

Next
meeting, 13th
September,
Ipswich

Suffolk Humanist NEWS



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The Newsletter of the Suffolk Humanist Group

September 2006

Humanist ceremonies confusion

We've been providing humanist ceremonies, mainly funerals, in Suffolk and N E Essex since 1991, before the British Humanist Association introduced its accreditation scheme. There are now six of us in our team: Margaret Nelson, Marie Haworth, Yvonne Peacock, David Mitchell, Sophie Lovejoy, and Michael Imison. Marie's retired from doing ceremonies, though she occasionally provides help and support for other members, and I'm only available to do a few. Michael, the newest member of the team, is the only one who's still accredited by the BHA. The rest of us have either resigned our accreditation, allowed it to lapse, or never had it because of being trained here in Suffolk.

The BHA scheme was meant to ensure high standards and quality assurance but has failed, for several reasons. Too many people were accredited in haste to meet increasing demand, who weren't competent. The BHA's quality control involved peer appraisal, which wasn't popular, and few were actually checked. Trainees were accepted who had little interest in humanism and after taking advantage of the training, quit to work independently. The BHA struggled to pay for the costs of training and administration, so introduced a levy that all accredited officiants or celebrants were required to pay. Many felt it was too high, or that it was being used to subsidise the BHA's other activities, or that they got nothing in return—or all of these. One defector recently wrote, "I wouldn't want to belong to the BHA scheme again. I enjoy the freedom of independence and I don't really want to pay the BHA over a £1000 a year for nothing in return."

Nigel Collins from Moreton-in-Marsh, who co-ordinated BHA ceremonies as a volunteer when I started, supplied the following notes at a meeting in London on 3rd September: "... currently, in the following listed locations, those conducting Humanist funerals are exclusively or predominately independent officiants, no longer accredited by the BHA ... Now some 50 or more in number they include both those who still

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"Praying is like a rocking chair - it'll give you something to do, but it won't get you anywhere."

Gypsy Rose Lee

Success

Derek Mason

Q: How to succeed? A: Ask a toothless budgie. (The old ones aren't necessarily the best).

Success is the favourable outcome of something attempted and Henry Ford said the key was, "Never explain. Never apologise." That was all very well for Henry Ford, but welcome to our world of constantly explaining and apologising.

A friend from boyhood days, suffering from a dreadful illness, has for some time been trundling around in a motorised wheelchair fitted with drips, pumps, drains and filters. Always cheerful, always optimistic, his humbling definition of success was to waken in the morning to the delightful surprise of finding that he was

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Derek Mason

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Suffolk Humanist News

Obituary—Tom Blount



Tom Blount in 1942



... and more recently

'...he was a stickler for precision in punctuation, grammar and so on ...

he was "fussy" about things like split infinitives and using words in the wrong context.'

Thomas Arthur Blount was born in London. He wanted to be a meteorologist but his family couldn't afford a higher education, so when he left school during 'the slump' of 1929, he was lucky to get a job in insurance.

Tom met Margaret at a friend's twentieth birthday party. Until then, he'd said he didn't intend to marry, but they began to see each other every weekend. In 1941, Tom was called up, and realising he couldn't live without Margaret, he got a special licence and they were married the following February while he was on leave. Tom served in the Navy as a writer – a rating who kept all the ship's records. Offered a commission as a meteorologist, he declined, feeling he didn't want the responsibility if there were fatal consequences from getting a weather forecast wrong. Serving in Alexandria, he looked forward to being reunited with Margaret in 1945, but was sent to Scapa Flow instead. They set up home in Guildford in 1947, a year after demob.

Tom resumed work at the Phoenix insurance company. He was transferred to Prince's Street, Ipswich, at Christmas, 1947, when he and Margaret moved to Rushmere. Tom cycled to work. They bought a beach hut at Waldringfield before Jane and Caroline were born and had many family holidays there.

Tom was 'quite a sailor' on the Broads, or in a dinghy on the Deben. He enjoyed football, with an Ipswich season ticket for a while, when they cost only £15. He sang with Kesgrave choir, which led to singing lessons with Ursula Nettleship, a friend of Imogen Holst and Benjamin Britten.

The Blounts moved to Martlesham about twenty-nine years ago. When Tom retired, they joined Suffolk Naturalists, the RSPB and The Suffolk Trust for Nature Conservation, and went out with them every weekend. Tom became very knowledgeable about birds, butterflies, trees and insects, though he didn't know his wildflowers as well as Margaret did.

Tom and Margaret have been members of Suffolk Humanists longer than most. When I made errors in the newsletter, Tom always spotted them and gently corrected me; he was a stickler for precision in punctuation, grammar and so on. He was, his family agrees, 'fussy' about things like split infinitives and using words in the wrong context. So I've been conscious of Tom's high standards as I've written the newsletters, and when I wrote the script for his funeral.

Increasing frailty has prevented Tom and Margaret from attending meetings for some time. A couple of years ago, they moved to Jane and Vic's home at St. Cross South Elmham. Tom was seriously ill last year, but he recovered. His memory was poor, which meant he couldn't remember the things that used to frustrate him, so he simply let go and lived in the moment, finding serenity in his old age.

Tom died suddenly, at home, on 31st July, aged ninety-four. He was interred in the churchyard at St. George's, St. Cross South Elmham, just down the road from home. We had a humanist funeral in the church, where the churchwardens were very helpful.

Bye-bye Tom. I shall mind my apostrophes and try to avoid splitting my infinities. MN

Creationist scientist

"When God originally made the animals they were all herbivorous, then after the problems in the Garden of Eden, they started to eat each other.

During the flood God drew all the animals to the ark, including the dinosaurs which existed on earth at the same time as man."

Dr. Jonathan Swingler, Senior Research Fellow, School of Engineering Sciences at the University of Southampton, and a Creationist, quoted by Mary Wakefield in the Sunday Telegraph.

Success

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still alive. Recently the unsuccessful morning arrived, but it could hardly be called a failure.

Success for Humanists would be for everyone in the world to have the freedom to think for themselves. There would be chaos in the short term, but eventually the slaughter of war caused by vain politicians, the starvation of innocents caused by greedy dictators, and oppression by religion would be history. Maybe not, but it's worth a try.



The animals (including the dinosaurs) came in two by two.

September 2006

Humanist ceremonies confusion

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remain ordinary BHA members and others now regrettably lost to the BHA, probably for all time! N.E. England (Tyne-Tees), Hull (East Yorkshire), Burnley (Lancs.), Coventry & Warwickshire, North Cotswolds (Glos.), Banbury, Oxford, Reading, Wiltshire (incl. Swindon & Chippenham), Bristol, Dorset (incl. all the Bournemouth area), Cornwall, Suffolk, and East Kent. In several further locations independent humanist officiants co-exist in fairly equal numbers." In many cases, there was a lot of anger involved with these defections, as people felt they'd been unfairly treated. The BHA's Executive Director, Hanne Stinson, wrote a letter to funeral directors last year, promoting BHA ceremonies. It had the effect, in some places, of undermining the independents' credibility, though most are experienced, competent people.

In spite of this damaging situation, the BHA appears to have tried to avoid acknowledging the problem of the disappearing officiants. Ordinary members may not have been aware of it. Considering that ceremonies celebrants are the public face of humanism, this seems strange. However, an overwhelming majority of those present at the 2005 BHA AGM voted in favour of a motion, proposed by Simon Allen, calling on the BHA to set up a working party to investigate the resignations. The resulting Ceremonies Working Party consisted of Jane Wynne-Willson (author of the BHA booklet, *Funerals Without God*), Richard Patterson (an experienced officiant), and Toby Lowe, who came to it without any ceremonies experience. After a lot of hard work (a questionnaire, analysis, consultation, etc.) the report was published. Some of those who'd left the BHA scheme didn't respond, as they didn't feel they'd been asked the right questions. The BHA planned to discuss the CWP's report at a meeting of their accredited officiants, until Harry Stopes-Roe, a former BHA President, pointed out that the issue affected *all* BHA members, so the meeting must be open to all members. His point was accepted, hence the meeting on 3rd September.

I attended the meeting, as did Michael Imison, our Chair and team member. Michael became a member of the BHA's Board of Trustees at its AGM. I asked the other members of the team what they'd like me to say, and David Mitchell wrote, "I think the Suffolk

Ceremonies group could form a template for a kind of semi-independent federal set-up, perhaps able to use the BHA name under a franchise. The main problem is that even such a loose association could give the control freak tendency opportunities to manipulate the granting of such franchises in particular areas for their own ends. I think our system has worked well. Local people serving their local community through local funeral directors where there is mutual respect between all parties. In the final analysis, why would we be interested in opting for anything else?"

At the meeting, I got the opportunity to point out that the Suffolk Humanist group is "unique in its unified approach. To my knowledge no other humanist group works as we do, with no division between our activities – fellowship for members, ceremonies, SACRE, speaking and educational activities, networking with other organisations, and the promotion of humanism in the community. Over the last few years, the BHA seems to have been largely incapable of appreciating this and has undermined us, deliberately or otherwise, probably because those concerned didn't think to ask the right questions."

The meeting, which lasted five hours, dealt with a range of options to address the ceremonies problem, some sensible, some far-fetched. It was less fraught than I'd anticipated, but I'm not sure if we accomplished much. The situation seems just as confused to me. Hopefully, Michael (who was taking copious notes) might write a report for the next newsletter. Meanwhile, we'll carry on as we've been doing for the last few years, maintaining our unblemished record for good ceremonies. As I said at the meeting, our system works because we all know one another, trust one another, like one another, and have complete confidence in one another. As David wrote, why would we be interested in any other approach?

Suffolk group members should be aware that there are other humanist celebrants offering funerals and other ceremonies in our area. We can't vouch for the quality of their work, so to ensure that you get one of our team, please specify that you want a Suffolk Humanist Celebrant.

MN



Reluctant Nomad

When Suffolk Humanist Joan Matthews was living in Norfolk she joined a writing group. With the encouragement of her tutor she began to write about her fifteen house moves, from suburban Middlesex to the Cotswolds, from the seaside to a cathedral city, from rural Norfolk back to her Suffolk roots.

The resulting little book is a fascinating account of life in England from the 1930s to the present day, when Joan and her husband Ted have settled in Kesgrave. If anyone is interested, Joan would be happy to sell you a copy. Tel. 01473 635454, or speak to Joan at a meeting.

Joan Matthews





The 'happy human'
- the international
symbol of
Humanism

The Newsletter of the Suffolk
Humanist Group

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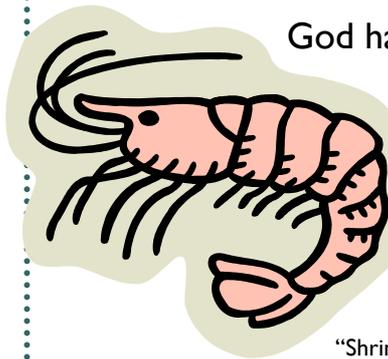
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The Suffolk Humanist group was founded in 1991. We promote Humanism and provide Humanist fellowship for non-believers in Suffolk and North East Essex. We meet in Ipswich and Colchester. Sympathetic non-members are welcome, but by joining us you'll help us to raise awareness of Humanism and challenge the increasing influence of religion in public life, the arts and the media.

Next Thought for the Day on BBC Suffolk (95.5, 95.9, 103.9 & 104.6 fm) at about 7.25 am on Wednesday 27th September.

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



God hates shrimp

The secular Humanist monthly 'Freethinker' drew our attention to the US website 'God Hates Shrimp', which challenges Christians who quote the Bible to justify their homophobia to consider all the other things the Bible says we ought to abominate, including shrimps. Leviticus 11: 9–12 is quite clear about this, apparently.

The site says,

"Shrimp, crab, lobster, clams, mussels, all these are an abomination before the Lord, just as gays are an abomination. Why stop at protesting gay marriage? Bring all of God's law unto the heathens and the sodomites. We call upon all Christians to join the crusade against Long John Silver's and Red Lobster. Yea, even Popeye's shall be cleansed. The name of Bubba shall be anathema. We must stop the unbelievers from destroying the sanctity of our restaurants."

Popeye's, Long John Silver's, Red Lobster and Bubba are seafood restaurants.

Programme — mark the dates in your diary now!

Due to a mix-up over the room, the quiz planned for 14th June in Ipswich has been postponed until 14th February in Ipswich.

13th September 2006 in Room 1 at Castle Hill Community Centre, Ipswich—**Guest speaker Richard Stock**, University Records Manager at the University of Essex, will talk about his work, with particular reference to Freedom of Information.

19th October 2006 in the Parnell Room, Friends' Meeting House, Colchester—Introducing children to Humanism, by member (and grandmother to ten) **Yvonne Peacock**.

8th November 2006 in Room 1 at Castle Hill Community Centre, Ipswich—Not the Antiques Roadshow. **Richard Andrews** has an antiques and collectables shop in Ipswich called 'Déjà Vu'. He and his wife Lynn will bring some items of interest, while members are encouraged to bring things that they'd like to know more about.



Peter Tatchell

Additional meeting—11th December in Room 1 at Castle Hill Community Centre, Ipswich—**Guest speaker Rachel Sloane** from

BBC Radio Suffolk, who'll talk about her work and invite us to talk about Humanism for a programme she's doing soon afterwards. Don't be shy, but we'll be recorded.



Rachel Sloane

14th February 2007 in Room 1 at Castle Hill Community Centre, Ipswich—Radio Times quiz devised by **Marie Haworth**, who says, "How's your memory for the 'olden days'? Bring yours along for all to share. If your memory's not that good, or you're not that old, bring a new favourite tape or CD to play."

15th March 2007 in the Hexagonal Room at the Friends' Meeting House, Colchester—**Guest speaker Peter Tatchell** will talk about his human rights work. We hope to have an especially good turnout for this meeting and will be publicising it in the Colchester area.

All meetings start at 7.30pm. We welcome sympathetic guests and raffle prizes. Refreshments are always provided.



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