



Britain's Enduring Housing Crisis: Winners and Losers, Reasons and Solutions

Saturday 8th April 2.00pm at Moordown Community Centre,
Coronation Ave, BH9 1TW

A talk by Paul Entwistle – [click image to RSVP](#)

We all know something about housing, don't we? Whether as a flourishing pensioner who has ridden the wave of rising prices, or maybe as a humble tenant, sore from our latest fault-free eviction and facing an unaffordable rent spiral.

Yet the British housing market appears to be increasingly dysfunctional. Land and house prices continue to rise compared with incomes. This results in rising debt, increasing inequality, financial crises, and a moribund economy.

Drawing upon *Home Truths: The UK's chronic housing shortage, how it happened, why it matters and the way to solve it* (2021) by economics journalist and broadcaster Liam Halligan, I will aim to cast some light on this enduring conundrum. A number of practical solutions will be presented for policy consideration. I look forward to seeing you!

The Art and Science of Cryptography

Wednesday 26th April 7.30pm, Orchid Hotel, 34 Gervis Road,
Bournemouth, BH1 3DH

A talk by Daniel Dancey – [click image to RSVP](#)

In this engaging talk, you'll learn about the fascinating history of sending secret messages and how modern cryptography is used to secure our data and communications today. After covering some of the technical aspects of the subject, we will discuss some of the contentious social and political issues surrounding cryptography. Daniel is treasurer of Dorset Humanists and a software engineer.





The Reluctant Teacher

Saturday 13th May 2.00pm Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Ave, BH9 1TW

Kevin Precious used to be a teacher. He enjoyed the teaching part – it was the stuff that goes with it that was a drag. So he left. Kevin will entertain us with a funny overview of the pitfalls and pratfalls that go with his former profession, with a bit of pedagogical stuff (ooh-er!) thrown in for good measure.

Kevin is a stand-up comedian, Master of Ceremonies, and non-believing former RE teacher. He has performed his stand-up comedy routines at top venues all over the country, including the Edinburgh Fringe. This is Kevin’s second visit to Dorset Humanists. His first visit, under the banner *Unholier Than Thou: The Unbelieving RE Teacher* was in December 2019.

‘Kevin’s stage charisma and poise set him head and shoulders above the previous acts.’ *The Times*

Universal Income or Job Guarantee?

Wednesday 24th May 7.30pm Orchid Hotel, 34 Gervis Road, Bournemouth, BH1 3DH

A talk by Steve Laughton

Universal Income or Job Guarantee? Money for nothing or forced labour? What exactly are economists on about? Steve Laughton will provide us with a framework for discussion. In recent decades an increasing number of economists have been suggesting that governments could introduce a universal basic income, while others have suggested a job guarantee. Some have opted for both! What problems are they attempting to solve? Jobs being destroyed by AI? Poverty amidst surfeit? Unemployment and slow growth? Too much growth? How would they be implemented? What's happened in places where they've been piloted? Who pays? These are some of the questions that will be discussed.

Dates for your diary

Thursday 6 th April 7.30pm	Moon	Friendly pub social at Moon in the Square. Just turn up and look for Dean or Lyn, and humanist leaflets on the table.
Saturday 8 th April 2.00pm	Moordown	Paul Entwistle: <i>Britain’s Enduring Housing Crisis: Winners and Losers, Reasons and Solutions</i>
Sunday 16 th April 10.15am	Wareham	Wareham to Corfe walk. 6.5 miles. Exercise, scenery, and friendly company. Details on Meetup.
Wednesday 26 th April 7.30pm	Orchid Hotel	Daniel Dancey on <i>The Art and Science of Cryptography</i>
Saturday 13th May 2.00pm	Moordown	Kevin Precious – <i>The Reluctant Teacher</i> (comedy)
Wednesday 24 th May 7.30pm	Orchid	Steve Laughton - <i>Universal Income or Job Guarantee?</i>

Please check all events nearer the time in case of any venue changes.



Photo by Aaron

And Humanist of the Year goes to...

Barry Newman! Barry took the initiative to get trained by Humanists UK to be a school speaker. He has joined Dorset Humanists committee and is taking a lead on our school visiting programme. This is a tough job because the response from schools is often disappointing, relative to the effort put into making contact. Nevertheless, Dorset Humanists made 23 visits to local schools last year and Barry has grown in confidence in, and enthusiasm for, the role. He is also our representative on the Dorset SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education). Barry is a retired intensive care consultant and a fan of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra.

Simon Bowden (photo on the right, with Botticelli's *Venus*) has been elected to serve on our committee and is willing to take on the role of Secretary as and when Cathy Silman steps down. Simon is a retired journalist who worked mainly for the BBC in news and current affairs. He did a fair amount of Parliamentary reporting and really enjoyed a stint on the BBC World TV Channel, covering foreign news for a global audience. One of the highlights of his career was doing a series of radio reports on the London poll tax protests and then the poll tax riot in Trafalgar Square, which was one of the factors leading to the downfall of Mrs Thatcher. Simon started life in state schools but switched to the private sector when the family fortunes improved and got a scholarship to Oxford, leaving with degrees in Honour Moderations (Latin and Greek) and English Literature. He went into journalism to try to discover whether his fellow students, many clutching Mao's Red Book, were right to insist "We need to smash the system!" He has been married twice and has five children. He aspires for Dorset Humanists to be seen as a reformist group, willing to listen to arguments from both political sides. He is not religious, but he thinks there are many limitations on the ability of the human animal to behave in a purely rational way.



Photo by Aaron



Photo by Aaron

Bournemouth Above And Beyond Trust

Roz Scammell (photo, left) spoke passionately at our AGM about the Above And Beyond Trust, set up to support ex-military personnel and serving military with re-integration to civilian life by dealing with the issues they face when leaving the Armed Forces. They assist with advice and guidance, tuition and healthcare, prevention and relief of poverty, the advancement of education, the relief of sickness and preservation of health, the relief of those in need because of age, ill-health, disability, financial hardship, unemployment or other disadvantage. They have a hut on the sea front to facilitate water sports.

Above And Beyond Trust did not gain quite enough votes to become our main appeal charity, but David Warden has pledged to invite the charity to speak to us in the near future.

David Warden presented a special chocolate award to Aaron Darkwood (photo, right and bottom) to thank him for his unstinting volunteering support for Dorset Humanists including preparing much of the food for the AGM. Aaron is our photographer and he often leads our walks. He is also a member of the production team for *Humanistically Speaking* online magazine. David would like to apologise for ruining Aaron's diet and fitness regime.



Selfies by Aaron



2023 AGM attendees – photo by Aaron

AGM report in brief

Our AGM was held on Saturday 11th March at Moordown Community Centre, following a delicious lunch organised by volunteers Aaron Darkwood, Daniel Dancey, Noah, and Cathy Silman. We are very grateful to all of them, and many others who helped on the day.

1. Accounts for the year ending 31st December 2022

The accounts were presented by our treasurer Daniel Dancey. Member Chris Smith confirmed that she was highly satisfied with the accuracy of the accounts and members voted to approve them. We are very grateful to Daniel and Chris for their work on the accounts.

2. Hope for Food Foodbank Report

Mary Duncan, general manager of Hope for Food, gave a short but inspiring address to tell us about the work of Hope for Food and to thank Dorset Humanists for the support we have provided over several years.

3. Dorset Humanists committee

These members of Dorset Humanists were re-elected: David Warden, Lyn Glass, Cathy Silman, John Kingston, Dean Robertson, Simon Whipple, Phil Butcher, Daniel Dancey, and Sally Hawsworth. New committee members are George Askwith, Barry Newman, and Simon Bowden. David Warden was elected to serve as Chair of Dorset Humanists for a further one-year term. Chris Street stood down and David Warden presented him with a gift as a token of our thanks for serving on the committee for fifteen years as our webmaster and as one of our school visitors.

4. Humanist of the Year 2023

Barry Newman was awarded Dorset Humanists *Humanist of the Year 2023*. This is to recognise Barry's enthusiasm in becoming a trained school speaker and representative on the Dorset SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education).

5. 2023 Appeal

Four charities were proposed. Chris Smith spoke in favour of the Uganda Humanist Schools Trust. Chris is a Trustee. Roz Scammell spoke about Bournemouth Above And Beyond Trust, a local charity for Armed Forces veterans. Mary Duncan spoke about Hope for Food. The fourth charity was Macmillan Caring Locally, proposed by Sandra Lucie-Smith. The first vote was to decide whether to support two charities, rather than just one. This was approved. The second vote was to choose the two charities gaining the most votes. These were Hope for Food and the Uganda Humanist Schools Trust.

Further information

Please email chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk if you are a paid-up member of Dorset Humanists and would like a copy of the minutes.

Humanism and metaphor

As part of his annual report at the AGM, David Warden spoke about Dorset Humanists' Five Aims and he suggested some ways in which metaphor can assist us to explain humanism in a more imaginative way. The talk was recorded but unfortunately the sound quality was not up to our usual quality and therefore we have not published it on YouTube.



The mission and aims of humanism

You may have noticed that the word 'mission' has come back into vogue. It's so fashionable again the Labour Party has adopted - not just one mission but five! Well, as you know we've got 5 aims:

1. To promote Humanism understood as a non-religious ethical worldview
2. To develop, and serve the needs of, the Humanist community in Dorset
3. To promote the public understanding of science
4. To be a force for good in our local community and globally
5. To support the work of our partners

Let's unpack these a bit. I think 3, 4 and 5 are fairly straightforward. Number 3: To promote the public understanding of science – we've had a number of talks about science this year including astronomy, the philosophy of science, and artificial intelligence. Number 4: To be a force for good in our local community and globally. Two examples - we've given donations to Hope for Food and to the Humanist Schools in Uganda. Number 5: to support the work of our partners – I can give two examples – we've hosted talks by the Chief Executive of the National Secular Society, Stephen Evans, and also the President of Humanists International, Andrew Copson. And I attended the Humanists UK AGM and Convention in Belfast. And Dorset

Humanists generously paid for my accommodation. Number 2: We serve the needs of the humanist community in Dorset by our existence and our lively programme of events. There's still a lively humanist discussion group in Dorchester so we are covering both ends of the county. What does 'develop the humanist community' mean? I think it means to develop our understanding of humanism but also to grow the humanist community in a numerical sense.

Let's focus on our first two aims for a moment. I think they go together: promoting humanism and developing the humanist community. I think it's by accident rather than by design that these two aims are pretty much the same as the first two aims of Humanists UK:

Humanists UK aims to achieve a situation where:

1. Humanism is understood as an ethical and fulfilling non-religious approach to life involving a naturalistic view of the universe.
2. People with humanist beliefs and values are supported in identifying themselves as humanists and in expressing those beliefs and values in their lives.

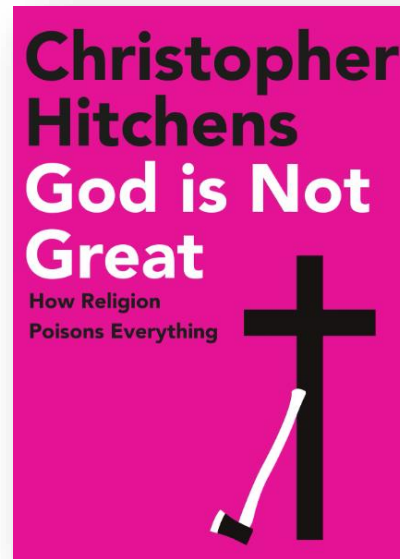
I think ours are more succinct but there may be some strengths in the Humanists UK version as well. ▷

But even so, our first one is still a bit convoluted: “To promote Humanism understood as a non-religious ethical worldview.” I’d like to suggest some ways in which we might be able to talk about humanism in a less abstract and perhaps a more engaging way.

Metaphors for humanism

One of the things that has been keeping me busy recently is that I’m contributing to an academic book on myth and metaphor. This came about because two years ago I gave an online talk on the historical Jesus – or rather the mythical Jesus – to a philosophy group in Wincanton and afterwards I was contacted by an academic writer and researcher who lives in Shaftesbury. She asked me if I would be interested in writing a chapter on humanism for her proposed new book on myth, metaphor and ‘spiritual consciousness’. Perhaps because my ego was flattered, I foolishly agreed! To cut a long story short, it’s got me thinking about metaphor and how human beings often express abstract things in terms of metaphors. For example, the concept of a human life is a bit abstract. So we talk about it in terms of a *journey*. There are other related phrases: *Our paths crossed*. *Where is your life going? Keep right on to the end to the road*. The process of thinking itself is a bit abstract. So we talk about it in terms of food: *Let’s chew over that idea. That will take me a while to digest. That’s a bit of a hot potato*. We often talk about abstract things in terms which are more concrete or immediate. So I’m going to suggest some ways in which we *might* be able to talk about humanism – perhaps more engagingly – because humanism itself is pretty abstract and it can be quite difficult to explain to people what humanism is. I’m sure you’ve had that experience. These are merely suggestions.

1. Humanism is the antidote to religion. The implication here is that religion is *poison* which is how Christopher Hitchens described it. I don’t want to imply that *all* religion is poisonous. But some aspects of it are.



Christopher Hitchens famously described religion as ‘poison’. If this is the case then humanism is the antidote.

Bertrand Russell kept a copy of Voltaire next to his copy of the Bible. He described the pairing as “poison and antidote”. So humanism is the antidote to fundamentalism, fanaticism, and irrationality. An antidote to all the bad things we sometimes find in religion but also elsewhere.

2. Humanism inoculates brains against mind viruses. Another medical metaphor. So it’s an ‘intellectual vaccine’ against any fanatical ideology or irrational belief.

3. Humanism is an ‘operating system’ for humans. This is a software metaphor. We could say that all religions and worldviews are like operating systems - a system of ideas or programs implanted in the mind which gives you a sense of meaning and understanding about how to operate in the world as a human being. The humanist operating system comes with lots of really good modules or apps: The rational thinking app. The anti-superstition app. The scepticism app. The free speech app. The human rights app. The ethics and morality app. The how to be happy app.

4. Humanism is a map of reality. Maybe maps are a bit old fashioned. But I think humanism can help us to navigate our way through life but it’s not a detailed set of instructions. ▷

5. Humanism is a work in progress. It's not and perhaps never will be a finished dogma. That's why we don't have a sacred book of scriptures.

Can we do the same thing with Dorset Humanists? Dorset Humanists is recognised as a *charity* by the Inland Revenue. We usually call Dorset Humanists a local humanist *group*. Barry sometimes refers to us as a *club*. Lyn has sometimes called Dorset Humanists a *family*. Here are five more suggestions:

1. Dorset Humanists is a philosophical society. But it's not *just* a philosophical society – we've got a mission which is to promote humanism.

2. Dorset Humanists is an ethical society. Humanist groups used to be called ethical societies. The idea here is that as humanists we try live by an ethical ideal. Living a good life.

3. Dorset Humanists is a micro-university – similar to U3A in some respects. Over the years I've attended hundreds of lectures here and I've learned a huge amount about all sorts of things. So it is a place of learning.

4. Dorset Humanists is a community organisation. It's *our* community but we are also engaging with the wider community in various ways.

5. Dorset Humanists is a refuge for religious refugees. This is an important one. I'm an ex-evangelical Christian. One of our current members is an ex-missionary. Another is an ex-JW. One of our former members was an ex-Catholic bishop. Some of our members have religious people in their families. It's an important function. And we belong to a global community of humanist organisations. Last week I joined a Zoom meeting hosted by Humanists International. There were humanists there from Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Canada, Australia, Mexico, Lithuania, Turkey, Zimbabwe, India and Singapore. So humanism is a global community and we are part of it.

In conclusion, can I just say how much I appreciate your support and loyalty to Dorset Humanists and the wider humanist movement. Every time you make the effort to come here, every time you make a donation, or pay your annual sub, and every time you volunteer to help, you're helping to strengthen the local and the global humanist community. So thank you for everything you do.



Mary Duncan from Hope for Food thanked Dorset Humanists for all the large food consignments we have given to the foodbank.



Chocolate brownies paired with Eton Mess: delicious puddings were served at the AGM!



Letters & Emails

It's your column...

From Jonathan Crozier about The Philosophy of Friendship talk, via Meetup comments

Thank you, David, for an informative, enjoyable and thought-provoking evening. Thank you, too, to those who offered their personal experiences and insights. Although you concentrated on the anthropological side of the coin of friendship, philosophical points presented themselves throughout the course of the evening. Like you, I am a book lover, and I have been turning over in my mind your question "Can books be friends?" As Professor Joad would have said on "The Brains Trust" radio programme decades ago, "It all depends on what you mean by friends." You will, therefore, hopefully understand me when I say that I believe that a book can be a friend, but not that one can make friends with a book. As several in the audience rightly observed, there needs to be mutuality and reciprocity in relationships of friendship. Maybe the answer is that there has to be a particular kind of reciprocity to make friends.

Another interesting aspect raised was that of the possibility, or impossibility, of being friends with those who have died. Like you, I have photographs of my parents in my home for which I have reserved prominent positions. This is because, when they were still alive, they were major positive influences in my life. They still live in my heart and mind, as your parents still do in yours.

Perhaps, like me, you know some religious people who observe All Souls' Day. I have long thought that religions were pre-scientific attempts at social and personal psychology. The next time I have the opportunity, I will put the 'friendship with the dead' question to

them. I honestly have no idea what answers they will give, but I suspect that some will surprise me, as they would you.

From Aaron Darkwood about Dorset Humanists' AGM

Four hours after getting home from the AGM, and I'm still buzzing with the energy and excitement of the day's events! Who said AGMs are boring and uneventful? As we turn to a new financial year, a full twelve members on the committee, a bunch of metaphors to develop a marketing strategy around and just the pleasant glow of being surrounded by ever-friendly humanists, I'm thankful to you all for being there.

Making a difference holds an immense amount of value. Today's efforts to bring an exciting agenda together started with the committee forming a plan, a handful of people catering to the food needs, an audience turning up and all those pulling together to tidy and clean up at the end. It really is heart-warming when we pull together like this.

In groups all around the UK, there are the organisers and there is the audience. As David Warden played around with words of society, family, colleagues... I think 'community' is one I favour. There is no 'us and them' in Dorset Humanists. We are collectively the thing that makes it what it is. If you're not one of those on the committee, I would strongly suggest stepping up as a volunteer, and help be a part of making it happen. Helping with food, putting leaflets out, moving chairs or assisting in the technical side... everyone's help is valued, and we're always needing extra hands to ease the workload on everyone else.

If you missed today or felt our 'state of the union' address was going to be in some way boring, you really missed out. Great food, lively chatter, social interaction, and a review of our annual achievements by our re-elected Chairman. For those thousand out there reading this, where have you been? Your local friendly humanist group is ready to greet you.

View from the Chair

David Warden
Chairman of Dorset Humanists



I've already had more than my fair share of space in this bulletin, but I don't want to disappoint those of you who look forward to reading my opinions on humanism and the state of the world in general!

I'm grateful to Aaron for his effusive email on the letters page. I agree about the importance of community. We know from longitudinal studies that the number one ingredient in human happiness is *meaningful and supportive relationships* and *social connection*. We literally die early if we are not connected to other people. This is why the shunning practices of some religions are so immensely cruel. I'm incredibly proud of the community we have built up at Dorset Humanists over the last 26 years. Some of our members have been with us since the beginning, and I am so grateful for your friendship and loyalty. I'm also proud of the fact that we do our level best to be inclusive. We may have a reputation for being a bit highbrow and intellectual – but Dorset Humanists is also a place of learning in a conducive atmosphere. Humanism is, after all, about *Enlightenment*. The Enlightenment that comes from human thought and discovery. Philosopher Julian Baggini was on Radio 4's *Start the Week* a couple of weeks ago and he expressed an excellent and original humanist slogan: "Think *for* yourself... but not *by* yourself." This perfectly encapsulates one of our main purposes in running a humanist society. I emailed him to say we would like to use it, and credit it to him.

In my address at the AGM, I also suggested that humanism is an intellectual vaccine which can inoculate us against mind viruses. I didn't have time to expand much on this. One of the 'viruses of the mind' I was thinking about relates to the human tendency to believe things not because they are true but because they are the beliefs which are expected of you by your class or group or tribe or cult. If you deviate from them even slightly, your heresy is immediately sniffed out and you are at risk from being shamed and even ostracised. Dissenting from group beliefs comes at high social cost which is why we generally prefer to persuade ourselves that the beliefs of our group are not only factually correct but also virtuous. People who dissent from these beliefs are considered ignorant and even hateful. This partly explains how our culture has become so toxic and polarised, with group beliefs hardening into dogma and rhetoric against other groups becoming ever more extreme, such as Gary Lineker's hyperbolic implication that the government are like Nazis. As humanists we should always be on our guard against this tendency to anathematize others who disagree with *our* opinions. We should believe things because they are true, not because they make us feel virtuous. Humanists are supposed to be heretics and dissenters. We should always, like Socrates, follow the argument wherever it leads, and be prepared to drink the hemlock of social opprobrium if our consciences, informed by evidence and critical thinking, lead us to have dissenting beliefs. It takes courage to be a humanist in this sense.