



Great Meeting Chapel Leicester

Newsletter - Autumn/ Winter 2023



300 years of Freedom, Reason and Tolerance

SUNDAY SERVICES

All starting at 11.00 am and led by the Minister unless otherwise stated

OCTOBER

- 1ST HARVEST FESTIVAL SERVICE with guest speaker RORY PALMER from TRUSSELL TRUST
- 8TH SERVICE LEAD: FRANCIS ELLIOT-WRIGHT
- 15TH
- 22ND
- 29TH ALL HALLOWS SERVICE

NOVEMBER

- 5TH
- 12TH REMEMBRANCE SERVICE led by SIMON HALL
- 19TH SERVICE REPLACED BY A MEDITATION SESSION
- 26TH

DECEMBER

- 3RD 1ST ADVENT SERVICE
- 10TH 2ND ADVENT SERVICE: led by REV. ROBIN HANFORD from Hinkley Unitarians
- 17TH **3.00 PM:** ANNUAL CAROL SERVICE
- 24TH CHRISTMAS CAROLS FOR XMAS EVE
- 31ST END OF YEAR SERVICE

JANUARY

- 7TH EPIPHANY SERVICE
- 14TH
- 21ST
- 28TH

WEEKLY EVENTS

- ◆ THURSDAY 11.00 – 1.00 AM : **COFFEE MORNING**
Tea, coffee and warm company in our beautiful garden room
- ◆ THURSDAY 1.00 – 1.30 AM: **MID-WEEK RECHARGE**
Half an hour of meditation, music, poetry and pause.

SPECIAL EVENTS

- ◆ **SATURDAY 7TH OCTOBER.** 2.00 PM Mill Hill Chapel Leeds. Arek's Ordination Service. Refreshments afterwards. All welcome.
- ◆ **SATURDAY NOVEMBER 18TH:** 1.00 PM. Arek's official Induction Service followed by a bring and share finger food buffet in the Garden Room.
- ◆ **Thursday 7th December:** Trussell Trust Carol Service. Time TBC. All welcome. Volunteers to help needed.
- ◆ Monday 11th or 18th December (TBC): Musical Memory Box Carol Service for people with Dementia
- ◆ **Sunday 17th December:** Festive tea party after the Carol Service. Please bring food to share.
- ◆ **Sunday January 28th:** Burns Lunch after the Sunday Service. £5 a head for a haggis, neeps and tatties feast

Thanks to Tony Fletcher for the cover picture, and many of the photos inside

FROM THE MINISTER

Experienced ministers like to share their wisdom with ministry students on every occasion. During my ministry training I have been given tonnes of advice (both, officially and unofficially) about the first few months of ministry. It all boiled down to pretty much two main contradicting headings:

Avoid the temptation of changing things right from ‘day one’! The congregation would have been through enough change in the months preceding your appointment. The last thing they need is more change.

(Somewhat tongue in cheek) If you are planning on doing something controversial, do it in the first 3 months. You will get away with more. If it goes down like a lead balloon, they will put it down to your lack of experience and will forgive you easily.

I am happy to report that, as far as I am aware, no lead balloons have been hurt in the first three months of my ministry. But at the same time, even though I spent most of my time learning our chapel, getting to know you, and discovering the city, I cannot pretend that absolutely everything remains as it was. Inevitably, some changes have occurred, simply because of who I am and what my style is. Much to my relief I have also discovered that whoever said that “young ministers go into their first congregations wanting to change the world, only to discover that they aren’t even allowed to change the style of the font in the church newsletter” was GROSSLY overexaggerating. To prove them wrong, I’ve asked our editor – Nicky – to publish this letter using the wackiest font available. (**Arck: 1; Anonymous: 0**). But in all seriousness – I will be forever grateful for the warm welcome and openness I have received from every single member of our community. I may not be fully settled in yet, but thanks to your openheartedness I do already feel at home – much sooner than I expected this feeling to arrive!

Trust takes time to build and you have taken the gamble of entrusting this ministry to the person you haven’t even heard of around this time last year. Strange to think about, isn’t it? I

struggle to believe that I didn't know any of you only a few months ago! I do hope that with every passing week, the trust between this newly appointed minister and our congregation will continue to be developed. I also want to reiterate what I have said several times – if you do wish to speak to me, please know that my door is open.

I would like to leave you with words of John O'Donohue, which I slightly adapted to fit our situation: "Though our destination is not yet clear, we can trust the promise of this opening. Let us unfurl into the grace of new beginning and awaken our spirit to adventure. Let us hold nothing back and learn to find ease in risk; Soon we will be home in a new rhythm."

With every blessing,

Arak

CONGRATULATIONS TO:

- ◆ Gabi Witthaus who passed her PhD viva in June. Her thesis *Refugees Online Learning Engagement in Higher Education: A Capabilitarian Analysis* is published open-access in the Lancaster ePrints repository.
- ◆ Diane Romano Woodward who won an award for Best Female Master Raw Lifter at a European competition held in Ireland
- ◆ David Kent for the premiere of his new theatre piece "Just We Two". In addition to writing the music and lyrics David stars in the show, alongside two co-actors.
- ◆ Manish who has started a new course. For the next year he will be studying for a Certificate in Strategic Business and Management at the Institute of Continuing Education at the University of Cambridge

AREK'S FIRST SERVICE AS MINISTER ELECT

On June 25th a large congregation was joined by friends from the Hinkley Unitarian Chapel for Arek's first service as Minister Elect.

Sporting a colourful stole, which we are coming to recognize as one of the hallmark's of Arek's ministry, his thoughtful address reflected on the delicate balance of being A PART and APART from the congregation that his new role requires.

To illustrate his theme he quoted Rev Mark Morrison Reed, an American Unitarian Universalist Minister, who explains that minister and parishioners cannot be friends, in the usual sense of the word, because the relationship

“is built upon an unavoidable imbalance. When necessary, we must be prepared to forsake the role of a friend for that of a minister, and be ready to choose the well-being of the community over the needs of the friend. We are not as free to share all aspects of our lives and ourselves. Nor can we make friends with whom we please, for that would create two classes of parishioners—the chosen and the not. Finally, when our ministries come to an end so must the relationships.”

After the service we had coffee and delicious cake to welcome Arek into our midst.

This newsletter goes to print on the 3 month anniversary of Arek's tenure and I think we'd all agree on how well he is handling the balance, and how fortunate we are to have him as our Minister



UNITARIAN SUMMER SCHOOL 19-26TH AUGUST NIGHTINGALE CENTRE, GREAT HUCKLOW

I first remember reading reports in the Enquirer back in 2018 about the summer school, chatting to Patrick Timperly and being intrigued about the idea of spending a full week with lots of Unitarians from around the country. It felt like quite a big commitment and not one I could make in 2019, and then the pandemic hit and there was no option anyway! Last year I dipped my toe in the water by watching some of the sessions that were offered online (including one jointly led by our now-own Arek!). This year was back in person for 44 of us, though with an engagement group also offered online for another dozen folk. The groups are a key part of the week and meet every day after the morning service, led by a different minister each day. I chose to be with Kate Dean (minister at Hampstead) and Eleanor Chiari to reflect on 'The Natural Network', imagining and speaking for non-human consciousness. The quote from Rilke that they offered which resonated with me was: 'If we surrendered to Earth's intelligence we could rise up rooted, like trees.' Over the week we had various activities, including journaling, crafting, meditating, listening to music, all to help us think and feel more deeply about nature.

The week's theme talks were given by Louise Baumberg from Guilford who spoke very eloquently about 'Real Life – telling the truth of our lived experience'. She asked how we might 'widen the circle' of our Unitarian community by considering who, and how, we might be excluding people. Going beyond 'thin' dominant narratives to really see the true 'thickness' of human lives.

There was the option each day to meet before dinner to discuss issues raised by the talks and readings, though for myself, after the intensity of the mornings I chose to engage with the more physical and creative workshops on offer in the afternoon/evening sessions. Amongst my favourites were: 'Biodanza' which is a Chilean expressive and spiritual dance, led by Caroline Boyce from Cardiff, was so joyful and energising; chanting and singing sessions with Danny Crosby

minister from Altrincham) and Shana Parvin Begum (student minister from the South-west/Wales) and a nature walk with mindful activities such as simple sketching and haikus with Jennifer Sanders, minister-elect at Brighton. I also enjoyed a good ramble, and a wild swim with a big group on our free afternoon.

To book-end the days, led by different people, there were morning meditations, and 'Epilogues' – simple services held in the tiny chapel a few minutes' walk away. You gather to walk in silence carrying lanterns which is such a calming and special ritual, leaving them in a line on the wall outside the chapel waiting for you at the end of 30 minutes. Each evening was a rich offering of poetry, music and words, helping to prepare you for a peaceful rest.

The Nightingale centre is set in a small village in the Peaks, surrounded by beautiful and easily accessible countryside, and is a homely welcoming place with hearty food. There was a real openness and genuine welcome from everyone. I made some lovely connections with people of all ages, including the five children with us, and from around the country and beyond. I heartily recommend the experience to everyone in the congregation. We are so lucky the journey is not too long for us, and first timers are especially encouraged to attend with generous bursaries. There's also money available to go from the EMU District. I'm very happy to talk more about my experience and answer any questions if you might be thinking, 'maybe it might be for me in 2024'.....



*Jude
Casson*

LEICESTER PRIDE

Do you also sometimes feel like we are the best kept secret in town? A group of us decided that it was time to do something about it as we took the church out of the building and marched in Leicester Pride for the first time in our history. Pride is a festival. Pride is a protest. Pride is a public declaration of our values of inclusivity and acceptance of LGBT+ people – something we constantly speak about in our own circles, but often fail to be vocal about. Probably because for many of us the principles of acceptance are just obvious.

I have attended a good number of Pride marches in my life. The very first ones in Poland, as a teenage lad. My first Prides weren't joyful celebrations like the one our congregation attended a few weeks ago. My first Pride marches were risky. One time, due to a serious threat of violence, the organisers advised us against drawing attention to ourselves – and against displaying rainbow flags until we were gathered together in a bigger group, protected by the police. The ratio of those attending to the police – most of whom in full riot gear – was probably 1 to 1. I remember an egg or two flying over my head and feeling scared glancing at the angry faces of (mostly) men shouting the obscenest things at us. Sadly, some of those yelling profanities did so in the name of religion, as they held rosaries and small crucifixes. I was grateful for the wall of police officers between me and the angry counter protesters. Although it must be said, that judging by how the police interacted with us, versus how they interacted with those on the other side, I could tell who they really sympathised with. When the march was over, we quickly took our rainbow flags down, put hoodies and jackets on to change our appearance, and dispersed quickly in a million different directions. I ran to my bus stop, turning around every now and then to make sure I wasn't being followed. Of course, I didn't tell my parents where I was. I didn't want to worry them.

What we have witnessed in Leicester in 2023 couldn't have

been more different from that experience. A representation from Great Meeting Chapel, dressed in our new team t-shirts, carrying rainbow flags and placards joined other church group as we march to express our inclusivity, acceptance and affirmation. We walked shoulder to shoulder with people from St. Nicolas, St. Luke, Christ the King churches in Leicester, All Saints & Holy Trinity churches from Loughborough, St. Mary's Church –



Hinckley, Stonegate Baptists, Countesthorpe Methodists, Community of Christ – Abbey Lane and others. I walked visibly as a faith leader with his congregation sending a clear message out to the world that our community will accept you as you are; and as a humbled member of this community which took me as I am. At my first Pride there was shame and fear. Keeping head up high took an enormous amount of mental and emotional energy. At my most recent Pride there was acceptance and understanding. I didn't have to scramble for bravery to look up, my community – you – held my head up high. Shame and fear turned to pride and affirmation.

Sometimes I wish I could travel back in time and tell my 15-year-old self that 20 years later I would drag people from the church where I work as a minister to a Pride march (not that the 15-year-old me would have believed it anyway!) to tell the world that people like me indeed can belong to faith communities – that they are valued and loved exactly as they are.

Hopefully we'll do it again next year!

TEA IN THE GARDEN

This year our annual *Tea in the Garden* event was held on 9th September, the first Saturday in the national **Heritage Open Day** schedule. This may have helped to account for the good attendance that we achieved, given that people could have easily been deterred coming into the city centre because of the weather: sweltering hot and completely lacking in breeze.

The steady stream of friends and visitor who joined us were treated to two excellent sets of jazz standards by the Great Meeting Four, an ensemble consisting of Huw on electric key board, Robin on alto sax, George Dunseth on bass and Matt Lacey on drums.

Thankfully the garden was cool and shady and everyone naturally gravitated there, to sit under the trees, listen to the music and enjoy refreshments in the peaceful setting.

Thanks to everyone who baked cakes for the stall. We had a wonderful selection and many compliments were received on how good they tasted. The hard work of the team (Sue, Nicky, Jude and Diane) who served them up, made drinks, and cleared up is also much appreciated.



Simon and David (accompanied by Thistle who proved a great draw, especially to children) worked hard to organize and run a popular tombola. As ever there was an eclectic selection of prizes so thanks to all who donated.

Steve's work on the heritage visitor sign in desk, and Mike, Tony and Arek's sterling efforts, taking visitors who requested them for guided tours of the Chapel, also contributed hugely.



This year we were pleased to offer space to Leicestershire Wildlife Trust and the Evington-based Graceworks community garden and co-housing project. Their stalls both attracted interest from our visitors and we hope that they found that their afternoon was well spent.

The event raised a total of £255 for Chapel funds. It also helped us with the goal, so central to our recent grant from the National Heritage Lottery fund, of helping the public to discover what a **hidden gem** Leicester City centre has in Great Meeting Chapel.

Nicky Drucquer

HERITAGE WEEK

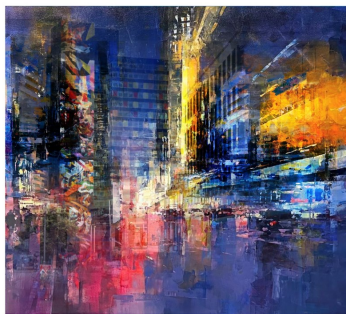
This year's annual Heritage Open week ran from September 8th to 17th and we are very grateful to all those (Tony, Mike, Stuart, Sue, Arek, Diane) who volunteered their time so that the Chapel was open to visitors throughout the entire period. In total 130 people dropped in, most of whom took up the offer of had a guided tour of the Chapel.

This year the beauty of the Chapel was enhanced by an exhibition of paintings by local artist Kendrick Snodin.

In the 'Town' section of the show Kendrick aims to "express and envisage our City as a 21st Century Metropolis". The works forming the 'Country' aspect of the presentation, whilst still fully expressive in their rendering, look to develop the importance of our county in both subject matter and inspiration.

'Town and Country'

A Series of works reflecting Leicester and Leicestershire by Kendrick Snodin



September 8th-17th 2023

The Great Meeting Chapel, Leicester

Kendrick's artworks were displayed on the window sills alongside hymnals opened on words to complement the art.

On the Thursday evening of Heritage Week Mike gave an illustrated talk entitled "Mystery of the Roof". He drew on extensive research into the architecture of non-conformist Chapels together with practical knowledge acquired during his period as lead for the Chapel's restoration project to present a fascinating insight into Great Meeting's unique and innovative design. He conjured up the challenge posed by acquiring, transporting and hoisting into place the two huge (9 metre long)! beams that enable our beautiful ceiling; the audience left full of awe for the people who conceived the project and the architects, master carpenters and workmen who implemented their vision.

ODE TO JUDE

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the “cover girl” of this edition of the newsletter – Jude – for her unwavering commitment and dedication in her role as the Congregation Support Lead. When Jude stepped into this temporary position, she knew it was born out of necessity during the time of ministerial vacancy and that the role will be discontinued once the new minister arrives. However, the transient nature of the role did not deter Jude from giving her all.

Jude went above and beyond what was expected of her, ensuring our congregation remained well-informed through regular updates. She took charge of our social media presence and enhanced our Chapel's Meet-Up profile – something Simon has started, and Jude continued. (For those unfamiliar, Meet-Up is a platform for promoting social gatherings, like our Coffee Mornings.) Speaking of the Coffee Mornings – Jude has always been there on Thursdays, to open up, serve superb quality beverages, and to simply be with others. I am constantly amazed by her natural ability to make conversations with literally anyone. I laugh when I remember how on one hot July Thursday morning we sat outside, and Jude was chatting away with two women who popped in for the coffee morning – Maxine and Anne. I didn't know them but it's not unusual for me to come across good old friends of the chapel I hadn't yet met. Judging by the flow of the conversation, the jokes, and the laughter, there was no doubt to my mind that Jude must have known them for donkey's years! That was until Jude asked them: “Sorry, what are your names again?” Wait, WHAT?! Are you telling me that you've only just met? I will never cease to be amazed by Jude's incredible ability to make everyone feel like a friend right from the start!

Moreover, Jude liaised with visiting preachers, posting regular service updates on Facebook and Instagram, ensuring our community continued to thrive. She organised board games afternoon (perhaps we should do it again?). Arguably,

it is thanks to Jude that we held Kendrick's art exhibition in the chapel, as she was the first person from our community that Kendrick spoke to! She took her time to write to the newsletter and volunteered her time to offer support to other members of our congregation. Beyond our local community, Jude, together with Simon, proudly represented the Great Meeting Chapel at the Annual Meetings of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches. These events are as lively as they are demanding! There, on behalf of our congregation, Jude has made new connections with Unitarians from other parts of the UK.

On a personal note, I want to express my deep gratitude to Jude and Huw for their warm hospitality during my visits to Leicester before my permanent relocation. They not only graciously hosted me but also guided me through the city, helping me acclimate to my new surroundings. The hours we spent together during the transition of responsibilities were invaluable, and I am genuinely appreciative of their support.

Jude, your contributions have left an indelible mark on our congregation, and your tireless efforts have enriched our community. We are immensely grateful for your selfless service and the dedication you've demonstrated during your time as the Congregation Support Lead. And now, we wish you all the best as you embark onto the Unitarian Worship Studies Course to begin the journey to become a lay worship leader!



You're such a legend Jude!

With love,

Arek

JOSEPH DARE – A REFRESHER

In the thorough review in 1970 by Jack Simmons his first line comments “*The subject of this paper is an almost forgotten man. He is, I think, wrongly forgotten*”. Unfortunately this statement still stands. I’ve noted in conversation that members of our Chapel don’t know the name at all, despite there being a page on our website! Curiously he is not mentioned in Hermann’s ‘*A History of Great Meeting, Leicester, and its Congregation*’ (1908). So here follows a brief reminder of Joseph Dare and his remarkable achievement.

Born in 1800 in Titchfield, Hampshire, he first comes to light in Leicester in 1845. Members of Great Meeting Leicester, namely Ann, the wife of Thomas Paget, surgeon at Leicester Royal Infirmary, and her husband invited Joseph Dare, then living in Hinckley, to start the Leicester Domestic Mission. Formerly he had been a teacher at the School attached to Great Meeting Unitarian Chapel, Hinckley. He was already of some influence in the area but in 1845 he was unemployed following the closure of his former school. The Domestic Mission was never a part of our Chapel and was established independently but with the active support of many of the congregation.

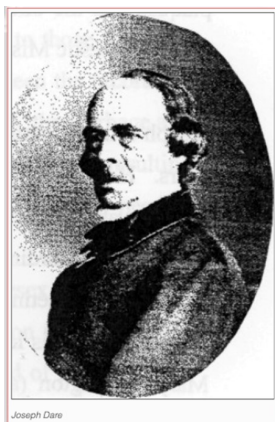


Photo from a screenshot in “Joseph Dare: Champion of the Poor”. By Hugh Beavin, Hinckley Historian Magazine No. 61 (undated). This unprovenanced photo appears to be the only portrait in existence.

Local domestic Missions were already established in the 1830's in London, Leeds, Liverpool and Birmingham, following a model in Boston U.S.A. They were concerned with education, instilling religious principles and the general improvement of the lives of working people, '*the neglected poor*'. The Leicester Domestic Mission departed somewhat from prototypes elsewhere in that religious instruction was somewhat down-played. For example, in Liverpool the administrator was entitled 'minister' while in Leicester he was 'Missionary'.

The first president of the Leicester Domestic Mission was Joseph Whetstone (Leicester's Mayor, 1839-40), plus several further members of the vestry Committee and Rev. Charles Berry, Minister of Great Meeting.

Dare remained in Leicester for the 31 years that the Mission existed. It was situated in 'old town' - the northern part of Leicester City, in a single room, formerly used by the Chartists, in the land opposite All Saints Church, known as 'All saints Open' in Highcross St. The building is gone but the 'open' remained as a parking lot and is now a building site under redevelopment. Dare lived in a house owned by Great Meeting at 122 Churchgate, approximately where Vaughan Way now stands (But Haynes cited below, places it as 'almost directly opposite St. Margaret's Church'). His job included educating and visiting the poor. In the latter role, it was much the same as that of a minister. Exceedingly conscientious, he was paying a staggering 4000 visits to families per year, roughly 80 per week. And he also led a religious service on Sundays. Education included evening classes until 10pm. In 1848, at the request of the Mayor William Biggs, he surveyed the schools in Leicester, finding from a population of 56,000 that fewer than 500 children were at school and few pupils attended for more than 2 years. Apparently he took only one holiday, in 1871, as a convalescence.

Simmons 1970 article (available on the internet) provides an admirable review of Dare's work and an informative summary

of social conditions in Leicester culled mainly from Dare's annual reports between 1846 and 1877. It is more readable than Dare's original reports which were continuous for 31 years, and Simmons summarises some interesting aspects of life in Leicester at that time. He also emphasises Dare's humanity, open-mindedness and lack of condemnation, despite the numerous social changes taking place at the time. In 1849 he enumerated, without comment, the presence of 64 places of worship compared with 545 drinking places!



Apparently these reports are much valued for their information on working people's conditions in the mid-Victorian period. A further fascinating and more detailed account is Haynes (1991), with many extracts from the annual reports, amplified with maps and abundant contemporary photographs.

Haynes notes that the first report in 1846 describes that the Mission had a sewing school, an adult class for men, a boys and girls class – on separate evenings, a reading room, a library and Sunday school. Attendances of the sewing school were around 40-50 while boys and girls evening classes were 80-100 or more, and since their ages ranged from 8 to over 40, adults were obviously included. Even the men's evening classes ranged from 40 to 60. Many of the children "*knew not a letter*" at their first entrance. The most under-privileged were encouraged to attend but many children, known as 'winders', were employed from very early morning until late at night and couldn't attend, even though the mission closed at 10pm. Many others were similarly discouraged through

employment constraints. Daily newspapers in the Mission reading room mainly were provided by members of Great Meeting.

Joseph Dare, born 1800, was retired in 1876 and he went to live in Belgrave Rd. He was succeeded for a short time (about one year) by Henry Thomas Basford but the All Saints Open Mission school house was soon abandoned. Our Chapel continued with the Boys' and Girls' Day schools held in its schoolhouse. He died in 1883. Remarkably Leicester lacks any monuments or street names in his memory. The only commemorative plaque is at Hinckley Great Meeting Chapel which celebrates his work there as a teacher and missionary. His gravestone can be seen in Welford Rd Cemetery, plot uE49.

Tony Fletcher

Sources.

Haynes, Barry (1991) *Working-Class Life in Victorian Leicester.* Leicestershire Libraries and Information-Service.

Simmons, Jack (1970) *A Victorian Social Worker: Joseph Dare and the Leicester Domestic Mission.* Trans. Leicestershire Archaeological and History Society 46: 65-80.



DIRECTORY

MINISTER

Arek Malecki
Tel: 0746 2958402
minister@leicesterunitarians.co.uk

PRESIDENT

Dr David Wykes
'Whitewings',
3 Southmeads Road, Oadby,
Leicester LE2 2LR
Tel: 0116 2710784
Director@dwlib.co.uk

CHAIRMAN

Dr Michael Drucquer
47, Elms Road
Leicester, Le2 3JD
Tel: 0116 2219685
m.drucquer@ntlworld.com

TREASURER

Mrs Diane Romano-Woodward
9 Glen Rise, Glen Parva,
Leicester, LE2 1HN.
Tel: 0116 2785820
Mobile: 07962427295
fossilmatron@msn.com

HEALTH and SAFETY LEAD

Jude Casson
judecasson@doctors.org.uk

NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Nicky Drucquer
nickydrucquer@gmail.com

ORGANIST

Mr Robin Lister
Tel: 0787 019 5026

CHAPEL ADDRESS

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

CARETAKER and LETTINGS

Gary Agate
lettings@leicesterunitarians.co.uk

CHAPEL WEBSITE

info@leicesterunitarians.co.uk



LeicsUnitarians



Leicester_unitarians



The Great Meeting
Unitarian Chapel,
Leicester