



## Dorset Humanists in the Square

**Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> July 9.00-4.00pm Bournemouth Square**

Humanism has always been in the forefront of promoting gay liberation and more enlightened attitudes towards sex and gender stereotypes. We'll be back in Bournemouth Town Centre on July 8<sup>th</sup> supporting 'Bourne Free' – Bournemouth's LGBT Pride event. The main event is taking place in Meyrick Park but we're going to pitch our tent in the middle of the Square and we expect to inform hundreds of people about Dorset Humanists and our approach to LGBT issues. We've got a great team of people to help but let David Warden know if you'd like to do a shift on the day or help with set-up or take-down.

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## Boys just wanna have fun

**Straight Talk about Gay Relationships – Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> July 7.30pm Orchid Hotel**

A no-holds barred exposé of the chairman's life! This specially commissioned talk will explore what it was like growing up in a 'heteronormative' society in the 1970s and the impact of the Gay Liberation Movement. David will answer all your questions about the origin and persistence of prejudice, often termed 'homophobia', what LGBTQIA+ means, same-sex relationships and marriage, and more. He will offer a personal perspective on evolutionary explanations for homosexuality. This talk will include some sexually explicit details but David will try not to embarrass anyone, including himself!



# Jeremy May 1953-2023

We are very sad to announce that Jeremy May died on 30<sup>th</sup> June in Bournemouth Hospital, following a recent stroke. He had been a member of Dorset Humanists for some years and he ran a popular discussion group called ‘Bournemouth Brainstormers’ which tackled a diverse range of political topics.

Jeremy left Cardiff at a very young age with his family for Cape Town in South Africa. He was educated there and at Queens’ College, Cambridge where he read classics and philosophy. He spent much of his adult life as a IT specialist in the US, as a writer, and as an amateur archaeologist in Greece.

He will be sadly missed by his many friends. His memoir, *A Cape Town Childhood* (2021) is available from our Dorset Humanists library.



A small but beautiful group of humanists gathered for a picnic on the beach to celebrate World Humanist Day on 21<sup>st</sup> June. More people turned up after this photo was taken. Why not join us next year?!

Photo by Aaron

## Dates for your diary

Saturday 8 <sup>th</sup> July 10.00-4.00	Square	LGBT Pride festival – please note there is no event at Moordown in July
Sunday 16 <sup>th</sup> July 10.15am	Dancing Ledge	Scenic walk in the Purbecks – see Meetup for full details
Wednesday 26 <sup>th</sup> July 7.30pm	Orchid	Boys Just Wanna Have Fun: Straight Talk about Gay Relationships – <i>a talk by David Warden</i>
Saturday 12 <sup>th</sup> August 2pm	Moordown	Humanist Chaplaincy – Dr James Croft. Includes a complimentary cream tea but please donate to our appeal charities – foodbank and humanist schools in Uganda.
Wednesday 23 <sup>rd</sup> August 7.30pm	Orchid	To be confirmed
Sunday 20 <sup>th</sup> August 10.15am	St Catherine’s Hill	Walk – see Meetup for full details
Saturday 26 <sup>th</sup> August	Depart from Poole Quay	Swanage Cruise via Old Harry Rocks – see Meetup for full details

Plus other social events which will be announced on Meetup. Please check all events nearer the time in case of any changes.





## Poundbury – the good, the bad and the ugly

*Forty people attended John Hubbard's richly-illustrated talk on the architecture of Poundbury at our June event at Moordown Community Centre. This is an edited report of his talk. You can watch the full talk on YouTube. Just click the image above or visit our Dorset Humanists YouTube channel.*

Poundbury was started in October 1993 and it's scheduled for completion by 2027 with a total of 2,700 homes. It is the Duchy of Cornwall's complementary extension of Dorchester. Poundbury takes its name from an adjacent hill on the north western edge of the county town. It's built on the principles of urban planning outlined in *A Vision of Britain* (1989) by the then Prince Charles, an outlook that reacts very confidently against the ugliness of much of the urban 'regeneration' of the 60s and 70s, with its tower blocks and distorting shopping centres.

Because of the distinction of its lead promoter and the international influence of one of its inspiring visionaries, Léon Krier, Poundbury has attracted a great deal of interest from Europe and elsewhere, and naturally enough it has been the subject of local concern and comment as it has developed over the years, from the nickname 'Charlieville' to other more comprehensive evaluations. In looking at Poundbury we can sometimes lose sight of its playful quality; it's

a built environment that at times sends itself up. It is possible to be too po-faced about building.

It is worth reminding ourselves that 1989, when Prince Charles wrote his television documentary and book, was a long time ago; he was a mere 41, Canary Wharf was still just a drawing and the sole significant skyscraper in the City of London was the National Westminster Tower. The ensuing development of the last thirty years in that area has probably not delighted the sovereign's heart. In the documentary and the pages of his book it is fair to say that he was probably speaking for many when he decried the barbarism of concrete as a dominant visible material and the out of scale developments in many historic towns and cities. He opined: '... it seems to me that we have suffered too long from the imposition of a kind of nondescript, mediocre, synthetic international style of architecture which is found everywhere.' Cheap modernism, ▷



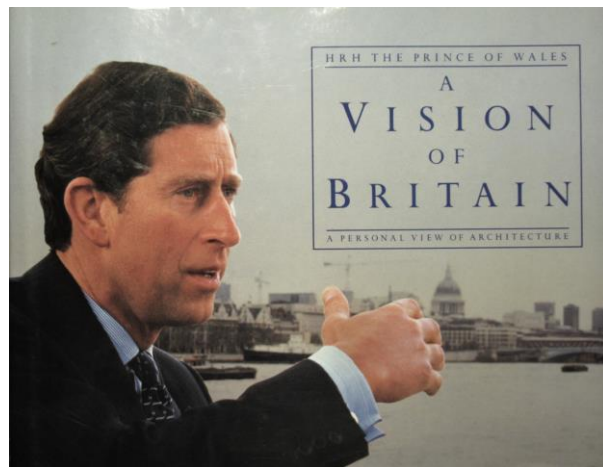
**Léon Krier, born in 1946, is an architect from Luxembourg and well-known for his master plan for Poundbury.**

as practised in the 60s and 70s, was indeed uninspiringly awful in many ways, but we do have to remember that the tower blocks so decried today supplied housing far roomier and more hygienic than many of the decayed and cramped slum houses that they replaced, and it is not true that they were without a sense of community. Many early inhabitants enjoyed their properties, but over time what made these places intolerable was a lack of funding for proper maintenance, and the erosion of security caused by growing levels of poverty and increasing levels of criminality.

## Ten principles of urban design

In the central part of the book Prince Charles suggested ten principles to adhere to in urban design which might, in his words 'satisfy intangible needs of the spirit' (a satisfying aesthetic which produces an emotional uplift and contentment) and it is only fair to bear these in mind when evaluating Poundbury. The ten principles, in brief, are as follows:

- 1. Place:** We should feel the lie of the land and its contours and respect them as a result.... New buildings should not dominate the landscape but blend carefully with it. Often, large buildings can be separated into elements which can humanise the scale, give a gentler skyline and enhance the picturesque quality of our landscape.
- 2. Hierarchy:** this relates to the size of buildings in relation to their public importance, and the relative significance of the different elements which make up the building. There is also a need for some buildings to be bigger than others such as churches, public buildings, halls and pubs, emphasising our values as well as social organisation.
- 3. Scale:** Charles stresses the importance of relating to human proportions. While large buildings are significant there is also a need for small-scale buildings which reflect our intimate lives.
- 4. Harmony:** A straggling village street or a wide city avenue which may consist of buildings belonging to many different periods



Charles was just 41 when he wrote *A Vision of Britain*.

can look harmonious, although Charles does also laud the towns of Bath and Cheltenham which are classical monocultures.

**5. Enclosure:** This is about delivering a sense of 'a recognisable community of neighbours'. There are numerous squares, both large and intimate, which add to a sense of interest and rhythm in Poundbury.

**6. Materials:** Charles describes the 'rich variety of building materials' as a 'source of constant pleasure and surprise'. He suggests that 'each district should have a detailed inventory of its local building materials and the way in which they are used'.

**7. Decoration:** Charles illustrates the richness that can be provided by detailed ironwork, interesting terracotta keystones, and ornamental brackets in wood and stone.

**8. Art:** This refers to the addition of sculpture and painting to finished buildings but on the whole this is an element in only the grandest and most costly buildings.

**9. Signs and Lights:** This refers to the awful visual clutter there is in most streets. In Poundbury, there is not one set of traffic lights and there are remarkably few road-signs.

**10. Community:** People should be involved in the improvement of their surroundings. Good communities are usually small enough for people to get together to organise the things they want. ▷



Harmony: one of Charles's ten principles of urban design

Charles's *cri de coeur* was this: 'Our age is the first to have despised the principles of mathematical harmony and proportion and to have embarked on a course which glorifies the triumph of science and man's domination over nature'. I see what he's getting at, but this seems to be slightly muddled thinking, for what is mathematics if not a science? The plea is perhaps for proportion to be observed in terms of human scale in relation to the land one is building on, and for materials to derive from local sources and traditions.

The big question Poundbury seeks to answer is how can you create an extensive housing development that is both functionally effective and architecturally interesting? One of the greatest weaknesses of many large-scale developments is a sense of monotony. From the outset, Poundbury was conceived as a small town in its own right, with a pattern of interconnected through roads, and its development in distinctive phases has also influenced the way it was designed and built. It is also worth remarking on the advantage that the Duchy of Cornwall had in not being beholden to shareholders and other short-term financial considerations which enabled it to take a longer view about financial returns. One of the greatest strengths of Poundbury is the variety of housing styles that it embraces. The perception that it is wholly classical is not

true. It has buildings that follow simple vernacular patterns as well as those in early-to-mid-Victorian style. Some buildings resemble old industrial mills and the hospital has fine ceramic detailing. You can also find villas, mews-style buildings, and runs of arts-and-crafts style buildings that put you in mind of Scotland or the Lake District. There are other buildings that might even recall New Orleans with multiple deep open verandas, and others that are in a unique style, quite often intended as landmark structures.

One of the things that makes Poundbury such a pleasure to walk around is the variety, not only of the building types with their variations of scale and formality, but also the range of materials. You will find fine finished Portland ashlar, to rougher stone and flint. There are numerous types and colours of brick, from yellow to various shades of red and blue engineers brick, all of the highest quality with the finest crafted elements forming the architraves and relieving arches of windows and doors. Needless to say, in a collection of buildings which tends to the later eighteenth and early nineteenth century in its references, there is plenty of painted stucco.

Visitors to Poundbury usually report a sense of strangeness, describing the place as like a film set, or dismissing it as a Disneyland. ▷





**Decoration: one of the ten principles**

The latter seems particularly unfair as this is a real inhabited community, not something constructed solely for entertainment. But why do we feel this strangeness? What is it about the way we have become used to towns through our own experience that causes Poundbury to disturb us slightly? Almost all of our towns and cities have a strong sense of an older centre, usually in the area of a church and its tower. We are unconsciously aware that there are specific areas of towns where much smaller homes dominate, the houses of the working population. You don't need to be an architectural historian to notice these things. It is part of subliminal observation of our environment as we pass through it during our long lives. Poundbury works as an environment in a completely different way and the interior map of a town that our life's experience has given us feels challenged and confused. There is no ancient heart from which buildings accrue a modernity as they are built at increasing distance from the old centre. Buildings alluding to older styles in design are mixed throughout the development, rather than being more concentrated closer to an ancient centre. Although there is a clear concept plan, each phase has a main focus. The first section has as its focus Pummery Square, the second the Buttermarket, the third the Queen Mother Square, the architectural climax with its large-scale buildings and its lofty tower, and the final phase Crown Square as envisaged, and

currently under construction. While I hesitate to say it in front of this audience, what Poundbury needs, from an architectural point of view, somewhere, is a decent church!

Although Poundbury has many shops and businesses it lacks a recognisable high street. The distribution of commerce across a multi-centred development is part of the Krier urban agenda, so that around the main squares or hubs of each sector you do get groups of commercial premises, but because they are dispersed and because we do so much online now, there is inadequate footfall for ordinary shops. There is no bustling centre.

It is clear from the initial concept sketches that Queen Mother Square was always intended to be the architectural climax where larger scale buildings would mass, but I'd like to argue that, given the emphasis in the Prince's book on scale, it is a mistake. It is simply, over-large. It is impressive, yes, but if you see it in the context of Dorset and its towns as a whole, this is not urban architecture, but metropolitan. My own sense is that buildings of this scale belong in a capital, not adjacent to a county town. Poundbury is, after all, considerably smaller in terms of population than Blandford Forum, and you can't get a better example of a restful and beautiful architectural centre and the beneficial effect of more delicately proportioned buildings than that. The sense of metropolitan rather than county style was also brought home to me by the marketing of apartments in the Royal Pavilion for which the initial tag line was 'A little part of Mayfair in Dorset', to which the only possible response after a profound and almost emetic shudder is 'Why?' The answer to that of course is so you can put a luxury spa on the ground floor.

Observed objectively, the very grand 'Duchess of Cornwall' is a splendidly confident building, a magnificent Italian palazzo over five stories. Its interior is airy, bright and spacious, but I can't help feeling that for a pub-hotel it is jarringly elaborated. It could perhaps be ▷

the old headquarters of a bank in EC2, and this is where I think that some of the aesthetic aspects of the project might be called into question.

Taken alone, the tower of the Royal Pavilion is impressive, rising from the stone triumphal arch of its base reminiscent of London and the work of Lutyens, its classical top echoing humorously the Dugald Stewart monument on Carlton Hill in Edinburgh. But if you are going to build such a monumental piece it demands a context that respects it. It has no processional axis to its opening, rather a car park, and on the other side, where you might expect it to open onto a beautiful straight avenue of trees and tall buildings, the line of sight is immediately cut across by a range of smaller homes. It is an expensive opportunity appallingly wasted, unless I have missed a post-Modern joke. It is a landmark for miles, but it tries to shrug off its dominance in an embarrassed stumble on its own doorstep. While I am very fond indeed of much of Poundbury, I have to say that Queen Mother Square errs on the side of the pretentious and would have benefited from a more modest consideration of its size.

There is, though, a very positive aspect of the Poundbury phenomenon that must not be underestimated, and that is its influence on housing design within older settlements and



**The tower of the Royal Pavilion – an expensive opportunity appallingly wasted**

in their extension, including in large towns like Bournemouth, where some new buildings harmonise historically with their surroundings in a kind of Edwardian revival.

Taken as a whole, I feel positively about the Poundbury project. There are huge numbers of houses I would be very happy to live in. It's bold in its buildings at times and well-intentioned and delivered with a social conscience. Its wider influence is strongly beneficial, and the people who have an actual day-to-day experience of living there seem to enjoy doing so. I have no doubt that over time we will wonder at it less. There are, in my view, some misjudgements although others would see the things I find troubling as gloriously triumphant. Whatever disagreements one may have about it, it is never less than interesting. Its success has encouraged the Duchy to embark on a similar project in Cornwall itself, with a projected build outside of Newquay of 4000 homes by 2045. For many, Poundbury will always remain a bit of a curate's, or citizen's egg. But if the King were to ask me how I found it, I think I could say with confidence, 'Parts of it, your Majesty, are excellent'.



**The Duchess of Cornwall pub – jarringly elaborated**



# Letters & Emails

*It's your column...*

*David Warden writes: My summary of Steve Laughton's talk in the June edition of the Bulletin was AI-assisted. The published report stimulated a flurry of communication between Carol Wilcox, Steve Laughton, and myself. Carol wrote that 'Modern Monetary Theory is NOT Chartalism'. When I asked ChatGPT the question 'What is Chartalism?' it instantly replied: 'Chartalism, also known as Modern Monetary Theory (MMT), is an economic theory that emphasizes the role of government in creating and managing money.' ChatGPT could, of course, be spouting rubbish and so I apologise if using it as an assistant led to some confusion! Carol also criticised John Mills' caution about exchange rates in relation to MMT, mentioned in Steve's talk, as 'meaningless'. Steve would like to make the following points and corrections:*

I have now watched my talk and read the excellent summary of it in the June Bulletin. I found two 'oral typos' in my talk:

1) I said that the NAIRU brigade (NAIRU = non-accelerating inflation rate of unemployment) think that 'if unemployment goes above a certain amount, there will always be inflation'. I meant of course 'if unemployment goes BELOW a certain amount, there will always be inflation.'

2) I said 'If you don't have anything to earn in your currency, the currency will collapse'. I meant to say 'if you don't have to DO anything to earn in your currency, the currency will collapse'.

In your fine summary of my talk you wrote, 'When the economy is operating at its full potential, considerations regarding job guarantees come into play.' This should, of

course, have said 'When the economy is operating with *spare* capacity with unemployed or underemployed labour, considerations regarding job guarantees come into play.'

You wrote 'Chartalism, also known as Modern Monetary Theory (MMT)'. I didn't hear myself say exactly that. MMT shares with Chartalism the understanding that money is not a commodity but a tax credit which is created by the 'ruler'. It is a debt token issued by the 'ruler'. It depends on the imposition of a tax liability only payable by the debt token, and the ruler's promise to accept the debt token back in payment of tax. This is called redemption.

Carol is keen to point out that MMT applies after the world came off the Gold Standard. When rulers promised that their tax credits could be redeemed in precious metal, this always created the problem of getting hold of enough metal to prevent bank runs, or just to facilitate economic activity. If you promise to convert a given amount of currency into gold on demand, you may well have to restrict the amount of currency you issue. The MMT-ers are analysing the economy, and policy space, as it exists post Gold Standard.

But MMT is consistent with the Chartalist insights that predated it. This means that because governments no longer have to find enough precious metal to supply in case of bank runs, they have more fiscal space, providing they have a floating currency.

Carol may be unfamiliar with John Mills's books on exchange rates and competitiveness. It's true to say that MMT-ers do not agree with John Mills, and I am of the opinion that MMT is vulnerable on this topic. So is the economist Steve Keen. When I was away in York, I met up with a UK MMT economist and we are still thrashing out this issue. I have said to Carol that I beg to differ with her opinion.

Thanks again for your work doing the summary and for giving me the opportunity to present to Dorset Humanists.



# View from the Chair

David Warden  
Chairman of Dorset Humanists



**M**y talk on humanism seemed to go down quite well at our June event at the Orchid Hotel. I took aim at the familiar formula 'Humanism is a non-religious worldview' because this privileges religion. It's like saying 'Black is non-white, or a woman is a non-man'. I suggested a subtle change to level up the semantic playing field. When people ask 'What is humanism?' we could say 'It's the opposite of religion' (or *religionism* if you want to add the suffix). This avoids privileging either term. It simply says that they are opposites.

I then went on to say that both of them can be thought of, metaphorically, as software programs which are installed in the human brain. The religion software package is often installed in children's brains from an early age and some of us have to spend many years uninstalling the program. I was twenty-three before I managed to uninstall the religion software, having spent three years of my life studying theology. I was lucky. I came across someone on Twitter the other day who was lamenting the fact that he'd wasted fifty years of his life in the service of an imaginary God. One of those who attended my talk emailed me subsequently. He wrote: 'I was interested in your analogy about the brain working by software. Actually it isn't really an analogy. Psychologists have a term for it: neurolinguistic programming. The brain has to be programmed in exactly the same way as computers are and it can be reprogrammed.' I realise that neurolinguistic programming is a controversial concept but I thought this was an interesting connection.

I was asked whether I regretted being a Christian in my early years. I nearly burst into a rendition of Edith Piaf's 'Non, je ne regrette rien' but my French accent needs a lot of work. No doubt I could have studied something more practical, but theology, philosophy, and the psychology of religion have been lifelong interests. I also feel that 'knowing the enemy' has been helpful in developing my understanding of the humanist alternative, as well as my ability to debate with Christian evangelists.

I think I overegged the 'mind virus' theme and I would like to do some more work on this. As I wrote on this page last month, I do think that humans tend to believe things which fit a satisfying 'gestalt' (that's our tendency to organize our perceptions into meaningful patterns and wholes) and this, combined with the fact that certain 'gestalts' confer social status, may be more accurate than the 'mind virus' metaphor.

In the Q&A, it was said that 'Humanism is the future'. I'd like to think it is. But unless we do a better job of explaining it and promoting it, then other neurolinguistic programs are likely to gain ground. The most popular program these days seems to be materialistic individualism. Another one is neo-Marxist utopianism. There's no guarantee that humanism will simply move into the vacuum created by the collapse of religion. We've got a lot of work to do if we want humanism to be the future.