

Keeping in Touch..... Number 43

Thank you as always to those who have sent in contributions this week. The deadline for next week is noon on Wednesday. Please send anything to c.a.curtis@ntlworld.com if you would rather just tell us something, rather than type, then please lift up the phone to Chris or Alan—01480 350787 or pop a note through the door.

Keep safe everyone!

Overjoyed whilst Underground - a memory.

Here is a joyful memory I share with Bill Mahood. The occasion was a visit with Bill to the Royal Opera House Covent Garden in Dec 2001 for a performance of Wagner's Opera 'Parsifal' conducted by the popular Simon Rattle. Having arrived at King's Cross, Bill and I made our way to the Underground for the final lap of the journey to Covent Garden.

The platform was not full and we were able to choose an uncrowded spot to wait. The train arrived and, as they sometimes do, a carriage door came to a halt very precisely in front of us. 'Minding the gap' we stepped aboard and took the first seats by the door, with seats opposite facing us across the gangway. Directly opposite was a man fully engrossed in a book. It took only a few seconds for Bill and I to exchange very furtive glances and nudges, having both recognised that the avid reader opposite us was indeed Simon Rattle himself - hopefully on the way to conduct our opera! Somehow, we managed to remain nonchalant and unconcerned for the rest of the journey. Annoyingly, we both failed to discover the title of the book he was reading! Mysteriously, SR got off at the stop before Covent Garden (probably to take a car to the Opera House) which meant we could finally express our schoolboyish excitement at our amazing close encounter.

Being at a Royal Opera House performance is a wonderful experience in itself, but I think both Bill and I recognised what an extraordinary coincidence it was that we should have chosen the precise spot on the underground platform which delivered Simon Rattle so precisely before us. It was that topic which took up a good deal of our conversation on the train journey home. At the end of a splendid day, Bill and I both agreed that being 'overjoyed whilst underground' had put an extra layer of icing on an already excellent cake.

Stewart D



Saint or Sinner?

I was the eldest of the four Wedderburn children, who along with mother and father, lived in a one room and kitchen flat in the south side of Glasgow during the early days of the Second World War. I think I can say that an early religious experience, other than being baptized as a baby in a church in Sydney, Australia, (and that's another story,) was joining the 216th Company of the Boys' Brigade whose object was "The achievement of God's Kingdom among boys"

Along with my younger brother Bill we duly progressed through the ranks with myself reaching lieutenant and Bill sergeant. Bible study was an integral part of the Boys' Brigade ethos. I think then the seeds were sown of my questioning the Virgin Birth of Jesus and the Physical Resurrection of Jesus from the tomb. These doubts remained with me during my 39 years of RAF service. In my "searching" and during detachments abroad, I took Communion at Gibraltar Cathedral, which was a big step for a lapsed Presbyterian, was impressed by the singing of a choir in Pisa Cathedral and attended a service in the Scots Kirk in Rome. My contentious feelings about the Resurrection were highlighted in 1984 when the Bishop of Durham cast doubts on the Virgin Birth and the Physical Resurrection of Jesus from the tomb.

Fast forward to 1991, when I had retired from the RAF. While I was stationed at RAF West Raynham I occasionally acted as a beater at a farmer friend's pheasant shoots. On one occasion when I was waiting to start a drive, along with Freddie the publican owner of the 'Hat & Feathers' and with the vicar of the local Church, we chatted amicably about our religious beliefs. I expressed my 'hang-ups'. Here was I, the sinner between the publican and the preacher!

I remember the vicar saying that the Resurrection lay at the heart of the Christian faith and that if you did not believe that, you could not call yourself a Christian. I found this pronouncement rather disturbing. Since then, I have been searching for an answer. Friends have said accept the Resurrection as an act of Faith and leave it at that. I have now done so Thus I rest my case and feel happier as a result.

Alex Wedderburn



216th Company of the Boys' Brigade

THE MEMORIES OF BOYHOOD.

"the company is seen here outside the church in 1949" Try and pick out 2 upstanding chaps! It was interesting to see our officers, 7 of whom had served in WW II and 2 were ex-aircrew. One was a Coastal Command navigator with a DFC. I had the privilege of him writing a reference for me when I joined the RAF.

Irene calling.....

CAPTAIN TOM

Goodbye Captain Tom
What a great example you've been,
Always optimistic
And knighted by our lovely Queen.

Your life was chequered
You knew much sadness, war and pain,
But always you had hope
That the sun would come out again.

Our nation mourns you,
You inspired us to believe,
That every one of us
Has a right to hope, achieve.

Achieve they did
So many, tiny tots to old,
Following your footsteps,
Raising cash to heights untold.

Your witty wise words
Those twinkling eyes and kindly way,
Helped us through bad times
Tomorrow will be a good day!

cc. IRENE CARTER

Some inspiring quotes found recently from NHS workers

Perhaps you might like to send some of your own quotes in

Look for something positive in every day. Even if you have to look a little harder,

How to reduce stress
Turn the news off
Turn up the music
and dance

Let the sunshine
warm your hearts
and let your smile
make someone's
day.

If your actions inspire
others to dream more,
learn more, do more and
become more you are a
leader.

Music is meditation
for the mind.

Nobody will
think any less of
you if you ask
for help. Never
struggle alone.

A butterfly cannot
become a butterfly
without isolation.



Here's a rather strange thing I found .

Its called Orange Jelly Fungus, well
what else could you call it.

Bill, my dear old brimstone beast is giving a demonstration in
how to behave during these snowdropie times

With warmest love to all.

Char x

From the Church Secretary

At the end of every year, each local URC church completes an annual return, covering various non-financial aspects of church life. Every year the form gets bigger - this year there were 16 pages in all - and new questions are added. Here are some of the Free Church statistics as of 31st Dec 2020:-

Number of Church Members – 92

Serving Elders – 11

Non-serving Elders - 26

Average congregation in church (Jan-Mar only) – 50

Average watching our weekly online worship – 35

Others receiving weekly Reflections (email or post) - 80

Thanks to Chris Curtis for completing the Safeguarding section of our return and updating our Safeguarding policies and documentation. These have been approved by Elders and, when activities restart in the building, these will be displayed and available in the Church Office.

For our Elders Meeting last week, Esmond as Church Treasurer kindly arranged for us to be joined for a time by Alison Jiggins, our M&M (Ministry & Mission) advocate. She explained the Fairshare scheme used to calculate the recommended contributions from individual churches to the central M&M fund. The formula is based on a combination of financial resources and worship attendance. It is then agreed with the relevant Church Treasurer. Alison thanked us for the contributions from Free Church members and friends, since without the support of churches such as ours the payment of ministers and the mission of the URC would not be possible.

For our own church, thanks to the continued generosity of members and friends, the flexibility and commitment of our staff, some careful and diligent financial management by the finance team, and the Government's furlough scheme, we ended 2020 in a relatively secure financial position. However, we are still running at a deficit so not complacent and well aware that there are tough challenges ahead in 2021.

Outside our immediate church, Catherine, Christine Macleod, Andy Fleming and I joined an online Area Partnership meeting as part of wider discussions within the URC on how best to deploy ministers around the churches. I also attended online Church Secretary training, organised by Synod. Both meetings were helpful and informative, and it was great to be able to share experiences with those in other churches. Although all churches are different, it was reassuring to hear that many have similar challenges to ourselves. In other Synod news, many of you may know that our Synod Moderator, Paul Whittle, has taken up a new post in Scotland. An advertisement for his replacement has been placed in this month's Reform magazine.

I hope that you are all managing to find some positives in such difficult times. For me, I've particularly enjoyed watching on TV the England cricket team do well. Barbara and I greatly appreciate the Zoom calls with our children and grandchildren. However, like many of you, we look forward to the time when we can see each other face to face again.

God bless you all and your families and friends.

David

Prayer plant

Seeing the article in KIT last week by Hadge Yeandle reminded me of a prayer plant that Betty gave to me at a party about 30 years ago. As you can see the plant is still going strong!

Anne Strong



Eileen Forrest's great grandmother's memoirs

Margaret Brodie's Diary continued:

After spending sometime in Liverpool and London, where her new husband had much business to attend to, they left for Southampton (21st January 1853) arriving at around 3 O'clock, and went aboard INDUS P&O Steamer for Egypt. They were allocated separate cabins on the lower deck.

I quote: - .

We were a long time getting out of the harbour, and after dinner at 4.30 when we reached the open sea, we found the weather had become quite stormy. Pitching and rolling was the order of the day. Our steamer was a paddle one and had just been lengthened by being cut in half, and an additional piece being put in, so our Officers were somewhat anxious about how we should get on. It was the first of the bi-monthly steamers and was very crowded.

She had a berth with 2 nervous ladies travelling to Bombay, who soon made her as nervous as they were. The gale freshened into a hurricane, and by the time they were in the Bay of Biscay everything was in commotion and they were going half speed. Most people were sea-sick. Her husband came occasionally to enquire for her, but she had nothing to eat from Thursday evening until Saturday, when the gale slightly eased and on Sunday the sea grew quiet. On Tuesday they arrived at Gibraltar and went ashore for a few hours. On returning to the quayside, they found that the Indus was lying three miles out, hardly visible. She and William with some others, embarked in a cargo sailboat for a most uncomfortable journey out to the ship, having to bale out the water most of the time. Then they had much difficulty clambering aboard the Indus. The next boatload had to be swung up in the slings.

The voyage along the Mediterranean became pleasant enough, and they reached Malta safely on the Saturday, went ashore on Sunday and noted with interest the strange black silk hoods of great size, stiffened with whalebone worn by many of the ladies. On Monday afternoon they resumed their voyage to Alexandria where they were to leave the Indus and commence the journey to Egypt.

After a very light covering of snow during Sunday night, we awoke to find this beautiful pattern on our drive. Perfectly regular and yet untouched by human hands.

The Denhams



Thoughts from the bathtub



In our family we have a saying - if in doubt - wash! It refers to what a cat does if it finds itself in a situation where it is unsure of what to do next. It takes a "time out". It pauses and starts licking its paw. The neighbour's cat does this a lot!

If I don't know what to do, I take a bath and have a bit of a think. You can gather your thoughts among the bubbles. A former colleague at work used to say that she disappeared and did the washing. There must be something healing about water!

At the moment we are thinking about how important it is to try to keep going and to try and keep in touch. My cousin Freda in Cambridge, England sent me a copy of the newsletter her church sends out. Just like our "Oak Leaf", the idea is to encourage everyone to hang on and keep in contact. Their newsletter is called "Keeping in Touch" and we are including in our "Oak Leaf" an article that she sent in to hers.

But first a word about my cousin Freda. Our mothers were sisters and we all grew up in London. Freda and I got on well together as teenagers. In 1966 I was going to be one of her bridesmaids and a lovely peach coloured long dress was sewn up for me. But a little while before the wedding the two sisters, our mothers had a row. Probably over some bagatelle and suddenly our family were not welcome to the wedding! End of story. It's hard to understand these days why my cousin and I accepted the "decree" so docily. We were after all 19 and 21, good friends and it was "the swinging sixties" when teenagers started to revolt. But that's how it was then and we just "obeyed". I said goodbye to my wonderful dress and she had to find another bridesmaid. From that day on there was no contact between the families.

But the story ended happily even though it took 43 years before the ending was written. In 2009, some years after her mother's death, Freda became a little nostalgic about those lost years with her relations. It wasn't that easy to trace people in England then. No identity numbers not many people used Facebook or social media in 2009.

But through a friend she managed to trace my brother in Kent, in spite of his having moved several times during those years. She can hardly explain herself how this friend managed it but the result was that one day I got a phone call from my brother with a "guess who just phoned me up!"

To cut a long story short, I'll just say that Freda and her husband visited us in Stockholm in 2009 and we went over to England in 2012 and met the rest of her family including my other cousin, her brother Brian, and his family.



What a wonderful reunion - the years in between (43) were swept away. The old row wasn't of our making and it was easy and fun to meet again. We just carried on where we had left off and have been in contact ever since. We said we ought to write a book or a television series or something about "the lost years"!

Freda is sitting in the same boat as us during the pandemic and we have included in our "Oak Leaf" a funny story that she sent in to her church's newsletter "Keeping in Touch". We left it in English as its not easy to translate jokes and play on words into another language!

Brenda

This is me and my cousin in her garden in Cambridge in 2012. Its easy to see we are related, isn't it?