

2018 Annual Report:

Throughout 2018, our two key-words in were Improvements, and Generosity. Our year was one of high achievement, in many areas, which can only happen when all of us work together---when even the smallest jobs assume significance, and each individual contribution counts towards the final reckoning.

We have enjoyed stimulating services, each carefully-prepared and thoughtfully-delivered. Kate, our Minister, has done us proud, with her traditional services (The Harvest Festival, Remembrance Sunday, and the Christmas ones) and with her more innovative offerings (Christingle, Teddy Bears, and the Distance travelled from Bethlehem, between that first Christmas and the present-day. In addition, those who chose to attend Communion, Contemplative Worship-sessions, or a workshop (either "The Death Café", or "What we believe and commit to") enjoyed tranquillity and the chance to consider what is truly most important in life; perhaps, in 2019, more members will join in! We thank Kate for all her hard work, on our behalf; it is not easy to prepare a quality service, every week, and we do not always appreciate the effort required. Kate reached her half-century, in March, which we celebrated with cards, gifts, flowers and cake, as we congratulated her on reaching such an advanced age!

Ade supports Kate very ably, as we have learned from experience, and makes an excellent Minister's "wife". However, I have noticed that he is always allocated the best jobs: sticking candles into oranges, preparing relevant props to support special, and, occasionally, acting as Fire Officer (thankfully unscathed!) We were delighted when Ade decided to become a member of our congregation; we welcome his formal commitment as much as we appreciate his contributions.

On the occasions that Kate has been absent, we have been fortunate in being able to call upon some of our own members to conduct services: Anne, Marian, Betty and Val have done so---all highly-impressive in their quality. We must surely be the envy of other congregations, as requests for repeat-visits to other churches indicate. Abi is helping the congregation at Rochdale with services and some pastoral-work, and Val is to be congratulated on successfully completing the Foundation Level of the Worship Studies' Course; she was sponsored by this church---an outlay which is already bearing fruit.

The trustees decided to carry out work on the premises; we should express our gratitude for their deliberations, preparation, and completion of all tasks---and for paying for it all! We now have a

platform-lift, which is quite magnificent; how did we ever manage without it, to transport people and objects alike? The stair-lift has been removed, and the banisters replaced, restoring the front staircase to its former glory. We can now see what we are doing, thanks to new suspended ceilings everywhere; at the same time, we have replaced all light-bulbs with LED's, which are brighter, cheaper, and longer-lasting. The side-wall at the edge of the garden has been demolished, to improve its appearance and we allow the grass to grow again! Thanks are expressed, in particular, to Roger and Peter, our two Property Stewards, who have worked tirelessly. In July, our appreciation was acknowledged at a short ceremony, when they were allowed a celebratory lift-ride, before cutting the ribbon.

The amount of work carried out caused much dust, dirt and rubbish, whose removal required cleaning and clearing sessions; we are nearing the end of these; items no longer needed have been disposed of; and forgotten treasures have reappeared---now brought to new prominence. Chief amongst this is the bell, which links all four churches on the site of the current church; it is now sited in the worship-area, looking as if it has always belonged there!

Our reputation as a generous congregation has continued. In 2018, we raised funds for Medical Assistance Dogs, after an illustrated talk about this charity's valuable health-improvement work. We sent donations to our Whitby and Chatham churches, which were in dire need. We discovered that, by the Harvest, we had donated more than 1,000 items to our local Food Bank, including Easter Eggs and chocolate Advent Calendars. We also contributed 157 pairs of socks, to be distributed to the homeless. All are achievements of which we can be proud!

Many of our activities are ongoing, but kept fresh with new ideas and changes of direction. Our Social and Fund Raising Committee organised 5 events: an Evening with The Sing-A-Long Band, the annual Quiz, a concert by The Tottington Public Band, a delicious Strawberry Cream Tea, and an intriguing Murder Mystery Evening, all of which were successful, in every sense, and much enjoyed. The Lunch Circle continues to serve delicious food, at incredibly low prices, and to enjoy the occasional trip out; we could do with new cooks and helpers, however. Our Book Club, now in its 13th year, hosted "An Evening with Paul Kenyon", in September---a superb talk by Paul about his new book: "Dictatorland: The Men Who Stole Africa"; we were privileged to have him with us. The Women's League were entertained by, amongst others, Veronica Walker, who spoke about Dickens and the women in his life, Sister Joan, who organises our

local Food Bank, and Maureen Hawksworth, whose work with women in Nepal is praiseworthy; we sold three of her yak's wool blankets, on the evening, but ordered another 13, subsequently. The Camera Club presented an amazing exhibition of photographs, which was displayed at the back of the worship area, on large boards suspended from the ceiling; so successful was this that its run extended from two weeks to several months! The Club's "Bury: Past and Present" Quiz was repeated at Valley Court, to much acclaim! The choir, and Barrie and Chris, our regular organists, always give of their best, lending valuable support to each service's music, but we still lack a choir-leader. The Traidcraft Stall continues to thrive, despite some upset, in the autumn, when it was announced that the company would cease trading, at the end of December; fortunately, last-minute efforts kept closure at bay, but long-term business is far from secure; all we can do is to support fair trade, as much as we can to support developing countries. Sadly, the Men's Fellowship has not met, this year, so action needs to be taken. We lost our Yoga Group letting, and we commiserated with Jean and Howard over their decision to close the Prostate Cancer Support Group; remaining funds were passed to Prostate Cancer U.K.

Our Calendar and website are well-produced and a tribute to Pam and Roger, who work continuously to keep us, and others, up-to-date and informed. We have maintained our profile, both in our local paper and nationally, by contributing a variety of articles, and by resuming our sponsorship of an "Inquirer" December issue. We continue to host Music Exams, three times a year, and our own fund-raising, via such ventures as the 100 Club, Sunshine Smarties, the Christmas Raffle, the bookshelf, and Saturday and Sunday Coffee, attracts regular income.

Not content with all this, we introduced several additions, in 2018. We were required, because of a change in legislation, to adopt General Data Protection Registration, whereby we collected information about our members but guaranteed to respect their privacy. This has involved Kate and Anne in much paperwork, now almost completed, but an ongoing task. With great tact and sensitivity, we held discussions, midway through the year, about whether we should obtain a licence to conduct Same-Sex Weddings; this was put to the vote, and agreed by a large majority; the paperwork is still awaiting our local Registrar's approval, and we already have a wedding booked, in April. It was decided that money which came to us from our Halliwell Road, Bolton, church was to be spent on a defibrillator, for our own use, as well as the local community's; this is on order. A decision about how to spend a legacy from the late Bob Alker is yet to be made. At the Junior Church Prizegiving, held on the first Sunday in

January, our children were awarded prizes, not only for good attendance, but for personal attributes---an important change. Partway through the year, it was felt that the children might remain in church throughout the service, once a month; despite some teething-problems, this has been successful and will probably become a permanent fixture; moreover, it gives June, the Junior Church leader, the opportunity to enjoy a full service regularly. Our youngest member, Hope, and our oldest World War Two veteran, Roy Wilkinson, laid the Remembrance Sunday wreath together, as we commemorated the centenary of the First World War, in a touching but symbolic ceremony. On October 1st, at Holebottom, we joined members of Bury Boys' Grammar School, to remember two of their pupils, Harry Greenhalgh and Arthur Ashworth, both members of Bank Street Chapel, who had died during the First World War, and whose graves are at Holebottom. For the first time, we opened our premises for Heritage Weekend, at the start of September; masterminded by Betty, Damion and Kate, this was a huge success, with an unbelievable amount of material on display; we welcomed the Mayor, Councillor Jane Black, and our M.P. James Frith, and completed the weekend with a special service. Another first special service was the Fair Trade Service, at the beginning of in March, during Fair Trade Fortnight, when representatives of Bury's Fair Trade Group and civic dignitaries joined us. Mid-September, when the now-annual Fun Run took place, we experimented with an afternoon service; as this was well-attended, the change will probably become permanent. Smaller changes occurred, too: we decided that it would be more practical to buy a large artificial Christmas Tree for the worship-area; we held sing-a-longs of wartime songs, and of Christmas carols, on appropriate Saturdays; accompanied by Stephen Ramsay, we sang enthusiastically, proving that we knew choruses much better than verses! Quality, not quantity, was the order of the day! Each week's notices can be emailed to those who request them; they also appear on the on the notice-board and on Facebook. In a spirit of generosity, we gave permission for our premises to be used, in December, for an Immigration Advisory Day, and, towards the end of the year, we allowed The Street Kitchen to serve meals, once a week, to homeless people; both were much appreciated by the organisers. But the prize for generous initiatives must go to George and Damion, who, with tremendous bravery, abseiled down Holcombe Tower, sponsored in order to raise funds for our Toilet-Twinning project. A magnificent £900 was raised, twinning 14 toilets in Africa in one year!

We exchanged services with Bury United Reformed Church, in July; their congregation joined us for a Flower Communion, a particularly Unitarian event. Rochdale Unitarians shared worship with us, in May, and followed this with attendance at Ainsworth, where Kate preached

the afternoon Anniversary Service. Kate attended Summer School, at Hucklow, as one of the organising-panel, and represented us at York, when she participated in a seminar: Working on our Welcome. Groups have visited Rochdale, for their Film Evenings; Bank Street, Bolton, for a Women's League Afternoon Tea; Hucklow for a Christmas Lunch; and Stand, to attend their 325th Anniversary celebrations. Neville, Betty, Val, Susan and Kate represented us at the GA AGM's and came back inspired, as they related at the subsequent feedback service ("Restoking the Fire"). Individuals attended a Taizé session, at Cross Street, Manchester; a dinner to celebrate the GA Presidency of Rev. Charles VanDenBroeder; Padiham Poetry Festival; the Future of Faith lectures, at Rawtenstall; and several meetings concerning the future of Unitarian College, Manchester.

Sadly, we lost two members, during 2018. Noreen Shaw, originally from Heywood, died early in the year. In July, we lost Edna Wilkinson ---a stalwart of this church, and of Bank Street, previously; Edna was a lovely lady, remembered with great affection, and much missed. To both families, we extend our sincerest condolences. The latter part of 2018 has been marked by a illness; some members remain seriously ill, whilst others make a slow recovery; to anyone who is still suffering, we send our best wishes. Alf Howson has entered permanent care, and we miss his cheery presence; Dorothy Roberts is currently in care, too---her future, as yet, undecided. We gained five new members, however: Adrian Brady, Barbara and Bryan Freemantle, Peter Hunter, and Damion Langford; in April, they were all welcomed formally into our church, in a moving ceremony which traced each individual's path. Unfortunately, Barbara and Bryan left us, afterwards; they moved to Staffordshire to be closer to family, and we wish them well.

It is my pleasure to thank everyone in this church for contributions made. None is too small to be ignored; all effort counts; working together, in harmony, we can move mountains! We are all equal in our goodwill towards our church---all dedicated to preserving what we possess. I do thank, especially, all those who undertake committee-work, particularly all officers of committees and groups, and all who perform vital everyday tasks that ensure the smoothness of church-life. It would be remiss of me not to mention Rene Hollos and Jean Taylor, both of whom have stepped down from their official duties, but who have worked steadfastly, for years, in many capacities; they deserve full gratitude and appreciation.

As we enter our 300th Anniversary year, we must ensure the continuation of Unitarian witness, in Bury, by keeping our congregation focussed and vibrant. Much of what we have is worth preserving, but we should always monitor this; maybe we can adopt a

more practical, sensible route, rather than a too-easy, familiar one? We have the strength to succeed, and the means to achieve what we most require; we must not fear change, but embrace it for the enhanced quality it can bring. Let us congratulate ourselves, as we enter our 4th century, and celebrate in style!

Anne Mills: March 24th, 2019.