

Seize the Opportunities

The country seems at last to be waking up to the danger posed by the emphasis on religious identity and the privileges granted to religious bodies. Symptomatic of this, Anglican bishops are complaining about 'persecution' of Christianity, the Roman Catholic hierarchy is being judged by the standards of humanity and legal liability, and by Catholics as well as non-Catholics: both Churches are losing credibility.

Locally, we have had the series of letters in the *Mercury* sparked off by one that I sent in on sex and relationship education and faith schools (these letters are conveniently accessed by going to <http://bit.ly/clCUgr> and then entering 'Allan Hayes' in the search box, top right – the latest is from Harry Perry – thanks Harry); the prior of Holy Cross is obviously rattled (<http://bit.ly/9yv04x>; <http://bit.ly/bOINfv>).

People are 'coming out'; in a recent debate in the House of Lords a range of peers identified themselves as humanists; on a recent TV programme religious education teachers openly identified themselves as atheist – Stephen Fry has become a 'distinguished supporter' of the BHA ...

We must seize the opportunity to argue that a secular civil society is best for all, both religious and non-religious – particularly in such a diverse city as



Madani Muslim School - paid for by you

Leicester; that the many that do not belong to a religion must be properly recognised; and that we can be good without God. We must win allies and push these points into the political discussion in the run-up to the election.

I have had the opportunity to do this at four recent meetings: in a House of Commons committee room – where I had the pleasure of opposing bishop Tim Stevens; at a

meeting in Oxford, where I spoke against faith schools – surprise! (invitations to speak followed on both of these); at the Battle for Politics, organised by the Institute of Ideas in London, and in Leicester Cathedral where I was able to get a show of hands on the desirability of faith schools. I also participated in an interesting meeting with councillors and officers from the county council on Sex and Relationships Education.

With regard to gaining allies, I believe that we must look to organisations like Accord, Muslims for a Secular Democracy, and the religious think tank Ekklesia for support against faith schools and for the separation of church and state. A recent *Mercury* article by Parvin Ali, 'Who rules our lives' (<http://bit.ly/ctZdhi>), opens up the prospect of useful talks with Muslims.

(Continues on page 5)

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Sunday 11th April, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: No Platform for Fascists? Mick Jarmaine will argue the case for denying opportunities for the BNP and other neo-fascist parties to put their views forward.

Thursday 15th April, 7.30pm, Secular Hall: A Profile of the Non-religious. David Voas, Simon Professor of Population Studies at Manchester, investigates who is unreligious and in what ways.

Sunday 18th April, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: John Mercer - From Pauper to Prominence. Member Frank Dewhurst will look at the life of the great Victorian textile chemist who he believes has been neglected.

Tuesday 20th April, 7.30pm, Square Bar, Hotel Street: Skeptics in the Pub. The Men Who Stare at Goats. Jon Ronson talks about everyday craziness. No George Clooney I'm afraid. Non LSS event.

Sunday 25th April, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: Don't Vote, It Only Encourages Them. Member Ross Longhurst proposes 'This house believes we should not vote'. Richard Johnson opposes. Have your say and vote, or not!

Sunday 2nd May, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: Headstrong Meeting. All welcome to come along and raise for discussion anything that's bugging you at the moment.

Wednesday 5th May, 7.30pm, Swan and Rushes, Oxford Street: Philosophy in Pubs. Free-ranging discussion on topics you bring for debate. Non LSS event.

Sunday 9th May, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: The Politics of Food. Members Michael Gerard and Caroline Moles expose the rotten side of the food industry's techniques of production and distribution of food.

Sunday 16th May, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: Why Students Must Pay Higher Fees. Final-year politics student Steven Heales argues the case for increasing the cost of higher education to those who can afford to pay.

Tuesday 18th May, 7.30pm, Square Bar, Hotel Street: Skeptics in the Pub. How Quackery Corrupts Real Science. Pharmacologist Prof. David Colquhoun explains. Non LSS event.



Library News

Apologies from the Librarian for her long silence – she has been busy with other things but promises to do better in future!

Many thanks to the members who have donated books – if they are not acknowledged here it is because they are currently out on loan.

Donations

Thank you once more to Rupert Halfhide for donating another book –

Gregor Mendel – Planting the Seeds of Genetics by Simon Mawer. Suitable both for the general reader and those with a scientific background, this is a fascinating account of the life and work of Gregor Mendel. Beautifully illustrated and easy to read – do not miss it.

Also thank you to Paul Southwood for –

Hung Drawn and Quartered – The Caricatures of Ken Gill. Caricatures by trade unionist Ken Gill with brief biographies of the characters. Names include Frank Chapple, Tony Benn, Hugh Scanlon, John Smith.

And to David Howe for –

How Mumbo-Jumbo Conquered the World – A Short History of Modern Delusions by Francis Wheen. A sceptic's account of the rise of irrationality in society over the last three decades – both funny and depressing.

And to Ariadne Tampion for a copy of her book **Automatic Lover.** As she knows, I bought my copy declaring that this was taking my support for the Secular Society a step too far – but nevertheless I read it to the end! Unlike any other book I have ever read – why not try it for yourself?

We also have a copy of member Dave Ray's **Disillusioned Apprentice.** A fascinating account of his early life, also a gripping story which I couldn't put down.

Other New Books

Evolution section

The Butterfly Hunter – The Life of Henry Walter Bates by Anthony Crawford. A very readable account of the life and travels of the Victorian field naturalist (born in Leicester) whose observations supported Darwin's theory.

The Forgotten Naturalist – In Search of Alfred Russel Wallace by John G. Wilson. A life of another of the leading evolutionary thinkers of the nineteenth century.

***The Greatest Show on Earth – The Evidence for Evolution* by Richard Dawkins.**

Dawkins once more assembles the evidence and provides a counter-attack on creationists and advocates of 'intelligent design'.

***On the Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin.** A nice new edition which features an introduction by William Bynum and a useful chronology.

Modern history section

***The Slums of Leicester* edited by Ned Newitt.** Essential reading for anyone with an interest in the history of Leicester. If you attended Ned's lecture at the Secular Hall last year and want a closer look at some of the photographs, here they are.

***Women of Courage, Vision and Talent – Lives in Leicester 1780 to 1925* by Shirley Aucott.** The title speaks for itself. A fascinating account packed full of information not available elsewhere.

General science section

***The Oxford Book of Modern Science Writing* by Richard Dawkins.** A wonderful collection of extracts, providing a guide to the best literary science writing with commentaries from Dawkins. Good for browsing – everyone will find something of interest in this volume.

Literature section

***Freedom – Short Stories Celebrating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Amnesty International publication).** Short stories by authors from all over the world, e.g. Kate Atkinson, Paul Coelho, Yann Martel, Henning Mankell, Mohammed Naseehu Ali. Inevitably some of the stories are quite painful to read.

***The Natural History of Selborne* by Gilbert White.** An old copy stamped 'Presented by Leicester Secular Sunday School, January 1913', and signed by the owner Dorothy Orton. Dorothy lived at the Secular Hall for much of her childhood (in the years before Louie Croxtall and her family).

Children's section (Amnesty International publications)

We Are All Born Free – The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Pictures. Wonderful illustrations.

Free? – Stories Celebrating Human Rights. Short stories by well-known authors, e.g. David Almond, Roddy Doyle, Michael Morpurgo.

And **finally** on a less positive note – I am unable to locate a number of books. All libraries 'lose' books occasionally but it is not difficult to enter your name in the borrowing book (in the left-hand cupboard) or to let me (or a Board member) know if you are borrowing a book or pamphlet.

Please return or sign for your books without delay if you have not already done so – the library operates on a budget of nothing and so depends on goodwill (and good behaviour).

Gillian



'One thing that is absolutely necessary in the present climate is for the Church to say strongly that Christianity contains a code for living and a blueprint for how society ought to be run. Muslims have been allowed to get away with the contention that they have a monopoly on practical spirituality. Their religion rules the whole of their lives and they say it should rule the whole of politics. Reformed Christianity should be the same, albeit not in the draconian way that Islam

controls the minutiae of everyday living. The fact that so many Christian churches have opted out of practicalities and become pietistic or antinomian, or both, has created a political-spiritual vacuum which Islam has been quick to fill. Islam truly presents a complete way of life. It is time for the Church to confirm that Christianity does too. That is going to be a big challenge for the Church.'

Christian Voice

Scientist Takes on David Tredinnick MP in General Election

Dr Michael Brooks, an author, journalist, broadcaster and consultant to *New Scientist* with a PhD in quantum physics, will be taking on David Tredinnick MP in the next election. For anyone who knows anything about Tredinnick's hopeless understanding of science and almost fanatical commitment to mumbo jumbo, the reasons will be clear.

Following Michael's announcement an appeal was put out by Simon Perry and other supporters for ten people to sign

Michael's nomination papers and this has been achieved.

Bosworth constituency covers the parishes of Ambien, Barlestone, Nailstone and Osbaston, Barwell, Burbage St Catherines, Lash Hill, Burbage Sketchley, Stretton, Cadeby, Carlton, Market Bosworth with Shackerstone, Earl Shilton, Hinckley Castle, Hinckley Clarendon, Hinckley De Montfort, Hinckley Trinity, Markfield, Stanton, Field Head, Newbold Verdon, Desford, Peckleton, Ratby, Bagworth, Thornton, Twycross, Witherley and Sheepy.

Please email Michael on mb@michaelbrooks.org if you are in the constituency and wish to offer support.

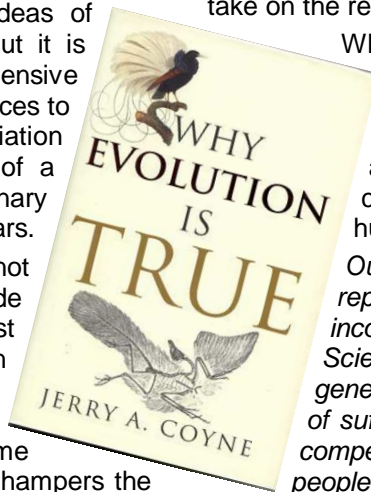
Why Evolution Is True

Jerry Coyne's book *Why Evolution Is True* was published in 2009 as a general rebuttal of the ideas of 'Intelligent Design' and 'Creationism'. But it is much more as it provides a comprehensive restatement of Darwin's theory and references to hard evidence of evolution and speciation actually occurring, as well as a review of a number of the points of debate in evolutionary science as they have occurred over the years.

As the cover blurb says 'this book should not be necessary' but it has been made necessary by the resurgence over the last couple of decades of creationist ideas in the wake of religious fundamentalism. Regrettably these ideas are not confined to a lunatic religious fringe but in some countries have a significant following that hampers the progress of scientific research and the application of new discoveries.

Different chapters cover basic Darwinism; fossil evidence, embryos, vestigial traits and 'bad design'; geographical influences; natural selection; sexual selection; and speciation.

As well as the text itself the detailed Notes, References,



Glossary, Index and Suggestions for further reading make the book an invaluable resource for anyone who wants to take on the religious loonies.

While all this makes excellent reading for those already convinced of the naturalistic origins of the universe and of species, Jerry Coyne is forced to conclude by quoting Ian McEwan about the failure of science to replace conventional religion, and the apparent human need for a mythology of origins:

Our secular and scientific culture has not replaced or even challenged these mutually incompatible, supernatural thought systems. Scientific method, scepticism or rationality in general, has yet to find an overarching narrative of sufficient power, simplicity and wide appeal to compete with the old stories that give meaning to people's lives.

Perhaps someone reading this can come up with just such an appealing and persuasive restatement of the naturalistic world view? This book will certainly help anyone who wants to make that attempt.

Harry Perry



Evolution and the Evangelist 4 Science

When I was a student I was conceited enough to think that I could prove the existence of God. I had evolved an argument of my own which in essence was similar to that of Anselm. It was to be years before I realised my mistake. However, at the time things were different. Fellow students in other faculties, particularly philosophy, were very sceptical; those interested in politics, particularly communists, were in the end more interested in finding support for their cause than in being too bothered about religion - unless it interfered with the red revolution of their dreams; many fellow medics thought the issue irrelevant (this is still the case particularly among those in fields depending on psychology). But what surprised me most of all was the opposition I had from some evangelicals. They thought that we were to 'believe in God' and not deign to think we could 'prove' in His (Her, Its) existence.

This was the first time I faced up to something that has bothered me for years. Besides being committed to traditional Christianity I was also totally committed to the scientific cause. God was the final explanatory hypothesis that contained all the others, so it was quite feasible to be scientific and believe in God's existence.

Of course problems arose when science and religion seemed to clash. There were the miracles in the Bible; then some parts of the Bible are hardly inspiring; and

finally there was the Theory of Evolution. At the time some of the issues that now seem to split the Church were simply seen as secondary issues under discussion. The theory of evolution in particular was interpreted (and is still interpreted in large parts of Christendom) as simply the creative hand of God at work. If you take this position it is also possible to add in intelligent design; not as in opposition to evolution but as supporting it; showing that God had the end product in mind when the evolutionary project was started. This position is actually very difficult to upset and it has always surprised me that some Christians have started to move away from this synthesis.

I think the real reason for the opposition to science goes far deeper. There is a genuine fear on the part of many believers that once people start thinking scientifically they will 'lose faith'. The believer is to believe God and hence in his Church, the Bible and so on. Spinoza saw through this in the seventeenth century; many more people in modern times. Yet there is little doubt that there are now evangelists who are determined to break the bond with science in the mind of anyone they can influence. They want to keep the material benefits of scientific exploration but to reject the scientific way of life. In the end I chose the latter despite the loss of much I formally believed.

John Edmondson



The Reagan Democrats - The New Deal Coalition and its Collapse

A review of the talk by Joe Merton on 14th March

Joe began by pointing out that in the USA liberalism means expanding the powers of government and redistributing wealth with European style social-democratic approaches.

In mid-twentieth-century America the US population, ethnically and in terms of class, was diverse but generally in support of democratic, liberal-style government.

Franklin D. Roosevelt pulled the USA out of depression and established the Democratic Party with four election wins.

After the death of Roosevelt, Harry Truman oversaw foreign policies such as aid to Europe after World War II. J. F. Kennedy, the first Catholic President, implemented full-scale rights for African-Americans and the introduction of a minimum wage while Lyndon Johnson extended civil rights to other minorities, and expanded the remit of government. However the Vietnam War undid Johnson.

What were the achievements?

The New Deal Coalition was working class based. Between 1930 and around 1940 the New Deal liberalism was entrenched with continuous economic growth. Features included:

- It was committed to Keynesian economics.
- It fought against communism globally.
- More civil rights for women, Catholics, Jews etc.
- The big idea was to wipe out poverty.
- Expansion of job and housing opportunities.
- Offering of social security and health insurance.

What brought about the collapse?

- Race issues played a part, the rise of black militancy.
- Racially integrated schools lost the support of many southern Democrats.
- The Vietnam War divided the Democrats.
- The rise of conservatism; e.g. Evangelical Christianity – and Ronald Reagan.



- Demographic changes with economic power shifting to the southern and south-western USA.
- Issues over increased crime.
- Rising class tensions.
- Increasing affluence, so that people defined themselves as consumers.

In the meantime a 'white ethnic power movement' was developing. In the 1970s this included ethnic Irish, Italian and Polish people. Issues of 'identity politics' were becoming important with questions arising over assimilation as opposed to keeping traditions alive. There were key issues over immigrant experiences and injustices. Politicians used these themes when campaigning.

There was 'Affirmative Action' for black Americans, so 'underdog' white groups demanded similar treatment.

White groups demanded an end to 'bussing' to de-segregated schools, arguing that they were being 'discriminated against'. Richard Nixon, in 1972, and Gerald Ford, in 1976, used these themes in their electioneering propaganda.

Subsequently Ronald Reagan managed to create a new sense of community in the USA, using the 'cold war' and appeals to 'patriotism', but this excluded the poor.

Presently there are new groups emerging in the USA who emphasise their differences, such as Latinos. The white ethnic movement has died out. At the moment we are seeing disunity in the USA, often due to politics of difference. The Republican line has been to attack 'diversity', and it has gained a lot of support, especially from white men.

So what next? Joe said that this was not at all clear.

Joe's talk was meticulously prepared and presented, with smooth use of PowerPoint projections of relevant details, charts and headings. It would seem that he has a great future ahead as a lucid and clear lecturer: it was a presentation well worth waiting for.

Caroline Moles



The Photograph

Reminiscence stirs, when this, your image, calls:
Like muffled fanfare for a ghost returned
To attic souvenirs, its shade enthral.
Dust filtered sun illumines past still yearned.

Soft as snowflakes in ethereal dance,
That gently thrill upon the slightest touch,
Your memories within me still entrance
Emotions that have always meant so much.

Days full of happiness and future's hope,
Fulfilling by the challenges achieved,
Still echo now their friendship's laughter:
As if they would to present time elope.

Here they intertwine, within my psyche weaved:
A precious pulse to warm me ever after.

Wilf Gaunt



From the City of Sanctuary Blog

As Parliament 'washes up' outstanding business before the general election campaign gets under way on Monday, MPs have just a few days left to add their names to Early Day Motions. These are a vehicle for members to express an opinion and draw attention to issues such as EDM 1224 which highlights the effects of incarcerating children at Yarlswood Detention Centre. That motion was posted a week ago and has attracted just four signatures. An earlier one, EDM 890 expressing 'concern at the low level of support for asylum seekers' has been signed by 43 MPs in its six weeks of life.

Sarah

6th April



Spring (or approximately equinox, definitely not Easter) Walk, Sunday 4th April

Despite chairman Mike Burden stressing the dangers of attending this event, six people turned up for it.

They were: Mike (leader), Ross Longhurst, Maria Peterson, David and Jan (visitors from Birmingham Humanists - sorry, only know given names) and me.

Mike's concerns were that heavy rain during the previous 24 hours had turned the course into a quagmire. Parts of it were rivers or lakes - should I have brought my swimming

costume? There was also an excessive number of stiles, But it turned out to be a marvellous occasion. No rain. Much mud - but we handled that. Nobody broke a leg getting over a stile.

The course was a figure-of-eight - something I'd never been on before - I'd only ever done circular walks.

We perambulated for two hours and got back to the start point - the Greyhound pub in Botcheston - at 12.30 pm for a lovely lunch, when we were joined by seven secularists who did *not* gain the benefit of the morning's exercise: LSS president Allan Hayes and wife Bessie; *Leicester Secularist* editorial team Harry and Jill Perry; Satish and Anu Kapur; and Michael Gerrard.

That evening we chilled out at Secular Hall when Mike played CDs of the black wit of Tom Lehrer - greatly appealing to my warped sense of humour. There were also some songs from members and guests. And a few jokes - some you could tell your mother-in-law, some you couldn't.

Terry Larkin

The General Election

The GREEN party is GOOD! Someone said to me there's no point in voting GREEN because they don't stand a chance. BUT I say: surely that could have been said about Labour originally - and look where it got to in the end. So ... why not vote GREEN ??

Jill Cunningham

Question the Candidates

The British Humanist Association has drafted some secular questions that you might like to ask candidates in the forthcoming elections.

You can find them at these web addresses:

Parliamentary elections: <http://bit.ly/cpOsxk>

Local elections: <http://bit.ly/cm365P>

Allan

(Continued from Page 1)

On a more abstract level, we should be aware of discussions going on about what a religion is, the origins of social behaviour and what a just society is. The Sea of Faith Network is particularly active in this area, examining religion as a human creation – its annual conference is at Leicester University, 27th to 29th July. The long-term effects of these studies could be as significant in allowing progress as was the breakthrough when the natural sciences became free from church control. Most members of the Sea of Faith are essentially humanist; a significant proportion of Quakers are atheists, and Unitarianism seems to be agnostic; and some 20% of Anglican ministers do not 'believe without question' in 'God the Father who created the world'.

Opposing faith schools is beginning to come up as the primary political issue – they are divisive, undemocratic and an unacceptable use of the state school system for proselytising. One of my concerns is that while we concern ourselves with issues like wearing a cross, the Church of England is steadily increasing its hold on the school system that we pay for.

Besides faith schools, religious education in schools is a big concern of mine – I serve as humanist representative on the Leicester Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education (SACRE). Progress in improving RE is slow, restricted by government regulations, but the agreed syllabus now includes slots for non-religious approaches to life, the cover has the humanist 'happy human' symbol on it and the annual report headlines one student's remark – 'My favourite part of RE is talking about whether God exists or not'. My aim is to get proper documentation on humanism distributed to schools, to get

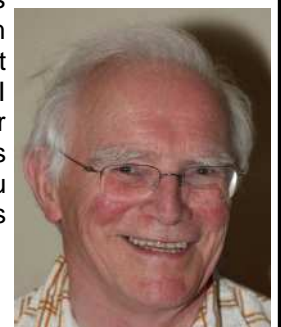
non-religious approaches a required part of the syllabus, to have evolution taught in RE and to get rid of compulsory worship.

There are going to be several opportunities to introduce our concerns into the political discussion in the coming weeks, so please consider making use of the following: writing to the *Mercury*; going to one of the hustings being organised by the Leicester diocese (<http://bit.ly/9WQ3jA>); and to the bishop's talk at Loughborough: 'Some more equal than others? Equality, Faith and the Established Church in England today' on Thursday 29th April 2010, from 7.30pm to 9pm, at the Robert Martin Hall, Loughborough University, Ashby Road, Loughborough.

Professor Voas will tell us on Thursday 15th April (at 7.30pm), amongst many more things, that the percentage in Britain of those who have no religion has gone up from 31% in 1983 to 43% in 2008; and that 37% are agnostic or atheist – it's time that we were listened to.

I have not mentioned Eleanor Davidson (ceremonies, chaplaincy and work with students at Leicester College), John Catt (humanist representative on the county SACRE and, like me, a BHA trustee) and Chris Williams (work with Leicester College), or Bessie Hayes (Voucher Exchange for Asylum Seekers), and Helen Everett (Leicester City of Sanctuary), and I have probably missed some other people out – ah yes Ned Newitt (bus campaign), but do let us know if you are doing anything you would like us to know about.

Allan Hayes



**SPECIAL LECTURE, THURSDAY 15TH APRIL 7.30PM
SECULAR HALL**

A PROFILE OF THE NON-RELIGIOUS

BY



PROFESSOR DAVID VOAS

**USING CENSUS AND SURVEY DATA DAVID VOAS
WILL INVESTIGATE WHO IS UNRELIGIOUS AND IN
WHAT WAYS. HE WILL ALSO EXPLORE THE
GEOGRAPHY OF 'NO RELIGION' IN BRITAIN**

**DAVID IS SIMON PROFESSOR OF POPULATION
STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER AND
HAS BEEN INVOLVED WITH THE *BRITISH SOCIAL
ATTITUDES SURVEY* PUBLISHED IN JANUARY**

DON'T MISS IT!

Join With Libre Pensée and NSS to Commemorate a Secular Martyr

On 4th July 2010, the NSS will be joining the French organisation Libre Pensée to commemorate the death of the Chevalier de la Barre in Abbeville, northern France.

In 1776 the nineteen-year-old was tortured and executed for refusing to raise his hat or kneel down when a religious procession passed by as well as singing an 'impious' song and reading irreligious books – including a work of Voltaire. During the fight for separation of church and state in France, the Chevalier became a figurehead and every year, a rally has taken place on the day of his death.

The NSS has been invited by our sister organisation Libre Pensée to join this year's commemoration and banquet. Libre Pensée and the NSS will be pleased to welcome NSS members and supporters to the event in Abbeville, which is around an hour from Calais by car, but it will involve making your own way to the event.

Abbeville is close to Le Touquet and the delightful Baie de Somme and there are wonderful tourism opportunities in the area. However, as the French school holidays will have just started, it might be useful to book any accommodation well in advance. If you need some suggestions, or more information, please email enquiries@secularism.org.uk

New Secular Society in Nottingham

At the end of the 19th century, the then Nottingham Secular Society ceased to exist. No information as to why this happened remains today. We can only guess at the size of its membership and of its influence in the city. It is worth noting, however, that the Society met in a Secular Hall in the city which was sometimes raided by Christians who would drag secularists to the Market Square where they would forcibly baptize them in the fountain which stood in front of the old town hall! They were obviously having some effect – the secularists that is, not the baptisms.

Secularism in the East Midlands has a long and honourable history especially in Nottingham, Derby and in Leicester too, where there is to this day a wonderful

Bee in the English Bonnet?

LS came today – a glorious read, and the now usual heavy dosage of homeopathy-phobia. Having friends on the continent who seem very comfortable with homeopathic remedies – salves and tablets, I think I rather agree with a *Guardian* columnist when she recently wondered what was behind so much fuss being made about homeopathy in this country. My father, born in England (= credentials!), was educated in Canada where he had a university degree in pharmacy. After working as a pharmacist for several years, he concluded that the industry was dishonest and corrupt. When he went to live in the States he got involved with the health movement of the 1930s. I view his general scepticism about pharmacy as a much more tenable position on tablets and proprietary medicines.

While I was lecturing in Nigeria, a young chemistry lecturer who was born in the area where the university was, but receiving advanced degrees in England, returned. He began his research working with local medicine men and looking at the chemical properties in the herbs they were using, at the same time honouring them rather than vilifying them. I suspect there is a lot to be said for selective use of time-honoured practice.

I struggle to make clear links between secular concerns and homeopathy-phobia. In all of the buzzing around the issue I am disappointed that no-one has taken up the matter of the royal's benign (malign?) involvement. Now there is something that would cause me never to let another pilule touch my lips (well, go under my tongue in proper practice, and only twenty minutes after ingesting, and never while drinking coffee or peppermint tea!) – and certainly in keeping with the writings of Tom Paine.

Bobba



One Way to Promote Secularism

One simple way of promoting an understanding of secularism is to offer your local school or voluntary organisation/society/club a talk on one of the topics we know a bit about: secularism, atheism, Humanism, comparative religion, god-free morality, etc.

If you don't feel able to deliver a talk yourself we can always find someone to do it for you.

Contact Mike Burden, Chair, if you have an idea. Contact details on the back page.

Secular Hall and a flourishing Society. It was founded in 1851, fifteen years before the NSS was formed as the national body.

A number of secularists in Nottingham have decided to resurrect the Secular Society and therefore invite all secularists, atheists, republicans, humanists and anyone with an interest in ridding the city and county of religious privilege in all its forms to join with them in forming the new Nottingham/shire Secular Society.

The inaugural meeting is to be held at 7.30pm (for 8pm) at the Duke of Cambridge, Woodborough Road, Nottingham on Wednesday 21st April or you can contact them through the National Secular Society: enquiries@secularism.org.uk.

In reply to Ted Hankin regarding the 9/11 debate

Yesterday someone asked me what reason could Bush have for bombing the twin towers. I can't believe that people aren't aware of the Patriot Act which suspended the American Constitution. The twin towers attack was used as the excuse - ostensibly to combat terrorism. Kissinger can't go abroad to lots of countries because he's wanted by the Court of Human Rights for murdering Allende. Pinochet, Bush's puppet, was up for murder too. Blair and Bush should be in the same boat (jail, madhouse).

The UK Civil Contingencies Bill annulled Habeas Corpus and the right of the individual to trial. In simple terms these bills turned both nations into dictatorships. That's why the authorship of the twin towers attack is in question, and the evidence damning.

McCarthy found un-American witches in cupboards and under beds in 1950s America, destroying lives through the activities of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, many decisions of which were later declared illegal.

Leicestershire has had its witches. In July 1616 nine witches of Husbands Bosworth were executed on the same day at Leicester jail for being implicated in the bewitching of the son of Erasmus Smith, Lord of the Manor of Bosworth.

A letter dated 18th July 1616 from Alderman Robert Heyrick to his brother Sir William Heyrick (a bit like Bush and his brothers running the Security, CIA, NIST and FEMA relating to 9/11) tells of this extraordinary event: 'wytches, 9 of them shall be executed at the gallows this for-noone, for bewitching a younge gentellman'.

Brought in, as they ostensibly were, by the family of the boy to effect a cure for the fits that he was suffering, the letter describes in detail how the witches practised their exorcism of the spirits tormenting the soul of the unfortunate child. For their failure to perform the necessary cure they were summarily hauled off to Leicester, tried and hanged.

This monumental purge of witchery in Husbands Bosworth wasn't the end to the matter, for in October of the same year another letter from Robert Heyrick describes the fate of a further six witches. A Royal Pardon issued by King James for five of the six came through in the nick of time and in a later letter Heyrick declares: 'the under-sherive, by a warrant directed to the highe-sherive, hath set the 5 witches at liberty; the sixt is ded in the gayle'. **Fancy that. Just like Frank Beck four hundred years on.**

Erasmus Smith died later that same year (of what we

wonder conscience, or at the hands of other members of 'the gang'?).

It was common then for property of dispatched witches to go to the state and local magistrates. Say no more.

The last statute relating to *maleficium* was issued by James I in 1604 increasing penalties and bringing definitions into line with those current in Europe. Between 1566 and 1666 there were over 500 witch trials in the Home Counties alone, another reason for common people to want to get shot of him.

In Leicester, in 1457, a scold was put upon the cuck-stool before her own door, and then carried half-naked to the four gates of the town. The practice seems strange but it might be noted that the ceremonies attending the installation of the Pope involve the placing of him in a similar chair, called the Sedes Stercoraria, but these days he isn't obliged to display his manhood, as far as I know - though if he was a Freemason he'd be used to that - and the meek shall inherit pederasty. 'There's someone to see you', said the priest to the child in the dormitory in the middle of the night. And so endeth the first lesson.

So here we are BACK TO WITCH TRIALS WITHOUT JURIES, and Enlightenment be damned. Bend over boy. The first criminal trial for 300 hundred years in England without a jury was held a couple of months ago (and thereby hangs another tale) and I'm crazy for thinking there's a conspiracy? Like Churchill said - 'You can fool all the people some of the time ...' Sceptics, you must be kidding. Big Brother's still on the prowl looking for pointy hats and broomsticks or turbans and bombs (It's the oil we're after) among other things. $2 + 2 = 7\frac{1}{2}$. Julius Caesar used the knowledge of the intellectuals of Alexandria to decide the date of Easter, in many ways founding Catholicism as we know it. That's why it 'floats' because the Jewish Calendar was based on the lunar cycle and the Jews were the ones who were most likely to know when Jesus died but their calendar 'slipped' ten days a year. Caesar made a compromise when he aligned the date for Easter saying it fell on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox. So now we know the truth? What a load of religio/whichio bollocks. Just like the official story of 9/11. It does not stand sensible analysis. Building 7 fell down because of 'a bad omen date, or a fire, or what the f--k' and my arse is made of glass.

Dave Ray



Preliminary Notice of Extraordinary General Meeting

The half-year EGM this year is to take place at 6.30pm on Sunday 6th June 2010 in the Francis Ridley Room at Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB.

The Agenda will include

- Minutes of the last meeting
- Reports from officers
- Motions

If you wish to propose a motion please ensure that it is sent to the Hall address for the attention of the Secretary, Chris Williams, to arrive no later than 6.30pm on Sunday 23rd May 2010.

The final Notice of the meeting complete with copies of any motions being proposed will be sent to members not less than one week before the EGM.

Chris Williams

Company Secretary

Why Can't I Own a Canadian?

This is an article that has been hanging about on the web for several years now. Nobody is sure of its provenance but it is still amusing ...

Dr Laura Schlessinger is a radio personality who dispenses advice to people who call in to her radio show. In 2002 she said that, as an observant Orthodox Jew, homosexuality is an abomination according to Leviticus 18:22 and cannot be condoned under any circumstance. The following is an open letter to Dr Laura penned by a east coast resident, which was posted on the Internet. It's funny, as well as informative:

Dear Dr. Laura:

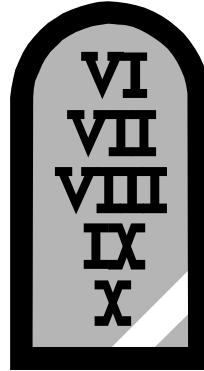
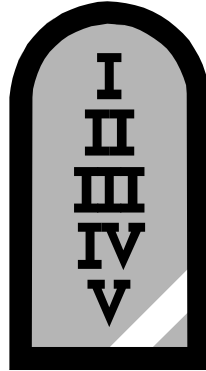
Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's Law. I have learned a great deal from your show, and try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind them that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination. End of debate. I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some of the other specific laws and how to follow them:

When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odor for the Lord - Lev.1:9. The problem is my neighbors. They claim the odor is not pleasing to them. Should I smite them?

I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?

I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual uncleanness - Lev.15:19-24. The problem is, how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offense.

Lev. 25:44 states that I may indeed possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are purchased from



neighboring nations. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify? Why can't I own Canadians?

I have a neighbor who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself?

A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an abomination - Lev. 11:10, it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle this?

Lev. 21:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle room here?

Most of my male friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by Lev. 19:27. How should they die?

I know from Lev. 11:6-8 that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?

My uncle has a farm. He violates Lev. 19:19 by planting two different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread (cotton/polyester blend). He also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to all the trouble of getting the whole town together to stone them? - Lev. 24:10-16. Couldn't we just burn them to death at a private family affair like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws? (Lev. 20:14)

I know you have studied these things extensively, so I am confident you can help. Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging.

Your devoted fan

Jim

From the Brights' Newsletter

With apologies for the American bias, here is an item from the recent Brights' newsletter which may point out a route that you could follow:

'If society's religiosity has you feeling cornered, try stepping outside of that "beliefs" box. Not focusing on religion for a while may be just the opening for you to make a real difference.

You can go beyond silence or complaint to try the route of civic participation. Adopting civics (rather than beliefs) as your framework recasts the situation. You can start showing that you, as a citizen, have a stake in the community. You can engage in constructive ways. It's about time more people holding a naturalistic worldview moved into alliance with fellow citizens on core issues of broad shared concern.

Brights are sorely needed in so many capacities (on school boards, in civil institutions and community service functions). Here are real examples of activities recently spurred or pursued by Brights:

- Nancy decided to apply to serve on her state's newly established commission to make legislative redistricting



more fair. She is doubtful she will be chosen, but she's stepping forward. (And she just might!)

- Fran is crafting an article to submit as an op-ed for his local newspaper. He wants to explain (as simply and briefly as he can) a concept that he thinks confuses people, but that the general public really, really, really needs to get straight.
- Marco and his friends are assembling a catalog of free presentations. They want to prepare and "market" them among civic organizations in their community (as a "speaker's bureau").

Take a small step. Accept that you and others (fellow citizens) will differ by worldview(s). If your belief system becomes relevant to any activity, then you can favor either the noun ("I am a bright") or its definition ("I hold a naturalistic worldview"). Claiming this fresh identity - without any reference to religion - means that you are characterizing yourself, but cannot readily be typecast by others or as burdened by their preconceptions.

An idea to keep in mind is civic pluralism. It elevates civility. It enables the bridging of beliefs to focus on shared purposes. You can take the involvement at your own pace, but you can begin.'

<http://www.the-brights.net/>

Society Facebook Group

There is now a 'Leicester Secular Society' Facebook group. For those members unaware, Facebook is a social networking website that allows users to send messages, update a personal profile about themselves and join groups. It would be good if as many members as possible can join the Society's Facebook group. Even if you are not a regular user, joining could help publicise the Society amongst other people in your network. Of course, choosing whether you wish to share information about which groups you belong to is entirely voluntary.

Richard Hopper

The Secular Catholic

A friend of a Facebook friend states in his Facebook profile that he is a Catholic Christian and that he attended an RC school as a child.

This is accompanied by his comment:

'thinks me and our lass deserve some good luck for a change ... c'mon God ya wanker, gis a break!'

You have to chuckle.

Harry Perry

We believe all have the right to their beliefs but ...

if you enjoy robust polemic you shouldn't miss this classic anti-Vatican diatribe by Pat Condell:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LKg4HLsu5gE>

'Some more equal than others? Equality, faith and the established Church in England today'

Charnwood Human Rights and Equality Council Annual Public Lecture with the Right Reverend Tim Stevens, Bishop of Leicester, as Guest Speaker.

On Thursday 29th April 2010, 7.30pm to 9pm at the Robert Martin Hall, Loughborough University, Ashby Road, Loughborough, Leics.

Recent debates in Parliament over the Equalities Bill have raised a number of questions. How far should government determine employment rights for faith communities? Where do religious freedoms begin and end in a secular society?

Should the bishops of the established Church have any voice in Parliament on these matters? How far should ancient religious traditions accommodate to contemporary views of human sexuality and human rights?

And how can we balance religious freedoms and statutory obligations in a plural society? These questions will be explored from the perspective of a bishop in the Church of England who participates regularly in debates in the House of Lords and currently acts as the Convener of the Lords Spiritual bench.

This is a free and open event and lively questioning is welcome. Please arrive by 7.15pm as the lecture will start at 7.30pm prompt. For further information please contact Varsha Parmar on 01509 261651 or email to info@humanrightsandequalitiescharnwood.org

Imperialist Delusions

George Jelliss's views on the war in Afghanistan (March *Secularist*) illustrate how deeply imperialist ideology permeates people in Britain, including many who regard themselves as generally progressive in outlook. It seems that he takes as a serious threat the tiny minority of Muslims who aim to establish a caliphate in Britain. This reminds me of Thatcherite fears of 'the enemy within'.

George talks about 'our involvement in Afghanistan' and 'Let's stay and get the job finished' as if he had ever been consulted or has any say in the British government's Afghanistan policy. Neither George nor I nor the great majority of people in Britain were ever asked for our views on this matter. It was our masters, the capitalist ruling class, who decided to invade, as they do on all matters of real importance to them.

George says that I think in terms of 'outdated "anti-imperialist" rhetoric'. Now that he is living in the backwater of my home town, Hastings (aka Mugsborough), it is not surprising that for George imperialism seems rather remote and irrelevant. For the people of Iraq and Afghanistan, whose countries have been attacked, devastated and occupied by Western imperialist forces, imperialism is all too real. 'War is one of the things that the British have traditionally been rather good at' claims George. Yes, the British state has been very vociferous in prosecuting murderous imperialist wars, such as the Opium Wars when the Chinese government was forced to allow the British East India Company to import this addictive drug into China with appalling consequences. Also they have had a go at Afghanistan on at least three previous occasions but each time met with ignominious defeat.

The Taliban could not sustain their guerrilla war against



NATO forces without widespread popular support. The Mujahedeen leaders they have opposed are the murderous, drug-running warlords that NATO have reinstalled as the Kabul puppet government, described by Hillary Clinton as a 'narco-state'. These are the people who make billions of dollars sending illegal heroin to Britain and other countries, bringing drug-addictive misery on the streets, especially noticeable in

Hastings. When the Taliban ruled they stamped out opium poppy cultivation. George says that 'the present strategy of involving the Afghan army and police is the right one'. The Afghan army consists of mercenaries who have little enthusiasm for fighting the Taliban, as British troops have discovered. As for the Afghan police, they have a reputation as robbers and rapists. George repeats the myth that British troops are not 'properly equipped and supported' when in fact they have some of the most sophisticated and deadly military equipment in the world. Even so, these 'brave heroes', as the media portray them, are unable to overcome an irregular army of peasant farmers relying on their ingenuity to make IEDs, etc. Perhaps if the troops were given even more victory parades and medals then they would rise to the challenge. The Afghani people are the most experienced and tenacious guerrilla fighters in the world and will not easily be defeated.

Another person who went to live in Hastings was Robert Tressell, an Irishman who had fought against British imperialism in South Africa. I recommend him to George as a model to be emulated, a fighter against oppression and exploitation who through his writing inspired millions of victims of the British ruling class to fight back.

Ross Longhurst



Leicester Secular Society Contact Details

Registered Office: Secular Hall

75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB

Tel: 07598 971420

Email: mail@leicestersecularsociety.org.uk

Website: 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

Chairperson & Events - Mike Burden: Tel: 07722 782727

Email: mikeburden2001@yahoo.co.uk

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

Email: treasurer@leicestersecularsociety.org.uk

Company Secretary - Chris Williams: Tel: 07718 629651

Email: chris.williams@open.ac.uk

Hall bookings - Wilf Gaunt: Tel: 07598 971420

Email: wilfredgaunt@yahoo.com

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

Email: web@leicestersecularsociety.org.uk

Librarian - Gillian Lighton:

Email: gillianlighton@hotmail.com

Secularist editor - Harry Perry: Tel: 07795 097635

Email: 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 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 13th May 2010.**

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.

The publishing schedule/copy deadlines for subsequent editions currently look like this:

Thursday 17th June

Thursday 29th July

Please bear these in mind for any articles or announcements you want to have published.

In order to reduce spoilage through paper-curl during printing I have printed this edition with a lower ink density. I hope it is still of adequate quality but look forward to any feedback you wish to offer - as indeed I do on any other aspect of the journal.

Thanks

Harry Perry

Editor

PS There may be one or two more errors than usual in this edition due to the sub-editor having a weekend away half-way through the job. Sorry about that.

How many atheists does it take to change a light bulb?

Two. One to actually change the bulb, and the other to videotape the job so fundamentalists won't claim that god did it.

Board Report from 18th March 2010

- Date set for next board meeting: 27th April
- Applications for two new members were approved by the Board.
- The Treasurer noted that the Society's financial accounts were currently healthy.
- Over £550 has been raised for the Atheist Bus Campaign. However, in light of recent objections to the campaign from Ariane Sherine (organiser of the original Atheist Bus Campaign), two options were considered: (1) Adoption of Ariane's original slogan; (2) Modification of the current slogan. Ned Newitt is to decide on the best way forward.
- Funding is being sought to produce a business development plan for the Hall modernisation project. All options to allow modernisation of the Hall are currently under investigation, should the HLF bid not proceed. The Board is to press for Grade 2* (2 star) listing of the building.
- The issues surrounding disabled access to the Hall were discussed. It was agreed that disabled access needed to be improved, although full disabled access may be difficult to achieve.
- The Development Group is to recommend a resolution to the Board, which can be put to an EGM, to allow members to indicate their preferences relating to options for both charitable status and Hall modernisation.

Richard Hopper

Disclaimer, Code of Conduct and Copyright

The Leicester Secularist is a not-for-profit undertaking of Leicester Secular Society. Please note that the views and proposals expressed in this journal are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Board of the Society and the Editor, the Society and its officers accept no liability for views expressed. As the journal of 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! We express our thanks for non-Society images sourced under the fair use convention for the purposes of debate and education. Resolution is reduced to prevent onward commercial use. The contents may be reproduced at will unless the item is accompanied by a copyright symbol. An acknowledgement of the source (for original material) would be appreciated.

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