



Newsletter

Lancashire Secular Humanists

Editor: Ian Abbott, Wavecrest, Hackensall Rd, Poulton-le-Fylde, Lancs FY6 0AZ
 Tel: 01253 812308 Mob: 07932 773589 e-mail: ian@ianzere.demon.co.uk
 Or for more details visit our Website: www.lancashiresecularhumanists.co.uk

How On Earth Did We Come To This?

Ed Balls denies that allowing Faith Schools (alone) to teach something as fundamental as Sex and Relationships Education [SRE] in their own idiosyncratic way is not an opt-out for them from “overdue and radical” new rules forcing teachers to address issues such as homosexual equality and contraception in sex education lessons and the importance of stable relationships, including civil partnerships ... forbidding the promotion of homophobia. Even though an amendment [tabled by Balls] will now permit faith schools to teach such issues in a way that reflects their religious character.

Liberal Democrats’ schools spokesman, David Laws speaking on BBC Radio 4 talked about “...a school system which is going to be tolerant of intolerance in the name of religious freedom?”

Andrew Copson, BHA Chief Executive believes this u-turn “... effectively gives license to faith schools to teach SRE in ways that are homophobic, gender discriminatory and otherwise violate principles of human rights.”

The Accord coalition’s Rabbi Dr Jonathan Romain, said: “By taking this position, Ed Balls is implicitly condoning homophobia in schools and undermining attempts to tackle homophobic bullying.”

Carolyne Willow of the Children’s Rights Alliance for England said, “... It is absolutely vital that sex and relationships education funded by the state occurs within the context of commitment to equality and respect for diversity; anything less is discriminatory.”

But isn’t this just another step on the long road of political sycophancy in pursuit of the mythical ‘Religious Vote’ which everybody else knows dissolved many years ago. Given recent surveys on religious beliefs across the UK this pandering to the religious lobby is nothing short of an abdication of democracy.

It beggars belief, for example, that a Secretary of State [Peter Haine] – on BBC Question Time Thurs 25th Feb – can advocate not compelling particular employers (Faith Groups) to appoint females to certain posts - or employ gays at all. That “... if they have any theological objections to any particular behaviour then that should be their right” and they should be indulged.

Shadow Secretary [Liam Fox] was no better when a member of the audience wondered if such leeway would spread to other lessons – such as science. Fox opined that ‘...you have to be tolerant of other people’s views ... some people believe in Creationism whereas ‘almost all of science’ suggests that it is way out there as a minority view’ [!?!] Even saying he would allow Creationism to be taught – ‘if that’s what people think’.

Plaid Cymru’s Elfyn Llwyd thinks ‘Creationism isn’t dangerous; it maybe barmy but it’s not dangerous is it?’

Why then, I wonder, do we bother to have state schools at all? Why a National Curriculum? Why even attempt to educate the next generation who never choose Faith Schools themselves but are compelled to attend the school chosen by their parents ... How on earth do they make their escape from bigotry, prejudice and ignorance if not through [real] Education?

In This Issue

Page 1. Education or Abdication?
 Page 1. Why Are We Here?
 Page 2. Their Joe but Our Bill
 Page 2. Paw Prints
 Page 2. Pray You’ll Get Better
 Page 3. ‘Outreach’ à la Manchester
 Page 3. Celebrity Spotting in that London
 Page 3. With Humble Apologies
 Page 4. Alan Bennett
 Page 4. ‘Outreach’ à la Lancashire
 Page 4. Get A Bible - Get Off
 Page 4. Getting Lively Getting Popular
 Page 4. **Stop Press!**
 Page 5. The Rat Singer Protests
 Page 5. Our Own TFTD
 Page 5. Disestablish Now
 Page 5. Drink - Drink - Drink
 Page 5. Condemning With Condoms
 Page 5. Death (it seems) Is Not The End
 Page 6. Thank God For Prisoners
 Page 6. Good God We’re Godless
 Page 6. Stand Up For Burials Down Under .
 Page 6. What Our Friends Are Up To

I may not know ‘Why We’re Here’ - But I know Why I Am !

A conversation during a recent LSH meeting prompted one member to proffer some thoughts of their own about what persuaded them to join such a group:

‘... it made me ask myself for positive reasons for joining and attending [LSH] meetings and this is what I came up with.

1 - I enjoy being with like-minded people. I have plenty of friends from my pre-atheist days who don’t know how to deal with me now. I’m open and honest with them, but because they know me as a joker, they seem to think I’m kidding! They insist on praying for me!

2 - I’m a lifelong learner and enjoy listening to the more erudite and experienced members of the group.

3 - Living can be tough (more so for some than others) and I like to know where I stand on difficult issues, so I enjoy the challenge of some of the speakers.

(How About You? - Ed)

Rich As Croesus

But We'll Pay £20,000,000 For His Visit

The National Secular Society has announced a large-scale campaign of protest against the state visit of the Pope to Britain in September 2010.

Terry Sanderson, [NSS president] said:

"The taxpayer in this country is going to be faced with a bill of some £20 million for the visit of the Pope. A visit in which he has already indicated he will attack equal rights and promote discrimination."

Mr Sanderson said that a coalition of groups that have suffered because of the Pope's teachings will ensure that wherever he goes he will be aware that he has caused damage and hurt in the lives of real people.

He is seeking to bring together gay groups, feminist groups, family planning organisations, pro-choice groups, victim support groups and anyone who feels under siege from the Vatican's current militancy.

"We hope that the many people who are outraged at the Vatican's apparent indifference to the abuse of children by its priests will turn out to make their feelings clear."

Terry added:

"We have an [online petition](#) where people can make clear their opposition to the state funding of this visit ... If the Catholic Church wishes its leader to come here, it should pay for the visit itself.

I am sure many others feel the same resentment as we do at the NSS at funding the presence of someone who wishes to impose a reactionary agenda of social change on us."

The 'Make the Pope Pay' Coalition was officially launched in the first week of February.

The NSS plans include a festival of films that show the wrong-doings of the Vatican, among them

The Magdalene Sisters ... and ...

The Boys of St Vincent's – (a film about the cover-up of sexual abuse at a Catholic orphanage in Canada.)

Add your name to the [Make the Pope Pay petition](#)

2

PAW Prints



Update of what the LSH Pro-Active Wings [PAWs] have been getting up to.

The initial meeting was held at The Phantom Winger (or - adding an 'h' for humanism - The Phantom Whinger) ... Chosen for its convenient location - where the M6 M55 & A6 converge - and preferring to meet in the more relaxed atmosphere of a pub, the gathering proved to be an encouraging 'kick-off' for this new initiative.

With eight people present - and apologies from another three - it was a lively and constructive meeting as a rudimentary agenda was agreed upon {*no-body mention SMART*} which simply sought to identify shared issues, prioritising them and agreeing on responsibilities. Then highlighting any results each had achieved as well as sharing best practice.

It being an inaugural meeting it was very much a case of sounding out who stood where and what the various individual aspirations might be.

There was a very interesting conversation about how we might access those [by now] disillusioned parents who have been informed they have not obtained a place for their children in the preferred school of first-choice.

Another string was investigating the feasibility of establishing a Secular Forum in preference to simply sitting in on various Faith Forums where the lone Secular Voice would be largely ineffectual being vastly outnumbered by religious representatives ... This dovetailed nicely with a current development - that of establishing an LSH 'Facebook' presence.

See also Thought For The Day - Pg. 5 and Outreach Pg. 4

Chaplains Worth More Than Nurses ... (and Cleaners)

from Dennis Penaluna (NSS 'Newsline')

Figures published on the Royal College of Nursing website concerning the NHS 'Agenda for Change' pay-scales clearly show that chaplains are valued more than the people whose work is absolutely essential for patient well-being.

The minimum starting salary for nurses is £20,710 pa and for chaplains it is £25,829, plus they also get extra for being called out, plus an additional amount as a national recruitment and retention payment of nearly £4,000.

In all, a new-starter chaplain will probably earn around £32k pa.

Additionally, all chaplains received an average pay-rise last April of 6.1%. Nice work if you can get it - which you can't, of course, unless you are an ordained priest. ... The NHS employs around 1,000 full and part-time chaplains (mostly CoE) but only a bare handful of humanist practitioners.

Some of the most important people employed in hospitals, the porters and cleaners, start on the NHS's minimum wage of £6.77 per hour. The pay of a new starter chaplain is roughly 2½ times as much.

Our research into the cost of chaplains in the NHS revealed that most people mistakenly believe that hospital chaplains are there on a voluntary basis and get paid by their religious group ...

They are paid for by the tax-payer and they place a £42 million p.a. burden on the NHS.

Another myth to demolish is the claim by some in the CoE that the church pays for the training of healthcare chaplains. It does not! ... It might pay for them to be trained as priests but the NHS picks up the tab for their healthcare training ...

They start on Band 5, the mid-point of which is £23,345 - nice training if you can get it. (You can't!)

'Outreach' - GMH Style.

By Ken Hayes

3

Greater Manchester Humanists attracted 60-70 people to their version of our "Any Questions" outreach project early in February. That was more than we drew in Blackburn last May, but not so many that Ian and I, there as observers, might have been embarrassed to report. Lack of the oxygen of publicity evidently leaves all of us gasping.

There was some variation of our format. For instance, Manchester chose to have their six presenters speak in succession (for 4-5 minutes each) before inviting questions. The subject headings, and their order, showed some variation, too.

The first, What Makes a Humanist? drew heavily on BHA literature to define and, at the same time, personalise the humanist life stance. I felt that, for newcomers, this was good – it added weight and authority to the event as a whole.

Two later subject headings – Humanism and Education, followed by Humanism and Climate Change - - opened up areas of current concern and controversy that couldn't fail to generate discussion. Topicality isn't everything, but it helps!

Also covered, a la Blackburn, were the history of Humanism, Humanist ethics and Humanist ceremonies – necessary elements of any such presentation.

It was all quite smoothly and efficiently done, but when it came to questions, I felt the Manchester organisers slipped up somewhat in that, several times, they allowed all or most of the presenters to have a say on issues raised – thereby squeezing the time available for further questions.

I hope we can discuss Manchester's approach at a future meeting before we commit to our 'Outreach' format this coming June.

CORRECTION

I'm sure the more eagle-eyed among you have already spotted this but in the last line of the article 'CitizenZone' (Pg.5 Col.1 February's Newsletter) I say:

'We have the Preston City Council CitizenZone on Wed 23rd June and our Outreach Event in in Preston Town Hall the following evening Thurs 26th June!'

That should (of course) read

Thurs 24th June.

Thanks to Helen for bringing it to my attention: as I explained to her; the 'day' changed so often as we were trying to set it up I ended up getting 'one-of-me-eads!'

BHA Reception

I played a great game of celebrity spotting at Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq, London on Monday [1st February] at a reception to celebrate Andrew Copson's appointment as the BHA's new CEO.



The Secular Humanist Choir
www.catholiccartoonblog.blogspot.com

It was (of course) terrific to mingle with so many prominent supporters of Humanism but equally important to meet again Humanist Group members from across the country and [in some cases] at last be able to put faces to names.

Introduced by Robert Ashby and Polly Toynbee, Andrew delivered an entertaining address but included in it the importance of being able to work with people who would not necessarily share our views on theology but who nevertheless share common aims in those areas where shared ambitions clearly overlap.

After all the 'speechifying' was over we were treated to two songs from the Humanist Choir. John Lennon's 'Imagine' and the 'Flaming Lips' song "Do You Realise"

[The Humanist Choir is based in London (and therefore rehearses there) but it did set me thinking about what appetite there might be for a North-West Secular Humanist Choir! ... I know many Humanists love to sing - some are already members of Choir's - it might be worth investigating how many from Lancashire / Manchester / Liverpool / W.Yorkshire / Cumbria / Chester might be interested.]

Addendum ...

I was amused by the Catholic Cartoon Blog's attempt at ridicule (above) ... and further amused (by the first part) and confused (by the second part) when 'blogger' Jane said:

"Unfortunately, and it grieves me profoundly to have to use the word, they would probably sing "Oh come let us abort him". I dare not use the word they might add which rhymes with 'Lord'. Let's keep this to ourselves and not give them any such ideas."

(Can somebody enlighten me please. What word ... so offensive as dare not be used ... rhymes with 'Lord'? [Ed])

[btw] - Interesting response from the erudite 'Blog-master' [Paul Nichols]:

"Wow, good point Jane. There's nothing they wouldn't do in their hatred of God and His Church, that's for sure."

I do like Alan Bennett ...

.. and David's account of the funeral service he attended [prompting '*Setting Up A Support Network*' in January's Newsletter] put me in mind of this from Bennett's short story 'The Laying On Of Hands'.

'The truth was, memorial services were a bugger. For all its shortcomings in the way of numbers a regular congregation was in church because it wanted to be, or at least felt it ought to be.

It's true that looking down from the pulpit on his flock Sunday by Sunday Father Jolliffe sometimes felt that God was not much more than a pastime; that these were churchgoers as some people were pigeon-fanciers or collectors of stamps; gentle, mildly eccentric and hanging onto the end of something. Still, on a scale ranging from fervent piety to mere respectability, these regular worshippers were at least like-minded: they had come together to worship God and even with their varying degrees of certainty that there was a God to worship the awkward question of belief seldom arose.

With a memorial service, and a smart one at that, God was an embarrassment and Father Jolliffe was reminded of this when he had his first sight of the congregation ...

Few of those attending, he suspected had on taking their seats bowed their heads in prayer or knew that was (once anyway) the form. Few would know the hymns, and still fewer the prayers. Yet he was shortly going to have to stand up and ask them to collaborate in the fiction that they all believed in God (or something anyway) and even that there was an after-life ... It was a challenge; the challenge being that most of them would think it an insult to their intelligence.'

Outreach

Your suggestions about how we can best use the Preston City 'CitizenZone' vehicle - sited on the Flag Market Preston Wed 23 June 10am - 4pm - are still invited.

You can visit CitizenZone 'in action' here:

- Sat 27 Feb Flag Market 10 - 4.
- Mon 8 March Intact Community Hall, Ingol 10 - 3.
- Thus 18th March Goosnargh Village Hall 9.30 - 2.30.

Or visit <http://www.preston.gov.uk/events/search/?c=38>

Quotation Corner

'It's a consequence of the experience of science.

As you learn more and more about the universe, you find you can understand more and more without any reference to supernatural intervention, so you lose interest in that possibility.

Most scientists I know don't care enough about religion even to call themselves atheists. And that, I think, is one of the great things about science -- that it has made it possible for people not to be religious."

Steven Weinberg, quoted in Natalie Angier,

"Confessions of a Lonely Atheist," - *New York Times Magazine* - January 14, 2001

WHATEVER YOU DO -DON'T 'AFFIRM' IN COURT!

The British Humanist Association (BHA) and The National Secular Society (NSS) have expressed alarm and concern at the remarks of Cherie Booth QC who told a man convicted of an assault: "*I am going to suspend this sentence for the period of two years based on the fact you are a religious person and have not been in trouble before. You caused a mild fracture to the jaw of a member of the public standing in a queue at Lloyds Bank. You are a religious man and you know this is not acceptable behaviour.*"

"... there is something intrinsically and self-evidently good about being religious ... if you are non-religious you are somehow less moral."

BHA Chief Executive Andrew Copson commented, 'Cherie Booth's remarks show a default assumption still made by too many in society that you are a good person if you are religious - that there is something intrinsically and self-evidently good about being religious and, conversely, that if you are non-religious you are somehow less moral. This is an assumption that persists despite there being no evidence whatsoever to support it.'

NSS President Terry Sanderson said 'We think this is discriminatory and unjust and we wish to make a formal complaint about it ... We strongly feel that this kind of consideration should not play any part in sentencing. The idea that someone who is religious gets a lighter sentence is outrageous. The indications are that people are losing their religion very fast in this country, so it would disadvantage many people if they were treated more harshly in court than people who go to church.

See also '[Thank God For Prisons](#)' - Pg.6 Col.1

GETTING LIVELY

If you're not already in it - you need to be.

The LS# Forum - hosted by [ThinkHumanism](#) - has discovered a new lease of life ...

There are debates, discussions, stories and histories being shared there which you really should be getting involved in.

Visit our [LS# Website](#) and follow the links - it simple.

See You There

Stop Press!

We Are Now On [FaceBook](#)
Follow The Hyperlink and join in!
[Thanks Helen]



Demonstrations Planned!

Terry Sanderson [NSS president], said a coalition of groups that have suffered because of the Pope's teachings will ensure that wherever he goes he will be aware that he has caused damage and hurt in the lives of real people.



'THE RAT SINGER'

He said that he was seeking to bring together gay groups, feminist groups, family planning organisations, pro-choice groups, victim support groups and anyone who feels under siege from the Vatican's current militancy. "We hope that the many people who are outraged at the Vatican's apparent indifference to the abuse of children by its priests will turn out to make their feelings clear."

Details of 'Protest the Pope' Coalition plans will appear in future editions of this Newsletter. [Ed].

Thought For The Day

LSH have been invited to contribute to a new development in commercial radio - Preston.fm's Chat City programme - 'Thought For The Day'.

A 3½ minute slot to deliver a thought-provoking message - with a moral slant - from [in our case] an entirely Humanist perspective.

So - thinking caps on everybody. Lets see your (between 450 - 500 words long) 'Thoughts' asap.

We hope to provide Preston.fm with a Pilot recording in the very near future.

Why Disestablish? - Here's Why!

The BHA has commented on the Archbishop of Canterbury's address to the General Synod, which made political statements, particularly on legislation on equalities and assisted dying.

Naomi Phillips, BHA Head of Public Affairs, said, 'Rowan Williams' address follows a huge amount of recent political activity by Church of England Bishops, who have taken their reserved seats in our Parliament to speak out and vote *en bloc* against progressive, ethical legislation.'

'We know full well – and this will be highlighted many times throughout the [February]meeting of the General Synod – that the Church's stance on issues such as gay equality, women's equality and reforming the law on assisted dying is not representative of even its own flock, let alone the rest of society.'

'While the Church and its spokesmen have a right to express their views and a right to seek to influence legislation, let them do it equally to the rest of us - as another civil society organisation, and not through sitting in our legislature as of right.

The continuing conservatism of the Church is one of many important reasons why we should seek actively to abolish the remaining and significant ties between Church and State.'

How Much Tea Can You Drink?

5 As you know - those who attend our monthly meetings at Gt Eccleston Village Centre are asked for a small donation [Members £2 - Non-members £3].

This is to cover room-hire and refreshments

What you may not know is that we're charged £1 per head (*the rest of you is free*) irrespective of whether you have 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 or 6 cups - - - or none!

Those much appreciated people who join LSH have (presumably) chosen to do so because they think ours is a cause worth supporting - Unfortunately these modest annual LSH Membership fees do not cover those costs outlined above. That is why we are so grateful for the generosity shown by everyone who participates in the monthly raffle so enthusiastically.

"The Catholic teacher can demonstrate putting a condom on a banana, saying 'First we expel the air, then place it over the end, *then we remember if you do this for real you'll face an eternity in unimaginably agonising molten lava searing through your pores as you scream in soulless anguish while demons submerge you in relentless unbearable horror*, then right the way along, nice and snug and we're done. Now you try.'" Mark Steel (*The Independent*)

Thought Dying Was The End Of All Your Problems?

Just when you think you know all you needed to know about funerals along comes David Hollinshead to tell us about so many aspects of this, the most inevitable of decisions; that the majority of us have never even heard of – let alone thought about.

In 'How Green Is My Funeral' David led a very well attended meeting in a fascinating, informed and entertaining discussion on Wed evening [17th Feb].

We heard about the environmental impact of various coffins, caskets, baskets, boxes and Eco-pods.

We learned about regular burials, woodland burials, burials in private gardens, burials at sea; funeral pyres, recomposing and even pariahs.

Then there were Cremations, Resomations and Promessions to talk about.

And (of course) the most considerate recycling of all – donating organs or even whole bodies ... Post mortem naturally ☺ !

We were also treated to a slide show of amusing and innovative uses of coffins people had purchased in advance of their demise: such as making book-cases, settees and even coffee tables out of them ... (or should that be coffin tables?) – and novel, rickshaw style, hearse!

The fact that we had input from Funeral Directors only added to the depth and breadth of the stimulating discussion which followed David's presentation ... added to which David provided a handy list of web-sites from where more detailed information could be found [see 'More Info' on the LSH web-site] and a downloadable 'Advance Funeral Wishes' form [... *follow the link there*].

Thank God For Prisons

2/3 of all prisoners 'Religious'

As at 30 June 2008 one-half of prisoners in England & Wales were of Christian faith. One-sixth were shown as 'other faiths' One-third were recorded as having no religion.

[All] Christian	50.3%
No religion.....	33.3%
Muslim	11.8%
Buddhist	2.1%
Sikh	0.8%
Other	0.5%
Hindu	0.5%
Not recognised	0.4%
Jewish	0.3%

Prison population by religious group - 30/06/08
House of Commons (Prison population statistics) ... Updated 12.09.09

What Our Neighbours Friends Are Up To

Cumbria Humanists

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

7.30. Wed. 17th March: ... Morton Community Centre, Wigton Rd, Carlisle.... Dan Bye, Member of [NSS](#) Council and [Freethinker](#) publishing board will speak "Against religious privilege: secularism and the National Secular Society".

Isle of Man Freethinkers

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

2.30. Sun. 14th March: ... Morton Hall; Ochan ... Celebrating David Gawne - "People Like Us" - Disability and discrimination
12.00 Thurs. 18th March:... Lunch (Alessandro's, Castle St, Douglas)

Liverpool Humanists

<http://livehum.org>

7.30 Wed 10th March - The Crown , 43 Lime St, L/pool, LI 1JQ
Liverpool Humanists have no event listed for March but check out their new website .

Greater Manchester Humanists

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

Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester, M2 5NS
7pm Wed 10th March: Mike Donmall – Reader in Addictions Research Director the Nation Drug Evidence Centre, University of Manchester.
[Drugs in the 21st Century](#)

South Cheshire And North Staffs Humanists

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

7.30 Thurs 18th March: At the home of Paul & Anne's - Congleton
[Grace Jackson](#) ... 'Whether paganism a relevant path for those who reject religious beliefs? Grace will talk about her move from paganism to humanism.

Humanist Society of West Yorkshire

www.wyhumanists.org.uk

7 (for 7.30)Thurs 11th March: Swarthmore, 3-7 Woodhouse Sq, Leeds, LS3 1
The Catholic Church - Big Church or Big Business?
Talk by Mike Granville, Sheffield Humanist Society

Does This Mean It's Official? -

Is Britain one of the most irreligious nations on earth? ... Well, according to the latest 'Social Trends' Survey 2009 we are! In that survey just 38% of the people in Britain believe in God.

So – look again at the religiosity of prisoners – it seems that 38% of the general population [*those who believe in God*] make up 66.7% of prison inmates!

Or - put another way ... 62% of the general population who are 'Godless' make up just 33% of all prisoners!

Must have something to do with that Moral Compass we keep hearing about!

It does beg the question '*what is it with this Government and "the faith communities"?*

When is the 'majority' in the community - [with no faith] - going to get a look in?

With thanks to NSS Websit for details

Dead End

One (of many) spin-off conversations prompted by David's 'Green Funerals' talk last month centred around upright burials ... to save space.

There is a common belief that Nostradamus [Michel de Nostredame] insisted he be buried upright '*So no-one could stand on my grave*' ... but alas ... [as with virtually all stories connected with Nostradamus] it simply isn't true.

However a fellow countryman of his - Grenadier Noisot - commissioned a bronze statue of Napoleon following his death and insisted that, when he himself died, he be buried upright near to the monument to stand guard over his beloved Emperor in death; as he had done during his exile in Elba.

Another upright burial myth is that some Jews are thus interred – They Aren't!

Perhaps the most famous upright burial however is poet laureate Ben Johnson (at his own request) to save floor-space in Westminster Abbey. He is reported as stating "*Six foot long by two foot wide is too much for me. Two foot by two foot is all I want.*"

But there was a curious news story which attracted attention from across the world.

The authorities in Derrinalum, Australia [about 250 Km west of Melbourne, Victoria] were inviting future residents of Mt Elephant Cemetery to '*Do you bit for the environment*' by considering a 'feet first' burial in a 700mm dia X 3m deep plot. Why? ... Well - to save space of course!

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