

Elmbridge Multi-faith Forum

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NEWSLETTER

Spring 2017

Issue 21

This publication is sponsored by Elmbridge Borough Council

The Aims of Elmbridge Multifaith Forum

To encourage the Citizens of Elmbridge:

- To respect and understand each other's Faiths
- To work with people of different faiths on projects for the benefit of the local and world community

The Beneficiaries of our work

The beneficiaries 'targeted' by our members are the citizens of Elmbridge and the locality, especially those who care about faith issues. Therefore we:

- Place Newsletters, Insights into Faiths and details of our activities in libraries, day centres, churches, mosques, synagogues and other 'faith centres' in the borough
- Invite and welcome anyone to our meetings
- Make presentations about our work to interested groups
- Tell groups whom we visit about our work and try to build relationships with them
- Have representatives on the Independent Advisory Group to Surrey Police

Membership

We are always pleased to welcome new individuals as members.

The annual subscription is £10, for which members receive the newsletters and priority booking for events and visits, as well as invitations to meetings.

The subscription year runs from 1st April to 31st March.

We now have over 100 members,
but not all have paid their subscription for the current year.

*For enquiries about membership,
please contact our Treasurer Leonard Beighton on 01932 863516*

Since our last Newsletter we have

- Published and distributed our 20th Newsletter in **March 2016**
- Finalised our report on the visit to the Armenian Church on **24th February 2016**
- On Tuesday, **21st June** visited the Zoroastrian Centre for Europe, Alexander Avenue South Harrow
- On **Tuesday, 12th July** held our Annual General Meeting in the EMF Centre, followed by brief presentations by representatives of Hindu, Jewish, Christian and Muslim religions on practices surrounding the birth of a child and his or her introduction to faith
- On **Tuesday 23rd August** at the EMF Centre, Mercer Close, discussed “German Attitudes to Islam and the Middle East in the 19th, 20th and 21st Centuries”, introduced by Professor James Hodgkinson of Warwick University
- On **Saturday and Sunday, 3rd and 4th September**, Charity Concerts by 2 young pianists from Kosovo and the BBC Young String Musician of the Year 2015
- On **Monday 19th September** at the EMF Centre held a discussion on “Faith and Inner Peace”
- On **Tuesday 11th October** at Surbiton Golf Club, Geoffrey Morris was invited to discuss with a Roman Catholic Men’s Group, the Aims and Activities of the Elmbridge Multifaith Forum
- On **Thursday 27th October**, enjoyed a presentation by Roger and Gail Partridge on “Impressions of Palestine”, followed by questions and discussion
- On **Thursday 24th November**, Geoffrey Morris and Nabil Mustapha were invited to speak to the Stragglers Club about the Aims and Activities of the Elmbridge Multifaith Forum
- Continued to meet the demand for our ‘*Insights into Faiths*’ booklet and to work on an expanded version in one volume
- Continued our research into introduction and inclusion of newcomers to Elmbridge who do not speak English and come from other faiths and cultures
- Been represented on the Independent Advisory Group to Surrey Police, Brooklands Radio, Voluntary Action Elmbridge (VAE), Elmbridge Equality & Diversity Forum, Elmbridge Community & Safety Partnership (EC & SP) and SACRE

Our work, during this period, has been supported by a grant of £250 from Elmbridge Borough Council.

Visit to the Church of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) in Thames Ditton ■ 27th February 2015

Introduction

With the help and good offices of Mr John Dolman, arrangements were made for EMF members to make a group visit to that church, which is within Elmbridge. We were welcomed by Bishop Jonathan Nabrotsky and his team into the wood panelled hall with hardly any icons or artefacts. There is no cross in the church; the reason, we were told, is the belief that Christ did not die. He is alive. There are no images of Christ although there are some pictures of Him.

John Dolman then gave a brief welcome talk in which he hoped that, despite the differences in interpretation of the Gospel by the different religions, there would be a spirit of unity in this evenings proceedings. There is one God, He may be called Elohim or Allah or any other name, but His is inevitably a sacred name, as in "Hallowed be Thy name."

John then mentioned some teachings by the Buddhist ShinjoEto, who taught us that we could have a good life, a good religion and material wealth, but most importantly we wish to feel good. A good way to feel like that is to heed the 'Beatitudes' of the Bible, where blessings are promised to the poor, the meek and so on. Indeed this shows how the teachings of Buddhism and Christianity are so very similar. John asked that, in listening to the presentation, we should all look to those areas of commonality between our different religions.

A song by 12 year old Karmin Jones

Following this introduction we were treated to the angelic voice of Karmin accompanied by her mother on the piano. The sweetness of the voice and the uplifting melody of the song was a source of great joy. The applause was enthusiastic and we thanked Karmin and her mother for coming from their home purposely to so lovingly entertain us.

More about the church

During Jesus Christ's ministry He established His church on Earth. From Paul's epistles, it is clear that within a few years of Christ's crucifixion the churches in different cities were straying from His teaching. As we know, His Apostles were accused and put to death in violent ways and it is our belief that consequently the Lord God removed His Priesthood Authority from Earth. Thus began what we term the Great Apostasy. We believe that the confused nature of God as described in the Nicene Creed is a result of there being no divine inspiration for the Council.

The young Joseph Smith was as confused as any as to which religion he should follow. On reading James 1:5 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him' he reflected deeply, and In

answer to his sincere prayer the Lord God and His Son Jesus Christ appeared to the young Joseph, and subsequent angelic visitations and teaching led to the publication of The Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith was further told that he was to re-establish Christ's church on Earth, and the first meeting of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints was held on 6th April 1830. Joseph Smith continued to receive Heavenly guidance in his role as a modern day prophet. Throughout his life Joseph Smith suffered persecution, and finally he sealed his testimony of the truth of his teaching with his own blood when he was murdered by a mob in Carthage, Illinois on 27th June 1844.

Following the death of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young was elected as President and Prophet of the church. As in the days of Christ the President is supported by a quorum of twelve Apostles who are special witnesses of our Lord Jesus Christ. But there is ever only one Prophet of the church. Priesthood can only be held by men, but women are very active in the structure and activities of the church through their Relief Society.

The church now has some 15 million members and there are about 90,000 missionaries worldwide sharing the Gospel. All members of the church undertake their duties on a voluntary basis. To be called to a serving in the church is a source of joy. We were introduced to the Mission President, Mr Millar, a venerable man, quiet and obviously with dignity and pleasant demeanour. He advised us that it is the duty of every male member over the age of 18 to do 2 years of full time missionary work. For females, although they are very welcome to serve a mission, it is not considered their duty.

Order of the Congregational Mass

Attendance at church on a Sunday lasts from 10am to 1pm. The first hour of the Sunday service is termed the Sacrament Meeting. All attend to sing hymns, to worship and to take the Sacrament. Because of the belief that alcohol should not be consumed, the Sacrament consists of bread and consecrated water. During the second hour the children separate to their own classrooms and the men and women remain together – all are taught the Gospel Doctrines or Bible Studies. Then, for the third hour the men and women separate with the men being taught appropriate to their Priesthood and the women are taught in their Relief Society. In addition the church organises Home Teaching programmes for the Priesthood holders and Visiting Teaching for Relief Society members.

Financing

Every member of the church has the obligation to contribute a tithe of 10% of their earnings. In addition, once a month every member is asked to fast for two meals and to make a generous offering of the cost saved by this fast.

Divine Ordainment of the Family

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints are allowed only one wife, and the concept of polygamy was abolished by the Church in 1890. The family is

ordained of God, and marriage is between a man and a woman. Chastity before marriage is imperative and children are seen as a gift of God (Psalm 27:3)

Members of the church abstain from all consumption of alcoholic beverages and tea and coffee; the teaching is to avoid anything that can be habit forming. St Paul, in his epistles, teaches that our bodies are the temple of God, that the Holy Spirit can live there should it be 'clean'.

Mr Derek White (High Priest)

Our second session was led by Mr Derek White, who told us that he is eighth generation Mormon. He described how the church carries the name of Jesus Christ because it is the restored church that He founded - He is the Creator and the Lord of the Old Testament. The church accepts four books of scripture termed the Standard Works: the Holy Bible (King James version), the Book of Mormon (another testament of Jesus Christ), the Doctrine and Covenants (modern day revelation to the Prophet) and the Pearl of Great Price (additional translation and revelation by the Prophet Joseph Smith).

Jesus Christ existed before the world was formed as we all were, but in a spiritual form, living with our Father in Heaven. God wanted us to experience good and evil and all that a physical body brings, but He knew that none would entirely reject the temptations of evil. He needed a plan to allow men to return to Him in a pure state so He called on His 'sons of the morning' for volunteers to achieve this. Lucifer proposed that man should never be allowed to sin so they could all return to Heaven, and Lucifer would be glorified for this achievement. But God the Father required that all His children should be allowed to choose their actions of their own free will. Jesus proposed that He could be a sinless sacrifice for man's transgressions thus allowing them to return to their Father in Heaven and the Glory would be to God.

Jesus and God created the Earth and Satan was banished here to tempt man. Subsequently, through the Holy Spirit, Mary was pregnant with Jesus as an incarnation of God on Earth; thus is Jesus both the son of Mary and the son of God.

We know through the Bible of Jesus's three years of ministry and His establishment of His church and of His twelve Apostles. We read that, in the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed to His Father and was able to carry all the sins of the world on His shoulders in His Atonement to God for us. That He was nailed to the cross on which He 'gave up the ghost'. That He overcame death by taking back his spirit in His resurrection, and thus we will all be able to return to live with our Father in Heaven.

We can read in Corinthians that our level of glory in the afterlife will depend upon our lives here on Earth, it being described as 'the Glory of the sun, the moon and the stars'. In answer to a question Mr White told that immediately upon death our spirit departs our physical body, either to 'paradise' or to 'spirit prison' (similar to the Jewish concept of Sheoul). That those in paradise teach those in prison so that all may hear the Gospel and all may repent of their sins.

The Book of Mormon - presented by our Missionary Elders

It is said that The Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion - if it is true then Joseph Smith was truly a Prophet of God, and ours is indeed the restored Church of Jesus Christ. The book tells the history of a group of people living in Jerusalem in 600BC who were commanded by God to leave the city and follow wherever He would lead them. Their travel took them eventually to the Americas and the book tells of what became of their descendants. During their travels the people were commanded to make a record on gold and brass plates of what befell them. In due course, through war and bitter fighting these people were annihilated, but God commanded that the plates be buried in order that their history would be available to later generations. Joseph Smith, by Divine Guidance, was able to locate these plates and he was ordered by an angel to translate them into English through the agency of the Urim and Thummim (Deut 33:8).

Family History and Temples - presented by our Sister Missionaries

In the very last two verses of the Old Testament Malachi tells us that the Lord will send Elijah to us before the 'great and dreadful day of the Lord: *And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers*'. These verses tell us of the sacred nature of the family and how we can continue to live with our families in the Celestial Kingdom with our Lord God. However, we cannot enter the Kingdom of God unless we have repented of our sins and been washed clean in the waters of Baptism. But for many of God's children, through no fault of their own, have never heard of the Gospel nor met a person with the Priesthood Authority to baptise them. Hence we read in the Bible of baptism for the dead, and this ordinance is conducted in the Temple for those spirits in Spirit Prison who have accepted Christ's teaching. For this reason family history is of major importance in Mormon families, since we may only conduct these baptisms for our own past relatives.

For our children Baptism is only conducted for those who are 8 years old or older. The Lord has advised that children under 8 years of age do not fully understand the concept of sin and so are regarded as sinless. For those over 8 years of age, Baptism is therefore a conscious decision. In the Temple we also make solemn vows and make covenants with Our Lord God.

Bishop Nabrotsky spoke briefly to close our presentation and told how exciting it is to have a Prophet of the Lord in our time to lead and guide us in the paths of righteousness. Then we were invited to socialise with fellow Mormons and to partake of a delightful buffet.

We thanked all those who had entertained us with a wonderful evening of knowledge and spirituality, and we agreed to consider an invitation to the London Temple Visitor Centre at some time in the future.

Nabil M Mustapha (Revised & Edited by Mr John Dorman)

VISIT TO St SARKIS ARMENIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Inverna Gardens, Kensington, London ■ 24th February 2016

NB: This visit took place just before our last Newsletter was published and in which we wrote a brief factual statement. This is a fuller version based on the notes we made and which we sent back for approval.

Introduction:

The visit was arranged using the good offices of a chance encounter of one of the members of the Armenian community, Mr Rafik Sarkissian, who fortuitously lives in Elmbridge and has some input into the Church.

After communications with His Grace Bishop Hovakim Manukyan, Primate of Armenian Church of UK and Ireland, the date was agreed and about 35 members joined our coach trip.

Bishop Manukian welcomed the group, and then handed over to Dr Hratch Chillingirian who gave us a detailed and enlightening talk on the history of Armenian Christianity and the Armenian Orthodox Church.

Christianity and Armenia:

Christianity was introduced to Armenia by St Thaddeus and St Bartholomew, the suggested date being 50-60 CE There are references to the existence of Christian communities in Armenia before the 4th Century CE, as established by "Gregory the Enlightener (or the illuminator)" With the baptism of King Tiridates III by Gregory, Armenia became the first nation to adopt Christianity as the state religion. This was an essential signpost to the creation of the Armenian identity, and the alphabet was formulated in 407 CE to transcribe the scriptures. Naturally, there followed the translation of the Bible and other liturgical writings.

Apart from the distinct Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church is divided mainly into the Eastern Orthodox (Byzantine, Chalcedonian) and the Oriental Orthodox (Non-Chalcedonian), spanning Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Syria and Indian Malabar. These Non-Chalcedonian churches are also known as non-Diophysites as they believe in the dual nature of Jesus, not the single nature

A brief history of Armenia:

The name, Armenia, was given by Herodotus (circa 520 BCE), although the people were recognised before that. The area occupied varied with time between Eastern Anatolia, Persia (Iran), Greece and the Caucasus. In 1905 the Armenians living within the Ottoman State were subjected to a pogrom This, and the effects following World War I, resulted in a dispersion of Armenians within the Middle East and further afield. Armenia itself was

absorbed within the Soviet States after the Russian revolution, and only after the dissolution of the USSR, did it regain its new sovereign status. However, to this day, only about a third of the Armenian people worldwide actually live in Armenia. The Diaspora is significant and successful, especially in the fields of art and crafts.

The Armenian language is an Indo-European mix with variations between the liturgical and classical language and the variations of the Diaspora.

The present geographical boundaries of Armenia are much smaller than in the past, and salient features like the famous Mount Ararat, supposedly the site of Noah's ark, is now within eastern Turkey. Mount Ararat is still the national symbol for Armenia.

The Armenian Church:

The Armenian Church's Christology is based on the Alexandria School of theology, and the formula of "One Nature of the Incarnate Word" postulated by St Cyril of Alexandria. This is the belief that at the moment of the Incarnation of Christ, Divine Nature and Human Nature were united inseparably in a single nature, a single person (the "Monophysite Creed"). This was agreed in the Ecumenical Council of Nicea of CE 325, and was re-enforced by the Council of Constantinople of 381 CE, in which Jesus Christ was defined as the incarnate of God, and Mary was described as "Theotokos", or the giver of the life of God.

The church relies on the Revelation, on meditation, and on biblical liturgy (the common worship where faith is practical).

Present organisation of the Armenian Church:

The Armenian Church is currently formed of four Hierarchical Sees:

1. The prominent See is the Holy Echmiatsin (Armenia), the Seat of the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos (Greek origin: universal or general) of all Armenians.
2. The Catholicate of Cilicia in Antelias (Lebanon).
3. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem.
4. The Patriarchate of Constantinople

These Sees are really united in their dogma, theology, and liturgy, but each has its religious order (or brotherhood) with jurisdictions, Dioceses, and Parish Churches.

Working with the Catholicos is the Supreme Ecclesiastic Council, which has clerical and lay members and carries out the overall administration of the Armenian Church throughout the world.

The priestly order in the Armenian Church includes both married and celibate clergy. Only the celibate priests are eligible for advancement within the church hierarchy, while married priests become parish pastors.

St Sarkis Church:

The British Armenian community is about 20,000 strong, and are mainly in London and Manchester. St Sarkis Church was the first church, but when there was further need it was joined by the neighbouring St Yeghiche (St Elisha) Church, both in Kensington, London.

Situated in a prime spot in the heart of Kensington's garden-surrounded residential area, St Sarkis presents an imposing and venerable edifice with a welcoming entrance. Attached to it is the Armenian Community Centre, a suitable arrangement for the Armenian community to congregate and undertake social activities and children's classes. The architecture is based on the Monastery of Haghpat in Armenia. It has 88 seats and is planned in the form of a cross. It has four main columns in reverence to the four authors of the Gospel. The dome is the symbol of heaven on earth.(However, St Yeghiche Church, which was originally an Anglican church, seats over 700 people.)

St Sarkis was built in 1922 by the Armenian oil magnate and philanthropist, Gulbenkian, and was originally dedicated to his parents. It was later extended so as to accommodate the expanding Armenian community in London. The atmosphere is serene and peaceful as would be expected in any church. There is an ornate pulpit area with an arch so well clad with golden icons and Christian carved symbols. Armenians are enjoined to visit Jerusalem at least once in their lifetime if they can, as an act of pilgrimage (Magdasi). However, there was a stress on the fact that the importance with Armenians is the *FAITH*.



Members of EMF with the Bishop of the Armenian Church

Bishop Manukian

The Bishop's address covered many of the Orthodox Creed as described above, and this was followed by response to questions, but he mentioned that his role extends from Monastery to school to Abbott, and they are well informed of all aspect of knowledge, including common subjects such as geography. He also mentioned that he is actively involved in inter-faith dialogue with other Christian denominations as well as non-Christian Faiths.

Hospitality:

After the talks and the photo shoots in the Church, we retreated to the residence next to the Church where an array of savouries and desserts together with their special tea and "oriental" coffee was served. The socialising was really invigorating, and all the group felt so gratified and informed with this visit.

We thanked His Grace Bishop Manukian, and the speaker Dr Hratch Chirringinian, and last but not least Mr Rafik Sarkissian.

Footnote: *I am grateful to have been given "The Armenian Church of St Sarkis" booklet, from which I extracted much of the information in this report.*

Nabil M Mustapha



Visit to the Zoroastrian Centre for Europe South Harrow ■ Tuesday, 21st June 2016

Introduction

The visit was arranged following communication with the Secretary of the "Zoroastrian Trust Fund of Europe" (ZTFE), Mrs Roshan Avari, and our member Mrs Rushna Master. A coach was booked and the group arrived at the Centre at 11.00 am as agreed. We were greeted by Mrs Rushna Master, Mrs Roshan Avari and Mr Rusi Dalal, and were seated in the main hall of the Centre. Mr Dalal, a teacher at the Centre then addressed us.

It is worth noting that the Centre was, in fact, a cinema in the past, and when acquired by the ZTFE in year 2000, a condition was that the art-decor appearance of this listed building and heritage site are to be maintained. Other aspects were allowed to be adapted as required. Indeed, the adaptation was both clever and very appropriate, and the theatre front has been maintained.

The Zoroastrian Religion

The Zoroastrian religion is considered to be the oldest Divine (revealed) religion, and is assumed to have been revealed in what was a wide area which included Persia, about

1500-1600 BCE. That is, it is about 3500 years old. The scripture was collected from cuneiform tablets, and it is believed that the Prophet, Zoroaster or Zarathustra was born in the Central Asian Steppes, probably around the area of Semipalatinsk, north-east of Lake Valaksh in Kazakhstan. It was then very much an oral society, with Zoroaster's teachings passed down orally through generations.

Zarathustra trained as a priest, but left his home to wander for 10 years in search of "Truth" before producing His teachings. He lived for 77 years but was assassinated by a Turanian named Bradärs

The effects of the religion became widespread, and there are echoes of its teachings in Ancient Greece, and the history of Judaism and Christianity. For example, the Jews who were taken as slaves in Babylon were subsequently freed in 539 BCE by Cyrus, who is believed to have been an adherent to the Zoroastrian teachings. The "Faraman" or Edict that was decreed, historically named as "Cyrus' Cylinder", has been found and is currently in the British Museum. A copy "cylinder" is placed in the United Nations building in New York as a symbol of freedom. Also the three "Maji" who were attracted to the the birth of Jesus were directed to the birthplace through studies of certain Zoroastrian texts.

It is worth bearing in mind that society at the time was very tribal, and all teachings and wisdoms were passed around by word of mouth. The only "civilisation" at the time was in the Indus Valley which was noted for its two classes, one the "Warriors". and the other the "Non-Warriors" or farmers. Another category was that of the "Learned" people, who are priests handing down their knowledge to the next generation. These were priests who were drawn from the tribal leaders, and they were called "Maji". Part of their pursuits included astronomy and astrology.

A major statement of Zoroaster is the "One God". He also separated good from bad. The revelation is attributed to several "Bounteous Immortals", but mainly "*Ahurä Mazda*" (Supreme Wisdom). Mazda means light.

The other side of this is "Obedience". All good comes out of Ahura Mazdä. Bad comes from turning away from Ahura. Evil is there to negate the good. There is therefore a "Duality". All good comes from, and is a creation of, Ahura Mazda. Good is creative. Not so evil, which is a negation.

Zoroaster taught that the most important creation is "Mankind". We are the creation that has a good mind. Other creations are, as expected, animals, plants, earth and water. These natural elements are important. But in addition there is "FIRE". This is energy and light giving, and it is the creation of Ahura Mazda. Man is the supreme. We have a good mind and we should use it. We have to think for others. God gave us the freedom to think for ourselves, and use our good mind for good thoughts, good words and good deeds.

Good thoughts : Good words : Good Deeds

Thus, if one does good, he will be rewarded. If he does bad, he will be punished. Our souls and our bodies are separate entities.

The concept of heaven and hell is named "Behesht" and "Dojact". There is a bridge for the souls' "separation" to enter them. The more good we do, the wider the bridge becomes. The more bad we do the narrower it becomes, and in separating us from heaven and hell, we are the more likely to fall into hell. No-one can forgive any person in the other life.

Interestingly, there are no commandments, and the teachings are not well defined. So goodness comes out of joy, and badness comes out of misery. The same applies to truthfulness and falsehood, which relate to happiness or despair.

Our mission in life is to do good and fight evil. We will eventually eliminate evil and reach "Perfection", restoring harmony.

Other interesting legacies

Zoroastrianism gave us the solar "Calendar", and the "Nawruz" (New Year), March 21st. There are twelve months in the year, and each of the 30 days of the month has a name, and 12 of these names are incorporated in the names of the months. 5 days are added at the end of the year, as holy days for prayers. It also gave us "Coinage", perpetrated by a just "King of Kings (Shah en Shah), who can decide on "just wars". All this was established in the Indo-Iranian part of the then world.

Aspects of Zoroastrianism:

The "priestly" class is now still recognised as a separate "learned" class. This class is perpetuated through generations. There are "Head Priests", also through generations. Some priests can be taken from non-priestly class, and there are now 6 families providing 8 "High Priests", who are hierarchical.

Dealing with the dead:

Internment of the dead body will defile the earth or the water. So it is better to expose the body to nature, allowing the vultures or the sun to deal with it. Death is the temporary triumph of evil over goodness. The soul is judged over the "bridge" that divides the person's good deeds from his/her bad deeds.

Present state of Zoroastrianism:

There is a total of about 150,000 Zoroastrians worldwide, and about 5000 in the UK. Some famous Zoroastrians names are the Tata family, the late Freddie Murphy, and the Composer and Conductor, Zubin Mehta. In addition, there are the "Parsees" in India. They are Zoroastrians who migrated in order to escape the persecution in Iran during the early Islamic era. Zoroastrians are still persecuted in present day Iran.

Zoroastrians or Parsees, those who came to India from Persia in the 10th Century AD, demonstrated their good deeds, working towards perfection, involving in charity, and acquiring wealth. Prosperity is acceptable, but it should be shared. There are no commandments in Zoroastrianism. After their refuge in Qujarat, India, they did not carry weapons nor slaughter cows as a mark of respect to the Hindus.. They wear good clothes.

The inner Sanctum "Fire Temple":

This is a living symbol of everlasting glory. It is an enclave housing the "fire" and protecting from the evil outside. The priest always feeds the fire. The community lives around the "Fire Temple". Bell ringing informs the laity that the priest is feeding the fire. It rings five times a day. There is a short prayer, and the laity remain quiet for a short while. The fire is kept using sandalwood and is in an urn. There are certain times of the year when the fire is kept all the time, day and night.

The fire was lighted and consecrated in India when the Parsees first landed a thousand years ago, and it still burns to the present day..

The priest has to go through a process of purity and piety before lighting the fire. Thereafter, the ash is taken to be put on the forehead. Prayer is towards the sun in the East in the morning and towards the West in the afternoon. People can face east, west or south, but not the north as evil is perceived to come from the north (the Indus basin).

The Symbol of Zoroastrianism:

This is very ancient, dating back to Jamshid about 600 BCE. The wings indicate triumph of goodness over evil. The right hand is raised towards Ahura Mazda. The ring in the left hand is a symbol of power handed over from one generation to the other. The symbol is a "Guardian Angel". The "Swords" in the "fire Temple" are to defend against raiders to the fire temples.

Worship:

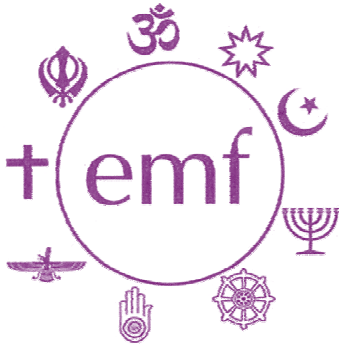
This is undertaken in any day chosen by the individual, apart from seasonal festivals or private occasions

Our experience of the day

We were treated to a philosophical and theological talk. But this was topped up with the spiritual experience of the meditative effect of the fire, and the priest who was feeding it. It was a generous act on the part of our Zoroastrian friends to go to all this length to give us the blessings of the fire and the meditation. In addition, we were thereafter treated to a wonderfully laid out table of refreshments, giving us also the opportunity to socialise and ask more questions.

We all felt gratified at the end of the visit, and we thanked our friends.

Nabil M Mustapha



Tuesday 12th July Annual General Meeting in the EMF Centre

Present:

The Worshipful the Mayor of Elmbridge, Councillor Mrs Tania Shipley and escort
Mr Nigel Shipley

Executive Committee Members

Nabil Mustapha (*Chairman and Trustee*)
Geoff Morris (*Secretary and Trustee*)
Leonard Beighton (*Treasurer and Trustee*)
Kauser Akhtar
Michael Banks
Chuyen Corfield
Margaret Hicks
Derrick Halle
Rashid Laher (*Trustee*)
Nazir Malik
Balbir Singh

Members and Friends

Debbie Banks
James Close
Stella Eusebio
Wang Zhen Gibson

Members and Friends contd . .

Avril Halle
Jackie Hinton
Linda Hunt
Steven Kasamba
John Mash
Rushna Master
Judy Porter
Peggy Sirr
Nadim Vanderman - Examiner of A/cs
Zehmina Vanderman
Geoff Walker
Betty Walker

Apologies

Jackie Foster
Roger and Gail Partridge
David and Judith Robinson

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

I greet you all, and welcome you to our twelfth Annual General Meeting. AGM's tend to be formalities attended by the few, and with our size organisation, would also tend to take a very short time. But before you all start yawning, I am pleased to tell you, that over the past two years we have developed our AGM's so as to include a topical subject worthy of an address, to follow on to the business part. I am very pleased to say that we have today included an address that will be the first part of a trilogy, masterminded by no less than our honorary secretary Geoff Morris, borrowing the well-known cliché: "*Hatches, matches, and despatches*". Tonight, we will present our views on how we

welcome our children into this world. We already have plans for discussing marriage and then the passing away to the other world .

We have had a busy year, and as usual I shall ask my friend Geoff to give you the details. Our engagement with the Walton Street Angel project came to an end as a result of the success of the endeavour, and the dissipation of the need for this service. We had collaborated with church organisations, and we collectively wound up the project.

We had a successful Gala evening at Claremont Fan Court School, attended by over 100 friends. We arranged visits to the Armenian Orthodox Church in Kensington, and the Zoroastrian Centre in South Harrow, and we maintained our input into the other Faith and Voluntary organisations as well as the Borough and Surrey Police. In addition, we are beginning to see way into the "Streets apart" project dealing with Esher Lower Green.

We responded to invitations by the Guildford & Godalming Inter-faith Association and Woking Inter-faith, to join them on their days dealing with the refugees and the customs related to fasting in various religions, and also in the workshop arranged by Surrey Minorities and Ethnic Forum to generate ideas on increasing community cohesion. This was part funded by the then Police and Crime Commissioner, Mr Kevin Hurley, who was in attendance.

I am also pleased to say that we are working on a Faith Training Day at Princess Alice Hospice in Esher, for staff and relatives of hospices in general. As for the rest of the year, well, I am sure Geoff will tell us about the coming events already planned, and also what we hope to add.

In recent years, our Executive Committee was becoming aware of the lack of change, both in its members, and more so in its Office bearers. Personally I was privileged by my colleagues to hold the chair since EMF started, and so has my friend Geoff. We worked together almost like the riders of a tandem bicycle. I cannot praise my friend more profusely for his dedication and hard work. Our trustees and our treasurer, Leonard were towers of strength. Indeed, our other committee members who needed no offices to show their extreme help, in particular Chu Yuen who was always at hand for our events, Rashid who provided his wisdom and his extensive connections, and Michael who, in addition to his overall help, is taking on the task of enhancing our efforts in publicity. And lest I forget, I will certainly mention two other towers of strength, wisdom .. and connections. Kauser and Margaret. I am sure I am expressing my colleagues' sincere gratitude to them for their invaluable help.

We have sadly lost our Membership Secretary, the late Phyllis Woodhead, whom you all knew, as she was the one who kept you circulated with our material and our invitations. My head bows to her memory of dedication and sincere love and kindness. We certainly miss her.

My head bows in equal sadness to the loss of our very dear Alan Foster, husband of our member Jackie. A kind and knowledgeable man and a great support for his wife's efforts in our work. Jackie has not waned in her input to EMF in spite of her loss. We extend to her our utmost love and admiration.

This was not a sad note to end on, but a joyful one as both Phyllis and John passed away in utter peace, and they are now in the world of everlasting happiness and tranquillity.

I thank you again and hand you over to my friend Geoff.

Nabil M Mustapha

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Nabil has told you about some of our activities in the past year, and there is a full list in our 20th Newsletter, of which copies are available now for those of you who have not already had them sent to you as members. If you are not already a fully paid up member, why not join this evening?

In the current financial year, we managed to arrange a visit to the Zoroastrian Centre in South Harrow. This was a repeat of a visit we made in 2004 when EMF had just been founded. To hear about one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions, members of which 'followed a star' to bring gifts to Christ, was a fascinating experience. We were specially privileged to attend prayers said by a priest around a ceremonial fire, followed by refreshments. An extra attraction was that the Zoroastrians have bought a grade 2 listed theatre/cinema in which to hold their own and 'community' events. We shall provide a full account of what we learnt in the next Newsletter.

We are indebted to the Director of the Centre and to Rushna and Phiroz Master for an inspirational visit followed by delicious food.

Future plans for the coming year include:

German interest in Islam in the Middle East in the 19th Century and today:

Tuesday 23rd August at 7.00 for 7.30pm at Mercer Close

Faith and Inner Peace: Monday 19th September at 7.30 pm at Mercer Close, to include Christian, Muslim and Jewish perspectives on mental health

Lower Green Community Project: Nabil has already organised a first Tuesday evening 'Tranquility Zone' and plans to make this a regular feature

Palestine and Israel Today: We hope that Roger and Gail Partridge will be able to find time in October to make a photographic presentation to us of their latest 'meet the people' trip through an area of controversy

Matches and Despatches: If tonight proves interesting, we shall complete the series.

In addition to the thanks expressed by Nabil, I should like to express my own special thanks to Edna Tipping who has managed the lay-out and printing of the Newsletter and

Jackie Foster, who, despite the death of Alan has helped me begin to reconstruct our email list to a format suggested by Kauser, to whom go also my thanks.

Finally, and most important of all, we need help to run EMF with a view taking over the reins of office. Please help us to prepare for the future!!!!

Geoff Morris

TREASURER'S REPORT 2015/16

The Elmbridge Multifaith Forum made a surplus of £740 in the year to 31 March 2016. However this apparently successful financial outcome is, in fact, deceptive. It arose because we received £1,202 following the closing down of Walton Street Angels. The EMF was one the major contributors to the setting up several years ago of the Walton Street Angels and, when a year or so ago, the trustees decided that it should close largely, because it was no longer needed, they also decided that the surplus which they were then running should be returned to the original sponsors in the proportion in which they contributed. Without this unexpected windfall, the EMF would have run a deficit of £462.

The major reason for this deficit was the very considerable loss of £1,244 which we made on the Gala. Until recently the Gala has not been a financial burden on us, but costs have risen sharply, and the number of members and guests paying to come has gone down. The consequence, alas, has been that we have decided that we can no longer afford to run the Gala.

This loss was mitigated by the very generous grant of £750 which we received from Surrey County Council, thanks to the generosity of Cllr Margaret Hicks who contributed to the Gala out of her member's allocation. We also received a grant of £500 from Elmbridge Borough Council for which, as ever, we were most grateful. Although we put most of this, £432, towards the cost of our newsletter, it left a balance of £68 which we also put against the cost of the Gala.

We should also note that our income from membership fees has been dropping. It would be good if we were able to increase our membership. We are now spending more on publicity as we attempt to get the bigger attendance at our events which they most certainly deserve. We hope by both these means to increase our income as well as our influence.

Fortunately as we go forward we have a healthy balance of £3,908.

I am most grateful to Nadim Vanderman who has certified our accounts and provided me with much help.

Leonard Beighton

EMF OFFICERS AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE 2016-17

The following were unanimously elected:

Dr Nabil Mustapha (Baha'i)	... Chairman, Trustee
Mr Geoff Morris (Christian)	... Secretary/Newsletter, Trustee
Mr. Leonard Beighton (Anglican)	... Treasurer, Trustee
Mrs Kauser Ahktar (Muslim)	
Mr Michael Banks (Anglican)	
Mrs. Chuyuen Corfield (Buddhist)	
Mrs Jackie Foster (Roman Catholic)	
The Rev Kim Plumpton (Christian)	
<i>(Unable to attend meetings)</i>	
Mr Derick Halle (Jewish Reform)	
Mrs Margaret Hicks (Christian)	
Major Rashid Laher (Muslim)	... Trustee
Mr. Nazir Ahmad Malik (Ahmadiyya Muslim)	
Mrs Pushpa Patel (Hindu)	
Ms. Kate Shaw (Society of Friends)	

The Mayor thanked the Chairman for inviting her to the meeting and congratulated the Forum on a successful year. She wished it well for the future.

Refreshments were provided, at the end of which we moved on to the presentations and debate.

Presentations by representatives of Hindu, Jewish, Christian and Muslim religions on practices surrounding the birth of a child and his or her introduction to faith

Following the AGM, Geoff Morris introduced a discussion on the various ways different faiths dealing with birth and its surrounding principles and practices. He said there would be four speakers, each representing his or her own faith, following which there would be time for comments, questions and discussion.

The first speaker, Avril Hallé, told us about attitudes to birth in Judaism. First, abortion was forbidden except for reasons of health and risk to life, either of the mother or of the baby. Contraception was also frowned upon, since God had ordained right from the days of Abraham and the Patriarchs that marriage was in order to establish a stable family, and should be encouraged to ensure the continuation of Jewish life. At the actual birth, where there was life threatening risk, and a choice had to be made between the life of

mother or baby, then priority should be given to the mother, as it was important that she should survive to give birth to more children, and to care for any existing siblings. The line of descent was deemed to be through the mother, as it was easier to establish this. A new born infant was not considered “viable” until after thirty days. Circumcision took place on the eighth day, providing the infant was robust enough, and he was given his name, often followed by a celebration. These days baby girls sometimes have a naming ceremony, also with a celebration. However, female genital mutilation has never been part of any Jewish ritual, and this was a view strongly endorsed by all the other speakers. At 13 boys have a Bar Mitzvah ceremony in synagogue marking their taking on adult responsibility within their ritual life. This is also followed by a celebration. Girls may celebrate a Bat Mitzvah, in some streams of Judaism at 12, in others at 13. One final point was that any male adult wishing to convert to Judaism, while being made very welcome, had to be circumcised - if it had not already been done at a young age.

Avril was followed by Geoff Morris, representing the Christian position. He started by saying that there were too many denominations within Christianity to do justice to them all within his seven minute brief; so he would bypass the Greek and Russian Orthodox, and Coptic churches, and concentrate on Roman Catholic and Anglican practices, which were very similar, adding a few words on the non-conformist protestant churches.

Under recent Popes, Catholicism is in a process of change but still officially upholds a ban on artificial contraception, whereas for Anglicans, as also for most Non-Conformists, it is much more left to individual conscience. Christian attitudes to abortion are the same as the Jewish and, indeed, are enshrined in the law of the land. Where the actual birth is concerned, in a life-threatening situation the Catholics used to hold the belief that the life of the infant should take priority over that of the mother; but this is now changing. Entry into the Christian faith is by baptism. Anglicans, Catholics and Methodists believe that it is important to baptise children. At the ceremony the baby can also be given its name and god-parents appointed, who promise to pray for the child and help the parents prepare it for 'Confirmation' when the child takes on for itself the promises previously made on its behalf by the god-parents. Catholic children normally take their first communion before Confirmation, and girls wear a white dress.

Baptists and some other non-conformist churches do not baptise infants, but the parents have their babies blessed and dedicate themselves to providing the child with sufficient teaching to enable it to make its own commitment when it so wishes, at which point the young adult may be baptised by total immersion.

The third speaker was Kauser Ahktar, who gave us the Muslim position. The status of the mother was very high: *“Paradise lies under the feet of the mother.”* Abortion was forbidden, except for health reasons, and could only be carried out before the embryo was 120 days old. The first words a baby should hear were the call to prayer, spoken into

its ear by the father. The Tahnik was the rubbing of a softened date on the baby's skin within seven days of birth. On the seventh day was the naming ceremony, and names must have Islamic connotations. That same day a sheep was slaughtered, the baby's head was shaved and weighed. This rite was called the Aqiqah. Circumcision also normally took place on this day; but could be at any time before puberty. Faith education was an important part of childhood, via the Shahidah from the earliest days, and then via the Madrassah.

The final speaker was Nabil Mustapha who spoke on the Bahai religion. There were no formal ceremonies surrounding the birth of a child; but it was expected that married couples should have children, to ensure the continuation of the Bahai community. Great importance was given to the education of Bahai children, especially in matters of faith. Once they reached the age of fifteen, they were registered to be entered as Bahai, and at twenty one the registration was completed. There were no clergy: all Bahai drew their faith and practice from the teachings of other faiths such as Christianity, Islam and Judaism. The most important influence in bringing up a child, with special reference to service for others, was the mother.

Following these presentations, there was a question and answer session conducted by Geoff Morris. He finished by thanking all those who had provided and prepared the excellent refreshments, and giving special thanks to the Mayor of Elmbridge, Councillor Tania Shipley and her husband, for including our meeting amid their busy schedule. The mayor responded by saying how much they had both enjoyed the evening, and how instructive it had been.



*German Attitudes to Islam and the Middle East
in the 19th, 20th and 21st Centuries"*
*introduced by Assistant Professor James Hodkinson
of Warwick University, at the EMF Centre, 23rd August 2016*

Introduction:

EMF was very pleased to respond to the approach by Dr James Hodkinson, (Associate Professor and Admissions Tutor in German Studies, School of Modern Languages and Cultures, Warwick University, Coventry), to talk to our members on the subject of "*Muslims in Germany. Today and in the past*". He is in the process of writing a book on the subject, and we were pleased that he offered to share some information with us. He was also hoping to receive some helpful comments from us. We are indebted to the good offices of Kauser Akhtar, who was instrumental in introducing Dr Hodkinson to EMF.

Preface:

Dr Hodkinson opened his talk by describing Germany as a nation that had, alongside the usual European phobias and prejudices, shown a fair degree of cultural tolerance towards Islam, and one that has gone through different circumstances, before and after the two world wars. Germany was not unified as a nation until 1871. It did not share the other major European nations in their colonial quests but did, however, develop an interest in Islam as a religion, and in Muslims as peoples. The attitude was idealistic, theologian and both cultural and intellectual. Their scholars also developed friendships with open connectivity.

An early translation of the Qur'an into Germany in 1771, by David Freidrich Megerlin was an indication of early encounter with Islam, but there appeared to be evidence of misunderstanding and manipulation. It was the German Philosopher Goethe who showed a keen interest and understanding of Islamic culture and philosophy, and included it in his "West-östlicher Divan (Divan is Arabic for discussion salons) in 1819. Pictures showing Imperial Germany characters with Muslim friends, and then Muslims and Arabs with Germans during WWI and early 1900's, demonstrate the presence of these communities within German society

This was not unadulterated, as they are set in elements of mistrust and indeed even some "Islamophobia". Such changes in attitude were part and parcel of Germany's entry into world politics and real life experiences, mixed with some moves towards exploitation. This appears to have remained to the present times.

Post WWII

Bearing in mind the fact that Turkey was part of the German "Axis" during WWII, and the frantic programme of development of Germany after the war, as well as the new German Constitution, the opportunity opened up for Turkish workers to come to Germany. They became known as "Guest workers". This period became the start of the liberal environment in Germany towards outsiders, and the development of a mixed and multi-cultural society. It was not, however, without its pressures.

The 21st Century

It was at this juncture that the pressures began to show their effect. For while Germany did not join the coalition for the Iraq war, it was involved militarily in Afghanistan and Syria. By 2010, there were 4.8 million Muslims in Germany, and we are aware of the notable recent spike of refugees from Muslim countries, mainly Syria. That sudden and relatively massive influx of refugees who had no time or reasonable opportunity to integrate, created its own tensions and showed a serious "cultural incompatibility" particularly when some sexual and violent incidences were attributed to these newcomers. The inevitable link with Islam and modern (contrived) Islamic culture provided the right chemistry for the development of the "Leitkultur" or controversial cultural politics, and was grist to the political hardliners and Islamophobes.

While the political "left" went around with placards of "Refugees welcome", the Anti-Islamic "P.G.I.D.A." movement called for the opposite. Politicians, as usual, exploited this tension to suit their purpose. On the other hand, Muslim radicals were not sitting there idle. They also tried to fan the flames of hatred and the feeling of exploitation.

Parallel cultural efforts:

In all this turmoil, the centres of knowledge and culture went about developing special courses, units, academic departments and so on, directed towards Islamic studies, and providing new University courses and training programmes for Imams. A leading centre was the University of Osnabrück.

A shining example of an enlightened German Muslim Scholar is Navid Kermani, an award winning author and theologian, who published his praise of Germany and its constitution, and criticised the attempts by the right to "contaminate". He spoke against ISIS, and favoured military action in Syria. But above all, he appealed to Germany's historical and cultural engagement with Islam.

A significant emblem of the total empathy between Islamic and German culture takes the form of two stone designed seats in a public space in Weimar, facing each other in exact dimensions. That symbol represents the unity of thought between the two famous philosophers; Hafiz, the 14th Century Islamic (Persian) philosopher and scholar, and Goethe. This was an excellent tribute to the best of these two nations or peoples, and it was a wonderful manner in which Dr Hodkinson ended his talk.

Questions/answers/and then refreshments:

The excellent and thought-provoking talk was followed by many questions, very elegantly answered. Many discussions continued on an individual basis while having our refreshments and a period of socialising as well.

The meeting ended with our gratitude to Dr Hodkinson, and very modest gift as a token of our gratitude.

Nabil M Mustapha

(Edited by James Hodkinson)

.....
Charity Concerts by 2 young pianists from Kosovo with the BBC Young String Musician of the Year 2015 ▪ 3rd & 4th September 2016



For 17 years citizens of Elmbridge, especially Esher and Cobham, have been involved in aid to Kosovo. After initially supplying food, clothing, blankets and materials for house repairs, the focus moved to education. We raised funds and built two primary schools, refurbished others and have worked on projects at three levels:

1. Education and settlement of Roma families.
2. Equipment for primary and secondary schools.
3. Exchanges between 'future leaders' (i.e. children with high potential)

There have also been exchange visits between families and friends. Members of EMF have visited Kosovo and helped receive visitors.

Will Dutton, winner in 2015 of the string section of the BBC Young Musician of the Year contest, came on one of our 'Future Leaders' visits and was invited to visit the Prenk Jakova music school - like Yehudi Menuhin, a special school for gifted young musicians. Will and two prizewinning young pianists, Yllka Shiti and Arberesha Shehu decided that they would like to play together in the UK to raise money for Charities in Kosovo and the UK. The result was two concerts entitled '*With love from Kosovo*' at which they played romantic showpieces.

Both concerts had capacity audiences, and, after deduction of travel and other expenses, raised money which was split between charities supported by the two churches and the Roma project in Kosovo. The girls visited the Roma and wrote 'Thank you for giving us the opportunity to do so much good!'



Presentations and discussion on "Faith and Inner Peace" *Monday 19th September 2016 at the EMF Centre*

This event was arranged in partnership with Surrey Faith Links.

The evening began with a 'surprise' event in which we were told that a young lady would like to talk to us about her experience. The young lady gave a moving account of how she had always been a 'misfit' in all walks of life, and suffered problems in relationships with peers, family, work etc. At one point a member of the audience brought the girl a glass of water and went to comfort her.

In fact, the girl was an actress, but the impact on us was far greater than any formal talk.

Presentations followed by representatives of the Jewish, Christian Muslim and Buddhist faiths, all of whom were actively involved in Mental Health and Well-being.

The final talk was by Dr Phil Ferreira-Lay, a Consultant Psychiatrist for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, who gave good practical advice for recognising and reacting to those with mental health problems.

Refreshments were provided, there was an opportunity to talk to those manning stands and there was a useful question and answer session.

11th October 2016 at Surbiton Golf Club - Geoffrey Morris was invited to discuss with a Roman Catholic Men's Group the Aims and Activities of the Elmbridge Multifaith Forum

Geoff used a Power Point presentation to illustrate his talk, in which he made the following points.

Aims of EMF

- To promote within the Borough of Elmbridge understanding of and respect for each other's Faiths and beliefs.
- To encourage people of different faiths to work together on projects for the good of the Community
- Geoff stressed that the purpose was not to 'convert' or to argue about the rights and wrongs of any particular faith, but simply to listen, to ask for further information, to respect, to understand and to work together

All Beliefs Are Welcomed

- Committee includes/has included Ahmadiya, Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Christian Scientist, Hindu, Jewish, Islamic, Quaker, Sikh, Zoroastrian.
- Also welcomed are Humanist, Jain, Mormon, Pagan, Unitarian, Orthodox etc.

Activities

- Visits
- Presentations and Discussions
- Project
- Newsletters and 'Insights'
- Gala
- Eating together

Examples

Illustrated examples were shown of each of the above activities. Including

- ***Visit*** to The Hindu Temple at Neasden
- ***Visits*** to the Zoroastrian Centre, the Shah Jehan Mosque, the Armenian Church
- ***Talks and discussions on*** "Aspects of Christianity", "Islam", "Hinduism", "The Arab Uprisings", "God in my Faith", "What should be the limits to Freedom of Expression?", "Customs, beliefs and practices surrounding "Birth", "Marriage" and "Death" in Different Religions"
- ***Participation in*** Passover Supper, Divali Celebration, various forms of worship
- ***Community projects:*** Walton Street Angels, Clothes for Kosovo, Kosovo Youth Exchange, Charity Concert by BBC Musician of the Year and Kosovar Pianists, Walton Green Community Project.
- ***Publications:*** Sharing Faiths, Newsletters, Insights into Faiths (we record what we understand during visits and check with our hosts before publishing). Circulation via libraries, day centres, schools, faith centres etc.

- **Gala:** An annual festival of multicultural foods and entertainment by young people.
- **Eating:** All events include some form of buffet meal, ensuring that people mix and talk whilst gathering food and drinks.

The talk was interspersed with questions and comments from the audience and time ran out with many people asking to be put on our circulation list.

Presentation by Roger and Gail Partridge on “ Impressions of Palestine” followed by questions and discussion ■ 27th October, Church Gate House

Well over forty turned up for this interesting and potentially controversial talk by two seasoned travellers. After some teething difficulties with the loss of sound on the video, we were treated to a commentary by Roger and Gail on the couple’s long walk along Abraham’s Way, which took seven days and required considerable agility and stamina at times. Abraham’s Way is supported and sponsored by Harvard University, with the objective of improving understanding between faiths. Gail began by giving us an insight into some of the atrocities committed by the Israelites living in Palestine, supported by the Israeli army, which was to provoke animated discussion following the talk.

Then we watched the video, which revealed how stony and rocky the whole of that part of Palestine is, acres and acres of barren rocky land, over the whole of Abraham’s Way. After an initial drive to Nablus, we were shown Jacob’s Well and its ancient church with 2000 year-old mosaics and pre-Christian remains. Pictures of a souk revealed, among other things, what must have been the world’s biggest junk shop! There had also been a Samaritan community there.

From Nablus they trekked at fairly high level up to Awata, past a Roman fortress which had once been supplied with water from fourteen cisterns, and then to Acquaba from where we could see the valley of the river Jordan. Again, stones and then more stones. Then to Duma, where their guide Anwar lived, and we saw his village and house. On and on, past a Roman aqueduct, still in working order, and vast marble quarries, then (cheating somewhat!) taking a taxi up to Kufur Malek and Tarberh, where both Moslem and Christian communities live side by side. To our surprise we learnt that there is even a brewery in Tayberh, also a fourth century church, rebuilt in the Middle Ages by the Crusaders.

Following the talk there was discussion, which became rather heated, over whether Israelis or Palestinians were the chief mischief makers and aggressors, until Nabil stepped in with some calming words of wisdom. Then we were treated to refreshments, kindly provided by Zhen Gibson and Julie Baird, and the evening ended happily.

John Mash

Thursday 24th November 2016 ■ Geoffrey Morris and Nabil Mustapha spoke to the Stragglers Club about the Aims and Activities of the Elmbridge Multifaith Forum

Geoff and Nabil again used our Powerpoint presentation (see article about the presentation on Tuesday 11 October) to make presentation to the Stragglers Club, of which they are both members. Geoff condensed his general remarks and Nabil made useful inputs. Interest was strong and it was clear that some of the audience had previously expected that our aim was to convince people of some particular belief rather than to promote understanding of different beliefs. Several asked to be kept informed of our future activities.



FUTURE EVENTS

**Tuesday 28th March - Visit to the UK Bahai Centre,
27 Rutland Gate London SW7 1PD**

We are expected at the Bahai Centre at 2pm and, allowing for a period of settling, we will have a programme for the afternoon, with refreshments and an address by Mr Rob Weinberg. The aim is to finish by 4pm, allowing a return to base by 5pm. A coach has been booked to leave Mercer Close Day Centre at 1pm prompt. The visit is limited to 33 people and it is essential to book a place if you wish to join us. The cost will be £12 each

A note for your diary: Mr Dominic Raab MP for the Esher and Walton Constituency will be speaking to us on **Thursday 1 June**. We shall let members know the time and venue when they are fixed

Annual General Meeting

The AGM will be held in the second half of June. As usual we shall be asking the new Mayor if he or she can attend and the date will depend on the response. Again we shall let members know as soon as we can.

Other plans in progress

Our hope is to run an 'event' (discussion, visit or project) every two months. Whilst continuing to visit sites of interest, we should like to explore themes like: Sufism; Dervishes; Nonconformist Christian Churches.

Contacts

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Geoff Morris (*Secretary, Events and Newsletter*)

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Leonard Beighton (*Treasurer and membership enquiries*)

01932 863516

Membership:

We need to find a new Membership Secretary. In the meantime application forms can be obtained from either the Treasurer or the Secretary to whom they can be returned with a subscription of £10 per person

General correspondence should be addressed to:

The Secretary

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Cobham, Surrey KT11 2EZ

email: elmbridgemultifaith@emas-bc.co.uk

website: www.elmbridgemultifaith.org.uk

The site contains back copies of our Newsletter with articles summarising the tenets of the major faiths of the world.