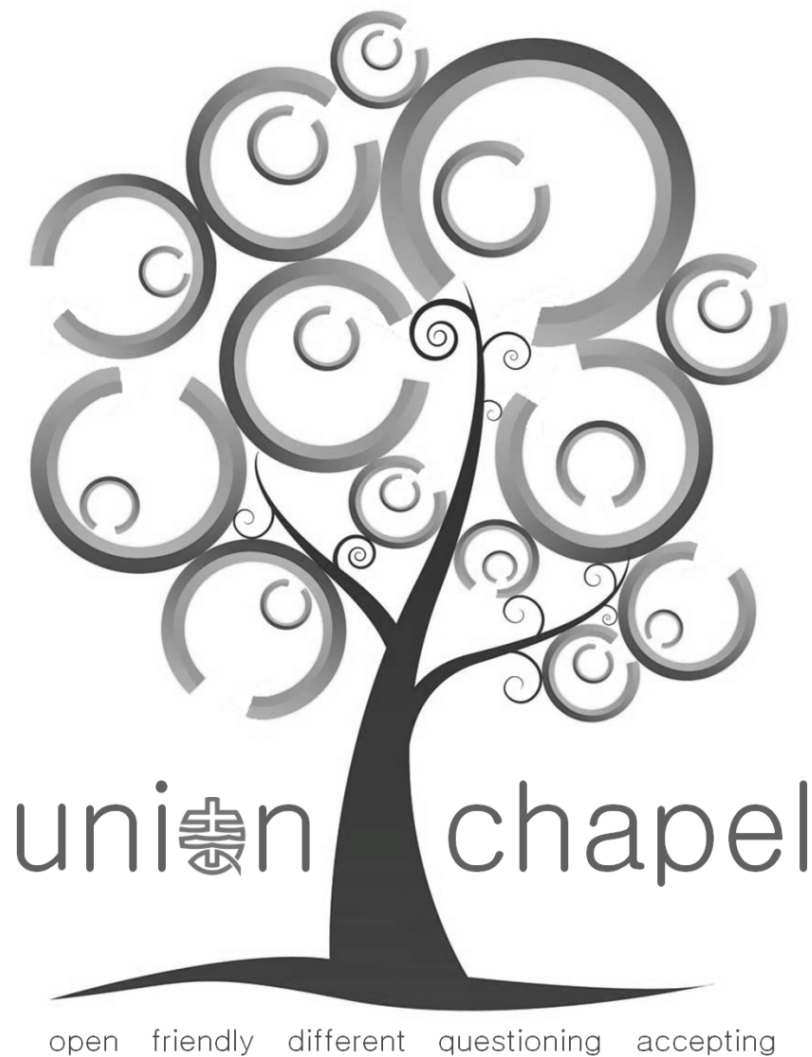


Christward

The magazine of



July 3rd–August 28th
2016

~ From the Minister's Desk ~

Another way of looking ahead, or perhaps back? Inspired by Pat Took's imaginative contribution to the Beyond 400 conversation of a few years ago.

Date: 16th July 2416

Document: Preliminary study on Religion in Manchester over last four centuries

Subsection: Research notes on Baptist presence

At the beginning of the 21st century there were a handful of small Baptist churches still operating within the primary transport conduits (some records make reference to 'motorways') which encircled Manchester. By 2038 there are only records of three recognised congregations, although some others may have continued informally. It is impossible to establish anything beyond the collapse of the Baptist Union of Great Britain in 2050, when the Universal Simplification made their function redundant. There continued to be gatherings identifying themselves as Baptist until the hyper-individualism of that century saw the dissolving of all forms of traditional church by 2081.

Details of the earliest period under study are very difficult to establish, although it seems that one congregation in particular managed to archive more information than most. The earliest records of Union Chapel date back to when the recognised membership was in the forties and the minister was Ian Gere (there are several variants of that surname in evidence). It appears that church life consisted of Sunday worship, buildings maintenance and a variety of smaller activities, all consistent with institutional religion of the time. During 2016 there was a huge amount of documentation regarding a building called Linton House, and evidence of a large decision-making process within the church. Unfortunately there is then a gap of several decades in the records, most likely due to the well publicised information loss when Manchester was absorbed into Northern Metropolis during the 23rd century.

Evidence from other sources helps to establish a partial picture of these lost decades. The political period of that era, now referred to as The Abandonment, marked the beginning of widespread voluntary food redistribution. Although no statistics survive, the extrapolated references to Union Chapel from various personal correspondence of the time indicate significant numbers were assisted during the following years.

It is widely accepted that the Universal Opportunities movement of the mid 22nd century finally ensured that education and enrichment was made freely available to all ages of people. What is less known is that the founder of that movement came from a long tradition of non-state education within the southern region of Manchester. The links are once again impossible to prove, but the particular repetition and pattern of two words ('Activities' and 'Opportunities') within governing documents indicate a possible link with an organisation known as O&A. Although it seems from the 2023/24 programme recovered that O&A was a fully independent organisation, there is mention of collaboration with a Union Chapel in its earlier history.

With regards to the religious function of Union Chapel during that time, it is only possible to speak in general terms. Their name remained on BUGB records until the Union collapse, despite indications that the relationship was often strained. There are no records of any further ministers appointed, or numbers in the congregation. Whatever form the church took over the latter half of the 21st century, there remain many positive references to it from multiple sources. Shared meals seem to have been a consistent feature, as does a commitment to justice and cooperation. There is even some evidence to suggest that the church played a part in the bridge building between major religions which began in large Northern cities during this time.

The Long Silence which lasted most of the 22nd century almost extinguished Christianity completely. On closer inspection however, it seems that there were several small communities meeting in Manchester throughout that period. This goes some way to explaining why the Micro-church Movement of the 23rd century first

found prominence in Northern Metropolis. None within these groups retained any memory of Union Chapel, but there were several unconnected sources that referred to a place or group known simply as 'Union' (and a more tenuous association with the image of a tree). There was no identification with a building, or with a Baptist identity, however there remained some marked similarities in function and vision. There was an unshakeable belief in the combined wisdom of all in the group, both in decision-making and spiritual exploration. Group life revolved around a shared meal where the life of Jesus was recalled and celebrated. Faith was seen as a life lived out, inseparable from the pursuit of justice and the care of others.

The current generation of Micro-churches are beginning to explore their history and discovering a great affiliation with Baptist heritage. Baptist churches back in the 21st century, despite on the surface looking like many others, were in many ways uniquely equipped to deal with the significant changes to come. They knew that church was not synonymous with buildings and clergy and hierarchical structures; they were the pioneers of relational communities of mutual commitment and radical lifestyle. They had the freedom to respond to their context, the scope to handle diversity, and the ability to be good news in almost any situation.

Perhaps one day we will discover the lost information which would explain how Union Chapel in particular managed the transition from its traditional form into a movement which went on to inspire so many. We might then understand how they adapted to a rapidly transforming world, not only surviving the end of all they found familiar, but sowing the seeds of hope which grew in so many unexpected ways during the subsequent centuries.

Ian Geere

~ Christian Aid Week 2016 ~

The cakes made and exchanged for donations to Christian Aid were happily eaten by people passing through the kitchen, and many

wanted to express their appreciation to those who donated their baking. So thanks to all who helped, you know who you are!

Cake donations amounted almost to £200, which is very pleasing, and will go a long way towards rescuing a family from the floodwaters.

So, that's all over and done with. What's next? Does anyone fancy packing a shoebox or two? We do need to think about this and decide if we really want to commit to doing it again this year. Please discuss.

Carole Walker

~ Looking Ahead 4: Sunday 12 June 2016 ~

On Sunday 12th June we continued with our exploration of what kind of future do we want for Union Chapel. In the first three sessions we had ranged far and wide. Firstly we considered questions such as 'What kind of church are we? What kind of church do we want to be? How should we approach these discussions? How do we create safe spaces so that all voices can be heard without people thinking their opinions do not count or that they will be speaking out of turn.

Then we moved on to the area in which we live and the people we come into contact with at Union Chapel. How much do we know about our area? What do we know of our fellow users? How far should they be involved in our discussions.

Finally in our third session we talked about our vision for the future. Where are we going as a church? What should we be doing to achieve our vision? We also looked at the way other churches had put their vision of church into practice.

Inevitably our discussions are heavily influenced by the imminent return of Linton House as a responsibility of Union Chapel. So in this fourth session we tried to be more concrete putting forward options which had been suggested by members of the congregation in the past.

We broke into small groups and considered four options. The groups were asked to list what they felt were the pros and cons of each option. Their results are shown below:

Option 1: Status quo - sell Linton House and retain present buildings. Explanation: no change - we could try to sell Linton House and keep our current buildings (Chapel & Large Hall). This would enable us to continue pretty much as we do now.

Pros

- Maintain what is going well/ many years' work/investment
- Selling would provide some income/capital/lump sum
- Someone else's problem/opportunity
- Most straightforward option, achievable, minimal disruption - no change
- Know what we're dealing with
- Character of building maintained
- Emotional attachments retained

Cons

- No control over new buyer
- No income
- Loss of capital asset
- Limit further possibilities
- Older members upset
- Lose years of hard work
- Short term thinking – sustainability not being considered – no challenge
- Space problems – not fit for purpose
- Cost of upkeep

Option 2: Redevelop Linton House - sell existing buildings and transform present Linton House fabric. Explanation: we could try to sell our current buildings (Chapel & Large Hall) and explore the possibility of transforming the interior of Linton House to make it suitable for the work of the church.

Pros

- On main road – greater visibility
- More space
- Fresh start to rethink
- Could be used for accommodation
- Less/more manageable disruption (phases)
-

Cons

- A lot of work
- No control over new buyer
- Lose cul-de-sac position
- Opposition from residents
- Would there be enough money raised to develop the building
- Condition of Linton House/cost of bringing the building up to scratch
- Large scale disruption
- Constraints of shell of building

Option 3: Rebuild Linton House - sell existing buildings, demolish and rebuild on Linton site

Explanation: we could try to sell our current buildings (Chapel & Large Hall) and explore the possibility of demolishing Linton House and building new premises on that site which would be suitable for the work of the church.

Pros

- Can do what we want – no restraints
- Greater visibility
- Chapel site value greater than Linton – more lucrative
- Phases
-

Cons

- Lose current valued activities
- Condition of Linton House/cost of bringing the building up to scratch
- No current purpose for Linton
- Planning restrictions
- Site not big enough for adequate building & parking
- Necessitate phasing – more time, more cost
- Capacity to manage project
- Lack of financial stakeholders

Option 4: Total redevelopment - start again, with a partner.

Explanation: we could try to find a partner with whom we could work (eg Housing Association) and clear the whole site. We would then work with the chosen partner to build on the site accommodation for both the partner's and the church's needs.

Pros

- Partnership – not on our own
- Size of opportunity
- Long term thinking – need carefully phased planning
- Viewing site as a whole asset
- Could make new building cheaper to run – sustainable
- Better facilities

Cons

- Disruption – couldn't keep all activities going and would lose people
- Finding suitable partner
- How to reach decisions
- Changing policy on right-to-buy may defeat object of partnering with housing association
- Size of opportunity overwhelming
- Reputational risk

Finally we carried out a small secret survey to try and judge peoples' preferences as far as the four options were concerned.

Inevitably quite a few people were away on this particular Sunday. We hope that if they read this article they will think about the options and if they would like to contribute to the discussion talk to Owen Roberts before Sunday 3rd July. They would also be welcome to make known their preferences by telling Owen; either in person, by email (*theowenroberts@hotmail.com*) or if they prefer secrecy dropping their decision into the Looking Ahead box.
(*Assume you have 10 marks to allocate between all the options.*)

The more people who take part in this process the more likely are we to get a clear understanding of what our work as a church in this area should be.

Owen Roberts & Alan Redhouse

~ More Looking Ahead ~

I have been reflecting on the discussions we have shared in which we have spoken at length about our vision for the future of our church and the associated activities. I was uneasy and I realised that, because our discussion was initiated by an urgent need to decide on the future of the Linton House building we

have largely concentrated on the buildings and their present and potential use.

Our debate concerning the BU missive on same sex marriage was centred on our identity as a local church and our belief that we can seek guidance as a body of believers in how we should act in sharing the good news with our community. We clearly felt that we did not want to be identified with a particular interpretation of the Christian faith.

My concern is that we have not spent enough time thinking about our own interpretation of the faith. We identify ourselves as followers of Jesus so how do we see this as relevant to others. The gospels seem to see it as a belief that offers people the chance to change their lives in transforming ways. Luke, in particular, shows Jesus mixing with individuals who may be religious or not, simple or sophisticated, socially acceptable or outcasts, rich or poor, but in every case offering them the chance to change their lives for the better. This was the good news that Luke set out to share with the early church. How do we now see that good news and how are we setting out to share it?

It would be sad if, having spent all our energy on identifying the challenge of what future we should create for our buildings, we fail to meet the challenge of how we actually share the good news with those the buildings accommodate and those we meet in our daily lives. I don't accept that the traditional way of doing it is the only way but it will take a deal of commitment for us to identify and to put into practice our own way of communicating hope and change. I believe we can do it.

Michael Welford

~ Snippets of Hebrew: Perfect verbs with the And prefix ~

When the grammatical structure of applying the prefix for “And” to Imperfect verbs is used with Perfect verbs, it does not indicate a logical sequence as it did with Imperfect verbs.

This Perfect form is the form found in many of the prophetic writings. So no logical sequence can be deduced except through context. A further complication in prophetic writings, is that although there are two tenses for verbs, Perfect and Imperfect, the first indicates a completed action, and the Imperfect indicates an incomplete action. Things in prophetic writings are often spoken of in the future, as though they have already happened.

So one could speak about the future, when an action will have been completed, or speak about an action in the past which was not completed. Therefore, the Perfect and Imperfect verb forms are not time related. To think of the Perfect as past tense and the Imperfect as future tense is only an approximation. Time was not so important in ancient cultures!

Because perfect verbs with the “and” prefix do not have the sequence nor the past tense element to them, the text which uses this form of verb is not clear when or in which order events will happen. How strange it is then to use this form of grammar in many of the prophetic writings. Perhaps this is a clue that prophetic writings are not always to do with foretelling the future.

There is a golden rule for interpretation: In all cases, including grammatical ambiguity, Context is King.

So although this may not help much, it does mean we shouldn't worry if we can't understand prophetic writings, because neither can the translators!

Geoff Walker

~ Fallowfield & Withington Food Bank ~

Thankfully this edition of the Church magazine will be published just before our Summer Tesco Collection!

I'm therefore able to renew my plea for volunteers to help at Tesco Burnage on Thursday June 30th between 8am & 10pm and on Friday July 1st between 8am and 2pm.

On Sunday July 3rd at 12.30pm we will gather at Withington Methodist Church to weigh, sort and date the items we will have collected. Lunch will be provided and we welcome everyone to join us for what is usually a fun afternoon!

A big thank you for your continued support, expressed in many different ways, it certainly makes a huge difference and I know it is appreciated by the families who come to us in times of real difficulty.

Colin Marchbank Smith

~ Minutes of the Church Meeting of Union Chapel Fallowfield (Baptist) held on Sunday 20th March 2016 at 11.20am.~

Present: Irene Roberts, Margaret Garner (chair), David Garner, Geoff Walker, Colin Marchbank-Smith, Carole Walker, Rachel Adebago, Ted Land, Eileen Land, Sarah Geere, Leonie Earnshaw, Margaret Edmonds, Lorna Richardson, Andy Howes (minutes), Michael Welford, Nicola Hamilton, Ian Geere (after completion of the first two items).

Apologies: Margaret and Alan Redhouse, Rose Bell (in Jamaica), Steve Roberts, Gwyneth Heritage-Roberts. With the children: Enid Welford and Carmen Bowman.

Minutes of the last meeting were accepted.

1. Manse Rent.

Ian and Sarah own their house, the church receives rent on 101 Victoria Road and pays a housing allowance to Ian as minister. It was proposed that this allowance be increased by 5%. All were in favour, with one abstention (Sarah Geere).

2. Nomination of Ian Geere to second term as governor of Northern Baptist College:

This involved a basic commitment of two meetings per year. The proposal was passed unanimously.

3. Linton House:

David briefed the meeting on the likely handback date of 27th October, and invited one or two others to join himself and Gwyneth on a working party to manage the process (eg. fabric, services, insurance, security). The group would work to the decisions of the church meeting, but was delegated to decide what needs doing and getting it organized.

4. Autumn ceilidh:

It was decided to have a Harvest ceilidh, on a date that is least disruptive to classes if possible, and inviting O&A and other folk eg. Foodbank. Agreed to suggested donations for waged & unwaged. Simple catering (possibly Lancashire hotpot as last year).

5. Harvest:

This could be the same weekend as ceilidh, possibly 9th October, with Harvest church lunch. It was agreed to check with Gwen and Enid regarding their willingness to oversee decorating. Suggestions for possible items to be used in the decorating included: allotment holders bringing apples on branches; children growing sunflowers, mustard, cress; we could all bring something representing the produce of our labour.

It was noted that giving thanks for food, and its production, is easy to neglect.

6. Projector in chapel:

Agreed that this is a valuable resource, but that the present projector has deteriorated to the point of not being useful. In such a light space, a more powerful one will be needed. Ian to check with Didsbury Baptist as to their setup. No final decision, but general support.

7. Our letter of response to the BU Council statement regarding same-sex marriage in Baptist church premises:

The March church meeting agreed that a letter should be written from the church. This has been drafted by Alan, composed by Gwyneth, circulated widely by email and in hard copy, redrafted in response to some suggestions. The final version had been circulated to some people who felt it ready to go. The meeting asked that it be circulated again widely, to regular members of the congregation, with two weeks for any further responses. As and when agreed, the meeting agreed that it should go to Lynn Green and Stephen Keyworth at the BU.

Other responses were noted: a website (*baptistssm.weebly.com*) contains many people's responses, the Chorlton church response is on their website. In a conversation with Ian, Tim Prestwood had suggested that many people had been upset by the statement.

8. Registering Union Chapel for same sex marriage: no objection to this were expressed, but it was felt that there was no pressing reason, given that we had not hitherto been a marriage venue for people not linked to the church.

Registration was seen to be a straightforward process should it become relevant.

9. Any Other Business:

An election of Deacons will be held at the AGM on 19th June. There are two retiring deacons, David Garner and Eileen Land. Member were asked to consider candidates for election and to follow the usual nomination process. Nomination forms will be available next week

10. Date of Next Meeting: 17th July 2016.

~ 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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