

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT: March, 2012.

I think it's fair to say that 2011, at Bury Unitarian Church, has been dominated by the letter "I"---namely, by the Interim and Infill Ministries, which have kept our church lively, confident and active, during the year. The Rev. Beryl Allerton began her Interim Ministry on January 16th---initially for six months, but extending to nine; after this, she agreed to "fill in", at three-quarter time, until we were able to appoint a new minister. We marked the change by presenting Beryl with a bouquet of Birds of Paradise; otherwise, we couldn't see the join!

Our worship has been very well-attended, and we have been privileged to hear well-prepared services and sermons on a wide variety of topics. In addition to morning-services, we have had two summer evening ones, times for reflection and tranquillity, as well as the traditional Maundy Thursday and Christmas Eve Communion. Special services were held on Mothering Sunday (when Simnel cake and posies abounded) and for the Harvest; two innovations, which may well be repeated, were a popular Peace service, and a short but much-appreciated act of devotion on Remembrance Day itself. We marked Remembrance Sunday with a moving service; after the laying of the wreath, by Roy and Edna Wilkinson, we were reminded that sacrifices were necessary so that future generations might live in peace; red and white candles and flowers reinforced this message. Two services, in particular, stood out for me. In May, we held a Music Service, with special contributions from the choir, plus readings about music; this was also a "full church" Sunday, followed by lunch, and the attendance of well over one hundred people attested to its success. Following a six-week Build Your Own Theology Course, the members of the group conducted an inspirational and moving service, greatly to the credit of the participants and indicative of the quality of the course.

In addition to conducting services, Beryl has undertaken a tremendous amount of visiting, in order to ensure that **everybody** had a chance to express views, and she has been available, "just for a chat", during Saturday-morning coffee-sessions. The Going To Church and Ministry Seminars have continued throughout the year, as we attempted to define the identity of our church, and our commitment to it and to each other. Seminars on Spirituality, and the Build your Own Theology Course, were well-subscribed and thought-provoking; exploration of the Spectrum caused much head-scratching and rethinking before we arrived, approximately, at a position of rational dissent. To Beryl, we owe a debt of gratitude for her efforts and achievements, and for simply being with us.

Thanks must also be given to another Allerton---to John, who has supported Beryl, and us, by preaching services, by contributing to other services with readings and music, and by coaching the choir, on occasions; the spontaneous applause that followed "In an English Country Garden" said it all!

Our musical-life has expanded: we are slowly becoming more familiar with the Sing Your Faith hymns; the choir has sought to expand its repertoire; and there have been regular, and much-appreciated, offerings from Catherine and Cody Coyne, and Richard Boardman. Music is an integral part of worship, which enhances service-themes and creates atmosphere, and its importance must never be underestimated.

Our Christmas events were many and varied. The Christmas Tree Festival produced a wonderful spectacle, much admired by The Mayor. Our links with the local community are now well-established, and amongst the organisations which display trees are charities that we have chosen to support---a pleasing situation. The Service of Readings and Carols, and the lunch that followed, were excellent; the highlight, for me, of the Children's Carol Service was their Nativity Play, when the Virgin Mary appeared, conventionally clad in blue and white, wonderfully set off by her bright pink wellies! Christmas Day attendance surpassed all expectations, with several family-groups present, and Beryl's "chocolate" Nativity story was most impressive!

A trip to the Harrogate Flower Show, in April, was very enjoyable, with great appreciation of the displays, plants and other goodies. In September, we visited Gorton Monastery; designed by Pugin and nicknamed Manchester's Taj Mahal, this building became derelict and is only now being renovated, to the advantage of the local community and visitors from further afield. We exchanged services with Bury's United Reformed Church, as usual, in July; also, that month, a group of members from Dunham Road Unitarian Chapel, Altrincham, visited, to learn about us, our church and its history; the occasion was a great success, and we were invited to pay a return-visit; sadly, although this was planned, the riots in Manchester thwarted our efforts, and we will have to try again, in the spring.

The Efforts Committee have organised a variety of events, proving, once more, that Bury Unitarians like to eat! Congregational lunches have been held, in May, August and October, and Beryl and John hosted the annual Summer Barbecue. The biggest event of the year was the November Bank Street Bazaar; months of preparation and item-collecting resulted in a highly-successful venture, in both social and financial terms. The Christmas Concert meant that the year ended, literally, on a high note; the musical contributions from Minster Brass, The Notability Choir, and Catherine and Cody Coyne were superb---and we experienced the excitement of Notability being rushed off early, to Media City, to perform on Radio Five Live!

This year, our designated charity was the Bury Cancer Care Centre, on whose behalf committee-members organised a Quiz, Tea at Molly's (when the sun actually shone, for once!), and a Music and Musings Evening, with a Cheese and Wine Supper. A new church recipe-book sold out, after two print-runs, but the prize for the lucky book was never claimed. More than £1600.00 was raised, and a cheque for this amount was presented to the Deputy Mayor, in October.

The Working-Group has met regularly; the conditions of the Interim and Infill Ministries were determined, and, later, arrangements for the appointment of a new, permanent minister were put in place. Once our pulpit-vacancy was advertised, this group became the Ministerial Appointments Group; it continues to prepare for an applicant. At the Congregational Meeting, in September, Anne Mills reported on the group's work, and Beryl on her Interim; terms of the Infill Ministry and the start-time of the service were discussed, and appropriate decisions taken, in democratic fashion.

Our various church-groups meet regularly; the Women's League, in addition to raising funds for the national annual charity (Combat Stress, from April, 2011), have enjoyed talks on a variety of topics, such as Drug-free Arthritis, Crime, and the workings of Summerseat Players. The Men's Fellowship were visited, amongst others, by Roy Brooks, who spoke about Rolls Royce, and by John Allerton, who described his sailing-holiday round the Scottish islands. Three teams cater for the Lunch Circle; delicious meals, at incredibly low prices, and a sociable atmosphere, are the result. Book Club discussions continue to be lively--particularly for such popular works as Paul Torday's "Salmon Fishing in the Yemen"; there are rumours of an offshoot Wine Club---but I couldn't possibly comment! The 100 Club is flourishing, too, although there are still enough spare numbers left for would-be participants!

Bury became a Fair Trade Borough, in June, and a copy of that certificate has now joined our own, in the lounge. Through our Fair Trade activities, I think we are entitled to take a share of the credit! Traidcraft sales dropped slightly, but, otherwise, the fortnightly arrangement seems to work well. Sadly, our links with Churches Together have come to an end; following problems over the Good Friday Walk of Witness, the proposed amalgamation of the Bury Central/South and Bury North groups brought a new draft-constitution, which we felt unable to accept; its aims and terminology were at variance with our Unitarian ethos and liberal views.

Craig House, now The Exchange, created a certain amount of disruption for us, as we endured extra dust and dirt, and fought with scaffolding to park our cars unscathed. The work is now complete, the building looks smart, and order has been restored! Our own premises were much improved when the corridor-areas were decorated and the upstairs room freshened; the Vestry has been ruthlessly tidied, so that it can, once more, be used for its correct purposes.

In December, we lost a long-standing and long-serving member in Jean Kenyon; because of poor health, Jean had been unable to attend church for most of 2011; her cheery presence and valuable contribution to church-life will be greatly missed. Jean Wild, too, died in December; although she had not been an active member for some years, many of us remember her and her late husband, Eric.

Two babies were baptised during 2011: Callum Hodgson, in April, and Eloise Jeannie Settle, in July; we extend a warm welcome to them, as well as to five new members.

A Congregational photograph, the first for 16 years, proved interesting---and poignant---as we compared the two, convincing ourselves that we hadn't changed a bit in the intervening years. We appointed a Publicity Officer, Howard Maden, to take charge of official photographs, and strengthened our links with "The Bury Times". Pam Gilbert and Roger Mills continue to do sterling work, as calendar-editor and webmaster, respectively. Susan Holt was elected Women's League National Treasurer, in April, at the GA Annual Meetings; Neville Kenyon ended his year as GA President, at these Meetings, and his Presidency was celebrated at a special NELUM Dinner, in May. Special mention must be made of Roan Hodgson for his help, each week; as part of his Duke of Edinburgh work, he tidies the premises after Saturday coffee, and his cheerful, willing presence has made him a firm favourite.

Our church thrives because of our efforts, and I should like to thank the whole congregation for their individual contributions---all are significant and valued. In 2012, we need to build on our strengths, moving on, positively, into the future, in the hope that the next year will bring us continuing happiness and peace.

SIGNED:

DATE:

CHAIRMAN OF THE CONGREGATIONAL A.G.M.