiritual journey. My pilgrimage into ministry began in response to a request to attend church by my son, then eight, and attendance at Dean Row. Training via several years at Chorlton is now guiding my pilgrimage to the Cotswolds.



I view pilgrimage perhaps not as a place, but more to a future that I am lucky to now have. Like all pilgrimages this is outside my comfort zone, bringing new insights and inviting growth and

change, perhaps never before considered. So with the guidance is acceptance, a little apprehension and the honour of being invited to serve a community. A group of communities close to the heart of the start of the Unitarian movement, with a range of beliefs that show the power and the mystery of that same movement, and a desire to harness that power and spirit for the good of others.

I look forward to continuing the pilgrimage and serving whoever appears along the way.

May you remain open to the beloved of your heart.

#### Mark Hutchinson

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#### A visit from the MUA President

On Sunday 24th June we at Oat Street Chapel had a super service from Diane Rutter, currently president of the Midland Unitarian Association. Diane began with the Bible story about Ezekiel and how his prophecy of the Lord's word brought surrounding skeletons of dry bones back to life. Diane's service then moved onto how we could bring figurative dry bones to life (ie refresh our energies) in our everyday journeys. We went from the old to the modern with Diane's reading from Robert Fulghum's book "Uh Oh" and lots of friendly advice about little everyday things to cheer us up and get us through another week. All of this was supported by two good, traditional no nonsense hymns: King of Glory, King of Peace and Be Thou My Vision, and then by the more reflective hymn Do You Hear.

Finally Diane did not let the morning time of day prevent her from rounding off with the "Goodnight Hymn", for after all, we were saying a temporary goodbye to each other until we met again. All in all, a bright, comforting sunny service for a bright

and sunny day. We enjoyed our conversations over tea and coffee and then we took Diane out for lunch at the ever faithful Wetherspoons. In all, Diane combined an in-depth knowledge of theology with a bright and bubbly presentation and personality and left all of us feeling much better. We look forward to another visit from Diane, whenever she can fit us in.

# Lesley Harris (from Cotswold Group Newsletter)

#### Stourbridge Unitarians celebrate two special anniversaries

On Sunday 3<sup>th</sup> June 2018, over 20 people from congregations from Kingswood and Evesham, friends, neighbours and members of the local Quakers joined our congregation at Stourbridge to celebrate our joint anniversary service.

Preparations had begun some months before with making sure Rev. Sue Woolley was available to lead the service. Invitations were sent out to all congregations within the MUA catchment area.

The service had initially been proposed as marking our  $230^{th}$  anniversary of the opening of our chapel, on  $5^{rd}$  June 1788; but it soon became clear we had another anniversary too -320 years since very first Unitarian congregation in the town in 1698.

As a small congregation, we don't have the luxury of an army of volunteers to assist with tidying up and preparation of the chapel and grounds. A few months before, part of our vestry ceiling had collapsed due to water damage after the unfortunate theft of lead from the roof. Getting this repair completed took right up to the very last minute. The day before the anniversary service, four of

our five-strong congregation spent a large part of the day weeding, sweeping up, dusting, putting up new signs (and provided the ideal opportunity to put up our security lights as someone was present to hold the ladder!) The day of the service began early, more weeding and sweeping, and the all- important bunting was put up, flowers arranged, and pots of flowers put outside. And just before the hoards descended, the specialist catering van from 'Green's Vegan Catering' pulled onto the chapel forecourt in readiness for serving après-service hot vegan and GF food.

Rev. Sue Woolley led a wonderfully inspiring and truly celebratory service, with readings and blessings. Good wishes were read out from Derek McAuley from the General Assembly, and Diane Rutter, President of the MUA, very kindly delivered warm wishes of congratulations from MUA committee and congregations.

Following the service Rev. Sue Woolley planted a Rowan tree in commemoration of this wonderful day at the front of the chapel. This was followed by music, hot food, cakes, Prosecco and fruit punch for all present.



Rev. Sue Woolley and David Taylor (photo Carolyn Taylor)

The Stourbridge congregation would like to thank everyone who could make it to support our small congregation, and to the good wishes from GA, MUA and Warwick congregation. We also extend our warmest thanks and appreciation to Rev. Sue Woolley for her wonderfully special service, and as ever, her strong support for our continuing endeavours to reach out to the wider Unitarian and local community.

#### **David Taylor**



Carolyn Taylor, Audrey Green and David Mearman (photo by David Taylor)

#### Stourbridge Chapel Anniversary Service (2)

What do you get when you add 320 plus 230? Usually 550 but in this case, what we had was the 320th anniversary of the founding of the Unitarian congregation in Stourbridge and the 230th

anniversary of the building of Stourbridge Presbyterian Unitarian chapel.

On the afternoon of 3 June, Fleur, Rosemary and I joined the Stourbridge Unitarian congregation to celebrate these two momentous occasions. The celebrations were organised by David and Carolyn Taylor plus a willing and highly capable band of helpers. A beautiful service consisting of greetings, blessings and hymns was conducted by Sue Woolley, accompanied melodiously on the organ by David Mearman. Stourbridge Unitarian Chapel itself had benefitted from cleaning and re-decoration and its blue paint and clear windows matched the sky and gave an almost cathedral like atmosphere to the proceedings. Wonderful refreshments including a super fruit punch were served at the front of the chapel afterwards while we planted a tree in a little area just by the front Chapel gates.

We scratch our heads at how to get publicity for our chapels, well, judging from the reactions of people who paused to look while passing by Stourbridge Chapel on Sunday afternoon, one effective way of getting publicity is to conduct your events right at the front approach to your chapel by the street. Overall the attendees and atmosphere of the day reflected the content of the blessings which were for inclusivity, intergenerational community, creativity, love and service and connection. We would like to thank everyone at Stourbridge Unitarian Chapel for their kindness and hospitality and for providing us with such a wonderful, inspirational yet relaxing Sunday afternoon. We look forward to future visits to Stourbridge and I will be there preaching on 12 August at 3pm. I will try my best to do justice to the chapel, the congregation and to the new tree.

#### Lesley Harris, Evesham

#### Interfaith Picnic, Holland House

"Sunday June 24th saw over 100 men, women and children from eight faith traditions enjoying a Multi-Faith picnic together at Holland House. Those gathered included Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Quaker, Unitarian, and Sikh faiths." From Holland House's website. Some of the Unitarians were from Oat Street Chapel in Evesham. This is Lesley Harris's report.

Christina, her sister Jane, Fleur and I very much enjoyed this year's Interfaith Picnic kindly hosted by Holland House for the Worcestershire Interfaith Forum. The gardens of Holland House provided a perfect back drop for this occasion. The weather was perfect, the food was wonderful and totally vegan.

It was lovely to see Unitarian Minister Winnie Gordon and other Unitarian representatives from both Kidderminster and Birmingham congregations. The care and hospitality of the Holland House staff ensured that everyone was looked after and felt at ease. Loving instrumental and vocal background music was provided.

Each of the faiths had a table. I "borrowed" our chalice and our little Transylvania visit plaque plus some leaflets for an impromptu Unitarian table. However I think that the prize for the faith tables went to the Muslim representatives who brought along a beautiful array of soft silky hijabs and kindly wrapped them round any willing female visitors (see next page).

The event gave both the opportunity for socialising with a variety of people and also of quiet contemplation of nature.

Christina, Jane and Fleur flew the Unitarian socialising flag while





Photo by Fleur Moyse

Photo by Lesley Harris

I spent some of the time recouping my energies by lying underneath one of the trees and just quietly taking in the leaves, the sun and the wind after a busy weekend. Overall the Interfaith Picnic formed a fitting Part 2 of a Perfect Day, following on from Part 1, which had consisted of a lovely sunny service at Oat Street Chapel by our MUA President Diane Rutter (see article above).

# Lesley Harris (from Cotswold Group Newsletter)

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# 'Season of Mists & Mellow Fruitfulness'

This is a beautiful time of year. The long heat of the Summer is over, and we can settle down and enjoy some warm, golden days before the Winter sets in. In our hemisphere at least, the harvest has been largely gathered in; although this doesn't mean what it

once did. For the last few days, the sounds of this traditional agricultural task have been drifting in through my open window, reconnecting me with the rhythms of the natural world. Even if it is now largely done by machines.



I think it is a shame that Western society has grown so far away from the cycle of the seasons, and the agricultural round. Even when I was a child, harvest still meant something, at least to a child brought up in the countryside. But now, ask anyone where their food comes from, and they are likely to reply: "from the supermarket." You can buy pretty much anything all the year round – strawberries in December, parsnips in June. We've got a recipe book at home called *The Cookery Year*, which is full of wonderful recipes to cook for each month of the year, using "seasonal ingredients". And at the beginning, there is a four-page table entitled *The Fruit and Vegetable Year*, which explains what you can get from which country at particular times of year. It makes fascinating reading.

I love the in-between seasons, when the weather is neither too hot nor too cold, when there is a reasonable chance of warm, sunny days, and still-light evenings, when it is a pleasure, rather than a penance, to walk abroad, either around the village, or in my beloved Salcey Forest.

I go up into the Forest as often as I can – it only takes five minutes to walk from my front door, to the gate which leads to the path to the Forest. I can be in the "Forest proper" in ten or fifteen minutes, which is such a blessing. The Forestry Commission has done a lot of work to ensure that the path is navigable all year round (when we first moved to the village, it used to be 'wellies only' except in the driest part of the Summer. Nowadays, I can walk in trainers for most of the year, and walking boots for the rest.

Working from home as I mainly do, I can choose my times of walking, whenever the weather seems propitious, or to clear my mind, or to soothe my spirit. I am looking forward very much to the next few weeks, as the leaves begin to turn, and the trees show just how colourful they can be when they really try. I am so very blessed to live in amongst it all.

# Sue Woolley (from Still I Am One blog)



#### **District Events**

#### **MUA Annual Lunch**

Guest Speaker: Rev. Daniel Costley

When: Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2018

Where: Kingswood Meeting House, Packhorse Lane B47 5DQ

**Time:** 11.00 for 11.30 am -3.00 pm (approx.)

Letters and booking forms for this have been sent to congregational secretaries.

MUA of Lay Preachers & Service Leaders Autumn Training Day

Putting the Worth into Worship

Course Leader: Rev. Ant Howe

When: Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> November 2018

Where: Kingswood Meeting House, Packhorse Lane B47 5DQ

**Time:** 9.30 for 10.00 am – 4.15 pm

Flyers for this event have been circulated.

Please send your booking forms for both events to Rev. Sue Woolley, District Minister, 5, Martins Road, Piddington, Northampton NN7 2DN

# **MUA Congregations: Times of Services**

Birmingham	Unitarian New Meeting Church	11.00 am			
Cheltenham &	C				
Gloucester	Bayshill Unitarian Church	11.00 am			
Evesham	Oat Street Chapel	11.00 am			
Kidderminster	New Meeting House	11.00 am			
Kingswood	Meeting House	11.00 am			
Shrewsbury	Unitarian Church	10.30 am			
Warwick	High Street Chapel	4.30 pm			
First Sunday of the	Month:				
Dudley	Old Meeting House	3.00 pm			
Northampton	Unitarian Meeting House	10.30 am			
Oldbury	at Dudley	3.00 pm			
Second Sunday of t	he Month:				
Coventry	Gt Meeting House Unitarian Chur	ch 11 am			
Cradley	Park Lane Unitarian Chapel	6.30 pm			
Stourbridge	Presbyterian (Unitarian) Chapel 3				
Third Sunday of the Month:					

# Fourth Sunday of the Month:

Dudley

Northampton

Oldbury

**Every Sunday:** 

Coventry	Gt Meeting House Unitarian Chu	rch 11 am
Stourbridge	Presbyterian (Unitarian) Chapel	11.00 am

Unitarian Meeting House

Old Meeting House

at Dudley

3.00 pm

10.30 am

3.00 pm

# **MUA Congregations: Contact Details**

Name	Contact	Details		
Birmingham		unitariannewmeeting@outlook.com		
Cheltenham	Alison	01242 254825		
&	Thursfield	ajthursfield@tiscali.co.uk		
Gloucester				
Coventry	Francesca	02476 605055		
	Rogers			
Cradley	Sheila	01384 838729		
	Powell			
Dudley	Barbara	01902 650168		
	Russell	barbara-russell		
		@blueyonder.co.uk		
Evesham	Lesley	01242 573927		
	Harris	agonoid@gmail.com		
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	James	elainejamesjames@gmail.com		
Kingswood	Mick	0121 628 1458		
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Northampton	Sue	01604 870746		
	Woolley	revsuewoolley@gmail.com		
Oldbury	Pamela	0121 422 0311		
	Rose			
Shrewsbury	Fiona	07487 531 913		
	Checkley	shrewsburyunitarians@gmail.com		
Stourbridge	David	01384 376478		
	Mearman	davidmearman@hotmail.com		
Warwick	Elaine	01926 611964		
	Nomura	emtnomura@aol.com		



The Winter 2018/19 issue will be published in January

Please may we have your contributions on local matters, & on the theme of "New Year, New Hope"

by Friday 4th January 2019

Thank you!