

.....  
Mar 2014  
=====

## Get-togethers

.....  
May 2014  
=====

There's been a Suffolk Humanist on Suffolk County Council's SACRE (Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education) for years - John Aldam, who was a member of the BHA's Education Committee before we founded our group, was a SACRE member. When he wanted to quit, Margaret Nelson was co-opted in his place. She contributed to the development of the new Suffolk Religious Education syllabus that was introduced in September 2007. It includes Humanism and other secular life stances. Some may anticipate problems with teaching children about Humanism, for the following reasons:

- Many who teach RE are non-specialists, of whom some may be unfamiliar with Humanism.
- Unlike most religions, Humanists don't have rituals and festivals to base lessons on.
- Humanism may be falsely considered 'too difficult' for younger children.

We hope you'll find that it isn't difficult to teach children about Humanism, mainly because of its relevance to their lives and experience. [The British Humanist Association provides resources for teachers on its new schools website](#). For KS 3-5, [Team Video](#) provides an excellent CD-Rom/DVD resource pack called 'Why Atheism?'. If you need any help, or would like to suggest the sort of help you'd like to find here, please [get in touch](#). Of course, [we're completely opposed to the teaching of Creationism or "Intelligent Design" as science \(or even as religion\) in UK schools](#). For a comprehensive explanation of Darwinian evolution versus Creationism and ID, see ["We're all monkeys"](#).

.....  
Jun 2014  
=====

Use this form to get in touch with us, or if you prefer, e-mail [mail@suffolkhands.org.uk](mailto:mail@suffolkhands.org.uk). You can also phone us on 01394 383122 or 01473 658828. [contact-form to='margaret@suffolkhands.org.uk' subject='Enquiry from website %26#039;get in touch%26#039; page'] [contact-field label='Name' type='name' required='1'][/contact-field] [contact-field label='Email' type='email' required='1'][/contact-field] [contact-field label='Enquiry' type='textarea' required='1'][/contact-field] [contact-field label='Tick here if you would like to receive our newsletter and occasional mailings' type='checkbox'][/contact-field]

.....  
Feb 2014  
=====

However much we may be annoyed by the activities of religious organisations in the UK, at least we're free to express our opinions about religion and belief without fear of death, which isn't the case for many atheists worldwide. Bob Churchill of the [International Humanist & Ethical Union](#) was interviewed on BBC World News about [the Freethought Report](#), which showed the extent of discrimination against atheists worldwide. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ZnwHOuSm5M> The first report was published in 2012 on International Human Rights Day, 10 December. In his preface to the report, the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, said:

As a universal human right, freedom of religion or belief has a broad application. However, there seems to be little awareness that this right also provides a normative frame of reference for atheists, humanists and freethinkers and their convictions, practices and organizations. I am therefore delighted that for the first time the Humanist community has produced a global report on discrimination against atheists. I hope it will be given careful consideration by everyone concerned with freedom of religion or belief.

.....  
Jan 2014  
=====

The TV funeral of Coronation Street character Hayley Cropper on Friday 31st January may bring back memories for the thousands of Suffolk and N E Essex families who've arranged something similar for a loved one. Since 1991, [the Suffolk Humanist Ceremonies Team](#) – David Mitchell from Pettaugh, Sue Hewlett from Stutton and Sophie Lovejoy from Brightlingsea – have helped Margaret Nelson from Elmsett, near Hadleigh, to meet increasing demand for funerals free from religion. Hayley Cropper is played by actor [Julie Hesmondhalgh](#), a distinguished supporter of the British Humanist Association. The Suffolk Humanist Ceremonies team are members of the group, Suffolk Humanists and Secularists, which is affiliated to the BHA. Margaret says,

For thousands of viewers who've never been to a humanist funeral, Hayley's will show them what they might expect. No hymns, prayers or religious readings, but a dignified, personal celebration of a life, where mourners can share memories and their sense of loss. People often ask us if we knew the person who's died, because they recognise his or her character and personality in our description, but mostly we didn't. We aim to find out as much as we can by talking to the people who knew him or her. It's like a mirror, reflecting back a familiar portrait in words. Some relatives or friends contribute their own memories to the ceremony, though we take the precaution of asking them to write it all down in case they're overcome by emotion on the day. Families choose music that was special to their loved one, and some even wear clothes that reflect his or her personality. I've done a funeral for a keen camper where all his friends wore colourful Hawaiian shirts, and at a funeral for a young Goth, we all wore black and purple, her favourite colours. Every funeral we do is different, because everyone is different. Some of my friends used to think it was a very odd thing to want to do, but I've met some lovely people and heard some fascinating life stories over the years."



Suffolk celebrants - left to right: Margaret, David, Sophie and Sue.

[Click here for a clip from Coronation Street, where Roy is interviewed by the Humanist Celebrant.](#)  
[David will be on BBC Radio Suffolk with Rob Dunger on Sunday morning, to talk about funerals.](#)

.....  
Jan 2014  
=====

The Rationalist Association has much more stuff for you to read. No point in us just forwarding it - get over there and read it yourself. Better still, use their feed to follow them, and join the RA while you're at it. [Click here for more brain food.](#)

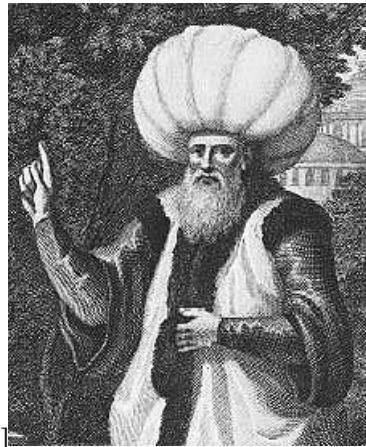
.....  
Jul 2014  
=====

[Copies of Alom Shaha's book have been distributed to every secondary school in the country, including Suffolk schools, by the BHA.](#)  
The book's blurb says,

This is a book for anyone who thinks about what they should believe and how they should live. It's for those who may need the facts and the ideas, as well as the courage, to break free from inherited beliefs. In this powerful narrative, Alom Shaha shows that it is possible to live a compassionate, fulfilling, and meaningful life without God.

To find out more, [click here to go to the author's website.](#)

.....  
Jul 2014



[caption id="attachment\_3095" align="alignright" width="224"] Harun-al-Rashid[/caption] The ISIS fighters in Iraq who've declared a new "caliphate" are ignoring history. Channel 4 News explains why it won't work - "... their vision of a medieval-style religious state is based on false view of early Islamic history, according to experts." [Click here to read more. Harun al-Rashid](#) (763 - 809) was Caliph in the 8th century. He was known as "the just", and his reign coincided with the Islamic "Golden Age". Shia Muslims detested him.

.....  
Apr 2014

**SUFFOLK HUMANIST NEWS** Spring 2014

**Humanists -- "They're very good at thatched cottages"**

This was from a local radio you just won't believe when they asked what they know about Humanists. One man said "they're people who like animals", another said "they're people who don't like animals", and another said "They believe in equality". Our reporter, Diane Johnson, liked the last definition, but none of the others had heard of it. She has no idea what we mean by that either.

Diane was interviewed on 998 March by BBC Radio Suffolk's Rob Chapman about her short video on Humanism. Diane is a Humanist and started by Stephen Fry, that interviewee, who says that most people are wrong, it seems they're normal. They give the question "What makes something 'normal'?" and then ask "What makes something 'abnormal'?" "How do we know what is true?", and then on the BHA website.

**AGM—Tuesday 8th April**

Notre Dame will be our AGM, where we have the usual election of a committee for the coming year and a chance to discuss the business of the BHA. We'll be holding a raffle and will welcome your ideas. For the time and place, see the diary on the last page.

After the business part of the meeting is over, there should be time to view one or two TED talks by Michael Shermer, the US science writer, and a presentation by John Collier from Population Matters at Café Scientifique.

**TEDx** is a non-profit organization devoted to spreading ideas, mostly as the form of short talks. It began in 1984 as a conference where Technology, Entertainment and Design converged, and today creates independent (and TEDx-organized) events around the world. Michael Shermer debunks pseudoscience, and explains why we believe them. He also publishes *Skeptic* magazine. For more, see [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com).

**Follow us on Twitter (@suffolkhands), Facebook ([www.facebook.com/suffolkhands](https://www.facebook.com/suffolkhands)), and on our website, [www.suffolkhands.org.uk](http://www.suffolkhands.org.uk).**

Our Spring newsletter is ready for you to download. The contents include the AGM agenda, news of the BHA's new videos, a report about John Collier from Population Matters at Café Scientifique, and the diary. Click here to download your copy - [2014 April SH&S News \(PDF\)](#).

.....  
Jul 2014

# #Great Blasphemies

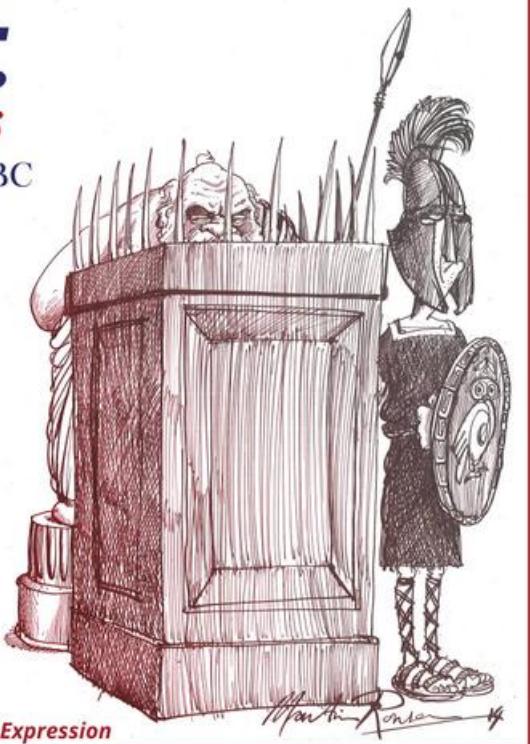
## The Trial of Socrates, 399 BC

The philosopher Socrates was prosecuted for blasphemy because he believed in his own 'inner god', or conscience, which he put above the established religion of Athens.

Today, many of us do just this, and live ethical lives according to reason and empathy.



#whc2014  
whc2014.org.uk  
www.humanism.org.uk  
*Freedom of Thought and Expression*



The BHA is sharing cartoons by [Martin Rowson](#) on the theme of blasphemy in the run-up to the [World Humanist Congress](#) next month. This one's about Socrates. Tickets for the congress, beginning on 7th August, are sold out. Look out for YouTube videos of the speakers.

.....  
Jul 2014

Though an increasing proportion of the UK population has no religious faith, or has a faith other than Christianity, children are still expected to participate in collective worship that is "broadly Christian" at their morning assemblies. Successive education ministers have said that they'd review the situation, yet done nothing about it. Now even [the National Governors' Association has said that a religious assembly every day should be scrapped](#) because they are "meaningless" in a multicultural society, and the Church of England's head of education, The Bishop of Oxford, the Rt Rev John Pritchard, agrees. The National Secular Society has written a petition calling for a change in the law, aimed at the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Minister for Education. They say,

Removing the legal requirement would in no way restrict the ability of schools to hold assemblies that address a whole range of topics, including faith and belief. Neither would it prevent schools with a religious ethos from holding acts of worship, but it would put that choice into the hands of head teachers. If you want a state education system with no compulsion to worship, please join us in calling for end to compulsory collective worship in schools.

[Please click here to sign it](#), and ask your friends to sign it.

.....  
Aug 2014

Like a church, but without God. Since the first Sunday Assembly in London last January, they've been springing up all over the place. Songs, readings and inspirational speakers are on offer to enthusiastic atheists and others. Does the idea appeal to you? Come and share your thoughts at our meeting on 9th September ([see calendar](#)). [The Sunday Assembly website](#) says,

The Sunday Assembly is a godless congregation that celebrates life. Our motto: live better, help often, wonder more. Our mission: to help everyone find and fulfil their full potential. Our vision: a godless congregation in every town, city and village that wants one.

Would you want one?

.....  
Sep 2014



Sunday assemblies—church for atheists?  
Brett and Debbie are not just any church, neither is Sanderson Jones. They are atheist. And they are quite happy to attend services where no one talks about religion or God. Brett says: "People are changing their minds, people are leaving their church, people are leaving their religion, and I'm quite happy to attend services where no one talks about religion or God. It's nice to go along and not feel like you're being judged or being told what to do."

People across the world have come to simple values, love, marriage and excellent music.  
We are a atheist congregation that celebrates.  
We have an awesome music team, Brett, Holly Ollie and Willow. Music.  
A range of services to suit all your needs, from the very young to the very present.  
An awesome coffee & coffee emporium is every home etc. a village that is divine.  
We are dedicated to helping everyone feel at home, and to be in the wider community, to make the most of the life that we have to offer. We have fun and joy and wonder and build communities and help others.

When I was asked to write this article, I said that they'd like me to write the first one. Humanists have principles. We're based that people are being made for an assembly in Norwich. If anyone is interested in more information, please visit our website at [www.suffolkhumanists.org](http://www.suffolkhumanists.org).  
Does the title suggest to you? Oh would you rather spend your Sunday doing something else? See the three on page 4 for one suggestion. We'll be telling about assemblies on one morning on Friday. My suggestion.  
As an atheist, I am the only person who can offer other atheists an alternative to church. Not on Earth philosophy alone do human values rise or "Temple to Heaven" costing 10 million. I haven't found any more than that.

Our latest newsletter is ready for you to download now. The content includes:

- Sunday Assemblies - church without God?
- "Persecuted" Christians, and a call for evidence from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC).
- Caliphates, not a good idea.
- What can the faiths contribute to caring?
- And much more.

[Click here to get your copy](#) (pdf).

.....  
Sep 2014  
=====

The Archbishop of Canterbury was interviewed while on a visit to Bristol, when he expressed his problem with doubt. [The Telegraph reports](#),

Britain's most senior churchman, who is effectively the leader of almost 80 million Anglicans worldwide, admitted that there are moments when he asks himself "Is there a God?" and "Where is God? He also said that Christians cannot explain why suffering exists in the world but that the answer was faith.

Apparently the archbishop relies on faith when dealing with these doubts.

It is not about feelings, it is about the fact that God is faithful and the extraordinary thing about being a Christian is that God is faithful when we are not.

If anyone can explain how God can be faithful, please tell us.

I was invited to comment about this on BBC Radio Suffolk this morning. [Click here to listen from the beginning](#), including listeners' comments. You have a week from today to hear the recording. *Margaret*

.....  
Sep 2014  
=====

Posters featuring quotes and reflections from prominent British humanists – much-loved novelists George Eliot and Virginia Woolf and philosophers Bertrand Russell and A C Grayling – will appear in 100 London Underground stations from 22 September until 5 October and in other UK cities in following weeks. [Click here to find out more and download copies](#).

.....  
Sep 2014  
=====

The problem with Secularism is that too many people don't know what it means. It's frequently used to describe a form of repressive atheism that's anti-religion. [The National Secular Society explains it succinctly](#):

Secularism is a principle that involves two basic propositions. The first is the strict separation of the state from religious institutions. The second is that people of different religions and beliefs are equal before the law.

The former nun, Karen Armstrong, who writes extensively about religion, is the latest to misuse the term in [an article for the Guardian](#), ['The myth of religious violence'](#). She's been taken to task in [an open letter by the philosopher Stephen Law](#). He wrote:

Your Guardian article presents a little history of 'secularism' on which it is revealed to be responsible for a long list of awful things. But pretty much all the awful things you describe have little if anything to do with Secularism. Ataturk's violent suppression of Islam was not Secular. Secularists would oppose that suppression. Locke's insistence that Catholics and Muslims should not be tolerated is not Secular. Secularists would oppose that too.

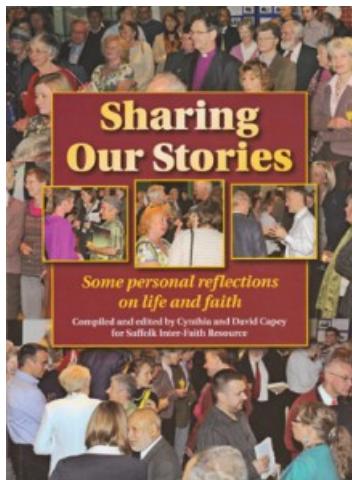
It would be good if Armstrong accepted the criticism, and acknowledged her ignorance. PS: [al-Razi of the Ex-Muslims Forum has also responded to Armstrong's essay](#), arguing that the secular movement is in fact responsible for the good things that religions now claim to be their intrinsic values, and says Armstrong's critique of secularism is a form of apologetics for fundamentalism and bigotry.

.....  
Nov 2014  
=====

This question is asked in an amazing half hour rant by Megan Fox, a Christian creationist Tea Party supporting home-schooling American "mom", made when she visited [the evolution exhibit in the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago](#). The sad thing is that she doesn't realise how wrong she is, that she's teaching her children a load of nonsense, and that she's making a total fool of herself online, since the video's gone viral. Comments have been disabled. We wonder why? Ms Fox wrote the following introduction to her video:

In November 2014, Megan Fox toured the Field Museum's "Evolving Earth" exhibit to audit it for bias. She found many examples of inconsistencies and the Field Museum's insistence that people support opinion as fact without proof. The Field Museum pushes certain theories as if they are absolute proven law when that is not how the scientific method works. She found enough bias to show that the people who put this exhibit together at the Field Museum pushed an agenda with quasi-religious overtones: the cult of "science" where the "scientists" are more like high priests pushing a religion instead of using the correct scientific method. Aside from having time machines, there is no way these people can be this certain about things they speculate happened millions of years ago before recorded history.

.....  
Dec 2014  
=====



We've been affiliated to the Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource (SIFRE) since its inception in 1991, at about the same time that our group was founded. Among other things, it's allowed us to contribute to educational activities in the county, in schools and other statutory and voluntary bodies, including local government. An off-shoot of SIFRE became the East of England Faiths Agency, which provides speakers for all of these organisations, and members of our group have been SIFRE and EEFA tutors. SIFRE has published three books about the various faiths and beliefs in our area, including Humanism, and a board game called Diversity, which is used to teach people about faiths and beliefs. This latest publication, Sharing our Stories, is a collection of personal reflections about life from a diverse group of people. Some will make you smile and some are very moving, such as an account of growing up as a Jew in Nazi Germany. Four members of Suffolk Humanists and Secularists have contributed their stories, including Derek Mason, whose typically succinct reflection was read at his funeral last year. We recommend that you put aside any prejudices you might have about religion and religious people, and buy the book. This is about how people live their lives, their experiences, their families and their communities. The book is £10, plus £3 P&P. [Click here to go to the SIFRE website and order it](#). If you prefer to borrow a copy, we will be buying one to add to our small library.

.....  
Dec 2014  
=====

Hardly a week goes by without someone displaying their ignorance in public about what secularism means. This is a simple explanation, for the benefit of anyone, like Baroness Warsi, Eric Pickles MP, the Pope, and [Donald Morrison](#) of the Free Church of Scotland (who

pities secularists), who doesn't know what he or she's talking about.  
The video was produced by [QualiaSoup](#) for the [National Secular Society](#).