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UK Community News

Stockport United Nations International Supper

Night of a thousand dinners

ON SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2002, Stockport Branch of The United Nations Association (UNA) hosted an International Supper and Musical Evening at Trinity Methodist Church and Community Centre, Davenport, Stockport. The event was part of the United Nations international project: "Night Of A Thousand Dinners" – a world-wide event to raise funds for the clearance of an estimated 70 million land mines and unexploded ordnance remaining from recent wars.



Food for thought at the Stockport UN supper

Stockport branch of the UNA has undertaken to raise funds in support of the "Adopt A Minefield" project and has "adopted" a minefield in Cambodia. We have pledged to raise the necessary funds of £22,000 in order to clear this minefield and so help reduce the fatalities, maiming, and economic devastation that are the legacy of uncleared mines.

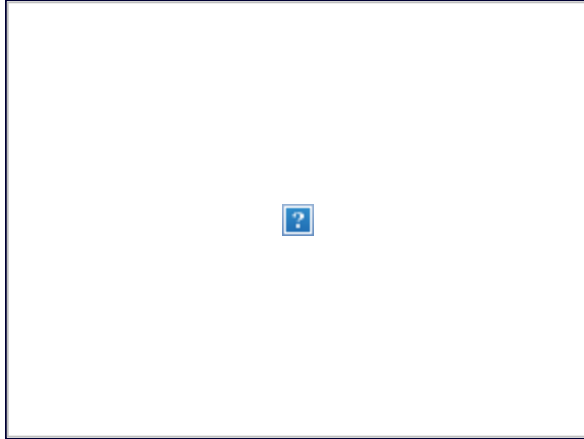
Two members of the Stockport branch have recently visited Cambodia and have been able to give first-hand reports to Stockport UNA of the village concerned and the current state of the minefield clearance. The UNA Executive Committee consists of eight members, three of whom are Bahá'ís, and so, through a previous letter to the Journal, we were able to call upon the support of Bahá'ís throughout the UK (and beyond) in this fund-raising effort. This resulted in some generous offers of help and support, and enabled us to put together a musical programme which included three performances by Bahá'ís as well as some songs from a group of local Bahá'í children.

Stockport UNA welcomed The Mayor of Stockport, Council, David Brailsford, accompanied by his wife, as guests of honour. The audience of around 150 people enjoyed a variety music from around the world and the evening was rounded off with an international buffet supper. We are delighted to say that the event raised £1500. It costs £1 to £2 per square metre to clear a minefield.

One feature of the evening, however, took us all completely by surprise; the Chair of the Action Committee (herself a Quaker) in her introduction to the audience and throughout the musical performances referred repeatedly to Bahá'ís and the Bahá'í Faith. This public reference was neither sought nor expected, and resulted in opportunities to answer questions about the Faith throughout the evening.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all those who participated in the entertainment, to those who prepared the supper, to those who have contacted us with offers of their own fundraising events, and to the friends who were unable to attend the supper, but who sent their generous donations before and after the event. We have now achieved about two thirds of the target and hope to raise the remainder in order to bring the project to a successful conclusion.

Universal House of Justice message presented in Abingdon



MEMBERS OF THE LOCAL SPIRITUAL Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Abingdon presented the Universal House of Justice's letter to the collected religious leaders of Abingdon in Oxfordshire on January 9.

Abingdon has an ecumenical committee comprising leaders of the Catholic, Baptist, Church of England, Quaker, Salvation Army, Methodists and others, so the community was able to present the message to them all at the same time. The Bahá'ís are Ian Digby (presenting) and Susie Howard.

Luton Interfaith Devotional Meeting to celebrate World Religion Day

THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF LUTON held a very successful interfaith meeting to celebrate World Religion Day on Tuesday, January 21. The celebration was called "An Evening of Sacred Music and Verse" and consisted of members of various religious communities presenting music and poetry of a sacred nature. The Bahá'í Community of Luton worked in association with the Luton Council of Faiths to host the event, which was attended by his worship the Mayor of Luton, Councillor Raja Saleem.

A Bahá'í prayer for unity opened the evening followed by a Hindu vandana, to welcome the guests. Verses from the Qur'án and poetry inspired by the Qur'án were also presented. In addition there was a Hindu bhajan, or song of devotion and love, and a Sikh kirtan, in a similar vein. The choir of a local parish church, All Saints in Caddington, also sang three beautiful pieces of church music from various ages and Mr Misaghian of Northampton delighted the audience with his santoor music.

The event was held in a local school, William Austin Junior, whose head teacher and chair of governors was also present. The Bahá'í community in Luton have also built up a good relationship with the Mayor who invited them in September last year to have tea with him at his office.

The Bahá'í of Luton have been endeavouring through their public devotionals to forge links with other groups and organisations in Luton with similar aims. A devotional meeting was held on United Nations Day for instance, which was attended by some Quakers and the next devotional meetings aim to focus on race unity and gender equality.

UK Associations of Bahá'í Women meet in Liverpool

AN HISTORIC MEETING of the four regional Associations of Bahá'í Women took place at the Liverpool Bahá'í Centre on the weekend of January 17-19, 2003.

This meeting was historic because this was the first joint review held by the regional committees. There was wideranging consultation of progress and sharing of good practice. Membership has been built up, several residential weekend retreats have been enjoyed by dozens of women, a regional conference was held in Scotland and a very successful "Give Girls a Voice" national women's conference in Bedford. Many Associations were represented at various external events. We also recognised the essential work that the Office for the Advancement of Women (OAW) has carried out in spearheading and encouraging all these events.

We also discussed the vital role that women are playing in the Five Year Plan, which is a step towards the achievement of world peace. We would also like to re-emphasise that the

whole community (men and women) study the compilation on women. We agreed the importance of continuing individual grass roots initiatives and networking with other local organisations.

We finished the weekend with some shopping together at the coffee and craft shops. We all went away invigorated and inspired by the companionship and a shared vision of the future.

Richmond hosts Tājirih commemoration

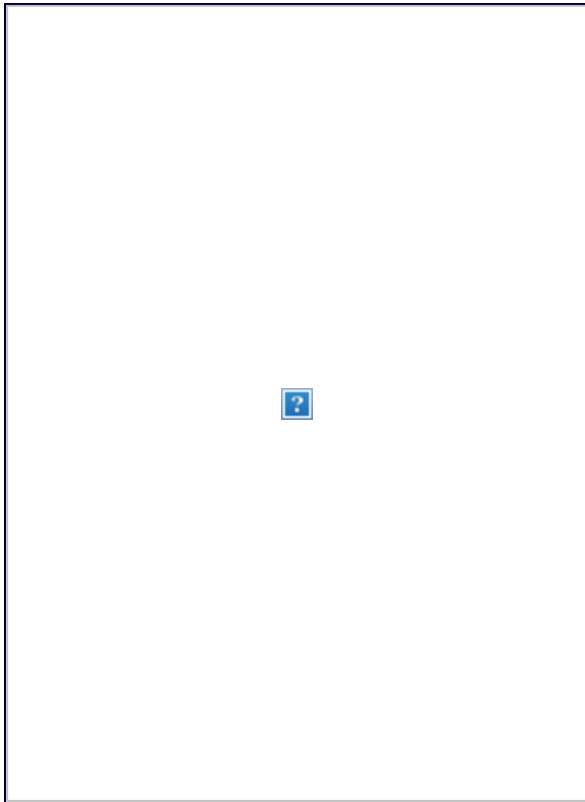
THE BAHĀ'Ā' COMMUNITY of Richmond hosted a commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the martyrdom of the Tājirih on Sunday, December 8, 2002.

The evening was a wonderful success and of the 130 who attended, more than half were non-Bahā'Ā's. The Deputy Mayor, Pat Parsons was among the guests.

The programme which comprised drama, music and chant was directed by Annabel Knight and the actors included Omid Djalili and Dana Haqjoo. Mina Beint and Emma Lewendon were the vocalists and dancer, Olivia Lopez played the spirit of Tājirih.

The guests, especially the non-Bahā'Ā's, were both touched and awed by the simple yet powerful message from the mystical act on the life of Tājirih and the incredible status of women in this era.

Annabel Knight, Omid Djalili, and Olivia Lopez re-enact the martyrdom of Tājirih



Cardiff Lord Mayor hosts Common Statement of Faith Communities

OVER 100 MEMBERS from nine religious communities in Cardiff came together at County Hall in Cardiff Bay for a reception given by the Lord Mayor of Cardiff, Councillor Russell Goodway. The occasion was formally to sign the

“Common Statement of the Faith Communities” document, essentially pledging the City of Cardiff to the commitment of the religious communities to live together in peace and goodwill.



In his welcome, the Bahā'Ā' representative and Cardiff Interfaith Executive Member, Dr Hoshmand Kalami spoke of the uniqueness of this landmark event in the city. “It showed that the apparent religious differences are less significant than common humanity.” He said that there could be no peace globally without this expression of love for all religions. The Cardiff Interfaith Association has a proud history. There is tolerance and goodwill between the communities and he believed that the signing of the document would be one way to break down barriers. Beliefs were not essentially the cause of conflict and that understanding could bring about peaceful coexistence. The five statements were read to the assembly by a Youth member of the Cardiff Bahā'Ā' Community, Miss Taryn Kalami, and Mrs Kathryn Delpak signed on behalf of the Cardiff Bahā'Ā' Community.

Lord Mayor, Councillor Russell Goodway, called the ceremony ground breaking. The time was relevant and the message was clear to the citizens of Cardiff. He said that he believed in the pivotal role of religion in Cardiff. More could be achieved by common endeavour and partnership. He stated that one crucial role for faith communities was to understand social hardship. The voice of the underprivileged needed to be heard, and political functions

of his office were often an impediment.

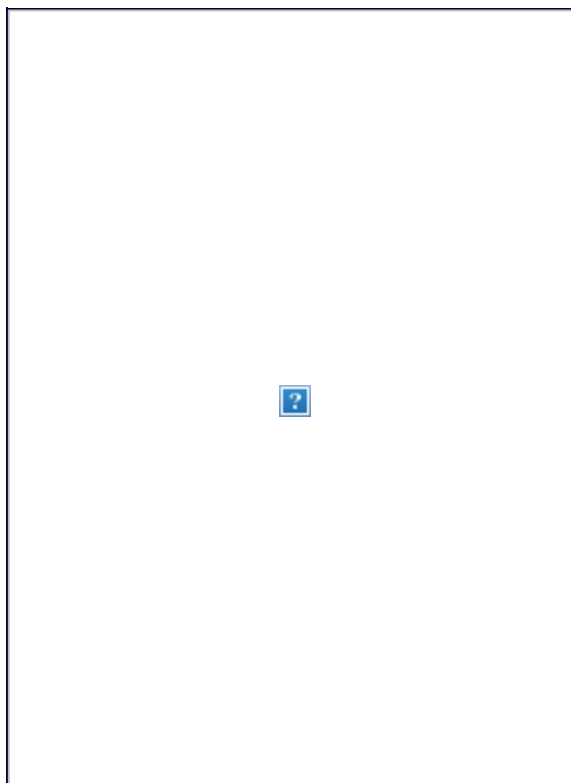
‘Paradise’ at the local children’s classes in Bristol

FOR THE LAST FEW MONTHS, children from the Bristol Bahá’í Community have been meeting every fortnight at the local Bahá’í Centre. They have also been bringing their friends along. The class became involved in an arts project based on the theme “Paradise”, organised by the National Gallery Touring Exhibition. Local Bahá’í artist, Corinne Randall, was approached by Bristol Museum to involve the children in painting work on what the Bahá’í interpretation of Paradise involves. Other local communities were asked to participate as well.

Their work was based on some of the Hidden Words and describes Paradise from three interrelated perspectives: Paradise on Earth, Heavenly Paradise and Nearness to God/Real Paradise.

The exhibition “Paradise” is now on display at the Bristol Museum. The main exhibition involves work by some of the world’s best loved artists – Monet, Poussin, Constable, Gauguin – and the exhibition shows how they created images of paradise or of an ideal world. There is a huge display of the children’s work along with paintings by Lesley Cottle and Corinne Randall. It is definitely worth seeing!

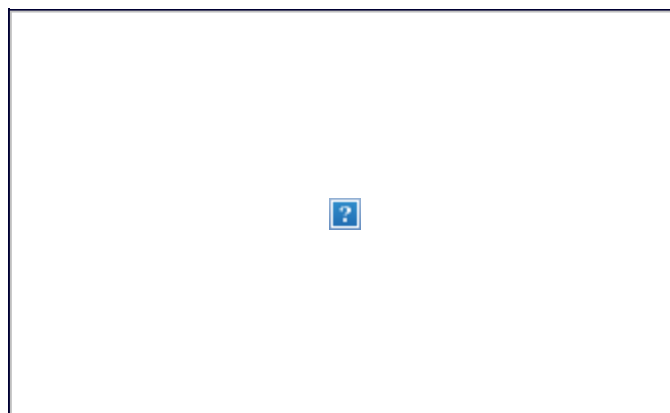
The exhibition will be running until March 30, 2003. Museum opening times: 10.00-5.00 pm every day and admission is free. Bristol Museum is on Queens Road, near to Park Street in the centre of Bristol.



The image above is a postcard of Corinne Randall's painting which can be seen in the exhibition.

Visit to Woking Mosque

ON FRIDAY AFTERNOON, January 17, fifteen Bahá’ís from the Surrey area visited Woking Mosque. We were commemorating the visit of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 90 years ago on the same date in 1913. On that occasion ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was in the company of Christians, Moslems, Jews and other distinguished visitors from East and West. Amongst the company were Prince and Princess Ourossoff, Lord Lamington, Ameer Ali, P.C., Sir Richard and Lady Stepley, Lady Blomfield, Lady Barclay, Lord and Lady Arundel, Shah Mahomed Yehya, Naimutulla Shah, His Highness Mehmet (the former Prime Minister of Persia), Dr J. Pollen (representing the East India Association), Miss Alice Buckton (Peace Society) and Mr G.R.S. Mead (“Quest” Magazine).



Friends on the steps of Woking mosque

The Bahá’ís present were representatives of several different countries – England, India, Persia, Tunisia and Zambia. We came from Guildford, Godalming, Leatherhead, Camberley, Engfield Green, Woking and Bracknell. As it was a Friday, Woking Mosque was very busy with hundreds of local Moslems visiting for prayer but we had kindly been

allocated our own time there which allowed us to pray privately and for the Tablet of Visitation of 'Abdu'l-Bah to be read aloud in the mosque.

Afterwards the Bah's were warmly welcomed by the Secretary of the Shah Jahan Mosque, Munawar Ahmed, at a reception held in the Memorial House. This was the same place in which 'Abdu'l-Bah had been warmly received after his visit to the Mosque ninety years earlier.

Bibhas Neogi from Godalming read out the article which was printed in The Surrey Advertiser on Wednesday, January 22, 1913, entitled "An Interesting Gathering" which recorded 'Abdu'l-Bah's visit to the mosque and the address given by him on that occasion.

The local newspaper article stated that: "His Excellency, who was in Persian dress, motored from London to the Memorial House, near the Mosque. In company with about 50 guests, he partook of lunch, served in the Oriental style, and after a short talk he walked into the sacred building to pray. Upon the entrance steps he subsequently received the greetings of some of the assembly, whom he addressed in Persian, his speech being interpreted by Sohrab.

In his address 'Abdu'l-Bah said the causes of difference were blind dogmas and imitations. Each one of the religions of God had two parts, the first of which was the foundation, and belonged to the world of morality. It was immutable and unchangeable, it meant justice, equality, faith and benevolence. Now the century of light had dawned, universal love must be established, and all religions must show affection towards each other. We were servants of one God, whose beauties were all-encircling, so let us rise to render thanksgiving unto Him, and let war and strife be banished from the face of the earth.

After Abbas Effendi had acknowledged his warm reception, many of the visitors donned sandals and inspected the interior of the building, and special interest was taken in a copy of the Koran, which was a gift of Queen Victoria. Tea was then served in the memorial House, and the visitors subsequently dispersed."

The friends gathered were able to view a photograph of 'Abdu'l-Bah taken at the Mosque at the time of his visit in January 1913. In addition, reference was made to 'Abdu'l-Bah's stay at Vanners farm in Byfleet and to his visit to the Brooklands aviation ground.

We are grateful to the Bah's of Guildford who initiated this visit to Woking Mosque on the 90th anniversary of 'Abdu'l-Bah's memorable and historic visit.

Thelma Batchelor

Friends celebrate World Religion Day in Omagh

THERE HAVE BEEN BAH'S in Omagh since 1980 and World Religion Day has been one of our focal events, held every year since 1984. Over one hundred adults, youth and children attended this twentieth celebration, in Omagh's Public Library, on January 19. For the second year in succession (presumably at the emphatic request of Omagh District Council), World Religion Day coincided with the staging in Omagh of the exhibition, "In Good Faith" (featuring the faiths that are present in Northern Ireland), produced under the auspices of The Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum.

The theme of the programme was "The Oneness of Religion" and an excellent audio-visual presentation, prepared by 17 year old Colin Palin, from the nearby community of Derry/ Londonderry, set the scene for the afternoon. Mr Eric Bullick, headmaster of Omagh Integrated Primary School commented on how moved he felt, while watching it and that, "...some of the World Leaders should have been present to see it"! In fact, he was there as he had brought along children from his school choir to sing and this brought a special happiness and joy to the event.

All the readings were taken from the Bah's Writings. Mahan Gornall (Magherafelt) and Dorothy Riordan (Craigavon), along with three students from Omagh's Drumragh

Integrated College, read beautifully. It was particularly pleasing to hear these young people read the words of Bahá'í and 'Abdu'l-Bahá with such reverence and feeling. This must have been, in no small way due to the enthusiasm and encouragement of their headmistress, Lady Rosemary Salisbury, who herself read movingly, at the Táhirih Anniversary, which Omagh Community held in October, last year.

The Chairman of Omagh District Council, Mr Pat McDonnell, also attended and although he did not come prepared to make a speech, he was happy to say a few words at the end of the programme. He said how he empathised with the sentiments of the audio-visual programme and with the readings. He remarked that, during his year of office as chairman, "..."of all the people I have met and spoken to, none have impressed me more than the Bahá'ís and what they are trying to do in the community." He said also that he had heard Bahá'ís being interviewed on the local Q101.2 West radio station on several occasions and that it was pleasing that this means of communication is being used in a positive way and not just for entertainment.

The afternoon ended with refreshments, when attendees and contributors had the opportunity to mix and chat with each other.

Rosemary Jamshádi and Malcolm Lake

News from East Devon

DUE TO THE BOUNDARY changes the original East Devon Bahá'í Community is now divided into Exmouth, Honiton, Sidmouth and Tale Vale (which is near Honiton).

Stephanie Houghton writes from Tale Vale: "I am currently working as a Learning Support Assistant at our local primary school in Payhembury and took this as an opportunity to ask whether I could take an assembly on Bahá'í's birthday

(which turned out to be our head teacher's birthday as well)! We began with the Red Grammar song, "I think you're wonderful" which the children had already practiced with their teacher. I then briefly explained who Bahá'í was. Using a mirror and torch, we then looked at the extract from the Gleanings about God's light being reflected in us as mirrors, and how if the mirrors are dirty with the 'dross' of this world (Vaseline and talc used here), God's light can't be reflected. We finished with the prayer "O God Guide Me" using the Lakota Indian hand signs to accompany it."

As Dorothy Bruce will be pioneering in Ireland for more than a year, Dorothy Hutton who is now 84 years old is an isolated believer in Exmouth. She says that she has had a good response to The Universal House of Justice's message to Religious Leaders from the Reverend David Harding, a retired Methodist Minister, who founded the Exmouth Peace Group. In his reply he said "Thank you very much for sending me that wonderful statement, so very positive, good, useful and challenging. Let me know if I can help further with its distribution, debate, influence etc."

Cathy Gray reports from Sidmouth, where she is also an isolated believer, that the Sidmouth Quakers sent a warm reply to The Universal House of Justice's message saying that the message was "...timely and most welcome." They made the message available to their members, one of whom made contact and hopefully some inter-faith activity will be possible as this was discussed.

In Honiton, Dermot and Roushan Knox presented the Message to the Rector of St Paul's Church in the High Street. She said that she would read it, pass it on to her committee members to read and then hopefully display it on a table in the church where there is other literature.

They also sent the Message to a personal friend, Canon Neil Collings of Exeter Cathedral; this was with Exeter Local Assembly's permission. He replied, "I have read the document with huge interest and I am going to circulate it to my colleagues in the Chapter. As you know, having visited Lebanon a couple of years ago, I have a deep interest in the views and objectives of the Bahá'í Faith."

Infuse 'Website of the Month' award

INFUSE, THE BAHÁ'Í youth project, (www.infuse.org.uk) has recently received the "Website of the Month" award from the UK Youth charity.

UK Youth is the largest nationally registered youth work charity in the UK. UK Youth exists to support and develop high quality work and educational opportunities for all young people. The network's members represent more than 750,000 young people and is supported by some 45,000 volunteer and part-time youth workers representing more than 7,000 youth groups, clubs and projects throughout the UK.

www.youth.org.uk is the leading Youth Work community for young people and Youth Workers using the Internet for learning.



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