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Humanists UK

national
secular
society

IHEU
International
Humanist and
Ethical Union



Dorset Humanists

Atheists and agnostics for a better world

■ **Saturday 11 November 1.30 for 2.00pm**
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation
Avenue, BH9 1TW

Finding a Path



Biologist and
filmmaker Jane
Atkins was
brought up in
Africa and was
inspired by the
extraordinary
places she visited

with her parents. They included wildlife parks in Zambia and Zimbabwe, lakes and mountains in Malawi, and war-torn Ethiopia and Eritrea. She trained as a biologist and film-maker, and spent 12 years at the BBC Natural History Unit during which time she worked on landmark series such as *'Human Planet'* and *'Alaska: Earth's Frozen Kingdom'*. Travelling to places as diverse as Papua New Guinea and Texas has deeply affected her thoughts about cultures and religion, yet the natural world – its quietness, beauty, inspiration and wonder - has always been something of a sacred place for Jane. In this talk she shares the fascinating story of how she combined her passions to 'find her own path'.



Part Two in the Café

Join us for refreshments in
the café after the talk.

■ **Wednesday 22nd November 7.30pm**
Tivoli Theatre, Wimborne.

'Tamed' with Professor Alice Roberts



How do you tame
wildness? For
hundreds of years
thousands of years
our ancestors
existed in a world
where they
depended on wild
plants and animals.
They were hunter-
gatherers –

consummate survival experts, but taking the world as they found it. Then a revolution happened: we started to domesticate wild species and they became crucial to our own survival and success. Join us on a group trip to the Tivoli Theatre to see Alice Roberts delve into archaeology, history and genetics to reveal the amazing stories of the species that became our allies. From dogs, cattle and horses, to wheat, potatoes and apples, find out how taming all these species has left its mark on them – and us.

£17.50 - contact Lyn Glass ASAP for
tickets. ☎ 01202 767323

📧 lyn.glass@btinternet.com

*This trip replaces our Green House Hotel
meeting in November.*

Send bulletin updates to chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk

HMRC Charities Ref No EW10227



dorsethumanists.co.uk



@dorsethumanists



Dorset Humanists



meetup.com/Dorset-Humanists

■ **Thursday 7th and Wednesday 20th December 7.30pm** and every first Thursday evening of the month at Moon in the Square, Exeter Rd, BH2 5AQ



Pub socials

Enjoy stimulating conversation over a drink or two at our pub social evening. Look out for the Dorset Humanists signs on the table. We warmly welcome regulars and newcomers.

☎ Dean 07713 858773



Sunday Walks

19th November – Portland Bill. A fairly ambitious 9 mile walk to see what wild Portland is like in the autumn. Amazing views expected over Chesil Beach. Some short cuts are possible.

17th December – Stour Valley Way. A relatively flat walk along the beautiful River Stour, looking out for kingfishers and wading birds.

All walks are between about 6 and 9 miles and will usually have an optional short cut. Please check [Meetup](#) for further details and any last minute cancellations due to weather conditions. Phil ☎ 07817 260498



Short Talks

■ **Tuesday 21st November 7.30pm** Green House Hotel, Grove Road, BH1 3AX. £2.00-3.00 donation requested.

The Philosophy of Socialism

A short talk by Katie Taylor, Chair of Poole Labour Party, history teacher and head of sixth form at Thomas Hardy School in Dorchester. What exactly is socialism? Is it for dangerous, loony, left-wing radicals or is it an expression of humanity? Katie will argue that socialism is as relevant today as it has ever been and that the economy is clearly in need of a different approach .

The Philosophy of Conservatism

A short talk by David Warden. David will talk about some of the ideas underpinning conservative political philosophy including liberty, self-reliance, free trade, civil society, and the importance of tradition and the sense of belonging to a culture and place. Conservatism is opposed, in particular, to utopian revolutions that result in tyranny. Ironically, the British Conservative Party was captured by a utopian set of economic ideas in the 1980s – sometimes referred to as the ‘Thatcher/Reagan Settlement’. This settlement seems to have run its course and this has plunged the Tories into an identity crisis. So what next for Conservatism?

Each talk is around 20 minutes followed by questions and discussion. See [Meetup](#) for further details.

■ **Sunday 12th November 10.57am War Memorial**

Remembrance Service

Please support David Warden and Lyn Glass at the Bournemouth Remembrance Service. We are one of very few humanist groups in the country who take an active part in civic remembrance events.

■ **Saturday 9th December 2.00pm** Moordown Community Centre

Shelley – a Humanist out of Time

A video presentation introduced by John Webster. This inspiring presentation will reveal how humanist ideals animated much of the poet Shelley's work.

■ **Monday 18th December 12.30pm** Day's Chinese Buffet Restaurant, St Peter's Rd, BH1 2AD. £9.00 per head/pay on entry.

Santamas lunch

Join other humanists for a jolly Santamas lunch! It would be helpful if you could sign the sign-up sheet at forthcoming meetings.



Other events of interest...

■ **Wednesday 6th December 7.30pm** Black Bear Hotel, 14 South St, Wareham BH20 4LT. Free entry – donation appreciated.

Who wrote the Bible? An audience with the authors... Three biblical authors will time-travel to the present to reveal the secrets of how the Bible was really written. An imaginative evening with Christians and Humanist participants interviewed chat-show-style by Aaron Darkwood.

■ **Sunday 10th December 10.00-3.00pm**
Triangle, Bournemouth

World Human Rights Day

A variety of local groups and organisations will be promoting Human Rights. Organised by Dorset LGB&T Equality Network.

Humanists UK GRAM

David Warden and Lyn Glass attended the Group Representatives Annual Meeting on 30th September in London. Owing to the vagaries of Southern Rail and the Northern Line we were late arriving. Unfortunately, we missed the first session led by Chester Humanists but we now have a copy of their presentation. Ten years ago, they had a few core members, most of whom were elderly and male. With the arrival of new members there was a desire to do more and so they embarked on an 8-step process for creating their group vision.

Step One: Consider the competitive environment. They decided that this included all religious groups, Sunday Schools, the Alpha Course, Merseyside Skeptics, Chester street preachers, and faith-based charities.

Step Two: 'Who is our target audience?'. Answer: Atheists, agnostics, theists, political groups, "spirituality" groups, people who want to be more thoughtful, serious, honest about themselves and the nature of reality in a non-religious way, university students, schools, equality, justice and environmental groups.



Communications Manager Liam Whitton explained the thinking behind the new Humanists UK branding.

Step Three: 'Why would our target audience join a humanist group?' Answer: People who are disenchanted with religious answers to life's important questions and looking for a likeminded, supportive community with whom they can share and grow.

Step Four: What are the benefits of joining our group? Answers included: friendship with likeminded people, local campaigning, stimulating discussion, regular meetups, a tolerant environment, learning, social gatherings, life skills, online interaction, practical support for each other, and religious deprogramming.

Step Five: Be clear about values and beliefs. These included equality, co-operation, humility, empathy, critical thinking, global awareness and so on.

Step Six: "We believe people will engage with Chester Humanism because"... of our local expertise, our 'One Life Sessions' (inspired by Dorset Humanists' One Life course), our affiliations with Humanists UK and the National Secular Society, our achievements with schools, hospitals and celebrants, our online communications, and our range of services such as counselling and civil society representation.

Step Seven: What makes us different? We are the only Humanist group in the region, science-based, totally inclusive (sexuality, gender, race, age, etc.) and our non-

religious outlook on moral and lifestyle issues.

Step Eight: What is our essence? 'Local freethinkers helping everyone to get the most from the one life we have.'

Chester Humanists also run a 'buddy scheme' so that visitors are looked after on their first visit. Their future plans include growing membership by 10% by this December (on track), continue delivering humanist pastoral support in local hospitals, universities and prison, establish a Death Café in Chester, and attend Chester Pride in 2018.

As Lyn and David spoke with other representatives it became apparent that Dorset Humanists is the most successful UK group on most measures. We are as successful as Central London in terms of attendance at meetings. Birmingham has a much smaller group than us. Yet Humanists UK is growing and David Brittain, Secretary of Basingstoke Humanists, asked why groups are not seeing the same growth.

Liam Whitton gave a presentation on the new Humanists UK branding. Humanists UK will consult with groups fairly soon about whether we want to adopt Humanists UK branding.

We had a kind of 'speed-dating' session with five short talks and discussions in our regional groupings. The first one was with Teddy Prout, Director of Community Services, who spoke about campaigns and how groups could get involved in various initiatives locally such as campaigning against prayers in their local council chamber. The second one was with Jeremy Rodell on dialogue with religious groups. The third was Young Humanists who can support us with any local initiatives. The fourth was about pastoral support volunteers going into hospitals etc. And the fifth was on the problem of fake news.

It was an enjoyable meeting and it's always rewarding to get together with other humanist groups to exchange ideas and to share successes, frustrations, and a beer at the end of the day.

Jane Bannister Winter Appeal: Vote Now



Our Jane Bannister Winter Appeal is named in memory of Jane Bannister who was Chair of Dorset Humanists until 2009. Jane, who died in 2013, supported charities that helped homeless young

people and women seeking refuge from domestic violence. We seek to maintain the spirit of Jane's philanthropy but without necessarily being tied to the same charities ever year. We have raised thousands of pounds for homelessness hostels, Refuge for women, and Mosaic for bereaved children.

Please let us know your preference for this year's appeal. Pick up a voting slip at our meetings or email your choice to David Warden. Please do not vote more than once if you have already voted.

Option 1

No change from last year – continue with 50/50 split between Michael House Homeless Hostel in Boscombe and Dorset-based Mosaic charity for bereaved children.

Option 2

Continue with 50% to Michael House Homeless Hostel in Boscombe and send the other 50% to an elementary Humanist school in India to help pay for recently-built toilets and showers. Dorset Humanists has had a friendship link with this school since 2003.

Option 3

Continue with 50% to Michael House Homeless Hostel in Boscombe and send the other 50% to Humanist Schools in Uganda. We have raised money before for this Trust and one of our members is a Trustee.

Option 4

Discontinue the appeal

Votes should arrive by voting slip or email no later than 24th November 2017
chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk



faith to faithless



Imtiaz Shams, co-founder of Faith to Faithless and a trustee of Humanists UK, gave us a stimulating and engaging talk about Faith to Faithless at our Moordown meeting in October. Faith to

Faithless helps to support ex-Muslims, ex-Orthodox Jews, ex-Jehovah's Witnesses, ex-Mormons, and anyone who has experienced difficulty and discrimination as a result of leaving their religion. Dorset Humanists is home to many people who have left their faith.

Imtiaz is from a conservative Muslim background. He was born in Manchester but grew up partly in Saudi Arabia. His upbringing in Saudi Arabia was in many ways more relaxed than in the UK because Muslim communities in the UK can be very insular and afraid of outside influences. When he left the Muslim faith he thought he was the only person in the whole world to have left Islam because he had never heard of such a thing happening. Then he realized of course other people have left Islam and they're all online. He asked 'Why are they not meeting up?'. When he became well-known as an ex-Muslim a woman came up to him in a branch of Tesco one day to 'come out' as a non-believer. Imtiaz was the first person she had been able to tell.

“The problem is massive and it's a human rights issue... leaving your religion should not be this bloody difficult.”

Imtiaz framed the problem of people being discriminated against for leaving their religion ('a minority within a minority') as a human rights issue and said that this was one of the biggest untalked about forms of

discrimination in the world. Many people who do leave end up facing things like homelessness, self-harm and mental health trauma which in many ways is due to lack of support – there is no community to go to. A recent survey of 254 ex-Christians and ex-Muslims found that 154 had suffered direct physical violence but only nine had gone to the police and only one perpetrator was charged. Imtiaz believes that this is about religious hegemony and political correctness around faith in the UK but this protects communities from any consequences of their actions. But apostates lose out as a minority within a minority. He said 'Let's not even talk about countries like Bangladesh where they chop up people who leave the faith.'

“It was my pleasure to speak to such an engaged and 'can do' humanist community. I'm very keen to see if we can grow some best practice for humanist groups around apostasy.”

Imtiaz told the story of a student from a conservative Muslim background. From the age of eighteen he knew he was an atheist. At university he was facing a lot of mental health problems as a result of coming from an isolated community. He went to the university counsellor and explained how difficult it was for him to leave Islam. A week later she said 'I've found the perfect group for you!' And she tried to pass him on to a Muslim mental health support group. This highlights the need for counsellors, social workers, police and so on to be trained so that they will not try help someone stay in their faith because they think that is the 'healthy' thing to do.

One of the common experiences that people go through is feelings of anger and hurt that they have been lied to [by the institution] for their whole life with no ability to think outside the box. Any doubts you may have are 'the work of the Devil'. You're not allowed to have critical thought. Imtiaz felt that there had been very strong forces in Islam trying to stop him from asking the kind of questions he had about the faith. It's can also be like the end of an abusive



relationship and feeling you have been deceived. It can really break some people although others recover quite quickly. Stepping outside the norms of narrow religious communities can be disorientating. Imtiaz had never been to the cinema before and didn't know where to sit or whether he could talk. Others find it difficult to feel comfortable with people on the outside.

A question for Dorset Humanists to consider is what it would be like for an ex-Muslim or an ex-Jehovah's Witness to actually turn up to a humanist meeting when their experience of groups in the past is that they are controlling. How could we make them feel welcome and safe? One suggestion made by Imtiaz was to make it clear that they never have to talk about religion again if they don't want to! When asked whether Dorset Humanists would be opening up itself to threats if it became known as a welcoming place for apostates Imtiaz said he thought that the threat, if any, would not be that great, especially if we frame apostasy as a human rights issue and not specific to any particular religion. He finds that this approach really disarms people.

How we can help

Faith to Faithless, a section within Humanists UK, has developed and funded a training programme to train social workers and counsellors in schools and universities to recognize the problem and know what to do about it. If you have any contacts in local government, schools or universities please contact David Warden.

<http://faithtofaithless.com/>

End of Life Companions

Following Mandy Preece's talk (Macmillan Caring Locally) several of our members have expressed an interest in becoming an end of life companion. Mandy advised: "With regard to end of life companions, our intake at the Mac Unit is currently full. However, it would be worth people contacting Lewis Manning hospice or Forest Holme hospice as I think they might be taking on more end of life volunteers."



Understanding Humanism

Our schools team is continuing with visits far and wide. Terry Milton spoke to nineteen fifteen-year-olds about Humanism at Hampshire Collegiate School in Romsey. Chris Street spoke to fifty-eight Year 9 & 10 pupils at Meoncross School in Farnham. David Warden has been invited to speak about Humanism and peace at a multifaith panel at Avonbourne School in Bournemouth. We are delighted that Greg Atkins, formerly a professor of virology at Trinity College Dublin, has joined our schools team.

Humanism at local interfaith gathering

David Warden has been invited to speak about Humanism at an interfaith week event at the Reformed Synagogue in Bournemouth.

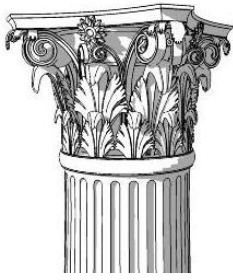
West Dorset Humanists Relaunch

David Warden gave his talk on Understanding Islam to West Dorset Humanists in Dorchester. Thirty people turned up and the event made a small profit. We are delighted that this marks the relaunch of a viable group in the West of the county. Further meetings will be planned in due course.

Wessex Humanists Launch

David Warden and Aaron Darkwood contributed to the inaugural meeting of Wessex Humanists which is a regional humanist group consisting of representatives from Dorset, Reading, Guildford, Basingstoke, Farnham and Isle of Wight Humanists. Catriona McLellan from Humanists UK also attended. We will provide a more detailed report in the December Bulletin.





Letters & Emails

It's your column...

*From Aaron Darkwood on short talks by
Chris Smith and Anne Sieve*

What another amazing account from two of our long-standing members. Listening to these fine examples of humanists contributing to society, in this case overseas, is to me what Humanism is all about.

*From John Kingston on Graham Marshall's
talk on science*

A breathtaking ride through our knowledge of life, the universe and everything. A brilliant presentation.

From Nick Pimenta

My girlfriend and I attended our first Dorset Humanists meeting yesterday [Graham Marshall's talk on astounding science] and we really enjoyed it! It was a really interesting talk and we got a lot from it. It really pushed my understanding and gave me some interesting ideas to think about.

I come from a Christian family and used to regularly attend church services, play in the church band and lead small groups in bible studies. My parents are still very much involved with church life and Christian beliefs. However I personally had some big questions around the validity of those previous beliefs and thanks to the power of YouTube and the internet I have been able to do my own research on the questions I had. After a number of years this digging for truth eventually changed my belief from being an all-out bible believing Christian to an atheist. This has been a rather lonely experience for me in that most of my friends, and most of my family are still very Christian, and I have not been able to go back to church since I could no longer accept the things being preached at the pulpit. It was frustrating for me that these

people can assert such claims and be satisfied to accept them on "faith", not quite the virtuous trait it's made out to be.

The meeting was quite amazing and surreal for me. It was similar in format to the services I have been used to, yet the speaker presented only proven, science-based facts. It made me smile to be in a room of people who are in their own way seeking truth but doing so based on information presented by science, logic and reason. These are things I wish to build my life on from now on.

I can see the purpose in Humanism for sure. The way I see it, we have evolved as primates who have an inbuilt need to belong to a group. That need is deep-rooted in us as a survival mechanism. Humans who ventured out into the wilderness alone would soon become lion food! We need organisations in our society for sharing morals and values, and I would like to see Humanist groups displace religious groups in time, but I guess we will see! If all religious groups were to eventually disappear it could leave our society without much purpose or meaning so I see the need for groups such as this in a very big way.

Going forward, I expect the trends in secularism to continue as more and more people in my generation are questioning knowledge from authority, and because we have access to detailed answers to all of our questions in our handheld devices. As the saying goes: in the age of information, ignorance is a choice! However these days in our modern culture, despite having an array of instant communication devices, we find ourselves more isolated than ever. Finding a group to belong to can be very difficult and I see that as a space which religion steps into, such that those who are lonely can belong to a group to be cared for and looked after. I felt the need in my life to carry on having interaction with people, and belonging to in a sense, yet the only options I knew about were churches. This is where for me the Humanist group comes in.

I look forward to attending the next meeting when we can. Thanks for everything you guys are doing - the world needs more of this!





Dorset Humanists
Chairman's View
November 2017



In his bestselling book *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (a follow-up to *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*) Yuval Noah Harari writes that 'For 300 years the world has been dominated by humanism, which sanctifies the life, happiness and power of *Homo sapiens*'. He refers to humanism as a 'religion' but he uses this term widely to include liberalism and capitalism. He suggests, however, that in the twenty-first century we may see the emergence of a new 'religion'. The first he calls 'techno-humanism' which upgrades *Homo sapiens* genetically and cognitively. Death will be eliminated and we will discover how to make ourselves blissfully happy. Humans that have not been upgraded may become useless. In the second 'religion', which he calls Dataism, artificial intelligence will eliminate *Homo sapiens* and conquer the entire universe. Whether you find these scenarios troubling or exciting, don't miss our Darwin Day lunch on 10th February when Kate Devlin will be our special guest speaker. Kate, who lectures at Goldsmiths, University of London, has a PhD in computer science and she researches into how society interacts with and reacts to technological change.

Not everyone agrees with me that humanist groups are in competition with local churches and so it was encouraging to read that Chester Humanists, in their vision-creating process, identified that religious groups form part of the competitive environment. If, as the defining Amsterdam Declaration states, we are an alternative to religion then surely we want humanist groups to be thriving and multiplying. Dorset Humanists is successful in comparison to other humanist groups but in comparison to religious groups our 'market share' is negligible. Within a one-mile radius of the Green House Hotel alone there are at least three popular churches with hundreds of members and multi-million pound modern buildings. In the whole of Dorset there are thousands of churches but only two humanist groups. There could be hundreds or even thousands of people in Dorset like Nick (see *Letters & Emails*) who might identify as humanists if they had the opportunity to hear about Humanism. One way to address this imbalance would be for Humanists UK to train humanist group leaders and to plant more humanist groups. The Group Representatives Annual Meeting is helpful but too infrequent. The launch of a regional group, Wessex Humanists, is an exciting development which could help to plant new groups in cities like Salisbury and Winchester. A full report will follow in next month's Bulletin.

David Warden

