

Brighton **Unitarian** *Church*

*Annual Report and Accounts
relating to the Financial Year
2022/23*



*Presented at the Annual General Meeting
held at Brighton Unitarian Church
Sunday 28th January 2024 at 12.30pm*

Minister Elect

Jennifer Sanders

Committee

Joanne Howarth (Co-Chair)

Rev Susie Courtault (Co-Chair)

Francis Clark-Lowes (Treasurer)

Helen White (Secretary)

Julia Badger

Trisha Purchas

Finance Officer

George Dean

Church Administrator / Venue Manager

Catherine Stead

Caretaker / Duty Manager

Stuart Lee

Membership: 33

Co-Chairs' Report

We started this year with no Minister and a brand-new Administrator and Caretaker. Our Church has been changing and growing and our job on the Management Committee has been to support and nourish the wonderful people that keep our beautiful building open and our wider community supported. Grateful thanks to Cat Stead for her inspirational work running the Church. Thanks to Stuart Lee for being our warm and practical face for hirers, and for maintaining the live-streaming of services beyond the pandemic; and to Barbara Lowe for keeping things shipshape and clean. Special thanks to Christine Clark-Lowes: not just as an impeccable financial record keeper but whose longstanding knowledge of our Church has been invaluable in all our decision making. She is retiring in September 2024 and we will miss her hugely.

In March we were joined by Jennifer Sanders as our Minister Elect. Jennifer is with us for 3 days a week, writing and leading 2 services a month and doing a wealth of community and spiritual duties the rest of the time. Currently they are still studying to be a Minister, and their Unitarian tutors have been on hand to help us with our transition to having a leader. At our Congregational meeting (to acknowledge Jennifer's first 6 months) everyone appreciated the highlights of the summer, including the anniversary picnic, the Death Café and hosting the Unitarian LGBTQ+ exhibition for Pride.

Jennifer was particularly valued for the way they dealt with the shocking news of the death in May of Jef Jones, our much-loved friend and retired Lay Leader. They brought together and held our spiritual community, as well as his family and friends in the wider Unitarian movement: organising vigils and reaching out to anyone who needed support. In early September the Congregation, alongside Jef's son Micky, opened its doors for a celebration of Jef's life. People shared their knowledge of Jef's favourite hymns and music and read some of the poems he had been working on latterly and which he was keen for us to share. We were honoured that Micky read a poem himself. Jef will be profoundly missed by all of us he inspired so much at this Church.

We also sadly lost our longstanding member Anne Antram in January, whose family has given us one of her beautiful paintings to put in the vestry.

Our Friday Lunchtime Concerts are just getting better and better thanks to Cat, Phillida and Marion. Lunchtime reflection continues on a Wednesday with Jennifer and with Pamela playing piano, as well as regular weddings, baby blessings and funerals in our sacred space.

FUSE was in June this year, and a large group of us went to Aylesford Priory where we took part in workshops and listened to an inspiring speaker on the theme of Seeking Paradise. This annual gathering of Unitarians from the Southeast is a wonderfully revitalizing event to be part of.

Practically, we have been working hard to modernize our Church and make it more sustainable. Our old boiler finally crunched to a halt. After months of research on Heat pumps, we had to admit the technology is not yet there for our needs, so we have stayed with gas for now. Meanwhile Jennifer has been working with Eco Church to clean up our act, and in the office they are overhauling our muddled computer systems to be more streamlined and closer to paper free.

The way we donate has revolutionised: though some miss handing around the collection bags, direct debits and our card reader are much preferred by others. Livestreaming has been an ongoing issue. We started in Lockdown with some basic kit, however, the huge costs to upgrade the quality have been the subject of much debate. Big thanks to Pete Tulley, our maintenance saviour, for all he has done to bring the sound up to scratch.

Many thanks to all those who have contributed to our Sunday services, we could not exist without your help. To Helen Lee and Simon for co ordinating the coffee makers, and all of you who have stepped into those important jobs. To our musicians Kathy, Pamela, Stuart Deeks, Nicola and Zhanna and to Beth for decorating our Church, before moving to Hastings. To those of you, like Brian Trisha, Bella, Matthew, Fanny and Diana who have led and contributed to community services; and to all the visiting speakers who have come, or livestreamed, from afar: we always value your input on Service leaders you would like us to invite.

Thanks to Stuart Deeks for starting the Irregular Choir. It meets when people are free, anyone is welcome and it is a thriving new addition to our church worship.

I personally want to thank those have helped with communication and research while I have been away from Brighton. To Jen Barton, Fanny Tulley and Ann Woodhead, to the Heart and Soul team including Katherine Malthouse; and Caroline Drijver for the invaluable *Newsletter*.

Most of all, thanks to the Trustees who commit monthly to dealing with the nitty gritty of the business of our venue, so we can afford to keep the Church open and have a Minister. All this means we can meet on a Sunday in our calm, spiritual space, free to open our hearts and breathe. Thank you: Trisha Purchas for your fundraising; Helen White for your designing and research; George Dean for explaining the figures so clearly. Thank you for everything and I wish you peace as you move on: Francis Clark-Lowes, Julia Badger and my dear fellow Chair Susie Courtault.

Jo Howarth with Susie Courtault
Co-Chairs

Minister Elect's Report

I first walked through the red doors of BUC back in 2011 to support one of Stephen Crowther's early services. Little did I know that 12 years later, at the start of 2023, I would be working my last few weeks as Lay Pastor at Hastings and preparing to join Brighton Unitarian Church as your Minister Elect.

There was a growing anticipation in the first 3 months of the year for us both as we approached the start of a new chapter in our church - and I was met with some degree of relief when I finally arrived! The past two years had been an exhausting time for the committee and the church: seeking a new minister, other staff changes and the pandemic. So, it was a welcome opportunity for the committee to let go of some of the enormous holding that had occurred.

Just before taking my first service as your Minister Elect at the end of March someone pointed out I had a flat tyre! They jokingly said: "you're not going anywhere now!" It was definitely a sign! I want to say thank you for your welcome in the first few weeks of ministry. Although many knew me as a congregant and member, it was a huge change for us all to get used to and I appreciate your support.

This was made all the more challenging by the death of Jef Jones, BUC former Lay Leader, just 5 weeks into my ministry. It was a difficult time for many of you as you grieved this loss with confusion, shock, sadness and seemingly no formal way to say your goodbyes. I saw how many of you looked after each other at this time and am both grateful and honoured to have led you through this difficult time. The church had two services in response to Jef's death within days and later in the year held a service of thanksgiving for him. There were many involved in making this happen and I express my thanks to them here for their support and hard work. Many attended this service - those who had known Jef as their Lay Leader, as a friend and colleague, father and fellow Unitarian. The service reflected the richness of Jef's writings of poetry, services and articles - as well as a number of personal tributes and, of course, some of his favourite music. In time, his last set of poems will be published and shared in the church.

The summer brought us a celebration of our 203rd Anniversary with a picnic in the grounds of the Royal Pavilion - a nod to the Prince Regent who over 200 years ago sold the land where our building was established.

We had a gathering in the woods at Stanmer Park to celebrate the summer solstice and there was a large contingent of us who attended FUSE (the Festival of Unitarians in the South East). PRIDE is such a huge celebration in Brighton, and we played our part by opening the church over the weekend offering a quiet place for revellers as well as an opportunity to look at the LGBT+ voices pop up exhibition. It was a joyful and busy weekend including an impromptu blessing of a couple who had just got engaged!

We said goodbye for now to Stephen Crowther, a member of our church who took the decision to step back from leading services at BUC and the district to support his husband, Charlie. We sent our best wishes at his last service in October.

Our Sunday services have been rich with a mixture of established and new service leaders including the President of the General Assembly, Vince McCully, in October who led a service complete with puppets, Ann Howell, Social Action Officer for the General Assembly, and Rev Julio Torres from Lewisham who will return in 2024 along with some new faces.

There is a rich talent of singers, songwriters, musicians, readers, actors and writers in our congregation - and it brings me great joy to include this in our Sunday services along with our established pianists who have brought such an eclectic mix of music. Unitarian services at BUC are a place for all and I look forward to discovering more hidden talent amongst us in 2024 to broaden our inclusive worship.

The Wednesday Quiet Reflection grows slowly with two or three that come when able and an ongoing appreciation that the church is open more for private prayer and group reflection. In addition, from January Reiki Healing will be offered on a Wednesday from 2-4pm by Mike, a regular at the church.

We ran our first 6-week course in late Autumn focusing on Prayer and Meditation and a new course will run in February and early summer 2024, along with the opportunity for those that wish to have occasional worship in nature.

There has always been the opportunity for those coming to church for a while to think about becoming a member and this is something I'd like to develop into a more meaningful spiritual commitment; acknowledging and celebrating our new members in a special service, the opportunity for existing members to revisit their own commitment and a chance for those who are new or considering this to understand more what this means. To reflect this, we will hold a membership service in the early part of 2024.

There is so much more to do: to reach those that are searching for a spiritual path that they can be fully present as themselves, to explore what it means to be a Unitarian in the changing landscape of world events, and to look at how we can offer a variety of events, courses, worship and community activities in addition to the Sunday services. It is important that as a community we decide together where best we can focus our plans, talents, skills and resources - and at the AGM we will begin our discussion together around our hopes and plans regarding social action and how we as a community can support causes that need our help in the Brighton area.

On the rare occasion which brings an opportunity to draw breath, I am struck by the diversity of groups that use our most precious building. Our church has been

full to bursting on many occasions this year and then settles itself in quietness for those that enter to light a candle and feel the peace and tranquility and sacredness of our church.

I feel blessed to be your Minister Elect in such a diverse and everchanging role with no two days the same. That brings with it the responsibility and honour to lead and serve you spiritually.

As I finish my last few training assignments, the hope is that I will complete my Viva in time to join the Roll of Ministers at the AGM of the GA in April 2024 complete with an ordination and celebration at BUC in the Spring.

My door is open to you all to come and ask questions, make suggestions, share your spiritual path. There has been a growing need for pastoral care and with the continued development of the vestry, we can provide a safe and supportive space to explore these questions of faith.

As I write, we are about to enter into the week leading up to Christmas, full of symbolism and tradition, followed by our AGM in a new year with a new committee, new ideas and hope for our growing community.

2024 will, I believe, be an unfolding and exciting chapter for our church of which we are all an important part.

Blessings to you all.

Jennifer Sanders
Minister Elect

BUC Account Figures

		FY 2022- 2023	FY 2021- 2022
A RECEIPTS			
1 Donations & Offertory			
To General a/c		7,197.62	7,961.11
To Gold a/c		1,589.78	897.77
Legacy		0.00	0.00
Subtotal		8,787.40	8,858.88
2 HMRC			
Gift Aid tax reclaim		1,839.14	2,199.40
Subtotal		1,839.14	2,199.40
3 Grants			
General Baptist Assembly		0.00	385.00
Highgate Hill		770.17	0.00
LDPA		0.00	444.99
Subtotal		770.17	829.99
4 Bank Interest			
Gold & Gen accounts		756.13	81.60
Subtotal		756.13	81.60
5 Lettings and fees			
Hirings and other fees		52,126.34	49,237.05
PRS payments from hirers		514.40	158.10
Subtotal		52,640.74	49,395.15
6 Other income			
Rites of passage		4,050.00	5,369.00
VAT claimed back		247.30	162.02
General Fundraising activity		7,472.74	3,840.78
Investment withdrawal		0.00	0.00
Charitable donations		130.00	475.25
GA Quota subs rec'd		840.00	140.00
Insurance claim		0.00	25,899.37
Miscellaneous Income		483.39	1,266.26
Subtotal		13,223.43	37,152.68
TOTAL RECEIPTS		78,017.01	98,517.70

B PAYMENTS

1 Ministry			
Stipend & Manse		9,352.28	0.00
Ministry expenses		862.99	0.00
Pulpit fees paid		1,848.00	2,275.00
Subtotal		12,063.27	2,275.00

2 HMRC			
Tax and NI		4,897.87	5,375.27
	Subtotal	4,897.87	5,375.27
3 Support costs			
Gifts, flowers, etc.		1,035.61	1,486.56
Travel expenses		269.19	400.76
Rites of Passage fees and expenses		2,070.00	1,754.85
Committee expenses		1,206.31	2,279.57
Organ and piano		2,197.00	800.00
Printing, advertising, etc.		623.23	612.52
Charitable donations		259.49	475.25
Denomination subscriptions		1,463.75	1,640.00
Subscriptions to periodicals		74.00	66.00
	Subtotal	9,198.58	9,515.51
4 Management & Administration			
Administrator salary		15,939.08	12,497.40
NEST (all employees)		1,067.88	0.00
Cleaner's salary		3,979.79	3,693.62
Caretaking salaries		7,537.63	13,616.32
Record Keeper		4,024.88	2,762.55
Light and heat		6,981.09	4,508.70
Water rates		0.00	193.38
Telephone		598.95	556.06
Repairs and renewals		9,692.03	10,714.64
Furniture and equipment		739.60	444.99
Kitchen supplies		2,253.36	1,006.19
Postage and stationery		755.45	367.44
Website, streaming, etc.		500.83	383.95
Investment		0.00	0.00
Insurance		3,678.01	3,408.96
PRS; CCLI; PPL		671.48	822.04
Accountancy and payroll		757.00	685.00
Bank charges		123.00	136.80
Refunds		569.00	620.00
	Subtotal	59,869.06	56,418.04
Total Payments		86,028.78	73,583.82
Funding			
General a/c		5,543.77	14,733.13
Gold a/c		48,730.48	47,661.83
HSBC a/c		234.06	174.06
Petty Cash		51.73	2.79
Floats		80.00	80.00
Total		54,640.04	62,651.81
Balance from last financial year		62,651.81	37,717.93
Receipts - Payments this year		(8,011.77)	24,933.88
		54,640.04	62,651.81
BNY Mellon investment portfolio		97,284.68	99,814.67

Report of the Independent Examiner on the BUC Accounts

Overview

The Books of Account were found to accurately represent the financial position of the Brighton Unitarian Church for the Year Ended 30th September 2023. 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 2022/23 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 2021/22 comparatives have also been brought forward correctly.

BNY Mellon

This investment was established in July 2019 with an initial investment of £75,000 and a further £25,000 was invested in September 2021. I can confirm that the value of the investment now stands at £97,284.68 as at 30th September 2023.

General & Gold Account Cashbooks

In line with usual practice, the Books of Account were subject to an interim audit as at 31st July 2023. 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.

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

Accountant. 29th November 2023

Treasurer's Report

The procedures by which our Church's governance is ruled are based firstly on the constitution adopted in 2018, which complies with Charity Commission rules, secondly by the Policy and Procedure document drawn up by a sub-committee which I chaired back in 2013, and thirdly by agreed amendments to that document made by the Committee since then. [Updating the Policy and Procedure document in accordance with our more recent Constitution and Committee amendments is a job waiting for an enthusiastic volunteer.]

At the time of our last AGM, in January 2023, no one had come forward to fulfil the role of Treasurer vacated by Kathy Pitt. Our understanding was that we needed to find a trustee who had served for at least six months and who was willing to take on that role. Moreover, that person, as with all trustees, had to be a Unitarian.

George Dean, the Quaker's Treasurer, offered to take on *our* Treasurer office in addition, on a *pro bono* (unpaid) basis. To get around the constitutional and procedural difficulties in accepting this kind offer, I agreed to act as the official Treasurer, while leaving George to do the bulk of the work as my assistant. He has done an excellent job, requiring only a minimum of input from me, for which I'm very grateful. He has also written his own report, which follows.

Francis Clark-Lowes

Finance Officer's Report

As Kathy Pitt reported in last year's report, there has been a steady recovery from the pandemic despite the inflationary pressures gripping the country at present. I am pleased to report this has continued in the accounting year ended 30th September 2023.

Upon replacing Kathy, I prepared an evolving budget to enable me to acquaint myself with the position for the current year. Although income was improving the appointment of a new lay leader Jennifer Sanders needed to be accounted for. It was apparent present conditions would result in a deficit for the year. As the figures filtered through, a critical evaluation showed that an element of fund raising was going to be important. Some price rises needed to be seriously considered.

Raising hiring rates is always a sensitive issue. One never knows how the increases will affect footfall in the building thus potentially proving counter - productive. It needs to be recognised that our hirers are subject to the same inflationary pressures as ourselves. Revisions were prepared for implementation in 2023-4.

Although reserves remain strong because of the successful insurance claim in 2022, it is important that we can be as self-sufficient as possible on a day-to-day basis in the coming year. In addition to the deficit for the year ending 30th September, heavy expenditure in the 2023-24 year on the church heating system has had to come out of reserves.

As reported by Kathy last year I need to thank several people for nursing me through this year's learning curve. Kathy herself has provided me with her invaluable experience, Christine Clark-Lowes has sent me the day-to-day figures, and Cat Stead's immense common sense has been invaluable when I might have retreated too much into my accountant's Quaker business methods. Joanne Howarth and the Committee have shown me far more patience than I have probably deserved.
Thank you.

George Dean

Church Administrator/Venue Manager's Report

Myself and Stuart Lee, our Caretaker/Duty Manager, have now been working at the church for over a year, and what a busy year it has been!

Rites of Passage: A funeral and four weddings have been held in the church in the past financial year bringing in £4,050 plus two memorial services. To round off the calendar year, a wedding took place three days before Christmas. We currently have three weddings booked in for 2024, including one on the Sunday of Pride, with enquiries already coming in for 2025.

We have seen an increase in hirings, and thus income, this past year:

2021 lettings and fees - £28,205.85

2022 lettings and fees - £49,237.05

2023 lettings and fees - £52,235.46

We expect this trend to continue, having implemented a 10% increase in our hire fees for the new financial year (starting in October 2023). This was done sensitively, taking into account our regular hirer's circumstances and the wider cost of living situation, and for some groups this increase was deferred to January.

The figures above include piano hire which generated £266.90 in the last financial year. We continue to be most grateful to Nicola Grunberg for the loan of her magnificent Steinway grand which is an additional attraction for musicians to perform at the church.

The diary for 2024 is looking quite full, which we hope is a sign of another good, busy year for us.

In May 2023 we hosted 12 Brighton Fringe/Festival events plus The Great Escape music festival for three days, which brought in a total of £5,369 in hire fees.

Our current regular hirers include: Pathways to Health, who offer low-cost acupuncture for people with long-term health problems; Amaze: a charity which supports families with special education needs and disabilities; and a Cocaine Anonymous Support group. Music features heavily in our weekly timetable with African drumming, three choirs and a Soulful Singing workshop plus a children's music group and monthly Pianobaths.

New regular hirers in the past year include the European Movement Sussex, Survivors Network, Brighton Philharmonic Orchestra Friends' recitals and candlelit Labyrinth walks to mark the Solstices organised by Brighton & Hove Centre for Spirituality. We have also welcomed back Carousel: a charity that supports and champions learning disabled artists and young people, who ran creative workshops here for young people in the school holidays, and BREMF, the Brighton Early Music Festival.

Our building is heavily used by Brighton & Hove's University of the Third Age (U3A) with regular classes including Jazz appreciation, Chair Yoga, Art, Scottish Country Dancing, and from January 2024, Drawing.

We are a well-established venue for craft and wellbeing fairs with our two regular hirers (Rainbow Crafts and Beau Events) as well as the Seaside Sisterhood and Sussex Cancer Fund all booked in again for 2024. Our very own Trisha Purchas regularly has a stand at the Rainbow Craft Fairs, helping her raise an amazing £700 for the church in the last year. On the fundraising front, just a reminder that we have some newly printed BUC mugs for sale at just £8 - dishwasher-proof, microwave-safe and produced by a local social enterprise.

Brighton Bike Tours continue to rent two sheds from us in the North passageway and in conjunction with Brighton & Hove Council and Brighton Bike Hub, they ran a number of led bike rides for refugees this year, where participants met up in the church beforehand and then enjoyed a communal lunch together afterwards. One of our parking spaces is permanently rented to our neighbour Mister Smith and our other neighbour Pinocchio's pay us an annual fee for access to their kitchen via our South passageway.

Audiences attending our Friday lunchtime fund-raising concerts now average 53, and the concerts made a profit of just under £5,000 for the church this year thanks to the hard work of Marion Bance and Phillida Simpson, the latter ably assisted by Tony Tree. Marion has already programmed the whole of 2024 so it will be my daunting responsibility to start programming for 2025 shortly, with her guidance.

Barbara Lowe, our very own domestic goddess, continues to work tirelessly keeping the church clean in just three days a week. In the summer she was nominated as Best Housekeeper in the National Housing with Care Awards for her work at Brighton & Hove Foyer (Sanctuary supported living), one of just 5 nominees nationwide. Although she didn't win, she enjoyed an all-expenses-paid trip to London for an Awards dinner/dance and overnight stay in a Mayfair hotel.

As part of our continuing quest to become more environmentally friendly we have a compost caddy from the White Street Community Garden (one of Brighton & Hove Food Partnership's community composting schemes), and thanks to Jennifer our cleaning and sanitary supplies are now all eco friendly.

The Hallmaster room booking software purchased in April is being populated with the church's details and tweaked to meet our requirements in the hope that we can move away from our current paper diary system within the next 3-4 months. There will be a period of time where both systems will be running in parallel to check that nothing has been missed off, so please do bear with us if processes take a little longer until we are ready to fully embrace the digital age.

In other news, our 33-year-old boiler finally failed its annual service in September and was replaced with two modern boilers working in tandem. The final cost was £13,500.

To conclude, I am loving working here at the church and can hardly believe it has been a year already. No two days are alike and the activities taking place in the building are so incredibly diverse. My thanks to everyone for making me feel so welcome and for all their help and practical support - I couldn't wish for a better workplace or team. Time truly flies when you are doing something you love!

Cat Stead

Church Administrator/Venue Manager

Brighton **Unitarian** *Church*



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