



Atheists and Agnostics for a Better World

Dorset Humanists

September 2014

A PARTNER OF THE
BRITISH HUMANIST
ASSOCIATION



Dorset Humanists at the World Humanist Congress in Oxford: From left, David Warden, Howard Cattle, Dorothy Cattle, Swami Manavatavadi, Chris Street and Phil James.



Thirteen humanists from Dorset attended the World Humanist Congress in Oxford, joining 1,000 delegates from 67 countries. The biggest group was from Norway with approximately 130 delegates (Norwegian Humanists get state funding!). We also made friends with humanists from Scotland, Northern Ireland, US, Canada, Germany,

Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, the Netherlands, Guatemala, Malawi, Burundi, India, Nepal, Singapore, Australia and many other nations. There were no delegates from China. The weekend featured a host of humanist celebrities including Richard Dawkins, P Z Myers, Stephen Law, Peter Tatchell and Taslima Nasreem. Dorset Humanist Betty Mileham summed up the feelings of many by describing the Congress as 'mind-blowing'. *More pictures and report inside.*

Send bulletin updates to chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk or phone 07910 886629

Website: dorsethumanists.co.uk Twitter: @dorsethumanists Facebook: Dorset Humanists

■ **Saturday 13th September 2.00pm**
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation
Avenue, BH9 1TW

Making Sense of Animal Rights



A talk by Emeritus Professor Norman Mclean. The relationship between animals and humans has been the subject of differing philosophical views for thousands of years and the controversy continues today. Science has shown beyond doubt that we are part of the same evolutionary continuum as all other life on earth, sharing behaviour, physiology and many of our genes with our animal cousins, yet even the most passionate animal rights campaigner would be unlikely to argue that a cockroach warrants the same rights as a human being. So how should we treat other animals, whether farmed, domesticated, or wild, and what rights should we accord to the diverse range of species with which we share our planet? Is a vegan lifestyle the only moral choice? In this presentation, Norman will explain the important role played by scientists in providing us with a strong evidence base for improving animal welfare attitudes and practices, and argue that, as a minimum, animal rights should include rights to exist, to hold territory, to reproduce, and to be free from unnecessary pain and exploitation. He will also examine controversial topics such as intensive farming, badger culls, hunting for sport, and the use of large numbers of laboratory animals in medical research and product testing.

Dorset Humanists help Indian school

Dorset Humanists donated 7 laptops and tablet computers to Swami Manavatavadi who runs a secular humanist school near Delhi. US humanists have added another 4. Children pay 20p a month to enrol at the school and 30p for computer classes.

■ **Wednesday 24th September 7.30pm**
Green House Hotel, 4 Grove Road
Bournemouth BH1 3AX

New Forest NightStop

A presentation by Nightstop Coordinator Jude Todd. At the age of sixteen, Jude Todd was sleeping on the streets or in derelict buildings. She suffered considerable personal abuse, was exposed to drink and drugs, and rummaged in bins or begged to get food. She will be sharing her personal story of surviving two years of homelessness, and explain how this led her to create New Forest Nightstop to offer safe, free emergency accommodation to homeless young people. One of the most surprising aspects of this inspirational charity's service is that volunteer families allow the homeless to stay with them in their own homes. Welcoming families, along with suitable advice and support, help ensure vulnerable young people in difficulty are able to recapture their potential and avoid falling into the downward spiral of long term homelessness. The support given by Nightstop not only raises young people's self-esteem but their chances for employment, training, health and housing are also much improved. Join us for an informative introduction to this charity's vital work, interspersed with a selection of uplifting personal stories about those who've been helped.

■ **Every first Thursday of the month**
Moon in the Square, Exeter Rd, BH2 5AQ



Dorset Humanists Social Evening

Our next social evening will be at Moon in the Square on Thursday 2nd October at 7.30pm. Join us for an interesting chat over a drink or two and get to know other like-minded people. See you there!

☎ Dean 07713 858773

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Other local events of interest...

■ **Wednesday 10th September 7.30pm**
Bournemouth Skeptics in the Pub at The
Brunswick, Charminster, BH8 8PX
Free entry (donations appreciated)

Lifting The Lid

Ongoing adventures in the world of
pseudoscience

A talk by Michael Marshall – Vice President
of Merseyside Skeptics Society

📧 bournemouth.skepticsinthepub.org
☎ Chris 01425 673477

■ **Sunday 28th September 11.00am**
5 Victoria Park Rd, Bournemouth BH9 2RB



Sunday Assembly

Bournemouth Launch

September 28th is going to be a big day for Sunday Assembly. Across the world, there will be many new Assemblies launching and thousands of people will be coming together to celebrate being alive. That's thousands of people who didn't know each other before coming together to form new communities... and the great news is... one of them is in Bournemouth! Sunday Assembly was founded in London in January 2013 by comedians Sanderson Jones and Pippa Evans as "all the best bits of church but without the religion, and with awesome pop songs too". "We are dedicated to helping the people that attend, and the folk in the wider community, to make the most of this one life that we know we have". "We harness fun, joy and wonder to build communities and to help others". Sunday Assembly is for everyone who wants to *Live Better, Help Often and Wonder More*.

For more information or to get involved in helping organise Sunday Assembly Bournemouth go to:
facebook.com/sundayassemblybournemouth
or phone Sue on 07855 069178



One Life

*An informative and enjoyable
six-week course exploring
Humanism and Atheism*

- 1 **Humanist Beliefs and History** Tuesday
October 7th
- 2 **The God Debate** Monday October 13th
- 3 **Secularism and Religious Privilege**
Tuesday October 21st
- 4 **Ethics & Morality without Religion**
Tuesday Nov 4th
- 5 **Prospects for Happiness** Tuesday
November 11th
- 6 **Possibilities for a Good Society**
Tuesday November 18th

All sessions 7.30pm – 9.30pm at Green
House Hotel, Grove Road, Bournemouth
BH1 3AX. *No meeting 28th October.*

£15 non-members £12 members **£2 off**
before 15th Sept £5 for students Free for
RE teachers

Cheques to Dorset Humanists – Covers all
6 sessions

*Book early to avoid disappointment –
limited number of places*

*"Just what we need to introduce people to
Humanism."*

"An amazing course – it's been fantastic!"

"It's done wonders for my happiness."

Course leader: David Warden, Chair of
Dorset Humanists.

📧 chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk
☎ 07910 886629

Are your subs up-to-date?

If you normally pay at the beginning of April
and haven't renewed yet we look forward to
hearing from you. If you're not sure when
your renewal is don't worry – you'll receive
a reminder from our membership secretary
when your payment is due. *Many thanks!*

☎ Cathy (membership) 01202 740550
☎ Simon (treasurer) 07786 318863

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World Humanist Congress

Report by David Warden

The theme of the 2014 World Humanist Congress in Oxford was 'Freedom of Thought and Expression: Forging a 21st Century Enlightenment.' This year's Congress, superbly hosted by the British Humanist Association, presented us with numerous reminders that in many parts of the world freedom of thought and expression is often brutally suppressed by laws and customs which provide severe punishments for blasphemy, apostasy, atheism and any expression of non-belief. In Bangladesh, for example, any writing against Islam can result in a sentence of up to 14 years in prison. In the Maldives you must be a Muslim; to leave Islam means death. In Uganda if you don't believe in God you are considered to be an agent of Satan. Bob Churchill of the International Humanist and Ethical Union is updating a complete global audit of freedom of thought in a key IHEU report. Shockingly, the UK only manages to reach the halfway mark in the rating scheme. Guardian journalist and writer Nick Cohen reminded us that threats of religious violence against any writer or cartoonist who dares to publish material deemed insulting or offensive to religion has created a culture of self-censorship in the supposedly free Western world. How many critical books and articles have *not* been written or printed because of this pervasive fear? During his presentation Cohen memorably referred to our religious Head of



David with Chris Malburn – President of the AHS (Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secularist students).



Chris Street with Swami Manavatavadi who runs a small secular humanist school near Delhi.

State as a kind of 'Queen Goddess'.

Forging a '21st Century Enlightenment' when so many countries have been overrun by religious fanaticism and extremism is a colossal challenge. At a gala dinner on Saturday night, former President of the International Humanist and Ethical Union Roy Brown estimated that the Roman Catholic Church alone has assets in excess of \$3 trillion. The IHEU's income is puny by comparison although it received a welcome boost of £27,000 in instant donations from delegates after Roy's speech.

In his interview with Samira Ahmed, Richard Dawkins was typically abrasive, commenting that "All religions are utterly stupid" and that religion is "a silly and squalid alternative to evolution". But he did refer warmly to Richard Harries, former bishop of Oxford, as a good friend and ally in the battle against creationism. During the Q & A session someone from the floor informed us about the 'Clergy Project' which supports priests who have become atheists

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in the course of their ministry. 620 clergy have signed up so far.

In a moving speech on the final day, Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasrin commented that "The Qur'an is the best book to inspire Muslims to become atheists" implying that religious books tend to be used as totems rather than studied texts.

Roy Speckhardt, President of the American Humanist Association informed us in one session that 18% of Catholics in the US do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah (what do they believe?!). Roy also suggested that humanists should encourage the 'humanistic elements' within religion. In the same session, Greg Epstein, author and Humanist Chaplain at Harvard University, memorably referred to God as a 'literary character'.

During the Congress British Humanist Chief Executive Andrew Copson came out as a Trinitarian: he declared his belief in the holy trinity of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The next World Humanist Congress is in Sao Paulo in 2017 – a date for your diary!



Letters & Emails

It's your column...

From Ruth Haydock, Group Co-ordinator, British Humanist Association

I'm a former Christian from Northern Ireland currently living in Bournemouth where I work for Farrow and Ball as a French Technical Advisor. In December 2012, I became the Press Officer for the AHS (The National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies of the UK and ROI) and then in July 2013 I was appointed the AHS Secretary. Up until about 2011, I believed in God but when those beliefs began to fall apart I found comfort in the knowledge that Humanists believe that we can live fulfilling lives

without the need to believe in a god. At the time I thought, well if Humanists can be happy without the belief in a god or an afterlife then why can't I? I will admit it took me a long time to say that I was a Humanist, (as I used to believe that Humanists were all evil), but once I got over my former way of thinking I have never looked back.

Since I properly managed to break free from religion, I have never been happier and a lot of that happiness has come from being a part of the Humanist community. I became involved with the AHS because I am passionate about the need for non-religious groups and that is why I am now the Group Co-ordinator. In my opinion nothing can replace being in a group of people who share your willingness to seek out truth and reason, living full and happy lives in the here and now.

I met some of you at the World Humanist Congress and I'm sure I will meet others soon. In the meantime, please do email me if you would like to discuss anything or if you would just like to say hello and introduce yourself, I would love to hear from you and your group. I will be in touch soon about the Group Representatives Annual Meeting.

From Swami Manavatavadi

I am highly obliged to Dorset Humanists, the British Humanist Association and the International Humanist and Ethical Union for facilitating my attendance at the World Humanist Congress in Oxford and for your unimaginable support in providing seven laptops to expand our children's computer class. There will be a formal inauguration on October 23, 2014 while observing our regular half-yearly function "Celebrating Dedication to Children". Please come and visit us! Humblest greetings/*Namaskar* to you all.

Facebook comment about Dean Robertson's YouTube night

Really great set of clips. Well done to Dean. Meeting Swami Manavatavadi and listening to his novel teaching methods was both fascinating and enlightening.

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Did you know? Saturday 21 September is
International Peace Day.



Dorset Humanists **Chairman's View** September 2014

Attending the World Humanist Congress in Oxford was one of the best experiences of my life. Not so much for the lectures and seminars (which were very good of course) but more for the sheer joy of meeting like-minded people from countries near and far. It felt like a secular pilgrimage. Some of the groups we made contact with have a long history, such as the Atheist Centre in Vijayawada, founded in 1940 by Goparaju Ramachandra Rao, an associate of Gandhi known as Gora. We met his grandson Vikas Gora. The Atheist Centre provides counselling, promotes intercaste marriage, works to abolish child marriage, provides aid to prostitutes, single mothers and vulnerable women, promotes sex education and family planning, tries to debunk superstitious beliefs by holding firewalking demonstrations, and provides education against witchcraft and sorcery. Other groups have just started, such as Humanistas Guatemala founded by David Pineda just a few weeks ago. Humanist groups are very diverse but what bound us together over the weekend was a deep sense of solidarity and endeavour to extend the frontiers of free thought and expression and to bring into being a 21st Century Enlightenment. Many of our humanist friends are on the frontline of that struggle. Sometimes they are beaten up, imprisoned, ostracised, exiled and killed for being an atheist or non-believer. To maintain some of these links and friendships I would like to appoint an international liaison officer to our team so please do get in touch with me if you would like to explore this idea with a view to attending the next World Humanist Congress in Brazil in 2017. I would also like to help sponsor a young person to attend the next European Humanist Youth Day in Utrecht, August 2015.



**World Humanist Congress: With
Blaise Ntakarutimana from the
Burundi Humanist Charity**

On 19th December 2012, the Governor of Haryana His Excellency Jagannath Pahadia opened the computer class at Kids' Kingdom, Kurukshetra, near Delhi. This is the school run by Swami Manavatavadi. The class started with just four laptops, donated by Canadian humanists, for 100 poor children from the slums, one of which has since ceased working. The children pay 30 rupees a month to enrol (30p). As a result of your generous response to our appeal, Swamiji is returning to India with seven more laptops and four more donated by US humanists. This will give an unimaginable boost to this downtrodden humanist school. Thank you so much and *Namaskar*. *David Warden*

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