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Jan 2015
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Our latest newsletter is ready for you to download. There are articles about our contribution to the annual Human Rights Day celebration based on Article 18 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, what group members thought about "British values", and differing views about atheism and anti-theism. [Click here to download it](#) (PDF). **Note:** if you're viewing this on the home page, the link won't work. Click on the heading above to go to the post.

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Feb 2015
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Stephen Fry was interviewed by Gay Byrne for [RTÉ One's 'The Meaning of Life'](#) today. Knowing that Fry is an atheist, Byrne asked him what he'd say if he was "confronted by God" at the Pearly Gates. Fry replied,

I'd say, bone cancer in children? What's that about? How dare you? How dare you create a world to which there is such misery that is not our fault. It's not right, it's utterly, utterly evil. Why should I respect a capricious, mean-minded, stupid God who creates a world that is so full of injustice and pain. That's what I would say.

Byrne, visibly taken aback, then said that Fry was unlikely to get in, if that was his response, to which Fry responded that he wouldn't

want to get in anyway.

[A poll commissioned by the Huffington Post UK shows that a significant proportion of the British population is likely to agree with Fry.](#) Reporting this, the American website Addicting Info says,

An eye-opening survey conducted in the UK reveals a truth many in the United States will find shocking. When asked if atheists are more or less moral than religious people, our allies across the pond favor atheists. The British feel those who identify as atheists are more likely to be good people. In fact, 12.5% of Britons believe atheists are more moral, while only 6% say atheists are less moral. Fewer than a quarter of Britons believe religion is a force for good. On the contrary, over half believe religion does more harm than good. Even 20% of Britons who describe themselves as 'very religious' are on record stating religion is harmful to society.

They end with a video showing [Sam Harris](#), author of 'The End of Faith', explaining why he thinks that the Christian God's "morality" is just the opposite. Stephen put it more succinctly, but it boils down to the same argument.

Image of God the Father by [Julius Schnorr](#), 1860.

Update, 2/2/2015:

Francesca Stavrakopoulou, Professor of Hebrew Bible and Ancient Religion at Exeter University, provides expert commentary on a [new BBC interactive documentary series. The 'Story of Now'](#) series, which uses the latest video technology to enable viewers to explore films and hear from 20 experts about some of the world's fundamental issues from religion, to politics, creation to consciousness. It includes a segment called, '**Why did we start believing in God and whose god should we believe in now?**'

[Francesca Stavrakopoulou's 2011 BBC series, 'The Bible's Buried Secrets'](#), upset traditionalists. She said, "[Eve, particularly in the Christian tradition, has been very unfairly maligned as the troublesome wife who brought about the Fall.](#)" Don't forget that the biblical

writers are male and it's a very male-dominated world. Women were second-class citizens, seen as property." She also criticised the version of history in Judaism repeated by Jewish tour guides in Jerusalem, saying that there was no archaeological evidence for most of their stories, including those about King David.

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Mar 2015
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Terry Pratchett, humanist author and advocate of assisted dying, died at home on Thursday 12th March "with his cat sleeping on his bed, surrounded by his family", said his publisher, Larry Finlay. Andrew Copson, [BHA](#) CEO, has written an obituary. [Click here to read it.](#)

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Apr 2015
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Our events calendar seems to have deleted itself, so apologies for not posting this sooner. We have a guest speaker on Tuesday 14th April. Richey Thompson from the [BHA](#) is coming to talk to us about faith schools. Around a third of all state-funded schools are schools 'with a religious character' – the legal term for 'faith' schools. This number has grown in recent years as successive governments have increased the influence of religious groups in the state-funded education system. The BHA aims for a secular state guaranteeing human rights, with no privilege or discrimination on grounds of religion or belief, and so we campaign against 'faith' schools, and for an inclusive, secular schools system, where children and young people of all different backgrounds and beliefs can learn with and from each other. The BHA challenges 'faith' schools' admissions, employment and curriculum policies, as well as the privileged processes by which new 'faith' schools continue to open. The meeting on Tuesday 14th April begins, as usual, at 7.30pm in the Henslow Room at [Arlington's Brasserie](#), 13 Museum Street, Ipswich, IP1 1HE. [Click here for a map.](#) Parking is in one of [the town's car parks](#). Family and friends welcome. [Click here for a report from the National Secular Society: Opinion poll shows big opposition to faith schools.](#)

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May 2015
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Our latest newsletter is ready, with reports of our activities over the past year and an invitation to our AGM and a pub lunch. Click on the heading and then [click here to download it](#) (PDF).

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May 2015
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Retired Suffolk Humanist Ceremonies celebrant Margaret Nelson was on BBC Radio Suffolk on Sunday morning, talking about DIY weddings. As [we no longer provide wedding celebrants](#), this is an option that couples might consider. [Click here to listen to the programme](#) - move the slider to 40 minutes in.

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May 2015
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Andrew Copson, CEO at the British Humanist Association, has been elected the International Humanist and Ethical Union's new President, following its General Assembly in Manila. [Click here to read more.](#)

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Jun 2015
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Anne O'Byrne and David Fisk will play at a free lunchtime concert in St Mary-le-Tower in Ipswich on 10th July. _

Friday 10th July 2015
1:00 PM to 2:00 PM

St Mary-le-Tower, Ipswich.

(by kind permission of the Vicar and Churchwardens)

Music to lift the spirits on a summer afternoon

A lunch time recital arranged in partnership with
Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource (SIFRE)

with



International Soprano
Anne O'Byrne



Accompanied by
David Fisk

Who will entrance you with music from around the world - including Irish folk songs, French melodie, German Lieder - and much-loved arias from the world of opera and musicals.

David will also play L'Isle Joyeuse by Claude Debussy

Light refreshments will be served from 12:20 PM

There will be a retiring collection
which will be shared equally between
the Church Choir Fund and SIFRE.

Dublin soprano **Anne O'Byrne** trained in Ireland and England before embarking on a career in opera and concert, working with many leading conductors – Sir Simon Rattle, Sir Andrew Davis, and producers – Jonathan Miller, Trevor Nunn – singing over twenty major roles, including Handel in Melbourne, Australia (Oriana in Amadigi), Mozart in Milan and the US (Pamina in The Magic Flute), Verdi in France (Gilda in Rigoletto), Puccini in England (Mimi in La Bohème), and Bizet in Ireland (Leila in The Pearlfishers). Anne has created roles in new operas for the Wexford and Covent Garden International Festivals, and has recorded for Irish television, the BBC, NPR, and as a guest soloist for Fox Business Channel. Since moving to Richmond Virginia, in 2002, Anne has performed for many East Coast choral societies and orchestras. She teaches voice, and was Artist in Residence at University of Richmond in March this year. Anne continues to travel for concerts and recitals – in Carnegie Hall and abroad. **David Fisk** is a local lad! He was born in Ipswich and went to school here before joining the Choir of St Paul's Cathedral where he became head chorister. He returned to Ipswich to complete his secondary education at Northgate High School. He studied the organ at St Mary-le Tower and was choir master at St Augustine's Church. He went on to do a degree in music at the University of Manchester and subsequently studied piano accompaniment and composition at the Royal Northern College of Music. Before David took up his present post he held similar posts with the Ulster Orchestra and with the Orchestra of St John's Smith Square. David and Anne are married and live in Richmond, Virginia USA, with their two children and a dog. **SUFFOLK INTER-FAITH RESOURCE**

- Encourages people of different faiths to meet, share their traditions and promote mutual understanding.
- Takes an active role in the inter-faith and multi-cultural process in Suffolk and East Anglia.
- Collects and produces study materials and makes them available for schools and other interested bodies.
- Provides a range of activities for the general public.
- Promotes research and the exploration of ideas.
- Liaises with national and international inter-faith organisations and networks.
- Is committed to equal opportunities and encourages people from different backgrounds to contribute their life experience and their scholarship.

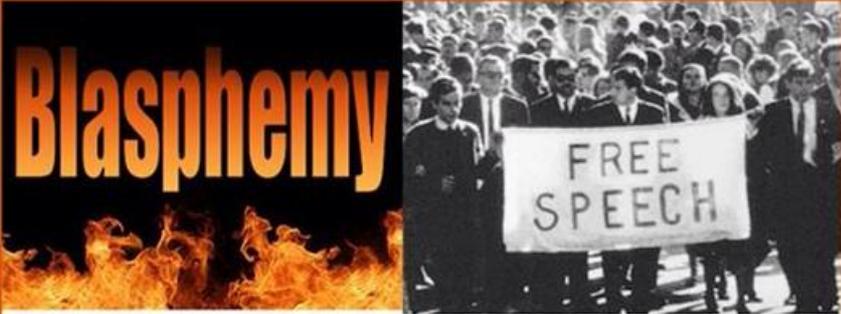
[The Suffolk Humanists & Secularists group is affiliated to SIFRE](#) and has been since both organisations were founded.

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Jul 2015

Short and sweet but with all the details about upcoming meetings, the first on Tuesday 14th July. Put the dates in your diary now. [Click here to download the newsletter now](#) (PDF).

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Aug 2015
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Blasphemy and Free Speech



The poster features two images: on the left, the word 'Blasphemy' in orange text above a fire; on the right, a crowd of people holding a 'FREE SPEECH' banner.

Andrew Copson, Chief Executive of the British Humanist Association will talk on "Blasphemy and Free Speech"

Thursday 20 August, 7:00pm
University of East Anglia, Lecture Theatre 1
Central Lecture Theatres, NR4 7TU



For travel advice, go to uea.ac.uk, and follow links "About Us" and "Visiting". Parking in Main Car Park is £1 from 2pm onwards. Bus from City is 25 and 26

Admission is free but donations will be welcomed. There will be an opportunity to meet Andrew at a reception afterwards

norfolkhumanists.com/
Norfolk Humanists on Facebook

meeting at UEA on Thursday 20th August. [Click here for more information.](#)

Norfolk Humanists are hosting a public

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Sep 2015



For a local perspective, Martin Simmons, Communications Officer at Suffolk Refugee Support in Ipswich, will give a talk entitled, 'Refugees: A Local Perspective on a Global Issue' tomorrow evening. It will be part of the Ipswich and District branch of the United Nations Association AGM on **Friday, 4 September 2015** at 7:30 pm in the Collinson Room at the Friends Meeting House, 39 Fonnereau Road, Ipswich IP1 3JH. All welcome. No charge. Free refreshments. Martin will give a brief overview of the global situation, followed by the first-hand testimony and then a more in-depth look at the local situation. He hopes to bring a Rwandan refugee to give his personal testimony. [For an explanation of what's happening in Syria, click here for an excellent graphic. There'll be a demonstration in support of the refugees on Saturday 12th September starting at noon from Marble Arch to Downing Street. If you're short of ideas to help, see these suggestions in The Independent.](#) *Photo of refugees staging a sit-in in front of Budapest's Keleti station on 2nd September.*

Oct 2015



Our latest newsletter is ready for you to download now. The contents include: Humanists for a Better World (H4BW), the Climate March on November 29th, a pair of successful Cancer Research fund-raisers, an account of life as an inner-city primary school head teacher, putting faces to the names of our committee, and the usual dates for your diary. [Click here to download the PDF.](#)

Oct 2015

Due to illness, we regret that [our ceremonies team](#) will be severely diminished for the foreseeable future. We may be able to help with a small number of funerals in the Ipswich or Colchester areas for families already known to us and we can advise anyone who wants to do a DIY funeral. It's advisable to contact us by [email](#) or phone us on 01473 658828 before making any arrangements.

Oct 2015

Our Chairperson Denis Johnston and his son Colin talked about their attitude to faith (they don't have any) with local BBC journalist Jon Wright. The resulting conversation is on [the BBC's Faith in the World Week website](#). [Click here to hear what they said](#), or some of it. The full interview can be heard [here](#). (From our home page, click on the title to access the links.)

Oct 2015



Every year we remind people why it's not good to get involved with the [Samaritan's Purse](#) scheme, Operation Christmas Child - search our website for previous posts. [An article in Humanist Life explains the reasons](#), or some of them. Apart from the homophobia and evangelism aimed at children, it's a huge waste of money. Those who work in aid organisations have an expression, SWEDOW, or "Stuff we don't want". Every time there's a disaster, people in need can expect a deluge of stuff collected by well-meaning people. It might include clothing, bedding, shoes and toiletries, or it might also include weird items such as a huge

mattress, sex toys, winter clothing sent to a tropical area (all these things have been sent to disaster areas), and all sorts of other junk. None of this is helpful. After the extra planes hauling useless stuff have got out of the way, aid organisations on the ground have to sort it all, wasting valuable time that could be spent dealing with more urgent organisation. Many of the items that are needed can be bought in the country receiving all this stuff - it's money that's needed, to buy it. Then there's the cost of transportation. Lorry and plane loads cost a lot to move from A to B. Organisations like [Oxfam](#) have had years of experience in taking essential items where they're needed, like medical supplies, water purification tablets and plastic sheeting. Nothing is wasted, as they know exactly what to take and where to take it. [Shelterbox](#) has a store of tents and other equipment in its warehouse, ready to fly out to wherever it's needed at a moment's notice. They'd welcome financial donations to support their work. Operation Christmas Children cultivate an emotional response in their donors. How wonderful to give Christmas presents to children who might otherwise not have any, they think. Many of these children live in societies where Christmas isn't celebrated, so they don't miss what they've never had. Their culture celebrates different festivals. The cost of distributing the boxes probably exceeds the value of most of the boxes. They may be filled with toys that could have been made by people in developing countries who are not much older than the children receiving them. The cost of the whole exercise would be far better spent on things that the recipient children really need, like vaccinations, education materials, and help with housing and healthcare. Children around the world will happily play with whatever they find - sand, water, tin cans, wood. Children in affluent countries might be indulged with expensive toys at Christmas, encouraged by clever advertising campaigns, blockbuster films and the latest crazes, but they don't really need them. Play isn't dependant on having shrink-wrapped toys with batteries. But that's another topic... The fundamental message about sending stuff overseas is - don't. Send money instead.

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Nov 2015
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Our November meeting, the day before Armistice Day, is about Atheism and War. Elisabeth Thomson will lead the discussion, using prose and poetry. You're welcome to bring your favourites. To start you off, here's Mark Twain's scathing indictment of war and the patriotism and religious fervour that's motivated too many. For details, see our events calendar. **The War Prayer** O Lord our God, help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot dead; help us to drown the thunder of the guns with the wounded, writhing in pain; help us to lay waste their humble homes with a hurricane of fire; help us to wring the hearts of their unoffending widows with unavailing grief; help us to turn them out roofless with their little children to wander unfriended through wastes of their desolated had in rags and hunger and thirst, sport of the sun-flames of summer and the icy winds of winter, broken in spirit, worn with travail, imploring Thee for the refuge of the grave and denied it — for our sakes, who adore Thee, Lord, blast their hopes, blight their lives, protract their bitter pilgrimage, make heavy their steps, water their way with their tears, stain the white snow with the blood of their wounded feet! We ask of one who is the Spirit of love and who is the ever-faithful refuge and friend of all that are sore beset, and seek His aid with humble and contrite hearts. Grant our prayer, O Lord, and Thine shall be the praise and honor and glory now and ever, Amen.

Mark Twain, c. 1880

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Dec 2015
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Hope you'll have a good time over the holiday. If you haven't already done so, please consider the refugees struggling in the cold. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) says they don't have enough money to help as many as they'd like. [Click here to go to their site.](#)