



# GLASGOW UNITARIANS

June 2025

## NEWS & VIEWS



"June" sang the river,  
"June" sang the sky;  
"June" sang the trees and  
the flowers together,  
"June" sang the meadow-  
lark, "June" sing I ....

June is the month of  
singing weather.  
June is the time for  
swinging clover,  
Time for the rumbling old  
fat bee-rover,  
Time for the sky to bend  
sweetly over...

And whisper, "Earth dear,  
from the East to the West  
You are lovely all  
seasons—but in June far  
the best!"

by Annette Wynne

**GLASGOW UNITARIAN CHURCH (SCIO)**

72 Berkeley Street, Glasgow G3 7DS Scottish Charity Number SCO 16472

Cover - Lyanne Mitchell

# PROGRAMME and NOTICES

## JUNE SERVICES

**Sunday 1 June – 11.00am in Church and on Zoom. The Annual General Meeting.**

**Sunday 1 June - 7.00pm on Zoom: Jon Bagust from Edinburgh Unitarians will tell the story of the Chennai Fund and how the money is currently being used.**

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**Sunday 8th - 11am in Church and on zoom - Emeritus Minister, John Clifford. Alone Together.** *Congregational autonomy is a central part of British Unitarianism. What stops us from degenerating into solipsism? We hear about 'echo chambers' in social media groups — does the same principle apply to congregations? Can the General Assembly serve as a remedy to chasing rabbits down a hole? What can the GA do to be effective for us in this area? The tension between personal and group will be looked at with some reference to the 2025 GA Annual Meetings.*

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**Sunday 15th - 11am in Church and on zoom - Roddy Macpherson.**

**Gospel Truth.** *Our friend, the Reverend Brian Cooper, who died recently, gave us memorable services years ago on the theme of Mark's gospel. Roddy will compare and contrast this with Luke's.*

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**Sunday 22nd - 11am in Church and on Zoom - Abida Farid - The importance of Women of Faith & Community.** *Abida is a member of the Islamic community in Glasgow. She will share the importance of her faith to her life and share her views on the importance of integration of different religious communities in Glasgow.*

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**Sunday 29th - 11am in Church and on Zoom - Helen Minnis, Professor of Child and Adolescent Behaviour, University of Glasgow . A Quaker's perspective.**

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## JULY SERVICES

**Sunday 6th - 11am in Church and on zoom - A service will be live - streamed from Edinburgh - to be confirmed.**

**Sunday 6th - 7pm on zoom - There will be no service on this evening.**



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**WEDNESDAY  
DISCUSSION GROUP**  
7 - 8 pm on zoom **All Welcome!**

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## **REFLECTIONS on a LIFE**

### **The Worshipping Atheist**

On Sunday 11th May 2025, we listened to 'Reflections of a Life' with Iain Brown. Alison Spurway led Iain through a reflection of his life and his journey to becoming a Unitarian Iain.

He left Church of Scotland spoke of his early life in the manse in Cardross, the loss of that home when it was bombed, the move to Edinburgh, where he quickly became the best fighter in his class at school. His father's position in the Church of Scotland shaped much of Iain's early life and education. An avid reader, Iain came from a devout evangelical background, but, as a teenager he realised he no longer believed the teachings of the Christian faith.

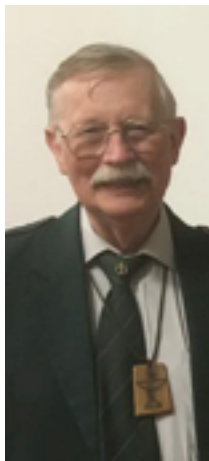
Whilst Iain not longer claimed to be an adherent too Christianity, when he moved to Glasgow to work at the University he realised he still wanted to belong to a spiritual group - one which was interested in pursuing the truth and believed in the values of love and kindness. He knew that a religion tied to a creed was not for him and the only religions he knew which fit the bill were Quakers and Unitarians.

He initially tried the Unitarians, but after a single meeting, thought that he needed a more emotional connection than the Unitarians appeared to offer, he was already intellectual enough. He joined the Quakers and ultimately he realised that the Holy Spirit didn't drive him in quite the same way it drove others.

Due to this understanding and a change in personal circumstances, he returned to the Unitarians. When it became apparent that he had a valuable role to play in the Church, he realised he had found his spiritual home.

The rest, as they say, is history!

*Contributed by Alison Briggs*



### **'REFLECTIONS**

**on a LIFE'** - *This is a series of services introduced by our Preaching Schedule Working Group. Participants so far include -*

Janet Briggs  
Rev John Clifford  
George Paxton  
Roddy Macpherson  
Iain Brown

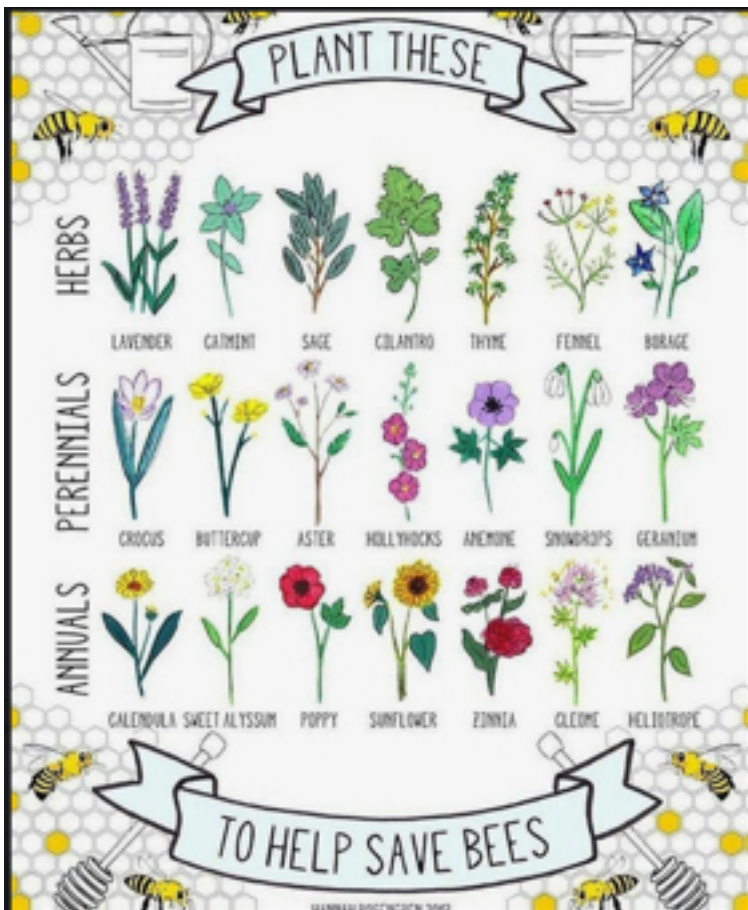


A Sincere **THANK YOU**  
to all for marking my  
retirement from the GUC  
organ on Sunday 27th April  
with cards and a  
beautiful bouquet of  
lilies and roses.

It was a privilege for me to  
play for our services over a  
number of years  
and now I look forward to  
being able to sing our  
hymns!

Lyanne Mitchell

*More thought provoking memes -  
contributed by John Clifford*



**“ THE DIRTY SECRET OF OUR  
FOOD ECONOMY IS THIS:**

**In many of the communities  
that grow and supply our food,  
far too many people can't  
afford basic healthy meals.**

— José Andrés

**JUST BECAUSE  
YOU'RE  
STRUGGLING  
DOESN'T  
MEAN YOU'RE  
FAILING**

**If you're scared that a  
book will change your  
thinking, you're not  
actually scared of the  
book.  
You're scared of thinking.**

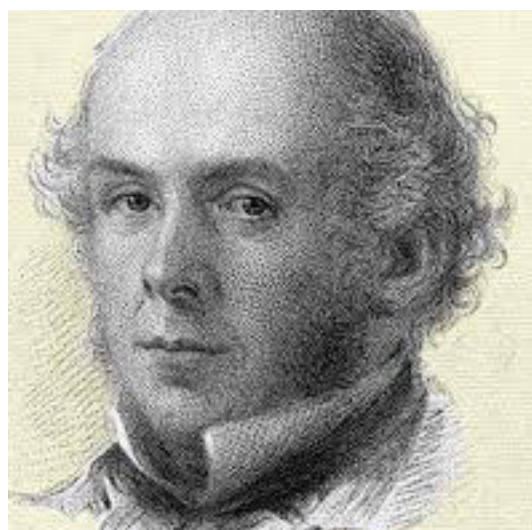
## Dr Glenda White and the poet Arthur Hugh Clough

Dr. Glenda White, who spoke to us on 30th March about Arthur Hugh Clough (1819-61), supposed (correctly so, in the case of me) that we should hardly know anything about this distinguished poet.

I had only just noticed that *Chambers' Biographical Dictionary* had far more on Clough than on many current celebrities. She gave each of us a booklet, containing her selection of poems. Glenda's reading of Clough's reply in verse to his friend Matthew Arnold's poem 'Dover Beach', was very telling:



*For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,  
Seem here no painful inch to gain,  
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,  
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.  
And not by eastern windows only,  
When daylight comes, comes in the light;  
in front the sun climbs slow, how slowly!  
But westward, look, the land is bright!*



Thus saying, she told us she was quoting Churchill's use of those very lines "less well known", as the culmination of his famous 'Report on the War' speech, delivered in April 1941.

That Clough was troubled by the Thirty Nine Articles of the Church of England opened the possibility, as it struck Glenda, of some Unitarian inquiry. But having enjoyed her readings of poems selected to pose these questions - *What do we think about money? What do we think about others? What do we think about prostitution? What do we think about violence? What do we think about God?* - her service for this Unitarian congregation culminated in her truly unifying guided meditation.

*Roddy Macpherson*



## The General Assembly 2025

This year's GA took place from 12-14 April at the Birmingham Metropole Hilton. Donald and I were lucky to attend for the first time, alongside our friends and GA veterans Rev John and Barbara Clifford.

While we didn't gain admittance to the opening service by the Rev Stephanie Bisby, we already started making friends while commiserating with others who had to wait outside. We were told the service was very good.

We were spoilt for choice with all the interesting plenary sessions and workshops on offer and greatly enjoyed mingling during breakfast, tea breaks, lunches and dinners. The dining hall with its round tables was so reminiscent of dining on cruises to me, that I steadied myself more than once against an imagined swaying of 'the boat'.

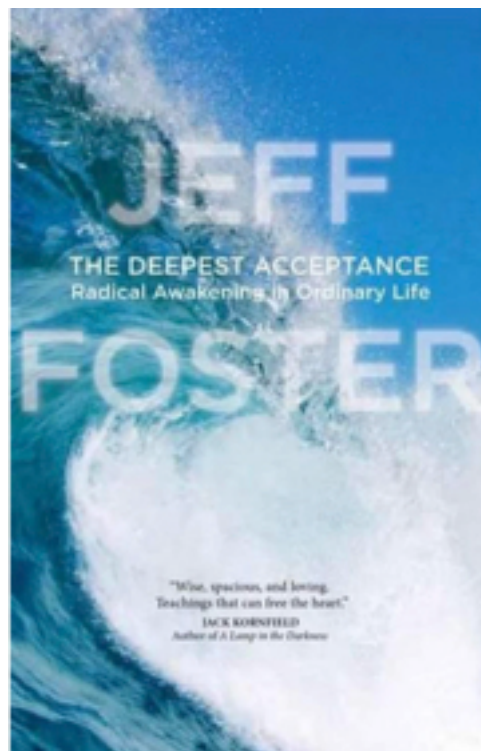
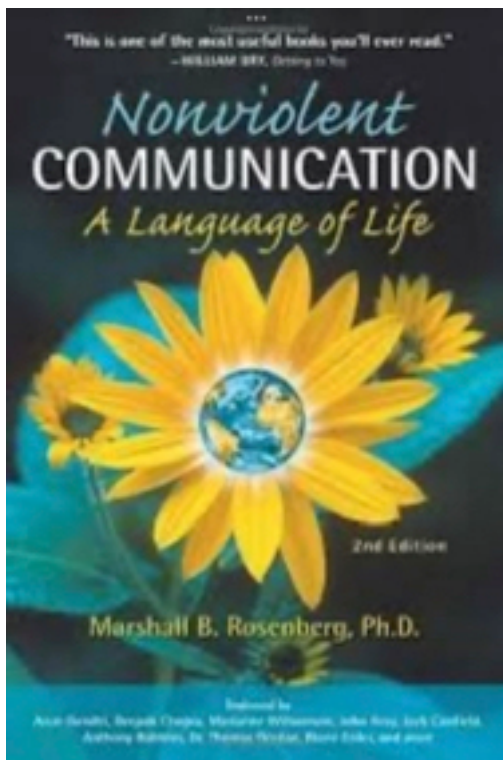
As a reminder of pandemic times, we saw many people whom we have grown to know very well on zoom in the flesh for the first time. It's almost like spotting a TV personality in public thinking for a split second that they should know us too, and in this case they did!

We particularly enjoyed the meditation and contemplation sessions led by Lizzie Kingston-Harrison, Richard Bober, Sheena Gabriel, Rob Oulton and Laura Dobson. Rob gave us angel cards containing a word as an aid for contemplation, I got 'truth', Donald 'forgiveness'. Some other memorable full body experiences were had swimming in the lovely warm hotel pool, and dancing and chanting at the Hindu Satsang organized by our friend Indra Sikdar.

We participated in a creative writing workshop led ably by John Midgley and Laura Autumn Cox from The Inquirer. The head of a catholic charity originally founded as a mission to China, and now active locally in Birmingham too, presented about the vital community work they do. Donald made friends with Norbert Nagy, a young minister from Transylvania.

The keynote speech was delivered by academic Alison Webster and brought together a fascinating variety of concepts, the idea of god as a fungal network of interconnectedness, along the lines of Merlin Sheldrake's book *Entangled Life* featured on these pages some while ago. We listened to the classic song *Sound of Silence* by Simon and Garfunkel followed by an original and relevant close reading of its lyrics.

The UCA bookstall in the break room held a few gems to be discovered. I found some great books on Nonviolent Communication and Radical Acceptance. (Pictures below) The women's league stall at which Barbara took turns too, always offered good conversations and they had a great raffle too.



Other important business transacted included the re-election of Jeff Levermore as GA president, wittily called Jeff Furthermore by the Rev Jo James, and the tributes to the retiring Melda Grantham and Rev Jim Corrigan. Jeff had prepared an engaging questionnaire which asked for our opinions on topics ranging widely from do we like music in church to is Jesus God (Certainly/Certainly Not).

The three days were over far too quickly and we all assembled for Rev Celia Midgley's moving and dignified closing service, with lovely hymns and a real sense of community and belonging. John's handy sewing kit enabled us to have the GUC banner up and ready for the final banner parade in which Donald walked proudly at the very end with our Glasgow Unitarians banner.

After many fond farewells, and many 'see you next year in Jerusalem's', to old and new friends, both the Cliffords and ourselves were lucky enough to follow up this eventful GA with a few days in different parts of Wales. We had a lovely couple of days with our friends Alex and Jean Bradley in Mid Wales and were able to give them all our news and pass on our sense of elation coming away from our first ever GA.

*Ruth Jacobs*

## BOOK REVIEW

### Old God's Time by Sebastian Barry

Recently retired policeman Tom Kettle is settling into the quiet of his new home, a lean-to annexed to a Victorian castle overlooking the Irish Sea. For months he has barely seen a soul, catching only glimpses of his eccentric landlord and a nervous young mother who has moved in next door. Occasionally, fond memories return, of his family, his beloved wife June and their two children, Winnie and Joe.

But when two former colleagues turn up at his door with questions about a decades-old case, one which Tom never quite came to terms with, he finds himself pulled into the darkest currents of his past.

A beautiful, haunting novel, in which nothing is quite as it seems, *Old God's Time* is about what we live through, what we live with, and what may survive of us.

I so appreciated this book that when I finished reading the last page, I went straight back immediately and read the whole book again for the 2nd time! I have only done this with one other book - (*Precious Bane* by Mary Webb. ) In both cases the language and writing styles are so beautiful .

Sebastian Barry's main character, Tom Kettle, speaks in his lovely Irish accent throughout and I almost felt bereaved when the story ended!

To my shame, I had not heard of Sebastian Barry. He is an acclaimed award winning Irish novelist, playwright and poet. He was named Laureate for Irish Fiction 2018-2021 and has been twice shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize.

*'Nobody writes like, nobody takes lyrical risks like, nobody pushes the language, and the heart, and the two together, quite like Sebastian Barry does, so that you come out of whatever he writes like you've been away, in another climate.'*

*Ali Smith*



Lyanne Mitchell