



Great Meeting Chapel Leicester

Newsletter - The unlocking edition



300 years of Freedom, Reason and Tolerance

SERVICES

Led by the Minister

SUNDAYS IN JUNE

6th 11am
13th 11am
20th 11am
27th 11am

SUNDAYS IN JULY

4th 11am
11th 11am
18th 11am
25th 11am followed by Vestry meeting

SUNDAYS IN AUGUST

1st 11am
8th 11am
15th 11am
22nd 11am
29th 11am

SUNDAYS IN SEPTEMBER

5th 11am
12th 11am
19th 11am
26th 11 am

Thanks to Leicester Museums and Galleries Service for use of the image on the cover of this newsletter. It is one of three surviving fragments from the *Thou Shalt not Kill* triptych by the German Expressionist painter Johannes Mattheus Koetz. The image is used in connection with the Chapel-hosted *Light in the Darkness Exhibition*. Read more about this event on pages 10-11.

UPCOMING DATES FOR THE DIARY

- * Saturday 24th July 2.30 - 4.00 pm: Launch of the Heritage Trails event with Leicester Arts Society
- * Saturday and Sunday 11th and 12th September 10.00am – 5.00 pm: Heritage Open Day.
- * Saturday 11th September 2.00 – 4.00 pm: Tea in the Garden

Volunteers are needed for all the above events.
Your help and time would be much appreciated. Please see
sign-up sheets in the garden room

FROM THE MINISTER

Dear Friends,

It is a great pleasure to be writing my first “From The Minister” for many months. I am very grateful to our chairman Mike and David Newton on the website for having seen us through this period of lockdown by printing up beautifully presented copies of the weekly homilies as they were given on zoom and circulating them. And now Nicky has quickly volunteered to resume her duties as newsletter editor, for which our warm thanks.

With our return to services in Chapel things have changed somewhat, but not completely. Zoom is still with us I am glad to say, and it is a real joy to still welcome our on-line Sunday congregation in this way. Thank you very much to Peter for his expertise in setting up zoom in Chapel, and to Diane for continuing week by week to ensure our health and safety compliance.

When restrictions first became necessary and we could no longer physically come to Great Meeting for services it was Simon Hall and David Kent who first stepped into the breach. While presenting his meditative and thoughtful online devotions, with candles of joys and concerns and chalice lighting, incorporating music and pictures, Simon showed me what was required to zoom, and David recorded beautiful YouTube music and words for our hymns. This all enabled us to continue as a vital worshipping community, and I can't thank them enough. Gabi Witthaus and David Wykes were also our cheerful and indispensable zoom hosts.

Zoom has provided some memorable and moving moments during these difficult months and I very much hope it will continue to do so for us all.



As you read through this edition of the newsletter, behind the reports of activities, news of considerable work undertaken on the Chapel fabric, and not least of how the finance became available for us to enable the work to begin, the figure of our chairman Mike Drucquer stands. The amount of energy and

commitment Mike has put into Chapel concerns has been completely remarkable, and we owe him a great debt of gratitude.

Please enjoy reading this revived issue of the newsletter, and possibly consider submitting an article, a review, a photograph for next time. It's good to be back!

With all good wishes,

Arthur.

ELECTION

During lockdown congregation member Simon Hall was one of four candidates elected to the Executive Committee of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches. The Executive Committee act as trustees for the General Assembly (GA) and Nightingale Centre and work with the Chief Officer and other staff and volunteers to develop and oversee the strategic direction and smooth running of the GA.

We offer our warmest congratulations to Simon on his appointment and wish him all the best as he goes forward in his new role.

MONEY RAISER

Thanks go out to Sue Harper who, as we go to print in July, is in the midst of a month long sponsored dog walk to raise funds for the Chapel's roof renovation project.

You can sponsor Sue through her online JustGiving page or by signing the sheet in the garden room. We wish her and her canine companion Bertie good weather and lots of fun walks together.

WEDDINGS

We are very happy to record that the wedding of **Laurence Alexander Worn** and **Ffion Rebecca Jones** took place at Chapel on Sunday 18th April 2021, the minister officiating.

Interestingly, this will be the last wedding at Great Meeting where the couple will receive a hand-written Certificate of Marriage. From May of this year all certificates will be computerised and issued by the Register Office.



Credit: Getty - Contributor

DEATHS

We are very sorry to record the death of **Richard Clapp** who died suddenly on 1st February 2021 at the age of 90 years. The cremation was held at Swindon. Our sincere condolences are extended to Richard's daughter Elizabeth and David Wykes and all their family.

We are very sad to record the death of **Raj Kumeri Bwry** who died on Friday 23rd April 2021 at the age of 98 years. The cremation took place at Gilroes. Our sympathies are extended to her daughter Manjula and grandson Manish Sood and all their family.

RENOVATION OF WALL



Following grants from Leicester City Council and Historic England our historic Grade 2 listed boundary wall on Butt Close Lane has been restored and repointed by Calibre Conservation. After a condition report and mortar analysis the wall was cleaned of vegetative matter and mould before replacement of perished bricks by hand-made replicas and complete repointing with lime mortar. The top of the middle part of the wall had to be extensively rebuilt due to damage by water ingress. The wall is now stabilised and should be secure for many years, although as part of routine maintenance it will need inspection and cleaning from time to time. We also took the opportunity to re-site four of the gravestones as they had been leaning against the wall and causing unnecessary stress onto it.



NATIONAL HERITAGE LOTTERY GRANT

In June we were delighted to hear the good news that we have been awarded £78,700 from the above fund which together with grants from Leicester City Council, The Leche Fund, the Chapel's Roof Fund and the Listed Places of Worship Scheme will bring the total for Phase 2 of the restoration project to £105,000. The repair part of this has been tendered at £72,000 including vat so the remainder will be split between contingency and an important Heritage Outreach Plan consisting of talks, Chapel tours, displays, school visits, concerts, exhibitions, collaboration with local universities, garden planning and planting and ecological measures.

The restoration section will consist of gutter replacement, drainage groundwork, repair of high level cornice, repair of windows, external redecoration, repair of internal Grade 2 listed plaster ceiling and internal redecoration of ceiling. A separate project, funded by the Pilgrim Trust will see cleaning of the internal memorials.

The Heritage Outreach has kicked off already with George Sfougaras' installation 'Light in the Darkness' which is very well received. Planning is under way for the other elements and I am very pleased that our lettings Officer, Shazeen Boles will be devoting an extra 3 hours per week to the project, paid for by the fund.

Our next event which will involve the congregation will be the Heritage Open days on September 11th and 12th.

Massive thank you to those who have volunteered to help and to the many who gave so generously to the roof fund. Your contributions were essential in showing that the project had congregational support.

ROOF REPAIR

We are very grateful indeed for the donations and grants that have made possible the repair of the roof leak, which is now complete. This photo shows the transformation of the problematic central well by construction of a substructure to support a flat roof cover set at a slight fall to the four sides.



The photo below shows the new roof in place, with new lead flashings [the only part visible from the street].



As well as the roof repair, the contractors W W Brown vacuumed out 300 years of dust and powder from the internal attic space and replaced the insulation. All timbers were treated for woodworm. When the fibre glass well was removed we discovered that one part of the structural oak beam was more severely affected by many years of wet rot than we thought and this will have to be strengthened by metal.

Mike Drucquer

LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

Between the dates of July 1st and July 14th Great Meeting Chapel was delighted to host congregation member George Sfougaras's *Light in the Darkness* art installation.

The work was inspired by the fragment of the *Thou Shalt not Kill* triptych featured on the cover. The work is by Johannes Mattheus Koetz and is part of Leicester Museum's internationally acclaimed German Expressionism collection.

The triptych, which had to be cut up and smuggle out of Germany in 1937, exposes the futility, hypocrisy and violence of armed conflict.

Light in the Darkness highlights the common need for shelter by all persecuted, exiled and displaced people and the responsibility to remember those lost. Amongst the photographs featured are ones of George's own family who were forcibly exiled from Turkey as part of that country's offensive



against Greece in the early part of the 20th century. The image above shows George standing alongside the tent against which the photos are projected as a revolving light records, and exposes the sadness of the past, but also illuminates the way to a better, more just tomorrow.

The viewer's experience is enhanced by a soundscape which relays voices as echoes from the past.

At the end of the exhibition this tent, and the tent which houses its sister exhibition at New Walk Museum, will be donated to a refugee charity to be used as shelters.

EVENT DAY

On Saturday July 3rd, in partnership with Leicester Museums & Galleries Service, the Chapel hosted an event day linked with the *Light in the Darkness* Exhibition.

There were two activities, both of which were brilliantly facilitated by volunteers from the Museum. *Foundation Stones* invited participants to decorate a stone with words or pictures to remember those lost in war and seeking safety. This is part of a larger project to involve the public in making an artistic contribution to the foundations of the new Holocaust Memorial, scheduled to open in London later this year.



The second was a collage activity which encouraged people to get in touch with their creative side by decorating a paper *Dove of Peace*.

Once again visitors enjoying tea and cake in the beautiful Chapel gardens expressed delight at encountering ‘a hidden city gem’ that they hadn’t previously known about.

Inside the Chapel visitors were encouraged to contribute comments about George’s exhibition and to take a Chapel tour, with Vestry Chairman Mike acting as tour guide. Feedback on both were overwhelmingly positive, leaving Chapel and Museum volunteers in agreement that the event had been worthwhile and very enjoyable for those taking part.

Nicky Drucquer

CHAPEL TRAILS

During lockdown Mike and Nicky, generously assisted by Tony Fletcher, developed two trails to help visitors to Chapel engage with, and enjoy the experience of Great Meeting. Both of these resources were based on templates provided by the national *Arts Society* and grateful thanks are due to Area Organiser Gill Murphy who offered invaluable assistance in two important respects: gearing content to the interests and the capabilities of the intended audience and ensuring that the high standards of professional presentation required by the society were fully adhered to.

The first trail is designed to engage children. Among the twelve intriguing features of chapel featured on the trail is this lovely example of graffiti that Tony discovered carved into one of the side pews, presumably by a bored child. Links have been made with a primary school that serves the New Parks Estate and it is hoped that the first of a target of six visits by school parties will take place in the autumn. Test runs of the trail have been encouraging with comments such as “strikes just the right balance between being fun and educational” received.



The second trail is a memory trail designed for people with mild to medium memory loss. It is less about heritage-linked facts and figures, and more about the sensory memories - sight, sound and smell - that being in Chapel stimulates and provokes in the visitor. As part of his year's heritage outreach programme it is planned to offer visits, based on the trail, to local residential homes.

Laminated copies of both trails can be found in stands, kindly provided by the Art Society, and placed on the window sill by the front table in Chapel. The children's trail has an accompanying answer sheet and a child-friendly evaluation instrument is being developed so that we can feedback on the success of this activity as part of the broader evaluation of the Heritage Outreach programme.

Nicky Drucquer

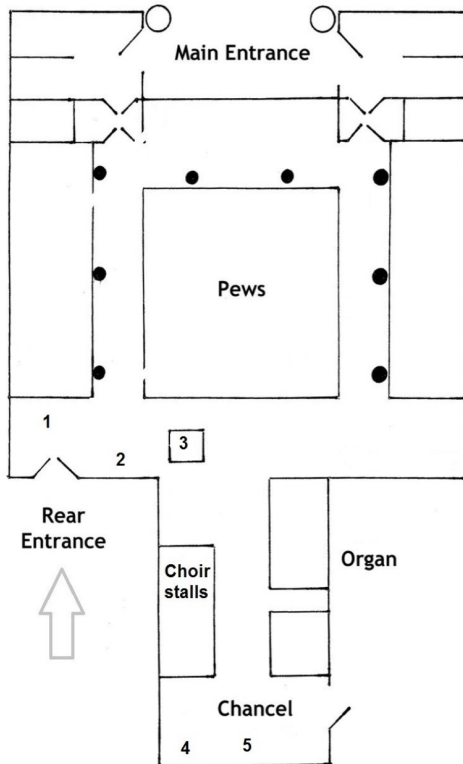
Conversation pieces for a memory-friendly trail

INTRODUCTION

Built in 1708 as a 'Meeting House for Protestant Dissenters' on the site of an orchard just inside the old town walls, the Great Meeting Chapel is the earliest domestic brick building in Leicester and has been Unitarian since the early 19th century. The organ, parts of which date from 1850, is reputed to be one of the best in Leicestershire. The interior was significantly modified and improved in 1866 and is little changed since, giving a 'time capsule' effect. There is a fine collection of internal memorials. Outside, the old graveyard has been converted into a garden, one of the few green spaces in the city centre.

1 FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Stand here for a moment and take a deep breath through your nose. Hold it for a couple of seconds and then breathe out. What do you notice? Are there any smells or sensations that come to mind, for example can you smell flowers or polish?



2 FONT

Spend a few minutes here and share what you notice. For example, what is the font made of and what does it feel like? Talk about what would happen here and any thoughts on who would do what. Do you have memories of naming ceremonies?



3 PULPIT

Share your thoughts on who would use this and what they would do from here. Touch the Pulpit — what is it made of and what does it feel like? Can you see carvings and what are they of? Do you remember sitting and listening to very long talks from the person standing in a Pulpit?



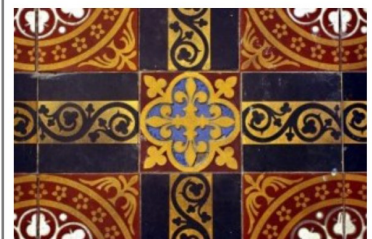
5 TOP TABLE

What catches your eye, for example the flowers or the candle. Do you have a favourite flower? Do you like to see candles in a place of worship?



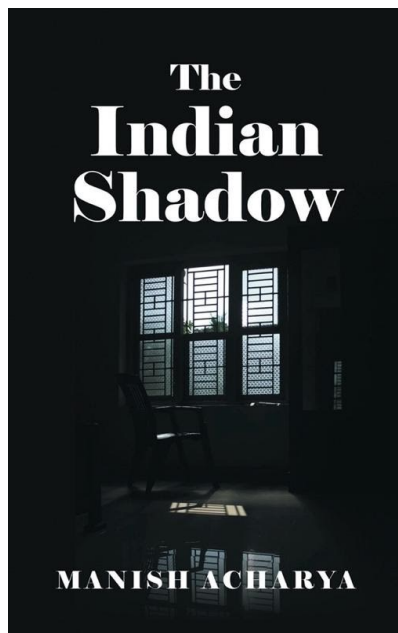
4 FLOOR TILES

Look at the patterns of the tiles. Which part do you like best?



THE INDIAN SHADOW

During lockdown congregation member Manish Acharya was able to put the finishing touches to, and publish, his first book *The Indian Shadow*. The book was written about his family's experiences, and how they have dealt with various challenges since arriving in England in the late sixties, right up to the present day.



The book has garnered praise from a number of academics and influencers who agree that it provides a very interesting, emotional and inspirational read. The many obstacles that Manish has faced in writing this book are acknowledged by Dipak Kumar Fakey OBE who comments ” *I have witnessed a substantial change in Manish, who has used spirituality to overcome his Autism and Aspergers Syndrome.*”

Manish wrote the book as a tribute to his late father, Councilor Paul, who died after three severe heart attacks at the age of 53 and is donating 10% of the net profits to the British Heart Foundation charity.

READING

There's the reading you do in the waiting room
 With an endless queue ahead,
There's the reading you do in the evening
 Lying quietly in your bed,
There's the reading you do on the Underground
 Which turns the curious head,
The reading you do on the sunny beach
 Between swims and getting fed,
The reading you do to discover yourself
 And what you already know,
 The reading that is an opiate
And which you can never let go.

Each sort has a different quality,
 One story is never the same,
 The reading you do
 When you ought to be doing
 Something entirely mundane.
Each one has a different memory
 Once you lay your book aside,
And the writing that follows the reading
 Is the story you have to describe.

Arthur Stewart

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