



# **Great Meeting Chapel Leicester**

**Newsletter - Winter/ Spring 2023**



**300 years of Freedom, Reason and Tolerance**

# **SUNDAY SERVICES — all at 11.00 am**

## February

- 5th Congregation service with Diane and Jude
- 12th Arek Malecki
- 19th Winnie Gordon
- 28th Mark Hutchinson

## March

- 5th Simon Hall
- 12th Arek Malecki (followed by shared lunch and optional board games)
- 19th Gavin Lloyd
- 26th Mark Hutchinson

## April

- 2nd Angela Maher
- 9th Simon Hall
- 16th Arek Malecki
- 23rd Mark Hutchinson
- 30th Congregation - speak to Jude with ideas for theme and content

## May

- 6th David Wykes
- 14th Arek Malecki
- 21st Mark Hutchinson
- 28th Simon Hall

# **WEEKLY EVENTS**

THURSDAY 11.00– 1.00 AM : COFFEE MORNING

THURSDAY 1.00 –1. 20 AM MEDITATION

## **SPECIAL EVENTS**

March 12th: After the service we will enjoy a simple shared lunch together. Followed by board games. All welcome

Date tbc. Folk Concert in Chapel

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## **OUR NEW MINISTER**

After a thorough appointment process and a General Meeting of the congregation, at which all members were entitled to vote, we are very pleased to announce the appointment of Arek Malecki as Minister elect as of 19<sup>th</sup> June 2023.

Arek is just reaching the end of his Ministerial training and impressed us with both his enthusiasm and intellect.

Arek moved to the UK from Poland in 2008 and started to attend Mill Hill Chapel in Leeds where he began to co-lead worship and then to lead services in other Unitarian Chapels.

As part of his Ministerial training he completed a year's placement at Scarborough Unitarian Church in 2022, where he took on all the functions of a Minister.

Arek is also a qualified group exercise instructor and intends to pursue this interest in Leicester.

We are very much looking forward to Arek starting his full time Ministry with us and starting also a new chapter in the history of Great Meeting. A service of induction will take place later in the year.

## LETTER FROM JUDE

It has been a busy and exciting time at Leicester Unitarians since I took over the role of Congregational Support Lead in mid November which Simon Hall had left in September. There were new members joining, so it was a useful start to ensure we had all the congregation details ready for the minister election. This gave me an invaluable overview of the chapel community and how we communicate to ensure everyone has a voice which is something I am passionate about. How we look out for, and empower each other to build a cohesive sense of what Great Meeting is about. I remember Arthur Stewart saying to me that he saw each of us individually giving to, and taking from different elements of the services, the building and the social aspects according to our needs at any time. How that naturally changes over weeks, months and years depending on a myriad of factors in our own lives, and the energy and direction of our shared chapel life.

It has certainly been challenging at times without a minister to guide us. However I have also heard many people say how stimulating and enjoyable they have found hearing a variety of voices leading services since April. Unitarianism is very much about connecting with a sense of a radical voice, and many inspirational words have met my need for growth, challenge and celebration. For some people, the informal coming together of coffee mornings re-started by Simon in early 2022 were a great way to connect and so I was pleased to be able to relaunch these in December. I particularly enjoy that members come for a cuppa alongside people from the community, often via a social groups site called 'Meet-Up'. We have had many interesting conversations, often about spiritual matters, our communities and life experiences. Every week is different. Some people stay on for the lunchtime meditation which I lead for about twenty minutes.

We relax back with periods of silence, gently focussing on the breath, grounding our bodies, bringing awareness to sounds near and far. There is a special calm energy to sitting quietly together as a group like this. We finish with a short poem to reflect on mindfulness as part of life. I have meditated daily for about ten years and spent a couple of years learning to teach mindfulness and lead meditations for medical students as a way to help them manage their own wellbeing and study. Many benefits to physical and mental health have been shown in thousands of studies of people of all ages and backgrounds. For me, becoming more aware helped me to connect more deeply with my own needs including for spiritual development. Which led me to being open to attending a Unitarian service after being fairly 'organised religion-averse' all my life due to my perception of faith groups in general perpetuating patriarchal values. I'm always happy to talk about meditation if you would like to know more, or just come along one week for a cuppa, to meditate or both!

We are lucky enough to have a city oasis with the beauty and tranquillity of the chapel buildings and garden to ground us, and a rich history to inspire us. However, it is people who make the Great Meeting community what it is now, and how it will be. So please, do share your thoughts about what works for you, what might need a change, and any ideas for the future. Some of us enjoyed a simple lunch in January, and then a board game or two. Join us in March if you fancy, or is there something else you would like to see in our social calendar? Last year we had a very interesting series of weekly zoom meets during Lent to discuss poems collected for the time. I am looking to try some sessions this Spring around a Unitarian book 'Building your own Theology'. More details to come! A folk music night is also in the pipeline.....

*Jude Casson*

## CAUSES FOR CELEBRATION

After a lengthy spell in hospital it is good to be able to report that Freda is now back at home.

Julie and Don continue to offer her their loving support and she now has a comprehensive care package in place. Jude found her in good spirits when she last visited her.

On Feb 4th Freda had her 96th birthday. We sent a card, containing personalised good wishes from many of the congregation.

Hopefully Freda will be able to join us for a service again soon.



## Congratulation to Manish

The lovely photo of Manish, and his proud Mum Manjula, was taken at his graduation ceremony in October. The qualification he received was a Masters of Science (MSc) in International Hospitality Management, awarded by the University of Derby. A great achievement, particularly given all the challenges of studying during the Covid period.





## AUTUMN OPEN GARDEN

On 25th October we opened the gardens so members of the public could enjoy the autumn colours and, if desired, visit our newly restored Chapel. The event was enjoyed by the 20+ people who attended and received 294 likes from followers of the Chapel on Facebook.

This was the last event in the programme of heritage outreach activities that we were required to organise as a condition of our grant from the National Heritage Lottery fund. Shortly afterwards we submitted our second *Activity Report* and our final *Evaluation Report* to the NHLF in order that the final instalment of money could be released.

The evaluation concluded that our project had achieved the best value possible out of the funding received, particularly so as the timing (July 2021 – November 2022) included the tail-end of the Covid pandemic.

The *Evaluation Report* is available on the website. It covers both the restoration project and the outreach programme and contains some interesting analysis and reflection. Thanks to Nicky for pulling it all together and to everyone who, by contributing their time and support, helped make our project **AN INNER-CITY GEM: RESTORED AND REVEALED** such a success.



*Wheelchair accessible picnic table—one of a number of garden enhancements made possible by the lottery funding*

## DEMENTIA-FRIENDLY CAROL CONCERT

We were pleased to welcome back 'Musical Memory Box' to the Chapel on 20<sup>th</sup> December to lead Leicester's annual Dementia-friendly carol concert. Usually it is held in the Cathedral but as it is undergoing renovations I suggested that we hold the concert at Great Meeting.

It was a joyful and informal affair, preceded by hot drinks, biscuits and Indian snacks. Kyle and Christina from Musical Memory Box led us through a selection of carols and Christmas songs, accompanied by Robin Lister on the piano, who coped magnificently with the repertoire - 'Once in Royal David's City' through to 'Rockin' round the Christmas Tree'. Jude started the event with a short prayer and the deputy Lord Mayor in attendance, Councillor Luis Fonseca, gave a lovely introductory speech and joined in with the singing enthusiastically. There was a substantial contingent from the South Asian group, Geet Sangeet [which means 'singing together' I am told], as well representations from as far afield as a distant place called Loughborough. One of the helpers was able to simultaneously translate 'Jingle bells' into Gujarati - surely a Great Meeting first. Whilst we sang, Cllr Fonseca's aid and driver, Chris Rhodes, did all the washing up unasked!

Feedback from the groups and helpers was very positive and Memory Box are booking in for a return visit in springtime to sing again and view the bluebells. We look forward to seeing them all again.



*Mike Drucquer*



## GOOD ENOUGH CHRISTMAS

I'm dreaming of a good enough Christmas.

It may be white and I will merrily sing the song, and lay on the snow and make an angel.

If it is muddy, mild and grey I will be glad there is no ice to negotiate and wonder at the snowy special effects on the telly.

Maybe I'll dust the mince pies with extra icing sugar.

I'm dreaming of a refreshing Christmas.

One where I wake up rested and ready for the day.

If I am bleary after tossing and turning in the wee small hours, I will be kind to myself and stay in bed another five minutes.

I will have a second cup of tea and open the back door and feel fresh air on my face.

I'm dreaming of a good enough Christmas.

I will welcome visitors with snow or mud on their boots.

Whether they bear gifts or none.

Meet them all at the door.

Love, friendship, shared history, shared space.

I'm dreaming of a connected Christmas.

The smile on the face of Big Issue man at the Co-op when I buy his last copy.

The card flown over ten thousand miles from summer down under.

The advent calendar from Father Christmas's home country to savour every day.

I'm dreaming of a good enough Christmas.

Maybe no-one will come. Perhaps no-one can come.

My phone, the internet, a laptop, one of them will be working and link me with the world.

I'm dreaming of a tasty Christmas.

The chance to feast and savour.

I will dig in the local clay for tasty roots to roast.

I will marvel at the chain of human hands who feed me today,

Who feed the world and support us to do what we are able.

I'm dreaming of a good enough Christmas.

The light, lights, sparkle and song.

Mariah, Cliff, Stormzy, King's College, I welcome them all.

I'm dreaming of my best Christmas self.

It is my good enough, everyday self.

Imperfectly perfect. Perfectly imperfect.

I'm coming as I am.

Come as you are, and together we will make merry and light the darkness.

*Composed for, and recited at, the Great Meeting Carol Service by Jude*

## BURNS LUNCH

After a three year absence from the Great Meeting social calendar the 24 of us who signed up for a Burns celebration after the Sunday Service on January 29th were greatly looking forward to the return of what has been a longstanding Chapel tradition.

The occasion lived up to our expectations with all elements perfectly planned and executed. Great thanks are due to Jude who co-ordinated the lunch, sourcing and cooking the haggis and pre-preparing the accompanying “neeps and tatties” (with help from Huw and Gaby) so that the meal was served up promptly, with no frantic last-minute mashing needed.

The photo opposite shows Stuart in the midst of his *Address to a Haggis*. We all appreciated his animated delivery of Robert Burns’ famous poem in a convincing Scottish accent. Unfortunately the photographer missed the moment when dramatically sliced open the first haggis with his Sgian Dubh (traditional Scottish knife).



Both the meat and vegetarian haggises came from the Queens Road - Archers butchers and Green and Pleasant wholefood shop respectively - and were enhanced by gravy made by Mike (chicken) and Nicky (mushroom). Mention should also go to Jude's yummy cream and whisky sauce. Many of us agreed that, given how delicious haggis and its accompaniments are, its great shame we only get to eat it once a year.



For dessert we were treated to the traditional Scottish pudding of cranachan, home-made by Roy. Sometimes known as whisky trifle this dish featured cream, raspberry and toasted oats and tasted delicious. Diane supplied tasty home made baked apples and there was wine for those who wanted it, courtesy of a 'stash' left over from a past tombola event.

Thanks to everyone who helped set out the room, serve the food, wash the dishes and generally clear up afterwards. It was a lovely, convivial occasion thoroughly enjoyed by all present. Those who could not join us this year, because of poor health, or other commitments, were sadly missed

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