

Next  
meeting  
12th April  
in Ipswich—  
see page 4

# Suffolk Humanist NEWS



The Newsletter of the Suffolk Humanist Group

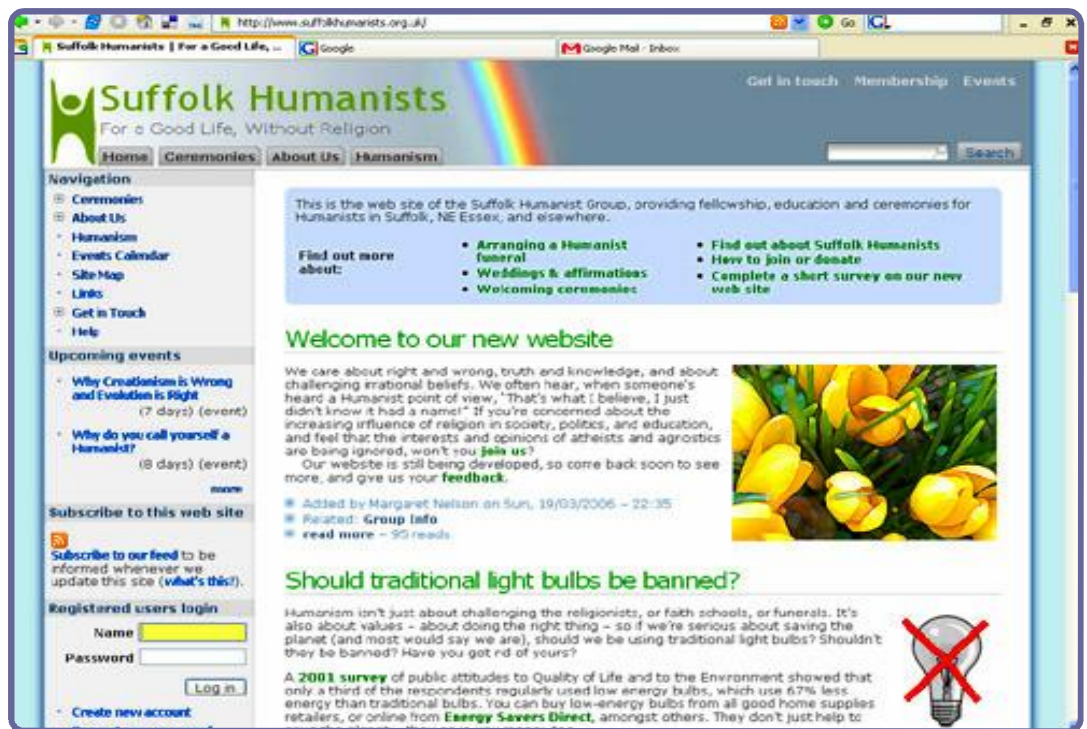
April 2006



Last month a Muslim man in eastern India accidentally divorced his wife in his sleep by uttering the Urdu word for divorce ("talaq") three times, which is all it takes under Islamic law. After the wife told her friends, village elders got to hear about it and said that the divorce was legal and that before remarrying, the couple would have to be apart for at least 100 days and that the wife would have to spend a night with another man and then be divorced by him. The husband has refused to accept the elders' ruling and the couple has been ostracised.

From a telephone sampling of over 2,000 households, University of Minnesota researchers found that Americans rate atheists below Muslims, recent immigrants, gays and lesbians and other minority groups in "sharing their vision of American society." Atheists are also the minority group most Americans are least willing to allow their children to marry.

## Our new website, attracting attention



Our new website is open for business. The opening ceremony was a quiet affair – we tried to book a celebrity to come and cut the ribbon, but Tom Baker was too busy, and we couldn't afford William Shatner. His fee shot up when he started doing the All Bran adverts.

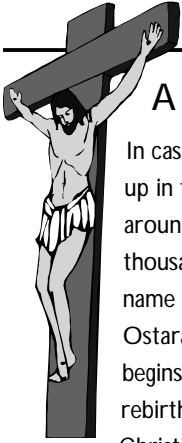
The Suffolk Humanists website has now been running in one form or another for six years, and we hope that this latest version will be around for a while and build on its good reputation. The site has had nearly a thousand visitors since its launch just over a week ago, looking for all kinds of information or just coming for a quick peek. People are finding us through the AOL, MSN and Google search engines, and from links to us on the BHA and BBC websites, and others. We're getting visits from across the UK, as well as the USA.

The new website is a clever beast. Built using the same content management platform used by the International Humanist & Ethical Union and many other community organisations, we are now capable of hosting online discussions, polls and surveys, organising related articles on topics from education to the environment, posting news stories every day, and, in the near future, accepting donations and membership applications online. We also have an events calendar with all the Suffolk Humanists meetings as well as other events of interest, so you always know what's coming up.

This is all in addition to complete information about the group, from newsletters to membership details, ceremonies to thoughts for the day. All articles can be viewed in a printer friendly format and pages are,

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[www.suffolkhumanists.org.uk](http://www.suffolkhumanists.org.uk)



## A suitable story for children?

In case you hadn't noticed all the chocolate eggs stacked up in the shops, it's Easter. There's been a festival at around the time of the spring equinox (21st March) for thousands of years. The word Easter is derived from the name of a Teutonic goddess of spring and the dawn, Ostara, and from the word for 'east', where the dawn begins. Eggs and bunnies or hares were symbols of rebirth, renewal and fertility. All very uplifting. Then the Christians, just as they did with the midwinter solstice festival, hijacked the spring festival to mark the crucifixion of their 'son of God', who apparently died for our sins. Well, I didn't ask him to, nor do I admit to having sinned, though I've enjoyed myself being naughty now and then.

I was thinking about all this in connection with some Bible stories rewritten for use in storytelling sessions with primary school age children, based on Montessori principles. I learned about them through Suffolk's Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE). The notes for teachers contain an implicit assumption that 'God' is a fact. One suggestion is that the teacher should say, 'I wonder what pleases God?' after the story of Jesus in the temple. Another story is about 'a very sad day: Jesus dies.'

RE is a statutory requirement for all schoolchildren, including the

very young. The new Suffolk Agreed Syllabus (see p4) recommends 30 minutes a week of RE for Reception children. Since small children probably can't distinguish between fact and faith, I doubt that telling them stories about the crucifixion may do them any more harm than, say, hearing Grimm's fairy tales, which are full of nasty things. The worksheet doesn't go into detail, but refers to Jesus being 'fixed' on a cross to die. However, I do think it odd that most parents are unlikely to question the wisdom of telling their children about the crucifixion, though they might write to the education authority if their children were told any other story of torture and execution. 2500 years ago, the Romans crucified thousands of slaves, rebels, pirates, despised enemies and criminals. It was an ignominious, slow and excruciatingly painful way to die. Mel Gibson's 'The Passion of the Christ' (the DVD is 'not for sale to persons under 18' on the Amazon website) depicts the whole gory saga in extremely graphic detail, which didn't stop fundamentalist Christian parents in the States taking their kids to see it.

Of course, religion never makes sense, so why expect Christianity to make sense over this. 'Now then children, once upon a time they hammered nails through a man's hands and feet into a big wooden cross and left him to die...'

*Margaret Nelson*

## Sustainable Development—Hope or Hoax?

Jules Pretty, FRSA, FIBiol, Professor of Environment & Society at the University of Essex, spoke to Suffolk Humanists about sustainable development at our meeting in Colchester on 16th February 2006.

Prof. Pretty began by drawing attention to our self-delusion about the permanence of civilisations and their perceived inevitable continuous advancement – in reality, a myth. All scales of social groupings, from villages to huge cities, have disappeared, sometimes

abruptly. Prof. Pretty gave examples, such as the Minoans, or the Mayan culture that suddenly disappeared from South America, leaving cities to be reclaimed by nature. On a smaller scale, he referred to Prypiat in the Ukraine after the Chernobyl accident, which has proved useful for the study of the return of biodiversity, as an example of what can happen to an environment after the sudden removal of humans, and of how we might reorganise our

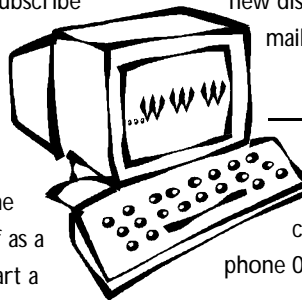
*(Continued on page 4)*

## Our new website

*(Continued from page 1)*

we hope you'll agree, easy to read and navigate. You can subscribe to the web site if you have news reading software, so it will even tell you automatically when it has been updated!

You can help us to make the new website a success. If you have access to the Internet, come and see the site at [www.suffolkhumanists.org.uk](http://www.suffolkhumanists.org.uk). Take a look around, fill in the survey via the link on the home page, and register yourself as a user. Feel free to comment on news items or articles – start a discussion, that's what the site is there for. Also bear in mind that we want to add news items, articles and web links as often as possible to keep the site lively and fresh, so if you would like to



contribute an article, recommend an interesting web site, or start a new discussion, let us know – [mail@suffolkhumanists.org.uk](mailto:mail@suffolkhumanists.org.uk).

*Nathan Nelson*

If you're not on the internet and would like to see the website, you can either use a computer at any county library (ask the staff to show you how), or phone 01473 658828 for help.

The website has been built using a free content management system, hosting provided by Nathan, and inexpensive domain name registration and renewal—real value for money.

April 2006

## AGM, 8th March

The AGM was well attended. It was reported that we have 56 members, 6 joining in the last few weeks. The website's hosting has had to be moved, and we're taking the opportunity to rebuild the site. It will have greater functionality for lower cost (see p1). We're still affiliated to the BHA, the NSS, and SIFRE. There's a steady stream of requests for information through the website, by email, telephone and by post. We're listed in the phone book under 'H' for humanism, and in the Yellow pages. There's a link to our site on the BHA site and others.

Treasurer David Mitchell reported a net increase in our overall funds of £68.70 in the year. Subscription income has increased in line with membership and 20 members pay by standing order. He recommended that our subscription remains £5 per annum. Total donations were down but small donations continue to provide an important element of our income.

Margaret Nelson reported on ceremonies. She and Michael Imison, David Mitchell and Sophie Lovejoy provide ceremonies in Suffolk & N E Essex, and Yvonne Peacock has rejoined the team after a long absence since a near fatal car accident in 2001. The team's work attracts interest in Humanism in general and we have an unblemished record for good work. We're independent of the BHA's ceremonies network, though Michael also works with the BHA. We recently sent all the funeral directors and crematoria in our area a newsletter and have reprinted our information for clients. A significant proportion of enquiries come through the website, which is why we contributed a share of the cost of it last year. Michael reported that a funeral he'd conducted would be shown on the BBC's Heaven & Earth Show, probably on 19th March.

Margaret reported on PR and her education and public speaking engagements. A newspaper article in the Advertiser recently drew several enquiries. She's taking a break from Thought for the Day on Radio Suffolk, but has been doing them since 1995 and sometimes contributes to other programmes. She continues as a member of Suffolk's SACRE and has contributed to workshops on the new model RE syllabus. Michael and Margaret have contributed to Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource (SIFRE) forums. Margaret is a SIFRE tutor and was an adviser to the East of England Faiths Agency until last weekend, but has resigned. She visits Kesgrave High School twice a year for school conferences. Some of the students there were interviewed for the 'Why Atheism' DVD produced by Team Video Productions, which featured one of Margaret's funerals and a baby-naming. It was favourably reviewed in the Independent a week ago. Margaret responds to requests for information from journalists and others whenever asked.

Michael reported that one of his wedding ceremonies had been featured in Suffolk Bride & Groom magazine.

It was agreed to delete a clause from the constitution limiting the

Chairperson's term of office to 3 consecutive years, that the committee should meet 3 times a year, that the AGM shall be held before the 1st April, and that the group should adopt the following statement: "Suffolk Humanists (the Suffolk Humanist Group) endorses the work of the Suffolk Ceremonies Team, and expects all members of the team to be members of the group." It was agreed to change the frequency of meetings as follows, on 12 months trial: 2nd Wednesday of February, February, April (which should be the AGM, a month later than previously), June, September and November in Ipswich, and March, May and October in Colchester – dates to be arranged.

The following people were elected to the committee: Chairperson, Michael Imison; Vice-Chairperson, Marie Haworth; Secretary, Margaret Nelson; Treasurer, David Mitchell; Committee members, Yvonne Peacock and Derek Mason.

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### Financial Statement for the year 2005/2006

#### Income

Opening balance	533.67
Subscriptions	222.5
Donations	189.5
Sale of publications	10
Refreshments & raffles	95.4
Celebrants' contribution to website costs	30
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	1081.07

#### Expenditure

Postage & admin costs	123.44
Room hire	48.2
Stationery & printing	17.03
BHA affiliation	50
NSS subscription	22
SIFRE affiliation	40
Freethinker subscription	15
Website costs	76.38
Phone & conference calls	12.2
Travel & speakers' expenses	74.45
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	478.7

**Balance** 602.37

Balance at Co-op Bank at 9/3/2005 187.17

Credits not yet shown 415.2

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602.37

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Please ask for a full copy of the minutes if you're interested.



The 'happy human'  
- the international  
symbol of  
Humanism

The Newsletter of the  
Suffolk Humanist Group

## Suffolk Humanists

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*The Suffolk Humanist group was founded in 1991. We promote Humanism and provide Humanist fellowship for non-believers in Suffolk and North East Essex. We also provide speakers for schools and other organisations, and Humanist welcoming, wedding and funeral ceremonies.*

*We meet in Ipswich and Colchester. Sympathetic non-members are welcome, but by joining us you'll help us to raise awareness of Humanism and challenge the increasing influence of religion in public life, the arts and the media.*

For directions to meetings, or to offer or request a lift, please phone 01473 658828 or email us at the address above.

## Humanism—for the good life based on human feelings and thought

### Suffolk's new RE syllabus ready for approval

Suffolk County Council's Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) met on Friday 31st March to put the finishing touches to the new Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education in Suffolk. It will be presented to the county council's cabinet for approval on 6th June.

Humanist SACRE representative Margaret Nelson reports that Humanism will be included in the syllabus, as recommended by the Qualifications & Curriculum Authority's 2004 non-statutory national framework for RE. Her suggestions regarding the Suffolk syllabus were incorporated in the final draft, such as ensuring that 'Humanism' is spelt with a capital letter throughout – it might seem a trivial issue, but signifies that Humanism is a life stance, like Christianity, Hinduism, and the other religions. The SACRE also agreed to delete the phrase 'where appropriate' after references to the inclusion of 'a secular world view' in the guidelines on a breadth of study at various key stages. Suffolk Humanist committee members agreed with Margaret that the phrase could be used by some teachers to justify exclusion of 'a secular world view' if they deemed it 'inappropriate'. Fortunately, SACRE members agreed that it's appropriate to include a secular world view in RE.

### Sustainable Development—Hope or Hoax?

*(Continued from page 2)*

own civilisation. The latter must be done to avoid a sudden and catastrophic readjustment within a few generations if our current habits do not change. These changes aren't hypothetical, developing over geological timescales, but are with us now in the form of global warming, increasing sea levels and the end of easily acquired fossil fuel.

The final thrust of Prof. Pretty's talk was that for thousands of years we lived a hunter-gatherer or agricultural life that was low-impact and environment-friendly. In a few generations, we



have completely altered the physical and organisational way we live by grouping into highly co-dependent, highly industrialised mega-cities, with a massive move away from sustainable agriculture. It is clear from measurements and scientific modelling that this recent industrial revolution is having a major impact on the environment and on us. Prof. Pretty proposes a return, not to hunter-gatherer lifestyles, but to a radically different, environmentally aware co-existence with nature. His core message is that Nature doesn't need us, but we need Nature.

*Peter Davidson*

### Programme 2006/2007—mark the dates in your diary now!

**12th April 2006** in Room 1 at Castle Hill Community Centre, Highfield Road, Ipswich—What does it mean to be a Humanist?

**18th May 2006** in the Hexagonal Room at the Friends' Meeting House, 6 Church Street, Colchester—Why religion? An exploration of the religious instinct, led by Michael Imison.

**14th June 2006** in the Hall at Castle Hill Community Centre, Ipswich—A Radio Times quiz to test your memories of 'the olden days', devised by Marie Haworth.

**13th September 2006** in Room 1 at Castle Hill Community Centre, Ipswich—Activity to be announced, possibly a speaker.



**19th October 2006** in the Parnell Room, Friends' Meeting House, Colchester—Introducing children to Humanism.

**8th November 2006** in Room 1 at Castle Hill Community Centre, Ipswich—Activity to be announced, possibly a speaker.

**14th February 2007** in Room 1 at Castle Hill Community Centre, Ipswich—Activity to be announced.

**15th March 2007** in the Hexagonal Room at the Friends' Meeting House, Colchester—Activity to be announced.

**All meetings start at 7.30pm.** We welcome sympathetic guests and raffle prizes.