



A PARTNER OF THE
BRITISH HUMANIST
ASSOCIATION

national
secular
society

December 2014

Dorset Humanists

Atheists and agnostics for a better world

■ **13th December 2014 2.00pm**
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation
Avenue, BH9 1TW

Humanist Schools in Uganda

A talk by Steve Hurd. A third of Uganda's population live in severe poverty. Belief in witchcraft, demonic possession and pseudoscience is widespread, and the country has been identified as the world's most dangerous place to live if you are gay. Against this backdrop of superstitious beliefs and religious bigotry, the Uganda Humanist Schools Trust was established to support three secondary schools offering liberal secular-humanist education in impoverished rural communities, providing otherwise-unattainable education for children growing up without electricity, sanitation, or running water, many of whom are orphans. The schools aim to provide an education that respects freedom of thought and expression, rational scientific enquiry, human rights, gender and racial equality, and that attains high levels of achievement and social responsibility. Join us to discover the remarkable story of these inspirational schools and their achievements.



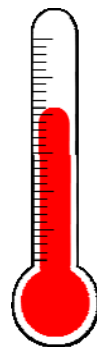
**3.30pm Mince pies and
mulled wine in support of
our Winter Appeal**

Do join us after the main meeting for our traditional festive mince pies and mulled wine. These refreshments are provided free but please give generously to our Jane



David Warden after the Bournemouth Remembrance Service where he represented the Defence Humanists – a section of the British Humanist Association.

Bannister Winter Appeal in aid of the New Forest Night Stop hostel and Women's Refuge – see inside for full details.



**Winter Appeal:
Only 10 days left to
help us reach our
target! See inside...**

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■ **Thursday 11th December**
6.30pm – 9.00pm
 Octagon Café, Pummary
 Square, Poundbury, DT1 3GW

West Dorset Humanists Christmastime Social

West Dorset Humanists will provide a glass of wine or soft drink and nibbles. However, we would be really grateful if you could bring some drink or some finger food to help the evening along. The Octagon is a cosy venue. Come and join us!

■ **Saturday 10th January 2.00pm**
 Moordown Community Centre, Coronation
 Avenue, BH9 1TW

Humanism, Politics and our Future



Professor Greg Claeys
 Are you fed up with bankers' bonuses, corporate giants evading tax, unaffordable housing, and incompetent government? In preparation

for the May 2015 general election, Greg Claeys will be considering the policies of our political parties and how well they correspond with our secular humanist tradition of working for a better world.

Greg is Professor of the History of Political Thought at Royal Holloway, University of London and is a popular speaker on both humanist themes and politics.

■ **Wednesday 28th January 7.30pm**
 Green House Hotel, Grove Road, Bmth

Escaping from Mormonism

Founded in the 1820s by Joseph Smith the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (aka 'the Mormons') demands strict obedience from its adherents, and controls almost every aspect of their daily lives. Former Mormon Ben Taylor will be sharing his personal experiences of being raised as a devout believer in this secretive cult. Ben is now a humanist.

■ **Thursday 8th January 7.30pm**
 Moon in the Square, Exeter Rd, BH2 5AQ



Social Evening

Enjoy stimulating conversation over a drink or two at our latest pub social evening. There is no fixed agenda so if you have any interesting topics or ideas you want to share and chat about in a friendly atmosphere then this meetup is for you. ☎ Dean 07713 858773

■ **Thursday 12th February 5.30pm for 5.45pm start**

Dorset Humanists Darwin Day at
 Bournemouth Natural Science Society, 39
 Christchurch Rd, Bournemouth BH1 3NS

The Difference That Darwin Has Made



Professor Anthony Grayling will address our 2015 Darwin Day celebration on the topic "The Difference That Darwin Has Made".

This will be an early evening start followed by light refreshments. Limited seating! DH members £2.00; Non-members £4.00; On the door (subject to capacity) £5.00

✉ lyn.glass@btinternet.com
 ☎ 01202 558763 or see Lyn at our events

Other local events of interest...

■ **Wednesday 10th December 7.30pm**
 Bournemouth Skeptics in the Pub at The Brunswick, Charminster, BH8 8PX
 Free entry (donations appreciated)



The Nativity: A Critical Examination

A talk by Jonathan Pearce. Another great opportunity to hear this scholarly and entertaining talk based on Jonathan's published book on the nativity of Jesus.

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Teacher, author, blogger and philosopher, Jonathan Pearce will be setting out the main problems with the historical reliability of the two infancy narratives, and building a cumulative case for objecting to the historicity of the Gospel's nativity accounts.

Links to purchase all of Jonathan's books can be found [here](#) if you fancy doing a bit of swatting up before the talk! Check out his blog [here](#).

📧 bournemouth.skepticsinthepub.org

☎ Chris 01425 673477

■ **Sunday 21st December 11.00am**
The Brunswick Pub, Malmesbury Park Rd
Charminster, Bournemouth BH8 8PX



Sunday Assembly Bournemouth

Sunday Assembly's December theme will be 'Winter Wonderland' in which they'll be having a "festive celebration full of fun, seasonal sing-along songs, and inspirational readings and poems". They are also planning to have a shared buffet lunch until 2.00pm, so please bring some food to eat and/or share if you'd like to stay on for this. Following the group's successful food-bank collections at previous assemblies, this month they are asking attendees to donate clean warm clothes, rucksacks, sleeping bags and toiletries for the homeless. Please help if you can. Everyone welcome! Free entry (donations appreciated)

<http://bournemouth.sundayassembly.com/>

■ **Sunday 25th January 2.00pm**
Lighthouse Poole BH15 1UG



HOLOCAUST
MEMORIAL
DAY 27/1

Holocaust Memorial Day

The main speaker will be Warsaw Ghetto survivor Arieh Simonsohn. Dorset Humanist Maggie Pepin will read the Pledge. Tickets are free and available from the box office 0844 406 8666 from the beginning of December.

Jane Bannister Winter Appeal



Please give generously to our 2014 Jane Bannister Winter Appeal in support of New Forest Night Stop and Refuge. Last year we raised £1700 for these two charities. This year, an anonymous donor has already pledged £250 if

other members match this sum.

Jane Bannister (1944-2013) was a former Chair of Dorset Humanists and very supportive of these charities. Cheques made payable to 'Dorset Humanists (Winter Appeal)' can be passed to David Warden or our treasurer Simon Whitlock. Dorset Humanists is now a registered charity and Gift Aid forms will be available.

10 days
left

The clock is ticking! A member of Dorset Humanists has pledged £250 to our Jane Bannister Winter Appeal if all other members together match this sum by 20th December.

newforest
nightstop *

New Forest Nightstop provides the only emergency overnight accommodation for homeless 16-24 year olds in the homes of trained and approved host households around the New Forest. New Forest Nightstop was established in 2003 and is a team approach to homelessness.

The primary aim of Nightstop is to enable homeless young people to access safe, free, emergency accommodation in our host households at the beginning of their homelessness when their need is most acute, then to support them into longer term housing through local housing providers. The support given by Nightstop improves not only young people's self-esteem but

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also their life chances, and their outcomes for employment, training, health and housing are much improved.

Nightstop is a unique and integral service in a multi-agency approach to youth homelessness. Nightstop is temporary emergency accommodation when needed at the point of crisis.

We support young people through the Supported Housing Panel where those with the highest needs are allocated appropriate accommodation if available. There is a shortage of suitable accommodation for this age group, and some young people may return home if appropriate, following mediation. Our Nightstop support volunteers give practical advice and support, helping young people who are not successful through the Housing Panel when their only option is to find accommodation in the private rented sector.

 newforestnightstop.org.uk/aboutus.html



Refuge is committed to a world where domestic violence is not tolerated and where women and children can live in safety. Refuge aims to empower women

and children to rebuild their lives, free from violence and fear.

They operate a three-pronged approach which involves:

- Providing a range of high quality services for abused women and children. Its national network of services supports women and children to regain control of their lives and move forwards in a positive way.
- Advocating for improvements to domestic violence policy and practice, and the implementation of legislation to meet the needs of abused women and children.
- Helping to prevent domestic violence through campaigning, education, training and research. We work in partnership with other agencies to raise awareness of domestic violence, its causes and solutions.

 Refuge.org.uk

‘One Life’ success

Twenty-five people attended our *One Life* course in October and November to learn more about humanism, atheism, secularism and related topics. The group fed back a whopping 95% satisfaction rating for the course as a whole.

“This course went a long way to fulfilling my objectives for doing it. It’s given me a very good understanding of humanism and signposted and enthused me to read further around the subject. Many thanks again for a fascinating six weeks.” Debbie

“The course is doing exactly as it says on the tin. For someone like me who wants to have a thorough understanding of Humanism, it could hardly be better... This was a great experience for me. I have learned a lot and have a deeper respect for Humanists now I have a better understanding of the subject. Consider a job well done!” John

“Thank you very much for a great introduction to humanism. I really enjoyed it. I will keep in touch with Dorset Humanists, a great force for good.” Martin

“I have enjoyed all the sessions, together with meeting a group of active and enthusiastic participants.” Paul



Letters & Emails

It’s your column...

From Jo Adams, Chair of West Dorset Humanists

West Dorset Humanists will be five years old on December 9th - since we had a first, exploratory meeting in my front room (this was after my meeting in Bridport with Jane and Dennis Bannister, you may remember, who were so helpful in my first thinking about setting up a group). Our first public meeting (in the Old Ship at

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Upwey) was in March 2010. The meeting last Thursday was so packed and vibrant - and the Steering Group were all playing active roles in it and I felt incredibly pleased at how far we've come in those few years.

Which is very helpful for me - because I'm sure now that WDH can continue its achievements and successes - and growth - without me. The Steering Group is strong and getting stronger and will, I'm sure take the group from strength to strength. I've taken this decision for personal reasons. I wouldn't be doing it, though, if I didn't think the Steering Group we have was well able to move forward without my input.

So part of all this is also saying a huge 'thank you' to Dorset Humanists for your invaluable help over the past five years. I think the Big-Brother-Little-Sister relationship between DH and WDH has worked so well and really appreciate your mentoring, guidance and support. I know the Steering Group will continue to look to you for that - be warned!

From Carol Wilcox, member of Dorset Humanists and Secretary of the Labour Land Campaign

I was unable to get to Doug Lock's talk on Thomas Piketty but very interested to read about the discussion. I have only skimmed through the tome myself but hear from others that 'Capital in the 21st Century' does not appear to recognise land as a separate factor of production. It is sad that economists like Piketty, who rail against the neo-liberal consensus, conflate land and capital in the same way and fail to see that much of the surplus value created by labour ends up in land values as well as financial capital. The result is gross inequality of wealth, unaffordable housing and a boom/bust economy based on debt (remember the junk mortgage-backed derivatives which crashed the financial system?).

I am pleased to see both our Chair and member Paul Entwistle endorsing land value tax (LVT) and I would like to point out to Ken Fagg that you can't hide land in a tax haven. LVT is not a panacea but most economists recognise it as the best tax we've never had. In fact we did once have it enacted here in 1931 by a Labour

government, but it was quickly repealed and never implemented.

I have recently co-authored a paper on how to introduce LVT without causing distress to ordinary homeowners. You can see it here:

www.labourland.org/papers-and-articles/

From Eric Austen, a Christian who attended our One Life course in Dorchester

In *Chairman's View* (November) you refer to the comments from a Christian minister who is attending your *One Life* course. You state that 'atheism is based on the very reasonable principle that we should not believe in entities for which there is practically no evidence'. As ever, this raises the issue of what is proof and what is evidence. You 'know' that the proof that is acceptable to you and others like you excludes the proof that others like me accept as proof. (Actually, 'proof' is too strong a word because it does not allow for the possibility of doubt and further questioning which to me is essential). In particular, for a Christian like myself, 'my experience' is valid in enabling me to reckon that, on balance, it is a valid experience of the numinous and even God. This is reinforced in me when this experience fits with the experience of people I meet which also includes some scientists.

You 'know' that you are right. And I 'know' that I am right. Actually 'know', I think, is the wrong word for both of us. I think 'belief' is the more accurate word in this context. So maybe there are at least some aspects in which it can be claimed that Atheism is, at least, in some ways similar to a faith.

In terms of our concern for humanity however we both have the same objectives. Maybe we should just get on with what we are doing that involves seeking justice for the many people in our world that are denied justice (your earlier comments about inequality are very relevant and which I totally support), against which I, with many others in the church, am seeking to do what little we can to bring about change.

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From Clive Aruede, Chair of London Black Atheists

One of the things that drove us to start London Black Atheists was the 'sea of white faces'. It struck me that something was wrong when I kept seeing the same one or two black and minority ethnic (BME) people at meetups when the proportion of BME people in London was so high. To address this under-representation in the freethinking community we started London Black Atheists (LBA).

I don't have any magic solutions for getting diversity where none exists. From the beginning LBA was an open group that welcomed all people to join. I think that was a very important message to convey and I believe it helped us to attract and maintain a very diverse membership. Dorset Humanists should positively assert that all ethnic groups are welcome in their literature. I would be happy to join Dorset Humanists if that would help to kick start a more diverse membership.

■ Clive has joined Dorset Humanists and we hope to arrange for him to speak to us in 2015.

From Dorset Humanists member and Liberal Democrat Councillor Roger West

I am a bit of a physical wreck though am making progress. I cannot eat or drink and am fed through a tube in my stomach. It is particularly tough on my wife as she has to drive me everywhere and we cannot look forward to going out to eat or planning holidays. The radiotherapy has affected my hearing on one side. However there is a plus side and that is my computer and my passion for a more open democratic society. I am able to make speeches in the Council though I do dribble. It could be a lot worse.

From John MacDiamid, Poole Christian Fellowship

It may surprise you that one of the things we will, I expect, agree on is that it was an outrageous decision by the fourth century church to Christianise a pagan festival. Today you can still hear Christians talking patronisingly about the world having hijacked our Christian festival. The truth is exactly the opposite. WE have hijacked a

pagan festival! So to me Christmas is all about turkey, mince pies, presents, log fires and Morecambe and Wise. Nothing especially to do with Jesus. The church would do well to stop pretending that it's a religious festival. Unfortunately, after 1600 years we're pretty much stuck with it. Ding dong merrily!

From Dave Elleman on 'The American Nightmare'

I'm not usually a big fan of analysing literature, but John Hubbard's passion and enthusiasm for these plays, plus his animated readings, made this an exceptionally enjoyable evening.

It's Christmas... or maybe not?

Humanists have differing views on whether to celebrate Christmas (or whatever you want to call it!). As we enter the festive season we present two alternative points of view from members. Whatever your stance, do you know anyone who will be lonely this Christmas? Can you help out by visiting them or inviting them to an event?



Aaron Darkwood

Tis the season to be jolly, and all that, but for those outcasts amongst the LGBT* community it can be a very lonely time indeed. In the 21st century one would like to

think that family and friends would treat the gay people amongst them with love, equality, and understanding. Although things have got much better in the UK, there are still many young people who have been disowned or thrown out, and Christmas can be a time when that hurts the most.

After two years of wanting to end it at Christmas, I chose to end Christmas itself. Not having children and not having a partner things had become very lonely for me at that time of the year. I put on a brave face as I attended various work meals out, did the exchange of cards, wore silly hats

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etc, but at the end of the day I would go home by myself. In later years, having my own place amplified this. I would do the meal with the parents or family, and then go home to my cold empty house, and on more than one occasion cried myself to sleep.

I think it was 2005 when I did my last family Christmas. I decided to paint my lounge on the 25th to keep myself busy. I also did a cooked breakfast for six colleagues who were working that day, and took it into them in foil trays. The day went by and things were better. I had a cycle by the river, and generally kept busy. Not doing Christmas meant no cards, but of course everybody still wants to give you cards anyway. They feel they are being kind including you, but really it just makes for an uncomfortable moment.

Many years later and things are much better. I have adopted the non-Christmas stance fully. What started as a personal defence system is now one of general morals. I'm not religious, in fact more Humanist these days, so celebrating a Christian festival seemed hypocritical. It always seemed totally mad to spend money you couldn't afford, buying presents for everybody important to you all at the same time of year, presents they possibly wouldn't like! Back in the day this was crippling, taking several months after to repay the debt. It's just totally crazy to me. This is one thing the Jehovah's Witnesses did get right, not doing Christmas, and they simply buy friends and family surprise gifts at random times of the year. This approach sounds much better to me, when it truly is an out-of-the-blue surprise.

Are you someone who's in pain at this time of the year? A time when nature generally forces you inside due to bad weather. Ask yourself why you are doing it? Maybe consider alternatives? Personally, I am much happier celebrating New Year's Eve, an event bringing in a new year of hope and opportunity. Is Christmas gone for good? I don't know. I might one day meet a partner who very much wants to, but for now, just me, there is no reason and so I happily give it a miss.

*LGBT = lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.

Merry Winterval



Lyn Glass

Some might say that atheists are being hypocritical celebrating 'Yuletide' (I will avoid the C word here). But I say any excuse for a party. Let's not forget that the celebration did start off as a pagan festival but was subsequently hijacked by the believer folk. I certainly avoid carol services and nativity plays and the rest but there are so many ways to get involved and have fun on one's own terms. Most parties and gatherings at this time make no religious references, then one has the delights of local panto ('Oh no you don't... Oh yes you do..'), Yuletide fairs, markets, Father Xmas parades and traditional festive fare. So where's the harm?

Although I don't have family of my own it is an excellent excuse to seek out local friends for a meet-up (in silly hats) over mince pies and mulled wine. Although I respect anyone's stance that they don't do Yuletide presents or cards, I find the annual card tradition an excellent excuse to keep in touch with old friends going back to school days even, and with more distant relatives. I often include a personal letter in each of these, with a teeny bit of personal news and then asking for updates on their activities, and over the years, old friends have started to reciprocate with news, even to the point that we have occasionally got round to a reunion once in a while. Mind you I make a point of sending jokey cards and would never use any that portray religious scenes! Then a relatively new joy for me at this time of year is the excuse to pontificate loudly at any opportunity about the myth of the Nativity story. If you haven't caught it before, you really should attend the next Skeptics in the Pub event to hear Jonathan Pearce explain all. Great fun! So Merry Winterval to all my Humanist friends.

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Dorset Humanists
Chairman's View
December 2014



I was very proud to be able to represent Humanists and the non-religious at the Bournemouth Remembrance Service. A big thank you to our Vice Chair Lyn Glass for being my special guest and to all of you who came along to be there and take pictures etc. I met the new Reformed Synagogue rabbi Maurice Michaels and we floated the idea of some kind of 'interfaith' event. I'm told that many members of the Reformed Synagogue are practically humanists in their philosophical outlook so that's a good start!

I had a very convivial evening out with the Christian minister on our *One Life* course who leads Poole Christian Fellowship (PCF). He told me about the work they do with people struggling with debt. PCF partners with 'Christians Against Poverty' (CAP) to run a Debt Advice Centre. Those who are struggling with unmanageable debt can find confidential, personal and in-depth help through the CAP Centre in Poole. Some people become virtual prisoners in their own homes, under siege from debt collectors. A 'debt coach' visits people at home and works out a sustainable and realistic budget. CAP contacts creditors so that the indebted person no longer has to deal with them direct and works with the indebted person until they are debt free. Initially, I thought this sounded like an excellent example of Christian charity but one of CAP's charitable objectives is 'the furtherance of the Christian faith' and as part of their service they offer to pray with people. This revelation demonstrates, yet again, the moral superiority of secular help and advice, such as Citizens' Advice, which comes free of evangelising intent.

Philae's touchdown on Comet 67P, which is 300 million miles away and travelling at 84,000 mph, was hailed by some as a 'great advance for human civilisation'. It was a great moment for human exploration but back on Earth human civilisation continues on its wayward course.

I was very sad to hear that Jo Adams is stepping down from her role as chair of West Dorset Humanists. She has been an extremely charismatic leader and we have forged an excellent partnership. I do, however, share her confidence in the WDH Steering Group and look forward to continuing our great relationship in the years to come.

David Warden

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