

Christward

The magazine of



March 5th–April 30th
2017

~ Some thoughts from our Interim Minister ~

By the time you read this, I will have been working with you as your interim Minister for a few weeks. My first impressions are that you are a welcoming, inclusive and diverse family with a heart for social justice and action. You have differing views theologically and yet are able to include and involve everyone whatever their particular position. You clearly value community and are academically strong, reflectively contemplative and generous with your time and money to the church and to those causes close to your heart.

So what, you might ask, am I doing as I work with you? Well I believe that my role is predominantly to help you as a church to look to your future. If you want to call it having a vision, that's fine, but if that is terminology you dislike, then perhaps you could think of it as a way of thinking beyond the here and now. Change is the norm whether we like it or not. The world around us is changing and in my view the church needs also to change in order to continue to be relevant. That does not mean the church has necessarily always to assimilate secular thinking but I do think the church has to engage in some shape or form with the community and culture of which it is part.

One of the immediate things with which I've been involved is Linton House. Alongside Andy Howes and David Garner, I helped with the handover back to the church, and the on-going issues around the church's current responsibility. Gwyneth has done an amazing job, along with other deacons, of trying to explore the options for Linton House and to present them to the church in a helpful way. But this task, as you can imagine is time consuming, particularly for people working full time, and so I am here to help with this process.

And although this might seem a purely administrative task, it is in fact one which has wider and longer-term implications for the church, and so options need to be considered within a framework of thinking about the future. I have begun the process of gathering thoughts by meeting with individuals within the church, meeting users of the building and asking the worshipping community of the

church to complete a focus matrix. If you haven't completed one yet then please ask me or one of the deacons. It is important that we get as many people as possible to contribute to this process.

You may not see me taking many services at Union, but I may use some of the second sessions as ways of helping the congregation to think about the future. I aim to try to be around in the Chapel at least part of my two days a week with you, when I'm not in meetings. The specific days may change each week, but you could well see me working in the office. If I haven't had chance to meet with you individually yet then please ask me and we can find a time to meet and chat.

I have enjoyed being a small part of Union Chapel so far and I am very much looking forward to working with you over the coming months. I am excited to see where your future might take you and I hope you are too. And so I'd like to leave you with some quotes to think about and ponder on ...

“Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.” T S Eliot

“If you are not willing to risk the unusual, you will have to settle for the ordinary.” Jim Rohn

“The biggest risk is not taking any risks ... in a world that's changing really quickly, the only strategy guaranteed to fail is not taking risks.” Mark Zuckerberg

Jane Henderson

~ Linton House - the end of an era. ~

It was rather a low-key ending, reading meters and collecting keys, but on February 9th Linton House was handed back to the Church after nearly 50 years' service as a student hostel. We leased the land back in 1968 to the North West Baptist Housing Association, specifically created for this project, to build and run a hostel for overseas students. As a church which had a number of such

students amongst the congregation and other contacts, we had become aware of the great difficulty overseas students were having in finding decent accommodation, particularly married students or those with families. Many landlords refused to let to “coloured” students, or charged exorbitant rents for substandard property. There were plans to build a large church on the site so it was not an easy decision to let the land for something else. By 1970 Linton House was completed and providing a welcome and a home to students (and their wives – no husbands then) from over 20 countries at any time in the 34 units of various shapes and sizes.

The early years were not easy with loans to service at a time of high inflation and interest rates. In 1981 the home passed to the Baptist Men’s Movement Housing Association. The position of overseas students changed rapidly after the Thatcher government’s introduction of differential “full cost” fees for non-EU students – they became a lucrative, and increasingly essential source of income, but Linton House remained a well-liked and distinctive residence. By 1991 maintaining a relatively small student residence was becoming increasingly difficult and the house was transferred to the University who continued to run it till the end of the last academic year. Despite its quirks, unsuitability for the needs of many of today’s students and increasing deterioration in the building structure, it remained a well-loved place till the end. It retained a particular international flavour and its out of the way location was liked. However it has now come to the end of its useful life as a student residence, and probably as a building.

As far as Union Chapel is concerned, we can be thankful that we have enabled such a worthwhile project for the last 50 years. We can also be grateful that we did not follow the vision and build that large building, and thanks to the foresight of those who set the project up and the determination of a few in 1990 to ensure the church was not disadvantaged, be grateful for the income Linton House has given us back for the last 20 years.

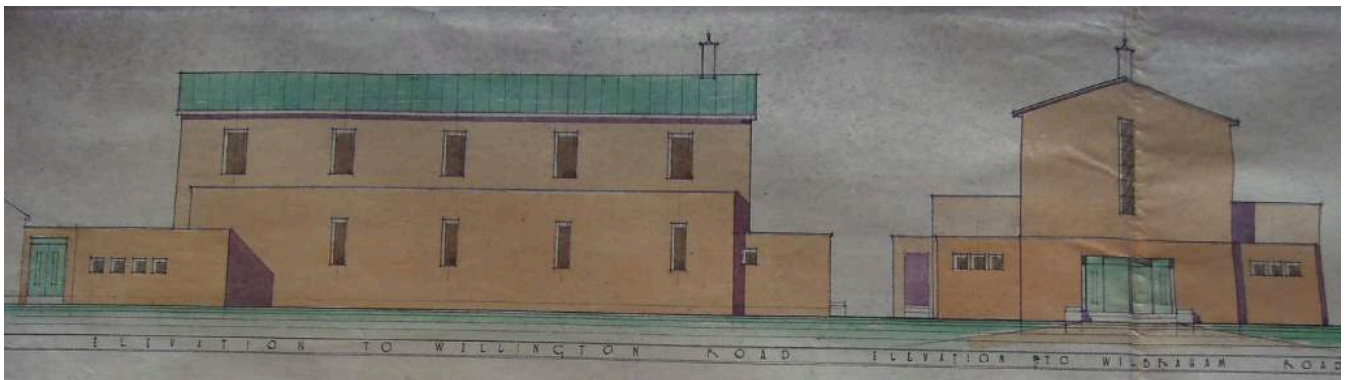
There is more of the story in the small exhibition in the Chapel. We are collating the story of Linton House and stories from those associated with it and will be producing some form (or forms) of publication in the next month or two. Any more contributions from

readers of Christward are welcome to SteveRoberts@live.co.uk or via any other route. More also, no doubt, in future issues of Christward!

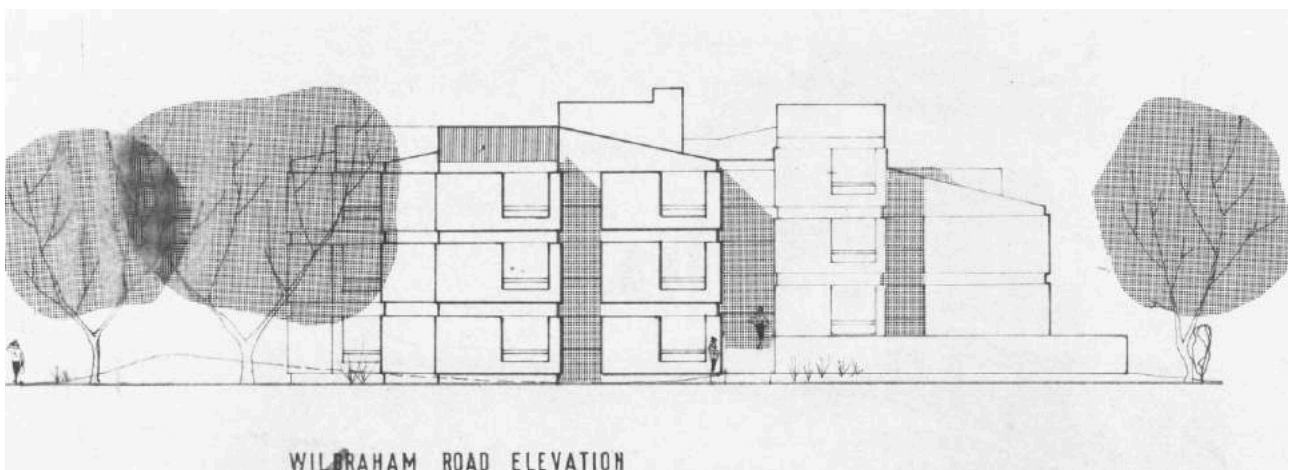
Steve Roberts

PS

All the pictures we have are on Flickr at <https://flic.kr/s/aHskPmNRhY> However if there is anyone out there who has any other pictures for this archive please contact me.



The Church we never built



What we did do Linton House from Wilbraham Road



The work begins - looking towards Waller Avenue



The finished job

~ Snippets of Hebrew ~

Idioms, or colloquialisms can sometimes be misunderstood. Such expressions cause particular difficulty when one is learning a new language. One finds that one may well be able to read a sentence and know the meaning of all the words in the sentence, but the meaning of the sentence still remains obscured. This is an obvious clue that an idiom has been included in the sentence. Perhaps a good example in English is to hear that a sportsperson completed a hat trick. Not being an avid follower of sport, I must admit I am not sure whether one scores a hat trick, or completes a hat trick or makes a hat trick. No doubt I will be informed in due course by an alert reader of this article.

In Hebrew, there are idioms. One is found in Ex 34:6 where God is telling Moses of His attributes. “And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth”. This seems quite straightforward, but the phrase “long-suffering” has been translated from a Hebrew expression which literally might be rendered “long of nose”. Since God does not really have a body, and this would be the only physical attribute in the list, clearly there is something else is meant here.

The use of the word nostril or nose in other parts of the Bible indicates anger, and is clear from the context. Perhaps the idea of someone breathing heavily through their nose is easily connected with them being angry.

So, if God has a long nose, the translators reasoned, then perhaps the long element was the time taken before heavy angry snorting like breathing would occur. And so it was that the translators came up with “long-suffering”.

Another idiom is found in the story of King David and Bathsheba. David recalls her husband, Uriah, from the battle, and tells him to go home and wash his feet. Given that David’s connection with

Bathsheba has resulted in her becoming pregnant, and it might be convenient if Uriah were to be thought of as the father, well I leave it to your imagination what washing one's feet is a euphemism for.

Geoff Walker

~ Biblical literalism: a Gentile heresy? ~

It was an irresistible draw. A day conference on the above theme. The controversial Bishop Spong as the speaker. And a venue adjacent to a central Birmingham railway station easy to reach from Worcester.

And it was still inviting even after the disappointing news that the 85-year-old Bishop had suffered a stroke. We would have to make do with a video of a 2015 talk and stand-in speakers for the rest of the day. But the theme was to be the same. So I paid my £20 and bought my train ticket. As did some 150 other participants.

And value for money it was. Bishop Spong's main thesis was that the New Testament, the Gospels in particular, was written by Jewish authors for a Jewish readership – who would immediately have recognised the myriad Old Testament references as creative parallels rather than sober history. But Gentile readers, when they got hold of the texts, missed the point, and could only take every word as 'Gospel truth'.

The subtitle for the day might have been, Why has 200 years of biblical scholarship been so slow to make it out of the lecture room and into the pulpit? And can we wonder if the church is dismissed as a museum piece when – well, when it behave like a museum? The general silence leaves the few who have spoken out, like John Robinson, David Jenkins, and Jack Spong, isolated and exposed.

Copies of Bishop Spong's 2015 book of the same title quickly sold out – even before Julie Grove, an Elder of the Carrs Lane church, had provided a comprehensive summary of its contents. She highlighted Spong's use of Goulder's thesis that Matthew's Gospel

is organised as a Christian Lectionary to fit the Jewish synagogue's liturgical year. The question of course arises, how does liturgy relate to history? It was not really addressed.

Robert Reiss, Canon Emeritus of Westminster Abbey, very effectively complemented Spong's point – with his own insights. He has this year published *Sceptical Christianity: Exploring Credible Belief?* He echoed Spong's emphasis on dating the New Testament books. The Gospels are significantly later than Paul's writing, the earliest part of the New Testament. So much of the Gospels, not least the Christmas stories and the resurrection appearances, seems to have been completely unknown to Paul – quite apart from the contradictions and misunderstandings that it contains.

The strong message we were sent away with was 'Spread the word'! This may have been aimed principally at the preachers in the audience. But why should lay folk leave everything to the clergy?

Gordon Neal

~ Sixty Million Trebles - Sixty Million Lives ~



WOULD YOU LIKE AN OPPORTUNITY TO BE PART OF A PROJECT THAT BOTH SEEKS SOCIAL JUSTICE AND BREAKS A WORLD RECORD AT THE SAME TIME?... THEN READ ON...

Did you know that there are upwards of sixty million displaced people across the world? Yes that is sixty million refugees. The thought of these numbers can be so overwhelming that we may

think there is nothing we can do. And yet, every time we do something, it makes a difference.

One woman looked at what resources and skills she had and what she could do about this situation. A keen crafter, she decided to use what she enjoyed and she set up the Sixty Million Trebles project to raise awareness.

Ellen Roche got together with friends, set up a facebook group, and initiated a project to break the world record for the largest yarn blanket ever made. There are currently nearly 3000 people involved worldwide.

The current record for the largest yarn blanket is held by a group of women in India (see photo), measuring just over 120,000 square feet.



So Ellen began asking people to knit or crochet 36” square blankets. The number of treble crochet equivalent stitches would then be counted towards the sixty million target. The project’s aims are twofold:

- To raise awareness of the numbers and plight of refugees across the world.

- To provide blankets to be distributed amongst refugees wherever they are needed.

As I write the project is up to 20 million trebles and people across the world are involved. It is co-ordinated by Ellen in the UK with lots of drop off and storage places locally staffed by volunteers. The Manchester drop-off is The Make It Shop in Chorlton.



So far I've contributed 5 blankets and I'm working on a 6th and 7th. So if you can crochet or knit then please consider making a blanket or two. Or if you would like to donate some wool (literally anything can be used, even odd bits), then please let me know and I'll get it to people who will use it for this cause.

The facebook group for the project can be found by searching ‘Sixty Million Trebles’ or you can link to the project through me if you don’t do facebook.

Jane Henderson

~ Writing to Wesley ~

“I was almost lost with wonder at my new eyes”

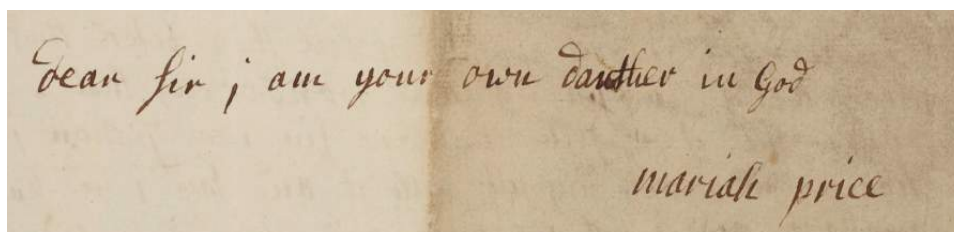
Mariah Price, 1740

One of the most interesting pieces of work I am doing in my new job as Heritage Officer for the Methodist Church is the *Writing to Wesley* project, which entails the transcription of over 100 letters from early Methodist converts.

Mariah Price was one of the very first Methodists, but you probably won’t have ever heard of her. She wrote the words quoted above in a letter to Charles Wesley in 1740. Hers is one of 153 such letters that are kept in the Methodist archive collection at the John Rylands Library in the University of Manchester. These are letters not from the famous, but from the ordinary, unknown people who joined the Methodist movement in the early years of the eighteenth century. The letters were written in response to a request from Charles Wesley to receive testimonies from members of the new Methodist societies that could be used to encourage and exhort others to faith. The letters span a long period, from the 1730s to the 1780s, although most date from the 1740s-60s.

They are deeply personal, surprisingly intimate, not always eloquent, and often strange to the modern reader. They are full of the language and imagery of the mid-eighteenth century, clearly influenced by extensive acquaintance with the Bible, sermons and other devotional writing. They are full of dreams and visions, yearnings and anguish, struggle and doubt, mixed with rapturous descriptions of faith and conviction. There are accounts of what one writer calls his “besetting temptation”, that he tries to overcome by

running up and down stairs (he doesn't tell us what exactly his temptation was, but there are clues). There is an account of a woman, pregnant for the fifth time, who talks frankly about considering some means of abortion.



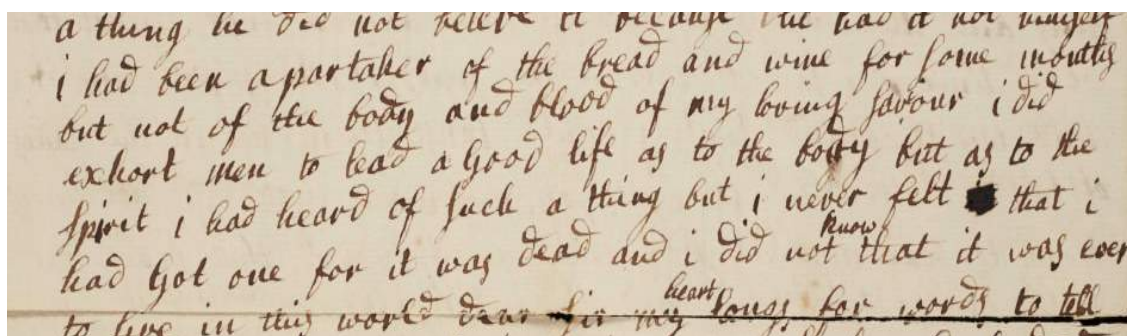
The letters give us a first-hand glimpse of what the people called Methodists were like; not only their faith journey, but what they thought about themselves, their different life experiences, their way of talking to one another. These were not the big names or the well-known leaders, but the grassroots women and men (most of the letters are by women) who found a voice through their experience of God, which empowered them to change their lives, take action, speak out, organise, inspire others; indeed, to change the world. What is so exciting is the recognisability of the voices; these are people who, although they lived nearly three centuries ago, can reach out to us through the humanity of their accounts, and by reading their own words, we can still catch a spark of their inspiration today.

The letters have been well known in academia for many years, and are studied for their insight into 18th century life and theology, but the ordinary person in the pew will not know that these letters even exist. As they are 18th century letters, they are obviously handwritten. The university library has digitised them all and they are now available online for anyone to look at. However, the digitised versions are PDFs of the original letter, so they are not that easy to read. This is where you could come in!

As part of this project, we would like to transcribe the letters, and we would like to open this up to anyone who might be interested. We need more than one transcript of each letter, so there are

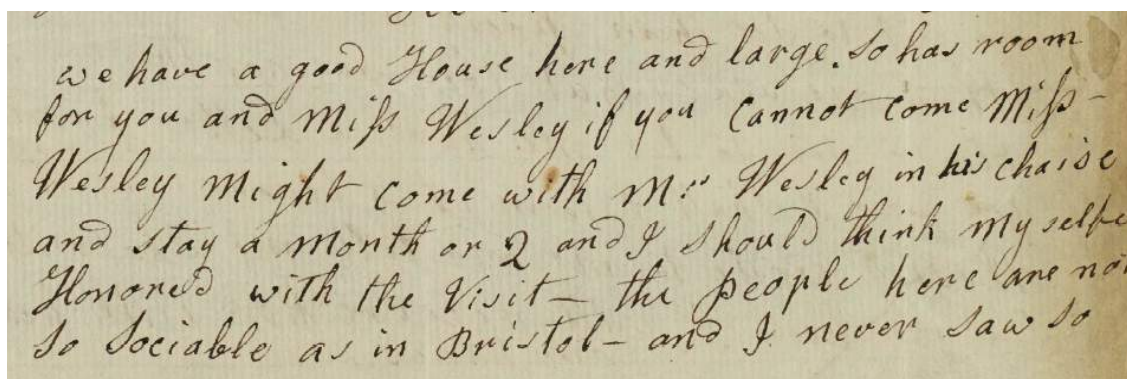
literally 100s of opportunities for you to get involved! We need at least three transcripts of each letter, as different people may be able to make out different words. We provide instructions for transcribers, and we are developing resources for groups who would like to work together as part of a house or Bible study group.

Here is another extract from Mariah's letter:



a thing he did not believe it because we had a new unger
i had been a partaker of the bread and wine for some months
but not of the body and blood of my loving saviour i did
exhort men to lead a good life as to the body but as to the
spirit i had heard of such a thing but i never felt that i
had got one for it was dead and i did not ^{know} that it was ever
to live in this world dear for my ^{heart} long for words to tell

I will close with an extract from Mary Lee, writing from Manchester in 1785:



we have a good House here and large. so has room
for you and Miss Wesley if you cannot come Miss
Wesley might come with Mr. Wesley in his chaise
and stay a month or 2 and I should think myself
Honored with the visit - the people here are not
so sociable as in Bristol - and I never saw so

If you would like to know more, or to get involved, please contact me through my work email address:

robertso@methodistchurch.org.uk

Owen Roberts

~ News of the Family ~

We send **Hilda Linton** our very best wishes. Hilda celebrated her 93rd birthday in February.

Our thoughts are with **Rachel Adebagbo** who is still in hospital at the time of writing.

~ Church Walk ~



No it is not a secret government missile silo it is Darwen Tower built to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria. This was the first stop on the January Church Walk You can see the glorious blue sky (well you can if you go and read the magazine on the Church website <http://www.unionchapelbaptist.org.uk>).

What a sunny wonderful day for a walk and the view from the top of the tower was superb. What a pity that there were only two people on it and one of them looks as if he's out of it and it was only near the beginning.



You too can experience the wonders of an exhilarating walk. We meet on the first Saturday of every month. There is one this coming this Saturday - 4th March. Contact Lorna on 225 3835

~ Fallowfield & Withington Food Bank ~

The Food Bank held a very well attended evening to value its volunteers and celebrate our local community who support us in many ways. It was an opportunity to hear from former clients and those involved in supporting us.



We have just received the outcome of our second Quality Assurance visit undertaken by Lynda Battarbee of the Trussel Trust. Lynda says . "You really do have an effective project and it was wonderful to see. Please do take time to reflect on all the positive work you have done and are continuing to do and celebrate your achievements."

A huge thank you to our dedicated volunteers who ensure that each week we continue to meet the needs of those living in difficult situations.

Currently we need donations of tinned spaghetti, tinned custard and rice pudding.

Colin Marchbank Smith

~ News of the Family ~

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~ Talking to Each Other ~

If you would like to comment on any of the articles in this magazine and so start a discussion or if you would care to write an article for us on a topic of your choosing such contributions would be welcome. Please send them by email to alan.redhouse@virgin.net or by post to The Editor, Christward, Union Chapel Fallowfield, 2b Wellington Road, Fallowfield, Manchester, M14 6EQ.

Alan Redhouse

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