

Celebrating 325 Years of Dissent

In collaboration with the University of Suffolk, we are holding an event on Friday 17th May to celebrate (at least) 325 years of dissent as witnessed by congregations at our Meeting House. In the morning there will be conducted tours from 11am, led by Margaret Hancock, a registered tourist guide.

Then at 1pm we move to the Hold (the Suffolk records office – 131 Fore Street, Ipswich IP4 1LR) where all the Meeting House records will be on display securely. There will be two presentations – the first, starting at 1.30pm, is entitled *'We are now in the Tabernacle of Meeting: The Origins and Founders of the Ipswich Unitarian Meeting House'* and will be given by Minister Emeritus Cliff Reed. The second will follow and is entitled *'A Comet in the System: Joseph Priestley and the Emergence of Rational Dissent in the Eighteenth Century'* which will be presented by Dr Elizabeth Kingston Harrison. All are welcome and we invite you to book for the free talks at -

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/celebrating-325-years-of-dissent-the-unitarian-meeting-house-in-ipswich-tickets-881423670927?aff=oddtcreator>

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Easter Bonnet Tradition



We also had chocolate eggs!

Anniversary Lunch



We shared a lunch after the service on 28th April – there was plenty for everyone!

General Assembly Annual Meeting

This year I was allowed to be your delegate at the GA of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches. Even more so than my attendance in previous years, the three days fully packed with services, plenary business sessions, workshops and a keynote lecture went by in a flash and left me with the positive feeling that Unitarianism is still very much alive in the UK. There is something very special about sitting next to a representative from Kendal or Herefordshire at a dining table or in a conference room and realising how much you have in common with them.

I made pages of notes during all the sessions I attended and am happy to answer any questions you may have, but for this report I have concentrated on the plenary business sessions while Liz, whose first visit was also funded by the Trustees, will write about some of the workshops.

I would like to thank the Trustees for letting me go to the GA and wholeheartedly recommend the experience to next year's delegate.

There were five plenary sessions organised during the three days of the GA to deal with business matters. They were filled with lively discussions. First the motions which had been submitted by different congregations and were sent to us in advance to let our own Meeting House members vote, were all proposed, supported or opposed and voted on. You may remember that the first motion asked for an AI Response Task Group to encourage greater awareness of AI. This motion was passed. So was the second motion asking the government for a National Oversight Mechanism in England and Wales, a new independent public body responsible for collating, analysing and following-up on recommendations arising from inquests, inquiries, official reviews and investigations into state-related deaths. The third motion about the situation in Israel and

Gaza caused a great deal of discussion, as it had been amended at the very last minute. The amended motion had removed the call for the British government to halt support for arms to Israel and was passed. Nevertheless, I sensed that quite a few members regretted the alterations and were unhappy with the speedy way in which the revised motion had been introduced. Motion four, asking for an unlimited number of motions to be allowed at the GA, was voted down but may be revisited next year.

As in most Annual Meetings the financial report raised issues about how healthy our finances are. The outgoing Treasurer called for caution due to a deficit, while others in Essex Hall were more optimistic. It was announced by the new Treasurer that there will be a large amount of money made available in the coming years that congregations can apply for should they come up with a worthwhile project.

The GA is in the process of becoming a CIO, a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, in order to prevent trustees being held liable for financial disasters. Congregations are also advised to become CIOs but some congregations have found the procedure complicated and needlessly time-consuming and have instead opted for an insurance to cover Trustee liability. Dot Hewerdine as well as John and Celia Midgley were made Honorary Members for their impressive list of lifelong contributions to the movement and the equally impressive Geoff Levermore was appointed as our new President for the coming year. His career in building and engineering has led him to play a leading role internationally in mitigation of climate change. All being well, he will come to Ipswich to lead our 325th Anniversary Service on 27th April next year. There is very little time to get to know other participants well during the GA conference. However, despite this, during the plenary sessions I felt especially close to the other Unitarians from all corners of the UK who are, just like us, struggling

with falling numbers and yet striving to make their unique Unitarian voice heard *“not in order to preserve our heritage but to feed the hungry”* in the words of Liz Slade, our excellent Chief Officer.

By Riena Jackson



The photo shows Liz Slade with retiring president Vince McCully.

As a newcomer to the Annual GA conference, I was struck by the exuberant and generous energy shared among the participants. A warmth and vibrancy that gave the sense of attending a huge extended chosen family get-together across the generations as we shared ideas, worshiped together, and enjoyed meals together. And then, although the conference didn't announce a unifying theme for the three days, very quickly, Unitarianism pasts, presents and futures emerged as a common thread. The concurrent small sessions and workshops, the keynote talk, and worship and meditations generated a double focus: a look back to rediscover Unitarian pasts, and an urgent attention to discussing how we can live, work and worship in the present to build strong futures for Unitarianism. I'm so very grateful to

the Trustees for funding my “newcomer” registration for the conference and came away with my mind abuzz with fresh ideas, and my horizons expanded.

Asking where we have come from, Lizzie Kingston Harrison looked back at the ways the “radical roots” of Unitarianism in Joseph Priestley's life's work inform our future directions. A session was also held to mark the 250th anniversary of the founding of the Essex Street Chapel by Theophilus Lindsey. And then, taking us into discussions of Unitarianism's paths forward, sessions were scheduled on “Thriving Congregations,” “Youth: supporting local provisions,” and “Our Social Action Future,” among others.

The future-oriented focus also shaped the thrust of keynote speaker, Roman Krznaric, through his discussion of growing a “legacy mindset” attentive to the ways we grow daily practices that generate a legacy that benefits those outside our kin in future generations. That is, what he defines as being a “good ancestor.” The three days generated a surge of collective and collaborative voices discussing paths forward for Unitarianism, an energy culminating in Rev. Ant Howe's rousing sermon urging us to *“love the Unitarians yet-to-be and do all we can to make their path into our faith as accessible as possible.”*

With 28 sessions or workshops scheduled during the 3 days, I'll focus on a small sample of the future-oriented discussions I attended at the conference.

How are Unitarian Youth Initiatives supporting future generations? In keeping with the conference's focus on future directions for Unitarianism in the UK, this question linked together several of the small sessions. One of the first talks at the conference was given by Professor Bernadka Dubicka, Professor of Child and Adult Psychiatry at Hull and York Medical School and the University of York, and Editor in Chief of the *Journal of Child and Adolescent Mental Health*. Organised

General Assembly Meeting – cont.

by the *Social Justice Network*, the talk and discussion not only provided an invaluable overview of the challenges and struggles facing young people in the post-Covid years. Dubicka's research also offered realistic ways in which Unitarian Youth Initiatives can play a vital role in supporting young people's mental health and well-being.

First, Dubicka shared with us a few telling statistics about child and adolescent mental health today in the UK: between 2019 and 2021, referrals to CAMHS (*Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services*) doubled; in a survey looking at the number of child psychiatrists per 100,000 children in 28 countries, the UK comes in 21st with 4.5 compared to Finland with 36; over the last few years, the UK has witnessed the greatest increase in child poverty among all the OECD countries, reaching 29% in 2022.

However, in this dishearteningly bleak environment for young people, Dubicka's research provides compelling arguments for the effectiveness of early intervention through a whole-system approach. Her research demonstrates that short-term interventions by non-specialists that encourage young people to engage in valued activities can massively improve their mental health. Through underscoring that such 'behavioural activation' can be delivered by non-specialists, Dubicka points to the significant role that Unitarian youth initiatives can play in supporting the mental health of our future generations. And since the top two causes of anxiety and depression among young people are eco-distress and climate change according to Dubicka, Unitarians ongoing work for climate justice also contributes to buttress Unitarian support for young people. Such efforts play a vital role, Dubicka emphasized, since untreated childhood or adolescent depression leads to 43% of adult depression, whereas when young people benefit from short-term interventions, adult depression is reduced to 16%.

Rev. Erika Hewitt, Minister of Worship Arts for the Unitarian Universalist Association, offered two inspiring and engaging workshops on "Worship Beyond 'The Word.'" Going "beyond 'the word'" for Hewitt means orienting our services to move towards meaning-making embodied or participatory worship practices specifically designed to overcome the social isolation, numbness and fragmentation that our cultures can leave us experiencing. She quoted the words of Franciscan Richard Rohr (Founder of *The Center for Action and Contemplation*) who writes, "If your religion is not teaching you how to recognize, hold and transform your suffering, it is a junk religion." Of course, we already draw on participatory worship practices, and yet Hewitt's workshop pointed us to strategies to enhance those practices. For example, she proposed asking contributing members not just to propose readings or hymns, but instead to invite them to talk about their reasons for selecting a specific text: an invitation to be known by others in an accepting faith community.

Finally, the workshop on International Collaboration led by Rev Alicia Roxanne Forde, UUA International Office Director and Rev. Zsolt Eleke, School Chaplain in Transylvania, shared the forward-looking projects undertaken by the newly formed *Leadership and Design Team for International Unitarian Universalist Collaboration* (www.uua.org/intl-uu-collaboration/home).

The team includes representatives from N. India, Kenya, the Philippines, Brazil, S. Africa, Burundi (where LGBTQIA people experience intense oppression) the UK and the US. We learned about the outcome of an international convening of U/U leaders held in Prague, in October 2023. With the goal of gaining a clear sense of the shifting landscape in international collaborations, organizers invited 50 members to participate and respond to a survey asking them to prioritize their sense of what they most needed in leaders. As the Czech presenters recounted, rather than solid theological grounding, it was skills in building congregations, in pastoral care, and in connecting

with local communities that emerged as the top priority for future leaders.

From the results of the Prague Leadership Convening; from Erika Hewitt's workshop on worship practices that push back against social isolation; and from Bernadka Dubicka's research on the enormously positive impact of non-specialist short interventions on young people suffering anxiety and depression, it is resoundingly clear that the progressive, inclusive spiritual and social-justice principles at the core of Unitarianism have a vital role to play now and in future generations in opening community, love and connectedness to people who yearn for an I-Thou relationship of mutuality and recognition.
by Liz Constable

European Heritage Story

As part of a grant application – for which we were sadly not successful, a story about our meeting house and its links to Europe has been published – see the link -

<https://www.europeanheritagedays.com/Story/Unitarian-Meeting-House-Ipswich-Suffolk-UK>

Poetry Group

On 30th June at 2 o'clock the poetry group will look at poems by Robert Graves. If you would like to join, please speak to Ann or Riena -

(annbaeppler@gmail.com or rienajackson@icloud.com)

Book Group

We will be meeting via Zoom on Thursday 16th May to discuss 'Babel' by R F Kuang which is the British Book Awards Fiction Winner and Book of the Year. Contact Tessa to request the link –

tessa@tessajordan.co.uk

Summer Opening

This month we re-open for the summer visitors on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from 12 noon to 16.00. Volunteers to open up and chat to visitors are needed – please contact Paulette -

etty.reed@gmail.com

Walpole Old Chapel

A non-conformist meeting house was created from this domestic farm building in the middle of the 17th century, during a time of religious repression. The congregation, which was originally formed in 1649, leased the farmhouse in 1689 and converted it shortly afterwards into an independent chapel. A simple space, created by local people to meet their own worship needs. The chapel has one of the finest meeting house interiors in England, and vividly conveys the atmospheric setting of 17th and 18th century dissenting worship. The historic chapel is one of the most threatened types of building in England. Many have been damaged by unsympathetic conversion or the removal of fittings. This building has been part of the village of Walpole for over 400 years and was a place of continuous worship for nearly 300 years.

The chapel formally closed in 1970, and eventually came into the care of the Historic Chapels Trust in 1995. It is cared for on a day-to-day basis by the Friends of Walpole Old Chapel. Today this beautiful Grade II* listed building continues to play an important role in the religious, social, and cultural life of the community. (www.nationalchurchestrust.org).

On Thursday 6th June at 6.30pm Dr Joel Holcomb from the University of East Anglia is giving a talk on 'Walpole & the Puritan Revolution'. I am reliably informed that Dr Holcomb is an expert on religious practice, culture & politics in Britain during the British Civil Wars.

The chapel puts on a series of events throughout the year, so if you want a wander up the A12 towards Halesworth you may be very surprised to find what the chapel has to offer - especially in the structure and layout of the interior. See their website for a list of the events.

(www.walpoleoldchapel.org)

Services in May

5th - Linda King, Ipswich Unitarians

12th - Rev Matthew Smith, Minister Framlingham & Bury St Edmunds. Unitarians

19th - Rev Cliff Reed, Minister Emeritus, Ipswich.

Service followed by Whit Sunday Communion

26th - Paulette Reed, Ipswich Unitarians.

Birthdays in May

We wish everyone celebrating in May a very happy birthday – to Daniele Falcinelli on 2nd; Sally Washington on 12th; Horst Gödicke on 15th; Simon King on 16th; Gerrie Hudson on 28th and Paula Chapman on 31st.

Organ Recital link

We now have a link to a recording of Robert Waller's celebratory organ concert -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJ1sPqZVduY>

Help the Cork Unitarian Church



On Monday 29 January 2024, fire caused extensive damage to the interior of our historic Cork Unitarian Church building. The fire destroyed furnishings, musical instruments, and audio-visual equipment used to broadcast our services. We lost office and computing equipment. We have also lost things that are especially meaningful: decorations, artwork – the entire sanctuary area. Our ability to fund ourselves has been impacted and we have found ourselves needing a great deal of community help and support. We are working tirelessly trying to create a space that will allow us to continue on with our many works in Cork City.

Donate to <https://www.gofundme.com/f/cork-unitarian-church-relocation-fund> to continue the work of the congregation as they consider their future home.

Bird Boxes on our trees



We are encouraging wildlife into our graveyard – St Nicholas Court arranged for bird boxes to be affixed to our trees – and Paulette has already seen a blue tit investigating one of them ...

A Children's Trail – Just Arrived!

The Orwell Decorative & Fine Arts Society was approached some time ago to see if they would be willing to create a "Children's Trail" which would be available to younger visitors to the Meeting House. They laboured long and hard and the finished product – both informative and fun – is superb. We owe all those involved a huge thank you and hope to make its availability widely known with a formal launch – this is being arranged for a date in June when we hope to have some schoolchildren to test out the trail.

Ann Baeppler

Bags for Lighthouse

We have delivered eleven more full bags of toiletries and necessities to Lighthouse for women who have experienced domestic violence and have left their homes with nothing. We have supported this charity for four years and are now focussing on raising funds for this year's charity – Brave Futures. Thanks for all your support.

Changing a Lightbulb ...

We all know the old joke about how many people does it take to change a lightbulb ... and the answer at the Meeting House is 'at least two'. We have recently replaced all the lightbulbs. To save energy and 'go green' the new ones are LEDs which will give a brighter light and use less electricity. Robert Waller and David Forsdike worked together to save us money.

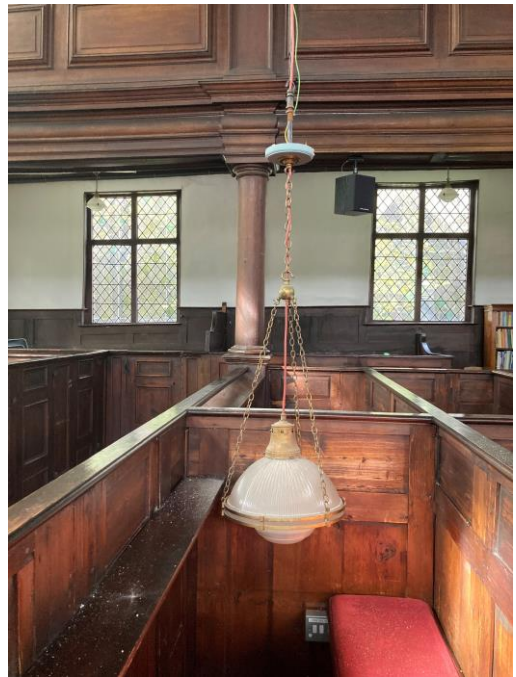
We only need a ladder to reach the side lights and replace the bulbs. The central ceiling lights are another challenge!



First David had to climb into the loft ...



He then had to detach the light's fixing and wind the lightshade down to an awaiting Tessa beneath ... In the process amounts of plaster and parts of the ceiling also fell on her head ...!



Two lightbulbs could then be replaced, but to reach the other side, David had to go out through the roof and into a hatch on the other side ...



Luckily it wasn't raining!

In the process of working on the lightshades, one did crack – safely repaired by David (who has the reputation of being able to mend anything).



Thanks go to David and Robert (and Tessa).

Bookstall

We have now finished collecting books and have donated those left to the National Trust Book Shop at Sutton Hoo.

Thank you to all who have supported the stall over many years.

As we are no longer operating and if the urge to support a book charity remains, why not support the Reverse Book Club run by Book Aid International?

The Reverse Book Club allows book lovers to support people around the world who don't have access to books. As it costs around £2 to select, pack and ship each book, a monthly donation of £6 helps send three books every month. If you can't make a regular gift but would like to make a donation please look at their website www.bookaid.org or contact them at Book Aid International, 39-41 Coldharbour Lane, London SE5 9NR

Linda King

Brave Futures Fundraiser – cake!

I am hosting tea and cake, (or coffee), on Friday 28th June from 10.30 - 4pm in aid of our chosen charity Brave Futures. This is local charity covering Suffolk and Norfolk and offers specialist and tailored support for children who have experienced sexual abuse. Brave Futures aim to help these children and young people overcome the trauma and confusion to help them understand what has happened to them and give them the tools to overcome their difficulties and teach them to identify their strengths and potential. So please come and support this local charity. Cake donations will be gratefully received. My address is 62 Phoenix Road IP4 4ND.

Looking forward to seeing you all and let's hope for fine weather.

Paula Chapman



Thanks to Maggie Hodges for this photo of the Spring blossom – and to everyone who helped with the gardening sessions when we planted bulbs and sorted weeds – the graveyard is becoming more beautiful each season.

Thought for the month

He who allows his day to pass by without practising generosity and enjoying life's pleasure is like a blacksmith's bellows -- he breathes but does not live.

- Sanskrit Proverb

Disclaimer

We welcome contributions from all members and friends of our congregation. Views expressed in the articles are those of the individual and not necessarily those of our congregation or of our Unitarian community.

Contacts

Contributions PLEASE for the next newsletter to Tessa Forsdike before the deadline of Thursday 30th May ideally by email to tessa@tessajordan.co.uk
To contact our Secretary, ring 01473 728498 (or email tessa@tessajordan.co.uk) or ring our Treasurer Robert Waller on 01473 610723.