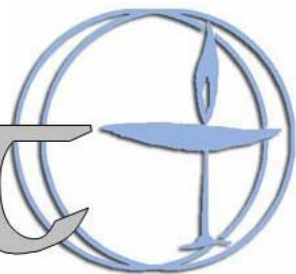


# Oscailt



January 2023

IRELANDS UNITARIAN MAGAZINE

Vol.19 Nº 1







**Oscailt** since January 2005 has become the monthly magazine for Irish Unitarians. Originally it was the calendar for Dublin but due to popular demand by non members this new format was born and continues to grow and flourish.

**Oscailt** is Published by the  
**Dublin Unitarian Church**  
112 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin D02 YP23.

Minister: Rev.Bridget Spain  
e-mail: revbspain@gmail.com  
Rev.Bill Darlison *Minister Emeritus*.

hello@dublinunitarianchurch.org  
www.dublinunitarianchurch.org  
www.unitarianchurchcork.com  
www.oscailtmagazine.com

**Cork Unitarian Church**  
Princes Street, Cork.  
Minister: Rev.Mike O'Sullivan

Editor: Paul Spain

#### **To Subscribe**

Annual subscription 12 monthly issues.  
€35 Posted for Ireland  
£35 Posted for England & Scotland  
Cheques and PO should be made payable to: *Dublin Unitarian Church*.

#### **Deadline**

The deadline for articles to be included is the 21<sup>st</sup> day of the month.  
Unsolicited articles, news items, letters, poems, etc are always welcome, however there can be no guarantee of publication. Copy should be sent by e-mail or at least typed, photographs should be 300dpi.

e-mail: oscailtmagazine@gmail.com

#### **Advertising**

Advertising rates available on request. e-mail: oscailtmagazine@gmail.com

**Front Cover:** Dara Molloy  
and Rev.Bridget Spain  
(photo P.Spain)

## **CONTENTS**

### **Re-Imagine the Divine**

*Dara Molloy* 2

### **Monasticism**

*Clive Geraghty* 8

### **Changes to the Changes**

*Rory Delany* 13

### **Book Review**

*Alison Claffey* 17

**Silent peace walk** 20



Our magazine title, **Oscailt**, is inspired by the account of the **Healing of the Deaf and Mute Man** in St. Mark's Gospel, Chapter 7. Jesus commands the mans ears to open up with Aramic word "Ephphatha" - open ! The Irish word *oscailt*, (from the verb *oscail*, to open), means an opening, or, metaphorically, it could mean a revelation or a beginning.

# Re-Imagine the Divine

The last time I spoke from a pulpit was about ten years ago and not in Ireland but in Indianapolis in a Lutheran church.

Life moves on and we all change, that is one of the things I want to talk about. Change is part of life: it's part of our physical life and it should also be part of our spiritual life. I used to be a Catholic priest. I left the priesthood in 1996. The best image I have for it, is I was in a boat, always tied to the shore, until the day I left. Not just the priesthood but the Catholic Church in 1996. It was like letting off that rope and I started sailing off into the sea not knowing where it was going to lead me, led me to where I am today.

But speaking theologically and spirituality I am in a very different place today than when I was a member of the Catholic Church. My spirituality in particular has changed hugely. Part of where I am is being shaped by where the world is now because the world has changed too over the last 50 years. If you look at the world today, the Cop27 meeting of world leaders is taking place. That's the climate action meeting to see what human beings can do to deal with the on-coming existential threat of climate change and biodiversity loss.

We are being reminded every day that this is coming at us like a train at full speed. How on earth can we adjust our lives sufficiently to deal with it? We can't: we have already done so much damage. But we have to do our best to limit that damage.

But that's at the political level, that's at the level of spending money and changing to electric cars, and changing our home heating systems to heat pumps, and insulating our homes and stopping using fossil fuels. That's all that side of things, that's the external stuff.

But what about the internal stuff? Internally I grew up with a belief in God. When I did theology, I studied people like St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. I didn't study Martin Luther because it was a Catholic theology course. Even Luther and the other teachers of theology at the Reformation still spoke of a God which I think gives an image of a God that is inappropriate for today.

My first point is to look at the image of the Divine that we have inherited from our various churches and religious schools. Practically all of them are monotheist. They all go back to the God dis-

covered by Moses. God spoke to Moses in the desert. And it led to the Bible and so forth. It les on to Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and so on. This is the image of God we have inherited, first of all that God is male, maybe even before that, that God is a person, that he can speak to us, and that God is in Heaven.

Even today we prayed the 'Our Father'. We presume that there is a God and that person is male and that God is in Heaven, Our Father who art in Heaven. That to me is very presumptuous because I think that the Divine is bigger than anything we could ever imagine. And in putting the Divine into this narrow picture of a sort of male patriarchal exclusive type God, no other image of God is allowed, certainly in the past.

People that had other ways of living with the Divine were told this was the Devil's work. They had to move away, they had to believe this one version. This image we have inherited is no longer appropriate.

I don't know if you agree with me. I have been told that you are a congregation that doesn't agree even with each other, so you probably won't agree with me either. This image we have inherited has shaped our world. That is the problem. It has given an emphasis of male over female. It gives a tick to authorism, because this God we have is shaped as being exclusive, intolerant, all of these things we can apply to the image of God we have inherited, a God that is in Heaven so totally removed from nature.

These are all things that are wrong with our society, so we have to find another way of imagining the Divine. I am not going to reject all that and become an atheist. I believe that there is a greater power and it is so big and so amazing that it is beyond us. The word **awe** comes to mind. If you experience awe, if you experience wonder or if you experience mystery, there are words for it other than awe, if you experience something beyond yourself which is what awe is, or mystery or wonder or magic.

And what about the coincidences in our life which we cannot explain but yet they happen all the time. There is something way, way, way, beyond us. We traditionally call that God but I think that now is inappropriate. We need to call 'it' something, what is 'it', we cannot even put words on 'it'. It is so difficult to get our heads round this. Someone said to me that it's like having a microbe living in your hair trying to understand who you are as a human being, you are far too big for the microbe to understand who you are.

Similarly, this world we live in is far too big for us to understand as well. So, we need humility, this man who is full of himself needs humility. We need the humility to allow ourselves, and let that call us to worship, let that call us to acknowledge the sacred in our lives. So, if we move away from standard religion, if we move away from monotheism, we certainly move into a vacuum. That can be a difficult place, the worst place to be. I think the Western world is moving into a vacuum. We are not sure where we are going. I am a wedding celebrant and I work with American, European and a lot of Irish couples, and most of the couples who come to me would describe themselves as spiritual but not religious.

These represent people moving out of the traditional religions. You here might represent that too, I don't know. They are moving out of traditional religion to some kind of spirituality that is non-religious. That is one type of movement. There is another movement that is going on among the young people. This is a love of nature. People want to go back into the forest and the wild. They want to do the Camino, to do the Irish Caminos because we have them too.

They want to experience the awe and wonder and mystery of the world. So, there are two hooks for the way forward. For me I have managed to combine both of them into a discovery that in the Celtic tradition we have a way forward as well. Other indigenous traditions can teach us as well, but for me it is the Celtic tradition. And particularly in the Celtic Christian tradition I don't have to abandon my belief in Christianity or in the teachings of Jesus. I might interpret them differently not like Augustine or someone else did. I can interpret them in a different way.

The Celtic tradition monks it seems to me were more right brained than left brained. The left brain is Augustine. The Augustines of the world, the Luthers of the world, and the Thomas Aquinases of the world ended up in trying to discover how many angels could balance on the top of pin.

The right brain is a totally different approach. It is where you try to get the bigger picture rather than trying to take things apart. It is more holistic. These Celtic monks seem to me to be more holistic in what they wanted to do: they were not interested in the medieval discussions throughout Europe as to who was off the box and who wasn't. They weren't interested in who was a heretic and who wasn't. Or in burning people at the stake who were teaching something they shouldn't have been teaching.

What they seem to have been interested in was experiencing

the Divine. And I think they inherited that from the pre-Christian culture. Because in early Irish culture before Christianity there was this sense that the world could manifest itself in two ways. It could manifest itself in a physical way, where you can see the trees, feel the wind, and experience throwing water over your face. That is the material world.

But behind the material world the ancient Celts got a great sense, I think, of some spiritual world equally present. And the way they talked about it was they attached a spiritual presence to almost everything in nature. They attached a spiritual presence to the sea and they called that “the God of the Sea” Manannán. They attached a spiritual presence to a river and called the river after a goddess. They attached a spiritual presence to the sun and called it after the sun god Lugh or some other sun god. They had lots of names for the presences they felt in nature.

There is an invitation for us; the challenge for us is to try and save nature, to get a new relationship with nature that is less damaging and less ignorant in the way we relate to it. And here is a way to find the presence of the Divine in nature. For the Celts they couldn’t put it all into one name so they had lots of names for gods and goddesses, both male and female. The earth itself Eriu, which gave its name to Ireland. She is the goddess of the land. You have Boinne, the goddess of the River Boyne. And you had so many others and they all intermarried and had children. So, there is a world out there of the Divine that we can learn from and which I have been learning from.

The Christian monks brought in another element: they brought in the scriptures. But here’s the thing. I think the problem with monotheism that became dominant in the Western world, was it all became based on “the book”. It all became based on the Bible, Scripture or in the case of Islam on the Qu’ran and we lost connection with nature. Whereas the Celtic monks always said that there were two sources of our connection with the Divine, one scripture and one nature.

So, to me this is a way back for us. The Irish monks did this by living surrounded by a sense of wonder. John O’Donohue, whose book Janet read from, wrote about “living in the presence of wonder” and this is what these monks were trying to do. They were trying to find a place where they could be surrounded by a sense of wonder and awe. When you have a sense of wonder and awe you are outside

yourself, you are in touch with the Divine.

These ancient peoples put different faces on it, different personalities. Each of us has our own perspective of the Divine. I think this is where we are heading. Everyone should be respected for their own personal experiences of the Divine, their own way of describing it. You can go back to the story of Moses as being a real story. We don't know whether it was or not. It could have been a legend that was rewritten and rewritten many times.

It is quite likely that someone is working outside in the desert on his own in hot temperatures. He is way down in the desert in Egypt. He is on his own. He is, perhaps, dehydrated and he has this profound experience where he thinks this bush is on fire and it begins to talk to him. There is an experience there that is transformative.

Many of us have had an experience that is transformative: I have had them myself. But he then had to interpret that experience and the interpretation of that experience is something that we are in control of. For example, I can walk down the street and meet somebody. I feel that spark and I can respond to that and end up marrying that person. Or I can feel the spark, ignore it and walk away and not marry that person.

So, the experience will be there as a fact in me and my interpretation and my response to that experience is up to me. So, looking back at that story of Moses, one interpretation was given to his experience and a religion was built on it. And all the experiences of other people in Judaism and thereon on had no relevance. The only experience that had relevance was Moses.

Each of us can be in touch with the Divine, each of us will have experiences of our own. As in one of the readings, we have senses that can pick up that sense of something personal being communicated to us in our hearts and/or in our souls that lead us to living out our destiny. And that is part of where we have to go too, we have to be true to ourselves, rather than to follow some formula, or some sort or authoritarian teaching, follow our hearts or even more so follow our souls. Just as the Celtic monks did.

One of the ways the Celtic monks had of doing this was to wander. So, to wander is to let yourself off a bit like cutting the rope and letting the boat off. It's letting yourself go to perhaps somewhere you have never been, perhaps to do a Camino. To get yourself out of



your normal routine and allow the spirit a chance to move inside you. These Celtic monks wandered all over Ireland then they wandered all over Europe. The word they used was wander. They were not on a pilgrimage to Rome. They didn't have an objective place to go. They didn't have a place to go to, they were letting the spirit guide them.

They trusted that in wandering things would become clear as to what their life was about, as to who they really were, or as to what their work should be. And when you look at the story of the Irish saints, either those who stayed in Ireland or those who went abroad, their stories are so amazing that even today even though these stories go back nearly 1500 years their stories of wandering of finding their destinies, their places of Resurrection. For me this is a possible way into the future. It is to go back to that spiritual tradition and use these Celtic monks as our mentors.

*Dara Molloy,*

Dara delivered this address on the 16<sup>th</sup> November 2022, you can listen to the recording on the church web site.

# Monasticism

## in the Early Irish Church

“Looking back from the great civilizations of twelfth-century France or seventeenth-century Rome, it is hard to believe that for quite a long time, almost a hundred years, Western Christianity survived by clinging to places like Skellig Michael, a pinnacle of rock eighteen miles from the Irish coast, rising seven hundred feet out of the sea”. This is from Kenneth Clark’s book *‘Civilization’*, one of the few places where due emphasis is given to the Irish contribution to the ‘precarious transition from classical to medieval’ by an historian. The Dark Ages had descended on continental Europe and many of the skills and beliefs that had enlightened life had disappeared or were in danger of doing so. Perhaps the period was not quite as dark or as barbaric as the historians who can only see virtue in Roman law and Roman culture would have us believe, but the lights of civilization were undoubtedly dimmed for a lengthy period.

Without a doubt part of the effort to re-Christianize Europe was exerted from Ireland when monks from Irish monasteries set out for the continent to found new communities or to revitalise old ones. But how had monasteries thrived in Ireland when it is known that that was not the form of church organization that was brought to Ireland in the fifth century by Patrick and others who were used to an Episcopal arrangement? Dáibhí Ó Cróinín posits one explanation “of a first generation Irish church, established along traditional lines with single bishops ruling over territorial dioceses, but whose structure proved totally unsuited to Irish conditions....buckled under the strain and were replaced by a different organization which was better adapted to the nature of Irish society”. It is important to bear in mind that the conversion of Roman Gall to Christianity had only begun a century or so before Patrick and was most likely still incomplete. But the diocesan system was the favoured option on the continent and we can take it that it was also the strongest option initially in Ireland. Nora Chadwick quotes from the chronicle of Prosper of Aquitaine, a contemporary witness of first

class authority that 'in the year 431 a certain Palladius was sent as the first bishop to the Irish believing in Christ' which would indicate that there were Christians in Ireland before Patrick arrived and that bishops, not abbots, were the Papal envoys. Yet within a century or so bishops are rarely mentioned in Irish church annals, whereas abbots frequently appear.

Richard Sharpe suggests "It is perhaps possible that the early isolation of Christians from the surrounding society made them form religious communities which were the basis of the monasteries". This seems as logical as any other explanation, and would perhaps explain why some of the monasteries, possibly forty per cent, were ruled by bishops instead of abbots. What we do know is that within a relatively short space of time the monasteries had been integrated into society, and became important centres of enterprise and secular activity. Ó Cróinín refers to this "Irish solution to an Irish problem, the tribal church, converted to a monastic structure often ruled by a hereditary succession of abbots, and many monasteries had resident bishops, but the ruler of the community was an abbot. Kim McCone says "the monasteries were major centres for crafts and trades as well as scholarship" and goes on to list some of the craftsmen practicing their skills; stonemasons, a doorkeeper, a cook, a brewer, a woodcutter, blacksmiths, metalworkers and others.. He tells us that evidence exists that there were monastic schools of law, history and poetry as well as Latin learning, and "there is no shortage...of prototypes for the practice of medicine and metalwork in a monastic context". Nora Chadwick tells us "that the monastery at Clonard accommodated more than a thousand individuals, .....and monasteries of this size were the only really nucleated settlements". It would seem that the coming together of the native Irish social system of the *Tuath* and the early church's ability to adapt and change formed a new energetic hybrid which Ó Cróinín says scholars have come to describe as the 'Celtic' Church and which was unparalleled in Europe, and led Ireland into a "Golden Age" of learning.

One of the truly inspiring achievements of the Irish was the practice of literacy. It is said by Ó Cróinín and others that politically 'there is no denying the crucial importance of the fact that Ireland was never a province of the Roman Empire, and

never acquired the language and script of empire through conquest. Through Christianity, therefore, the Irish acquired their knowledge of Latin letters and they developed a variety of the Latin script which came to be regarded by outsiders as uniquely Irish'. The magnitude of this accomplishment is easy to overlook. Unlike their fellow Celts on the Continent who lived under a Roman administration and who would have been familiar with vernacular Latin the Irish had no contact with the Latin language until they became active in the church. But there were no grammar books for beginners. Even the most basic sort presupposed a knowledge of the spoken language. Ó Cróinin tells us that 'by the end of the sixth century a new kind of Latin grammar, the elementary grammar designed specifically for beginners with no previous knowledge of Latin, had come into being, and the credit for producing it is due in large part to the Irish'. There can be little doubt that one of the major influences on this development was the fact that many monastic settlements had scriptoria as an integral part of their organization. Here, initially at least, copies were made of religious tracts, gospels and other writings in Latin but in a very short space of time the scribes, clerical and lay, had taken to writing in Old Irish, and had included comprehensive studies of Irish law, of history, mythology and poetry in their work, an achievement of impressive proportions. It is possible nowadays to examine the Priscian Grammar of St. Gall online, and it is both instructive and moving to see glosses written in Old Irish in this old Latin Grammar from the 9<sup>th</sup> century, three and a half thousand of them, explaining and commenting on words and phrases in the margins of the pages. It is not possible to ascertain the effect the literary output of the monasteries had on Irish society as a whole, but we can surmise that national or local pride would have been increased and that the "*Féiniúlacht*" or sense of identity of the race would have been enhanced.

It is a matter of dispute as to whether Christianity ever really supplanted native paganism in the hearts and minds of the people. Kim McCone says it would be a moot point whether, despite a plethora of flourishing, influential and outward looking monasteries, early medieval Ireland could reasonably be

termed a predominantly Christian country. He goes on to quote Proinsias Mac Cana who “envisages merely skin-deep penetration, in a society which was now publicly Christian but which was still strongly attached to traditional beliefs and practices, still had a rich and learned oral tradition running alongside the written vernacular tradition”. A moot point indeed, but no matter how opinions vary one thing is sure, that the opportunities provided by the monasteries were eagerly grasped and that Old Irish became the oldest written language, after Greek and Latin.

In ‘A Guide to Early Irish Law’ Fergus Kelly seems to be in no doubt on this vexed question. He tells us that “By the time of the Old Irish secular law-texts (7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries) the Church had clearly triumphed over organized paganism”. The place of the druid in society had been taken by the cleric. Indeed we can see that the cleric had improved on the status once held by the druid, because Kelly goes on to say that “high-ranking clergy are treated as equal or superior to kings”. The success of monasticism can be seen by the fact that as Kelly suggests “The early Irish Church was not merely an organisation of pious and learned men and women: it also owned a great deal of land and other wealth”. It had considerable political power “Leading churchmen were very often of royal lineage- Columba, for example- and in a few cases were actually kings”. The ruling kin-group of a *Túath* would often provide the Abbot of a monastery as well as the king. A clear indication of the status of the clergy is the fact that the abbot of an important monastery had the same *Lóg n-enech*, honour-price, as a provincial king, even if the abbot was not in Holy Orders. Kelly further tells us that there were three grades of clerics whose evidence could not be overturned by a king, that of a bishop, a hermit or a *suí litre*, expert in ecclesiastical learning.

Finally, it seems fair to say that the points made in this essay would lead one to the conclusion that monasticism played a very important role in the early Irish church and consequently in Irish society as both became inextricably connected in terms of the influence exerted by the monasteries on the governance of society and the contribution the scriptoria made to the literary

and cultural life. Aspects of the importance of the role of monasticism and religion in everyday life will be debated by scholars for a long time to come as new points of view are aired and contested, but they will most likely not alter the basic fact of the crucial influence of monasticism on the early Irish church.

*Clive Geraghty*

St Stephen's Green Unitarian Church



A place of worship since 1717

## **UNITARIAN CHURCH**

Prince's Street, Cork.

Registered Charity Number 0000246

**Service: Sundays at 11a.m.**

*Minister:-*Rev.Mike O'Sullivan Telephone:023-8842800

e-mail:- osullmike@gmail.com Mobile 087-9539998

Further information from 087-9539998

**Treasurer :** Brian Cluer e-mail: bmcleur@gmail.com

**Secretary :** Colm Noonan : e-mail : colm.noonan@gmail.com

[www.unitarianchurchcork.com](http://www.unitarianchurchcork.com)

**Jazz Vespers,  
first Friday of the month @ 6pm.**

An ecumenical service with the Methodist church.

## **Please Note**

*If you are aware of any member of our community who is unwell, or who has suffered a bereavement, and who would welcome contact from others in the church, please e-mail Rev.Bridget Spain.*

Vestry 01 - 4780638

e-mail: revbspain@gmail.com

For any queries about Sunday Club, or to volunteer as a leader, please email  
Denise at [sundayclub@dublinunitarianchurch.org](mailto:sundayclub@dublinunitarianchurch.org)

## **DUBLIN UNITARIAN CHURCH**

**Lunch-time service every Wednesday from 1.10 to 1.40 p.m.**

Each week Eileen Delaney sends an e-mail circular as to  
what is happening in the church and  
the other activities associated with the church.

If you would like to receive this information you should send  
your details requesting your name be added to the list to:-  
**[eileendelaney76@gmail.com](mailto:eileendelaney76@gmail.com)**





# Dublin Unitarian Church

112 St. Stephens Green Dublin 2.

**Service 11.00a.m.**

## **Sunday Rota for January 2023**

1 <sup>st</sup> January	<i>Favourite Readings</i>
Service	Rev.Bridget Spain
Reader	Elaine Harris and various
Flowers	Janet Mulroy
Welcomer	Catharine Cook
Coffee	Janet Mulroy, Paula Mills, Dorene Grocock
<hr/>	
8 <sup>th</sup> January	<i>Stop trying to fix yourself</i>
Service	Rev.Bridget Spain.
Reader	Andrew Connolly Crangle
Flowers	Jane Nolan
Welcomer	Paula Mills
Coffee	Jane Nolan, Madeline Stringer, Dorene Grocock
<hr/>	
15 <sup>th</sup> January	<i>Give peace a chance</i>
Service	Rev.Bridget Spain
Reader	Kevin O'Hara
Flowers	Colette Douglas
Welcomer	Colette Douglas
Coffee	Gavin Byrne, Doireann Ní Bhriain, Andy Pollak
<hr/>	
22 <sup>nd</sup> January	<i>T B A</i>
Service	Elaine Harris
Reader	Janet Mulroy
Flowers	Trish Webb Duffy
Welcomer	Gavin Byrne
Coffee	Colette Douglas, Trish Webb Duffy, Janet Mulroy
<hr/>	
29 <sup>th</sup> January	<i>A Moment in Time</i>
Service	Monica Cremins
Reader	Colette Douglas
Flowers	Janet Mulroy
Welcomer	Janet Mulroy
Coffee	Tony Shine, Sheila Hanley, Frank Kelly

Services are broadcast live from the church each Sunday at 11a.m.  
On our WebCam, click and connect at [www.dublinunitarianchurch.org](http://www.dublinunitarianchurch.org)

Recordings of previous services are also available on the website.

LOVE IS THE DOCTRINE OF THIS CHURCH  
THE QUEST OF TRUTH IS ITS SACRAMENT  
AND SERVICE IS ITS PRAYER.

TO DWELL TOGETHER IN PEACE  
TO SEEK KNOWLEDGE IN FREEDOM  
TO SERVE MANKIND IN FELLOWSHIP  
TO THE END THAT ALL SOULS SHALL GROW IN HARMONY  
WITH THE DIVINE  
THIS DO WE COVENANT WITH EACH OTHER AND WITH GOD.

## **DUBLIN UNITARIAN CHURCH**

112 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin D02 YP23, Ireland.  
Unitarian Church - Dublin Registered Charity Number 20000622

**Service: Sunday at 11a.m.      Phone: Vestry 01-4780638**

**Managing committee:** -Madam Chairman: Denise Dunne;  
Vice Chairman: Dennis Aylmer; Secretary: Trish Webb-Duffy; Treasurer: Rory Delany;  
Tony Shine; Andy Pollak; Peter White; Will O'Connell;  
Paul Murray; Madeline Stringer; Gavin Byrne; Tony Brady.

[www.dublinunitarianchurch.org](http://www.dublinunitarianchurch.org)  
e-mail: [hello@dublinunitarianchurch.org](mailto:hello@dublinunitarianchurch.org)

[www.oscailtmagazine.com](http://www.oscailtmagazine.com)  
[oscailtmagazine@gmail.com](mailto:oscailtmagazine@gmail.com)

**Minister: Rev. Bridget Spain:**      Telephone: 01 - 8388 808  
Vestry 01 - 4780638      e-mail: [revbspain@gmail.com](mailto:revbspain@gmail.com)

Rev. Bill Darlison (*Minister Emeritus*)

**Madam Chairman: Denise Dunne:- Tel: 087-2450660**

**Secretary: Trish Webb-Duffy:- Tel: 087-9346720**

**Treasurer: Rory Delany: 087-2217414, e-mail: [roryjdelany@hotmail.com](mailto:roryjdelany@hotmail.com)**

**Musical Director: Josh Johnston :- 086 892 0602**

**Caretaker: Kevin Robinson      Telephone: 4752781**

**Recordings of the church services are available on the church website.**

# Changes to the Changes

## on St. Stephen's Green

During an 'Open House' visit to the Irish Architectural Archives on Merrion Square last October my attention was drawn to a scale model (pictured below) that forms part of a display of architectural models in the front room of the IAA building. While the building that sits in the centre of the model is quite obviously the Unitarian Church, the model was constructed to show what a planned new development facing on to the Green to the north and south of the church would look like when it was built. A printed sheet inside the display case informs viewers that they are looking at the Ardilaun Centre designed by Costello Murray Beaumont - 1980. However, the Ardilaun Centre, which



was constructed between 1979 and 1981, was built to a modified version of the design shown in the display case.

Sharp eyed observers will notice that the model shows the proposed development abutting directly onto the walls of the church on the north and south sides. However, as we know, the church building was kept detached from the Ardilaun Centre by passageways on both sides of the church. A further examination of the model reveals a different configuration of the blocks on each side of the church to those that were actually built. To the south of the church the finished development graduated in blocks outwards as it turned on to Cuffe Street, and to the north it absorbed a pair of 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings partially shown in the photo.

When the development was announced on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1980 the developer's publicity included an artist's impression of the completed development. The Irish Times printed this image in its edition of 8<sup>th</sup> February to accompany an article on the plans for the site. This printed image was an accurate reflection of what the completed construction would actually look like. Given the admirable record of the Irish Time as a robust critic of the aesthetic quality of many of the buildings constructed in Dublin in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century its description of the new Ardilaun Centre as 'classically simple' is somewhat surprising.



Two pictures:- Ardilaun  
Centre construction  
work in progress 1980



The Ardilaun Centre, (*named after Edward Arthur Guinness, Lord Ardilaun - a statue of him sits inside the railings of St. Stephen's Green facing the College of Surgeons*) was developed by MEPC and constructed by Sisk at a cost of £12.5 million pounds. The proposed MEPC development became an item on the Managing Committee as early as 1972. The early discussions appear to have focused on a plot of ground to the rear of the church which was the subject of a long-term lease between the church and Kapp and Peterson, the owners of the adjoining premises at number 113. When the MEPC purchased these premises the lease transferred to them and the early discussions at Managing Committee meetings concerning the development seem to have centred around the sale of the plot of ground to the developer. It is interesting to note that church files on the subject include copies of advice from our legal representatives that MEPC had intimated an interest in buying the church and leasing it back to the congregation at a peppercorn rent and also indeed an interest in buying the church outright.

Agreement between the parties was eventually reached and, as part of the agreement, the developers built an extension to the church to contain a new caretaker's flat and male and female dressing rooms and toilets for the Damer Hall theatre. The dressing rooms were subsequently used as the Minister's office and a small meeting room. The Ardilaun Centre became the Headquar-

ters of Telecom Eireann (now *Eir*) and in more recent years it was purchased by the Royal College of Surgeons Ireland. As you know, the RCSI has undertaken a major building project on the site of the northern section of the Ardilaun Centre and work on the construction of a landmark 21<sup>st</sup> century building is well underway there.

Of the buildings that stood on the west side of St Stephen's Green in the 1970's all that remain are the pair of houses at numbers 119 and 120, the College of Surgeons, and the Unitarian Church. It is sobering to think that so many 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings were demolished to make way for the construction of buildings that are no longer fit for modern requirements after just 40 years. Our caretaker's flat and the offices in the extension built in conjunction with the Ardilaun Centre haven't exactly stood the test of time either and are now badly in need of major repairs and modernisation. The initiation of a project to carry out the required modernisation will be high on the Managing Committee's agenda for 2023.

*Rory Delany*

St Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

December 2022

**Dublin Unitarian Book Club's  
choice for November 2022.**

**The Tenant of Wildfell Hall**

*by*  
**Anne Bronte**

Anne Bronte died at the age of 29 in 1849 and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* was published the year before her death. It is a brave and insightful book from such a young and inexperienced author of Victorian times. It stands out as a courageous and honest depiction of misjudged love and marriage failure as our heroine, Helen Huntingdon struggles to escape an abusive relationship to protect her son at a time when wives were the property of their husbands under English Law.

The narrative begins with Gilbert Markham writing to his friend Mr. Halford of his life twenty years previous when a young widow came to live at Wildfell Hall, the local uninhabited manor owned by Frederick Lawrence. The young widow is Helen Graham and with her is her young 6 year old son Arthur and Rachel, her servant. She is an artist and Mr. Lawrence ( who is really her estranged brother) has helped her leave her husband and is sheltering her under a false identity. He is also helping her sell her paintings and live independently.

The local rural population are intrigued to find out about the mysterious Mrs. Graham almost to the point of stalking her. Helen does partake in some gatherings just to allay gossip and she meets Gilbert Markham, a young gentleman farmer. They become friends and develop feelings for each other but Helen tells Gilbert that they can only ever be friends. Prior to Helen's arrival Gilbert flirted and courted the Parson's daughter Eliza Millward. Eliza now feels very snubbed by Gilbert and is jealous of the beautiful Helen. She maliciously starts rumours about Helen being involved with Mr. Lawrence as there is a great resemblance between him and her son Arthur. This rumour takes hold and Helen is ostracised by the community. She feels she must leave for fear of being discovered.

Gilbert does not believe the gossip and asks Helen to refute it, which she does and says she will tell him all the following day. They arrange to meet on the Moor. However, later that evening Gilbert sees

Helen and Mr. Lawrence out walking at Wildfell and they share an embrace. As Gilbert does not know they are siblings he misinterprets the embrace and is furious and feels betrayed. He doesn't meet Helen the next day but she seeks him out and asks him why he did not meet her. He says he saw her with Lawrence and she gives him her diary which she tells him will reveal all.

He reads the diary through the night which is the heartbreaking account of a young naïve eighteen year old girl who is under the care of her Aunt and Uncle. She falls for the wild Arthur Huntingdon, who pursues her and convinces her to marry him against her Aunt's wishes. Her married life at Huntingdon's Manor, Grassdale is one of neglect and Arthur spends most of his time away in London with his debaucherous friends. When he does return home he continues the partying by bringing his obnoxious pals with him. He is mean and cruel and violent towards Helen and he now torments her by including the young 5 year old Arthur in his wild drinking nights. This is the last straw and she asks him to let her leave with young Arthur. Of course he refuses but eventually she does escape with the help of her brother Frederick by going to Wildfell Hall.

Following his reading of the diary Gilbert goes to Helen to beg forgiveness and she too asks him to forgive her for not trusting him with the truth. She says she has to leave Wildfell Hall and that they must not see each other but she agrees that they can communicate through Frederick Lawrence.

After a time Gilbert finds out through more of Eliza's gossip that Helen has returned to her husband, a great scandal indeed has been unearthed. He confronts Lawrence who confirms it is true as Huntingdon had a fall from his horse and is badly injured. Helen returns to Grassdale but Arthur is still self centred and controlling. He is also drinking himself to death despite doctors orders and does indeed die with Helen at his side.

Gilbert is still relying on Lawrence for news of Helen but she does not ask to see him. Also her uncle has died and has left her everything and she is now a rich woman. She is living with her Aunt at their estate Staningley Manor with young Arthur.

Gilbert hears that Helen is to marry a 'friend' of Huntingdon and an old admirer from who else but Eliza, another false bit of gossip but enough to send him off to seek out Helen. On his journey he discovers that it is not Helen who is getting married but



Frederick. Gilbert also hears how wealthy Helen has become following the death of her uncle. Gilbert goes to Staningley but is reluctant to go beyond the gate fearing that Helen is now out of his league. As he hovers at the gate a carriage pulls up with Helen, Arthur and the aunt. Helen invites him into the house where they have a good heart to heart and reconcile their differences and confess their love to each other which has endured. And so we have a happy ending with the couple getting married and living a quiet life at Staningley.

Anne Bronte does not shy away from the messy sides of relationships, the effect of alcoholism on a family, infidelity, the struggle of women for equality within the law and also to pursue an artistic career which she understood only too well having to publish under the pseudonym of Acton Bell. Some call *Wildfell Hall* the first feminist novel as the Victorian world shook when Helen shut the bedroom door on Arthur following the discovery of his infidelities.

There were mixed reviews from our readers. Some found it bleak and tedious as it is very wordy and long, but the writing is wonderful if you persevere. The characters are well drawn and very human, Helen can be a bit self righteous and preachy with high morals yet also brave enough to defy the law and social norms by leaving Arthur. Markham has a good core yet also proud, prone to jealousy and can be a bit entitled and self absorbed. Most found it a good read and interesting because of Anne's courageous writing dealing with very real issues of her day thus making this book feel more contemporary than her sister's more romantic writings, Emily's *Wuthering Heights* and Charlotte's *Jane Eyre*. A 50/50 recommendation from the group .

*Alison Claffey*

St Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

## **" Invitation to a silent peace walk"**

A group of zen practitioners meet every month to walk in silence for a half an hour, practising staying present , breathing in suffering and breathing out peace and compassion in support of the people affected by the war in Ukraine .

**Who ? All are welcome.**

**When ? Promptly at 2pm every third Sunday.**

**Where? On the grassy area in Thorncliffe Park, just opposite the Russian Embassy on Orwell Road Rathgar.**



# Managing Committee Notice

## Membership Renewal 2022/23

The Managing Committee would like to thank all those who responded to the email regarding Membership Renewal that was circulated in November 2022. If you are a Member of the congregation (*i.e., if you signed the Membership Book at some stage between 1999 and 2022*) and you did not receive a communication regarding the renewal of your membership it is because either

- (1) the email address that we have on record for you is defunct, *or*
- (2) we don't have an email address on record for you.

If you have an email address and didn't receive your copy of the Membership Renewal Form that was sent out in November, please contact us via [treasurerunitarianchurch@gmail.com](mailto:treasurerunitarianchurch@gmail.com) so that the form can be sent to you.

If you don't have an email address the Membership Renewal Form can be sent to you by post or you can pick one up in the church. To have a form sent out to you by post please write to:

The Treasurer  
Unitarian Church  
112 St. Stephen's Green  
Dublin D02 YP23

Completed forms can be returned to the treasurer by email or post, or by dropping them into the locked Donations Box in the church.

**The closing date for receipt of renewal forms  
is 31<sup>st</sup> January 2023**

*Rory Delany*  
Treasurer St Stephen's Green Unitarian Church