



Great Meeting Chapel Leicester

Newsletter Winter/ Spring 2026



300 years of Freedom, Reason and Tolerance

SUNDAY SERVICES:

Starting at 11. 00 am and led by the Minister unless otherwise stated

February 1st – Candlemas / Imbolc

February 8th – Service led by Andy Frost (from Hinckley Unitarians)

February 15th – What is love? (Valentine's Day)

February 22nd – Service led by George Dunseth

March 1st – Service led by Jude Casson

March 8th – International Women's Day

March 15th – Mothering Sunday (*leader TBC*)

March 22nd – Spring Equinox / Ostara

March 29th – Palm Sunday (*leader TBC*)

April 5th – Easter Sunday

April 12th – Low Sunday

April 19th – St. George's Day

April 26th – Earth Day (possible visit of Unitarian for Climate Justice group)

May 3rd – May Day / Beltane (*leader TBC*)

May 10th – (*leader TBC*)

May 17th – IDAHOBIT

May 24th – Pentecost/Whitsun (service with communion epilogue)

May 31st – Unity Sunday

REGULAR EVENTS

- ♦ THURSDAY 11.00 AM – 1.00: **COFFEE MORNING**
Tea, coffee and warm company in our beautiful garden room
- ♦ THURSDAY 12.30 AM – 1.00: **MID-WEEK RECHARGE**
Half and hour of meditation, music, poetry and pause.
- ♦ FIRST SUNDAY OF THE MONTH: Join us after the service for a bring-and-share lunch, followed by a convivial afternoon playing **BOARD GAMES**.

UPCOMING SPECIAL EVENTS

Sunday, 15 February, after the service

Screening of “*Adrift: Senegal’s Coastal Crisis and the Deadly Route to Europe*” a short documentary by Environmental Justice Foundation (co-produced by Kate Drucquer), followed by a discussion.

Fri 27th – Sunday 29th March. The General Assembly Annual Meeting. Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire

The keynote speaker is Sarah Corbett, an award winning activist, author and founder of the global Craftivist Collective.

Saturday, 11 April

Lincoln’s Klezmer Group
“*Simcha*” – concert -
documentary in the chapel



SIMCHA
Lincoln's Klezmer Band

**Kindertransport –
the concert documentary**
Unitarian Chapel
45 East Bond Street, Leicester LE1 4SX
Saturday 11 April 2026, 7.30pm
Tickets: Adults: £10 | Under 16s: £5

Book now: wegottickets.com/event/690813
Enquiries: 07944 907051



FROM THE MINISTER

Some time ago I came across an analogy that has stayed with me. It described the Bible (though the image can be extended to all religious sources) as collections of different Lego sets poured together into a large, empty bucket.

In that bucket are pieces from many different sets, all jumbled together. Some of those sets clearly belong to fantasy worlds: Sauron's tower, a T-rex enclosure from Jurassic Park, the Millennium Falcon from Star Wars. Others are recognisable attempts to reflect the real world: the Eiffel Tower, the Houses of Parliament, San Francisco's cable cars. Many of the sets in our bucket are incomplete, some bricks are of uncertain origin, some are off-brand but fit with the rest. Some have been hoovered up by the vacuum of history; others chewed by the dog - damaged, but usable.

Recently I was asked online which religious groups I consider dangerous for their own followers. After some thought, my answer was: to some extent, all of them can be. Including my own. That's because every religious tradition builds a worldview from inherited Lego bricks - scriptures, stories, practices, traditions, rituals, and communal wisdom. Each of us assembles these pieces in ways that make sense to us, within the parameters your group deemed acceptable. The danger is not usually in the bricks themselves, but in how rigidly we insist that our particular construction is the only possible one, or that it perfectly represents reality.

Unlike a single Lego set, there is no picture on the box showing us what the finished product is meant to look like. We've got many sets mixed together, partial instructions handed down, and no shortage of voices claiming authority. When we confuse our particular constructions with objective truth, we risk creating something that traps rather than frees, and harms rather than helps.

Using the very same bricks, we can build a throne (elevating power, hierarchy, and control); or we can build a table (a place of gathering, nourishment, and welcome). Neither of these appears on any picture on the box, and neither was ever mandated by the original sets. The bricks themselves are rarely the problem. What matters is what we choose to make of them, and that choice can be deeply revealing.

Even our cherished holy trinity of freedom, reason, and tolerance can become unhelpful if we never stop to ask how we are actually using them in today's world. Freedom to do what? How are we reasoning? Tolerance of what? When was the last time you've revised the structures we've built? Faithfulness, of any kind, requires both the courage to rethink those structures and the humility to recognise that no single structure tells the whole story. Perhaps our task is to keep asking whether it still serves life, justice, and compassion. And to be willing, when necessary, to rearrange the bricks.

With every blessing,

Arek

CONGREGATION NEWS

The congregation send their commiserations and warmest thoughts to Manish on the passing of his beloved mother Manjula, pictured on the front cover. For many years she had been a valued and loyal supporter of Great Meeting Chapel, attending Sunday services in person and then on Zoom as her mobility began to decline. We looked on her as a good and wise friend and all miss her greatly.

We are glad to be able to turn to Peter, one of her dearest friends in Leicester, for the straight-from-the-heart tribute to Manjula overleaf.

REMEMBERING MANJULA

An extract of words spoken by *Peter Soulsby* at the Prarthna Sabha held to pay respect and offer tribute to Cllr. Manjula Sood who passed away on December 24th, just one day after her 80th birthday.

“Manjula Sood was an inspiration. I have never known anybody so inspirational or anybody so widely loved and respected – somebody that I had the honour to call my friend.

Manju had an absolutely unparalleled understanding of our city and its communities. She had that understanding because people mattered to her. In so many ways she brought together in one person all that is best about our City. All that is best in Leicester. Tolerance - respect - understanding – she had them all .

She knew about communities. She knew about religion - she knew about origins - but above all she cared about people. She knew those people – and they knew her. Walking around the city with Manju was a revelation. Children she had taught – now grown into adult citizens. The pride she took in their achievements – even those (some here today) who didn’t ultimately share her politics. She was rightly proud of you all – and you showed your respect for her.

Of course as a person of Indian origin, as a ground breaker, she faced challenges as a teacher. Not easy in a sometimes hostile city. Her determination and dignity prevailed.

Remembered too in the street. Those many people we met , so grateful for her help and who greeted her as sister or aunty. For those causes she had championed. Those – so many – she had helped at times of need or crisis.

When her husband Paul died so suddenly – nearly 30 years ago – there were a few who questioned how Manju could ever pick up

his legacy. They didn't know her. She served with distinction as councillor, first in Abbey ward – more recently in Stoneygate - and represented our city as the first woman of South Asian origin to be Lord Mayor in any UK City. Do you remember that iconic photo of an apparently diminutive Manju as our Lord Mayor inspecting troops outside town hall? A photo that went national for what that said about our City - our communities - and our Manju.

Manju insisted on calling me her Boss (even on my birthday card – opened after her death – and which I will treasure). I think she was perhaps joking – because I was much more dependent on her sound advice than ever able to tell her what to do, Her judgement was always sound and her knowledge impeccable.

When she called me boss – I always hastened to tell people who was really in charge.

I said inspirational; also a role model who broke down barriers and showed what can be achieved. Many have followed where Manju inspired them to go.

I am going to miss my friend Manju desperately. For that friendship, for her support, for that wise advice. Other will miss her - family need to be so much in mind. Yadav and Aryana – the grand children of who she was so proud. Manish, Mitish her sons and of course Sheenal her wonderful daughter in law. Our hearts and prayers go out to you all.

I have said I will miss Manju. But she certainly will not be forgotten. Mother, Grandmother, Sister, Friend and Colleague.

Inspirational

A role model

A good friend

She will be remembered.”

VISIT TO JEWRY WALL MUSEUM

On Sunday 16 November, after the service, Ros led a small group on foot to visit the new Jewry Wall Museum in Leicester (unfortunately, others travelling by car weren't able to park owing to an event nearby and the driver had to abandon the trip).

Leicester is one of the most explored Roman sites in the UK after London and the museum boasts the finest collection of Roman discoveries in the Midlands, including mosaics, ivory, glass, stone and metal jewellery and many small domestic items, as well as the remains of the Roman bath house excavated by the eminent archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon in 1936-39.

Through the interactive displays, we immersed ourselves in everyday life in Leicester (Roman name Ratae) nearly 2000 years ago and admired the amazing craftsmanship of the Roman artisans, as well as learning something of religious life under Roman rule. Highlights included a tiny grooming set, several curse tablets (inscribed by victims of crime against the perpetrators) and the wonderful peacock mosaic pavement.

The name Jewry Wall is something of a mystery! It is thought that it may derive from "Jurats" (medieval borough councillors who used to hold meetings in St Nicholas churchyard).

If you haven't yet been to the museum since it re-opened, a visit is highly recommended. There is a great deal to see and

for the price of your ticket, you can visit as many times as you like for a year.



Anne
Whichcord

LUTE CONCERT

On Saturday 3rd December Ayres and Graces presented a "Prelude to Christmas" in the Chapel. This took the form of a free concert of Elizabethan and Jacobean music on the themes of winter, advent and Christmas. The varied programme of songs, and some poems, was entertainingly performed by luteist Dr Nick Gravestock and singer Natalie Windsor both of whom donned period costume. Nick introduced and played several instruments including a replica of a 1583 lute and a renaissance guitar.

The festive atmosphere of the concert was enhanced by the fine Christmas tree and attractive decorations which adorned the Chapel. Its good sight lines (courtesy of the new stage) and excellent acoustics added to the enjoyable musical experience which was had by all.

After the programme the audience enjoyed refreshments in the garden room. Many made generous donations, offsetting the costs of the event and raising a total of £55 for Chapel funds.



EDITH GITTINS (1845 -1910)

Edith Gittins was a Sunday School teacher at the Great Meeting Chapel. There is a plaque in the chapel, erected by the congregation, in appreciation of her work in the Sunday School and the Women's Friendly Society.

I first became interested in her story when she was cited in a special Women's Day tour at the Guildhall. At the time, I was attending the 101 meetings in the Chapel. We were talking about Unitarians, so I decided to investigate further into Edith's life, talents, and achievements. I wanted to share the legacy of this incredible woman with others

One of five children, Edith lived with her family in a Georgian bow fronted house, situated in Churchgate, opposite Butt Close Lane. Her father was a corn dealer, which was potentially a lucrative business. However, profitability was influenced politically by the Corn Laws.



As well as her commitment to the Great Meeting Chapel, Edith was a talented watercolour artist and a teacher of drawing, trained by William Morris. She was a member of Leicester Artists and Sketch Club. At the age of 20 she exhibited her artwork at the New Water Colour Society.

Today the Leicester Museums hold five of her paintings, including/ 'Groby Manor House' and 'The Library of the Old Guildhall Leicester'. We also have two of her works in the Garden Room.

Edith was known for her strength of character, tenacity and fighting spirit. She was a founding member of Leicester Women's Liberal Association when women had no political power and she later became one of the Vice Presidents for the Leicester & Leicestershire Women's Suffrage Society. Edith famously gave a lecture on women's suffrage to the Leicester Liberal Club and was probably the first local woman to fulfil such a public function on the question of the vote.

In June 1908, Edith joined over 3,000 women who marched through London to campaign for the right to vote. This was famously called the 'Mud March'.

Although Edith appears militant, her friend and local Quaker spoke at her funeral saying that 'she disapproved of the militant suffragettes, stating that women would just be associated with 'feeble violence and hysteria'. This illustrates that even though Edith fought for women's rights, how she did it reflected Unitarian values.

Edith died at 65 years old and by special request in her will, her body was cremated, (unusual for this time). Her ashes were buried in the family grave in Welford Road cemetery.

But her story does not end there! In her will, she left the sum of £500 for the erection and maintenance of a public drinking fountain, to be called 'Æthelflæd Fountain.' This was made of bronze and designed by Mr Benjamin J Fletcher.

So why have Æthelflæd on top of a water fountain?

This was a powerful statement for women's rights. She intended for her to stand as a female counterpoint to the city's male figures by it being placed on an axis with the Clock-tower.

Carole Cafferty

FINDING TREASURE

The chapel garden is an undoubted treasure in the centre of the city. Very lovingly curated, it has so much to offer anyone who is able to venture outside but also to anyone who views it from the garden room. I admit to sometimes being distracted by the birds, squirrels and occasional rodents going about their business on a Sunday morning and I admit to hugging the magnificent trees. I have also taken to saying hello to various long-gone Leicester residents whose names catch my eye on the gravestones (a practice initiated by my sister and her grandchildren as they walked to school past a small graveyard). I wonder about the lives of these people, their joys and their struggles. I wonder what turmoil and peacefulness the trees have lived through. The garden is full of history and presence – wonderful food for the spirit.

Helping out in the garden has been a great joy for me, and Arek's service on Epiphany brought to mind a biodynamic practice that is typically used at this time of year as a gift and blessing to the land - the use of a preparation known as the Three Kings. I try to garden on my city allotment with biodynamic principles in mind (organic gardening with an added boost!). I find it heartening that there are so many farmers and gardeners around the world who are turning to this approach in acknowledgement of the harm that has been done over many years of industrialised farming.

I mentioned this to Arek during coffee after the service. The result was the communal stirring and spraying of small amounts of gold, frankincense and myrrh that took place the following Sunday.



Arek, George and I started the stirring just after 10.15 and others joined in as they arrived at the chapel and towards the end of the service.

Despite an early morning forecast of rain at 12 o'clock, the skies remained clear throughout the process of spraying as we took turns to spread the highly diluted 'dynamized' gift.

Thank you so much to everyone who was there in person and on zoom. It felt very special to be focusing on our relationship to the land around us and to acknowledge with gratitude the 'more-than-human' world.



Author, activist and public theologian Brian McClaren writes:

'In my dream, even in our cities... a marriage between science and spirit would allow us to marvel at the sacredness of sunlight, the wonder of wind, the refreshment of rain, the rhythm of the seasons... our life-giving connection to each other and to the living Earth would be fundamental, central, and sacred...'

(From: Life after Doom: Wisdom and Courage for a World Falling Apart' 2024)

A beautiful vision which is surely manifested in our own city-centre chapel garden.

Debs Plummer

LIVING LIGHTLY ON THE EARTH

I first heard this in the year 2000 and really liked the idea which seems beautifully simple. Comparing notes with Carol and Jude in line with this concept, we found our views and actions were similar. From this blossomed the idea of having a series of discussions among our congregation, to consider issues of saving resources, recycling, re-using, restoring, and making ethical choices, all of which conform to Unitarian principles. Here are some brief notes from the first meeting on 23 November 2025, to which some people brought items as visual aids.

HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS: cleaning products with ingredients which don't damage the environment for dish-washing, laundry and general household cleaning e.g. Ecover, Ocean Savers, Pink Stuff. Washable cloths, pan scrubbers made from bamboo, cellulose and similar (non-plastic) e.g. Ocean Savers, Signature Home; these will rot down over time.

PERSONAL CARE: Handwash foaming soap refill tablets from Reefyll, toothbrush heads made of bamboo or other non-plastic material, Live Coco brushes and Braun-type heads for electric toothbrushes. Toilet paper (unbleached) by Naked Paper and white (part-recycled paper and paper wrappers) from Who Gives a Crap. Plastic-free tissues from Cheeky Panda are biodegradable bamboo and ones without plastic wrappers come from Tesco.

FOOD & DRINK: Really too numerous to mention but look out for meat and fish coming from sustainable sources, high welfare (not just Red Tractor) and RSPCA Accredited, Rainforest Alliance, Fair Trade and other sources, particularly B Corp companies. The Co-op is good for sources of these foods and Morrisons does Wonky vegetables (perfectly good to eat). Watch out for produce from farm shops providing local food, reducing transport costs and supporting local farm producers. Seasonal food is always best! Look out for regenerative farming with their sustainable practices such as low (or no) till/ploughing, reduced or no synthetic fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides. These farms use cover crops, natural grazing to provide fertilizers, fallow fields to allow natural recovery, care and attention to hedgerows

for shelter and biodiversity, crop rotation and attention to soil health with its mycorrhiza. Some farmers will use biological control of pests.

SERVICES: Ecology Building Society – profits go to assisting the environment. The Co-operative Bank does not invest in fossil fuels or unethical businesses and is led by its customers, giving a lot of money to local charities and activities to assist the environment as well as mental and physical health. Ecosia – an app for browsing. As you browse, they plant trees.

WILDLIFE: The local Wildlife Trust (Leicestershire & Rutland) encourages sustainability and biodiversity as well as restoration of depleted landscapes. For a small annual fee, you can access over 35 nature reserves giving nearly 1300 hectares of nature conservation land. Organisations such as The Woodland Trust and RSPB also work for similar objectives.

OTHER: Charity shops – our use of these is win/win – win you support the charity with your money and win for you because you can give pre-loved items to a good cause and buy books, clothes etc. fairly cheaply. Many other charities have online or postal outlets.

A thimble represented sewing clothing, doing repairs as necessary and darning holey socks to avoid throwing them away (at least discarded bamboo socks will rot down).

Lip balm and hand cream – make your own! This sparked an idea for a workshop to show people how to do this. Watch the noticeboard.

Tubes of hand cream (& other creams) – when apparently finished you'll be amazed how much is left inside. Cut the end off and keep the open tube in a plastic container. Lipstick – when difficult to use, carry on by using a lip-brush to get out the last 10mm You'll be surprised at how long it lasts.

Clearly this is not an exhaustive list of the wide-ranging topics we discussed but it's a start and we know people are interested! We welcome contributions (information, advice, tips) from everyone, and will hold further informal and enthusiastic discussions in future.

AN EXCITING FUNGUS DISCOVERY

The Leicestershire Fungi Study Group (LFSG), founded in 1980, has met monthly at Great Meeting since 2010. Great excitement has been expressed nationally over a recent discovery by members of the group of a very rare fungus in Leicestershire, and it was recently highlighted in the BBC News. The following description was kindly supplied by a member, Dr Geoffrey Hall.

"During a recording meeting on 28th September in Burrow Wood, an ancient woodland in Charnwood Forest, two members of the LFSG showed the group a large clump of the rare fungus Candelabra Coral (Artomyces pyxidatus) that they had found a few days earlier while on a walk through the wood. It is easily recognised by its crown-like tips that resemble the turrets of a castle, and grows on well-rotten, mossy logs. It was thought to be extinct in Britain, until it was recorded in 2012 in Suffolk, almost 116 years after its first discovery made by the mycologist Carleton Rea on 20 October 1896 in Shrawley Wood, Worcestershire. Since then it has been recorded only five times, in Kent (2021), Norfolk (2022), Middlesex (2023), Surrey (2024), Sussex (2024) and in the New Forest, on both sides of the Hampshire/Wiltshire borders, for the first time this year.

This is the first record in Leicestershire and the most northerly so far. According to Henricki & Mahler (2012), it is widespread in Europe ... "but nowhere common, mainly northerly, with records

stretching from France to the Czech Republic and north to Finnish Lapland."



The cause(s) of its sudden appearance are unknown, but as it is medium-sized and distinctive, it's unlikely to have been overlooked in the past. Little is known about its ecology, but its habitat on a rotting hardwood log indicates that it is part of the large group of fungi that decompose and recycle woody material. They are a vital component of the woodland ecosystem, maintaining healthy forests.

The LFSG meets monthly at 7pm on the fourth Thursday from September to April to show new discoveries, have talks suitable for beginners and experts, and has outdoor outings through the Autumn. It also has a large library from which items may be borrowed. Newcomers are welcome.

Anthony Fletcher

SOFAR SOUNDS

On Friday 16 January, we hosted our very first Sofar Sounds gig. I first came across Sofar while I was in Leeds, where Mill Hill Unitarian Chapel was one of their semi-regular venues during my time there. Getting in touch with Sofar Leicester was high on my priority list when I moved here in 2023, but at that point they weren't operating locally. Happily, Sofar Leicester was resurrected only a few months ago... and with great success!

Sofar Sounds is a global music community known for hosting intimate, pop-up concerts in unexpected spaces: warehouses, backyards, living rooms, galleries, cafes, and all sorts of community venues. Now active in over 350 cities worldwide, Sofar events invite audiences to listen closely, discover emerging artists, and experience live music in a way that feels more personal and more connected than a typical gig. We were delighted to be part of that!

Part of Sofar's appeal lies in its sense of mystery. Concert dates are advertised, and tickets sold, but the details remain shrouded in mystery. Ticket-holders don't know the exact location or the performers in advance: the venue is revealed to the ticket holders just 36 hours before the show, and the line-up isn't announced until you arrive at the door. This is precisely what makes Sofar so intriguing. Where are you going?

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We were treated to performances by three wonderful artists:

Araya – a British-Thai singer-songwriter based in Leeds, who pairs confessional emotive vocals with an introspective and 90s-inspired sound. Her music fuses the genres of folk, trip hop, bossanova and alternative music.

Cj Pandit – a Leices-ter-based singer-songwriter whose “happy-sad” music blends indie, pop, and rock with thoughtful, emotionally resonant lyrics rooted in longing and the search for meaning. Cj describes his songs as being “for memories of places you’ve never been and faces you’ve never seen.”



Essy Sparrow – who describes herself “as a scrappy song-writer making music from the Cornish coast.” Her songs are nostalgic, witty, and richly storytelling. Her debut EP was released in 2024, and since then she has played the BBC Introducing stage and Boardmasters, who praised her music for “making you feel like you are being listened to, like you are being heard.”

Alongside a memorable evening of live music, our bar also raised a modest net profit in support of our Thursday Coffee Morning. It turns out that good music can *do good* in more ways than one!

Arek

BURNS LUNCH

Many thanks to all helpers and contributors to the Burns Lunch, it was most enjoyable.

Mike and Nicky did a great job cooking the haggis, tatties and neeps; Roy's Cranachan was as delicious as ever; so too was Ros' onion gravy, an essential accompaniment. The efforts of those who set out the tables, helped to serve and cleared up afterwards are also much appreciated.

Before the event, to get us in the mood, Gabby shared a brilliant Burns themed joke on the GM What App group. Sadly, it cannot be shared here due to the pressure on space!

Huw read the Burns' address to a Haggis poem with panache, and Ros recited the Scots grace that her Grandfather and Uncle used to say before each meal.

After costs we made a profit of £114, an excellent result.



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