



Atheists and Agnostics for a Better World

Dorset Humanists

November 2013

A PARTNER OF THE
BRITISH HUMANIST
ASSOCIATION

■ **Saturday 9th November 2.00pm**
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation
Avenue, BH9 1TW

Religious Education in a Secular Society

Dr Heather Meacock

Is there any justification for teaching religious education in our increasingly secular society? Despite low church attendances in Britain, surveys that ask broader questions about belief such as 'Do you believe in God or a Transcendent Being?' suggest we still have a fundamental interest in finding meaning beyond our physical world.

Dr Heather Meacock will discuss the value and format of religious education and ask whether schools could provide a better understanding of our children's spiritual and philosophical needs than that offered by churches. Heather is a retired Senior Lecturer in Primary English Education.

★ **Part Two Meeting 3.50-4.30pm**

A report on the Dorset Humanists Schools Education Project (DHSEP) which launched this year. As a result of our efforts in previous years, non-religious worldviews such as Humanism are now a fixed feature in RE syllabuses in Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset. But do schools have the knowledge to teach Humanism? Our new project aims to help them. Members of the project will explain its aims and strategy.



■ **Wednesday 27th November 7.30pm**

Green House Hotel, Grove Road,
Bournemouth BH1 3AX

Islam, Islamism and Islamophobia



Martin Holst

Martin will explore what is known about Muhammad, how Islam developed, and he will consider its impact on the modern world. He embraces a critical approach to Islam/Islamism without being offensive or hostile to Muslims, and suggests how we can engage with them in different contexts. Martin believes we need to improve our understanding of Islam and appreciate its internal driving forces because this affects how we seek to establish good relations with Muslims. A former maths lecturer, Martin is a Methodist

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preacher, and a member of the National Executive of the Christian Socialist Movement. He regards improving community cohesion as a key issue in the pursuit of peace.

■ **Sunday 10th November 10.57am**

War Memorial, Bournemouth Central Gardens.



Remembrance Day Service

Please come along and support David Warden at this historic occasion when the non-religious are included for the very first time.

After several years of campaigning, Dorset Humanists will be formally represented at the Bournemouth Remembrance Day Service. Dorset Humanists is one of a small handful of Humanist Groups in the UK to have achieved this milestone in representation for the non-religious. David Warden will stand alongside Christian and Jewish leaders and will say some words about peace adapted from *Celebration: A Ceremonial and Philosophical Guide for Humanists and Humanistic Jews* written by the late Rabbi Sherwin Wine, founder of the Society of Humanistic Judaism. Humanist celebrant Maggie Pepin will lay a wreath of behalf of Dorset Humanists and the UK Armed Forces Humanist Association. Please also write to the Mayor afterwards to express your support for our inclusion.

■ **Wednesday 13th November 7.30pm**

Goat and Tricycle near the Triangle in Bournemouth, West Hill Rd BH2 5PF

Humanists in the pub

Enjoy intelligent, stimulating conversation with like-minded people. The Goat and Tricycle is a proper CAMRA pub with a good selection of beers. If you are lucky you can park on the road but if not there is a pay and display car park almost next door. If there is enough interest this will become a monthly event and may evolve into something different (talks, debates on

specific subjects). Please let Dean know if you will be coming so that he can ensure we have the right number of tables reserved.

☎ 01202 527274 / 07713858773

✉ dean.robertson@ssfs.co.uk

■ **Saturday 14th December 2.00pm**

Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW

Witchcraft, Superstition and Global Humanism

Bob Churchill, Communications Officer for the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU)

Humanists and rationalists in many parts of the world are engaged in dangerous struggles against witchcraft, superstition, and fanatical religion. In August, a leading campaigner against superstition in India was shot dead by gunmen, and in May, a young Humanist teacher was abducted by a Maoist group and forced into marriage. Having worked professionally for national Humanist organisations in Britain, Uganda, and lately at IHEU itself, Bob has a unique perspective on organised Humanism around the world. He will explain how it's expressed in different regions and discuss the most significant challenges it faces going forward.

This meeting will be followed by our traditional festive minced pies and mulled wine. These refreshments are provided free but please give generously to our Jane Bannister Winter Appeal in aid of a local homelessness charity and women's refuge.

Christmas Raffle in support of our Winter Appeal

All unwanted gifts very gratefully received for our Yuletide raffle to accompany Mulled Wine & Mince Pies after speaker Bob Churchill on 14th December. Please bring any contributions to November or December meetings, or contact Lyn Glass.

✉ lyn.glass@btinternet.com

☎ 01202 558763

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Committee changes

Following our appeal for three new committee members we are delighted to announce that Cathy Silman will be joining the committee. Two other members have expressed an interest and their names can be revealed in due course!

Two people on the *One Life* course, Rebecca and Margaret, have also volunteered to join our Schools project. Thank you for this excellent response.

📧 <http://goo.gl/BWmS7q>

Dorset Humanists to lead London meeting

Dorset Humanists has been asked by the British Humanist Association to organise this year's programme for the Group Representatives' Annual Meeting in London.

The meeting will focus on local group development and will celebrate successes and suggest ways to tackle persistent problems. The meeting will also feature a presentation by Sanderson Jones on the Sunday Assembly movement and contributions from BHA staff.

Martin Billingham, a former Dorset Humanists committee member, will perform a stand-up comedy routine under his stage name of Martin Watts. Martin is currently doing an MA in Stand-Up comedy at the University of Kent at Canterbury.

One Life course

More than thirty people are attending our second *One Life* course. Another *One Life* course has been scheduled for January in Dorchester and is filling up fast. *One Life* is an opportunity to explore Humanism and Atheism in six evening sessions. Topics covered include humanist history and beliefs, secularism, and non-religious ethics. A number of Humanist groups around the country, notably Greater Manchester Humanists, run similar courses.

An Atheist on the Alpha Course

Around 90 people in total attended David Warden's talk 'An Atheist on the Alpha Course' in Bournemouth and Dorchester. David argued that Alpha-style evangelical Christianity is based on 'negative psychology' and the psychology of cults. He also described the evangelical gospel, which envisages that God will destroy everyone who does not accept Jesus as their personal saviour, as morally deplorable. He argued that 'the habit of faith creates the illusion of God' and invited evangelical Christians to move on from their sixteenth century theology and embrace a gospel of universal goodness. You can listen to his talk on Dorset Humanists YouTube or ask for a transcript.

📧 chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk

<http://youtu.be/tfWPK-biOzI>

Could you become a mentor?

The British Red Cross Refugee Services in Dorset is seeking bilingual, culturally aware volunteers to mentor refugees in the Bournemouth and Poole area. Mentors will assist refugees to build their capacity to gain employment, access essential services, interact socially, support their children's learning and confidently communicate in English. If you are interested or would like more details please contact Mark Forsyth on 07738944626 or email mforsyth@redcross.org.uk

Damning report on Religious Education

Chris Street (representing Atheism UK) talks about a damning Ofsted report on LBC radio:

<http://youtu.be/sPYOGB4fPKU?t=4m30s>

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Dorset Humanist to be Polish Advocate

Dorset Humanist Anna Andersen has been accepted as a Polish Advocate for the Dorset Police and Crime Commissioner. Anna, from Poland, is a qualified lawyer and former company director. In this role Anna will provide support to Dorset's elected Police and Crime Commissioner working on community issues, helping raise awareness of the PCC role among Polish people and giving the PCC a better understanding of the crime and community safety issues affecting local Polish people. We send our hearty congratulations to Anna on being selected for this important community role.

Scouts introduce secular promise

Following a long-standing campaign by the British Humanist Association the Scout Association has decided to introduce a secular Promise as a new option for members, allowing those with no religion to join for the first time. Until recently, the Scouts have required all members to pledge to 'do my duty to God'. The new alternative Promise replaces 'do my duty to God' with 'uphold our Scout values'. The BHA has been working very closely with the Scouts over the last few months to help them develop this new Promise and overcome all the difficulties in doing so. Last month Girlguiding UK went ahead and removed the reference to God from their Promise.

They've Got It All Wrong

Dorset Humanist Ken Fagg's book *They've Got It All Wrong* is now available as a Kindle edition, reduced from £4.94 to £1.99 for a limited period (printed edition special offer £7.95 includes p+p). *They've Got It All Wrong* is an entertaining and controversial compendium of ideas which 'debunks established theories and cherished notions'.

[Click here for details](#)

www.kjfbooks.co.uk

Jane Bannister Winter Appeal



We are proud to launch our Jane Bannister Fund with a winter appeal in support of local homeless people and a women's refuge. An anonymous donor has already pledged

£400 if other members match this sum. Jane Bannister (1944-2013) was a former Chair of Dorset Humanists and a keen supporter of similar charities. Cheques made payable to Dorset Humanists (Winter Appeal) can be passed to David Warden or our treasurer Dariusz Andersen.

chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk

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Local firm pledges support for our Winter Appeal

A local firm of independent financial advisers have indicated their willingness to contribute to the **Jane Bannister Fund Winter Appeal** if any Dorset Humanist members choose to engage them. Strategic Solutions is a Chartered firm of independent financial advisers covering the South of England including Bournemouth and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and chartered by the Chartered Insurance Institute. Chartered status is only given to those that can demonstrate a commitment to knowledge, capability and ethical practice. Please contact Dean for further information.

01202 527274 / 07713858773

dean.robertson@ssfs.co.uk

<http://www.ssfs.co/>

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Letters & Emails

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

From Chelle Coulson via our Dorset Humanists Facebook Group

Hi there! I've come here to ask some advice, if I may. I have exempted my 9-year old son from Collective Worship (CW) at school. I did this a year ago and at the time they said that this was the first exemption they'd ever had and he would be welcome to sit unsupervised while collective worship was happening. I said that this was fine.

Fast forward a year and I find out that he's increasingly been attending CW assemblies because he doesn't know what the assembly will be about and by the time he is in the hall he is too shy to stand up and ask to leave. He said he finds this frustrating as he doesn't like to sing hymns or pray.

I wrote a simple letter to his class teacher reminding him of the exemption and asking that he please let my son know prior to an assembly if there is going to be CW. My son came home that evening saying that the teacher said it was fine for him to sit out, but the teacher couldn't help him with any warning about CW because he doesn't know himself and because my son is in year five he should be sorting it out himself. He is to get up and leave the assembly as soon as he notices that CW is taking place.

I asked my son how he would be alerted to the fact that CW is taking place and he said that they would start saying/singing 'God or Lord' and that nobody gave prior announcement like 'now we are going to worship'.

Am I wrong in thinking that this is not good enough? And what can I alert the school to to support my case? To complicate matters the primary school became an academy back in January, so they don't have up-to-date policies, but they're not a religious school so I presume that they still have to

stick by the governmental guidelines? Any advice would be really appreciated.

A response from Derek Holloway, Religious Education Adviser and Consultant SIAMS Inspector

It sounds like everyone is trying to do their best. It is fairly rare for a Primary school to receive a request to withdraw from Collective Worship (CW) so it is quite likely that the school is finding its way here.

I would suggest that Chelle asks for a copy of the schools CW planning overview. This should identify what the theme or content of the worship will be each day and or would be a guide as to which assemblies to go to i.e. the good work assemblies or the visiting speaker from a charity would presumably be OK and which would be the more religious ones. This does of course presume such planning exists! It certainly would be there in a church school and probably should be there as at least an overview/outline of a couple of pages of planning in a community school.

If the school has a regular pattern of worship i.e. 'Every other Monday the Vicar comes in' then it should be easy to navigate. If they have a structure i.e. we always finish with a hymn and a prayer then if the child sits near and exit it should be possible for them to slip out relatively unnoticed at the right time. After that it's a little difficult to advise without knowing the details of the case

The academy bit is more convoluted and so wouldn't want to be publically commenting on that without knowing the case.

Chelle Coulson posted this reply to numerous helpful responses on our Facebook page:

I just wanted to pop on and thank everyone for their support and help on this. I was able to go into the school and be quite clear on my rights, which meant that we could come up with a workable plan that suited everyone. I've never really considered Humanism before (although always been more or less atheist) but off the back of this issue I have been reading into it a little and wondering about getting involved in other ways. Thanks again.



Dorset Humanists
Chairman's View
November 2013



Session Two of our *One Life* course evaluates eight arguments for the existence of God and introduces some of the 'big beasts' of theism and atheism. There was only one woman in the theist corner - Karen Armstrong - and none in the atheist corner. The 'big four' are of course Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett and Sam Harris. I am grateful to John Davison for mentioning the name Ayaan Hirsi Ali at this point in the course. I had her book *Infidel* on my bookshelf waiting to be read. My short break in France last week gave me the opportunity to do so. It's an enthralling story of a black woman's journey from fundamentalist Islamism to atheist humanism. Until last week, FGM (female genital mutilation) was an abstraction to me. Hirsi Ali's factual description of how, as a child at home and on the insistence of her own grandmother, she was cut without anaesthetic and then sewn up to guarantee her virginity until her wedding night 'defloration' was profoundly shocking. Referring to this practice as a three-letter abbreviation risks medicalising an act of child torture.

Maryam Namazie has memorably referred to the burqa as a 'mobile prison'. Hirsi Ali's book gave me another perspective on this particular issue. In some societies it is an essential form of self-defence. If women are perceived to be 'impure' or provocative in the slightest degree they risk becoming a target for sexual harassment and rape. And then they will be disowned and punished for bringing it upon themselves.

Hirsi Ali made her way to Holland to escape an arranged marriage. She quickly learnt Dutch and became a member of Parliament. The majority of Dutch liberals, with the best of intentions, had tried to respect and accommodate Muslim immigrants, including the funding of Muslim schools. But Hirsi Ali insisted that this degree of tolerance allowed a subculture of oppression and violence against women and children to co-exist in Dutch society. A section of Dutch society was being denied basic human rights. She made a ten-minute film, *Submission*, with film-maker Theo Van Gogh. Van Gogh was brutally murdered a few weeks after the film was released.

Having taught equality and diversity to hundreds of public sector workers I'm painfully aware of the liberal dilemma. Cultural and religious needs should be accommodated where it is reasonable to do so. But where do we draw the line in accommodating a religion which appears to deny the very concept of human rights? Please come along to our talk on Saturday when Martin Holst will help us to explore these issues. *David Warden*

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