



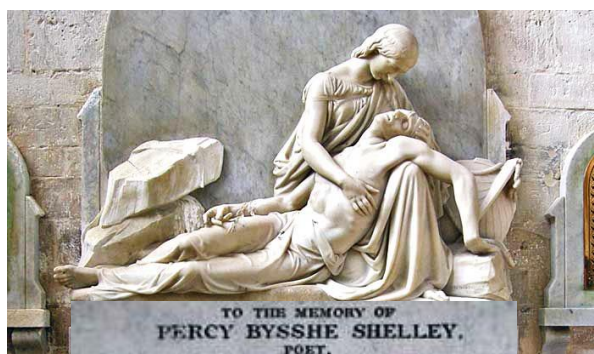
Shelley Pilgrimage Walk & Talk

Led by Dorset Humanists Dead Poets Society.
Saturday 12th July ♦ 11.00-4.00pm. Start at
Christchurch Priory main entrance and then on to
Shelley Park and Theatre (private visit) and finally
the Shelley grave at St Peter's Church Bournemouth.
Approximately 7 miles with plenty of escape points
and bus routes. Full details on Meetup.

Shelley was a poet, radical, atheist, and visionary, whose passionate belief in reason, liberty, love, and the perfectibility of humanity made him one of the most original and influential voices of the Romantic era — a writer who challenged tyranny, religion, and convention in both his life and work, and whose ideals continue to inspire generations of freethinkers, reformers, and humanists.

In 1822, aged just 29, Shelley drowned in a storm while sailing off the coast of Italy. His body was cremated on the beach. During the cremation, his friend Edward Trelawny retrieved what he claimed was Shelley's heart from the pyre. The heart was kept by Mary Shelley for many years, reportedly wrapped in a silk shroud inside her writing desk. When she died in 1851, it was interred in her grave at St Peter's Churchyard, Bournemouth, alongside her parents (Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin), her son (Sir Percy Florence Shelley) and daughter-in-law.

Join us for a unique humanist pilgrimage from Christchurch Priory to Bournemouth, tracing the life, legacy, and radical ideas of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Along the way, we'll stop at key locations to reflect on Shelley's poetry, atheism, social justice, and humanist vision, with short, accessible readings and discussion. Enjoy clifftop and beach views, flexible participation and refreshments at the Mary Shelley pub to conclude. Ideal for both lovers (and haters!) of poetry, freethought, fresh air and friendship-building. Full details on Meetup or phone David 07910 886629.



Shelley's monument is at Christchurch Priory even though he was an atheist.



Unforgettable Summer Equinox

“Thank you Helen and Barry x 100 for a beautiful evening with very yummy food. We had an unforgettable Summer Equinox. Great company. A unique group of friends.” Ana and Hugh

We had a small but lively gathering to mark World Humanist Day on 21st June, raising £61.75 for Dorset Humanists Appeal in support of a local food bank and Humanist Schools in Uganda.



Roger and Angela pose nicely for the camera!
Photos by Aaron

Dates for your diary

Thursday 3 rd July 7.30pm	Moon in the Square	Pub social
Saturday 12 th July 11am-4pm	Walk	Shelley Pilgrimage Walk & Talk starting at Christchurch Priory
Friday 18 th July	Westcliff Hotel	Hotel bar social
Saturday 9 th August 2pm-4.30pm	Tea Party	Chairman’s Tea Party with scones and jam.
Saturday 13 th September 2pm	Moordown	Jessica Toale MP will speak about life as a new MP

Plus “Big Conversation” coffee mornings – see next page. Please check all events nearer the time on Meetup in case of any changes.



Have your say in the Big Conversation!

As we look to the future of Dorset Humanists, we want to make sure every event feels welcoming, inspiring, and worth coming to — every single time. Your thoughts and experiences are crucial to making that happen. Please take a moment to reflect on the questions below and share your honest views. You can think about them now or bring your answers to one of our upcoming coffee mornings or social events. Your feedback will help us create a truly meaningful, inclusive, and engaging humanist community for everyone. Thank you for being part of this conversation.

1. What makes you look forward to attending our events?
2. What puts you off attending more often?
3. What was the most inspiring or enjoyable humanist event you've ever attended? What made it great?
4. What aspects of our events (venue, speakers, discussions, food, social atmosphere) could be improved?
5. How comfortable do you feel contributing your voice in discussions? What would help you feel more at ease?
6. If you could wave a magic wand, what would you change about Dorset Humanists to make it amazing every time?
7. Do you feel welcome and included here? If not, why?
8. What kinds of topics or activities would make you *want* to attend more regularly?
9. Is there anything we do that feels off-putting, annoying, or awkward?
10. What would make you proud to bring a friend to one of our events?

The committee has a development day on Saturday 20th September and we'd love to be able to consider your feedback then. So get thinking and tell us what you think!

Big Conversation social events and drop-in coffee mornings

- Friday 18th July 7.30pm West Cliff Hotel 7 Durley Chine Rd, Bournemouth BH2 5JS
- Thursday 7th August 7.30pm Moon in the Square, Exeter Road
- Friday 15th August 7.30 West Cliff Hotel 7 Durley Chine Rd, Bournemouth BH2 5JS
- Wednesday 20th August 10.30am Coffee#1 Westbourne 86 Poole Road
- Wednesday 27th August 10.30am Coffee#1 Winton 401 Wimborne Road
- Tuesday 2nd September 10.30am Coffee#1 Poole 134 High Street
- Wednesday 3rd September 10.30am Coffee#1 Lower Parkstone 129 Commercial Road
- Wednesday 10th September 10.30am Coffee#1 Southbourne 17 Southbourne Grove
- Thursday 4th September 7.30pm Moon in the Square

Chat online/email/text

<https://talk.dorsethumanists.org/>
chairman@dorset.humanist.org.uk

07910 886629



Paganism and Humanism

38 people attended our June event at Moordown to hear Megan Manson's lively and informative talk about Paganism. This is an edited report based on her slides and notes.

Megan was raised as a Catholic but her dad ran a shop that sold New Age and Pagan books, crystals, incense etc. So she grew up in a mixed religious/spiritual environment.

The turning point came when she moved to Japan and lived there for three years. Japan exposed her to a completely different approach to religion. Shinto, in particular, left a lasting impression. It's a nature-based tradition, centred on local spirits and rituals that aren't about doctrine but presence and respect. While in Japan, Megan had several spiritual experiences that opened her up to the idea that spirituality doesn't have to be rooted in belief.

When she returned to England at the end of 2009, she decided to explore Paganism more seriously — not just as an interest, but as a path. Over the next few years, she deepened her practice and connections, and in 2016, she co-founded Gravesham Pagans — a community group for people curious about or practising Paganism. They're not a coven or a church — just a 'moot'. A moot is an old term used in the Pagan community to describe an informal, open gathering — usually social, sometimes educational, always welcoming.

It meets in a pub, they discuss ideas, celebrate key points of the year, and build a shared sense of belonging. This kind of openness is increasingly common in modern Paganism. While some traditions — like Wicca — are structured and ritual-heavy, many Pagans today prefer an eclectic, flexible, and community-focused approach. It's less about magic circles and more about making space for people to explore meaning, nature, and spirituality on their own terms. So while witches and covens are part of the wider Pagan landscape, Megan's approach is non-dogmatic and inclusive.

Gravesham Pagans meet once a month in a pub in Gravesend, Kent. The group isn't tied to a specific Pagan path — you might find Wiccans, Druids, Heathens, or people who are simply curious. The emphasis is on community, rather than creed. They have over 300 members on Facebook, though the typical in-person meeting might have 10 to 20 people — a healthy turnout for this kind of group. Some moots across the country are mostly social — a chance to chat over a pint. Others might run workshops, rituals, or seasonal celebrations.

Paganism originally comes from the Latin *paganus*, meaning ‘country-dweller’ or ‘rustic’. In the Roman period, it came to mean those who still worshipped the old gods rather than the new Christian one. Today, Paganism with a capital P usually refers to modern spiritual movements that draw on pre-Christian beliefs — sometimes called Neopaganism. According to the 2021 census, nearly 75,000 people identified as Pagan in the UK and Paganism is legally recognised as a religion under the Equality Act. Surveys suggest more than 60–70% of modern Pagans in the UK and US are women. Paganism tends to be decentralised and community-led — many rituals happen outdoors or in hired spaces rather than fixed temples or buildings.

What most Pagans have in common

- Paganism is very diverse but there are some recurring themes:
- Polytheism: belief in many deities
- Based on pre-Christian beliefs
- Nature-centred: reverence for the Earth, seasons, cycles
- Individualist and syncretic: it’s a DIY spirituality, often tailored to the individual
- Practice over doctrine: how you live matters more than what you believe
- Mysticism and magick: often includes personal ritual or esoteric practice

One of the more intriguing — and sometimes misunderstood — aspects of Paganism is its embrace of mysticism and magick. And yes, in most Pagan traditions, magick is deliberately spelled with a ‘k’ at the end — to distinguish it from stage magic or illusions. It refers to spiritual practice aimed at transformation, often of the self, or of one’s relationship with the world. For many Pagans, magick isn’t about defying the laws of physics — it’s about intention, symbolism, and inner work. It can be as simple as lighting a candle to mark a personal transition, or as complex as a full ritual honouring a deity at the solstice. This connects with a broader mystical orientation.

Paganism, much like some Eastern and esoteric traditions, places a strong emphasis on experience. It’s not about accepting a creed or reciting doctrine — it’s about connecting with something beyond the everyday: nature, the divine, the unconscious. Personal ritual plays a big role. This might mean creating an altar at home with objects that symbolise a season, a goal, or a goddess; or celebrating the moon phases, perhaps by journaling, meditating, or making offerings. Pagans tend to develop their own spiritual ‘toolkits’ — blending traditional elements with personal creativity. Paganism encourages people to take responsibility for their spiritual lives. But this can make it hard to define from the outside, since there’s no single text, prophet, or ritual everyone shares.

What do Pagans mean by spirituality?

Spirituality in Paganism often refers to a way of making meaning. It’s about:

- Feeling connected — to nature, to ancestors, to the turning of the seasons, or to something bigger than the self (even if that something is just the cosmos or the living Earth)
- Marking moments — using ritual not to invoke supernatural forces, necessarily, but to create focus, reflection, and intention
- Creating beauty and symbolism — through myth, story, and imagery — tools humans have always used to explore meaning and values

So when Pagans talk about magick, they may mean the power of symbolic acts to change how we feel, how we relate to the world, or how we move through life. A candle ritual, for example, might work more like a form of active meditation — not a supernatural spell, but a gesture that concentrates emotion, memory, and intention. Similarly, Pagan mysticism may not require belief in anything irrational — only openness to experience, ambiguity, and awe, perhaps not unlike what some humanists mean when they talk about a sense of the sacred in nature, or the profound in art or love or the night sky.

There are many different Pagan ‘paths’ — Wicca being one of the most well-known, but also Druidry, Heathenry, Goddess movements, traditional witchcraft, and reconstructionist paths that try to revive specific pre-Christian traditions. Influences come from diverse sources including shamanism, ceremonial magick, Eastern spirituality, and even esoteric Christianity (mysticism). Paganism is a rich tapestry woven from old myths, mystical practices, and modern reinvention.

The Wheel of the Year

Paganism has its own liturgical calendar — often called The Wheel of the Year. It includes eight festivals, drawn from Celtic and other traditions. These festivals mark the solstices, equinoxes, and cross-quarter days, celebrating the turning of the seasons. They are often marked by rituals, feasts, and gatherings. One of the key festivals in the Pagan calendar is Imbolc, which falls around the 1st or 2nd of February. It marks the slow return of the light — the days are lengthening, the earth is stirring, and there’s a sense of hope and quiet renewal.

The Pagan festival that falls on the Spring Equinox — usually around March 20th — is called Ostara. This might sound familiar because Ostara shares a lot in common with Easter. In fact, the word Easter is thought to be related to Ostara or Eostre — possibly a Germanic goddess of dawn, fertility, and renewal.

The Summer Solstice which falls around June 20th or 21st is known as Litha, the longest day of the year, when the sun reaches its highest point in the sky. For Pagans, Litha is a time to honour the power of the sun, the abundance of life, and the peak of the growing season. At Gravesham Pagans, Megan shared that they often create an altar decorated with solar and summer symbols — things like sunflowers, fruits, and candles.

As we reach midwinter, we come to Yule — the Winter Solstice, around December 21st. It’s the shortest day and longest night of the

year — a moment of stillness, reflection, and, importantly, hope. From here, the light begins to return. For Pagans, Yule celebrates a turning point — the rebirth of the sun, the beginning of nature’s long awakening. A time of fire, feasting, and gathering together to hold off the cold and dark. The Christmas tree probably isn’t Pagan in origin but the idea of bringing greenery indoors in the dead of winter — to symbolise life, continuity, and renewal — resonates with Pagan themes.

Other celebrations include baby-blessings, hand-fasting (weddings), croning (a celebration of the menopause) and saging (a celebration of male ageing) — moments to honour wisdom, experience, and the transition into a new phase of life.

What Pagans and humanists have in common

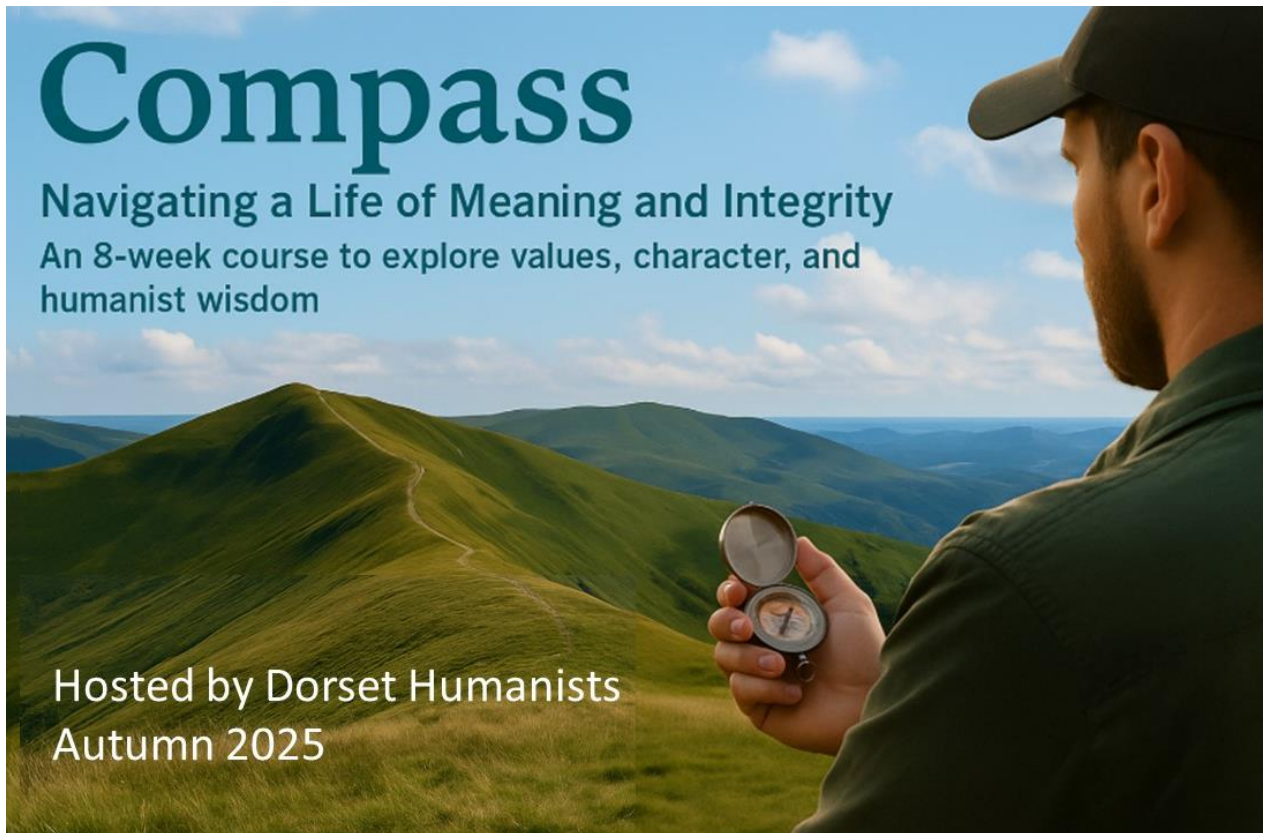
- Both are largely post-Christian
- Neither has a holy book or fixed dogma
- Both are individualist in ethos
- Many are LGBT-friendly and lean progressive

Where humanists and Pagans diverge

- Pagans often believe in the supernatural; humanists don’t
- Ritual is central in Paganism; for humanists it’s minimal or symbolic
- Paganism is nature-centred, while humanism is often human-centred
- Humanism tends to be more male-led, while Paganism can be female-dominated

Conclusion

Paganism is a living, diverse, and evolving set of traditions. It’s ancient in inspiration, modern in expression, and deeply individualist — like humanism in some ways. You don’t have to believe in gods or magic to see why people find meaning in seasonal rituals, Earth-reverence, and myth.



Our overall mission is to create a welcoming, thoughtful community where people can explore how to live well without religion — through shared values and open conversation. In support of this aim, we're running an inspiring and potentially life-changing series of discussions in the autumn. The whole course is called "Compass" and you're invited to sign up for the whole series for maximum impact.

Humanism can be defined as "living a good life without supernatural beliefs" but what does it mean to live a "good life" — not just in theory, but in practice? Together, we'll ask searching and sometimes uncomfortable questions about society, personality, human nature, good and evil, the human species, and our evolutionary programming. We'll invite honest reflection and open conversation, drawing on practical wisdom from philosophy, psychology, literature, and life experience.

- What can we learn from the great moral thinkers of the past—and today?
- Has modern society lost its moral compass?

- Does our deep sense of right and wrong have an evolutionary explanation?
- Does my personality define my character?
- What does it take to be a truly excellent human being?

If you're curious about how humanist values can help you live with greater clarity, kindness, and purpose — and contribute more fully to our community and the world around you — this course is for you. It starts on Tuesday 23rd September and continues for eight consecutive Tuesday evenings. To express an interest, email chairman@dorset.humanist.org.uk or text 07910 886629 and tell us what you would like to gain from the course.

To secure your place:

- £10 for members payable in cash at one of our events
- £15 for non-members which includes complimentary membership of Dorset Humanists for one year.
- Concessions for unwaged



A point of view

David Warden

People sometimes complain that humanism is “too intellectual”. I make no apology for humanism appealing to the human brain and for our efforts to stimulate learning and rational thinking. But at the same time, maybe we are missing something important about being human. Listening to Megan’s talk about Paganism, it struck me that I do celebrate Yule in a pagany kind of way. It’s celebrated at the winter solstice and it’s a time for ritualistic card greetings, gift-giving, feasting, and decorating homes with greenery and twinkly lights. We eat things like turkey and Christmas pudding because it’s traditional and it links us to Christmases past. It’s also a time to remember dead relatives, hopefully with fondness and humour. It marks the rhythm of the year, as the Earth rotates around the Sun. I realise that not all humanists do this, but are there any humanists who live solely for the mind and not for the senses? Surely not. I’m sure that most if not all of our members appreciate music, art, colour, texture, beauty, nature, festivals, old things and historic connections. Most humanists secretly enjoy visiting old churches and we cultivate sensory and sometimes ritualistic pleasures in our homes. John and I, for instance, always light candles at the dinner table. It’s a totally unnecessary waste of wax but part of our ritual of eating together.

Appealing to the senses is not something that can be done easily or on the cheap. What appeals to one person may repel another. But there may be things we can build into our humanist programme which go beyond the merely intellectual. For example, we schedule walks along the Jurassic Coast, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which inspire awe. We celebrated World Humanist Day at the Summer Solstice with a barbecue. And we’ve scheduled a Shelley Pilgrimage to visit special sites connected with the Shelley family in Christchurch and Bournemouth. We’ve had talks about Shelley at Moordown Community Centre. Founding member of Dorset Humanists Liliane Apers and her partner Mike Hammond gave us a wonderful talk entitled *Shelley – Visionary Humanist* in May 2009 and John Webster gave us a talk about him in December 2017. But there are several sites of special cultural interest about Shelley and his family in Christchurch and Bournemouth so we have a unique local opportunity to combine walk and talk. We can also enjoy the wonderful irony of Shelley’s impressive monument in Christchurch Priory given that he was a notorious atheist. If you have ideas about how humanism can appeal to the senses and emotions as well as to the intellect please let me know.

Are humanists good people? What does it mean to be good? We briefly touched on this in our original *One Life* course but there’s so much more for us to explore and think about. I shall be spending the summer doing some preparatory reading for our new *Compass* course about humanist values and ethics and I hope you will be able to join us for this fascinating series of discussions in the autumn.

Why not visit our new chatroom <https://talk.dorsethumanists.org/>