



Great Meeting Chapel Leicester

Newsletter - Autumn/ Winter 2021



300 years of Freedom, Reason and Tolerance

SERVICES

Led by Minister unless otherwise stated

SUNDAYS IN OCTOBER

3rd	11am	Vestry
10th	11am	Harvest Festival via Zoom —Simon Hall
17th	11am	Led in Chapel by Simon Hall
24th	11am	
31st	11am	

SUNDAYS IN NOVEMBER

7th	11am	
14th	11am	Remembrance Day service
	12 am	Chapel consultation meeting followed by shared lunch
21st	11am	
28th	11am	

SUNDAYS IN DECEMBER

5th	11am	
12th	11am	
19th	3.00 pm	Carol Service followed by Xmas tea
26th	11am	Boxing Day Service

SUNDAYS IN JANUARY

2nd	11am	
9th	11am	
19th	11am	
23th	11 am	Burns Lunch
30th	11 am	

The photo on the front cover is of graffiti discovered by Tony on the front of the pew directly behind the desk in the entrance to Chapel. Visitors taking tours enjoy speculating on the story behind the image. What does it conjure up for you?

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **5th October 7.00 pm.** David Wykes. Talk to the Victorian Society on the subject of *Great Meeting Chapel in the 19th Century*
- **11th November 2.00 pm.** Conservator's talk on *Memorial Cleaning in the Chapel*. Reservation only, please pre-book with Chairman Mike.

FROM THE MINISTER

Dear Friends

At the beginning of the pandemic when we were told to stay at home except for exercise, like millions of others I adopted a pastime to help keep myself occupied. With me it was Lino cutting. I walked the dog for exercise, wrote my homilies for chapel, kept in touch by phone, read, and gouged bits out of my fingers with the cutting tools.

In 2019 I had started attending art classes in the evening. These were curtailed by covid, but I remembered enough about Lino cutting and printing to carry on by myself.

The objective first of all was to make my own Christmas cards for 2020, then occasional birthday cards and for anniversaries. I can't draw, so I used designs from anywhere I could, and transferred them to lino blocks. The clumsiness of my cutting rendered the original unrecognisable, avoiding worries about copyright.

Printing linocuts is another haphazard process, further obscuring its origins, but amazingly resulting in spontaneous and original images. The imperfections of printing were what made the cards interesting. The imperfections were far more

effective than neat and tidy drawings would have been. When you ink the lino and press the card onto it, you never know what you are going to see when you lift the card up. And it was the combination of these two factors, the imperfections and the spontaneity of every card, which fascinated me. Even with the Christmas cards when I mass-produced between 30 and 40 of them, each one was unique.

In my family where most of our birthdays and anniversaries fall in this part of the year, and now that the covid restrictions seem to have lifted a little, I am scraping around for card ideas between being much busier again with chapel concerns. Rituals and familiarity make life comfortable; individuality and spontaneity are what go to make it wonderful. I don't like to know what I'm going to read about in a novel, or how the plot is going to unfold in a film. I like not knowing what is going to be revealed when I lift the card off the inky block.

I am hoping that now as we engage more fully with life once again that we are all feeling ready to renew the adventure. Chapel will be there to be part of everyone's experience. Thanks to the marvelous efforts of our Chairman Mike and our officers, the roof repairs will soon be complete and the restoration of the chapel ceiling done. I trust that Great Meeting will return to be its familiar source of quietness and strength for us all, not without its characteristic individuality and surprises.

Meanwhile, has anyone got any suggestions for Christmas card designs...?

With best wishes to all members and friends,

Arthur

RENOVATION UPDATE

The first phase of the renovation is now complete and the roof space has been cleaned out, treated for woodworm and re-insulated. A major revision of the top roof area with a roof cap covering the whole central well will keep the roof water-tight for decades to come. Instead of passing through the roof space via shoots, rainwater is now discharged onto the outer roof directly.

In the process of clearing out the leaking fibre glass roof well, one of the major oak beams from 1708 was finally fully exposed and was found to have suffered significant wet rot. This is of a severity to justify plating with bolted galvanised steel which will be installed from below via the massive birdcage



scaffold which you will have seen in the Chapel. A section of the ceiling has already been removed and the affected beam exposed from below. We have been able to study the structure of the roof in some more detail – it is, in the words of our architect John Eaton RIBA, ‘a remarkable example of early 18th century vernacular carpentry’. Indeed so, and the technical achievement of creating a large hexagonal ceiling structure without internal support such as pillars is notable. After plating, re-plastering and decoration, attention will turn to the outside where the gutters will be replaced with aluminium and the ground drainage system updated. Finally, the windows will be repaired where necessary, the cornice repaired and the external elements will be decorated. With a fair wind, we will be back in Chapel for the Christmas Carol service. The extra works have left us with a £6000 deficit on the roof fund so donations are still most welcome. We are applying also to grant giving bodies for a top-up of funding and remain optimistic that the project will be completed.

Mike Druequer

TEA IN THE GARDEN

This year's tea in the garden (TIG) event broke the mould by being held in September, rather than the traditional date of August Bank Holiday Saturday. The date of September 11th was chosen to coincide with the national Heritage Open weekend/ Ride'n' Stride event in an effort to maximize attendance from the public, sections of whom are still nervous about socializing due to fears of contracting Covid.

All the familiar elements of the annual TIG were retained and, as always, the event benefitted from the generosity of many members of the congregation who donated cakes and tombola prizes and the hard work of others who helped with the running of stalls and/or with setting up and clearing away duties. The rain held off and a good time was had by visitors and helpers alike. The photos below give a flavor of the day.





Visitors enjoy refreshments in the garden



Singer Sammy Dean in the new gazebo



Diane with novelty apron



Mike takes visitors on a tour of the renovated wall, Butts Close

Footfall for this year's event was considerably up on the TIG held in 2019 (the 2020 event had to be cancelled due to Covid). The feedback we received from those who took a tour and filled out an evaluation form after it was overwhelmingly positive with many people commentating that they would like a return visit once the renovations to the chapel are complete. After expenses a sum of 98.45 pounds was raised. This will be put into the Roof Fund and will be very useful in helping to plug the shortfall that has opened up due to additional wet rot being detected in one of the beams.

Special thanks go out to Tony Fletcher who, once again, coordinated our involvement in the Heritage Open Day/ Ride'n'Stride event and put in many hours on the rota which made sure that all visitors to the chapel over the weekend received a warm welcome and an informative tour if they wanted one.

TRIBUTE TO MANJULA'S MOTHER

In the last edition of the newsletter we shared news of the sad death of Raj Kumari Bowry at the age of 98. Here we pay tribute to her life and describe how Vestry have decided to spend the bequest that she kindly made to Great Meeting in her will.

Raj Kumari was born on the 17 July 1923. She grew up in Ludhiana, in the east of Punjab, with parents in the dairy business. At the time of partition, she was in her twenties, living in Delhi with her husband. In 1956, she moved to Kenya, where she remained until her husband died in 1993. Her daughter Manjula stayed in India and was raised by her grandparents until she moved to Britain in 1970. In 2008, Manjula Sood MBE became lord mayor of Leicester, the first Asian female lord mayor in Britain.

In August 2017, the 70th anniversary of partition, Raj Kumari was one of the individuals interviewed for a special feature by the Sunday Times magazine. In the piece she recollected how, back then:

There were no televisions, all our information on the radio. That was how we heard that India was being divided. After the announcement, we stopped going to the houses of Hindus and Sikhs, because we were frightened we would be killed.

One of my neighbours was Muslim and he was working away from home at the time. When he got back, his family had gone to Pakistan. He was alone and he came to my father, who let him stay with us. After a few days, it was announced that there was a caravan going to Pakistan. My father gave him some of his clothes so people wouldn't recognise him, then took him to the caravan in the dead of night. The man later wrote to him and said: "You saved my life."

On the night of independence, we walked to the Red Fort in Delhi. My husband said it was important for us to witness this. There were lots of people out on the street. I saw Lord Mountbatten give a speech and then I saw the British flag go down and the Indian flag go up. It was then that Jawaharlal Nehru [the first prime minister of India] gave his speech. He sounded like an intelligent and influential person. Both of them were big leaders, so we respected them. There was clapping, but it was all low key.

Raj Kumari felt strongly that the sacrifices that were made to achieve independence should not be forgotten. In her own words,

So many people died during partition. History gives us the names of the big people, yet no one knows the names of the common people who died. We don't even know how many died.

Raj Kumari's commitment to keeping memories of the past alive was a factor in Vestry's decision about how to spend her generous bequest to the Chapel. Chairman Mike takes up the story....

At the rear of the Chapel are two storage areas concealed by blue curtains. With help from a grant from National Heritage Lottery and a donation from the family of the late Raj Kumari Bowry we have constructed two panelled display areas and cleaned and reframed some of the interesting pictures of the Chapel and eminent figures associated with it which had been gathering dust on the Chapel balcony. The curtains will remain in place but can be drawn back when visitors come to the Chapel for a guided tour. On the other side will be a montage of photos and text concerning prominent women who have been associated with the Chapel such as Edith Gittins, Elizabeth Austin, Annie Clephan and Gertrude von Petzold.

We are very grateful for the grant and bequest from the Sood family that have made this valuable addition to the Chapel possible.



Manjula and Manish advise on the hanging of the restored pictures

THE JOYS OF DOG WALKING AND THE JULY 100 MILE CHALLENGE

I could have kept a diary when I became a dog owner six years ago, the firsts in enjoying nature with him at my side were heart warming. The early morning winter walk before going to work when the stars were out and the sky becoming lighter on our way back; the green shoots emerging through the dark black lifeless earth and noticing the rapid growth through January and into Spring and Summer when no earth is visible. Bertie's joy when he first experienced snow and looking up in wonder at the white trees towering ahead; the flowers and berries as the seasons change appreciated as you stroll both in the wild and gardens passed.

In July we did a 100 mile walk challenge which I'm sure created more interest with Bertie involved.

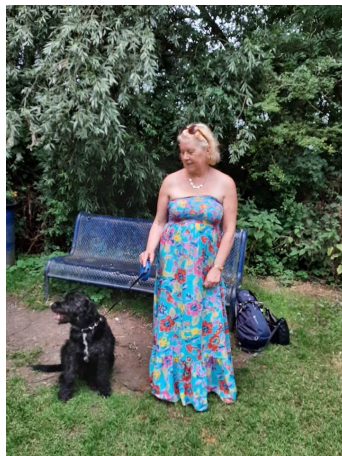
It is a joy how friends and family enjoy walking with him. and enjoy his excited greeting. During the month we trod local 'Whistle Way' a disused rail track many times, Bertie's tail up and waving, a familiar sight and sign he's happy.

We walked from Great Meeting to home in Enderby via the canal in

Aylestone Meadows, approximately 7.5 miles. Stamford walks to Burghley and the meadows with family including Pam my sister and nieces and their partners and lively puppy Whippet!



Wendy my friend of thirty years walked from Blaby to Glen Parva. In the photo opposite we see Alison with our lockdown park bench in Littlethorpe.



Bertie and I also walked through Aylestone Meadows, a distance of 4.5 miles and with Patrick along Whistle Way (5 miles). Tony a walking club friend who has recovered from a major illness walked 5.5 miles in the Cossington area. A walk with a dog has an enjoyable quality which is a pleasure to share with friends.

I used 'Map my Walk' on my phone and clocked 197 km/123 miles. The photos presented are all from the walks. £505 was raised, £262 from Chapel members and the rest from family and friends.

A HUGE THANK YOU TO ALL. Thank you also to our Chairman Mike Druquer who's championing of the Roof Fund inspired the Challenge and I believe many who donated so freely.

Sue Harper



DIRECTORY

MINISTER:

Rev Dr Arthur Stewart MA

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

Tel: 01509 812236

Mobile: 07803895828

E-mail:

ArthurStewart@live.co.uk

PRESIDENT:

Dr David Wykes F.R.Hist.S

'Whitewings', 3 Southmeads

Road, Oadby,

Leicester LE2 2LR

Tel: 0116 2710784

E-mail: Director@dwlib.co.uk

CHAIRMAN:

Dr Michael Drucquer

47, Elms Road

Leicester, Le2 3JD

Tel: 0116 2219685

E-mail:

m.drucquer@ntlworld.com

ACTING SECRETARY:

Rev Dr Arthur Stewart

(see contact details above)

TREASURER:

Mr Ray Harding

14 Gilmore Close

Oakham

LE15 6FR

Tel: 0797160 1137

Email: rayharding123@aol.com

ASSISTANT TREASURER:

Mrs Diane Romano-Woodward

9 Glen Rise, Glen Parva,

Leicester, LE2 1HN.

Tel: 0116 2785820

Mobile: 07962427295

Email: fossilmatron@msn.com

NEWSLETTER EDITOR:

Mrs Nicky Drucquer

47 Elms Road, South Knighton,

Leicester, LE2 3JD.

Tel: 0116 2219685

Email: nickydrucquer@gmail.com

ORGANIST:

Mr Robin Lister

Tel: 0787 019 5026

CARETAKER:

Mr Stephen Lynch

Mobile: 07811970859

LETTINGS SECRETARY:

Shazeen Boles

lettings@LeicesterUnitarians.co.uk

CHAPEL WEBSITE:

www.leicesterunitarians.co.uk

CHAPEL ADDRESS:

Great Meeting Unitarian Chapel

45 East Bond Street,

Leicester, LE1 4SX

Twitter: LeicsUnitarians

Instagram: leicester_unitarians

Facebook: The Great Meeting

Unitarian Chapel, Leicester