

Conversation Club Newsletter

Issue 20



March-2021

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Trustees

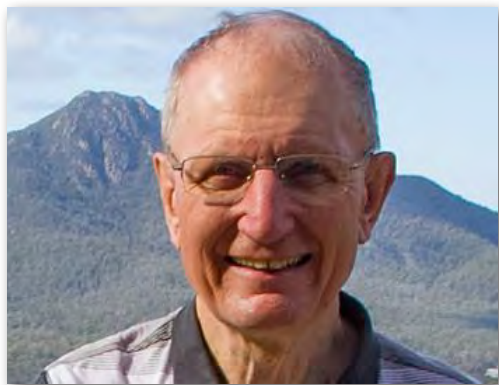
- Brian Helsdon (co-chair)
- Christine Barltrop (co-chair)
- Victor Mujakachi (treasurer)
- Richard Chessum (external liaison)
- Helen Roberts (membership)
- Qais Aryan (Wednesday club)
- Jim Dimond (Friday club)
- Lee Moran (co-opted)
- Ralph Hancock (adviser).

Newsletter

Editors

- Jim Dimond (editor)
- Mozhdeh Sahebkar (newsletter design)

Welcome from the co-chairs



Welcome to this latest edition of the Conversation Club Sheffield Newsletter. Looking back to 2020 it was a year like no other, certainly in our lifetime. The pandemic took over everything, what we do and how we live. It changed what we could do in Conversation Club. Keeping in touch was a real challenge. We managed this in a number of ways, through WhatsApp,

Zoom and during the warmer weather, meeting in local parks. We hope you will enjoy reading the Newsletter and that it will bring back memories of when we were able to meet. Our thanks go to Jim for editing the newsletter and to Mozhdah for the design and format online. That is another difference from before. This time we are making the Newsletter available online only to begin with.

Finally thanks to all of you who were part of the club in the unusual year of 2020. We look forward to seeing you all again soon, back at Victoria Hall and the CURC (Central United Reform Church).

***Christine Barltrop and
Brian Helsdon (co-chairs)***

Ralph's thanks to Christine and Brian

By Ralph Hancock



Last year (2020) was different and our AGM as normal as can be, with so many good friends. 2020 was, however, a Zoom AGM meeting. The year has seen difficult times for many people, but for Conversation Club Brian and Christine have approached Lockdown problems with creativity and sensitivity. Brian organized a WhatsApp Conversation Club group in the spring of 2020, which continues, and during fine weather we socially-distanced met in Sheffield's parks. Brian also continued

his ESOL classes (either by Zoom or in the park) and was joined by Jim's class. Now that it is winter, we have enjoyed Brian's weekly Zoom meetings which have been one way we can 'see each other' and feel connected to dear friends. So I thank Brian and Chris on behalf of us all for their remarkable handling of 2020. It is so important to say thank you for a year that has been so challenging. Let's hope we will return to some sort of normality in the near future.

Ralph

Conversation Club Annual General Meeting

By Jim Dimond - November 2019

Our AGM last year was a great celebration with around 60 people attending. Brian Helsdon opened the event and welcomed everyone before introducing our special guests the One World Choir. The choir entertained us wonderfully with a selection of songs originating from Southern Africa and Kurdistan, and also songs in English and Arabic.

Formal business then began with the re-election of Qais Arryan and the confirmation of Qais and Jim Dimond as trustees was proposed, seconded and confirmed. Christine Barltrop gave the Co-Chair's report and thanked the choir for entertaining us. She also thanked STAR and both of the Sheffield Universities for their support; she thanked Conversation Club volunteers

and trustees for their ongoing commitment and for organising the many trips and outings over the past year; she thanked Victor Mujakachi for his work as Treasurer; and she especially thanked Astrid Degen (following her resignation from the board of trustees) for her hard work and success with fundraising over the past 8 to 10 years.



Conversation Club Annual General Meeting

Chritine also commemorated John Simmonds (who had sadly passed away earlier in the year) and she also thanked Ralph Hancock - a very hard act to follow - for continuing to mentor the co-chairs and for paying the bills, despite stepping down as Chair. Finally, she thanked Sam, Ahmed and Jim for their work in producing the 2019 newsletter.

Victor presented the Treasurer's report, confirming that the accounts were in a healthy state having had been audited and correct as at 30th April 2019. Brian thanked Victor and introduced our guest speaker for the AGM, Councillor Kaltum Rivers.

Kaltum spoke movingly about her journey to the UK as an unaccompanied child refugee



brought up by her older sister. She spoke about the importance of community, diversity, humanity and the environment. She stressed the importance of reaching out to seek more funding and support and she advocated asking the question, "why not?" with determination and perseverance.

Kaltum answered some questions from the floor

and her answers celebrated the contribution of immigration to cultural enrichment and making the UK a better place. Brian thanked her for her inspirational words and brought the formal part of the AGM to a close with an invitation for everyone to stay for food.

Trip to Bradford Museum of Science and Media

By Christine Barltrop

We had been planning a trip to the Bradford Museum of Media and Science for some time and at last fitted it in during the quiet period between Christmas and New Year of 2019.

It was a great success. Those of us who grew up in the UK were taken down memory lane at the exhibits from TV programmes of our childhood. There was an excellent history of photography featuring the earliest photographs ever taken, mock ups of early portrait studios, and an amazing collection of

cameras up to the latest digital models. Another floor was devoted to the development of computers and the internet and gaming. There were lots of interactive exhibits to keep even the youngest of our party interested, particularly one on the science of light and colour.

It was our second trip to the museum, and it was amazing how much had changed and been updated since our first trip nearly 10 years ago.



Trip to Bradford Museum of Science and Media



In Memory of Deborah Sunday

By Richard Chessum



Deborah on her 40th birthday at Chatworth

Deborah was a familiar presence in her wheelchair at our Wednesday Victoria Hall drop-in and Conversation Club. She lived her whole life with serious disability, having been paralysed in both legs by polio at the age of 2 years. In later life she also developed rheumatoid arthritis which caused her constant pain. Yet she faced life with courage and determination and never lost her sense of fun or her sense of humour. She came to this country

as a university student and was bright and intelligent as well as being caring and compassionate. The same could not be said of the Home Office which made every attempt to deny her sanctuary and leave to remain. Happily it was a battle which Deborah won after much heartache and distress. Less happily she was to pass away before enjoying any long term benefit from her victory in the summer of 2020 having been diagnosed with

terminal cancer. She would have given so much that was positive to our society had she not died before her time. Much missed, she will be remembered fondly and with admiration by all of us who knew her. Rest In Peace Deborah.

News from Konstantine Tzetzkladze

By Kathleen Wallace



I am in regular contact with Konstantine by phone and he always asks about Conversation Club. He often talks about his time in Sheffield which was a good experience. Like elsewhere, Tbilisi is going through a difficult time because of Covid. I am hoping that Konstantine can join CC

on Zoom sometime and also that I can meet up with him in the future. Konstantine sends his greetings from Tbilisi in Georgia. Here he is pictured in conversation with me and Helen Roberts during our trip to visit him in Georgia back in 2017.

News from Yousf Abbas in Germany

By Yousf Abbas



Hello to all. I hope all of you are well. I have missed Sheffield and missed you all at Conversation Club. I have been living in Germany for five years.

Germany is a beautiful country, but the people are not as friendly as the British. Greet them and they don't answer, especially in government departments and bus drivers (Abbas was a bus driver in Sheffield).

On the social side in Germany we

don't feel strangers because of all the nationalities present.

I tried to start a conversation club here in Germany, but the idea was ignored and I didn't get any support.

Thank you for everything and I hope I see you soon.

Lockdown Memory (Lanes)

By Ralph

Recovering from a broken hip added to my challenges that we all faced with Covid19 restrictions, but I have been so fortunate to be able to walk and talk with Conversation Club friends since March 2020. Just before Lockdown 1, I was the thorn between two Helens (Roberts and Ullathorne) as we walked along the track from Hassop Station towards Monsal Head. Not only was it lovely to

see Helen, it was also a wonderful way to remember Conversation Club's day volunteering, a number of years ago, with the Peak District Rangers to rid the trail of ragwort, an invasive species. As I recall, the day ended with ice-creams.

Summer club-meetings in Sheffield's parks have been a marvellous way to keep in touch with old friends - especially the Botanical Garden's bear who could be cuddled

regardless of the virus. On days when the weather was poor, the Zoom meetings organised by Brian were an opportunity to chat and see friends in the comfort of a cosy chair. Highlights of local walks have included the excitement of hand-feeding a feral goose I nicknamed 'Whitey' at Hardwick Ponds. He is very tame but when gobbling seed, he'd try my fingers as an extra snack and I was lucky to



Lockdown Memory (Lanes)

escape with all digits. Ogston Reservoir is also a favoured place to walk. The path is relatively flat and I could target the Brackenfield village sign as the end of my trek. During the first Lockdown, a man passing me started giggling saying I didn't need a mask with a beard like mine! In all, I have respected the virus regulations but been lucky to enjoy my days as I have in past years thanks to meeting, virtually and in person, friends from Conversation Club.



By Ahmed Mola

COVID-19

It was a year which will always be remembered with all the changes and difficulties it posed to humanity worldwide. The Corona (Covid-19) virus dominated the global scene and imposed changes at every level of human life as we adjusted to the new norms of masks, social distancing, sanitising, lockdowns, curfews and empty cities. The luxury of choice suddenly disappeared and put us all on the same obligatory path.

Conversation Club was no exception and had to adjust

its activities and meetings to the new norms. Soon after the March lockdown, a few members started meeting in parks and open spaces with masks and social distancing observed. We started at Weston Park for the first few weeks where 10-15 members met on Fridays at the usual meeting times. The weekly English class took place in the open as well, under a lush tree while others played sports including football to frisbee. Some just sat on the benches and engaged in conversation. We soon moved

to Botanical gardens where more participants were able to attend.

As autumn and winter set in we were unable to meet outdoors but social activity continued every Friday at 1 pm for one hour on Zoom allowing us to meet and interact together online despite the lockdown. In this way Conversation Club has continued its mission to support refugees and asylum seekers, as well as helped members and volunteers to feel less isolated and marginalised.

Visit to Sheffield General Cemetery

By Jim Dimond

One of the positives to emerge from the pandemic was the chance to visit Sheffield parks and green spaces during the summer months when we weren't able to travel further afield. We visited Sheffield General Cemetery on Friday 18th September 2020, many of us the first time, and found it to be a hidden

gem with its unique calm atmosphere and overgrown charm. We had a very informative guided tour led by local architect and historian Adrian Hallam, dressed appropriately for the occasion in Victorian clothes and top hat. The cemetery is set in beautiful grounds close to the city centre and its landscape was

designed by Robert Marnock, who also designed the Botanical Gardens, in the 1830's. The cemetery is the resting place of many notable Sheffield families from Victorian times, as well as the site of a mass grave of local cholera victims.



Visit to Sheffield General Cemetery

Nowadays the cemetery is a well-loved park and nature reserve being home to bats, foxes, badgers, and owls along with other types of birds. A team of volunteers maintain the cemetery grounds but sadly many of the monuments and catacombs, however, are in



Visit to Sheffield General Cemetery



need of repair and renovation due to decades of neglect. Thanks to a grant from the National Heritage Lottery fund, restoration works are now getting underway so the people of Sheffield will be able to enjoy the cemetery for many generations to come.

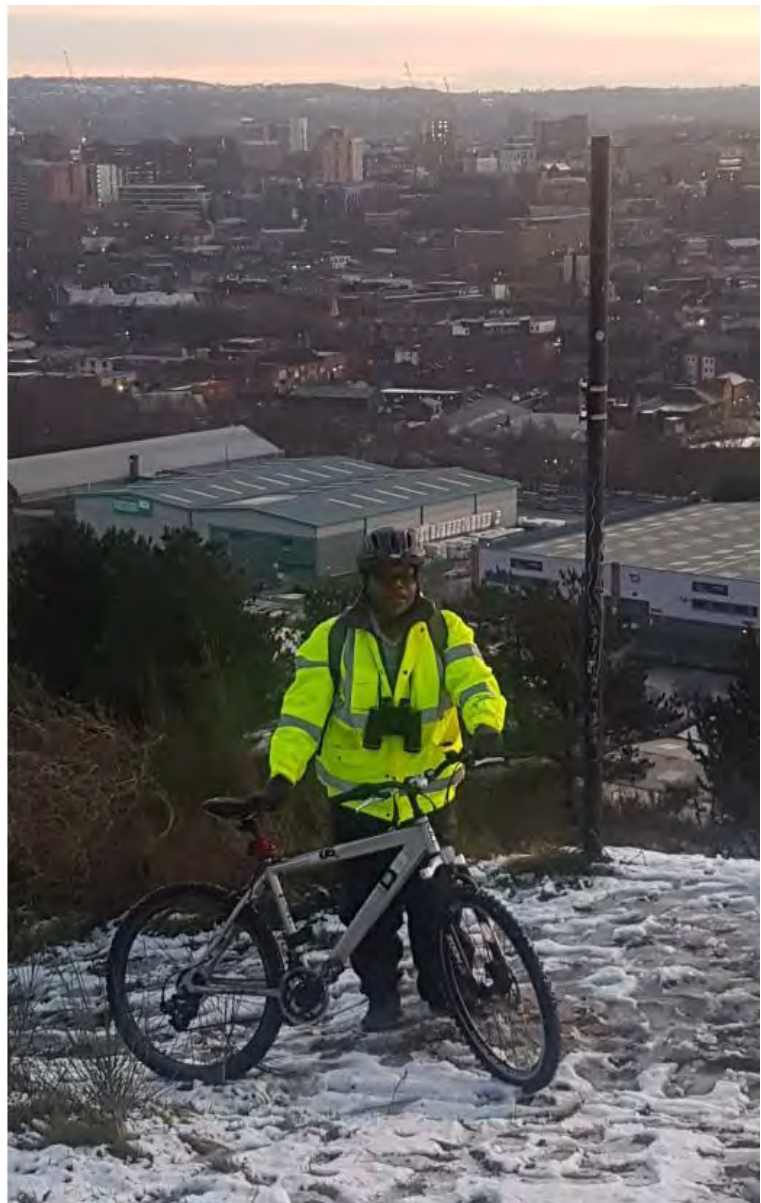
Good News from Victor Mujakachi

By Victor Mujakachi

I'm pleased to announce that I now have leave to remain generally known as LTR in immigration parlance.

Whilst this is very pleasing news that brings a sense of relief to me personally and my immediate family members who alongside me have waited for this outcome for thirteen years, I cannot help feeling a tinge of sadness when I think about my fellow asylum seekers whose asylum cases are still to be determined.

Claiming asylum in the United Kingdom follows a stringent legal process where



one has to prove that they deserve protection in this country for whatever reason the asylum claimant is leaving their country of birth to get safety in The United Kingdom.

The legal process starts with a substantive interview before a Home Office caseworker who, after a series of repetitive questions that can last a few hours or days, has the authority to accept or decline an asylum claim.

If the caseworker is satisfied during the interview, and after rigorously and extensively questioning the asylum claimant to determine if they warrant protection from The United Kingdom government, the caseworker will then inform the applicant in writing whether

or not their claim for protection has been successful. An applicant whose application is accepted at the substantive interview stage becomes a refugee and they are accorded rights and privileges enjoyed by British citizens. An asylum application can be turned down. An asylum seeker whose claim is turned down is termed a refused asylum seeker. Refused asylum seekers have no rights and are subject to removal from the United Kingdom. That is the situation I found myself in after my initial asylum claim was refused together

with subsequent appeals the process of which lasted 11 years during which an attempt was made by The Home Office to remove me from the country in February 2019.

It was during this eleven year period of asylum limbo that I immersed myself in volunteering and got associated with a variety of charities such as Assist Sheffield, Migrants Organise, Epilepsy Action, The Cathedral Archer Project, Sheffield Tools For Africa, These Walls Must Fall, NACCOM, FURD Football Unites Racism Divides), The

Good News from Victor Mujakachi

Sunday Centre, St Peter's Church Ellesmere Road, Christ Church Pitsmoor, SYMAAG, The City Of Sanctuary, St Marks, St Wilfrid's Centre, Sheffield Amateur Boxing Club, Spectrum Theater Group, Side By Side Dram Group, Ahmadiyya Muslim Centre, House Of Hope in Norfolk Park, St Cuthbert's Firvale, Burton Street Foundation, The Quaker Meeting House in the city centre, HARC (Homeless And Rootless At Christmas), South Yorkshire Refugee Law & Justice, The Crowded House Church, Time Builders and Sheffield Conversation Club.

This whole period was not without personal tragedy. I lost two siblings back home in Zimbabwe. My younger brother Michael in 2010 and youngest sister Barbara in 2017 both whose funerals I never attended due to immigration restrictions. In 2019 my second son Simba suffered a near catastrophic brain haemorrhagic stroke which nearly cost his life after being in a coma for two weeks. Volunteering was not only therapeutic offering me a structure and a purpose, it opened up opportunities to learn new skills, get connected, build up friendships and networks: it also helped me to

get acquainted with a large section of members of the British society whose immense support and encouragement I'll forever cherish."

CONVERSATION CLUB



March - 2021