



ACT TOGETHER

Ashram Community Trust

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October Weekend 2021 at Frodsham

Contents

Page 1. A toothbrush says it all.....	David Bown
Page 2. A Burngreave childhood.....	Alastair Clark
Page 5. How to prioritise.....	Sandra Dutson
Page 6. Snowdrops.....	Lorraine Jones
Page 7. Thoughts on saving gas.....	Nona Wright
Page 7. Letter from John Barnabas	
Page 8. Letter from the Hendersons	
Page 9. New Roots memories.....	Linda Marshall
Page 10. Ashram Connections 3 - international!	Linda Marshall
Page 11. Welcome to asylum seekers.....	Pat Hamilton
Page 12. Gary's latest Journey.....	Gary Grief
Page 13. Black History Month.....	Margaret Mackley
Page 14. "Oh not Rosa Parks again".....	Jenny Medhurst
Page 15. Time is of the essence.....	Caroline Hart,Joliba

- Page 16. Red Ellen play review.....David Bown
Page 17. Karma?.....Ian Parker
Page 18. What I can remember – reminiscences from 7 Decades.....Ian Parker
Page 18. Books that have changed the way I look at the world.....Jenny Medhurst
Page 19. A contemporary prayer and Christmas 2021.....John Vincent
Page 20. Can we trust the Bible on the historical Jesus?.....Nirmal Fernando
Page 22. Community Information



Gentians are all-seeing eyes of happiness in a brown and wind-troubled place"
Mark Cocker "Our Place"

To see the world in a grain of sand
and Heaven in a wild flower
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
and eternity for an hour

William Blake

(Gentians are rare Alpine survivors of the last ice age, hanging on in Upper Teesdale,
but with numbers more than halved in the last fifty years)

A toothbrush says it all

.....

“...It was discovered that one family all shared the same toothbrush, and, comments Ian, the delight shown by the two children on being given their own tooth brushes was greater than when his own children received Christmas presents. Medical supplies are one of the most needed requirements in Poland.”

Here is another quotation...

“It is the end of Communism my friend and without bloodshed; the end of Jaruzelski and his Russian regime; it's going to be ‘Solidarity’ and Lech Walesa from now on.” This sums up the enormous relief the people are beginning to feel. They are a people with a sad history who have suffered oppression and economic stagnation for too long. Industry is antiquated and its pollution causes leukaemia and other diseases, yet they have great hope for the future and a united spirit to build that future together.”

These diary excerpts relate to a week beginning Friday, 17th November 1989. I had been invited by Ian, his wife Lindsay and their friend Adrian, to join them on a special journey to Poland whereby we took a whole van full of supplies to several locations around the country. At each location we were welcomed by the Methodist pastors, joined them in worship and were recipients of the warmest, gracious and generous hospitality we could have wished for. People at our churches back home were no less generous in donating the much needed supplies, just the same as people everywhere are doing right now for the people of Ukraine.

In the light of the terrible scenes we are witnessing in Ukraine plus the sight of and knowledge that a whole quarter of the country's population are displaced, let's go back to my diary and to those very people who welcomed us with our gifts, and are now welcoming Ukrainians with open arms of magnanimous generosity and love.

The diary again...

“Ryszard works as an electronic engineer and told us it would take all of 27 years of salary to buy a one-bedroomed flat and inflation is over 100% a month! I

asked him whether he had considered going to West Germany, Canada or Australia to work, and his reply was immediate and yet considered: ‘God would have me stay here. I must work with Jarek (the student pastor) in the church here and I must stay with my people to build a future together.’ I looked again at this young man and I was deeply moved by his self-sacrifice and sense of discipleship.”

“Without exception, there was an unmistakeable likeness in all the pastors we met; not a likeness in appearance, but a similarity in everything they stood for, lived for and hoped for. They seem to have a heightened state of sensitivity, a sensitivity towards humanity, to their own people and a sensitivity to the presence of God within themselves.”

One more excerpt...

“Harry and Ania Irrgang and Andrew Cawthorn are key church workers in Warsaw. Both Harry and Andrew have a keen desire to stimulate the missionary work of the church's ministries. Harry is a very gifted and blessed person, fluent in several languages, organist and choirmaster and something of a strategist-cum-policy maker. The three of them are people of great faith who command the respect and confidence of the pastors; they are like pastors to the pastors. These pioneers must not be forgotten and need to be supported. Why is it that only when the church's resources are at their weakest, that the church seems to be at its strongest?”

With people like that, with characteristics such as theirs, with a vision like that and the determination to see it fulfilled, no wonder the arms of Poland and their contemporary countries, are at this time, arms of seamless compassion, unquestioned love and genuine openness.

What a reversal of fortunes these thirty-three years have seen, but notice also those human characteristics which, if they have changed, it's only by being reinforced and made stronger and then used for another peoples' gain.

David Bown

A BURNGREAVE CHILDHOOD

Despite our tramstop being at Burngreave Vestry Hall and my ancestors being buried in Burngreave Cemetery, in the 50s we knew our area as Pitsmoor. We lived on Grimesthorpe Road, Pitsmoor and it wasn't until I was in my twenties that I realised what a picture this address must have conjured up to others elsewhere. It was, in fact, originally a Roman road, later a toll road, that led to Grim's Thorpe or village , a Danish name. On the moor there hadn't been coal pits but excavations for iron ore.

Living near the steelworks in the dirtiest city in the world, growing up with pollution we just accepted it as normal. Until the Council cleaned the sandstone Town Hall, I just thought stone was black. On Sunday mornings, when I was very young my Dad used to take me on walks up the road to an open space with a good view to the east and I was amazed at the variety of different coloured smokes arising from the works' chimneys (even on a Sunday) - white, grey, black, red and green. I will never forget him showing me a hedge-sparrow's nest in a hedge at Osgathorpe allotments. The tiny birds were looking up at us with their beaks wide-open. Later on, I used to go with him delivering "Daily Workers" (the Communist Party's newspaper) to people in Grimesthorpe and Wincobank. Our family walked a lot. Dad was a great hiker and we learned much from him about the countryside and nature on our trips into Derbyshire. But one of the most memorable occasions for me then was when we were walking one Sunday across an open area in Brightside where buildings had been demolished, surrounded on all four sides by black steelworks. It was a brilliantly sunny day and Dad pointed to the azure sky and said "Listen to that skylark". I was amazed at its being there and singing so beautifully and at the contrast between the beauty and miracle of nature and of God's creation and those ugly creations of Man. I think it must have been during "Works' Weeks" when all the works closed and there was a mass exodus to Blackpool, "Skeggey", Scarborough, Cleethorpes, and Torquay.

At Ellesmere Road School our headteacher told us how Ruskin had described Sheffield as "a dirty picture in a golden frame" referring to the smoke and grime but also to the beautiful surrounding countryside, particularly in North Derbyshire. The fathers of most of the kids in my class worked in the steelworks but our dad was a painter and decorator, also a Shop Steward and Branch Secretary of the Painter's Union and I was always running down to the post box on Ellesmere Road to post letters to Salford (the union HQ) for him. Dad was an atheist and a communist , who had attended a Church of England School and Mum said he knew his bible better than she did. She was from Aberdeen and attended St. James Presbyterian Church on Scott Road. My sister and I were christened, and went to Sunday school there. But we also went to Daily Worker bazaars at the Vestry Hall. When I was 14 I went to several meetings of the Young Communist League but I soon began to question the unquestioning adherence of the leaders to the strict party line and didn't go any more.

Our house was a "back-to-back" and it really annoys me when people describe terraced "two up, two down" as "back-to-back" – they aren't. We had only one outside door and the three rooms were on top of each other with no through ventilation. Three houses in the row faced the street and to go to the backyard (shared with the other three houses at the back of ours, their fronts facing the yard) we had to go onto the street a few steps, than go down the passage and into the yard. It wasn't much fun in the cold winters of the 50's trudging through snow wearing wellingtons to the "lav". There were three w.c.s to six houses and we shared ours with my cousin's family who lived at the back of us.

My parents met during the war and both spoke a lot of their family history, and the war. The ceiling in the attic was very roughly plastered and I used to lie in bed imagining what the various shapes looked like, e.g. a woman's

head. I learned that shrapnel had gone through our roof when a bomb in the Blitz flattened houses behind our block. Dad had had to repair things as best he could. Many people were killed and our drains had been blocked with corpses. Dad used to show me an open area near us where he had been taken in 1917 to see houses bombed in attacks by Zeppelins

aiming at the works. He was born in Stockton Street but the family soon moved to Heeley. However, in November 1918 his mother died at the age of 35 of the "Spanish Flu", leaving her

The puddings were served first with gravy, Yorkshire -fashion. For Sunday tea if we didn't have meat sandwiches spread with dripping, we often ate canned salmon, followed by peaches, pears or fruit cocktail with evaporated milk, and home-made cake. I hated the tinny taste of canned Danish cream. We did not eat the fruit with bread and butter as some families did, Mum thought it a weird Yorkshire thing.

Monday was wash day and Mum toiled over the zinc tub pounding the clothes with the "posher" using "Rinso" powder and heating the water



Buckenham Arms

husband (in the RAF) with three children. They were looked after for several months by their paternal grandmother who lived on Hallcarr Street. She shopped at Wostenholms' grocers on the corner with Spital Hill , we always bought biscuits there in the 50s (and it became the Ashram shop years later). Aunts told us how Grandma made ginger beer and her daughters went in the works to sell it to the thirsty men. Once she had to wash away with a ladling can the brains of an Irishman who had been killed in a fight outside her door!

Mum used to say you could buy anything you needed on Spital Hill in the 50s, there was a great variety of shops. She had to be a careful manager so she went to the corner shop for some things and the Co-op and others for bargains and good value. She was also a good cook and baker battling with the coal-fired temperamental Yorkshire range. We always had a roast at weekends, alternating between beef (with Yorkshire pudding) and pork (with seasoned pudding containing sage and onion).

and boiling whites in a gas "copper". She was thrilled when she was able to get to use the council-run wash-house on Sutherland Road , until then she sent sheets to the Co-op laundry. Washday necessitated a quick meal of corned beef, tinned processed peas and chips fried in beef dripping. Opposite us was a popular chip shop (see photo, our house was where the garage is) and we often used to get fish and chips from there too. We never had it with bread and butter though, another weird English thing, she said!.

Our area was almost solidly working class (except for the posh houses on Burngreave Road). There were some rough families but it was generally very respectable. Our house was next to a pub (see photo) so we were no strangers to seeing drunk men, and it was awful trying to get to sleep on a warm summer's evening (especially when the customers sang. I'll never forget "When The Saints Go Marching In", every Saturday). Dad didn't go there, he

went to the Big Gun in the Wicker and Hays on Norfolk Street after union meetings. 3

Everybody knew each other. A lot of people passed our house on the way to work, the tram or the shops. Most mothers then did not go out to work and they formed a community I suppose. They helped each other out and sold their kids' cast –off clothing. As a small boy I was lucky, my aunt worked as a housekeeper for the daughter of Woodhouses' (who owned the chain of furniture shops) and her son was older than I and I got his very good-quality castoffs. Most of the many local kids played together and in school holidays we 'd walk further afield say to Parkfield Springs for more exuberant games, or climbing the Bull Rocks, near the Cemetery. Not having watches we'd troop back when we thought it was near lunch or teatime. Parents in those days worried less and there was safety in numbers.

Mum always tried to make us look well-turned out, well-scrubbed (Palmolive soap), with burnished shoes, clothes washed and ironed, hair washed with "Lustercreme" and brushed neatly, and every day a clean hanky. If it was a special occasion, I wore my maroon tie with pandas on it. It was still a custom then for children to get new clothes at Whitsun and be given money by adults to put in their pockets or handbags. I remember being very pleased with a woollen suit with a "hacking jacket", with short trousers of course. On Whit Monday we walked with the Sunday School under its banner which said "Suffer the Little to Come unto Me" to Firth Park for the Free Churches Service together. I don't know what the Anglicans and Catholics did.

Money was scarce and Mum used to go to jumble sales and after careful washing many a garment was worn by us. Once, she saw a perfectly good boy's pullover on top of a bin and she washed it, got it dyed navy blue and it was ideal for me for school. She did buy some things on credit and a great treat was a trip on a Saturday to the Banners' department store on Attercliffe Common. This was a no-nonsense good value shop very popular with the working-class and we always bumped into people we knew. It was here I got my first grownup clothes

but she bought my first semi-pointed shoes at "Easiephit" on Spital Hill. I think they were 30 shillings. Winkle –pickers were the height of fashion but I didn't like them and she wouldn't let me have white socks as she said they were common. She was right (as usual).

I made very good progress at Ellesmere Road School and passed the "eleven plus" to King Edward's Grammar School. Mum had to buy the uniform on credit at Roberts Brothers and Stewarts in town. "King Ted's" was a terrible culture shock for me from the (respectable) working- class. I was bullied, and suddenly had gone from getting nearly 100% in tests and homework to a mere 60%.average, music was worse. A lot of the boys came from the wealthy areas of the city and I was the only one from Ellesmere that year, I kept quiet about living in a back-to-back. But I weathered the storm, learned to give as good as I got and did well in "O" Levels at the age of 15. I started "A" Levels but got sick of weird French novels and the Revolt of The Netherlands and left to work at the Town Hall. It was here I got to know about Sociology and later went to study it at Salford University. It was ironic, I was leaving the city that by 1969 was boasting about being the cleanest industrial city in the world because of its Clean Air Programme, going to another still-dirty, quite run-down place.

Our house was condemned in 1938 as being unfit for human habitation and that was why my grandfather, aunt and father moved there that year, hoping to get a council house. Then came the war and grandad died there. Before they were married Dad told Mum they wouldn't be long there. However, we didn't move until 1965 (when the house was demolished.)! The day we moved to the council house in Southe Green was one of the happiest in my life. We had an indoor lav., hot water, a bathroom, enough bedrooms, a back door and a garden. But I still have many memories of Pitsmoor – mainly good, and as I get older, living in Stockport, I become fonder of good old Sheffield. I owe it a lot.

Alastair Clark

How to prioritise

Well, I told Jenny I would write something , but really not sure what to focus on. The reason is I could write about so many things, so decided rather than write about one thing I would write about how to prioritise! Or at least how I prioritise.

One of the stories told in all three synoptic gospels is actually two stories in one. It starts with Jairus, an official in the synagogue, and his appeal to Jesus to heal his 12 year old daughter who is very ill. He stresses the urgency of doing so and they set off but then a woman suffering from constant bleeding over many years touches him. Jesus makes a point of stopping and draws attention to the woman, engages her in conversation and heals her. The delay in reaching the child means by the time he does so she has died and much loud mourning is taking place. Jesus is undaunted and raises her from the dead. There are many questions maybe to be asked about these stories and explanations given of what was going on. For me however a central dilemma is how Jesus prioritises his time. Would he have made a good triage nurse? He was exposed to many pressures, the anguish of a father who moreover was a fairly influential figure, the reactions of different groups in a crowd, the noisy mourning of those with her family, a woman with extremely low self esteem and a debilitating medical condition who probably did not want to attention drawn to her. How did he come to the decisions he did about what to do next? A friend once said 'life is the interruptions'. I think that was very clear in Jesus' ministry as in the intertwining of these two stories and that openness to what each day brings is often a helpful, life giving approach.

In terms of my own life at present. Apart from Ashram commitments to membership matters I am on the Council of management of Church action on poverty and my Quaker involvements involve Peace Promotion group, Environment group, Social Justice group, the Conflict Minerals campaign, my local Meeting Premises committee and the Quaker Trading board which has responsibilities for all five of the buildings in the Manchester and Warrington Area. And yes I do have family commitments, sometimes quite demanding and try to keep up with friends.

This is said not in boastful way as it is a bit of a pattern for my life which might be criticised. 'Trying to spread yourself too thin'? Maybe and certainly some weeks

definitely. I know some things get put on the back burner for rather long time and even just fall off the list. However one of reasons for not focussing on just one or two things is that in many ways it is the connections that are also important.

I suppose at present the most common thread is the environment, the climate and ecological emergency. Politicians at local, national and global levels have declared a global emergency but actions do not reflect the urgency of the crisis and indeed often make it worse. Consider at present the war in Ukraine and the military 'bootprint' of all that weaponry, the oil used in the military vehicles and quite apart from the horror of the impacts on people we can also see longer term impacts on agriculture, the need for rebuilding buildings and infrastructure. Significant government budgets are skewed away from all the other serious issues which desperately need finance and the skills of trained scientists. The Conflict minerals campaign has opened my eyes to the ongoing colonialist attitudes and behaviours still resulting in exploitation of both people and environment in poorer countries so wealthier countries can for example have electric vehicles.

Belonging to these various groups with their huge agendas can be daunting at times. I feel I could write letters every day to my MP about the cost of living, a whole range of environmental issues, the huge resources used to increase weaponry in the world, our outrageous treatment of people seeking asylum. The list could go on. In some ways belonging to groups helps keep some sort of focus. I am also aware of the pressures on my MP being inundated with petitions, letters and pressures within her own Party. I know from 'They work for you' briefings of her voting patterns and that her vote is usually in the minority figure. How disheartening must that be? How do I relate to her in ways which recognise her humanity? Which allow her to prioritise? She says she spends most of her time on casework. In my view that is the result of the impact of government policies which are inhumane. If only our political parties tried to see things holistically. For me only the Green Party has anything approaching a coherent manifesto when all the connections are made and policy is not made at a superficial level with a view to crowd responses.

Sometimes my life reminds me of sweeping a large hall.

I have done so in various churches and you cannot do it one sweep. You do one section for a bit then go back to tackle another section and then another and then pick up on the first line -- and you get the idea. I wish sometimes there was a different image that felt a bit more creative. Yet creating a sense of space that can be used for groups of various kinds has its own satisfaction,

and the inspiration of being with people with knowledge of and real concern for a variety of issues is sustaining. And finally, today is Easter Sunday and a beautiful one at that so I decided to have a break and go for a short walk. A space for reflective thinking, the need to withdraw, an opportunity simply to delight in birdsong and trees, sometimes is the priority.

Sandra Dutson



Snowdrops

I went past the now cleared garden of the empty house on the corner of Breadalbane Street – and it was covered in snowdrops! I saw my first snowdrops this year on 28th January – the earliest I remember seeing them and due, no doubt, to the unusually mild weather (for winter) we'd had up till then.

I love to see snowdrops, not just because they are beautiful flowers but because, appearing as they do during the short days & long dark evenings of winter with its cold, wet and windy weather they are a wonderful reminder that spring is on its way. The delicate little plants with their brilliant white heads seem so brave to risk blooming when they may well suffer from frost damage and/or be beaten down by wind and rain. Nevertheless they push up through the soil to bask in the limited hours of sunshine and don't seem to worry that they may soon be destroyed by harsher weather.

As one of the first flowers to bloom after the long, dark of winter the snowdrop is often associated with hope –

and this was the meaning assigned to them in the Victorian language of flowers.

Their early blooming gives an association with new beginnings too. With their nodding heads across the frosty grass of late January and February their flowering timing coincides also with Imbolc, also a festival of new beginnings in the wheel of the year. The Victorians associated the flower with January though – and it's traditionally the birth flower for this month – while in Russia 1 March is snowdrop day celebrating the end of winter when children traditionally given posies of the flower to their grandparents.

The time of new beginnings is here, with sunlight and warmth slowly returning after the winter, and the snowdrop grows even though we're not quite there yet, just as we must grow through adversity or in less than ideal conditions. So let's take courage and hope from the snowdrops and remember that spring will come again.

Lorraine Jones

THOUGHTS ON SAVING GAS

Euan and I grew up in fuel-conscious homes without central heating, and we both remember what it was like. He wore gloves while doing homework in his bedroom! And our bedroom was only for sleeping, in the winter. I remember four sisters piling up in one bed to get warm. So the need to be careful with fuel, but NOT to the point of suffering, is in our very fibres.

We have solar panels and batteries, so our electricity is relatively cheap. This powers some of our decisions but would not work for everyone.

We also have a condensing gas boiler, with central heating controls enabling us to heat the whole house or just the downstairs area. The boiler heats water only when needed.

In the bleak mid-winter, we save on the gas on a daily basis by

- 1) Burning wood gathered from local projects and people. This is time-consuming but also neighbourhood building. We rarely top up the heat from the wood burner with the central heating, and instead spend our winter lives near the wood burner.
- 2) The central heating is now only turned on for the mornings when it is absolutely needed , 16C

- 3) or below. When the house is warm enough, I get out of bed. The heat from an hour of central heating lasts until teatime when the wood burner is lit.
- 4) We have baths three times a week and share the bathwater (which is later used to flush the toilet.) But I like my bath HOT!
- 5) All clothes are now washed at 30C , except towels during COVID, and always with a full load.
- 6) Washing-up is done once a day, and lately the water has been topped up from the electric kettle (cheap electricity)
- 7) We have a gas hob, so try to use this minimally. Vegetable steamer helps, as does the wok. One-dish meals feature a lot, usually in the electric oven or the slow cooker.

Of course, there are all the usual tweaks, like a good set of loft insulation and cavity wall insulation as well. We have massive windows, which are covered at night with lined curtains. We have found this makes a big difference to our comfort.

Nona Wright

From John Barnabas

To Sisters and Brothers in Ashram Community,

I am writing to you in self-isolation, recovering from the flu and a party with Iranian LGBTQ+ Brothers and Sisters at the Lodge on Good Friday. Did a silent walk of witness, and did a re-enactment of Good Friday with no Jesus on the cross, but there through the Holy Spirit. A sermon from Martin on Jesus and the Passersby, a Comm-Unity lunch, Stations of the Cross through characters in the story, and also in song and Taize chants. Then shoot the breeze with Vicki. For the 3rd year running renewed my vows as a Companion of the Northumbria Community in Handsworth Park on my own on Easter Sunday. I sit by the lake in Handsworth Park most days and through being in the moment PRAY. I am listening to a Radio 3 Essay series on Ukraine, Ukrainian poetry on the theme Words not War.

Is anyone in Ashram, housing Ukrainian or Afghani refugees?. Burngreave Ashram could be used to house refugees, asylum seekers or leased to a local community project.

SHALOM, John Barnabas, the Hermit, a House of Prayer, Flat 3, Panda Court, Hamstead Rd, Handsworth B20 2RL, W Mercia.

In a separate note “I write to say we must oppose the government's proposal to extradite asylum seekers (and) refugees to Rwanda. It's a member of the Commonwealth and will probably send a team to the Commonwealth Games. Peter Tatchell will probably plan a campaign to publicise some Commonwealth countries' human rights record towards LGBTQ+ brothers,sisters. Please PRAY for me as I recover from flu.....I hope to see you in May at Cliff College.”



XPHCTROC
BOCKPEC

Dear Linda & Peter

We had some Ukrainian refugees in our church last Sun. They asked if we knew of an orthodox Church where they could celebrate Easter & we do know of one & are trying to arrange for them to go.

However it is a Russian orthodox church & though they speak Russian there might still be a problem as the church is under the Moscow patriarchate & Patriarch Kiril has excommunicated the Ukrainian church.

But these petty squabbles between the churches make me kind of wince in the face of the horror which is unfolding.

Now there's a kind of wall of hatred growing up between Ukraine & Russia & the Iron Curtain has come down again. I was talking to a friend in Chernogorsk & she said there is a wave of Russo phobia here in the west & that our media are not telling the truth.

The inscription says 'Christ is risen' with the best love,
Hoping for Peace one day Donald Jaque

New Roots memories

Readers who use the current Ashram Prayer Handbook will already be familiar with the text below but there will be others who may not have encountered it before, and because I find it so moving and so inspiring I asked if it could be reprinted in this Summer's *Act Together*.

The *New Roots* shop in Sheffield was a project of Grace Vincent, and opened in 1987. It operated for over thirty years, run entirely by volunteers, many of them students at the nearby university, and in 2004 Grace's book *New Roots, Shop for Justice* was published. In the book she explains the rationale behind the project and what struck me was how far-sighted, how ahead of its time it was, especially in the references to the relationship between human and ecological, to sustaining and sustainable living. So here's the extract from the book:

The place we choose to stand, the area we choose to live in, is profoundly important. It speaks volumes. As a public place, a shop can embody and express significantly certain aspects of a radical faith:

- *Raising the significance of everyday things.*
- *Acting justly.*
- *Standing for something.*
- *Believing in the power of quite simple choices.*
- *Declaring our interdependence as human beings.*
- *Asserting that all things hold together: our good news is somehow about human and ecological, mutuality and tolerance, about how everything 'holds together'.*

It is becoming clear that the world will only survive by self-giving, living simply, empowering others , caring about the weak, not abusing creation, opposing oppressive people and structures, people having something to live for beyond themselves. This model of sustaining and sustainable living is what the NT refers to as Christ who/which holds all things together.

But as I was about to save and send this brief article I needed to check one detail, so I googled the name of the shop and was blown over by what I found, so I just had to share one or two of the comments/memories with those of us who still rely on text printed on paper for our information.

1. *I have happy memories of New Roots and think of its passing as a success. The values that made New Roots unusual in 1987 are now more mainstream – The Student's Union has its own zero-packaging shop, you can buy vegan food almost everywhere, get fair trade and organic veg in supermarkets and so on. All things have their seasons.*

New Roots is now passed into legend, but leaves behind a community which stretches out across generations of volunteers – I'm still in touch with many. A community forged by decades of shop floor chat, of protest planning, bicycle powered smoothies, cake cutting, and tens of thousands of hot veggie burritos.

2. *As a student I pretty much lived off the New Roots crumble bars – part flapjack, part fruit crumble, entirely delicious. The cherry one was the best. I also fondly recall chatting away with friends downstairs discussing 'figs on the Don' – historically, the effluent from the steel works and power stations raised the water temperature in the river, creating perfect fig germination conditions on the banks.*

3. *I had a lot of lovely times, burritos, and cakes at New Roots! Nearly all my friends volunteered there at some time (I was a student 2000-2004), and some friends also lived in the flat upstairs for a while. We plotted Peace in the Park in the basement, and I loved ALL the amazing window displays; always sharing important campaigns. Thank you to everyone who helped out there and kept it going for so long.*

4. I spent some great days at New Roots, often working with my friend Ali (I was in Sheffield 2001-2006) – it had healthy food, was budget friendly, provided valuable work, and was a remarkably calm escape to appear at and breathe out. The shop taught me:

- one of the great rewards of work is simply the work itself, whether that was grounding me by meeting locals and doing something hands-on like measuring out TVP between studies (plus of course the quantity of crumbs you have to eat after slicing 15 cakes), and there seemed to be similar reward for those who wanted something other than full time employment structuring a schedule, taking responsibility and having an outlet

- a steady, quietly principled, Christian spiritualist inspired place was an important rock amid the various fluid political chunterings of my university life – and some of the ethics the place seemed to have of being nice, being globally conscious, being generous with your time, being occasionally firm with the wayward, helping keep people healthy in a non-flashy but very reliable way, and being accepting of all the different colours of society with all their stories and obscure or well intentioned pursuits (and window-advertising those) — these are things that have stuck with me. For those things and more, thank you Grace, and thank you the people that made New Roots.

Now back to the contributor of this item, and all I can say to end the article is - what a challenge, what an example to follow!

Linda Marshall

Ashram Connections 3 – International!

Our overseas members that keep actively in touch with us are Donald and Jacquie Henderson, who joined many years ago when they were based in the Birmingham area, but since then have moved onto a smallholding in the Dordogne, from where they keep in touch by phone calls and letters, having made the decision not to move on to electronic means of communication. The French postal service produces a wide variety of special stamps which the Hendersons make sure to purchase for their communication with Ashram, one of which you can see alongside the scan of Donald's beautifully designed Easter card.

So that's the start of a French connection, but have you read the letter that came in Donald's card? Amazingly, it begins with Ukrainian refugees who had attended the local parish church (Catholic, of course) in their tiny village of Piégut-Pluviers, and moves on to a phone call with a Russian friend, because Donald and Jacquie lived and worked for some years in Russia, hence the Cyrillic greeting on the front of the card.

Returning to France, Donald sent me, a few years ago now, the newsletter of a Protestant-based charity he had visited in Toulouse and I found it so interesting and inspiring that I took out a subscription. In an edition of a couple of years ago there was an article about child development which came with an illustration showing the results of some academic research on the effect of screen time on small children. I was attending a local Family Centre at the

time, to help with the oversight of a pair of autistic twins, and showed the illustration to one of the staff there, who found it so convincing that she took a copy to use in her discussions with parents who attended the centre. (I did email the organisation in Toulouse to thank them for it, which they were pleased to acknowledge.)

The last connection goes wider still in one sense. In a phone call some time last year Donald mentioned that Islam in France now has its first female imam, and she had written a book about how she had come to take on this challenge. A few days later a copy of Kahina Bahloul's book "Mon islam, ma liberté" came through our letterbox, and it made very interesting reading, including the details of her background – growing up in Algeria with a Moslem father and a Jewish Catholic mother! At her opening service in the mosque she was accompanied by a female rabbi and the woman minister who was president of the United Protestant Church of France. I mentioned the book in a phone call to Saidun, our elder son's Moslem mother-in-law in Cambridge, in particular some details about how Islam had in the past been more inclusive of women than is often the case today. A couple of days later two more books came through our letterbox, this time on social mobility in Islamic civilisation, written by her now deceased husband Muhammad Beg - and all because I met Donald Henderson in connection with Ashram's Sparkbrook project in Birmingham some time last century.

Linda Marshall

"Welcome" to Asylum seekers



Dialstone Lane Methodist Church invites your family to our **Welcome Group 2021** on Tuesdays, 2.00 - 3.30, for 20 parents and their children from The Britannia Hotel.

We are at 161 Dialstone Lane - turn left out of the hotel and the Church is on the same side of the road, across 3 side roads, one with traffic lights.

Meet at 1.50 at the hotel for accompanied walk along the road – or just come!

Play space inside and out

Toys and books, Comics and magazines

Crafts and board games, Time to chat and practice English

Teas, coffee, juice, Cake, biscuits, nuts and fruit

We look forward to getting to know you

FREE, including WiFi



This is the invitation leaflet for the "Welcome" we are trying to give to asylum seekers housed at the Britannia hotel in Stockport for a short time before they move on to more permanent accommodation.

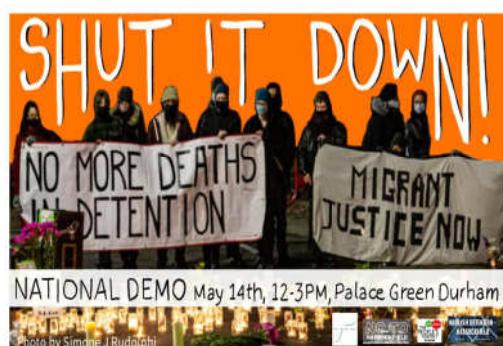
Most of our guests are Kurds from Iraq and Iran, but also from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Nigeria.

I am in a small group of volunteers trying to help with English. Our guests are very keen to communicate although their level of English is very varied and we are trying to find the best way to cater for all needs. There are a lot of resources available and we have printed a lot of basic materials mostly with pictures and diagrams. This week a couple of us are going to sort and make sense of the materials we have already printed and try to work out the gaps.

Next week we have a zoom meeting with ESOL teachers in Stockport Council to help guide us to a more creative way of providing language support.

Most of all, it is a pleasure and a joy to meet with our guests who have travelled a long way to find a new home in our country. We really do welcome their presence among us and want to help them settle into our country with all its cultural peculiarities.

Pat Hamilton

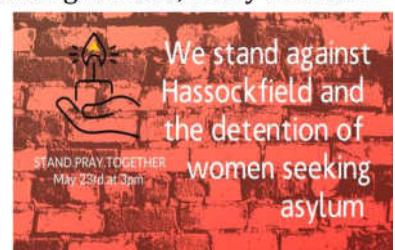


Well done Pat.

Here in the North East there are monthly protests outside the Hassockfield Immigration Removal Centre (a notorious former young offenders institution) near Consett, now housing women, many of whom have been abused, prior to deportation

and another place far from legal help and support – an old RAF base at Linton on Ouse - is being converted to provide accommodation for up to 500 single men

so that the Government's acknowledged broken asylum system can save some of the £2.7million a day it is spending on hotels....



A Faith Witness last year

Jenny Medhurst

Gary's Latest Journey

Part One - Who would live in a place like this?

One thing I missed when I lived out in Jordan was being able to get involved with the local community in any sort of meaningful way – it’s what happens when you don’t speak the language, I suppose, but it bugged me nonetheless.

So I was very much looking forward to re-engaging with whichever-projects-I-might when I came back to Sheffield last Christmas*. But there was a fairly major snag in all that, namely the naughty Coronavirus. The main projects that I’d been giving time to, coincidentally all concerned with feeding hungry people, had all had to stop, and try as I might I haven’t really been able to find any equivalents to lend my weight to. An added frustration in all of this is a significant scaling back of community focussed projects coming out of/supported by St Mark’s church, a hotbed of Anglican heresy that has been a real inspiration to me over the years, but which seems to be becoming less outward looking in its approach these days, and more focussed on individual spirituality, so they’re not proving much help in my quest.

Anyway, I was bewailing all this to John the other day, and talking with him about how to best identify and respond to the needs of society in this new context, and we got to musing about ways forward. Unsurprisingly, given the success of the model so often used by Ashram

in Sheffield, we mostly spiralled in on the idea of someone/a couple/a group acquiring and living in a house in an area of Sheffield where we thought we could do something useful, and getting on with supporting the local community. I was both interested and heartened (not necessarily in that order) to hear that he was quite happy to entertain the idea of this happening anywhere in Sheffield where it was needed and might be realistic, and not to only look at Burngreave (which is where we’ve tended to focus our efforts so far). This is partly because the principle of attempting to meet ‘the need’ wherever it is is one that I tend to subscribe to, but also because I am aware of a church in a different part of Sheffield that is very community focussed, and which is in need of support to continue its work attempting to alleviate the impact of multiple deprivations on its doorstep.

I’m probably not in a position to relocate just at the moment. But it’s a fascinating idea to try to follow up, and one that I could be a big part of when my wife completes her studies as we can not only look to be more settled in one place, but also she may well be able to use her language skills to the cocktail of skills and experiences on offer. Meantime, maybe it’s time to keep an eye out for people who might be interested in joining in with this pipe-dream.....

**last Christmas’ – surely a cue for a song!?

Part Two – Coming In Off The Streets

‘Jesus Christ is waiting, waiting in the street,’ ‘Feet that walked the dusty streets,’ ‘...always back to the streets.’ The idea that ‘the streets’ are where Christ is to be found, and where Kingdom-building takes place, is one that’s held a great appeal to me for many years. And given the number of times streets are evoked in songs and liturgy, it seems I’m not the only one. So it’s hardly surprising that that’s the direction I looked when I got back from Jordan in an attempt to work out my calling, even if results have proved to be less-than forthcoming so far. (See Part One, above.)

So further thinking and praying was called for. And it’s required me to stop trying to square the circle I’m currently in. My wife is battling with some significant health conditions. A good friend of mine likewise. Both these things need me to devote a lot of my time to them. And that’s all fine, but there’s only so many hours in a day, and it seems Gary needs to sleep at least some of the time (as well as go out to work!?) So something’s (or maybe some things have) had to be let go. And for now I’ve realised that one of those things is this need I’d nurtured to be ‘out there’ doing my thing. For now ‘my

thing’ isn’t to be found in the streets, among the people I have spent so much time previously, it’s right under my nose. And if that means I’ve got to develop a new understanding of ‘calling’ and ‘mission’, then so be it.

So any romantic ideas I might have about living and ministering in whichever bit of Sheffield seems most ‘in need’ are going to have to sit on the shelf for now. Possibly for a significant while, even - I can’t imagine Fiona will suddenly return to rude health, and even if she did, her studies will take us to Exeter for a couple of years or so. I’m not going to stop caring about the things I’ve previously cared about, and I’m not going to stop looking for others who might be well suited for the vision me and John talked about. It’s just they might have to manage without me for the time being – but then it’s important for me to remind myself of something someone once said to me, that no-one’s indispensable .

Love, light and peace,

Gary Grief

Black History Month

When Elvey Morton, one of the people behind the creation of August's Leicester's Carnival in 1985, was interviewed in October 2021 for East Midlands Today, she said, 'Black History month shouldn't have 'A Month', but should be something celebrated everyday of every year. Everybody should know about our history'. She saw that Carnival would be an opportunity to educate young people about black history.

Black History Month was first launched in the U.K. in October 1980 in an event that was pioneered by Ghanaian-born Akyaba Addai-Sebo. The aim then and now is to challenge racism and to educate people about Black History and to encourage people to 'share what they are proud to be'.

Nationally events over the years have grown and in Leicester, every October, Black History Month celebrates culture, arts, heritage, history and accomplishments of people across the African, and Caribbean communities, with events and activities taking place across the city.

Black History month last October, was a selection of events, programmed by Serendipity (who were awarded the contract by Leicester City Council), that took place in Leicester. Events were also arranged by Leicester Universities, schools, the Independent cinema and community groups during Black History month.

The events below may be a reminder of what to look out for in other places in the U.K. in October 2022. The events included:

Exhibitions

Afromanifesto: work by artists across the disciplines of film, photography, illustration, screen-printing and collage, to explore the themes from intergenerational trauma, environmental issues, heritage, presence and identity.

Community Curators: Black Lives Matter Too! Was a community exhibition by local people who shared their experiences of racism and racial inequality.

Music

Rush – A Joyous Jamaican Journey. The story of reggae from the arrival of the Windrush Generation from Jamaica, bringing their stories, history and music with them

Theatre

Reckoning – a multimedia short film created from the Reckoning with Refugeedom archives which tell the stories of generations of displaced people

Community

Keeping the Art of Braiding Alive – workshop using mannequin heads as well as learning about the history of hair braiding

Discussion

Black Arts in Education; Diversity in the Comedy Industry, Can dance change the world?

Poetry:

Poetry workshop exploring themes of inclusion and difference
Celebration of Black Female Voices – poetry competition

National Radio and Television

As well as local events, there were programmes on the radio and television relating to Black History month. One programme explored the power of the 'black pound' and the practice of deliberately buying from black-owned businesses. Another, how the black British community had responded to the Black Lives Matter movement.'

'1000 years a Slave' explored 'how slavery stained our past and shaped the modern world' and a series called, Stephen: the Murder that Changed a Nation' where the second police investigation showed footage of the racism of the gang alleged to have killed Stephen Lawrence.

Standing Firm: football's Windrush story where the poet Benjamin Zephaniah explored the impact that Caribbean migration has had on football. The story of the African novel from the 1950's was explored by the historian David Olusoga and Selina Thompson telling the story how grief caused by slavery affects its modern descendants,

The Chineke! Orchestra, a British orchestra, was featured a few times on the television. It is the first professional orchestra in Europe to employ black and ethnically diverse classical musicians in the UK and Europe. It's worth looking at their website: www.chineke.org to see the variety of opportunities it offers.

Lenny Henry and Suzy Klein fronted a programme called: Black Classical Music-The Forgotten History. It celebrated black classical composers and musicians across the centuries, whose stories and music have been forgotten.

To quote Elvey Morton again: 'Our history should be a history for mankind, and everyone should know our history'.

Margaret Mackley

BLACK —



"PROUD TO BE"



— **HISTORY MONTH**

Lenshina, Fair and Fabulous

"Please not Rosa Parks again!"

This challenge came to our Fairtrade shop network from a member from Wales, Lenshina. Her English mother and Jamaican father as recently as the Sixties had buckets of water thrown at them from upstairs windows as they walked together in the London streets. When she discovered that Rosa Parks was being taught in schools in Black History Month she felt that there must be inspiring stories of black British men and women too, so two years ago we were asked to share a Local Hero story and then last year we celebrated stories of people alive today in the 'Proud to be Black' series.

I knew the story of Olaudah Equiano, the slave who bought his freedom and campaigned for the abolition of the slave trade, but I didn't know that he was also a member of the radical working class London Corresponding Society which campaigned to extend the vote for working men. Nor did I know much about Dr Harold Moody, Sir Roy Marshall, Walter Tull, Claudia Jones and Iris de Freitas. Their stories are at www.bafts.org.uk/post/black-history-month or can be easily scrolled through on the BAFTS Fair Trade Network Facebook page if you click on the magnifying glass and put 'Blackhistorymonth local heroes' into the search.



DR HAROLD MOODY
BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Time is of the Essence

Update from Joliba's work in Mali (sent 11th March)



At a time when our support has never been more desperately needed, our income has plummeted and we are having to drastically cut all our projects, and are losing our hopes for supporting people in 2022. Most of our activities are seasonal and take place from January-August. It would be wonderful if you could help.

In 2021 the rains started late and finished early. Sixty percent of people in our project area had no harvest because their crops could not ripen. Grain prices have doubled to £42 a bag - a rate higher than we have ever known - and people are running out of food. The UN has reported that 14.7 million people in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger are facing food crises - 51% more than last year - due to climate change and conflict.

It has never been more important to focus on projects which promote food security and poverty reduction. In our region there used to be a number of organisations providing water. Joliba is the only one left, and we now have 75 villages with a terrible water crisis on a waiting list for a well. Larger organisations such as Water Aid work only through governments, who prioritise tap water in urban areas, whilst communities in remote rural areas such as ours suffer more than anyone in the world from lack of access to any water - clean or dirty - to meet their most basic needs. If a traditional, earth-dug well collapses in a storm, a village is plunged into poverty and food insecurity. Everyone in the world has a right to water, and to clean water.

It is vital to protect fertile farming land so that people can continue to grow crops, but this year we have had to cut



our work on dune stabilisation by 80%. Desertification means that more and more people are being forced to migrate in search of better land, and this is causing conflict as resources run out. People need to plant trees, to improve the health and value of their livestock, to increase the productivity of their farming land, and to gain an income so that they can cope if harvests fail.

Security has greatly improved in Mali and our work is continuing normally. We would appreciate any support you can give and your money will go a long way. With £225 we can stabilise an acre of dunes and plant over 4000 trees. £10 would provide the tools needed for people to work on land regeneration so that they can grow more food. With just £5.82 we can provide a family, through a well, with a permanent source of clean water.



Three years later - a recovered dune

Please help us to find new supporters by letting people know about our work, or by using social media to help raise our profile:

Joliba Trust has a Facebook page. Please share, like or respond to our posts so more people discover we exist.

Please follow and share our recent news blogs on www.jolibatrust.com and a new twitter account: https://twitter.com/Joliba_Trust

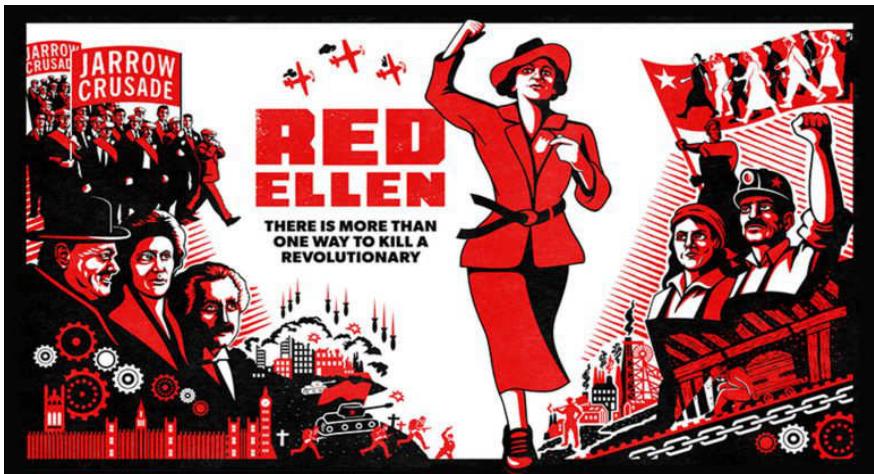
There are many deep concerns in the world at present, but areas like Mali, which face some of the greatest challenges, are going unnoticed. An investment is needed now to prevent catastrophe.

We would like to thank you for all your support.

Caroline Hart, Joliba

From Joliba's TheBigGive appeal

Increasing winds and sandstorms are causing the dunes to move into fertile valleys, but planting windbreaks- of dead hedging and then euphorbia, followed by deep rooted grasses and trees can restore the land, so that within three years crops can grow and hedgehogs, squirrels and birds return!



Ellen Wilkinson in 1924

RED ELLEN

Nottingham Playhouse 23rd April 2022
Written by Caroline Bird Directed by Wils Wilson

Ellen Wilkinson is born in Manchester in 1891 to cotton worker Richard Wilkinson and his wife Ellen. At the age of sixteen she joins the Independent Labour Party, and just six years later after leaving university, she is employed by the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. Joining the Labour Party at such a young age and going straight into vocational work after university demonstrates a determined spirit and someone ready and willing to give her all and at a time when the Labour Party was in its infancy.

But in no time at all and before the gift of experience, Ellen is caught between revolutionary and parliamentary politics and fights with unstoppable, reckless energy for a better world. She battles to save Jewish refugees in Nazi Germany; campaigns for Britain to aid the fight against Franco's Fascists in Spain; and organises 200 workers in the Jarrow Crusade.

From the outset of her active social and political career, Ellen was driven by her passion, the driving force of her ideals, and this overwhelming energy is unsuppressed throughout the performance. Juxtaposed between ideology and the practicalities involved in making necessary changes, Ellen's campaigning spirit and battle for justice never gets the carefully planned strategy needed to turn ideology into reality. This is apparent when cancelling her membership with the Communist Party, as nothing in the practical order of things was being achieved.

For all her animated zeal, the play showed up Ellen's weaknesses. The Jarrow march only attracted 200 men who had to forfeit their financial benefits at the same time as making this extreme sacrifice as a statement of the deplorable unemployment and economic bankruptcy families were facing. Ellen joined the marchers at different stages of the route. Nevertheless, her determination to make vital social and economic changes for the benefit of the working classes was as sincere as it was hard fought for. Likewise, her hard fought fight for Jews in seeking out and gaining the

support of Albert Einstein and her fight against Franco's Fascists was unfeigned and fearless.

In a carefully choreographed style, the play made clear Ellen's chaotic personal relationships with her family but especially in relation to her colleagues and her lovers, and it begged the question how much of that human chaos might have interfered with the (hopeful) outcomes of everything she dedicated herself to. But at the same time, both in Ellen's personal life and in her political life, the play brings out the huge struggle for women to be accepted as equal to men, because the inequality and discrimination against women was rife.

Flamboyant, charismatic, ambitious and extrovert as Ellen was, the play pictures someone over-reaching herself in her desire to become Chancellor or some such senior government minister of state and leaves the audience with unquestioned admiration, but also mindful that personal ambition can obstruct even the best ideals.

A thoroughly good performance with acting at its best and totally captivating; it is a play that is a must for anyone interested in social political history, then and now.

- 1924-26 *Ellen becomes the only female Labour MP (for Middlesbrough East) in the 1924 General Election*
- 1934 *Visits Spain to report on the Oviedo miners' uprising and is forcibly ejected from the country.*
- 1935 *Member of Parliament for Jarrow*
- 1940 *Ellen appointed Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Home Security*
- 1945 *Begins work of establishing the United Nations in the USA & becomes Minister of Education*
- 1947 *Ellen dies on 6th February, aged 55*

David Bown

Karma?

The floor of the kitchen was hard. But now he'd found cardboard to sleep on, he wasn't quite as cold. Apart from the muffled rumble of Dalston High Street above his head, the only sound was an occasional hiss as a fly expired on the insectocutor which shed a dim eerie light on the stainless steel preparation tables. Apparently, Environmental Health had stipulated the insect killer should be on 24 hours a day. Peter was grateful not to be in total darkness, and truly grateful that for the time being rats and cockroaches had been banished. He was now oblivious to the smell of fried spices which had pervaded his life for the last three days. On his first day he'd gorged himself on the congealing curries, cold rice and half eaten nan which came back to the kitchen. The first two nights in his current accommodation he had slept soundly, exhausted by standing for most of the 16 hour shift, and by the unaccustomed work in the kitchen. But tonight he couldn't sleep. What had Raj said when he left him outside the Pride of India restaurant? "My uncle always needs kitchen hands and he'll let you sleep on the floor. But it's bad karma, and I won't be seeing you again" Besides being a successful trader in cocoa futures, Raj was a student of eastern philosophy and had come across his former acquaintance while jogging in Victoria Park. When he learned Peter was homeless and had been robbed of everything including his mobile phone, he was sure it must be due to his previous actions.

Like writing a CV with the most recent job first, Peter reviewed the sequence of events that had led to his current situation in the light of Raj's philosophy. Staying in his expensive flat until physically removed by the bailiffs: bad karma. Selling the BMW and most of his furniture and designer clothes, just so he could continue to have money to spend with his "friends" in the wine bars of the City of London: bad karma. Putting all his remaining money into an Icelandic bank just before it went into liquidation: bad karma. Not getting a proper job: bad karma. Thinking he could make a good living playing the stock exchange just before the worst recession since the 1930s; bad karma.

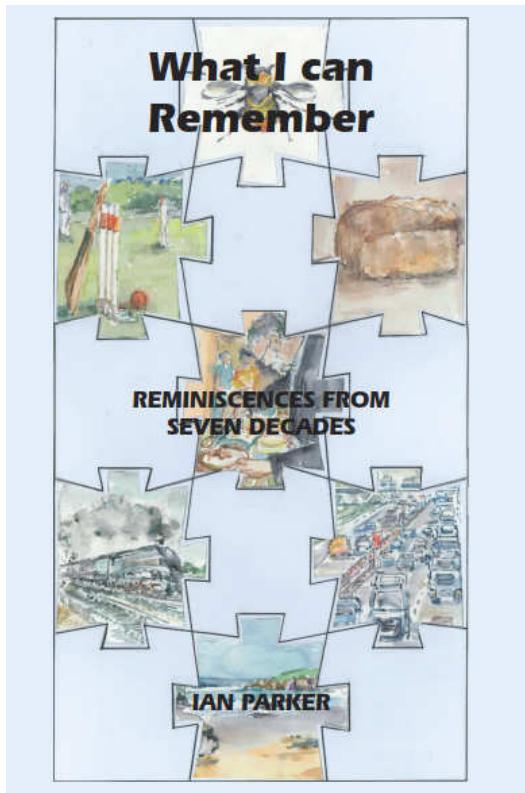
Perhaps it had even been a mistake to persuade his father to sell the regional double glazing company Peter had been running for him and give him the proceeds. His father! Among his businesses was a minicab firm that was always short of drivers. Peter did still have a clean licence.

Two days later, he asked Raj's uncle to pay him off. He had just enough money for a single ticket from Euston to Manchester Piccadilly. The minicab office wasn't far from the station. When the manager recognised Peter, he phoned his father, and was told to send Peter home as soon as a car and driver were available. All the way out to Altrincham Peter rehearsed in his mind what he was going to say to his father, and wondered what reception he would get. As the car turned in to the gravel drive Peter saw his father already outside the front door. No sooner was he out of the car, his father flung his arms around him. "Welcome home son. Phew! you stink of stale curry! Go and have a shower; you'll find plenty of clean clothes in your bedroom. We're going out this evening to celebrate." "But dad I've made some terrible mistakes for which I have to suffer; it's karma you know." "Nonsense" said his father. "Grace beats karma every time."

Ian Parker 17vi19

615 words

hat I can Remember – Reminiscences from 7 Decades



"Ian Parker has been a Methodist minister since 1980. Before that he was a probation officer and worked for a charity offering accommodation to ex-offenders. This collection of memories extends from growing up in Croydon to semi-retirement in Cumbria, but is arranged thematically, not chronologically. Sections include, Food, Work, Family and Holidays. Older readers may have their memories jogged; younger ones may be struck by how things have changed over seven decades."

Copies are available from:

Ian Parker. 5 Vicarage Lane, Ennerdale, CLEATOR CA23 3BE

Price £5 including postage. Cheques payable to "Ian Parker" ****Copies will be available for £4 at the May Weekend****

Books that have changed the way I look at the world

The Hidden Life of Trees *What they Feel, How they Communicate: Discoveries from a Secret World* by Peter Wohlleben. Trees as supportive families, communities and well barricaded larders – amazing!

The Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds & Shape Our Futures by Merlin Sheldrake- A mind bending exploration of fungi - they enabled life to move out of the sea onto land, can survive unprotected in space, and thrive amidst nuclear radiation, solve problems without a brain and manipulate animal behaviour. They connect plants through the large collaborative 'Wood Wide Web', give us bread, alcohol and life-saving medicines and digest harmful waste.

Other Minds: The Octopus, the Sea, and the Deep Origins of Consciousness by Peter Godfrey-Smith- an insight into a distinctive and wonderfully other intelligence.

English Pastoral by James Rebanks - a lyrical and passionate book, a cri de coeur for a healthier countryside where nature and farming are put back together.

The Book of Trespass- Crossing the Lines that Divide Us by Nick Hayes. We are excluded from 92% of this country's land and 97% of its waterways, by walls whose legitimacy is rarely questioned. Land given by the monarch, bought with the proceeds of slavery or loot from the Empire in India and beyond, or more recently by accounts registered in the British Virgin Islands, and whose ownership is kept secret. Land that once fed and provided fuel to the poor...and could again. After a lifetime of walking on public rights of way, this book with its stories of migrants and protesters, vagabonds, witches and ramblers challenging orthodox power at its heart, has completely changed the way I see the land.

Jenny Medhurst

A Contemporary Prayer

Jesus we meet together as members of your Family today,
and as would-be disciples of your Kingdom here on earth.

Grant us the gift of your Spirit,
the ability to stand by each other,
the strength to persevere in difficult times,
the faith to act boldly.
Keep us in fellowship and mutuality.
Hold us in the power of your love.
And bless us all in our life together in community.

Jesus Community and His Movement

Jesus, we commit ourselves to your Community
A Community of Sisters and Brothers,
upholding each other
giving our gifts and possessions to each other,
covering each other's weakness in love,
provoking each other to deeds together
sustaining each other in doing them.

Jesus, we commit ourselves to your Movement
A Movement for
the raising up of the low
the feeding of the hungry
the liberation of the captives
the seeing of the blinded,
the hearing of the deafened,
the freeing of the slaves,
the unbinding of the burdened.

Yours is the Movement, we join it,
Yours are the People, we find them,
Yours is the Truth, we act it.

Community Worship 2000 page 32

Christmas 2021

Christmas 2021 is a time for Mary's Magnificat:

He hath filled the hungry with good things
And the rich He hath sent empty away. (Lk.1.53)

It's the story of the powerful, being put down from their thrones—and the lowly, who get lifted up (v.52). It's the story of the God as one who remembers his servant people Israel (v.54).

What belongs to Christmas belongs to this bottom-up world. Shepherds function as angels, animals function as worshippers, wanderers hail the child as king.

We celebrate Christmas best with our celebrations of the world upside down.

- In Ashram Community, we seek new people and new worlds;
- In Urban Theology Union, we open up new courses and programmes;
- In Sheffield Inner City Ecumenical Mission, we seek a new future.

CAN WE TRUST THE BIBLE ON THE HISTORICAL JESUS?

Bart D. Ehrman, Craig A. Evans, and Robert B. Stewart

Westminster, John Knox Press, 2020

A Critique with a Brief Survey of the Quests for a Historical Jesus

Nirmal Fernando

This book originated in a public debate between two leading contemporary New Testament scholars, Bart Ehrman, an agnostic and James A. Gray Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Craig Evans an evangelical who is Distinguished Professor of Christian Origins at Houston Baptist University, with Robert B. Stewart Professor of Philosophy and Theology, and Greer-Heard Professor of Faith and Culture at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, acting as moderator. The transcript of the debate is now published as book: *Can We Trust the Bible on the Historical Jesus?*

The book's title tends to imply that Jesus is historical, something that is being searched for over centuries, and now commonly referred to as the 'quest for a historical Jesus'. We know of three quests.

The Quests for a Historical Jesus

The First Quest started during the Enlightenment with Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768) and ended with Albert Schweitzer's bestseller of 1906, originally titled *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*. It was disapproving of the bias of the various writers who had viewed resources on Jesus from their own theological positions, selecting supportive evidence of their preferred traits in Jesus's character. In this quest, Bruno Bauer (1809–1882) concluded that Jesus was non-historical, followed similarly by the Monist, Arthur Drews' (*The Christ Myth*, 1909).

The Second Quest began in 1953 with Ernst Käsemann's lecture: "The Problem of the Historical Jesus", and ended in the 1970s after the death Rudolf Bultmann, who had been of great influence, and also since academic interest in existentialism began to decline. A notable hypothesis in this quest was that 'the historical existence of Jesus could not be proved objectively by the authenticity of his sayings, but that historical existence can be encountered historically and existentially in Jesus' kerygma (proclamation)', in James M. Robinson's: *A New Quest for the Historical Jesus* (1959).

The Third Quest which began around 1977 generated new insights into Jesus' Galilean and Jewish context, much more than on the person of Jesus. It also has made clear that all material on Jesus has been handed down by the Church, thus raising issues of contradiction and authenticity, including the high possibility of attributing material to Jesus, where in probability they would be authentic to the Church. In this quest several scholars faulted historical Jesus research for religious bias and lack of methodological soundness, and some argued insufficient critique, also amounting to covert apologetics. For instance, John P. Meier, a Catholic priest and a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame stated: "... confusion comes from the ... claim they are doing a quest ... when ... they're doing theology ..." ("Finding the Historical Jesus: An Interview with John P. Meier". *St. Anthony Messenger*. Jan 6, 2011).

Critique of *Can We Trust the Bible on the Historical Jesus?*

The new book arguments whether the New Testament is a reliable source on the historical Jesus; what meaning "history" should be given; the methods of historical analysis; the reliable standards for testing authenticity; and what place reason, implication, and interpretation should be given.

Ehrman's position is that "you can find the historical Jesus using sources, but that doesn't make the sources historically accurate. The reason historians have to dig to find historically accurate information is because the Gospels themselves are not historically

accurate" (pp. 67–68). He is correct that a comparative reading of the Gospels reveals significant *inter se* contradictions, and therefore cannot all be historically true. However, it is unclear to me whether he holds that the historical incompatibility relates to those passages which contradict parallel passages, or whether all Gospels as a whole are historically inaccurate.

Evans, avoids countering that argument, but contends that the preservation of ancient New Testament manuscripts is far better than other works from antiquity; the proximity between historical events and the texts; the Gospels' plausibility with other information on the first-century; and an attempt at justifying inconsistencies given practices of the times. He concludes that the Gospels contain sufficient resources to hypothesise a representation of the historical Jesus.

Ehrman responds that the fact that the New Testament is better preserved than other works from antiquity is irrelevant to the question under debate. Likewise, just because a source contains truth, it doesn't mean that it can be trusted as accurate to a historical personality.

Those familiar with Eraman's earlier works will know that he has proven beyond doubt that numerous vital mistakes and alterations, have occurred in Gospel manuscript transmission done by scribes over the centuries, given scribal error, and biased theological positions. Although this reality was raised by him in the debate, I cannot see any plausible response given by Evans.

Ehrman emphasises that the Gospels need to be critically scrutinised to determine which parts are true to history and which are not. However, on that premise he reaches a conclusion that such an exercise in itself implies that the Gospels are not sources that can be trusted as historical evidence. That to me is not easy to agree with, since it is unsafe to reach a generalised conclusion as to reliability in evidence of any part of a whole, without assessment of that part in relation to the issues in focus, in order to determine if any differences amount to serious *per se* contradictions within that whole, and *inter se* contradictions between others.

It comes across to me that the issue as seen by Ehrman differs with that of Evans. For the former, it is whether the Gospels can be trusted as reliable evidence of the historical Jesus, while for the latter it is whether the Gospels are adequate in data to historically hypothesise an accurate representation of the Jesus of history (p. 62).

In reception, this book will give some validation to existing views, but most readers' concepts on the historical Jesus are sure to be challenged, by unbiased reliable information.

Finally, it is not unusual that there is no winner or loser in this debate. However, readers must be cautious that the moderator Stewart is known for his very conservative theology, a fact that he admits in the book (p. 10), and therefore the book as a whole has a slight bent towards assuming that the Evangelical Evans does better than the agnostic Ehrman.

For Discipleship it Shouldn't Matter

I have not sighted any evidence outside the narratives on Jesus or those of his disciples that are sufficient to conclude that Jesus' twelve named immediate disciples were historical figures. I do not think that they or even Jesus were important enough to mention let alone describe, as they had little direct impact on Judaic or Roman politics, socioeconomics, or culture during their purported lifetimes, if they actually existed in history. We have no subaltern history for that period, unless the narratives of Jesus are deemed to be within that of the subaltern (Gramscian term denoting a "subjected underclass in a society"). Disciples accept and follow a calling to a way of life provided it suits them. That calling we have today is not orally from Jesus, nor is our way of life based on what we see him doing with our own eyes, but as in the narratives about him and his lineage of disciples. So, even if Jesus is ahistorical without ever having had a body, it does not matter. That's quite unlike for those to whom the historicity of Jesus is vital, since they are dependent on rituals based on his body and blood, or his physical death on the cross for atonement, and life in heaven.



Members and Associates

We invite anyone interested to request details about becoming a Member or Associate from the membership secretary, Sandra Dutson: smdutson@btinternet.com

Members and Associates are listed in the 7-day cycle Community Prayers

Projects and Commitments

Ashram Press – Radical Christianity, Gospel Study, Discipleship, Community Study and Research- projects on Community and related issues
Homelessss and Asylum Seekers - Residence and Community for people in need
Multi-faith - mutual activities and projects open to all faiths

DATES

2022

2nd July Day: Saturday 9th Venue tbc
October Weekend: 14th - 16th October Foxhill

COMMUNITY

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Articles for the Autumn 2022 edition needed by September 19th

Contributions from members / associates who do not attend national Community events are especially welcome!

HOUSES AND PROJECTS

For current information about Houses and Projects in Sheffield please contact

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MEETINGS/ZOOM GROUPS

Please contact the convenors if you would like to know more about meeting or events. They are the local contact points for the Community.

Convenors

London – Linda Marshall –01784 456 474
Saturday Meetings – Monthly on Zoom or in person

North-West – Sandra Dutson
smdutson@btinternet.com
Meetings bi-monthly on Zoom or in person

Community Zoom meetings fortnightly – Pippa Thompson – 07918 757068.