UNITARIAN HISTORY TIMELINE
Persons listed here are included either because they were Unitarian, had a close association with Unitarians, or had a major impact on Unitarians (or dissenter predecessors). Which of these entries intrigues you most? Email us and let us know!

1326 Adam Duff burned at Hoggin Green, Dublin, for denying the Incarnation and Trinity.

1510 Francis David born. First bishop of the Unitarian Church of Transylvania.
1531 Michael Servetus publishes On the Errors of the Trinity.
Catherine Vogel burnt at Krakow — regarded as the first Polish Unitarian martyr.
1553 Servetus escapes from prison at Vienne (April 7); burnt alive at Geneva (October 27).
1568 Transylvania passes the Edict of Torda, proclaiming religious liberty, incl. for Unitarians — the first such law in Europe. Francis David instrumental.
1579 Faustus Socinus arrives in Poland. Francis David dies in prison at Deva, Transylvania (November).
1588 Synod of Brest — Socinus unites the divided Polish Anti-Trinitarians.

1605 The Racovian Catechism is published by the Polish Brethren.
1608 John Milton born in Bread Street, London (December 9).
1632 John Locke philosopher, born at Wrington, Somerset (August 29).
1642 Isaac Newton discovers the law of gravitation at Woolsthorpe.
1652 John Biddle forms a small Unitarian religious society in London.

1662 John Biddle dies in prison (September 22).
Act of Uniformity passed — "Two thousand" clergy ejected from their positions.
1689 John Locke's Letter Concerning Toleration published.
Act of Toleration passed (but Unitarians, Catholics, Jews, Atheists excluded).

1700 Ipswich Meeting House opens.
1704 Dissenter and novelist **Daniel Defoe** works as a state spy in Bury St Edmunds to pay off debts, lodging with Presbyterian John Morley.
1711 The new Bury St Edmunds Meeting House - built for Presbyterian dissenters - opens on Churchgate Street.
1717 Framlingham Meeting House opens.

1723 Richard Price born in Glamorgan (23 February).
1730 Josiah Wedgwood born at Burslem, Staffordshire (July 12).
1738 Joseph Johnson, publisher and host of the Johnson Circle, is born. (15 November)
1743 Anna Laetitia Barbauld, poet, born at Kibworth Harcourt (June 20).

1755 Joseph Priestley becomes minister of the dissenting congregation at Needham Market, Suffolk, but upsets members with his unorthodox views.
1756 Warrington Academy, "the cradle of Unitarianism", is founded.
Octagon Chapel in Norwich opens.
1759 Mary Hays, novelist and biographer, is born. (4 May)
1766 John Pounds, founder of the Ragged Schools is born (17 June).
1768 Tom Paine, writer and radical, moves to Lewes and becomes closely associated with Westgate Meeting House.

1772 Joseph Priestley achieves carbonisation of water - effectively inventing the soft fizzy drink.
1773 Theophilus Lindsey resigns his Church living at Catterick and moves to London with his wife, Hannah.
Beginning of the immensely long (until 1829) ministry of Samuel Say Toms at Framlingham Unitarian Meeting House, during which time the congregation developed a Unitarian outlook.
1774 Essex Street Chapel opened by Theophilus and Hannah Lindsey (April 17) — the first Unitarian place of worship in England opened as such. Benjamin Franklin attends.
1775 Duke of Grafton, former Prime Minister, resigns as Lord Privy Seal advocating leniency towards the American colonists.
1776 Richard Price produces a pamphlet in support of the American colonies.

1778 William Hazlitt the younger, essayist and radical, born (10 April).
1779 Mary Somerville, scientist and mathematician, born (December 26).

1781 Lucy Aikin, social historian, is born (6 November).
1782 Joseph Priestley publishes History of the Corruption of Christianity.
1787 Elhanan Winchester establishes a universalist congregation in London.(This evolves through a Unitarian phase to become South Place Ethical Society, then Conway Hall).
Josiah Wedgwood's anti-slavery medallion is issued and becomes widely circulated.
1788 William Rathbone (the fifth) born (February 11). Liverpool merchant and philanthropist.
1789 French Revolution begins.
1791 Birmingham Riots (July 14) — Priestley's house and laboratory destroyed by a mob.
1792 Mary Wollstonecraft publishes A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.
W.J. Fox MP fails in his attempt to repeal the anti-Trinitarian statute.
Rammohun Roy born near Krishnagar, Bengal (approx. May 22).
Iolo Morganwg (Edward Williams) revives the Gorsedd (an ancient society of Welsh culture).
1793 Poet Robert Burns protests the transportation sentence for Thomas Fyshe Palmer.
1794 Priestley arrives in America.
1795 Unitarian Christian Church of Madras founded.
The Life of Lorenzo de Medici, by William Roscoe, is published.

1801 Dr Nathaniel Phillips becomes the first avowed Unitarian to serve as minister at Bury St Edmunds Meeting House.
1803 Smithson Tennant discovers Iridium and Osmium.
1805 Sarah Fuller Flower (later Adams) born. Author of the hymn "Nearer, my God, to Thee" (22 February).
James Martineau born at Norwich (April 21).
1807 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow born (February 27).
Florence Nightingale born — parents Unitarian. (12 May)

1812 Charles Dickens born (February 7).
1813 William Smith's bill repeals the statute against anti-Trinitarians. Being Unitarian is now legal.
1819 William Ellery Channing preaches the Baltimore ordination address — the defining statement of American Unitarianism.

1820 Goodwyn Barmby, Utopian socialist, born at Yoxford, Suffolk (12 November).
1821 Guardian newspaper founded (originally the Manchester Guardian).
1822 Frances Power Cobbe social reformer and animal rights activist, born (December 4).
1823 Death of economist David Ricardo.
1825 British & Foreign Unitarian Association and the American Unitarian Association are founded on the same day (26 May).
John Quincy Adams becomes US President.
1826 Thomas Jefferson and John Adams die on the same day (4 July).
1828 Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts.
William Johnson Fox becomes editor of The Monthly Repository.
1829 Suttee abolished in India (December 4), largely through Rammohun Roy's efforts.

1830 Channing visits the West Indies; revives his anti-slavery zeal.
W.J. Fox introduces Harriet Taylor to J.S. Mill.
1832 Rammohun Roy arrives in England.
Jeremy Bentham dies (June 6).
R.W Emerson resigns his ministry at Second Church, Boston, to pursue lecturing and essay writing.
1834 Anne Milbanke (Lady Byron) establishes Ealing Grove School as England's first co-operative school.
Gwilym Marles (William Thomas) born in Brechfa, near Llandysul, Wales.
1836 Emerson's essay Nature published.
Dispute between George Ripley and Andrews Norton on miracles creates conditions for the emergence of Transcendentalism in New England.
1838 Emerson delivers the Divinity School Address at Harvard.
1839 Charles Darwin marries Emma Wedgwood.

1841 Goodwyn Barmby coins the term ‘communitarian’ for those who try out communal living.
1842 Dickens meets Channing in Boston.
The first combined wash house and public baths open in Liverpool, due to the efforts of Catherine Wilkinson.
Novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne marries painter Sophia Peabody.
First edition of The Inquirer denominational newspaper is published.
1843 Charles Dickens joins Little Portland Street Unitarian Chapel.
Goodwyn and Kate Barmby establish the Communist Church.
1844 Passing of the Dissenters’ Chapels Act.
The Rochdale Pioneers open their first co-operative store.
1845 Frederick Douglass, American social reformer and abolitionist, publishes his Narrative.
1848 Elizabeth Gaskell publishes her novel, Mary Barton.
Harriet Martineau publishes Eastern Life, a travelogue showing her growing scepticism.
Goodwyn Barmby changes course and begins Unitarian ministry.
1849 Henry David Thoreau publishes his essay, Civil Disobedience.
Bedford College in London founded by Elizabeth Reid.
Edmund Sears writes the carol It Came Upon The Midnight Clear as an anti-war piece.

1851 The novel Moby Dick, by Herman Melville, is published.
Harriet Taylor publishes The Enfranchisement of Women.
1852 Mary Carpenter aids in establishing a reformatory for boys at Kingswood.
1854 Red Lodge reformatory for girls opened by Mary Carpenter.
1858 Theodore Parker begins his Boston ministry.
1859 Charles Darwin publishes Origin of Species.
Millard Fillmore inaugurated as US President.
Elizabeth Blackwell becomes the first woman on the GMC Medical Register (1 January).
J.S. Mill publishes On Liberty - a collaboration with Harriet Taylor.
Samuel Smiles publishes his book, Self-Help.

1863 Sir Charles Lyell publishes Geological Evidences of the Antiquity of Man.
1868 Louisa May Alcott publishes Little Women.
1873 Joseph Chamberlain becomes Mayor of Birmingham.
1876 Alexander Graham Bell patents his prototype telephone.
1878 Earl Russell – Anglican supporter of religious liberty – dies (May 28).

1880 Rev Dr Thomas Sadler conducts the funeral of novelist Mary Ann Evans, aka ”George Eliot”.
Caroline Soule ordained into the Universalist ministry, serving Unitarians in Scotland.
Death of abolitionist Thomas Cooper, a former minister at Framlingham Meeting House.
1881 Goodwyn Barmby dies. His funeral takes place in Framlingham Meeting House and he is buried in the town’s public cemetery.
1882 H.W. Longfellow dies (March 24).
R.W. Emerson dies (April 27).
Sir Henry Tate dies (December 5).
1885 Birth of Dorothy Tarrant, classical scholar specialising in the work of Plato.
1887 Hajom Kissor Singh establishes a Unitarian Church in Meghalaya state, India.
1888 Composer Edvard Grieg visits Birmingham to conduct some of his works, meeting with Unitarian friends.

1890 James Martineau’s The Seat of Authority in Religion is published.
1892 Future Prime Minister Ramsey McDonald begins leading Unitarian services in London.
1898 Carl Sandburg attends Lombard College and becomes influenced by Universalism.
1893 World’s Parliament of Religions held in Chicago. Jenkin Lloyd Jones is a key organiser.

1900 James Martineau dies (January 11).
1904 Frances Power Cobbe, animal rights activist dies (April 5).
Gertrude von Petzold becomes the first woman minister in England to be appointed to a ministry – in Leicester.

1909 William Howard Taft becomes US President.
Dedication of the new Unity Temple, Oak Park, Illinois, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

1910 Comparative Religion, by Estlin Carpenter, is published.
1912 Rabindranath Tagore speaks at Manchester College, Oxford, following the publication of the English translation of Gitanjali.
1916 Unitarian Peace Fellowship is established.

1923 Norbert Capek devises the Flower Communion service for his Czech Unitarian community.
1926 Death of artist Helen Allingham.
1927 Community Church Boston, founded by Clarence Skinner, moves its services to Symphony Hall with about 1800 people in attendance at the first gathering.
1928 Formation of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

1930 Astronomer Clyde Tombaugh discovers Pluto.
1930 Adrian Boult becomes first chief conductor of the newly formed BBC Symphony Orchestra, premiering Holst's The Planets in the same year.
1933 Reg (later Lord) Sorensen criticises British rule in India at the Labour Party conference.
1938 Unitarian ministers Rosalind Lee and John McLachlan go to Prague, ultimately helping Nicholas Winton with the kindertransport.

1939 Martha and Waitstill Sharp arrive in Prague to assist refugees (February) and are caught up in the Nazi annexation of Czechoslovakia the following month.
Beginning of World War II (1 September).
1941 Hans Deutsch designs the flaming chalice symbol for the Unitarian Service Committee to make documents look more official, as they work to secure safe passage for refugees out of Europe.
1942 Norbert Capek is killed by the Nazis in Dachau.
1943 Children's author Beatrix Potter dies, leaving her land and properties to the National Trust.

1944 Premiere of Bela Bartok's Concerto for Orchestra.
Establishment of the National Unitarian Fellowship (NUF).
1945 Publication of A Free Religious Faith.
1947 Canadian lawyer and Unitarian John Peters Humphrey completes the first draft of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
1948 James Chuter Ede, Home Secretary, steers the liberalising Criminal Justice Act through parliament.
1949 Astronomer Clyde Tombaugh reports seeing unidentified flying objects but rejects an alien explanation.

1952 Alan (later Lord) Bullock publishes Hitler: A Study in Tyranny – the first Hitler biography.
1953 Ray Bradbury publishes Fahrenheit 451.
1954 Buckminster Fuller patents the geodesic dome.
Universalist Church of the Philippines founded.
1955 Sidney Spenser, proponent of mysticism, publishes The Deep Things of God.
1955 Folk singer Pete Seeger writes the first version of Where Have All the Flowers Gone?
1959 Beacon Press publish Viktor Frankl's Man's Search for Meaning, in the USA.
1961 Unitarian Universalist Association is formed through merger of the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America – the Canadian Unitarian Council being established the day before.
Theologian and humanitarian, Albert Schweitzer joins the Unitarian Church of the Larger Fellowship. His 'reverence for life' doctrine is influential.

1962 US UN Ambassador and Unitarian Adlai Stevenson persuades John F. Kennedy, in a private meeting, to challenge the military consensus by pursuing a diplomatic solution to the Cuban Missile Crisis – to prevent nuclear war. (16 October)
Conservationist Rachel Carson publishes Silent Spring.
Poet E.E. Cummings dies. His funeral is conducted by Dana McLean Greeley.

The song Little Boxes is written and composed by folk singer Malvina Reynolds.
1963 A survey establishes only 66* British congregations still use a liturgy, while over 175 congregations have replaced it with an open service form. (*None by the year 2000).
1964 Rachel Carson dies. Duncan Howlett conducts the memorial service she requested at All Souls Unitarian Church, Washington DC.
1965 Dr Martin Luther King Jnr suggests that 'the arc of the moral universe bends towards justice' in his Selma speech, developing an idea of Theodore Parker.
Baptist Jimmie Lee Jackson and Unitarians Rev James Reeb and Viola Liuzzo are murdered during the civil rights campaign in separate incidents.
Poet Sylvia Plath's collection, Ariel, is published posthumously.
1967 Poet Carl Sandburg dies.
1968 Assassination of Dr Martin Luther King Jnr (April 4).
1969 Sir Alister Hardy establishes the Religious Experience Research Centre.
The world's oldest surviving international inter-faith body changes its name to the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF).

1971 Beacon Press publishes The Senator Gravel Edition of The Pentagon Papers, documenting how successive US Presidents had misled the public over the Vietnam War.
1973 Pete Stark elected as the first openly atheist member of the US Congress.
1974 London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard launched.
Australia and New Zealand Unitarian Association founded.
1977 The new Essex Church building in Notting Hill Gate opens its doors to Kensington Unitarians.

1981 Novelist Kurt Vonnegut publishes Palm Sunday, including the essay In Praise of William Ellery Channing.
1983 Richard Gilbert publishes the Building Your Own Theology small group study programme.
1985 Publication of Hymns for Living.

1986 Publication of Robert Fulghum's All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten (which goes on to sell over 17 million copies worldwide).
1989 Gordon Oliver becomes Mayor of Cape Town, South Africa, leading a peace march with Archbishop Desmond Tutu and others five days later, in defiance of the state of emergency.

1995 The first annual RE Summer School is held at Great Hucklow, Derbyshire.
1996 Harris Manchester College becomes part of Oxford University.
1997 The new building for Cross Street Chapel, Manchester opens.
1998 World Wide Web inventor Tim Berners-Lee publishes an online article explaining his Unitarian Universalist perspective and affiliation.
Actor Christopher Reeve publishes his autobiography, Still Me, writing about the challenges caused by his quadriplegia, and also explaining his adoption of Unitarian Universalism.

2001 The Unitarian General Assembly adopts a revised Object (statement of purpose), expressing Unitarian values.
2002 Thandeka delivers the Essex Hall Lecture on engagement groups, prompting revived interest in small group ministry and study groups.
2006 A portion of astronomer Clyde Tombaugh's ashes are sent into space on NASA's New Horizons interplanetary probe, bound for dwarf planet Pluto in the Kuiper Belt and beyond.
2009 Publication of the Sing Your Faith hymnal.

2010 UUA decides to begin a process to review its Principles and Purposes.
2013 Same-sex marriage legalised in England and Wales - including the right to perform these ceremonies in churches, synagogues etc for religious groups who so wish, following lobbying by the Unitarian General Assembly and other liberal religious groups.
2014 Elizabeth and William Gaskell's former home in Manchester, 84 Plymouth Grove, opens to the public.
2015 Lindsey Press publish the Life Spirit group study book, by David Usher.

2018 Film director Greta Gerwig included in The Times list of the 100 Most Influential People.

2020 Environmentalist and philosopher Rupert Read speaks to a packed audience at Bury St E Meeting House, following the Extinction Rebellion actions in 2019. (January)
Covid pandemic forces Sunday services to move online. (March onwards)
2022 Brian Eno and friends launch the Hard Art Collective.
2025 Launch of the Unitarian General Assembly's Innovation Fund.
Bicentenary of the founding of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association.