



Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2pm – Moordown Community Centre, 21 Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW



## Mary Anning the Fossil Finder



*A talk by Dean Robertson*

Mary Anning (1799 – 1847) was a fossil collector, dealer, and palaeontologist who became known around the world for the discoveries she made in the marine fossil beds in the cliffs at Lyme Regis. Her findings contributed to changes

in scientific thinking about prehistoric life and the history of the Earth and her discoveries included, when she was just twelve years old, the first correctly identified ichthyosaur skeleton.

Because she was a woman, Anning was not eligible to join the Geological Society of London and she did not always receive full credit for her scientific contributions. Despite this, she became well known in geological circles in Britain, Europe, and America. Dean, a member of our committee, will tell the fascinating story of Mary Anning's life.



## Appeal raises £2312.38

A huge thank you to everyone who gave so generously to our Annual Appeal in aid of the Hope for Food foodbank. This is a tremendous effort. Dean Robertson will report in due course on how this money has been spent. The next appeal will be decided at the AGM in March.

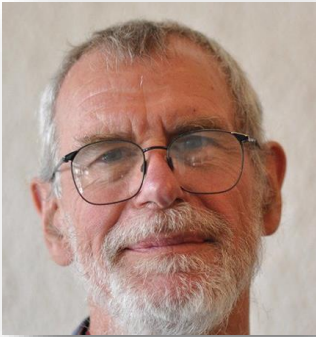
## Humanist Views on Immigration

Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> January 7.30pm Orchid Hotel, 34 Gervis Road, Bournemouth BH1 3DH

Cathy Silman, Daniel Dancey, Aaron Darkwood, and David Warden will present their views on immigration. Should the UK have open borders? What can be done about the boat crossings? Is there an optimal rate of immigration? Migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are constantly in the news. How should humanists approach the moral and political questions which arise from immigration? Come along and have your say too. **Please note the venue address.**



**Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2023 ❖ Lunch at 1.15pm ❖ Talk at 2.15pm Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Ave, BH9 1TW £5.00 for members, £10.00 non-members (talk only - free)**



# Darwin Day Lunch with Emeritus Professor Richard Norman

## *Can Humanist Ethics produce a Political Programme?*

Darwin Day is a global event which celebrates the life and work of the naturalist Charles Darwin who was born on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1809.

We are delighted to welcome Richard Norman back to Dorset Humanists as our distinguished guest speaker for our annual Darwin Day Lunch. His last visit to us was in 2012 so it's long overdue! Richard is Emeritus Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Kent. His work has been mainly in the areas of ethics and political philosophy. He is co-author, with Andrew Copson and Luke Donnellan, of *Understanding Humanism* which was

published last year by Routledge. He is also a patron of Humanists UK.

You will need a paid-for ticket *by the end of January*.

A delicious lunch (chicken curry, vegan lasagne, beef casserole, Eton mess, brownies, fruit & cheese, tea/coffee) will be prepared and served by committee members and volunteers. Tickets from Lyn Glass - email [Lyn.glass@btinternet.com](mailto:Lyn.glass@btinternet.com) or see her at an event. Or phone David on 07910 886629.

Lunch is only for members and non-members who are attending the Darwin Day talk.

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## Dates for your diary

Thursday 5 <sup>th</sup> January 7.30	Moon in the Square	Pub social hosted by Dean. We usually sit on the ground floor on the right. Friendly conversation. Food available.
Saturday 14 <sup>th</sup> January 2pm	Moordown	Mary Anning the Fossil Finder - a talk by Dean Robertson.
Wednesday 25 <sup>th</sup> January 7.30pm	Orchid Hotel	Views on immigration. Cathy Silman, Daniel Dancey, Aaron Darkwood, David Warden
Saturday 11 <sup>th</sup> February 1.15pm	Moordown	Darwin Day with Emeritus Professor Richard Norman: "Can Humanist Ethics produce a political programme?"
Wednesday 22 <sup>nd</sup> February 7.30pm	Orchid Hotel	The Philosophy of Friendship – a talk by David Warden
Saturday 11 <sup>th</sup> March 1.15pm	Moordown	Annual Members' Meeting (AGM) with complimentary buffet lunch

*Plus social events and more walks which will be announced on Dorset Humanists Meetup. Please check all events nearer the time in case of any venue changes. We respectfully ask you to take all reasonable precautions to ensure that you do not spread infection to others at our events. If in doubt, please stay at home. Videos are usually available later on YouTube.*





# The Great Stink...



Geoff Kirby’s highly entertaining and scholarly talk on the history of sanitation from neolithic to modern times is now available to watch on our YouTube channel. Click the image to watch. The image shows Geoff Kirby on the left with David Warden on the right. Photo montage by Aaron. There was no toilet actually present!

## Dorset Humanists HawkrIDGE Singers

Our mini-choir sang seven secular songs after Geoff’s talk. Choir members are (back row from left): Sally Hawksworth, Margaret Ball, Elaine Stott, Lucy Freeman, Carolyn Gardiner, John Davison, Pat Clifton, Mike Goodman; (front row from left): George Askwith, David Warden and Phil Butcher. David Stott (lying down!) is our pianist.



Photo by Aaron



# Disestablishing the Church of England

*Twenty-four people attended our October event at the Orchid Hotel to hear Stephen Evans's talk. Stephen is Chief Executive of the National Secular Society which was founded in 1866 by Charles Bradlaugh MP. Dorset Humanists is an affiliated group of the National Secular Society as well as a Partner Group of Humanists UK. This report contains edited extracts of Stephen's talk. The full talk can be viewed on our Dorset Humanists YouTube channel.*

◀ **Click image to watch the whole talk. Stephen Evans (centre) with David Warden and Lyn Glass**

In his opening remarks, Stephen said the fact that we have a national church is harmful to British identity. Establishment is a formal relationship between church and state. The Head of State is also the Supreme Governor of the Church of England. The monarch has to be Protestant and Anglican.

The Church of England is established only in England. There are no established Churches in Northern Ireland, Wales, or Scotland. Disestablishment took place in Wales in 1920 and the Church of Ireland was officially disestablished in 1871. The Church of Scotland (the Kirk) is recognised in law as the national Church of Scotland but it is not an established church and is independent of state control. So it is a fact that disestablishment can and does happen!

## The Queen's Coronation Oath

At her coronation, the Archbishop of Canterbury asked Queen Elizabeth II: "Will you, to the utmost of your power, maintain the Laws of God and the true profession of the Gospel? Will you to the utmost of your power maintain in the United Kingdom the Protestant Reformed Religion established by law? Will you maintain and preserve inviolably the settlement of the Church of England, and the doctrine, worship,

discipline, and government thereof, as by law established in England? And will you preserve unto the Bishops and Clergy of England, and to the Churches there committed to their charge, all such rights and privileges, as by law do or shall appertain to them or any of them? The Queen responded: "All this I promise to do."

The monarchy has a quasi-religious character – an institution we almost worship – and the BBC was quite guilty of this during the recent mourning period for the late Queen. It is undue reverence and there's almost a blasphemy code surrounding the Royal Family. If their authority derives from God how can they be held accountable?

The next coronation will be an unmistakably Anglican affair. It's a solemn religious ceremony. The sovereign is anointed, blessed and consecrated by the Archbishop of Canterbury. We really don't need a coronation. No other European monarch has one. The King could be crowned in a secular investiture in Westminster Hall. And Charles is already King. But if they do not have that divine right to rule then where does their legitimacy come from? This is a can of worms they will not be keen to open.

In a recent article for *The Independent* newspaper, Stephen wrote: "We expect ▷



## Some of the secularising reforms that took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century

- The Sacramental Test Act (1828) removed the requirement for public officials to be members of the Church of England.
- The Roman Catholic Relief Act (1829) allowed members of the Catholic Church to take seats in the Westminster Parliament for the first time.
- The Tithe Commutation Act (1836) abolished the system of tithes under which the Church had claimed one-tenth of land produce as payment for its services.
- The Marriage Act (1836) and the Births and Deaths Registration Act (1836) introduced civil marriage and the civil registration of births, marriages and deaths.
- The Bishopric of Manchester Act (1847) limited the number of Bishops entitled to sit in the House of Lords to 26 (its current figure).
- The Matrimonial Causes Act (1857) took the issue of divorce away from the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical courts, making divorce more widely available and accessible (especially for women).
- The Court of Probate Act (1857) passed control of probate administration (including the collection of death duties) from the ecclesiastical courts to a newly established government department.
- The Compulsory Church Rate Abolition Act (1868) made the payment of church rates voluntary instead of compulsory.
- The Oaths Act (1888) permitted a non-religious affirmation, rather than an oath on the Bible, for the requisite oath taken by Parliamentarians. This was instigated by the founder of the National Secular Society, Charles Bradlaugh MP.

our monarchs to remain strictly neutral in respect of political matters. So why the double standards when it comes to religion?"

The privileges of bishops in the Lords extend far beyond their right to vote. They have unique access to ministers and the corridors of power. All parliamentary sittings begin with prayers led by a bishop in the Lords and by the Speaker's Chaplain in the Commons. If you're not there for prayers it's hard to get a seat.

The church could still continue to act as an education provider even if it were disestablished but the role the church and other faith groups play in state education is down in large part to the privileged role the church enjoys in our political settlement. A quarter of all primary schools are run by the Church of England. I think this is the reason why we still have a law requiring a daily act of collective worship in all schools. There's an exemption from equality laws which allows church schools to discriminate in admissions in favour of churchgoers and we have an outdated version of RE which allows faith groups to very much control the subject.

The church also has a prominent role in our ceremonies and state occasions such as Remembrance. It should be an entirely secular affair to be meaningful to most people, particularly young people.

In many ways the church is subservient to the state. Bishops are appointed by the ruling monarch on the advice of the Prime Minister although since 1976 the church has provided a shortlist of two candidates with a preferred candidate. This becomes problematic if the PM is not an Anglican. Boris Johnson, a Catholic, could not advise the Queen so the Lord Chancellor fulfilled this role. So we see the assumption that our political leaders will be Anglican.

The church has a legal duty, if asked, to baptise and marry all those who live within the parish. But they obtained an amend- ▷

ment to ensure that this duty did not extend to same-sex couples.

The Church of England, with assets of £22 billion, still receives a large amount of money for the maintenance of its buildings – around £750 million in the last five years. Some of this might be justified in terms of our national heritage.

### **What is the case for disestablishment?**

There are two principal objections. First is that it's unfair. The existence of a national church privileges one part of the population. Removing the symbolic and institutional ties between government, monarchy, and religion would go a long way to ensure equal treatment and parity of citizenship – for citizens of all faiths and beliefs. The Church of England also sees its role as giving a leg-up to other religions in the public square. Are other faiths content to ride on the coat-tails of Anglican establishment? And do Anglicans want to promote other faiths? Other faith leaders do seem to enjoy the enhanced status granted to them by the Church of England. Humanists may sometimes be invited to the multifaith table but the favouritism shown to the Church of England and the crumbs from the table for other religious groups demeans minority faiths. And it neglects and disenfranchises the non-religious. The late Queen and Prince Charles have supported freedom of religion and belief but how consistent is this with the role of head of state reserved exclusively for believing Anglicans? It makes second-class citizens out of non-Anglicans and also LGB people. The Archbishop of Canterbury recently reaffirmed his church's rejection of gay sex and same-sex marriage. Surely an officially homophobic institution shouldn't be part of the state. The CofE's general synod recently voted to give overseas Anglican leaders greater power in choosing the Archbishop of Canterbury. This is likely to give greater weight to more conservative Anglican bishops, further alienating itself from the country it supposedly serves.

The second argument against an established church is that we can't in any meaningful sense still be described as a Christian country. The concept of a national church is at odds with the diverse and pluralistic nature of today's UK. The national anthem is out of step. We need a strong and inclusive national identity – a sense of shared citizenship based around universal values.

### **Facts and figures**

- The UK is the sixth least religious country in the world.
- 52% of British people have no religion, rising to 70% of those aged 18-24
- Just 12% of Brits are affiliated to the CofE
- Average Sunday attendance in 2019 was 600,000 adults – fewer than 1% of the population.
- Just 1% of young adults identify with the Church of England.
- 60% of Brits do not think religion is important in their lives.
- 81% of us agree with the statement: "Religious practice is a private matter and should be separated from the political and economic life of my country".
- More of us oppose than support the idea of the UK having an official state religion.
- 58% of the adult population oppose faith schools.
- British citizens (including churchgoers) overwhelmingly reject the Church's position on abortion, assisted dying and same-sex marriage.
- 25% of countries around the world have a state religion (48 from a total of 192)
- Just 18 of those were classed as liberal democracies.

A third objection comes from people within the Church itself. Jonathan Chaplin, a member of the Centre for Faith in Public Life at Wesley House, Cambridge, and of the Cambridge University Divinity Faculty, argues in his new book *Beyond Establishment* that the CofE should voluntarily relinquish its privileges to free the Church to pursue its own mission with greater authenticity. It's an argument we are increasingly hearing from Anglicans who value the idea of Church autonomy and state impartiality. Tim Farron, former leader of the Liberal Democrats, has also argued for disestablishment. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, has said "Dis-establishment of the Church of England would not be a disaster. Removal of the Church's privileges should be a decision for parliament and people". Many people in the Church think that disestablishment may be the best strategy for its own survival in an increasingly secular society. A formal separation could benefit both parties. Maintaining a minority established Church in a religiously pluralistic and largely non-religious nation is really unsustainable. The concepts of nationhood and citizenship are too important to centre around an anachronism.

## Further reading

*Beyond Establishment: Resetting Church-State Relations in England* (2022) by Jonathan Chaplin

Professor Martyn Percy: 'With the Church of England dying, how much longer can we justify having bishops in the House of Lords? The Church of England could be extinct by the 2060s. That threatens to trigger a constitutional, as well as an existential, crisis.' *Prospect magazine* October 2022

*Cut the Connection: Disestablishment and the Church of England* (1994) Colin Buchanan

# Holocaust Memorial Day



**Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> January 2.00-4.30pm at Lighthouse, Poole**

Following in the footsteps of Maggie Pepin, David Warden is currently the humanist representative on the Bournemouth and Poole Holocaust Memorial Day Committee. He will lead the pledge at the end of the event. Please support this event if you can.

The main speaker is Lady Milena Grenfell-Baines MBE (image below) who was born in Prague 1929. She was on the last Kindertransport train that left Prague on 31st July 1939. She was one of the 669 children saved by Trevor Chadwick, a local hero who lived in Swanage and who helped to organise Kindertransport trains.

Tickets are free. There will be a retiring collection. Eventbrite link for tickets:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/commemoration-of-holocaust-memorial-day-2023-tickets-483001479427>



# View from the Chair

David Warden  
Chairman of Dorset Humanists



I listened to the King's speech on Christmas Day, as our family has listened to every speech of the late Queen in bygone years. I thought he was a good deal warmer and more natural than his mother. Apart from the absurdity of believing that he had stood on the spot where the baby Jesus was born, his speech was remarkable for its implicit humanism. After a brief mention of God, the speech was devoted to humanity and enlightenment. He spoke about his mother's faith in people, a faith he shares with his whole heart, a 'belief in the extraordinary ability of each person to touch with goodness and compassion the lives of others and to shine a light in the world around them... This is the essence of our community, and the very foundation of our society... the humanity of people... who so readily respond to the plight of others.' Yes, the message was delivered in a religious wrapper, but God was quickly edged out of the picture for *people* to take centre stage. This is the very essence of humanism. Maybe the King will explicitly acknowledge it one day. A lot of what passes for religion is, in fact, hidden humanism. I often find this when I visit church schools and study their school values. They are almost always about developing the capacities of the child to live an 'abundant life' (the biblical reference is John 10:10). That's humanism – the idea that we can live abundant and fulfilling lives. But it's very much a work in progress for humanity. It won't magically be delivered by a god.

The Scottish Gender Recognition Reform Bill, approved on 22nd December by 86 votes to 39 of MSPs, makes it easier for trans people to obtain a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) by removing the requirement for a diagnosis of gender dysphoria. It also lowers the minimum age for applicants to 16 and lowers the time required for an applicant to live in their acquired gender from two years to three months, or six months for people aged 16 and 17. Those in favour of the Bill say that a move to make trans people's lives easier is long overdue. I am all in favour of making the lives of trans people easier, but I think this Bill is a mistake. It's only supported by 20 per cent of Scots (YouGov/The Times survey 6th - 9th December 2022). Transitioning from one gender to another is a very serious business which should be done slowly and with great care and deliberation. Fast-tracking the process could lead to more tragic mistakes, as in the case of Keira Bell who came to regret her decision to transition from female to male. In a High Court hearing two years ago, she said that the Tavistock Gender Identity Development Service should have done more to challenge her belief that she was a boy. Opponents of the Bill also say there are insufficient safeguards to protect women and girls from predatory men who can too easily claim to be women, raising concerns about environments such as changing rooms and women's prisons. The public debate on these matters is often vitriolic, with each side loudly protesting their 'rights'. Humanists are in favour of human rights but we are not human rights fanatics. The humanist approach is to promote dialogue about complex >



matters in order to reach wise decisions based on humanity, reason, and compassion.

I can't really let 2022 go by without some reflections on the year. On **24<sup>th</sup> February**, the unthinkable happened in Europe when Russia launched a 19<sup>th</sup> century-style invasion of Ukraine. Since then, hundreds of thousands have been killed or maimed, millions have become refugees, and millions are now living without heating and water. The invasion was endorsed by the Christian Patriarch Kirill as a kind of holy war. On **5<sup>th</sup> April**, the 38-year old President of the Humanist Association of Nigeria, Mubarak Bala, was sentenced to 24 years imprisonment by the Kano State High Court for offending against religious feelings. On **12<sup>th</sup> August**, the 1989 fatwa calling for the murder of Sir Salman Rushdie finally caught up with him when he was brutally stabbed in Chautauqua, New York. We can only wonder how many books have *not* been written or published in the last 30 years because of the ever-present threat of violence inspired by religious fanaticism. On the home front, UK politics descended into chaos and farce as the Tory Party removed the incumbent of No. 10 for a multitude of sins and then backed the wrong horse. We are now in the throes of a new Winter of Discontent with nurses and train drivers on strike.

Looking on the bright side, we have our first Hindu Prime Minister and the British people are completely at ease about it. Pity he's a former banker and hedge fund manager but at least we have a period of calm. My hero of the year is the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, for resisting Russian tyranny. Our former Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, is a freedom hero in Ukraine and we should never forget the important part he played. Joe Biden is often portrayed as geriatric but under his leadership the US has spent \$100bn in supporting Ukraine. Another hero of the year is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie who delivered a stirring defence of free speech in her Reith Lecture. Humanism is very largely about freedom from tyranny and fanaticism. Let's play our part in 2023 to promote these precious freedoms. I look forward to seeing you all again soon. *Happy New Year.*



Free cuddles! Dorset Humanists' festive dinner at the Marsham Court.  
From left: Simon, Sandra, Paul, Lyn, Barry, Helen. Photo by Aaron.



Aaron as we've never seen him before! He was our lively games master for the night. Photo by David.