



Atheists and Agnostics for a Better World

Dorset Humanists

April 2013

A PARTNER OF THE
BRITISH HUMANIST
ASSOCIATION

Forthcoming events...

■ Saturday 13th April 2.00pm

Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW

Humanist Ceremonies

Humanist celebrants Maggie Pepin and David Hewitt

Humanist weddings, baby-namings and funerals have seen a surge in popularity in recent years, as more people seek personalised non-religious ceremonies that honestly reflect their genuine beliefs and values with warmth and affection.

In a special event that will be of interest to everyone considering a Humanist ceremony, Maggie and David will answer all your questions and explain how they can help create and organise dignified and meaningful occasions that best encapsulate your feelings and wishes.

★ Part Two meeting 3.50-4.30pm

Many Humanists are now communicating via our Dorset Humanists Facebook page and Twitter. If you have no idea how to use Facebook and Twitter but would like to, come along to this interactive session when Chris Street and Simon Whitlock will explain all in plain English!

‘Quote... Unquote’

‘Science is our best defence against believing what we want to.’ Ian Stewart



Humanist ceremonies to mark important stages of life are becoming increasingly popular. Come along to our talk on 13th April.

■ Wednesday 24th April 7.30pm

Green House Hotel, Grove Road, Bournemouth BH1 3AX

Science and Religion: Complementary or Contradictory?

Back by popular demand! A second opportunity to hear this excellent presentation by government scientist David Nunn. Since the Enlightenment, science has relentlessly marched into territories formerly occupied by religion. David Nunn

Send bulletin updates to chairman @dorsethumanists.co.uk or phone 07910 886629

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investigates the long-standing debate about whether the apparently conflicting worldviews of science and religion can be reconciled. Taking a scientific approach, David considers the origins and evolution of both and offers some fun approaches to resolving the conflict.

★ Recommended reading: *Science and Religion: Are They Compatible?* (2011) Daniel C. Dennett and Alvin Plantinga

■ Tuesday 23rd April 7.30pm

West Dorset Humanists at the Wessex Royale, 32 High St West, Dorchester



Filmosophy

Dorset Humanist Mat Coussell guides us through moral and ethical dilemmas in some recent films.

Free entry but £2 donation appreciated.

✉ westdorsethumanists@hotmail.com

☎ 07921 311518

■ Thursday 2nd May 12.30pm

Chinese buffet lunch

Join fellow Humanists and friends for another visit to the excellent Day's Chinese Buffet Restaurant, St Peter's Quarter (in the arcade under TK Maxx - from Old Christchurch Road, Bournemouth) £8 per head. Pay on entry. Register an interest in attending with Lyn Glass at a meeting or phone 01202 558763 or email lyn.glass@btinternet.com (or you can just turn up on the day if you're not able to commit earlier!)

Dorset Humanist **Eileen Brennan** has suggested that members might enjoy seeing a collection of films, interviews, etc. shown on YouTube, dealing with topics that interest Humanists that many would not normally see. The Green House Hotel has a screen that might cater well for this. Is there anyone who would like to look into this for a monthly evening meeting?

✉ chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk

■ Friday 7th – Sunday 9th June

BHA Annual Conference 2013, Leeds

Distinguished scientists, philosophers, artists, writers, and entertainers are gathering in Leeds from 7 – 9 June to debate and discuss some of our biggest questions about life, the universe, and everything. Through the lens of Humanism we will explore our imagination, push the boundaries of our understanding of creation, and investigate how we engage with the world around us.

Book now via BHA website or phone 020 7079 3580.

Annual General Meeting

There was a very good turnout for our 2013 Annual General Meeting. Officer reports reflected another successful year for Dorset Humanists and we discussed a revised 'Aims and Objectives' document to give us renewed focus for the year ahead. Richard Scutt was awarded 'Humanist of the Year' for his outstanding contribution to our group over many years in the fields of education and publicity. An enthusiastic group of members has indicated their willingness to help with our efforts to inform schoolchildren about Humanism. We'll report more on this in due course. The elected committee members are David Warden, Jane Bannister, Joanna Cole, Dariusz Andersen, Chris Street, Richard Scutt, Lyn Glass, Geoff Jones, Simon Whitlock and Dean Robertson. Team roles will be decided at the next committee meeting.

Membership renewal

Although entry to our meetings is free we rely on membership subscriptions to give us a guaranteed stream of income and also to know that we have a strong membership base. Many membership subscriptions are due around this time of year. Please pay yours promptly to help us cut down on administration. Please consider paying by standing order or via Paypal (website). Membership form enclosed or attached. Enquiries: David on 07910 886629.

Meet your new committee members!



Simon Whitlock

I was born in Bournemouth and was brought up in a moderate Christian household. In my pre-teen years, I attended services at a United Reformed church but despite considering myself a Christian as a teenager, I was less keen on going to church and avoided it when I could.

My faith gradually faded over time along with my interest in the subject. However, in 2010, I was invited to attend my 16 year old brother's baptism. He had recently attended a Christian camp, which turned him from an apathetic agnostic to an enthusiastic Baptist Christian. This was probably the reason for my increased interest, first in atheism and then Humanism. My main source of information on the subject has come from listening to hours of podcasts / internet radio shows each week, such as Reasonable Doubts and the Atheist Experience.

I've attended nearly all of the Dorset Humanists talks since my first visit in September 2011, which have served to increase my interest in the issues related to Humanism. On the Saturdays when there is no meeting, I occasionally find myself in friendly hour-long discussions with the Baptist Christians that speak in Bournemouth Square.

I studied Computational Mathematics at the University of Reading in 2005 and now work in Admissions in the chiropractic college in Boscombe.

My favourite non-fiction book is called Being Wrong by Kathryn Schultz, which addresses dogma, not just with regards to religion but every aspect of life.

Other interests include dancing. I'm currently learning dance from the 1940s era including the Charleston, as well as

travelling the world with trips to South Korea, Australia, Venezuela and Cuba.

I'm hoping I can bring a fresh perspective to the DH Committee and am looking forward to working with others to continue the good work of Dorset Humanists.



Dean Robertson

I grew up the same as most of us do as a 'cultural Christian'. I didn't question whether God existed because I was programmed well at an early enough age.

I had always been interested in science and had a keen interest in astronomy but for some reason my logical mind didn't look at religion in the same way. By the time I reached my thirties I would probably have called myself agnostic, but mainly because I never really thought about it too much and would have felt that I would upset baby Jesus if I questioned things too much.

About 5 or 6 years ago I did a couple of mountain bike trips in Morocco and Jordan. I mixed with Muslims and found their devotion to their belief interesting. I spoke to my wife about it as she knows I'm a bit odd she bought me a copy of the Qur'an for my birthday (that raised a few eyebrows from friends). I started to read it and was surprised to be reading about Jesus, Mary, Joseph, Moses and Noah. It soon became clear that I was reading number 3 in a trilogy. So I put it down and over the next few months read the Bible. By the time I read the last Amen in Revelation I was an atheist.

I also listened to hundreds of hours of religious debates. I wanted to hear both sides of the arguments but just found that the religious arguments were always flawed, they had huge holes in the logic but they filled the gaps with faith. I travelled to debates, I actually had a face to face chat with Christian philosopher William Lane Craig. I became interested in the subjects of free will and morality and how it's very easy to be good without God. I started to read Dawkins, Hitchens, Sam Harris etc.

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I saw that Stephen Fry was a humanist but didn't really know what that that meant. I Googled 'humanism' and found the Dorset Humanist debate last year at the university with Moorlands Bible college. I thought it was great. I then started to come to the meetings.

I'm still not 100% sure what a humanist is but since there is no dogma I don't suppose I have to tick every box. Dorset Humanists are people who actually think and like to discuss and are open to new ideas. I would be very happy to do what I can to help and support the group.

Grassroots Humanism

One of the aims of the British Humanist Association is to arrive at a situation where Humanism is understood as 'an ethical and fulfilling non-religious approach to life involving a naturalistic view of the universe.' One audience we wish to reach is religious people, in order to increase understanding of Humanism amongst them with a view to increased mutual understanding in society as a whole. Over the past year our volunteer dialogue officer has been working with local humanist groups to ensure that humanists and the non-religious are represented in dialogue between people of different beliefs on a local level. We are grateful to volunteers all over the country who are giving their time to participate in these forums and networks, making sure someone is there to represent the 25% of us that say we don't have a religion. *BHA News*



Dorset Humanists at the 'grassroots'

Lyn Glass has recently represented Dorset Humanists at Bournemouth Older Person's Forum, the Criminal Justice Voluntary Sector Forum and Bournemouth 2026. David Warden spoke in a debate between the Bournemouth Universities' Christian

Union and the Bournemouth Students Humanist and Atheist Society. The debate was subsequently broadcast on the University radio station. He also spoke about Humanism to lecturers at Poole College as part of a series of talks on world religions and beliefs organised by Faith Links and to a discussion group in Swanage.

■ Could you represent Dorset Humanists?

✉ lyn.glass@btinternet.com

☎ 01202 558763

India Fund

Computers needed for 60 children

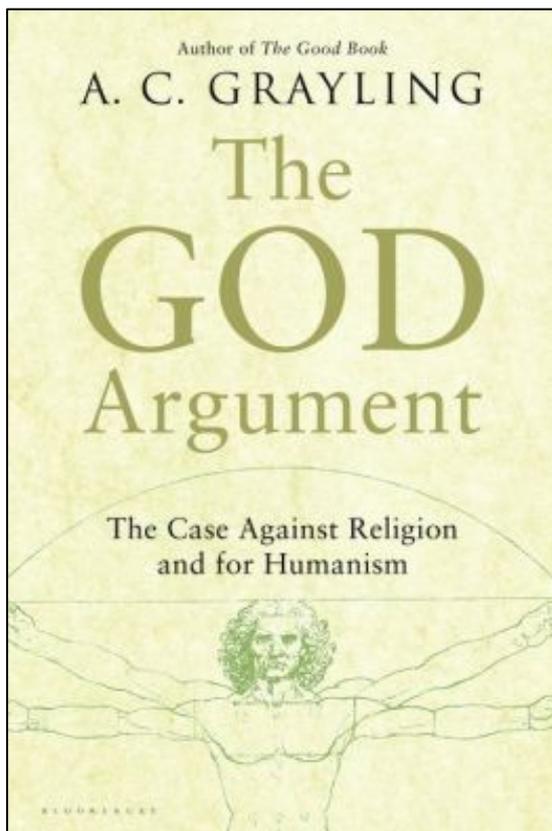
The Humanist Association of Toronto has recently donated four laptops to the secular humanist elementary school in Kurukshetra, India, run by Swami Manavatavadi. These four laptops need to be shared between 60 children. Locally, the cheapest HP laptop is 28500 IC Rupees – about £335.00. Please donate to our India Fund this year so that we can help buy at least one more computer for deprived children in India. Dorset Humanists has had a friendship link with the school since 2004. Donate via your membership form or contact our treasurer Dariusz Andersen.

☎ 07415 069029

✉ treasurer@dorsethumanists.co.uk



A group of children at the school, 2012



Like boxing with jelly

Book review by David Warden

In his new book *The God Argument: The Case Against Religion and for Humanism* (2013) A C Grayling writes that 'contesting religion is like engaging in a boxing match with jelly: it is a shifting, unclear, amorphous target, which every blow displaces to a new shape.' No doubt every freethinker has experienced the frustration of arguing with Christians and other religious believers and perhaps wondered whether it is worth the effort. It is. Richard Carrier, in a lecture about another contribution to the God debate (*The Christian Delusion*, 2010) reminds us that the more Christians are forced to defend their beliefs the more they are forced to think about them. And if only a proportion of those who are thus made to think about their beliefs walk away from religion we will gradually win the battle for the human mind.

The first half of Grayling's book aims to 'continue the debate until the evasions and rationalisations of religion have been fully examined'. He writes that 'it is a game of shadows' but that in his view 'the argument

against religion is an argument for the liberation of the human mind, and the possibility of at last formulating an ethical outlook that all humankind can share'. This constructive task is the purpose of the second half of the book. Grayling asserts that 'Humanism is the emphatic answer to the request for an alternative... an outlook of great beauty and depth, premised on kindness and common sense, drawing its principles from a conversation about the good whose roots lie in the philosophical debates of classical antiquity, continually enriched by the insights and experience of thinkers, poets, historians and scientists ever since.' It is a tradition, he claims, which most of the world's educated and creative minds have embraced.

Written with Grayling's customary grace and eloquence, this is a major contribution to the literature on Humanism by one of our most clear-thinking philosophers. It is a book to be savoured and shared.

■ *We have ordered a hardback copy for the Dorset Humanists library.*

Atheist bloggers in Bangladesh arrested

Police have arrested three atheist bloggers in Bangladesh after they were accused of "defaming Islam and the prophet Mohammed." As a result of their atheistic blogs, each faces up to 10 years in jail for something that should never be a crime in any country that claims to respect religious freedom and the freedom of expression. This isn't the first case of atheist bloggers being arrested for a 'crime' against religion. Egyptian atheist Alber Saber remains in prison for insulting Islam and the prophet Mohammed. *American Humanist Association*



Humanist ceremonies

Dorset Humanist Maggie Pepin is a trained Humanist officiant.

☎ 01202 523338

📧 humanist.org.uk/maggipepin



Dorset Humanists
Chairman's View
April 2013



I had an unexpected encounter with Bertrand Russell's daughter Kate on my hols. She was born in 1923 and she grew up in an isolated house in Porthcurno near Land's End. The house, *Carn Voel*, was the setting for an idyllic period in the life of the Russell family. Her parents, Bertrand and Dora Russell, dreamed of setting up their own progressive school in which they could educate Kate and her older brother John. In 1927 their dream was realised when they took over Telegraph House near Petersfield. Beacon Hill School aimed to raise freethinking children but it became a nightmare for Kate and her brother John. Many of the children at the school were 'problem children' and they made Kate and John's life a misery. In her book *My Father Bertrand Russell* (1975) she wrote that 'Emotionally, the school was a bad experience for all the Russell family. John and I felt turned adrift in a hostile world, unable to go to our parents for help'. The Russells had been full of hope, to 'start a school in which their children would blossom into the finest flower of mankind. At the end of seven years, they had lost each other, their children's confidence, their money and much of their hope. Those years shattered the crystal of our happiness and left us like jagged splinters, unable to touch one another without wounding'. Dora Russell, a believer in 'open marriage', had two more children by another man and Bertrand Russell transferred his affections to his children's young governess, the beautiful Peter (Patricia) Spence. At the outbreak of the Second World War Russell, Peter, Kate and John left for America on the *Queen Mary*.

Kate married an American, became a Christian, had five children of her own, got a PhD, and in due course suffered the 'shipwreck' of her own marriage. Dora Russell continued to run the school on her own for many years and was a great feminist, rationalist and campaigner for women's rights. She continued to live at *Carn Voel* until her death in 1986. On a recent trip to Cornwall I went to visit *Carn Voel* - a kind of secular pilgrimage to an historic Russell home. I felt compelled to ring on the doorbell to exchange a few words with the present owners. An old, gentle woman answered the door. I was astonished when she told me she was Kate Russell. When I told her I was from Dorset Humanists she decided I was 'harmless' and invited me in. We had a few minutes' chat about her famous parents and she showed me some photographs of them. Russell's books lined the bookcase. We've since exchanged letters and I'm hoping to expand her entry in Wikipedia. *David Warden*