



Farewell Rituals

What can we learn from global funeral traditions?

A presentation and interactive discussion facilitated by Simon Whipple. All welcome. Free entry. A voluntary donation of around £3.00 to help with our expenses is appreciated but not obligatory.

Saturday 11th October 2.00pm. Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Ave, BH9 1TW

Societies across the world mark the deaths of their members in many different ways. Funerals serve two purposes – they help the bereaved to accept the loss of their loved one, and they often appeal to a divine being to grant favour to the person who has died. In this interactive talk, Simon will describe some of the enormous variety of funeral customs that can be found in different cultures across the world. Then we'll break into small groups to consider which customs our secular society might adopt in order to improve our experience when someone we care about dies. Simon is a member of our committee and a retired solicitor.

Humanists UK has just launched a social media campaign called *That's humanism!* featuring four animations narrated by Stephen Fry and a new series of eye-catching educational posters for schools. Click the image for more information.



Dates for your diary

Saturday 11 th October 2pm	Moordown	Varieties of funeral customs across the world. Simon Whipple leads the discussion.
Friday 17 th October 7.30pm	Westcliff Hotel	Humanists in the hotel. Informal social evening hosted by Sandra.
Thursday 6 th November 7.30pm	Moon in the Square	Humanists in the pub. Informal pub social hosted by Dean or Lyn.
Saturday 8 th November 2pm	Moordown	Remembrance ceremonies across cultures. A presentation and discussion led by Simon Whipple.
Wednesday 26 th November 7.30pm	Westcliff Hotel	The heyday of the ocean liner in the twentieth century. A talk by John Hubbard.
Thursday 18 th December 7.00pm	Marsham Court Hotel	Festive dinner. The cost this year is £33.95. A limited number of free places are available for members of Dorset Humanists on very low income.

This list is not exhaustive. Please check all events nearer the time on Meetup in case of any changes.



Jessica Toale MP visit

Fifty people attended our September event at Moordown to hear Jessica Toale MP tell us about her first year in Parliament. She is a Parliamentary Private Secretary in the Foreign Office. A PPS is not formally part of the government but essentially it is a liaison role between ministers and backbench MPs. This is an edited selection of her talk and responses.

Jessica told us that she's "absolutely loved" her first year in Parliament. For her, it was never about different parties but about how we come together as communities to solve our collective challenges. She doesn't have a magic wand but she can bring people together, ask the right questions of ministers, and push for the change we all want to see. Over the last year she has focussed on five main things:

1. Revitalising Bournemouth Town Centre – making people feel proud of the area again
2. Crime and anti-social behaviour
3. Access to GPs and dentists

4. Housing

5. The environment

She gets 1,500 emails from constituents every month asking for help. She runs a fortnightly surgery and attends three or four events every month. She knocks on doors and sends regular updates to her constituents and asks whether she is focused on the right things.

She described Parliament itself, however, as an antiquated beast. A really strange place to work, a real rabbit warren but she knew her way around it from a previous role as an adviser. Her toughest day so far was waiting 9½ hours in the chamber to give a five minute speech! ►

Assisted dying

She felt that we saw Parliament at its best during the assisted dying debates. They were incredibly respectful about a very deep, emotional and ethical issue. She spent a lot of time agonising over it, ultimately voting in favour of the legislation, but she met with many constituents who did not want her to vote in favour of the bill.

Faith schools

Cathy asked about Jessica's view on faith schools and said she would like Labour to be campaigning to end faith schools. Jessica said she doesn't have a strong opinion either way on faith schools in the area and that it isn't an issue that anyone has brought up with her before. There are some really good ones and they are part of the system we have at the moment. She thinks it's great for families to have a choice. She is more focused on the curriculum including things like art, music, citizenship, languages and so on and seemed more concerned about grammar schools locally.

Environment

Andrew asked about the environment and Jessica said that talking about climate change is "quite disempowering" for the population because it feels like there is nothing that you as an individual can do. She felt that renewable energy is part of delivering solutions to the cost of living crisis. So when the government talks about the environment it is often framed in terms of being good for jobs and bills.

Defence

Aaron asked how we can accelerate defence spending. Jessica acknowledged the scale of the challenge which is rapidly becoming a reality. We may well be at war very soon. She spoke in some detail about the government's current strategy and said that they had to make really a tough decision to cut the aid budget. She recently went to a conference in Kyiv and said how grateful Ukrainians were

for the UK's steadfast support.

Parliamentary reform

Barry asked if there is any appetite for reform of these medieval institutions. Jessica said they were committed to modernising the House of Commons (such as sitting hours and digital voting) and reforming the House of Lords. Jessica 100% agreed that there is no place for bishops in the Lords and said that they are going through the process of removing 92 hereditary peers. Ultimately they want an elected upper chamber that represents the regions and nations of Britain with fewer members (600 not 900). She briefly mentioned changing the voting system.

Litter

Penny asked about this. Jessica said she has set up a Citizens Panel to dig under the skin of some of the issues including litter, antisocial behaviour, graffiti etc. and to appoint Ambassadors for the town. She also said there is a gap between perception and reality. For example, serious violent crime has been going down in the local area and shop vacancies have been going down. It's hard to reconcile nostalgia with changing realities. And what can we do as individuals? Jessica has been on litter picks.

Gaza

John K asked about this. Jessica said that sanctions and arms sales are always under review. A big step was formally recognising the state of Palestine.

Future hope

Jessica said that the government was delivering on its manifesto and vision for Britain: getting the economy growing again, getting NHS waiting times down, cleaning up our seas, being a clean energy superpower and, crucially, asking will people feel more hopeful about the future by the time the next election comes around?



Hope for Food celebrates its 10th anniversary

David Warden and Dean Robertson attended the 10th anniversary party of Hope for Food at St Luke's Church on 3rd October. Dorset Humanists has supported Hope for Food for a number of years through our annual appeal and we are about to spend a whopping £2379 on food and other essential items for the charity, thanks to your generosity.

Hope for Food is a local charity based in Bournemouth, set up and run entirely by volunteers. Although it uses church premises for some of its operations, it is a non-religious charity.

Mary Duncan, in the photo above, is the Operations Manager. She's a retired secondary school teacher who, together with husband Eddie, joined the charity in 2017. She has particular responsibility for the logistical hub

for all the charity's activities. She also looks after publicity and she gives many talks to local schools, businesses and community groups as well as media interviews.

Our appeal is open until December 31st. Ask David or Daniel how to donate.

<https://www.hopeforfood.org.uk/>





A point of view

David Warden

Jessica Toale, MP for Bournemouth West, seemed right at home at our recent Moordown Community Centre meeting. She spoke engagingly about her priorities for the local area and she avoided the usual political theatre of mudslinging and name-calling.

Humanism and democracy go together, but when democratic debate descends into demonising and smearing political opponents – and, by extension, their millions of voters – civic discourse begins to fracture. I'm afraid the Prime Minister's recent conference speech fell into this dismal category.

The gist of the recent debate is this. Reform UK argues that Britain cannot afford to give permanent settlement and benefit rights to hundreds of thousands of recent arrivals. The Prime Minister branded Reform's policy "the politics of grievance" and Reform as "the enemy of national renewal". As humanists, we should pause for thought before taking sides. Reform is right to insist that large-scale immigration and the cost of welfare are legitimate topics for public debate. A democracy must be able to talk about numbers, costs, and limits without being accused of racism. At the same time, Labour is right to warn against unintended consequences and to defend a compassionate society that recognises the humanity of settled migrants who have built their lives here.

The deeper problem is not the disagreement itself, but the tone. When political language slides into smearing, contempt, and caricature, democracy is the loser. Reasoned disagreement – the lifeblood of democracy – gives way to moral theatre. Opponents are not engaged but condemned. Humanism should stand for something higher than this: the belief that good societies depend on dialogue conducted in good faith, with empathy, humility, and evidence.

Jessica Toale modelled that better spirit: thoughtful, respectful, and willing to listen. If national politics could rediscover that tone, we might begin to rebuild public trust.

Humanism cannot solve the immigration dilemma, but it can remind us how to think – calmly, fairly, and humanely. Our task is not to take sides in the politics of polarisation, but to rise above it and to insist that honesty and civility are virtues worth defending.

Dorset Humanists is planning to have more discussions about difficult topics in 2026. In order to do this well, we'll be cultivating the habits of good conversation – curiosity, patience, and respect for difference. We'll be modelling the kind of public dialogue our society so badly needs – thoughtful, civil, and genuinely open-minded. In this way, humanism can make a difference to our fractious and divided world. It can also help us to deepen the bonds of friendship and respect within our own humanist community, even when we disagree.