



Builders move in -



Right on time the builders, Valiant, moved in on 17th February to start the restoration work on our Meeting House. In the photo you can see the site office and preparations for the barriers around the working site. We hope to be back in the autumn in a beautiful building restored for at least the next hundred years.

We have reserved enough parking for people with a disability to access services and in practice there is space for a few more cars. Our secretary Riena

Contents –

- 1 – Builders Move In
- 2 – Working Party; Last Service; Trustees; Winter Plums
- 3 – Daniele’s Story; Claire’s Story
- 4 – Claire’s story cont.
- 5 – Claire’s story cont.; Services; Restoration Collection Tins; Land of No Today
- 6 – Book Group; Bury MH Party; Charity Recycling; Birthdays; Events; Contacts; Thought for the Month

Jackson has written to the Borough Council to request special permission to park in the Cromwell Street car park during the times of services, but has so far not received a reply. The standard parking fee (also on Sundays) is £3.10, so think of having some change or check if there is space (double parked) at the Meeting House.



Very quickly the gates to our churchyard were removed to allow access for lorries. They are now stored in the Meeting House for security and will be returned at the end of the project.

We do still have to raise some money to complete the restoration, so please publicise this link for donations -

<https://www.justgiving.com/unitarianipswich>

Working Party



Thank you to everyone who came to help us clear the Meeting House on the Saturday before the builders moved in. The photo above shows some of the 'workers' with a well-deserved cuppa and cake supplied by Sandra Hawes.

Last Service in the Meeting House until ...



On Sunday 16th February, John Stevens led our last service in the Meeting House until after the building work has finished. The theme of the service was 'Whatever Love Means'. Here he is pictured with his daughters Beatrix and Molly. Linda King and the Worship Group are organising the people to cover services throughout the year and welcome volunteers.

Trustees

The Meeting House Trustees are:

Ann Baeppler (Chair)

Riena Jackson (Secretary)

Andrew Gibbs (Treasurer)

Linda King

Paulette Reed

As we do not have a minister at present, if you have any concerns please feel free to contact one of the above!

The Trustees met on 11th February and one of the important areas of discussion was whether we should start the search for a new Minister. In view of all the upheaval during the six months of the building work, I hope you will support the decision we reached - which was to delay the start of any search until our Meeting House is free of scaffolding, rubble, etc and is restored to its former tranquil glory.

Ann Baeppler, Chair

Winter Plums

Two winter plum trees grow beside my door:
Throughout the cold months they had little pink
Flowers all over them as if they wore
Nightdresses, and their branches, black as ink
By sunset, looked as if a Japanese
Painter, while painting air, had painted these

Two winter plum trees. Summer now at last
Has warmed their leaves and all the blooms are
gone.

A year that I might not have had has passed.
Bare branches are my signal to go on,
But soon the brave flowers of the winter plums
Will flare again, and I must take what comes:

Two winter plum trees that will outlive me.
Thriving with colour even in the snow,
They'll snatch a triumph from adversity.
All right for them, but can the same be so
For someone who, seeing their buds remade
From nothing, will be less pleased than afraid?

Clive James - 1939 – 2019
(The Poetry Group's chosen poet for their first meeting of 2020.)

At our recent Membership Service, we welcomed Daniele Falcinelli and Claire Johnson as members. Each of them read the story of their journey to Unitarianism during the service. Here are their stories -

Daniele's story

What I am going to do it is to tell my "spiritual journey" in a nut-shell, from my childhood to now. From my childhood in Italy, mainly a Catholic country, to my experience in our congregation. I was born in a tiny village. I have never seen my parents particularly interested in religion, but since they have been traditional in their life style, so they have been in their religious behaviour. I was baptized, I had my first communion and later on I received confirmation but shortly after that I realised that my interest in Christianity was gone, as happened to many other young people of my own generation and I did not need any figure such as Jesus or the Virgin Mary to make sense of the world.

Much later on I started to practice Zen meditation. After some years I stopped it to take on Vipassana meditation. Both are rooted in Buddhist tradition and are a vital part of Buddhist practice. Finally in autumn 2015 I "took refuge" that means becoming formally Buddhist. After a while, paradoxically, I meditated less and less often and my interest in the teaching and practice slowly dropped. I am not able to explain why that happened and how. In the meanwhile I went more and more often to the Quakers and took part in "meeting for worship", then I started to come here to the Unitarians as you know.

I have found Unitarianism attractive for various reasons: the capacity to consider the Bible and Christianity through different points of view, the openness to other religions and practice, philosophies and so on, the flexibility about the service in terms of content and ideas.

Personally I find rites and symbols really important:

lighting the chalice, taking part in communion, singing together, and so on.

I like having chats with people of every kind, I enjoy jokes but also talking through controversial subjects (such as gender issues, politics, religion, ethics) above all with people having different or opposite opinions from mine. I have in mind a quote by the German philosopher Nietzsche that it is really inspiring in our time when many opinions are polarised and having genuine debates is so difficult: "The surest way to corrupt a youth is to instruct him to hold in higher esteem those who think alike than those who think differently."

As I said to a visitor to the meeting house "I am religiously confused" or if you may prefer, to say that I am religiously uncertain. It is not because I do not have enough data, information or experience about religion but because the subject is quite difficult and obscure. I do not have any religious faith nevertheless I feel really attracted by religion in itself, including the sense of community, rituals and so on.

Finally I would like to say thank you for welcoming me and making me feel a member of the congregation.

Daniele Falcinelli

Claire's story

Writing anything to a theme has always been fun but difficult for me; while I know this isn't meant to be the longest speech in the world, it does remind me of my university days, having to rush to get presentations done - well, not HAVING to rush, but rushing anyway - and hoping to stay on-topic enough.

And with this topic, belonging, it feels like an easy topic to get carried away with, get a bit too personal with. Belonging has always been a difficult experience to grasp for me; belonging implies fitting in, which I've never done; implies

similarity or inherent kinship on most fronts, which is very rare; and it implies a strength of affection and welcome that is even rarer.

Looking back, I'd never been encouraged to look to religion to try and find belonging. I was "raised Christian" in the same way that most people with non-religious parents are in this country, going to a Church of England school and getting disillusioned with the whole idea in their teens. And disillusioned I certainly was! As someone who's never really fit in to pretty much any social group, and was experiencing a lot of bullying at the time, it was easy for me to be a deeply unhappy and angry 15 year old agnostic; when you're consistently mistreated, just a little bit every day, it's incredibly difficult to swallow messages about how a grand all-creator actually loves you, especially when you know that the mistreatment is because of just how unusual you are compared to your peers. I had friends, but it was a case of outcasts banding together with other outcasts. Belonging, then, but a fragile kind.

As a teen, I was determined that God, and a lot of other things that people would say he represented, didn't exist - and yet, my attitude contradicted that. The idea of a grand all-creator who loves you is still appealing, after all, even if I didn't believe it personally. I both felt that it was silly to believe, and also that people who had faith were really quite admirable; that the doctrine was oppressive and harmful, but also that it could give people great peace and meaning. I could understand the pros without actually being invested. I was further put off Christianity when I was targeted by a pair of rather attractive Mormons, who managed to offend me when they claimed that it wasn't with my own efforts that I'd gotten through my previous trials - it was all God's doing, and shouldn't I be thankful for that? I severed contact with them when they insisted that I attend a sermon at their own church, but I'd still taken the time to talk with them, and try and hear what they had to say, and even prayed with

them once. I insisted that it was purely out of politeness, and that's about 90% true, but is that surely it?

Things started to improve for me after that, slowly but surely. While I was always strange and eccentric, it took until I was almost 19 before I could be diagnosed as having Aspergers Syndrome, or ASD, and while it's just a label at the end of the day, being diagnosed helped me step on the path to finding a sense of belonging in myself - later realising that I'm not a straight person added to this. I could, by the time I was in university, say that I was okay with myself as a person, while still being aware of that difference.

That path of self-belonging or acceptance included a lot of other things, like it does for most people - hobbies picked up and dropped, books read, terrible advice considered - and for a while, religion did come into it in stops and starts. Reading into Buddhism and realising it didn't suit my personality and values all that much, researching whether there were any local wiccan covens, that sort of thing - but nothing enough to make me actually commit to anything.

It's impossible to join a religious group without feeling like you could belong there, after all - a bit difficult to join together in ritual, meditation and worship if you think everyone around you desperately wants you to leave. But belonging first requires you to show yourself to others and expose who you are. That idea of a creator loving all their creations also relies on this concept, that it can see every inch of your heart, shadows included, and accept it for what it is. At the time, I was still trying to understand those shadows myself, let alone tackling those kinds of ideas; you need to trust, and know you won't be rejected.

What made me try again was going on holiday to Northumberland, standing near a cliff-edge and being buffeted on all sides by strong and chilling winds. The particular area we were staying in -

Claire's story cont.

- that particular piece of cliff-edge, even - had religious significance during the turning-point between Paganism and Christianity, and maybe it was just the weather being very dramatic then, but it was something a person could almost feel. When Lewis would talk about God being a part of nature, this is the moment I always think back to; in a way, a person always belongs to nature since they occupy the same physical space.

I think in that way, my interest sparked again, I started to worry a little about this concept of belonging. Would any church welcome someone like me? Most of my friends and family are atheists too; what would they think? But finding an inclusive space of worship like this really helped; it's easier to fit somewhere when the basic ideas are quite commonly agreed on. In fact, it's better than I could have thought - I'm actively being welcomed, any trust I've invested being reflected back.

Belonging is still a difficult concept for me, but breaking it down into its smaller pieces - trust, open-mindedness, compassion and welcome - makes it much easier, and I thank everyone today for extending such a welcome to me.

Claire Johnson

Services in March

1st Rev Cliff Reed (Minister Emeritus)
8th Ann Baeppler (Ipswich Unitarians)
15th Colchester Unitarians, Circle service.
22nd Stefan Freedman
29th Andrew Benedict
(East of England Faiths Agency)

Restoration Collection Tins

The tins will be emptied and contents counted by willing hands on the **8th March** after the service. We have another £121,000 to raise and whilst I'm sure that amount will not fit in to the tins which are in circulation, we can but try!

Land of No Today

Stefan Freedman held the launch of the short film, 'Land of No Today' on Saturday 8th February at the Quaker Meeting House which was attended by more people than expected, so he had to close applications for tickets. The event raised £310 for Suffolk Refugees, whose Lottery Funding recently ran out, so they will be grateful for this financial support.

The film was produced by Stefan with artistic support by Lois Cordelia who created the art work while the music and songs were written by Stefan with Adrian Lush on Saxophone. The film was first shown with no introduction so as to invite un-influenced feedback, which was a fresh way of receiving such cinematic work. The film used references to Bob Marley and the Ipswich Reggae Choir entertained us with his songs during the afternoon.

After a break for luscious vegan and vegetarian food, we gathered again to hear Stefan introduce the film and for a second viewing. Some people found the second viewing helpful – and one comment was that often we view films as 'only' a visual concept, whereas for this short film, the aural content, the music and words of the songs are important and during a second viewing we were able to concentrate better on them. One message of the film is the need to conserve our planet. Each of us took away our own interpretation. It will be taken to film festivals where we are sure it will be appreciated too.

During the afternoon, Lois created a painting of Bob Marley, which was offered as a silent auction. She raised £120, with half that going to Suffolk Refugees. It was fascinating to watch the creative process alongside listening to the music and singing (which we joined in and danced to). Many of us hoped to buy the painting, but only one person could have it. Her work is on www.loiscordelia.com

Book Group starting

After the service a couple of Sundays ago we discussed starting a Book Group at the Meeting House. Liz Constable and Tessa Forsdike have settled on Thursday 23rd April at 7.30 in the evening for our first meeting. That feels a while away but it will give us the chance to read the book and to let more people know about the idea. Maybe at that meeting we can all decide how we want to run the group, set a regular day and choose the next book?

The first book for us to discuss is *'The Faraway Nearby'* by Rebecca Solnit – available in paperback and possibly also from the library. Do join us for a relaxed and informal discussion. Tessa Forsdike

Bury Meeting House Party

Friday March 20th is the 309th anniversary of the founding of Bury Meeting House in 1711 and the Friends have organised a free entertainment.

Kick off [not literally, I hope] is at 6.30 pm. There will be free drinks – doubtless the ubiquitous prosecco and something non-alcoholic for the drivers and / or abstemious. Canapés will be thrown in [again not literally, I hope]. You will be entertained by the Arcadia Recorder Consort. I've heard them before and they are very good – a long way from the massed ranks of descant recorders playing Frère Jacques that I remember from primary school. I believe they are including music of the time: Queen Anne's pavane, or some such. I believe, too, they will surprise us with a TV theme tune.

Two new items will be for sale:

A monograph of the talk Peter Riddington gave in 2018 about the Meeting House.

A 2020 calendar of photos of the Meeting House.

There's a particularly fetching shot of the iron work in front of the upstairs windows (think Calendar Grilles).

In conclusion, this is the warmest of warm invitations to join us for a birthday celebration. I hope some of you will be able to come. Angela Cowling

Charity Recycling

During the restoration of our Meeting House there is nowhere to keep the things we save for charities, so please keep them until after the work is finished or hand them in person to –

Toiletries for the Homeless to Ann Baeppler

Used stamps to Linda King

Plastic Milk bottle tops to Tessa Forsdike

Thank you!

Birthdays in March

Happy birthday to Joel Waller on 7th and to Jenny Pile on 24th.

Events in March

17th – Unitarian Women's Group Meeting – 11am
Ely Cathedral Refectory

18th - IFCF / UoS Faith Lecture - Ed Kessler - "The Changing Landscape of Religion and Belief: Standing at the Crossroads"

20th - Bury Meeting House Party

21st - Saturday 21st March - EEFA - Sacred Music around the World with Stefan Freedman

24th - Worship Group meeting 2.30pm – Linda King

27th - Social Group Meal 7.30pm – at Ottoman Restaurant – sign-up sheet after services or contact Paulette. £20 for a shared Mezze starter and choice of main course.

Contacts Contributions PLEASE for the next newsletter to Tessa before the deadline of Wednesday 25th March to ipswichunitarian@gmail.com or post to 48 Crabbe Street, Ipswich IP4 5HS

To contact our Secretary, Riena Jackson, ring 01473 210064/email mjack76748@aol.com

Website – www.unitarianipswich.com

Thought for the month

One of our key ministries should be the practice of hospitality: "and we welcome the whole person: mind, body and soul. We do not ask anyone to leave any part of themselves at the door. We welcome people with their doubts and beliefs, with their imperfections, whomever they love, wherever they are on their spiritual journey."

Rev. Stephen Lingwood, Unitarian Minister