



# The Leicester Secularist

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## Getting Noticed; Making a Difference

'I now call upon the President of Leicester Secular Society to say a few words'. The occasion was a dinner given by the Anatolia Cultural and Education Society for the end of Ramadan on 15th September. I hadn't been forewarned that I would be asked to speak, but was told that my few words about the Society were 'great'. However, the point is that the LSS President had been invited to an important dinner – the guests filled the old St Mark's Church on Belgrave Gate, now a conference centre - given by a significant national society and had been asked to speak along with the Lord Mayor and representatives of various groups. Turkey is of course a secular state with a Muslim majority. I have invited some members of ACES to visit us next year.

Earlier the same day I had spent the morning talking to sixth formers at Kineton High School, Warwickshire.

Two days before we had our annual Open Day – very successful with much interest in the Society and what we do. There were 66 names on the visitors' book including the Lord Mayor's.

A few days later I was talking about Humanist views of death and euthanasia to the Leicestershire Interfaith Forum and also attending the annual Leicestershire Constabulary Community Cohesion evening at Police Headquarters. We are 'known to the police' and those involved with community cohesion feel it is important to include the Secular Society.

The Society is here to spread the word about Secularism and influence policy; I am glad to say that we are, little by little, succeeding.

To backtrack a little: In August, Clare Carr, Eleanor Davidson and I had a half-hour slot on Citizens' Eye Radio. I gave talks to a Muslim Group and to the Oadby and

Launde Rotary Club.

Eleanor is week by week letting people see a caring side of the Society as she conducts Humanist funerals and serves on the hospital chaplaincy team; and she and Chris Williams act as Faith Ambassadors to Leicester College.

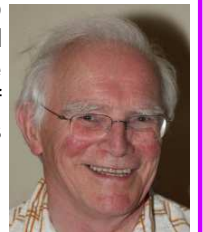
And, of course, thanks to Harry Perry, we have our 'house journal', *The Leicester Secularist*.

Coming up in November, 15<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> to be exact, we have the National Interfaith Week. We will be using the opportunity to spread our views at events at County Hall, Leicester College, A Feast of Faiths (Loughborough Council of Faiths - John Catt will be at that one) and on Radio Leicester.

I know that the terminology of faith this and faith that jars with many members, but we have to gain recognition and put our case, and I shall certainly be doing that, particularly in the article I have been invited to write for the Leicester Mercury.

To finish, I must tell you about a most exciting and refreshing day I had with around 200 Leicester young people at a Secondary Students' RE Conference on 28th September. The students were lively and ready to express their views, with quite a few identifying themselves as atheist or agnostic. Invitations were distributed to join a new 'Leicester Student Council for RE'. The invitations provided for students to describe themselves as 'no religion' or humanist and they were told during the sessions that they did not have to believe in God to become a member of the Council. We must make use of this development.

Allan Hayes



## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

**Sunday 11th October, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: Community Cohesion Is Not About Faith.** Val Carpenter, Director of Diversity Hub, has worked on community issues for over thirty years and will argue that community cohesion is more than simply getting religious groups talking to each other.

**Sunday 18th October, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: Carnegie; Philanthropy, Misanthropy and Workers' Self-Education.** Steve Vallance, Society member, will present this talk.

**Sunday 18th October at 6.30pm is the deadline for submissions of motions and President/Chairperson nominations for the AGM.**

**Tuesday 20th October, 7.30pm, the Square Bar, 5-9 Hotel Street: Skeptics in the Pub - Bad News: What's Wrong With the Media?** Nick Davies, veteran reporter. Non-LSS event.

**Sunday 25th October, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: Making a Democracy: Really useful knowledge about social movements in Taiwan.** Richard Johnson will share his experiences of participating in the making of a democratic island state.

**Thursday 29th October, 10.30am-12.30pm, Secular Hall: Coffee Morning** hosted by John Catt and Ariadne Tampion. Member or not, come along for a friendly chat, biscuits and refreshment.

**Sunday 1st November, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: LSS Annual General Meeting.** Open to paid up Society members only. All should attend.

**Wednesday 4th November, 7.30pm, back bar of the Swan and Rushes, Oxford Street (just along from DMU): Philosophy in Pubs - Public v. Private.** Non-LSS event.

**Sunday 8th November, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: The Origin of Species one hundred years on.** Dr Peter Thompson, Society member, will take a look at developments in evolutionary theory in the last part of the twentieth century.

### Leicester's Secular Hall Open Day

Old buildings are funny things. They live in our time and are unmistakably of the here and now, but they began their life somewhere else, some distant time in the past. So it is with Leicester's magnificent Secular Hall; it's just where it always was, there on Humberstone Gate, but one knows that the Humberstone Gate that first welcomed its Victorian fanciness in 1881 is a very different street to the dull and dowdy place it has become. Nowadays Voltaire and Tom Paine, Socrates and Jesus, carved into the front of the building, stare glumly between the buses and taxis to the Sainsbury's beyond. Once it would have been very different.

How good it was to have the chance to look round this wonderful building, a unique example in the country. Go up the winding stairs and suddenly one is in a large light hall, currently the home of a dance academy (mind those shoes on the floor please!) but once a place where excited audiences gathered to hear and dispute. The churches wouldn't let their halls be used by secularists and freethinkers and so the secularists built themselves their

own hall and, astonishingly, made it look just like a Methodist church, complete with a bit of stained glass and a balcony. Down we go, past the room we currently use, evidently where the snooker tables once resided, and down again, past the gents and into the cellar. Now the home of a karate club, this was where the secularists did what all secularists did: played skittles!

Suddenly one is really in a different world, where the Secular Society was just that, a society where people gathered not only to think and talk and argue and learn, but to play together and socialise and be in society with each other, free from the cant and restrictions of dogma and orthodoxy. If we don't preserve the hall we forget that this was what many people did here once. Voltaire and Tom Paine and Jesus and Socrates and Robert Owen, too, had more to do than stare out blankly at the bleakness. 'Come in', they said, 'Welcome to you all.'

Hamish Whiteley



### COFFEE MORNINGS

**THURSDAY 29TH OCTOBER AND  
THURSDAY 26TH NOVEMBER**

**10.30AM — 12.30PM  
AT THE HALL**

**TEA, COFFEE, BISCUITS.  
COME ALONG FOR  
A FRIENDLY CHAT.**

**HOSTED BY ARIADNE TAMPION  
AND JOHN CATT**

### Come to the Launch of the *Disillusioned Apprentice*

After the success with his book of Leicestershire walks member Dave Ray is publishing another book.

The title of the book is *Disillusioned Apprentice*. It's about growing up on the Becontree Estate - the biggest municipal housing estate in Europe, built to replace the worst slums of London's East End; and then working as an apprentice at the Ford Motor Company where 40,000 were employed.

The launch takes place on Friday 16th of October at Thurmaston Community Centre, Silverdale Drive, Thurmaston, LE4 from 7pm till 9pm. There'll be a Powerpoint presentation, wine and nibbles. There's a bar (people have to pay) and plenty of parking. Buses leave Charles St every half hour and stop at the Asda store about five minutes walk from the Community Centre.

### Jesus' Teaching 6 – Forgiveness

In 1993 two boys aged 10 murdered a toddler just short of his third birthday. By all accounts this was planned and deliberately carried out. They eventually finished up in a young offenders' institution. While they were there a woman who otherwise had nothing to do with the case wrote to them and said, 'God had forgiven them'.

In recent months Jack Straw, the Justice Secretary, became aware that some art therapists working at Broadmoor Hospital for mentally disordered offenders were getting positive results. The morale of their clients improved and they were happier and more settled in every way. The Minister of Health had been very complimentary. But Jack Straw stopped this very positive initiative.

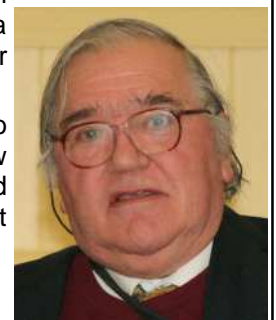
Now the important point is that neither the woman nor Jack Straw understood the meaning of forgiveness.

To put forgiveness into the perspective of the teaching of Jesus so far we should begin with the idea of an empathetic love that is given even when not deserved and which requires resilient hard work and a deep sense of proportion to make it effective and to aim towards creating a better future. Inevitably, however, we face the problem of being let down and betrayed. What do we do then? Basically two reactions are possible. The first is to hang in with the trauma and distress and think only in terms of punishing the offender, which in the case of people like Jack Straw means making them worse or at least no better. The second is to try to arrange for the offender and the

victim to work towards a better future and this is where language like forgiveness and reconciliation comes in. In its full extent it is a very complex subject but most of us know it on a daily basis. Someone fails to do their job properly at work and we have to cope with the consequences; we plan to meet someone at a given time and place and they fail to turn up. But it can involve serious crime of the sort we mentioned at the beginning. The issue from Jesus' point of view was that it was no use getting stuck with the past. To create a better future one had to work together to obtain it. That is why the woman in the first case mentioned was so mistaken. Forgiveness does not mean letting the offender off any sense of responsibility, it means helping him or her to accept it in a bid to rebuild a future with the victim against the set-back of a damaged past. In our world today there is a very serious risk that we will sell out to a futile sense of justice and the awarding of damages and will fail to put our resources where they will be most useful - in creating a better future. Jesus has a message for us today as well as for those to whom he spoke so long ago.

(Because of my day job I want to make it quite clear that I know nothing of the case first mentioned except, like everyone else, from what I read in the papers.)

John Edmondson



### Afghanistan - What business is it of ours?

Among the, now almost weekly, justifications thought up by the government for our intervention in Afghanistan the only one that might appeal to us as secularists is that of defeating the Taliban. Of course we would like to see them disappear but is that possible by armed invasion by foreign powers? History surely shows that this is counter-productive. If the insurgents are sufficiently well embedded in the local population, as the Taliban unfortunately are, then the more the foreigners attack the greater the support for the insurgents becomes. For us in Britain I would just say – ‘look at Ireland’. Nearly a thousand years of English armed attempts to subdue the Irish have not succeeded. Defeats in one generation have just resulted in new insurrections in the next until at last, negotiations have achieved a solution

that will, hopefully, last. In the end we will have to talk to the Taliban so that we can make some sort of ‘honourable’ withdrawal. Otherwise we will have to cut and run just as the Americans had to do from Vietnam.

But perhaps the most pertinent comment came in a radio interview with a girl friend of one the 18-year-old soldiers\* killed a couple of months ago. After saying she was proud of her friend she was asked what she knew about Afghanistan. Her reply was ‘Not much but I’ve read a bit lately. As far as I can see the Taliban is trying to overthrow the government. But I think we’ve got to be a bit selfish and say what business is it of ours?’

Peter Thompson

\*Incidentally you had to be 19 to be sent overseas in the Second World War.



### Easing Asylum Seekers’ Hardship

On 20<sup>th</sup> September Bessie Hayes gave a well-researched and informative talk about Leicester’s new Voucher Exchange Scheme, started in August by a group of volunteers from Leicester City of Sanctuary. To explain the need and put it in context, Bessie presented a great deal of information set out on flip chart sheets.

The talk was preceded by the playing of a short excerpt from ‘Forced to Flee’, a DVD produced by Refugee Action. This clip showed how refused asylum claimants can find themselves destitute and reduced to rough sleeping or worse, prostitution, just to survive: things that they would never have imagined themselves doing back in their home country.

Bessie gave some definitions of common terms relating to different categories of migrant, and the various types of support available to asylum seekers from the Home Office (UKBA – the UK Border Agency). She also suggested some reasons why so many (534 people currently in Leicester) have ended up in the invidious position of depending on a weekly voucher or supermarket gift card worth £35 for all basic needs.

We heard some moving stories about some of those people who now benefit from the scheme by exchanging one voucher a month for its cash value. This gives them money for bus fares, the market and charity shops, all out of reach to those on vouchers. Some grateful comments:

‘This is the first time I’ve received £35 for my voucher’ – often people get as little as £25 or even £20 for a voucher.

‘I need the cash for my daughter’s bus fare to school.’

Clearly this scheme is needed, but will the UKBA find a way to prevent it operating? Asylum seekers get a raw deal in this country. Let’s hope that by participating in this scheme, some of us can make their difficult lives here just a little easier.

Helen Everett

### LSS in the Media

On 24th August I moved the tuner on my radio for the first time in months from 92.7 to 87.7 to listen to John Coster, who had invited the LSS to broadcast a half-hour programme about the Society. We were represented by Allan Hayes, Clare Carr and Eleanor Davidson. Allan gave a robust defence of the current role of the Society especially concerning faith schools as well as giving a brief history of the Hall, its redevelopment and some of the speakers who had come to the Hall. Clare spoke about developing philosophy courses for schools in conjunction with the Society. Eleanor was able to explain her role as a celebrant. Her observations that too few people were aware of such services were raised but demand was increasing. Many of the people who had attended humanist/secularist funerals and weddings often expressed surprise and a desire to mark their own rites of passage in similar vein. Alas Citizen’s Eye had a limited run but while it did it got an estimated audience of about 28,000.

Mike Burden

### Colours

**Red. Always red - like daffodils are yellow, leaves are green; water, in its resolution, colourless.**

**Promote themselves naturally, but not poppies, which each year, about eleven a.m., line themselves up in their printed salutations for yet another brief, ethical resurrection.**

**Red is, momentarily, the moment. The colour of a minute; the suppression of all noise, while the dead - unimaginably large, often unaccounted for - are aligned by monument in marbled black, or grey, or white man-made; comfortably bloodless.**

Huw Watkins



*Truth hurts -  
not the searching after;  
the running from!*

**John Virgil**

## The Secular Tourist Russia's Inheritance

As many of you will know, Jill and I have just returned from a marathon motorhome trip across Europe to Russia and back - 7,000 miles over nearly seven weeks. You can imagine that we have observed many different aspects of life in modern Europe and in some countries were absolutely gobsmacked by the extent to which 'faith' intrudes into everyday life.

Russia's recent communist and atheist history is everywhere in evidence - statues of Lenin abound (though not many of Stalin) and the heroic socialist realism of the Moscow metro deserves a whole book to itself (I'm sure it has them). Hammer and sickle insignia are still present on numerous buildings and the museum of the revolution in St Petersburg (formerly Leningrad) includes examples of how



the party sought to eradicate the influence of religion in Russian life. The war memorials with eternal flames are numerous and every town and village worth its salt has a T34 or artillery piece mounted on a plinth on its boundary -

scrupulously well maintained - every one of them explicitly depicting the achievements of the communist Soviet Union in its massive struggle against Fascism in WW2.

However, while visible aspects of faith in Russia are fewer than in Ukraine, Poland or the Czech and Slovak republics (where crucifixes and shrines leap out at you every couple of kilometres along the road) it was in Russia that we, by chance, were able to observe an Orthodox service in full flow in the cathedral within the walls of the kremlin in Novgorod.

This whole complex is undergoing a massive overhaul as part of a drive to increase tourist traffic (*my advice - just abolish visas and install decent roads, the rest will look after itself*) but we found that locals were still trooping through the building-site booby traps to attend the Friday mass. The place was crowded and three priests appeared

to be hearing the equivalent of confessions at the front while another priest was chanting the service over the PA system and a heavenly choir provided the background ambience from somewhere off-stage. The air was heavy with incense.

It really was quite touching to see the congregation mouthing the words in time with the priest and frequently performing crossings and small bows toward the icons at the front. A chap behind me stood in a corner praying energetically by himself. These people really believed they were communicating with someone and were convinced that that someone was listening and had the power to do something about their problems.



My gaze fixed upon the younger priest nearest to me - smartly groomed with an elaborately embroidered cape. A girl of about 13 years was telling him something about her week and he was listening attentively - bending slightly forward, asking questions and perhaps offering advice and guidance, or possibly warnings about the hellfire to come if she pursued some sinful course.

This went on for about ten minutes as others waited their turn patiently in line a few metres back. Then at the end of it all the priest placed something like a thick, highly decorated tea-towel on the girl's bowed head, rested his hand upon it and uttered a few words. With that the girl skipped away, apparently spiritually renewed.

Of course, this youngster was doing only what she had been taught to do by her parents and grandparents but in a few decades time she will be doing the same with her offspring; eventually the girl will become the old woman shuffling forward for the thousandth time to remind God that her prayers have not yet been answered.

Amidst these contradictory influences from Russia's past, and the all too evident pressures of a booming capitalist economy, I am led to ponder on how the Russian 'soul' is coping with its schizophrenic inheritance.

Harry Perry



## Frank's Scientific Method

I thought I'd collapse a 2 litre fizzy water bottle to take less room in the bin. Remembering a school demonstration of atmospheric pressure using a vacuum pump and a petrol can I decided to pump the air out. Not having a suitable mechanical pump to hand I started to use a biological one - my lungs, rib-cage, intercostal muscles and diaphragm. Applying the opening of the bottle to my lips I inhaled deeply - sure the bottle collapsed, but I found myself

spluttering and panting - quite seriously hyperventilating - and had to sit down. It only took about half a minute before I was back to normal, but the unexpected effect on me was quite a shock.

After regaining my breath I had another go, but this time using a different human pump - my buccal cavity. In other words I sucked by lowering my jaw and using my tongue against the roof of my mouth as a valve. This time I was able to continue until the bottle had collapsed completely apart from a space around the neck and the base where I suppose the plastic is thicker and would take a greater pressure differential than I could create to deform. It took about 100 sucks, and the last few were increasingly difficult, but I felt no ill effects.

Here the scientific method part of my education kicked in, and I formed a hypothesis. To test it, I filled the bottle to the top with water and emptied it before evacuating it by the chest/lung method of my first attempt. This time, as I expected, I had no breathing problem, and just one suck collapsed it almost as far as the 100 mouth sucks.

*What was my hypothesis? (Answers, please, by 6th Nov.)*

Frank Friedmann

### To My Son in Spain

Saku Pinta's film *To My Son In Spain* was shown on Sunday 6th September, to a packed house at Leicester Secular Hall. It was loudly applauded, and led to a lively discussion by the 80 person audience.

The film is a documentary of the Spanish Civil War, which it covers excellently. It begins by clearly explaining the causes, and the history of events leading to the war. The film follows the war through the eyes of Jules, a Finnish/Canadian, and the role of the 116 Finnish/Canadians from Thunder Bay, Ontario, in the Mac Paps Battalion, of the International Brigades.

Jules and his comrades shared the same background as their fellow Brigaders, who came from all over the world. They came from poor working-class neighbourhoods, where life was hard, and it was a struggle to exist, a situation that forged them into being revolutionary organisers, trying to build a better world. This, plus their shared ideals, made the choice to go to Spain obvious to them, and the thousands of others like them.

The film makes this all very clear in an emotionally moving way, as it flows and engages you in the events, so you don't notice time passing. It explains the politics of the time, looks at the military

tactics and weaponry and the ebb and flow of the frontline, while never losing sight of the personal effects of the war on the Brigaders and the Spanish people.

Jules talks of his comrades, their motives and fighting spirit, and his own capture and treatment in a Franco concentration camp.

This film reminds us why we respect and admire the men of the International Brigades. It is made by the young Finnish/Canadian Saku Pinta, and is perfect to show to the younger generation, as it informs and moves in an energetic way that is both educating and fascinating. It very cleverly uses drawn/cartoon characters to express the words of Jules' father's poem, that gives its name to the film; it also uses a section of film of Canadian lumberjacks that exemplifies the struggle of the working class perfectly, and is an oblique nod to Saku's own IWW credentials.

The result is a film with a fresh feel to it; one that I think will remain and make a useful tool to help keep the memory of the International Brigaders, their sacrifices and achievements, alive for many years to come. !NO PASARAN!

Lyn Hurst



### Humanism - Wishy-Washy or What?

Ross Longhurst's experience of 'funerals conducted by Humanist officiators' (*Leicester Secularist*, August 2009) has clearly been very different from mine, and I would suggest adds weight to the central point of his piece, that undertakers more often than not deploy people who are not true, accredited Humanist celebrants.

My brother-in-law was a lifelong atheist. When he died in 1999 my sister organised an hour-long celebration of his life at the crematorium, introduced and facilitated by a Humanist celebrant. He talked about Tom's uniqueness as a human being and the value of his life and relationships within it, and then handed over to a variety of family members and friends who shared memories, anecdotes, music and poetry. It was just right, and truly Humanist.

I don't regard Humanism, or myself, as 'wishy-washy'! However,

I do think the atheist bus slogan 'There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life' was an unfortunate error which has undermined Humanism's already unsatisfactory image. In the first place, as frequently pointed out, the first sentence sits on the fence with the insertion of the word 'probably'. Secondly, the second sentence betrays an ignorance of what modern, liberal Christians are really about. Among the many Christians I know and have known, the emphasis is on belief in God freeing people up to live 'life in all its fullness' – quite the reverse of anxiety, or the avoidance of enjoyment.

How do we improve the image of Humanism and extend our own knowledge of what it really represents? Perhaps a reader of the *Secularist* could set the ball rolling in a future issue?

Jill Perry



### Meeting the Secular Society

Following on from the English Heritage Open Day on 13th September the evening meeting was a chance for interested members of the public to stay and find out more about the Society and its members.

There was a full house for what turned out to be an interesting and enlightening evening. Each person had a few minutes to outline their early influences and their interest in/journey towards secularism.

It became clear that we are, indeed, a diverse group. It was fascinating to hear about individual members' backgrounds and formative influences. There were second- and third-generation secularists present, as well as people who had had traditional and non-traditional religious upbringings (which had been gradually abandoned). For some, secularism has been a central tenet for most of their lives. Others have come to a realisation of its

importance much more recently.

One of the more memorable contributions was from Bessie Hayes, who welcomed the fact that the Society had evolved from 'a gathering of grumpy old men', into a vibrant group with real relevance to modern, multicultural Leicester!

When one of the visitors asked what secularism actually meant, this triggered a lively discussion encompassing agnosticism, atheism, Humanism and secularism. It became clear from the replies that there are some differences of opinion, which would be interesting to explore another time. What was encouraging was the level of tolerance expressed. This is not a club with rigid rules and belief systems.

Hopefully, visitors will have left with a positive view of the Society and its members and an interest in coming again.

Denise Lanes

### Earth Friendly

On Tuesday 27th September Doug Holly gave a stimulating talk to Leicester Secular Society about Friends of the Earth (FoE), and in particular the activities of the Leicester branch.

FoE has been much involved in combating climate change and played a major part in steering the Climate Change Bill through Parliament. It became law, as the Climate Change Act, in 2008. Its provisions will require people to create far fewer greenhouse gases, which will ease many other environmental pressures such as those on rainforests, which FoE has also been campaigning on.

A strength of FoE is its branch structure, as was evident in the campaigning on the Climate Change Bill. The branch structure allows many people to become involved. The two current main

campaigns are Get Serious about CO2 and Fix the Food Chain.

The Get Serious campaign consists of working with local authorities to encourage them to lower their greenhouse gas emissions. Each branch 'adopts' its local authority. The Fix the Food Chain is designed to reduce the environmental impact of the food chain, for example, by trying to stop the destruction of rainforests for huge, often genetically modified monoculture soy crops that are used to feed food animals in the west.

Leicester FoE is concentrating on the Get Serious campaign. It does not have enough active members to pursue both campaigns at once. However, it actively participates in local campaigns.

Michael Sackin



### Humanist Funerals - One Man's View

My parents told a story of my father's future father-in-law, he said of him 'Methody, Methody, quack, quack, quack - go to the devil and never come back!' So much for religious unity!

On marriage my parents became vegetarian, attending a Unitarian Chapel, upsetting both Methodist and CofE relatives.

My parents gave me a book in 1973: *Be Humanist or Die* by Robert Waller.

When my father died in his early 80s, never having been in hospital, he left his body for medical research.

To celebrate his life I gathered together about forty friends and relatives; we met in café on a route he loved walking up Rivington Pike, Lancs. I read out seven pages of notes that I had made about him on the bus going to work. Not all of it was complimentary, but honest, I loved him.

At the end half the people cried and the other half clapped. I felt a necessary part of grieving had taken place.

Why, I often wondered, were church services so unsatisfactory? For me it is because they are concerned with their own procedures of getting to a better place and not bothered about how that life had been lived.

I joined Leicester Secular Society when I retired and have enjoyed the company of freethinkers. Since joining - though not related! - I have attended a number of funerals of dear friends. These events have been excellently,

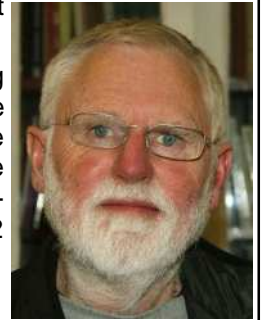
sincerely, and mightily professionally conducted by Eleanor Davidson.

In every case these non-religious celebrations of a life have allowed/encouraged relatives and friends to speak openly about the deceased; many attendees have said how much they enjoyed the experience, 'how fulfilling', 'how interesting to hear about someone you had known so long but didn't know that', 'how wonderful, much better than fusty church services where the speaker doesn't know the deceased'. My memories include as much laughter as tears! These ceremonies have worked, inspired and helped relatives/friends to grieve because Eleanor does her homework, allows everyone 'airtime' to remember and speak. She is sensitive to everyone's needs and allows each celebration to be individual within the time constraints. At these events attendees have often said to me, 'I want a funeral like that, how can I join the Secular Society?'

I was pleased after my first experience of a Humanist celebration to meet Eleanor at Leicester Secular Society.

Beware! I read, with falling congregations, church people are offering 'secular funerals'. Don't be taken in by that; go directly to the Secular Society for a bona fide non-religious funeral or phone 0116 292 1964 for Eleanor Davidson.

John Cook



### Gay Humanists Welcome PM's Apology for Alan Turing

Britain's only gay humanist charity, the Pink Triangle Trust (PTT), has welcomed Prime Minister Gordon Brown's apology for the treatment meted out to the wartime cryptologist and mathematician Alan Turing.



Alan Turing

The PTT called for an apology earlier this month, when its secretary, George Broadhead, said, 'As a gay atheist himself, Alan Turing is a humanist hero and an apology for the appalling way he was treated for being gay is long overdue.'

Computer programmer John Graham-Cumming had launched a Downing Street petition calling for an apology, and the number of signatories was soon in the tens of thousands. By 11th September, it was up to 31,000.

The Prime Minister wrote an article in the *Daily Telegraph* on 10th September, in which he said:

'Thousands of people have come together to demand justice for Alan Turing and recognition of the appalling way he was treated.

'While Turing was dealt with under the law of the

time, and we can't put the clock back, his treatment was of course utterly unfair, and I am pleased to have the chance to say how deeply sorry I and we all are for what happened to him. Alan and the many thousands of other gay men who were convicted, as he was convicted, under homophobic laws, were treated terribly.

'Over the years, millions more lived in fear of conviction. I am proud that those days are gone and that in the past 12 years this Government has done so much to make life fairer and more equal for our LGBT community. This recognition of Alan's status as one of Britain's most famous victims of homophobia is another step towards equality, and long overdue.'

It is certainly not before time that this apology has been issued. It is regrettable that it has taken so long for the British government to issue one and to recognise the invaluable work Turing did in altering the course of the Second World War. However, at least Gordon Brown has gone some way towards putting that right, and, of course, we welcome his message. It is particularly apt coming so close to the seventieth anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War.

George Broadhead

### To mark Universal Children's Day and International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

Show your opposition to Sharia Law and all religious based tribunals in Britain and elsewhere

Demand an end to cultural relativism and racism

Demand one secular law for all and universal rights

Defend the right to asylum for those who have fled Sharia

**Date: 21st November, 2009**

**Time: 12 noon - 2pm**

Place: North Carriage Drive, in between Stanhope Place Gate and Albion Gate, Hyde Park, London (closest underground Marble Arch). Confirmed speakers and performers include: Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, Roy Brown, Nick Doody, A.C. Grayling, Goranka Gudelj, Rahila Gupta, Johann Hari, Marieme Helie-Lucas, Mehboob Khan, 'Lilith', Houzan Mahmoud, Maryam Namazie, Taslima Nasrin, Terry Sanderson, Selina aka 'Jus1Jam', Hanne Stinson, Peter Tatchell, and lots more.



Matthew Arnold on Dover Beach

### The Sea of Faith

BBC 4 recently screened an Open University programme devoted to Matthew Arnold's poem 'Dover Beach'. There are parts of it that closely reflect my own misgivings of present social circumstances and, set out here, provide a perfect setting for commentary:

#### The Sea of Faith

*Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore  
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.  
But now I only hear  
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,  
Retreating, to the breath  
Of the night wind, down the vast edges drear  
And naked shingles of the world ...*

*... for the world, which seems  
To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
So various, so beautiful, so new,  
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
And we are here as on a darkling plain  
Swept with alarms of struggle and flight,  
Where ignorant armies clash by night.*

It is this contrast, between the apparent comfortable certainties of faith and the seeming wilderness of the freedom beyond, that needs addressing: if belief is to be subdued. To simply point out that the certainties of faith

are those of a dream, while the apparent uncertainties of free intellectual curiosity treat of reality, is not sufficient. The continual periodic reiteration of the benefits of an ever-wider scientific understanding put over by charismatic exponents, such as is the normal practice of all faiths in relation to their dogmas, is what we should be providing.

Our present, comfortable social conditions have been hard won, many within the memories of older generations; and yet, to most of those born since the Second World War, this is regarded as the unremarkable norm. Most of our youth, and the recent immigrant population, behave as if this is how it always was: there is little appreciation of the dynamic, reforming forces that have brought us here, and that are still operating within our culture.

There is a breathtaking denial of the reality of our current cultural environment by faith groups, particularly among the immigrant communities, when they attempt to take up the moral high ground in respect of welfare provision. Our welfare provisions are universal and are not dependent on whim or group membership. These provisions were not put in place by faith groups or one-nation conservatives: they were the result of bitterly opposed reforms implemented by socialist, secularist and Humanist-oriented organisations. We should not be shy to point this out.

As with all reforms, there have been unforeseen results which often cut across old boundaries of cultural morality, causing much heart-searching. The independence they have gifted to each individual has resulted in a dearth of social interaction, with a resulting feeling of loneliness in many individuals. In seeing all this, Matthew Arnold's 1851 composition was prophetic. But perhaps the most prescient of all was that last line:

'Where ignorant armies clash by night.'

Wilf Gaunt



### The Law on Assisted Suicide

After Wilf's article on suicide in the August edition the Director of Public Prosecutions has published an interim policy regarding the application of the law on assisting at suicides. Kate Carty, Chief Prosecutor Leics and Rutland, has asked for your comments.

The document can be found at [www.cps.gov.uk](http://www.cps.gov.uk).

You have about ten weeks in which to make your points so please do make sure the secular humanist viewpoint is represented.

Harry Perry

### Buttered Jesus

Our five-year-old grandson attends a CofE school. Just before last Easter we asked him what he'd been learning about in school. 'Hot Cross Buns' came the reply - then, in response to our enquiry about what he'd learnt about them, he replied - 'Jesus died on one'. If that's the best CofE schools can do by way of indoctrination perhaps we're worrying too much about them !!!!

David Kimmins

### It's a quote ...

From *The Way of All Flesh* by Samuel Butler. The best book I've ever come across giving a clear account, from a man who knew, of why the Church of England became an anachronism in the nineteenth century:

'The hymn had engaged my attention; when it was over I had time to take stock of the congregation. They were chiefly farmers: fat, very well-to-do folk, who had come, some of them with their wives and children, from outlying farms two and three miles away; haters of popery and of anything which any one might choose to say was popish; good, sensible fellows who detested theory of any kind, whose ideal was the maintenance of the status quo with perhaps a loving reminiscence of old war times, and a sense of wrong that the weather was not more completely under their control, who desired higher prices and cheaper wages, but otherwise were most contented when things were changing least; tolerators, if not lovers, of all that was familiar, haters of all that was unfamiliar; they would have been equally horrified at hearing the Christian religion doubted, as seeing it practised.'

Dave Ray

### DMU Distinguished Lecture Series

On Wednesday 11th November at 6pm Prof. Lord Patel of Bradford, will deliver a free lecture in Room 1.10 of the Queens Building at DMU. You can book a place by phoning: 0116 257 7452.

*Our first awakening reveals that our mind,  
conditioned as it is to superstition and tradition,  
is the prison-house in which we dwell.*

Joel Goldsmith

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**Librarian - Gillian Lighton:**

Email: [gillianlighton@hotmail.com](mailto:gillianlighton@hotmail.com)

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

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

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

### Report Back from Board of 11th September 2009

- Next meeting to be 7.30pm, 13th October
- One new member approved
- Development Group on 3rd October to formulate proposals on future use of the Hall for subsequent approval
- High-profile event to launch fundraising drive in preparation
- Open Day planning well in hand
- Some changes to events programme forced upon us
- Research to be undertaken on running our own atheist bus campaign
- High-level guttering repairs being organised

### The Leicester Secularist Copy Deadline

The copy deadline for the next edition is **12 noon on Friday 6th November 2009**. Articles, letters, jokes, poems, news, announcements, book reviews, adverts are all welcome. Please send to me via the Hall or email at the address in the box adjacent. Include photos or illustrations where you have them.

Thanks.

Harry Perry, Ed.

### Funeral Help Needed

I'm researching the history of non-religious funerals and wonder if any of you have memories (or anecdotes from deceased friends or family members) of non-religious/secular/humanist/etc. funerals in Leicester(shire), particularly from 1850 onwards.

Also, past rituals and practices concerning death and funerals.

I'd be most interested to hear from you. Thanks very much.

Eleanor Davidson

19 Hall Road

LE7 9SY

0116 292 1964

### Quiz Night 2009

This year we're changing the format of our last meeting (20th December). Part of the evening will of course be the traditional quiz, though shortened to make space for two new elements.

**Five-minute talks:** We're looking for about four or five volunteers to give us a short talk on a subject that matters to you. We don't know well enough what a diversity of interests and talents we have among our members, so if you have something you'd like to tell us about in a five minute talk, followed in our peaceful tradition by a few minutes of questions, have a go. One aim is to give new and young members a chance to experience putting together and delivering a talk to a critical but hopefully friendly audience, so such entries will be favoured if we have to choose. Brief proposals please to Frank Friedmann (email details in the box diagonally above, or at Secular Hall) by 13th December.

**Just a Minute:** Audience members will be invited to talk unprepared for one minute on a theme suggested by a randomly chosen picture or slogan. We shan't be penalising you for hesitation, deviation or repetition – so just take the risk and try.

I'm sure we'd all appreciate it if some participants brought along some festive fare to share on the night.

Frank Friedmann - Host

### Do Put This in Your Diary

**Renowned French pianist Mariko Terashi will be performing for the Society at Secular Hall on Sunday 29th November at 6.30pm. Tickets are £6 and £4 (members and concessions). Call Mike Burden on 0116 270 3335 to reserve your place.**



### 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.