

## What can you do in 6 min 40 sec?

Well quite a lot – surprisingly.

For a start you can discover how the entire universe was formed - from the big bang to now.

You can listen to a very amusing fable about 'The Humanist and The Believer'

You can hear a few Wendy Pope poems; including an all-purpose one for State Occasions and an interesting take on a nursery rhyme.

You can ponder a moving piece entitled 'I Am The Disabled Child' used at the humanist funeral of a twenty year old man.

Or be entertained by a very proficient key-board rendition of Cold Play's 'Viva La Vida'

Then you can listen to Terry Pratchett's erudite article - 'In Defence of Science'

Consider a feminist's complaint about stereotyping and how sex is portrayed in the media.

Empathise with a grumpy old man for whom 6 **hours** and 40 seconds wouldn't allow enough time to say everything he'd like to say.

Followed by a solo guitar rendition of The Script's 'The Man Who Can't Be Moved'

And even squeeze in a talk about alternative medicine – including a man who counts a glass of cider as one of his 'five-a-day'.

Pecha Kucha – so much more than just 'chit-chat'! ... as we all discovered at our July meeting.

And, as if that wasn't entertaining enough - you can then adjourn to the pub next door and round the evening off with a 'glass-n-a-chat' - and discuss in greater depth your particular favourite subject of the night ... With no time constraints!

## Make A Wish

If you could choose just one thing to improve the way **LSH** functions; what would it be?

Would you wish for more frequent meetings?

Would it be for meetings that were specifically formatted for different activities.

Would it be less talk & more action? [*Or less action & more talk?*]

How about meeting at a different location?

Or meeting at different locations around the county?

Would you prefer meetings to be even more open - with members of different faiths specifically invited. [*Or more exclusive with no-one but confirmed Humanists - Secularists - Atheists allowed*]

### *Or do you think bigger?*

How about a mobile 'meetings-bus'?

Or a Humanism Shop - a drop-in advice centre with [only] Humanist / Secular literature and leaflets about various services ... Ceremonies - Education - Equal-rights - Lectures - Humanist / Secular Events [etc]

### *Or bigger still?*

A permanent home - purpose-built or adapted - just for our use? - And where would that be – how would it be set up – what would need to be included – how would it be run - who would run it?

Pipe-dreams? - Perhaps; but look about you: there are buildings and busses and outlets and facilities for any number of groups who are far less representative of the population of Lancashire than **LSH** - and yet ...

So - if you could choose just one thing to improve the way **LSH** functions; what would it be?

*Responses to the usual address please ...*

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## **A Bit of Hitchens ...**

[Christopher - in case you were wondering]

*"Our belief is not a belief. Our principles are not a faith. We don't rely solely upon science and reason, because these are necessary rather than sufficient factors, but we distrust anything that contradicts science or outrages reason. We may differ on many things, but what we respect is free inquiry, open-mindedness, and the pursuit of ideas for their own sake."*



## Get 'Em While They're Hot!

After much consideration – argument – and debate we finally agreed on our own **LSH** 'Car Window Sticker' [below] - which Helen has now had printed. As you can see we settled on '*simple & understated*' rather than '*contentious*'

We are offering them at the subsidised price of just £1 and would encourage you to display one in your car to let even more people know about us.

There's a limited number - First Come First Served!  
To reserve one contact **LSH** in the usual way

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From  
The  
Committee  
Room

Next **LSH** Committee Meeting 09.30am Sat 2<sup>nd</sup> Oct. 2011  
Meeting Room – Great Eccleston Village Centre  
All 'paid-up' **LSH** members welcome



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

## Shh<sub>hh</sub>!

Keeping Secrets has always been associated with such kindred behaviour as: not letting the cat out of the bag; keeping the lid on something; not giving the game away; turning a blind eye; sweeping it under the rug - etc . . . All of which [of course] might be perfectly reasonable strategies under the right circumstances.

However; it is impossible to reconcile such conduct when the secret being kept concerns something as serious as the sexual abuse of children – then 'keeping the secret' makes the keeper complicit in the offence ... and, under such circumstances, civilized societies don't simply condemn the behaviour of co-conspirators – they usually punish them.

The reasoning is obvious: it's an acknowledgement that society's concern for the victims of such heinous crimes must always outweigh any perceived loyalty an individual may harbour for the offender. How else could it be?

The Irish government is to be congratulated for sticking to its pledge to force priests to break the secrets of the confessional box and reveal instances of abuse: what a pity governments closer to home have neither the moral fibre nor courage to do likewise.

Unsurprisingly relations between the Vatican and Ireland have plummeted and - with seeming [continued] inability even to comprehend that once you are made aware a child has been raped or abused; you can only compound that offence if you're demonstrably more concerned about protecting your own reputation; concealing the identity of the offender; and shielding any co-conspirators, than you are for the welfare of the damaged innocent victim – the Vatican has responded with a fairly typical fit of pique by recalling their Ambassador to Rome.

This particular conundrum will no doubt run its course but what it has served to do is bring a much needed spotlight to bear on the wider [and perplexing] problem: 'Which Should Hold Sway' - Secular Law; applied equally to all citizens, or Religious Rules; administered piecemeal to different inhabitants based entirely on which faith each individual professes allegiance to?

How can any society function if one member is able to share the terrible secret that they have committed a despicable crime – safe in the knowledge that they will be afforded state-condoned anonymity: when another: who admits to the very same offence, – must do so in certain expectation that the full weight of the law will be brought to bear on them?

Kicking self-serving, antiquated, unlawful behaviour out of civilized societies isn't without precedence: there are many religious practices which have been outlawed, in spite of great wailing and gnashing of teeth from those who stand to lose influence.





*What the world most needs at this moment is a means of convincing human beings to embrace the whole of the species as their moral community. For this we need to develop an utterly non-sectarian way of talking about the full spectrum of human experience and human aspiration. We need a discourse on ethics & spirituality that is every bit as unconstrained by dogma and cultural prejudice as the discourse of science is' . . . . . Sam Harris*

### Announcing our inaugural regional conference

(Organised by Lancashire Secular Humanists, Liverpool Humanist Group & Greater Manchester Humanists)

## 'Humanism For The 21<sup>st</sup> Century'

Saturday 8th October – Sunday 9th October 2011

St Thomas Centre, Ardwick Green North, Manchester M12 6FZ

The Conference Objectives are:

- To enrich the knowledge and commitment of new and existing members.
- To develop links between local Humanist Groups – particularly those in the North West.
- To develop links with other like-minded groups in the North West.
- To help participants move forward in living their lives as Humanists.
- To enthuse participants with the message that we have something really worthwhile to offer.
- To help promote the value of Humanism to the wider Public.

### Saturday 8 October:

From 9.00 am Registration

9.30 am Opening of conference

9.45 am Keynote address by Andrew Copson, CEO of BHA followed by break-out groups and plenary discussion

1.00 pm Buffet lunch on site

2.30 pm Panel discussion on conference theme chaired by Guy Otten

Panellists: Andrew Copson, Evan Harris, BHA Vice-president Professor Ray Tallis and Professor Carole Truman

5.30 pm Close

Evening: Informal dining at various locations (facilitated get-togethers)

### Sunday 9 October:

9.30 am Why more equal societies almost always do better Kathryn Busby, The Equality Trust

11.00 am Happiness and wellbeing Speaker from Action for Happiness (tbc)

12.30 pm Conference close

**Tickets:** £42 including lunch and refreshments (£36 early bird reduction for bookings received by 18 Aug 2011)

### For further information, or to book a place, contact:

John Coss: tel: 0161-430-3463

email: [secretary@gmh.humanist.org.uk](mailto:secretary@gmh.humanist.org.uk)

For up to date information visit: [www.gmh.humanist.org.uk](http://www.gmh.humanist.org.uk)

**NWhumanists** is a new initiative seeking to build bridges between the various Humanist Groups situated in & around the North West.

The hope is that by engendering closer cooperation between such like-minded groups we will be able to share information and learn from each other; provide mutual support; establish a facilities & equipment bank and, when called for, present a louder voice on local issues which extend beyond the geographic boundaries of any one specific group.

It is envisaged that our core participants will be:

Chester Humanists  
Cumbria Humanists  
Greater Manchester Humanists  
Isle of Man Freethinkers  
Lancashire Secular Humanists  
Liverpool Humanist Group  
South Cheshire and North  
Staffordshire Humanists

Other Humanist groups such as Sheffield – Shropshire - West Yorkshire; along with local University Humanist Groups and United Kingdom Armed Forces Humanists are being kept informed of our activities and non-humanists with compatible views will also be invited to participate should they wish to, including: Philosophy-in-Pubs – Café Scientifique – Skeptics-in-Pubs and Secularists – of whatever hue.

Obviously – as with any enterprise – support is vital and we encourage as many of you as possible to participate in the [above] inaugural conference.

There is a continuing open invitation for anybody [from any Humanist Group] who wants to become involved in developing this initiative to join **LSH - LHG & GMH** on the steering committee.

Contact us in the usual way

This Conference is in Manchester because the venue was available and found it to be appropriate for purpose when used previously by **GMH** but the hope is: subject to the success of this event; the **NWhumanists** conference will become an annual fixture.

Future conferences will be in different locations across the region: Lancashire; Liverpool; Chester; Cumbria; S<sup>th</sup> Cheshire & N<sup>th</sup> Staffs and the Isle of Man.

If you are aware of appropriate venues across the region - please let us know of them. The criteria should be:

- It has a main room capable of accommodating the conference.
- Other rooms to be used for break-out or fringe meetings.
- [Ideally] Catering facilities.
- Accessibility [i.e. Physically impaired - public transport links - adequate car-parking etc].
- Not prohibitively expensive!

## Crem-encounters

I've recently had the pleasure of visiting an amazing man who is terminally ill. He is however determined to play a part in how his funeral will be conducted – and as well as spending a very enjoyable afternoon chatting about his life and family he shared with me some of his own poetry and musings on *'Life, The Universe and Everything'* – including this nugget of wisdom which he'd found and wanted to share with me – and I'd like to now share with you.

### Life's Priorities

A philosophy professor stood before his class with some items on the table in front of him. When the class began, wordlessly he picked up a very large and empty mayonnaise jar and proceeded to fill it with rocks, about 2" in diameter. He then asked the students if the jar was full? - They agreed that it was.

So the professor picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly. The pebbles, of course, rolled into the open areas between the rocks. He then asked the students again if the jar was full? They agreed it was.

The professor picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up everything else. He then asked once more if the jar was full? The students responded with a unanimous "Yes."

"Now," said the professor, "I want you to recognize that this jar represents your life.

The rocks are the important things – your family, your partner, your health, your children – things that if everything else was lost and only they remained, your life would still be full.

The pebbles are the other things that matter – like your job, your house, your car.

The sand is everything else. The small stuff."

"If you put the sand into the jar first," he continued "there is no room for the pebbles or the rocks. The same goes for your life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff, you will never have room for the things that are important to you.

Pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness. Play with your children. Take your partner out dancing. There will always be time to go to work, clean the house, give a dinner party and fix the disposal. Take care of the rocks first – the things that really matter. Set your priorities. The rest is just sand."

... But then ....

...Continued ...►

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... A Student came forward and took the jar – which all the other students and the professor agreed was full; and proceeded to pour into it a bottle of beer.

Of course the beer filled all the remaining spaces within the jar – making it truly full!

**[Moral]** – No matter how full your life is – there's always room for beer!

### Quick "Quote"

*"Religion convinced the world that there's an invisible man in the sky who watches everything you do. And there's 10 things he doesn't want you to do or else you'll go to a burning place with a lake of fire until the end of eternity. But he loves you ! .... And he needs money ! He's all powerful, but he can't handle money ! " - George Carlin*

## R.E. - Significant for Schools

The Blackburn Diocese has hit out at a Government decision not to include religious education in the English baccalaureate. [E.bac]

Fred Kershaw, acting director of education for the diocese, [most of Lancashire], said RE played a 'significant part' in all schools and the community.

The baccalaureate will be awarded to anyone who gains five C or higher GCSE passes in English, Maths, Science, a Foreign Language and either History or Geography.

Mr Kershaw said:

*"We're extremely disappointed that RE isn't being included as a subject in the E.bac. The subject plays a significant part in the community, particularly in cohesion and developing a wider view of pupils' well-being."*

Schools minister Nick Gibbs has previously denied that excluding RE from the baccalaureate indicated a lack of importance of faith lessons in schools.

Mr Kershaw believes the decision will affect faith; non-faith schools and staff within them. He said:

*"RE makes a significant contribution to education nationally. It's not just the Church of England, it involves faith schools and non-faith schools. The decision to exclude RE was taken despite a recent report from the Commons Education Select Committee, which published a critical report into the English baccalaureate that called for the subjects included to be reviewed."*

He said that a 140,000 signature petition has been sent to Downing Street calling on the government to reverse the decision over RE being excluded.

## Chaplains or Charlatans?

From a talk to Brighton & Hove Humanists by **DR ROBERT STOVOLD**  
Featured in 'the Freethinker' - March 2009  
To read the unabridged article [and I strongly recommend you do] go to  
<http://freethinker.co.uk/features/spiritual-care-on-the-nhs-chaplains-or-charlatans/>  
Better yet - for similar articles; subscribe to 'the Freethinker'  
... you won't be disappointed!

August 7, 2008 - received an email from Richard Harlow, chaplain at the Princess Royal Hospital in Haywards Heath:

*We are currently consulting on the Spirituality Strategy for the mental health Trust that includes Brighton and Hove, and would be pleased for a response from the Humanist Society*

I read through the draft strategy and was at first unsure of how to respond.

On the one hand, some definitions of spirituality were certainly broad enough to include humanists. For example, "[spirituality pertains to] the essence of human beings as unique individuals... the power, energy and hopefulness in a person".

On the other hand, to take part in such consultations can be futile and even counter-productive. Humanist views will rarely prevail against the religious majority, which, having got its own way can exploit your presence by claiming to be inclusive and saying, "Well, we did consult you!"

But as I carried on reading, I became more and more disturbed.

The draft mentioned Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Paganism, Jehovah's Witness, and even Scientology . . . But not, of course, atheism, agnosticism or humanism.

Right through the document ran the self-serving and unsubstantiated assumption that all religions deserve respect.

I began my response by challenging that.

Humanists respect the rights of others to believe what they will, but draw a firm distinction between respecting a person's right to hold a belief, and respecting the belief itself.

After a little research, I found a job description for an NHS hospital chaplain; containing the following:

10. Most Challenging / Difficult Parts Of The Job –  
*To distinguish in the experiences people share between what is genuinely spiritual and what is delusional or hallucinatory.*

A patient who feels he's been "saved" by accepting Jesus as his personal saviour is, if we are being honest, deluded from an atheist's or a Muslim's perspective, and sane from a Christian one.

How does the Trust intend to resolve such serious contradictions – or does it intend to ignore them in the name of well-meaning but muddle-headed multi-cultural political correctness?

If the Trust takes the reasonable view that false beliefs should not be propagated or legitimised by state-funded chaplains, it has two options:

- 5 • Fund no chaplains at all  
• Identify the "one true faith" (*good luck!*), and fund only its associated chaplains

How might the Trust achieve the second of these objectives? . . . Well, I was relieved to hear that, according to the Strategy, "*We will support research in the area of spirituality, with the same rigour as in other disciplines*".

Drugs that fail to pass clinical trials are rejected by the NHS as a waste of money; if the Trust is being honest and consistent, it ought to apply the same rule to hospital chaplains.

When scientists like Richard Dawkins rip into religion or "alternative" medicine, they are often seen as being too critical.

But once you understand how critical scientific enquiry is, you'll appreciate that Dawkins isn't being some kind of killjoy – he's only being consistent. He's only asking for a level playing field – spiritual remedies should be subject to the same standard of testing as conventional treatments.

Does the NHS seriously intend to test the efficacy of chaplains "with the same rigour" as a pharmaceutical drug? . . . Just imagine the trials!

Some chaplains dispense advice that genuinely reflects what their religion actually teaches: others would give a kind of "dummy" religious advice ... as a placebo! [- Of course, such rigorous trials will never be carried out – and the Trust should not try to pretend otherwise.]

A large-scale scientific study into the effects of intercessory prayer in patients of heart bypass surgery found that prayer made no difference when patients didn't know they were being prayed for, [but] may have hampered a person's recovery if they did! Perhaps people who knew they were being prayed for dwelt on the gravity of their condition more, and made things worse rather than better.

Has it occurred to the Trust that, religious or not, patients in hospital may regard chaplains in much the same way as a sick animal regards vultures – as unwelcome harbingers of death? [A West Sussex audit of 2005 revealed only a minority of people said they'd like to talk to a chaplain or faith leader].

I'm not saying that religion is all bad. It can provide a genuine sense of community and support for some; I wouldn't be surprised to find that visits from religious colleagues or leaders could speed a person's recovery. But by the same logic, people who are passionate stamp collectors would likely benefit from visits by fellow enthusiasts.

I'm all for trying to make everyone, religious or not, as comfortable as possible in hospitals.

But the idea that religious communities should be privileged above secular ones must be challenged. Again it comes down to consistency – to a rejection of double standards. Let's not have one rule for them, and one rule for us.



## Eat Your Sins

From NSS website [www.secularism.org.uk](http://www.secularism.org.uk)

Apropos 'RE Significant for Schools' - Page 4 - [Ed]

The NSS has been receiving emails recently from parents telling of extreme evangelical groups being invited into their children's schools.

We are told that these are isolated incidents, but still reports keep coming.

The latest is on the website of **Parentdish** that tells of a Baptist Church coming into schools and telling children to write down on a piece of paper that they have repented their sins – and then eat it.

Keith Porteous Wood, Executive Director of the National Secular Society, said:

*"Religious Education is increasingly being used as a tool for evangelism.*

*Some of the groups that are invited into schools from churches and religious organisations bent on proselytising are quite extreme. And yet the law permits this.*

*We think that if outside religious organisations are to be invited into schools and given a free hand to inflict their sometimes questionable beliefs on children, parents should be informed in advance so they can make a decision about whether they want their child to participate."*

*"If we are going to teach creation science as an alternative to evolution, then we should also teach the stork theory as an alternative to biological reproduction"*  
... Judith Hayes

## Next Meeting

The time / date / place of our next **LSH** meeting is:

**7.30pm – Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> August 2011**

Great Eccleston Village Centre, 59 High Street, The Square, Great Eccleston, Nr Preston. **PR3 0YB**

Our newly appointed Events Secretary [David] is already making great progress in arranging future events and is soon to publish a full programme of activities planned for the year ahead on our website [www.lancshumanism.org.uk](http://www.lancshumanism.org.uk)

It's anticipated we'll have a guest speaker every alternate month and a group-generated event every other month.

For August we will be showing a film - then opening up the meeting for discussion - ostensibly about the film just seen but *[if every other Humanist meeting I've ever attended is anything to go by]* I'd be very surprised if the conversation limited itself to that.

So - if you like to participate in lively conversation - hear exchanges of different views - and consider new perspectives on a wide range of subjects ... Oh - and participate in what must be the best-chance-of-winning Raffle in the whole of Lancashire ... you know where to come.

I look forward to seeing you there

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*"I told my children never to touch the fruit bowl. They were naughty and touched it though; so I threw them out in the middle of winter and cursed them to suffer horribly for the rest of their lives – and for all subsequent generations to suffer also. I forgave them by sending my newest child to them to be tortured and murdered.  
Am I a bit sick?" ... Alan Harvey*

## Breaking News!

In 2010 - for the first time in history - the number of humanist weddings has outstripped Roman Catholic marriage ceremonies.

There were 2092 humanist marriages in Scotland compared to 1776 Roman Catholic weddings.

The Humanist Society of Scotland predict that the numbers of such non-religious marriages will surpass Church of Scotland weddings by 2015!

## What Our Neighbours Friends Are Up To

### Cumbria Humanists

e-mail - [oldcodger2@btinternet.com](mailto: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](http://www.iomfreethinkers.co.uk)

12.30 Sunday 13 August - **Freethinkers Birthday Meal !**

12.00 Thurs 18 Aug. - '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 10 Aug: Friends Meeting House, Mount St, M2 5NS  
**Ethical Jury**

### South Cheshire And North Staffs Humanists

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

7pm Thus 11th Aug: 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](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/lytham)

7.30pm Mon 1st Aug: 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' \**