

MU NOW



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ASSOCIATION

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AIMS OF THE MUA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- Support congregations
- Make things happen by providing leadership and initiating projects
- Find resourceful solutions
- Connect Unitarians in the Midlands

From the Editor

Welcome to the September 2024 issue of *MU Now*. It includes a fascinating article by Rev Mark Hutchinson, about developments at Oat Street Chapel, Evesham, an incredibly powerful personal testimony by David Mearman of Stourbridge, as well as some lovely contributions on our theme of 'Autumn'.

My thanks to the people who contributed.

Submissions to *MU Now*

We are particularly looking for stories on local activities, or with a local interest, in addition to articles on the theme.

The theme for the next issue, due out in January 2025, is, "New Year, New Beginnings". Which I hope will be particularly appropriate this year, as congregations reflect on the Sustainability Audit process now taking place.

The deadline for submissions is Friday 10th January 2025.

Please send your contributions to me at revsuewoolley@gmail.com or to 5, Martins Road, Piddington, Northampton NN7 2DN.

THANK YOU!

Sue Woolley

President's Piece



Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness...

By the time you read this, the season of Autumn will have started. Autumn has always been my favourite season, maybe because I was an 'Autumn baby' (my birthday is 7th September). My mother used to tell me how hot it was when I was born, and that in the hospital ward, with windows open due to the heat, there were dozens of Daddy long-leg spiders!

We associate Autumn with the harvest, the season of the gathering of crops. The word is derived from the Anglo-Saxon 'haerfest'. At this time of year, we rejoice in the earth's generosity. The branches of the apple and pear trees have been bent for weeks, almost to the ground, the fruit dropping off the branches at the merest shake. Everything is ripening, coming to its fullest expression before nature goes to sleep for the winter.

In the Druid tradition the Autumn Equinox is known as *Alban Elfed*, a delicate time of balance, with Summer just giving way to shorter days and ultimately the Winter. My favourite name associated with Autumn is Michaelmas – the feast of the Archangel Michael. Angels don't sit comfortably in Unitarianism, often seen as an archaic theological worldview. As you may know, Michael is depicted as a valiant and noble conqueror of the dragon (see icon on facing page) – that evil being whose forces threaten to overwhelm humanity. Just at this poignant time of year when summer's lease is over, we have the Michaelmas festival in September: the image of Michael is one of hope and

courage that helps us remember that when we unite together, we can overcome things that we cannot possibly do on our own



(icon of Archangel Michael: photo supplied by David Taylor)

We are always reluctant to lose the light and heat of Summer; reluctant to see the plants go to sleep. But nature brings us a wonderful truth. Even as the days grow shorter and the air begins to cool, we can now resolve to carry Summer's warmth within us – we can trust that there is life even when we cannot see it. If all of us share this inner warmth with one another, together we overcome the dragons of uncertainty and fear that perpetually strive to overtake us. The image of Michael and the dragon is a reminder that inner warmth and love for one another is not dependent on a season but is always in us.

David Taylor



District Minister: September Update

Hello again. Here's a summary of what I've been doing, around the Midland Unitarian Association.

Leading worship around the Midland Unitarian Association: Since March 2020, I have been producing an online service for the District each week, which has been posted around by e-mail and also on the MUA website and am continuing to do so. It is always a joy to lead worship in person, to see all your faces and catch up with your news.

By the time you read this, the **Autumn Taster Workshop**, on the topic of 'Finding Our Centre: Exploring Different Ways to Meditate' will be imminent, on Saturday 19th October, at Unitarian New Meeting in Birmingham. It promises to be a wonderful and deeply experiential day – why not sign up for it?

I have also been compiling demographic information about the settings of all our congregations, as part of the Transformers team

who are carrying out the **Congregational Sustainability Audit** in our congregations, on your behalf and for the District. I hope that the visits (now ongoing) will prove both helpful and enlightening.

I am a fully qualified **spiritual director**. I offer direction sessions, on a one-to-one basis. Please contact me if you are interested.

And if you are feeling alone and would like to hear another human voice, please feel free to give me a call on 01604 870746 or 0785 325 3880...

Sue Woolley, District Minister, Midland Unitarian Association

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### **MUA Executive Committee Key Messages**

The Key Messages from our May and July meetings have already been shared in the relevant issue of *Bits & Pieces*, the monthly news-sheet sent to all congregations, and the one which is still current is below:

Midland Unitarian Association Inc. Executive Committee: is a dedicated band of volunteers from MUA congregations. At present, due to circumstances beyond our control, we are two ordinary members short of our usual number. If you feel you would like to serve the wider Unitarian community in the West Midlands, please contact Sue Woolley for more information.

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Ministry of an Open Gate by Mark Hutchinson

A Walk with Evesham Unitarian Community into the Ministry of an open gate.

Background

Oat Street Chapel had a pre-school nursery as tenant for well over 20 years. I have met one person who put that figure at 45 years, but I have never been able to corroborate that. The financial side was always appreciated but on examination it was not as advantageous perhaps as it could have been. Understandably the risk assessment for the pre-school meant that the gates to the chapel gardens and the chapel itself had to be closed at all times, during term time. Over time the congregation declined and so the number of times the gates were open reduced to rare lettings and Sunday mornings. The trustees wrangled with the issue eventually issuing a termination of the license to occupy in October 2022. This was not a smooth process causing considerable anxiety both to those who wished to leave the pre-school in place and also those who knew there needed to be a change.

Year of change

The pre-school left at the end of March 2023 and so began a year of change. The remaining trustees agreed to re-energise the chapel site by calling themselves Evesham Unitarian Community. This means that all who use the building are part of this community and the worship aspect is one part of this.

The trustees also set up a new website with our updated logo and colour scheme with new outside notice boards using the same scheme. Once again, although this was accepted at the AGM, it wasn't unanimous or without debate.

Additionally, it was agreed to spend some of our meagre reserves on updating the Gatehouse facilities. We are fortunate in that the trustees had spent considerable resources over the last 25 years ensuring the chapel itself is in good order. Nevertheless, costs

have been significant. Repainting, new heating, furnishings all added up. By Autumn though, a new look Gatehouse had already brought in new lettings.

Beginning to renew into 2024

With a minister on 1.5 days and only two active trustees, the challenge of 2023 began to take its toll. It was decided that the priority was ensuring our garden was beautiful and available. To this end we appointed a new high-quality gardener and a zero-hour caretaker. This has meant that our sacred space is open regularly and kept to a high standard. The cost of this is viewed as part of our ministry.

As Community Minister I offer Earth Spirit Circle wheel of the year celebrations and a monthly Saturday morning meditation but largely connect in the community. As Chair of Trustees at Wallace House Community Centre, both the chapel and the Unitarian name are more broadly known, and we are getting regular enquiries for building use. I work from the chapel when I am in Evesham even if it is not for Evesham work, and the number of visitors to the chapel gardens and the chapel itself is increasing week by week.



Where to ?

None of this yet means that the chapel’s future is secure. What it does mean is that we are risking our resources both in terms of finance and energy for the future. To honour all those who brought Oat Street Unitarian Chapel to here, it is vital that we do this. It’s vital that all congregations look to do their version of looking to the future.

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**20 years ago, 16th August 2004, and I’m still here by David Mearman**

16<sup>th</sup> August 2004 started like any other day of the working week, within a specialist Department of Medical Physics at Birmingham’s Queen Elizabeth Hospital, where I worked.

10:15 I went for my morning cuppa, but started to feel a slight headache coming on. The week had been very hot. Inside the Department was very hot. I often get migraines in hot weather no matter how much water I drink, so I didn’t think it was unusual.

11:00 I mentioned to a work colleague that I thought I was going down with something, and not feeling good at all.

11:30 Whilst working on some scientific equipment in a separate laboratory, I started to become quite shivery, and somehow detached from the world. The headache – or now, migraine – was considerably worsening, and I was feeling a bit drunk. Hmm.

12:30 I decided to have lunch. I met our Department Head in a corridor, and said to him that I thought I was going down with something, and feeling all shivering and migraine, and not really

quite with it. I'd stay for lunch and see how I was after. I'd come and see him if I thought I ought to go home, and not spread anything. Department Head agreed.

Feeling very shivery, I put on my white lab coat, and had lunch in my office. The migraine was getting so much worse now. It took an hour to eat sandwiches with my eyes shut. The bright daylight from my office windows made the migraine so much worse.

2:00 pm I thought, it's no good. I had an impulsive thought, that seemed like a military order that I must go home NOW! All being well I'll get the six minutes past train. I was feeling really drunk, with difficulty focusing, and shivering a lot. I let the Department Head know, along with various others.

Still wearing my white lab coat and carrying my bag, I set off in 33°C to catch the train, looking like an eccentric professor.

The train claimed to be a couple of minutes away, and arrived shortly. Walking between train stations in Birmingham Centre, I now felt very paralytic, staggering and losing my balance. The migraine headache was unbearable with all the noise, heat and bright light. My eyes could no longer focus and I was having double vision. I only hope the public didn't think I was doing any medical operations in the state they saw me in!

I managed to catch the train from Birmingham Snow Hill to Stourbridge, which was due to leave, and the guard confirmed it was the right train. I got on, and the train left within a few minutes I guess.

I could no longer reason, think properly or make sense of what was going on around me. Inside the train it was very hot and packed, but I was both shivering and sweating. I tried to keep up

with the journey whilst having eyes shut, but it was very difficult to resist all out sleep. The train made the journey without any delay other than for stations.

I left the train at what I believed was Stourbridge. I somehow negotiated the steps down from the platform to the exit, in perhaps a very paralytic state. I might have missed a few steps or even fallen down, I don't know. But I reached the exit. I thought to call in at the Ticket Office, to confirm I was at Stourbridge.

My next conscious few seconds were of being in a wheelchair, and raced through a crowded room. That turned out to be A&E. I was screaming my head off, gripping my head and shouting words or noises of drunken gibberish.

My next state of drowsy, double-visioned consciousness, was waking up in a strange room, in a strange place, on my own. I had two intravenous drips in the back of both now very swollen hands that resembled balloons, with small thimbles for fingers and thumbs. I was covered in wires that went to an ECG machine, and to another machine recording other vital signs.

A wonderful nurse must have noticed I was stirring, came into the room and said, "Hello! it's nice to see you've woken up on this sunny day! Would you like a cup of tea and something to eat?"

"Oh yes!" I said, but how it sounded I've no idea. A cup of tea duly arrived and some toast and marmalade. I had a few sips of tea, and I think two bites of toast, and then...

I was awoken by a different nurse, I think, calling my name, but I gather several hours later. I was still holding the same piece of toast. That bit of effort had totally exhausted me.

“The consultant is about to come in and see you.”

“Ugh?” was my reply. I felt like going back to sleep.

The nurse was joined shortly by a kind-faced, portly gentleman who said, after greetings, “You are in Russell Hall Hospital. Do you remember collapsing at Stourbridge train station?”

“Ner” and shook my head in reply.

“Were you trying to get home?” - I nodded.

“Well, it’s a good job you didn’t. You have been very, very lucky. You would not have made it home. When the ambulance picked you up from the station, you had a rising temperature of 105 degrees. As you entered A&E (15 minutes later) it was 106.5 degrees.”

I learnt much later that at 107 degrees, all your internal organs stop working. That is the point of death. For me, that was less than 20 minutes away.

Apparently, the consultant never bothered to do any pre-tests or examination. He just knew to fit some intravenous catheters, take a blood sample and get as much “stuff” inside me to lower my temperature, and pump several types of antibiotics and antiviral drugs into me in blind faith that I would respond to one of them to start a recovery process.

I then spent another three and a half weeks in hospital. A few days later, the Consultant informed me that blood tests revealed markers that it was a viral attack. The initial diagnosis was meningitis.

Over the year of follow-up clinics, it was concluded that the illness was the much more serious and deadly identical twin, encephalitis, which always results in brain damage. Encephalitis is a viral infection of the brain. Like all infections, it produces inflammation and swelling. Inflammation leads to haemorrhage / bleeding, resulting in an abscess followed by scarring. If that is on your leg, then no further problems really occur. When it is on the brain, it results in brain damage in that area from loss of blood, and so is effectively a stroke.

That was 20 years ago.

Today, I still have very impaired short term memory which, if I am tired, is non-existent. Memory recall during speech with names. various words etc is also very impaired. My cognitive skills are very much reduced with loss of energy from brain damage. The virus also left me with the rare neurological variant of ME/CFS.

In the last four years, from Covid infections, my reading ability is now very much impaired, as I cannot remember what I have been reading, and I regularly lose my place. If I do a reading in Church, there is no problem, but I won’t remember any of it, or what it was.

Although I still had all my knowledge and skills base, like now I could only do these for a limited time, and need(ed) complete rest/sleep to recover.

I struggled through another nine years moderately well at work, as a professional electronics engineer, which requires a great deal of cognitive activity for analysing and delivery of the necessary skills. However I could no longer work full time, and needed quite a lot of concessions.



2011 The ME/CFS had been in remission now for three years, though I didn't go back to work full time, and still needed rest due to the brain damage.

2012 The ME/CFS came back with an absolute vengeance. Even with the special working concessions in place, it was clear now, I was not in the least bit coping anymore. I was scarcely able to work more than a week or two without needing half or a day off work from various troubles.

2013 On the first Friday of January, I arrived back home from a very good week, when I felt and coped very well, in fact it felt like my previous self before the illness. I put my little ruck sack on the floor in its usual place. That ruck sack is still there today, never touched or opened since, covered in a felt layer of dust.

Over that weekend I had a massive mental breakdown, and never worked again. Three months later I had a tribunal, which resulted in another examination by Occupation Health. During the consultation the physician said to me, "David, I have never seen you looking so ill. I cannot perceive a time now when you might be able to work. Look, you've done 33 years of excellent service, your name is legendary in your area of medical physics, but now I believe you should let me help you retire."

I was reviewed a week later by two other top hospital consultants. They both agreed that there were a couple of treatment plans that could be tried, but they also have unpleasant side effects, and both equally doubted they would have any lasting effect. Six months later, during the final tribunal, I was dismissed on the grounds of poor attendance and being incapable of doing my job. It also coincided with the successful outcome of being fully medically retired, which gave an enhanced pension, over just normal early retirement.

2015 I had spent 18 months In that mental breakdown. During that time I was sleeping 15 to 20 hours a day, hardly eating or drinking anything. I had neither the will power nor the energy. When I was up, all I was capable of doing was to sit in a chair and stare at a dot on the carpet. That was the limit. Food shopping was done at a corner shop four minutes' walk away. That would need two days of sleep to recover.

2016 I had finally come mostly out of the 2013 Breakdown. Very gradually, I started to go out one evening a week, besides orchestra. Having a few mental health problems since my early teens, one of which was a form of Social Anxiety Disorder, I've never done just "going out". It was almost the scariest thing I had ever done. The alternative was to sit at home as a hermit prisoner.

I started to make a whole group of new friends. Without them knowing what I'd been through, they all encouraged me to come out more and join in, and I had a lot of interests in common with some of them. Since then, new friends just haven't stopped coming. I'm so grateful for family, friends, church members and orchestra, which helped me struggle through and keep going.

To these friends, "You are all absolutely fabulous in keeping me going. You know who are, from age 18+ , I say unmeasurable thanks and gratitude."

Today, the State still doesn't recognise that I am mentally disabled, and no help is available from disability benefits.

You are probably curious why should I be putting this supposedly very personal information into a Church District Magazine? The few answers that come to mind are:

- To help and encourage others who are going through a very difficult time in their lives.
- I have now broken the chains which stopped me from opening up. Those are the chains of “fear” and “shame” that say, “Others will laugh at you, or not understand you. No one will be interested. You’re just seeking attention.”

On the 20th anniversary, I looked back on that day. Even a year later after the illness, I had hardly any memories of that day. Over the last fifteen years, more of the events have come out of the subconscious mist to give a better understanding of the events of that day after 11:15am, which I’ve related above.

I am also convinced Spiritual Deities were almost certainly involved. Let’s examine the critical ones:

- I felt I had to leave work at THAT time, 2:00pm. The total train journey time is around an hour and fifteen minutes.
- I knew the Stourbridge Ticket Office staff had their afternoon tea break at 15:30, so they might be around when I arrived. If I had arrived later from train delays, the Ticket Office would have been unmanned. There would have been no-one to make the phone call for the ambulance.
- The two trains from Birmingham University to New Street and Birmingham Snow Hill to Stourbridge were within less than 2 minutes of their advertised arrival or departure. There were none of the usual delays that plagued train journeys in those days, including buckled rails from the heat. If I had missed either train, the next one was 20 minutes later. Probable outcome: I would have collapsed and died in the centre of Birmingham or on the platform of Snow Hill Station.
- If I had missed the Stourbridge train, and caught the next one, 20 minutes’ later, the probable outcome: I would

either have rolled off the train seat and died in front of other passengers, or collapsed and died at Stourbridge Station.

- From Stourbridge Station to Russell’s Hall Hospital is usually 20 minutes: we did it in 15. I arrived through the doors and was rushed through A&E, with a still rising temperature of 106.5. I had around 20 minutes until certain death. Any delays or missed trains, I would never have made it to hospital, or probably be in time for the ambulance.

Today: My brain is still very faulty and Beyond Economic Repair, but it is functional, I am alive. It has resulted in significant cognitive slowing, plus five episodes from Covid 19, including the original one, have left their lasting signatures of cognitive impairment including lack of finger coordination, when I’m slightly tired. It has messed up my musical abilities quite a lot.

But I have made some tremendous life achievements. Since retiring I have been able to help dozens of people, who I’ve only had the pleasure to meet since 2016. I always give thanks to the Divine realm. You never know at the time how lucky or watched over you are. It brings me finally to remember those amazing words of encouragement by Professor Stephen Hawking:

“Remember to look up at the stars and not down at your feet. Try to make sense of what you see and wonder about what makes the universe exist. Be curious. And however difficult life may seem, there is always something you can do and succeed at. It matters that you don't just give up.”

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District Round-Up

Warwick photos

The following photos were sent to me by Elaine Nomura, Secretary of Warwick Unitarians, just too late for the May issue. They are beautiful, so it is a pleasure to include them here.



A psychedelic sheep!



A dragonfly of light

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## Autumn

This issue's theme has attracted a lovely crop of articles...

### Thoughts on Autumn

*It comes too soon and brings too many problems. When shall I put the heating on? When is it time to change from summer to winter duvet – (and did I make the change this year)? I don't like getting up in the dark*

*mornings. It is too cold, windy and wet to go out on my scooter. Where are all my warmer clothes and did I put them away clean? It's the end of summer activities – playing outdoor bowls, watching cricket. Falling leaves blocking guttering, making pathways slippery.....*

Wait a minute! Now you have gone too far. Please remember this is a journal for a religious community. Its readers want and expect something uplifting and positive. I stopped you at 'falling leaves'. If ever there was anything to be positive about it is falling leaves.

*Ah, you mean that beautiful poem sung by Nat King Cole, Frank Sinatra, Eric Clapton and everyone else in the days when songs were sung slowly and you could hear and understand the words.*

No, I don't actually. That song is beautiful and true but sometimes too sad, though the lyrics do bring back uplifting memories. If you bring up the song on line the background pictures are gorgeous. Certainly part of positive thinking about Autumn is that the colour of trees can be breathtaking. But it is not just the colour it is the **wonder** of falling leaves.

When they fall they decompose and essential nutrients are returned to the earth, are absorbed by the tree roots and aid growth in the next season. They also help to conserve moisture during the Winter and are a habitat for beneficial insects as well as suppressing harmful ones.

*Very interesting – but so what?*

Well, we human beings are clever to some extent but sometimes at our most skilful we are only doing what nature does best. Just think of flying and swimming. Perhaps thinking about the surprise value of seemingly dead leaves will encourage us to be more positive about Autumn. Cooler weather can sometimes

make walking more enjoyable. We lose Summer sports but gain Winter ones. We have fruit picking and Harvest Festivals. In some ways it can be a time of renewal for us, too. Plus – there is colour. Simply letting ourselves be engrossed by Autumn colours is quite wonderful. We can enjoy being able to ‘stand and stare’.

A Catholic anthology, *Listen to Love: Reflections on the Seasons of the Year*, has these words: “Love comes in all seasons. It rides the icy winds of Winter and laughs with the raindrops in the Spring. It wanders through the restless heat of Summer and catches leaves of Autumn as they fall.”

**Peter Godfrey (Stroud)**



**Autumn: A Teacher’s Tale**

You think Autumn and we drift into the poets' world of fruits and mellow something or other.

No, Autumn is BACK TO SKOOL We have been preparing for this all through August with badly spelled and badly written notices urging us to buy uniforms and socks and gym bags and pencil cases. Can you still buy Helix tins with everything you need for the world of Mathematics? Good bye numeracy, hello quadratic equations.

No, Autumn is September and the new Year Fives arrive, resplendent in their new uniforms. Shiningly clean and eager. They have visited the school from their first school so everything is familiar. They have their own Year Five enclave and their own Year Five playground. They can play in the big playground but theirs is a haven if a game is too rough or another child too big.

Now they will have real science lessons from a real science teacher, Mr Best. Dennis is 6'4" and is marshmallow, but they do not know this. They are overawed and impressed. I hear through the folding doors which divide his teaching space from mine, “You will need a pencil, a pen and a ruler.” With a squeak of delight, thirty 9 year-olds scatter to their tidy drawers. “Sit DOWN.”

My class should be practising “Bonjour Mademoiselle” but what is happening next door is too exciting.

“When I tell you to go to your tidy drawers you will go quietly and slowly. You may go now.” Scuffle, shuffle, calm reigns. My class return their attention to me and my glove puppet and we take our first steps into the world of Français. “Je m'appelle Wendy et toi?” “Je m'appelle Samantha.”

The bigger children play it cool but actually they are glad to be back with everyone else. Six weeks is a long time and parents' tempers can get frayed. The biggest Year Eights are swelling with pride. They had been given a pretty stern lecture at the end of Year Seven about how important it is to be in Year Eight. “You will be the oldest and most experienced students in this school. The other children will look up to you. You will set a good example. All of you will be given the chance to be prefects and we will choose those who are the most effective to be appointed as permanent prefects.”

I am in my classroom. There is a stentorian roar. “Stop!” I peek through the small window in the door. Standing at the foot of the stairs is Wayne. He is small and scruffy and has been constantly in trouble since he joined us three years ago. But now he is a temporary prefect and revelling in the power. Two terrified Year Fives are standing on the staircase. “How many times have you

been told?" continues Wayne. "You do not run down the stairs. Now let me see you walk down properly."

Yippee! We have not managed to teach Wayne much of anything but he does know how to do a good telling off.

At the first parents' evening a young mum sobs. "I hate this school." "Oh no," I cry. "David is doing so well and he is so happy." "You don't understand. When he was at first school we walked there and back together and he held my hand and told me what he was going to do or what he had done. Now he is at the Big School he won't hold my hand and soon he will want to go to school on his own."

This is true. I try to comfort her with clichés and assure her that, at some time in the future, her son, now a man, will once again hold her hand to cross the road.

A father looks at me suspiciously. "Are you Miss Haughton?" "Yes." "I was told you were an old lady with glasses and her hair in a bun." ...Well, if you are nine, 27 looks pretty old and I do wear glasses but in the evening I release my hair from its pins. Sorry for the confusion.

My English class are about to write a poem about Autumn (of course). We have discussed changing leaf colour, blackberries, chilly mornings. They pick up their pencils to start drafting work in their General Note Books. One child, a late arrival, sits bemused. "What's the problem, Azibo?" Her black hair is decorated with coloured beads which jiggle and rattle as she shakes her head sadly. "There is no Autumn where I come from. There is only the wet season and the dry season." "Why not write me a poem about the dry season?" She curls her tiny fingers round

her pencil, looks at the empty page in her GNB for guidance and then begins "It is the dry season... "

So we have come back to the poets' world of fruits and mellow something after all. But not, in this country, the dry season.

### **Dorothy Haughton (Shrewsbury)**

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Autumnal Sunrise

"If you want to be reminded of the love of the Lord, just watch the sunrise."

Jeannette Walls, *Half Broke Horses*

As the theme of this issue of *MU Now* is 'Autumn', I began to think about a spiritual experience I had one autumnal morning back in the 1990s.

Although my memory is hazy about the year, I clearly remember that it was Autumn. The warm, sunny daytime giving way at sunset to a chill.

I had journeyed down to Glastonbury in Somerset, intent on exploring its Arthurian links and its 'alternative' spirituality. I had spent the day in Glastonbury, walking around the glorious Abbey ruins, soaking in the calm at Chalice Well, and perusing the many bookshops for all matters Arthurian and esoteric.

As the light began to fade, I made my ascent (or should that be pilgrimage) up the steep slopes of the Tor. It never ceases to amaze me just how many people you find on wind swept hills on a Saturday evening, but as the light faded and the chill set in, the numbers diminished until there was only a handful of us left.

Spending your Saturday night in a sleeping bag, on an open, windswept hill top (even a sacred hill like Glastonbury Tor) may not be everyone's idea of a good night out. I think I spent more hours awake, trying to get warm and comfortable than I did asleep, but as dawn broke, it was worth it.

The Autumnal Sunday morning began with a spectacular golden sunrise, made even more majestic by the sea of mist that surrounded the Tor. It is said that the Celtic name for the Tor was Ynys Wydryn, or sometimes Ynys Gutrin, meaning 'Isle of Glass'. I could see why. Before me, as far as the eye could see, was a sea of glass-like early morning mist. Only the occasional hill or tree top poked its head above the flat grey sea of mist.

Like a Samuel Palmer painting, the deep golden sun rose through the mist. A hazy disc of fire. The words of the poet William Blake ran through my mind: *"What it will be questioned, when the sun rises do you not see a round disk of fire somewhat like a guinea? O no, no, I see an innumerable company of the heavenly host crying Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty"*.

Confronted by this wondrous sight led me into an interest in Celtic Christianity and its view of the natural world. The Celtic Saint Ninian of Whitehorn said that the eternal word of God was reflected in every plant, insect, bird, animal, every man and woman, a view inspired by Corinthians 15:28: *"... that God may be the All in all"*.

This view of the interconnectedness of nature and the divine was mirrored by Irish Celtic Saint Columbanus who said: *"Understand the creation if you would wish to know the creator. For those who wish to know the great deep, must first review the natural world"*.

It would be fair to say that I never looked at a sunrise in the same way again.



David Taylor (Stourbridge)



Autumn Blessings

This is a beautiful time of year, as the days begin to get shorter and the nights longer. 21st September marks the Autumn Equinox, when day and night, light and dark are of equal length. The long heat of the Summer is over (even if it came at times we didn't expect, like all through May), and we can settle down and enjoy some warm, golden days before the Winter sets in. In our hemisphere at least, the harvest has been largely gathered in; although this doesn't mean what it once did. For the last few days, the sounds of this traditional agricultural task have been drifting in through my open window, reconnecting me with the rhythms of the natural world. Even if it is now largely done by machines.

I think it is a shame that Western society has grown so far away from the cycle of the seasons, and the agricultural round. Even when I was a child, which really isn't so long ago, harvest still

meant something, at least to a child brought up in the countryside. But now, ask anyone where their food comes from, and they are likely to reply, “from the supermarket”. You can buy pretty much anything all year round – strawberries in December, parsnips in June. We’ve got a recipe book at home called *The Cookery Year*, which is full of wonderful recipes to cook for each month of the year, using “seasonal ingredients”. And at the beginning, there is a four-page table entitled *The Fruit and Vegetable Year*, which explains what you can get from which country at particular times of year. It makes fascinating reading.

It is very odd. Each Spring, I declare that Spring is my favourite season. And each Autumn, I declare that Autumn is my favourite season. The truth is, I love the in-between seasons, when the weather is neither too hot nor too cold, when there is a reasonable chance of warm, sunny days, and still-light evenings, when it is a pleasure, rather than a penance, to walk abroad, either round the village, or in my beloved Salcey Forest.

The Autumn colours have been glorious this year - the leaves have been every possible shade of red-russet-copper-brown-gold-yellow-green that the eye could see or the heart could imagine. The sheer beauty of it all has taken my breath away (and does every year) especially when the multifarious colours have been backlit by sunshine against a vivid blue sky. Which is why I count myself so blessed to live within walking distance of it all, on the outskirts of Salcey Forest, although the wonderful displays of colour have been everywhere this year, not least in the trees lining the roads that I drive along.

It is a mystery, but a beautiful one, and is one of the many reasons why I love Autumn so much - it is a feast for the eyes and the heart. I am looking forward very much to the next few weeks,

when these glorious Autumn colours will make themselves evident again - it has already started.

Sue Woolley (MUA)

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**Autumn senses**

Autumn is my favourite season, though I am usually a fan of whatever season is the current one! Interestingly, I have realised more clearly that the seasons as they are understood by the English-speaking countries of the Northern Hemisphere are very Euro-centrally defined. We imagine Autumn as a time of crisp mornings, crunchy leaves underfoot and berries, these are all signs we can look for in our English surroundings. Still, the passion for these signs has spread to the rituals and activities of many other places that do not have the same climate as we do here, particularly in the south-west of America where people use plastic decor items to evoke the sense of the season that we find in the traditions of many of our ancestors. People all over the world mark change in different ways.

Autumn is sometimes considered a transitional season, it’s the bit in between the extremes of warmth and cold. Summer the height of the heat, Winter the depth of the freeze and both Spring and Autumn are a season of motion from one direction to another. This we know is caused by the consistent motion of our globe around the Sun, and due to the axial tilt of the Earth the concentration of the Sun’s rays across the surface of the planet where we are situated changes.

We feel this change in our bodies, we experience it in the change of behaviour of our fellow beings journeying with us on our “Blue Boat Home”. You’ll probably notice that suddenly your house is filled with spiders, (sorry to those whose skin shudders at the

thought). These eight-legged marvels are utterly uninterested in you and your family. They are seeking shelter to start a family themselves! They are small, just want a corner and they will eat other household pests you don't need munching through your carpet and sock drawer, like moths, carpet beetles, woodlice etc.

If you can stand to permit them room try not to kill them, and don't be tempted to "put them back outside where they belong". They want shelter, historically they'd be using piles of leaves, tree hollows, caves, and hedges to hide amongst, but since your house is now where those things used to be, if you have to remove them from your dwelling, pop them in a shed or a bin/wood store!

I look forward to Autumn myself because of the embodied sense of change I experience with all my senses, I look for berries, and leaf colour, I pick up shiny multicoloured leaves from the pavement and walk over grass verges and park greens covered in drying curled foliage just to experience "THE CRUNCH". Our senses open up a path for communication between ourselves and the wider world around us.

As part of this Autumn's workshop from the MUA, I will be bringing my experience and creativity to the workshops with a version of my "Sensory Sojourn" which I trialled at the General Assembly venue this last Spring for participants of the large national gathering for Unitarians in the UK and Ireland. One of the activities and resources I make available is sets of artistic prompt cards, I have ones which speak of body positivity, I have a set which details constellations you might be able to see in the night sky, I bring pebbles, shells, found objects, religious and secular artworks. All these things are an invitation to experience more, to be more, to open ourselves up to that sense of deep connection with one another and our surroundings. Why not come along to the workshop and give them a go?

**Aleks Zglinska**

## MUA Congregations: Times of Services

**This list shows when our Unitarian congregations in the Midlands meet for worship. But please contact the congregation before travelling, in case they are no longer accurate.**

### Every Sunday:

|                         |                              |                       |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Birmingham              | Unitarian New Meeting Church | 11.00 am              |
| Cheltenham & Gloucester | Bayshill Unitarian Church    | 11.00 am              |
| Evesham                 | Oat Street Chapel            | 11.00 am <sup>1</sup> |
| Kingswood               | Meeting House                | 11.00 am              |
| Shrewsbury              | Unitarian Church             | 11.00 am              |
| Warwick                 | High Street Chapel           | 4.30 pm               |

### First Sunday of the Month:

|                   |                         |          |
|-------------------|-------------------------|----------|
| Northampton       | Unitarian Meeting House | 11.00 am |
| Stroud Fellowship | The Exchange, Stroud    | 3.00 pm  |

### Second Sunday of the Month:

|             |                                   |                      |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Coventry    | Gt Meeting House Unitarian Church | 11 am                |
| Cradley     | Park Lane Unitarian Chapel        | 6.30 pm <sup>2</sup> |
| Stourbridge | Presbyterian (Unitarian) Chapel   | 11.00 am             |

### Third Sunday of the Month:

|             |                         |          |
|-------------|-------------------------|----------|
| Northampton | Unitarian Meeting House | 11.00 am |
|-------------|-------------------------|----------|

### Fourth Sunday of the Month:

|             |                                   |          |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|----------|
| Coventry    | Gt Meeting House Unitarian Church | 11 am    |
| Stourbridge | Presbyterian (Unitarian) Chapel   | 11.00 am |

<sup>1</sup> No service on 5<sup>th</sup> Sundays <sup>2</sup>currently in abeyance



## MUA Congregations: Contact Details

| Name                    | Contact           | Details                                         |
|-------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Birmingham              |                   | unitariannewmeetingbirmingham@yahoo.co.uk       |
| Cheltenham & Gloucester | Alison Thursfield | 01242 254825<br>thursfieldalison@gmail.com      |
| Coventry                | Francesca Rogers  | info@coventryunitarians.org.uk                  |
| Cradley                 | Sheila Powell     | perconicous24@yahoo.co.uk<br>01384 480784       |
| Evesham                 | Jane Couper       | 01386-839458<br>janecouper@outlook.com          |
| Kingswood               | Maria Govier      | 07816-159199<br>maria.heath@icloud.com          |
| Northampton             | Aleks Zglinska    | 07970-785159<br>aleks.zglinska@gmail.com        |
| Shrewsbury              | Jenni Duffell     | 07487 531 913<br>shrewsburyunitarians@gmail.com |
| Stourbridge             | David Mearman     | 01384 376478<br>davidmearman@hotmail.com        |
| Stroud                  | Pam Jenkinson     | 07776 276276<br>pam.jenkinson58@gmail.com       |
| Warwick                 | Elaine Nomura     | 01926 611964<br>emtnomura@aol.com               |

## Northamptonshire Central Library: Carnegie Lectures

### “200 Years of Unitarian Witness In Northampton”



**Speaker:** Rev Sue Woolley

**When:** Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> November 2024

**Where:** Northamptonshire Central Library,  
Abington Street, Northampton NN1 2BA  
(sorry: no parking: park in the Grosvenor Centre or Mayorhold carparks)

**Time:** 2.00 pm

To book your free ticket, please follow this link:

[Carnegie Talk - 200 hundred years of Unitarianism in Northampton Tickets, Sat 16 Nov 2024 at 14:00 | Eventbrite](#)

## Unitarian Society for Psychological Studies Annual Conference

**When:** Saturday 28th September 2024

**Times:** 10am - 4pm

**Where:** Warwick Unitarian Chapel, 31 High Street, Warwick,  
CV34 4AX

### **Tickets:**

£15 (payable on the door - cash only)

or in advance by online payment to USPS Lloyds Bank account.  
Sort Code: 30-94-74 Account No: 00836674

### **Speakers:**

**Prof Rob Gandy:** *Haunted Roads*

**Dr Mark Fox:** *Scent from a Distance: Olfaction, Premonitions &  
Preternatural Knowing*

**Alan Murdie:** *White Lady Apparitions: Spectres or signs from the  
Cosmos?*

### **Everyone welcome!**

Refreshments included - Bring packed lunch.

**Further details from:** [infousps@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:infousps@yahoo.co.uk)



**Issue no. 73 will be published in January 2025**

**Please may we have your contributions on local matters,  
and on the theme of “New Year, New Beginnings ”**

**by Friday 10<sup>th</sup> January 2025**

**Thank you!**