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BRITISH HUMANIST
ASSOCIATION

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International
Humanist and
Ethical Union



Dorset Humanists

Atheists and agnostics for a better world

■ **Saturday 12th March 1.15pm AGM 2.15**
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation
Avenue, BH9 1TW

Celebratory lunch followed by AGM and talk: 'Being a Humanist Today: Challenges and Choices'



This year Dorset Humanists will celebrate its twentieth anniversary and so we want to make this year's AGM one which all members will want to attend. At our AGM

we celebrate the highlights of the past year, award 'Humanist of the Year', and renew and refresh our sense of belonging to a stimulating and engaging community group. The meeting also enables our members to influence the future growth and development of Dorset Humanists, so please do come along and take part; and we hope you will also join us for a celebratory lunch at 1.15pm prior to the meeting beginning at 2.15pm. Lunch is free for paid-up members, £5 for non-members. We are offering a varied buffet including salads, dips, meat and vegan/vegetarian dishes, and desserts. Gluten-free options also available.

After his main report Chair of Dorset Humanists David Warden will talk about *Being a Humanist Today: Challenges and*

Choices, in which he will explain why identifying as a humanist is now more important than ever, and how the steady decline of mainstream religion presents us with many opportunities. He will also highlight how the intensification of fundamentalist religion presents challenges and dangers to which we humanists must respond. Everyone is welcome to attend the AGM but only subscribing members may vote on resolutions. Dorset Humanists annual membership costs £15. Contact our membership secretary Cathy if you're unsure whether your membership is up-to-date. A number of people have yet to adjust their standing orders to reflect the recent modest increase in the annual subscription.

☎ Cathy (membership sec) 01202 740550

✉ catherinesilman311@btinternet.com

■ **Wednesday 23rd March 7.30pm** Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX

Thinking Fast and Slow: How to Think More Effectively



A talk by Dorset Humanist member and psychologist Phil James

Why do we believe that air travel is more dangerous than car travel, despite statistics proving the opposite is true? Why are judges more likely to deny parole before lunch? And why do we forget to eat when focused on an interesting project? In his best-selling book, *'Thinking Fast and Slow'*, Nobel Prize-

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winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman explored the intuitive biases and irrationality in our decision making, and proposed that we have two parallel mental systems which he calls 'System 1' and 'System 2'. Kahneman also details the mental shortcuts we use in our thinking that can assist or inhibit the accuracy of our decision-making. Awareness of these can help us avoid costly mistakes. Phil James will present an entertaining exposition of Kahneman's key psychological observations with a special focus on how we can improve the effectiveness of our thinking in our everyday lives. Are you more likely to believe something printed in bold text? Can smiling as you read this make you more confident this talk will be worth attending? Find out in this **unmissable presentation!**

Phil James BSc (Hons), MSc is a Member of the British Psychological Society. He was co-facilitator on Dorset Humanists' well-received 'Happiness Course' last year.

■ **Thursday 7th April 7.30pm** and every first Thursday evening of the month at Moon in the Square, Exeter Rd, BH2 5AQ



Social Evening

Enjoy stimulating conversation over a drink or two at our 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

■ **Saturday 9th April 2.00pm**
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW



Blasphemy by the Back Door

Andrew Copson, Chief Executive British Humanist Association

Britain's antiquated blasphemy laws were widely believed to have been abandoned prior to their surprising revival for the Gay News trial in 1979, and a decade or so later,

efforts to ban Salman Rushdie's 'The Satanic Verses' highlighted that our anachronistic laws only protected Christian beliefs.

It became increasingly clear that freedom of speech was a more important principle than protecting religious beliefs, and our blasphemy laws were finally repealed in 2008, but are we truly free to criticise religious sensibilities? In this lively talk, Chief Executive of the British Humanist Association (BHA) Andrew Copson will be considering how various rules and regulations still privilege religions in the public space and lead to opposing voices being silenced.

Join us for an entertaining and alarming exploration of Britain's de facto blasphemy laws.

Other events of interest...

■ **Wednesday 9th March 7.30pm**
Bournemouth Skeptics in the Pub,
Brunswick Pub, Malmesbury Park Road
BH8 8PX

Lies, Damned Lies and Statistics

Science and medicine have transformed our lives immeasurably, and never in history have they been more central to our lives and well-being. Yet despite this, there is often a glaring disconnect between the findings of actual science and media reporting of such topics, and consequently a needless chasm between public perception and the evidence on many contentious topics. This can lead to needlessly adversarial and counter-productive discourse of everything from vaccination to climate-change.

In this talk, physicist and science journalist Dr. David Robert Grimes explores frequent problems in reporting science, such as misunderstandings, bad statistics and false balance. He will examine the factors that cause these problems and suggest how they can be remedied.

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■ **Tuesday 15th March 12.00-1.00pm**
Bournemouth University Chaplaincy

Theist, Atheist, Agnostic?

Three panel members including David Warden and Conor O'Luby explain their points of view and answer questions from the floor. This event is intended to be an open discussion to help people think as opposed to a 'debate'. Students only.

■ **Wednesday 6th April 7.30pm**

'Out of the Box' at the Black Bear Hotel, 14 South St, Wareham BH20 4LT. Free entry - small donation appreciated. First Weds of the month.

On Being a Humanist Today

An exploration led by David Warden, Chair of Dorset Humanists.



'Out of the Box' is a successor to Purbeck Open Lectures (POL). It has been set up by a small group of POL supporters in collaboration

with Dorset Humanists. This launch is for a trial period of 4 months. 'Out of the Box' will be a forum to explore the journeys that different people make to arrive at a set of beliefs or worldview. It will provide opportunities for people to share their journeys with others rather than try to convince them that their destination is the only right place to be.

At the inaugural meeting we heard Ruth Haydock's amazing story of how she grew up in Northern Ireland and Burkino Faso with her missionary parents. Ruth was severely traumatized by belief in evil, demons, and witchcraft and it has taken her years to recover from religion and to discover the liberation of Humanism. At our 2nd March meeting we heard the story of John MacDiarmid who was born into a Catholic family and converted to evangelicalism after a brief interlude as an atheist. At our 6th April meeting Chair of Dorset Humanists David Warden will help us explore the meaning of Humanism today. What's the difference between Humanism

and Atheism? Does Humanism have any overall purpose? Is there 'something missing' in Humanism's account of what it means to be human? David has a degree in theology and he was an evangelical Christian in his teens. Towards the end of his theological studies he concluded that he no longer believed in God, a position he has held ever since. In 2009, David was the first guest lecturer for Purbeck Open Lectures with a talk on the 'Alpha Course'.

■ **Sunday 20th March**

March for Men

Thanks to member Bob Harley for bringing this event to our attention.

Bournemouth Hospital Charity's March for Men event is returning to Bournemouth Seafront on 20 March and aims to raise thousands of pounds for a new piece of imaging equipment that will benefit men with prostate cancer at the Royal Bournemouth Hospital (RBH).

Money raised from the event will be used to fund men's health projects at the hospital including the purchase of a new Olympus image management hub. This will be used alongside the hospital's da Vinci Robot, used in complex major surgery to treat men with prostate cancer.

March for Men encourages men, women and children to walk, run or march 1km, 5km, or 10km along Bournemouth seafront and lower gardens. Hundreds of people took part last year helping to fund the template biopsy machine which has benefited over 100 men with prostate cancer since it was bought last year.

If you'd like to inspire a group of Dorset Humanists to take part please tell us!

Details on how to sign up: [Follow link here](#)

John Rawlings



Last month we reported that Dorset Humanist member John Rawlings had died. We have discovered this photograph of him at a recent Darwin Day lunch.

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BHA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

BIRMINGHAM 10-12 JUNE, 2016

The British Humanist Association Annual Conference 2016 will be held in the busy and bustling city of Birmingham, home of the Midlands Enlightenment, on 10-12 June 2016.

Tickets are selling quickly, so make sure you get yours now! Annual Conference 2016 will be the biggest and best to date, with more than 500 humanists gathering for a busy weekend of lectures, plenaries, panel discussions, live entertainment – and more choice than ever before.



**BHA President
Shappi Khorsandi**

The BHA is delighted to be welcoming the following fantastic guest speakers to Annual Conference 2016, and will be announcing many more in the weeks and months to

come: BHA President comedian Shappi Khorsandi, Professor Alice Roberts, Professor Francesca Stavrakopoulou, journalist David Aaronovitch, Polly Toynbee and many more.

Tickets: £129 for BHA members, £149 for non-members, £89 for students.

 [Conference](#)

 020 7324 3060

Dorset Humanists Membership Benefits

At Dorset Humanists we strive to create a welcoming and stimulating community for humanists, atheists and agnostics in the local area, while also working to ensure our group is guided by sound values based on

reason, evidence and compassion. In recent years we have doubled the number of entertaining and informative presentations in our events programme, gained representation for non-religious people at Bournemouth's Remembrance ceremonies, succeeded in getting secular, non-religious philosophies such as Humanism into Dorset's RE syllabuses, developed engaging educational courses, and instigated a range of additional regular social events.

We are entirely funded by voluntary donations from our members and visitors, and we hope you will wish to help us continue and further expand our activities by paying your annual membership fee. Growing our membership also helps us to increase our influence on local policy in areas like education, religious privilege, and gain representation in policy groups and at civil events. At just £15 a year our membership offers great value and joining really demonstrates your support for our aims, values and community.



Membership offers excellent value for money and our members get exclusive discounts to educational courses such as our 'One Life' and 'Happiness' courses and also to a complimentary lunch at the AGM as well as enabling you to participate in determining

future group activities, vote on constitutional issues, and elect committee members. If you're not sure whether your current membership is up to date you don't have to worry because we'll send you a reminder. If you haven't joined us yet we'd love to welcome you as a new member. Just pick up a membership form at one of our meetings, contact Cathy, or see our website. Many thanks for your continuing support!

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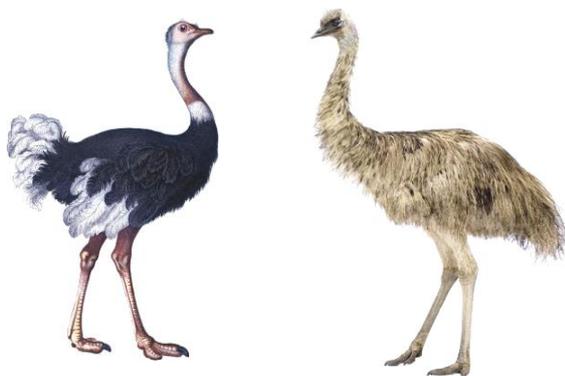
Predatory Dinosaurs and the Evolution of Birds



At our superb Darwin Day celebration palaeontologist Darren Naish overturned any lingering illusions we may be holding onto that dinosaurs were scaly, cold-blooded creatures.

They were most definitely fuzzy and feathered. Our usual image of dinosaurs, nurtured by films such as *Jurassic Park*, are hypothetical constructs. T. Rex did not walk around with its belly on display, with a head shaped like a brick, and its tail dragging on the ground. What bothers Darren is that this 'olde view' of scaly, fat, ugly, tail-dragging, lizard-like dinosaurs will not die because people love this image. Velociraptor, for example, was more like a giant fuzzy land-hawk, not like a kimodo dragon. Was T. Rex fuzzy and feathery? Probably, yes.

Birds are theropod ('beast-footed') dinosaurs with three toes. There have been about 1 million species of birds over the last 66 million years with 10,000 living bird species today. Birds are, therefore, the

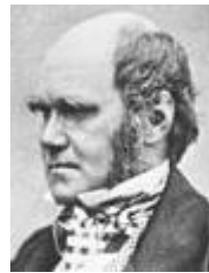


Ostriches and emus are perhaps most obviously related to non-bird dinosaurs

most successful type of dinosaur having survived the mass extinction event because of their small size.



We've only had space to include a fraction of the material included in Darren's informative and engaging lecture. Watch the full lecture on Dorset Humanists YouTube [here](#).

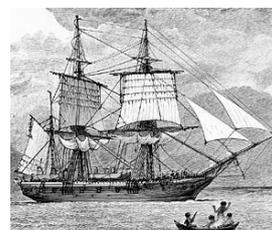


Life of Darwin

Eighty people packed into the Green House in February to hear David Croman's absorbing talk on the life, ideas and influence of Charles Darwin.

Darwin was born on 12 February 1809 in Shrewsbury. He was the fifth of six children of wealthy society doctor and financier Robert Darwin and Susannah Darwin (*née* Wedgwood). His mother died when he was just eight years old. One of his grandfathers was the natural philosopher Erasmus Darwin (Dorset Humanists had a talk on Erasmus Darwin in February 2008).

At the age of sixteen, Darwin went up to Edinburgh University to study medicine but he preferred taxidermy to medicine and privately started studying natural history, marine biology and botany. At the age of eighteen he went to Christ's College, Cambridge, in order to study divinity (at this time 80 per cent of all degrees at Cambridge were in divinity and theology!). He passed his divinity exams but he spent his summers studying geology. His tutor Professor Reverend Henslow was also a geologist and botanist. Henslow had been invited to go on the Beagle voyage but his wife didn't want him to go. And so he recommended the 22-year old Darwin. Fitzroy, captain of the Beagle, was a phrenologist and believed that Darwin's nose was 'wrong'. Darwin's father thought the journey would be risk and he said 'no'. Darwin appealed to his uncle Josiah Wedgwood and after a meeting with Darwin's father the voyage was agreed.



The Beagle was being prepared in Plymouth. It was originally a man o'war with a crew of 70. The height of the lower decks was 4ft 10ins which created some discomfort for Darwin who was over 6ft. At night he slept with his feet in a cupboard because conditions were so cramped.

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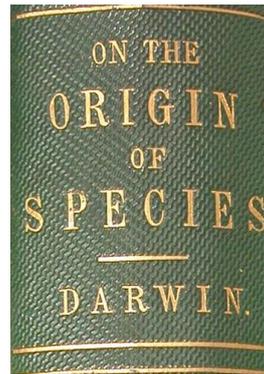
The journey, which was supposed to last for five months, lasted for five years during which time Darwin suffered continuous seasickness as the ship circumnavigated the globe. He was incredibly industrious, collecting and logging the details of every insect and marine animal he came across. He was sending crates and crates of his findings back to Henslow in Cambridge, becoming famous as a result. You can still view his collections today in the Herbarium in Cambridge and his journal is available online. Darwin was the fittest man on board. He climbed 12,000ft in the Andes, undertook long journeys inland, and he experienced an earthquake and a tsunami. Just five weeks out of a five-year journey were spent in the Galapagos Islands where Darwin's first meal was giant tortoise. Darwin's meticulous observations of beak variations in different island populations of finches gave him the vital clue that species evolved according to ecological conditions. Darwin used the word 'transmutation'. One of the challenges to evolutionary theory has been the apparent absence of intermediary forms between species but the gaps are now being filled in. For example, the archaeopteryx is a feathered dinosaur and a transitional form between reptile and bird. Darwin sketched his famous 'tree of life' in his 1837 notebook illustrating the key idea of common ancestry. David Croman explained this is why humans share 40 per cent of their DNA with cabbages! But Darwin didn't know about genes. He thought the effective mechanism was a particle of some sort.

Upon his return, Darwin married his first cousin Emma of the Wedgwood family. They had had an amazing love affair and produced ten children, three of whom died including Annie, his favourite. Emma was very religious but Darwin became increasingly disillusioned with religion. He accompanied the family to church but preferred to go for a walk than attend services. After three years in London they moved to Down House in Kent (now the Darwin Museum and well worth a visit).

At the age of 35, Darwin wrote a 50,000 word thesis on natural selection and left a letter to Emma asking for it to be published

after his death. He knew it would scandalise the church.

In 1858, an essay from Alfred Russel Wallace came as 'a bolt from the blue'. Darwin was prepared to defer to Wallace as the originator of the idea of natural selection but he was persuaded by his peers to present a joint paper at the Linnaean Society. The society's annals for the year noted that 'nothing of significance had occurred'



On the Origin of Species was published in 1859. The first edition of 1250 copies sold out on the first day and a second run of 3,000 copies was hurriedly arranged. Darwin felt it was like 'confessing to a murder'. Despite her religiosity, his wife

Emma was amazingly supportive. On the evolution of man, Darwin offered only this hint: "Light will be thrown on the origin of man and his history".

Darwin was recommended for a knighthood but Bishop Samuel Wilberforce opposed it and so Darwin never got his knighthood. Notwithstanding this setback, Darwin was recognised as a great man during his lifetime and buried in Westminster Abbey next to the remains of the astronomer William Herschel. Wallace was a pallbearer at his funeral.

Groups mark Darwin Day

Humanists and science enthusiasts around the world marked Charles Darwin's 207th birthday on 12 February. The BHA Groups network joined in with a series of lectures, dinners, and comedy.

140 people were at the Manchester Conference Centre for Greater Manchester Humanists Darwin Day Celebration 2016, which this year was a lecture given by Dr Susanne Shultz, who talked about 'Religion, Cooperation, and pro-Sociality'.

Cardiff Humanists held their annual Darwin Day Dinner and had a talk about work

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supporting refugees. Southampton Humanists held their annual Lunch at Blue Keys Restaurant, with Chair Norman Maclean entertaining the group with a talk in celebration of Darwin. Plymouth Humanists met at Veggie Perrin's restaurant for their annual celebration of Darwin Day.

Over 200 people gathered in Conway Hall on Saturday 13 February, where Central London Humanists hosted 'Stand Up For Darwin', featuring comedy from BHA President Shappi Khorsandi, BHA Patrons Kate Smurthwaite, Robin Ince, and Sara Pascoe, and music from the likes of Jay Foreman and Jesus Camp the Musical.



Letters & Emails

It's your column...

From Paul Beckett

I noticed a leaflet at a recent DH meeting about The Humanist Galha/LGBT branch or Section. Could somebody enlighten me please what purpose this group serves? Like all Humanists I have applauded and fully backed every move to bring minority groups into full respect of the mainstream. Gay people used to understandably complain that they felt locked outside a society which was prejudiced against them and rightly needed to feel included. Happily we now have gay marriage and the UK at least does not discriminate on the basis of sexuality. And so it is at our DH meetings - as is our code - all are proudly accepted as part of the Humanist family. So I think that is why, seeing that leaflet, I felt a little uncomfortable and wondered if this is not a step backwards, away from integration? After welcoming gay folk into the fold, we are now seeing them still separated into their own sub-group, based completely on their sexuality. I can understand if a group was being persecuted in some way, so found it necessary to form a protest lobby,

to discuss tactics to attain their rights. But those have been achieved - so why should there now be a need for this kind of 'sexual apartheid'?

I am sorry if I am stepping on some toes here, (which is not my intention) but I would simply like to know what are its aims that are not the object of all Humanists, so why have a separate section?

David Warden's reply

The Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association did start as a separate organisation about 30 years ago. But now it's fully integrated into the BHA as a section of the BHA, similar to, for example, the Defence Humanists and the Student Humanists. Its aim is to continue campaigning for LGBT rights, not just in this country but also internationally. LGBT rights have been won in this country but there is still a lot of homophobia about, for example in sport, and people are often fearful to come out at work for fear of discrimination and loss of livelihood. I was chair of the LGBT workers Group at Dorset County Council as a way of visibly supporting gay and lesbian people in the workplace. In many countries, as you may know, gay people suffer from severe persecution. I'm thinking in particular of Christian countries in Africa such as Uganda and Nigeria, and also in Muslim countries, some of which mandate the death penalty for gay people. So your claim that gay rights have been achieved is only partly true.

So in answer to your question, there is no intention for LGBT Humanists to be 'separated into a sub-group'. LGBT Humanists are, as you say, fully accepted and integrated into mainstream Humanism. It's very important that we make this clear because, on rare occasions, we find that people who identify as Humanists do not appreciate that this includes positive acceptance of sexual diversity. I am proud that Dorset Humanists supports the BHA's 'LGBT Humanists' section and we need to continue to make this visible to members and visitors.

I hope this has reassured you Paul.

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Dorset Humanists
Chairman's View

March 2016



The first two 'Out of the Box' events in Wareham have been very engaging. In February, Ruth Haydock told her story of how, as a young child, she was traumatised by Christian beliefs in evil, hell and witchcraft. As she started to make friends outside the narrow confines of her family's religion she found it increasingly hard to believe that people she liked and loved were destined for hell. This moral dissonance was the start of her liberating journey to Humanism.

Our March speaker, John MacDiarmid who is pastor of Poole Christian Fellowship, listened intently to Ruth's story. He confided that if his own experience of Christianity had been as disturbing as hers he could imagine that he too would have ended up rejecting God. But his experience was quite different. He was born into a Catholic family and attended a Catholic boarding school where the priests, brothers and nuns were all lovely. During his teenage years he started asking whether Catholicism was really true and he became an agnostic. In his gap year he read Darwin, Nietzsche, Camus, and Sartre and concluded that he was an atheist. He felt a tremendous sense of freedom, not least because now he could have sex! It wasn't long, however, before he found himself struggling with the implications of atheism. He felt it was totally unreasonable to believe that the world, with all its complexity, had come about without a creator. And so by the time he started studying law at Southampton University he had become a deist (belief in a distant, watchmaker-type of God). On his very first night at University the 'God squad' got hold of him. He was invited to an event at Above Bar Church where the speaker was John Stott - one of the most high-profile evangelists of the 1970s. Over time he became more and more convinced that the evangelical account of Christianity 'stacked up' but he was troubled by the fact that this God required 100% allegiance from him. At the end of January 1979, alone in his room, he read John's gospel and prayed a prayer of surrender to God: "OK, I'll do whatever you want with my life!". In this instant he claims he 'found reality' and 'met God'. He was joyful and ecstatic and since that moment has had 'no doubts at all'.

We didn't have time to explore what a psychologist might have made of this conversion account but it illustrates the dramatic power of the Christian meme over the human mind. Once it snaps shut there's little chance of escape. *David Warden*

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