

Rivington Unitarian and Free Christian Chapel



Founded 1662

Built 1703

"Here set no man a stranger be"



Aug - Oct 2021

www.rivingtonchapel.org.uk

Facebook: Rivington Unitarian Chapel

Lay Person in Charge's Letter

So much has happened since the last newsletter last spring and, at risk of stating the obvious, nothing will ever be the same. We have all experienced hardships and privations of one kind or another; not just the physical ones, but especially ones of a mental and I suspect spiritual nature too.

It has all been a bit strange and we have had to do even basic things differently, what with shopping on our own, not being able to meet in public, then being able to, but in groups of no more than six. Carol services were cancelled and performances of all kinds and meetings of any kind 'outlawed' too. Face masks, at one time these were only ever found in workshops and operating theatres, were everywhere. In short, we have had to change the whole way we approach the world.

There are few upsides to this, any meaningful ones would surely be where it has brought us closer to our God and to our loved ones. Often we can't or don't make time for introspection, for having a quiet moment to pray and reflect. Likewise we often don't consider the world and the people in it and instead take everything for granted.

I have recently finished studying a book written in 1897 all about the history of Park Lane Chapel, near Ashton-in-Makerfield. It tells the story of the first 250 years of its existence, a story that has parts common to all Unitarian chapels that began as Presbyterian chapels after the Act of Uniformity in 1662 and the resultant 'Great Ejection'. It is an account of the travails that have beset Unitarians from the earliest of times. At our inception they too were dealing with a pandemic, the 'black fever' aka the 'black death' or 'plague'.

Perhaps the most serious challenge to our existence occurred when a certain Mr George Hadfield of Manchester, writing from the stance of

the Congregationalists, published a book with the title, “The Manchester Socinian Controversy”, with “Introductory remarks as to Presbyterian chapels in the hands of Socinians, a list of the chapels so circumstanced and a particular notice of Dr William’s and Lady Howley’s charities”. The idea was to prove the illegality of tenure and for chapels to be “re-owned” by Presbyterians through legal processes and for all charitable funding in their favour to be stopped.

The conflict was begun in 1830 on the part of certain Trinitarian gentlemen, calling themselves “dissenters protected by the Toleration Act” (1689). Litigation lasted for 12 years settling in favour of the Trinitarian party in 1842. Proceedings went to the wire, and it was, apparently, due in no small measure to the eloquence of William Ewart Gladstone that our Unitarian forbears prevailed in 1844 with “The Dissenters Chapels Act” that put an end to these perfidious depredations.

To this day we continue to fight the cause of liberal religionists and happily not just from a Christian perspective. We have our ‘Earth Spirit’ movement, our Triennial Pilgrimage for ‘Religious and Civil Liberties’ and in our services we are as likely to quote from the Upanishads, Taoism, Islam and Marcus Aurelius as we are to quote from the Bible. Just this month the Methodists, the first of the big four churches in our land, have decided, at last, to follow our lead and conduct same sex marriages.

During lockdown we have lost two dear members of our congregation, stalwarts of our community, with the passing of Dennis Crompton and Rev Frank Williams. Our thoughts and prayers go out to their families and loved ones. May they rest in peace. This pandemic has claimed the lives of 128,000+ people in the UK and our thoughts and prayers go out to these casualties and their families and loved ones

too.

Our Chapel's social engagements are still very much in the balance with last year's and this year's Rivington Spring Festivals cancelled and next year's pencilled in for 7 May. Heritage Open Day in September is likely to be a low key affair as we are still subject to the uncertainties and vagaries of both the Government and Covid.

Indeed, nothing can ever be the same.

Stay safe and God Bless

Vince

Lay Person In Charge

Chairman's Letter

At the time of writing the Chapel is open for services, but it seems uncertain whether it will be possible to remove all COVID restrictions over the next month. Please keep an eye on our website and Facebook page for updates. If you have no access to the internet, we will keep you informed by phone.

It is still difficult to make definite plans for events later in the year, but we hope to be able to mark Heritage Open Days in some way on Saturday 18 September.

The wedding and one of the naming ceremonies which were planned for July have been postponed due to continuing restrictions on the numbers allowed to attend. There are still two weddings booked in September which we hope will be able to go ahead.

We are very pleased that Jacqui Kershaw has agreed to take on the role of our Publicity Officer, but we are still looking for a Rites of Pas-

sage Coordinator to take over from Mary Horrocks who 'retired' from the post earlier this year. In the meantime, enquiries about arranging a ceremony should be made to me or Vince. Contact details are on the back page of the newsletter and there is now a contact form on the Chapel website www.rivingtonchapel.org.uk/contact-us

Alison Whitaker
Chairman, Congregational Committee

Trust Matters

My last newsletter item was in the February 2020 edition, just before the pandemic struck – a period which now seems so far away, although for those who are still suffering from 'long Covid', as a friend of mine has since March 2020, the period has been both painful and traumatic. He still has a long way to go before he returns to his former self, as may others who are suffering from such long-term effects.

My report at the Trustees AGM in March of this year highlighted a number of issues, not least the generous grant of £5,000 received from the Manchester District Association. This made a significant contribution towards offsetting income lost during last year when services were suspended and Tea Room rental income reduced because the Trustees gave the tenants several months of rent holiday to support their business. In spite of the fact that running costs of the Chapel borne both by the Congregational Committee and Trustees largely remained unchanged during 2020, the respective accounts showed final surpluses thanks to the grant and donations via the website.

General Chapel maintenance has continued during the pandemic

under the direction of Paul Fairclough to whom the Trustees are grateful for his continued efforts here under very difficult conditions. The Tea Room and toilet drain refurbishment was undertaken during the first quarter lockdown period of this year, but since then further drain blockages have been experienced. Currently, discussions are taking place to decide whether the main drain under Sheephouse Lane, the responsibility of Chorley Council, is partly to blame. Just before Christmas, the Chapel interior walls were painted, which, as might be expected, has improved the general brightness. As services are now running once again, members can experience this for themselves. Also, other maintenance has included painting of the bell tower and repointing parts of the roof.

During September of this year we plan to have the next quinquennial review undertaken, with this time a drone being used to inspect in detail both the Chapel and Tea Room roofs. Once this is completed and the Trustees have an action plan which will address the major issues arising, we expect that the Hibbert Trust will pay us a retrospective grant towards the cost of the review.

Richard Horrocks
Chairman, Rivington Chapel Trustees

Smithells Family History

John Smithells, whose marriage to Sarah Harding took place at Rivington in June, has provided some details about the history of his family, which has a long connection with the Chapel.

MARTHA SMITHELLS (née LIVESEY)

Martha's father, James Livesey, who died 29 September 1864, aged 68, was a blacksmith and wheelwright. Many of his ancestors appear to have been

farmers who lived in the vicinity of Bury, Lancashire. Place names associated with the family include Heap (possibly from Heapey, 4 miles north of Rivington), Birtle and Ashworth. The Ordnance Survey map identifies an area south-west of Blackburn as Livesey.

One of James' ancestors, who must have been born during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, was Robert Livesey (died 25 April 1675) who had 3 sons:

Thomas, born December 1617, died 1 July 1673;

Richard, baptised 30 March 1623, died 9 June 1688;

James, born December 1685, died 7 Feb 1681/2.

Martha's father may have been descended from the youngest of the three. He married Leah Ashton (born 1793, died 1860), the daughter of Dan Ashton (1771-1839) and Betty Nuttall (1773-1857). They had 4 children:

Edmund, died 6 March 1881 aged 56 years (born c. 1825);

Sarah, who married Arthur Bentley and had 5 children;

Martha, born 1827, who married James Smithells;

Mary Anne, who became the 3rd wife of Rev. E Allen.

Martha was a much-loved lady. Henry Harwood, in his memoir, writes: 'Mrs Smithells was a very handsome woman up to the day of her death in her 91st year. She spent very little on her personal attire and adornment in order that she could give more lavishly to those who were in need. In the village of Rivington, where she lived for many years, she was regarded as the 'Lady Bountiful' and it was generally conceded that she was the most beloved lady in the district.' She died at home in Southport, in a house she called Rivington, 23 Stanley Avenue, Birkdale. She was buried at Rivington, and 'her funeral was attended by many of the villagers, amongst whom the deceased lady was held in high esteem, and whose last tribute to her memory took the form of lining the grave with flowers and foliage culled from Dean Wood.' It adds, 'The coffin was of polished oak with

brass handles.'

In 1919 a brass tablet was placed in the Unitarian Chapel, Horwich, which reads: 'Erected by this congregation in memory of Martha Smithells of Dean Wood, Rivington. Born 1827, Died 1917. A generous benefactor & friend to this church.'

In the many photographs of Martha in later life, she is always wearing at her throat a brooch with the monogram JS. Two identical, slim note-books record a variety of events, one from 1854 to 1897, the other from 1874 to 1885. They are marked (by another hand) as both being Martha's, but the overlap of dates is not explained; many entries are identical, but the handwritings are not. On October 24 1883, the note from 1854-1897 reads 'Lucy went to Altrincham; that from 1874-1885 reads 'I went to Altrincham'. The mystery is resolved.

A Summer Blessing (written by Vince)

As you wake to each long summer's day and retire each night, may you;

Say 'Thank You' to your God for blessings received, for the joy of movement, food to eat, water to drink, the wonders of this earth, for the freedom to smile.

Say 'Thank You' to your God for holding you in life, for each breath and blink of the eye, each pulse and thought.

Say 'Sorry' for each wayward thought, word or deed that you have done and will do.

Say 'Please help me' to do what I know is right, keep me in Your sight and never let me add to another's plight.

As you wake each long summer's day and retire each night, may you find true happiness.

Amen

A Tribute to Dennis Frank Crompton 28 Jan 1927 - 16 Oct 2020

On reading Dennis's autobiography I could not resist opening this account with his first recollection:-

'Being kissed by a Policeman - my father, feeling that it was time to be part of the modern age, had bought one of the first Morris Seven cars. He was driving from his Dental Surgery towards the junction of Chorley Old and New Road, I was in the back seat, my mother in the front seat, no seat belts in those days. At the junction he collided with what must have been the only other car in Bolton. My mother suffered a cut to her head and I had a minor graze on my finger. A friendly neighbourhood policeman checked the car and saw to my mother. He then turned to me and seeing the grazed finger he just kissed it better. Two observations: how was it that a policeman without the benefit of a squad car could have been on the scene so promptly; and secondly, why don't the Police want to kiss me anymore?'

'Another early memory was of our Scottish Terrier 'Roddy' who, when I was 8 years old, saved my life. We lived above my father's surgery. Owing to a gas escape below my bedroom I was almost unconscious in the early hours of the morning. Roddy obviously liked the smell of gas and his barking raised the alarm. I think he got an extra treat as a reward.'

Dennis attended Oxford Grove School and then went on to Rivington Grammar School where he played self-taught guitar in a Jazz group. His outstanding academic ability won him a scholarship to read English at Pembroke College Cambridge when he was only 17 years old.

At the end of the year he was called up for National Service following receipt of his call up papers and was soon aboard the HMS Addes on route to Palestine where the bombing of the King David Hotel took

place. It is difficult to imagine how hard it must have been after two years absence to return to his studies and gain a degree in English. He then got his teaching certificate at Leicester College of Education and took up a teaching post at Bolton County Grammar School where he began producing plays in one of which, 'The Merchant of Venice', I played Portia. Although madly in love with him I could never imagine that in later life I would become his wife.

Other interests were playing tennis, rock climbing, acting in many plays at Bolton Little Theatre, walking in the Lake District and holidays in Greece for which he learned to speak the finest Greek.

In 1962 Dennis proposed to me beneath an oak tree on Scout Road. Needless to say I had no hesitation in saying yes and we married on 18th August at Bank Street Chapel. Sadly not at Rivington because my mother deemed it "too far for relatives from Atherton to travel!"

Dennis's next career move was to become Head of English at Farnworth Grammar School where he stayed until the introduction of Comprehensive Education. He reluctantly moved to Little Lever High School where he was Head of the Arts Faculty.

In February 1966 our son Richard was born. He grew up to become all we could have ever wished for a son to be. Dennis took great pride in his lively personality and they formed a close bond which deepened in love and intensity as he grew to manhood.

Although Dennis's dedication to teaching prevented his taking an active part in my many Unitarian activities he supported me in full, a fact for which I am eternally grateful. After a post retirement teaching spell at Bolton School ending when he was 72 years old, he then became fully involved in Unitarian life both at Rivington, where he held offices of Secretary and Chairman, and in the wider denomina-

tion. He represented us on the Manchester District Association as Publicity Secretary.

During his last six years his skill as a writer came to the fore. He wrote historical one-man shows for our professional actor friend Dean Taylor' well known as "Richard III', 'Oliver Cromwell', 'Sir Walter Raleigh', 'Lord Byron' and, yet to be performed, 'Prince Albert'. Many of you will have enjoyed these productions at the Tea Room, but they have played to wider audiences at Garstang Literary Festival, Turton Towers and Lydiate Abbey.

Most of all it is as a beloved husband of mine for 58 years, devoted father and father-in-law to Kate, adored Grandpa of Lily and her wife Chloe and Sam and his fiancé Lyndsey that his memory will be ever cherished and revered. He is held close in the hearts of his sister-in-law Gillian and our Canadian family, Katie, Jamie and their children Lizzie and Douglas. His words and deeds will live on. His many friends and ex-pupils join us in mourning the passing and celebrating the life of this remarkable, unassuming, wise, witty and wonderful man.

A very perfect gentle knight and true gentleman to whom I hope to have done justice.

Judith Crompton

A tribute to Rev Frank Williams 3 May 1938 - 16 May 2021

Frank had spent a good part of 2021 either in hospital or intermediate care before his death from a heart attack in May. His funeral was on Thursday 3 June at Charnock Richard Crematorium, and was attended on behalf of Rivington Chapel by Vince, Alison, Judith, Mary and Richard. Everyone was encouraged to wear bright colours. The funeral service was led by Rev Tony McNeile and included Dylan

Thomas's poem 'Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night' and music by Judy Collins, Peter Meyer and Handel ('Zadok the Priest', a favourite of Frank).

Although at Rivington we knew him as Frank, he was also known to many as David. During the Eulogy we heard about his early years and difficult relationship with his father, and his time spent in the Merchant Navy. In the early 1970s he trained to be a Unitarian Minister, and was Minister at Park Street Chapel in Chorley from 1973 to 1984. Following this he remained in Chorley, living there for a total of 48 years. In recent years he was a volunteer reader at Chorley Library and contributed to 'What's Your Story, Chorley?', an annual festival which celebrates and encourages interest in literature. He was also a member of U3A and a local philosophy group.

Although he came to Rivington Chapel for a relatively short time, he was a regular member of the congregation and will be remembered for his strong singing voice (he had sung with Blackburn Choral Society) and hearty greetings. We were grateful to Frank's daughters, Sarah, Ros and Rose, that despite the limits on numbers attending funerals, they were able to include Chapel members in the invitation to be there. Others, including Frank's son Philip, were able to watch the online live stream.

Sarah, Ros and Rose have sent the following message:

'Whilst there was deep sadness in saying goodbye, it was also wonderful to spend time with the people who knew him. It was good to see the connections across the Unitarian fellowship amongst those who gathered in Frank's garden after the service. The Rivington Church and congregation had been a great support to Frank in his later years.'

Rivington Calendar 2022

Chris Martin is collecting images of the Rivington area for consideration for next year's fundraising calendar. All previous donations have been carefully stored away, but if you have any new ones please send them to chris_and_june@hotmail.com.

You should also contact Chris if you would like to buy any of the various Rivington Chapel publications, details of which can be found on the website: www.rivingtonchapel.org.uk/publications

Donations

Although the Chapel is now open for services, there will still be some of you who will not be able to attend or who prefer to avoid using cash. If you wish to contribute what you would have put in the collection you can still do so via CAFDonate.

You can either follow the Donations link on our website www.rivingtonchapel.org.uk or go directly to <https://cafdonate.cafonline.org/12556>

A Note from the Editor

If you need to inform us of any change in your details, or if you no longer wish to receive our newsletter, please contact me, either by emailing newsletter@rivingtonchapel.org.uk or phoning 01942 816569.

Also, please email if you would like to help us reduce the cost of printing and posting the newsletter by opting to have an e-mail version rather than a paper copy. You can read this and past issues online at www.rivingtonchapel.org.uk.

Alison

Dates for your Diary

Sunday Services at 2:15 PM

1 August	Graeme Pilbrough - Padiham Chapel
15 August	Chrissie Wilkie - Dean Row Chapel
5 September	Vince McCully - Rivington Chapel
19 September	Rev Shammy Webster - Stand Chapel
3 October	Rev Danny Crosby - Altrincham and Urmston Chapels
17 October	Hannah Stevenson - Southport Unitarians Harvest Festival
7 November	Vince McCully - Rivington Chapel

Flower Donors

1 August	Elsie Kent
15 August	Alison Whitaker and Peter Bearon
5 September	tba
19 September	Elsie Kent
3 October	Vince McCully
17 October	Mary Horrocks
7 November	Jacqui Kershaw

Other Dates and Ceremonies

We have some wedding bookings for later in the year and we hope they will be able to go ahead. However, as there are still some COVID restrictions in place at the time of writing, we have decided not to publish any details.

If you would like to arrange a ceremony at Rivington
Chapel, please contact Alison or Vince
Contact details overleaf

Copy date for next issue: 1 Oct 2021
Issue date: 17 Oct 2021

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Please send your contributions electronically if possible to the email address above. For those without access to the internet I am still happy to receive handwritten copy.

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