

# The Leicester Secularist

*Journal of Leicester Secular Society*

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No. 2

The Oldest Secular Society in the World  
Formed in 1851

## Your Input Needed

Please come to these two important meetings: **Sunday 16th Nov: The Modernisation Project consultation, with a presentation by our consultant, Marion Blockley; Sunday 23rd Nov: Annual General Meeting; reports; elections; view ahead.**

These meetings will help significantly in determining the future of the Hall and the Society and how effective we can be in promoting our objectives in Leicester and further afield.

## We have unique opportunities:

**For the Hall:** we not only have the prospect of £2m for much-needed modernisation but also the opportunity to emphasise our position within the heritage of Leicester: architectural, social, educational, political and intellectual (these will be crucial factors in gaining support and encouraging donors). Along the way we will benefit from increasing media exposure and commentary.

**In politics and social policy:** next year will see issues like faith schools, religious education, sex education and religious privilege break through into serious politics. The British Humanist Association ([www.humanism.org.uk](http://www.humanism.org.uk)) is involved with the remarkable Atheist Bus campaign

(which has provided many with an opportunity to speak out) and with the campaign against faith schools, which is gaining momentum through the broad-based ACCORD coalition and more professional support. The National Secular Society ([www.secularism.org.uk](http://www.secularism.org.uk)) continues its incisive challenging of faith schools and religious bias in legislation at all levels, national, European and in the United Nations.

Locally, the Church of England will be developing the site of Leicester Grammar School and may be attempting to gain control of more schools - and the Bishop may still have his Mercury pulpit column. Nevertheless, we are being heard more: in the press, on the radio and in a wide range of meetings. For the first time there will be a place for secularism and humanism in our school RE syllabus; and teachers will be getting a history of our Society in their resource packs.

Of course our objectives include enjoying life - so come along to meet other members in the bright Hall, newly decorated by our corps of volunteers.

Allan Hayes  
President



## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

**Sunday 16th November, 6.30pm** at Secular Hall - formal member **Consultation Meeting** on the modernisation project. Members only. The Development Group and our consultant, Marion Blockley, will report on their work. Members to discuss, make comments and suggestions about their hopes.

**Tuesday 18th November, 7.30pm** at The Park, 5-9 Hotel Street, Leicester - **Skeptics in the Pub:** David Allen Green: **The Skeptic in the Courtroom.** (Non-LSS)

**Thursday 20th November, 7.30pm** at Secular Hall - **IDEAS Group - Members only.** George Jelliss will be opening a discussion on **The Secular Conscience.**

**Sunday 23rd November, 6.30pm** at Secular Hall - **LSS AGM.** Secular Society members gather to hear reports from the Board and to elect Directors. New applicants may attend but not vote.

**Sunday 30th November, 6.30pm** at Secular Hall - Dr Shaaz Mahboob will talk about the recently formed organisation **Muslims for Secular Democracy.**

**Sunday 7th December, 6.30pm** at Secular Hall - John Edmondson on **Jesus, the First Humanist.** John is a psychiatrist with an interesting take on Jesus of Nazareth - of whom we have a bust on the front of the Hall.

**Sunday 14th December, 6.30pm** at Secular Hall - Bessie Hayes on **Changing Views on Infant Care Through the Ages** (with comments about religious morality in the nineteenth century). (Change of topic.)

**Thursday 18th December, 7.30pm** at Secular Hall - **IDEAS Group Winter Solstice General Knowledge Quiz** by Harry Perry. Prize of the Natural History Museum's 2009 Darwin Diary for the highest score!

## Heritage Open Days - What's It All About?

An edited version of a letter to the Society from Katja Condy, Heritage Open Days Manager

Sunday 14th September saw the last doors closing upon Heritage Open Days 2008. We hope you have since recovered and are able to look back with pride and satisfaction.

We know how much effort and work so many of you put into organising your events, and how great the expectations in the build-up to Heritage Open Days (HODs) can be. We hope that the visitor turn-out and feedback made it all worthwhile and rewarding for you.

For the HODs team, the summer months were as manic as ever. At the end, we counted 3,717 entries which is almost two hundred more than last year.

2008 was maybe the most successful media campaign in terms of publicity too. Since 2nd September, the Guardian and the Times featured us thrice, the Independent and Daily Telegraph twice and the Daily Mirror once. Among the national magazines featuring HODs were BBC Homes & Antiques, Prima, Heyday, Guiding and Scouts Magazines as well as Sky Magazine, which I suppose was our biggest coup as our event plus website was mentioned in Mariella Frostrup's column to circa seven million subscribers.

On the eve of Heritage Open Days we were featured on the BBC UK News website, on Friday we were on BBC2 Working Lunch and in the evening on Channel 5's Behind Hidden Doors.

From 8th September, all HODs events listed on our directory were also listed on the Daily Telegraph's online Family Activity Planner. Peter Bembridge, the Civic Trust's Managing Director, was interviewed by Chinese television on Friday 12th September and if it was broadcast as promised on Saturday lunchtime, HODs would have been exposed to a potential audience of 500 million.

On 3rd September, our website was temporarily brought down by 50,000 web users trying to browse the directory at the same time. This was triggered by an email to two million subscribers of moneysavingexpert.com – the credit crunch being positively felt for once.

Although we will have lost users during down times and our web analyser was partly disabled, the website still registered over 101,000 individuals successfully browsing the event directory between 17th August and 16th September, which is a fantastic result.

On behalf of the Civic Trust, Sarah Holloway, Katy Martin and I would like to say thank you for your support and commitment this year. It's been a great pleasure and inspiration to work with you.

## Hell Explained by a Chemistry Student

The following is an actual question given on a University of Washington chemistry mid-term exam:

Bonus Question: Is Hell exothermic (giving off heat) or endothermic (absorbing heat)?

Most of the students wrote proofs of their beliefs using Boyle's Law (gas cools when it expands and heats when it is compressed) or some variant. One student, however, wrote the following:

*First, we need to know how the mass of Hell is changing in time. So we need to know the rate at which souls are moving into Hell and the rate at which they are leaving. I think that we can safely assume that once a soul gets to Hell, it will not leave. Therefore, no souls are leaving. As for how many souls are entering Hell, let's look at the different religions that exist in the world today. Most of these religions state that if you are not a member of their religion, you will go to Hell. Since there is more than one of these religions and since people do not belong to more than one religion, we can project that all souls go to Hell. With birth and death rates as they are, we can expect the number of souls in Hell to increase exponentially.*

*Now, we look at the rate of change of the volume in Hell because Boyle's Law states that in order for the temperature and pressure in Hell to stay the same, the volume of Hell has to expand proportionately as souls are added.*

*This gives two possibilities:*

*1. If Hell is expanding at a slower rate than the rate at which souls enter Hell then the temperature and pressure in Hell will increase until all Hell breaks loose.*

*2. If Hell is expanding at a rate faster than the increase of souls in Hell then the temperature and pressure will drop until Hell freezes over. So which is it?*

*If we accept the postulate given to me by Teresa during my freshman year that, 'It will be a cold day in Hell before I sleep with you,' and take into account the fact that I slept with her last night, then number two must be true, and thus I am sure that Hell is exothermic and has already frozen over. The corollary of this theory is that since Hell has frozen over, it follows that it is not accepting any more souls and is, therefore, extinct ... leaving only Heaven, thereby proving the existence of a divine being which explains why, last night, Teresa kept shouting 'Oh my God.'*



## Agnosticism

Regarding Lyn Hurst's piece (*Secularist 1*, October) replying to my article on Agnosticism. There is a deliberate attempt on the part of 'No-God believers' to misrepresent Agnosticism. Let's try some formal logic:

**The unknowable --> I do not know = Agnostic**

**The unknowable --> I know = Faith: (There is/there is not/ a God.)**

Both the latter are equally irrational. Someone in the Roman Catholic church must have worked this out long ago, because Agnosticism is regarded by them as a much worse sin than No-God Atheism. Anyone who can believe the irrational (whose grasp on the reality of our condition is so suspect) is always open to conversion.

Wilf Gaunt

## Barking Mad

'Religion is like a big dog - comforting for its owner but terrifying for everyone else.'

Nick Doody at the stand up session at the Ex-Muslim Conference

## Noticed the New Hall Signage?

Selby Signs and Swisslog are pleased to assist the Leicester Secular Society and their renovation. Swisslog is a world class automation and robotics integrator. For more information visit [www.swisslog.com](http://www.swisslog.com).

The Board expresses its sincere thanks.

## Anthropomorphism and the Personal God

I got to thinking about this while watching the recent TV programme, 'God on Trial'. Set in Auschwitz-Birkenau, the drama involved Jewish prisoners discussing why God was allowing the Holocaust to happen and then deciding to put him on trial. I was intrigued once again by the way in which the doomed Jewish prisoners spoke of their God, and how believers generally speak of God, as if 'He' is a real person.

One has only to listen to a Thought for the Day, or prayers or hymns in a church service, to conjure up the Renaissance image of an elderly bearded chap reclining on a cloud while listening to prayers and dispensing judgements.

It is blatantly obvious that all this is an extreme case of *anthropomorphisation* – the attribution of human characteristics to a non-

human entity. We normally think of this as applying to the animal characters in a Walt Disney cartoon, to Thomas the Tank Engine or nowadays to the robots, cyborgs and androids in science fiction stories. We routinely do the same thing with pets, cars, ships, etc., and some psychologists believe there is an innate psychological trait that causes humans to do this. I was so curious that I tapped the term into my browser and from the list returned I thought that the *Catholic Encyclopaedia* promised to be the most entertaining.

You can imagine my surprise when I found that Catholics attack anthropomorphism almost as eagerly as I do myself: ... *anthropomorphism is the ascription to the Supreme Being of*



Naughty Michelangelo thought he knew what God looked like ...

*the form, organs, operations, and general characteristics of human nature. This tendency is strongly manifested in primitive heathen religions, in all forms of polytheism ... [and even] 'The Bible, especially the Old Testament, abounds in anthropomorphic expressions ... [God] speaks, breathes, sees, hears; He walks in the garden; He sits in the Heavens and the earth is his footstool.*

The entry continues ... *the justification of this language is found in the fact that truth can only be conveyed to men through the medium of human ideas and thoughts, and is to be expressed only in language suited to their comprehension.* Thus, it is necessary to speak of and with God as if he were a human being but only by way of analogy. This is because God is, 'in fact', pure spirit but as human minds cannot comprehend what that really means or, indeed, how one might refer in any meaningful sense to 'pure spirit' (duh), it is unavoidable that we have to speak as if 'he' were human. This metaphorical language gets around the problem of God being spiritual, invisible, ineffable, etc.

Now the article here recognises the danger of this sort of talk slipping over into a subversive agnosticism in which God is conceived of only as some kind of force or energy but this would be completely wrong because human nature requires us to conceive of God in personal terms so that we can exercise sentiments of reverence, obedience and trust towards him. If we deny the attributes of personality to God then the faithful would not be able to do all the things the Catholic Church routinely expects them to do.

Their stock in trade would be exposed as well past its sell-by date so they have to persist with the concept of a 'personal God'. What they are doing here is to say 'don't be silly, we know there isn't an old man sitting on a throne in the clouds, nobody has believed that since Copernicus first looked at the heavens through his telescope'. But they are

stuck with a holy book that says exactly that, just as did the pagan religions of Greece and Rome before them. The solution? To postulate, for the masses, an impossible coalescence of infinite being with everyday characteristics. The explanation, worthy of the wordy circumlocutions of Rowan Williams, pulls in obscure philosophic language in the hope that nobody will have the will to investigate further.

But our languages only have substantive meaning because of their connection with our experiences. Our daily linguistic exchanges only convey meaning because they can be checked against others' use of the same terms in the same way and by cross-references to real things in the real world. We know what it is to see, feel, hear, get angry, punish, etc., etc., because we experience those things and observe others doing the same. When we ascribe the same human characteristics to animals or cartoon characters or cars we are transferring the meanings by analogy to observable entities in a light-hearted way to give cause for a smile or to express affection.

We can transfer the terms to an imaginary entity like a ghost, fairy, or even angel, because all, in theory at least, have known imaginary physical characteristics. Can we do the same thing with an unobservable 'pure spirit' that human minds simply 'cannot comprehend' in any way at all? Quite simply, no, because there is nothing there to latch on to. Our language requires there be something to bear the attributes to which our language refers.

So when people talk about an entity that listens to prayers, intervenes in the world to do good things (but not bad, that's Satan's job - presumably another pure spirit?), talks, gets angry, shows love, has a son and rewards or punishes 'his children', then their words *only have meaning* in our normal language game. That is, these words can only refer to a person or thing believed to have all the usual organs, senses and emotions of a human being, whether real or fictitious, actual or imaginary. Divorced from that language game and the world to which it applies they are meaningless and no amount of metaphysical spin about the 'doctrine of analogy' can change that fact. The Christian churches cannot, therefore, succeed logically with an argument that an entity which is 'purely spiritual', infinite, unknowable, supernatural, outside the Universe, etc. etc. can be related to in a metaphorical sense as a person. That such a thing as 'pure spirit' might listen to and respond to a prayer, in the words of Bishop Tim Stevens (*Leicester Mercury* 4/10/08), for help in dealing with everyday concerns like 'an overflowing inbox', is absurd.

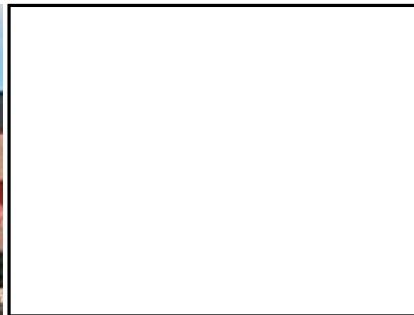
Harry Perry



### Can you spot the difference?



Thomas the Tank Engine



Pure Spirit

### In the LSS Library

One of the most curious books in our Library has the title *Corona: The Bright Side of the Universe* subtitled 'Studies in Optimism'. It is by F. T. Mott, F.R.G.S. and was published in 1888.

At first sight one might take it to be a scientific tract, especially since it has chapters with the titles 'Time and Space', 'Evolution' and 'The Conservation and Dissipation of Energy', but in fact it is a religious text, expressing the author's own strange metaphysical views. The text is also interspersed with original poetry by the author, which is why I catalogue it in the Literary section.

In the preface he maintains: 'the acceptance of all the discoveries of science can only strengthen and enlarge the soul's high trust in God'. However, according to his science 'Man is not a mammal' but 'a new class in the scale of animal life'.

He bases his theory on the concept of wave-forms. It was about that time that Heinrich Hertz was doing his experiments on electromagnetic waves.

'Here, then, is a theory of matter which does not imply the existence either of infinitely divisible particles, or of space-occupying forms built up of mathematical points. The resistances of which we are conscious are due to the interaction of force-waves which have no relation to space in its ordinary signification. The resistances are real, not merely ideal, but their cause is of the same nature as the conscious mind which perceives them, and this Force or Energy is the one only substance of which we have any knowledge whatever. Matter and Mind are two phases or conditions of it. Matter as a solid space-occupying substance distinct from force is a myth.'

'We are, all of us, concentrating waves of energy of vast complexity, systems of wave within wave more intricate than anything we can imagine except God, and our development depends largely upon the continual reception and accumulation of additional supplies of energy from the non-ego.' And there is much more of this type!

The reason for the inclusion of this book in our Library is that Mr Mott was a local man of some eminence at the time, involved with the development of the Public Library and Museums.

Searches on the web reveal that F. T. Mott is also the author of *The Benscliff Ballads and Other Poems*, 1899. A copy for sale (1) is signed by the author with the inscription to: 'H. M. Riley. A memento of good service at the Central Free Library. F. T. Mott, Chairman of Committee Sept 1899.' Apparently Mr Mott and his friends used to meet at Benscliffe in Charnwood Forest for 'High Talk'. He lived at Birstall Hill.

He also contributed reports to *Nature* on sightings in 1880 of an unusual meteor, or UFO! (2) and in 1883, while on holiday in Llandudno, of a Sea Serpent! (3)

He was also involved with the Leicester Lit & Phil Society which produced a work on the *Flora of Leicestershire including the cryptogams* in 1886.

As part of his Library duties he was also in 1893 on a BAAS Committee on Provincial Museums of the UK. (4)

(1) <http://tiny.cc/CxDD4>

(2) <http://tiny.cc/js3Uj>

(3) <http://tiny.cc/sF6Lq>

(4) <http://tiny.cc/evbdd>

Perhaps other members know more about this interesting man of Leicester?

George Jelliss

### NB. Two new books have been added to the Library:

1. Ned Newitt's pictorial *People's History of Leicester*
2. *Life Evolving* by Christian de Duve, about Molecules, Mind and Meaning.

These, and any of the other 1,000 books in the Library, can be borrowed by members free of charge. Just speak to an officer at an event or use the contact details on the back page to arrange it. A record of the borrowing will then be made in the register.

### Overcoming Alcoholism and Addiction

SOS - are you a former alcoholic or drug addict or someone who feels strongly on this issue and would be willing to launch a branch of SaveOurSelves in Secular Hall?

SaveOurSelves was started by non-religious people in the USA but is expanding globally. Its objective is to achieve sobriety without God. Religion plays a big role in the 12 steps to sobriety offered by Alcoholics Anonymous but some people looking to overcome addiction to alcohol, drugs or gambling aren't comfortable with AA's religious overtones. SOS is the secular response.

There is a wealth of information and support to draw upon so if you think you can help please check out the SOS website, [www.sossobriety.org](http://www.sossobriety.org), if you can, and/or get in touch with Harry Perry to explore the idea further. Contact details on back page.

### The Brights - A Naturalistic World View

What is a bright?

- A bright is a person who has a naturalistic worldview
- A bright's worldview is free of supernatural and mystical elements
- The ethics and actions of a bright are based on a naturalistic worldview

More at: <http://the-brights.net/>

### Behold - Sharia Justice Somali Style

Somalia is a country without the rule of law - apart from Sharia Law, that is. *The Independent* (2/11/08) reports that Aisha Ibrahim Duhulow (13) was stoned to death for the crime of 'adultery' in the coastal town of Kismayo last week.

#### Aisha had allowed herself to be raped by three men.

A crowd of 1,000 men looked on. One boy tried to stop the execution but was shot dead. Imagine the sequence of events: Aisha, a thirteen-year-old girl, is abducted and raped. In physical pain and mental turmoil she tells her parents of her ordeal. They report it to the Islamic Militia controlling the town, possibly expecting the culprits to be hunted down and punished. But no, the Militia applies Sharia Law and she is convicted of the crime of adultery. The sentence: death by stoning.

Can you imagine the bewilderment, the sense of betrayal and sheer terror that Aisha felt as it sank in that she was to be barbarically killed for being the victim of a horrendous crime? Sobbing in fear and disbelief, struggling, she is buried up to her neck. She wonders why Allah hasn't come to her rescue as the first stones strike and she slowly loses consciousness until her death some fifteen minutes later.

It is impossible to grasp the mentality of people who think that such barbarism can in any way represent justice. The power of religious conviction achieves many things but too often enlightenment is not one of them.

Harry

### What's the Hall For?

In the context of the current consultation on what we should be using the Hall for, the following extract from a poem composed for the opening of the Hall on 6th March 6th 1881 by James Thomson is enlightening. The full poem can be read on the Society website at [tinyurl.com/jthomson-bv](http://tinyurl.com/jthomson-bv)

At the 1881 opening it was read by Mrs Theodore Wright (not advertised with her own first name, as was the convention at that time).

...

*Some classes for instruction and delight;  
A club wherein our members may unite  
For cordial converse and such innocent pleasure  
As makes a blessing, not a curse, of leisure!  
Some social gatherings, where we trust to see  
Not the Man only but the Family,  
Where poetry and music, dance and song,  
Shall make the sweet hours blithely dance along.*

*Thus all our youths and maidens, girls and boys,  
Must link this place with all their purest joys,  
And growing in their turn husbands and wives,  
Fathers and mothers, may devote their lives,  
Not as an irksome task, but gracious duty,  
Full-fraught with light and sweetness, love and beauty.*

Frank Friedmann

(With thanks to Tom Leonard, biographer of Thomson.)

### The Credit Crisis

On 16<sup>th</sup> October the Ideas Group met for a discussion on 'The Credit Crisis' led by Dave Ray. His presentation gave us the opportunity to consider the present 'problems' from a longer historical perspective than the reporting in the popular media.

The members' discussion provided some interesting information on the present 'Global Financial Crisis' from the Marshall Plan of WWII to the unregulated 'bonus driven' decisions and actions of many of our contemporary financial institutions.

We considered the effects of complex, opaque, financial arrangements, money without any real foundations (Funny Money) and the growth of rapid electronic transfers, which appear to have led to instability and imbalances in the flows of cash and credit resources. The use of these by little-known entrepreneurs, investors, speculators, dealers, agents and fund managers operating for short-term personal and sectional gains in a largely unregulated global market left us with Dave Ray's thoughts 'that there were unregulated forces and interests beyond the national level that had a major influence on our domestic institutions and markets'.

We left with some pessimism on whether our present global leaders had any real long-term peaceful solutions.

Gerry Schofield

The Americans love their bumper stickers but this is a good one quoted in NSS Newline: 'Don't pray in my school and I won't think in your church!'

### IDEAS on Sex Review

Wilf Gaunt introduced a discussion on the subject of Sex Education and National Attitudes based in part on having spent 15 years working in the Netherlands. He recommended his intended audience to read before a short research paper by Jane Lewis and Trudie Knijn entitled *A Comparison of English and Dutch Sex Education in the Class Room* to be found by typing the title into Google. The paper notes that in the last quarter of the twentieth century the Dutch halved their teenage pregnancy rate to 4.1 per 1000 whilst the British rate remained at 40 per 1000. Wilf has spent 15 years working in the Netherlands and noted that in Netherlands' families it is regarded as an important responsibility to talk openly about sex and sexuality with children. In schools the topic is treated openly and in a common sense way together with subjects like cycle maintenance as part of Education for Day to Day Living. This contributes to cultural openness and improved sexual health among young people whilst in the UK we tend to mistake openness for permissiveness.

In the Netherlands politicians tended to pass the issue of sex education over to professional sex educators who are charged with developing programmes and building consensus.

Both Biology and Personal and Social Education are covered with nationally set attainment targets. Wilf distributed copies of his book *The Heterodoxies*. The presentation led to a serious and interesting discussion with most present contributing constructively to what clearly had been a very worthwhile and thought-provoking meeting.

Frank Crowhurst



### Confucius

On Sunday, 19<sup>th</sup> October, we enjoyed a presentation on the philosophy of Confucius by Professor Grayson, a Methodist minister who has worked in South Korea.

We learned that Confucius was a professional Chinese philosopher who lived around the turn of the sixth and fifth

centuries BCE; that East Asian philosophy is based on the community; and that it tends to be political and addressed to the ruler (shades of Machiavelli). Their philosophies subordinate the individual to the group, and lay great emphasis on loyalty.

Confucius defined five relationships and put them into a hierarchical order: parent and child; husband and wife; siblings and friends; and ruler and ruled. Emphasis was placed on social stability, with a further hierarchy of scholars, farmers, merchants, and soldiers.

His philosophy was aimed at good governance: pointing out the need for responsibility, benevolence and compassion. It was aimed at the practical realities of life: requiring no metaphysical intervention.

The political standpoint of the philosophy was radical: being against feudalism, and promoting the concept of an enfranchised meritocracy. Thus, a scholarship entrance exam system became the route for entry to the Chinese civil service.

Apart from the recent diversion into Communism, Confucianism has been the guiding philosophy of China ever since.

De Leerling

## The Northern Lights

Siobhan Logan gave a fascinating presentation on the Aurora Borealis to over twenty members of the Society on 2nd November, covering both the science and the mythology.

Apart from amazing slides Siobhan shared some of her poetry with us including this piece on the Northern Lights:

### **Fire-bridge to Sky-shore**

*If you could put your feet upon pure light  
kick away the earth for a path of sky  
walk the Trembling Roadway  
called Bifrost, bridge of green fire  
shafted with rails and struts of shine;  
if you could swing out dizzy  
on ropes of colour, swaying free  
hear yourself out there in the silence  
gulp air charged with icy brilliance  
smell frost-needles fastening hair;  
if you could lean down and stare  
at far cities mapped in neon  
old Midgard, land of men  
the lock of nine worlds now ajar  
to warrior gods, spiralling valkryies;  
if you could go bodily into air  
without suit or shield or charm  
grazing an ionosphere ablaze  
with burning colour, oxygen green  
nitrogen blue, a violet belch of gas;  
if you could go mouth open, eyes  
blind with so much vision  
star hunter, spirit hiker, sky wight  
you would be beyond our kind  
ecstatic, dream-bound or dead.*

© Siobhan Logan (www.siobhanlogan.co.uk)



George Jelliss

## IDEAS Group Thursday 20th November

The next IDEAS Group will be held at 7.30pm on Thursday 20th November at Secular Hall.

George Jelliss will once again get the ball rolling with a review of *The Secular Conscience* authored by Austin Dacey and recently published by Prometheus.

The *New Humanist* review (Sept/Oct 2008) summarised the book as asking why secular liberals remain silent in the face of the outrageous consequences of extremist religious activity? I'm not sure where this assertion comes from but the book apparently exposes it as the 'Liberty Fallacy'. Sounds like the Francis Ridley Lecture Room could be the right room for an argument at 7.30pm on Thursday 20th November. Come along and join in.

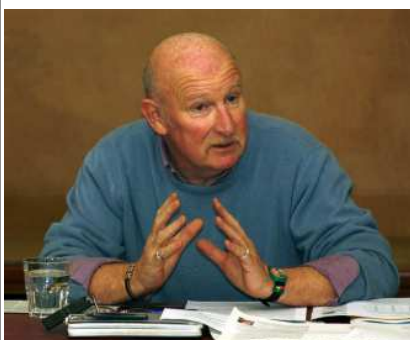
## Ever wondered why Christians are so alike?



From Grant Denkinson and Sanji Hopkins

## 'One Leicester' So Why Segregate Our Schools?

Peter Flack, spokesperson for the NUT, addressed the Society on 26th October on how the government's academies programme amounts to the privatisation of education in England and a radical increase in the number of divisive faith schools.



His talk explained how this fitted in with a section of the Lisbon Treaty that redesignated public education as just 'a matter of general interest'. Religious bodies among others are being gifted huge sums of public money to take over education provision. In Leicester the Council

has now declared its aim of creating a further three academies with an assortment of sponsors. It seems these would serve the outer social housing estates. The Council was providing no arguments for this, as the evidence increasingly showed academies were no panacea for the problems in state schooling. Could it be due to the Council's desire to get low performing areas out of its statistics, or was it all about gaining brownie points with the government that could be cashed in on some other project? The new academy sponsors might include the universities but the fear of further religious involvement was very real. In the midst of

the current 'One Leicester' branding campaign by the City Council one has to ask how this can possibly fit with promoting divisive religious schooling. It doesn't, of course.

In its determination to privatise state education further the government is now waiving the earlier requirements for sponsors to stomp up a small part of the capital cost and soft-peddalling on reports that fair admissions guidance is being ignored. In respect of the Samworth Academy on Saffron Road the local church has been replaced with another, St Christopher's, actually in the school itself and there was no evidence that the CofE had even paid for that from its own funds! Not that they were short - they had sold the site of their redundant church to developers - a site which had originally been gifted to the church by the Council when the Saffron estate was built! Why didn't the Council get some cash back?

The audience got a picture of a government playing fast and loose with taxpayers' money to the advantage of private organisations and religious bodies that were entirely outside public scrutiny or control. They had no obligation to publish academic or financial performance and were not subject to the Freedom of Information Act. Not even the *Leicester Mercury* had been able to prise information from them!

Mr Flack asked the Society to consider affiliating to the Anti-Academies Alliance and announced an open meeting of the Leicester Education Forum, with a speaker from Sinfin School in Derby (where they are battling against becoming an academy) to be held at 7pm on Wednesday 19th November at the Adult Education Centre, Wellington Street.

### Trespass Charge Peace Protesters Found Not Guilty

Four peace protesters have won a court victory after defending themselves before magistrates.

The four members of peace movement Leicester Arrow were among ten defendants in a five-day court case at Derby Magistrates' Court.

They were charged with aggravated trespass after chaining themselves to concrete blocks outside the Rolls Royce Raynesway factory, in Derbyshire, on 28th April this year. Eight of the ten were found not guilty by magistrates because they were not technically trespassing.

However, two protesters – one from London and one from Staffordshire – were found guilty. They were given community service orders and banned from Derby for twelve months.

The four from Leicestershire were Bob Ball (55), Zena Zelter (33), Dave Ray (62) and Emma Bateman (41).

Ms Bateman said: 'We were charged with aggravated trespass because we put two concrete blocks in front of Rolls Royce and chained ourselves to them, but the piece of land we were on was public highway. We defended ourselves against a Crown prosecutor, so we were pleased we won.'

Rolls Royce Raynesway makes the nuclear reactors and fuel which power Britain's nuclear submarines. The campaigners argued that the use of nuclear weapons was illegal under various conventions and treaties

Note: The court was too low in the hierarchy to be able to consider our basic defence that by producing weapons of mass destruction RR are either committing or aiding and abetting war crimes. The district judge was very reasonable. We need more magistrates like her. Note the article above makes no mention of the fact that at that plant RR are producing fuel rods for Trident .

Dave Ray

### Pervez Kambaksh Update

The young Afghan journalist Pervez Kambaksh has just been sentenced to 20 years in jail for his supposed 'blasphemy'. He distributed an article that said that Mohammad had ignored the rights of women.

Mr Kambaksh, aged 23, was sentenced to death in January by a court in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif and this led to a world-wide campaign calling for his release, in which members of the Society participated. The appeal court has reduced the death sentence to 20 years in prison.

'The court has sentenced Mr. Kambaksh to 20 years jail for the crime he has committed. But this is not the final hearing, he has the right to appeal', judge Abdul Salaam Qazizada told the court. Under Islamic law, stipulated in Afghanistan's constitution, blasphemy is punishable by death.

The resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and its

emergence in Pakistan as a serious threat to the stability of the region must make us ask whether the presence of British troops in the NATO forces is achieving anything at all. Clearly, the tactics of the Americans has made things worse with hundreds of bystanders regularly killed by US bomb attacks on doubtful targets.

When these counter-productive failures are added to the fact that the Karzai government being defended is almost as bad as the enemy in terms of its religious extremism, we must ask whether it is all worth it. The only 'advantage' of that government, it seems, is its willingness to act in support of US strategic interests in the region.

The only option now being discussed to counter the Taliban is for a huge increase in British and American armed forces. Do we want to see our soldiers' lives sacrificed again to advance US strategic interests?

Harry Perry

### Taking Liberties: the Struggle for Britain's Freedoms and Rights

This is an exhibition at the British Library in London that lasts for four months from 31st October 2008 to 1st March 2009. The British Library is very close to St Pancras Station - very convenient if you're travelling by train from Leicester to the capital.

These rights didn't simply happen. They were hard won, the product of hundreds of years of debate, struggle, bloodshed and war. Do we, as the introduction to the exhibition asserts, take them for granted?

As well as iconic documents like Magna Carta and the Good Friday Agreement (and the works of Tom Paine, according to Geoffrey Howe speaking on *Today* on Radio 4, 28th October 2008), and lavish computer interactives, you can take part in events with top speakers addressing today's hottest political debates, such as human rights, ID cards, and detention without charge. For students there are learning workshops on history and citizenship.

You can also nominate people from your area who have made a contribution to freedom and justice in the Hidden Heroes scheme.

Frank Friedmann (More details on the website)

### More on Creationism

From David Ridge's letter to the Independent on 17/09/08

'I agree with Robert Smith that Creationism should be taught more widely; pupils could learn a lot by analysing the implications. I've been thinking about the events of that busy first week in the 'Young Earth' model.

Consider the challenge of creating the first chicken (on the fifth day); an egg would be no good on its own. Would you start at the beak and sweep backwards? You would have to be quick or fluids would leak out. No, it would have to be completely formed in an instant, with all the organs and blood supply and nerves (including behaviour and memory). The space it suddenly occupies would have to be cleared of air at exactly the same moment to prevent a

deafening shock-wave.

Creating a whale would be even more challenging; a large volume of water would have to be removed in an instant, and not by converting it into energy, or the planet would be blown away.

The difficulties don't stop there. All the delicate inter-relationships between species would have to be immaculately planned, and on the third day there would have to be fully grown trees, ready rotted wood and dead animals for scavengers; nests, burrows, and much else. And this for the whole world, down to the last ant and pine-needle, rotifer and bacillus.

That's zoology, anatomy, physiology, psychology, physics (Newtonian and nuclear), and ecology.

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**Keyholders:** Allan, Michael G, Harry and Wilf are all keyholders for Secular Hall.

**Audio-visual kit:** This is normally held by Michael G or Harry.

*All can be reached by post via the Hall address.*

### Competition Winner

There were four correct answers to the decoding puzzle in Secularist No.1 last month. Jill Perry's correct answer had to be disqualified as coming in before the competition had even started (anyway, she could have watched the prize DVD any time she wanted to). The other three: George Jelliss, Tim Sketchley and Peter Thompson were put in a hat and the winner drawn out by John Catt's daughter was George Jelliss. Congratulations, the DVD is on its way!

For the curious the solution was:

*'Government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil; in its worst state, an intolerable one.'* The author was, of course, Tom Paine.

### This Month's Challenge

What was the first man-made thing to break the sound barrier?

Answers to me by phone, post or email as usual, by noon on Friday 5th December 2008.

If there is more than one correct answer the winner will be drawn from a hat. Another fabulous prize awaits!

Good luck!

Harry



The pansy is apparently the symbol of freethought because its name in French, *pensée*, is a bit like the French verb for thinking - *penser*. It also, apparently, looks like a human face (Karl Marx's, I think) hence a connection with Humanism. Does anyone else think this is all a bit weak? What would you use as a symbol for freethinking or secularism?

### Board Report

Although a number of decisions of the Board, or the results of them, have been reported in the newsletter this has not been done in a systematic way. Now, in response to motions put forward to the AGM, a Board report will be included in each edition of the Secularist. This is the first.

Each Board meeting has a number of standard items on its agenda, i.e. new member approvals; Treasurer's Report; Modernisation Project report; Hall Management; Events Programme, etc., etc. Much of this is mundane stuff that is unlikely to interest members. The Board report in the Secularist will therefore tend to be about the more interesting items, if there are any!

#### October 2008

- Eight new members approved.
- Agreed to issue an appeal for a volunteer Press Officer to draft regular press releases and gain publicity.

- Format of consultation meeting agreed to be open exchange of ideas, no motions or votes.
- Agreed not to proceed with an event under Leicester Comedy Festival owing to apparent inefficiency on their part and lack of time on ours.
- Agreed not to affiliate to Accord.
- Agreed to get price for fitting electric hand driers in the toilets as no space for paper towels.
- *The Leicester Secularist* approved as the title of the newsletter after members' clear vote in support of it.
- Discussion begun on adopting a suitable 'strapline'. Invitation to be put in the Secularist.
- AGM timetable approved.

Harry Perry  
Secretary

### Don't Lose Touch - We'd Miss You

In the unlikely event that you are moving on to a new home please don't forget to let the Society know your new contact details. Also please notify changes of email and phone numbers. Our contact details are stated in the box above, top left. Thanks, Harry

### The Leicester Secularist Copy Deadline

The deadline for items for the next edition is noon on Tuesday 9th December. Please let me have your items before then if you can so I can get a head start on putting it together. Thanks, Harry

### Disclaimer and Code of Conduct

Please note that the views and proposals expressed in the Newsletter are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Board of the Society and the Society and its officers accept no liability for views expressed. As a Freethought organisation any member's views will be published subject to the usual constraints of avoiding libel and occasional editing to fit the space available. When writing please abstain from intemperate language and avoid being unnecessarily offensive, especially to other members! Thank you.