



# THE INQUIRER

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The voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians



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Foy studies institutional racism

More coverage of the GA  
meetings

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## Confronting a slaver's legacy

Derek McAuley writes of the  
Hibbert Trust's journey

# THE INQUIRER

The Unitarian and Free Christian Paper

Established in 1842, The Inquirer is the oldest nonconformist religious newspaper.

**“To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition.”**

From the Object passed at the General Assembly of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches 2001

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Shown above: Pixabay photo by Sue Rickhuss

## Inquiring Words...

**Chris Carr, chair of the Yorkshire Unitarian Union, delivered this message and prayer at the Unitarian General Assembly Meetings.**

Sometimes it can feel we are bogged down with procedures and so forth. Sometimes it's with workloads, other times it's the thankless task with little credit. (Any long-suffering church treasurers will know exactly what I'm talking about!) But if we get it right and are true to our meaning, our vision and our mission, then the work we do here, in our districts and our churches is as valuable and spirit-filled as an address, a hymn or a meditation or a Sunday service. Here is a short prayer including at least some of those whose work is valuable and shows true love and commitment.

### Prayer

Let us give thanks for:

The meeting organisers

The secretaries and letter writers

The minute takers

The small-change counters

The safeguarding officers

Those website wonks and brave Zoom managers

The article writers

The flower arrangers

The meeters and greeters

The biscuit providers

The gloved washer-uppers

Those who dust, mop and vacuum

The chair stackers

The car lift givers

The hand holders

Those with a spare tissue for tears,

And the keyholders, there long before you arrive and long after you leave.

May we give thanks and praise for all those working to make our world a better place. Amen.

**Derek McAuley** writes of how the Hibbert Trust is coming to terms with its origins.

# A matter of trust

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**The Hibbert Trust has been on a journey of exploration and challenge. We have had to look with care at the legacy of slavery as it relates to the trust in light of the issues raised by the Black Lives Matter campaign. We do not claim to have done all we could. There is much more to do, and people will disagree with us. Some think we are doing too much, and others far too little and too slowly. We ask for forbearance.**

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We hope other Unitarian bodies will learn from our approach, but we do not assert that this is the only way. The origins of the Trust, established in 1853, lie in a legacy left by Robert Hibbert whose wealth arose from owning a plantation, Georgia, in Jamaica. This history is no secret; it features in the three books published about the Trust in 1874, 1933 and most recently in 1984. Indeed, Robert Hibbert was a controversial public figure in the run up to the end of slavery in the British Empire. Subsequently we received a legacy from Rev Dr George Case – about whom I have written in the latest edition of the *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society* – and the trustees are also trustees of a separate trust for Unitarian buildings, the John Gregson Trust. More recently the Trusts received considerable donations and a large legacy. We are acutely aware that our responsibility to take forward the purpose of the charity now runs the risk of being undermined by the origins of the funds given by the Trust's founder – even though these now constitute a minority of our assets. For us as trustees, this is ultimately a moral and a governance question. In opening the conversation on the legacy of slavery, the trustees issued a statement on our website on 6 July

“We committed ourselves to addressing white privilege and the legacy of colonialism and the resulting inequalities in access to power and resources.”

2020 saying we should have done more when issues were raised in the past about the origins and use of its charitable funds. (See <https://tinyurl.com/AboutHibbert>) The trustees have in recent years sought to promote its objectives in ways that reflect inclusivity and diversity but acknowledged more needed to be done. We committed ourselves to addressing white privilege and the legacy of colonialism and the resulting inequalities in access to power and resources. The trustees agreed that we must find ways to

make reparation for the Trust's connection with slavery, in the context of fulfilling the legal obligation to the remit of the Trust.

Our approach is threefold.

## **Awareness**

The Hibbert Trust is a faith-based charity – our objective is to apply the funds to ‘the spread of Christianity in its most simple and intelligible form and to the unfettered exercise of private judgment in matters of religion.’ We knew we had to better understand the issues raised by our past. We invited Prof Anthony Reddie, prominent Black British theologian, to talk to us about slavery, racism and responsibility. We were challenged to de-centre our

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# Awareness, understanding action

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whiteness – which is hard when we do not even recognise that this is the norm. We discussed the implications of our apology and our need to take responsibility to look at our structures and systems, recognising that we benefit from them. We also engaged in a discussion of our own individual perspectives in a facilitated conversation using the Quaker ‘threshing’ methodology which is a type of meeting defined by the Quakers at which a variety of different, and sometimes controversial, opinions can be openly, and sometimes forcefully, expressed, in order to defuse a situation.’ We also undertook racism and unconscious-bias training.

Some of the trustees, and at least one other Unitarian, attended the ‘Dismantling Whiteness Symposium’ in April 2021, which was the first UK theological exploration of whiteness. This proved controversial, with lots of aggressive social media comment. I have attended a free online course at the University of Glasgow on the history and legacy of British slavery in the Caribbean.

It is essential that any new trustees are fully briefed on the historical background and its implications for our work.

## Understanding

Understanding our past has proved insightful and revelatory. We thought we knew about Robert Hibbert. There is increasing availability of information on the long-term impact of slavery on Great Britain, Africa and the West Indies – on the colonisers as well as the colonised. The Hibbert Family are explored by Kate Donington in *The Bonds of Family: Slavery, Commerce and Culture in the British Atlantic World*. We find them – dissenters associated with many current Lancashire chapels as well as conforming Anglicans – as leading slave traders and plantation owners.

Two valuable databases can be used to explore connections with both the seizure and transportation of enslaved people and their ownership on plantations. The ‘Legacies of British Slave-Ownership’ at University College London (see: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>) provides an online, fully accessible database of British slave-owners in the Caribbean, including details of compensation paid on abolition

of slavery in 1837 under the Slave Compensation Act. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database now comprises 36,000 individual slaving expeditions between 1514 and 1866. (See: <http://www.slavevoyages.org>)

Using these databases I found new information on the likely origins of George Case’s great wealth and funds the trust received at the end of the 19th century. With regard to the John Gregson Trust, we know little except that the donor went to South Africa as a clerk and worked his way up in banking in the gold mining area. So clearly this has a colonial aspect worth exploring.

## Action

We have been reviewing all our activities and grant giving to ensure they reflect values of inclusion and diversity and redress the historic marginalisation of Black people within our society and indeed within the Unitarian movement. The curriculum of ‘Ministry in the Making’ and the soon-to-be-launched lay leaders programme will include issues of anti-racism and inclusion.

We are looking to widen the diversity of the trustee body to better reflect the UK population and again to ensure new more diverse voices are heard in our decision-making. We have discussed changing the name of the Trust. But we have decided it now could be seen as a convenient means to hide our past rather than acknowledge it. It is more important that we should change the perception of the Trust by our actions. We were supportive of the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre changing the name of its ‘Hibbert Room’.

We are publicising what we are doing within the wider Unitarian community and beyond to demonstrate what churches and other institutions might need to do. I was interviewed for a video by students at UCL who had discovered – and were surprised – by the actions the Hibbert Trust had taken and its public stance.

The Trust is funding *The Inquirer* to produce four, four-page inserts on racism, privilege and how Unitarians can be more inclusive and recognise the experiences of people of colour.

At the most recent meeting of trustees we agreed finan-

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“Be open; tell your history as it is. It may not be how you would like it to be or have presented in the past.”

**Shown left:** Robert Hibbert's plantation house in Jamaica, now a museum. Photo by the Jamaica National Heritage Trust.

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cial priorities for the new financial year. These include a £10,000 research grant on the legacies of slavery in liberal religious movements and three small grants of £100. We have already provided a £14,000 grant over two years to the Cape Town Unitarians for leadership and development work in South Africa and other parts of the Continent and also a travel grant of £3,000 for an American Unitarian Universalist writer to undertake research, including on the largely forgotten British-Jamaican and early Unitarian Robert Wedderburn.

We are looking at how the original funds can, in a targeted way, make some form of reparation within the terms of the purpose and have allocated £7000 next year for justice work in Jamaica. (After all; is this not practical work of ‘loving your neighbour’ Christianity at its simplest?) We have initiated discussions with a Jamaican justice NGO on how we might work together on projects. In doing this we are acutely aware that there is a danger that we continue this pattern of ‘us’ doing it to or for ‘them’. We are taking early steps in developing a true partnership of equals. Taking such action is not without consequences for what we might have traditionally funded amongst Unitarians and others in the UK and beyond. At this time of financial pressures, our priorities have therefore shifted. But as we are often reminded, meaningful change is often difficult and painful.

### What we have learned

All charity trustees need to ensure that they fulfil their moral and legal obligations. If you are an old historic charity as we are – especially from the 18th or mid-19th centuries – look at your funders, as slavery underpinned a huge part of the wealth and economy of the UK. Look at your connections across the colonies of the Empire even after the abolition of slavery. Churches could review old congregational histories and look at names and descriptions. ‘West Indian merchant’ is a real give-away. We hope that other charities with links to slavery can learn from our proactive stance as we are learning from others.

Be open; tell your history as it is. It may not be how you would like it to be or have presented in the past. This will be uncomfortable. However, take things at a measured pace. These are complex issues to unpack and there will be costs in time, energy and money. Review whether your spending today perpetuates the inequalities created in the past, and then take action to change. We know that access to resources underpins unequal power relationships.

In the *Hibbert Journal* published in 1949 to mark the 100th anniversary of Robert Hibbert's death, the Rev Dr G Stephen Spinks wrote about ‘Robert Hibbert and His Trust’. He opened with the sentence ‘The pleasures of civilised living – scholarship no less than sugar – are often gathered from soil dunged deep with human suffering.’ ‘Dunged deep’ is surely an apt, evocative and powerful phrase.

He followed with: *The association of scholarship and liberal learning with slavery is indubitably shocking when we first meet it; but an interval of 100 years not only provides a sedative for sensitive consciences, it sometimes encourages us to be arrogantly surprised that so many honourable men made so much money and left such handsome benefactions out of so much human misery, overlooking meanwhile the social iniquities of our own generation.*

He ends: *We are not born to judge our ancestors; our task is to address ourselves to the benefits and the problems they have bequeathed to us’. I hope I have shown that the present Hibbert Trustees – 70 years on – are still pursuing this task!*



### Derek McAuley

Derek McAuley is a member of the board of the Hibbert Trust and is the former chief officer of the Unitarian General Assembly.

# Take heart, find courage

My brother and his eldest child recently visited family in Yorkshire for a few days. I went over to spend a day with them. They are going through a difficult time, a real challenge. He is facing it with commitment and courage, living with true love and dedication. I admire my older brother. He has always been a man of commitment, of love and courage – and he is showing it now. He describes the problem as his ‘cross to bear’. But it is curious he would use such a phrase, as he says he is an atheist. Still, he sees power in religious tales and phrases. He gets the mythos. He understands the deeper meaning beneath it all.

A few weeks ago I went with Rob, a new attendee at Altrincham, to see our musical heroes, New Model Army. It was a great night, and one I needed. The band played an old song, which they dedicated to the people of Ukraine.

The song was ‘Courage’ and the chorus goes like this:

*And I salute your courage and I toast to your health*

*And I wish you all the luck in the whole wide world*

*May you never be broken like they say you will be.*

Despite the hell they are living through, the Ukrainians do not look broken. They are showing consistent courage, inspired by deep love, against a much more powerful force.

We have seen similar examples throughout human history – including the people of London during the Second World War, what was called ‘The Spirit of the Blitz’. It was thought that people would crumble under the constant bombardment and descend into terror. The leaders were convinced by a theory of Gustav Le Bon. But this was not the case. In fact, the opposite happened. People came together in love.

This same spirit arose in Germany four years later under similar bombardment, which meant the German people hung on even longer, rather than surrender. Twenty-five years later, three times the amount of firepower was dropped on the Vietnamese than was dropped in the entirety of the Second World War. But the Americans could not break the spirit of the people. In the end they gave up; they lost.

This has been repeated many times. Again we see it in the Ukraine. The spirit is harder to break than we think. We underestimate the power of courage, the power of love; the power that enables humans to rise above what we believe we are capable of. Courage is about heart. For the Ukrainians it is love for their home, their country. For my brother, it is love for his child. For others it is love for many things.

Courage, derived from the Latin ‘cor’ from which the French ‘coeur’ or Italian ‘cuore’, both mean ‘heart’. Courage is an act of the heart. When a person acts courageously, they are living from that deepest core of their being, a place seemingly unknown until it is called upon. In such

## FROM NOTHING TO EVERYTHING

By Danny Crosby



times, the most natural thing we can do is not forced. It just comes from that place deep within us, at the core of everything.

Courage should never be confused with fearlessness.

Those who have true courage are intimate with fear, they are just not ruled or fettered by it. To quote Nelson Mandela, ‘I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.’

Courage is about faith – even if you are uncertain in that faith. And, it is about love. Without love there can be no courage. Folk can put on an act for a while, but it cannot be maintained. True courage grows from a place deep within each of us, within all life. It grows from whatever we hold most dear in our lives. It comes from recognising how sacred, how precious, life truly is. It comes in seeing that love is the true ‘cor’, the courage of life. For without love we find we have nothing really to live for.

Fear is common to most folk and we respond to it in a variety of ways, the two most common are fight or flight. To turn away in fear is no less damaging than to turn towards it in anger and hate. How we respond to one another – and to life – really matters. Everything matters, every thought, every feeling, every word and every deed. How we are with each other matters. We can’t change the whole world, but we can affect one another and inspire one another in the ways of loving courage. Spending time with my brother, I saw a man living with courage, living from deep love, committed to whatever challenge he has to face.

We are living in fearful and distrustful times. It matters how we respond. Do we turn away; do we respond in anger and make things worse? Or do we live faithfully and lovingly and thus overcome the fear with courage, an act born of love?

We will always know the emotion of fear; we will always feel it. We need it as a natural instinct. But we need not be enslaved by it. To be free, all we need do is live with integrity, live in love and the courage will be birthed within us and shine out of us. We liberate ourselves, but we also become a light to others who may be inspired to liberate themselves and others.

My brother was that light to me. Cheers, our kid.

# Still sending children at 60

An unmissable event at the GA Annual Meetings marked the 60th anniversary of the Send a Child to Hucklow Fund. A delightful success story! It all began with a letter in the *Inquirer* from the Rev Peter Godfrey in December 1961, which coincidentally raised £61 (that's all it needed!) to support his idea for a holiday for needy children at our beloved Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre at Great Hucklow. And there was Peter, a cheerful nonagenarian, presiding over this happy event, telling the story and sharing the experiences. He left us to ponder the thought that 60 years of holidays later, the Fund is still needed. Sixteen holiday weeks this year. I loved Peter's thought that a week in the countryside gives the children 'the opportunity to just be children'. Some of the first children to benefit are now pensioners, ready for a bus pass.

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A worship service on the theme of this scheme is available from [chris.hayhurst@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:chris.hayhurst@tiscali.co.uk). It includes a hymn composed by the Rev John Allerton, with whom I once tagged along as a helper on a 'Send a Child' week. On a country walk, one small boy was limping, so I sat him on a wall to check his footwear. Ringing wet socks, and daylight visible through the soles of his wellingtons. The Centre now keeps a supply of wellies and some other clothing for children that need such help.

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Bank Holiday Mayday Monday brought Eid, the end of Ramadan and an invitation to the home of Muslim friends. A warm welcome, food and a friendly chat. More visitors arrived, then more, then even more. In a small house, the room was full. These other visitors were *all women*, each wearing a new outfit for Eid, gorgeous, colourful flowing near-Eastern gowns and shawls. There was laughing and chatting, mostly in English, some in Arabic and other languages. There I sat with my wife and 10 other women crowded, in this little room. I tried to make a joke of it and offered to go, leaving them to it, but they insisted, 'No, it's all right, don't worry'. They stayed about half an hour and left in twos and threes, on foot, to go a-visiting in the neighbourhood. Quite an experience! So where were the men? It seems the men go in the morning to the Mosque for prayers and then go touring around their various homes on their Eid visits. Women do theirs in the afternoon. I'll remember that next year.

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In our local elections, an astonishing story of two candidates gaining exactly the same number of votes. Two recounts followed, with the same result. What to do? They were given a choice. Toss a coin, cut a newly opened pack

## FUNNY OLD WORLD

By John Midgley



of cards, or draw straws? They chose this last option and, alas, the man I had voted for drew the short straw. What to make of this? The people have spoken? The democratic will of the electorate? What was it Winston Churchill said? "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others." It certainly illustrates that every vote matters.

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Impressive obituary in the *Guardian* for Prof Tony Wrigley of Cambridge. Son of a Unitarian minister, he was somewhat on the fringe of the Unitarian movement though supported both Harris Manchester College, Oxford and Unitarian College Manchester where he served as College Visitor. His signature appears on my 1966 college-leaving certificate. His visit was at the time of the Profumo scandal, a married cabinet minister at the height of the Cold War who became involved with model Christine Keeler, who also had a relationship with a Soviet naval attaché. It led to the fall of the MacMillan government. As Tony wryly observed over dinner at the college, 'That's what you get when you have heterosexuals in high places.'

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An all too brief new book from Alan Bennett provided bedtime reading for a couple of nights. *House Arrest – Pandemic Diaries* (2022) tells of being confined because of Covid and giving up his bicycle because of arthritis. He airs his views on Boris Johnson, memories of his beloved father and junk shops, ending with a description of a journey from London to home in Yorkshire. It sounded like a valediction. I hope I am wrong. I'm also enjoying diary jottings of Alan's friend, the late Sir Alec Guinness (*My Name Escapes Me*; Penguin 1995). A long and distinguished career in theatre, cinema and television. An Oscar for *Bridge on the River Kwai* and admiration from John le Carré for his TV portrayal of inscrutable spy George Smiley. Neither diarist cares much for sparkling publicity. Sir Alec muses, 'Today I have picked up a rather good notice in an American film trade paper for a performance I have never given in a film I have never heard of. It says that I am "almost unrecognisable" in the film. I like the "almost".'

## #Blessed youth speak on faith and the environment

By Allan Warhurst

The focus of the Unitarian General Assembly session by Undodaidd Cymru/Unitarians Wales session (previously known as the Welsh Department) was the youth group #Blessed from Gellionnen Chapel in Trebanos. Its members spoke on 'My faith and the environment'.

Gwen Evans told us they started out in September 2020 with an idea, five young people, and Andy Farrell, the group's leader. They were inspired by their Unitarian faith to make a difference in their community, especially with social/environmental activism and challenging oppression. They are such an inclusive group that among the nine members they include 'a token English member' (Nicola Temple), a self-confessed shopaholic (Gwen), a joker (Steffan James), lots of dog lovers (See the chapel's dog nativity here: <https://tinyurl.com/gellionnen>), the youngest committee member ever from Swansea (Zac Baker), and even a fan of all things Disney (Laura Davies)!

Siân Evans and the others took turns to tell us all about the group's activities. Their first event was an online gaming session with 18 young adults. They bonded over Covid difficulties and raised money for Route 16, a charity supporting care-leavers. During the first lockdown they wrote more than 50 letters and arranged 12 hampers for isolated people in their community. In the summer they took part in a beach clean with Surfers Against Sewage. We saw some great photos of their work moving fly-tipped rubbish (including 18 tyres!) from the mountain, piling it



*Shown above: Siân Evans spoke at the Unitarian Wales session. GA photo by Aaron Scott Richards*

where it could be collected more easily, and holding the council accountable for this. Although well-supported locally, they had to explain on social media that it would be collected, lest anyone think they were the perpetrators! Helping the community is a key focus and, in true Unitarian fashion, this extends far beyond their own congregation: fundraising for Ukraine raised £4,000; holding chess tournaments and other events to reopen another chapel; meeting youth groups in the US and Canada to form links and consider the most important issues of the day ('What is a chip and what is a crisp?'); and teaming up with Malvern Unitarians to run a Festival of Ideas.

This is a very brief synopsis of a really inspiring session. Welsh Unitarians are surely #Blessed with their enthusiasm and fantastic contributions, and so is the wider Unitarian

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## Women's League AGM

By Barbara Clifford

The 2022 AGM of the Women's League expressed its deep appreciation and thanks to Mrs Joyce Ashworth, its outgoing president. Joyce took office in 2020 and held things together in the years of Covid restrictions, demitting office this year. In her president's report she thanked the League for the opportunity to serve during this troubled time. The League Annual Project for 2020-21, Emmaus (charity for homeless people), also became a two-year event because the lack of branch activities impacted the fundraising dimension for the project. A cheque for £2000 was given to the representative of Emmaus. Joyce thanked the League for its efforts in difficult times.

After reports and accounts were received, Joyce presented the president's badge to Mrs Susan Holt for 2022-23. Susan has been the League Treasurer for some

years and for technical reasons will continue this role while the bank accounts are transferred. Susan then introduced the speaker for Women's Aid, the charity chosen for the Annual Project 2022-2023. This charity addresses domestic abuse and sexual abuse of women and the speaker described the terrible situations facing many women.

The Annual Project is about informing members and churches about the chosen charity's work as well as raising funds. Now that more branches and churches are meeting physically you should be hearing more about Women's Aid in the coming year.

**Barbara Clifford is former president of the Women's League.**

*The Women's League project for 2022-23 is Women's Aid.*



# Women's Group confronts racism

By Hazel Warhurst

At the Unitarian Women's Group (UWG) conference in October 2021, Danielle Wilson suggested considering white supremacy. She recommended a book *Me and White Supremacy* by Layla Saad, and offered to be the study leader at the 2022 conference. It was a natural progression for her to be invited to speak to a well-supported UWG session. Danielle described her background, being brought up in Dallas, Texas, in the 1950s and 1960s by an ultra-racist family. Now settled in this country, the murder of George Floyd affected her deeply and made her want to examine her own racist past. She joined an online book group with European Unitarian Universalists in July 2020. In the closing chapters of the book the reader is invited to make a commitment in light of what they have read. Danielle's was to make a commitment to further the work of helping people understand white supremacy.

Danielle quoted Dr Martin Luther King, "We may not all be able to do great things, but we can do small things in a great way!", - admitting that she can't change things about racism but can inform herself and act. Her talk was illustrated by video clips showing various scenarios in which the advantages conferred by white privilege were clearly demonstrated. There are many examples available online.

Danielle moved on to explain 'White Fragility' – defined by Robin DiAngelo as 'the defensive reactions so many white people have when our racial worldviews, positions or advantages are questioned or challenged.' We watched a video of a white student being picked on by the teacher. Eventually she left because she couldn't take the pressure, but black people don't have that right.

One of the shocking elements of Danielle's talk was being reminded of the callous killing of George Floyd. We watched long agonising moments as he lay with the policeman's knee on his neck, demonstrating the ugly face of white supremacy in the killing of a black person. Another video which haunts me was the filming of black parents in the USA coaching their young children how to answer a white person in authority to keep themselves safe. We were told about the pitfalls of language, as what we say may be truthful but hurtful. It is our responsibility to inform ourselves. In her book, Layla Saad urges us to, 'Help change the world and be a good ancestor.'

There are still places at the UWG conference to explore this subject further. Contact Margaret Robinson :- [margaretrobinson81@gmail.com](mailto:margaretrobinson81@gmail.com)

**Hazel Warhurst is a member of Stockton Unitarians and of the Foy Society.**

## NUF makes connections

By Tony McNeile

Elizabeth Kingston Harrison was invited by the National Unitarian Fellowship (NUF) to speak at their workshop about her role as Congregational Connections Lead. She explained first how she came across Unitarianism when writing her PhD thesis on Joseph Priestly. It was when she moved off the teaching and academic route and found the Unitarian Meeting House at Framlingham that she really engaged with Unitarianism at a spiritual level. Historically, Unitarianism has had the reputation of worship based on 'arid reason'. She puts the spiritual connection between individuals and community at the heart of the project this role has given her.

The connections she seeks to build are based on honesty and openness being shared among individuals and communities. She recognises that people may feel vulnerable when talking about their spiritual experiences and needs, but if we can be open about our vulnerability then we are able to build strong relationships not only with our faith but also with each other. There is no shame in being open and we should recognise the vulnerability in others. She quoted from the book, *All About Love* by bell hooks.

Over recent decades, our culture has changed to make a virtue of individualism and self-sufficiency at the expense of community. This comes with a price, because it contains the thorns of loneliness and despair for the individual, and that can – and often does – lead to emotional and mental health problems. Being in community and being open to community leads to healing and connection between individuals. Communities are built through shared values. This is how Lizzie intends to build her role in the Unitarian movement. At one level there is the practical side of sharing best practice and showing off the best examples of our faith in action. The other level is providing spaces where people can meet in community and be open to one another in a spiritual setting.

The Unitarian community offers a counter culture to the present infatuation with consumerism and individualism. The current danger is that individualism and consumerism can be present in our church communities and be a barrier

**"Communities are built through shared values."**

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# Witnessing for peace in troubled times

By Sue Woolley

Peace Fellowship Chair, the Rev John Carter, began by leading a centring meditation, using words written for the occasion. A series of statements beginning 'For peace to be in our world...' It included a sobering list of 20+ countries in which more than 10,000 people had died in the past year because of civil war, terrorist activity and drug wars.

He asked those present a series of questions for reflection:

- What are our thoughts and beliefs about peace?
- Which conflicts concern us the most?
- What are our congregations doing to witness for peace?
- What would we like to see our wider Unitarian community doing to witness for peace?

When the meditation ended, he opened the discussion by asking more questions:

- What one thing stood out for you in your personal reflection?
- Do you have a dream for our Unitarian community and our witness for peace?
- What would you like to do in your own life to witness for peace?
- How can we be pro-active, rather than reactive?

A lively and thought-provoking discussion followed, during

which people suggested a wide variety of ways in which we, both as individuals and the wider Unitarian community, might witness for peace. Some were shocked by how widespread the violence in the world is. Most agreed that we need to start where we are – to bring peace into our own lives, and to act at a grassroots level – not only through how we relate to people day by day, but also through actions such as taking to the streets in a walk of witness for peace (e.g. an annual inter-faith peace walk) or planting a peace pole in the grounds of our chapels and churches. We agreed that both will and energy are needed to get people together to witness for peace. And that empathy for the other is an essential ingredient.

We concluded that it should be the role of inter-faith relations to work together for the promotion of peace and lobbying for more government money to be spent on this and less on defence. And that better communication between individuals and countries is at the heart of working for peace, as it will lead to a better understanding of the other's motivations.

Peace can be seen as a fundamental choice about how we choose to deal with conflict.

**Sue Woolley is secretary of the Peace Fellowship and president of the Unitarian General Assembly.**

## NUF connections

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to building spiritual and healing openness. She quotes Jane Blackall, 'Church is where we strengthen the things that matter (our sense of meaning, value, morality, justice, connections, solidarity, community, etc.) against the temptations and pressures of the prevailing culture.'

How can this be achieved? By focusing on spiritual health, on sharing ideas and resources and providing new and adventurous ways to connect us all. There will be collaborative workshops and shared spaces for us to develop our sense of connectedness and community. Her honesty and enthusiasm for this new role was

“Church is where we strengthen the things that matter.”

apparent and that enthusiasm rubbed off on those who listened to her. The NUF give their blessings for her vision and we offer the support of our website and our News & Views magazine in promoting those spaces where we can be open to one another in faith and community.

**Tony McNeile is chaplain of the NUF.**

## #Blessed

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community.

The Rev Melda Grantham, secretary of Unitarians Wales, offered a brief report with the threat of questions at the end to make sure we were paying attention – as well as allowing the charms of the beautiful, melodic Welsh accent to soothe my savage breast, soften my rocks, and bend my knotted oaks (to paraphrase Lucan by way of William Congreve).

“They were inspired by their Unitarian faith to make a difference.”

It had been a difficult two years, but the 21 Unitarian Chapels in Wales continued to provide spiritual sustenance throughout, and made good use of the technical skills of their younger members to help provide services, meetings and game nights online. Online events have led to growth in the congregations, including the number of young people attending.

Melda remembered the Rev Alun Wyn Dafis, who is sadly no longer with us, but did great work in Lampeter and was originally from Swansea.

**Allan Warhurst is a member of the Foy Society.**

# Foy conference looks at institutional racism

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people in our churches because they hadn't found us yet. Oh no, my dears. They found us and we drove them away. We asked them 'Where are you from?' and when they said, 'Doncaster' we said, 'No, where are you really from.' Because you are black and English people are white, you must come from Somewhere Else.

I admit to doing this myself. I was recently fascinated to learn that my audiologist was Masai. I truly, truly hope that I did not make him feel that he *did not belong here*. I don't think we did because we chatted a bit about There and Here. However, my questions, while unintentional, still came from my white privilege status and unawareness that such questions leaves people of colour in a position of performative citizenship explanation and justification. He has a nice Zimbabwean wife, just in case you want to know. And then we make it absolutely clear that our worship, which is clearly the right worship, is whiteness-centred, uses only white authors' words and white composers' music. We may have allowed you people to come here and eat your strange food and wear your strange clothes but you cannot possibly have any culture.

I was working. One of my co-workers replied in exasperation to a racist comment, 'Look, mate, I come from Benin. We had drainage and plates when you lot were still living in caves.'

## Descended from great civilisations

'During the Holocene era, Niger-Congo speakers independently created pottery in Ounjougou, Mali – the earliest pottery in Africa – by at least 9400 BCE.

'The kingdom of Benin began in the 900s when the Edo people settled in the rainforests of West Africa. By the 1400s they had created a wealthy kingdom with a powerful ruler, known as the Oba. The Obas lived in beautiful palaces decorated with shining brass.' So there!

So believe me, writing a poem or a concerto is not going to be a problem for people of colour. Put Black composers into your search engine and then notice how many you have heard of.

Now put in Black Poets.

I have previously recommended people to read *Staying Power* by Peter Fryers to which I shall now add David Olusoga's *Black and British*. and *Me and White Supremacy* by Layla Saad.

Sorry, it is no use shouting Maya Angelou and Khalil Gibran at me. They are *not enough*.

## DORIS' COLUMN

By Dorothy Haughton



Winnie challenged us to start using words and music by people of colour in our services. So do it. And ask service leaders who are coming to lead worship to do it. Just one piece, one poem. Surely, my dears, you can do that. I have wittered on and on before now about a race-inclusive banner to fly alongside our rainbow banners. I suggested a wreath of colours woven together, coral (I am not white, I am, if anything, a pale apricot but coral will do), bronze, gold and ebony. You could even wear it as a necklace.

## We must look at ourselves

What was particularly valuable is that we were told to examine ourselves. Which I did. Now, I had thought that I was not a racist but I now understand that most of the black people I knew were behaving as I expected them to behave. Well do I remember the cries of 'Assimilate, assimilate' in the 1970s. I hope I know better now and can understand that assimilating can deny the affirmation and celebration of cultural diversity in this country. I know that I am arrogant and aggressive, I override and interrupt and I believe that no topic can be thoroughly discussed until I have added my scintilla of sparkling knowledge. But my friends know that when they say, 'Shut up, Dotty' I do. So I will.

PS We have been searching for hymns by people of colour and can find none. However, Charles Tindley was a black American Methodist minister who wrote 'The Storm is Passing Over' which many of us have sung at some time and, more importantly 'I'll Overcome Some Day' which became the much-sung and much-loved 'We Shall Overcome'. The tune is from another song 'No More Auction Block for Me'. His version contained the words, 'If in my heart. I do not yield'.

On many occasions people sing 'We Shall Overcome' who have never had to overcome the horror of the manacles and the auction block. Sing it, sing it, as they say, loud and clear for the whole wide world to hear, sing it as a tribute to those who did overcome slavery and for all who still have to find true freedom.

**Dorothy Haughton** writes of the Foy Society conference, which spotlighted institutional racism in Britain

# Not just in the USA



*Shown above: Tony Cann speaks at the conference as the Rev Winnie Gordon looks on. Photo by Hazel Warhurst*

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I recently attended the Foy conference at the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre at Great Hucklow – well-known for ‘Send a Child to Hucklow’ and a second home to many Unitarians who have been going there since they were children.

Many Unitarian societies hold their annual conferences there, there are junior and senior weekends, summer school, walking weekends, field breaks, retreats and many other things.

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Check the website. (<https://www.thenightingalecentre.org.uk>) You can go there as an individual or a group. Why not hire a charabanc and take the whole congregation? It is clean and warm and comfortable, the food is great, the staff helpful and obliging. And it is situated in the beautiful county of Derbyshire which is packed with interesting places to visit. I could write an entire article but I won't. Just go and find out for yourself.

Foy – the Foy Society is a fellowship of all genders (women, men, trans and non-binary) who, in a spirit of free inquiry, seek to understand the nature of present issues and problems – political, social and religious. It was founded in 1924 as the Fellowship of Youth. Basically Foy is for people who like to think a lot, talk a lot and laugh a lot. The annual conference always has a theme. This year's theme, ‘In search of Truth and Justice’ proved to be as interesting as ever but unusually very challenging. We started off with what can be called in brief ‘Blue on Black Mortality’. There are a horrifically large number of deaths in custody and a disproportionate number of these deaths are of black people – almost always male, and often young. We began to appreciate why black parents warn their children to be especially careful. ‘Don't wear your hood. Don't put your hands in your pocket. If you get stopped, don't run. Put your hands up. Don't make a lot of moves.’ Why? Ian Minter told us of case after case of black, usually male often young, people who are quite literally attacked and carried off to the police station. In one case, 11 officers arrived to deal with one individual. What makes it heart breaking is that in many, many cases

the police are called out to deal with a person who appears to be behaving strangely and people are concerned that they may harm themselves. Many of the incarcerated have mental health issues. If you are schizophrenic and have not taken your tablets you might well be staggering down the street making strange sounds. Being jumped on, from behind, by three police officers is not going to calm you down. Over and over again we heard of young men being thrown to the ground and in some cases sat on as they called out, ‘I can't breathe. I can't breathe.’ You thought it was only in the United States. Sorry, my dears, it is here. You thought it was only George Floyd. Sorry my dears.

‘The United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, has published a damning report calling on states including the UK to “end impunity” for human rights violations against Black people by police officers and reverse the “cultures of denial” towards systemic racism.’ Do some research for yourself. The report is here: <https://tinyurl.com/UNonRace> Or, try: <https://www.inquest.org.uk>

Dipak Panchal then gave us a view on racism from his perspective when a serving police officer. Just to make sure that we really, really understood that the race problem has not, as we pink, liberal, Unitarians might have been thinking, gone away, Winnie Gordon then treated us to a list of the most upsetting and distressing racist comments made by Unitarians in Unitarian places of worship.

You thought there were no black or ethnic minority

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