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Another packed Newsletter so hopefully there will be something in here to interest you.

If cartoons are your thing we've two this month [Pg.4 & Pg.5] – instead of our usual one ... simply because the decision to leave one out was too difficult.

There are a couple of 'Quick Quotes' too [Pg.3 & Pg.4] to make you think and smile at the same time [*who said men couldn't multi-task?*]

Here [Pg.1] you'll find details of this month's meeting as well as a statutory notice of our upcoming AGM.

You'll find a report on August's Pecha Kucha meeting [Pg.3]

The Rat Singer features large again [Pg.2 & Pg.5]; as you would expect with his imminent arrival here in the UK.

There are a number of articles from LSH members.

- **One's** an example of that Christian tolerance we hear a lot about [Pg.2];
- **Another** is sharing a visit to Darwin's rooms in Cambridge [Pg.3]
- **Our** third is a humorous account of a visit to a South African 'healer' [Pg.4]

The proposed NW Regional Conference is updated [Pg.5]

And the 3rd of our current running feature – the six Preston Outreach Talks is also available [Pg.6] ...

... The same page to find details of what all our neighbouring Humanist groups are getting up to.

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'Spirituality' ... a word guaranteed to invoke strong responses in humanists, atheists, secularists, rationalists, skeptics and freethinkers.

Carrying with it, as it does, deep religious undertones; it is a word some humanists (*etc*) determinedly refuse to even acknowledge and yet others with equal determination embrace - to deny religion claiming it as 'theirs'.

Whatever 'your' views are we hope you'll bring them with you to our September meeting* - share them with everyone else - listen to the views of others - and perhaps (*as so often happens when a group of freethinking open minded rationalists converse*) – take away opinions different from those you brought ... and be all the richer for it.

*** 7.30pm Wed. 15th September.**
The Village Centre, 59 High Street,
Great Eccleston, Preston PR3 0YB

Trouble parking at The Village Centre?
Use The Farmer's Arms car park!

Just to make
sure everybody
is clear ...

SEPTEMBER

OCTOBER

Notice of A.G.M

[Extract from our constitution] ...

An Annual General Meeting shall be held before the end of Oct. in each year. It shall receive financial accounts & the reports of the Exec. Committee for the year ended the previous 31st Aug. It shall elect the Honorary Officers of the Group and members of the Exec. Committee.

It least 21 days' notice of the meeting shall be given to all members.

Nominations of members who have prior approval (duly seconded by fully paid-up members) and notices of resolutions must be received [by the Sec.] at least 7 days before the meeting.

Any member whose nomination for Honorary Office doesn't lead to election shall be considered as a nominee for ordinary membership of the Committee.

The L.S.H. - A.G.M will be 7.30 pm
Wednesday 20th October 2010
The Village Centre, 59 High Street,
Great Eccleston, Preston PR3 0YB

The Popetician Cometh

Our shores are about to be visited by this most interesting of hybrids. A rare species who - in the blink of an eye - not only can, but is allowed to redefine himself at will.

If he finds himself in any situation which is at all uncomfortable for him he simply transforms and what's more the awkward circumstance magically accommodates him in whatever way he feels happiest.

In the guise of politician he has not the slightest qualms about telling governments how to behave. Notwithstanding that he himself has never undergone any form of democratic process having been appointed head of an insular misogynistic state by a system of myth and cronyism he nevertheless demands; and [whatsmore] is afforded, privileged access to the highest echelons of democracies whose legitimately elected representatives are to be seen falling over themselves in fawning adoration.

'he is to be extended a degree of reverence and respect far exceeding any that could possibly be warranted by his behaviour'

No mention is made by them of the shortcomings of the state this politician heads:

- Its resistance to sign up to many major human rights treaties.
- Its formation of concordats with other states which negatively affects the human rights of the citizens of those states.
- Its uncompromising opposition to the distribution of condoms in the poorest countries of the world even though such methods would stem the growth of unwanted and unaffordable large families and the spread of AIDS
- Its unabashed promotion of segregated education for children
- Its refusal to deny abortion to even the most vulnerable
- Its unrelenting opposition to equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.
- Its abject failure to address the many cases of child abuse within its own organisation: compounded by hypocritical rhetoric claiming to do all it can to bring about reconciliation and [yet] refusing to disclose documents it undeniably has which reveal the truth of what happened.
- Its rehabilitating of the holocaust denier bishop Richard Williamson and the appeaser of Hitler; the war-time Pope, Pius XII.

And if anyone in the attending media dares to suggest criticism of the many shortcomings his particular state exhibits: or that this politician's time might be put to better use putting his own ...

Continued ... ►

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The Popetician Cometh ... Continued.

... house in order before presuming to pontificate to others who - for all their failings - are striving to maintain and improve a democracy at least aspiring to freedom and equality for all: he famously performs his instant transformation into 'Religious Leader' which [for reasons which have always escaped me] demands he be extended a degree of reverence and respect far exceeding any that could possibly be warranted by his behaviour - or [for that matter] the behaviour of his predecessors!

See ['Protest the Pope' Film Season 13 - 16 Sept. Pg5](#)

Could You Imagine ...

From Ian Abbott

"I know John said he didn't believe – but I don't think he really knew what he believed. I do believe and I know he is looking down on us now from heaven. And if you would just read the book of Romans you'll find in there all the answers you are looking for"*

These are words delivered by a lady friend of the deceased at a recent Humanist funeral I conducted for a man who specifically asked for a humanist / non-religious ceremony ... despite the fact that this lady was present at the family meeting I had with his relatives. A meeting in which – as I do at every family meeting - I went to great lengths to explain why there can be no religious content in Humanist ceremonies.

She asked if she could say a few words at the end about 'what John has meant to me' - a request his family graciously acceded to; despite her saying she couldn't / wouldn't e-mail me what she was going to say but assured me it wouldn't be long and there was no danger of me duplicating things she was going to say [... *I suppose she was right there!*]

I remonstrated with her after the ceremony about her downright rudeness and insensitivity toward John's views and the feelings of his family but she was completely without remorse – in fact quite proud about what she had done.

Could you imagine the reaction if you or I had gone into her church to speak at the funeral of a friend:

"I know John said he believed – but I don't think he really knew what he believed. I don't believe and I know there is no heaven and that his life has simply ended – as all lives must. And if you would just read Dawkins, or Harris, or Hitchens then you'd soon discover that what you think you believe is nonsense."

[Come to think of it – a 'tick-box-CofE' friend of mine has been looking a bit peaky lately – If the worst should happen I'm sure I could get his family to allow me to say a few words at the end ... if only we Humanists weren't so bloody considerate!]

**To conceal his identity and prevent further distress to his family the name of the deceased has been changed*

Pecha Kucha

Lesser mortals might have begun to suspect that providence was somehow conspiring to thwart the success of our August meeting as one-by-one an ever-mounting number of intending attendees offered their apologies: for reasons ranging from recent joint replacement surgery to household emergencies ... Added to which several other 'regulars' were missing from our usual happy throng.

However; what we lacked in quantity was certainly more than compensated for in quality and variety. The eighteen or so who were present were treated to a veritable smorgasbord of talent, stimulation, entertainment and discovery.

Linda got us off to a flying start with the thought provoking Stevie Smith poem 'Was He Married?' I especially liked the concluding thought:

A larger one [move] will be when men*

Love love and hate hate but do not deify them?

**added (for clarification) - Ed*

Next up was David [H] who entertained us with memories of his recent South Africa trip; in particular a rather bizarre consultation with a local 'healer' whom he supposed in a previous era would have been called 'Witch Doctor' [See page 4]

Dave [B] followed that with an amusing slant on Leviticus and developed his own musings about how we humanists might fare if we took a leaf or two out of that particular book when confronting those who were less than respectful of our outlook.

Then it was my turn – always happy to share my love of Lancashire Monologues in general - and Marriott Edgar in particular - I offered my own rendition of his delightful 'Three h'apence a foot'.

Ken reintroduced some gravitas to the evening by 'thinking aloud' [or, more accurately 'thinking allowed'] as he argued rhetorically about the sanity of not being sure - as opposed to the more dodgy dogma of uncompromising certainty.

Robyn provided a musical interlude with a terpsichorean inducing demonstration of keyboard virtuosity.

Stuart followed; revealing his own poetic prowess with a lament concerning the events of the morning after the night before: featuring his [now] famous kettle – "*made mainly of plastic & hardly of metal.*"

And we rounded the evening off with a Sophie-rap-come-ballad about her homework eating hamster.

These annual Pecha Kucha evenings never fail to surprise. I for one always come away having discovered something new

... Ian Abbott [Ed]

'In God We Trust.'

I don't believe it would sound any better if it were true ... Mark Twain

Visiting Darwin's Rooms

from ... Julie Humphrey

The popular image of Darwin is one of a venerable, bearded, old sage, but from 1827 to 1831 he was a fresh-faced undergraduate at Christ's College, Cambridge, and while on holiday last week I came across this younger Darwin - captured in bronze in a sculpture in the fellows' garden at his old college. It was created using the earliest sketch of Darwin as an adult as a reference point.

The plants in the garden were chosen to echo the countries Darwin visited during his voyage on HMS Beagle.



As well as the garden, you can now visit Darwin's rooms, located in the south side of the first court and they have been painstakingly restored, as accurately as possible, to the décor & furnishings they would have been during his tenancy.

Someone from the college was there to tell us a bit of background to Darwin's undergraduate life – as a relatively well-off 'pensioner' student the rooms were expensively decorated and furnished.

As visitors, we were made very welcome – questions were encouraged, the rope removed so we could take photographs - very refreshing as some of the porters at the lodges of the colleges can be scary as pit-bull terriers!

In the dining hall Darwin appears again, this time immortalised (in the secular sense of course!) in the stained glass window – this time in the image we all now recognise – venerable and bearded, robed in red, commemorating the honorary degree awarded by Cambridge in 1877.



(Darwin's rooms are open daily except Mondays from 6th Jul to 26th Sept 2010 – price £2.50)

How About You? Do you have an article to share with the rest of us? It might be a recent visit or an experience you've had. Something you've enjoyed or something which annoyed you ... Send it to the usual address [Ed].

Visit to a healer

David Hollinshead 4

When I was in Durban I was often handed leaflets by bored looking people on street corners. I usually say 'no thanks', but when you're in a foreign country its intriguing to see what it's all about. These leaflets were from various "doctors"; note the inverted comma's, with names like 'Dr Rutu' or 'Prince Arafa', advertising the various benefits they can give you . . . Things like:

- Stop lovers from cheating you and make him/her to be yours only
- Abortion with no pain and same day
- To be loved at work
- Win lotto, casino, scrash card and interviews

I found out that these "doctors" are what we might have called witch doctors ... However traditional Zulu doctors are now called songramas, or healers.

As well as personal problems, these healers can deal with village political or legal issues. They might have to decide what to do with a child that has stolen a neighbours chicken for example.

I joined a group visiting a Zulu village. Part of the tour included a visit to one of these healers.

First we told that becoming a healer is not a career that you choose yourself. You would get a calling from the spirits and are told it is your destiny. This could be at anytime in your life and it would be dangerous to ignore such a calling.

The healer we saw was called Michael, who told us his father also used to be healer. After his father died Michael got the calling, he was told by two different healers that this is the spirits wanted him to do. Each healer uses a collection of stones and bones to help them. Michael uses the same ones that his father uses. He had a dream in which his father told him exactly where the stones had been left in a nearby river.

We all went into Michael's room and - taking our shoes off -sat on the floor ... Whilst he was talking I looked around at the antlers skull hanging on the wall, and at all the various herbs and medicines all around him in old plastic containers and bottles.

The healer welcomed me and I sat down.

He had the pile of stones and bones in front of him. He belched quite dramatically and moved the stones and bones around the floor with a flourish. He took a few out and spat on them. Then offered them to me to split on, I pretended to spit and passed them back.

He said a few words, which I took to be a prayer as he said amen at the end. He put the stones back and spread them around, as though he was preparing for a game of dominoes.

We waited a while; I had to put up with another dramatic belch until he pointed to some of the stones with a stick.

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'Visit To A Healer' - continued

The first stone was like a round disk. - I was told it showed I was lucky and I always have been.

Another was pointed at; this was in the shape of a dice. This was from my mothers ancestors; these are the ancestors that have given me the luck ... I was told I should buy my mother's family a gift when I return to England.

A third stone was pointed at; I was asked if there was divorce in my family. I said yes [*but thought I don't know many families where divorce is not*]. It was suggested that I should go to a crossroads when back in England and put some money on it. This would stop the divorces happening.

After the next object was pointed at, I was asked if I have ever worked for the Government ... I have! Pointing to the same stone he said I would come into some money from the Government.

I made a mental note to email the boss to see if I've been made redundant whilst I've been away.

It also entered my head that all this claptrap is something I could talk about at my next Lancashire Secular Humanist meeting.

Finally I was asked if I went to church, when I said no, I was simply advised that I should.

Next we discussed my illness ... I wasn't going to discuss all my problems but I did say I suffer from indigestion.

Michael belched and looked at a couple of powders he was going to give me. He tipped some powder onto the back of his hand; he licked a bit and threw the rest over his shoulder. He asked for 300 rand [£26:50p] for some powders, luckily I made a point of having a lot less than that in my wallet and he accepted what I had.

I was already concerned about getting the powders through customs at Manchester airport.

I joined the rest of the group afterwards and we discussed our visit.

One had been told she was lucky.

Another works in Government

Another is divorced.

One woman had been given some powder for her headaches, she was told to take it with porridge.

I don't eat porridge... it gives me indigestion.

'Protest the Pope' Film Season 13 - 16 Sept.

As part of the Protest the Pope campaign, the National Secular Society is presenting a short season of films that explore issues the Catholic Church and the Government would prefer were kept under wraps during the papal visit.

The authorities in this country refuse to ask difficult questions of the Pope - so the NSS will do it for them ... Each of these powerful films illustrates clearly why the Pope should be made to answer for the many sins of his Church.

All films will be shown at Conway Hall, 23 Red Lion Square, London WC1 (nearest tube: Holborn)
Tel 020 7242 8032 www.conwayhall.org.uk
Tickets for each film are £3.
Seats are limited, so advance booking is advised.

'Sinners' - Mon 13 Sept. 7.30pm

A look at life inside one of the notorious Magdalene Asylums where women the Catholic Church decided had stepped out of line in some way were incarcerated and abused.

Deliver us from Evil - Tue. 14 Sept. 7.30pm

A truly shocking, Oscar-nominated documentary by Amy Berg, this is the story of Father Oliver O'Grady.

Vows of Silence (Brit Premiere) Wed. 15 Sept - 5.30pm

This documentary by Jason Berry that traces the shocking events surrounding Father Marciel Maciel, who won the favour of Pope John Paul II, despite years of paedophilia accusations.

Unrepentant - Wed. 15 Sept. 7.30pm +Q&A

This multi-award winning documentary at last tells the truth about the almost unbelievable abuse and murder that took place in the Church-run Indian Residential Schools in Canada.

Kevin Annett will be present at the screening to introduce the film and answer questions

The Crime of Father Amaro -Thurs 16 Sept 7pm +Q&A

Set in Mexico in 2002, starring Gael Garcia Bernal, directed by Carlos Carrera. The film follows the experiences of a young, idealistic priest who is sent to a small parish to assist the ageing Father Benito.

The film will be preceded by a talk by David Ranan, author of Double Cross: Code of the Catholic Church - exposing corruption that has been at the heart of the Church since its very foundation.

So if you're in London between Mon 13th & Thurs 16th Sept: or if you're planning a mini-break to London and [until now] have been undecided about the dates - Be sure to contact Conway Hall early and book your tickets to be certain of reserving your seat.

If you go - why not write a review for **LSH Newsletter?**

"...This is not good work. If this is the best God can do, I am not impressed. Results like these do not belong on the résumé of a Supreme Being. This is the kind of shit you'd expect from an office temp with a bad attitude. And just between you and me, in any decently-run universe, this guy would've been out on his all-powerful ass a long time ago." ...
George Carlin

Northwest Regional Conference

5 Unfortunately we've been forced to defer this conference as some of the proposed speakers are now unable to be with us at the scheduled time.

One of the aims of such a conference was always to create and develop closer ties with neighbouring groups in the Northwest and making it a reality is an ongoing project between ourselves, Liverpool, and Manchester groups with hopes of including Cumbria and The Isle of Man.

We are resolved to hold a conference on the theme:

'Humanism for the 21st Century'

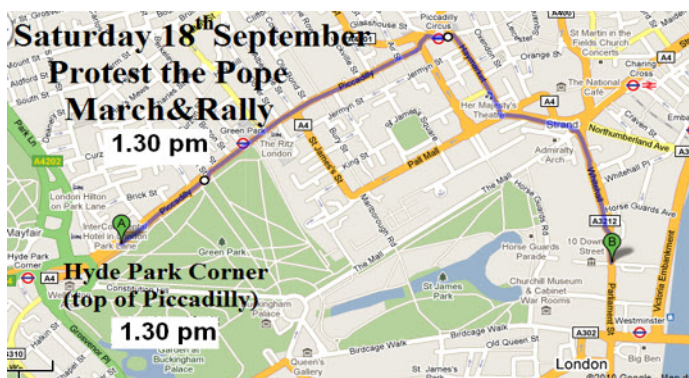
and envisage it will now form part of this region's activities during 'Humanism Week' [June] 2011

If anybody wants to become involved in planning this project you will be made most welcome.

Further updates will follow in due course.

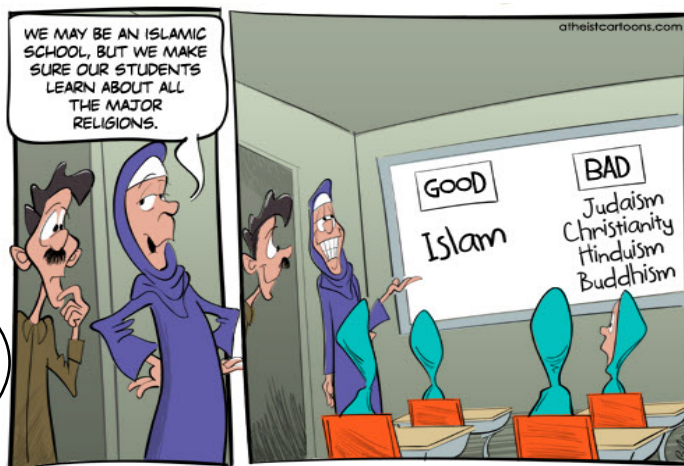
Protest the Pope! Be there!

Join the big march through London to oppose the state visit of Joseph Ratzinger to the UK



On the night before the big march, join guest host Peter Tatchell for a night of comedy, music and secular revelry as we say "NOPE!" to the Pope during his visit to the UK

Any **LSH** member / associate interested in travelling to London to support this protest and participate in the march should contact me [Ed]. I'll put you in touch with each other with a view to car-sharing or any other travel arrangements.



Reminded me of Richard Dawkins' Current TV series [Ed]

As you'll have gathered, humanism is a large and growing movement, and I'd like to cover some of the things that the British Humanism Association does to further the cause.

The BHA devotes a lot of time to campaigning for a more open society, and a secular state with no religious privilege or discrimination.

Here are some of the specific areas on which they have been campaigning

It has been well known for a long time that the national census contains a question on religion with ambiguous wording.

Too many people who have not been near a Church for many years and have no religious beliefs still have a 'Church of England reflex' when faced with an official form and their responses undoubtedly inflated the 'religious' figure arising from the 2001 census.

Unfortunately, parliament has now approved the order confirming the questions for the 2011 census, including the same flawed phrasing as used in 2001.

The BHA will launch a significant new campaign closer to the time the census is taken to encourage people who do not have religious beliefs to answer the question more carefully.

They campaign for stronger equality laws against discrimination, particularly in the context of 'religion or belief' and 'sexual orientation' equality.

They make representations to Government, Parliament, Commissions and NGOs and are campaigning for a Single Equality Act.

Some examples of specific cases they supported are their ongoing lobbying of the Scouting Movement, which only accepts members and youth leaders who have religious beliefs (or are prepared to make a promise to a god), supporting a claimant in an employment tribunal, and making an intervention on schools admissions in the High Court.

They work for an open and inclusive society with freedom of belief and speech because free speech is an essential liberty without which societies can slide easily into being cultures of oppression, suspicion and fear.

They lobbied hard for the repeal of the blasphemy laws, and towards ensuring that it is made clear in the Racial and Religious Hatred Act that the law is not intended to protect beliefs, but to protect people.

Libel reform is a hot topic at the moment, and the BHA is having its say. They have joined calls to change UK libel laws to prevent victimisation of scientists, journalists and human rights campaigners. Current libel laws allow companies to 'protect their reputation' ...

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... by bringing costly, unfair legal cases against those who criticise them.

Chief Executive Andrew Copson has said:

'The BHA is pleased to add their voice to support the Libel Reform Campaign.

In an open society, there must be room to have open debates about scientific issues, room to discuss human rights and room to defend free speech.'

They monitor any new legislation for threats to free speech and actively oppose clauses against harassment on grounds of religion or belief in legislation, as these may lead to unwarranted free speech restrictions via the back door.

I hope that this has given you an insight into the sort of thing that the BHA is campaigning for and how they're going about it.

I refer you to their website www.humanism.org.uk for more information and for how to get involved yourself ... *Thank You*

Next Month ... Talk No. 4 - 'Humanism and Morals'

What Our Neighbours Friends Are Up To

Cumbria Humanists

www.cumbria-humanists.org.uk

730 Wed 15 Sept: Morton C/unity Centre, Wigton Rd, Carlisle.
Jan Dunckley, CHG member & BHA accredited celebrant, will talk about Humanist Ceremonies.

Isle of Man Freethinkers

www.iomfreethinkers.co.uk

12.30 Sun 12th Sept - Unfortunately details of the IOM groups events are unavailable due to their web site being down at time of going to press

12.00 Thurs 6th Sept: Lunch Alessandros Restaurant, Douglas

Liverpool Humanists

<http://livehum.org>

7.30 Thurs 9th Sept: 07 Café Bar, 103 Mount Pleasant, L3 5TB
Andrew Copson, CEO - BHA.

Greater Manchester Humanists

<http://gmh.humanist.org.uk>

7pm Wed 5 Sept: Friends Meeting Ho, Mount St, M2 5N
FMH Objections to Humanism - Andrew Copson CEO - BHA

South Cheshire And North Staffs Humanists

www.humanists.org.uk

7.30 Tues 22 Sept: Workshop: Humanist teaching / presentation Materials ... At the home of Angela Mayer

Humanist Society of West Yorkshire

www.wyhumanists.org.uk

No Activity Scheduled for September

Amnesty Preston

www.preston.amnesty.org.uk

7.30pm Mon 13 Sept: St Augustines Parish House,
St Augustines Place. Preston

Lytham St Annes & Blackpool Amnesty

www.amnesty.org.uk/lytham

7.30pm Mon 4 Sept: Church Rd Centre Methodist Church;
Church Rd, St Annes.

Don't Forget - If you have trouble parking at Great Eccleston for our meetings you can use The Farmers Arms Car Park

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