

THE JOYS OF SPRING: A HISTORY OF DAFFODIL DAY

The first known reference to a Daffodil Day is in a photograph likely to date from the early 1920s. A poster advertising the fourth such event at Bristol Central Hall can be seen behind Lilian Broadbelt, wife of the superintendent minister, the Rev John Broadbelt, and leader of the women's fellowship, known as the Women's Bright Hour. By the middle of the decade, the day was well established.

Daffodils adorned the hall and platform at Bristol and the buttonholes of members. Mrs Broadbelt had given the women, many of them from the poorest parts of the city, a bulb to grow at home; it was to be brought on the day, with prizes for the best blooms. Afterward, the flowers were distributed to the sick and aged. A celebrated preacher and a soloist were invited. The service was also well attended by men, some of whom arrived early to put out chairs. In time, the Women's Bright Hour became known throughout the country, receiving royal recognition by a visit from Princess Mary, great-grandmother of King Charles III.

At Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, Daffodil Day was celebrated from 1960-63 by the congregation's Sisterhood during the ministry of the Rev Derrick Greeves. It blossomed again as the Daffodil Day Rally in 1982 after the Rev Dr John Tudor, certain of the event's potential for ministry, became superintendent. His widow, Cynthia, has told us that they inherited Daffodil Day some 20 years earlier at Queen's Hall Mission, Derby: it had been established there in the 1950s by a predecessor and his wife, who had also set it going in Nottingham. "In whichever church we served," Cynthia said, "this event was introduced and was embraced and sustained enthusiastically by the members."

John saw Daffodil Day as a way to celebrate the joys of faith seriously but with a light touch. Enter Dame Thora Hird at his invitation: both soon had a packed Great Hall ringing with laughter. More and more people began to attend, arriving by coach from different parts of the country. Support for the day from Methodist Women in Britain, as well as by all subsequent superintendent ministers, has ensured its continued success.

The annual visits of the Lord Mayors of Westminster confirm the value they place on Daffodil Day in the life of the city. In recent years, we have been delighted by one mayor staying well beyond his scheduled time, to learn more about the day and talk to members of the congregation, and another incumbent saying she liked the service so much that she would come again.

It is impossible not to be fascinated by the space Daffodil Day has given us. At Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, its original set-up remains: the Great Hall is decorated with daffodils, as are the platform party's buttonholes. The faith is joyously sung at an informal service, with well-known hymns played on the organ and led by the church choir, joined more recently by gospel singers.

Our superintendent minister, the Rev Tony Miles, quickly put Daffodil Day back on the calendar after Covid forced a hiatus. Attendance is growing again as he makes the very best of this precious heritage. The BBC presenter Pam Rhodes joins him on the platform, interviewing dignitaries and other guests at a service recently moved from a weekday to a Saturday, enabling working people and the young to join the congregation. There is now talk of a Daffodil Day Spring Festival. It could hardly come at a better time: the original event was created to celebrate the Christian faith in a service that could easily bring together people of belief and those of none, fulfilling a need that exists equally in the present day.