Editorial

Welcome to this sixteenth issue of the Oldham Peace Times, newsletter of the Oldham Pledge to Peace Forum. This is a regular publication to inform people and organisations with an interest in working for peace about the Forum and its work. This time, there is good news on the peace front as the resolution of two seemingly-intractable conflicts may suddenly be possible.

In an incredible turn of events, North and South Korean leaders Kim Jong Un and Moon Jae-in held two historic summits at the border and then, finally, US President Donald Trump and Chairman Kim made history at their meeting in Singapore (below left) by making a pledge to work for ‘the promotion of peace, prosperity and security in the Korean Peninsula and the world’ (below right). In an unusually statesmanlike comment, President Trump said “anyone can make war, but only the most courageous can make peace”.

Photo: AFP

And, as this issue went to press, a second piece of astonishing news. A pact for peace between newly-elected, Ethiopian President Abiy Ahmed and a man described as leader of ‘Africa’s North Korea’, Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki (below). Like the USA and North Korea, these two nations have been at loggerheads for over 50 years, and have frequently been at war.

President Ahmed holds a Master’s Degree in Conflict Resolution, an inspiration to this humble Peace Studies undergraduate student. Photo: BBC

In Oldham we have been doing more modest things to promote peace - but at least one of these events has also involved flags!

I hope that the events and activities highlighted in this issue inspire you to work for peace. If you have comments, contributions, or wish to sign the Pledge to Peace please get in touch. Please also like our Facebook page – The Oldham Pledge To Peace Forum.

Yours in Peace,

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An Introduction to the Pledge to Peace

The Pledge to Peace initiative, also called the Bruxelles Declaration, was established at the “Peace and Prosperity - Founding Values of the European Union” conference held on November 28, 2011 at the European Parliament in Brussels.

The initiative was the brainchild of then First Vice President of the European Parliament, Mr. Gianni Pittella MEP, the former President of the European Parliament Senator Emilio Colombo, and the Italian peace group, the Associazione Percorsi. The Pledge to Peace was sponsored by Mr. Prem Rawat, an authoritative and international speaker on peace, who was the first signatory. Mr Rawat was later appointed ‘Ambassador to the Bruxelles Declaration - Pledge to Peace’

Institutions and organisations are invited to sign the Pledge to help create a ‘culture of peace’ in their communities. Each signatory is asked to submit an annual report to the Secretariat, the Percorsi Association, by the UN International Day of Peace, 21st September.


Article and photo courtesy of the Percorsi Association
CND at 60 – The first Aldermaston March

This is the second of our articles on seminal events in 1958 which put the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament on the map as Britain’s most enduring movement against nuclear weapons.

The first Easter 1958 march to the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston, Berkshire, established to research, develop and build Britain’s nuclear warheads, was the initiative of the Direct Action Committee (DAC), which began to organise the march in December 1957. Organisers included Hugh Jenkins (later Chair of CND from 1979-81), Frank Allaun MP, Walter Wolfgang from the Labour Hydrogen Bomb Committee, and Michael Randle. Pat Arrowsmith, working from the offices of Peace News, became the March Organiser.

Leaders of the newly formed CND were lukewarm about the march. The leadership said it would ‘give its blessing to the [DAC] plans [for Aldermaston] and should publicise them, but should make clear, at this stage of the Campaign, they could not be very closely involved.’ In fact, CND members participated extensively in the event, and it became linked with CND in the public mind.

Less than two months after the first meeting of CND (see Oldham Peace Times March 2018), 6,000 protestors gathered for the send-off in London’s Trafalgar Square and 4,000 people joined the 4 day, 53-mile march. ‘This,' pronounced Michael Foot, 'can be the greatest march in English history.'

The march became synonymous with the launch of the famous symbol created by Gerald Holtom (right on the banner carried by these marchers in London) and with the protest songs performed en-route despite the insistence of the leadership that marchers remain silent.

The Guardian reported: "They headed off on the coldest Good Friday for 41 years in duffle coats and hobnail boots and with knapsacks on their backs. One of the prime movers in the march, Canon Collins of St Paul's Cathedral, had asked for silence during the walk in deference to Easter, but when they reached their first overnight stop - at Hounslow - they were led into the town by Ken Collier's band playing 'When the Saints Go Marching In', 'High Society' and 'Lady Be Good', while those at the back contented themselves with chanting ‘1-2-3-4-5 keep the human race alive...’

"After a night on the floor in church halls around Hounslow, Twickenham and Isleworth and a 3/6d breakfast, they marched on to Slough and then Reading through snow and slush in what became the worst Easter weather for more than a century. They looked a sorry bunch - the Daily Mail likened them to 'columns of displaced persons who struggled across Europe in 1945 or perhaps the enchanted followers of some Orwellian Pied Piper’ - and some dropped out. But
mostly they soldiered on, rallied by the sound of the jazz bands, church choirs and skiffle groups scattered through the miles and, almost imperceptibly along the route, the tradition of song as a soundtrack to political protest, lifting spirits and symbolising unity, was firmly established.”

Two protest songs especially stood out. The ‘official’ theme tune John Brunner’s ‘The H-Bomb’s Thunder’, and Ewan MacColl’s ‘Song of Hiroshima’, sung by the London Youth Choir. The minutes of the DAC Organising Committee also include endearing references to marchers being entertained by folk dancers at overnight stops; an invitation for 500 marchers to join the proprietor of a country club in Taplow for tea and sandwiches; and catering arrangements which included a mobile canteen which served hotdogs and ‘between 6-700 cups of tea an hour’.

Marchers were implored ‘to bring their own mugs’, ‘sleeping bags and lilos’ and ‘plenty of nourishing picnic food’, and were advised in the event of their arrest to defend themselves in court by saying they were seeking to prevent an offence under the 1951 Genocide Convention.

The Spectator reported: “The first Aldermaston March had the wonderful feeling of a spontaneous break-through, even a faint illicit flavour. The hard core of six or seven hundred who walked the whole way went out into the wilderness to shout against something very big, and what they did was not quite socially acceptable. Men, women, students and children from in and around London and the west of England, with a sprinkling of foreigners and, at the beginning and end, a few thousand joiners, they stamped and chanted and sang bad lyrics to popular tunes or just plodded along over the fifty-odd miles to Aldermaston.”

“They were soaked with rain, battered with abuse by the popular press and some bystanders, laughed at, and they had a few raw eggs thrown at them by fascists. Probably worst of all, they were subjected to dismaying blasts of political hot air at meetings along the way, climaxed with a numbingly boring marathon speech by the German pacifist Niemoller in Falcon Field. When it was over one sensed that this sudden spurt of protest had broken through the helplessness which an ordinary citizen must feel in the presence of the vast, apparently senseless and evil forces of world politics. These marchers had done something which belonged to them, and it was good and right.”

Around 8,000 converged on Aldermaston walking the last mile in silence to a rally point organised by the Chief Constable of Berkshire. This far exceeded the expectations of the organisers, who expected 300. More importantly the Aldermaston march became identified with CND, and it was repeated many times across the decades.

Sources include the CND online archive, the DAC archive at Bradford University, Kate Hudson’s book ‘CND at 60’, The Guardian and The Spectator.
Maria and Richard managed to catch up with the giant CND symbol when it was installed in All Saints Park, Oxford Road in early June as part of the Manchester Histories Festival. Our friends in Greater Manchester and District CND were staffing a stall and taking signatures on the Peoples Petition in favour of the UK Government signing the nuclear weapons ban treaty.

At first sight it would be easy to think the installation is made of marble but closer examination reveals it to be of wood on a steel frame, and the letters and ‘semaphore’ symbol each come apart into two halves and are bolted together. Sandbags at the rear ensure that it does not come crashing down on anyone.

**Above left:** Richard and Jacqui Burke from GM and District CND take a pew. **Right:** the rear view.

**Below Left:** As it is the 100th anniversary of women’s suffrage, we were joined by a Suffragette and a Woman Peace Crusader.

**Right:** Steve Roman supervised the loading of the disassembled symbol into a small van. Steve was taking the symbol down to Salisbury the following day as part of the national tour.

**With thanks to Maria Ellis for several photos.**
The Heartstone Odyssey

Maria Ellis attended a special showcase dance-drama and storytelling performance of excerpts of ‘The Heartstone Odyssey’ at the Royal Northern College of Music on Friday, 27 April. This followed a previous performance staged at the Manchester Cathedral last year, which attracted the support of the Elders, an organisation established by Nelson Mandela to promote peace.

This was a nationwide project, funded by the Arts Council England, in which the pupils of several Oldham Pledge to Peace schools participated. It was designed to bring people together across different nationalities, cultures, faiths and backgrounds to challenge racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance.

The show was led by Sitakumari, Director and Principal Dancer/Storyteller for Heartstone together with dancers of ‘Moving Lives Dance Theatre’ based at Liverpool Hope University.

‘The Heartstone Odyssey’ is a fantasy for children but also of interest to adults. It tells the story of a magical gem which was broken in the late 1700’s by British soldiers stationed in India at the time and how a single fragment was brought to Britain on board a tall ship by Sailvoyage Stonekeeper and hidden in a stained glass window in Wellminster Cathedral. The prophecy tells of a time in the future when a map, showing where the pieces of the shattered gem have been hidden deep in the Himalaya Mountains, will be found thus starting a great adventure to return to India, find the pieces and heal the hurt and pain which had been caused all those years ago. The story opens in 1980’s Britain with the heroine, a dancer, Chandra, whose show is cancelled by a racist threat, finding herself at the centre of the great prophecy.

After the show, Maria was able to speak to one of the artists and a director about the performance and our work for peace in Oldham.

Photograph courtesy of Heartstone Project
A Year of Peace Activities by Saddleworth Peace Group

In August 2016, Saddleworth Peace Group signed the Pledge to Peace (left).

At its recent Annual General Meeting, this small group of dedicated peace activists reaffirmed their commitment to working as part of the Oldham Pledge to Peace Forum and Group Secretary Phillida Shipp presented a report of the group’s activities from March 2017 - March 2018.

Here is a summary of some of the highlights:

- In March 2017, Michele wrote to the Oldham Chronicle about the danger of transporting nuclear material by road, and her letter was published. Steve wrote to Oldham Council on the same subject and received a 3 page reply from Council Leader Cllr Jean Stretton. This implied that the Council considered the risk from Nuclear Convoys to be low for the inhabitants of Oldham.

- In May, Katy visited Saddleworth School and spoke to nine Year 10 RE classes about the Peace Group and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). She reported that they were attentive, but quite fearful and sceptical about unilateral disarmament. However she said it was good to get a debate going and offer them a particular view. Well done Katy.

- We had a stall at the Saddleworth Show on July 2nd. The site and weather were good. The badge making was popular with children and the captive parents received a flyer, which Steve had written explaining what SPG did and stood for. The Mayor, Cllr Shadab Qumer, visited the stall.

- On July 16th, at the Mayor’s invitation, Magda, Liz Green, David and Philida attended a Remembering Srebrenica event at the Oldham Sixth Form College, organised by the Oldham Interfaith Forum. They found it a moving experience (a view shared by Maria Ellis who also attended the event).

- On 9th August, Nagasaki Day was marked with a simple event in Uppermill Square as a number of SPG members were on holiday. The Mayor gave a short address followed by a silent vigil.

- On September 20th, members of the group attended the Oldham Pledge to Peace Forum AGM and lecture.

- On November 11th, a Peace Reading was held at Greenfield Library. Unfortunately only one child came, but Kathryn and Richard Knight entertained the adults from SPG with their Peace Stories.

- On January 27th, 2018 at a Holocaust Memorial Day, SPG members were joined by young people from the Oldham Youth Council and Oldham Theatre Workshop (OTW), and their parents and siblings. The Mayor gave a short address and the young people, who had just returned from a visit to Auschwitz, read poems and stories and performed a song. They were pleased to be invited and the adults who attended were very impressed by their energy and sincerity. We hope they will be able to take part in a Holocaust Memorial event with us next year.

- It seems that Peace and Young People formed a thread running through our activities last year in which most of the events have been successful. I think it is a theme that we should try to continue this year as well.

With thanks to Phillida Shipp for this information.
Putting our Best Foot Forward for Peace

Peace activists and park lovers put their best foot forward to take part in a special ‘Walk at One as One’ in Dunwood Park, Smallbrook Road, Shaw to celebrate World Labyrinth Day.

There were 17 participants in the contemplative walk around the labyrinth, including Shaw and Crompton Parish Councillors Chris Stephens, Louie Hamblett, and Angie Farrell, who is also the Parish Council’s Peace Champion.

Carol Hughes, Secretary of the Friends of Dunwood Park, organised the event, with support from Peace Talks Oldham and the Oldham Pledge to Peace Forum. It was part of an annual celebration of labyrinths taking place across the world, with all walks starting at 1pm local time.

Carol said: “It was a wonderful opportunity in glorious Bank Holiday sunshine to join in the 10th World Labyrinth Day and Walk As One at 1, alongside walkers from over 24 different countries.

“In the UK there are 162 permanent labyrinths, some in churches, universities, retreats and spiritual and healing centres as well as parks and private homes.

“Many are constructed on the day just for the event - drawn in the sand in Australia, Bahamas, New Zealand and South America and in other countries with pebbles, stones, rope, tea lights and even pine cones.

“We are incredibly lucky at Dunwood Park to have a permanent labyrinth and are grateful to OMBC for allowing it. We especially want to thank the kind and dedicated gardener Andy who walks the labyrinth for 10 minutes every time he mows the path, and then has to walk it again with the mower blades set higher to form the whole labyrinth.

“It was looking really good on Saturday and I am sure that all present took something meaningful away from the experience of walking as a group taking steps for peace.”

For more information about The Labyrinth Society and World Labyrinth Day go online: https://labyrinth society.org/world-labyrinth-day

With thanks to Carol Hughes and Aimee Belmore of the Shaw and Crompton Correspondent for this article
Putting Down Firm Roots for Peace

Shaw and Crompton Parish Council Peace Champion Cllr Angie Farrell (seated right) has been inspired to create a space for peace in Dunwood Park’s own Railway Garden.

The Railway Garden is a community growing hub located next to the labyrinth. It is the brainchild of Amanda Wright, owner of Café Mandels and social enterprise Right Opportunities. (Amanda has also signed the Pledge). Here local people are growing fruit, vegetables and herbs as part of a borough-wide healthy eating programme.

Angie’s idea is to turn one corner of the garden into a contemplative area where residents can reflect on peace. There will be bench seating, a peace pole and flowers associated with peace.

Work to progress the scheme will take place over the summer and it is hoped that a launch might be possible as part of our 2018 peace day celebrations.

Elsewhere in the park, work is unfolding to turn an ash tree stump into a peace sculpture (right). Maria and Richard have recently helped a panel select one of several designs submitted by students from the Oldham Sixth Form College.

Meanwhile in Uppermill...

You can see that Oldham Council’s Saddleworth District team (left) are delighted at the April unveiling of a new heron sculpture in the Uppermill Library Gardens.

The sculpture was crafted from a cherry tree stump (far left) and overlooks the peace pole, which is also in the Library Gardens, forming a place for quiet reflection and enjoyment.
Supporting the Conscientious Objectors of South Korea

On International Conscientious Objectors’ Day, Forum Secretary Richard Outram sent a personal plea to the President of South Korea, President Moon Jae-in, via an email to the Korean Ambassador in London, for prisoners of conscience to be released and able to serve instead in a civilian capacity rather than in the military under arms.

In his email, Richard commended President Moon for agreeing with North Korean President Kim Jong-Un to formally end the Korean War and work for peace, but asked him to carry out a ‘second heroic act for peace’ by releasing prisoners and providing alternate civilian service.

Responding, Hannah Brock, the ‘Right to Refuse to Kill’ Programme Worker at charity War Resisters’ International (https://www.wri-irq.org/en) said: “It is great to know that such a message has been sent. We are very happy to see the number of emails, postcards and letters that are being sent to the South Korean authorities today. We hope it has an impact.”

South Korea imprisons more people for conscientious objection than the rest of the world put together. Hundreds of South Koreans are currently in prison because they have refused to do military service on religious and pacifist grounds. Many are Jehovah’s Witnesses. The organisation reported in February 2018 that South Korea has so far sentenced over 19,300 Witnesses to a combined total of more than 36,700 years in prison for refusing to perform military service.

The UN Human Rights Committee (CCPR) has condemned South Korea for denying conscientious objectors ‘freedom of thought, conscience and religion’ and for punishing them with ‘arbitrary detention’ for exercising rights guaranteed under international law. On November 3, 2015, the CCPR urged the government to release all conscientious objectors, compensate and exonerate them, and offer them alternative civilian service.

President Moon, a former human rights lawyer, took office on May 10, 2017 saying: “Freedom of conscience is a fundamental right of the highest level among all fundamental rights under the Constitution. Therefore, I promise to implement alternative service and get rid of the current practice of imprisoning conscientious objectors.”

Left: The opposition movement in South Korea to military service is growing.

A petition from over 900 conscientious objectors, many imprisoned, was delivered to the new President last September.

Recent lower Court judgements have favoured the conscientious objectors.

And as this issue went to press, there has just been a historic judgement by the South Korean Constitutional Court that in future conscientious objectors must be provided with alternate civilian service, but regrettably they have not ruled that prisoners of conscience be released. So the campaign is half-won, but the fight to free the conscientious objectors must go on.

Photo courtesy of War Resisters’ International
‘Collateral Damage’, a project supported by the Peace Pledge Union, is a display of unique textile poppies honouring innocent victims of wars. In November 2018, the UK will mark the centenary of the end of the First World War, a ‘war to end all wars’. Sadly, conflicts have continued all over the world since then. In the twentieth century, there were 175 - 180 million fatalities. Now over 90% of war victims are civilians, dismissively called ‘collateral damage’ by the military.

In May and June, the exhibition was on display in the Quaker Friends’ Meeting House in Manchester. Members of the public contributed unique textile poppies to the display with tags with the name and story of a victim(s). The Editor visited the exhibition in May and found the poppies and citations dedicated to animals and young children, particularly those accompanied by photos, to be very moving. Many victims were from recent conflicts in Iraq, Syria and Yemen.

The exhibition will be displayed in several UK locations throughout 2018, before being taken to Westminster for the centenary event. You can contribute your own poppy to the display. It can be sewn, knitted, crocheted, or felted. It can be white, coloured; plain or highly decorated, with or without a leaf. Please send poppies to add to the installation by 8th October 2018 to: Collateral Damage White Poppies, c/o QPSW, Friends House, 173-177 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ.

Further information about the project can be found at www.ppu.org.uk/collateral-damage
On Friday 25 May, the World Community for Christian Meditation (http://wccm.org/) hosted this interfaith event at Manchester Cathedral. The event was organised by Joanne Caine, the former head-teacher of St Pauls Primary School in Royton and now a Coordinator with WCCM.

Held three days after the first anniversary of the Manchester Arena Bombing, it was a very moving event providing an opportunity for the 120 participants to reflect on, celebrate and strengthen the powerful spirit of community that followed this tragic event, and to meditate upon and pray for a more peaceful future.

Maria and Richard were invited to attend on behalf of the Forum. Father Laurence Freeman, International Director of WCCM, spoke to the assembly about the power and importance of meditation in our lives, before leading the group in a first 20-minute meditation.

Speakers representing Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhist and Humanism, as well as Maria representing The Prem Rawat Foundation, then addressed the assembly. Maria spoke about the work and message of Mr. Prem Rawat, Ambassador to the Pledge to Peace and read one of her own compositions, The Voyage, which is a beautiful poem that she illustrated herself (below).

Following lunch, representatives from the World Peace Prayer Society (http://www.worldpeace.org/) led the participants in a flag ceremony where everyone in turn carried a flag to the front and those assembled then said in unison ‘May peace prevail in...(name of country)’. The flags are made by hand by a small team of women workers at the Society’s head office in Japan and they are prayed over during their construction with the intention of blessing them for use in such ceremonies.
Maria carried Belize, Iceland and Tonga, whilst Richard got New Zealand and, by chance, ended up carrying the last flag to be displayed, the Union Jack. Father Freeman then took up the Earth Flag, and after everyone singing ‘What a Wonderful World’, the participants joined him in each picking up a flag and following him in a slow procession round the Cathedral. Maria took up Iceland again and Richard joined the end of parade with the United Kingdom once more (below). Event organiser Joanne Caine later said: “I must admit; it was the most beautiful Flag Ceremony I have been part of.”

The event ended with a second period of meditation and some final reflections from Father Freeman.

There is also a very moving installation in the Cathedral which is well worth seeing.

*Together Unafraid*

Manchester's response to the atrocity of the Arena bomb was not to become a divided city with neighbour set against neighbour. Many say that a new respect for each other’s humanity became apparent. It was exemplified by the heart felt floral tributes and messages left in St Ann’s Square and an attitude that rejected intolerance for ‘others’.

The Artist-in-Residence here at Manchester Cathedral, Stephen Ranc, was just one of the thousands who were affected by this adversity. His reaction was to invite people of all faiths to join together in painting a small part of a large banner with his words ‘Together Unafraid’. The final artwork was unveiled in the week leading up to the anniversary of the tragedy on the 22nd May.

Since March of this year participants have joined in painting sessions which were hosted in a Mosque, a Synagogue, a Gurdwara, the Cathedral and some local schools. People of all ages and abilities painted a square from which Stephen assembled this printed artwork.

Many of the contributors had their photograph taken which forms the border of the banner; a faithful record of the wonderful diversity of people that live and work in the city of Manchester.

Thanks to Maria Ellis for several photos.

13 The Oldham Peace Times Issue 16 – June 2018
A Big Hope for Peace

Richard Outram and Maria Ellis attended the Big Hope 2 Congress (www.thebighope.info) held recently at Liverpool Hope University (above).

On 19 June, Richard joined a panel discussion on peace education and youth empowerment and spoke on the work that has, and is being done, in Oldham to promote peace in schools, before participating in a question and answer session (below left).

At the end of the panel discussion, Maria, as Chair of Peace Talks Oldham, made a presentation of two books about the life and message of Prem Rawat, ‘Peace is Possible’ and ‘No Ordinary Box’, to Susan Murray from the University’s Sheppard-Worlock Library (below right). Maria also made a second presentation to Dr Catalina Montoya, Director of the Desmond Tutu Centre for Peace and War Studies. Maria and Richard later spoke with academics about the possibility of the University becoming a signatory to the Pledge to Peace.

Maria and Richard also joined friends from Liverpool Peacepool, Nina, Gerry and Esther, Gerry (right), who staffed a stall with materials about The Prem Rawat Foundation’s Peace Education Programme at the conference.

Thanks to Maria Ellis for the photos.
In Croydon Peace is Inevitable

As part of the Croydon Festival of Peace, on 22 June, Peace Partners, signatories to the Pledge to Peace, hosted a forum on street gangs and knife crime in London and showcased the work of The Prem Rawat Foundation in turning the lives of gang members in Ecuador around through the Peace Education Programme. In London, 40 young people have died in knife crimes so far this year.

Held at the Croydon Conference Centre, the keynote speakers were Pastor Mimi Asher and Bruce Carlton-Smith.

Pastor Asher discovered her son Michael was involved with a gang called the Organised Criminals and chose to open her home as a community centre where gang members and other young people could gather so she could engage them in conversation. Over three years, Pastor Asher has worked with over 300 young people, delivering a range of activities including anger management and conflict resolution courses. She described many gang members as ‘teddy bears’ and felt that transforming the lives of young people for the good was life’s ‘greatest reward’.

Bruce Carlton-Smith is the head coach at the Sting ABC Boxing Club in Croydon. He works with gang members referred to him by Croydon Council and other partners under the Turnaround Programme. He believes that when young people misbehave this should be ‘challenged by grown ups’ and, because not enough of us do this, young people think their behaviour is perfectly acceptable.

The audience was also entertained by the poet, Mr Gee, who performed his poem ‘Living on a Knife Edge’ and by Festival Organiser, Katie Rose, who sang a song of her own composition called ‘One Life’. Both touched on the personal impact of knife crime.

The film ‘Peace is Inevitable’ was then shown, highlighting the transformation made in the lives of young gang members in Ibarra, Ecuador, who were exposed to the message of Mr Prem Rawat through watching the Peace Education Programme (below left and right). These young people went onto establish a youth centre to support gang members wishing to exit a life of crime and also prevent other young people joining gangs.
In the second half of the event, a workshop was held where several speakers highlighted the value of reading circles and the Peace Education Programme in engaging with gang members and offenders. Richard also addressed the 80 or so delegates about the work being carried out for peace in schools in Oldham (below).

Following the event, there was some excellent networking with attendees from Bristol, Croydon, Lambeth and Worthing, all of whom were interested in following Oldham’s example by urging their local Council to sign the Pledge to Peace.

Richard is now in contact with these individuals about taking their interest forward.

Maria also presented Mr Gee with a copy of ‘No Ordinary Box’ (right). Mr Gee is well-known for presenting BBC Radio 4’s ‘Rhyme & Reason’, ‘Bespoken Word’ & ‘Poetic Justice’.

Mr Gee also recently interviewed Mr Prem Rawat, Ambassador of Peace.

We talked with him about his work using poetry with offenders in prisons.

You can see him speak about this work in his TEDx talk at Brighton ‘Have Poems, Will Travel’.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GsvVF0vsECo

Photo - top right - courtesy of Maria Ellis
Croydon Sings for Peace

On Saturday 23 June, the finale of the Festival was held in the Park Hill Park, which included performances by Croydon Citadel Brass Players and Caterham School Brass Band (shown above), Tim Spoerer and the Ecclesbourne School Jambus, Spoken Word by Shaniqua Benjamin and dancers led by Anusha Subramanyan.

The highlight was the public signing of the Anthem for Peace which had been especially commissioned for the Festival through crowd-funding and financial support from the Mayor of London. The performance was led by the London Mozart Players (shown below left) with the chorus to the song (shown below right).

Maria and Richard were able to meet Catherine Graham, co-Chair of the Friends of Park Hill Group, and we talked about working to make Croydon a borough of peace. Catherine very kindly showed us round the Peace Garden that had been officially opened that day. This is a collaborative project by twelve community groups, which reflect the diversity of faith and ethnicity in Croydon (details overleaf). Catherine explained the garden will be made accessible by a pathway to people in wheelchairs or pushing buggies, and part decorated by tiles. There may be a possibility of Oldham sponsoring some of these tiles as a mark of our new partnership for peace with Croydon.
At the close of the Festival, Maria also presented Katie Rose, Festival Organiser, with a copy of Prem Rawat’s talks ‘No Ordinary Box’ (below right).

A Unique International School Link for Peace

We were very proud when, in October 2017, Dr Nava Sonnenschein, Director of the School of Peace in Neve Shalom – Wahat al-Salam, chose to visit Oldham to sign a unique Partnership for Peace with the Oldham Pledge to Peace Forum. Wahat al-Salam - Neve Shalom (the Oasis of Peace, in Arabic and Hebrew) was established in 1972 by Father Bruno Husar and Anne le Meignen as Israel’s only intentionally formed Jewish-Arab village.

As part of the partnership, both parties agreed to look to make links between several of Oldham’s Pledge to Peace Schools and the Primary School in the village. In May, two Year 4 classes at Ss Aidan’s and Oswald’s Primary School in Royton (63 pupils) made contact with one Year 4 class (24 pupils) at Neve Shalom. The children of Ss Aidan’s and Oswald’s Year 4 (below) recently told an assembly held on the School’s Annual Peace Day (28 June) that they were ‘trying to make new friends’. They have been taking photographs of the places that they love the most in Oldham to share with children at Neve Shalom and are ‘really looking forward to seeing the amazing places the children enjoy in Israel.’
A full report of this event will appear in the September issue of the Oldham Peace Times.

It is appropriate that Ss Aidan’s and Oswald’s School (http://www.ssaidanoswald.oldham.sch.uk/) is the first to make a link as it is a Roman Catholic School, and Father Bruno Husar was a Catholic Dominican friar. The name comes from the Biblical Book of Isaiah: “My people shall dwell in an oasis of peace.”

In September, when both sets of pupils move into Year 5, these friendships will be developed further and the children in Royton and Israel will also start to work on joint educational projects, including one in collaboration with NASA.

We will bring you an update on progress in a future issue of the Oldham Peace Times.

Benita Hide, Executive Director at Oasis of Peace UK, expressed her high hopes for the project: “The diversity of Oldham is a perfect match for Neve Shalom, and with such inventive and enthusiastic teachers the link will go far.”

The Israeli Ministry of Education seems to share these expectations. The Wahat al-Salam – Neve Shalom Primary School has been selected to participate in a pilot project with several other schools specifically to make international links so our partnership is very timely.

Ministry officials joined teachers from both schools and Richard on a Skype call in April, and Richard has since responded to further enquiries from the Ministry about the work being done in Oldham schools to promote peace and community cohesion.

**What makes Schooling at Wahat al-Salam – Neve Shalom ‘Special’?**

Wahat al-Salam - Neve Shalom (http://wasns.org/-school32) offers nursery, kindergarten, and primary school tuition up to Sixth Grade. Approximately 270 children are taught here, some are from the village itself, but most travel daily from more than twenty communities within a radius of 30 kilometers.

Demand for places is increasing as more parents from outside of the village choose to send their children there because of its very special educational model. As well as being educated to the requirements of the national school system, the children learn in an environment that is bi-national and bi-lingual, with roughly the same number of Arab and Jewish pupils. They learn to speak both Arabic and Hebrew, and learn about Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Whereas other children in Israel grow up in relative ignorance of the other people that share the same land, children here learn to accept this inter-cultural exchange as something that is natural
and desirable. Since Arabs and Jews have differing and often irreconcilable narratives relating to their culture and history, the pupils are made aware of these separate narratives. They learn that both sides have suffered pain, that justice cannot be one-dimensional, and that in a bi-national environment we always need to take our neighbours into account.

As the school works according to an egalitarian and democratic model, the children also learn that it is possible for Arabs and Jews to work together and share authority. There is an atmosphere of openness and tolerance at the school that encourages the children to understand, accept and appreciate each other. There is also equal participation by Arab and Jewish staff in school administration and teaching.

History

The idea of creating an educational framework that would express Wahat al-Salam - Neve Shalom’s ideals of coexistence and equality was born together with the community’s first children. The idea was translated into action from the late 1970s, when the village began to educate children at nursery and kindergarten levels.

In 1984, using recycled building materials, the village was able to construct a small building for a primary school. Initially, the school served only the dozen children of primary school in the village. When the teachers became more confident of their binational and bilingual teaching methods, the school opened its doors also to children from outside the village, and the enrollment and age-range began to grow.

State recognition and support was slow in coming. The Kindergarten received state authorization in 1992 and the school in 1993. In 1997, the Education Ministry assigned the status of "experimental school" to the Primary School recognizing its value as a model for emulation.

In the year 2000, the Education Ministry gave the status of the school to that of an official, extra-regional school. However, the school later became a recognized independent school.

This article is abridged from text taken from the Neve Shalom – Wahat al-Salam website. All photos courtesy of Neve Shalom - Wahat al-Salam