



Atheists and Agnostics for a Better World

Dorset Humanists

May 2013

A PARTNER OF THE
BRITISH HUMANIST
ASSOCIATION

Forthcoming events...

■ Saturday 11th May 2.00pm

Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW



Money that Works

Creating a Sustainable Economic System

A presentation by Stef Kling

The credit crunch, bank bailouts, European debt crisis, quantitative easing, and austerity measures fill the news but where do we go from here? Independent financial expert Stef Kling explains how the financial system works and what actions are needed to create a sustainable economic system. He calls into question our current obsession with continuous economic growth and outlines alternative models.

★ Part Two meeting

3.50-4.30pm

Does Dorset Humanists need a new 'mission statement'? Maybe we need to replace our current mission statement, 'To promote the spread of Humanist ideas'? Come along to this special meeting and have your say.



Mahadevi missing, forced into marriage by Hindu cult. See News inside.

■ Wednesday 22nd May 7.30pm

Green House Hotel, Grove Road, Bournemouth BH1 3AX

Sex and Sexuality: A Humanist View

A talk by Jo Adams – former Chair of the National Sex Education Forum and member of the Labour Government's Independent Advisory Group on Sexual Health and HIV

Almost all world religions make rigid rules about what is and is not acceptable in terms

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of our experience and expression of sex. At the moment, for example, there is an active lobby pressing for Abstinence Education with young people despite the lack of evidence of the success of such approaches. This talk will explore what a more positive, holistic and person-centred model of sex and sexuality might look like.

■ **Saturday 25 May 2013 7.30pm**

Regent Centre, Christchurch

An Audience with Sir Jonathan Miller

Jonathan Miller is President of the Rationalist Association which publishes *New Humanist*.

■ **Thursday, 30th May 7.30pm**

West Dorset Humanists, Wessex Royale Hotel, 32 High St. West, Dorch DT1 1UP

Humanism in a Multicultural Society

A talk by Dr Allan Hayes. Allan is a trustee of the British Humanist Association, a director of Leicester Secular Society and a trustee of the Sea of Faith Network. Free entry but £2 donation appreciated.

✉ westdorsethumanists@hotmail.com
☎ 07921 311518

■ **Saturday 1st June 2013**

Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW

Leaving Your Body to Medical Science

A talk by Dr Jenny Skidmore

Dr Jenny Skidmore, Director of the Centre for Learning Anatomical Sciences at Southampton University, will talk us through the practicalities of bequeathing your body to medical science and what happens after the anatomical examination of your body is complete.



Mahadevi missing, forced to marry

Mahadevi, the student teacher at the Humanist school in Kurukshetra, India (also known as 'Kid's Kingdom') went missing on 1st April. She did not turn up for lectures on her biotechnology course at the University of Kurukshetra and her bicycle was abandoned. Swami Manavatavadi, director of the school, received an anonymous phone call on 4th April claiming that she had been abducted. He has since received news that she is alive and that on 19th April she was forced to marry someone unknown to her. Her abductors are members of the Arya Samaj Hindu cult which is highly influential in the police, the state administration and even the University. Swami Manavatavadi fears that this is part of a long-running campaign of intimidation against the school. David Warden has emailed the Vice Chancellor of Kurukshetra University for more information about this gross violation of Mahadevi's human rights.

Dorset Humanists have given generously over a number of years to help pay college fees for Mahadevi. This is a great blow for the children she taught in the evenings.

We are collecting money to help buy computers for the children at the school. Please give generously via your membership form or direct to our treasurer. Pick up an info leaflet at our meetings.

A Day in School



Angela Joynson reports on her visit to Cerne Abbas to tell 4-5 year olds about Humanism

Was I ready to explain the finer points of Humanism to the Reception class? A

dozen wide-eyed 4 and 5 year olds gazed up at me expectantly. Along with a Muslim leader and the local vicar, I was visiting Cerne Abbas First School for the day. The three of us shared our common and differing beliefs and values with the fifty-odd pupils.

I was saved by the Happy Human. Even the youngest could interpret that image for themselves. They could understand our universal wish to be happy and the route to happiness via making others happy.

The primary importance of our day-to-day behaviour towards our fellow humans, although it may ultimately stem from our underlying beliefs, was shared by the head teacher and the vicar, but I'm not so sure about our Muslim colleague. He told the children completely seriously at one point that all children are born Muslims. I suppose that is logical if you believe, as he also said, that Allah has created everyone for the purpose of worshipping him. It seems to make as much sense as the Christian belief in original sin and the need for baptism.

You'll be glad to know that we didn't discuss those specific points with the children, but we did try to answer their many questions. Some are more tricky than others when we, as Humanists, get lumped in with the 'faiths'. 'What is your book called?' 'Do you have a special building?' 'What rituals do you have?' 'Do you have a leader?' I racked my brains for an equivalent to Justin Welby, but neither David Warden nor Jim Al-Khalili seemed quite to fit the bill.

Despite quite a bit of preparation beforehand, I had also to think on my feet – had to be really honest about what I think, to respect the other contributors and to use

concepts and language accessible to the under tens. But it was a fascinating day.

■ Cerne Abbas First School is a Church of England Voluntary Controlled school

Committee roles

At our first committee meeting after the 2013 AGM, the following committee roles were agreed:

- David Warden – Chair and Bulletin Editor
- Lyn Glass – Vice Chair, Speaker Finder, Local Forums and Lunches
- Jane Bannister – Advisory role
- Joanna Cole – Secretary
- Dariusz Andersen – Treasurer and Membership
- Chris Street – Website and Education
- Geoff Jones – Education (SACRE)
- Richard Scutt – Publicity
- Simon Whitlock – Publicity and Events
- Dean Robertson – role to be decided

We sincerely appreciate the assistance of other members including Frances Usher (library), Karen Preston (SACRE), Dave Elleman (publicity), Maggie Pepin and Angela Joynson. More members have expressed their willingness to help with education and representing Dorset Humanists on local forums and we will be taking this forward in the coming months.

Silver Moments

Can you help? Silver Moments, a social and support group for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community in Bournemouth, would like to set up a group in Dorset. If you think you could help, please contact John (contact details below).

Silver Moments meets on the last Friday of the month at Over the Rainbow from 2pm. 27 St Michaels Road, Bournemouth, BH2 5DP. Regular excursions, day-trips, meals-out and other activities and events.

☎ 01202 466364

✉ frtherjohnsb@yahoo.co.uk



LETTERS & EMAILS

Write to Dorset Humanists,
58a R L Stevenson Avenue
Bournemouth BH4 8EG or
email chairman
@dorsethumanists.co.uk

From David Nunn (Science and Religion speaker)

I very much enjoyed my visit to Dorset Humanists. You do have a lively bunch! I could have gone far more into a religion-bashing exercise but I sincerely believe that is not the job of science and would have clouded the real message of my talk – that for some there is a cross-over of science and religion but for others a definite divide.

However, the ‘angels over the battlefield’ comments did throw me a little [see note below]. I didn’t quite expect that from humanists – but on reflection I think they were Jehovah’s Witnesses. They said “You have shown that science can’t explain this – therefore they were angels”. But how could they be so sure since they weren’t there, they were basing this on accounts from others, who probably got their accounts from others etc. So they have no idea that these sightings were angels either – but they were prepared to argue (from spurious authority) that they were since it could not be shown they were not. A curious position to take and clearly a religious position. There would have been a rational explanation (like clouds, planes, missiles of an unknown type) and so I suggested they were not angels, as did many others in the crowd. All told, an interesting and enormously enjoyable evening. Keep the good work going...it seems to be working!

■ **Background note:** When British troops were retreating from the Battle of Mons in August 1914 it has been reported that some said they saw ‘angels’ in the sky protecting them from the pursuing German soldiers. Years later it was claimed that French soldiers also saw spiritual beings in the sky at Mons.

From Lyn Glass

The ‘angel sighting’ was based on a fictional short story published in several newspapers and magazines in 1915 and this became warped into the Mons retreat event despite there being not one living witness recorded as attesting to the angels at the time. The speculation is that the Government encouraged the idea to improve morale generally during the war that God was clearly on our side!

From Nathaniel Major, Services Manager at St Pauls Direct Hostel for the Homeless in Bournemouth

Thank you for helping us to fund the Winter Watch service this year. Without your generosity the service would have been harder to run and would not have had the same positive impact. 163 people used Winter Watch with all 10 beds full nearly every night. All of these people were given a meal and a warm bed as well as being offered help and support by the co-ordinator of the service, made possible by your donation.

It was the coldest March since 1963 and we had to extend the Winter Watch service beyond the end of February. The demand for beds was so high throughout March we decided to put five more beds up in addition to the 10 we usually provide, plus the 40 beds upstairs. We closed the service on April 5th.

The Winter Watch service really does save lives. For example, on Christmas Eve a gentleman moved in who had been discharged from the armed forces 4 years ago. During this time he had been wandering from place to place and job to job. It turns out he had post traumatic stress disorder. With our help we linked him into services who help ex-servicemen. With their support he was soon moved out to a specialist accommodation unit which specialises in dealing with people who suffer from post traumatic stress. So once again, thank you very much for your generosity, and your thoughts.

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Church for Humanists?

Dorset Humanist Cathy Silman suggests how we might meet a human need that the churches harnessed thousands of years ago

I thought the talk by Maggie Pepin and David Hewitt on celebrations was informative and, at times, moving. Nearly everybody in the hall seemed to be at one in feeling that at major turning points in our lives we need a formal coming together of friends and family to mark and affirm their importance.

Human beings have a need to meet together to share life's problems and joys. Organised religions to a large extent, were invented to meet that need. They realised that music and some kind of ritual can add to the experience. I would like to suggest that as a group we consider setting up some kind of 'affirmation of life' celebration on a monthly basis. A colleague said to me she liked going to church on Sundays not because she believed but she liked the opportunity to reflect on the past week – take the good from it, say goodbye to the bad and resolve to do better in the coming week. As a humanist I am able to formally join in celebrating major events but at present do not have access to a more regular celebration of life.

Most of you are probably aware of the Sunday Assembly movement. It was started in London at the beginning of the year and is now spreading across the country. For more information see links below. I am not necessarily recommending we follow their structure formally but it does outline how their very successful assemblies have worked.

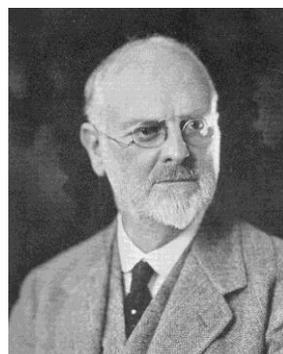
I would like to suggest we discuss this after a Saturday meeting in the near future. I am sure there will be much to debate. Yes I know it would mean a lot of work but no, I don't think it will mean copying a church; it will be meeting a human need that churches harnessed thousands of years ago.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-21319945>

<http://sundayassembly.com>

The Ethical Church

Stanton Coit, a wealthy American, was a leading player in the British Ethical Movement which preceded the Humanist movement. A hundred years ago he experimented with an 'Ethical Church'.



Stanton Coit, leader of the Ethical Church

Most Humanists will have heard of South Place Ethical Society in London and will know that British Humanism grew out of the Ethical Societies. Stanton Coit, a wealthy American by marriage, was responsible for South Place

Chapel converting to an Ethical Society in 1888. Coit left South Place to set up the West London Ethical Society which became the 'Ethical Church' in 1914.

Coit was an ardent disciple of Ralph Waldo Emerson who had looked forward to a 'new church founded on moral science'. Coit's Ethical Church was, in miniature, a realisation of this dream. It was housed in a Gothic church building in Bayswater. The interior was furnished with oak-panelling, richly embroidered curtains and a gold-starred blue ceiling. Portraits, statues, busts and stained glass windows commemorated a diverse array figures such as Jesus, Buddha, Socrates, Marcus Aurelius, Joan of Arc, Elizabeth Fry, Florence Nightingale and Kuan Yin (the Buddhist Goddess of Compassion). A marble altar was dedicated to 'the True, the Beautiful and the Good'. Ethical ceremonies included secular hymns, a statement of belief, an anthem, and a forty-five minute address.

In 1933 the father of British Humanism, Harold Blackham, became the new 'minister' of the Ethical Church. Initially, membership was in the hundreds but in 1953, nine years after the death of Coit, the Ethical Church sold its building to the Catholics for £25,000 and changed its name back to the West London Ethical Society.

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Dorset Humanists
Chairman's View
May 2013



The abduction and forced marriage of Mahadevi from the Humanist school in India is deeply troubling. The police, state authorities and even the University appear to be in the grip of a Hindu cult known as Arya Samaj. As Swami Manavatavadi has pointed out, if she had wanted to get married she would have had every support and blessing from the Humanist school. Swamiji fears that more sinister machinations are at work and that her abduction is part of an ongoing campaign of intimidation against the school. The school is a member of the International Humanist and Ethical Union. I have informed the IHEU of the situation and I have also written to the Vice Chancellor of Kurukshetra University where Mahadevi was studying for a degree in biotechnology. I am in regular contact with Swami Manavatavadi and I am trying to obtain and understand the full facts of the case. The children are in shock and very depressed about this situation. Please show your support by contributing to our India fund or by contacting Swamiji. You can write to Swami Manavatavadi at:

International School of Humanitarian Thoughts and Practice
Rajghat
KURUKSHETRA-136118
Haryana, India

✉ manavatavadi@lycos.com

📘 [Swami Manavatavadi](#)

Children's questions about Humanism include, 'What is your book called?' 'Do you have a special building?' 'What rituals do you have?' and 'Do you have a leader?' Angela Joynson, who represented us at Cerne Abbas First School, racked her brains for an equivalent to Archbishop Justin Welby and thought that neither Jim Al-Khalili, President of the BHA, nor myself seemed quite to fit the bill. Maybe this could be remedied by some kind of 'Humanist Church' in which I could dress up as the Archhumanist of Dorset? In all seriousness, it will be good to discuss Cathy Silman's idea for Humanist 'celebrations of life' (not a church) and we have reserved some time after our meeting on Saturday 1st June to give consideration to this. Please come along if you can.

David Warden