



**Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> March 2023 ♦ 1.15pm Informal ploughman's-style lunch ♦ AGM at 2.00pm**  
**Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Ave, BH9 1TW. Please RSVP via Meetup or email.**



## Annual General Meeting & Lunch

*An important message from Vice Chair Lyn Glass to all of our lovely members!*

**Click image to RSVP**

We'll be celebrating another highly successful year at our Dorset Humanists AGM in March. If you're a paid-up member please make every effort to attend. (Non-members also welcome.) We'd love to see you for an informal ploughman's-style lunch at 1.15pm followed by the usual AGM business (which we keep to a minimum) plus lively discussions about our priorities going forward. Our special guest speaker is Mary Duncan, Operations Manager at Hope for Food. She was extremely grateful for our latest donation of £2312.38 and she will let us know how this has helped people in need.

♦ **Please let David Warden know in advance of the AGM which charities you would like us to consider and vote on for the 2023 Appeal. Contact details below.**



Around fifty people attended our Darwin Day event with Richard Norman (front row, second from left). We failed to persuade everyone to join in the group photo! Photo by Aaron.

Email: [chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk](mailto:chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk)

Phone: 07910 886629

HMRC Charities Ref No EW10227



Click for  
events

Click for  
website

**Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 7.30pm Orchid Hotel, 34 Gervis Road, Bournemouth BH1 3DH**



## Ghosts and Folklore

A talk by Paul Cowdell, a Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Hertfordshire. Paul currently serves on the Council of the Folklore Society, and the editorial boards of both its journal *Folklore* and the *Folk Music Journal*.

Humanists who are curious about irrational beliefs will want to understand folklore – that is, how the traditional beliefs, customs, and stories of a community are passed through the generations by word of mouth. Folklore is not usually considered to be a religion, because it does not have any central organisation and it usually does not have a deity. But the practice of folklore can involve ritualised behaviour, and sometimes belief in magical beings with supernatural powers, and so it has some elements in common with religions.

Our speaker Paul Cowdell has devoted his academic career to the study of folklore. He has carried out fieldwork into folklore, interviewing many people who have tales to tell or ghost stories to relate. He has found that official religions are generally sceptical about ghost stories, even when many of the people who belong to a particular religion also believe those stories. Because many people believe that ghost stories are not true, the stories are usually very slow to pass on to others – you only relate a doubtful story to those who will be likely to believe it.

In his talk, Paul will discuss the historical progress of ghost narratives. He has found that, usually, the more the stories are told, the more they change to fit into the style of traditional stories. He will include examples from his own fieldwork and research. He will also examine ghost lore in the broader context of folklore. This will hopefully provide a first glimpse into what folklore is, how it works, and how folklorists look at it, but more particularly it will provide some things for humanists to consider in their interactions with beliefs and believers. I very much hope that Paul will also tell us some intriguing and scary ghost stories!

*Simon Whipple*

---

## Dates for your diary

Saturday 11 <sup>th</sup> March 1.15pm	Moordown	Annual Members' Meeting (AGM) with complimentary buffet lunch
Wednesday 22 <sup>nd</sup> March 7.30pm	Orchid Hotel	<i>Ghosts and Folklore</i> – a talk by Paul Cowdell who is a Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Hertfordshire.
Saturday 8 <sup>th</sup> April 2.00pm	Moordown	Paul Entwistle: <i>Britain's Enduring Housing Crisis: Winners and Losers, Reasons and Solutions</i>
Wednesday 26 <sup>th</sup> April 7.30pm	Orchid Hotel	Daniel Dancey on cryptography

*Plus social events and 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.*

# Darwin Day 2023

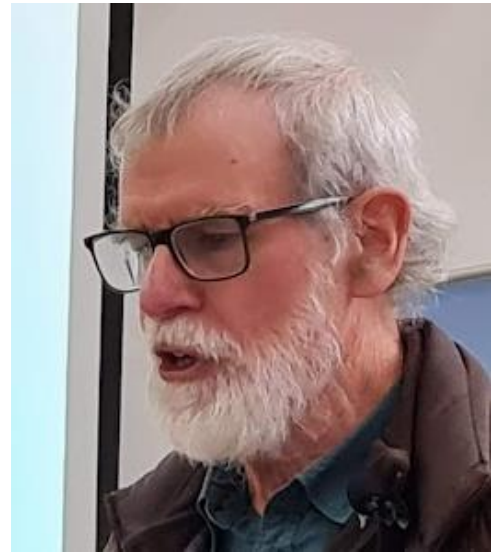
*Around fifty people attended our Darwin Day lunch and talk with distinguished guest speaker Emeritus Professor Richard Norman. The title of Richard's talk was 'Can humanist ethics produce a political programme?' This is a brief, edited report of the talk. You can watch the whole talk on our YouTube channel. Click the image of Richard.*

*The event raised £317 for the Disasters Emergency Committee to help in the relief effort following the Turkey/Syria Earthquake on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2023. Thank you to everyone who gave so generously.*

"There is a humanist perspective or approach to politics. Whether humanist values amount to a political programme you will have to judge for yourselves.

The humanist tradition has always been linked with certain ethical ideas which do have political implications. The humanist tradition is not sharply defined. In Europe we can trace it back to ancient Greece but modern humanism starts to take shape with the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment.

One of the great representatives of those ideas was Thomas Paine (1737-1809). I think we can call Paine a humanist. He wasn't atheist but what was called then a deist. He believed in a sort of God. Like many of his contemporaries, he believed that the universe was a Newtonian machine which implied a creator but he did not believe that God needed to intervene once the universe had been started. Paine's God is a not a God that one can worship or pray to. Paine believed in the equality of man and this was the starting point for his politics – our common humanity." ▷



"I believe in the equality of man, and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavouring to make our fellow-creatures happy....

I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church."

Thomas Paine *The Age of Reason* (1794)



Many people stayed for the TalkBack session after the main talk to continue the discussion with Richard Norman.  
Photos by Aaron



Richard went on to explain the link between equality and democracy, and the principle that no government can have authority over us unless we have consented to it – tracing these ideas back to the 17th century ‘Levellers’ such as Thomas Rainsborough. Paine and others, at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, took forward the ideas of the Levellers: equal rights grounded in our common humanity and that everyone should have a say in how they are governed. These were revolutionary ideas compared to ‘the divine right of kings’.

Paine was responding to Edmund Burke who thought that human rights were a product of tradition. There’s nothing wrong with tradition as such but, for Burke, tradition is a product of a divinely ordained order which we inherit and in which we all have our ‘appointed place’. Burke defended the idea of an established church and church control of education.

Richard spoke about the poet Shelley whose poem, *The Mask of Anarchy*, contains the well-known lines:

‘Rise like Lions after slumber  
In unvanquishable number,  
Shake your chains to earth like dew  
Which in sleep had fallen on you –  
Ye are many – they are few.’

Richard also acknowledged the feminist

“It is with infinite caution that any man ought to venture upon pulling down an edifice which has answered in any tolerable degree for ages the common purposes of society...” The state is “a partnership not only between those who are living but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.”

Edmund Burke *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790)

dimension of equality as written about by Shelley’s mother-in-law Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Both Wollstonecraft and the French humanist thinker Nicolas de Condorcet (1743-94) claimed that human equality is based on our ability to reason, and that, since both men and women have this capacity, we should have equal rights.

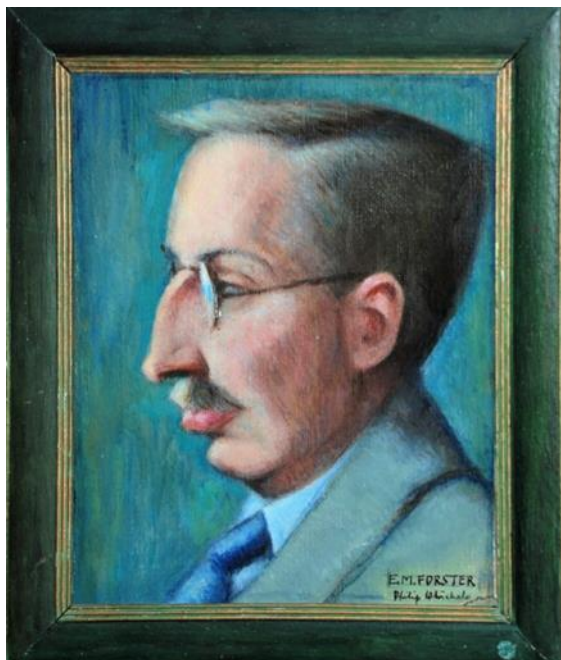
***“Since the time of Wollstonecraft and Condorcet, this struggle for rights and equality has been inseparable from the humanist movement.”***

Condorcet also challenged racial oppression, especially in relation to slavery. ▷



**What was Dean explaining to Phil?  
Darwin Day photo by Aaron**

More recently, humanists have been at the forefront of the movement for gay rights. Many prominent humanists such as A J Ayer, Julian Huxley, and Bertrand Russell were among the founders of the Homosexual Law Reform Society (1958). The humanist E M Forster made a large donation to the society. The Gay Humanist Group was founded 1979 which became the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association in 1987 – now known as LGBT Humanists.



**Portrait of E M Forster donated to the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association**

“So,” Richard said, “I think there is a humanist politics and I think it consists in a commitment to human equality working for human rights and democracy. I’m very pleased that you have foregrounded the word ‘democratic’ in your Dorset Humanists pop-up banner about humanism. These values are not, of course, exclusively humanist. Christians such as Wilberforce were also at the forefront of the campaign against slavery. So in answer to the question posed, what I am saying is that humanist ethics can produce a humanist politics. It’s a politics of human rights and democracy which is rooted in humanist values of our common humanity and the equality of all human beings. Is that a political programme? It certainly was in 1790.”

“Those values have of course become mainstream. Very few people in the political arena are going to say they don’t agree with democracy. But if Paine could see where we’ve got to now I think he would feel a certain pride.” Richard made some remarks about the modern divide between left and right in politics. What divides them is the means of achieving an economy which benefits everyone. He said that “a humanist could consistently take either side in that debate and that humanist organisations, rightly, are neutral on the party political divide at the moment. That’s not to say that we should be complacent about human rights and democracy. They are constantly under threat, or even non-existent, in different parts of the world. The humanist agenda still needs our continuing commitment and action. Closer to home, the rise of authoritarian populism and extreme nationalism is a reminder that the struggle for democracy and human rights is never complete. Just think across the Atlantic and the unholy alliance between Donald Trump and the evangelical right. Or think of the way in which the demonization of immigrant communities leads to forms of racism and attacks on the rights of minorities in this country and other parts of Europe. Think of the attacks on gay rights in some countries in Eastern Europe. Humanists have to defend those rights. They are never secure. Many Humanists UK campaigns are part of that agenda of human rights, such as assisted dying.”

In summary, Richard said that central to the humanist tradition has been the politics of democracy and human rights. The fact that, at least in theory, this is now mainstream in the UK is an achievement to be celebrated. There is still a lot to do to defend and extend it in this country, even more world-wide. And in UK this means also advocating the politics of secularism. Finally, he advocated for environmental politics. We should add our humanist voice to the climate crisis and the biodiversity crisis.

See [Humanist Climate Action](#)



# The Philosophy of Friendship

*Thirty-eight people attended David Warden's talk on friendship at the Orchid Hotel in February. This was based on a recent seminar David gave at Bournemouth University in the Faith & Reflection Centre where he is the humanist advisor.*

*You can watch the whole talk and discussion on our YouTube channel or by clicking the image.*

David explained that, to be more accurate, this talk should have been called 'The Anthropology of Friendship' because it is based on Robin Dunbar's book *Friends: Understanding the Power of our Most Important Relationships* published in 2021. Dunbar is an anthropologist, an evolutionary psychologist, and he specialises in primate behaviour. He leads the Social and Evolutionary Neuroscience Research Group in the Department of Experimental Psychology at the University of Oxford. He is best known for formulating Dunbar's number, a measurement of the 'cognitive limit to the number of individuals with whom any one person can maintain stable relationships'. This number is 150.

## Concentric circles

One of Dunbar's main findings is that humans organise their relationships in what may be thought of as concentric circles. The innermost circle has an upper limit of around five people. These are the people who satisfy our needs for intimacy. Typically, this would be a romantic partner or spouse plus a few others such as closest friends. It could include a god, if you believe in a deity. David suggested it could include yourself, in the sense that we should aim to be a 'good friend' to ourselves. It may even include a pet. David said that it's possible to pay for intimate relationships such as a therapist or

a sex worker. He said that the number five is not a target – it's the upper limit of the number of relationships that can be maintained at this level of intensity. Typically, we spend 40% of our friendship budget on this inner circle, leaving limited time for the middle and outer circles. The circles increase roughly by a factor of three. The 15 circle contains friends you may see once a month, and the 45 circle contains friends you may see twice a year. Each successive circle (150, 500 etc) contains friends or acquaintances at decreasing levels of intensity. This is a model of how humans typically organise and manage their friendships. People can, of course, move in and out of these various circles depending on time and circumstances.

## Homophily

The second main section of David's talk was about the principle of 'homophily' which simply means that we make friends with people with whom we share things in common. The seven most significant factors are speaking the same language, growing up in the same geographical location, having had the same educational and career experiences, sharing the same hobbies and interests, sharing moral, religious or political points of view, having the same sense of humour, and the same musical tastes.



# Our Annual Appeal 2023

**Which charity or charities should we support in 2023? Please contact David Warden before the AGM so that we can do some preliminary fact-finding.**

*Dorset Humanists raised £2312.38 for the Hope for Food foodbank in 2022 thanks to the amazing generosity of our members. At the AGM, we will discuss ideas for the 2023 appeal. Until recently, the appeal was named after Jane Bannister, a former chair of Dorset Humanists who was particularly keen on supporting charities for homeless people and women's refugees.*

## Uganda Humanist Schools

*From Sally Hawksworth*

My suggestion for a charity for us to support for the coming year is the Uganda Humanist Schools Trust (Charity Registration No 1128762).

I don't propose that it is our sole beneficiary. I think we should split the money between this and a local humanitarian charity such as Hope For Food or one of the other local good causes we have supported in past years. Why?

1. We in Dorset Humanists have an actual direct personal connection because Chris Smith is one of the Trustees.
2. We know that the money raised is not a drop in a huge ocean, and not spent on large salaries for "professional" charity workers, fundraising etc. The trustees are unpaid volunteers and the money raised goes to supporting a small cluster of schools in impoverished rural locations. With more money more schools could be funded.
3. This is a specifically Humanist charity, whose remit is to create schools in Africa with a liberal secular humanist ethos. By supporting it we would be promoting at least three of our stated aims, providing educational opportunities where they are desperately needed and teaching a new generation about the Humanist ethos.

4. The founders of and teachers in the schools are Ugandan Humanists, not Western outsiders. This is a home grown initiative, not an instance of neo-colonialism.

It's right that we should contribute to good causes that benefit our local community, and be seen to do so. But we should not do so exclusively, as if our own country and local area are our sole concern. We have a responsibility to ALL humans in need, and to encourage the spread of Humanist thinking and ethics throughout the world.



**You can watch Chris Smith's inspiring talk about the Uganda Humanist Schools by clicking the image above or going to our YouTube Channel. More information is in our November 2022 bulletin.**

**Website: [ugandahumanistschoolstrust.org](http://ugandahumanistschoolstrust.org)**

# Committee nominations

*We have received 12 nominations for the 2023/24 committee. There are 12 vacancies and therefore members will be invited at the AGM to vote for the entire list. Some committee members have indicated a desire to retire in the coming year and therefore there will be opportunities for new people to come forward. Please have a word with David or any committee member if you would like to know more about what's involved. We are also hugely indebted to the selfless service given by our team of volunteers.*

**Chris Street** is standing down from the committee. Chris was our webmaster and founder of our schools visiting team. He has served on our committee for around 15 years and we are hugely grateful for his years of service.

1. **David Warden** has been Chair of Dorset Humanists since 2009. He produces the bulletin and leads our pastoral team. He is an Honorary Member of Humanists UK, Editor of Humanistically Speaking magazine, and Humanist Advisor to the Faith & Reflection Team at Bournemouth University and Arts University Bournemouth. David is willing to stand again for election as Chair.
2. **Lyn Glass** has been our Vice Chair since 2013. She was also our 'Speaker Finder' for many years and she often hosts our pub nights. Lyn is a former Chair of Poole Arts Trust (Lighthouse), and board trustee director of BH Live.
3. **Cathy Silman** has been our Secretary since 2014. She is also our Membership Secretary, and part of our Meet & Greet and pastoral teams, as well as one of our school speakers and caterers for our special events. Cathy is a retired teacher.
4. **Daniel Dancey** is our treasurer (since 2021) and webmaster (since 2023). Daniel works in software engineering.
5. **Dean Robertson** is one of our pub night hosts and he helps with some of the heavy-lifting at our events. Dean is an independent financial adviser.
6. **John Kingston** was our treasurer until 2021 and he often helps with our audio-visual equipment. John is a retired IT Project Manager.
7. **Phil Butcher** is our main audio-visual technician. He organised our walks and short talks programme for a number of years. Phil worked for over 40 years in the nuclear industry.
8. **Simon Whipple** is our lead on events programming. Simon is a solicitor specialising in Social Welfare Law.
9. **Sally Hawsworth** is a member of the BCP Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education. Sally is a retired teacher.
10. **Barry Newman** is a member of the Dorset Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education and one of our school visitors. Barry is a retired intensive care consultant.
11. **George Askwith** is our Faith to Faithless link (the Humanists UK support service for apostates leaving high control religions). She is also our social media lead. George is a research advisor at Bournemouth University.
12. **Simon Bowden** is a retired journalist who worked mainly for the BBC in news and current affairs. He is a longstanding member of Dorset Humanists and aspires for Dorset Humanists to be seen as a reformist group, willing to listen to arguments from both political sides.



# Dorset Humanists Impact Report 2022

We've been *building back* after the Covid interregnum. Our recent events at Moordown Community Centre have been attended by over 50 people and our recent Philosophy of Friendship talk, at our new evening venue the Orchid Hotel, attracted nearly 40 people. With many humanist groups struggling to get back on their feet after Covid, these are very encouraging numbers for Dorset Humanists.

## Aim 1

Promote Humanism understood as a non-religious ethical worldview

**Aim 1:** Humanism is now a **mandatory element** in the local RE curriculum – a fantastic result after two decades of patient effort by our SACRE representatives. Our **schools visiting team** has spoken to around **2,000** pupils about Humanism in Bournemouth, Poole, Christchurch, Salisbury, and further afield in Dorset. We now have a **humanist adviser** at Bournemouth University and Arts University Bournemouth. We take a leading role in producing an **online humanist magazine** with global reach. **371** people subscribe to our YouTube channel, **1,002** people subscribe to our Meetup site, and our monthly bulletin is sent to **1,019** subscribers.

## Aim 2

Develop, and serve the needs of, the Humanist community in Dorset

**Aim 2:** Our **pastoral team** and **Hardship Scheme** has helped members in financial difficulties. **Simon Bull** continues to conduct humanist ceremonies. Our **walks programme** resumed over the summer to promote fitness and friendship and our **singing group** entertained us in December.

## Aim 3

Promote the public understanding of science

**Aim 3:** We continue to host events of scientific interest including talks on astronomy, the philosophy of science, artificial intelligence, and how an understanding of maths can help to explain inexplicable phenomena.

## Aim 4

Be a force for good in our local community and globally

**Aim 4:** We donated over **£2,500** to a local foodbank through our **Annual Appeal**. We supported Bournemouth **LGBT Pride**. Chris Smith spoke to us about **Humanist Schools in Uganda**. David Warden spoke at the **Bournemouth Remembrance Service** and Sally Hawksworth laid a wreath at the **Poole War Memorial**. David Warden spoke at the Bournemouth & Poole **Holocaust Memorial Day** event. We took part in an interfaith dialogue event at **Bournemouth University**.

## Aim 5

Support the work of our partners

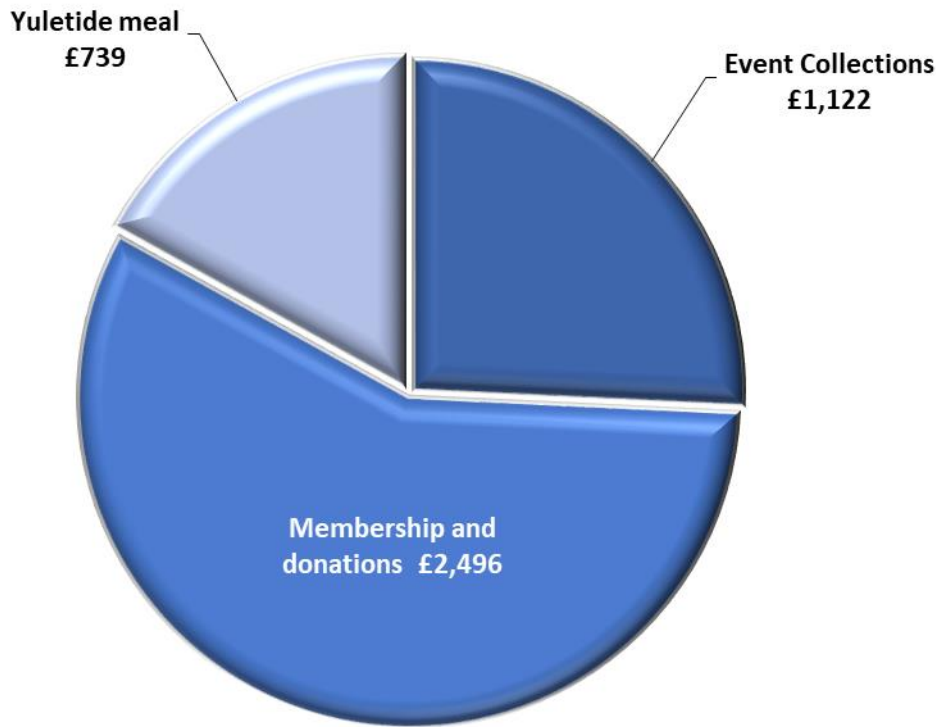
**Aim 5:** **Andrew Copson**, chief executive of Humanists UK and President of Humanists International, spoke at our August event. **Stephen Evans**, chief executive of the National Secular Society, spoke at one of our evening events. One of our members, **Sophy Robinson**, serves on the Board of Trustees of Humanists UK. We pay subs to Humanists UK, the National Secular Society, Humanists International, and the South Central England Humanists Network. David Warden attended the **Humanists UK Convention and AGM in Belfast** and published a comprehensive report in *Humanistically Speaking*.

*If you like what we do, please show your support and solidarity by becoming a member for an incredible £15 a year. 170 of you already have – thank you!*

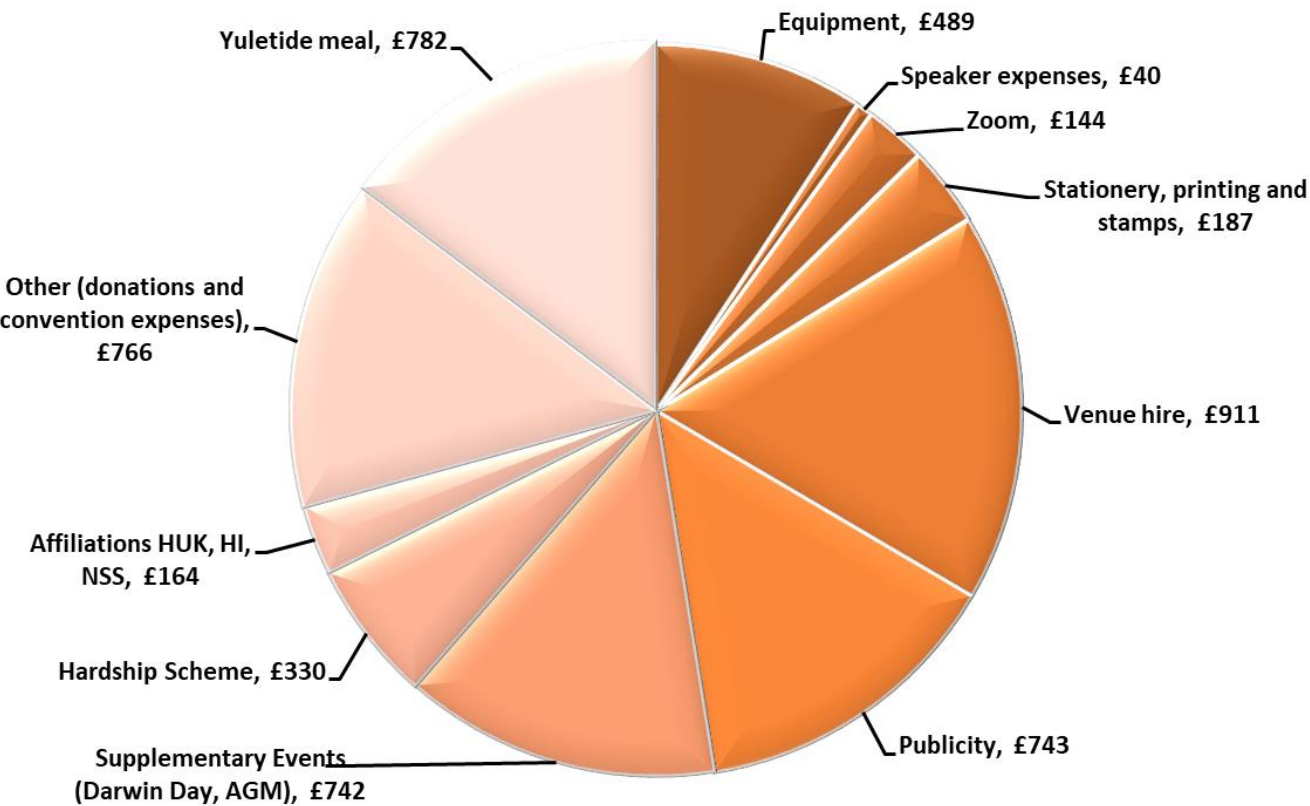
# 2022 accounts at-a-glance

Our treasurer Daniel Dancey will present formal accounts for member approval at our AGM on 12<sup>th</sup> March. These indicative graphs are for illustration purposes only. If you would like a copy of the formal accounts please email [treasurer@dorsethumanists.co.uk](mailto:treasurer@dorsethumanists.co.uk)

2022 Revenue £4356



2022 Expenditure £5363



# View from the Chair

David Warden  
Chairman of Dorset Humanists



Richard Norman, in his excellent Darwin Day lecture for Dorset Humanists, said that humanist politics consists in a commitment to equality working for human rights and democracy. He claimed that these humanist values are now part of the political mainstream, although they still need to be fought for and protected. I would have liked Richard to go a bit deeper into the principle of equality. He said that Enlightenment thinkers such as Condorcet argued that humans are equal *because* we all have the capacity to reason. This seems to me to be a peculiar claim. It may have been persuasive in the eighteenth century when progressives were arguing against the idea that God has deliberately made us to be *unequal*, but I don't think that today we would base the principle of equality on our capacity to reason. Equality, in today's world, seems more like a basic axiom of social and political relationships which does not require any rational justification. One can't help noticing, however, that the political elites seem to have given up on the principle of economic equality, or at least of less *inequality*. Life chances remain massively dependent on the economic circumstances into which you are born. Some people inherit gigantic amounts of social and educational capital from their families, in addition to any genetic inheritance of intelligence. These people will, in all likelihood, excel in education and they will enjoy well-paid careers. They will have little difficulty in buying homes and they will pass on all of their social advantages to their children. At the same time, many people will be born into families which pass on very meagre amounts of social and educational capital. They may have insecure and low-paid employment, insecure housing and dysfunctional relationships, or chronic unemployment and debt. They may live in decaying towns and cities with crime and drug problems. So my question is this: how can we really talk about human equality when these structural and enduring inequalities are plain to see? A humanist politics would surely make addressing these inequalities a priority. The puzzle is that there do not seem to be any simple answers. Taxing the rich to give to the poor may not actually solve the problem. We already do that with the benefits system. What we need is a system which levels the playing field to a greater degree in terms of social and educational capital, and access to well-paid employment and affordable housing. We need a politics of the common good, and a 'levelling up' agenda across the whole of society. Labour's new '5 Missions for a Better Britain' may help, including 'Break down the barriers to opportunity at every stage' and 'Secure... good jobs and productivity growth in every part of the country making everyone, not just a few, better off' but I haven't yet delved into the detail about what these missions will mean in practice. At the very least, they seem to have more substance than Rishi Sunak's recently announced 'five pledges'. As we approach the next election, I hope that Dorset Humanists will have plenty of opportunities to assess what is being offered by the political parties.