

Report for 2014

This report was presented at the congregational AGM on 1st March 2015

ANNUAL REPORT: 2014: BURY UNITARIAN CHURCH

Two significant anniversaries dominated 2014 for us: one of international importance, and one much more personal and closer to home. In 1974, the three Unitarian congregations of Bank Street Bury, Chesham, and Heywood, which had joined together to form the new Bury Unitarian Church, moved into their new premises, to embark upon a challenging journey, led by their new Minister, Rev. John Allerton. Before the start of 2014, plans had been put in hand to celebrate the church's 40th Anniversary--- and what a thoroughly successful year it was!

On March 9th, we celebrated the Anniversary of the Dedication of the new building: John again conducted the service, the church was full, and the weather was beautiful; John confided that he had set himself the goal, when he first came to Bury, of maintaining a Unitarian congregation there until the year 2000---an ambition not only achieved but splendidly surpassed. An excellent service was followed by lunch and the showing of Roy Turner's film, "To Rise Like The Phoenix". By the time the service was held, 40 seasonal bulbs, one for each year of the church's life, had been planted in tubs underneath the external notice-board, and the flowers shone in the sunlight, as they did throughout the year, enhancing all our events and festivities. On June 1st, in the presence of the Mayor and Mayoress (Councillor Sharon Briggs and Shirley Rabbett), Rev. Beryl Allerton conducted a Special 40th Anniversary Service; again, we had brilliant weather, a full church, and an excellent service; we remembered members who had belonged to the church during its 40 years and observed a minute's silence in their memory; we considered the importance of working together and endorsing the ministry of the church; and we smiled at the mention of the 1974 church's new "hippie" Minister, with his long hair and John Lennon-type glasses! The service was followed by a buffet lunch, a toast to the church and a special birthday cake---and a good time was had by all! On October 12th, we held our Celebratory Lunch, at Park Farm; thanks to superb organisation by Anne Mills, the occasion passed off splendidly; by the greatest of coincidences, 40 people were present! During the year, Anne also produced a digest, in each month's calendar, of what was happening in 1974; it was an interesting exercise to examine old calendars and copies of Church Council Minutes and Annual Reports, and a full account now exists on our website so that everybody may access it.

On January 6th, our oldest member, Mrs. Alice Whewell, celebrated her 100th Birthday; the previous day, she attended the service, with family-members, and was presented with cards and gifts galore; Alice's health was drunk, and we all enjoyed a piece of birthday cake and coffee with a tot of Bailey's. Alice's poem, "Church Anniversary", was printed in the February Calendar.

1914 is remembered also for the outbreak of the First World War and the conflict which followed. We remembered the actual date and time (11p.m. on August 4th) with a moving service, during which all the lights were extinguished at 11 o'clock, to leave only a candle of peace burning, whilst we observed an amazingly profound and concentrated silence. Our Peace Service, in October, reminded us of the need for all of us to work continuously towards peace; no effort is too small. The Remembrance Sunday and Remembrance Day services followed, when we concentrated on the sacrifices of individuals, and the actual act of remembering, respectively. This year, Lawrence

Killian had offered to play “The Last Post” at our Cenotaph; the church was decorated with felt poppies—one for each member of our three constituent congregations killed in action during both World Wars; the wreath was laid by Vera Stephenson, in memory of her grandfather, Private Alfred Smith, who was killed in action, on September 6th, 1916; and the red candle of remembrance was finally replaced by the white candle of peace. Beryl has undertaken a tremendous amount of research, throughout the year, into the details of those members of our congregations whose names appear on our War Memorial—work that has been both time-consuming and harrowing; her findings will be published in book-form. A retiring collection, after the Remembrance Sunday service, raised £155.00, which was donated to the Royal British Legion’s “Every Man Remembered” Project, and we were able to commemorate each member of our war-dead, individually, as well as being provided with certificates to record the contribution from the church as a whole.

None of the above would have been possible without the efforts of our Minister, Beryl; we owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to her, for her inspiration, her leadership, her strong sense of purpose, her energy and enthusiasm—in short, for all that she does for us—and for all that she enables us to do together. As we know, Beryl can turn her hand to everything: this year, she has helped with church-flowers, decorated the upstairs kitchen, done more than her fair share of catering, and exhausted herself in the process, and our thanks and appreciation are due to her; we have had 22 special services during 2014; in terms of preparation and delivery, this represents a huge outlay of time and thought. Thank you, Beryl!

Thanks are due to John, as well; the fact that he preached at both the original Dedication of the new church and its 40th Anniversary pays tribute to his enduring commitment to our congregation. John still conducts services for us, in addition to playing the piano and rehearsing the choir; when not engaged in such demanding pursuits, he is often to be found erecting banners on the tower, or changing light-bulbs (where his mountaineering-skills stand him in good stead), and he is not averse to clearing the odd loft-space or cupboard or two, or moving furniture; we are lucky to be able to call upon so many, varied talents.

August brought Beryl and John’s 30th Wedding Anniversary; typically of them, they invited us to share the occasion, as they hosted a delicious supper, followed by a splendid concert by Lawrence Killian and friends. Photographs taken of them, at the concert, show them sitting relaxed and contented—long may this continue. It was my pleasure to present Beryl and John with gifts and a card from the congregation, to celebrate their day—and to surprise them by doing so—no easy task to organise, when they are involved to such an extent in church-activities!

We are grateful, as ever, to our visiting preachers, for their contribution to our worship, and never more so than when our own members participate; in May, a Service of Readings and Meanings, conducted by Betty Kenyon, Anne Mills, Marian Price and Lois Williams, investigated what was important to each of us in our lives and emphasised the necessity of maintaining our integrity in all we did. Other special services during the year included the Prize-Giving, when Val Chamberlain presented the Junior Church prizes, and June Clarke was presented with a bouquet of flowers to thank her for her work with the young people. On Mothering Sunday, we thought about aspects of motherhood, both personal and global; the children presented posies of daffodils to the congregation, and Simnel cake was served with the coffee. In June, we celebrated the centenary of Laurie Lee’s birth, with appropriate readings by and about him. The Deputy Mayor and Mayoress attended our Harvest Festival, as did representatives of Bleakholt Animal Sanctuary, who were presented with a cheque from

the Charity Committee for more than £1200; we had also collected a mountain of textiles to donate to Bleakholt, and, after the service, a small group from the church was given a guided tour of the animal sanctuary, which was declared impressive.

Christmas 2014 brought a wealth of excellent services; Marion Baker, the G.A. President, conducted the first one in December; the following Sunday involved the Nativity Play (with lunch afterwards); Christmas Day issued yet more "Happy Christmas" greetings to various groups; and the last Sunday of the year looked back on our achievements to date. Special mention must be made of an innovation, this year: Carols by Candlelight, on the Sunday before Christmas, which was sheer delight; the church was full, we welcomed many visitors, the readings and music were impressive, and the atmosphere was amazing; this is an event well worth repeating! Naturally, the choir had worked hard to extend its repertoire for the Christmas services; they make a valuable contribution at all times, which is appreciated. Our organists continue to produce superb music and do us proud with their expertise and variety of styles and musical tastes; we are fortunate to be able to call upon such talent.

At the beginning of May, we dedicated our new Memorial Garden at Holebottom; the area around the Celtic cross has been flagged, and a plaque now informs the public that this is our Garden of Remembrance, where we can bury the ashes of our loved ones and give thanks for their lives. It was fitting that the first name on the plaque should be that of Barbara Ashworth, who worked tirelessly for our congregation and whose major efforts transformed the ground at Holebottom into pleasant meadowland. Joe, Stuart, Richard and Becky attended the ceremony, but, sadly, this was the last Sunday on which Joe was present at church; he had decided to go and live with Richard, in Chesterfield; Joe was thanked for all that he had done for Bury Unitarian Church through the years and wished all the best in his new life.

2014 brought us two new members, in George and Di Scaife; they were welcomed into the church on the last Sunday in December, having already made themselves quite at home. We lost two valuable members, however, in Colin Smith and Miriam Murphy; both had worked long and hard for the benefit of the church and will be sorely missed. Marjorie Atkinson and Lillian Sharples, both of whom had a long-standing association with the church, also died during the year; they, too, are remembered with appreciation.

At our special events, we have been pleased to welcome many visitors---from other Unitarian churches, from the local community, and from different parts of the country. Our July exchange with Bury's United Reformed Church continues; we invited Bury Art Group to stage an exhibition, in September; we participated again in Bury Light Night, when we attracted more than 100 visitors; and we hosted a Day Gathering, in September, organised by the Unitarian Renewal Group; earlier in the year, we were visited by a group from the Oldham, Rochdale and Tameside Organists' Association, to which some of our organists belong; and we hosted the Manchester District Woman's League AGM, service and lunch. All our visitors were impressed equally by the facilities on offer and by the warmth of the welcome they received.

Away from home, we gave a good account of ourselves, too; our church was represented at the NELUM Dinner, at Rawtenstall; at Rochdale's 40th Anniversary Celebrations; at Dunham Road Altrincham's Bi-Centenary Celebrations; at Halliwell Road Bolton's Special Service of Memories (just before its closure, sadly); and at the Induction Service, at Rochdale, of Rev. Shammy Webster---one of the best I have attended, and full of thoughtfulness and meaning. Five of us represented the church at the G.A. AGM's, at Whittlebury Hall, Northamptonshire, and reported back; however, I am not convinced that other churches give as much time and consideration to the business of the meetings

as we do, or delve as deeply, and I was sometimes dismayed by the decisions reached by the AGM delegates.

As in previous years, all our regular groups have been busy; we all worked together for the Bazaar, in November, the stalls looked bright and attractive, and the event was a great success, although we could have benefitted from a few more customers. The Men's Fellowship have been entertained by talks on Bomb Disposal; Organ Music; and the History of Ainsworth Chapel by Steve Horrocks; this last was repeated at the Women's League, when a chance question led on to a most interesting discussion about the controversial demolition of Brunswick Methodist Chapel, whose graveyard now lies beneath the Tesco store and car-park! This year, the Women's League's charity has been "Singing for the Brain", towards which a Musical Quiz and Supper were organised, in October. The Luncheon Club continues to enjoy cordon bleu food at rock-bottom prices, and has ventured into wine-tasting on one or two occasions, this year. The Book Club still meets regularly, although finding books which suit the majority of tastes is becoming increasingly difficult; however, I think most of us enjoyed Bo Caldwell's "The Distant Land of my Father", which compensated for the poorer offerings of the year. The Social and Fund-Raising Committee organised a popular Book Auction; a Concert given by one of our organists, Chris Price, which showed off our organ and piano, and Chris's keyboard; and an excellent Christmas Concert by HD Brass, who are fast becoming firm friends. The Charity Committee held its annual Quiz, as well as a Coffee-Morning and a Strawberry Tea, but the planned Dancing Display had to be cancelled, at the last minute; nevertheless, a goodly sum was raised for Bleakholt.

Two seminars were held in October, to consider what we might do to encourage Growth; as a result of our deliberations, we now have a Facebook page, which works in conjunction with our website, to spread the word about what we do, and, thanks to a generous donation, a splendid new television set graces the lounge and keeps us glued to our seats, as we watch ourselves and others in re-runs of recent events. Other suggestions will take much longer to implement, but we all agreed that, whatever we do, we must do to the best of our ability---and we are capable of being very good indeed! A series of seminars, "Heart to Heart", began towards the end of the year and will continue into the New Year.

What does 2015 hold for us? We need to preserve the status quo---to keep busy and active, and to strive for the best, at all times. The subject of Growth must remain uppermost in our minds, as we move forward, but we are well-equipped for the future, because we are able to call on so many talents and abilities from members of our congregation. Thanks are due to everyone who contributes to the life of our church; all of it is valued, appreciated---and needed! To all the church-officers and members of Church Council and its sub-committees, I extend my personal thanks for all their efforts. During my trawl through the 1974 calendars, I read through the following year's, too, and was struck by how flat they seemed. In 2015, let us not succumb to anti-climax but, instead, remain flexible, build on our strengths, and aim for perfection.

Anne Mills,

Chairman of the Congregation and Church Secretary:

March 1st, 2015.