

August 2008

Dear Friends,

It was with great sadness that we heard of the death of Bill Cowhig earlier this year. In consequence it is only right and fitting to devote a good portion of this edition of the Newsletter to an appreciation of Bill's life and his enormous contribution to the Fellowship. His son, granddaughters, and Eric Allen have all agreed to us using their words from the service of thanksgiving held in his memory. Lucetta Geymonat has also sent an appreciation of Bill from an Italian perspective. Here it appears in Italian. In the next edition it will appear in English.

In June a party of seventeen set out for Torre Pellice, including Ruth Cowhig, and they were joined by others for varying periods of time there. A week later twelve of these moved on to Ferrara, to be joined there by three others, while the rest remained in Torre Pellice for a further week. We bring you a taste of what they experienced both in Piedmont and in Emilia Romagna.

Kate Grand

RECOLLECTIONS by Roy

Everyone gathered here today, will have his, or her, own particular memories of Dad. Most of you will have some idea of his extraordinary achievements as a very gifted and innovative scientist.

This started with being part of the original team that gave birth to RADAR during the Second World War which at that time, I believe, President Roosevelt described as the most valuable item ever to cross the Atlantic. It probably culminated in the joint transatlantic research that led to the revolutionary material 'carbon fibre,' now in everyday use from fishing rods to the space shuttle.

In the 60's and 70's he spear-headed the development of independent forensic science, appearing as an expert witness in a series of high profile cases that challenged the arrogance of the establishment of the day. This led to the overturning of a large number of unjust convictions and the eventual complete overhaul of the way science is now used in our courts. Of this he would certainly have been justifiably proud, as it epitomised his tireless work against oppression and injustice in any form throughout the world - a common cause he shared throughout his life with Mum.

But a much lesser known facet of his personality was his ability to take his scientific skills and communicate them to young people, bringing it down to their level, making it vibrant and interesting. I remember, aged thirteen, waiting for him after school whilst he gave a lecture to the entire Sixth Form. The buzz and interest when they emerged at the end, spoke volumes, as this was a group of lads **not** known for their normal interest in physics.

In the late 60's and early 70's, the Greater Manchester Council commissioned a series of educational books, entitled, "It Happened Round Manchester." These covered such subjects as Canals, Aviation and Railways and were, for the most part, a little dry and dusty. But No.2 in the series was his contribution: "Textiles", which from the first sentence is lively, educational, practical and entertaining. To give you the flavour, I am going to read two short extracts. This first one I can very clearly see him demonstrating :

"How is yarn made? The easiest way to understand is to try to spin a yarn itself. When you are next in the countryside, look out for tufts of wool caught in the hedges in areas where sheep are grazing. Take a tuft in your left hand and grip a small bunch of fibres with the fingers of your right hand and gently pull them out as a strand. They will withdraw slowly and jerkily and the strand will become finer until it breaks. But this is not a yarn because it has no strength. The secret is to twist the fibres between your fingers as you withdraw the

fibres, and if you carefully twist and pull, twist and pull, after a little practice you will be able to make a short length of yarn which although uneven may be quite strong. This was the big discovery which man made perhaps 50,000 years ago."

The next is my personal favourite:

"A typical dye recipe, even as late as 1850 in the Dyers Instructor (sold by J. & J. Thompson of Manchester), gave the instructions for a dark olive colour:

'For 20 pounds of cotton, add four pounds of sumach in a tub of cold water: steep in this for an hour. Sadden in another tub of cold water with two pounds of dissolved Copperas, give eight turns, wring out, enter another tub of warm water, with half a pailful of urine. Then dye in another tub with six pounds of fustic and a little log wood according to the shade of darkness, and raise in the same liquor with one pound of vitriol.'

There are still a few old inhabitants of Lancashire villages who remember that urine was carefully stored in each household and sold to the dye house collector, who called from door to door on his round."

Very evocative and brings a whole new meaning to Re-cycling!

Now, I would love to sell you all a copy of this little book, originally priced at 75p, as technically Dad would still be entitled to a royalty, but I'm afraid it's long out-of-print and this is the one and only very treasured copy I have.

Roy Cowhig

Taid's Poem – Composed and Spoken by Joanna and Lucy

Organising theatre trips kept Taid young,
We both went on one, they were actually quite fun.
The coach, the food and the play,
They had organised such a wonderful day.

Taid was so good at computers and the internet,
Such a good way to keep in-touch with people he met.
Friends from Italy, the church and his family,
How amazing to receive an e-mail from Taid at 93.

He took it all in his stride, it wasn't a big deal.
However talking on the phone did not have quite the same appeal.
When Taid was passed the phone, he'd often keep it short,
One minute you'd be talking and then the next, he'd abort.

One of my earliest memories is a cassette that Taid made,
I loved it so much it was very overplayed.
It was about a cat that swallowed a blue bag you see,
A very imaginative story but it made perfect sense to me.

One memory I have that is particularly funny,
Is when Taid taught me how to eat a carrot like 'Bugs Bunny.'

It was always eventful with Taid behind the wheel,
I didn't know whether to shut my eyes or keep them well peeled.
In his Lada he went from A to B, near and far,
I think Taid was about 85 when he finally sold his car.

Taid got such enjoyment from the garden, plants and flowers,
On a sunny day Nain and Taid would sit out there for hours.
Nain and Taid are an inspiration to everyone,
They were always busy, active and having fun.
Although now in body not together,
Their love will always be, forever.

**Address for the Service of Thanksgiving for the Life of
William (Bill) Thomas Cowhig
2nd February 1915 – 1st May 2008
at Sale URC 9th May 2008**

Ruth has accorded me the privilege of speaking a final word; but it is an impossible task to compress into a short compass the 93 years of Bill's varied and fascinating life. It is worthy of a longer celebration at a later time – even a Festschrift. I can only indicate a few of the significant qualities of this learned and good man, always full of practical wisdom, always eager to share his gifts, eager to educate sixth formers on scientific discoveries, or engage with young children on marvels of creation. We have heard from his son Roy and Mary's daughters a little of all this. Bill's use of the computer and internet to communicate with his grandchildren – and other people's grandchildren – to popularize in Manchester knowledge of textiles; ecological issues through his gardening projects (i.e. the church garden) and his beekeeping; a love of astronomy through his own telescope but also Jodrell Bank, through Bernard Lovell and Patrick Moore whom he liaised with; organizing the theatre group, critiquing the plays they attended at northern and Midlands theatres. For 23 years he organized the local Church and Society group, and only last Thursday he was putting questions to a speaker on Fair Trade; Water Aid was another favourite project. When Ruth's eyesight failed they both became officers and organized meetings of the Manchester Macular Degeneration Society!

All his activities were rooted in the practicality of his faith, focused on the simplicity of the Gospel message of Jesus of Nazareth and centred in the living of the faith, not the reciting of creeds or pious prayers. He took seriously the prophet's call to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with his God. Religion for Bill meant 'walking the walk, not talking the talk.'

That is why Ruth chose the unusual readings for this funeral service: not from 1 Corinthians 15 about resurrection life or the familiar

words of comfort from John 14 about the many mansions of our Father's house. Instead we had the Old Testament of Isaiah 11 about transforming a fractured and divided world, about taming our warring destructive passions and turning society into a place of justice and peace – where even the fiercest animals of prey live peaceably with the weakest and most vulnerable creatures; where even little children can play safely outdoors without being bitten by snakes and scorpions!

And from the New Testament Gospel of St. Matthew we heard the story of the disciples banishing children from Christ's presence – a story of exclusion – which called forth the rebuke, "No! Let the children come unto me for of such is the Kingdom of God!" Yes, fully inclusive, the door is always open!

Bill was always accessible to young people. He believed children should be cherished, cared for, educated and given priority of place, in our homes, churches, schools and colleges. As we've learned from Roy, Joanna and Lucy, he was a born communicator, sharing scientific discoveries like radar, computers, telescopes and new textiles.

In the parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25 we hear how God blesses the deed rather than good intentions. What we do has eternal consequences as well as an immediate effect i.e. feeding hungry people; giving water -- clean, pure drinking water – to the thirsty; welcoming the stranger into your home; clothing the naked; helping the sick; visiting the ones in prison. ... Did you notice how the righteous replied? "But, Lord, when did we see You sick or a stranger? etc." Then Jesus said, "Inasmuch as you did it to these others you did it to me." Jesus is to be discovered and is to be served in the needs of others! Religion is not about me and my salvation, me and my church me and my race and nation. This parable made Ruth and Bill very down-to-earth Christians who took the social and political implications of the Gospel seriously. We honour and respect them for their challenge to our more easy-going compromising lifestyles.

Bill's faith and character were forged in his humble origins in the depression years in South Wales. His father's family had migrated from County Cork because of the Irish Potato Famine. His mother was English, one of seven born in India where her parents taught in Army schools. They lived in Porth at the foot of the Rhondda valley where his father was a miner. His mother eked out the family income by newspaper rounds and selling eggs door to door. Bill often helped in this. At a young age he won a scholarship to the Rhondda County School, a place of academic excellence. From there he went to Cardiff University, commuting daily from home by train. He graduated with a good Science degree and then, because there was no employment, he stayed and took a second in Mathematics.

He eventually found employment in England with British Thompson Houston laboratories in Rugby. There he set about renting a council house and brought his parents and sister to live in Rugby. Incidentally, his sister, who did not have much schooling, after her marriage, went to a teacher training college and did excellent work amongst special needs children; sadly she died young of kidney failure. Her daughter Ann is presently a very active Methodist local preacher in Middleton-in-Teesdale, and is here with us.

In Rugby Bill met Ruth MacDonald who had come down from Wilmslow Beacon Adult Education Centre for a training course. Bill took Ruth to a photographic exhibition in London and within two years, in May 1940, they were married.

Ruth's mother was at first not too pleased that her daughter, coming from a middle-class Presbyterian home in St. John's Wood London, should have married into a poor miner's family ... but eventually fell for Bill's handsome face and head of wavy auburn hair, and his strong singing voice (As a child he was a chorister in the local Episcopal church), as well as his academic gifts and charm.

Ruth had been an outstanding student at Girton College Cambridge with a double first in English Literature. She had no desire to stay on for a PhD but wanted to get out into adult education and share the

delights of her learning. There was no Open University in those days, just WEA classes (Workers' Educational Association) and the adult school movement, and a few centres pioneered by Quakers at Swarthmore etc. Ruth had found a lecturing post at Wilmslow, which led to her term at the Rugby Guild House – and meeting and marrying Bill.

In wartime Britain Bill became a government scientific boffin in the team that developed Radar: research which began in Birmingham and moved, for security reasons, to Malvern College. After that project Bill was invited to join in research for the atom bomb but for moral reasons he refused.

They settled for a few years in Oxford and joined the Presbyterian Church, now having their family of Mary, Roy and Andrew. Eventually Bill decided on research in textiles for the British Rayon Association in Manchester -- which later merged with the Shirley Institute – where he stayed for the rest of his career. After eight moves in ten years they settled in the large house and garden of 21 Priory Road in Sale. Soon they were very energetic members of the Presbyterian Church under Revd Bill Loutitt (whose daughter Anne is an elder here and preached from this pulpit last Sunday). Bill and Ruth conspired to get the the large dry-rot infested church made redundant and moved into a united cause on this Congregational Church site in Montague Road. Bill was a leading member of the committee which oversaw the building of this smaller and more user-friendly community style sanctuary. You all know the church garden he designed and cared for. Ruth and Bill were also involved in children's and youth work, and in producing with their Gestetner a lively monthly church magazine.

Meanwhile from 1976 to 1986 Ruth and myself were members of the United Reformed Church national Committee for Mission and Ecumenical Work Abroad. In 1980 we sent Ruth to use her Italian language skills in visiting our partner Waldensian congregations in the mountain valleys of Piedmont.

She made a great impression on some leading ministers, who agreed with her strong views that exchange visits should be made by ordinary members of the church rather than prestigious visits by Assembly Moderators. That was the beginning of the URC Waldensian Fellowship and within two years Bill as Chair and Ruth as Secretary took a busload from the Sale and Manchester area to Torre Pellice and the Valleys. The Fellowship has thrived ever since, though I am now Chair and Yvonne Jones Secretary.

Bill by 1981 had been awarded the Smith Memorial Medal and retired from his textiles research post. He devoted all his energies to the Waldensian project, improving his Italian linguistic skills so he could read their weekly newspaper *Riforma* and then translate any significant news for our Fellowship Newsletter. He monitored the output of their Claudiana publishing house and drew attention to important books; and eventually through a satellite tuner watched Italian TV and videoed programmes he could share with us. He was a great networker, first by post but in recent years by fax and the internet, in regular touch with 232 adults and 68 young people. Bill and Ruth hosted many Waldensian young people who came over to improve their English and became lifelong friends and members of the Cowhig extended family!

Bill soon had the expertise and confidence to tackle a major piece of translation work -- the book 'Love Never Fails' by Tullio Vinay, the story of the youth camp volunteers building an international conference AGAPE Centre at Prali in the historic Waldensian Valleys. This was just one of four major enterprises inspired by Tullio: his first in the war years in Florence was hiding Jewish refugees in his church manse roof and smuggling them to safe houses in the mountains. Like the Waldensians who risked death fighting with the partisans, Tullio put his life on the line. Then from 1948 the building and beginnings of Agape as a centre for the reconciliation of former enemies, especially within one's own society. Ray Davey, a Presbyterian minister in troubled Ulster, came to Agape and Tullio inspired him to found the Corrymeela

Community and preached at its opening in Ballycastle. The third project was to build a school and agricultural centre in Riesi in Sicily. To do this he defied the death threats of the Mafia. Finally his involvement with the tragedy of the US war in Vietnam led him to visit and expose the conditions in the prison camps there -- disguised as a priest. His mission was successful, but again at great risk to his own life.

Bill revered Tullio and toiled to bring his story to the attention of English readers in the UK and the USA. He included a short appreciation by Franco Giampiccoli, who ranks Tullio with those dissidents, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu, true freedom fighters of that generation.

Tullio's last task was serving in the Italian parliament. On the floor of the Senate he raised ethical issues and addressed the practical measures needed to alleviate social problems. He spoke powerfully about disarmament, justice and reconciliation, global hunger and international human rights.

One begins to understand why Bill and Ruth confessed themselves happier within the lifestyle of the Waldensian churches than out less politically and socially involved URC congregations. Bill admired Christians who walked the walk.

Two or three years ago Bill got hold of some hand-written memoirs of Waldensian pastor and one-time Moderator, Achille Deodato. Bill painstakingly read them and managed to persuade the family these were valuable and should reach a wider audience. Eventually they agreed to his urgings and had them published in Italy, and the book sold well. But Bill was still not satisfied ... he translated sample pages into English and persuaded our committee that someone should translate the whole book for the UK market. That someone is Margaret Neil of Shrewsbury, whom Bill had encouraged over many years to learn and perfect her Italian. She has taken on this mammoth task, and we are pleased to announce that by Christmas

this year we hope to have it printed and published by a friendly printer. It will be a wonderfully appropriate memorial to the energy and expertise which both Bill and Ruth Cowhig have brought to fellowship between the URC and the Waldensian churches of Italy.

As we remember and give thanks to God this day for Bill so we also link our thoughts with Ruth, for they have been a perfect partnership, doing things together for 68 years. They illustrate for me the saying of Saint Exupéry: "True love consists not in gazing at each other, but standing together, looking outward in the same direction."

Well, I have seen Ruth lovingly gazing at Bill, and sometimes to indicate her disapproval! But most of us most of the time have seen Bill and Ruth standing together, looking outwards, and together doing those things they both felt called to do as disciples of Jesus of Nazareth.

Now Ruth will greatly miss Bill at her side ... and we can only do a little to compensate for that loss. But I want to end by reading some lines passed on to us by a mutual good friend and Ruth's fellow President of the URC Waldensian Fellowship. You will find this in 94 year old Revd Arthur Macarthur's memoirs "Setting Up Signs"¹:

"If I should die and leave you here a while
Be not like others sore undone who keep
Long vigil by the lonely dead and weep.
For my sake turn to life again, and smile,
Nerving the heart and trembling hand to do
Something to comfort weaker souls than thine:
Complete these dear unfinished tasks that I began."

Revd Eric Allen

¹ 'Setting up Signs' page 60 URC London WC1H 9RT ISBN 0 85346 170 8

Ricordi di Bill

Le molte persone che nelle comunità valdesi e metodiste nelle Valli e in varie città italiane conoscono la Waldensian Fellowship hanno appreso con grande tristezza la notizia della morte di William Cowhig (per i più conosciuto come Bill), avvenuta, a Sale, nel nord dell'Inghilterra, il 1 maggio scorso.

William Cowhig ha costantemente e attivamente affiancato la moglie Ruth nell'ideazione e nello sviluppo della Waldensian Fellowship nata nel 1980 (grazie anche all' incontro con il pastore Achille Deodato) allo scopo di stabilire e mantenere contatti tra la Chiesa Unita Riformata in Gran Bretagna e la Chiesa Valdese e Metodista in Italia, non solo attraverso i responsabili delle chiese stesse, ma soprattutto attraverso i membri delle comunità. Il legame tra le due chiese si è espresso in questi 27 anni attraverso regolari scambi di visite dall'Italia e dall'Inghilterra che hanno portato a un approfondimento della conoscenza sul piano della fede ed hanno instaurato legami di durevole amicizia.

Nel dare la triste notizia della morte di William Cowhig, ho parlato con varie persone ed è ispirandomi alle loro parole e alle varie occasioni di incontro che ho avuto con i coniugi Cowhig che vorrei tracciarne un ricordo.

Di William Cowhig vengono ricordate innanzi tutto la gentilezza e l'affabilità con cui, insieme alla moglie Ruth, accoglieva ogni gruppo in visita dall'Italia. Con la stessa affettuosa cortesia venivano accolti singoli visitatori o studenti desiderosi di migliorare il proprio inglese trascorrendo un periodo in Inghilterra. I signori Cowhig s'adoperavano per procurare famiglie disponibili ad offrire l'ospitalità e li seguivano affettuosamente, aiutandoli ad ambientarsi. Ma soprattutto è vivissima nella memoria di molte persone il grande interesse e attaccamento che William Cowhig dimostrava per la Chiesa valdese di cui seguiva ogni aspetto attraverso la lettura di Riforma e attraverso Protestantesimo. Quando un argomento lo

colpiva in modo particolare non esitava a richiedere approfondimenti.

Ricordo in particolare due occasioni. Nel 2005, dopo avere letto su Riforma il resoconto della rappresentazione di 'Il paese delle querce', ad opera della 'Compagnia delle Querce di Rorà', chiese che gli fosse mandato il testo della commedia che desiderava leggere e, forse, pensava di tradurre in inglese.

In occasione del falò del 16 febbraio 2006 organizzato dalla comunità valdese di Torre Pellice con interventi di varie persone, chiese di potere avere i testi degli interventi per darne diffusione tra le persone interessate.

La sua ottima conoscenza dell'italiano gli consentì di tradurre in inglese vari articoli apparsi su Riforma e, in particolare, il libro del pastore Tullio Vinay 'L'amore è più grande' (in inglese 'Love Never Fails').

Ricordo, infine, la determinazione e il coraggio con cui continuò a mantenere i contatti con i vari amici italiani malgrado i problemi di salute di questi ultimi anni. Nel luglio scorso, in occasione della visita del gruppo italiano, non esitò ad affrontare il viaggio con la moglie Ruth dalla città di Sale, ove risiedeva, alla Regione dei Laghi dove il gruppo trascorreva alcuni giorni.

Gli siamo riconoscenti per quanto ci ha dato ed esprimiamo a Ruth la nostra viva partecipazione al suo dolore e con lei condividiamo la speranza che la certezza della risurrezione in Cristo infonde nei nostri cuori.

Lucetta Geymonat

From Kathleen Brown's Diary

Thursday 5th June We caught the midnight coach to Gatwick, had a comfortable flight and arrived in Milan on time -- to pouring rain. We sat with our luggage in Terminal 2, waiting for the other groups. When we knew they should have arrived, no sign of them. Their flights had come in at Terminal 2, 5 kilometres away! David caught the shuttle bus to try to find them. Eventually the coach arrived, but no David...till the next shuttle, then off to Torre Pellice..

The Foresteria has again been updated and the office moved back into the Cascina Vecchia. After unpacking, a refreshing cup of tea in the bar opposite and then a walk up the road to show Dorothy the church. At 7.30 p.m. one of the nicest meals I remember. All the staff but one lady in the dining room seem to be new.

Friday 6th June Woke at 6 a.m. after an excellent night's sleep to lovely birdsong. Service led by Edward on the Lord's Prayer. After breakfast we crossed to the Collegio, where the Headmaster gave a very interesting talk, translated by an English teacher. It is the only Protestant grammar school (liceo) in Italy, taking about 90 pupils, 60% Protestant / 40% Catholic, from 14 to 19 years, studying one of 4 different courses (Classics, Modern Languages, Science or Law and Economics.) – very unusual for one school to offer all four directions. If they fail their exams they may have to repeat a year. Many go on to university but some leave education at 16. We were shown around some of the buildings and met some of the older students on their last day of lessons before their exams. The teaching was in very small groups, so they had almost individual attention. There was a computer for every student!

Friday market, lunch, siesta, walk up the road. We were delighted to see lizards darting in and out of the stone walls. At 4.30 p.m. across to the museo to meet Pastor Marcello Salvagio from Palermo and see a DVD on Waldensian history. Interesting but rather intense. It might have been better to see it in chunks which we could have assimilated more easily. Walked to Claudiana to see if the DVD was

on sale; but it was not. I would have liked a copy for the church to see. At dinner Silvia Gardiol and Claudio came to welcome us.

Saturday 7th June Prayers, a hurried breakfast and a walk to the station for the bus to Pinerolo, then another to Turin. Massimo and Renza met us and took us to the *tempio*. We went to the Mole, Museum of Cinema, where some took the lift up the tower to access the views over the city, but we referred to go sightseeing. At 2 p.m. we returned to the *tempio* for a welcome lunch provided by the ladies of the church, with a wonderful selection of cakes! We had a brief question and answer session with Massimo on the church's work with asylum seekers, young people and the homeless, then a quick visit to the church, before returning to Torre by train. We made the change to a distant platform at Pinerolo by the skin of our teeth.

Sunday 8th June Woke to a really soaking morning and disappointment that a visit to friends for lunch after church had to be cancelled because of the weather, but we understood. With our group and the Swiss one from the foresteria we made up a good congregation. Apart from the lessons in English, the service was mainly incomprehensible but I coped with the hymns in Italian. The kitchen staff really excelled themselves with a full Sunday lunch.

In the afternoon we walked to Villa Elisa, a home for the elderly run by the YWCA, where we squashed in with Waldensian friends and residents to hear a concert by a very talented 12 year-old Thai girl playing a stringed instrument called a kim. Beautifully dressed in a golden Thai costume, she played very well: her fingerwork was awe-inspiring and she looked as though she enjoyed her playing. Tea and delicious looking cakes were served afterwards and there was a small bazaar. I was introduced to Marco Rostan, who had designed the Torre Pellice t-shirt, (and later gave us all postcards with his drawings.)

Monday 9th June We met Silvia at the *museo*, where we spent a very interesting and informative morning. Silvia is a very thorough guide and has all the information at her fingertips. Although I had

been twice before, I learned a lot from her. Like the foresteria, the *museo* is constantly being updated.

After lunch we had an excursion to the Angrogna Valley but could not go as far up as Pra del Torno as excessive rainfall had made the road unsafe. We visited Ghieisa d'la Tana, the Beckwith School, Chanforan and at Serre the newly refurbished Women's Museum. On the return we stopped off at Ciabàs, which means 'old shack', the nickname rudely given the church by the Catholics because it was so plain.

After dinner, Cornelio Gai showed us all slides of the first Waldensian visit to England in 1982, which were very good. He also had some splendid views of the Valleys, mountains and lovely wild flowers. Lucetta and Christine translated for us.

Tuesday 10th June Prayers and Ruth shared with us some recent memories of Bill. Free till 4 p.m. so Dorothy and I walked down to the Pellice river: very wide, surprisingly not in full spate but littered with dead tree trunks washed down from higher up river. From the other side we had lovely views of the confluence of the Pellice and the deeper, narrower, faster-flowing Angrogna, where we saw men were working on building up defences on the banks. We saw signs of the recent flooding and we came upon a recent landslip too.

At 4 p.m. we were collected by car and taken for tea [billed as una merenda, 'a snack' !— Ed.] to Lilly Chiavia's house, where we sat outside and talked till it began to rain. She and her friends had laid on a super buffet, an impressive spread of food and wine. A convivial occasion.

Wednesday 11th June Early morning walk in the cool, fresh air before breakfast. We were escorted by Mariangela and Paulette from Pinerolo and Lilly to the fort of Fenestrelle high in the Chisone valley. Spectacular views! Lunch outdoors in the village, then down to Pomaretto, where, with Vilma and Gino Long, we visited the *scuola latina*, now a fascinating museum. In the church hall we had tea and cakes with the ladies after their meeting. Karola Stobäus, their German deacon, spoke of the church's recent initiatives to

draw families into the church. We sang 'We shall overcome', in English and Italian, then 'One more step along the world I go', the words produced from Vilma's handbag, bringing memories of singing round the organ at morning service on a previous visit.

Evening meal with our Waldensian friends: a happy occasion with presentations and our thanks to Lucetta, who had coordinated and organized our visit, to Adriano, Silvia and Lilly.

Thursday 12th June We say goodbye to our English friends staying on in Torre Pellice and to Lucetta and Christine who have come to see us off. Glorious sunshine as we leave for Ferrara.

Kathleen Brown with Dorothy Fox

REST AND RELAXATION

On Thursday 12th June, we waved goodbye to part of the group going on to Ferrara and beyond and settled down for six more days of rest and relaxation. At least that's what we thought!

What brought us here to these Valleys and a small town that hardly anyone at home has heard of? What brings the Americans, Swiss, Germans and other nationalities visiting the *Foresteria*? What on earth is an over ninety year old doing here, when she has limited sight and is confined to a wheelchair because of a recently broken ankle? It has to be compelling don't you think?

True the mountains are glorious but they can also be cruel, as recent landslides have shown us. True also that this place has vital importance in the history of Protestantism. We walk over bones in the ground from troubled events in history, to beautiful sites of remembrance. This is a place which has always required tremendous courage and endurance, determination, innovation and cheerfulness. It reflects itself in the life of the people. So could we be here because of the people?

Ah! The people! Who said rest and relaxation? The weather is awful and many folk call at the Foresteria guest house, apologising for the rain and cold, declaring that Italy has betrayed us. We shall be bored, they say, therefore we're invited for a delightful afternoon and evening at a farm- house. What's more, they will transport us there. There's a wonderful dinner of many courses with all the food fresh and grown on the farm. Potent wines have been produced by the family. We remind ourselves to take small portions - you never know how many courses will follow.

Often during the day our small group would slip out for tea or coffee in one of the café bars. In no time at all our Italian friends had found us and we spread to several tables, enjoying riotous conversation and laughter. We're delighted to get to know a friendly group from Valdese, North Carolina. Some of them are direct descendants of Italian immigrants. This is the trip of a lifetime for them. We promise to keep in contact to exchange newsletters and information.

Groups of two and sometimes four had other invitations to family lunch, afternoon tea and cake with more dear friends. Four of us spent an unforgettable day in San Germano Chissone, where we were given a sumptuous lunch including three kinds of wine. There was some leg pulling because we couldn't stand the pace and take limoncello with our coffee. Acknowledging our tiredness, (or dizziness from the wine) our lovely friends tucked us up on comfortable chairs, tenderly wrapping a particularly tired one in light blankets, to rest for half an hour. No, no, of course we couldn't help with washing up, they explained with a twinkle, the water was different here and we wouldn't understand it!

Sunday was a cold wintry day, but also a special Open Day for the Cultural Centre. Pastor Marcello Salvaggio presided at morning worship, at which two women Elders were ordained. This time we knew all the hymn tunes which is a great help when trying to sing in Italian. Our American friends presented the Torre Pellice church with two prints of Valdese, North Carolina. The choir sang and a ringing

baritone voice rose melodiously from the balcony. Aperitifs and refreshments were served after church. We spent the afternoon taking part in the Open Day and opted for hot drinks rather than ice-cream (still a sore point, as it was never warm enough to indulge in this typically Italian treat).

The final two days zipped past us at speed, talking to visitors, meeting for coffee, a bit of shopping and delivering the 160 euros collected by the whole group, to help the church's appeal for the education of the children of a young woman, tragically swept away, along with two other family members, in the land slide of 29th May, a few days before we arrived here. As two more of the group were departing early on Tuesday, our final meditation was on Monday evening. The blessing was as appropriate as ever, "Lord, give us a stout heart to bear our own burdens; give us a willing heart to bear the burdens of others and a believing heart to cast all burdens on Thee" (from John Baillie's "Diary of Private Prayer").

Of course Wednesday, departure day for the rest of us, dawned with a cloudless blue sky and sparkling sunshine. Wouldn't you know! We tug ourselves away from that little town where our minds and hearts live a lot of the time. Shine and sparkle as you may in today's sunshine, nothing can be as warm as the welcome and kindness we have experienced here. Thanks be to God for these precious days.

Margaret Neil

Discovering Emilia Romagna

The sun which had accompanied us much of the way deserted us in Ferrara. Rain again, but not too heavy, as our driver set us down near to our hotels in the centre of Ferrara. In Torre Pellice we had had a daily time of prayer and reflection together; here, split between two hotels, we had no opportunity to do that. With much more free time to devise our own individual programme, even daily contact with everyone was no longer certain, though Ferrara was small enough to ensure we came across some of our group some of

the time. However, for the first evening we did meet up in one of the hotels, where at short notice a very good meal was arranged for us all, after the opportunity to unpack, rest or get our bearings and catch up with friends old and new just joining our party.

The following morning I renewed acquaintance with the duomo, perusing the details of its west façade and still chuckling at the exuberance of slender columns along its southern flank, two apparently tied up in knots, above a row of shops built right up onto its wall. The market was in full swing with a group of musicians playing a merry tune as they made their way through the throng.

That day I delighted in a *delizia*, (one of the summer retreats of the d'Este dukes, only a short walk from their magnificent moated castle) the Palazzo Schifanoia ('Banish boredom'), with its wonderful frescoed hall depicting the months in Greek mythology, astrology and life at the Ferrara court; I visited other palazzi, Casa Romei with its many sculptures, the cathedral museum with more fine stonecarvings, tapestries and a collection of superb illuminated Bibles and missals, and wandered the narrow streets, some covered, in the area of the former Byzantine camp, losing myself temporarily, before emerging near the Baptist church.

I had been looking forward to attending a Bible study there that evening, but, like Yvonne and others, I could not gain access: the meeting was on Thursdays, not Fridays as I had been told. Later we discovered that the minister was away at a conference. Sadly, and a visit on Sunday was not possible as we were to worship in Bologna.

Our first visit to the Chiesa Metodista in Bologna came on Saturday afternoon, when we were invited to a concert there: not a short one, as we had thought, but a marathon (4 - 9 p.m.) which was already in full swing when we arrived at the appointed time. We heard solo singing, some by their American deaconess, Lisa. A quartet played – 2 violins, cello and harpsichord with a soprano soloist. There followed a selection of organ music and harpsichord music and then

a Latvian soprano from Parma University singing songs by Schubert, Schumann and Tchaikovsky. It was very enjoyable and informal, though I was surprised at the number of Italians who talked through the performance. We left during one of the breaks and some of our party returned at once by train to Ferrara, others chose to eat first and sample the famed Bolognese cuisine.

In brilliant sunshine we made our way back to Bologna on Sunday morning. Yvonne and I took the quiet street parallel to the long Via dell' Indipendenza. We discovered the site of Copernicus' home in Bologna, though the house itself had been replaced long ago, and had time to take a look round another church en route.

The service was led by Pastor Sergio Ribet, who was pastor at Pomaretto on our last visit. It was good to see him again. A group of Africans formed part of the congregation and their lively singing made a powerful impression. At the close of the service we were invited to stay behind for a summary of the sermon in English - not a one-off for our benefit but a normal feature for the sake of the Africans whose Italian was perhaps not yet quite up to it. Once a month there is an afternoon service in English too. Lisa had taken notes and impressed Pastor Ribet with her summary. The Africans then asked us to join with them in singing another hymn from their own compilation. A moving moment.

Over a fine lunch, prepared for us downstairs by the ladies, we were able to share food and conversation with our hosts and learn more about them. Richard, the leader of the Africans, was from Ghana; others were from Cameroon, Senegal and elsewhere. Many had come to Bologna to study and find employment. He himself has lived in Bologna for many years and is an industrial chemist. After work he teaches at the Italian language school set up by the church five years ago and run by 15 volunteer teachers, members of the congregation or friends of the church. Its aims are not only to help immigrants settle more quickly into Italian society through language acquisition but also for the Italians to learn about the experiences,

cultures and stories of the students they teach and gain greater understanding. The Africans and Italians certainly seemed to have a very good relationship and all were very welcoming and good-humoured.

Pastor Ribet told those at our table that despite the holiday period, our presence had kept the congregation about its usual size, though the number of members on roll was much higher. He spoke of plans to convert a recently vacated flat above his own behind the church for use by the young people. The church premises are also used by Philippine, Ukrainian and Korean churches.

There was much laughter and photograph-taking, including one of everyone, which we hope will be sent to us. Too soon we had to say goodbye to make way for one of those churches that uses the premises in the afternoon. We hope some of our hosts will be part of next year's visit to Britain. Richard accompanied us to the main square round the corner and suggested a bus tour of the city, but there was a long wait and our party broke up to explore the bustling city on foot or enjoy a drink in the open air.

In our remaining time in Ferrara some of us visited the ducal castle and the exhibition of paintings by Garofalo, Ferrara's own Renaissance artist; some enjoyed the peaceful park and *orto botanico*, with its pleasant pool and inquisitive turtles. Yvonne and I took the bus to Comacchio in the Po Delta, enjoying another landscape: canals and lagoons and a glimpse of egrets.

On our final day we took the train to Ravenna and explored the amazing array of 5th and 6th century mosaics in the churches, baptisteries and mausoleum there, which make this pleasant town a World Heritage site. These vivid images will remain with me forever. In Classe, a short bus ride from Ravenna, the church built for the sailors of the Roman fleet survives, where the sea has long since retreated and the fleet with it, leaving the bell tower and basilica

soaring behind a sea of wild flowers, many-hued: the work of nature and of human hand both a testimony to the glory of God.

So many memories, so much to take in. Thank you to all who made our Italian visit not only possible but such a rich experience.

Kate Grand

Did you know?

The fort at Fenestrelle is the largest in Europe. The original fort on the site, then in France, was commissioned by Louis XIV to monitor what the mutinous Waldensians were up to and keep them in check. Hence the nickname 'Fort Mutin'.

Lago Laux, the picturesque little lake above Finestrelle, which we visited all too briefly, was where the first talks took place to consider whether the Waldensians should join the Reformation, before the decision at Chanforan.

Over the years people from both sides of the border have met there to discuss aspects of their faith. At the beginning of August a conference (the 5th in this series) was held there for Catholics and Protestants to revisit their pre-Reformation history of conflict in the valley and discuss their relationship of more peaceful co-existence and cooperation today.

Lilly Chiavia not only attended a scuola Beckwith but as a child used to live in the actual coulege dei Barba that many of us have visited above Pra del Torno in the Angrogna Valley. We have seen the black and white photograph of her with her father and an English lord sitting outside the door.

The new Director of Servizio Cristiano since 1st May is Gianluca Fiusco, a 31 year old journalist, a member of the Trapani-Marsala church, who has attended the Synod of the Waldensian and

Methodist Churches several times. He has been director of the Sicilian television company, Telescirocco and communications consultant for a number of public institutions, both local and national, as well as chief press officer of European and national parliamentary delegations. He is the author of numerous reports on the mafia and political collusion. He has also been involved in social work in Sicily.

Last year the Waldensian Church received 6.9 million euros in donations through the **Otto per Mille** scheme: an increase of 1.2 million euros over the previous year. The Moderator, Maria Bonafede stressed that these funds are used for cultural, social and welfare initiatives in Italy and abroad, that detailed accounts are published of how the funds are spent and that none of the money is spent on the churches, church services, payment of ministers or evangelisation. 30% goes to projects in developing countries.

Anna Maffei, President of UCEBI – the Baptist Union of Italy – has recently announced that the Baptists have decided to join the Otto per Mille scheme.

Salvatore Rapisarda, the Baptist minister who made us so welcome in Siracusa in 2002, has a letter posted on the UCEBI website expressing solidarity with the victims in Ossetia and Georgia. “We expect leaders who claim to lead great nations to be able to sit down and discuss problems instead of acting like old-fashioned cowboys in a Hollywood western,” he writes. “War never solves problems, only makes them worse. It is the defenceless -- children, the elderly, the common people -- who pay for the foolish actions of those who go to war... We say it is never too soon to stop war... Hatred, destruction, death, injury, pollution caused by war are all very difficult to remedy.” The churches are praying for the conversion of those with power to stop the war and will do all they can to work for peace. “Prayer may seem a feeble weapon, but it is not in our prayer we place our trust, but in the power of the Lord who controls history.”