



BURY UNITARIAN CHURCH: ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2013:

In 2013, we had much to lift our spirits, so it is worth repeating the year's achievements now. By June, we had acquired a new external notice-board, thanks to a bequest from the late Irene Rogers and a goodly amount of co-operation between several groups of people; the new board is bright and clear, easy to read (even from a distance), and allows us to advertise all our forthcoming events. Also in June, our extension to the sound-system was installed, courtesy of grants from The G. A.'s Millennium Fund, NELUM, and the church trustees; it is now possible to amplify sound throughout the building, as well as in the worship-area. On October 11th, we participated in Bury's Light Night event for the first time; the immediate area around our building was transformed into an Enchanted Garden, and we welcomed over a hundred people; it was a relaxed, pleasant evening, and one which raised the profile of our church in the wider Bury community. During the Bazaar, in November, Howard Maden carried out a thorough Fire Risk Assessment; his subsequent report indicated that we were doing well---but we must bear in mind that improvements are needed, too. Work continued on a new Memorial Garden, at Holebottom, where ashes can be buried, and this will soon be in use.

After some uncertainty about the ministry at Bury, Rev. Beryl Allerton accepted a three-year contract, from May 1st, to serve as our permanent minister, on a three-quarter time basis---although I would estimate that Beryl's actual contribution is far in excess of this. Services are always thoroughly prepared and thought-provokingly delivered, yet there is time, too, for cheerfulness and humour. Beryl's commitment to pastoral work remains as strong as ever, and, this year, when several members have been affected by on-going illness, she has been greatly in demand. Much pastoral work must remain discreet, but I can assure you that Beryl accepts its demands and does not stint her efforts. Moreover, she has proved herself, in many spheres, and can turn her hand to jobs such as painting, hoovering and flower-arranging. On behalf of this congregation, I express appreciation and gratitude to Beryl for everything she does---for us, and with us.

Nor must we overlook the contribution of Rev. John Allerton, who is always on hand to help wherever needed. During this year, John has conducted services, trained the choir, played the piano at services, read lessons, and generally supported Beryl, in a variety of ways. Thank you, John---we are very grateful. Thanks are due, also, to all those who have conducted services for us, in Beryl's absence; some have been church-members, and some have come to us from other congregations; a variety of preachers offers a different perspective which is to be valued.

This year has brought us a wealth of special services; the first, on January 6th, allowed us to celebrate Alice Whewell's 99th Birthday, John Allerton's 40 years of ministry at Bury, and the success of our Junior Church and its leaders. On January 27th, the group who had followed the "Journeying Home and Away" seminars led an inspirational service, conveying to us not just the sense of the physical place that is home, but also its unique, personal, spiritual associations. We celebrated Mothering Sunday, in March, with readings by several mothers, and with posies distributed by the children, as well as pieces of the Simnel cake they had made. Marian Price conducted a Spring Service, which was very well-received, and Marian also contributed to the November "4 Unitarians 4 Unitarian Values" Service, as did Betty Kenyon, Janet Thatcher and Lois Williams, when the

themes of Friendship, Kindness, Wonder and Forgiveness were thoughtfully considered. On June 9th, we held a Reunion Service, to which many past and present members of the congregation were invited; more than 100 people filled the church, on the day, and there was much opportunity for reminiscence and nostalgia; a group photograph was taken, lunch was served, films of church-life were shown, and a highly-enjoyable occasion resulted. A very different service, centred on the theme of Bullying, took place in August, when members were invited to speak impromptu; so moving was the response, and so great the post-service comment, that an evening of discussion was held, in order to pursue the subject. October 6th saw the church as beautifully-decorated as ever for our Harvest; at this service, attended by The Mayor and her Consort, our cheque for more than £1200 was presented to Liz Greenwood, of The North West Air Ambulance. On Remembrance Sunday, our service commemorated The Battle of The Atlantic, and this and the reading of our roll of honour reminded us of lives sacrificed for our future freedom. A short service, on Remembrance Day itself, was made more poignant by the strains of "The Last Post" echoing from The Fusiliers' ceremony. December brought the usual plethora of Christmas services, including a visit from Rev. Bill Darlison, the G.A. President, on December 1st, as well as a Nativity Service (when, despite hitches, the play was "all right on the night"), a Service of Readings and Carols, and, immediately before Christmas, a Quiet Service---acknowledgement that Christmas is not necessarily a season of universal rejoicing. Christmas Day, although not especially well-attended by members, was a delight; the Healey family brought their latest addition---6-week old Andrew David---and Beryl's choice of a David Blanchard reading ("Long journey---part of the present") was inspirational---and well-worth repeating for its moral.

Our talented organists continue to delight us with their wonderful music; we now have two who play regularly, once a month each, as well as four more who can be called upon as required; we are indeed fortunate in all our organists, with their differing choices of music and styles of playing. We encourage those who wish to remain in church during the playing of the postlude, in acknowledgement that this should be an integral part of the service. The choir have worked hard, this year, to supply music for special services and to lead the congregation in new hymns. They deserve their mints!

In addition to the seminars and discussions already mentioned, two more took place: a small group explored the content of The Seven Deadly Sins; at the end of their deliberations, they published their modern "sins", alongside Mahatma Gandhi's list, and invited us to consider their choices and suggest our own. The G. A. Annual Meetings debated, for the second year running, the difficult subject of Assisted Dying; we devoted a full evening to discussion, and Beryl, plus Betty Kenyon and Anne Mills (the two delegates), all spoke in the debate at Nottingham, so our views were well-represented. Although the meeting voted in favour of Assisted Dying, this remains a contentious, personal issue, and we need to be aware of what is said on the subject, on our behalf.

2013 saw many visitors to the church; this is valuable, as it brings new people into the church, welcomes them and encourages them to return. Anne Mills ensures that such occasions receive reports, and we have regular articles published in "The Bury Times", "The Inquirer", "The Unitarian" and the Women's "League Letter". We hosted the Manchester District Women's League AGM, in February, and NELUM's AGM, in March, when G.A. President, Lis Dyson-Jones, conducted the service. Our Reunion Service brought in many visitors; we exchanged services with Bury's United Reformed Church, as usual, in July. We were visited by the congregations of Unity Chapel, Bolton, in June, and Rochdale Unitarian Church, in November; both have expressed a wish to return.

Our social life continues to flourish, also. The Women's League began by cycling across America, with John Smith, and ended with the scenic splendours of New Zealand---a varied year. The Men's Fellowship regrouped and now meets, most months, in the morning, to learn about such matters as "The Manchester Guardian", Bomb Disposal, and The East Lancashire Railway; lunch at The Trackside follows---a popular move. The Luncheon Club chefs impress with their culinary feats, and a new system (asking attendees to sign up, each month) seems to be encouraging new members. The Book Club has read a good selection of literature, including Hilary Mantel's "Bring up the Bodies"---the third of the trilogy is eagerly awaited. The Efforts Committee organised several concerts, including one by our organist, Sam Ali, and our reputation for staging excellent brass band concerts is growing. The Charity Committee raised funds for The North West Air Ambulance by holding a Quiz, and a Coffee Morning, both of which were successful, although events later in the year were less so. The Bazaar was, again, a social and financial success, although illness amongst the helpers, on the day, proved problematic. Saturday coffee thrives, with a wonderful variety of home-made cakes, and a Congregational Lunch, in August, and the Christmas Lunch, continued our tradition of high-quality eating. Our Traidcraft initiative has been commended by Bury's Fair Trade Group, and we received a certificate from Just Trading Scotland for our sales of rice; a tasting-session, during Fair Trade Fortnight, was possible because of donations from The Co-operative.

We welcomed two new members, on Easter Sunday: Jean Brookhouse and Susan Mitchell; both have already proved their worth. Sadly, however, we lost three valued, longstanding members: Barbara Ashworth, a former Chairman of Trustees and intensely involved in the fabric of this church; June Seddon, who will long be remembered for her hard work and cheerful smile; and Beryl Oliver, whose quiet generosity was of benefit to us more often than we knew. We are the poorer for the passing of these ladies, and we are also diminished by the absence of those members who, through illness, have been unable to join us during 2013. We all prayed for Freddy, when meningitis struck, and we rejoiced, equally, to know that he was recovering, slowly but surely.

The life of this church continues, and, as we begin to celebrate its 40th year, we record our thanks to all who serve our congregation, in whatever capacity. Our calendar, photographs, and website are excellent; our lettings are efficiently stewarded; our Junior Church runs well, and Safeguarding measures are in place. We are fortunate to be able to call upon a wide range of talent, all of which is freely and generously given. My hope for our congregation is that we will have the courage to raise our profile, in 2014; that we will feel able to make the effort to bring new people into our midst; it will not be easy, but, with determination, we can succeed. Let us be positive and cheerful, as we move forward!

Anne Mills: Chairman of the Congregation and Church Secretary: March, 2014.