



Newcastle Unitarians The Calendar



June-July 2025

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**A member Congregation of the General Assembly
of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches**

Articles for the next calendar to be submitted by
Sunday 27 July 2025. Thanks to all those who have
contributed to this calendar.

Chair's Hello June and July 2025

We're now into summer, with two important Unitarian events behind us! The Unitarian General Assembly met over 12-14 April 2025, with me (Louise Reeve) attending as our fellowship's voting delegate. You can read about the new resolutions from the GA later on in the Calendar, and we're planning to have some services based on them later on in the year.

27 April 2025 saw both our AGM, and the return visit of Unitarian Transformers' Rev. Mark Hutchinson (a former recipient of the Rev. Herbert Barnes Memorial Award) and his business partner John Gill to further develop what we might want to do to grow our community here in Newcastle. We're moving ahead with plans to recruit



some community outreach workers to offer new Unitarian spiritual gatherings in Newcastle upon Tyne over the next two years, to support people's spiritual growth and sustain our community. More updates will be in future Calendars.

We have an update on what's happening with our old home, the Church of the Divine Unity, as well! Northumbria University have continued to restore and develop it in line with their plans to reopen it as a place of learning in September 2026, and this has been reported on in the Chronicle. You can read more about this later on in our newsletter!

Rev. Roger Tarbuck does not have a letter in this Calendar as he's having some health issues, we wish him well and are thinking of him. And we'll be marching at Newcastle Pride on Saturday 19th July, mark your diaries!

I look forward to seeing you soon, enjoy the sunshine,

Louise Reeve
Chairperson, Newcastle upon Tyne Unitarians

Church of the Divine Unity, Ellison Place Building Update

From Northumbria University:

“On Monday 12 May works began to redevelop the interior of Durant Hall, a GRADE II listed church in Ellison Place, Newcastle Upon Tyne. The project will include the renovation and refurbishment of the existing spaces to create much-needed additional teaching spaces for Northumbria University.

Durant Hall was acquired by the University in May 2023, and since then significant time has been spent working with contractors, John Flowers, to refurbish the ten roofs on the church many of which were blighted by dry and wet rot. Due to the listed status of the building this was complicated work and needed to be done with due deference, and the final stages of this work were completed last month, enabling the team to move on to the next stage, which is to redevelop the building’s interior.

Northumbria University will be working with Aptus Construction as principal contractor, who have designed the interior to create state-of-the art

teaching facilities while maintaining the heritage of the building. Wherever feasible, the building's historic fabric is being retained and restored, but the project also includes significant accessibility upgrades, including new

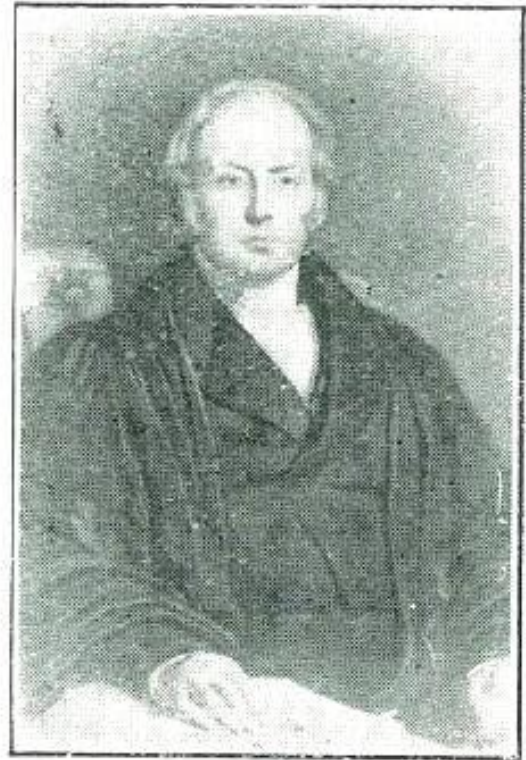


ramps and a platform lift providing access across all four floors. Once completed the building will house two, tiered lecture theatres comprising 400 seats and 150 seats and a flat teaching room of up to 60 seats, providing much needed additional flexible teaching space for faculties across the University.

Aptus Managing Director Chris Price commented: "Revitalising a Grade II listed building like Durant Hall requires a balance between conservation and innovation. Through close collaboration with Northumbria University and our consultant team, we've developed a scheme that respects the building's historic fabric while integrating modern interventions to support contemporary academic and community use. It's a testament to what adaptive reuse can achieve in the built environment."

‘About Rev. George Harris’, by Rev. Tom McCready

“Hello to everyone at Newcastle. I was encouraged by the interest shown by members of the congregation in my research into ‘Working Class Unitarians in Scotland’, and I was highly encouraged by the links sent to me by Louise, where I found a fascinating connection in the person of the Rev George Harris, who served both the Glasgow and the Newcastle congregations as minister. He was born in 1794 and entered Glasgow University at a very young age and had made a reputation as a gifted Unitarian preacher by the age of 20.



Rev George Harris

He was later offered a choice of several pulpits and he decided in favour of Glasgow, because, as he put it, he choose to work ‘where the supporters of the church were the least

numerous'. He was one of the founders of the Scottish Unitarian Association in 1830. From Glasgow he went to Edinburgh, and on the 1st of June, 1845, he preached his first sermon as the minister of the Church of the Divine Unity in Newcastle, where he remained until his death in 1859. He was by all accounts an impressive preacher and a tireless worker in the service of the church and the cause of Unitarianism, returning to Glasgow to chair a 'Congregational Soiree' for the opening of the new Glasgow Unitarian Church in St Vincent Street on May 3rd 1856. But it was not until his sudden death in December 1859 and the publication of subsequent obituaries that the extent of his endeavours for political and social progress became more widely known.

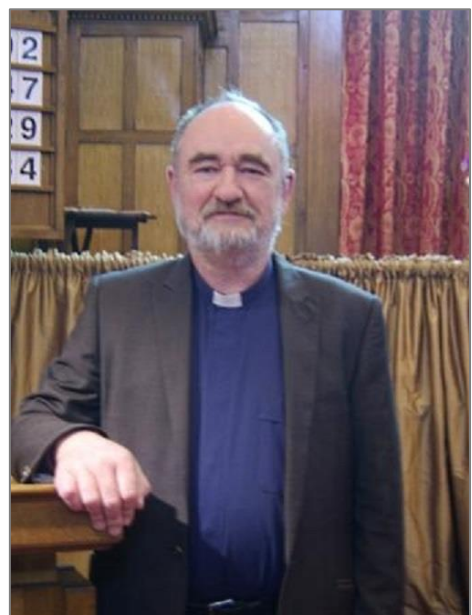
He was a committed and energetic campaigner for the abolition of capital punishment and for improvement in housing, sanitary conditions and education for the poor: A Mr S. G. of Newcastle, wrote in 'The Daily Chronicle and Northern Counties Advertiser on December 30 1859, "God's benevolence, said Rev Harris, is a moral benevolence. His own philanthropy partook of a like character: he was ever seeking to elevate and dignify the souls of men, by imparting to

them the eternal truth which, through Christ, he had himself received, and desired to see in the possession of *all* the human family, without distinction of rank, sex, country or colour.”

Rev. R. B. Aspland of Hackney wrote in The Newcastle Guardian on December 31st 1859 “He was the fearless champion of, and placed his unhesitating trust in, the power of God’s truth; that he regarded religious establishments as altogether unnecessary as a bulwark of true religion, and dangerous to the liberty of the subject, inasmuch as they might become an entrenchment for perpetuating prejudice and religious error; and that he sought to give to every rank the benefits of education.”

His theology may have been that of a Unitarian minister of his times, in the broadly liberal, free thinking Christian tradition; but in his commitment to social progress and political reform in the name of equality for all of God’s children he was definitely ahead of his times.”

Rev. Thomas McCready



Bible Bulletin 37 – ‘Conception of the Church, its Orders and Government’; a review of the ideas of John Courtney James

The word 'church' can mean an assembly or a place of assembly. The translators of the Authorised Version were instructed not to use the word 'congregation' for 'church' (as in the Geneva Bible). This was to reinforce the idea of an established body under a king who ruled by divine right; this was totally opposed to the Free Church view (“no state religion, no divine right of kings”).

Judaism was closely linked with the nation; the Christian Church should not be. 'Universal Church' embraces the Church visible and invisible. Wesleyan theologian John Courtenay James believed that divisions in the Church are inevitable and beneficial and that organic union, though desirable, is not essential. Claims based on tradition or Creeds which have no support in scripture are dismissed.

The Free Church view of ministry and the sacraments is arrived at through “a constructive argument based upon Scripture, history, and

reason". There is no sympathy with priestcraft and the idea of Apostolic succession is a myth.

Episcopal ordination is deemed to convey grace and celebration of sacraments by 'unworthy priests' is considered valid (and Judas was considered to remain an apostle even after his betrayal). In Free Church thinking ordination does not convey grace, rather it recognises grace already present. John Wesley initially held High Church views but became convinced that he was entitled to perform ordinations which, eventually, he did.

The New Testament laid down principles of Church polity, not fixed rules. The three types of organisation are Congregationalism.

Presbyterianism and Episcopalianism, each to some extent represented in the early Church as experimentation took place.

In the modern period, from the Reformation, reaction from the tyranny of Episcopalianism led to conflict between Connexionalism and Independency, the latter represented by Congregationalism, the former by Presbyterianism (and, later, Methodism). Extreme independence misses out on many of the advantages of a connexional system

(however, “Congregationalism has always been better in practice than in theory”). [The formation of the United Reformed Church in 1972 seems a logical development!]

The term '**laity**' is usually considered to refer only to non-clerical members of the church. In fact, the Greek '*laos*' means the whole people. In contrast to episcopalian churches, Lutheran, Calvinistic, Presbyterian, Congregational and Methodist churches allow, in varying measures, greater freedom to lay members. In Methodism, the non-Wesleyan bodies permitted more latitude than the Wesleyans.

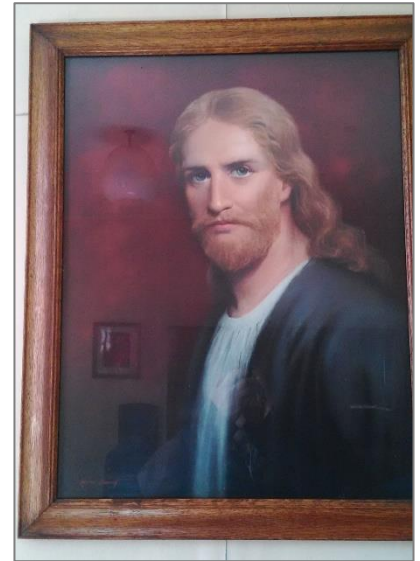
Perhaps unsurprisingly, our Wesleyan author is disapproving, stating “We have no desire to see the parent Methodist Church transformed into an ill-defined ecclesiastical democracy. The Reform Movement, which resulted in the United Methodist Free Churches, taught us by a striking object-lesson some consequences of democracy which we truly deprecate”.

A typical attitude of Free Church members would be, “This is our reply to Romanists who ask us to surrender our religious convictions to the Pope, and to Anglicans who ask us to surrender our

religious convictions to the Crown – We have a King: for One is our Master, even Christ.”

Progress, whether in society, personal life or church affairs is not in a straight line. An unprogressive church is a dying church. “From ecclesiastical history it is apparent that

Christianity has been kept alive by the periodic re-adaptation of New Testament doctrines and principles” There is no finality, and Protestantism is not necessarily the final form of Christianity.



John Courtenay James was Superintendent Minister of Newcastle (Heaton Road) Wesleyan Circuit at the time of Methodist Union, 1932. While declaring his loyalty to the new Church he told the Circuit Quarterly Meeting that he had been opposed to the Union, a position which would not surprise readers of his work, 'The Philosophy of Dissent'.

It is interesting to speculate about the effect his ideas might have had on his younger son, Norman Courtenay James (1897-1976) who, for a short time in the 1920s, was minister of a Congregational Church in Gateshead. His

ministry, however, was cut short following a series of incidents which were probably the result of an earlier nervous breakdown. He seems to have spent the rest of his life in literary pursuits. A privately-issued pamphlet, *Let Jesus speak for himself: a pocket reference guide to the words and teaching of Jesus*, by 'Courtenay James' was probably his work.

I am grateful to Jacqueline Reiter, Librarian of the Congregational Library in Cambridge for information on Norman Courtenay James.

Norman Moore

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## **Future of the Inquirer, 11 June 2025**

It's hard to imagine British Unitarianism without *The Inquirer* magazine, but like literally every other British organisation these days, the prevailing economy it has to survive in isn't exactly kind and forgiving. It was therefore quite exciting to be invited to a 'Future of *The Inquirer*' online event, and reassuring for those of us who have hoped for some updates on what's happening. Here's the headlines, courtesy of Laura Autumn Cox (Inquirer editor) and Kieren Mardle-Moss:

- **Finances:** Kieren presented the good news that *The Inquirer* is in a healthy financial position, and donations are increasing.
- **Content:** Laura stated that current editorial policy is to focus on accessibility, variety, and a diverse spread of authors and article topics. A style guide has been created for contributors.
- **Contributors:** All budding writers are invited to contribute to *The Inquirer* and they don't have to be Unitarian; the editorial board is keen to welcome other views and build connections beyond the movement.
- **A surprise!** *The Inquirer* has launched a brand-new creative competition! Details are in the June edition, and on the new Instagram page: **@theinquirer\_mag**.

The discussions afterwards covered the range of topics in the magazine, details of the style guide, and the need to create an AI policy, which the editorial board plans to move forward with, much to the delight of yours truly, since it was me who brought it up. Watch this space for more details, and for now, all seems promising!

*Louise Reeve (Written without the aid of any AI whatsoever. All mistakes entirely my own fault.)*

## **Supporting local, national and international charities**

We invite anyone who wishes to do so to donate to charities helping those suffering through the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, refugees fleeing war, persecution and natural disasters. Please search online for a charity that speaks to you. More locally, GAIN is a charity that helps those with autoimmune conditions. Donate online here:

[justgiving.com/fundraising/geordie-leather](https://justgiving.com/fundraising/geordie-leather)

We continue to support the Joseph Cowen Centre, helping homeless men in the city. They need tea, coffee, sugar, powdered milk, men's socks, underpants and toiletries – you can take them to the Byker centre or drop them off with us on Sundays, or you can make a financial donation online:

[localgiving.org/charity/tynehousing/](https://localgiving.org/charity/tynehousing/)



## **‘Annual Meeting of the General Assembly Report’, from Newcastle upon Tyne Unitarians AGM 2025**

The UK Unitarian General Assembly – our Annual Meetings – was held in Birmingham over 12-14 April 2025. The GA voted as follows (in summary):

- ‘Golden Rule’ motion: To express our full solidarity with the humanitarian lifesaving work of the UN Relief and Works Agency, providing essential medical aid, educational facilities and shelter to Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, World Health Organization, United Nations Children’s Fund, UN Refugee Agency and World Food Programme.
- Having debated two emergency motions on:
  - 1) Solidarity with the Unitarian Universalist movement in the USA, and concern at the direction of North American politics
  - 2) Response to the recent armed police raid on Westminster Quaker Meeting House,

- The Annual Meetings selected Emergency Motion 1 (above) for debate, and the motion was passed.
- That our national movement – the GA itself – should become a CIO (Community Incorporated Organisation).
- Amending the GA's Constitution so that if people step down, vacancies can be filled by appointment if it is not possible to find enough candidates for an election.



Full reports on the Annual Meetings can be found on our blog, 'Exploring Together', written by myself as the church delegate:

<https://newcastleunitarians.org.uk/blog/> , and here's a link to the first in the series:

<https://newcastleunitarians.org.uk/2025/04/12/roving-reporter-ga-day-1-12-april-2025/>

Louise Reeve, Newcastle upon Tyne Unitarians' Delegate to the Annual Meetings 2025.

# Sunday Gatherings at Northumbria University

## Large Spiritual Commons Room and online

| Month     | Date | Worship Leader      | Notes                                             |
|-----------|------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| June      | 1    | Rev. James Poore    | 'And Who Might You Be? Identity and Personhood.'  |
|           | 8    | Kainara Motta       | 'Meditation – Attachment and Aversion'; Committee |
|           | 15   | Rev. Paul Walker    | 'A Quiet Pause'                                   |
|           | 22   | Anne Mills          | 'Words of Wisdom'                                 |
|           | 29   | Paul Lindsay Dawson | 'When Through The Woods'                          |
|           |      |                     |                                                   |
| July      | 6    | Rev. James Poore    | Committee                                         |
|           | 13   | Kainara Motta       | 'Meditation – The Fear of the Unknown'            |
|           | 20   | Brigitte McCready   | Pride Week                                        |
|           | 27   | Rev. Paul Walker    |                                                   |
|           |      |                     |                                                   |
| August    | 3    | Chris Carr          |                                                   |
|           | 10   | Louise Reeve        | 'Art and Spirituality'                            |
|           | 17   | Chris Newsam        |                                                   |
|           | 24   | TBC                 |                                                   |
|           | 31   | Rev. James Poore    |                                                   |
|           |      |                     |                                                   |
| September | 7    | Paul Lindsay Dawson | Fairtrade Service                                 |
|           | 14   | Kainara Motta       | 'Meditation and Yoga' Committee                   |
|           | 21   | Louise Reeve        | 'The Golden Rule'                                 |
|           | 28   | TBC                 |                                                   |

Join us online via Zoom at:

- Direct link – Join Zoom Meeting:  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89981324654>
- Meeting ID: **899 8132 4654**

# About Newcastle upon Tyne Unitarians

We are a free religious faith and affirm the unity of the human family, regardless of race, creed, class, orientation or sex. We believe that peace,

compassion and justice should be the hallmarks of a truly spiritual society, pursued in a spirit of freedom, reason and tolerance.

The Unitarian Community in this city traces its history back to 1662, when Dr Richard Gilpin and Rev. William Durant started separate Nonconformist meetings after the Act of Uniformity. Under the Rev. Herbert Barnes, our former building in Ellison Place opened on Sunday 21 January 1940.

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