



Angela Bowden

We are very sad to report that Angela Bowden died on 15th December, just one day short of her 98th birthday. Angela was a stalwart member of Dorset Humanists for at least twenty years. When she was younger, she helped with our outside events, notably at Tolpuddle Festival. She loved coming to our meetings and contributing to our discussions. She will be greatly missed. Simon Bowden, Secretary of Dorset Humanists, is her son.

More about Angela on next page.

Is humanism fit for purpose in the 21st century?

Saturday 11th January 2.00-4.30pm – free entry – all welcome
Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Ave, BH9 1TW Please
RSVP via Meetup by clicking the image on the right.



Dr Mike Flood and David Warden published complementary articles in the October 2024 issue of [Humanistically Speaking](#) magazine addressing the question “Is humanism fit for purpose in the 21st century?” In two short talks, they will present their contrasting perspectives on the question while also acknowledging common ground. Audience discussion will be encouraged.

Mike is Chairman of Milton Keynes Humanists and he runs the [Fighting Fake](#) website (combatting fake news and misinformation). David is Chairman of Dorset Humanists and editor of *Humanistically Speaking* magazine.

Angela Bowden

1926-2024

Angela Bowden, née Scott, was born in Bournemouth in 1926. She was a pupil at Talbot Heath School where she acquired a great love of Shakespeare and strong dislike of religion. Her father, Maitland Scott, was a GP based on the Westcliff near Durley Chine and she was descended from a distinguished family of medics and architects including Sir George Gilbert Scott and related to the philosopher Gilbert Ryle.

Angela's father died in 1942 when she was just 15 years old, leaving her and younger brother Michael in the care of their young mother Ursula. After the war, Angela studied medicine at University College London, graduating with a degree in psychology. As a student, she imbibed a full set of radical opinions, becoming an anarchist, atheist, republican, advocate of free love and a disciple of the Freudian psychologist Wilhelm Reich. She became a teacher at Summerhill, the radically progressive school in Suffolk, where children could decide whether or not to attend lessons.

Although Angela 'did not believe in marriage', she married three times and brought up three sons. Sadly, she did not marry the love of her life, Alan Rezler, who was Simon's father. Simon took the name of Angela's second husband, Kenneth Bowden, whom she had met through the Progressive League. At this stage, the family lived in Notting Hill in London where Angela went on 'ban the bomb' marches. Around this time she met Dora Russell, second wife of the philosopher and CND campaigner Bertrand Russell.

After two divorces, Angela married her third husband Gene Bransden and together they moved to Sandbanks in Poole where she lived until her recent fall. They shared a love of body surfing in north Devon. Gene died from lung cancer.



Above: At Dorset Humanists Darwin Day 2012.
Below: manning our tent at the Tolpuddle Festival.



Angela is survived by her sons Simon and Malcolm, and by six grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. A third son Caspar, who predeceased her, was a computer pioneer who established the Foundation for Information Policy Research, campaigning for the rights of internet users.

Angela remained a resolute atheist and stipulated that there should be no funeral or ceremony for her. She worried that a eulogist would get it all wrong!

Many details are from *A Young Doctor at War* (2024) by Maitland Scott and Simon Bowden.



Quest is nearly here...

Quest is an exciting series of friendly discussions about humanist answers to some of life's biggest questions. Free entry – all welcome.



1. **HUMANISM IN CONTEXT** Wednesday 22nd January 7.00pm Westcliff Hotel
Understanding what humanism is in contrast to other worldviews and philosophies
2. **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS** Wednesday 29th January 7.00pm Westcliff Hotel
"What's the difference between atheism and humanism?" and other frequently asked questions
3. **HUMANISM IN THE UK AND AROUND THE WORLD** Wednesday 5th February 7.00pm Westcliff Hotel
What does the humanist movement actually do in this country and on other continents?
4. **IMPROVE YOUR THINKING SKILLS** Wednesday 12th February 7.00pm Westcliff Hotel
How to be more rational and avoid common pitfalls of bad thinking
5. **IMPROVE YOUR HAPPINESS SKILLS** Wednesday 19th February 7.00pm Westcliff Hotel
How to experience more bliss in your life
6. **WHAT'S WRONG WITH US?** Wednesday 26th February 7.00pm Westcliff Hotel
Understanding the weird psychology of human beings and how to be your own therapist
7. **PROSPECTS FOR HUMAN SURVIVAL** Wednesday 5th March 7.00pm Westcliff Hotel
The top six threats to human survival and how to stop worrying about them
8. **WHAT IS A HUMANIST GROUP?** Wednesday 12th March 7.00pm Westcliff Hotel
What's a humanist group for and how can it become a magnet for all non-religious people?

Email David on chairman@dorset.humanist.org.uk or text [07910 886629](tel:07910886629) to register your interest. This programme may be adjusted to meet the needs of participants – let David know what you would like to see included. Attend as many as you like but for the full benefit attend all eight! Details correct at the time of printing. Please check the latest bulletin and especially Meetup.com for any changes to this programme. Venue address: Westcliff Hotel, 7 Durley Chine Rd, BH2 5JS.

Dates for your diary

Saturday 11 th January 2.00pm	Moordown	Is Humanism Fit for Purpose in the 21 st Century? A joint talk by Mike Flood (Chair of Milton Keynes Humanists) and David Warden (Chair of Dorset Humanists).
Friday 17 th January 7.30pm	Westcliff Hotel, Durley Chine Rd	Friendly social evening in the hotel bar. Just turn up!
Wednesday 22 nd January 7.00pm	Westcliff Hotel, Durley Chine Rd	Quest session 1 : Humanism in context (see more details above)
Sunday 26 th January 2.00-4.30	Lighthouse	Holocaust Memorial Day "For a Better Future" Admission by free ticket
Thursday 6 th February	Moon in the Square	Friendly pub social. Just turn up and look for us on the ground floor on the right.
Saturday 8 th February	Moordown	Darwin Day – please let us know if you are joining us for lunch at 1.15pm chairman@dorset.humanist.org.uk
<i>Plus other social events and walks which will be announced on Meetup. Please check all events nearer the time in case of any changes.</i>		



Holocaust Memorial Day

Sunday 26th January 2025 at Lighthouse, Poole, 2.00-4.30pm

David Warden represents the humanist community with concluding words at 4.30pm.



The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust writes, “At a time of increased tensions in the Middle East, marking HMD is all the more important as we seek to build a better future together. We ask organisers to avoid politicising HMD ceremonies for or against one side or other in the current Middle East conflict. However well-intentioned or earnestly felt, such politicisation risks distracting from the act of memory by increasing the pain of communities who are already reeling from a ghastly war in the region, and increased prejudice in the UK. The opportunity of HMD and its focus on past atrocities is to show empathy towards different groups who suffered at the hands of the Nazis, or in genocides recognised by the UK government or in Darfur, as a means of building bridges of understanding to overcome enmity in the present and to forge a better future.” [HMDT](#)

Admission is strictly by [ticket only](#). The event is free but there will be an opportunity to make a voluntary donation to help with venue hire. The theme for HMD 2025 is ‘For a Better Future’. We will be marking the 30th anniversary of the Bosnian genocide and the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. The main part of the programme will be devoted to hearing about the artist, Yehuda Bacon who, at the age of 13, was deported with his family from Ostrava in Czechoslovakia to the Theresienstadt ghetto and a year later was sent to Auschwitz. He survived and was liberated in May 1945. His art work served as evidence in trials against Nazi criminals. Yehuda is now in his 90s and lives in Tel Aviv. His story will be told by his daughter Hana.

Darwin Day 2025

Saturday 8th February 2025 at Moordown Community Centre, 1.15pm

Don't miss out! Book now for our legendary lunch!

Join us for our legendary Darwin Day celebration. Our in-house volunteer chefs Cathy Silman and Dean Robertson will create culinary delights for you including chicken casserole, vegetarian lasagne, and vegan curry followed by desserts created by other volunteers. We will serve a selection of wines and soft drinks. All of this for an inflation-busting price of £5 for Dorset Humanists subscribing members and £10 for non-members/guests. Don't forget you can join Dorset Humanists for just £15pa to claim your discount. Please let David Warden know if you can volunteer to help with this event (such as providing desserts, laying tables and clearing up afterwards).

You must pre-pay for this event so that we know who to cater for. You can book and pre-pay in person at our events or contact David on 07910 886629.





A humanist guide to the Seven Deadly Sins (and the Seven Heavenly Virtues)

Unfortunately, our committee member Simon Whipple was unable to present his talk on the Seven Deadly Sins at our December event at Moordown. David Warden stepped in with a hastily prepared alternative! The event was not recorded but this report gives a flavour of the discussion. Thanks to the generosity of those present, we raised over £200 for our Appeal in support of Hope for Food foodbank and Uganda Humanist Schools. Image (left) depicts 'Anger' by Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1500, Prado Museum, Madrid).

The word 'sin' is a Christian concept meaning immorality according to the teachings of the church (although the New Testament Greek word *hamartia*, translated as 'sin', is more accurately translated as 'missing a target'). The word 'sin' does not belong in the humanist lexicon but an exploration of Christian sins can be interesting and instructive for humanists.

The Seven Deadly Sins have their origins in early Christian theology and they were codified as a moral framework by Pope Gregory I ('Gregory the Great') in the 6th century. They represent a classification of

vices that were believed to lead individuals away from virtue and ultimately away from God. Gregory also codified the Seven Heavenly Virtues as a counterpart to the Seven Deadly Sins. These virtues were believed to function as antidotes to the sins.

The Seven Deadly Sins became widely known in the Middle Ages, especially through depictions in paintings, sculptures, and stained glass, and in works such as Dante's *Divine Comedy*, which vividly portrays the sins and their punishments in hell. The sins were used as a moral framework to guide Christians in avoiding vice. ►



There was an opportunity to indulge in the 'sin of gluttony' before and during the talk. Photo by Aaron.

While audience members were seated at tables, indulging in mince pies, mulled wine, and other seasonal comestibles, David invited each group to discuss their thoughts about each of the seven deadly sins. The sins, with their Latin names and definitions, are:

1. Pride (*Superbia*): Excessive self-love or arrogance. A number of people expressed the view that pride, in the sense of healthy self-respect, is a virtue. On the negative side, pride can inhibit people from having a go at things if they fear failure or being humiliated, and it can get in the way of restoring broken relationships. The corresponding virtue is **humility** which can be good as long as it doesn't become self-abasement. In Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* pride leads Mr Darcy to look down on the Bennet family, especially Elizabeth, whom he initially deems socially inferior and unsuitable for marriage. Over the course of the novel, Darcy undergoes significant character growth. He learns to temper his pride with humility, which ultimately redeems him in Elizabeth's eyes. We briefly discussed the widely misunderstood concept of Gay Pride which is not about bring 'proud' of your sexuality as such, but resolving not to be ashamed of it. Verdict: humanists are ambivalent about the 'sin' of pride.

2. Greed (*Avaritia* – hence 'avaricious'): Overwhelming desire for material wealth or possessions. David suggested it's OK to have 'appetites' but some of our appetites are stimulated artificially to the point of addiction or what others might judge to be vulgar excess. He reminded us of the case of Imelda Marcos, the former First Lady of the Philippines, who is famously associated with an extensive shoe collection, often cited as a symbol of her extravagance during her husband Ferdinand Marcos's presidency which ended in 1986. She is reputed to have had at least 1,200 pairs of shoes.

The phrase 'Greed is good' was made famous by the fictional character Gordon Gekko, portrayed by Michael Douglas in the 1987 film *Wall Street*. The line is delivered during a



Gay Pride: the opposite of shame

speech Gekko gives to shareholders, encapsulating his philosophy of aggressive capitalism and self-interest. Maybe we could reframe greed as 'incentive' or 'ambition'. Striving for a good standard of living for yourself and your family is usually commended. However, several people said that greed means taking or having more than your fair share, to the detriment of others. Cathy reminded us about Barry's talk on intergenerational justice, suggesting that our current generation is greedy. Maybe we live in a greedy and excessively materialistic culture. A humanist antidote to greed could be 'moderation' and giving away what you don't need. The counterpart 'heavenly virtue' is **charity**. Verdict: humanists seemed to agree that greed is a 'sin'.

3. Lust (*Luxuria*): Intense or uncontrolled desire, often sexual. In Christian theology, lust was traditionally understood as an intense or disordered desire, primarily sexual in nature, that prioritized physical gratification over spiritual and moral considerations. It was typically defined as an excessive or inordinate craving for sexual pleasure, especially when it is sought in ways contrary to God's laws. From a modern perspective, we could talk about an 'excessive interest' in sex or eroticism. ►

But what is excessive? Is having sex every day excessive? Is having multiple sexual partners excessive? Humanists have generally been pretty permissive about such questions. So maybe we should be talking about sex addiction, when your interest in sex becomes excessive to the point of being an unbalanced element in your life, or destructive of your relationships. The Christian counterpart to lust is **chastity** but this is very much associated with downgrading sexual feelings in order to pursue a spiritual relationship with God. Humanist verdict: humanists are positive about sex, but within a framework of consent and respect for others.

4. Envy (*Invidia*): Resentment toward others for their success or possessions. We suggested that envy could be a motivating factor if we like what others have and we are prepared to work hard in order to attain or obtain what others have. But the emotion of envy is generally destructive of human happiness. The corresponding Christian virtue is **kindness**. Another powerful antidote to envy is gratitude for the good things you do have in your life. We can also try to cultivate unselfish feelings of happiness for the good fortune of others. Every human life is unique and we all have things that others may desire. The healthy attitude is to be grateful for what you have.

5. Gluttony (*Gula*): Overindulgence in food, drink, or other pleasures. This seems to overlap with the sin of greed although focused on food. The Christian virtue that counteracts greed is **temperance** which may also be expressed as ‘moderation’. We’re more knowledgeable nowadays about food addiction and various medical conditions affecting appetite regulation, and therefore more circumspect about judging what we might consider to be excessive food intake. Nevertheless, it’s widely recognised as virtuous to maintain a healthy bodyweight as far as we can.

6. Wrath (*Ira* – hence ‘irate’): Extreme anger or hatred leading to harm. David suggested that anger is a form of aggression and verbal violence. It’s an amygdala response to others



Is gluttony a sin – or a treatable medical condition?

who are doing something you disapprove of and want them to stop doing. Some audience members said that anger can be a good thing if it motivates you, for example, to do something about injustice. The corresponding Christian virtue is **patience** which suggests that anger can derive from impatience with others. We should all perhaps be wary of the relationship between anger and hatred. Humanist verdict: a degree of ambivalence about this ‘sin’.

7. Sloth (*Acedia*): Laziness or neglect of responsibilities, especially ‘spiritual’ ones. We all know that work, in general, is a good thing. The more effort you make at something the better you will be at it. And so laziness is simply not very conducive to a good and fulfilling life. But rest and relaxation are also important for a balanced life. The corresponding Christian virtue is **diligence**. Humanist verdict: Laziness is bad, diligence is good, but rest and relaxation are also good.

Conclusion

David indicated that there is some overlap between Christian virtues and humanist virtues, but quite a few humanist virtues are missing from the traditional Christian list. ►

The sin/virtue schema codified by Pope Gregory was a good practical tool for Christians in the Middle Ages and beyond. A list of 7 sins and 7 counteracting virtues would have been memorable and useful in the pursuit of virtue:

Pride counteracted by **Humility**
Greed counteracted by **Charity**
Lust counteracted by **Chastity**
Envy counteracted by **Kindness**
Gluttony counteracted by **Temperance**
Wrath counteracted by **Patience**
Sloth counteracted by **Diligence**

While such schemas can be helpful, humanists tend to prioritise intellectual flexibility and nuance over such rigid lists. David suggested these additional humanist virtues:

Intellectual virtues which tend to be absent from Christian lists:

- Scepticism – question beliefs, including your own
- Rationality – base your beliefs on evidence
- Tolerance – tolerate other points of view because they may be right

‘Manly’ virtues:

- Courage
- Resilience
- Fortitude

Can you suggest a non-sexist description of these, such as ‘toughness’ virtues?

Hygiene virtues

- Cleanliness
- Tidiness
- Good grooming

Individualist virtues

- Self-reliance
- Autonomy – self-governing
- Authenticity – being yourself

Additional information

There are different lists of Christian virtues such as Faith, Hope and Love (derived from St Paul) and the so-called ‘Cardinal Virtues’ which include Prudence, Justice, and Fortitude. The term ‘cardinal’ means ‘pivotal’.



Foreground above: Simon Bowden and John Hubbard in conversation. Below: David in action.
Photos by Aaron



Book Review

Handle Gently: An exploration of a journey through grief is a wonderfully moving book by Wendy Goddard who is a retired therapist and a member of Dorset Humanists.

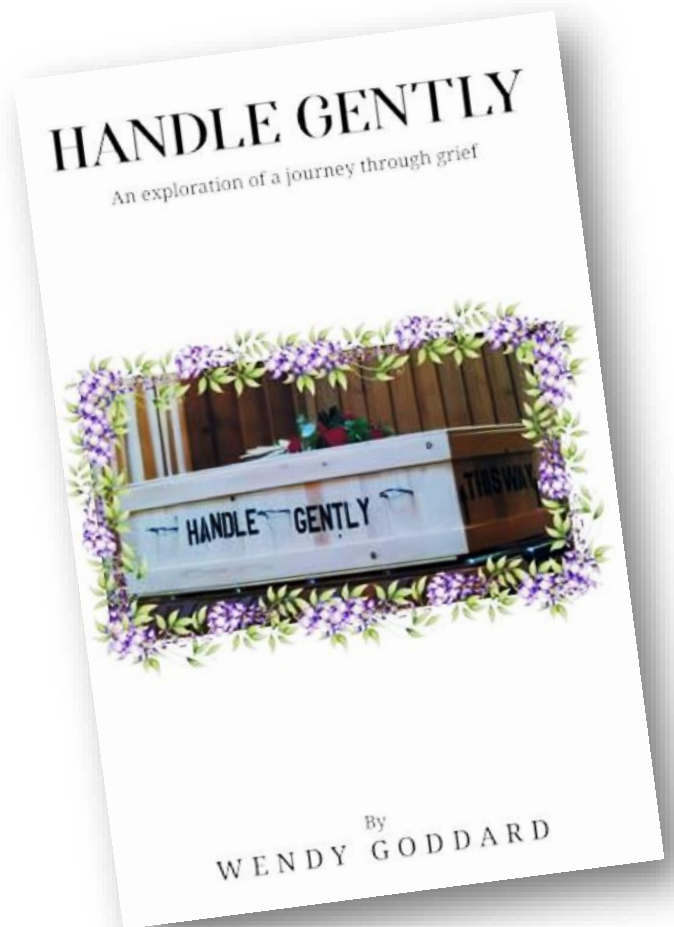
From the book:

"This is a book about grief, a book about loss. But it is more than that. It is one person's journey from anguish to acceptance, helplessness to independence, suffering to relief, and melancholy to hope. It is my story after the death of my beloved husband. At least that is what I began with, until it grew into a journal of self-exploration – including childhood memories that affected the way I am now and how I dealt with his death; the people in my life that have influence my progress and relationships that have altered the way I think about the world. However, most of all, it is a story of love."

From David Warden to Wendy:

"You will be pleased to know I have finally read your book! It is a really beautiful record of three years of your life. The writing is flawless and I was moved to tears many times. Today I listened to Mahler's 5th (the Death in Venice bit anyway!) when you mentioned it was included in Peter's funeral. I really cannot praise your book highly enough - it is a real treasure."

Handle Gently is available in paperback for £12.99 or £3.99 on Kindle. Click the book image to go to Amazon.





View from the Chair

David Warden

Chairman of Dorset Humanists

As I prepare for our new *Quest* series of discussions about humanism and humanist answers to life's big questions, I'm increasingly drawn to metaphor and story as useful tools to help us understand abstract and complex ideas. A common metaphor for life is that it's "a journey". You might also hear people refer to "my life story". As we go through life, we hope to be able to make sense of it, that it will be rounded off nicely, and that we will have done the things we wanted to do. The Danish existentialist philosopher Søren Kierkegaard famously said: "Life must be lived forwards but it can only be understood backwards". But Kierkegaard was only 42 when he died (exact cause of death is uncertain) and he cannot have known of the posthumous fame his writings would achieve in the 20th century and beyond. He was a gadfly, a heretic, and he lived a rather tormented and lonely life in his home city of Copenhagen. On the plus side, he was not short of a bob or two. He inherited a lot of money from his father, a self-made textiles merchant, and this enabled Søren to devote his short life to philosophy.

What I would like to focus on in our *Quest* series of discussions is how humanism can help us address the inescapable facts of human existence. Humanism is often described as a "non-religious worldview" but that makes it sound a bit dull and lifeless. The metaphor I'm drawn to currently is to describe humanism as a piece of "cultural software". Human beings are the "biological hardware" and we come into the world pre-programmed with instincts and drives. Our lives are spent trying to satisfy those drives. As a child of the 1960s, I was programmed by school and church with a piece of cultural software called Christianity. Christianity works well enough for lots of people, but it didn't work for me. After a great deal of confusion, experimentation, and effort, I managed to "uninstall" it. Since my early twenties, I've been experimenting with and developing an alternative piece of software called humanism. There's no definitive spec for this piece of software and we can break it down into various modules such as "thinking skills" and "happiness skills". As humanists, we're not the recipients of fixed ideas. All of us can be "software developers" - seeing what works and what doesn't. The whole point of a piece of cultural software is to help us make sense of the human situation and optimise our lives. We all want to meet those basic drives as far as we can but not, as humanists, by harming others. We seek human flourishing but we also seek the common good. Reconciling these sometimes contradictory aims is one of our major challenges. I hope you will join us on "the journey" starting on Wednesday 22nd January at 7pm. Let me know if you're coming.

At this time of year, it's customary to look ahead to the year in prospect. I've already seen friends on Facebook express pessimism about what's in store. Optimism is a healthier attitude psychologically but it amounts to an act of faith in the future. 2025 will bring its fair share of doom and disaster, but it will also bring forth abundant joy for many. My new great-nephew Charlie was born on 27th December. I want him to have the gift of optimism.