



Great Meeting
Unitarian Chapel
45 East Bond Street
Leicester LE1 4SX

www.leicesterunitarians.co.uk



Great Meeting Tercentenary

September and October
Newsletter 2008



1708-2008

300 years of freedom, reason and tolerance

Great Meeting Chapel Newsletter for September and October 2



SERVICES IN SEPTEMBER

Sunday	7th	11am	The Minister
Sunday	14th	11am	The Minister
Sunday	21st	3pm	The Minister
Sunday	28th	11am	The Minister Harvest Festival

SERVICES IN OCTOBER

Saturday	4th	3pm	TERCENTENARY SERVICE
Sunday	5th	11am	The Minister
Sunday	12th	11am	Rev. Dr. R. Waller
Sunday	19th	3pm	The Minister
Sunday	26th	11am	The Minister

Items intended for inclusion in the Winter issue of the Newsletter should be in the minister's hands no later than Sunday 12th October, if possible. Thank you.

DIARY FOR SEPTEMBER

Saturday 6th	2.30pm EMU Quarterly Meeting at Hinckley.
Sunday 7th	3pm Loughborough Unitarians meet.
Saturday 13th	11am to 5pm Heritage Open Day and Leicester Historic Churches, Bike Ride and Walk
Saturday 13th	7.30pm Concert by the Blackett-Howe Singers at Chapel
Sunday 14th	12.00 noon to 6.00pm Secular Society Open Day
Saturday 27th	2pm Setting up for harvest.

DIARY FOR OCTOBER

Saturday 4th	3pm TERCENTENARY SERVICE with The Lord Mayor of Leicester.
Sunday 5th	3pm Loughborough Unitarians meet.
Saturday 11th	2pm EMU Annual General Meeting at Derby.

Dates and times of the Vestry and Making Things Happen Group meetings will be announced from the pulpit.

FROM THE MINISTER



Dear Friends,

The April of 2009 will (d.v.) mark the beginning of the 20th year of my ministry here in Leicester. In that time our corner of the city has been a scene of significant building and renovation.

When we arrived in Leicester in 1989 the construction of the original Shires was underway, and we were just getting used to being able to walk from Chapel down Bond Street to the High Street when the top end of the former disappeared under concrete for ever. The hoardings came down and the new shopping centre was revealed.

It didn't seem long before the developers moved in opposite us to remove the foundations of the old Bond Street Maternity Hospital, and after a few months, Saxon House, the new tax office appeared.

Then St Margaret's Baths disappeared followed swiftly by the NCP car-park, and the new Shires project, the Highcross Centre, was announced. Its glittering facades are just now becoming familiar to us.

And of course we ourselves have not remained inert. In 1989 when I arrived the transformation of our graveyard into a garden with access to Butt Close Lane and St Peter's Lane was already in progress. Then we developed the Schoolrooms into our very successful offices, now let to Brett and Randall, and likewise our Garden Room and new facilities were completed in 2001. How these changes have transformed our Chapel life.

300 years ago the builders were also very busy here. They were clearing an orchard plot and erecting a great brick building, using a technique called Flemish Bond in the brickwork to produce an extra-sturdy and long-lasting construction, and a roof design which would allow the architect to create an interior space of enormous volume without the use of supporting pillars.

The completed building with its three-sided balcony was a triumph: a great cube of light airy space into which the Independent and Presbyterian congregations flocked, occupying the box-pews which filled almost every inch of floor space. They came to worship and to listen to their erudite and

challenging preachers who addressed them from the high pulpit on the back wall. What they heard from the Presbyterian ministers was another work of building and renovation, as an eighteenth-century Trinitarian theology gradually came to grips with the revolutionary ideas of Dissent and transformed itself into nineteenth-century, and then twentieth- and twenty-first-century Unitarianism...

Our corner of the city has indeed been the scene of historic building and renovation over the centuries, in a physical, intellectual and spiritual sense.

Now as we celebrate the Tercentenary of our Chapel, let us always be aware of those worthy men and women, those ladies and gentlemen and their families from a bygone era, whose elegant and enduring grave-markers still adorn our Garden, who bequeathed to us a place of worship substantial and significant; and to those preachers whose heirs we are, whose hard-fought-for freedoms of thought and worship we so readily enjoy today. The names of some of them are known to us, the faces of a few have been preserved. From our historical perspective let us take a moment or two to recall them all: the members of the many congregations who over 300 years have filled the Chapel with the sound of their singing and their prayers, to which it is our privilege to join our own.

*We come unto our founders' God,
Their rock is our salvation;
The Eternal Arms their dear abode
We make our habitation.
We bring thee, Lord, the praise they brought,
We seek thee as thy saints have sought
In every generation.*

With every good wish to all our members and friends,

ARTHUR.

WELFORD ROAD CEMETERY WALK

On Sunday 22nd June after the morning service and lunch at Great Meeting, a large group of about 15 members of the congregation travelled across town to Welford Road Cemetery. We assembled in the Visitors' Centre for an introductory talk by Gwyn Jones, our leader for the visit.

In very blustery weather which, however, remained dry and quite sunny, at about 2pm the party set off on a pilgrimage around the final resting places of some of the eminent Unitarians of the city.

Amongst the graves we visited were those of members of the Paget, Clephan, Fielding-Johnson, Wykes and Biggs families. Gwyn provided us with a running commentary at each place of interest, and David Wykes was also able to contribute some interesting details about his own antecedents.

The afternoon concluded with a return to the Visitors' Centre and refreshments kindly organised by Morag Jones and the staff.

Welford road represents a wealth of local interest and history and would repay many visits. Our group dispersed at around 4pm, with gratitude to Morag and Gwyn who had made the afternoon so informative and enjoyable.

SIMON HEADLEY ORGAN RECITAL

On the evening of Saturday 26th July last, the second of our Tercentenary Musical Events took place in Chapel with the Simon Headley Organ Recital which began at 7.30pm.

Approximately 22 members and friends gathered to listen to a varied programme of music which included works from Vaughan Williams, William Walton, Handel, and Mendelssohn.

As the minister noted in his concluding remarks, it was wonderful to have a musician of Simon's calibre able to give expression to the full range of our excellent three-manual Walker's capabilities.

The recital ended with "the Toccata", as Simon described Widor's masterpiece, which sent us on our way with a stirring finale.

Our grateful thanks for a wonderful concert to Simon Headley, and to the members of the congregation who provided refreshments at the close of the recital.

At 3pm on Saturday 29th November the chapel is very pleased to welcome Dr Jane Mackay as our Tercentenary Speaker. Jane will be speaking about Elizabeth Gaskell and her novel 'Mary Barton'. There will be an opportunity to ask questions of our speaker and refreshments provided after the talk.

About Dr Jane Mackay

"There is no such thing as a great writer who does not address the spiritual struggle of life...."

There is no doubt that Jane is both by birth and name a Scot - she was born in Ayrshire and lived in Scotland for forty years. Her mother's great love of D.H. Lawrence and Robert Burns was an important trigger for her fascination with great literature, which took hold in early childhood.



Jane took her degree in History and English at Glasgow University, and followed this with a first in Literature from the University of Stirling, before embarking on her teaching career in Colleges and Universities in Scotland and England. She has taught literature, creative writing and media studies at various universities, helped to pioneer adult education courses for Leicester University and brought degree courses in social history to high category prisoners.

Alongside her teaching career, Jane brought up her family, worked for a number of years editing the novels of prize-winning authors and carried out her PhD research into the short fiction of D.H. Lawrence. Since the year 2000, she has been a free-lance lecturer in world literature in England and the USA, being appointed one of the Sir Evelyn Wrench speakers to the English Speaking Union of the USA in 2001.

Currently she speaks regularly to capacity audiences throughout the UK, having reduced her overseas tours to once a year. The transfer of Jane's recorded talks onto CD is a response to demand from her audiences and a testament to her penetrating insight and compelling, accessible style.

Gwyn Jones for the following...

Mrs T Fielding Johnson writing on the early years of the 1800's

'The life of the middle classes, confined as it then was, within limits which to our modern habits would seem insufferably narrow was, however then enlivened by some local event which brought a welcome relief into its dull monotony. ----- as when on the evening of Christmas Day 1809, Handel's oratorio of "The Messiah" was performed for the benefit of the same charity (the needs of the Infirmary) at the Great Meeting Chapel in Bond Street for which one shilling admission was charged, "or half-a-crown for the eastern aisle," --- now difficult to locate, but probably meaning the front row of pews.

Abstract from "Glimpses of Ancient Leicester" by Mrs T. Fielding Johnson. 2nd Edition with Supplementary Notes.

LOCAL ARTIST REMEMBERED AT GREAT MEETING



The Tercentenary year of the Chapel has proved to be an opportune time to remember a particularly significant figure from the history of Great Meeting. Two works by Edith Gittins are at present on display in the Garden Room. Our grateful thanks to Gwyn Jones for his work in cleaning and replacing the glass in the larger landscape, and to Freda and Alec Betts for the loan of the second example of Gittin's delightful work..

Edith Gittins

1845-1910

Artist and Social Reformer



Born in a comfortable Georgian house in Churchgate, just a few minutes walk from the Great Meeting, which would shape her life, Edith was one of the three daughters and two sons of Edward Gittins, a corn/seed and flour dealer. Unlike her two sisters Edith spent the whole of her life in Leicester.

In her 'Records of Nineteenth Century Leicester', Isabel Ellis described Edith as: *'a born leader' who all her life 'organised and led her fellows, expending a wealth of emotion on the causes she took up, and upholding them with remarkable tenacity. Gifted with much personal charm, she was an unusual combination of artist and social reformer...'*

Like her sister Catherine (1840-1930), Edith benefited from an education by

'Miss Drayton, a lady of Unitarian connexions, whose pupils became during the next half century leading women of Leicester' and was to become a landscape artist and teacher of drawing.

Throughout her life, her love of beauty was to be a great passion and with A.H.Paget she was to be a co-founder of the Leicester branch of the Kyrle Society, formed to bring *'beauty in every form to humble streets and homes.'* Later the society was to merge with the Leicester Civic Society. Edith was also to be of great influence in the Society of Leicester Artists and several of her watercolours are held at the New Walk Gallery.

As an active member of the Great Meeting, she served as a teacher in the Sunday School for more than forty years and on one night a week ran a *women's friendly group 'where she arranged a service by women, for women, of music, prayers, readings and address'*. She was also active on the Chapel Vestry and the Domestic Mission Committee.

Whilst her sister Catherine was working in Liverpool as a governess and later Birmingham as an art mistress, Edith like her sister, felt very strongly the claims of women to political equality. In 1886, she was a founding member of Leicester's branch of the Women's Liberal Association when it was first started in the home of Charlotte Ellis.

When Catherine herself returned to Leicester in 1900 to live with her mother and sister at 6 Salisbury Road, she too was swiftly drawn into the campaigning, serving as Secretary of the local branch of the National Council of Women until 1916. Amongst various campaigns concerning women's welfare, she was to be instrumental in initiating the Bond Street Maternity Hospital.

Both women were to work together in the cause of women's suffrage, as active members of the Leicester and Leicestershire Women's Suffrage Society. In February 1907, Edith travelled to London with Margaret MacDonald, the wife of Leicester's MP and others to join a demonstration organised to mark the opening of the Houses of Parliament. 'The Joint Women's Franchise Demonstration' as it was termed, attracted women's suffrage societies from all over the country and every walk of life.

LOCAL ARTIST REMEMBERED AT GREAT MEETING



The spectacle of 3000 women - many of them highly respectable and far from the images projected by the popular press - toiling through the mud from Hyde Park to Exeter Hall, impressed many. The 'Mud March', though modest by later standards, was to set the future pattern for ordered, large scale processions accompanied by banners and the colours of constituent societies.

Never one to be impressed by the militant suffragettes, Edith told the Women's Labour League in April 1907 that the actions of the Women's Social and Political Union had *'put the clock back'*. Now she felt that women were connected in the press with 'feeble violence and hysteria'. Nonetheless she emphasised the poor status of women in society: *'Their voices were not listened to. They were practically slaves in a free land and had to obey its laws...'*

When in June 1908, she attended the biggest parade yet organised by the non-militant suffragist societies in London, she wrote enthusiastically in 'The Leicester Pioneer' of the ten thousand women who marched:

'Brains, character, indispensable service these women give, but they are unrepresented in Parliament; they are voteless, governed and taxed without their consent...In its place ...floats the Leicester banner of purple and crimson, between those of Leeds and Liverpool. We pass between two living walls of interested, curious, 'chaffing' cheering humanity- 'the superior sex''

Edith for one felt great optimism for the future:

'It is this thought, this hope, this confidence that we are nearing the goal at last, after so many weary years of struggle and contention, that makes today's demonstration different from those preceding it...'

Edith's own attitude to the need for patient campaigning is well illustrated by her short story which appeared in several Leicester papers at the time:

"'No!' said the paving -stone.

'Please!' pleaded the fungus roots.

'I can't be disturbed' said the paving-stone.

'Sorry!' said the fungus roots.

'Be quiet' said the paving-stone.

'But we're alive!' said the fungus roots

'What's that?' growled the paving-stone.

'We must grow, make way please' cried the fungus roots

'Nonsense' said the paving-stone.

'What can you do? - weak soft things like you! Here I am at the top and here I stay. It is an excellent arrangement. Be content and don't push. You make me very uncomfortable' said the paving-stone.

'We are in the great plan of things as well as you, and we must push.' said the fungus. And it is on record that they moved the paving-stone.'"

Sadly, Edith's confidence was to be misplaced. Several years of increasing bitterness and violence lay ahead before women finally secured the vote. Edith would not live to see the victory.

At her death in 1910, Edith left a considerable fortune to be distributed amongst her nephews and nieces. Under the terms of her will, she asked for her body to be cremated and left one painting from her collection, by herself or another artist, to the Mayor of Leicester for display in Leicester Art Gallery.

To the Great Meeting House vestry, she left £200 as well as the same amount to the Leicester Domestic Mission which was to be invested and used 'in giving sick and convalescent aid to... or training my former Sunday School Girls'

Also, she left £500 to the Treasurer of the Borough of Leicester for the erection of a public drinking fountain, to be called 'Ethelfloeda's Fountain'. The work, she specified, was to be entrusted to B.J.Fletcher and Crosland McClure of the Municipal Art School, if they were willing, and was to be placed at the junction of the High St. and Silver St. It was not to be until 1922 that the Edith Gittins Memorial Drinking fountain was finally erected and as the site in the High St. was now so heavily congested, an alternative

LOCAL ARTIST REMEMBERED AT GREAT MEETING

location was selected in Victoria Park.

The fountain was surmounted by a bronze statuette, executed by B.J.Fletcher, of Ethelfloeda, eldest daughter of Alfred the Great, renowned as a militant Christian. After the statuette was stolen in 1978, the fountain was relocated to Dolphin Square near the Market Place and the statuette was replaced by a replica. After further acts of vandalism, the statuette and upper part of the fountain were eventually installed in the entrance hall of the City Rooms and now rest in the courtyard of the Guildhall.

It is sad that there is no better memorial in Leicester to the life of a woman who contributed so much to her home town...

Jess Jenkins

*Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland Record Office
First published in 'The Dustsheet' - the Record Office newsletter - Spring 2007
Reproduced here with her generous permission.*

TERCENTENARY CHAPEL BADGES

As many will have seen, Chapel has produced a commemorative lapel badge to mark our 300th birthday. It is now on sale at the modest price of £1 each from the table in the Garden Room, our grateful thanks to Tony Fletcher for arranging for the production of badges to our own design.

And please note that an initial issue of two COMMEMORATIVE CARDS suitable for use as Christmas Cards or Notelets will soon be on sale, featuring our beautiful stained-glass windows, and an early sketch of the chapel made over a hundred years ago. Thanks again to Tony for the photograph of "Faith, Hope and Charity".



AN INVITATION TO GREAT MEETING CONGREGATION AND FRIENDS FROM LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY

On **Sunday 14th September** we are invited by the **Leicester Secular Society** to a **Heritage Open Day at Secular Hall**, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB. There will be a full programme of events from **10.00 am to 6.00 pm** of guided tours, talks, video shows and live music followed by a talk on **'Unitarianism'** by **Sir Peter Soulsby**, discussion and refreshments.

BIRTH CONGRATULATIONS

Warmest congratulations are extended to MORAG and GWYN JONES on the birth of their great-granddaughter CHLOE, a little sister to BILLY, born on the 30th July 2008 to proud parents SHEREEN and ANDY.

BAPTISMAL CONGRATULATIONS

On Sunday 24th August we were delighted to welcome a large congregation of members and friends who attended the baptism of JACK SHEPHERD COCKERILL, fifth grandchild of Sir Peter and Lady Soulsby. It was delightful to have Mum and Dad, Cassandra and Thomas, and their other children Robert and Florence, with us on this happy occasion when some sixteen youngsters occupied the pews with their parents, family friends and members of the congregation, almost filling the Chapel.



As we go to press, we also anticipate a second baptism on 31st August of ELIZABETH ELLA CADOUX, first daughter of Alexandra and Arlo. We look forward to welcoming their family and friends to our Sunday service, and what we are sure will be another thoroughly enjoyable occasion.

BIRTHDAY CONGRATULATIONS

Special Greetings to 'Birthday Buddies' Alec Betts and Jennifer Stewart. On September 20th Alec will celebrate his 93rd Birthday and Jenny her 18th!

Pictured below is Alec with his friend Trevor on a 'Sun' tandem in 1937 and Jenny on her 1st Birthday. Warmest Congratulations to them both and Many Happy Returns.



Jenny with her sister Kate

DIANE ROMANO-WOODWARD

Pictured here in her work for the Red Cross, 1st June 2008 with BBC 'Top Gear' presenter James May.



It seems that each of the 3 Top Gear presenters were given 1000 to buy an Italian car and get it ready for the Auto Italia Concourse at Stanford Hall. The other cars were gleaming Maseratis and Lamborghinis, all with engines polished and painted...

They also had to race them at Rockingham racetrack, so the cars were a bit worse for wear by the time they got there. Jeremy Clarkson's had a "go faster" stripe which I'm sure was made from electrical tape...!

The Duty Officer persuades James May to have his photo taken with us, so hopefully it will also go into the national Red Cross magazine...

Di is currently in Italy at Lake Garda, working as a holiday representative. Her husband John, who will join her shortly, reports that she is enjoying herself and the hot weather! They expect to return home late September.

The group plans to meet in the Garden Room on Wednesday mornings from October.

What is a Baby Café?



The Baby Café Charitable Trust is a small organisation which began its life as a charity in July 2005.

We co-ordinate a network of branded drop-in centres which support breastfeeding mothers, because we believe that every breastfeeding mum deserves free, top quality help and support.

A Baby Café drop-in is a fully funded service, run by paid facilitators and freely accessible to all mothers needing support with breastfeeding.

A Baby Café drop-in centre is generally open once a week and set out with coffee tables, and play areas for accompanying toddlers. All pregnant or breastfeeding mums are welcome to drop in at any time during opening hours. No appointment is necessary and partners, supporters and health professionals are also welcome.

MAKING THINGS HAPPEN...

SIMPLY CINDERELLA, THE MUSICAL !

Tickets have been provisionally booked at **CURVE**, Leicester's new theatre for Friday 16th January 2009 at 7.30pm. Tickets Adult £23 and £8 Children.

Sign up sheet in the Garden Room, by **30th September**

G M TREASURER and SECRETARY

The Minister and Vestry would like to record their gratitude to both Ruth Archer and to Phil Archer for their invaluable contributions to Chapel during their time as officers. Ruth as our Secretary diligently kept us up to date on all correspondence and reports and was a great help to both the minister and Vestry. Phil's contribution to Great Meeting's life was so monumental that it is difficult to accurately evaluate it. As Chairman and later Treasurer he took hold of our finances and established order and regularity within our accounting. In everything he was thorough, painstaking and utterly reliable. Giving freely of his extensive experience and ability, he was completely generous of his time and energy. As we say, it is not easy to quantify his contribution, but perhaps suffice to say, we all owe him an immense debt of gratitude. We hope that their retirement "to the back-benches" will provide them with a well-earned rest!

MINISTERIAL TRAINING

All good wishes to Patrick Timperley, who is beginning his training for the ministry at Unitarian College Manchester this autumn.

HARVEST FESTIVAL

This year Harvest Festival will be held on Sunday 28th September at 11am. A Sale of Produce will follow the service.

This year our nominated charity (which will benefit from monies raised at the Sale) will be the Disasters Emergency Committee.

Setting up will take place at Chapel from 2pm on Saturday 27th September. All contributions of produce or of donations towards our charity for 2008 will be gratefully accepted on any Sunday during the month beforehand.

AND FINALLY...

"Nightingales, Florence and Her Family" – by Gillian Gill

As the title suggests, the subject of this biography is the Nightingale family, although daughter Florence inevitably receives the dominant coverage. The book deals with the way her background, education and religious faith formulated the future of Florence Nightingale's life.

In the book's very first page the author asserts that the roots of both of Florence's parents "were by tradition Unitarian or Rationalist Christian" and that this Unitarian heritage was to shape the lives of male and female descendants." They were both part of a rising, influential middle class.

At this time in the nineteenth century most Victorians thought that by training a girl's intellect "you make her unmarriageable." So Unitarians at this time were almost unique in valuing the importance of a broad liberal education for their daughters. Even so, it was even more unusual for mathematics to be an important part of this education. In fact, Florence received a thorough mathematical grounding and she was an excellent mathematician.

The Nightingale family were well connected and their home hosted a constant stream of prominent visitors from the fields of politics, science and religion.

The story of Florence Nightingale's nursing exploits in the Crimean War is of course well known, but history has perhaps romanticised her. This book showed that her successes were due to a number of factors. These included the practical support of the influential friends and contacts she had developed back in England to whom she pleaded in a constant flow of letters from the Crimea. In addition, her mathematical ability to effectively interpret statistics, such as death rates, enabled her to powerfully back up the recommendations she made in her reports to her influential friends.

The use of these abilities coupled with her personal determination, a deep religious faith and very good organisational skills made her an excellent nursing and hospital manager and so was able to put into effect the positive changes of which we are all now aware.

This book is very well researched and will appeal to all those who are interested in the history of this period. It also has many references to Unitarians and Unitarianism and is a really good read.

**By Alan & Cathy Bailey
August 2008**

DIRECTORY



MINISTER:

Rev Dr Arthur Stewart,

11 Herrick Close, Sileby, Loughborough, Leics, LE12 7RL.

Tel: 01509 812236 Mobile: 07803895828

E-mail: arfstew@btinternet.com

PRESIDENT:

Dr David Wykes F.R.Hist.S,

4 Quickthorns, Blackthorns, Oadby, Leicester, LE2 4EE.

Tel: 0116 2710784

E-mail: directory@dwlib.co.uk

CHAIRMAN:

Sir Peter Soulsby MP,

288 Evington Road, Leicester, LE2 1HN.

Tel: 0116 2217418 Mobile: 0771 571 4820

E-mail: soulsbyp@parliament.uk

TREASURER:

Dr David Wykes F.R.Hist.S.

4 Quickthorns, Blackthorns, Oadby, Leicester, LE2 4EE.

Tel: 0116 2710784

E-mail: directory@dwlib.co.uk

ASSISTANT TREASURER:

Lady Alison Soulsby

288 Evington Road, Leicester, LE2 1HN.

Tel: 0116 2217418 Mobile: 0771 571 4820

Email: soulsbya@parliament.uk

NEWSLETTER COMPILER:

Mrs Annie Stewart

11 Herrick Close, Sileby, Loughborough, Leics. LE12 7RL.

Tel. 01509 812236 Mobile:0773772381

Email: anniestewart@btinternet.com

ACTING SECRETARY:

The Minister

Rev Dr Arthur Stewart,

11 Herrick Close, Sileby, Loughborough, Leics, LE12 7RL.

Tel: 01509 812236 Mobile: 07803895828

E-mail: arfstew@btinternet.com

FLOWER SECRETARY:

Mrs Morag Jones

10 Scraftoft Lane, Leicester LE5 1HU.

Tel: 0116 2760400

ORGANISTS:

Mr Mark Balding

458 Narborough Road, Leicester, LE3 2FT.

Tel: 0116 2892203

Mr Qyan Arnachellum,

223 Glenfield Road, Western Park, Leicester, LE3 6DL

Tel: 0116 2858502 Mobile: 07881953348

CARETAKER:

Mr Stephen Lynch

Mobile: 07811970859

CHAPEL ADDRESS:

Great Meeting Unitarian Chapel, 45 East Bond Street, Leicester LE1 4SW.

For Directions see our website: www.leicesterunitarians.co.uk