



Humanist volunteers interact with visitors.
Gay seagull in flypast.

What a glorious day!

On Saturday 8th July, an energetic team of volunteers from Dorset Humanists erected our famous rainbow tent in Bournemouth Square in support of Bourne Free – Bournemouth's LGBT Pride event. Occasional showers throughout the day did nothing to dampen our enthusiasm.

We almost had the Square to ourselves, except for a group of Christians preaching against the sin of 'pride'. Many people complained about them and so we were very proud to be the antidote to their message of doom. The main Pride event took place in Meyrick Park – and many people complained about this too and the £20 entry fee. We were very pleased to bring a positive humanist message to the main Square completely free of charge.

At one stage, a group of students from Saudi Arabia complained about the presence of a Saudi flag in our international flag bunting. After a brief discussion, David Warden agreed to cut it off. The news seemed to go viral as we had a constant stream of Muslim students throughout the day to inspect the cut off remnant of their flag.



Boys just wanna have fun

Straight talk about gay relationships

Wednesday 26th July 7.30pm – Orchid Hotel, 34 Gervis Road, Bournemouth BH1 3DH

A talk by David Warden – Chairman of Dorset Humanists and founding chairman of the Dorset County Council LGBT workers group

*Free to attend - voluntary donation of around £3.00 appreciated
Everyone Welcome (Parental Guidance)*

Please click on the image above to RSVP via [Meetup](#)

This specially commissioned talk will explore what it was like growing up gay as an evangelical Christian in a ‘heteronormative’ society in the 1970s and the impact of the Gay Liberation Movement. David will answer all your questions about the origin and persistence of prejudice, often termed ‘homophobia’, what LGBTQIA+ means, same-sex relationships and marriage, and more. He will offer a personal perspective on evolutionary and

scientific explanations for homosexuality. This talk will include some sexually explicit information. David lives in Westbourne with his husband John.

We warmly welcome anyone who made contact with us at Bourne Free Pride. Stay and chat in the hotel bar afterwards.

Dates for your diary

Sunday 16 th July 10.15am	Dancing Ledge	Scenic walk in the Purbecks – see Meetup for full details
Wednesday 26 th July 7.30pm	Orchid Hotel, Gervis Road, BH1 3DH	Boys Just Wanna Have Fun: Straight Talk about Gay Relationships – <i>a talk by David Warden, Chairman of Dorset Humanists, who has been in a same-sex relationship for 37 years.</i>
Saturday 12 th August 2pm	Moordown	Humanist Chaplaincy – Dr James Croft. Includes a complimentary cream tea but please donate to our appeal charities – foodbank and humanist schools in Uganda.
Wednesday 23 rd August 7.30pm	Orchid	Debate: Bystanders or Heroes. What would you do if an incident happens in front of you? We’ll debate the ethical dilemmas.
Sunday 20 th August 10.15am	St Catherine’s Hill	Walk – see Meetup for full details
Saturday 26 th August	Depart from Poole Quay	Swanage Cruise via Old Harry Rocks – see Meetup for full details
Tuesday 19 th December 7pm	Marsham Court Hotel	Yuletide dinner – please hold the date in your diaries!

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



Pride powerhouse

Aaron has always been the powerhouse behind our presence at Bourne Free. He encouraged us many years ago to take our humanist tent to Bournemouth Gardens on Pride Day and march in the parade. This year, he chivvied and cajoled David Warden to get things organised in order to maximise the impact of our big event. And it paid off. 2023 was our best year ever, despite the showers.

We haven't marched in the parade for the last two years because it's difficult logistically to give our full attention to our information tent at the same time as losing a big group of marchers for an hour or more at midday. But we feel that we are 'doing our bit' by having a very impactful and colourful presence in the Square.

A huge thank you to Aaron and all of our wonderful volunteers (in alphabetical order): Adam, Annie, Chris G, Chris S, Dan, Dean, Ffion, George, John H, Lyn, Steve, Roger M, Roger E, Simon W. Many hands made light work! DW

Reflections on the day

By Aaron

Our encounter with the general public in the town centre was socially interesting. The majority (over half) were polite, including those who took a leaflet, those who said "No thank you", and those who declined with a smile or gesture. Then there were those who simply ignored us. This group split into two: those who don't like people approaching them, and those who don't like Pride and who assume that gay people are approaching them.

Those who are out for Pride, in costume or in town for the day for that purpose, seem to engage. They're there to support, take part, celebrate or observe Pride in all its colourfulness. Everyone else is either shopping, working in town and on a rushed lunch break, going to appointments, or just busy. They are the unknown quotient, the

element we didn't really encounter when we were in the Lower Gardens pre-Covid – but they are, potentially, the people we'd like to reach. They are the everyday people of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, rather than holiday-makers and out-of-towners. Promoting humanism is a globally worthy cause, of course but our primary aim is local membership growth.

I reflected on how I respond to leafletters when I'm in town. Typically, I try to find out first what it's about, and then I respond. Mostly it's surveys, or vouchers for a nightclub entry, which I wouldn't use. I never ignore them, or blank them. At Pride I had one "Go fuck yourself!" from a pair of lads, possibly brothers. I thanked them for their recommendation, but that was the only verbal nastiness I experienced.

There were a number of people in the town centre who appeared to have mental health problems. Several were homeless, one ▷



Bourne Free 2023: David Warden posed for a photo with Elliot (left) and Ashton (right)

was 'out of it', a couple were on their own, and maybe a dozen over the course of day were out with an escort. We don't normally encounter such people, but as a person with a role on the day, I made judgements about who to approach, and who to let pass by. Society has its share of people who are struggling with life, of course and I would imagine that very few of those who passed us by were doing so without money worries and cost of living burdens.

From our perspective, we were the life and colour of the town centre, and I thought this was amazing. Previously, we've been just one of many gazebos, all selling their cause and decorating the Gardens. In pre-Covid days it was good, and to be part of it was great, but now Dorset Humanists is the sole free representation of Pride to Bournemouth. The parade itself skirts around, but not through, the town centre for one hour before retreating behind the 'iron curtain' of Meyrick Park, and the £20 pay wall. For the townsfolk, the visitors, the beachgoers and tourists, we

are it. This year we had the added bonus of a quartet of 'god-squad' preachers, trying to draw the public in, but mostly their efforts pushed people towards us. Once the music started, drowning them out, they retreated back to heaven.

Could we have a presence in the Square on other days? This is a topic which David and I have discussed, but I think our humanist tent in the Square without its rainbow decorations would certainly lose something. Our branding, our message, and our delivery wasn't overpowered by 'gayness' on the day, and I do not think that anyone approaching us would have assumed that we were a gay group as such. I think we made it clear that, as humanists, we were promoting values of equality, fairness, compassion and understanding. From our perspective we did a great thing this weekend. In upholding Pride for the people of our town, we did an even better job! ▷



John Hubbard salutes, with Michelangelo's *David* posing nude inside the tent. Adam is on the left.

The overwhelming sense I gained from the public was how disappointed they are that Pride is no longer in the town centre and the Gardens. The key aspects fed back were:

- That Pride is now away from the town centre. The town used to be packed with the hustle and bustle of colour from morning until evening, but it's now just an average day of shoppers.. and people looking for Pride. The feeling has gone, the celebration has been removed, and connectivity has been lost. Bourne Free is no longer Bournemouth Pride, it's purely a commercial enterprise. It charges so much that it denies access to everyday people, then gives surplus money away to charities, £20,000 last year. Is this a vanity exercise to make themselves feel good?
- The £20 ticket entry, plus having to pay £5 for every food item or drink once you get in, is an expensive barrier. People were very upset about it. Many simply weren't going to pay. Many wanted a casual day of supporting Pride, but the pay barrier excluded them, and they went home.
- Others blamed BCP Council but I explained that Pride (Bourne Free) is its own entity and the Council is not to blame.
- People complained about the lack of signposting about the route of the parade and where it had moved to. There was nothing in the town indicating this. Other than some rainbow bunting, nobody would have known anything was happening. Clearly this is Bourne Free's failure. A sign in town or volunteers directing people would have been helpful. Had we not been there as an information desk, nobody would know. Their website had little information.

Bourne Free may have given up on the good people of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, charging the LGBT community £20 and keeping allies, the curious, and passers-by well out of it, but we are still doing our bit. We promoted humanism and we supported the Pride ethos through our values and ethics, and we gave the locals our colourful presence in the town centre.



▲ A colourful visitor interacts with Steve. Annie (in purple) and Roger are on the right.

◀ An anonymous but very encouraging message posted on our Facebook page.



▲ We removed the Saudi flag from our bunting. See *Chairman's View* for an explanation.

View from the Chair

David Warden
Chairman of Dorset Humanists



It was a very happy day. The run-up to this event is always a bit daunting because there are so many logistical details to get right. But with a team of sixteen helpful people from Dorset Humanists it all came together brilliantly on the day.

One of the aspects of our presence in the Square that I'm most proud of is that we were 'non-political'. We were simply making a positive statement that Dorset Humanists is an inclusive community group. This does not preclude us from having difficult conversations about controversial issues. As our Pride banner states, one of the reasons we still 'do' Pride is to promote free speech, dialogue and understanding on social and ethical issues. Humanism is about people's humanity. But in the spirit of Enlightenment humanist values, we also facilitate open discussions about ideologies and beliefs, whether they are religious or secular in nature.

We were slightly unsettled by the appearance of Muslim students complaining about the inclusion of a Saudi flag on our international flag bunting. The bunting contains hundreds of flags and I hadn't given it a second thought. It was just bunting to me. But the students complained about its presence. I discovered afterwards that, because the Saudi flag depicts the Shahada – the Muslim declaration of faith – there are numerous regulations governing its public display. The flag must not, for example, be flown vertically and I think this may have been one of the main objections. The students gestured to me with their fingers, in a cutting motion, that they wanted me to remove the flag. I checked with them that they wanted me to cut the flag off. They confirmed that this is what they wanted so I got a pair of scissors from our kit and I complied with their request. Did I do the right thing? Did I give in too easily to 'offence'? I did not want to cause unnecessary offence to religious sensibilities. It was just cheap bunting and it was not as if we were doing expensive damage to our kit. Afterwards, I also reflected that I was very happy to remove the flag of a country where homosexuality is, according to Wikipedia, a capital offence. So it was a win-win for Muslims *and* humanists to remove the Saudi flag from our display. Now, I'd better look at all those other flags...

A Christian group was preaching nearby and handing out rainbow leaflets with the word 'Pride' on one side and various biblical references on the other condemning the 'sin' of pride. I didn't study the leaflet in detail (I remember reading it last year) but a number of people complained to me about their presence. They were exercising their right to freedom of speech of course but when I reported this negative feedback to them they insisted that they were preaching about 'love'. It's a pity there weren't some liberal and inclusive Christian groups there to counteract their message, but it was a great opportunity for us to position ourselves as the 'anti-God squad'. *That's* why we do Pride!

A huge thanks to everyone who volunteered and helped on the day.