

Happy New Year

What has 2012 in store for us?

The recent call to arms over the unsettling growth of sectarian education in Lancashire is something we should all support and seek to be engaged with.

As well as developing even closer relations with all our neighbouring humanists and building on work already done to establish stronger links with other like-minded groups; we should [also] not be afraid of supporting campaigns by some non-humanist organisations: where there are shared values and objectives - We simply need to be confident about establishing well-defined demarcation lines and be clear about our intolerance to proselytising.

Many more people are discovering Humanism and are clearly pleased to identify with our principle of 'scruples without scriptures'.

One very clear indication of this trend is the growing number of people accessing humanist ceremonies to mark significant events in their lives.

Giving voice to the huge numbers of non-religious people in Lancashire continues to be an especially important role for us and the new 'Partnership' initiative between the BHA and ourselves should provide the means for us to do that even more proficiently.

The **LSH** 'Speakers Programme' has never looked better with a wide range of experts lined up to discuss

& debate an impressively diverse array of issues throughout the year: added to which the 2012 NW Regional Conference is to be here in Lancashire; attracting Humanists from even further afield.

Continued vigilance highlighting and opposing iniquitous privilege and disproportionate influence afforded to religion by the state must be a constant engagement ... even more so as the economic situation looks set to worsen and the 'Big Society' seems hell bent on gifting important public services; which need to be accessible by all; to narrow self-interest religious groups - in spite of recent history where such groups have clearly been partial about who should or should not be assisted, based entirely on the doctrines of this or that particular faith-stance.

So - bring on 2012!

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Life without a Hitch

December saw the sad loss of Christopher Hitchens - a staunch ally of Secular Humanist principles and formidable debater. In our own small tribute all the 'Quick Quotes' in this month's edition will be exclusively his.

Quick 'Hitch' Quotes

"Faith is the surrender of the mind; it's the surrender of reason, it's the surrender of the only thing that makes us different from other mammals. It's our need to believe, and to surrender our skepticism and our reason, our yearning to discard that and put all our trust or faith in someone or something, that is the sinister thing to me . . . Of all the supposed virtues, faith must be the most overrated."

Last Month's LSH meeting saw a rare visit from the Fat Fairy of Festive Facts & Fiction who shared with knowledge such as why Rudolf 'Donner' should be 'Donna' when it's done). We heard the Glastonbury Thorn and why spelt Xmas.

Everybody got a prize and the plus there was seasonal music - ensure no atheist's delicate little ears might be offended).

If the difficulty experienced in getting people to leave as the evening drew to a close is anything to go by I think we can safely say everybody there appears to have had a good time.



us valuable nuggets of is a girl-reindeer and What Wassailing is (& about Black Peter and Christmas is sometimes ...And so much more! food was excellent - (carefully selected to

Over 3,000 'honour attacks' in 2010

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The Iranian & Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO) revealed there were 2,823 so-called 'honour attacks' reported in Britain last year. However, these numbers are likely to be just a fraction of the true figure since a great deal of 'honour' violence – usually punishments that can be as extreme as murder carried out against Muslim women – is never reported.

IKWRO said: "This is the first time that a national estimate has been provided in relation to reporting of honour-based violence.

The number of incidents is significant, particularly when we consider the high levels of abuse that victims suffer before they seek help."

Using figures obtained under FOI requests the following details emerged:

Metropolitan Police 495 incidents reported.

West Midlands 378 incidents.

West Yorkshire 350.

Lancashire 227.

Greater Manchester 189.

Cleveland 153

Suffolk 118.

Bedfordshire 117.

In some cases the number of reported incidents had risen by 47% compared to the previous year: however, the Northumbrian force recorded a 305% increase between 2009 and 2010.

IKWRO director Diana Nammi told the BBC:

"The perpetrators will be even considered as a hero within the community because he is the one defending the family and community's honour and reputation.

The problem is that there is no systematic training for police and other government forces in the UK, such as social services, teachers and midwives."

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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] as soon as possible thereby allowing time for those matters to be given fair consideration before the meeting.

Quick 'Hitch' Quotes

"[Mother Teresa] was not a friend of the poor. She was a friend of poverty. She said that suffering was a gift from God. She spent her life opposing the only known cure for poverty, which is the empowerment of women and the emancipation of them from a livestock version of compulsory reproduction."

.....

"The Bible may, indeed does, contain a warrant for trafficking in humans, for ethnic cleansing, for slavery, for bride-price, and for indiscriminate massacre, but we are not bound by any of it because it was put together by crude, uncultured human mammals."

Timely Reminder

As well as having Christopher Hitchens' books '**God Is Not Great**' - '**The Missionary Position**' - '**The Portable Atheist**' & '**The Rights of Man**' in our **LSH** Library; we also have the DVD of the 2010 Munk debate [**Blair v Hitchens**] as well as a CD-ROM (thanks to David Brindley) of the Intelligence Squared event [Sun 13th November 2011]

'The Loves And Hates Of The Hitch'

This was originally billed as a discussion between Christopher Hitchens & Stephen Fry but; due to Hitch's deteriorating health, it was a conversation about him between Stephen Fry and friends ... [Martin Amis; Christopher Buckley; James Fenton; Lewis Lapham; Sean Penn & Salman Rushdie].

Prophetically [and unavoidably I suppose] it quickly moved from its presumed intention of being some sort of applause in-absentia and becomes more a funereal-like eulogy: a casualty of the inevitable emotion of the evening which now makes the event all the more watchable.

Although in truth I found the Blair / Hitchens debate a little disappointing - I thought Hitchens' curious respect for Blair stayed his hand somewhat - I do recommend the Intelligence Squared event however.

Quick 'Hitch' Quotes

"[George W. Bush] is lucky to be governor of Texas. He is unusually incurious, abnormally unintelligent, amazingly inarticulate, fantastically uncultured, extraordinarily uneducated - and apparently quite proud of all these things."

"Religion is man-made. Even the men who made it cannot agree on what their prophets or redeemers or gurus actually said or did."

*From The **LSH** Blog*

Many schools in Lancashire require parents to pass a test of religion in order for their children to access state funded education.

A classic example is Archbishop Temple in Preston which requires parents to attend the right type of church up to 90 times in the previous two years in order that their children can attend the school which is state funded but controlled by a branch Christian church - Very few places are available for children of other religions.

The school itself is very good and parents who are concerned about their children's education can, of course, always pretend to believe to gain a place.

They would be well motivated to do so since other alternatives in the area get very much inferior results. This creates a self-perpetuating situation since parents who are that concerned will tend to try hard to ensure that their children go to Archbishop . . . But what about the children of other religions or of atheists whose moral position does not let them pretend to be religious?

This unfairness is recognised by both secular and religious organisations. Indeed the Accord Coalition is run by rabbis, vicars and ministers as well as secularists and campaigns against discrimination by faith schools.

Faith schools are even allowed to discriminate against teachers on grounds of religious belief or the lack of it.

One wonders how children deprived of a good education because of religion will feel about the churches in future years. The problem is particularly acute in Lancashire because of the large number of such schools. Surely it's time we started an active local campaign to bring it to an end.

It's not about religion vs. atheists, many of the victims will be non-Christians of various faiths. It's about fairness and the rights of children.

*To comment on this or any other 'blog' visit the **LSH** website; click on News then [in the drop-down menu] Blog.*

The Next Meeting of Lancaster Skeptics in the Pub

8pm - Wed 4th January 2012
The Park Hotel; 1 St Oswald St,
Lancaster. LA1 3AS

'Weird Science' - An Introduction to Anomalistic Psychology.

Professor Chris French

Ever since records began, in every known society, a substantial proportion of the population has reported unusual experiences many of which we would today label as "paranormal".

Opinion polls show that the majority of the general public accepts that paranormal phenomena do occur. Such widespread experience of and belief in the paranormal can only mean one of two things. Either the paranormal is real, in which case this should be accepted by the wider scientific community which currently rejects such claims; or else belief in and experience of ostensibly paranormal phenomena can be fully explained in terms of psychological factors.

This presentation will provide an introduction to the sub-discipline of *anomalistic psychology*, which may be defined as the study of extraordinary phenomena of behaviour and experience, in an attempt to provide non-paranormal explanations in terms of known psychological and physical factors.

This approach will be illustrated with examples relating to a range of ostensibly paranormal phenomena.

Professor Chris French is the Head of the Anomalistic Psychology Research Unit in the Psychology Department at Goldsmiths College, University of London (www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/apru). He's a Fellow of the British Psychological Society and of the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry, as well as being a Distinguished Supporter of the British Humanist Association and member of the Scientific Advisory Board of the British False Memory Society.

He's published over 100 articles and chapters covering a wide range of topics within psychology. His main current area of research is the psychology of paranormal beliefs and anomalous experiences. He frequently appears on radio and television casting a sceptical eye over paranormal claims. He writes for *The Skeptic* and for the *Guardian's* online science pages.

Follow him on Twitter: @chriscfrench



Crem-encounters

It's not uncommon for Humanist celebrants to decline invitations to conduct funeral ceremonies.

This most commonly occurs when funeral directors who are perhaps less familiar with our ceremonies haven't fully explained the non-religious aspect of them to bereaved families.

Less frequently; only during the family visit, does it become apparent that, for one reason or another, the family want some hymn or prayer.

Then the celebrant: not wanting to imposed on them a ceremony they do not want – and seeking to preserve his/her own integrity – and the integrity of humanist ceremonies – withdraws and refers the family back to the funeral director so a more appropriate person can be found.

Some clergy however; are not that scrupulous. Some clergy are 'Coffin-Chasers' or [my preferred epithet] 'Olivers'*

One in particular – we'll call him Rev. White, from a well known Fylde Coast church – has been known to conduct five funerals in one day. I'm reliably informed he recently took 18 in just one week.

'Nothing wrong in that' you may say – 'he's clearly doing something families like.'

Perhaps you'd revise your opinion however when you discover that these are sometimes ceremonies where families have insisted there be no religious content whatsoever ... and even ones where they have specifically requested a 'humanist ceremony'.

We've all heard the joke about dog-collars looking like shirts worn back to front: well Rev. White has shirts whereby his dog-collar can be worn back to front!

In the blink of an eye the clergyman's collar disappears to be replaced by a shirt & tie.

The Bible miraculously transforms into the BHA's publication 'Funeral's Without God'.

We non-religious are often harangued by believers about issues of morality and integrity and yet [it seems] what's sauce for the goose isn't necessarily sauce for the gander.

* 'Olivers': Reference to the Lionel Bart musical - specifically the song Oliver sings to Nancy ... "I'll Do Anything".

Quick 'Hitch' Quotes

'Islam makes very large claims for itself.

In its art, there is a prejudice against representing the human form at all. The prohibition on picturing the prophet – who was only another male mammal – is apparently absolute. So is the prohibition on pork or alcohol or, in some Muslim societies, music or dancing. Very well then, let a good Muslim abstain rigorously from all these. But if he claims the right to make me abstain as well, he offers the clearest possible warning and proof of an aggressive intent."

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"Jesus is Watching You"

"'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse" . . . Well; not exactly!

A passing burglar: seeing the family leaving for church; and guessing they wouldn't be back for at least an hour, sneaked around the back, climbed through an upstairs window, crept downstairs to the lounge and proceeded to tear open presents beneath the tree to see what was worth stealing. Suddenly a voice came out of the darkness

"Jesus is watching you."

The startled burglar quickly scanned the room with his torch but no-one was there.

Returning his attention to the presents, but with more urgency now the voice came out of the darkness again *"Jesus is watching you."*

The intruder spun round and searched the room by torchlight again – more carefully this time.

In the corner he spied a parrot in a cage.

"Did you say that?" asked the burglar.

"Yes!" said the parrot.

The man relaxed and went to the cage ... *"You're a good talker aren't you – what's your name?"*

"Moses" answered the parrot.

"Moses?" snorted the burglar *"... what kind of family names a parrot Moses?"*

"The same kind of family who names a rottweiler Jesus I suppose." was the parrot's smug reply.

Lancashire Voluntary, community and faith groups invited to bid for grants funding.

From 22nd December 2011 groups will be able to apply for grants between £1,000 and £5,000 through LCC's Local Initiative Fund.

This aims to provide grants to fund activities which support three of the county council's priorities. These are family issues, skills and employability, and activities for teenagers.

Over £200,000 is available in total.

County Councillor Mark Perks, chairman of the cabinet working group for the third sector, said:

"...Earlier this year, we provided over £140,000 worth of grants funding everything from organised activities for young people, to providing training opportunities for young adults. Funding will be given to projects that benefit families, provide activities for young teenagers, or boost people's skills and employment prospects. These are areas that have been identified by the county council as being most beneficial to the community. We think that by focusing on these priorities these organizations will make a huge impact on the local community."

Funding will go towards projects that benefit the community rather than general running costs of the groups. Other criteria for the grants are listed in the information pack which can be downloaded from the website www.lancashire.gov.uk

“Aggressive Secularism”

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Toby Young helped set up one of Britain's first Free Schools.

In his new book he talks about that experience and his own steep learning curve on how to cope with objectors.

Recalling a private conversation with former education minister Lord Adonis in which he was pondering why it was so difficult to find common ground with his opponents in order to have constructive dialogue.

... ‘Adonis gave me a look of withering contempt, much like Prospero gives his naïve daughter in *The Tempest* when she expresses admiration for the rogues that have washed up on his island. “*They are not interested in ‘constructive dialogue’*” he said. “*Don’t you get it? If you extend any sort of olive branch to them they’ll see it as a sign of weakness and move in for the kill.*”

“*Believe me - they would rather stick pins in their eyes than admit they have common ground with someone like you.*”

Young comes to this realisation: ‘If you want to know how to mount an effective campaign rent ‘The War Room’ on DVD. Clinton’s campaign manager’s battle cry is “*Follow me if I advance, kill me if I retreat, avenge me if I die.*”

I’m afraid that’s the kind of martial attitude you’ve got to take. By all means give the impression that you’re reasonable and would gladly engage in ‘constructive dialogue’: “*if only ‘they’ would be a little less ideologically hidebound*” – but only as a tactic to discredit them.

In reality, you don’t give an inch.

The only way to win a propaganda war is to be every bit as energetic as your opponents – in some cases more so.

Every time a damaging story about your campaign appears in a newspaper or on the internet you need to respond immediately: you create a Google alert with your campaign title in it so you know the moment any such story appears – and respond straight away.

He quotes dialogue from the film ‘*The Untouchables*’ – when grizzled street-wise cop [played by Sean Connery] advises Eliot Ness on the only way to get someone like Capone.

“*... They pull a knife, you pull a gun. He sends one of yours to the hospital, you send one of his to the morgue. That’s the Chicago way!*”

He talks about ‘The Elevator Pitch’ – A pithy one-sentence description of your objectives that captures its essence.

Imagine you’re in an elevator with someone influential and you only have that 30 second ride to present your case.

It has to be brief, punchy and easy to remember.

Once you’ve decided on your ‘elevator pitch’ you need to get it out there.

Make sure all the members of your group memorise it and trot it out at every available opportunity.

That is how you win: you repeat the same thing over and over again ... It’s boring – but you’ve got to do it.

Your opponents already know this and they’re good at it.

Just think of how many times the phrase ‘Aggressive Secularism’ is rolled out.

It somehow slithered into the Papal envoy’s address to school leavers at Stonyhurst College earlier this year.

It was used by the Bishop of Burnley [John Godard] interviewed on BBC Radio Lancashire when all he was asked about was ‘what Christmas means to him’.

It effortlessly trips off the tongue of almost every religious representative [of almost every faith] time and time again.

So much so that, in time, it gets lodged in the collective psyche of the general public who’ve heard it so frequently it has almost become a de-facto ‘truth’.

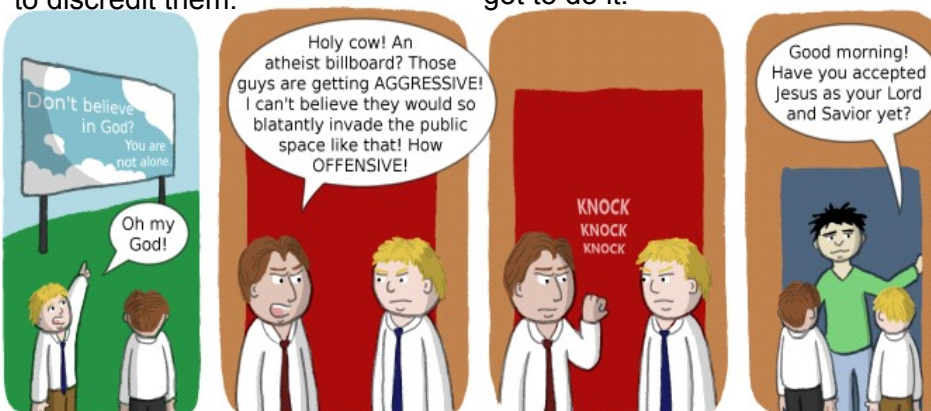
Our problem [as Humanists] has been that we try to engage in debate: intellectually [but respectfully] seeking to explain why the phrase is nonsensical but by the time we’ve got our first sentence out that 30 second elevator ride is over and our listener has got off.

Quick ‘Hitch’ Quotes

“*Religious exhortation and telling people, telling children, that if they don’t do the right thing, they’ll go to terrifying punishments or unbelievable rewards, that’s making a living out of lying to children. That’s what the priesthood do. And if all they did was lie to the children, it would be bad enough. But they rape them and torture them and then hope we’ll call it ‘abuse’.*”

.....

“*... Once you assume a creator and a plan it makes us objects in a cruel experiment whereby we are created sick and commanded to be well - I’ll repeat that - we are created sick and then ordered to be well!*”



Quick 'Hitch' Quotes

"Judaism has some advantages over Christianity in that, for example, it does not proselytise — except among Jews — and it does not make the cretinous mistake of saying that the Messiah has already made his appearance. However, along with Islam and Christianity, it does insist that some turgid and contradictory and sometimes evil and mad texts, obviously written by fairly unexceptional humans, are in fact the word of god. I think that the indispensable condition of any intellectual liberty is the realisation that there is no such thing."

Next LSH Meeting

7.30pm - Wednesday 18th January 2012
Great Eccleston Village Centre; 59 High Street,
The Square, Great Eccleston PR3 0YB



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"We are a campaigning organisation; it's what we do. Our purpose is to protect people wherever justice, fairness, freedom and truth are denied." ... This is the simple Mission Statement of Amnesty International: an organisation of ordinary people from across the world standing up for humanity and human rights.

Historically campaigns have focused on prisoners, but A.I. have responded to the changing patterns of human rights violations in the world.

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Promoting general awareness of human rights A.I. carry out a wide range of educational activities, promoting the values contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international agreed human rights standards.

- Encouraging people to accept that all human rights must be protected
- Encouraging governments to accept and enforce international standards of human rights
- Encouraging governments, political organisations, businesses, other groups and individuals to support and respect human rights
- Opposing specific abuses of human rights
- Undertaking research and action focused on stopping abuses of the following rights:
 - Physical and mental integrity
 - Freedom of conscience and expression
 - Freedom from discrimination

A.I. have over three million supporters worldwide, people who are passionate about these beliefs and not afraid to take unpopular stands to realise A.I.'s vision and mission.

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Question. Explore. Discover

QED is a two-day science & skepticism conference taking place in the Piccadilly Hotel, Manchester on the 10th -11th March 2012

Many fantastic speakers from the worlds of science and entertainment will be joining delegates for a weekend celebration of science, reason and critical thinking.

Tickets for 2012 **QED** are very affordable, with a headline price of **£89** for the full weekend.

For students the price is turned upside-down - **£68** with any recognised student ID.

To read more about who, what & when and to secure your tickets visit the **QED** website:

www.qedcon.org

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

2pm Sun 15 Jan: 1st floor Java Lounge; 43/45 Duke St, Douglas

How Did We Become Freethinkers?

12noon Thur 19 Jan: Lunch - Alessandro's, Castle St, Douglas

Liverpool Humanists

<http://livehum.org>

7.30pm Thur 12 Jan: The Head of Steam; 7 Lime St, L1 1RJ
Faith Schools & Education - talk by Richy Thompson

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

7pm Wed 11 Jan: Friends Meeting House, Mount St, M2 5NS
Faith Schools & Education - talk by Richy Thompson

South Cheshire And North Staffs Humanists

www.humanists.org.uk

7.30 Mon 16 Jan: Unitarian Meeting Ho. A34 [opp. Lidl (parking)
& Travelodge, Newcastle-under-Lyme, ST5 1QS

Book Review - "The Rational Optimist: How Prosperity Evolves"
by Matt Ridley.

Humanist Society of West Yorkshire

www.wyhumanists.org.uk

7 Thus 12 Jan: Swarthmore, 3-7 Woodhouse Sq, Leeds, LS3 1AD
Social Networking - for Good or Ill? Simon Duncan,

Co-ordinator, 'Linkedin'

Lytham St Annes & Blackpool Amnesty

www.amnesty.org.uk/lytham

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'