



GLASGOW UNITARIANS NEWS & VIEWS NOVEMBER 2025

"Nothing Golden Stays, By Robert Frost

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaves are flowers—
But only so for hours;
Then leaves subside to leaves.
In Autumn she achieves
A still more golden blaze
But nothing golden stays.

Of white, blue, gold and green,
The only colors seen
And thought of in the vast,
The gold is soonest past.
A moment it appears
At either end of years,
At either end of days.
But nothing golden stays.

In gold as it began
The world will end for man.
And some belief avow
The world is ending now.
The final age of gold
In what we now behold.

GLASGOW UNITARIAN CHURCH (SC016472)
UNITARIAN HOUSE, 72 BERKELEY STREET GLASGOW G3 7DS

Services

November

2nd 11.00am in Church and Zoom. Ali Briggs “Día de los muertos,”
"A Celebration of Life"

7.00pm Zoom only Rev Janine Sim, Minister of St Marks Unitarian Church in Edinburgh will lead our service.

9th - 10.50 am in Church and Zoom. Jamie Dobson will lead the service for Remembrance Sunday. His title is “The ethics of being part of the UK’s instrument of nuclear mass destruction

16th 11.00am in Church and Zoom. Reflections on a Life. Charlie Dand in conversation with Margaret McClymont Macintyre

23rd 11.00am in Church & on Zoom. Alison Spurway will lead the service. Her title is “The power of guilt”

30th 11.00 am in Church & on Zoom. Ruth Gregory will lead the service

December

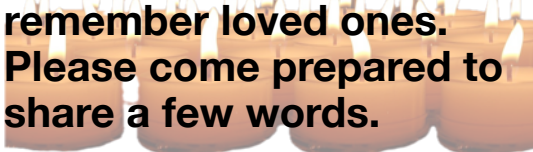
7th 11.00 in Church & on Zoom. The service will be live streamed from the Unitarian Church in Dundee.



Welcome to a packed issue of News and Views!

The articles are longer than usual. I hope you enjoy them and feel free to write a piece with your views if you disagree, want to add something, or just want to share a view on any topic.

On 2nd November, the service will include time to remember loved ones. Please come prepared to share a few words.



On the 9th of November, a light lunch of soup and a sandwich will be served after the Service. All are welcome!



Reflections on a Life

Neil Spurway in conversation with Alison Spurway 28 September 2025

Many of you will be aware that Neil has considerable memory loss. This made preparing the service reflecting on his life quite challenging. However, a good deal of interesting information was pulled together and he responded wonderfully well to an audience. This is a summary of what was said.

Neil was born in Bradford in 1936. His mother suffered badly from anaemia after the birth and his father was encouraged to take her out of smoky Bradford to a better climate. He was consequently largely brought up in Cornwall. During the war, Neil was educated, with his cousins, at home for a period of time by his mother who was a trained infant teacher. His first experience of religious discrimination was at his primary school when a bullying head teacher demanded to know which boys in the class, did not attend church.



Neil's mother had a poor view of religion arising out of her dislike of dressing up in hat and white gloves on a Sunday morning. This was compounded when her sister suffering from TB, and despite treatment out of doors which was the practice at the time, succumbed to the disease and died. As far as Ethel was concerned, that was sufficient for her to dismiss God from her life and the lives of her husband and son.

However, Neil was fascinated by the Gifford Lectures in Natural Theology which he obtained from the local library and at the age of sixteen, he started to attend the services at the local Church of England in Falmouth, St Charles the Martyr (Cornwall was Royalist!) This interest in philosophy, particularly evolution and the interface between science and religion, continued throughout his life.

After a period in the RAF (conscription being a requirement in the 1950s), Neil entered Cambridge taking Part 1 – Physics, Mathematics and Physiology and carrying on Physiology for Part II. With a PhD almost completed, he commenced the business of applying for an academic position during the era of expansion in Universities (Harold Wilson's "white heat of technology") and was offered positions in two London Colleges, St Andrews and Glasgow. He selected Glasgow for its

proximity to excellent sailing and mountains, submitted his thesis and settled down to life in this city.

Neil's research into muscles and the impact of training, led him to introduce the first Sports Science degree programme in Scotland. He chaired the British Association for Sport and Exercise Science, served on British Olympic Committees and coached the Scottish Optimist Sailing squad: two of his three sons were members!

His interest in Philosophy and Science continued throughout his professional life and into retirement. He was President of the Royal Philosophical Society of Glasgow, the European Society for Science and Religion, the UK Science and Religion Forum and the Scottish Churches Theological Society. But his greatest satisfaction came from chairing the University of Glasgow Gifford Lectureship Committee. A short video of Lord Gifford was shown at the service giving those present, a flavour of the subjects chosen by leading thinkers at the four "ancient" Universities of Scotland. (Later this subject was pursued by the Wednesday discussion group).

Neil was asked to explain his fascination in Darwin and evolutionary epistemology, a philosophical approach that applies the principles of biological evolution to the development of knowledge and cognition, suggesting that our understanding evolves through a process similar to natural selection. In other words, how do we know what we say we know. Following on from the discussion on Darwin, he was asked if he believed in God. He answered that he did but certainly not a "creationist" explanation of God. Rather an awareness that there is limitation to the human mind's capacity to know beyond their experience. He dismissed those who claimed the truth of their particular religious tradition as arrogant and lacking the capacity to accept the mystery of the unknown. Instead, he stated: every philosophy, creed or faith is the attempt of an individual mind or group of minds, to navigate through the infinitely complex – and therefore ultimately incomprehensible – reality of being.



Alison Spurway

Next month: Reflections of a Life features Margaret Paxton

Dover Beach

The sea is calm tonight.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits; on the French coast, the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!
Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,

Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Matthew Arnold



Matthew Arnold 1822-1888

design of the area so they belong there and never anywhere else. I wonder what employees think about their strangely elongated fingers and if they realise the significance of them.



The Caryatid figures made by J & G

Charlie Dand told us how he used to climb them to clean them and replace the bulbs when necessary. He also said that two more caryatids were hidden behind the stage in St Vincent Street.

'The Sports Day Cups'

Not as memory serves. these are from 1904/05, for Glasgow Unitarian Sunday Schools, won by St Vincent Street.
They could both use a polish!



AJB

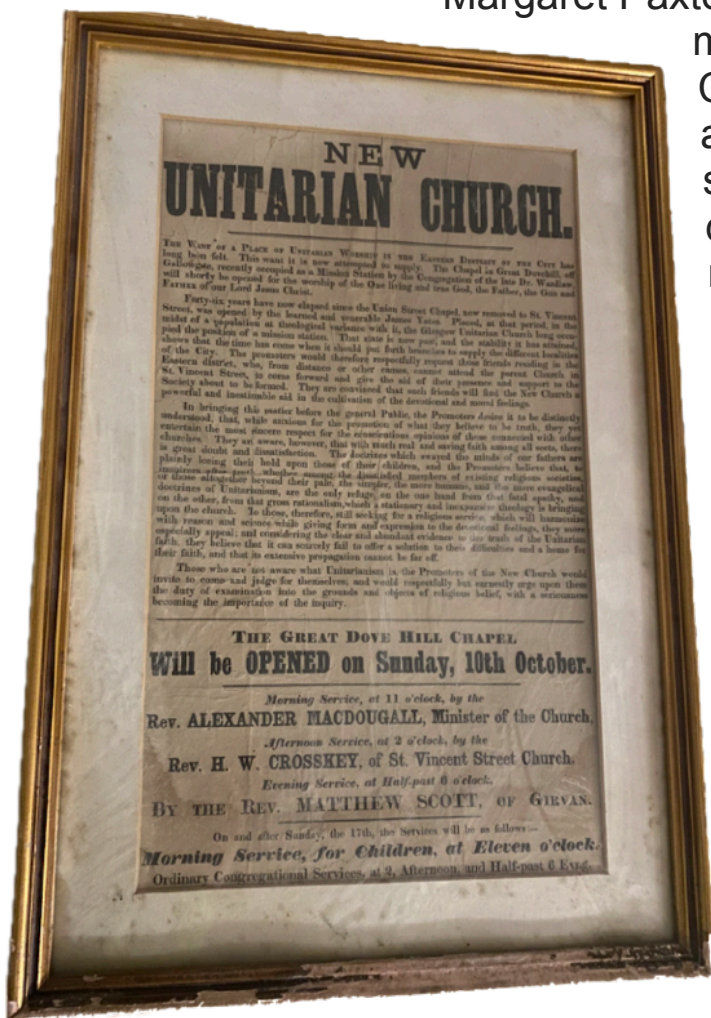
Saint Mungo and the Unitarians

In this 850th anniversary year of Glasgow's burgh charter (undated and long-missing as the venerated deed may be), Unitarians have recently recovered two very definite nineteenth century connections with the city's patron saint. The "New Unitarian Church" poster, now on show downstairs at Unitarian House, advertises the opening of *The Great Dove Hill Chapel* on Sunday, 10th October 1858. None of us seems to have heard before of a Unitarian chapel being in Great Dovehill Street. The Glasgow *anecdote* about the rising by the saint of the miraculous mound at Dovehill, off the Gallowgate, was read in our Sunday evening service on September's first Sunday, in honour of the recent rediscovery of our past.

The second connection is with the Ross Street Church - the Unitarian church we have all heard of in the "Eastern District".

Margaret Paxton's *History of Glasgow Unitarians*

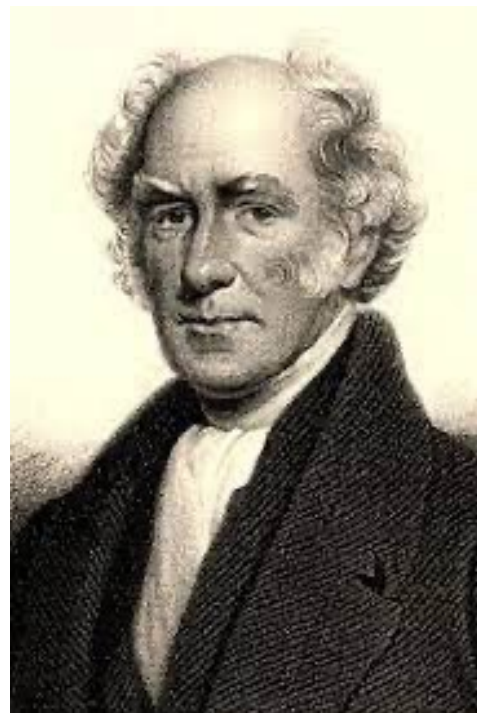
mentions that the Ross Street Church building was erected in 1876 and closed in 1947. Ross Street is south of Gallowgate and could be described as a continuation of the north-side street, Great Dovehill Street. However, research shows that the Ross Street Church and the Great Dove Hill Chapel do not share the same site - but they do share in Saint Mungo's memory: as Kerr Jamieson informs us, Ross Street, prior to 1905, was named South Saint Mungo Street.



The 1858 poster states that the new Unitarian chapel was "recently occupied as a Mission Station by the Congregation of the late Dr. Wardlaw." Although coming to us 167 years later, this is still *astonishing news!*

Dr. Ralph Wardlaw, a highly distinguished Congregationalist minister, who died in 1853, had been the outstanding opponent in print of Unitarianism in Glasgow. (See L. Baker Short's *Pioneers of Scottish Unitarianism* to learn more of the "Wardlaw-Yates Controversy" (pp. 76-77). The Glasgow Unitarian minister James Yates, in reply to Wardlaw's published *Discourses*, as Baker Short puts it, "replied, in 1815, with a most effective book called 'Unitarianism Vindicated'. So began what is known as the Wardlaw-Yates Controversy, which shook the religious life of Glasgow for some years, and had its reverberations throughout orthodoxy and Unitarianism.")

I learn from an obituary of Ralph Wardlaw that around the year 1850 "his people raised a large sum to erect a mission house at Dovehill Station, to be called the 'Wardlaw Institution'." One wonders if a spinning sound may have been heard in 1858 from the venerable Dr. Wardlaw's property in the Glasgow Necropolis. One supposes that the preaching of the word 'Unitarianism' in Great Dovehill Street was not a *great* success. Baker Short mentions Henry William Crosskey, Glasgow minister (1852-69), as having "made some tentative experiments" in the direction of helping to spread Unitarianism "especially in the poorer east end of Glasgow". Of the Great Dove Hill Chapel, however, we read nothing of the name, but only of its fate. The Glasgow minister's efforts in 1871 "to make a real effort to found a second Unitarian church in Glasgow - in the east end" bring the author's comment (pp. 112-113), "Several previous attempts had all ended in failure."



Ralph Wardlaw

Roddy Macpherson

A Personal View of the conflict in Gaza

I've been trying to keep up with events in Gaza since October 2023. It's hard to look and I refuse to look away.



Images from Gaza

When Antonio Gueterres remarked the attack on Israel by Hamas 'did not happen in a vacuum' he was condemned by Israel and many in the West. He was correct.

Failures to recognise decades of suppression of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank lie at the root of this latest war.

I first became aware of the issues in Gaza in the 1980s, roughly 40 years ago. Nothing has changed for the

better. Why are many in the West, who could do something to curb Israeli excesses, so reluctant to recognise their own failings and look for lasting solutions?

This week, Israel handed back 135 prisoners to Gaza, all dead, most with signs of torture. Yet, (as October 15th) there are 19 dead Israeli hostages unaccounted for. Hamas seems unable to find the remains in a country devastated by war for 2 years. These 19 souls are receiving more media attention and condemnation than the 135. Where is the proportionality?

Many of the accusations directed at Hamas have been recognised as Israeli tactics. We've heard multiple times that Hamas uses 'human shields', with little evidence to confirm. Yet, we have heard direct testimony from Gazans claiming that they were used as human shields by Israeli forces. We have consistently been told that Hamas steals aid delivered to the territory, yet there is no evidence to support this claim. Meanwhile, we have seen news footage of Israelis destroying aid at the border.

There are so many questions for Israel to answer about the war; did they know an attack was impending, it appears they did, was the so called 'Hannibal Directive' given, it appears it was, how many Israelis were killed by 'friendly fire' on October the 7th, it appears that many were. This is not to suggest that the responsibility for the deaths during and following the attack by Hamas is in any way mitigated, more to say that use of excessive force rarely produces good outcomes. The questions are endless.

Meanwhile the slaughter of 67,173 Gazans, in retaliation, is seen by many to be a legitimate use of force. Yet the question about whether Israel has the right to self



defence against a “de-facto’ occupied state, remains. Of course Israel will argue that Palestine is not a state in its own right.

The suppression of news from Gaza and the deliberate slaughter of journalists, and aid workers, is well documented, yet it is addressed only as each person dies, and usually attributed to an unfortunate error, a mistake, or the accusation that they were really Hamas, in disguise. There has been wholesale slaughter of entire families, with the justification that a Hamas militant *may* have been amongst them.

Meanwhile, Israel has been enabled by many Western countries including the UK, to continue its offensive. The most recent cease fire, which has already been breached by Israel, and to a lesser extent, Hamas, is only a starting point. If we look away now, the suppression of an entire people will continue and further atrocities will occur. The EU is currently considering dropping proposed sanctions against Israel. I fully expect the UK will follow suit, if we ever planned to impose sanctions.

Many Israelis seem to believe that it is their right to displace Palestinians so that they can live in a utopian ‘Israeli Riviera’, where Gaza used to be. Meanwhile, the voices of more moderate Israelis are drowned out by ‘official spokespeople’ often from the government itself.

The issues aren’t confined to Gaza, the West Bank and its people have also been under attack for decades. So far, this year, over 3000 Palestinians in the West Bank have been subjected to violence. The IDF is complicit in protecting and enabling settlers.

Around 44% of Israelis are of European descent, they may have been ‘promised’ the land by God, yet in this day and age, such a premise for allowing Israel to carry on unimpeded is difficult for me to swallow.

One thing is clear to me, Palestine doesn’t need ‘the West’ to decide its fate, Moderate Palestinians and Israelis must. It’s the only path to a lasting semblance of peace.

AJB

Glasgow Unitarian Church

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Rev. John Clifford - revclifford@fastmail.com

Minister Emeritus: Rev. John Clifford

Lay Preacher: Iain Brown

Worship Leaders: - Barry Bell, Alison Briggs, Barbara Clifford, Rev. John Clifford, Donald Jacobs, Roddy Macpherson, Jim Millar, Lynne Mitchell, Margaret Paxton, Alison Spurway

Music Co-ordinator: - Roddy Macpherson

Publicity/Social: Ruth Paxton Wright, Margaret Macintyre McClymont, Ruth Gregory

Property Manager: Charlie Dand

Fire & Safety: Church Officer/Property Manager

Website: <https://glasgowunitarians-scio.org.uk/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/GlasgowUnitarians>

Please contact the Church Officer if you require additional personal email addresses or telephone numbers. We can also be contacted on Facebook Messenger or our Website.