

Next
meeting:
11 December
in Ipswich

Suffolk Humanist NEWS

Suffolk Humanist Group Newsletter

December 2006

In The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, the mega-computer Deep Thought was asked the answer to 'Life! The Universe! Everything!' Deep Thought said that it would be 'tricky', but that he could answer the question – only he would, he said, have to 'think about it.'

It took Deep Thought 7½ million years, but the day of the Answer came, 'Though I don't think,' he said, 'that you're going to like it.'

The descendants of those who'd asked the Ultimate Question, who'd waited and trained all their lives for this portentous moment, were impatient, and said, 'We must know it! Now!'

'Alright,' said Deep Thought. 'The answer to the Great Question... Of Life, the Universe and Everything... is... Forty-two.'

Meet Rachel Sloane

Rachel is an award winning broadcaster (BBC Frank Gillard Gold Award 2003, Medical Journalist Association Radio Awards 1988 and 1989) who's presented every type of programme (news, current affairs, consumer, arts, medical, and phone-in) in her twenty five year career in commercial radio and BBC local radio. She presents the weekend breakfast shows on BBC Radio Suffolk. Suffolk Humanist Margaret Nelson occasionally reviews the Sunday papers with her.



Rachel is currently doing a series of features on her Sunday morning programme about the faiths in Suffolk. On 11th December, Rachel will come to meet Suffolk Humanists with her recording equipment, so she can include Humanists in her programme. She'll also tell us about her work.

It's possible that our meeting may also be filmed by Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource for a DVD for schools, but if the camera's there, just ignore it!

Faiths schools, no thanks

The BHA has provided the evidence that a majority of the British public is against public funding for faith schools*. In spite of this, the Government continues to encourage more. In Norwich, evangelist Christian millionaire Graham Dacre wants to take over the Heartease School, which has had problems, and turn it into an "academy" with a religious ethos. Similar "academies" have been teaching children "Intelligent Design" as part of the science syllabus. How long will it be before someone tries the same sort of thing in Suffolk?

If you agree that faith schools are a bad idea, please write to your MP and county councillor and, in due course, your prospective parliamentary candidates, and explain why they're divisive. For some useful arguments against them, see "Religious Schools: the case against" by the Humanist Philosophers Group—ask us for a copy @ £2 + P&P.

*64% opposed the idea of government funding for faith schools, ICM poll 2005; 80% believed all schools should be open to those of any religion or belief, MORI poll 2001; 80% opposed the expansion of faith schools, YouGov poll 2001.

www.suffolkhumanists.org.uk



Suffolk Humanist News

Humanism in the RE syllabus

The new Suffolk RE syllabus was launched at Endeavour House (the County Council HQ) on 19 October. Suffolk teachers will be expected to use it from September 2007.

It took a lot of hard work by the British Humanist Association's former Education Officer, Marilyn Mason, to ensure that the QCA (Qualifications & Curriculum Authority) recommended the inclusion of Humanism and secular life stances in RE syllabuses, which are locally determined. As a member of Suffolk's SACRE (Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education), I was fully involved with devising the new syllabus, and my comments and suggestions were all accepted.

Every local education authority has its SACRE. Ours is made up of councillors, representatives of religious organisations, teachers, the RE Advisor, and me. We work as a harmonious team, which is not always the case in other areas; some SACREs have resisted the co-option of Humanists, and others have been affected by hostility between members.

Now that we have our new syllabus, I propose that we should provide Suffolk teachers with some easily accessible resources on a new website. Most RE is taught by non-specialist teachers and the teams sometimes change from term to term. Many know nothing about Humanism. We need to make it as easy as possible for them to find what they need. I hope that the group will agree with me. The committee will begin discussing the idea next week.

MN

17 million Humanists?

The Suffolk Humanist group is affiliated to the British Humanist Association, which recently commissioned an Ipsos MORI poll about British attitudes towards religion and humanism, which has shown that 36% of people – equivalent to around 17 million adults – are in fact humanists in their basic outlook. They feel scientific and other evidence provides the best way to understand the universe (rather than feeling that religious beliefs are needed for

a "complete understanding"), believe that "right and wrong" can be explained by human nature alone, and does not necessarily require religious teachings, and base their judgments of right and wrong on "the effects on people and the consequences for society and the world".

A copy of the BHA press release has been sent to local media. For a copy of the report, please phone or email us.

10 Downing Street e-petition against faith schools

There is currently an online petition calling for the abolishment of faith schools on the 10 Downing Street website that reads: "We the undersigned petition the Prime Minister to Abolish all faith schools and prohibit the teaching of creationism and other religious mythology in all UK schools." You can sign at:

<http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/faithschools/>

A Suffolk Humanist got a speeding ticket the other week, and he didn't have the goat excuse to fall back on. The goat excuse? It was in a BBC news story:

A Swiss man caught speeding on a Canadian highway has blamed his actions on the absence of goats on the roads. He was caught driving at 100mph in a 60mph zone. A traffic officer's notes said the Swiss driver had said he was taking advantage "of the ability to go faster without risking hitting a goat". Canadian police spokesman Joel Doiron said he had never found a goat on the highways of eastern Ontario in his 20 years of service. "Nobody's ever used the lack of goats here as an excuse for speeding," he told the AFP news agency. "I've never been to Switzerland, but I guess there must be a lot of goats there," he said.

News

Suffolk Humanists on TV

David Mitchell did a biker's funeral with lots of bikers and a sidecar hearse on 14 October. It was shown on About Anglia. On 26 October Michael Imison was also on Anglia TV, on Late Edition, being interviewed about faith schools. I was *almost* on BBC1's The Politics Show on 5 November, in an item about faith schools, but they decided they didn't need me. The three studio guests, including Norwich MP Ian Gibson, weren't in favour of faith schools.

Yvonne Peacock

Yvonne, a member of our ceremonies team, recently had surgery for breast cancer. She was very relieved to learn that the operation was a success and she won't need further treatment. We wish her a speedy recovery.

In November 2004, Yvonne wrote about alternative midwinter festivities for this newsletter. Her grandchildren enjoy fireworks, a treasure hunt, a bonfire and lots of fun and games. Now her ideas have been included in a book about alternative Christmases—details next time.

One World Fortnight

Farlingaye High School, Woodbridge, had a One World Fortnight ending with a Faith & Reflection Day on 3 November, when I talked about "A Small World". The other speakers included a Jew, a Unitarian, a Buddhist, the Mayor of Woodbridge, John Gummer MP, a Hospice Chaplain, the Bishop of Dunwich, a Quaker, and the local Vicar, who said he agreed with everything I said!

Website

Our website continues to attract visitors from all over the UK and abroad. The most popular page is the one about "funeral etiquette", which has been viewed 1383 times. The registered users include people from the US and South Africa—welcome all!

Membership increase

Our membership has increased to 61—welcome to all the new people. Now, if all those who'd signed up as local website users were to join too, that would be even better! See the membership form with this newsletter.

Junk, or social history?

Richard Andrews of Déjà Vu is a compulsive collector of the things other people throw away. He and his wife Lynn brought some of them to our meeting on 8th November, and we were invited to bring along anything we'd like to talk about. A member who was expecting The Antiques Roadshow suggested it was "junk", but David Mitchell enjoyed the evening; "Much of it was very nostalgic because so many of the items were circa my childhood. A lot of people live by the rule 'if you haven't used it or looked at it for six months throw it out'. If we all did that there'd be no libraries or museums."

Richard collects domestic items, games and toys, from the first half of the 20th century. Among other things, he brought some Archie Andrews soap, cigarette cards, a collection of Picture Post magazines, and a 1949 Rupert Bear annual.



Merry Midwinter, or Bah Humbug?

Christmas isn't compulsory. You can enjoy the midwinter festival any way you like, or, like me, do you best to ignore the hoo-ha.

For thousands of years, in Europe, Scandinavia and around the Mediterranean, communities celebrated the midwinter solstice on 21st December with eating, drinking, and other fundamental pleasures. Nothing wrong with that. They weren't pestered by retailers' or Christians telling us we've forgotten "the real meaning of Christmas", which is the name they gave it when they decided to hijack the solstice festival in about the 4th century.

Whatever you do, wherever you are, have a pleasant Midwinter and a happy and healthy New Year.



The Happy
Human—
the international
symbol of Humanism

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 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.

The Suffolk Humanist Ceremonies Team has an unblemished record for high standards. We provide non-religious ceremonies for all occasions, including baby-namings, weddings, funerals and civic ceremonies. For more information, see the contact details above.

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

“At Cambridge University I was taught a laudable method of argument: you never personalize, but you have absolutely no respect for people's opinions. You are never rude to the person, but you can be savagely rude about what the person thinks. That seems to me a crucial distinction: You cannot ring-fence their ideas. The moment you say that any idea system is sacred, whether it's a religious belief system or a secular ideology, the moment you declare a set of ideas to be immune from criticism, satire, derision, or contempt, freedom of thought becomes impossible.”

Salman Rushdie

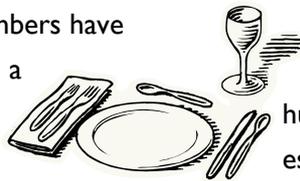
Programme — mark the dates in your diary now!

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.

Pub lunch — 14th or 21st January.

As there's quite a gap between meetings, a few members have shown an interest in a pub lunch. Suggest



The Seal at Woodbridge one Saturday or Sunday in January. As it gets busy, we'd have to be there early (around noon) to ensure we get a table. The food is good and it's reasonably priced. If you're interested, please let us know ASAP—01473 658828.

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.



Thought for the Day on BBC Radio Suffolk

3rd January & 2nd February 2007 at about 7.25 am — T4TD by Margaret Nelson during Mark Murphy's programme on BBC Radio Suffolk (95.5, 95.9, 103.9 & 104.6 fm). Listen online via the Radio Suffolk website — www.bbc.co.uk/suffolk/local_radio.

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