



The Leicester Secularist

Journal of Leicester Secular Society

December 2009

No.13



Promoting Secularism

Promoting Secularism takes many forms, from casual conversations, through our lecture series and the *Secularist*, to acute confrontations, but a lot is to do with the steady build up of the Society's presence in the city and wider as an organisation to be taken notice of. In a year that will see a general election it is important that we seize every opportunity to make our case and spread the message - to reach out.

November 15th to 21st was National Interfaith Week, not an attractive title for many of us, but one of its aims was 'to increase understanding between people of religious and non-religious belief'. It is an indication of the increased standing of the Society that the county council organiser expressed keen interest in having a secular/humanist voice heard. A particularly important part of his invitation, to my mind, was the offer of a First Person slot in the *Mercury* to put the secular/humanist case.

As a result, with the help of Ned Newitt, Dave Ray, Helen Everett and Mike Burden, I arranged an open afternoon on Sunday 15th November along the lines of our earlier English Heritage Open Day. This attracted a disappointing number of visitors, but the previously arranged talk by Resham Singh Sandhu about Sikhs in British Society in the evening was well suited to the Week and was very successful. Six of us, Bessie Hayes, Mike Burden, John Catt, Eleanor Davidson, Frank Friedmann and myself, attended the official opening in County Hall on Monday evening. This was a rather formal affair but it did present opportunities to make people aware of the Society. My First Person column appeared on the Wednesday, and in

the afternoon I stood in for Eleanor Davidson and Chris Williams in a discussion with students from around the city at Leicester College. It is vital that we recognise and respond to the disillusionment with religion that is so evident amongst young people. On Sunday 22nd November, it was once again fortunate that an appropriate talk was already on our programme: Paul Pettinger from the British Humanist Association spoke about a Humanist vision for education - you will find a report of the meeting in this issue of the *Secularist*.

One annoyance of the Week was that there was no mention of secularism in the exhibition in the Highcross Centre, but I shall press for this to be rectified next year.

Besides the First Person article referred to above, several letters have appeared in the *Mercury* from Harry Perry, John Catt and myself, provoked by the Bishop's remarks about the Samworth Academy and global warming (which he said was more likely if people do not believe in God!) and by the revelations of the appalling behaviour of the Catholic Church in Ireland - texts are available on the Society website in the new News column. We need to keep this up, and not just in the *Mercury*. I am grateful to Lyn Hurst for drawing my attention to an excellent article in the *Guardian* about academies (<http://tinyurl.com/yzbaylu>) which revealed amongst other things that the Samworth Academy sponsors, David Samworth and the Diocese of Leicester, still owe £380,000. It enabled me to add comments about the use of the academy model to get more faith schools.

We continue to help Leicester City of Sanctuary - they had a very successful celebration in the Hall after a walk to/from Loughborough (both ways for some). Our member Helen Everett is Chair of the organisation and Bessie Hayes is the main organiser of the voucher exchange scheme.



(Continued on page 6)

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

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'.

Sunday 3rd January, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: Chill-out Evening. A relaxing evening to round off the festive season for members and their guests. Bring along some seasonal fayre and refreshments.

Wednesday 6th January, 7.30pm, Swan and Rushes, Oxford Street, Leicester: Philosophy in Pubs: **Forgive and/or Forget?** People attending are invited to discuss an article on a topic presented to them on the night. No preparation possible.

Sunday 10th January, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: The Nuclear Power Debate. Members Caroline Moles and Chris Williams debate the pros and cons of nuclear power as a major energy source at a time of global warming.

Sunday 17th January, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: The Bureaucracy Still Rules, OK? Members Jill and Harry Perry give an illustrated talk on their campervan trip to Russia, with observations on regional life and politics after the fall of communism.

New Season Events Programme

Leicester Secular Society
 Secular Hall Events
 January-March 2010

The Nuclear Power Debate
 Chris Williams v. Caroline Moles, 8.30pm
 Sunday 10th January

Darwin Lecture: What a Wonderful World
 Adam Burdick, 7.30pm
 Thursday 11th February

Eyewitness in Gaza
 Jenny Libell, 8.30pm
 Sunday 28th February

Artificial Intelligence Demystified
 Prof. Adrian Hopgood, 8.30pm
 Sunday 7th March

MORE EVENTS INSIDE
 Feel welcome to come along to debate and to socialise over tea and biscuits
 Free entry (collectors) unless stated otherwise

Leicester Secular Society
 Secular Hall
 75 Humberstone Gate
 Leicester LE1 1YB
 www.leicestersecularsociety.org.uk

Members in and close to Leicester should be receiving five copies of the new January-March Events Programme along with this edition. If you have the *Secularist* electronically then you will be receiving the copies by post, alone.

The Board would like you to use these copies constructively to promote the Society and encourage a growth in membership.

Please offer copies to friends, relatives and neighbours who you think may be interested in an event or the programme in general.

In addition, please seek to display them in places the public frequent like libraries, information points, common rooms in schools and colleges, post offices, shops, etc. Ask permission first!

If you need more copies please ask Mike Burden and he will get them to you.

Contact details on back page.

Thank you

2010 SUBS ARE DUE!

Please use the membership renewal sheet enclosed with this *Secularist* to renew your membership for 2010.

Renewing now will help the Society greatly with its cash flow and ease the burden on the Treasurer. Thanks.

Today in Taiwan

On 25th October Richard Johnson told us of his visit to Taiwan as neither tourist nor academic, but a bit of both.

Richard was there for six weeks meeting and lecturing students and academics. His conversations and lectures were all translated both ways.

There are many interesting developments in Taiwan, one of which is their community universities – which are a type of free adult education along with centres for community activism, for example taking action to prevent the building of a nuclear power station. Each of these universities has its own banner.

In Khaosung Community University there was a two-day event; part of the discussion/learning action related to the little traditional harbour ferries which were in danger of being displaced by large modern ferries. People want to maintain and preserve their democracy.

Taiwan has a long history of being colonised by others: by China, by Japan and by the USA. The resulting influences of these invasions have melded together to create a modern, democratic Taiwan following the major struggle in the 1980's and 1990's after the fall of the Kuomintang (KMT).

For Richard visiting Taiwan raised some interesting issues around what it means to be a democratic country, and how to incorporate local traditions. He found it fascinating that the local Community Universities did courses on effective campaigning,

Richard explained that Taiwan is a relatively equal society with small industries located in the countryside, reasonable media freedom and a range of ethnic groups.

Caroline Moles



Proof

There is, in the collective human psyche, a contrariness which makes us reject the blatantly obvious; and yet espouse, wholeheartedly, pronouncements for which there is not a shred of evidence.

Fashion and hierarchical dominance override all the claims of common sense, and scientific rectitude and rigour. This is shown most notably in the contrasting attitudes to the subjects of Astrology, on the one hand, and the Relativity Theories on the other.

Astrology has never been subjected to proper scrutiny or research on a modern, methodical, scientific basis because 'responsible' opinion condemns it as being 'superstitious nonsense'. Yet we are all witness, in our everyday lives, to the often overriding influence of the Moon and Sun on our actions. Our sleeping and waking (jet lag), the tides of the oceans, weather, seasons - planting and harvesting - the cycles of mammalian fecundity, the very existence of life on Earth, are all dependent on the Earth's disposition in relation to the other members of our solar system.

But the 'honourable men' - and they are all, all 'honourable men' - say that the basic assumption for astrology is superstitious nonsense. And, because they are 'honourable men', we accept their verdict: even though the REALITY around us screams otherwise.

When light was observed as having a constant speed, Einstein proposed that TIME should be regarded as a variable, and put forward the Relativity Theories.

Since time is a measure of the observed progress of the universe, this implies that the universe reverses its

progress, or speeds up its development (all hundreds of millions of light years of it), on the moment of an electron's motion (Quantum theory), or at the behest of a mathematical formula (Relativity). You may not have noticed TIME going into reverse, or jumping forward; but the 'honourable men' say that it does, so it must.

The key to these attitudes is human hubris: through its faith that a system of logic can determine, rather than indicate, events in the REAL world. The fault can be seen in St Anselm's Ontological PROOF of the existence of God, and in Richard Dawkins' PROOF that God does not exist. Can a mere logic system manipulate matters of such awesome consequence; which are, as both the Buddha and Kant pointed out, way beyond our ability to know or understand? Mathematics is the most magnificent logic tool developed by humankind; but it still can only indicate, not determine, reality. Like all logic systems, it is still bound by the rule: 'Rubbish in, rubbish out.' Like the digital logic of an audio system, if you put a pig's grunt in at one end, then a pig's grunt should issue forth from the other. As with all logic systems, mathematics CANNOT 'prove', it can only 'validate': within the limits of the input.

When Einstein's arguments required that time be regarded as a variable, in order to achieve a conclusion, should not some hard questions have been asked? But then, the 'honourable men' said that it was all right, so we must suppose that it was.

Wilf Gaunt



~~~~~ **What is the biggest problem for an atheist? No one to talk to during orgasm.** ~~~~~



Samantha Stein, the camp director of Camp Quest-U.K.  
Photo courtesy of Camp Quest-U.K. website

### Samantha Stein and Camp Quest

Three years ago Samantha Stein, inspired by information in Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* about a summer camp for young people in the United States that accepted atheism, wanted to find out more. An undergraduate at the time, she went to a Camp Quest in Michigan and came away determined to set up a similar camp in the UK.

On 4th October we were treated to an excellent presentation on what took place this July at a five-day Camp Quest near Bath where twenty-four young people, ages 7 to 17, enjoyed many outdoor activities plus sharing ideas with a group of nine camp counsellors. Among other tasks, the sixteen girls and eight boys were challenged to refute the presence of invisible unicorns also inhabiting the camp site! Not surprisingly the camp was realised with networking through websites. What was not expected was the media

coverage earlier in the year over an atheist camp for children. Ironically that coverage resulted in a lot of free publicity, and places for the camp filled up quickly.

Samantha gave her résumé in little over a half an hour, and that allowed for the many questions that we wanted to ask. It was here that she excelled in reflecting on issues related to what had taken place, such as media distortion, an international side to those attending as campers and counsellors, Dawkins' contributions, the difference between what this camp offered and what a Woodcraft Camp might offer.

We can support Camp Quest UK by letting others know about it, making contributions - especially funds for young people to attend, and looking to set up one in our area. Judging from the discussions that were taking place at the end of the meeting, maybe we will have one of our youngest members telling about his experience at a Camp Quest in a year's time!

Bobba



### A Humanist Vision for Education

On 22nd November an audience of 27 heard an excellent review of the British Humanist Association's work in education from Paul Pettinger, BHA's Campaigns Officer (Faith Schools and Education).

The BHA's aims include: taking control of faith schools from religious bodies; radically changing religious education and the daily 'collective act of worship'; improving PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education), particularly Sex and Relationships Education (SRE); and combating creationism.

Co-operation with the Accord Coalition and teachers'

unions is on-going; there is now an All-Party Humanist Group and separate ones for each major party. Help is provided to local campaigns.

Recent successes include: SRE to be compulsory in all schools from 5 to 16 and parents will not be allowed to withdraw children who are 15 years of age or older; evolution is to be a compulsory subject in primary schools. The campaign to raise £30,000 ([www.justgiving.com/nofaithschools](http://www.justgiving.com/nofaithschools)) which started on 10th November has now (23rd November) reached £14,000 (over £17,000 with Gift Aid).

Points made about faith schools during discussion included: they make up one-third of all state schools; the taxpayer pays for all wages and salaries and over 90% of building costs; reputable reports show no convincing evidence that they are superior to other schools; the threat of more faith schools if schools are taken out of local authority control.

Allan Hayes



### Eleanor's TFTD x 2

If you missed them live you can still hear Eleanor Davidson's thoughts for the day for Radio Leicester by downloading podcasts from the Newsbox on our website home page. [www.leicestersecularsociety.org.uk](http://www.leicestersecularsociety.org.uk)

### We Did It! Following the Secularists' campaign to stop Tony Blair being appointed as the first President of the EU Council of

Ministers the Council instead appointed the Belgian Herman van Rompuy. Thanks to all those who signed the petitions! Shame, though, that he could be another Catholic mole!



### Saving Sayed Pervez Kambaksh

You may not have noticed the snippet of news that came out of Afghanistan last month. Reporters Without Borders report that Sayed Pervez Kambaksh was quietly pardoned and released from prison by President Karzai and immediately fled the country. He is now keeping a low profile lest a Muslim fanatic tries to settle the score.

### 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

### Remembrance Sunday

'Died for their country'  
What a farce

Who are these who  
Form our country?  
Not me  
Nor my friends,  
Nor my family

Did that lad  
Really feel he  
Was fighting  
For his country?

Gill Cunningham

## The Jewish Problem

Yes, catchy heading, eh?

Channel 4's *Dispatches* on 16th November described how the Israeli lobby works in Britain. It was a comprehensive, if slightly superficial (owing to the difficulty of penetrating secretive activities), look at the way in which a small number of wealthy Jews are able to influence the British government's foreign policy, and media coverage of the Middle East, in favour of the Zionist project for Israel.

Some emphasis was placed on the roles of Labour Friends of Israel and Conservative Friends of Israel in lobbying the government, organising pro-Israeli functions and the channelling of funds to pro-Israel parliamentary candidates. (No mention of Lib-Dem Friends of Israel though it does exist, counting the Secularist of the Year, Evan Harris, as a member.)

The programme makers and the presenter, Peter Osborne, judged every word carefully in an attempt to pre-empt the usual fake furore created by Zionist Jews about any media coverage that is not totally submissive to the Israeli state policy of colonisation and annexation of Palestinian land. It didn't work, for the internet was alive with accusations of anti-Semitism even before the programme was broadcast. Anti-Zionist Jews who took part were accused of being 'self-hating Jews' (is this some Freudian concept?).

You may be feeling slightly uncomfortable now about such free use of the word 'Jews' when the norm in this discourse is to use terms like 'Zionists' or 'Israelis'. You fear that I am about to launch into a diatribe, Nazi style, about a Jewish conspiracy or even quote the fraudulent *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Well, Osborne was careful to state that they found no evidence of a conspiracy as such and yet there is no doubt that the use of free tours of Israel for *hundreds* of MPs, the donations from Jewish businessmen to sympathetic parliamentarians and the pressure on media editors from Jews in positions of influence and power does have the nature of a conspiracy. It may not be co-ordinated or directed by any central body but then does it need to be? The clarity of the aims of the Zionist project, for Jews to acquire, in time, the whole of 'Biblical Israel' (including 'Judea and Samaria' - the West Bank), by any means necessary, is a sufficient organising principle to work from.

The Jewish community in Britain is only 300,000 strong and a very large number of them, possibly the majority, do not uncritically support the excesses of the Israeli government, or the so-called 'settlers' and the religious right in Israel. While most do want to see Israel remain, many have qualms about its description as the 'Jewish state' with all the racist and apartheid policies that follow in the wake of that official concept. A democratic, open, pluralist state is one model favoured by some progressive and secular Jews.

So, for those like me, opposed to religious influence in politics and deeply concerned about the consequences of the disastrous

UN decision to create the state of Israel after WW2, what is 'the Jewish Problem'?

A country has been, is being, stolen from the people who inhabited it. The piecemeal, ratchet method of ethnic cleansing of Palestinians for the settlement of Jews goes on daily, today, now. Evictions and expulsions are the order of the day. Cynically, the Israeli government uses the Nazi rationale for German expansion in the 1930's - there is a need to acquire land for the 'natural growth' of the Jewish population - *Lebensraum*.

Meanwhile, the natural, and faster, growth of the Palestinian population is denied additional land for new villages or even building permits to extend the houses they own at present. Their overcrowding and homelessness worsens by the day - incentivising emigration and all part of the grand plan.

Cleverly, the Zionist Jewish lobby in the UK protests that anybody who compares Israeli methods with those of the Nazis is being anti-Semitic! You can compare the methods of any government in the world to those of the Nazis, it is a standard political debating point, but not if you're talking about Israel! This is intended to disarm supporters of the Palestinians, to hamstring opposition to the Zionist project.

This, then, is the new 'Jewish problem': how to objectively describe what the Israeli Jews are doing, with the secretive support of a few wealthy Jews here, without mentioning Jews and thereby being accused of anti-Semitism? With Israel officially designated *the* Jewish state there is no avoiding the fact that the colonisation is being done in the name of Jews. It is therefore impossible to comment on the situation without referencing the fact that Jews of a particular outlook are at the bottom of it.

Despite the *Dispatches* expose, the media continues in its compliant attitude to the Israelis. On 30th November James Naughtie (BBC, R4, *Today*) interviewed the Israeli ambassador, Ron Proser, on the threat of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons. Throughout the interview the ambassador was permitted, without challenge, to portray Israel as a normal Western democracy. Not once was he challenged about Israel's own nuclear weapons - developed in defiance of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Israel **has** nuclear weapons. Israel is **not** a signatory of the NPT. Nevertheless, the ambassador was allowed to criticise Iran for not observing the terms of the NPT and to call for stronger sanctions against it. Without challenge!

On 1st December, also on the *Today* programme, there was an item on how illegal Jewish settlers had vandalised 81 olive trees of a Palestinian farmer in an attempt to drive him off his land. To 'balance' things an (illegal) Jewish settler was also interviewed about how a Palestinian farmer had vandalised 'his' olive trees - on stolen Palestinian land! At the end of the item the *Today* programme commentator Evan Davis idiotically referred to the incidents as a 'neighbour dispute'!

Harry Perry



## Fascism and Free Speech

Last month Harry Perry suggested the Secular Society ought to support the right of Nick Griffin's BNP to have a platform because it has declared a policy commitment to free speech.

The Secular Society banned the National Front from the Hall after they physically disrupted a meeting in the 1970s at which Tariq Ali spoke.

The British National Party came out of the NF and took a so-called respectable turn and joined the electoral process. The state has since been legitimising them. Hitler entered the political process. Nick Griffin cannot explain what he means by changing his policy of Holocaust denial.

BNP propaganda, which includes distortions and lies, leads to racist and homophobic attacks. There was a life-threatening homophobic attack in Liverpool shortly after

Nick Griffin spoke on *Question Time* and there has been a serious racist attack in Leicester.

Around the country BNP members have racially abused people including a labour councillor who received death threats after criticising them. Socialist Party members have been physically attacked on a stall in the north of the country. Is this what we mean by free speech?

The BNP are a fascist party, anti-racist, anti-traveller, anti-gay, anti-abortion and Islamophobic.

Fascist parties have been used to divide and rule and physically attack the left and other progressive groups by different states in the 1930s and since then in Northern Ireland and in Latin America. Why should the policy of Leicester Secular Society change? No Platform for Fascists.

Chris Goodwin

# Non-religious funerals

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

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BHA ACCREDITED



One of the twin towers in New York on fire minutes after a hijacked passenger plane was allegedly seen crashing into it

## Who Dares, Wins?

Some Society members have suggested it's lunacy to hold the opinion that the 9/11 destruction of the twin towers in New York was as likely to have been the work of George Bush & Co. as of Osama bin Laden (who is probably dead) and Al Qua'ida.

I challenge them to openly debate this issue.

Dave Ray

Contact Mike Burden if you wish to take up Dave's challenge.

## \* The Electronic Secularist \*

Taking your *Secularist* as a .pdf file over the internet would save the Society oodles of money. We now have seven members taking it on this basis saving us about £7 per month! Contact the Editor (box on back page) to make the switch.

Harry

Atheism is a religion like bald is a hair colour.

## Climate Change Vigil

Saturday 12th December at 4pm

Place: The Clock Tower, Leicester

Host: Dave Carter

A silent candle-lit vigil. For one hour ordinary people unite to tell our leaders: 'work out a settlement that is fair. The weak must not be penalised; the strong must take responsibility and make it binding.' Bring candles and banners but 'let the clamour of our silence speak for those who have no voice'.

## JANUARY 3RD 'CHILL-OUT' EVENING

A RELAXED SOCIAL GATHERING FOR MEMBERS AND THEIR GUESTS. BRING YOUR OWN DRINKS, ALONG WITH ANY LEFT OVERS.

IF YOU PLAY AN INSTRUMENT WHY NOT COME ALONG AND ENTERTAIN US? WANT TO RECITE A POEM? WANT TO SING A SONG?

THIS WILL BE THE PLACE TO BE. WE

PROVIDE THE HALL –

YOU PROVIDE THE 'EVENING'.

## Evolution Evolving

On 8<sup>th</sup> November our member Dr Peter Thompson gave a well-researched and interesting talk on 'The Origin of Species 150 Years On'. His talk covered the developments in evolutionary theory since its beginnings. Peter began by setting the scene around Darwin's idea of 'descent with modification'. He mentioned the influences of Lamarck, Wallace and Darwin's own grandfather, Erasmus. Peter also mentioned the important reading of the two papers, one Darwin's, the other Wallace's, on the theory of evolution, at the Linnean Society and put us in the minds of Wallace and Darwin on that significant day. He then went on to discuss the developments since the publication. He mentioned Gregor Mendel, the 'father of genetics', whose scientific paper was never actually read by Darwin, although it was later found on his bookshelf. Indeed, the significance of Mendel's work was not realised until the early part of the twentieth century. The important work of the scientists Fisher, Haldane and Huxley in connection with evolutionary theory was also covered. The idea of eugenics was also mentioned, demonstrating the ugly side of research into evolution. In the middle of the twentieth century the research of Crick, Watson, Franklin and Wilson and the discovery of the structure of DNA had huge implications for evolutionary theory. Lastly, the idea of the 'selfish gene'



was explored. This led on to the question which scientists are still debating: at what level does evolution work - on the population, the individual or the gene?

Another interesting point made by Peter was that Darwin did not use the phrase 'survival of the fittest' until the sixth edition of his book, *The Origin of Species*. Perhaps a more appropriate phrase to describe natural selection could be 'those that are more responsive to change'.

The last part of Peter's talk covered the arguments made by creationists challenging evolutionary theory. He explored a range of statements made by creationists and counteracted them with arguments supporting evolution. This part demonstrated how weak creationists' views are. Of course, Darwin at the time did not know everything about evolution and there were holes in his theory. Scientists, including the ones mentioned above, have worked throughout the last century to fill in these gaps. However, the number and variety of questions raised by the audience showed the thought-provoking nature of this talk and also how evolutionary theory is still an 'evolving field' - so very much alive and, perhaps, as controversial today as it was in Darwin's day.

Rachael Mansbridge



**THERE'S PROBABLY  
NO GOD  
NOW STOP WORRYING  
AND ENJOY YOUR LIFE**

### Atheist Poster Campaign for Leicester?

The Atheist Bus Campaign was launched in October 2008 with the initial fundraising target of £5,500 which was surpassed in a matter of hours. The

campaign has so far raised more than £153,000 and has been featured widely in the press. From January 2009, the bus adverts were on the streets of Aberdeen, Glasgow, Dundee, Newcastle, Morecambe, Liverpool, York, Leeds, Manchester, Sheffield, Coventry, Birmingham, Norwich, Cardiff, Merthyr, Oxford, Southampton, Stevenage and London.

Sadly the slogan *There's probably no God* has yet to be seen on a bus in Leicester, though the campaign has spread far beyond Britain. In the last year, advertising campaigns have been attempted in the USA, Italy, Spain, Croatia, Canada, Australia, Holland, Sweden, Finland, Germany and Austria. Campaigns are also planned for Argentina, Chile and Luxembourg. Most of these campaigns have used the British slogan and some have met resistance from advertising companies. In British Columbia and Vancouver the adverts were barred on the ground that no religious advertisement is allowed on buses! The slogan of the Italian campaign was 'The bad news is that God does not exist. The good news is that you don't need him.' This advert was not allowed on the grounds that it may 'offend the moral, civic and religious convictions of the public'. As a reaction, a new campaign was launched in Genoa with a different slogan to comply with the advertising authority's rules: 'The good news is there are millions of atheists in Italy. The excellent news is they believe in freedom of expression.'

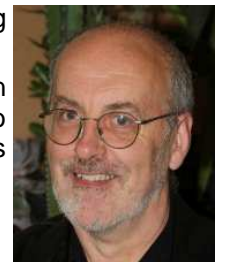
In the last month, a new campaign has been started in Britain. This uses the remaining money raised in donations for the Atheist Bus Campaign. Billboards

in London, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast have displayed posters of children with the slogan, ***Please don't label me. Let me grow up and choose for myself.*** This draws attention to the fact that it is seemingly OK to describe children as 'Catholic', 'Protestant', 'Muslim', 'Hindu' or 'Sikh', whilst it is socially unacceptable to label children as 'Marxist', 'Anarchist', 'Socialist', 'Libertarian' or 'Humanist,' when all are beliefs.

These are timely campaigns and the support for them has given a new confidence to Secularists. Whilst the original London-based campaign has financed the 'There's probably no God' advertising across Britain, nothing has happened locally. It is therefore down to Leicester Secular Society to take this campaign forward, with or without any external support. However, the parlous financial position of the Society means that it simply cannot afford to finance advertising from its own very limited resources. But the national campaign has shown that there are large numbers of unaffiliated people who are prepared to support atheist bus advertising through their donations.

I hope that members of the Society can now give some serious thought as to how we can mount an atheist bus campaign in Leicestershire.

Ned Newitt



### Continued from page 1 ...

Eleanor Davidson continues as a BHA accredited celebrant for non-religious funerals and other ceremonies, and she and Chris Williams act as 'Faith Ambassadors' in Leicester College.

Education will be increasingly important. At a recent meeting of Christians Aware Mike Burden and I heard a prominent Hindu educationalist state very firmly that in all his talks to schools he found that the majority of students responded to his questions by claiming to be agnostic or atheist. The same story comes out in various surveys.

Perhaps as a result of John Catt's long, and now successful, campaign to get on to the county Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education, SACRE, the introduction to its Agreed Syllabus now states on page 5 that: 'It is expected that teachers will often start from the secular point of view, since this is the most common factor for students, and therefore non-religious points of view will be acknowledged.' We have to work to make sure that the secular point of view will be an active part of RE and not just acknowledged.

There was a meeting of the city SACRE during Interfaith Week at which I was able, as humanist representative, to press the case for the many pupils who are not religious to be treated properly.

In the coming year we will need to persuade as well as expose, and in persuading we need to be aware of the many who, though not part of a secular or humanist organisation, are receptive to our views and who often share our concerns. I have mentioned students above, but in addition there are the groups like the Accord Coalition (against selection of staff and students by religion) the Sea of Faith Network (viewing religions as human creations and so subject to human critique and alteration). Finally, we also need, especially on the political front, to be aware of the vital necessity of alerting the majority who just want to get on with their lives and do not realise the dangers in government policy on faith schools and faith provision of services, to what may lie ahead.

Please do use the new Newsbox on our website to let us know what you are doing or what you find. The address is [web@leicestersecularsociety.org.uk](mailto:web@leicestersecularsociety.org.uk).

Allan Hayes

A girl runs home to her mother crying, 'I can't marry Mike! He's an atheist! He doesn't believe in God or Jesus or anything!'

'Don't worry, kid, go right ahead', said her mum.

'But Mum, he doesn't even believe in Hell!'

'Don't worry', repeated her mother, 'you marry him and I'll convince him!'

Religious father to son: 'What did you learn at Uni today?'

Son: 'Oh, the usual; critical thinking, logic, rational argument, secular ethics, scientific method and all that stuff.'

Dad: 'That's okay then, as long as there's none of that atheist nonsense.'



### Sikhs and British Society

Over twenty people attended Secular Hall on 15<sup>th</sup> November to hear Resham Singh Sandhu deliver this talk. There was some disappointment that at the start he announced he could only stay for forty minutes.

Resham said he had walked past Secular Hall many times but never ventured inside.

He was interested in secularist and humanist ideas because many accorded with those of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism some 500 years ago. This guru wanted to create a better society. 'I am not a Hindu, I am a human being' was his motto. His teachings were often secular, based on humanity, and almost communistic; for an open society and against brainwashing. A society that got to the root of killing and ideas of 'my god is better than your god' and, above all, to stand up against oppression.

There has always been a strong Sikh-British relationship, he said. In both world wars Sikhs fought on the side of Britain. They were said to be fearless fighters, strong and trustworthy.

Sikhs came from Punjab to earn money here to send back home. Being treated badly by some Brits was hurtful, for example, being told 'you people came here to cause trouble'. Many early immigrants were poor and ill educated but they worked hard, often doing two jobs and jobs that Britons felt beneath them, and as such have rarely used social security. He quoted examples.

He mentioned three dispensations for Sikhs - not wearing police helmets, motorbike helmets, or armed forces

headgear. Britain gave him opportunities and he classed himself as English.

In a question to Resham on the play *Bezhti* a difference of opinion emerged as to the weight that should be given to 'offence' and to free speech. However, Sikhs opposed faith schools.

After Resham had left, questions were put in a relaxed and friendly fashion to the two Sikhs and one former Sikh who remained. The latter said he was born in Leicester and had rejected Sikhism early on. But he thought of himself first as Indian and hoped his children shared his passion for Punjab as well as England. The discussion covered shared values as well as the treatment of women in Sikhism, the divisions in the Sikh community and the persistence of the caste system 'for cultural reasons'.

Questions about the Sikh ideas of god and afterlife were answered personally and, it was admitted, without much knowledge of Sikh theology. The limited size of the Sikh religion, with only around 200 million followers worldwide, was explained as due to its being ethnically based with neither proselytising nor penalties for leaving the faith.

It was reported that local temples provided over 1,000 free meals each week to those who felt the need for them and this included numerous non-Sikhs. Our visitors invited everyone to visit a temple, which are always open to all and where they would receive a warm welcome (and free food!).

I think I can say we all felt it a very positive meeting, especially the latter part with the free-flowing discussion. In closing Mike said maybe we should try this again - send the speaker away and let the audience continue alone!

John Cook



### The Many Moods of Mariko Terashi

What a treat!

On 29th November fifty-five Society members and visitors were privileged to hear a recital by world-class pianist Mariko Terashi of works by Scarlatti, Seixas, Beethoven, Couperin, Chopin and Schubert.

After first studying in Japan, Mariko moved to France where she obtained her first degree at the Ecole Normale de Musique de Paris and her Master's degree at the Conservatoire Européen de Paris. She later won the Cziffra Foundation award for young musicians.

Beethoven's Appassionata Sonata is so called as a reflection of the passionate nature of the first and third movements, and Mariko lived the passion to the full in her interpretation, whilst drawing us all into the calm, reflective mood of the second movement. It was a stunning performance.

For me her interpretation of Schubert's Impromptu No. 2,

Opus 90 was a revelation. She presented an extraordinary combination of flowing Schubert with a marked rhythmicity rarely heard in these pieces. It was lovely to hear, and all too short.

Mariko is known for her interpretation of French harpsichord music (including the two Couperin pieces we heard) played on the piano. She has recently released two CDs - 'Scarlatti, Seixas, Couperin, Rameau' and 'Favourites' - which I have yet to find (they are not available through Amazon). I would love to hear all eight Schubert Impromptus played by her.

Mariko's next known local appearance will be on Saturday 19th June 2010 at the Fraser Noble Hall where she will be playing with the University of Leicester Sinfonia. Can we invite Mariko back to Secular Hall for another concert, perhaps in our 2010/11 season?

Jill Perry

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**Audio-visual kit:** This is normally held by Michael Gerard 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 Thursday 7th January 2010**. The change of day is to permit the distribution of copies by hand to members who attend the Sunday evening session on 10th January. This will save on postage.

Remember, 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.

Many members have already contributed - if you haven't done so yet, why not?

Thanks.

Harry Perry, Ed.

## A Yuletide Carol

When precessions of the equinox,  
And the far extremes of solstices,  
Were measured in classical epochs  
They assumed this caused weather's unease.

Our bucolic dependence on seasons  
To assure normative weather's maintained  
Caused humans to check, with good reason,  
That solstice reversals always prevailed.

The mid-winter freeze-up of Northern climes  
Made more urgent the watch for this change:  
To presage an end to the decline  
With its threat of a dark, bleak, ice age.

The winter solstice's promise of renewal  
Gives Yuletide hope in weather that's cruel.

Wilf



## Stroke Identification

I forward most of the following from the internet:

During a BBQ, a friend, Ingrid, stumbled and took a little fall - she assured everyone that she was fine (they offered to call paramedics). She said she had just tripped over a brick because of her new shoes.

They got her cleaned up and got her a new plate of food. While she appeared a bit shaken up, Ingrid went about enjoying herself the rest of the evening. Ingrid's husband called later telling everyone that his wife had been taken to the hospital - and at 6pm she passed away. She had suffered a stroke at the BBQ. Had they known how to identify the signs of a stroke, perhaps Ingrid would be with us today. Some don't die, they end up in a helpless, hopeless condition instead.

It only takes a minute to read this.

A neurologist says that if he can get to a stroke victim within three hours he can totally reverse the effects of a stroke ... totally. He said the trick was getting a stroke recognised, diagnosed, and then getting the patient medical care within three hours, which is quite possible if you act fast.

### Recognising a stroke

Please remember the 'Three Steps', S-T-R . Read and Learn!

Sometimes symptoms of a stroke are difficult to identify.

Unfortunately, the lack of awareness spells disaster. The stroke victim may suffer severe brain damage when people nearby fail to recognise the symptoms.

Now doctors say a bystander can recognize a stroke by asking three simple questions:

**S > Ask the individual to SMILE.**

**T > Ask the person to TALK by speaking a simple sentence coherently (e.g. It is sunny out today.)**

**R > Ask him or her to RAISE BOTH ARMS.**

If he or she has trouble with ANY ONE of these tasks, call 999 immediately, ask for ambulance and describe the symptoms to the dispatcher.

### New sign of a stroke: stick out your tongue

Another sign of a stroke is this: Ask the person to stick out their tongue. If the tongue is 'crooked', if it goes to one side or the other, that is also an indication of a stroke.

A cardiologist says that if this information is given to ten people you can bet that at least one life will be saved.

I have done my part. Will you?

From Dave Ray

## 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.

# 2010 Subscriptions

As another year comes around subscriptions fall due. Please can you pay these promptly. We are in need of funds if we are to continue to both campaign for secularism and maintain its home in Secular Hall, so please consider making an additional donation.

The subscription rates are:

Household £24

Individual £18

Low income (including students) £6

Please send your cheques, made payable to Leicester Secular Society, to the Treasurer - **John Catt at 32 Bramcote Road, Loughborough LE11 2SA**

together with the form below.

If you use Internet banking, you can credit the Society's account directly:

Sort Code: 08-60-01

A/c No: 20195380

If you do this please confirm by email to [leic.sec.society@gmail.com](mailto:leic.sec.society@gmail.com)

Whilst doing this you might also like to set up an annual standing order. Please quote your surname and postcode in the reference box.

If you prefer to pay cash you can hand this to any Board Member.

As mentioned at the AGM it would save the society almost £1 per issue if you would be prepared to read the *Secularist* via the internet. If you would be happy with this arrangement please indicate at the bottom of the form.

.....Cut.....

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