



APRIL 2024

Welcome to the April Newsletter.

Dear Friends

I hope this letter finds you well and enjoying the warmer weather and lighter nights! I for one am glad that I am no longer going to work and returning in the dark!!

Hopefully you will find something of interest in this month's newsletter. I am particularly grateful to Sister Patricia for sending over the transcript of her talk at the Clifford's Tower 1190 Commemoration event, which I was unable to attend. If you attend any event during April which would be of interest, please do write a little report for the newsletter as it helps us all to 'keep up' when we cannot be there in person.

Anne Castle

Our April Meeting will be [Live](#)

at City of York Council, West Offices, Station Rise, York YO1 6GA

Tuesday [April 2nd](#) 7.00 - 8.30 pm

Looking at art is one way of listening to God

(Sister Wendy Beckett)

Our interfaith meeting will be about the relationship between religion and art. We are grateful to our three art champions, Jay Prosser, Dee Boyle, and Anne Castle who will start the meeting by sharing their personal response to a work of art with religious significance from the Jewish, Buddhist and Christian faiths respectively. We will then invite the members of the meeting to share their responses to religious art from other faiths that will be on display in the room. We will use the responses that members share to make a Wordle that we will print in the next newsletter. We look forward to seeing you on 2 April

Sarah Hubbard and Chris Styles Co- chairs

VAISAKHI or BAISAKHI



On Sunday 14th April, Sikhs from all over the world will celebrate Vaisakhi or Baisakhi

Vaisakhi or Baisakhi is both a cultural Spring harvest festival and celebrates the founding of the Sikh community or brotherhood known as the Khalsa on 13th April 1699. Vaisakhi is a joyous occasion.

In 1699, Guru Gobind Singh, the 10th Guru of the Sikhs, called Sikhs from all over India to the city of Anandpur Sahib. At the gathering, the Guru told Sikhs to uphold their faith and preserve the Sikh religion.

He asked for anyone prepared to give his life for his religion to come forward. There was a huge silence, until one person finally came forward and followed the Guru into a tent. Shortly after, the Guru reappeared with his sword covered in blood and asked for a second volunteer. Another person came forward and the Guru repeated this until five people had offered their heads.

Finally, the Guru emerged from the tent with all five men still alive and dressed in blue and wearing turbans. They became known as the Panj Pyare (the Five Beloved Ones): Bhai Daya Singh; Bhai Dharam Singh; Bhai Mukham Singh; Bhai Himmat Singh; Bhai Sahib Singh. The Guru-ji gave them sacred holy water (Amrit). The Panj Piare were from different castes, so by creating Khalsa he abolished the caste system.

The Khalsa was given five distinctive symbols of purity and courage (**the five K's**) by the Guru are: **Kesh** (uncut hair); **Kara** (steel bracelet); **Kangha** (comb); **Kirpan** (sword), and **Kachera** (shorts). Baptised men and women have the name Singh (Lion) and Kaur (Princess), respectively

The Khanda resembles the symbol of Sikhism. It is based on a double-edged sword (also known as a *khanda*) surrounded by a circular ring known as the *Chakar* resembling eternity and enclosed with two swords – *miri* and *piri* representing equality and justice.

In normal times Vaisakhi is celebrated by a visit to the Gurudwara (Sikh 'House of God' or Sikh place of worship) followed by visiting families and friends and joining cultural festivities such as music, singing and bhangra dancing. **HAPPY VASAIKHI TO EVERYONE.**

Suki Kaur Matharu

Welcome Bags for Refugees



The Welcome Bags for refugees that we started helping with last year are still much needed as new refugees are arriving in York most weeks. As one family is moved elsewhere in the country, sometimes at very short notice, another family arrives into York and so this is an ongoing project that continues to need our support. It is just a small bag of food items but the contents offer a real welcome to those who often arrive with nothing.

Anyone wanting to help with the project can collect a bag from the Unitarian Chapel in St Saviourgate or request bags from YCoS to fill with goods. Contact Rebecca@yorkcos.org.uk for bags. Once the bags are full, they can be delivered to the Chapel on a Thursday morning between 10.30am and 11am and these will then be collected by one of the YCoS Trustees and delivered to the refugees. If you can help at all please or to collect / drop off bags please contact Dee on deeboyle@gn.apc.org
Many thanks

YCoS SUGGESTED BAG CONTENTS LIST

- Cooking oil/Olive oil
- Rice
- Flour
- Couscous
- Pasta
- Pulses - lentils, chickpeas, kidney beans, etc.
- Tea
- Coffee
- Sugar
- Tinned goods (tomatoes/beans, chickpeas/kidney beans, vegetables / veg soup)
- Vegetable stock cubes
- Biscuits/chocolate

Please note that toiletries are no longer needed in the YCOS bags as Refugee Action York (RAY) will be covering those now.

Please DO NOT include perishable or fresh food items or products that contain meat. All items should suitable be for vegetarians so that they are acceptable for everyone.



Are you interested in helping with Interfaith sessions in schools?

At our last committee meeting we were discussing the school sessions that YIG seems to be getting more requests to take part in and so we are planning on having a sub-group to look at different aspects of our input into these sessions. We will be putting together a document clearly stating what we can offer the schools and then will bring this back to the whole committee for further discussions and acceptance of it as something that we can present to schools when they request help from us in the future. If you would like to be a part of this sub-group please could you let Dee know a.s.a.p. as I am hoping to arrange our first meeting via zoom on in April so that we can have a draft ready for our next YIG committee meeting?

We will also be creating a list of named people from the different faith groups who are prepared to go into the schools to take part in these days as that will make it easier for us to contact people in the future. Each of the faith representatives on the YIG committee will be checking with people within their faith groups to find out who would be willing to be a named person to join us on these types of days so that we can add their names to the list? If we have several people from each faith group that would be good to allow for a bit of flexibility regarding their availability. Obviously a lot will depend on what the date and times are for going into the schools but by having a list of names to contact it will make the job much easier of finding a group to attend any particular session. It will also help us if a school contacts us regarding just one faith that they are studying.

Many thanks

Please contact Dee on deeboyle@gn.apc.org if you are interested in being part of this subgroup or would like your name added to the list of people willing to go into schools.



.Clifford's Tower 1190 Commemoration, 18th March 2024

'The fragility of freedom': English Catholic post-Reformation experience.

Transcript of a talk given at the event by Sister Patricia Harriss

I am speaking as a member of York Interfaith Group, and I shall be looking at another faith and another experience of persecution – not a single event like the one at Clifford's Tower that we are remembering today, in which an entire community was destroyed together, but an experience for individuals and groups, that continued for almost 300 years, all over the country, though I shall be looking chiefly at what happened in York.

When the turbulent times after Henry VIII's break with Rome settled into what was to be the 45-year reign of Elizabeth I, English men and women had to decide. Would they be prepared to take the Oath of Allegiance to the Queen as head of the English Church, attend its Protestant services as the law now required – or get round the law as best they could, and create a secret Catholic community worshipping in people's homes, at Masses celebrated by priests travelling in disguise? Would they become 'recusants' – 'refusers' of what the law required of them? Many people made the second choice; seminaries were founded on the continent – the English Colleges in Rome and Valladolid, for example – by men from Oxford and Cambridge who had to leave because they could not in conscience take the Oath of Allegiance. Young men went to them to be trained as priests, be ordained and return to secret ministry in England. Life was made more dangerous for them when in 1570 Pope Pius V excommunicated Queen Elizabeth. Should a Catholic power, Spain for example, invade England, English Catholics might choose their faith and not their country, and join the enemy. Seminary priests were considered traitors, certain to be condemned to death if captured – and the death would be by hanging, drawing and quartering. Many of them suffered that penalty, a large number here in York on the Knavesmire. Not only priests suffered for their faith: lay men were put to death for helping priests. Here in York a butcher's wife in the Shambles, Margaret Clitherow, was pressed to death - laid on sharp stones, a plank placed on top of her and loaded with heavy weights until she died. The aim was to get her to tell the authorities what they wanted to know – who were the priests she had sheltered in her house? But she remained silent till the end. Other women, like Dorothy Vavasour, a doctor's wife who had helped her husband to run a secret maternity home for Catholic women and was caught with friends preparing to have Mass in the house, died of the appalling conditions in prison. Torture was common, when information was wanted – the rack, where the victim was stretched, so that joints were dislocated, and savage beatings. Accounts of the Gunpowder Plot include the merciless torturing of conspirators not fortunate enough to have been killed while resisting arrest.

But Catholics had other penalties to face, heavy fines for failure to attend their parish church, and confiscation of property. Men were excluded from the universities, the army and the professions because they refused the Oath of Allegiance – which in gentry families meant that younger sons had no obvious means of livelihood, and many went abroad to serve as mercenaries in foreign armies.

For all Catholics there was the constant fear of being victimised, of having false charges made against them – and that persisted into later times, when the worst savagery of the earlier times was past. The background to the founding of the Bar Convent is an example. A Yorkshire gentleman, Sir Thomas Gascoigne, decided with Catholic friends that ‘we must have a school for our daughters.’ They began to plan – but this was towards the end of Charles II’s reign, when there was hysteria about a Catholic succession to the throne. Sir Thomas had dismissed two dishonest servants, who decided to take their revenge. They went to the authorities and alleged that they had heard him plotting with his friends to kill the King and to found a Catholic nunnery and school. Sir Thomas, his family and friends, were all arrested. He was taken to London for trial. Fortunately, so many local people went to testify to Sir Thomas’ goodness and the villainy of the accusers that the case was dismissed, and he and the other prisoners were released. But not, sadly, Thomas Thwing, his nephew. Thomas was a ‘seminary priest’ – and all the laws and penalties were still in force, though it was now almost the end of the 17th century, and it was some years since they had been carried out. He was kept in prison for most of a year while the authorities tried to find a way round the verdict that eventually they had to give – the death-penalty in all its force.

It is no wonder that for more than a century the ‘Ladies at the Bar’ hid their identity as religious sisters, followers of the Yorkshire woman Mary Ward, who travelled to Saint-Omer in the Spanish Netherlands in 1609 to begin the first apostolic congregation for women. They moved into the house on Blossom Street, for which Sir Thomas had paid £450, in November 1686, dressed simply in ‘slate-coloured gowns and hoods’ – ten women who intended to start a school for girls. Even their pupils, about 40 boarders, did not know the full identity of their teachers, known as ‘Mrs.’ and their family names, who lived the life of ordinary women, taking the girls out, visiting friends and having other ladies to visit them. The girls came from Catholic families, at first all from the north of England, later from further away; soon after their arrival the ‘Ladies’ also began a day school, but little is known about it until much later. They also helped sick people, who gathered at the back door. One sister, Eleanora Clifton, was particularly gifted. On one occasion a young man came with a foot almost severed from his body after an accident with a sickle. Carefully Mrs. Clifton sewed it back on. Some months later he returned, cap in hand, to offer, as a sign of his gratitude, his hand in marriage. She thanked him for the honour he was doing her but explained that she was promised to another. Perhaps the story offers some evidence of the community’s success in remaining anonymous.

They were careful in other ways too. The house had a chapel, but on the first floor; when in 1769 they were able to improve it, they began other building works at the same time, including the Georgian façade, so that the chapel would not be noticed. They built an attic floor and a sloping roof, to hide the dome, and provided eight exits, including a priest’s hole – in case of a sudden raid by pursuivants it would be essential to get everyone out as quickly as possible. But little by little, from the end of the 1770s, the anti-Catholic laws were repealed, public opinion became more tolerant, and by the early 19th century, the sisters were free to live their full identity.

SOMETHING OF INTEREST FROM AUDREY

I would like to draw the attention of the York Interfaith community to the link below forwarded to me by John Nightingale

Thank You
Audrey Miller

Here is the website for Al Mizan, a statement of Muslim principles on the Environment, which is potentially as important within that faith as Laudato Si has been for Christians.

[Home | Al Mizan](#)

Thank you for this contribution Audrey

YORK ENVIRONMENT WEEK

Dear Members of the Interfaith group

My name is Adam Myers, I am part of a group seeking to organise York Environment Weeks 2024 these will be in September/ October this year. YEWs24 is an umbrella allowing and supporting organisations to come together to celebrate their work and to share it with the wider public. Last year YEW23 involved 60 events reaching approximately 2,500 people.

More information about last years YEW23 can be found here: <https://yorkenvironmentweek.org.uk/yew-events-2023/>

This year we are exploring bringing organisations together under themes, one being faith-based groups.

I wonder if you would be able to spread the word about this to members of the Interfaith group so that YEWs24 is able to reach as many groups as possible that are active on Environmental and Climate related issues in faith-based communities within the City. If you pass on my email addresses that would be very helpful.

All the best

Adam Myers

YIG Programme for 2024

(This is a 'draft' programme so look out for any changes in each months newsletter)

APRIL 2nd

The Role of Art in Different Faiths (Chair and Organisers Christopher Styles and Sarah Hubbard)

April and October 2024 - "Bring and Share Objects of art and faith"

In these sessions we would like to share works of art that are precious to us as individuals from different faith backgrounds and discuss together how such works have been a personal inspiration to us in our diverse spiritual journeys.

If you are passionate about a piece of art that inspires you or speaks to you spiritually and that you would like to bring and share with us at one of the sessions then do contact Christopher and give him a brief description of your piece of art and what you would like to communicate about it.

You can reach him at WiseOldBob@BTInternet.com

Christopher or Sarah will then contact you and provide you with all the information you will need to take part.

MAY 7th

A Zen Perspective on Modern Science: the quantum world, AI and virtual realities

Speaker: Ocean Melchisedech

Chair Sister Patricia Harriss

JUNE 4th

Current Topics Which Concern Us: an inter-generational discussion in groups.

Two students will join each group, and lead it, introducing and discussing current topics which are matters of concern for them.

Organiser: Mimi Lowry

Chair - Penny Coppin-Siddall

JULY 2nd: Planning meeting, to collect suggestions for the 2025 programme and for Interfaith Week 2024

Chair Avtar Matharu

AUGUST 6th Annual Picnic - location to be decided

SEPTEMBER 3rd-

'Music Which Inspires Me'.

Is there a piece of music which holds a deep and spiritual meaning for you? Would you consider bringing it along to our September meeting and sharing it with the group followed by a short explanation ? If so, please email Anne am.castle@btopenworld.com telling her the title and length of the music, (so we don't have a duplicate) and a short paragraph with the main thrust of why this piece has meant so much to you. Anne will put together a programme and you will be fully informed about how the evening will run

beforehand. If you would like to invite a younger member of your faith community to participate with, or instead of, yourself, that would also be very welcome!
Look forward to hearing from you!

Organiser and Chair: Anne Castle.

OCTOBER 1st

The Role of Art in Different Faiths: second session. (See April 2nd)

Chair and Organisers: Christopher Styles and Sarah Hubbard

NOVEMBER 5th

Celebrations of Faith, presented in Photographs- Key Moments of our Faith Year.

We hope to make a presentation/display of photographs taken over twelve months (so starting this November) recording key moments in your faith year, or high points for individuals such as weddings or naming ceremonies etc. If photography is your passion why not consider putting yourself forward as the representative of your faith for the year? Obviously you would not have to take all the photos yourself but ensure that events are recorded and that any people in the pictures are happy for them to be on public display. For further information and any ideas you may have please email

Mimi Lowry Organiser - ml292@st-andrews.ac.uk

Chair - Penny Coppin- Siddall

DECEMBER 3rd

AGM followed by social activities.

Chair - Avtar Matharu -Organiser of social part: Anne Castle.

HOLI Festival of colours 25th March 2024



Holi has been celebrated in the Indian subcontinent for centuries, with poems documenting celebrations dating back to the 4th century CE. It marks the beginning of spring after a long winter, symbolic of the triumph of good over evil. It is celebrated in March, corresponding to the Hindu calendar month of Phalguna on the day after the full moon.

There are varying accounts of Holi's origin mentioned in several works of ancient Indian literature. According to one popular version of the story, an evil king became so powerful that he forced his subjects to worship him as their god. But to the king's ire, his son Prahlada continued to be an ardent devotee of the Hindu deity Lord Vishnu. The angry king plotted with his sister, Holika, to kill his son. Holika, who was immune to fire, tricked Prahlada to sit in a pyre with her. When the pyre was lit, the boy's devotion to Lord Vishnu helped him walk away unscathed while Holika, from whom the festival derives its name, was burned to death despite her immunity.

Another legend about Holi is related to Lord Krishna when he played Holi with his friend Radha.

On the eve of the festival, large pyres are lit in many parts of India to signify the burning of evil spirits (Holika Dahan -Burning of Holika). People often throw wood, dried leaves and twigs into bonfires.

On the day of Holi, entire streets and towns turn red, green and yellow as people throw coloured powder into the air and splash them on others. Each colour carries a meaning. Red, for example, symbolizes love and fertility while green stands for new beginnings. People also splash water on each other in celebration. Water guns are used to squirt water, while balloons filled with coloured water are also flung from rooftops. Later in the day, families gather together for festive meals. It is also common to distribute sweets among neighbours and friends and celebrate with love, hugs and joy.

Thank you to Varsha for this article.

RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS APRIL 2024

*Message from Sarah Hubbard, Jewish representative YIG Committee.

Pesach (Passover) is coming up 22 April to 30 April and there will be some events that YLJC will be inviting our interfaith friends to. We will let folks know when it is all confirmed.



4 April (Thursday) QINGMINGJIE / CH'ING MING [Festival of Pure Brightness / Tomb Sweeping Day] Chinese

The first occasion in the year when family graves are visited. Many families cleanse and sweep them, offer food to the spirits, and picnic/feast by the grave with their ancestors.



5 * April (Friday) LAILAT-UL-QADR [Night of Power] Muslim

* Muslim festivals begin in the evening before the Gregorian dates shown in this calendar.



8 April (Saturday) HANAMATSURI Buddhist (Japanese)

Mahayana flower festival to celebrate the Buddha Shakyamuni's birthday. Shrines are erected and an image of the infant Buddha is bathed. Theravadins celebrate Buddha's birth, enlightenment and passing away later in the year, at the full moon in May.



10 * April (Wednesday) END OF RAMADAN Muslim
(for details of Ramadan, see start date in March)

* Muslim festivals begin in the evening before the Gregorian dates shown in this calendar.



10 * ** April (Wednesday) EID-UL-FITR [Feast of Fast Breaking] / 1st SHAWWAL Muslim

This is a time - once the fast of Ramadan has been completed - for making gifts to the poor. It is especially a time for new clothes, good food, and presents for children. Families get together and contact friends, especially those who live far away. The community assembles for Eid prayer and a sermon at its mosques. The traditional greeting is 'Eid Mubarak' – 'a happy and blessed Eid'. Shawwal is the first of three months in which some of the acts of Hajj can begin to be performed.

* Muslim festivals begin in the evening before the Gregorian dates shown in this calendar.

** Some uncertainty about date



13 April (Saturday) to 15 April (Monday) SONGKRAN Buddhist

Traditional New Year's Day festival in Thailand. Containers of water are thrown as a symbol of washing away all that is evil. Fragrant herbs are often placed in the water jug or bucket.



14 April (Sunday) VAISAKHI / BAISAKHI – Sikh

In 1699, on Vaisakhi, the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, founded the Order of the *Khalsa*. Five men (Five Beloved Ones), offered their lives when the Guru asked for volunteers. The 'Five Ks', the outward signs of Sikhism, were made obligatory and Sikh men took the name '*Singh*' (lion) and women '*Kaur*' (princess). The initiation ceremony, *amrit*, was introduced.



17 April (Wednesday) RAMA NAVAMI Hindu

The birthday of Rama, the seventh avatar of Vishnu, is celebrated at noon in the aarti ceremony, performed in front of a murti or of a picture depicting Rama swinging in a cradle.



20 April (Saturday) - 1 May (Wednesday) RIDVAN Baha'i

The most important Baha'i festival. In these 12 days, in the garden outside Baghdad after which the festival is named, Baha'u'llah declared himself the Promised One, prophesied by the *Bab*. The first, ninth and twelfth days are especially significant and are holy days, when no work is done. It is during this period that Baha'is elect all their governing bodies.



20 April (Saturday) ADAR MAH PARAB Zoroastrian (Shenshai / Parsi)

On the ninth day of Adar, the 9th month, Zoroastrians celebrate the birthday of fire. They pay visits to the fire temple to make offerings of sandalwood or incense, and to thank the holy fire for the warmth and light it has given throughout the year. Traditionally on this day food is not cooked in the house as the fire is given a rest and the *Atash Niyayesh* or litany to the fire is recited in honour of the house fire or the ceremonial oil lamp.



21 April (Sunday) MAHAVIR JAYANTI (599 BCE) Jain

The birthday of the last Tirthankara, or great teacher and model of the Jainas. His birth and the events surrounding it are re-enacted. Monks or nuns read from the scriptures and teach about the rest of Mahavira's life. Lay people then return home to a celebratory feast.



23 April (Tuesday) HANUMAN JAYANTI Hindu

This Hindu festival recalls the birth of Lord Rama's supreme devotee, the monkey-headed Hanuman, whose feats figure in the Ramayana epic. Hanuman's birth is celebrated at sunrise on the full-moon day of the lunar month of Chaitra.



23 * April (Tuesday) - 30 April (Tuesday) PESACH / PASSOVER Jewish

An eight day festival when Jews commemorate the Exodus from their slavery in Egypt. The *Seder* meal is held in each family's home at the beginning of the festival, when the story of their deliverance is recounted. *Matzah* (unleavened bread) is eaten throughout the festival.

* Jewish festivals commence at sunset on the evening of the day prior to the date shown.



23 April (Monday) ST GEORGE'S DAY National

St George is the patron saint of England. He lived and died in the Middle East, but his popularity grew after the Crusades, when his red cross on a white background became the symbol of the English Crusaders.



27 (Saturday) April LAZARUS SATURDAY Christian (Orthodox)

A moveable feast before Palm Monday which celebrates the raising of Lazarus of Bethany.



30 April (Tuesday) MAY EVE/ BELTAINE EVE Wiccan / Pagan

The wheel of the year continues to turn and fertile spring yields to the height of summer. Many pagans celebrate Beltaine by lighting fires and leaping over them, and/or with maypole dances, symbolizing the mystery of the Sacred Marriage of Goddess and God.

And finally, A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR

As Chair, I continue to value your membership and my aim for 2024/25 is to continue to expand our network through mutual respect and shared values for a better and inclusive York.

As York Interfaith Group continues to expand we are always looking for additional support. If, you would like to assist or shadow any of the above roles then please do not hesitate to contact me. Your skills and expertise would be most welcome.

York Interfaith Group Committee 2024	
Member	Responsibility
Avtar Matharu	Chair
Dee Boyle	Vice Chair and Interfaith Week planning
Penny Coppin-Siddall	Secretary
Daryoush Mazloun	Treasurer
Rasha Ibrahim	Press and Publicity Officer
Anne Castle	Newsletter
Varsha Gulati	Hindu Representative
Sister Patricia Harriss	Annual Meeting Planning
Tina Funnell	Planning assistance
Sarah Hubbard	Jewish Representative

Your feedback is very important us. We constantly try to improve our service so that we can best support your needs and those of your faith. You can contact and/or follow us via:

Facebook York Interfaith group

Instagram @yorkinterfaith

Twitter @Yorkinterfaith

email yorkinterfaithgroup@gmail.com

If you would like to contribute an article or advertise an event in our May Newsletter, please email yorkinterfaithgroup@gmail.com or send direct to am.castle@btopenworld.com **by April 16th**

Please ensure that your contributions are in 'Word' or a format which can be converted to 'Word'. (PDF Leaflets are particularly difficult).

Wishing you all the very best for the month of April.

Avtar Matharu, Chair, YIG