

BHA Conference Report

'A Personal View' - LSH Member Stuart Herkes
Friday 18th:

Badly missed opportunity as an ice-breaker on Friday night, it began late and as I'd enjoyed what I'd seen of Robin Ince before was disappointed in his routine: clearly an off night for the comedian. However worse was to come; the pub quiz was badly designed and executed and D J Mooei from 'Eggheds' fame came across as quite smug.

A number of female members claimed to find him quite offensive. The quiz itself was purely humanistic with a lot of Greek philosophy and a lot of new humanists who attended felt [as one told me] "stupid!" Clearly what a lot of members took a pub quiz to be was completely different to who-ever had designed the quiz.

Saturday 19th:

Vastly improved day due to excellent speakers . . . Despite a coffee urn exploding on myself in the morning my enthusiasm wasn't dampened. First up Dr Peter Atkins; whose argument was that science can literally explain everything, including more traditional roles often concerned with spirituality.



He was the most prepared speaker with a good sense of humour and breadth of knowledge but I couldn't shake the notion that at times I was listening to a university lecture rather than a talk on the meaning of life. Indeed I meet some students who claimed he said the same thing every time.

Next was the popular author/philosopher Julian Baggini who argued about what religion has that perhaps humanism was unable to offer. A lot of this time appeared to be talking about transcendence and how perhaps religiosity could take this to a further level. Understandably this talk divided the room. Personally I found it enjoyable but a lot of people felt he was winging it on a subject he was not that keen to address: although I did not get a sense of this.

Next was a change in programme. A.C.Grayling did not attend because of planned protests (*although there were none during the conference*) so Andrew Copson stepped in at the last moment to discuss, with existing President Poly Toynbee, 'The Meaning of Life' . . . This was an enjoyable interlude and I was very impressed with Poly Toynbee who came across as passionate, articulate and understanding and was clearly greatly loved by the majority of the B.H.A.

Stephen law followed with his 'believing bullshit' talk; although the very title seemed to put a lot of people off. I found the nuclear argument; negating all ideas, very interesting; although quite a lot of people appeared disappointed in his talk, believing he would offer some kind of verbal defence against brain-washing.

Lastly was Chris French [easily the crowds second favourite speaker of the entire conference].

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His subject was meaning and randomness and covered such topics as apophenia, subjective validation (a type of confirmation bias), hot hand phenomena, pareidola - complete with a picture of - Christ-al palace and Madonna in a cheese toasty [which a Las Vegas casino bought on e-bay for a staggering £28,000 and is now behind some glass at the roulette table!]

The fantastic examples of recordings played in reverse culminating in David Oats extremely dangerous reversed speech theory which he charges a small fortune for. Very enjoyable and polished.

Interview with Phillip Pullman Probably a lot more fascinating if you were a fan of the author; but he did come across as being an astute caring person.

Notes:

First B.H.A. conference in 10 years - only two microphones,►Page 2

... Continued from Page 1.

... no clip-ons and no microphone stand for the speakers, A sell out but only 150 attendees (although this might be advantageous if we believe Malcolm Gladwell)

Gala dinner.

The food was nice but portions amazingly small and unbelievably we didn't have a jug of water at our table because they'd run out of jugs, this led to a conspiracy theory that this was a deliberate ploy by the Hilton to get people to buy bottled water. However I learned afterwards that other tables did have jugs of water.

The trustee at our table informed us that previously they'd been held at universities during summer holidays for a fraction of the cost.

Unfortunately Andrew Copson then asked for donations whilst at the gala dinner in the Hilton which went down like a lead balloon at my table - full of 'first time humanists' who like myself had dug into their savings to attend.

It gave out the entirely wrong message - almost like religions begging for a new cathedral ... and the trustee - whose name I have shamefully forgotten - agreed stating "... it gives out the wrong message completely."

Sunday:

Natalie Haynes - clearly the most popular speaker of the entire event! A whirlwind of entertainment and knowledge - even giving the audience an opportunity to pick what she should talk about ... although I wished I understood more Latin!

The final speaker (shamefully I've forgotten his name too) brought together brilliantly all the views of the speakers and returned to what the theme of the conference should have been about The Meaning of Life and brilliantly took the Alpha Course's motive "The Meaning of life is" and changed it to "What gives life meaning?"

The conference title was after all

'The Meaning of Life'

but a lot of the speakers didn't address this directly.

LSH On Air

LSH was again invited onto BBC Radio Lancashire's Sunday Morning Faith Programme by Joe Wilson to discuss medically assisted death - in the wake of Terry Pratchett's Television programme.

Then again on Graham Liver's [weekday] Breakfast Show - to discuss the recent claim [by RE Teachers] that the proposed Ebacc is seeking to remove Religious Education altogether.

Quick Quote

"Atheism is the arrogant belief that the entire universe was not created for our benefit"

[Origin unknown - referenced by Michael Nugent during his humorous address to the World Atheist Convention]

... <http://www.atheismuk.com/>

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**From
The
Committee
Room**

Next **LSH** Committee Meeting 09.30am Sat 2nd July 2011
Meeting Room – Great Eccleston Village Centre
All 'paid-up' **LSH** members welcome

Agenda

- 1. Attendees & Apologies**
- 2. Minutes** of previous meeting – [*Appendix I*] – to be agreed
- 3. Matters Arising**
- 4. Interim Treasurer Report:** - Simple overview of current **LSH** finances - *pertinent to Items 5 – 7 - 8 – 10 – 11 – 12 – 13 & 14.*
- 5. Discuss** - 'Working Better Together - Phase 2.
- 6. NWHumanists:** - IA to report on progress so far.
- 7. Proposal** – Nominate David Hollinshead as '**LSH** Events Secretary'. David has agreed to fulfil this role. Nomination to be seconded and voted on.
- 8. Proposal** – As far as possible this committee should aim to draft out forthcoming events and activities for the year ahead – and publish those advance details on our website – *See Item 6.*
- 9. Discuss** – Proposed programme. [*see Appendix II*]
- 10. Update** – Exclusive Christian Brethren School - Hornby [suggest action / strategies etc]
- 11. Discuss** – **LSH** Representative[s] to BHA AGM – [*Appendix III*]
- 12. Discuss** – LSH Representative[s] to BHA GRAM [November] – advance notice of Item for next [October] Committee Meeting ... *pertinent to Items 4 – 5 -*
- 13. Proposal** – Purchase quantity of **LSH** Window Stickers – [*see Appendix IV*]
- 14. Proposal** - Add funds from the **LSH** account to the amount raised in the 'Exit Collection' at our April meeting by way of a donation to Dignity in Dying
- 15. Discuss** – **LSH** Fundraising – any Further Ideas?
- 16. Proposal:** That **LSH** [again] participate in Remembrance Sunday [*see UKAFA 1 & 2*]
- 17. A.O.B.**
- 18. Time / Day / Date of next Committee Meeting**

*A lot to get through so - any paid up **LSH** member who wants to attend should - arrive on time and already have briefed themselves about details of the various agenda items ... Contact me for copies if necessary.*



Many A True Word ...

Spiritual Care Forum

“...if we are going to use phrases such as ‘Inclusive of all faiths and none’ then it seems to me we need to have some understanding of the needs of the increasing number of non-religious people in our society ...” is how Southport & Ormskirk Hospital Trust’s Chaplain; Rev Peter Tarleton, opened the inaugural meeting of his newly formed Spiritual Care Forum.

Which explains why an invitation had been extended to LSH for a humanist to be included – and why I was there; joining a Catholic Priest, a Methodist Minister, a Rabbi, an Imam, a Pastor, a Salvation Army Captain, a Doctor from the Palliative Care Team, a Hospital Patient’s Representative and a Non-executive Director of the Hospital Trust.

Invited to describe humanism in general and the chaplaincy needs of the non-religious in particular I explained how; in the UK, it is almost impossible to grow up without religion therefore, someone declaring themselves non-religious is doing far more than just not being religious, they have had to make a positive decision to reject religion: and their reasons for doing that will be many and varied . . . For most it will simply be an intellectual conclusion but for others it will be because they have been hurt – or even damaged - by religion.

. . . And for those people, religious references, overtones or even assumptions may be more than insensitive; it could be upsetting or possibly offensive at what is already a distressing time.

Most panel members accepted that description as a possible scenario and seemed to genuinely seek a way to accommodate the non-religious patients, visitors and staff who pass through the Trust’s care.

The current [Southport] Chapel was considered not fit for purpose under any circumstances – it was too much like a Christian Church to be inclusive of other faiths – let alone none - and the discussion focused on how that could be improved.

There was some debate about providing ecumenical services – but an acknowledgement that this still wouldn’t address the needs of non-religious people – and even an admission that the use of the word Chapel may not be appropriate.

‘How about a Chapel and a [separate] Quiet Room?’ was one serious consideration – along with the proposal that all the various religious iconography and symbols could be incorporated in one [larger] ubiquitous ‘Chapel’ but all coverable with curtains.

Each panel member was provided with a copy of the Trust’s ‘Spiritual Care Policy’ “... which is far too ‘Corporate’ ...” and we are invited to condense and redraft it to reflect our own specific outlook [ahead of the next Forum meeting in November] – with the hope of arriving at a more pertinent policy document.

If anybody living nearer to Southport would like to be part of this initiative - please contact LSH [in usual way].

Appeal – Do you know of a ‘Hospital Chapel’ – anywhere in the UK - which could be cited as an example of ‘best practise’ for this panel to consider in their deliberations?



Trevor Philips
Chairman of
the EHRC

Worrying Priorities?

Trevor Philip’s comments in a recent Telegraph article [22 June] gave some cause for concern to those who are not religious - but nevertheless don’t feel they are somehow ‘unfulfilled’ as a human being!

“... Being an Anglican, being a Muslim or being a Methodist or being a Jew is just as much part of your identity and you should not be penalised or treated in a discriminatory way because of that. That’s part of the settlement of a liberal democracy.”

So far so good you might think; but then he went on to say:

“... Our business is defending the believer. The law we’re here to implement recognises that religious identity is an essential part of this society. It’s an essential element of being a fulfilled human being.”

One would imagine that Mr Philips’ roll as Chairman of the Equality and Human Rights Commission is to ensure equality for all - and such a presumption [that ‘religious identity is an essential part of being a fulfilled human being’] does not auger well for any non-religious person seeking redress having being penalised for not having a religious identity. [Denied employment in a Faith School - Denied employment in a public service administered by a Faith group - Refused a place for your child at your local school ... & so on]

There were also encouraging aspects of his article; for example he warns religious groups of the danger of extremism, saying some Christian activists are not fighting for their religion but for political influence - adding that his own background as the son of immigrants from Guyana means he fears “undiluted” attitudes to homosexuality risk Afro-Caribbean communities not integrating into the mainstream.

Quick-Quote

"Taxonomically, my family is Freethinker (including atheists, skeptics, agnostics); my genus is Humanist (including the religion-based), and my species is Secular." ... John Rafferty

Do you consider yourself 'religious'?

If your answer is "NO" ...

... you may be the right person to participate in a 'Focus Group Discussion- for people who consider themselves 'non-religious' on the subject –

'Religion and Belief, Discrimination and Equality'

If you'd like to participate this event is being held at **Blackburn Central Library, Town Hall St. BB2 1AG**

on

Thursday 7th July 2011, 5pm to 7pm

Places are limited, so please book your place by sending an e-mail to s.contractor@derby.ac.uk or by calling 0788 401 8684.

All participants will be given a £20 shopping voucher to cover any travel expenses incurred.

This focus group discussion is part of a research project being undertaken by the Universities of Derby, Oxford and Manchester.

If you are 'religious' and would like to participate please send an e-mail to s.contractor@derby.ac.uk.

For more details of this research please visit:

<http://www.derby.ac.uk/religion-and-society>

If you are intending to participate in this [I am] - and have confirmed your place with the organisers let me know. I'll put you in touch with other LSH-ers who are going so you/we can arrange car-sharing. Usual contact details. [Ed]

NEWS FLASH!



Crem-encounters

A man who spoke at the funeral of his close friend began by sharing this definition of what a Humanist is: "... a student of literary culture and of human nature; someone who puts human interests and the mind of man paramount, and who critically applies a logical method of pragmatism to all the sciences."

Much better than the usual description of what a Humanist isn't - don't you think?

.....

I conducted the funeral of a young man who died suddenly and unexpectedly ... [I'll call him **John**].

During my conversation with his family I discovered he was gay and in a long term relationship.

He and his partner [we'll call him **David**] had been together for almost ten years; living for the past three years at John's mother's home ...

David was present and participated in our meeting.

John had been very secretive about his sexuality; fearful of disclosing it to his extended family and work colleagues - who frequently participated in homophobic office banter and (being ignorant of his secret) often included him in their fun.

His office manager allegedly boasted he'd never employed anybody gay – and never would!

In the current employment climate – this only served to make John even more fearful about being discovered.

All this is sad enough but John's family were adamant his sexuality was not to be referred to during his ceremony – for fear of upsetting various family members and shocking his [homophobic] work colleagues . . . Worse still – no mention was to be made about David being his partner.

David is openly gay; he & John had gay friends and participated in the local gay scene.

I struggled to write a ceremony which fulfilled John's family's wishes; and [at the same time] make at least some reference to David which acknowledged his significance in John's life.

I eventually submitted a proposed draft for their endorsement and was saddened to receive an amended draft back (*sent from David's computer*) with all references to David removed.

During my meeting with John's family I sensed that, although his mother had accepted his sexuality, she was nevertheless ashamed too; and most of John's family were ignorant of it as well – so their anxiety that people could find out was dominant.

What a dreadful indictment of our society: that threatened condemnation and open bigotry should still have the power to persuade a mother that her son's sexuality must be a dirty little secret he takes to his grave. And concerns over some perceived disapproval of relatives should override any compassion she has for the tangible grief being endured by the man who demonstrably loved him.



Beyond Atheism
Beyond Agnosticism
Secular Humanism

www.secularhumanism.org

Secular Humanism is a comprehensive, non-religious life-stance incorporating:

- A naturalistic philosophy
- A cosmic outlook rooted in science
- A consequentialist ethical system

Let's examine these items one by one:

A comprehensive, nonreligious life-stance.

Secular humanism is *comprehensive*, touching every aspect of life including issues of values, meaning, and identity. Thus it is broader than atheism, which concerns only the nonexistence of god or the supernatural. Important as that may be, there's a lot more to life ... and secular humanism addresses it.

Secular humanism is *nonreligious*, espousing no belief in a realm or beings imagined to transcend ordinary experience.

Secular humanism is a *life-stance*, or what Council for Secular Humanism founder Paul Kurtz has termed a *eupraxsophy*: a body of principles suitable for orienting a complete human life.

A naturalistic philosophy.

Secular humanism is philosophically *naturalistic*. It holds that nature (the world of everyday physical experience) is all there is, and that reliable knowledge is best obtained when we query nature using the scientific method. Naturalism asserts that supernatural entities like God do not exist, and warns us that knowledge gained without appeal to the natural world and without impartial review by multiple observers is unreliable.

A cosmic outlook rooted in science.

Secular humanism provides a *cosmic outlook*—a world-view in the broadest sense, grounding our lives in the context of our universe and relying on methods demonstrated by science.

Secular humanists see themselves as undesigned, unintended beings who arose through evolution, possessing unique attributes of self-awareness and moral agency.

A consequentialist ethical system.

Secular humanists hold that ethics is *consequential*, to be judged by results. This is in contrast to so-called command ethics, in which right & wrong are defined in advance and attributed to divine authority. "No god will save us," declared *Humanist Manifesto II* (1973), "we must save ourselves."

Secular humanists seek to develop and improve their ethical principles by examining the results they yield in the lives of real men and women.

An e-mail has flooded in ...

.. in response to my less than respectful treatment of the oft-used [Christian] funeral phrase "...in the sure and certain hope of resurrection" during our last LSH meeting - when I contended that you can have 'hope' or you can be 'sure and certain' - but claiming to have 'sure and certain hope' is somewhat oxymoronic.

Dear Ian,

At the risk of excluding myself from the Enlightened Brethren of the Lancs & Fylde Humanist Association, I think I have to describe myself as a H.H.H. = Half Hearted Humanist.

I so often find myself only 95.5% convinced by the general consensus at meetings - and by the arguments of my own F.H.C.H.H. = Full Heartedly Convinced Humanist Husband.

In particular I take issue with your humorous dismissal of the pious platitude so often used at Christian funerals. I don't think it is a nonsense to have a true and certain hope of whatever it may be. Hope is not a conviction but a confidence in the future, and can be held very fast and very sincerely.

Hope – OED: '*an expectation, a desire combined with expectation*'

To hope is to trust, to have confidence.

The poet tells us that it "springs eternal from the human breast" - not knowledge, not even certainty, not factual experience, but an expectation of the future which is grounded in emotional trust.

It is a bet on the future which one may feel proud to have no doubts about. And however we may quibble about the actual nit-picking logic of the phrase, it is a sentiment that one may not share, but which masses of people understand.

I send this missive in the true and certain hope that you will not find it too obnoxious to include in your next newsletter.

All good wishes,

H.H.H. Chris Middleton



Gecha Pecha Kucha In – Now!

This month's **LSH** meeting is a 'just-for-fun' event.

Pech Kucha* is a Japanese term for 'Chit-Chat' which we have adapted and simplified.

Anybody at all can speak – on any subject you want ... **'Any Subject'**: the only criteria being you have precisely 6-minutes 40-seconds available to you.

You are guaranteed not to be interrupted – heckled – jeered – or criticized during your time.

However - as soon as the bell sounds (signifying the end of the allotted time) you **MUST** stop!

No Exceptions – No Excuses!

Actually – when we say 'speak' what we really mean is – the floor is yours!

You could also sing, mime, juggle, dance, whistle, yodel, paint, conjure, gurn, play an instrument or do origami ... although most people still speak.

There are two fantastic benefits to this event:

1. You get an amazingly varied range of completely unrelated subjects and view talents you were unaware other people possessed.
2. If you find any particular subject is the most boring thing you've witnessed in your life; look on the bright side ... you only have to endure in for 6-minutes 40-seconds - Max!

Can everybody who wants to participate please contact me [Ian] in the usual way?

I don't want to know what you plan on doing – just that you will be doing something.

That way I can ensure your name is in the hat so participants can be invited up at random.

If – on the night – you decide to do something ... that shouldn't be a problem. If there is time left after the hat has been emptied 'any other participants' will be invited to step forward.

You don't have to be a member of **LSH** – or a humanist / atheist / secularist. You don't have to have been before – you don't have to join (or promise to join). You just have to bring an open mind – and [perhaps] some well-flexed chuckle-muscles!

So get thinking – there must be something you want to get off your chest – a cause you want to promote – something you want to share – a talent you want to demonstrate – a spleen you want to vent – as story you want to tell.

You'll never have a better opportunity – and to a captive [and mute] audience!

Weather permitting we'll have a barbecue going outside – why not bring something to wash it down with?

7.30 [for 8pm start] - Wednesday 20th July
Great Eccleston Village Centre, 59 High Street,
The Square, Great Eccleston. PR3 0YB

Bring a Friend!

Pech Kucha* ...

... was originally designed to combat those interminable 'Power-Point' presentations that both corporate and public sector hierarchy love so much.

The innovative Japanese idea was that every presenter was only allowed 20 power-point slides and each slide could only be displayed for 20 seconds.

That is all the time they had to get their message across.

$$20 \times 20 = 400 [= \text{6min. 40sec}]$$

Clever eh?

We don't use Power-Point - we've just adopted the principle of rigorously limiting the time available.

It Tends to Focus The Mind.

What Our Neighbours Friends Are Up To

Cumbria Humanists e-mail - oldcodger2@btinternet.com

Sadly Cumbria Humanists is currently disbanded enquiries can be directed to George Weston at the above e-mail address.

Isle of Man Freethinkers www.iomfreethinkers.co.uk

1pm Sunday 12 July - Summer Garden Party - Maughold

12noon Thurs 23 July - 'Lunch' Alessandros, Castle St, Douglas

Liverpool Humanists <http://livehum.org>

No details posted yet - for update see website

Greater Manchester Humanists <http://gmh.humanist.org.uk>

7pm Wed 13 July: Friends Meeting House, Mount St, M2 5NS

Christian Zionism – a major obstacle to peace in Middle East
Hilda Reilly – member of Liverpool Humanist Group

South Cheshire And North Staffs Humanists
www.humanists.org.uk

Meetings start at 7.30pm - Details of July meeting not yet posted - see website for further info.

Humanist Society of West Yorkshire
www.wyhumanists.org.uk

7pm Thus 9th June: Swathmore 3-7 Woodhouse Sq. Leeds,

Details of July meeting not yet posted - see website for further info.

Lytham St Annes & Blackpool Amnesty
www.amnesty.org.uk/lytham

7.30pm Mon 6th June: Church Rd Centre Methodist Church;
St Annes. FY8 5PX

LSH Meetings - The Small Print

Lancashire Secular Humanists is a group for free-thinking individuals living lives informed by **Logic, Science & Humanity**

All **LSH** meetings are 'open' meetings. Anyone is invited to join in our discussions regardless of whether they are humanist – secularist – religious - undecided - or [just] interested.

We are people who enjoy participating in intelligent discourse between ourselves and with others about wide ranging subjects on the understanding that the only common denominator will be that nobody resorts to dogma in defence of a contention.

Being freethinkers there are many things we secular humanists will not agree on between ourselves, but there are matters on which we do take a firm and unanimous stand ...

We do not condone discrimination of any sort - nor do we hate religious people ... Such views are entirely contrary to any humanist philosophy and we reserve the right to exclude any person promoting them!

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'*