

Brighton Unitarian Church

Annual Report 2021



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**A sacred space
in the heart of Brighton**

Committee 2021

Officers:

Joint Chairs: Jo Howarth & Susie Courtault

Secretary: Francis Clark-Lowes

Treasurer: Kathy Pitt

Other Committee Members:

Helen White

Heather Duff

Chairs' Report

In 2021 we gradually opened up from lockdown into the new normal. We lost people we loved, some of whom moved elsewhere: Jef Jones our Lay Leader in March; Martin our caretaker; Martin Whitell, our District Minister and several members. Others very sadly passed away; Peter Badger, Stephen Whittington and Jeannette Cragg. Some we still hope to see walk through our red doors whenever they are happy to return.

We've also seen new faces, or half faces, as we greeted new masked congregation members and our superb new Caretaker Tom Vidler, who has also facilitated our return to the Church for services.

The new volunteer trustees: Jo Howarth, Susie Courtault, Helen White, Heather Duff, Francis Clark-Lowes and Kathy Pitt, met monthly on Zoom. Running our church has meant learning many new skills just to maintain our core activities, the services and spiritual community, without a Leaders support.

For services we are hugely grateful to the pioneering online Zoom hosts: Helen White, Heather and Jen Barton, doing an incredibly demanding job holding a congregation and visiting speakers, with all their various idiosyncrasies. Thanks too to those service leaders who took the risk and succeeded in creating a sacred space in each of our homes.

Following the Government's 'roadmap' we got back into the Church in May, with the intrepid Stephen Crowther leading a Zoom hybrid service, facilitated by Jen Barton. Jen worked many hours with Pete Tulley, setting up a workable system so, as the Church reopened, those who wanted could stay home and still socialize afterwards. Although this was technically complex, we carried on until the numbers we had in the Church far exceeded those at home. For now we hope to continue to livestream on You Tube as long as it is needed, and we can afford it.

Without Jef, and with travel restrictions, we joined many other churches in the South East who found it hard to find service leaders. So we are very grateful to the Pulpit Rota team (Trisha Purchas, Susie and Helen White) for their miraculous work in keeping the pulpit rota full, to Plymouth and Kensington for inviting us to join them online once a month, to Jen Barton again for co-ordinating services and liaising between all the people involved, to Kathy for finding pianists and for Pamela, Stuart and Kathy herself for playing. New service leaders have joined us from far and wide, including Rev Fay Barratt from Manchester and Dr Eleanor Chiari from London, while our own Stephen Crowther and Susie Courtault held most regular services. We have also enjoyed congregation-led services.

Although Rev Duncan Voice (Horsham/Ditchling) has offered pastoral support, many have been feeling the loss of a spiritual anchor after Jef's departure. However, this time has allowed us to have different voices ministering to us, the essence of Unitarianism.

New normal is still spaced chairs, singing in masks, donating online and lighting separate candles rather than passing objects between us. But otherwise, services are familiar, and our church has returned to being the spiritual oasis it always was for many of us. We now enjoy post-service coffee off the trolley as the weather is getting colder, after our summer visits to Pavilion Gardens café, thanks to the refreshments volunteers.

At the height of the pandemic many missed our sacred space so, when able, Susie opened the church up on a Wednesday lunchtime: lighting a candle and holding a meditative space, where people could safely come and be. Pamela Nickels joined to play piano between the times of stillness, and folk have come in and sat for a while appreciating the

peace. On Fridays our very popular lunch-time concerts restarted, thanks to Marion and Phyllida Simpson. Meanwhile 'Heart and Soul' has continued online two Thursdays a month, where it can reach out to participants beyond Brighton. Thanks to Katherine Malt-house for coordinating these evenings of themed prayer, meditative practice and deep sharing. The prayer tree has also continued every week.

Throughout this time our building has come alive with hirers and events thanks to Ashleigh Ward, our Church Manager, so we are gradually building up our income to a point where we can think about employing a new spiritual leader.

Thanks to Fanny Tulley, Ann Woodhead and Jen Barton for initial research and liaison with the General Assembly about the process, and to John and Julia Badger for joining them to create our 'search party'. Once we had completed the requisite 6 months without a leader, they organised two 'Congregational Conversations' to ensure everyone could be involved in creating our future. The first was a lively and interesting introduction facilitated by Jo Howarth. The second, facilitated by professional community and organizational development expert Yvonne Rivers, threw up many interesting questions for us to take forward to the next stage.

We are grateful for our committee member Heather's extensive work helping us with the human resources input, both in our leader search and in employing our caretaker.

Our first 'conversation' coincided with a fabulous weekend of celebration of our 200 years as a church - postponed last year because of Covid and held in November. Ashleigh organized a Friday night music evening with a light show projected onto the church exterior. On Saturday there was a market and workshops with our hirers, to give an idea of exactly what is on offer here. On Sunday we welcomed Jim Corrigan, recently in post as District Minister, who joined us for our service - 'Unitarian church Brighton past, present and future'. Several members went to Pinocchio's with Jim for a celebration afterwards.

In November we also joined with the Interfaith Contact Group, the Quakers, Fabrica and the Dome for a 'Day of Compassion' - Brighton and Hove's tribute to the NHS workers who served us all so well during the pandemic. After our service we offered a Death Café, led by Fanny.

Since leaving as Chair Caroline Drijver has kept us up to date with all these adaptations to our strange times in the digital newsletter and will continue as we move into the new year.

Jo Howarth and Susie Courtault (Co-Chairs, Nov 25, 2021)

Secretary's Report

I took on the role of secretary at the last AGM at a difficult time for the church and a very busy one for me. We were in the middle of lockdown, and Christine and I were moving house. Through the year I have also been preoccupied with other matters in my own life, some of them unforeseen and requiring urgent attention.

I had been on the committee between 2009 and 2014, but much had changed since then. I therefore needed to catch up, in particular with our new status as a Charitable Incorporated Institution (CIO). I also felt a need to define what my role would be. My previous experience as a secretary preceded the advent of online communication. The Secretary's role as a conduit for communication between the outside world and the organization s/he serves has largely been replaced by a less defined situation where messages fly back and

forth to multiple recipients, with the division of responsibility for dealing with them sometimes being unclear. This is a wider social problem of our time, and will hopefully in time be resolved.

I felt I could more profitably occupy my time focusing on the mechanics of our operation, and the important matter of record keeping. On the first, I laid out a timetable to be followed each month by myself, the Committee and Ashleigh, the Office Manager. In the event, there were problems, some of them on my side, but I hope my successor will build on this experience. On the second matter, I was concerned to ensure that the committee minutes were a useful record, and to this purpose I liaised with our minute-taker, Ashleigh.

Notes on the Secretary's role, and on minute taking, together with the timetable referred to, have been filed for future reference.

A task which remains outstanding, but which I didn't have time for, is the updating of our Policy and Procedure document. This was produced by a sub-committee consisting of Caroline Drijver, Paul Taylor and myself some eight years ago, and it is now out of date in a number of respects. Jen Barton, our Election Manager, has been interpreting it in the light of the new constitution introduced when we became a CIO in 2018, but would find her task easier if the two documents were properly aligned with one another.

Treasurer's and Independent Examiner's Reports

Our financial year runs from 1 October - 30 September. Many of the recent 12 months were spent in lockdown, with little or no activity permitted in either our church or the hall. Bearing that in mind, our accounts show a healthier picture than might have been anticipated. And thanks to Ashleigh's initiative and stewardship, our hall hirings have been on a par with those for the same period in the previous year (although it should be remembered that in a non-pandemic year such as 2018/2019, our income reached £46K). However, our income from Rites of Passage has been hit hard, especially as weddings nationally have been in a state of flux and uncertainty.

We were the beneficiaries of two legacies from past members: one from Steve Whittington (£5,000) and the other from Jeanette Cragg (£20,000). These have been invested with our original £75,000 with BNY Mellon. The committee intends to use the legacies at a future date for specific Memorial Projects.

Other positives include the completion of the North windows by Pete Tulley. They now look beautiful and - most importantly - are water-tight. We received a grant of £10,000 from New Gravel Pit Fund (a Unitarian charity) to help offset the cost of this project.

An obvious saving for the last half-year has been a Minister/Lay-leader's stipend as Jef left us at the end of March. This situation will change and it is to be hoped that by the time of writing the next report we will have a new incumbent in place. Various costings continue to be done in respect of this. Finding a new minister will continue to be the main item on the committee's agenda.

The day-to-day work of overseeing our finances continues to be done by Christine Clark-Lowes. Her ability to make sure that all our financial concerns are in order is second-to-none. The church owes her a huge debt of thanks for her patience and expertise. As, of course, do I - thank you Christine!

Kathy Pitt
December 2021

Account activity for Annual General Meeting January 2022

	FY 2020-2021	FY 2019-2020
A RECEIPTS		
1 Donations & Offertory		
To General a/c	10,385.69	11,503.14
To Gold a/c	429.90	658.14
Legacy	0.00	0.00
Subtotal	10,815.59	12,161.28
2 HMRC		
Gift Aid tax reclaim	2,228.45	2,893.62
Subtotal	2,228.45	2,893.62
3 Grants		
General Baptist Assembly	385.00	385.00
National Churches Trust	0.00	1,500.00
Highgate Hill	900.00	1,850.00
New Gravel Pit	10,000.00	0.00
Hibbert Trust	600.00	0.00
LDPA	137.40	1,000.00
Subtotal	12,022.40	4,735.00
4 Bank and Investment activity		
Investment income	0.00	0.00
Bank interest other accounts	2.47	88.80
Subtotal	2.47	88.80
5 Lettings and fees		
Hirings and other fees	27,785.85	27,385.87
PRS payments from hirers	0.00	211.08
Subtotal	27,785.85	27,596.95
6 Other income		
Rites of passage	870.00	3,988.50
VAT claimed back	0.00	0.00
General Fundraising activity	1,385.22	2,067.56
Charitable donations	0.00	0.00
GA Quota subs rec'd	35.00	0.00
Insurance claim	0.00	0.00
Miscellaneous Income	928.38	597.10
Subtotal	3,218.60	6,653.16
TOTAL RECEIPTS	56,073.36	54,128.81
B PAYMENTS		
1 Ministry		
Lay Leader's stipend	9,434.74	18,632.42
Ministry expenses	360.00	896.49
Pulpit fees paid	1,400.00	777.45
Subtotal	11,194.74	20,306.36
2 HMRC		
Tax and NI	4,251.00	5,441.77
Subtotal	4,251.00	5,441.77

3 Support costs

Gifts, flowers, etc.	1,095.42	572.38
Travel expenses (eg GA fees; bus pass Jef)	86.38	708.41
Rites of Passage fees and expenses	677.00	731.00
Committee expenses	126.35	1,460.33
Organ and piano	317.00	1,086.00
Printing, advertising, etc.	234.00	102.40
General Fundraising costs	0.00	0.00
Charitable donations	0.00	175.00
Denomination subscriptions	1,670.00	1,840.00
Subscriptions to periodicals	60.00	60.00
Subtotal	4,266.15	6,735.52

4 Management & Administration

Church Manager's salary & pension	14,043.73	12,959.24
Cleaner's salary	2,650.46	2,667.04
Caretaking salaries	4,628.53	12,430.15
Record Keeper	2,097.31	2,079.96
Light and heat	2,494.34	3,213.51
Water rates	322.02	345.85
Telephone	576.83	412.70
Repairs and renewals	11,461.98	22,019.69
Furniture and equipment	1,427.75	1,832.61
Kitchen supplies	377.40	516.95
Postage and stationery	226.06	135.06
Website, streaming, etc.	489.59	75.00
Investment	0.00	0.00
Insurance	3,218.04	3,037.89
Performing Rights Society	270.91	518.96
Accountancy and payroll	685.00	785.00
Bank charges Gen a/c	87.50	66.00
Hiring/key refund	104.50	300.00
Subtotal	45,161.95	63,395.61

TOTAL PAYMENTS **64,873.84** **95,879.26**

Funding

General a/c	17,910.69	6,155.96
Gold a/c	19,489.64	39,831.60
HSBC a/c	230.86	430.86
Petty Cash	6.74	19.99
Other Floats	80.00	80.00
Total	37,717.93	46,518.41

Balance from last financial year	46,518.41	88,268.86
Receipts - Payments this year	(8,800.48)	(41,750.45)
	37,717.93	46,518.41

BNY Mellon investment portfolio **111,098.67**

Note: figure shows investment value as of 30 September 2021.

No transactions on investment will be shown, as any income is re-invested.

Note: lump sum of £25,000 transferred from General a/c to investment portfolio September 2020.

BRIGHTON UNITARIAN CHURCH
REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT EXAMINER TO THE BUC TREASURER
YEAR ENDED 30TH SEPTEMBER 2021

Overview

The Books of Account were found to accurately represent the financial position of the Brighton Unitarian Church for the Year Ended 30th September 2021. It should be noted that the Books are maintained on a cash basis, rather than on an accruals basis.

Financial Statements

I have checked the FY 2020/21 AGM Statement and agreed the final presentation. Figures from the General Account cashbook and other sources have been carried forward correctly to this statement. I can also confirm that the closing balances are correctly stated and that the FY 2019/20 comparatives have also been brought forward correctly.

BNY Mellon

This investment was established in July 2019 with an initial investment of £75,000. I can confirm that the value of the investment now stands at £111,098.66 as at 30th September 2021.

General Account & Building Appeal Fund Cashbooks

In line with usual practice, the Books of Account were subject to an interim audit as at 30th June 2021. This change has been made to reduce the volume of work at the year-end given the time constraints at this time. The change has proved very useful and the practice is now an established routine.

It should also be noted that due to the pandemic, the number of transactions were less than usual due to the reduced activity in the financial year, affecting both income and expenses.

The General Account is structured in such a way that record keeping is transparent, enabling more convenient auditing. A convenient record is also kept of receipts not banked and payments not cashed at each month end. Such record keeping reduces risk and enables greater control and understanding of the 'Finances'.

Receipts

Receipts were sampled and both the receipt in the bank account and its accurate recording in the cashbook confirmed.

Payments

Backing documentation was examined for all invoiced payments with a value of £50 and above. The majority of documents carried sufficient payment details to enable the appropriate records to be validated. The same invoices were traced to entries in the BUC General Bank Account and all were found to be accurate. Invoices were generally booked correctly and carried forward correctly to the financial statements.

Petty Cash

The petty cash account was checked for the accurate recording of funding transfers; addition and balances carried forward were checked for accuracy.

Generally

Record keeping was thorough and detailed, with little risk of material misstatement. This has the benefit of not only facilitating the audit, but more importantly, evidences good financial control and minimises the risk of error.

Donald Simmons ACMA CGMA
27th November 2021

Office Manager's Report

It has been another strange year as predicted but I am very happy to see a normal level of hirings in the last quarter.

2020 lettings and fees - £28,936.71
2021 lettings and fees - £28,205.85

The year started off in lockdown but the committee and I decided to let the support groups carry on meeting inside the hall. This was in-line with the Government guidance at the time and we believed that now more than ever it was important for these support groups to meet.

As well as Jef leaving at the start of the year our caretaker, Martin Holliday, left the church in February. During March we recruited and interviewed for a new caretaker with the help of Jef and Heather Duff. In April we hired our new caretaker, Tom Vidler. At the final interview he got to meet the Committee Chairs and we all agreed that his clear empathy would work well here in the church especially around the more sensitive events we hold here. Tom has been a great asset to the church, and I constantly get good feedback about him. Barbara Lowe has been working hard keeping the church clean and we have her in 3 days a week now as part of our covid-secure policy instead of 2 days a week previously. Thanks to the Sarah West and the LDPA we were able to invest in some good quality streaming equipment, this means that we now can livestream services and offer this to hirers as an extra hire cost.

Towards late spring the committee and I decided to let people in for rehearsals and streaming sessions (with no audience), again in line with the Government advice. I signed us to a new company called Find Mushroom, which is like Airbnb but for musical instruments, it has been very successful for us with people hiring our piano, and we have become their top user in the Brighton area. I also made an agreement with our neighbour, Pinocchio's, to use the portico once again in April and hired out one of the parking spaces permanently. So we were starting to get some income again even when events couldn't happen.

At the end of March things started to change with the pandemic in the UK and some small, controlled events were allowed back but most were still unsure, so Brighton Fringe delayed their festival for another month. I was able to move everyone over to June and we had about a third of the normal amount of Fringe hirers.

We restarted our Friday Lunchtime Concert's in May with a limited audience capacity, over the year the audience numbers have built up again and we are averaging at the same capacity now as before the pandemic.

June was a setback as a lot of event managers were expecting to put on events after 21st June when all restrictions were going to be dropped. So we saw a lot of cancellations in July, when the date was changed, but I managed to move most of them till after 19th July.

There is an ongoing problem with graffiti on the outside of our church, but because of the CCTV we put outside of last year we managed to catch the main culprit and handed over the footage to the police. The police caught the suspect, arrested him and took him to court where he pled guilty. Now thanks to Peter Tulley we have repainted the church and added an anti-graffiti layer which would make it easier to remove in 6 months' time. Kathy Pitt is now going to try and claim the cost from our insurers.

July and August were quiet months for us, hiring wise. They normally are the quiet months but this year I think a lot of people were travelling to see family so it was even quieter than normal.

From September for the first time in my job here, bookings were returning and we have been almost fully booked for the last quarter of the year.

In October we decided to celebrate our Bicentenary (2020) as we didn't get to celebrate too much last year. This was a full weekend event with live music, poems and performances on Friday night. On Saturday we had a craft fair and stalls and demos from our regular hirers and the special Bicentenary Service on the Sunday. This was a successful event with a lot of new people coming inside the building and seeing it for the first time. The bands, artists and regular hirers all really appreciated the event and would like to know if we are going to do something similar again.

Our current regular hirers are as follows:

Pathways to Health – low-cost acupuncture for people affected by stress, anxiety, depression, drug and alcohol, and those living with HIV.

Amaze – which gives support to families with special education needs and disabilities.

African Drumming – a jazz appreciation group from the University of the Third Age.

A Russian choir – a pop choir and an amateur choir.

Kids groups – we now have 3 different such groups, with another one starting in January 2022.

Beau Natural – frequent craft fairs

Also the following support groups:

Alcohol Anonymous

Cocaine Anonymous

Marijuana Anonymous

2022 is looking really good in the diary and I hope that is a sign of a good, busy year for us.



