

ONE LIFE

Dorset Humanists Magazine

30th Anniversary Year 1996-2026

October 2026



The Inheritocracy Dilemma

One Life Café: Saturday 10th October 2.00pm Moordown Community Centre Coronation Ave, BH9 1TW

A friendly discussion led by Cathy Silman. Complimentary tea, coffee, cake and biscuits on arrival. Free entry – a small donation of around £3 is appreciated but not obligatory. Everyone welcome.

Most people feel a powerful instinct to leave any worldly goods they may have to children or others in their kinship group. This drive may have an evolutionary basis, but is it compatible with a humanist concern for fairness beyond our own families?

Cathy will lead a friendly and interactive discussion focusing on this interesting dilemma. Should we be adding to the financial advantage of those who may already be doing well? Or, in doing so, do we further disadvantage those who have inherited little or nothing?

You Can't Say That!

Humanist Forum: Thursday 22nd October at Bournemouth Westcliff Hotel 7 Durley Chine Road, Bournemouth BH2 5JS

A friendly round-table discussion led by Barry Newman. Free speech is widely regarded as essential to a free and democratic society. But does that mean we should be free to say whatever we like? What about speech that offends, causes distress or is regarded as harmful? And who should decide where the boundaries lie? Drawing on humanist principles, we'll explore why free speech matters and where we should draw the line.



Email: chairman@dorset.humanist.org.uk

Phone: 07910 886629

HMRC Charities Ref No EW10227



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events

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website

Research Participants Wanted

An invitation to Dorset Humanists members to take part in academic research

Martin Anderson, a PhD researcher at King’s College London and a Poole resident, is inviting volunteers to participate in a study exploring how people construct spoken arguments about public, social and ethical issues.

His research may be of interest to Dorset Humanists members who enjoy discussing challenging subjects and exchanging different perspectives.

Martin is particularly interested in hearing from adults with current or recent experience of formal debating, debate training or participation in debating clubs. However, he has indicated that the ability to discuss subjects of interest, rather than experience of competitive debating alone, is relevant to his research.

Participation begins with a short online questionnaire. Those who meet the study criteria and wish to continue may be invited to take part in an interview conducted via Microsoft Teams. Eligible participants who complete the interview will receive a £10 thank-you payment.

Participation is entirely voluntary, and you can read the full Participant Information Sheet before deciding whether to take part.

Visit the [online study page](#) to find out more and complete the initial questionnaire.

Alternatively, contact Martin directly at martin.a.anderson@kcl.ac.uk if you have any questions.



Eighteen people enjoyed our Stour Valley walk on Sunday 27th September led by Aaron. This photo of a heron was one of many delightful species encountered. Photo by Aaron.

Dates for your diary

Saturday 10 th October 2.00pm	Moordown	Humanist Café: Inheritocracy – a discussion led by Cathy Silman
Friday 16 th October 7.30pm	Westcliff Hotel	Hotel bar social. No set agenda. Come along for a friendly social.
Thursday 22 nd October 7.30pm	Westcliff Hotel	Humanist Forum – discussion on free speech led by Barry Newman
Thursday 5 th November 7.30pm	Moon	Pub social hosted by Dean
Saturday 14 th November 1.30pm	Moordown	Dorset Humanists 30 th anniversary party lunch – strictly by RSVP only

Please check all events nearer the time on Meetup in case of any changes.



DORSET HUMANISTS

30TH

ANNIVERSARY

You are invited

Celebrate 30 years of humanism
in Bournemouth and beyond!



MOORDOWN COMMUNITY CENTRE

21 Coronation Ave, Bournemouth BH9 1TW



SATURDAY 14TH NOVEMBER 2026



1.30PM – 4.00PM



*Buffet lunch and
drinks provided*



PLEASE RSVP BY 14TH OCTOBER 2026
to secure your place.



07910 886629

or



chairman@dorset.humanist.org.uk

We look forward to celebrating with you!





Photo by Aaron

Gossip

More important than it sounds?

Simon Lucie-Whipple led our September Forum in an exploration of something almost all of us do, but which few of us think seriously about: gossip.

Gossip has a bad reputation. It can suggest malicious rumours, whispering behind people's backs and taking pleasure in other people's misfortunes. But Simon invited us to consider whether it might play a much more important role in human life.

Drawing particularly on the work of evolutionary psychologist Robin Dunbar, Simon explored the idea that gossip developed as part of the social machinery that enabled humans to live successfully in increasingly large groups. Other primates maintain relationships partly through physical grooming, but humans cannot possibly groom everyone in a large social network. Conversation – including talk about other people – may have become our more efficient alternative.

Gossip allows us to exchange information about relationships and reputations: who can be trusted, who has behaved generously, who has cheated, who is having difficulties and what is happening within our community. It can strengthen relationships between the people sharing information and help establish the informal social norms by which groups operate.

Our discussion soon demonstrated how difficult it is to decide where ordinary social conversation ends and gossip begins. Is mentioning that somebody has got married gossip? What about telling people why an absent member cannot attend? Much of what might technically count as gossip is simply the everyday exchange of social information.

More difficult questions arise when the information is negative. One participant offered a useful example: suppose you knew that someone had a history of fraud and discovered that a friend was considering investing £50,000 with them. Would warning your friend be malicious gossip – or a moral obligation? In this case, sharing reputational information could prevent serious harm.

But the same human tendency has a darker side. Negative gossip can damage reputations, exclude individuals and sometimes develop into bullying. Several participants reflected on the particular dangers of social media, where rumours can travel far beyond the small communities in which gossip evolved. Online communication also strips away tone of voice, facial expression and other cues that normally help us interpret what someone means.

We also considered the unsettling experience of discovering that other people have been talking about us. One suggestion was to follow the principle: don't say anything about someone behind their back that you would be unwilling to say to their face. A good rule of thumb, perhaps, although our discussion showed that even this has exceptions.

By the end of a lively evening, gossip looked considerably less trivial than it had at the beginning. Perhaps the important question is not whether gossip is good or bad, but how we talk responsibly about people who are not in the room.



Hengistbury Head

A Forager's Perspective

On Sunday 30th August, around 14 of us joined local foraging enthusiast Dave Elleman for a leisurely four-mile exploration of Hengistbury Head and Mudeford Sandbank, discovering just how much there is to see – and sometimes eat – when you take a closer look at the plants beneath your feet.

Setting off from the Hiker's Café, we quickly discovered that this was going to be rather more than an ordinary scenic walk. Dave's aim was to encourage us to look at familiar plants with fresh eyes: not simply as anonymous greenery or weeds, but as species with their own culinary uses, histories and sometimes surprising stories.

There was an important caveat. Foraging requires considerable care: some British plants are highly poisonous and edible species can have dangerous lookalikes. Dave's golden rule was therefore simple: never eat a wild plant unless you are completely certain of its identity and that it is safe to eat. Plant identification apps can be useful aids, but they are no substitute for knowledge and caution. Fortunately, there was plenty to investigate without filling our lunchboxes.

Among our early discoveries was wild radish, whose flowers have the characteristic four-petalled cross shape of the cabbage family. Its young seed pods and flowers are edible and have the familiar peppery radish flavour. We also sampled wild apples. Almost every wild apple tree is effectively its own variety, since apples grown from seed rarely reproduce the characteristics of their parent. Somewhere out there, perhaps, is the next Granny Smith waiting to be discovered.

More familiar were blackberries, although the dry summer had taken its toll on many of

them, and nettles. Nettles may be an irritation to walkers but they are remarkably useful plants: young leaves can be cooked like spinach and used in everything from soup and risotto to gnocchi, while the fibres in their stems have even been used to make cloth.

Dave also introduced us to some of the folklore surrounding common plants. Yarrow, for example, takes its botanical name *Achillea* from Achilles, who was reputed to have used it to treat his soldiers' wounds. It has a long history as a medicinal herb and was once used as a bittering ingredient in drinks before hops became dominant.

Another plant with a long human history was wild carrot, or Queen Anne's lace, the ancestor of our modern cultivated carrots. Its delicate umbrella-shaped flower heads are attractive and familiar, but Dave warned that this is one family where amateur foragers need to be particularly cautious: the carrot family also contains several dangerously poisonous species.

As we climbed Hengistbury Head, plant spotting was temporarily competing with the magnificent views along the coast and across Christchurch Harbour and its salt marshes. Picking up the pace along the top, we eventually descended towards Mudeford Sandbank and its rather different habitat – not forgetting, of course, its famously expensive beach huts. ►

Here the maritime plants came into their own. We found rock samphire, once so prized as a pickle that Shakespeare mentions it in *King Lear*. Its strong parsley-like flavour means that it works best alongside milder ingredients. Nearby was the quite different marsh samphire, with its succulent, salty stems, now familiar as an accompaniment to seafood in restaurants.

There was also sea purslane, a member of the spinach family whose leaves naturally retain some of the salt from their coastal environment, and sea beet. The latter has a particularly distinguished family tree: Swiss chard and beetroot are both cultivated forms derived from sea beet. Suddenly the plants growing wild beside the path seemed rather less remote from the contents of the supermarket vegetable aisle.

Not everything lived up to expectations. The numerous sea buckthorn bushes on Mudeford Sandbank appeared to be male plants, so there were none of the bright orange, vitamin-C-rich berries to be found. But elsewhere there were damsons to taste and the red hips of the Japanese rose, larger and sweeter than those of our native dog rose.

Even as we headed back along the land-train route, there was one final discovery. High on a dying tree was the unmistakable sulphur-yellow bracket fungus known as chicken of the woods, so named because of its surprisingly chicken-like flavour and meaty texture. Unfortunately, this specimen was tantalisingly out of reach.

By the time we returned to our starting point, Dave had identified more than 30 different plants along the route – far more than we can describe here. The real lesson of the afternoon, however, was not simply how many of them were edible. It was how much more interesting a familiar landscape becomes when we slow down and really look at what is growing around us. Our thanks to Dave for a fascinating and informative walk – and for giving us an entirely new perspective on Hengistbury Head.





Factfulness: the humanist approach

Are we genuinely interested in discovering the truth, or are we more interested in being right? It's an uncomfortable question, particularly for humanists who pride themselves on being rational, evidence-based thinkers.

At Dorset Humanists, we want to promote a culture of factfulness: a commitment to understanding the world as it really is, rather than as we might wish it to be. This requires more than simply rejecting superstition or misinformation. It means recognising that we are all susceptible to prejudice, confirmation bias and intellectual laziness.

Our approach can be summarised in five steps:

1. **Start with a question.** Genuine enquiry begins with curiosity, not a predetermined answer.
2. **Ascertain the facts from primary sources.** Wherever possible, go back to the original evidence rather than relying on selective reporting, social media or hearsay.
3. **Give a fair hearing.** Listen seriously to alternative perspectives, particularly those that challenge our existing beliefs.
4. **Assess objectively.** Distinguish between facts, interpretations and opinions. Apply the same standards of evidence to arguments we like and those we dislike.
5. **Arrive at revisable conclusions.** Reach a reasoned judgement while remaining willing to change your mind when better evidence emerges.

Unfortunately, human beings have a remarkable talent for doing precisely the opposite. We start with our conclusion, search for supporting evidence, dismiss inconvenient facts, double down when challenged and, in extreme cases, unfriend anyone who disagrees with us!

This caricature is amusing precisely because it is so recognisable. And humanists are certainly not immune. Indeed, there is a particular danger in believing ourselves to be exceptionally rational. Rejecting supernatural beliefs does not automatically protect us against political tribalism, ideological certainty or selective use of evidence.

Factfulness also requires intellectual humility. Our opponents may occasionally be right. Our favourite commentators may sometimes be wrong. And complex social and political questions rarely yield to simplistic explanations.

None of this means abandoning our values or pretending that every opinion is equally well supported. It means having the confidence to subject our own convictions to the same scrutiny we apply to others.

This is the culture we want to encourage through our One Life Café and Thursday Forum: serious but friendly conversations in which disagreement becomes an opportunity for learning rather than a contest to be won.

Our ambition is not to create a community of people who think alike, but a community of people who think well together.

Thomas Horlock Bastard

Blandford's Forgotten Humanist Pioneer

Long before the word “humanist” came into common use, Dorset had its own advocate of reason, secular education, and social reform. His name was Thomas Horlock Bastard (1796–1898), a Blandford gentleman whose unusual surname may be remembered more readily than his remarkable ideas. Yet his life reveals a fascinating link between Dorset and the early roots of modern humanism.

Born into one of Dorset's established families, Bastard inherited the Charlton Marshall estate. The Bastard family name was already well known locally through the builders associated with the rebuilding of Blandford after the devastating fire of 1731. But Thomas Horlock Bastard would leave a very different kind of legacy: not in brick and stone, but in ideas.

At a time when religious belief still dominated public life, Bastard openly supported freethought and rationalism. His 1877 pamphlet *Scepticism and Social Justice* argued that religious doubt should not exclude people from moral respect or civic life. The work challenged traditional claims about biblical authority while defending freedom of thought and conscience – principles that later became central to organised humanism.

For Bastard, scepticism did not mean cynicism. The title of his pamphlet is revealing: he linked questioning with justice. He argued that people who rejected traditional religious beliefs could still be ethical citizens committed to human welfare. This was a radical message in Victorian Britain, where non-believers often faced suspicion and social exclusion.

His commitment was practical as well as intellectual. According to a contemporary rationalist obituary, Bastard was “unwearied” in his support for the Rationalist movement. He supported rationalist publishing,

encouraged the spread of critical writing on religion, and founded a secular school in Blandford – an extraordinary initiative at a time when education was still closely connected with the churches.

The idea of a secular school was not simply about removing religion. Victorian freethinkers often wanted education based on evidence, science, inquiry, and moral development accessible to everyone. Bastard also supported wider reform causes, including campaigns for public access to cultural institutions and improvements in education.

His life illustrates an important point about the history of humanism. Modern humanism did not emerge only from opposition to religion. It also grew from positive movements for learning, equality, freedom of conscience, and human flourishing. Bastard's combination of scepticism and social concern anticipated many themes familiar to humanists today.

He lived long enough to see enormous changes. Born in the reign of George III, before railways and modern democracy, he died in 1898 in his 101st year. Reports suggest he remained mentally active almost to the end of his long life.

More than a century later, Dorset Humanists continue conversations that would probably have interested him: how should we think clearly, educate wisely, and build a fair society without relying on supernatural beliefs?

Perhaps it is time that Blandford's forgotten freethinker was remembered.

Thanks to Madeleine Goodall for bringing this local humanist figure to our attention.

Madeleine is Humanist Heritage Manager at Humanists UK, where she researches and shares the rich history and influence of humanism and non-religious people in Britain.



**From Keith Porteous Wood, President
of the National Secular Society**

Dear Dorset Humanists

We are pleased to enclose the summer edition of our members' Bulletin. We recently launched our *Britons and Secularism* report in collaboration with *More in Common*. The report explores British attitudes to religion in public life and the issues at the heart of our work. It revealed that most people in Britain instinctively support secularist principles and oppose religious privilege in public life. You can read more about the findings in the Bulletin and access the full report at www.secularism.org.uk/cohesion.

Our annual Members' Day will be held on Saturday 28 November 2026 at Conway Hall in London. As an affiliated group, you can send a delegate who will be able to vote at our AGM. Please let us know if you wish to do so. We will send more information in the autumn. In the meantime, we wanted to let you know that members can propose motions and stand for Council at our AGM, which will take place during the Members' Day. Motions must be seconded by another NSS member. Candidates for Council must be nominated and seconded by other members. We request that anyone interested in standing for Council contact us in advance. Nominations and motions can be posted to the NSS office or emailed to membership@secularism.org.uk.

All nominations and motions must be received by Friday 16 October 2026.

Our essential campaign work is only possible due to the support of our members. If you are able to make an additional donation, it will be very welcome. Please donate online at www.secularism.org.uk/donate

***Aaron Darkwood asks: "Do We Still
Need a Dorset Humanists Leaflet?"***

Dorset Humanists committee recently decided not to replace our existing glossy Dorset Humanists tri-fold leaflet, which had reached the end of its useful life. Some of its information was out of date, its QR code was no longer linked correctly, and Dorset Humanists has changed and developed since it was produced. A new six-monthly events publication is planned, which will provide information about forthcoming meetings and activities, while people wanting to know more about Dorset Humanists can also be directed to our website.

But should we still have a small general-purpose leaflet as well? In the past, our tri-fold leaflets have been handed to newcomers at meetings and social events, distributed at occasions such as Pride, and taken away by people wanting something tangible that explains who Dorset Humanists are and what we do. They are inexpensive to produce, easy to carry and can include a QR code directing people to more detailed and up-to-date information online. On the other hand, maintaining printed material means updating and reprinting it when information changes, and perhaps the website and forthcoming events publication now make a separate leaflet unnecessary. We'd therefore be interested to hear what members think: should Dorset Humanists produce a new general-purpose leaflet, or is directing people to our website the better way forward? What would you find most useful when introducing somebody new to Dorset Humanists?

Email chairman@dorset.humanist.org.uk