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April 2017

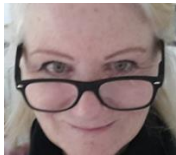
Dorset Humanists

Atheists and agnostics for a better world

■ **Saturday 8th April 2.00pm**

Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW

Memories of a Former Sri Chinmoy member



Former Sri Chinmoy group member Alice Herron spent 27 years as a devotee of the Indian guru, Sri Chinmoy. She will describe how as an

idealistic young woman she joined a meditation group, and how this group grew and changed over the subsequent years. She will also cover Chinmoy's life as he travelled the world gaining new disciples, meeting the rich and famous, and building a worldwide spiritual empire. Explaining why she eventually left, this presentation is an insider view of life in a Hindu-based religion in the later part of the 20th century. Alice will highlight both the positive and negative aspects of such groups.

Alice Herron is a retired business studies lecturer. After leaving the Sri Chinmoy group she studied psychology of religion at Heythrop College, University of London, where her master's dissertation was titled, 'Psychological Factors in the Emergence of New Religious Movements'. She is currently a psychology PhD candidate at the University of Surrey, researching atheists who claim to have had some kind of mystical-type experience. She aims to complete her PhD in 2018.

■ **Wednesday 26th April 7.30pm**

Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX

First Brexit, then Trump

How did we end up here and where should we go?



It's the failure of mainstream economics that got us 'here' – but where are we? This talk by economist Steve Laughton aims to debunk mainstream economics, espoused by 90 per cent of academia, and

explain why political parties are struggling to convince electorates that they have answers to their problems. Steve will demystify economics, a subject which, he will argue, has morphed into a fake science hiding behind beautiful mathematical models built on false assumptions. Steve will explain the jargon which economists use as a cloak of authority including 'crowding out', 'deflation', 'trade deals', 'neo-liberalism', and 'libertarianism'. After the crash, the Queen famously asked 'Why did no one see it coming?' There is now a new breed of heterodox economists, such as Professor Steve Keen, who did see it coming and who are warning of trouble to come if we don't change course.

Under the tutorship of Professor Keen, Steve Laughton is currently undertaking research into exchange rate policies and post-Keynesian theory. He is member of the Labour Party, the Fabians, and Dorset Humanists.

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■ **Thursday 6th April 7.30pm** and every first Thursday evening of the month at Moon in the Square, Exeter Rd, BH2 5AQ



Pub socials

Enjoy stimulating conversation over a drink or two at our pub social evening. Look out for the Dorset Humanists signs on the table. We warmly welcome regulars and newcomers.

☎ Dean 07713 858773

■ **Sundays 10.15am**



Sunday Walks

April 23rd. Tadnoll and Winfrith Heath nature reserve. Enjoy the early signs of spring in a quiet part of Dorset heathland - Hardy's "Egdon Heath". May include a visit to T E Lawrence's resting place. 5-7 miles.

May 21st Studland Peninsula. 7 miles.

Please check [Meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com) for further details and any last minute cancellations due to weather conditions.

Phil ☎ 07817 260498

■ **Saturday 13th May 3.50pm**

Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW

Notice of EGM

Dorset Humanists will hold an Extraordinary General Meeting at Moordown Community Centre on Saturday 13th May at 3.50pm to vote on the proposal that Dorset Humanists becomes a partner of the LGB&T Dorset Equality Network. This vote was carried over from the AGM owing to lack of time. See inside this Bulletin for further information and discussion. Paid-up members may vote at the meeting or by email or post to arrive with the Secretary or Chairman no later than 12th May.



Lyn Glass with BHA President Shappi Khorsandi at Lighthouse. Forty members of Dorset Humanists enjoyed the show and drinks with Shappi afterwards.

"A tremendous evening!" *Chris Smith*

■ **Wednesday 19th April 2017 7.30pm**

Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX. £2.00 donation requested.

Introducing our new 'short talks' programme by members of Dorset Humanists.

Poetic Naturalism

A short talk by Chris Street based on cosmologist and physics professor Sean Carroll's book *The Big Picture: On the Origins of Life, Meaning and the Universe Itself* (2016).

Technobiophilia

Nature and Wellbeing in the Digital Age

A short talk by Sue Thomas based on her book *Technobiophilia: Nature and Cyberspace* (2013). This talk introduces a few of the ways we can feel better about technology-induced anxiety.

Please check [Meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com) for further details

Future dates for your diary:

■ **Saturday 13th May 2.00** Moordown

A walk with our Ancestors: Human Evolution and Archaeology with Emeritus Professor Norman Maclean

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■ Weds May 24th April 7.30 Green House Hotel 'Humanism and Feminism' BU lecturer Frances Hawkhead

■ Saturday June 10th 2.00 Moordown 'Tolpuddle – a radical, revolutionary and religious Dorset village' David Nunn

■ Wednesday 28th June Green House Hotel 'Was God a magician?' An hour of fun, fantasy and flim-flam with Dr Richard Rawlins.

Other events of interest...

■ **Wednesday 5th April 7.30pm**
Black Bear Hotel, 14 South St, Wareham BH20 4LT. Free entry – small donation appreciated 'Out of the Box' presents:

Marriage and Same-Sex Relationships

Humanist and Christian perspectives

Can Christians and Humanists reach common ground on this divisive issue? Will the church eventually modify its stand on same-sex marriage? Come along and join the conversation!

'Out of the Box' is a dialogue group for Humanists and Christians. The emphasis is on listening, learning and respectful discussion.

Humanist pastoral care

Dorset Humanists is introducing a pastoral support service. Please contact Susan Bryson on 079802 776234 or Cathy Silman on 07817 695615 if you ever need help with a small task or help with transport or just a friend to talk to. If either Susan or Cathy are unavailable or unable to help they will endeavour to find someone who can. Please make contact and we will do our humanistic best! As this a new venture please also come forward with your suggestions as to how we can develop this support service.

Dorset Humanists AGM

Members enjoyed a delicious buffet lunch prepared by Susan Bryson and Cathy Silman before this year's AGM. Reports were presented by outgoing treasurer Simon Whitlock, Vice Chair Lyn Glass, and by Susan Bryson and Cathy Silman on the topic of pastoral care for our members. David Warden presented a review of the year. Maggie Pepin was awarded Honorary Membership of Dorset Humanists in recognition of conducting over 200 humanist funerals. Aaron Darkwood was awarded 'Humanist of the Year' for the energetic contribution he has made to Dorset Humanists over the last two years.

The proposal to formalise an events donation request to £3 for visitors and £1 for members was not approved. The proposal to become a partner of the LGB&T Dorset Equality Network was postponed for further discussion (see next page for further information). A proposal to add wording to the Dorset Humanists vision statement ran out of time.

The elected committee members are David Warden (Chair), Lyn Glass (Vice Chair), Cathy Silman (Secretary), John Kingston (Treasurer), Chris Street (Website), Dean Robertson, Susan Bryson, and Phil Butcher. There are two vacancies.

New treasurer

We are very pleased to announce that committee member John Kingston has been appointed to the role of treasurer. We thank outgoing treasurer Simon Whitlock for his excellent stewardship of our finances for the past three years.

Membership Development

We are very pleased to announce that Aaron Darkwood has been appointed to the role of 'Membership Development'. The aim of this role is to help Dorset Humanists meet its membership target of 200.

There has been an expression of interest in our Diversity role. Publicity remains unfilled. Please contact David Warden if you would like more information about this role.

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Should Dorset Humanists become a partner of the LGBT Dorset Equality Network?

At our AGM in March members voted to postpone a vote on this proposal to allow for further discussion and reflection. This article provides factual information and responses to some of the points which were made on the day and subsequently. Names were supplied to the Editor but are not included below. There will be an Extraordinary General Meeting on Saturday 13th May from 3.50-4.30pm in order for members to discuss and vote on the proposal.

Dorset LGBT Equality Network is a registered charity which works towards creating a Dorset which is free of hostility and discrimination against people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. The Network exists to support LGBT people who feel isolated and vulnerable – a particular concern in a rural county like Dorset. It seeks to tackle issues such as mental health and homophobia in sport and schools. It works with local authority and public service organisations to combat LGBT discrimination, prejudice, and hate-crime. The Network works with Dorset Police, Prejudice Free Dorset, Dorset Community Action, and Dorset councils. As a relatively new network its current partners are specifically LGBT organisations like Bourne Free but it is hoping to broaden its support base to include other organisations which support its aims.

Dorset Humanists can help the Network achieve its aims through educational talks and discussions (for example, in the past we have hosted talks by Peter Tatchell) and the Network can help Dorset Humanists extend its rational and non-religious influence on public debate in Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset. David Warden has already spoken about Humanism at a Network event where the Mayor and police equality officers were present.

The core values of Humanism include human rights, human dignity, and equality

of people regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age and so forth. The struggle for dignity and equality for LGBT people, and for people in these other groups, is far from over, despite positive changes in legislation. At least one member of Dorset Humanists has been physically attacked for being gay and other members and visitors have experienced verbal abuse and mental health problems related to isolation and fear of 'coming out' as gay or lesbian.

Dorset Humanists is already partnered to 'LGBT Humanists' which is a section of the British Humanist Association. 'LGBT Humanists' exists to campaign for equality and diversity, particularly relating to sexual orientation and identity – both in the UK and internationally. Dorset Humanists includes a small 'LGBT Humanists' logo on its programme as a signal to LGBT people that Dorset Humanists is a welcoming and safe space for them. A partnership arrangement with the Dorset LGBT Equality Network would strengthen this aspect of Humanism at the local level.

1. “Why is Dorset Humanists proposing to link to an LGBT organisation rather than organisations dealing with, for example, race equality?”

The reason for this proposal being considered now is that we were invited by the LGBT Network to become a partner following David Warden's talk on the gay victims of the Holocaust at Bournemouth and Poole Holocaust Memorial Day. Dorset Race Equality Council also operates a partnership arrangement. If Dorset Humanists decided in principle that it would like to support local equality groups in this way then joining the LGBT network as a partner could be a catalyst for other similar arrangements.

2. “I'm against humanists setting up separate subgroups – we should all be integrated.”

The proposal is not to set up a separate sub-group. The proposal is to support the work of an equality network whose particular focus is LGBT equality.

3. “If Dorset Humanists becomes a partner of the LGBT Network people might think we are a gay group.”

The current partners of the LGBT Network are

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LGBT groups but the Network wishes to broaden its partnership base to non-LGBT groups that support its aims. Any reference to this partnership on our leaflets and website would be appropriate and proportionate.

4. “The British Humanist Association is against such partnerships. We should stick to humanist matters where our expertise lies.” This does not appear to be the case. The BHA states on its website that it is ‘proud to support the LGBT Humanists’ as a section of the BHA campaigning for LGBT equality and dignity both nationally and internationally.

5. “Differences in approach might arise to the extent that the partnership could become untenable.” If differences in approach arose to the extent that the partnership became untenable we would terminate the arrangement.

6. “I’m against partnerships in general except to specifically humanist organisations. For example, I never wanted to link to the National Secular Society.” We took a democratic decision to become an affiliated group of the National Secular Society because our aims are sufficiently similar even though the NSS does not identify as a specifically humanist organisation.

7. “I see no reason why Dorset Humanists should not support certain LGBT events and campaigns just as we have done with other organisations with whom we are in sympathy. I just think it would be wrong to tie the full partner knot. I suppose we could publish a list of organisations whose aims are generally in line with ours and with whom we have worked.” We could, but this is not the current proposal under consideration.

8. “Isn’t it probable that some LGBT people are not Humanists and some Humanists are not fully in sympathy with LGBT actions?” Of course, not all LGBT people are humanists. It’s hard to imagine, however, that anyone who identifies as a humanist is not fully in sympathy with the aims of dignity and equality for all demographic groups including race, gender, sexuality and so forth.

9. “I’m not terribly comfortable with some of the very “in your face” LGBT events which IMO are a bit OTT for people like me.” This is a bit off-topic but as Bourne Free is coming up again soon let’s talk about it. ‘Gay Pride’ marches are meant to be political and celebratory. They are not to everyone’s taste and there is no compulsion to join in. However, LGBT people are always hugely appreciative of ‘straight allies’ – people who are neither LGB nor T and yet who are prepared to ‘walk in their shoes’ for a couple of miles and express solidarity with people who are still being stigmatised, persecuted, attacked, imprisoned, and killed around the globe. All sorts of organisations, commercial companies, and community groups march in the Bourne Free parade. Some are LGBT. Many are not.

10. “Unfortunately, this state of indecision leaves current and potential LGBT members unsure of how accepted and welcomed they really are in Dorset Humanists.” Ideally, it would have been good to have had more time in the run up to the AGM to discuss this proposal with members. The invitation was received in early February following David Warden’s talk at Holocaust Memorial Day and the AGM seemed a good first opportunity for members to consider the proposal. Whatever the members’ decision at our EGM in May, our partnership with LGBT Humanists at national level remains in place and Dorset Humanists will continue as before to be an accepting and welcoming place for LGBT people.

11. “I feel embarrassed and a little ashamed that Alan Mercel-Sanca from the LGB&T Dorset Equality network sat there and experienced our very ‘non-equality’ based conversation.”

Alan Mercel-Sanca wrote: ‘I enjoy difficult questions because that way advances are made. There were as many supportive questions and statements of support. Postponing the decision is very different to rejecting it. Really good to meet and make new friends at your AGM’.

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A Sceptic's Guide to the Origins of Christianity



Peter Marchant from Isle of Wight Humanists spoke to us at our Green House meeting in March. The material he presented demonstrates that the New Testament is a

sophisticated work of literature, much of which is written in elaborate code, rather than history. The New Testament writers reworked well-known stories both from the Hebrew scriptures and from classical Greek authors. Readers at the time would have appreciated this far better than their Christian descendants today who naively believe that the Gospels are 'gospel truth'! This article is based on extracts from Peter Marchant's book '3 Peter: A Sceptic's Guide to the Origins of Christianity' (2016) as well as elements of his talk.

Peter commenced his talk by contradicting the so-called 'Big Bang' model of Christian origins which holds that the original pure deposit of faith came from one man Jesus Christ and only later degenerated into rival heretical sects. Peter believes that the opposite is true: that Christianity started out as a wide variety of beliefs within Judaism which only later coalesced into a monolithic faith. This was achieved by the early Catholic Church which enforced its opinions from the 2nd century onwards by rewriting texts and by excluding any documents and contrary opinions from the developing canon of scripture. The Gospels themselves were written to anchor Christian doctrine in a narrative purporting to be history.

Peter then presented an intriguing account of the system known as Anno Domini (AD) which reset the Western calendar to the supposed birth date of Jesus Christ. It was introduced by Dionysius Exiguus ('Denis the Humble') in the early 6th century. As the actual birth date of Jesus was unknown it seems that Dionysius adopted the convoluted reasoning of the 2nd century Christian writer Tertullian. Tertullian 'calculated' the birth of Jesus by counting

back 70 years from the known date of the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem (AD 70 according to the new calendar). Tertullian's reasoning was based on the early Christian belief that Jesus was the Third (spiritual) Temple and the belief that there were 70 years between the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians and the building of the Second. Tertullian, a keen numerologist, surmised that 70 years must also have separated the Roman destruction of the Second Temple and the birth of the Third. So 70 minus 70 gives us the start of the new era, give or take a year! (If you're struggling to follow the logic, don't worry. Tertullian also believed there 'ought' to be four Gospels in the New Testament to correspond to the 'four winds'.)

The biography of Jesus was constructed largely by the process of *haggadah* – a Jewish literary term meaning the retelling of stories with new characters and contexts and with elements of intensification, exaggeration, combination and reversal. Jesus is thus portrayed in different places as Moses, Elijah, Elisha, the new Joshua (the Hebrew equivalent of Jesus), David, Jonah, 'Suffering Servant', 'Son of Man' and so on. There are many parallels between Moses and the life of Jesus in Matthew's gospel. For example, the baby Moses was concealed in a basket in the bulrushes to avoid the decree of a new pharaoh who wanted to drown all male Hebrew children in the river Nile. Similarly, Jesus was born in a manger and when King Herod heard about his birth he ordered the execution of all young male children in the vicinity of Bethlehem, prompting Joseph to take the family to Egypt for safety. Moses spent 40 years and Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness. Moses fed the Israelites with manna from heaven; Elisha fed a small crowd with loaves and fishes; Jesus fed thousands with a few loaves and fishes. Moses imparted the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai; Jesus gave his Sermon on the Mount. Peter Marchant provides many more examples in his book, especially regarding the Passion narratives.

The New Testament writers were Greek speakers and men of literature. They would

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have had an in-depth knowledge of some of the core texts of Greek culture, above all Homer. Homer is the name given to the semi-legendary author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, two epic poems which are the central works of Greek literature. New Testament writers would also have been familiar with the work of Athenian dramatists such as Euripides. The author of Luke's gospel and Acts of the Apostles was the most literate of the New Testament writers. His account of Paul's escape from prison in Acts is based on the similar escape of Dionysus in Euripides' tragedy *The Bacchae*. Both tales include a miraculous breaking of chains followed by an earthquake. Homer's *Odyssey* is also the basis for Paul's missionary journeys as related in Acts. Homer was almost certainly a significant influence on the gospel of Mark. For example, the backbone of the story is the inordinate number of sea voyages undertaken by Jesus in imitation of Odysseus – despite the absurdity of staging such voyages on the puny inland Sea of Galilee.

The Gospels are structured in sophisticated literary forms such as *chiasmus* (mirror symmetry) and *mimesis* (imitation). This further undermines any idea that they are biographical narratives. People's lives are not lived out in repetitive patterns or in symmetry. One of the most astounding uses of *chiasmus* underlies the entire Gospel of Matthew. Eleven episodes in the Gospel lead up to the plot of the Pharisees to kill Jesus. This is followed by another eleven episodes on the same subjects but this time in reverse order. (The complete sequence is provided in 3 Peter on pages 76-77.)

As to whether Jesus was a real person in history or not, Peter Marchant writes that Jesus was either an historical person mythicized or a mythical entity historicised. Peter now thinks that the balance of probability lies with the second, more sceptical, of these two propositions.

<http://www.3peter.co.uk/>



Letters & Emails

It's your column...

From Jack

I was disheartened to hear that some members were not in full support of the proposal to become a partner of the LGBT Dorset Equality Network. Many people believe that times have changed and incidents of homophobia do not occur anymore. This is not the case. All through school and my younger years up until now I was picked on for acting/being gay so much so that I did not feel confident enough to attend college. After living and being raised in the Poole and Wareham area I have noticed the majority can be still very homophobic and people do not understand what it is like because it is deemed as abnormal to not 'go forth and multiply' as the Bible says. Many other people still experience all sorts of problems like verbal and physical abuse because of their sexual orientation. And some feel constantly uncomfortable just to be themselves.

I thought humanism was about being accepted for who you are and valued for the individual that you are. I think the LGBT partnership is a great opportunity and will help a lot of people and raise more awareness to be accepting of all types and free from discrimination that humanism claims to be.

From Aaron Darkwood

I would just like to voice my thanks and appreciation to Frances Usher for such a well-crafted and beautifully illustrated talk at 'Out of the Box' on her journey through life, with toes dipping in and out of various faith avenues, and a superb summing up at the end. It was an honour to be present.

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Dorset Humanists **Chairman's View**

April 2017



Mark Horsford (top left) was very appreciative of our Winter Appeal cheque and he gave me a mini tour of Michael House hostel. It was an uplifting experience. Walls in the communal areas are enlivened with inspiring pieces of original art (created by residents) and the garden is a calm oasis of lush plants and homes for birds, bees, and hedgehogs. Michael House is a vibrant, creative community which helps to restore hope and happiness to those who pass through its doors on their way to a new home of their own.

The risk of being made homeless in Bournemouth if you are on benefits is very real. One of our own members is facing this prospect. Tenants have few rights and suitable accommodation can be very hard to find. Our new pastoral team has been able to offer some support and advice to the member affected but the real remedy is for the government to build 250,000 new homes a year to keep up with demand. The government agrees with this target (housing White Paper published 7th February 2017). For further information you can read the plan devised by the charity Shelter at <http://thehomesweneed.org.uk/>

I also received effusive thanks from Mosaic when they received our Winter Appeal cheque: "This is fantastic news and the money raised for Mosaic will be put to good use." It is estimated that in Dorset 2,500 children and young people will be bereaved by the death of a close relative each year – that's seven children per day. Most families cope in their own way but approximately 250 children will need additional support and that's where Mosaic can help with counselling and a residential weekend. Mosaic newsletters will be available at our next meeting or you can visit Mosaic online.

I support the proposal for Dorset Humanists to become a partner of the LGB&T Dorset Equality Network. Equality and human rights for all demographic groups is a core element of Humanism and I have written to Dorset Race Equality Council to enquire about their similar partnership arrangements. Partnerships like this can help Dorset Humanists to punch above its weight in the local community. I hope you will give this proposal careful thought and come to our EGM in May to vote on it.

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