

The Oldham Peace Times

Issue 9 – April 2017

News from the Oldham Pledge to Peace Forum

Editorial

Welcome to this ninth issue of the Oldham Peace Times, newsletter of the Oldham Pledge to Peace Forum. This is a regular publication to inform people and organisations with an interest in working for peace about the Forum and its work.

In March and early April, we have held events highlighting the fight of women for peace.

On International Women's Day (8 March) academic Ali Ronan and playwright Hazel Roy presented a new film on the Women's Peace Crusade of 1917. At a time when we are constantly assailed with tales of daring do and sacrifice on the front lines in France, it would be remiss not to highlight the courage and commitment of women at home who opposed the First World War by joining the Peace Crusades.

On April 1 we were honoured with a visit by two Hibakusha ladies, one the survivor of the atomic bombing at Hiroshima and the other a second-generation descendant. The ladies have been touring the UK with the message 'never again' as 123 states meet at the UN to discuss outlawing nuclear weapons. In Oldham they met the Mayor and planted ginkgo seeds received from the Mayor of Hiroshima as a symbol of our desire for ensuring friendship, co-operation and peace between the people of Oldham and those of Japan.

I do hope that this issue will inspire you to do something for peace – you can join the Forum if you represent an organisation that has signed the Pledge to Peace or one that wishes to do so – please find more details about the Pledge on Page 2 of this newsletter.

Our next newsletter will be out in May 2017 so do please send stories and photos for inclusion in our next issue, as well as feedback, to richardoutram35@gmail.com Please also like our Facebook Page at The Oldham Pledge To Peace Forum. You can also leave a peace related post or send emails to Maria at peacetalksoldham@gmail.com

Yours in Peace, Richard Outram, Editor

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An Introduction to the Pledge to Peace



Above: Mr. Prem Rawat and Mr. Gianna Pitella, co-sponsors of the Pledge, in the European Parliament at the conclusion of the conference.

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

The initiative was the brainchild of then First Vice President of the European Parliament, Mr. Gianni Pittella MEP, the former President of the European Parliament Senator Emilio Colombo, and the Associazione Percorsi.

The Pledge to Peace was sponsored by Mr. Prem Rawat, an authoritative and international speaker on peace, who was the first signatory.

Mr Rawat was later appointed 'Ambassador to the Bruxelles Declaration - Pledge to Peace'.

Institutions and organisations are invited to sign the Pledge to help create a "culture of peace" across Europe by carrying out practical actions for peace in their communities

Each signatory is asked to submit a report of these activities to the initiative's secretariat, the Percorsi Association, by the UN International Day of Peace, observed on 21st September each year.

More information about the Pledge can be found at:

<http://www.pledgetopeace.eu/> and <http://www.associazionepercorsi.com>

More information about the Ambassador to the Bruxelles Declaration – Pledge to Peace, Mr. Prem Rawat, can be found at:

<http://www.premrawat.com> and <http://www.wopg.org>

Article and photo courtesy of the Percorsi Association

Former Mayor of Warrington calls on Council to follow Oldham's Lead

Former Mayor, Geoff Settle is asking Warrington Borough Council to sign the 'Pledge to Peace' and follow the Mayor of Oldham's example.

Geoff said "Last year I was given a pack of information about the 'Pledge to Peace' during a visit to the Peace Centre that detailed what we need to do to sign up. It is a commitment to putting in place projects and actions related to peace by the community."

"Warrington is associated with Peace in so many ways that it seemed strange that Oldham were making this request especially as they had been so inspired by what we have achieved over recent decades."



Above: Photo of the Warrington Peace Centre named after the two young people tragically killed in the 1993 IRA bombing in the town centre.

Geoff passed on the details but apologised for not following it up, however the recent call for Warrington to become a City of Culture and a reminder of the 'Hate Awareness campaign' work done in the town left him with no choice but to raise a question at a future meeting of the full council.

Geoff's question to full council reads: "Last year I attended the Peace Centre as Mayor on several occasions. During one visit, I joined a delegation led by the Mayor of Oldham. He was accompanied by people who had been instrumental in signing up Oldham for the 'Pledge for Peace'. To date they are the only Town or City that has successfully achieved this accolade in the UK. At the end of the visit they gave me a 'Pledge to Peace' pack and offer of support."

"The Councillor for Peace Cllr Derek Heffernan (who is now the Mayor) told me that they had been inspired by Nick Taylor (CEO) at the Peace Centre when he came to visit Oldham and describe the work they do. It was very noticeable that they were also gaining additional inspiration when they met and talked to Colin and Wendy Parry, founders of the Peace Centre, as they described events, progress and future challenges."

"I am reminded by the Chief Executive that in 1999 we tried to gain City status using the concept 'City to Peace'.

"Will the council include as part of the 2021 City of Culture bid (or earlier) the promise to use the 'Pledge for Peace' pack and make Warrington a Town Pledged to Peace?"



Above: The second visit by an Oldham delegation to the Warrington Peace Centre –

left to right; Colin and Wendy Parry, both OBEs, founders of the Tim Parry and Johnathan Ball Foundation for Peace, which runs the Peace Centre; Cllrs Yasmin Toor and Ateeque ur Rehman, then Mayoress and Mayor of Oldham, Mrs. Jean Settle and Cllr. Geoff Settle, then Mayoress and Mayor of Warrington; with Cllr. Derek Heffernan, now Oldham's Mayor of Peace at the rear; Richard Outram; Graham Foulkes, trustee of the Centre, and Maria Ellis, Chair of Peace Talks Oldham.

With thanks to Geoff Settle for this article and to the Warrington Peace Centre for photos

The M62: A Northern Corridor of Peace?

In January 2016, Oldham hosted a visit by the Chief Executive of the Tim Parry and Johnathan Ball Foundation for Peace, Nick Taylor, who signed the Pledge to Peace in the presence of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor and spoke at the inaugural meeting of the Oldham Pledge to Peace Forum.

In recent months, we have had contact with Councillors and former Councillors in Manchester, Bradford, Leeds and Hull, all of whom have expressed an interest in pursuing the possibility that their local authority might join Oldham Council in signing the Pledge.

Commenting Richard Outram, Secretary of the Forum: "It is interesting that both Maria Ellis and I separately had the vision that these towns and cities could be joined with Oldham as signatories of the Pledge to Peace and, linked as they are by the M62, we could see a Northern Corridor of Peace. Watch this space..."

May Peace Prevail on Earth: The Ss Aidan and Oswald Peace Song

The Mayor, Maria and Richard visited Ss Aidan & Oswald's RC Primary School in Royton (<http://www.ssaianoswald.oldham.sch.uk/>) on 9 February for a signing ceremony (see Oldham Peace Times issue 8). At the assembly the children sang their Peace Song. This is regularly sung at school assemblies and masses.

Specially composed by parent and Oldham Council Music Service teacher Angela Preen, the song was inspired by the universal peace message and prayer "May Peace Prevail on Earth".

Below: The Student Chaplains and Angela Preen pictured in the school Peace Garden.



The words of the song are as follows:

"May peace prevail on earth.
May peace be in our hearts.
Reaching out and sharing peace,
Bringing friendship and forgiveness.

St. Aidan and Oswald's
Bringing peace to our friends.
We are the peacemakers,
The children of God.

With our words, with our actions, with our thoughts,
We can spread the message of peace, Spread the message of peace.

May peace prevail on Earth,
May peace be in our families.
Reaching out and sharing peace,
bringing friendship and forgiveness.

St. Aidan and Oswald's
Bringing peace to our friends.
We are the peacemakers,
The children of God.

With our words, with our actions, with our thoughts,
We can spread the message of peace. Spread the message of peace."

Angela explained: "Peace Poles are now recognised as the most prominent international symbol and monument to peace. They bear the message, 'May Peace Prevail on Earth' in different languages and symbolise the oneness of humanity and our common wish for a world at peace, stand as a silent visual symbol for peace to prevail on earth, and remind us to think, speak and act in the spirit of peace and harmony."

With thanks to Angela Preen for the above article and photograph.

Solutions not Sides promote Peace in the Middle East

On Friday 10 February AS and A Level Citizenship students attending the Oldham Sixth Form College, a recent signatory of the Pledge to Peace, enjoyed a fascinating session on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict delivered by the educational group 'Solutions Not Sides'.

'Solutions Not Sides' (<http://www.solutionsnotsides.co.uk/>) describe themselves as 'not simply pro-Israel or Pro-Palestine, but pro-solution'. The group encourage open discussion and a safe environment in which to ask difficult questions and have tough conversations.

The students listened to Seffy and Yassar, from Israel and Palestine, talk about their upbringing and their lives in the Middle East. This was a brilliant opportunity for the students to meet ordinary people, not politicians or journalists, who live and work in Israel and Palestine and find out what life is like in the midst of a conflict. Hearing real stories from real people allowed the students to see past the media's negativity and bias, and understand that violence will never be a means to end the conflict.



Above: The student group and facilitators exploring the solutions.

Citizenship course leader, Andrew Barker said:

"This event was arranged to give the students a better understanding of the conflict and help them engage with the content on a much more meaningful level. It was a well organised, unbiased approach which enabled our students to really empathise with young Israelis and Palestinians. To hear about personal experiences from the conflict first hand was hard hitting and thought provoking. The students really enjoyed this opportunity which will help them in their Citizenship studies."

Peace Crusaders celebrated on International Women's Day

On International Women's Day (8 March) Oldham Library kindly hosted a talk and film show about the Women's Peace Crusade in 1917 in the Performance Space.

The producer Ali Ronan and writer Hazel Roy (**photo below left**) spoke about the courage and tenacity of the women involved in the campaign to secure a negotiated peace in the First World War, and the making of the film which is set in locations in the North West.

Dorothy Bintley (**photo below right**) spoke of the research carried out by herself and Sheila Goodyear as volunteers with the Oldham Historical Research Group in which 110 Conscientious Objectors living in or around the Oldham district have been identified.



Oldham's Mayor of Peace, Cllr Derek Heffernan, also spoke of the power of women in bringing about peace and cited particularly the campaigners in the Greenham Common camp who had forced the US military to withdraw Cruise missiles from Britain.



Photo: Maria Ellis, MC at the event, with the Mayor about to rise to speak, and Ali Ronan and Hazel Roy shown behind him.

Dr. Ali Ronan coordinated the research and helped to produce the film, whilst Hazel Roy wrote the script. Ali also sold signed copies of her book about the Women's Peace Crusade at the end of the event.

Using the fictional cycle journey of young Manchester undergraduate and Women's International League member, Mabel Phythian, the film referenced Peace Crusade events from Manchester to Nelson, including the Oldham Riot of 6 August 1917, when locally-billeted New Zealand troops broke up a Peace Crusade meeting.

A full article on the film – On the Set at Alexandra Park - featured in Oldham Peace Times issue 6. **Photo: a Still from the film shown below.**



Knowsley School reaches out to Syria

On the sixth anniversary of the outbreak of the Civil War in Syria (15 March), the pupils and staff of Knowsley Junior School, Springhead (<http://www.knowsley.oldham.sch.uk/>) showed their solidarity with the people suffering in the conflict, particularly the children who are often the innocent victims of war.

A special assembly was held and approximately 800 handprints were collected that will be sent to the charity Postcards to Peace, which has launched the Reach Out to Syria appeal (<http://www.reachouttosyria.com/>).



Photos: A sample of handprints (left), Pupils queuing to mark their mark (right)

As well as the fear of death itself, people in Syria, especially children, feel isolated and alone. They fear their plight is unknown to, or ignored by, the world. And in such circumstances they lose hope.

The charity is asking people from around the world to create handprints to “show the people of Syria that people around the world are aware of their plight and we do care.”

The intention is to create 10 million pairs of handprints, enough to reach from the United Nations headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, to Aleppo, Syria.

It is fitting that Knowsley School rose to the challenge as the Chair of Governors there is Oldham's Mayor of Peace Cllr Derek Heffernan.

Cllr. Heffernan has often has spoken movingly about the plight of children in the besieged city of Aleppo and that it is even more poignant that the children attending our school assemblies are the same age as those being bombed in Syria.

The Oldham Pledge to Peace Forum is now looking at other ways to work more closely with Postcards for Peace, and all school head-teachers recently received information of its work in the packs supplied to them at the 2 March conference.

With thanks to Nikki Pearson for the photographs and to everyone at Knowsley for participating.

Update on the Kifubon Book Project



The Kifubon book project was established by Bunya Publishing based in Obuse in Nagano, Japan.

Bunya is a small company with big aspirations to send out a message of hope for humanity, a message that can positively impact the lives of people all over the planet.

Kifubon is a Japanese word meaning 'to share or to provide books'. Bunya created the Kifubon project to "share wisdom and help individuals and humanity rediscover our empathy and compassion."

Individuals support the Kifubon project by buying books, which are then donated to social projects.

Bunya has published two life-affirming books written by Prem Rawat, *Splitting the Arrow* and *The Pot with the Hole*. Through charming stories and poetic expressions, the books shed light on the art of appreciation and understanding of life. The stories are beautifully illustrated by the Japanese artist Aya Shiroy.

The Kifubon team are seeking donations of 1,000 plus of these books to place in social and humanitarian projects in the UK. More than 750 have been donated so far.

All UK prisons have received a copy of *Splitting the Arrow*. The UK project team are now working to prioritise donations of both books to family refuges.

The feedback from recipients of the books has been quite lovely.

More information about Kifubon can be found at the www.kifubon.com website. You can pay for a book(s) to be donated, or to suggest UK projects that might benefit from a Kifubon donation, by sending an email to info@kifubon.com

With thanks to Lesley Cooper and Peter Lee for this information.

Seeds of Peace from Japan

On the day the editorial of Peace Times Oldham issue 8 was written, the Editor received a very special package in his office – a gift to Oldham, as part of the A-bombed Trees Project, of ginkgo, hackberry and jujube seeds from the office of the Mayor of Hiroshima.



The gift came with an explanation of the Project: "A-bombed trees, having faced the horror of the atomic bombing, sprouted buds again from their burnt trunks, giving citizens hope and the courage to live, and symbolically calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons and the realization of eternal world peace. We hope from the bottom of our hearts that these ginkgo, hackberry and jujube seeds from A-bombed trees will serve as symbols of peace."

The mother tree of these ginkgo seeds stands in the Shukkeien Garden, 1,370 meters from the hypocentre of the atomic bombing (a place of national scenic beauty created in 1620), and is said to be over 200 years old.

Its trunk was slanted by the atomic blast, but the tree lived through the bombing and resultant fires and even now spreads out large branches.

Please scan the QR code below for the location of the mother tree



There was a giant hackberry tree in a temple in a central part of Hiroshima City.

The trunk diameter of the tree was greater than 2 metres before the atomic bombing.

After it withered in the atomic bombing on August 6, 1945, it was cut down. However, two sprouts emerged from the base, which are now growing as if they were separate trees.

These Japanese hackberry seeds were picked from this A-bombed tree.

Please scan the QR code below for the location of the tree.



Thanks are due to the Mayor of Hiroshima office for the seeds, the photos and this information. The locations can also be found below

The mother tree of these jujube seeds was exposed to the atomic bombing 1,430 meters from the hypocentre. It was later moved to a green belt along Peace Boulevard.

Despite a scar from the bombing on its trunk, the mother tree sprouts new shoots in summer and bears many red fruit in autumn.

Please scan the QR code below for the location of the tree in Hiroshima City.



<https://www.google.co.jp/maps/place/34%C2%B024'03.2%22N+132%C2%B028'02.0%22E/@34.4008889,132.4672222,17z?hl=en>

<https://www.google.co.jp/maps/place/34%C2%B023'23.8%22N+132%C2%B027'23.5%22E/@34.3899444,132.4565278,17z>

<https://www.google.com/maps/place/34%C2%B023'37.4%22N+132%C2%B026'21.3%22E/@34.3937222,132.43925,17z>

Hibakusha Atom Bomb Survivors Visit UK

In late March, the Nuclear Free Local Authorities network, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the UK and Ireland Chapter of Mayors for Peace organised a visit to Edinburgh, Glasgow and Faslane in Scotland and Manchester, Oldham, Oxford and London in England of two 'hibakusha', one a direct survivor of the Hiroshima atomic bomb attack and the other second-generation being born to parents who experienced the blast.

Their visit coincided with the commencement of negotiations in the United Nations to formulate a ban on nuclear weapons. Although 123 countries support a ban, the UK and other nuclear weapons states are boycotting the talks though, as signatories to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, they agreed to "negotiate in good faith" to abolish nuclear weapons.



Photo above: the empty UK seat at the negotiating table.

Facilitated by the group Gensuyiko, the two ladies, Mrs Reiko Yamada and Ms Midori Yamada, who are unrelated, were accompanied by Shigeo Kobayashi of the UK based group JAN.

Prior to coming to Oldham, the hibakusha spoke at a public meeting at the People's History Museum in Manchester. Recounting their own 'Survivors' Stories' with moving personal testimony, the ladies also responded to questions from the audience.



Above left: Midori, Reiko and Shigeo on the platform. Above right: Mrs. Reiko Yamada.

Born in Hiroshima, Mrs. Reiko Yamada was eleven years old at the time of the A-bomb attack. Mrs. Yamada, who now serves as Vice-President of the Toyko Federation of A-bomb Survivors' Associations, recalled the exact moment when the bomb struck: "That morning, I was in the schoolyard under the blazing summer sun. 'Look, a B29!' a boy shouted, and I looked up in the sky and saw the silver-shining B29 bomber flying high in the blue sky, drawing a white arc with its vapour trail. 'That's pretty,' I thought. The next moment there was a white flash and I was blinded."

The Hibakusha campaign all over the world using the slogan 'never again', making others aware of their experiences and urging citizens and world leaders to oppose the manufacture, possession and use of nuclear weapons.

Thanks are due to Andrew Gibson and Sean Morris for photos and information.

Konnichiwa, Hibakusha receive Our Warmest Oldham Welcome

On Saturday 1 April Oldham was honoured to receive a visit by the hibakusha. The ladies and their interpreter first visited our award-winning Green Flag Alexandra Park, (http://www.oldham.gov.uk/info/200393/parks_countryside_and_canals/676/alexandra_park) where they were given a guided tour of some of the facilities by the Council's Head of Environmental Management, Glenn Dale.

Having seen the pagoda and the oriental garden, where ultimately we intend to locate the Japanese trees when they are ready as the centrepiece of a peace garden (**below left**), the party also encountered Blind Joe, a much-loved former town crier (**below right**).





The party assembled outside the Conservatory (**above**) before we went in to meet Oldham's Mayor of Peace, Cllr Derek Heffernan, and exchange friendly greetings.

It should be noted that the Mayor is in considerable pain at present, yet to his enormous credit he courageously continues to diligently attend every event that he can such is his personal commitment to peace.

After the Mayor's welcome and the ladies' response, Maria read out a moving letter from the Mayor of Hiroshima (**below**)



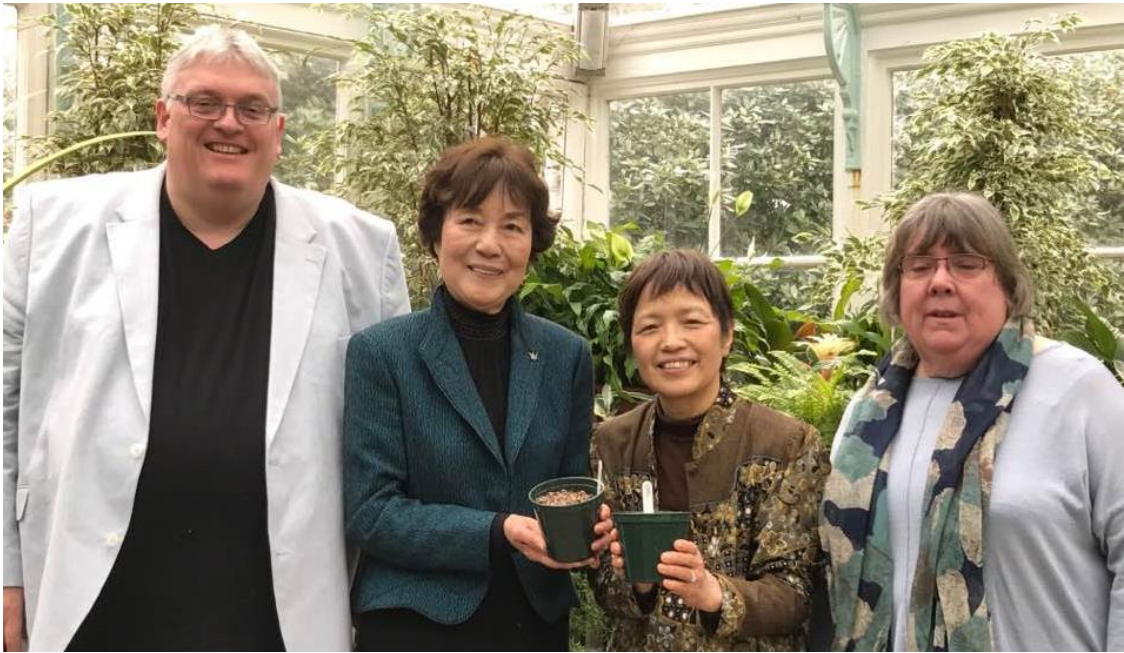
The Mayor declined the offer to plant any of the ginkgo seeds raising a laugh by saying that he was not blessed with green fingers and they would probably die before everyone had left the building **(below)**.



The ladies though were happy to oblige – a truly symbolic act that is unlikely to ever be repeated in Oldham, survivors of the Hiroshima bombing planting seeds from a ginkgo tree that was itself a survivor of the blast.



The ladies received assistance with the planting from Euey Madden, Council Principal Greenspace Manager, and Glenn Dale **(above)**.



We were also joined in the Conservatory by Councillors Howard Sykes MBE – left - and Cath Ball – right - from the Council’s Liberal Democrat and Labour Groups **(above. Thanks to Cllr Sykes for this photo).**

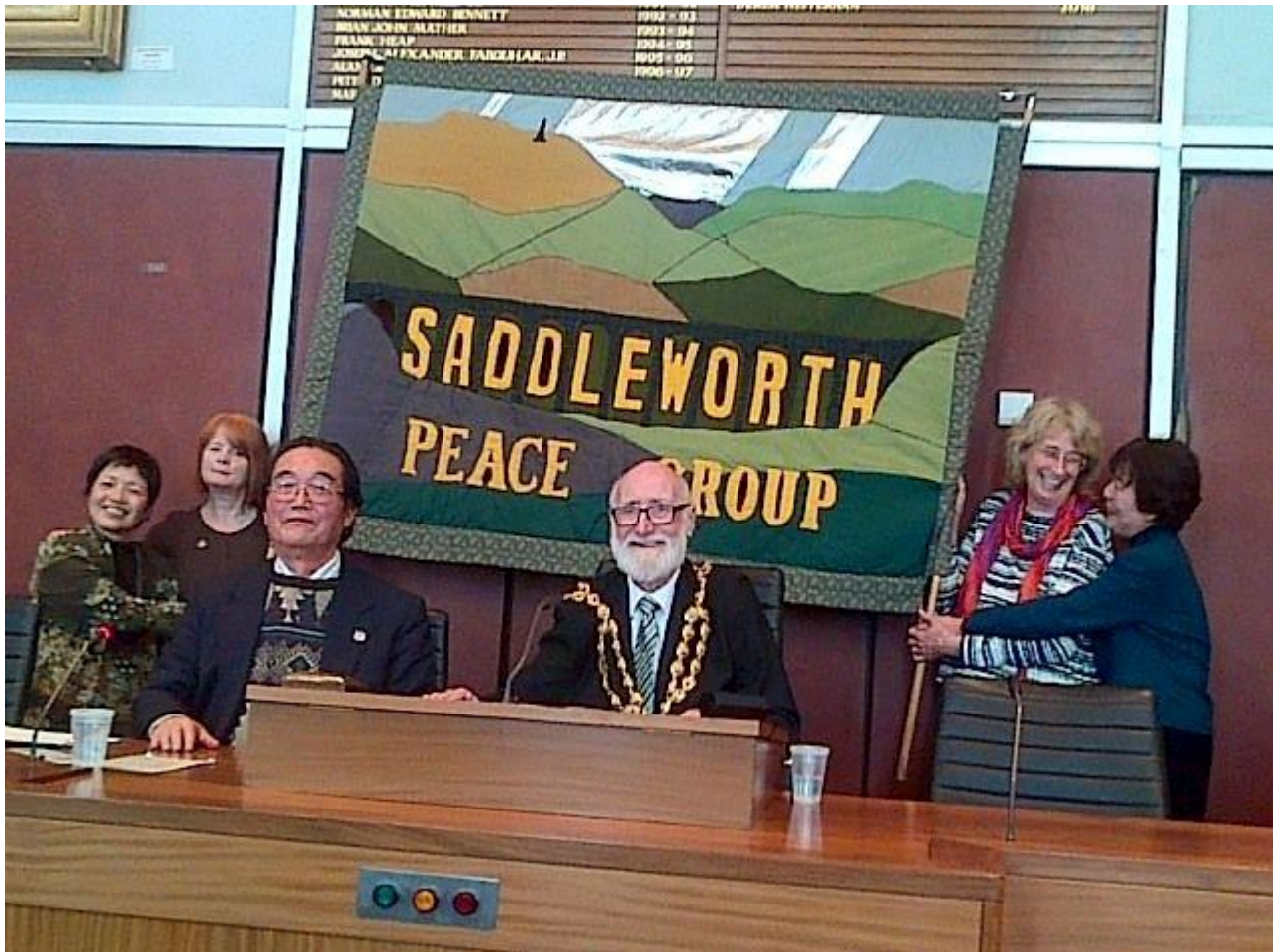
After lunch in the Mayor’s Dining Room, the party later reconvened in the Council Chamber for some presentations.

Midori and Reiko received personal gifts of pens and paperweights and also a corporate gift of an Oldham coat-of-arms shield to take back to their hometown.

Imagine Reiko’s – and our delight – when she discovered that the gifts all bore the Oldham owl, our municipal emblem. By an amazing co-incidence, or more likely serendipity, Reiko explained that so too does her home town of Toshima in Toyko **(below).**



Reiko has promised to speak with the mayor of her home town on her return to Japan to see how Oldham and Toshima can co-operate on peace initiatives as ‘sister cities’.



At the end of an afternoon that had been both momentous and moving, the Mayor and hibakusha were joined on the Council dais by our friends, Jacqui Burke and Liz Green from the Saddleworth Peace Group and the group's banner (**above**).

The Mayor described it as "the best event" he had been to during his term in office.

Then it was regrettably time to say Sayonara to our new Japanese friends. This Editor can report that he got a few stares from Oldham drivers when he accompanied the party to the car-park and bid farewell with several bows as is the Japanese tradition.

Peace is All Around You 2

On a recent visit to Cambridge, this Editor spotted this knitted CND symbol on Magdalene Street in the heart of the city centre.



2017 marks 20th Anniversary of Landmine Ban



Photo above: The actor Daniel Craig (second left), the UN Global Advocate for the Elimination of Landmines, inspecting work to clear landmines in Cyprus

On 8 December 2005, the General Assembly of the United Nations declared that 4 April of each year shall be observed as the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action.

In September 1997, the Ottawa Treaty was adopted by nations committed to abolishing anti-personnel land mines. Landmines are a most indiscriminate weapon that, once placed, kill and injure civilians for many years after the end of a conflict.

The Treaty came about largely because of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (<http://www.icbl.org/>) The ICBL and its then coordinator American Jody Williams jointly won the Nobel Prize Peace in December of that year.

After twenty years, the 'Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction' has now been ratified or accepted by 156 states.

More than 41 million stockpiled anti-personnel mines have been destroyed, and their production, sale and transfer have largely stopped. However unfortunately landmines are still a global problem. Over 60 states and territories are still contaminated by landmines and an average of 18 people were killed or injured by landmines every day in 2015. In addition, 35 states have still to join the treaty.

So although the United Nations Mine Action Team, the Mines Advisory Group, based in Manchester (<http://www.maginternational.org/>) and the Halo Trust, famous for its association with the late Diana, Princess of Wales (<http://www.halotrust.org/>), amongst others, continue to save lives by clearing mines across the world, the ICBL is calling on the UN to commit itself to a mine-free world by 2025 to 'get the job done'.

"Peace without mine action is incomplete peace. I urge all Member States to keep this issue at the top of the international." - *UN Secretary-General, António Guterres*