



# Newsletter

Lancashire Secular Humanists

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## Humanist week 2010

Message from Bob Churchill [BHA Head of Membership and Promotion]

*"We want all groups to be involved in this planning process."*

The week is being planned for **21<sup>st</sup> - 27<sup>th</sup> June**. Last year, we sent display materials to groups who requested them so that they could put them up in local libraries and other locations. This year we plan to write new materials and to run a day conference in London.

The theme of the week this year is centred on 'Humanist Heritage.' ... What has been achieved by humanists in your area? How can that be celebrated?

We'd like to know the answers to the following questions:

- What sort of materials do groups want from the BHA for the week?
- Should this be different for University/local groups?
- What sort of support would groups need from the BHA to organise special events during the week?
- What else should the BHA be doing for the week?
- What did you think of the materials last year?

Please send all suggestions or input re Humanist Week to [Pepper Harrow](mailto:Pepper Harrow)

*"PS Remember also that we're on the lookout for content for our new website at [www.HumanistLife.org.uk](http://www.HumanistLife.org.uk). As well as your members being able to submit content individually, groups themselves can be represented, for example by reporting on their talks/debates. We've already featured a debate held by a local group on "spirituality", for example, with the group members in question providing their cases against and for humanist use of the term 'spiritual'. Get in touch with [me](mailto:me) or use [www.humanistlife.org.uk/submissions](http://www.humanistlife.org.uk/submissions) to submit content arising from your meetings." ... Bob Churchill*

*See article on 'Spirituality' Pg. This Newsletter*

## LSH February Meeting

'How Green Is My Funeral?' –

LSH member David Hollinshead discusses the issues regarding a more environmentally friendly way to go.

Like most environmental issues David has discovered that things are not as straightforward as you would hope, when thinking about a green funeral.

Cremations can release harmful toxins into the air, but burials take up space on a small island ... and how many of us have heard of promession or know what a Promatorium is? ... Then, are bamboo coffins better than wood coffins if the bamboo is imported from China?

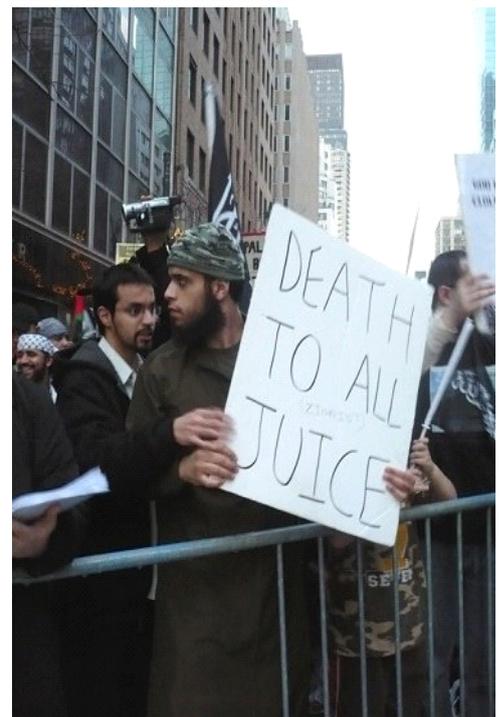
So, as in life, death for a 'greenie' can be just as complicated."

**7.30pm Wednesday 17th February 2010**  
**Gt.Eccleston Village Centre, The Square,**  
**Gt. Eccleston [Nr Preston] PR3 0YB**

## Government defends protection of humanists in domestic law

The British Humanist Association has welcomed the Government's firm stance taken last night [Feb13] during debates on the Equality Bill, that people who hold humanist beliefs should continue to have equal status before the law and equal protection from discrimination as those with religious beliefs, or those who have a lack of belief.

Read full article [here](#)



Dyslexia Rules K.O.

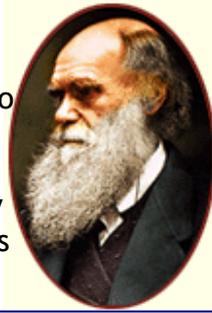
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## Happy Darwin Day

[12<sup>th</sup> February]

The objective of Darwin Day is to encourage institutions, private organizations and individuals to celebrate Science and Humanity every year, on, or near, Darwin's birthday ... 12th February.



*"I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent, omnipotent God would have designedly created parasitic wasps with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of Caterpillars."* ... Charles Darwin

*{... & from sublime logic to ridiculous lunacy}*

♪ -Bless My Phone The King Of Heaven- ♪

It's 2010 - and yet hocus-pocus is thriving ... right in the financial heart of Britain.

On 11<sup>th</sup> January St. Lawrence Jewry Church parishioners took their mobile phones, palm-pilots and laptops - to be blessed by The Rev Canon David Parrott. A pile of these gadgets were laid out on the altar - many more were held aloft by members of the congregation ... as the good Rev chanted magic incantations. Rev Parrott said it was "To remind the capital's busy office workers that God's grace can reach them in many ways" - adding - "It's the technology that is our daily working tool, and it's a technology we should bless."

The ritual capped Monday's services at the official church of the Corporation of the City of London; the capital's financial district.

### Planning Ahead

#### And 'Change Of Dates' For Your Diary

As most of you know we hope to have at least one meeting-per-year at a location other than our current home [Gt Eccleston] ... and May has been the month normally set-aside for that ... However - as Humanist Week is an annual event, which takes place around Mid-summer Day [June 24] - it would make far more sense if we took advantage of the natural symbiosis that offers and held our 'Outreach Event' in June also.

So ... the May meeting will now be back at Great Eccleston Village centre and June's meeting will be our 'Outreach Event' ... *(with just one more [slight] wrinkle)* ... As you know, our meetings are arranged for 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of every month - but Humanist Week is 21<sup>st</sup> - 27<sup>th</sup> June consequently each 'Outreach Event' [from now on] will be the only meeting **'not'** on 3<sup>rd</sup> Wed. of every month.

Please see 'Citizen-zone' article on page 5 for details on how you can get involved in an exciting event in Preston during that week.

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### Keep BHA's faith schools officer!

The BHA are fundraising to keep their faith schools officer [Paul Pettinger] for another year!

Donate at [justgiving.com/nofaithschools](http://justgiving.com/nofaithschools) (this site is separate from the BHA website - your BHA username and password won't work here) ... Or donate directly on the BHA's own website. Log in at [www.humanism.org.uk](http://www.humanism.org.uk) with your BHA username and password, then visit [/shop/donations](#) and pick the "No Faith Schools appeal". (Visit [here](#) if you don't have your login.)

\*Paul joined the BHA in April 2009. He is responsible for BHA campaigning on faith schools and other education-related issues, such as Religious Education and collective worship.

Paul graduated from Exeter University in 2004 with a Master's Degree in Politics and came to the BHA from Liberal Youth, where he had been their Head of Office.

He has also worked a Peer's Researcher in the House of Lords, as well as being elected Councillor on Exeter City Council.

### Remember: 'It's Just About Education'

A recent article on the [Lancashire Telegraph](#) web-site reported on a SCARE initiative whereby pupils themselves direct the RE syllabus ...

It provoked this comment from 'Ian\_G' in Whalley:

*"Religion in school is nothing short of brainwashing children. It should be banned until children are old enough to make up their own minds rather than be forced to 'believe' ... I was brainwashed from an early age by Catholic schools and the effects of the indoctrination that I suffered lasted a long, long time ... Religions are businesses. They try to ensure that they have 'customers' into the future by catching them at an early age in school and browbeating them into 'belief'.*

*It should be banned."*



Last months suggestion for a more ‘pro-active’ group within LSH has been received with some enthusiasm - so, once they are up and running, we will be including details of what they’re up to as a regular Newsletter feature - in a column headed ‘PAW-Prints’.

Just to help get things started perhaps the formatted letter [below] will be useful for anyone writing for access to information held by public authorities (including schools, colleges and universities).

[Your Name]

[Your Address]

[Your e-mail and/or telephone No.'s]

[FOI Officer's address]

[Date]

**Freedom Of Information Act Request On [your information here]**

Dear ???

I am writing to make a request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to find out about [your query here].

Specifically, I would like to know:

1. [If your request has multiple points make them here]

I would prefer to receive this information electronically, however if that is not convenient I can accept hard copies. If the decision is made to withhold some of this data using exemptions in the Act, please inform me of that fact and cite the exemptions used.

If there are any other issues with the way this request is worded that make it unmanageable then please telephone me as soon as possible (rather than the 20<sup>th</sup> working day).

I would be grateful if you could confirm in writing that you have received this letter, and I look forward to your response within the statutory time limits.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Regards

[your signature]

**Where do you stand? – ‘The Veil’**

A question particularly relevant in Lancashire where traditional mill towns attracted very many Asian immigrants with particular skills in that industry.

Opinion seems sharply divided on the thorny issue of the wearing of burkhas in public ... resurrected by the recent debate in France in which fining transgressors has been one of the options under consideration – this issue has gathered pace and is currently reverberating around Europe and America.

On the one hand women in the full burkha are accused of using passive violence by disconnecting themselves from the humanity around them ... Others see any steps to curb the individual’s right to wear whatever they choose as an outrageous infringement of liberty.

The BHA’s CEO, Andrew Copson may not like the burkha; in fact he admits to thinking “*it disrupts normal social contact (as it is intended to) to the extent that we can never know a Muslim woman in the burkha that we meet as well as we may know one who goes unveiled, we may think it is a sign of the oppression of women and an insult to men.*”

**... ‘The Veil’ ... continued**

*... However, it is a principle of a liberal democratic society that people have the freedom to do as they please as long as they don’t harm others.*

*This means we may prohibit the burkha in some specific instances, where teachers are teaching small children for example, or in service industry jobs, or at times of necessary security such as airport gates.*

*It may also mean that we recognise a difference between the right of adult women to choose what they wear, if that is a free choice, and the enforced wearing of a burkha by a child, which we might make moves to prevent.*

*But it also means that we have no justification for an outright ban on the wearing of the burkha at all times.”*

Whereas author and distinguished supporter of Humanism Salman Rushdie is less conciliatory and sees it as a way to reinforce the sealing off of Muslims from the world that is symbolised by the veil, which he sees as a hideous anti-feminist shroud, " a one-woman tent".



Marilyn Mason



Jeremy Rodell

### So ... how should Humanists regard "spirituality"?

This is a subject which surfaces with persistent regularity at many Humanist meetings ... as it did at a recent L.S.H. gathering. There's a good debate 'Can Humanists Be Spiritual?' on the [HumanistLife](#) website which is worth a visit.

The participants are Marilyn Mason - teacher for 20 years and B.H.A. Education Officer 1998 - 2006.

And Jeremy Rodell [Chair] [S.W.London Humanists](#).

*A précis of the two positions is included here:*

#### The 'No' Camp (Marilyn):

Humanists of course are divided on its meaning and use, not just here but in Europe and the USA too. Some want to "claim" it and demystify it, others to abandon it to the religious sphere, and often humanists, like everyone else, are talking at cross-purposes. We're not always clear, for example, what we are complaining about when we say that religious people have hijacked "spirituality". Are we saying that religious people deny that we can have rich, fulfilled aesthetic and emotional lives, or that they deny that we are religious – or is it something else we resent: the implication that we are all materialistic, in the worst sense of the word?

Many humanists feel uneasy about using words carrying so much religious and pseudo-religious baggage: "I do not think that the word 'spirituality' can be used at all without the implication of a supernatural spirit", wrote one humanist, and some American humanists in their magazine [Free Mind](#) thought it "meaningless" or "laughable nonsense", best shunned to "avoid repetitive, cumbersome explanations." A Dutch humanist expressed scepticism about our tendency to label the "unknowable as spiritual".

To sum up, "spiritual" and "spirituality" almost always require explanation if they are to communicate clearly, and so I think that it would be better to abandon them altogether, and leave them to the religious. If we are really talking about emotions or emotional development or emotional literacy, or aesthetic awareness or experiences, or love of nature or humanity, or love and goodness, or hope, why just not say so?

#### 4 The 'Yes' Camp (Jeremy):

Because many Humanists put so much energy into being against religion, the important and enriching potential of the spiritual part of our lives has been under-developed. Yet, for many people, spiritual experience is a profound part of being human, even if they rarely experience it in their daily lives.

Christina Rees's opponent in the *Today* programme discussion was the humanist philosopher A.C.Grayling. Unfortunately, he didn't pick up the point about spirituality – perhaps because it's the type of concept philosophers feel uncomfortable with, or more likely, because there was limited time and he had his own points to make about non-religious philosophers. But what he could have said is something like:

"It's simply untrue to say that humanists are not spiritual, and rather insulting. Spiritual experiences are pretty much universal across cultures and beliefs, and can be shown to be a feature of the way the human brain works. Many Humanists have as profound a spiritual awareness and understanding as you have. The difference is that they know the cause is not any sort of supernatural agent. But the experience is profound and important in helping us understand our place in the world. If humanists have a fault, it's that we've failed to do enough to acknowledge and develop this aspect of our humanity."

#### Quick Quote

*"There is on earth among all dangers no more dangerous a thing than a richly endowed and adroit reason ... Reason is the devil's bride and God's worst enemy. It must be deluded, blinded and destroyed. Faith must trample underfoot all reason, senses and understanding." ... Martin Luther*

#### **Greater Manchester Humanists**

...Are staging a 'PUBLIC MEETING: Humanism - Any Questions?' on Tuesday evening [2<sup>nd</sup> Feb. 7 - 8.30pm] at Friends Meeting House Mount St, M/Cr. M2 5NS. Similar to our Blackburn 'Outreach Event' in May [09] the public will be invited to ask a panel of Manchester Humanists about their beliefs . . . including why, with no supernatural powers or sacred texts to guide us, we have to take responsibility for our own lives and actions and for the world we live in.

Ken Hayes & Ian Abbott are already planning to attend (*short notice - I know but!*) anyone wishing to car-share is more than welcome to come along.

*Usual contact details - see front page.*

## **CITIZENZONE**

CitizenZone is a 7.5 tonne multi-purpose vehicle and is similar in size to a large van. Once parked at a location\*, the sides of the vehicle fold down tripling the space inside.



CitizenZone can be used in all weather conditions as the vehicle is fully covered even when it is opened out. It is an interactive vehicle packed with the latest technology. It allows people to access a range of services provided by various groups and it is particularly useful for people who find it difficult to travel to that groups usual venue or do not have access to the internet at home.

The vehicle is equipped with a high-speed wireless network connector, which enables it to access the council's wireless network from locations across the city.

Facilities include:

- Six desktop computers with high-speed wireless internet access.
- Six laptop computers which can also be connected to the wireless network.
- Plasma screen with DVD/CD presentation equipment.
- A touch-screen information point, which will be located at the entrance to the vehicle and used for various consultation exercises
- Air conditioning and heating
- A meeting area with a table and chairs
- Seating capacity for up to 12 people
- Standing capacity for up to 22 people
- Chair lift providing access for disabled people

Thanks to Julie Humphrey we have use of this remarkable facility throughout the day Wednesday 23rd June ... \*It will be sited on The Flag Market [a prime location in the heart of Preston - on market day!].

Bob Churchill and Pepper Harrow at BHA [London] are already giving some thought to what promotional / educational items they have with which we can take advantage of the facilities CitizenZone offers.

What can you do? ... Well - first- we need volunteers to staff CitizenZone throughout the day on Wed 23rd. June ... Also, you too can start putting your minds to novel and innovative ways to use it - Perhaps the computers can be used for a 'Are You A Humanist' interactive quiz - Maybe the Plasma screen can be used for a 'continuously looped' DVD presentation - Possibly an on-line Q & A with a prominent Humanist could be set up ... The list is endless ... Lets take full advantage of this opportunity!

**Our 'Outreach Event' will be held in a Committee Room in Preston Town Hall the following evening [Thus 26th].**

## **Some Books Just Move You**

*By Ian Abbott*

Inspired by Scarlet Rudd's review [December 09 Newsletter] I decided it was time to read what is after all a book I own - Ayaan Hirshi Ali's 'Infidel.'

Having been raised in an 'enthusiastically religious' [Methodist] family, and therefore not (in any way) seeking to compare my soft upbringing with the hardships Ayaan endured; I nevertheless found I understood completely what she meant as she described finally coming to the conclusion that she was an atheist [Chapter 14 'Leaving God'] having read *The Atheist Manifesto* whilst on holiday:

*'One night in that Greek hotel I looked in the mirror and said out loud "I don't believe in God." I said it slowly, enunciating it carefully, in Somali. And I felt relief. It felt right. There was no pain but a real clarity. The long process of seeing the flaws in my belief structure and carefully tiptoeing around the frayed edges as parts were torn out, piece by piece - that was all over. The angels, watching from my shoulders; the mental tension about having sex without marriage, and drinking alcohol, and not observing any religious obligations - they were gone. The ever-present prospect of hellfire lifted, and my horizons seemed broader. God, Satan, angels: these were all figments of human imagination. From now on I could step firmly on the ground that was under my feet and navigate based on my own reason and self-respect. My moral compass was within myself, not in the pages of a sacred book.'*

I genuinely tingled as I read that passage but it serves as reminder too (I suppose) to acknowledge just how unshackled we freethinking secular humanists are.

Perhaps I am guilty, from time to time, of ridiculing 'believers' who are still caught in that web of their parents weaving; I should really be pitying them ... (but point the way to the escape route too!)

### **LSH Support Network**

**How to develop David's idea** - (comments received). **Many** of us are faces seen only once a month; it can be difficult to get to know one another well.

**Stick-on** labels displaying our first names will help communication between 'new faces' and 'old faces'.

**Our** after-meeting get-together in the local is more & more popular - a great way to get to know each other.

**Get** the [ThinkHumanism Forum](#) (via [LSH Website](#)) more active. That way conversations could be started - continued - developed without trying to squeeze everything into a once-a-month meeting.

**Why** not have two meetings [one-a-fortnight]? One for speakers & debates (as now) and one for in-house business and socialising . . . . *What do 'you' think? [Ed]*

## Government Dilemma Church – or - Law

From [NSS Website](#)

Four senior Anglican Bishops have issued a press release full of factual errors in a desperate attempt to put pressure on the Government to withdraw an amendment in the Equality Bill on Monday that seeks to bring UK law on discrimination against homosexuals in line with a European Directive.

The law currently gives religious organisations *carte blanche* to discriminate against gay employees. The Church wants to retain this. The European Directive, however, only permits this opt-out for priests and similar roles, not for administrative or janitorial staff or for youth workers ... The Government has already been warned twice by the European Commission to bring the law into line with the Directive.

Keith Porteous Wood, [Exec. Dir. NSS] said: "If the Government accedes to the bishops' demands it is likely that it will be prosecuted by the European Court of Justice (ECJ).

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Following a complaint by the NSS in 2004, the European Commission has already called the Government to account twice, most recently in November with a Reasoned Opinion. If the Government caves in to the Church's demand to make no changes, the National Secular Society will complain again and the Government will face near-certain prosecution by the ECJ.

"The Church is so obsessed with homosexuality it will stop at nothing to pressurise the Government. Contrary to the bishops' claims, the current (2003) Regulations give religious bodies *carte blanche* to discriminate and do not make any explicit limitations at all. The bishops conveniently ignore the impending threat of prosecution from the ECJ.

"The reason the law is deficient is that the current regulations were drafted by the Church itself and then the Government passed them into law in 2003, despite multiple warnings that they were in breach of the Directive. The Government must not make the mistake again of being brow-beaten by the Church into breaking EU law.

"In 2007 the Church lost an Employment Tribunal case brought by a youth worker [John Reaney] who had been unanimously recommended for a job by the interviewing panel but was subsequently refused employment by the bishop on the basis of his sexuality.

## What Our Neighbours Friends Are Up To

### Cumbria Humanists

<http://www.cumbria-humanists.org.uk/>

7.30. Wed. 17th February: ... Morton Community Centre, Wigton Rd, Carlisle.... Bert Thomas, [Senior Schools Officer, Carlisle Diocese] will ask "Does the Church have a positive contribution to make to education and schools?" And he hopes that we will give him our views on this. I'm sure we will, Bert!

### Isle of Man Freethinkers

<http://www.iomfreethinkers.co.uk/>

2.30. Sun. 14th February: ... Morton Hall; Ochan ... Celebrating Darwin Day - Video & Discussion

12.00 Thurs. 18th February:...Lunch (Alessandro's, Castle St, Douglas)

### Liverpool Humanists

<http://www.liverpoolhumanists.co.uk/>

7.30 Wed 10th February - The Crown , 43 Lime St, L/pool, L1 1JQ  
Darwin Day Lecture - Prof. Robin Crompton  
'The arboreal origins of human walking'

### Greater Manchester Humanists

<http://greatermanchesterhumanists.googlepages.com/>

Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester, M2 5NS  
7.30 Tue 2nd February: Public Meeting - Humanism ... [See Page 4]  
7pm Wed 10th February: FMH Humanist School, Uganda  
7pm Tue 16th February: Exploring Humanism Course (Part II)

### South Cheshire And North Staffs Humanists

<http://www.humanists.org.uk/>

7.30 Thurs 18th February: At the home of David and Irmgard  
Environmental Issues - Robert Hine  
[Member of Friends of The Earth]

### Humanist Society of West Yorkshire

[www.wyhumanists.org.uk](http://www.wyhumanists.org.uk/)

7 (for 7.30)Thurs 11th February: Swarthmore, 3-7 Woodhouse Sq, Leeds, LS3 1

"What Darwin Didn't know" -

Written and presented by the Professor of Evolutionary Biology, Imperial College. This programme was on BBC4 at a late hour, so you may well not have seen it.

## **A RETURN VISIT? - UNDOUBTEDLY 'YES'**

Andi Sidwell of '[Students for Sensible Drug Policy](#)' was a great success addressing LSH's January meeting.

Andi was put in touch with us following our enquiries with [Transform](#) looking for someone to participate in a debate about the legalisation of drugs.

Sadly Lancashire Police decided such a debate was not something they should be participating in: and neither The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs nor The Home Office itself responded to e-mail and phone message requests for someone to oppose to the motion 'Legislation prohibiting possession and use of illegal drugs does more harm than good and should be repealed.' ... but it was reassuring to hear from Andi that "nobody ever does" ... And after listening to his entirely sensible arguments it was easy to see why!

Andi proved more than capable of holding his audience and, if his enthusiastic e-mail is anything to go by, he appeared to enjoy the experience too.

**Thanks very much for the opportunity speak last night - it was brilliant to have a room of such rational and intelligent people willing to listen. I'd be happy to come back another time if find someone who can provide an argument again. :)**

**Again, many thanks,**

**Andi**

Until the next time Andi ... Thanks from all at LSH

*\* With apologies - the [hyperlinks](#) are for those reading this 'on-line' \**