

9th June 2022

GUNS

“By ... our readiness to allow arms to be purchased at will and fired at whim; by allowing our ... screens to teach our children that the hero is one who masters the art of shooting and the technique of killing ... we have created an atmosphere in which violence and hatred have become popular pastimes.”

Martin Luther King, Speech, November 1963

On 5th May this year, the following piece, under the banner of “25lb Gun Repainted”, appeared on the website of the Dunbar Community Council:

The 25-pounder gun on Dunbar’s glebe has been repainted by Community Service workers organised by ELC. The gun had suffered from 10 years of exposure to the salty air ... Thanks are due to Councillor Norman Hampshire for his help ... and to Dunbar Community Council for funding the paint and materials.

The gun is in a small park on the west side of the town. It’s angled out to sea – with an ocean-going tanker in the Firth of Forth appearing to be in its sights! And my question is “Why?” Not “Why?” to the involvement of Community Service workers or East Lothian Council, or the funding by the Community Council, or the involvement of Councillor Hampshire. I’m sure they all did good work. But my question is “Why?” to the gun itself.

When our children were small, we tried hard not to have them playing with toy guns, and to ensure they weren’t given guns as presents. The reasons didn’t take much explaining when they saw their dad regularly in tears at news reports from the world’s conflict zones and even at war documentaries. Of course, guns could be made from Lego, and a hockey-stick can be a reasonable representation of a rifle or a machine-gun. But, if Martin Luther King is right in his assessment that “We have created an atmosphere in which violence and hatred have become popular pastimes...” we were trying hard to create a different atmosphere.

Why, then, is a 25-lb gun on display in Dunbar? Do we explain what it represents? Might there be signage to the Peace Garden elsewhere in the town? Could it be covered over till the war in Ukraine ends? I’m in correspondence with the Dunbar Community Council on these issues ... Because, from Ukraine to school-shootings in the USA, guns are an anathema. I cannot think otherwise than that the question “Why?” has to be asked when we see a gun so prominently on display.

A prayer for today

“Peace! Peace!” we cry – and so we should. Amen