

ANNUAL REPORT: 2016:

2016 found us as busy as ever, as a trawl of the year's calendars clearly shows. A celebratory New Year Service, on the first Sunday in January, was followed by the Junior Church Prize-giving, the following week, when the prizes were presented by Margaret Miller. February brought a special Valentine's Day Service, entitled "Aspects of Love", which was followed by an excellent lunch. The annual Charity Quiz was held, towards the end of the month, when the Minister's team won, and a large profit was divided between the Radcliffe branch of Christians Against Poverty, and Streetwise; representatives from both organisations visited us, later in the year, to speak about their work and to thank us for our support. In March, we entertained members of The Manchester District Women's League; lunch was served, the AGM was held, and a service, conducted by National League President, Joy Foster, concluded the proceedings. Mothering Sunday was marked with posies of daffodils, and Simnel cake baked by June and the children; the service concentrated on mothers of children with problems, which proved most moving. Easter Sunday dwelled on recent tragedies in Brussels, conveying a powerful message: evil must not prevail; forgiveness and shared sympathy must always triumph; an account of that day's sermon attracted 155 visits on our Facebook page---a record! The GA AGM's took place, in April, and were attended by 5 representatives from Bury; we felt that the proceedings were somewhat lacking in interest, this year, and a questionnaire designed to improve the Meetings and enhance their appeal was completed in detail, later in the year. A visit to the Harrogate Flower Show, in beautiful spring sunshine, lifted our spirits, as we admired everything on offer there. May Day brought our Cherry Blossom Service; despite disappointing weather and a lack of blossom, we celebrated spring, new life and the earth's beauty. A cherry-themed lunch completed a successful day. On what would, in past years, have been Whit Sunday, we remembered the traditional Whit Walks and watched film from the 1960's, when members of Bank Street Chapel participated. At the end of the month, we said farewell to our Minister, Rev. Beryl Allerton, at a poignant service in which emotion was relieved by touches of humour, especially at the end, when Sousa's "Liberty Bell" March was played with great gusto; the congregation presented Beryl with a pair of diamond earrings, and the day ended in true Bury style, with a celebratory lunch at The Red Hall. In June, we held a Summer Lunch, which, luckily, coincided with the visit of a ministry student by the name of Kate McKenna! At the beginning of July, we exchanged our usual visits with Bury's United Reformed Church; the Junior Church launched its Noah's Ark Project, which kept the children occupied until the autumn; the exhibit now graces the wall of the Primary Room; and we started to knit the first of our Beanies, for premature babies in Africa; by the time we had finished, in December, we had completed 356 hats, as Pam Oxley correctly guessed, in the competition we ran. Later in July, Abi very generously invited us to lunch at her home, where we were also able to admire the cattery which she and Geoff run. A Strawberry Tea, at the end of the month, produced magnificent food, particularly as regards the home-made cakes, and we relished the chance to relax and enjoy ourselves. We rested, to some extent, throughout August, recouping our strength for our Singalong Band Evening, in September, when we sang our hearts out and laughed at the compère's jokes. Dot Hewerdine, the GA President, conducted a service for us, in September, and our Harvest Service, at the beginning of October, combined traditional and imaginative elements, as we were invited to consider the more metaphorical meaning of sowing seeds and reaping the products. An Antiques

and Valuation Evening, later in the month, was interesting and enjoyable but needed more support and items to be auctioned. We welcomed our new Minister, Rev. Kate McKenna, at the beginning of November, and have kept her busy, ever since! Kate warned us not to expect perfection, at first, but to accept limitations and work on improvements; after the service, we toasted the future success of Kate's ministry with us and presented Kate with a bouquet and a card. Then Remembrance Day and Remembrance Sunday were upon us; we pondered the sacrifices made during times of war; we commemorated the 100th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme; Roy Holden laid our wreath on the War Memorial; we listened to Lawrence Killian playing "The Last Post" and "Reveille"; and we gathered together the felt poppies, scattered around the worship-area, in order to honour our war-dead. December followed, with its wealth of Christmas activities; we held a Grand Christmas Raffle, which offered 21 magnificent prizes; our Christmas Lunch, once again---and for the last time!---organised and cooked by Pam Gilbert, was superb. Our Carols by Candlelight Service, beset by problems, in its earlier stages, won through, in the end, and the quality of the service impressed the Mayor and Consort, visitors and members alike; the mince pies and mulled wine proved as popular as ever, as did the sherry and shortbread, on Christmas Day, when a good-sized congregation celebrated in traditional manner.

On the whole, we had another very successful year; we raised a great deal of money, both for church-funds and for other organisations, and we proved, once more, how generous Bury Unitarians can be, not only in terms of money, but also in time and effort. The Notability Choir gave us a free concert, in May---because we allowed them free use of our premises, in January, for a day's master-class. We sponsored Freddy, when he and Zilpha participated in the junior section of The Great Manchester Run; more than £1,000 was raised by Freddy, and at least one third of this came from this church. We did not hold a bazaar, but, instead, organised alternative fund-raising events, all of which succeeded admirably. On the minus side, however, we have experienced parking-issues; complaints were made by our immediate neighbours, and these are not yet fully-resolved. On September 18th, we cancelled our service, because a Fun Run was taking place, and many roads in the town centre were closed, preventing us from accessing our premises; as the Run promises to become an annual event, this is a situation which still requires resolution. Bury Light Night, transformed into a weekend event, and transferred to mid-November, was, unfortunately, a washout, in every sense of the word!

Our regular groups and activities continued to prosper. The Luncheon Club enjoyed a trip out, to Ditto's, as well as eating in. The Book Club worked its way through several more books, and, having read "Brooklyn", by Colm Toibin, acquired the DVD and watched it at the next meeting. The Women's League's varied programme included a Bag Beetle Drive, and the fund-raising evening for the League's annual charity (The National Deaf Children's Society) raised £250, when Anne and Roger Mills gave an illustrated talk about their holiday to India, followed by an Indian-themed supper. The Men's Fellowship continues to enjoy lunch at the Trackside, preceded by a talk; several members contributed, including Roy Wilkinson, who spoke of his experiences as a member of 633 Squadron during World War 2. Beryl completed the last of her Seminar Group sessions (a second consideration of Build Your Own Theology, after which an excellent booklet of haikus, written by the group's members, was produced and distributed); almost immediately, she began her "Taking the Service" classes, with John

to assist her; ten people lasted the course and showed what a wealth of talent this church possesses, in terms of ideas, knowledge and expertise, when the pulpit needs to be filled.

It is my pleasure to thank everyone in the congregation for the contributions made to church-life, during the past year. I often comment that nothing happens by magic; there must always be at least one person who brings ideas to fruition. To the Church Officers, and all those who sit on Church Council and its sub-committees; to the Trustees, and, most especially, this year, to the members of the Ministerial Appointments Group, who worked immensely long and hard, I wish to express my gratitude for all the administrative work carried out. But, also, my appreciation must be conveyed to a host of people: our flower-arrangers, who decorate the church so beautifully, each week: our bakers and coffee-brewers, who keep us well-supplied, every Saturday and Sunday morning; our website and Facebook administrators, who work hard to keep the sites up-to-date, and current in terms of techniques; our photographers, for the excellent record of church-life they produce; our calendar-editor, for assembling and printing our monthly news-sheet; our Traidcraft organiser; those who book service-leaders, and organists, and read the notices; our Profiles compiler, an innovation, this year; our Sunshine Smarties' collector; our choir, currently without a leader, but still singing bravely; our stewards, who turn out, whenever required; and everyone who organises rotas, events, or outings, or who works to keep the church going. You will notice that I have stressed jobs, rather than using names; if you can't think who carries out the above tasks, perhaps you should wonder why you don't---and resolve to find out!

2016, more than ever, has been about people---generous, willing, quietly efficient, hard-working people---our congregation! And I think we should all feel very proud of ourselves for what we have achieved, particularly over the five months when we were without a minister. There were extra tasks to be carried out, extra burdens to be borne, extra considerations to be taken into account---and we coped, without fuss or grumbling. It wasn't easy, but we did it! Worthy of special mention here are those who carried out the pastoral work, keeping in touch with members who were sick, lonely, or needy, in some way. Also worth special consideration are the members of the Taking the Service Group, who gave freely of their time, worked diligently to acquire techniques, and then put theory into practice and conducted amazingly proficient and impressive services. This group has now become the Worship Support Group and remains a valuable asset.

We congratulate June, and Fred, on their Diamond Wedding Anniversary; Val for reporting on her visit to Flanders and Picardy, in the footsteps of the Lancashire Fusiliers, tracking down former congregation-members, who gave their lives in the two World Wars; and Betty, who, almost in the closing hours of the year, was able to reveal her secret---that she had been awarded a BEM, in the New Year's Honours List.

Sadly, this year contained more than our fair share of losses, and, in March and April, we attended a high number of funerals. During the year, we said our farewells to Chris Thompson (one of our organists), Betty Connery, Joe Ashworth (whose ashes were subsequently buried at Holebottom), Muriel Smith, Jean Jackson, Rodney Shaw, Dorothy Stott, Gillian Isherwood, Sheila Houghton, and Harvey Evitts. Many of these were long-standing, active, committed members; we mourn their passing, and we miss their presence amongst us; we extend sincere sympathies to their families, as we do to

those of our members who have been bereaved; we also send our very best wishes to those who have suffered ill-health, during the past year.

With great regret, we had to say goodbye to Beryl, who had been our Minister for five and a half years, having come, initially, for six months! Beryl felt that it was an appropriate time for her to retire; at her final service, she said that it had been a privilege and a pleasure to serve our congregation, and that she considered its members to be friends, as well as church-associates. Beryl's time at Bury was hectic; she always led from the front, never sparing herself, even when her gallstone-problems were at their height. We owe Beryl a huge debt of gratitude for all the work she carried out within this church, for her enthusiasm, her inspiration, her generosity, and her determination. She was very ably supported by John, to whom thanks are also due; we shall not see either of them, for a year, since they took the decision to allow our new Minister to settle in unimpeded, but we miss their presence and encouragement, and hope that it will not be too long before they feel able to join us again.

We had our share of arrivals, however; Abi was formally welcomed as a member, in May; Theresa came to us, from June onwards, to open the premises, each Sunday morning, and prepare everything for worship; and Isabelle Boardman, daughter of Richard and Justine, was baptised, in October. There were innovations, too, some of which have already been mentioned: we took the decision to give the Yoga Group a key, so that they could steward their own sessions, thereby freeing church-members from turning out; we tidied The Church Gardens, several times, in preparation for Bury in Bloom---a gesture much appreciated in the town, and one which contributed to the success of Bury's entry in the competition; and Ashley-Jayde sang a beautiful solo, during one of our Christmas services.

The main arrival of the year was that of Kate---and Ade, of course---both of whom quickly made themselves at home. Beforehand, the Manse required a certain amount of attention, as it had been somewhat neglected by the tenant, but, finally, all was well. Arrangements to engage a new Minister occupied most of the year, yet November 1st almost took us by surprise---suddenly Kate was with us, and we embarked on a new chapter of our church-life. Kate has spoken warmly of the welcome she has received, and of the affection she feels already for this church and its congregation, and for Bury itself, so very different from Norwich. There is much to be done, as we help Kate to settle in and to learn the many ropes which constitute ministry; we are experiencing a different style of ministry now, but our relationship with Kate, and the general atmosphere created, is relaxed and beneficial; it feels good, and right. 2016 ended on a very positive note; foundations were laid, to be built on, in the immediate future, and we can proceed into the New Year with optimism and confidence.

Anne Mills, Chairman of the Congregation, and Church Secretary: March, 2017.