



# The Leicester Secularist

*Journal of Leicester Secular Society*

November 2009

No.12



## AGM: Competition for Seats on the Board!

This year's AGM on 1st November went off without too much dissent - a far cry from days of yore when (I am told) the blood spilled was so great it flowed out the doors on to Humberstone Gate like the Nile in flood.

Attendance, at 33, was a little lower than in recent years perhaps because there was only one motion to discuss - with the thorny issue of the SACREs (Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education) once again rearing its ugly head. But this time it was only a technicality - with the amended motion passed to require LSS members on any SACRE to do their best to make it clear in public pronouncements that they were not LSS representatives. Apparently an AGM some years ago decided we would not seek to send delegates as it would compromise our opposition to religious influence in schools (all the other members being from religions rather than being educationalists). Allan Hayes (President) and John Catt (Treasurer) currently attend the city and county SACREs as 'recognised observers' 'vouchsafed' by the BHA.

The discussion never strayed over that ground or on to the substantive matter of whether LSS should engage with religious believers in anything other than combative mode.

The only other area of dissent was the statement by yours truly about my reasons for stepping down as Secretary and not standing again for the Board. This is all about the Hall and the modernisation project (see page 6).

Apart from these the usual officer reports were given - very little changed from those given to the EGM in June. In brief, that the Society has had a reasonably successful year by way of events and attendances at meetings. Praise for this learned journal was again heard as it was for the social activities of the spring walk and the visit to Cambridge.

While membership has stabilised at around 150 and finances on the 'Society' side of activities are breaking even (thanks to increased fees, donations and collections) expenditure on the building and the modernisation project continues to run high. Despite grant funding for much of this expenditure we have also had to pitch in, with reserves depleted as a result.

Michael Gerard was thanked for his period of service as Chair and Mike Burden was welcomed in his place. Allan Hayes was elected for his final year as President.

For the first time for many years there was competition for the vacant seats on the Board with two new members being elected (Richard Hopper and Steve Vallance). These help to give the Board a much needed more youthful complexion. Michael Gerard returns as an ordinary director and Dave Ray was thanked for his years of service.

The new line up is:

President: Allan Hayes

Chair: Mike Burden (Events)

John Catt (Treasurer)

Michael Gerard

Richard Hopper (Minutes)

Satish Kapur

Ned Newitt

Steve Vallance

Chris Williams (Comp Sec)

At the first meeting of the new Board Chris Williams was appointed Company Secretary and it was agreed to invite Dave Ray to be co-opted back.

Harry Perry



## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

**Sunday 15th November, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: Sikhs in British Society.** Resham Singh Sandhu MBE is a leading Leicester-based Sikh with a notable record of working for community cohesion in Leicester.

**Tuesday 17th November, 7.30pm, Square Bar, Hotel Street, Leicester:** Skeptics in the Pub with Prof Chris French talking about the **Psychology of Alien Contact and Abduction.** Non LSS event.

**Sunday 22nd November, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: A Humanist Vision for Education: Challenges and Opportunities.** Andrew Copson, head of education for the British Humanist Association, will present this talk on education and the promotion of an understanding of humanist philosophy.

**Sunday 29th November, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: A piano concert with Mariko Terashi, internationally recognised performer.** A notable evening in the Society's calendar. Pay event: £6; £4 concessions.

**Wednesday 2nd December, 7.30pm, Swan & Rushes, Oxford Street, Leicester:** Philosophy in Pubs: **Exploration Unlimited.** Non-LSS event.

**Sunday 6th December, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Funeral.** Eleanor Davidson, LSS member and humanist celebrant will demonstrate her dry humour and perfect timing in recalling some of her experiences.

**Sunday 13th December, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: The Incredible Life of Thomas Paine.** Michael Gerard presents his one-man show of scenes from the life of one of the greatest secularists of all time.

**Tuesday 15th December, 7.30pm, Square Bar, Hotel Street, Leicester:** Skeptics in the Pub with Ariane Sherine talking about the **Atheist Bus Campaign and the atheist's Guide to Christmas.** Non-LSS event.

**Sunday 20th December, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: Winter Solstice Fun Night.** Frank Friedmann comperes an evening of wit and humour with a quiz and a variant of 'Just A Minute'.



Campaigners in Australia - just one of thousands of events organised through the progressive on-line campaigning body AVAAZ (<http://www.avaaz.org/en/>)

## TckTckTck

TckTckTck is the name of the campaign to bring pressure to bear on world leaders at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen between 7th and 18th December.

There has been a huge mobilisation of people around the globe to seek to ensure that serious agreements are reached there for reductions in carbon emissions.

The campaign title emphasises that time is fast running out for the world to wake up to the seriousness of this issue.

Hundreds of organisations from every field of human activity are supporting the calls on world leaders to use Copenhagen to take meaningful action.

You can add your voice to the almost 3 million people worldwide who have already pledged support by making your declaration that **you are ready for our leaders to sign a global climate deal in Copenhagen that is ambitious, fair and binding**:

Harry Perry <http://tcktcktck.org/>



## Major Piano Concert by Mariko Terashi

Mariko is an internationally renowned performer who will be giving a concert in **Secular Hall** to include music by

Beethoven, Chopin and Scarlatti at

**6.30pm on Sunday 29th November,  
in Secular Hall**

Please book your tickets now by contacting

Michael Gerard on 0116 210 9027

or Mike Burden on 0116 270 3335

Or by email: [mikeburden2001@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:mikeburden2001@yahoo.co.uk)

**Tickets are £6 (£4 concessions)**

**Pay at the door**

## Jesus 7 - Epilogue

Kwame Kwei-Armah is a descendant of black Africans shipped at the end of the eighteenth century to America to work in the new plantations. They were torn from their tribes, their tribal customs and religions. Once in America they were initially treated only as one would treat any other chattel - just for what they could produce in terms of labour. However, these slaves did begin to form-up into little church groups. The slavers were at first opposed to this but overall the slaves worked harder and were less trouble so they began to support these developments. Some of the slaves learnt to read the Bible for themselves. And then it happened. Identifying with the Hebrew slaves who left Egypt in the Old Testament stories they started to claim for themselves the dictum, 'And God said - let my people go.' Together with this they also claimed that Jesus was not only the Lord for the white slavers, he was Lord for them too. They won the debate but it was a long journey before black Americans became fully integrated citizens in their own country.

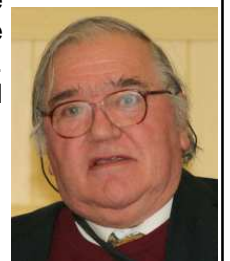
Now I can well see that a modern humanist might have difficulty with the success of Jesus as head of the church, but there is another message. It is the humanist message which is inherent in his teaching and the recognition that all human beings are created equal. There was no getting round it, hidden within the outer framework of church

doctrine was the hidden message of an early humanist who may have originally been little more than a wandering sage whose wisdom captivated those who heard him. I have tried to capture this and indicate how it could become part of the life of our own times and to make the point that it is valid in the entirely humanist context that I and many now own. This was not the context of Jesus in his own day, nor of the long pilgrimage that led the black Americans from slavery to full citizenship, but in our day I think we can make it our own.

Kwame Kwei-Armah thought of Jesus as a revolutionary. Similarly in this series I have tried to present him as someone whose impact was to force people to see things differently; to turn things round and to start again; to ask where love was to be found in any situation; to ask what was most important in the light of love; to see everyone as our neighbour; to help us look to the future rather than be tied to the past; and if things had gone wrong to work hard together to put them right. The people who benefited most were those otherwise most likely to be overlooked. So if I had to make an epitaph for him I would choose with Kwame:

***Jesus of Nazareth - Revolutionary,  
Defender of the Dispossessed.***

John Edmondson



### Question Time with Nick Griffin

Not my regular viewing but I was one of those who tuned in to swell the BBC's audience threefold for Question Time in late October to see BNP leader Nick Griffin perform.

The format turned out to be quite different from the normal one with Griffin repeatedly put on the spot to explain this or that quotation from his past or from his party's literature. A knowledgeable and assertive audience helped puncture the euphoria Griffin was enjoying following his party's electoral advances and the invitation to appear. When a comment hit home with particular force he would join in the laughter to demonstrate what a good guy he really is.

The bigger debate ignited by the appearance is, of course, the issue of free speech and the BBC's duty to air obnoxious views despite most people finding them abhorrent. Secularists defend free expression as a fundamental liberty too often

denied to atheists and others in the past by dominant religious forces. Indeed, the fight for free speech was one of the key motivators of the development of our Society in the first place. We must, therefore, support the BBC in issuing the invitation.

What then of the traditional leftist view that there should be 'no platform for fascists'? This is a position taken by the Society some years ago following a fascist invasion of the Hall that prevented Tariq Ali being heard. Since then the Society has taken the position that it supports free expression only for those who themselves adopt the same view - that free speech is a vital liberty for all and not to be suppressed for temporary political advantage or as part of a totalitarian state. The BNP also proclaims its adherence to the principles of free speech so we must defend its right to a platform.

Harry Perry

### Can you help or do you know someone who can?

The new Board has identified that it lacks expertise in Building Management. If a member has any expertise in this area, the Board would be grateful if they could offer their help on a consultation basis or consider co-option on to the Board.

Mike Burden (Chair)

### Uplifting Ruling of the Raving Rabbi (99)

Jews are forbidden by Jewish law from working on the Sabbath - including doing things like operating electrical equipment. But rabbis have for many years permitted lifts that stop at every floor without the passengers needing to push buttons, allowing Orthodox Jews to use them.

However, a recent ruling by one of Israel's leading rabbis, Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (99), barring the lifts, has reignited the row, forcing Orthodox Jews living on top floors to decide if they'd rather stay in bed than go to the synagogue on Saturdays. (That's a hard one.)

There is no single religious law authority for Orthodox Jews. But Elyashiv is a respected scholar and a highly influential voice in the Jewish world, thought of as his generation's greatest authority on religious law.

The Orthodox community is divided over the lifts. Opponents argue that while passengers push no buttons, their weight still increases the electrical power used by the lift, thereby violating Jewish law! Gravity, gravity, oh God why did you invent it? Couldn't you foresee the problems?

Elyashiv has been behind controversial decisions in the past. In September he decided Jews could not wear Crocs shoes on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, because he thought them too comfortable for the fasting holiday when the faithful must atone for their sins.

In 2004 he barred religious women from wearing Indian-made wigs for reasons of modesty because the hair might have been involved in forbidden idol-worshipping ceremonies ...

### The Islamic Invisible Man

A £90m feature film about Mohammed's life and the Islamic religion is being planned by a joint Qatari-British media outfit. Just don't expect to see Mohammed in it as depictions of 'the Prophet' are forbidden in Islam.

This brings to mind the old 'Invisible Man' TV series. Perhaps wrapping the invisible actor in bandages would solve the problem - or would that be too much like mimicking the pagan practices of ancient Egypt?

### It Might Have Been Murdnunoc!

Murdnunoc was a Superior Being,  
In fact an omnipotent being,  
One day a thought came and  
This Being decided to make a world!

But after much thought and  
planning Murdnunoc realised how  
complex it would be and the  
Idea was shelved.

The main problem was with the  
New world's prime beings.  
Murdnunoc was confused?!  
'If I tell them that I made them  
It raises Questions and If I  
Don't they may make up all  
Sorts of explanations of how  
They got there.

They might ask where I  
Came from, or even where the  
Universe came from?!'  
I don't know where I came from!

The more Murdnunoc thought  
About it the worse the problem  
Became. Suppose they want  
To worship me - how distasteful.

Over a long period Murdnunoc  
Tried to work out this insoluble  
Mystery until eventually  
There was an explosion  
Resulting in a big bang!

And .....?!

Paul Howe



### Put It In Your Diary - Quiz Night 2009

This year we're changing the format of the December meeting (6.30pm on the 20th). Part of the evening will be the traditional quiz, though shortened to make space for two new elements:

**Five-minute talks:** Will you give us a short talk on a subject that matters to you? If you'd like to tell us about it in a five minute talk, followed by a few minutes of questions, have a go. Contact me (email details in the box on the back page, or at Secular Hall) by 13th December.

**Just a Minute:** Members to 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!

Bring along some festive fare to share on the night.

Frank Friedmann - Host



### Stop Bliar!

You will have noticed that with the impending implementation of the Lisbon Treaty in the EU a campaign is under way to have Tony Blair appointed to the position of first President of the EU Council of Ministers.

We know from bitter experience that this would be a dreadful development in European politics. Blair lied to us over Iraq's non-existent weapons of mass destruction; he allowed Alastair Campbell to tell us that New Labour 'does not do God' while pouring our money into religious schools; he supports Israeli Zionism, favouring Israeli expansion over the rights of the Palestinians; he 'came out' as a Catholic only after leaving office and has devoted the millions he is making from public appearances to launching his Faith Foundation to further increase the damaging influence of religion in international affairs. In brief, the man is a deceitful menace to Europe and the world. Over 45,000 people have already supported the petitions to Stop Blair so join them as a matter of urgency by signing now at: <http://tinyurl.com/yhshbfff> and <http://tinyurl.com/yd4rk3x>. Then write to PM Gordon Brown and your local MP to object.

Harry Perry



### The Website Continues to Evolve

I have at last added a news box to our homepage ([tinyurl.com/seculeic](http://tinyurl.com/seculeic)), so whenever you have done or been involved in - or achieved - something relating to the Society and its objectives, do let me know. Remember, this is for News, so don't wait six months and send a big list!

To contact me with your news just use the details on the back page.

Thank you

Frank Friedmann

### Gay & Lesbian Humanist, Now Out!

G&LH is the only magazine published for LGBT non-believers worldwide. The latest issue is now available FREE at: [www.gayandlesbianhumanist.org](http://www.gayandlesbianhumanist.org)

### Euro vision

In this issue of G&LH we take a look at what life is really like for gay people in Russia and the former Eastern bloc countries of central and eastern Europe.

In an exclusive interview for G&LH, Mike Foxwell talks to Martyn Andrews, the British expat presenter on Russia Today, the popular English-language Russian TV channel.



George Broadhead

### City of Sanctuary

The City of Sanctuary, in partnership with the British Red Cross, continues to collect much-needed items for destitute asylum seekers in Leicester. Don't forget that you can either bring your donations for the blue box at Secular Hall or take them straight to the British Red Cross at 244 London Road, Leicester.

Items needed are food (non-perishable), toiletries and baby stuff.

Asylum seeker recipients really do appreciate these items.

Thank you.

**Atheism is a religion like "off" is a tv channel.**

### \* The Electronic Secularist \*

Taking your *Secularist* as a .pdf file over the internet would save the Society oodles of money. Contact the Editor (box on back page) to make the switch. Thanks. Harry

### Carnegie, Rags to Riches

On 18<sup>th</sup> October our member Steve Vallance gave a well-researched and thought-provoking talk on Andrew Carnegie, the nineteenth-century Scottish-born steel magnate, who became known as 'the father of modern philanthropy'.



Steve Vallance

Steve began by describing Carnegie's rise to fortune. The failure of his father's weaving business caused the family to emigrate in 1848 to Allegheny, Pennsylvania in the United States. After a series of low-key jobs, which included being a bobbin-maker and railroad worker, Carnegie started a bridge-making company before later moving into iron and steel production.

Carnegie was a ruthless businessman, who undercut his competitors and held much political influence. His relationship with his workers was poor; a fact which, as Steve pointed out, probably contributed to the industrial unrest which occurred during a strike at his Homestead steelworks in 1892. During the unrest, an armed militia, known as the 'Pinkertons', were sent in by management to restore order. This action to try and break the strike resulted in the deaths of twenty-five men. Unsurprisingly,

Carnegie was keen to distance himself from the events at Homestead and pinned much of the blame for the trouble on his steelworks manager, Henry Clay Frick.

Steve explained that Carnegie described his ideology in his 1889 article *The Gospel of Wealth*. In the article he advocates the Social Darwinist model proposed by Herbert Spencer. Although Carnegie ultimately sought to justify his wealth, he nevertheless

gave very substantial sums of money away to charitable causes. The fruits of his philanthropy can be seen in, amongst other things, the many universities and libraries which he helped to set up, both in North America and Britain.

After the talk, members discussed the merits and disadvantages of Carnegie's top-down philanthropic approach to providing education for workers. Steve pointed out that Carnegie's approach was at odds with the system of educational self-help already adopted by workers at the time.

Richard Hopper



**'The Catholic Church is a Force for Good in the World' - yeah, right**



The Catholic Church encourages the faithful to obey its doctrines by telling them what will happen to them if they don't - eternal torment at the hands of Satan. Wonder how many of those in this picture are Catholic priests?  
(NB Artist's impression only, not a photo)

The opportunity to watch Christopher Hitchens and Stephen Fry debating the Catholic Archbishop of Abuja and Ann Widdecombe MP on the motion 'The Catholic Church is a Force for Good in the World' was one that Chris and I could not miss. So, on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> October, we travelled to the Methodist Central Hall in Westminster to the Intelligence Squared debate.

The hall was packed and I wondered if our party of five was a small raft of atheists in a sea of devout Catholics. The initial numbers read out by the Chair, Zeinab Badawi, gave us the answer: For the motion, 678; undecided, 346; against, 1,102.

Hitchens and Fry had everything going for them, the facts, the arguments, the intellect ... and the support of the audience. Hitchens' knowledge of the atrocities of the church, past and present, devastated Widdecombe's position even before she spoke. Fry condemned the church's attitude to sex, and likened its 'extremes' of celibacy and child abuse to those who are obsessed with food, either anorexic or morbidly obese. Even Ann Widdecombe appeared a little embarrassed when her

'defence' of the (now non-existent) doctrine of Limbo was that unbaptised infants did not go there for eternity, 'only until the second coming'. The Archbishop's basic stance, that 1.2 billion Catholics can't be wrong, didn't wash at all and his evasion of the question, 'did Jesus himself say anything about homosexuality?' put by Ms Badawi, was blatant – it was, 'that is the wrong question'!

The figures speak for themselves. The poll taken at the end of the debate:

For, 268; undecided, 34; against, 1,876.

Which goes to show that Hitchens and Fry v the Catholic Church is 'no contest'!

For an excellent summary of the two-hour event, I would recommend this site: <http://tinyurl.com/ykq2z5g>

The BBC filmed the debate and, we were told, it will go out on BBC World on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> November. BBC World is not available in the UK but I am confident it will be uploaded on to YouTube in due course.



Pennie Blatchford



Ludovic Kennedy – a great man and a great secularist

**Death of Ludovic Kennedy**

Sir Ludovic Kennedy, who died earlier this week at the age of 89, was a long-time honorary associate of the National Secular Society and one of which we were particularly proud.

During a long and eventful career as a journalist, broadcaster, author and campaigner for social justice, Sir Ludovic made a huge contribution to the abolition of the death penalty in

Britain through his rigorous investigations into miscarriages of justice. It was he who proved that Timothy Evans — a young man who was wrongly hanged for the murder of his wife — was innocent.

Kennedy later campaigned for the legalisation of voluntary euthanasia and wrote an influential book about atheism *All in the Mind – a Farewell to God*. The NSS received regular requests for contact details for Sir Ludovic from journalists and researchers even after he had moved into a nursing home, proving that his legacy is still important and will live on.

From the NSS weekly bulletin

**Corrective Note**

I had a piece in the August edition of the 'Leicester Secularist' in which I reported some critical comments made by an undertaker on secular officiators at funerals. Further investigation revealed that these remarks were not about officiators from the British Humanist Association but ones from an organisation called 'Celebration of Life'. I am sorry

for this confusion. While I am sure that some BHA officiators do a good job - such as Eleanor Davidson - my own experiences of such occasions have not been very positive. I have found that the most satisfactory funerals have been ones where the relations and friends of the deceased person have made their own arrangements.

Ross Longhurst

**Photos from Saku Pinta's Talk**

Regrettably I omitted to include with Lyn Hurst's report in last month's edition the photos taken by Frank Friedmann at the showing of Saku Pinta's film *To My Son In Spain* on 6th September. These are reproduced below. Harry



Saku answers questions from the audience



Around fifty attended - a good crowd for the Hall



Saku shows off his DVD

### Why I Stood Down From the Board

I thought it right that I explain why I have resigned as Company Secretary and stood down from the Board.

As stated at the AGM, I have come to the conclusion that the Hall modernisation project is a mistake. As things have unfolded it has become clear that the many good ideas drawn from members during Marion Blockley's consultation will not come to fruition in the refurbished Hall because they are uneconomic. The option plans just submitted to HLF show that the modernised building is expected to have the same tenants as now with more or less the same spaces - and the same conflicts of usage.

This means that we are being asked to embark on a huge fundraising campaign in order to modernise a building that is in the wrong place and that will not achieve the objectives originally envisaged. I believe the diversion of effort and resources into this project is distorting our priorities as a Society. The focus on building preservation does not help recruitment - it is attractive to historians and conservationists but deters younger secularists who primarily want to challenge growing religious influence.

Conversion into an educational charity is soon to be sold to members to help with fundraising because gift aid tax supplements will be accessible to boost funds raised from donations. It will also mark us out, in the eyes of local authorities, as reputable recipients of grant aid. It will further water down the Society's ability to challenge religion.

In order to smooth the path for fundraising it seems we

must at the same time avoid public controversy so as not to rock the boat. The Campaign Group called for by the EGM appears to have been sidelined for just this reason. Press releases on topical controversies are rarely issued in case we are seen as troublemakers.

With these views having developed in my mind I felt that I could not honourably continue on the Board lest it give the impression that I support this strategy and what has become a major preoccupation of the Society - the preservation and maintenance of a historic building.

I believe a modern functional centre for the Society is important and we should turn our efforts to finding one that meets our requirements, in a good location with ease of access and car-parking and which does not involve us in being primarily a property management company. The Rationalist Trust should sell the Hall in order to provide the funds to buy such a building but as they will not do this then leasing or hiring is the best way forward. The best future for the Hall would be with a conservationist charity.

If we persist with the project for Secular Hall we will simply repeat the costly mistakes of the past (where has Horace Stableford's bequest gone?) and saddle our successors for the next thirty years with the same problems we have had for the last thirty.

We are supposed to be rationalists, let's have a rational debate and make a rational decision on this.

Harry Perry



**NHS BLOOD STOCKS ARE LOW - only four days' supply of O negative and B negative!**  
**Call 0300 123 23 23 to find out how and where you can donate.**



### Author, Printer, Salesperson

Having printed my book *Disillusioned Apprentice* I now have to sell it. I previously produced *Walking in Leicestershire* with a view of getting an insight into the publishing business. I thought it would be easy to sell simply because the competition was printing in black and white so in business jargon I had a USP (unique selling point). In the jargon of a spiv 'an edge'. Not that I'm a spiv mind. Selling the walks book's been a doddle. I've sold out and made a few bob. With the latest book I'm aiming at a different market. I've got an ISBN number and it comes up on shop computers as 'In Print'. I launched it at Thurmaston Sports and Community Centre as some of you know. It was a good evening and I sold some books. I've contacted Borders and Waterstones and neither were prepared to buy it centrally. I have spoken to the managers of both the local shops and they were happy to take it, though both said it would be on a sale or return basis, but they said that with the walks book. Last Saturday I went to the Anarchist Book Fair in London and sold four copies to stallholders (I was too late to get a stall myself). By the end of the day one

copy had gone to the public which was gratifying.

On Sunday I went to the William Morris Museum in Walthamstow which was interesting. Upstairs is an exhibition of the work of Frank Brangwyn who knew William Morris and Earnest Gimson. Frank was my great uncle. One of his paintings there is called 'The Last Supper'. The gallery have taken the name seriously when it's a picture of down-and-outs in a soup kitchen. The name was obviously a piss-take. Old Frank new what it was to be skint. He lived next to a monastery and used to get plastered with the monks next door who brewed something potent. I met him once or twice but was too young to remember. One thing I do know was that he was an atheist and although a war artist in the first lot, he became a pacifist thereafter. On Monday I schlepped down Charing Cross Road attempting to flog some books but failed dismally. Never mind, I've sold one box - only sixty-one more to go.

Dave Ray



### 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.

## Our Love of Stability:

The nano-universes in our head  
Hypothesise outside reality  
With an endless supply of analogues  
Producing false airs of sagacity.

Such musings, crenellated, can be used  
To dominate social environments,  
And so protect islands of certainty  
From the awful encroachment of truth.

Sought stability's the sclerotic trend  
That hinders explorative endeavour:  
Whereby progress is viewed as a challenge  
To ways we'd continue forever.

Doubtful concepts in religion and  
science  
Are too often shielded by social  
compliance.

Wilf Gaunt



## Summer Headline: 'Camp Quest aims to encourage scepticism and critical thinking'

As I'm sure you will all remember, this was a summer camp in sunny Somerset for children of Atheists, Agnostics, Humanists, Secularists, Rationalists and Freethinkers like us that aimed to encourage them towards scepticism and critical thinking – a laudable objective that should be pursued in our state schools.

The organisers of Camp Quest said the children would be 'encouraged to think for themselves and evaluate the world critically'. My spirit soared.

As well as applying their newly sharpened intellectual scalpels to the putrid creeds of the conventional religions I hope at least a few of them will also have attempted to dissect the newborn dogmas of ... oh, say ... Eco-Alarmism, a new religion based upon guilt, just like most of the old ones. Alarming, children are being force-fed eco-propaganda in science and geography lessons. Hopefully some of them will question the beliefs being presented to them as scientifically proven facts (see <http://tinyurl.com/ygof3b2>).

They might then turn their attentions to the doctrines of Political Correctness. The new testament of this belief system has many dark suspect areas requiring the searchlights (let's switch metaphors) of their scepticism and critical thinking, although they will have to be careful not to be perceived as heretics by the new Puritans.

Current political issues will exercise their minds in new and exciting ways. Lots there for searchlights to illuminate (and scalpels to tear into).

Then there is Postmodernism ... <http://tinyurl.com/25vf9k> ... umm ... they might be wasting their time.

Perhaps some of these wider applications could be considered at next year's Camp Quest.

Ian Bartram



**COFFEE MORNING**  
**THURSDAY 26TH NOVEMBER**  
**10.30AM — 12.30PM**  
**AT SECULAR HALL**  
**TEA, COFFEE, BISCUITS.**  
**COME ALONG FOR**  
**A FRIENDLY CHAT.**  
**HOSTED BY ARIADNE TAMPION**  
**AND JOHN CATT**

## A Study-Visit in Belgium

Can you imagine state-funded secular counsellors in our schools, universities, prisons, hospitals and workplaces?

This September I spent a week with the Humanistisch-Vrijzinnige Vereniging (Humanist/Freethinking Association) in Antwerp, Flanders, finding out just how this has been achieved in Belgium.

To understand how this came about we need to look first at the country's Napoleonic constitution, under which the state must pay the salaries of the clergy, but both church and state are barred from interfering in each other's affairs.

By the 1980s, hostility to the church had reached such a level that a constitutional amendment might have ended the church's state funding.

Instead a deal was done – some on both sides regard it as a pact with the devil – to allow the funding to continue, but extending it to the non-religious under the umbrella of the Unie Vrijzinnige Verenigingen (UVV – Union of Freethinking Organisations). The principle of non-interference was maintained so funding is per institution, not per head.

In Antwerp province alone, twenty-eight centres, each employing at least five staff, are funded by the Ministry of Justice. Some buildings are bigger than others but all are available for ceremonies, lectures and counselling, and as meeting places for the community.

Paid humanist workers - 'moral counsellors' - (doesn't translate well!) provide ceremonies for funerals, marriages/civil partnerships, baby namings and for Coming of Age ceremonies for freethinking youth at around the age of twelve years. The MCs also work in prisons, homes for the elderly, universities, the army, hospitals, fishermen's organisations and national airports; they are also involved in foster care provision for Social Services. In state schools, students can



opt for two hours per week of RE or Secular Humanist Ethics.

MCs are a well-salaried graduate profession. The 'counselling' is existential caring – enabling people to face situations that they are not able to look at alone. They help people through loneliness, bereavement, divorce, disability issues, children leaving home, etc. They also help individuals and families through abortion and euthanasia issues and are often approached by Catholics who need a more sympathetic ear than they get from their church.

It is difficult to generalise about the interactions between MCs and their clients because sessions are confidential, and the principle of non-interference precludes even the collection and publication of statistics. The UVV stands for these principles:

- free enquiry, not bounded by religion;
- rejecting dogma and all arguments based on authority;
- every individual is the creator and bearer of his/her own moral values and method of giving meaning to life.

What practical lessons for us?

Earlier this year I approached the BHA to consider developing here in Leicester a pilot for a 'humanist in the community' profession based on the kind of work I undertake – conducting ceremonies and representing the non-religious in hospitals, hospices and colleges. Nothing has yet come of this. But, unless the BHA is prepared to invest in getting out there into the community it will remain an elitist organisation of intellectuals and leave the majority at the mercy of the religions.

Next month: A look at UVV's work in hospitals, prisons, homes for the elderly, schools, and the Belgian law and practice on euthanasia.

Eleanor S Davidson



## Leicester Secular Society Contact Details

Registered Office: Secular Hall

75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB

Tel: 07598 971420

Email: [mail@leicestersecularsociety.org.uk](mailto:mail@leicestersecularsociety.org.uk)

Website: [www.leicestersecularsociety.org.uk](http://www.leicestersecularsociety.org.uk)

LSS is a company limited by guarantee

Reg. No. 06292639

**President - Allan Hayes:** Tel: 0116 241 8747

Email: [allan-hayes@ntlworld.com](mailto:allan-hayes@ntlworld.com)

**Chairperson & Events - Mike Burden:** Tel: 07722 782727

Email: [mikeburden2001@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:mikeburden2001@yahoo.co.uk)

**Treasurer/Web group admin - John Catt:** Tel: 01509 211468

Email: [treasurer@leicestersecularsociety.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@leicestersecularsociety.org.uk)

**Company Secretary - Chris Williams:** Tel: 07718 629651

Email: [chris.williams@open.ac.uk](mailto:chris.williams@open.ac.uk)

**Hall bookings - Wilf Gaunt:** Tel: 07598 971420

Email: [wilfredgaunt@yahoo.com](mailto:wilfredgaunt@yahoo.com)

**Website/News updates - Frank Friedmann:** Tel: 0116 292 1964

Email: [web@leicestersecularsociety.org.uk](mailto:web@leicestersecularsociety.org.uk)

**Librarian - Gillian Lighton:**

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

**Secularist editor - Harry Perry:** Tel: 07795 097635

Email: [harry.perry1@btinternet.com](mailto:harry.perry1@btinternet.com)

**Keyholders:** Allan, Michael G, Mike B 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.*

## The Leicester Secularist Copy Deadline

The copy deadline for the next edition is **12 noon on Friday 4th December 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.

## Non-religious funerals

A Humanist funeral ceremony is a uniquely personal and memorable way to celebrate the life of your loved one

[eleanor-ceremonies@ntlworld.com](mailto:eleanor-ceremonies@ntlworld.com)

0116 292 1964

0793 032 8755

ELEANOR S DAVIDSON

[www.RedRibbonCeremonies.co.uk](http://www.RedRibbonCeremonies.co.uk)

BHA ACCREDITED

### Report Back from Board of 13th October 2009

- Next meeting 7.30pm, Tuesday 3rd November
- Campaign Group never launched
- ED offering picture for the Hall - to be investigated
- Two new members approved
- Final accounts show small surplus
- New proposals for design of Hall refurbishment outlined. New drawings due in November
- HLF submission behind schedule; HLF agreed further extension while some items already sent in
- LRT has confirmed that if a lease is legally possible it would be granted
- Forward planning of events programme well in hand
- Atheist bus campaign costs not yet investigated
- Guttering repair (*circa* £500) to be given go-ahead

### Report Back from Board of 3rd November 2009

- Next meeting 7.30pm, Tuesday 8th December
- Society's artwork to be reviewed
- Website to promote room lettings
- Allowance to Leicester Rationalist Trust for legal advice on granting lease increased to £1,450
- Problems with speakers withdrawing at short notice discussed
- Display in front window has been updated
- Chris Williams appointed as Company Secretary
- Richard Hopper appointed as Minutes Secretary
- David Ray to be invited to join the Board as a co-opted member
- HLF logo to be displayed as required by our agreement with them
- Some slots in Spring programme still to be filled (ideas welcome)

### 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.

[www.leicestersecularsociety.org.uk](http://www.leicestersecularsociety.org.uk)  
email: [mail@leicestersecularsociety.org.uk](mailto:mail@leicestersecularsociety.org.uk)