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Lynda Battarbee (pictured) was the guest speaker at LSH's November meeting.

As previewed in last month's Newsletter; Stepping Stones Nigeria [SSN] is a secular charity working closely with their partners in the Nigerian delta region seeking, among other things, to eradicate the barbarous practice of abandoning, abusing, torturing and killing children accused of being witches.

SSN is committed to upholding the rights of children and ensuring that they have hope for a brighter future. The key issues their work focuses on are Child Rights – Education & Literacy – Child Witches - and Trafficking of Children:

After outlining various aspects of their work Linda went on to describe harrowing examples of the suffering innocent children have been subjected to – no only at the hands of the local community but from their own parents and close family.

As one might have guessed the problem, and therefore potential solutions, are far more complex than might at first be assumed. A combination of wretched poverty and western religious teachings fused with traditional tribal beliefs – and a large dollop of cynical opportunism and religious profiteering - has resulted in a toxic mix whereby cures are 'sold'; so called 'miracle babies' can be produced for wealthier childless couples, and children & babies can be randomly condemned to abject misery and death by the simple act of being labelled 'Child Witches'.

Other factors such as 'Globalisation' as well as unfettered corporate greed resulting in pollution, destruction of crops and eradication of fish stocks, all have their part to play too! Soon everybody present began to comprehend the enormous complexity of the problem.

It's not just a matter of education or even the right kind of education [although that must help] but ultimately, the long-term solutions lie in the hands of the people of this region themselves . . . It can only be achieved by identifying, nurturing and supporting local community organisations to help the many children who need them . . . Also, by making the world aware of the issues that these children face on a daily basis: thereby pressurising the Nigerian governments to fulfil their responsibilities to them. SSN do all they can to ensure their partner organisations are run by inspirational Nigerians whose work goes a long way to dispel the negative stereotypes that are often held by people from outside of Nigeria. They share a commitment to upholding the highest standards in accountability, transparency and effective service delivery. Above all, they work tirelessly to bring positive change to the lives of some of the most needy children on the planet.

The exit collection held at the end of the evening raised a little over £76 in voluntary donations to support the work done by SSN – Well done LSH

Watch out for SSN's forthcoming 'Blog Project' – something you will be able to participate in yourself – and check out their website by following the link from the LSH web page.

Also - the two books referred to by Lynda have now been added to our ever-growing LSH [virtual] library.



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BHA GRAM Great Success

Sara Passmore & team are to be congratulated for the Group Representatives Annual Meeting on November 26. We had: Philip Veasey's 'How To Run An Ethical Jury' - Oxford Humanists 'Making A Stand' - Websites Round-up & Resolution Revolution - a Website Workshop - An update on the BHA's 'Working Better Together' initiative and an inspirational talk from Paul Blanchard 'Practical PR tips' ... **'and'** you meet lots of very committed Humanists!



Season's Greetings To All Our Readers



Back To Skool for LSH Chairman

As a result of our recent contacts with Lancaster's Skeptics-in-Pubs **LSH** were invited to participate in an R.E. Question Time event at Carnforth High School on Monday 7th November – 1.30 to 3.30.

Sat between a Hindu lady and two Muslim men - I also shared the panel with an Anglican Bishop (*who, as you know, can only be a man*), a Sikh Lady, a Jewish lady and two Buddhists [*one of each*].

The Panel was chaired by Chris Edmondson: head of RE at Carnforth School.

Our interrogators were the whole of year 10 R.E. group ... around sixty of 'em!

Each panel member was asked to speak for about five minutes outlining the precepts of the particular body they were representing – then it was questions from the floor.

A good indicator of just how engrossing the event was is revealed by the fact that – at the final bell – there were many more questioners with hands raised ... and we hadn't even looked at the written ones submitted by students ahead of the debate - as a 'fall back' plan in case questions from the floor dried up.

It was a well-mannered respectful affair with students asking pertinent; incisive, sometimes challenging questions and everybody involved [panellists; teachers and audience alike] enjoyed the afternoon – as well as gaining valuable insights into the views and beliefs held by such a wide spectrum of people.

On behalf of **LSH** I presented the school with a copy of Richard Dawkins' new book 'The Magic of Reality' – as well as leaving a number of pamphlets on Humanism for further enquiry.

The book was enthusiastically received and preliminary enquiries were made about my willingness to return for more of a 'one-on-one' with the class ... sometime in the future.

I must say I thoroughly enjoy this particular year group [yrs 10 & 11] they're keen to participate; well informed and able to articulate their questions clearly ... and what's more – they refuse to be fobbed off with anything less than a full answer.

Carnforth High School is a delightful place to go and has a very friendly atmosphere about it.

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From
The
Committee
Room

Next **LSH** Committee Meeting 09.30am Sat 7th Jan. 2012
Meeting Room – Great Eccleston Village Centre
All 'paid-up' **LSH** members welcome

Please submit any items for the agenda [in the usual way]
by Saturday 31st December allowing time for those matters to be given fair consideration before the meeting.

Quick Quote

"Looking back on my development from devout Catholic girl to adamant atheist, I think that it was its bottom-line-dogmatism that drove me away from the church, and indeed, from the very possibility of religious faith. "Faith" presents a paradox: if a doctrine can be defended on rational grounds, then it needn't be taken on faith. But if it *cannot* be defended on rational grounds, why do you believe it?"

Louise M. Antony from
'For The Love
of Reason'



Skeptics In Pubs [Lancaster]

8pm Wed. 7th Dec. - The Park Hotel,
1 St.Oswald St, Lancaster LA1 3AS

Speaker - **Simon Perry** (pictured)

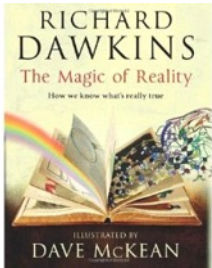
Simon is an active campaigner against nonsense. Using the ASA, Trading Standards, other regulatory bodies & [even] help from MPs, he's helped shut down dodgy allergy test services - prevented traditional Chinese medicine salesmen from claiming to cure cancer and exposed psychic scams.

His largest involvement in a campaign: coined the "**Quacklash**" by Jack of Kent; involved almost 600 separate letters being sent to trading standards to report claims to treat childhood diseases with a back rub ... Sixty of the letters gained 500 signatories.

Further complaints were issued with the General Chiropractic Council.

Simon will be explaining the techniques he's used to fight 'Woo': what works and what doesn't; and tell stories about some of the crazy nonsense he's encountered along the way.

Simon runs Leicester Skeptics in the Pub, blogs at <http://adventuresinnonsense.blogspot.com> and writes a skeptical column in the Leicester Mercury.



Recent addition to the LSH 3 library – Richard Dawkins beautifully written; exquisitely illustrated book – **‘The Magic of Reality’.**

... from the blurb ...

What are things made of? – What is the sun? – Why is there night & day, winter & summer? – Why do bad things happen? – Are we alone?

Throughout history people all over the world have invented stories to answer profound questions such as these. Have you heard the tale of how the sun hatched out of an emu’s egg? Or what about the great catfish that carries the world on its back? Has anyone ever told you that earthquakes are caused by a sneezing giant?

These fantastical myths are fun – but what is the real answer to such questions?

The Magic of Reality, with its explanations of space, time, evolution and more, will inspire and amaze readers of all ages – young adults, adults, children, octogenarians.

Teaming up with renowned illustrator Dave McKean, Richard Dawkins answers all these questions and many more. In stunning words and pictures this book presents the real story of the world around us, taking us on an enthralling journey through scientific reality, and showing that it has an awe-inspiring beauty and thrilling magic which far exceeds those of the ancient myths.

We encounter rainbows, our genetic ancestors, tsunamis, shooting stars, plants, and an intriguing cast of characters in this extraordinary scientific voyage of discovery.

Richard Dawkins & Dave McKean have created a dazzling celebration of our planet that will entertain and inform for years to come.

For a flavour of the book [extract from Chapter 4 - ‘What are things made of?’] go to page 5.

Give ‘Operation Christmas Child’ the Boot

Once again this month children across the country will be bringing home shoe-boxes to fill with toys & presents for children in need in African, Eastern European & Arabic countries as part of their schools contribution to the charity ‘Operation Christmas Child’.

What they may not have been told is these contributions will be funding a massive conversion campaign by evangelical Christians.

On their website ‘Samaritan’s Purse’ say of Operation Christmas Child that:

“Wherever it is culturally appropriate and in partnership with our local partners, we make a booklet with Bible stories available to children in their own language.”

Continued next column ... ►

O.C.C. ... Continued

... But; an email to the BHA from a representative of ‘OCC’, casts doubt on this claim and raises fears that the charity is misleading schools, parents and children, who will in actual fact find themselves funding religious proselytising around the world.

This email made it clear that: far from ‘*wherever it is culturally appropriate ...*’; evangelical literature is distributed ‘wherever possible’:

“We are blessed to be able to report that over 95% of the shoe-box gifts which we distribute are given out with literature in the child’s native language. Unfortunately, in a small number of countries we are unable to distribute literature along with the boxes for the safety of those who distribute the gifts. These men and women live and work in the countries where we distribute the boxes and in places closed to the Gospel, this can involve taking on great risks to their personal safety in order to be involved. We hope you can understand the reasoning behind why a small percentage must be given out without literature, but even in these cases, we trust the Lord can still work through our overseas partners to bring children and families to Himself.”

Samaritan’s Purse has been the subject of much controversy in the past; including branding Islam “...a very evil and wicked religion” and boasting it is “...waging a holy war against “the idol” of Islam’s false god and ‘a guy called Satan’ who wants to destroy us as a Christian army” . . . Also claiming Hindu’s are “bound by Satan’s power”.

If your child’s school; or your workplace, sets itself up as a collection point for this toxic organisation please make them aware of precisely the kind of people they are supporting.

To quote Dr Giles Fraser, vicar of Putney:

“...when you mix humanitarian work in a war-torn country with evangelisation you create a problem. You have desperate people and you have someone who has food in one hand and a Bible in another.”

Although we humanists vehemently object to covert evangelising such as this, we certainly do not object to giving. We simply suggest everybody chooses to give to those more inclusive and secular charities that offer a direct alternative to the Samaritan’s Purse shoe-box appeal.

For some alternative ideas – go to page 5

Quick Quote

“George Bush says he speaks to god every day, and Christians love him for it. If George Bush said he spoke to god through his hair dryer, they would think he was mad. I fail to see how the addition of a hair dryer makes it any more absurd.”

–Sam Harris

Crem-encounters

Every Humanist celebrant gets 'Thank-You' messages. They're always appreciated - some make you smile:

"Thank you very much for - I'm not sure how to describe what you did - but it was fantastic! Everyone said how much they appreciated not just the words you spoke but the warmth with which they were delivered . . . I thought about you afterwards and the nature of the job (is that the right word?) you do. You're like a fourth emergency service. You sweep in at times of great distress, provide comfort and then with a firm shake of the hand and expression of thanks fly off to presumably help someone else. I don't know how you do it, but don't stop!"



Patronising Prelate!

Don't Like Women!

(now)

Don't Like Gays!

Already fiercely opposed to female equality [[LSH Newsletter Oct 2011](#)] now the Bishop of Burnley; Rt Rev John Goddard won't tolerate Gay marriages either!

In the wake of the government announcing plans to allow same-sex couples to have civil ceremonies in religious settings Burnley's Barmy Bishop says the CoFE won't be conducting them because *'...it is not part of the Church of England's teaching pattern'*.

"We recognise gay people may wish to make a commitment to each other with a civil ceremony. However, the Church of England is clear on this and it will not be conducting any civil ceremonies ... This is not about banning gay people from church. It is simply contrary to the decision made by the Anglican community."

That's odd! - 'Now' it appears decisions of the Anglican Community are 'sacrosanct'. . . Yet their earlier decision to allow women bishops seems to have been merely 'optional'.

He continues - in his own brand of Bishop Babble:

"... We are not judging couples but ... We will not be encouraging the confusion between the marriage ceremony, for a man and a woman, and a civil service, which is a marriage-like service for same sex couples."

The ban on ceremonies in religious surroundings will be lifted on December 5; allowing same-sex civil partnership to be conducted in churches, as the religious part of the ceremony will be kept separate from the civil registration aspect.

In another example of Churches being allowed to duck & dive when it comes to obeying the law - they won't be obliged to host same-sex ceremonies.

It's thought around 1,500 such ceremonies a year could take place once the ban is lifted.

A spokesman for the European Forum of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual Christians, said:

"... people should be able to choose where they get married or have a civil ceremony. If they're religious they should be able to have their service recognised ... in a religious setting."



[LSH Chairman lays our wreath](#)

It was an honour to participate in Preston's Service of Remembrance [Sunday 13th November]

Led by the clergy; the public turned out in large numbers to demonstrate their support of the armed forces – veterans - dignitaries and many 'others' – attending to lay wreaths commemorating the enormous sacrifices made by past and present generations.

Leaving aside for a moment the incontestable truth that those killed and injured have always been drawn from many backgrounds and religious beliefs, Lancashire Secular Humanists were present at the request of UKAFHA [UK Armed Forces Humanist Association] specifically to also acknowledge the sacrifices made by those who are not religious.

How disappointing therefore to [once again] find ourselves participating in a ceremony purporting to represent a *"united nation"*: a ceremony which described itself as comprising of *"...the people of Preston and the surrounding area"*; and yet no other voice but the Christian voice was deemed worthy of being heard.

An unapologetically Christian introduction was followed by a Christian hymn, a Christian religious reading, Christian Intercessions [outrageously linking *'mental distress'* with the non-religious], another Christian prayer, yet another Christian prayer, the Lord's prayer, another Christian hymn and Christian Act of Commitment before we got to the real reason we were 'all' there – to acknowledge, respect and honour the fallen . . . The ceremony ended with a Christian prayer and a Christian blessing.

How sad that no others were acknowledged or represented; let alone invited to participate.

How unfair that the sacrifices of many should be commandeered by one.

How ignoble that so many should be marginalised in such a deliberate manner.

Of course Christianity has been the dominant religion in this country for many generations – and that rich heritage is certain to be accommodated in these ceremonies: but no such glaring distinctions were made in hours of great need.

Nobody told people of other faiths and none that they would not be permitted [expected] to lay down their lives too.

Why then are they ignored and shunned now?

New Kids On The Blog

On 6th December [LSH](#) will be running a workshop for volunteer 'bloggers'. If you'd like to have your say through our blog, but are a little bit cautious - don't let that stop you. It's no more difficult than email. And we'll give you some training. Why not join our happy band of bloggers? Email deebeewebdesign@gmail.com

LSH's [virtual] Library

Most of you will already know about our library - but here's a quick reminder about how it works.

LSH members tell us about the books they have which they think would interest fellow humanists - and are happy to lend out.

LSH doesn't hold all the titles in our library - they're retained by the owners. We act as a contact point.

You browse the library on our website [*also published quarterly & distributed with the Newsletter for those not on-line*]

If you see a book you'd like to borrow you let us know - we contact the owner and ask them to bring it to the next meeting where you can collect it.

When you're finished with it you return it in the same manner. Our 'Library' keeps track of them.

Please let us know if you have any titles you're happy to add to the **LSH** 'library'.

'The Magic Of Reality'

- from Ch.4 - 'What Are Things Made Of?'

The creatures in the picture below are dust mites - (*picture stunningly detailed images here*) - distantly related to spiders but too small to see except as tiny specks. There are thousands of them in every home, crawling through every carpet and every bed, quite probably including yours.

If primitive people had known about them, you can imagine what myths and legends they might have invented to explain them? But before the invention of microscopes, their existence was not even dreamed of - and so there are no myths about them. And, small as it is, even a dust mite contains more than a hundred trillion atoms.

Dust mites are too small for us to see, but the cells of which they are made are smaller still. The bacteria that live inside them - and us - in vast numbers are smaller even than that.

And atoms are far smaller even than bacteria. The whole world is made of incredibly tiny things, much too small to be visible to the naked eye - and yet none of the myths or so-called holy books that some people, even now, think were given to us by an all-knowing god, mentions them at all! In fact, when you look at those myths and stories, you can see that they don't contain any of the knowledge that science has patiently worked out. They don't tell us how big or how old the universe is; they don't tell us how to treat cancer; they don't explain gravity or the internal combustion engine; they don't tell us about germs, or nuclear fusion, or electricity, or anaesthetics. In fact, unsurprisingly, the stories in the holy books don't contain any more information about the world than was known to the primitive peoples who first started telling them! If these 'holy books' really were written, or dictated, or inspired, by all-knowing gods, don't you think it's odd that those gods said nothing about any of these important and useful things?

Giving 'Without' Strings

Healthy alternatives to 'Operation Christmas Child'

Charities working abroad usually prefer donations of money which they can spend locally, but some of these below do have the attraction of collecting things (particularly appealing to children and something the school may insist on) . . . Others have very tangible ends, and some of them would make good gifts from one humanist to another.

Plan UK <http://gifts4life.org> offer a range of 'gifts for life' to assist some of the world's poorest children.

Via **Oxfam**, you buy someone a flock of chickens or a camel, or textbooks or dinners for a third world school. For these and many other life-changing or life-saving gifts, see www.oxfamunwrapped.com

Good Gifts is a means of getting suitable gifts to people who really need them, endorsed by a range of worthwhile charities. Buy a goat for Rwanda or a bicycle for a midwife in Cambodia or turn weapons of war into farm implements www.goodgifts.org

The **environmentally conscious** can adopt an 'endangered species animal' via www.wwf.org ... or a whale or dolphin via www.wdcs.org

At www.worldlandtrust.org you can protect an acre of rainforest [also at www.rainforestfoundationuk.org]

Closer to home, you can sponsor a tree through www.woodland-trust.org.uk. All these send certificates to mark the gift.

There's the annual **Blue Peter appeal**, of course, which is always carefully chosen so that virtually any family can contribute something. Keep an eye on www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/bluepeter

Other ideas

If you work at/attend a school, you could **link your school** with one in South Africa, Ghana, Uganda or Malawi! Visit www.lcd.org.uk/uk/lsp/

Go to the **Make Poverty History** website www.makepovertyhistory.org for suggestions of how to continue the campaign to end world poverty.

Gift boxes

If gift boxes are still preferred we used to have the shoe-box scheme run by **21st Century Child** www.21stcenturychild.org/shoebox_appeal.html.

However - in 2007, 21CC decided to "take a break" and advise donors look to **Link Romania** www.linkromania.co.uk/shoebox-appeal because "they don't place any literature in the boxes and promise not to discriminate in who the boxes are given to".

The **Aquabox** scheme www.aquabox.org is popular amongst humanist groups and many schools. Welfare items from a recommended list are collected to fill a water treatment box, which costs £50.00. This then becomes a useful kit that can be sent quickly to disaster areas ... Plus - each box is numbered and linked to the donor, so that you can find out where your box went.

There! ... Loads to choose from - all ethical - and not one of 'em cynically preying on desperate vulnerable people just to further their own ends.

Next Meeting

With what's now become something of a tradition of our own; **LSH** is observing the seasonal solstice celebrations with a light-hearted look at those very familiar practices and rituals which have grown up in various cultures around the world and now enjoy the status of having become institutions.

After which we'll be enjoying a buffet meal washed down with whatever tippie tickles your fancy.

Unusually for LSH this will be a ticket-only event.

Tickets [to cover the buffet & room hire] are **£8.50p**
The usual tea & coffee etc will be available ... but bring your own wine - beer - or - juice if you wish.

To book your place contact **LSH** in the normal way
as soon as possible - by Friday 16th Dec. [latest]

So - 7.30: Wednesday 21st December 2011
Great Eccleston Village Centre

In keeping with the obligatory kitsch and nonsense we set the scene in our own 'pantomimesque' way
... [with sincere apologies in advance]



And so arrives that season of harmless frippery and nonsense

A time for stories of gold, mirth and someone called Frank (incensed?)

Perhaps the Fat-Fairy of Festive Facts & Fiction will call

Perchance there'll be fun and laughter; gifts and prizes for all

I bet we'll have 'Crackers' filled with all the usual treats

Plus small nuggets of knowledge to take home and keep

There'll be no Raffle this month – but much better by far

There's a bran-tub to rummage in – I heard there's a car!

And when the Fat-Fairy is exhausted and weary
We'll bring on the food and the wine and get cheery

Then round off the evening sharing music and laughter

And proclamations that 'next year' couldn't get any dafter

So if you want to join in with the frolics and fun
If you're a kid: a grandparent, a dad or a mum

*Be sure to let us here at **LSH** know*

You can order your ticket and stump up your dough

Cos this month it won't be 'all-comers' I fear.
(Well we can't let just strangers guzzle free beer)

Come on! Help us round off the year with a smile

We promise laughter and knowledge - but definitely 'not' style!

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Religion & Youth Groups May Not Mix!

DARWEN councillor Roy Davies has called for faith to be taken out of youth groups such as Scouts and Guides.

Not [as we might hope] because he's worried about excluding children from non-religious families: more because he's worried that children of Muslim families specifically aren't included.

So: although the penny hasn't quite dropped yet; at least he's beginning to think the unthinkable - that, contrary to the fervent claims of the faithful, - 'Christian' values aren't necessarily values cherished by all and, far from being benign, they really do prevent the participation of many.

Keep pondering Roy – you'll get there in the end.

What Our Neighbours Friends Are Up To

Cumbria Humanists e-mail - oldcodger2@btinternet.com
Sadly Cumbria Humanists is currently dormant enquiries can be directed to George Weston at the above e-mail address.

Isle of Man Freethinkers www.iomfreethinkers.co.uk

1pm Sun 11 Dec: WINTER CELEBRATION: All members invited
Food & drinks provided!. Queens Prom, Douglas

12noon Thurs 15 Dec: Lunch - Alessandro's, Castle St, Douglas

Liverpool Humanists <http://livehum.org>

No details posted - for update see website

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

7pm Wed 14 Dec: Friends Meeting House, Mount St, M2 5NS
Social evening and in-house debate/panel discussion
– topic to be decided

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

7.30 Mon 5th Dec: Unitarian Meeting Ho. A34 [opp. Lidl (parking)]
& Travelodge, Newcastle-under-Lyme, ST5 1QS
On Being Human - through prose, poetry, art and music

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

7 Thus 8 Dec: **Swarthmore**, 3-7 Woodhouse Sq, Leeds, LS3 1AD
Gordon Steff: *That's it! - all I know! ... Intriguing isn't it?*

Lytham St Annes & Blackpool Amnesty 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' **