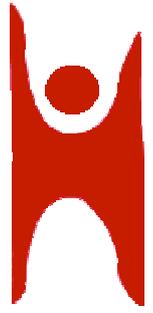


Subs
due
now

Suffolk Humanist NEWS



The Newsletter of the Suffolk Humanist Group

March 2006

“... whenever I told the studio audience that Linda was on the panel, there was a sigh, a ripple of pleasure that wafted up to the stage. They loved her. We loved her. We were nominated for best political comedy some years ago at a Channel 4 bash, and she appeared on screen, and announced that ‘Simon Hoggart was the best chairman we could possibly have’ – nicely timed pause – ‘in his price range’. I cherished that.

“We will miss her more than I can say. She was the funniest woman I’ve ever known, and one of the nicest people I have ever met. She was a humanist, so we can’t wish her in a better place. In any case, she could not have imagined a better place than on a stage or with her friends, or at home with her partner, Warren Lakin. But we can say thank you.”

*Simon Hoggart,
The Guardian*

8th March meeting: AGM & Five Minute Topics

Our meeting at 7.30 pm on Wednesday March 8th will be our AGM. Don’t let that put you off—we’ll try to keep the business part of the meeting as short as possible. The agenda is on the back page. We’re meeting in Ipswich. If you haven’t paid your subscription by cheque or standing order, it’s due now—still a very reasonable £5, though you can add a donation if you’d like to.

Linda Smith—comedian and Humanist

British Humanist Association President Linda Smith died on 27th February of ovarian cancer, aged 48. Linda was voted the funniest person on radio in a 2002 listeners’ poll. Many people will remember her contribution to BBC programmes like The News Quiz, where she never failed to delight with her quick wit and deadpan humour.

Linda was invited to become President of the BHA after being interviewed about her beliefs by Bel Mooney on Radio 4. The BHA had been looking for a new president to replace Claire Rayner, who’s had serious health problems over the last few years. Linda adopted her new role with enthusiasm, though she might have wondered what she’d let herself in for after her first sparsely-attended BHA AGM in 2004, where most attendees were well over 60. Suffolk Humanists’ Chairperson Michael Imison was there and reported: ‘She began by expressing her surprise at receiving the invitation. She had asked what had led to the offer of the presidency and was told it was a result of her speaking on the programme Devout Sceptics. She had had to play the tape back before she could remember what she had said but now supposes she has long been an “unconscious Humanist”. She was also pleased to be asked to follow Claire Rayner, whom she has long admired. She said her presence at the AGM was to ensure good attendance. Looking round the half-empty hall she added, “So that didn’t work then”. Clearly the association needed more members but she concluded bluntly, “You’re not going to get them with events like this”.’ Linda planned to organise a fund-raising gala for the BHA, perhaps in the West End, hoping to attract new young members. Her illness, which she kept secret from most people, prevented her from doing this, but Linda did promote Humanism whenever she got the opportunity. She’ll be missed.



www.suffolkhumanists.org.uk

In Brief

Meeting, Wednesday 8th March

We're meeting at Castle Hill Community Centre, Highfield Road, Ipswich. Please phone 01473 658828 for directions, or to offer or ask for a lift. We can't guarantee to be able to help, but we'll try. Bring your agenda with you (see back page). Raffle prizes and sympathetic guests are always welcome.

Committee

The current members of the committee (Michael Imison, Peter Davidson, Margaret Nelson, David Mitchell and Derek Mason) are willing to continue, if the membership wishes it, but we've been short of one committee member this last year, so will you consider being nominated?

Most committee meetings are by telephone conference call, for one hour, so travelling need not be a problem.

As you'll see from the agenda, we would like to change the frequency of committee meetings to 3 times a year, and to move the AGM back a month. We're also proposing to change the frequency of ordinary meetings. A couple of years ago we changed from monthly to bi-monthly meetings in Ipswich, after disappointing attendances. Now that we have some new members, we'd like to consider more frequent meetings. We've met in Colchester twice over the last few months, and would like to see if members will support more meetings there. The committee proposes the following changes: Meetings in Ipswich—the 2nd Wednesday of February, April (AGM), June, September and November. Meetings in Colchester (dates to be arranged) in March, May and October.

Ceremonies Team

The team has recently mailed a newsletter about their funerals service to all the funeral directors and crematoria in our area (most of Suffolk & N E Essex), as we've done for the last few years. We've had favourable responses from some recipients, and increased interest from funeral directors who rarely or never used our services before. Copies of our new funeral leaflet for clients will be available at the AGM.

Margaret Nelson is currently unavailable, for health reasons. Yvonne Peacock has begun doing funerals again, though on a limited basis. As we get busier, we'll need at least one addition to our team. Please let us

know if you're interested.

The BBC filmed a funeral conducted by Michael Imison last week. We'll let you know when the programme will be transmitted.

EEFA & SIFRE

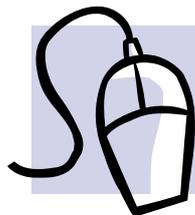
Margaret Nelson is an adviser to The East of England Faiths Agency (an offshoot of Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource).

EEFA has organised a conference on 'What the Faiths teach about the Environment' at Essex University on Sunday March 5th. Margaret Nelson will offer a Humanist perspective, supported by Michael Imison and Nathan Nelson.

David Mitchell will attend a SIFRE event in Bury St Edmunds on March 14th.

Suffolk Police IAG

Suffolk Police are proposing to set up an Independent Advisory Group to consult about diversity issues in the county, and asked how they should go about it. I replied, " ... most of us who are members of a secular organisation are concerned that, in general, religious organisations are being given special treatment as advisors and consultants to various statutory bodies and all levels of government, despite their representatives being unelected and often self-appointed. As atheists and agnostics, Humanists don't expect any special treatment by or from the police, only fairness, efficiency, courtesy and consideration. We think that everyone else should expect the same. Accordingly, I'd question the necessity for your advisory group, when education by suitably qualified people can help you to achieve your aim of providing the highest standard of service to the whole of Suffolk."



Website

If you've tried to access our website recently, you'll have found it's not there. There's only a holding page with our email address. This is because we must change our hosting arrangements and rebuild the site, so Nathan and I will take the opportunity to give it a make-over. You should soon see a better, brighter, more brilliant website than before.

March 2006

Letters

From south of the border

May I, as a new member, express my thanks to you all at Suffolk Humanists for making me so welcome in your group. You have been instrumental in helping me find a way out of what became unacceptable (after many years of trying to come to terms with it) , and failing in the end. I refer, of course, to the Christian Faith, with all its mysticism and reliance on supernatural dogma. I shall be more than happy to change the direction of my life's journey and become a Happy Humanist.

Kindest regards, John Baker (from Halstead)



Where's Lars?

Can anyone identify the Norwegian by the name of Lars Tordus? Every night, in every pub, just before closing time, the cry goes up, "Lars Tordus please," but he never appears. What's going on?

Derek Mason (from Ipswich)

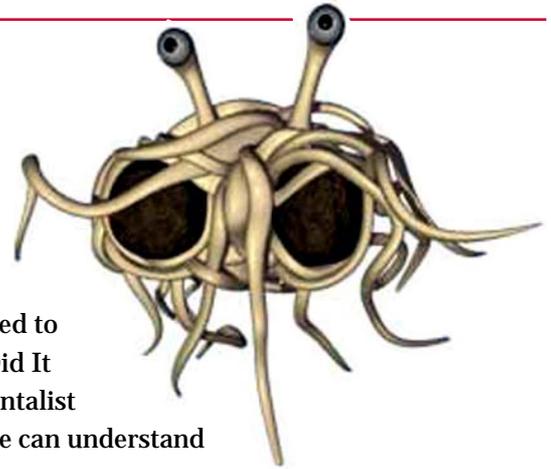
Derek says the senility is coming along nicely.

As some of you know, I've recently been in hospital for major surgery. Thank you to everyone who sent good wishes, flowers and offers of help. I'm coming along nicely too.

Margaret

Touched by His Noodly Appendage

American scientists and rationalists are fighting to prevent schoolchildren being taught Intelligent Design as scientific fact. We have a similar problem here, on a smaller scale, though British Universities report a worrying number of science students don't accept the theory of evolution, having been influenced by creationism. Advocates of Intelligent Design argue that life on earth is too complicated to have evolved but was the creation of an intelligent designer—the God Did It theory. They've been encouraged by President George Bush, a fundamentalist Christian, who said, "Both sides ought to be properly taught ... so people can understand what the debate is about..." (Source: *Washington Post*)



There's been a fight over the science syllabus in Kansas, where "concerned citizen" Bobby Henderson has employed a new tactic to challenge the creationists—ridicule. He wrote to his local school board as follows: "Let us remember that there are multiple theories of Intelligent Design. I and many others around the world are of the strong belief that the universe was created by a Flying Spaghetti Monster . It was He who created all that we see and all that we feel. We feel strongly that the overwhelming scientific evidence pointing towards evolutionary processes is nothing but a coincidence, put in place by Him. It is for this reason that I'm writing you today, to formally request that this alternative theory be taught in your schools, along with the other two theories. In fact, I will go so far as to say, if you do not agree to do this, we will be forced to proceed with legal action. I'm sure you see where we are coming from. If the Intelligent Design theory is not based on faith, but instead another scientific theory, as is claimed, then you must also allow our theory to be taught, as it is also based on science, not on faith."

Followers of the FSM are called Pastafarians. It might catch on over here among those who've been touched by His Noodly Appendage. (See illustration of the Supreme Being, resembling spaghetti with meatballs.)

www.venganza.org

"Scientific beliefs are supported by evidence, and they get results. Myths and faiths are not and do not."

Richard Dawkins—River out of Eden



The 'happy
human' - the
international
symbol of
Humanism

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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.

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

AGM Agenda—Wednesday 8th March 2006

If you haven't paid your annual subscription by cheque or standing order, please come prepared to pay a minimum of £5 at the beginning of the meeting—form enclosed.

- 1 Apologies.
- 2 Minutes of last AGM.
- 3 Matters arising.
- 4 Reports:
Chairperson
Secretary
Treasurer
Ceremonies
PR, speaking & education
- 5 Motions:
Proposed changes to the constitution (changes shown in italics).
(Chairperson's term of office)
Delete: "The Chair shall not serve for more than 3 consecutive years".
(Frequency of committee meetings) It shall meet at least once every 3 months and reasonable notice shall be given to committee members.
It shall meet 3 times a year.
(AGM) An AGM shall be held before the 1st April.
An AGM shall be held before the 1st May.
Proposal to adopt a statement supporting the work of the Ceremonies Team, as follows: "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."
- 6 Frequency of ordinary meetings (see p2).
- 7 Election of committee:
Chairperson
Vice-Chairperson
Secretary
Treasurer
2 committee members

AOB (Note: AOB may not be used to begin a discussion, only to raise items for addition to a future agenda or for points of information).

After the AGM—Five Minute Topics



Come prepared to start a brief discussion on a topical issue—bring press cuttings and ideas. The discussions may last longer than 5 minutes, depending on the time available.

As usual, there'll be a raffle—prizes welcome—and refreshments.