

**Next  
meeting:  
12 Sept in  
Ipswich**

# Suffolk Humanist **news**

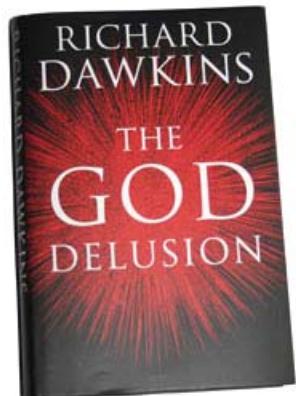
Suffolk Humanist Group Newsletter

September 2007

“... humanism is ... about the value of things human ... about human life; it requires no belief in an afterlife. It is about this world; it requires no belief in another world. It requires no commands from divinities, no promises of reward or threats of punishment, no myths and rituals, either to make sense of things or to serve as a prompt to an ethical life. It requires only open eyes, sympathy and the kindness it prompts, and reason.”  
A C Grayling

## Read any good books lately?

If not, there'll be some suggestions at the 12 September meeting in Ipswich (see diary, back page). Copies of the British Humanist Association's 'A Short Course in Humanism' will be available for the discounted price of £4, and a few copies of 'Against All Gods' by Humanist philosopher A C Grayling will be on sale at £7 (RRP £8.99).



## The next census

The increasing interest in Humanism we've experienced locally and nationally seems to be largely due to concern over religious organisations' influence in public life. Maybe we can do something about that. Andrew Trimby has written in the BHA website forum, "Census results have been used to influence government legislation. The 7 out of 10 who claimed to be Christian is now in serious doubt, also confirmed by subsequent polls including the Mori poll from November last year. I wonder if divisive faith schools would have been given so much governmental support, if Christian bishops would still be sitting in the House of Lords, or if there would still be the requirement by law for 'broadly Christian' school assemblies in all non faith schools, if the percentage that ticked 'no religion' were much higher? Close on 23% either ticked 'no religion' or didn't tick a box at all in the last census. The real percentage of people with no religion is likely to double this figure, potentially reducing the Christian percentage to less than 50%! The next census is still over three years away but I think the need to raise the profile of Humanism and to try to get people to tick the no religion or maybe tick a Humanist box if available, has never been so important." Watch this space!

## BHA groups meeting

The British Humanist Association is having a meeting for affiliated groups (GRAM) on Saturday 3 November at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London. We're entitled to send three representatives. The programme includes: practical solutions to developing your membership, special interest groups, and a forum 'to share your joys and woes'.

If anyone would like to represent Suffolk Humanists, please get in touch ASAP.

# Suffolk Humanist News

## Busy, busy, busy...

Some of us have been busy, promoting Humanism, educating people, or just enjoying ourselves.

### 13 June

The British Humanist Association's Education & Public Affairs Officer, Andrew Copson, came to our meeting in Ipswich, where he spoke about the organisation's education work.

### 2 July

The Ceremonies Team met in Ipswich. Amongst other things, we discussed correspondence with the CEO of the Society of Allied & Independent Funeral Directors, who's recommended that SAIF members should only refer clients to BHA-accredited celebrants. Since SAIF members in our area and elsewhere don't take much notice of this recommendation because they know their local celebrants best, we've rejected the suggestion that we might become associate members of SAIF as it wouldn't benefit us to do so.

### 5 July

Nathan Nelson (my son) and I attended a Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource tutor's meeting and buffet on 5 July at Suffolk College, followed by a Forum of Faiths on Community Cohesion, led by Andy Yacoub, Suffolk County Council's Diversity Officer. Nathan and I were joined by Suffolk Humanists' Vice-Chair, Richard Stock, whose report is on page 3. During a discussion someone made comments that suggested she didn't understand what secularism meant. Since then, I've suggested that SIFRE might have a Forum of Faiths on Living in a Secular Society, and I've been asked to lead one on 16 October—see the diary on the back page.

### 8 July

I contributed to a non-religious remembrance event for the families of patients who'd died the previous year at St Nicholas's Hospice, Bury St Edmunds, organised by the chaplain, Rev. Neil Bramble-Chapman, who'd realised that it wouldn't be appropriate to have a Christian ceremony because some families weren't religious. He chose readings from my suggestions and provided pleasant music.

### 9 July

On 9 July Nathan joined a team of SIFRE tutor's at Mildenhall College of Technology, where he spent the morning talking to groups of 6th formers. He says, "We covered death, ghosts, evolution, where Humanists meet, and whether (prompted by a student's question) religion was the opiate of the people."



Nathan Nelson

At lunchtime on the same day, I spoke to a group of Suffolk County Council staff and police at Endeavour House, the council HQ, during a SIFRE lunchtime session on 'equality issues' - diversity, ageism, etc. Several of those who attended asked for more information about Humanism at the end of the session.

After lunch, I had a useful, friendly meeting with Rev. David Flowers, the chaplain of St Elizabeth's Hospice in Ipswich, to talk about his provision of non-religious funerals for hospice families.

### 5 August

A pub lunch at the Seal in Woodbridge, where a small group of Humanists put the world to rights.

### 7 August

The group's scattered committee had a meeting using a phone conferencing system arranged by Community Network in London, a charity that provides a cheap service for charities and voluntary groups. It's an environmentally-friendly way to meet without leaving home.

### 12 August

I reviewed the Sunday papers on BBC Radio Suffolk with presenter Luke Deal. This meant getting to the studio by 6.30 am! On the way home I heard Luke say that a listener had phoned in to say something like, it

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was the most intelligent and enjoyable thing she'd heard on the radio for some time. If it was you, thanks!

## 20 August

I was on BBC Radio Suffolk again, this time to comment on the Humanist equivalent of godparents. The problem is, what to call them? 'Supporting adults', or 'guide parents' aren't very satisfactory names. Any ideas? I mentioned that Suffolk Humanist Celebrant Sophie Lovejoy's daughter Tess refers to her

'supporting adult' as her 'spare mummy', while Sophie calls her friends the children's 'ungodparents'.



## 1 September

A humanist Thought for the Day on BBC Radio Suffolk. I've been booked to do more Thoughts for the Day on 29 September, 3 November and 12 December—see diary on back page for frequencies. MN



## Achieving cohesion in Suffolk

*Richard Stock, Suffolk Humanists' Vice-Chair*

I attended the Forum of Faiths meeting on 5 July at Suffolk College. The purpose of the meeting was to offer local faith groups an opportunity to feed into the "creating a cohesive county" element of Suffolk Strategic Partnership's "Shaping the Future of Suffolk" community strategy. Our aim was to ensure the humanist perspective was reflected in the dialogue. The discussion centred on Suffolk in twenty years time. What are the issues that will face the county? What evidence is there that these issues (will) exist? What can we do to solve them?

The most striking element of the session was how irrelevant religion was to the whole discussion. This meant that a general consensus was reached on a variety of non-religious issues, particularly Suffolk's ageing population, housing and the built environment, and the role technology will play in changing how society organises and communicates. Religion was barely mentioned.

While it is noteworthy that religion should be playing such a small part in these discussions, the failure to look at the impact of religion on community cohesion was concerning. My suggestion that problems associated with religious division or segregation would become more serious with the growth of religious extremism was ignored. Although there was general agreement that promoting inter-faith understanding was a good thing, nobody seemed willing to discuss the possibility that the fruits of the current severe and very frightening divisions between religious groups across the world will impact on all parts of our society, regardless of faith or lack of it. The world grows ever smaller and Britain's involvement in political and military ventures overseas is already affecting us as creeping surveillance of the individual to monitor growing terrorist activity and the ever present security threat demonstrate. Suffolk will not be immune to what I fear is currently perceived as an "international" problem.

Humanists can play an important role in promoting cohesion within our county. We must celebrate Britain's secular outlook and ensure that our message goes out to the local community that secularism benefits everyone because it does not allow one belief system to dominate another. This message must be a guiding principle in the development of a cohesive county over the coming decades.

# Suffolk Humanist News

You can download **International Humanist News** from the Internet at [www.iheu.org/node/2758](http://www.iheu.org/node/2758). The current issue contains articles on violence against women, creationism and science, and the fight for a secular Europe, with stories about humanists in action in India and Uganda.

There hasn't been time to construct a separate Suffolk Humanists' **website for teachers** who'll start using the new county RE syllabus including Humanism and other secular world views from this term. However, we will try to add a page of information for teachers to the existing site and Andrew Copson, BHA Education Officer, told us in June that the BHA will have a teachers' website from next year.

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

The Suffolk Humanists website continues to attract hits from around the world. During the week ending 19 August there were almost 1200 pageloads and 370 visitors. The page about 'funeral etiquette' continues to attract the most hits for some reason—6700 at the time of writing. We try to add new stories as often as possible, so keep checking. If you've signed up as a user you can add comments or start a forum topic. Articles can be submitted by email. Don't be shy, write something!

**As interest in Humanism increases, especially in education, and demand for Humanist ceremonies continues to rise, we'll need more Humanist speakers and celebrants.**

We'll need people who can talk about Humanism or about a variety of topics from a Humanist perspective to groups and organisations, adapting their approach to suit their audience, and warm, perceptive, resourceful people who can provide grieving families with a dignified, relevant funeral for their loved ones.

Suffolk Humanists train our own celebrants and speakers. We have very high standards, so we're very fussy about selecting suitable trainees. If you think you've got what it takes, please ask for more information.

Best-selling author and leading biologist **Richard Dawkins** will present this year's **National Secular Society Irwin Prize for Secularist of the Year** on 20 October in London. Recently Richard Dawkins ripped into "alternative medicine" and psychic mumbo-jumbo in a Channel 4 two-part series, *Enemies of Reason*. Terry Sanderson, president of the National Secular Society, said: "We are thrilled that Richard Dawkins will be with us for this increasingly prestigious event."



## It's hot in Cambodia

Life in Cambodia is proving hot and frustrating for Nathan Nelson, who's had difficulties tracking down the elusive government officials he was supposed to be working with on a sustainable rural development project. His travelling companion Hannah, a recently qualified vet, is trying to educate local horse and cattle owners about animal welfare. They're living on the first floor of a house above a friendly Khmer family near Wat Bo, a Buddhist temple near the heart of Siem Reap, where they can walk into town through the monks' living area where lots of orange robes hang drying. There's a crocodile farm in the back garden; they "stir occasionally, splash into the water, or groan a deep, reverberating groan," in the middle of the night. You can read more in his blog, [www.spikydog.com/blog](http://www.spikydog.com/blog).

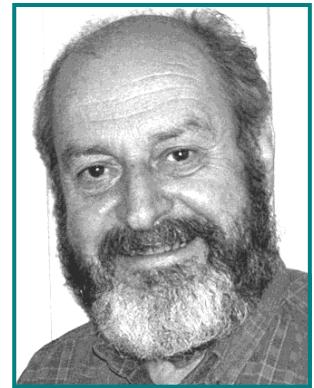
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## The British Humanist Association AGM

*Michael Imison*

(any views expressed are the writer's and not necessarily those of the BHA)

The Conway Hall, London, was less than half-full for the BHA AGM on July 7th. Generally, the mood was buoyant. Polly Toynbee's agreement to become our President, announced at the meeting before being released to the press, was welcomed. For the first time in years, there were more candidates than vacancies for the Board of Trustees (though one has since arisen) and a postal ballot was held. Approximately 35% of members voted; a reasonable turnout for an organisation of this sort. Robert Ashby was re-elected, and at the subsequent board meeting re-elected to the chair. Mary Porter, one of four newcomers to the board, was elected vice-chair.



Michael Imison

BHA Executive Director Hanne Stinson's reported rising income and membership, though pressures on staff time meant that it wasn't possible to organise a members' conference this year. However, there would be a one-day conference for groups, to be hosted by a local group.

Community Services Officer Maryam Namazie reported on the re-organisation of the Celebrants' Network with additional finance and a new autonomous Ceremonies Management committee, which was being elected by all BHA celebrants (it turned out later that over 60% of them voted). David William, a new trustee and an independent celebrant, felt the BHA should do more for humanist celebrants outside the network whose existence was ignored. Hanne said she was always willing to meet with any of the independents. Abe Algren felt the cost of an expanded network would be too much for the BHA.

Membership & Development Officer Jemma Hooper reported on an experiment in direct marketing sponsored by the Reed Group to find effective ways of both recruiting members and soliciting donations. There would be a GRAM (Groups Annual Meeting) in November this year.

Education & Public Affairs Officer Andrew Copson, who held an education workshop earlier in the day, reported on various campaigns and said he was being helped by more members.

The one piece of formal business was the passing of an amendment to the Memorandum and Articles to bring them into line with recent charities legislation, allowing trustees who serve charities in another capacity to receive payment for that activity. This means that I, as a trustee, can be paid for training celebrants.

The election for the new Ceremonies Management Committee followed the AGM. Unlike the Ceremonies Sub-Committee, which was made up of busy regional co-ordinators, this was open to all celebrants who can devote their energies, outside performing their own ceremonies, to setting policies for the network. Interestingly, the candidate who failed to get elected was the only one to want to see the celebrant body as a "separate entity" from the BHA. The six who were elected have a formidable range of experience and qualifications including in financial management, an area in which the old Board of Trustees felt themselves wanting. Their initial meeting was characterised by a willingness to form pro-active sub-committees to deal with the many issues that face them. Top of the list is selection of a Head of Ceremonies whose role will be rather different from that of the current Community Services Officer. Then there will be the appointment of three paid part-time Regional Development and Support Workers to pilot regions, who'll have the double task of trying to achieve a major increase in the number of ceremonies and ensuring that celebrants in their region feel they get value for their levy.

*Note: Michael is a BHA trustee and the only member of the Suffolk Ceremonies Team who's chosen to continue as a member of the BHA network; the rest of us remain independent of it.. MN*



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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**

## *Programme — mark the dates in your diary now!*

**11 September—SIFRE Open Evening** in Lecture Theatre 4, University Campus Suffolk, Ipswich, from 7-9pm. An opportunity for members, associates, affiliate groups and friends of Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource to hear about its work during the previous year. SIFRE needs numbers for a buffet by 4 September, so get in touch ASAP if you'd like to go.

**12 September—Recommended reading for Humanists.** Ipswich meeting in Room 1 at Castle Hill Community Centre, Highfield Road, Ipswich. A selection of books about Humanism or of interest to Humanists, with extracts of some of the good bits, recommended by Margaret Nelson. Friends and raffle prizes welcome. We've been asked to provide a books page on our website—maybe this will get it started. Anyone interested in becoming a reviewer? Copies of 'A Short Guide to Humanism', published by the BHA, will be on sale at a discounted price of £4.

**26 September—Freshers' Fair at University Campus Suffolk**, from noon– 4 pm. We're hoping to have a stall at this event organised by the Students' Union at the new university college in Ipswich. Volunteers please!

**2 October—Fish 'n chips & stimulating conversation** in Elmsett, from 6—9.30 pm. Phone 01473 658828 by the 28 September if you'd like to come and to order your meal from 'Ye Flying Fryer'.

**16 October—SIFRE Forum of Faiths on 'Living in a Secular Society'** led by Margaret Nelson. 7 pm in Lecture Theatre 4, University Campus Suffolk. Come and join in the discussion. Ask for directions or look for a map on our website.

**18 October—Introducing children to Humanism.** Suffolk Humanists in Colchester, in the Parnell Room at the Quaker Meeting House, Church Street. A talk by group member Yvonne Peacock, who wrote about her Humanist alternative to Christmas in November 2004, "... being grandma to ten (to date) has its responsibilities and being a miserable old git is not an option."

**14 November—The Burston Strike School.** Ipswich meeting at Castle Hill Community Centre. Group member David Mitchell plans to go to the Norfolk Strike School rally in September with his granddaughter. He's aiming for an audio-visual presentation.

**Humanist Thoughts for the Day on BBC Radio Suffolk; 1 October, 3 November & 12 December.** Listen at about 7.20 am on 103.9, 104.6, 95.5 or 95.9 fm, or via the BBC website. See our website for a link.

**Group meetings start at 7.30pm.** We welcome sympathetic guests. We have raffles in Ipswich but respect the Quakers' request that we don't 'gamble' in Colchester.

