

Suffolk Humanist News

SUFFOLK HUMANISTS—The Suffolk Humanist Group

November 2005

Guest Speakers

Our guest at the Ipswich meeting on Wednesday next, 9th November, will be Gary Battell, Countryside Officer with Suffolk County Council.

In February we hope to have Prof. Jules Pretty FRSA, FIBiol, Head of Department of Biological Sciences at Essex University, as our guest speaker in Colchester. Prof. Pretty has said he'd like to talk sustainable development—date to be announced.

Blog Off!

If you're not technologised and the Internet doesn't interest you at all, you probably won't know what a blog is—or care!

A blog is an online diary; a personal chronological log of thoughts published on a Web page; also called a Weblog. Blogging services include MSN Spaces, Blogger, LiveJournal, AOL Journals, WordPress and Movable Type—they're all free, which is why it's reckoned that a new blog is created every second. There are thousands of them, covering a huge number of subjects, written by people from all over the world. In some cases they can be politically subversive, used to report events in countries where the press isn't free and the truth can be very dangerous—anyone caught writing it can expect to be severely punished or killed if they're caught. In the run-up to the Iraq War the Baghdad Blogger's observations on what was actually going on interested many. Since then its author, a 31-year-old Iraqi architect known as 'Salam Pax', has become internationally famous, writing newspaper columns, making short films for the BBC, etc. Radio Free Nepal (<http://freenepal.blogspot.com/>) has been posting

reports of events in that country since King Gyandendra banned independent news broadcasts.

Many blogs are little better than adolescent ramblings written by teenage girls, but the Internet is full of junk—you've just got to keep an eye open for the good stuff, and there is lots of good stuff. Just depends what you're interested in.

Anyway (and no apologies for nepotism here) you could start by checking out my son Nathan's Big Trip Blog, which he's been writing since he started his round the world trip in January. As I write this, he's just arrived in Tahiti, having spend the last month in New Zealand. This is part of his last entry:

I'm in a list-writing mood, so here are some facts about New Zealand, now that I have been here for thirty-eight days:

There are more sheep than people in New Zealand.

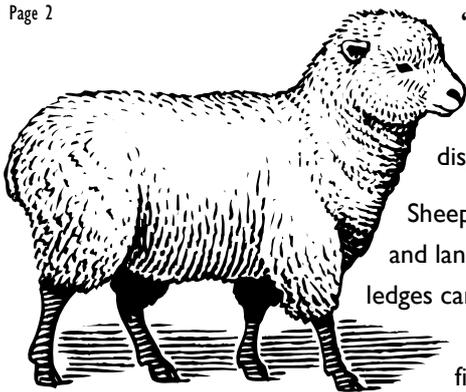
Sheep have been trained to sniff for drugs at airports, and are now used as seeing companions for the blind as well as in bomb

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'I don't accept the currently fashionable assertion that any view is automatically as worthy of respect as any equal and opposite view. My view is that the moon is made of rock. If someone says to me, "Well, you haven't been there, have you? You haven't seen for yourself, so my view that it is made of Norwegian beaver cheese is equally valid" - then I can't even be bothered to argue. There is such a thing as the burden of proof, and in the case of god, as in the case of the composition of the moon, this has shifted radically. God used to be the best explanation we've got, and we've now got vastly better ones. God is no longer an explanation of anything, but has instead become something that would itself need an insurmountable amount of explaining. So I don't think that being convinced that there is no god is as irrational or arrogant a point of view as belief that there is. I don't think the matter calls for even-handedness at all.'

Douglas Adams

1952-2001



“New Zealand has been mining cheese since 1867”

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disposal.

Sheep who fall off hills and land on isolated rock ledges can survive for years on the grass they find there—they are

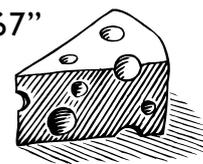
known as hermit sheep. Their wool grows so long that they cannot see any more and resemble giant balls of wool.

A sheep called Tundra in the South Island just off the West coast can talk, draw simple diagrams, and re-wire household electrical appliances.

Green spaces and squares in Christchurch today were used to grow potatoes to send to England after World War II.

New Zealand's less well-known food export after lamb and wool is cheese, which is extracted from mines near Rotorua.

New Zealand has been mining cheese since 1867. The cheese



is infused with gases common to that area produced by geothermal activity, imparting a distinct flavour and scent. It is most often packaged as The Laughing Cow, Dairylea, and Tesco Value Cheese Spread.

Maui rental campervans are predominantly hired by Germans with no sense of humour.

Wellington has a bitch of a one-way system.

Coin-operated showers at all campsites are all set to operate for precisely fifteen seconds too little.

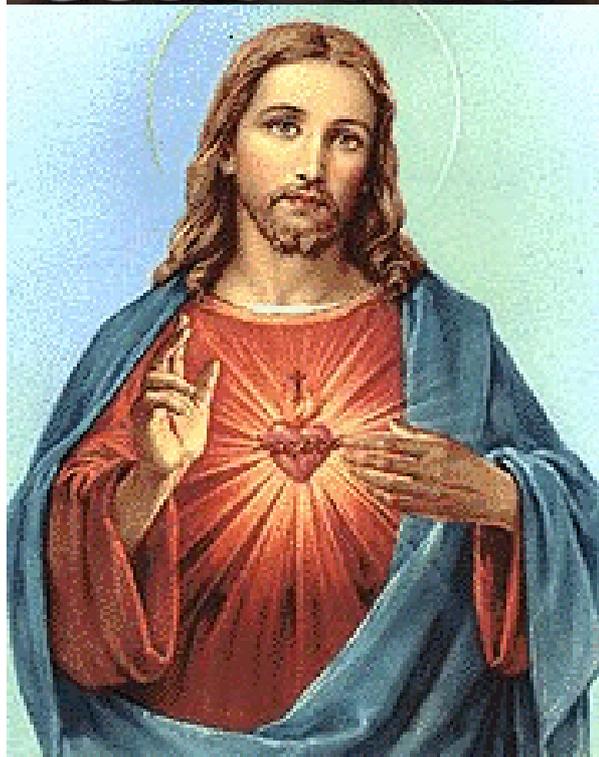
The Cosy Corner motor camp at Mount Maunganui has the nicest smelling toilets in New Zealand.

I can't provide proof of all of the facts above.

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<http://www.mybigtrip.info/blog/>

THE GOD



WHO WASN'T THERE

November 22nd—The God Movie and Fish 'n Chips

Nathan's not the only one who can't provide proof of some interesting 'facts'. Christians (and other religions) are useless at it. To hear about some of the contradictions, historical inaccuracies and thorough nastiness in fundamental Christian teachings, and enjoy a fish 'n chip supper (and it's not even on a Friday!), come to 5 Hadleigh Road, Elmsett at 6pm on Tuesday 22nd November for a viewing of 'The God Who Wasn't There', a documentary DVD by Brian Fleming. Among other things, Brian says 'Jesus Christ is likely a fictional character, a legend never based on a real human,' and 'Christianity is as obsessed with blood and violence now as it was in the 1st century.' I wasn't impressed by the 'dazzling motion graphics and sweeping soundtrack', but it's probably not fair to compare this personal project with the high standards we've come to expect from British TV documentaries. Still worth watching.

If you'd like to come, please phone 01473 658828 or email margaret@suffolkhumanists.org.uk ASAP (by 18th November at the latest) to leave orders for the 'Flying Fryer' fish 'n chip van. I'll provide drinks.

If you can't come on the 22nd, you can either buy your own copy (ask how) or borrow mine in return for a small donation to Suffolk Humanists.

Margaret

November 2005

That Stupid Boy!

I was born and raised in a Suffolk village. My mother was quite bright, having passed the 11-plus in the early '30s, but as with so many children of poorer families, free education was a distant dream if you couldn't find the money for the uniform and all the extras. On top of that there was an underlying belief in our little segment of society that grammar school 'wasn't for the likes of us'.

Things had changed a lot in the mid-'50s when I sat the 11-plus.

At that time my mum was cook at the primary school and the headmaster seemed to take great pleasure in telling her, before he told me, that 'he'd only just passed'.

You see, even some of the teachers didn't really believe that the Grammar School 'was for the likes of us'.

There was never really a uniform at the primary school. If we did any sport, or what passed for PE in those days, we generally did it in what we stood up in. You could put the total amount of clothing that most children needed for school in a large shoe box and labelling it was unheard of.

Not at the Grammar School you couldn't. When we got the list it seemed to go on forever. As well as enough sports kit to run the Olympics and World Cup combined, the winter and summer uniforms (which could only be bought at Harrods or the local tailor in Woodbridge) were enough to

keep the weavers of Worsted busy for months.

It was at this stage of my young life that I first heard of the dreaded Cash's name tapes and their wondrous ability to personalise one's garments.

Mum took me to the tailor's and asked to see some samples. A large card was produced on which were displayed about two dozen name tapes in different letterings. Some were woven in blue and some red and featured the names of several well known people from the time. We selected a design in red capitals which seemed to be the clearest and easiest to read.

Then came the moment that over fifty years later still makes me blush; in front of the rather superior sales assistant I blurted out, 'But mum, what if someone else has Henry Hall in his clothes?'

Perhaps the headmaster was right after all.

David Mitchell



Do animals have souls?



The subject came up during a recent visit to an Ipswich High School, where I was contributing to a Year 11 Religious Education Conference on 'Matters of Life & Death'; the main topics were abortion and euthanasia. I'd been asked to talk to three groups. The last one was especially lively.

One young man was a fundamentalist Christian, and judging from the reactions of his peers, well known for his persistence in trying to persuade everyone of the error of their ways. He was keen to tell me where I'd gone wrong. His fellows laughed – in a good-natured, 'there he goes again' sort of way – and apologised for him. Talking about euthanasia, I said that I'd taken several pets to the vet for euthanasia, and they'd all died peacefully. If I'd allowed



them to suffer, I said, I could have been accused of cruelty, so why should it be any different for human beings? If I was suffering with no hope of recovery, I'd like someone to put me out of my misery. Ah, said the young fundamentalist, but it's not the same thing – 'animals don't have souls'. I'm not sure why that should mean that I might have to suffer, while my dog doesn't. I avoided getting into a debate about who or what has or hasn't got a soul, or what a soul is; that wasn't what we were supposed to be talking about. I said that that was his opinion, there was no evidence for a 'soul', but I wasn't going to argue with him about it. He started to argue, just the same, until several of his peers interrupted. One chided him, saying that I wasn't attempting to convert him to atheism, and he shouldn't attempt to convert me. We moved on.

Margaret Nelson



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

What's happening?

Saturday 5th November at Conway Hall, London—Humanist Groups Annual Meeting (GRAM). Peter Davidson will represent us—hope to have a report in the next newsletter.

 7.30pm on Wednesday 9th November at Castle Hill Community Centre, Ipswich—meeting with guest speaker Gary Battell, Suffolk County Council Countryside Officer. Guests and raffle prizes welcome. Phone 01473 658828 for directions or to offer or ask for a lift.

16th November —Suffolk Humanist Ceremonies Team meeting, where we'll discuss the BHA's letter to funeral directors, reported as implying that they should only refer clients to the BHA for humanist funerals—a bit like saying that C of E clergy are the only people who can offer 'Christian' funerals. We'll also be planning our experimental humanist entertainment—more news next time.

22nd November—The God Movie in Elmsett—see p2.

My commitments as follows: 10th November—Suffolk County Council Standing Advisory Council on RE (SACRE) meeting in Ipswich where the agenda includes the new Agreed Syllabus. 24th November—Kesgrave High School's Year 10 Marriage Conference (again). 25th November—White Ribbon Breakfast (about domestic violence) at Martlesham Police HQ. 7th December—addressing Suffolk County Council staff at their HQ about Humanism. 24th-26th December—I shall be ignoring Xmas!

Is anyone interested in having a midwinter supper party at a restaurant in Ipswich? Would anyone like to organise one?

Contributions for the next newsletter to the address below by 19th December please.



Margaret

In the news...

"I hate the Pope. Wholeheartedly, gut-wrenchingly hate him. I hate him for sitting around in his white frock, luxuriating in the infinite wealth of the Vatican while casually denying condoms to the dying of Africa. I hate him for condemning the poorest of women to early death by childbirth. And I pretty much hate, by extension, the Roman Catholics whose devotion permits his tyranny to thrive...editors permitting, I am free not only to say so, but to admit that I hope to influence you. In other words, I admit to attempting to incite you to religious hatred of these people. But not, I fear, for much longer. The Racial and Religious Hatred Bill was flung back from the Lords last week; in its present form, cried Lord Hunt, it had 'gone too far' - no comic vicars for Rowan Atkinson, that kind of thing - so when it comes back before them next month, they want to see 'amendments'...Beliefs, be they political or religious, are a matter of choice, and if we may loathe not only the BNP but, by inextricable connection, anyone who chooses to join it, so I should be able not only to loathe the devil-bashers at my local church, but also to say so."

Carol Sarler, *The Observer*, 30/10/05

"Our solicitors are about to serve notice on Debenhams and Centros Miller Ltd, the developers for the Cattle Market project in Bury St Edmunds... Unless they withdraw unconditionally all their plans for redeveloping the Cattle Market site by the close of business on Friday, November 18, and vow publicly never to set foot in Bury St Edmunds again, we will have no choice but to summon divine vengeance upon them... On the feast day of St Edmund, November 20, there will be a denunciation, a cursing. Through prayer, the knights will summon the avenging saint. Once more, the ancient curse of St Edmund will be invoked to smite our enemies. And then, it will rest in God's hands.

Those hell-bent on wrecking the town may suffer insanity. They may suffer destruction of property, loss of fortune, extinction of line, drying up of the vital juices ... death. May the Lord God have mercy on their souls."

Alan Murdie, 'consultant & knight', quoted in *The Telegraph* (29/10/05) talking about the Order of the Knights of St Edmund's threat to curse the Cattle Market developers

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The Suffolk Humanist group is
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Association, the National Secular
Society, and the Suffolk Inter-Faith
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