



Urgent need to halt Church takeover of schools

Dear Friends

... the BHA has campaigned for the abolition of state-funded religious schools, which discriminate against staff, parents and pupils, and exacerbate racial, religious and socio-economic inequalities in our society, for many decades. ...

I am writing to you urgently ... to bring your attention to new moves by the Church of England and the Department for Education rapidly to expand the Church's role in our state education system.

If the Church and the Government have their way ... the Church will become the single largest provider of schools, totally funded by the state. That means that a majority of schools may be allowed to discriminate religiously in employment, discriminate religiously in admissions, and teach curricula heavily skewed towards Christianity right across the board.

For some time, we have been warning that the government's Academies programme has provided a huge opportunity for the Church to take control of inclusive community schools which convert to Academy status. Community schools are maintained by their local authority, do not have a religious character, and before the coalition government, made up two thirds of all state schools. However they are now converting in droves to be Academies, and therefore opting out of local authority control. ...

The Church is now waking up to the unique opportunity that the Academies programme has presented it. In July, Malton School became the first to seek a

'double conversion', first changing to an Academy and then to be a CofE 'faith' school. In late September, Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams



acknowledged that Malton was not the only school that is seeking to do this, stating that there had already been 'many, many' community schools interested in becoming CofE schools upon Academy conversion. Dr Williams stated that 'We are looking at the middle-term future, where the Church of England will be quite conceivably the largest sponsor and provider of secondary education in this country, which is a rather startling and breathtaking proposal.'

And now we find out that the Church even has its eyes on every non-religious school - and the government is actively supporting the Church's plans. Last week it was revealed that the Church is working on a major new report, looking specifically at how it can capitalise on the demise of the local authorities, and 'Discussions are also in progress with the Department for Education about how the process for community schools wishing to become CofE faith academies can be made quicker and easier. At present, there have to be

separate consultations dealing with academy and faith proposals, but plans are being devised that would allow them to be combined.' ...

Commenting on the proposals, Michael Gove says that 'I don't think we should interpret what's happening as some kind of clerical takeover. It's not like the dissolution of the monasteries being reversed with our children's education being placed in the hands of monks and abbots. ...'

In fact, this is a potentially massive takeover. It is unsurprising that a 'national' church to which 80% of the population do not actually see themselves as belonging and whose services are attended on a monthly basis by under 5% of the population should see its only hope for future survival as a state-funded service provider. But the idea that government, which should be providing schools inclusive of all, is facilitating this drive with public money is shameful. In spite of what Mr Gove says, 'faith' schools are extremely unpopular.

On behalf of the BHA, I have written to Michael Gove opposing the plans, ...

Please join me by writing to your MP and to Michael Gove to also show your concern at the proposals, and please encourage all your friends and family to do likewise.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Copson".

Andrew Copson
Chief Executive,
British Humanist Association
(abridged version)

Membership renewal subs are now due

I am pleased to report that one-third of members have paid their subs so far. Now I just need the rest of you to follow their example! We have had many voluntary donations too. Please now pay your subs promptly to save me the trouble of chasing payments!

Post cheques and POs to me at:

32 Bramcote Road,
Loughborough, Leics. LE11
2SA.

Or through internet banking you can credit the Society's account number 20195380 sort code 08-60-01. Please confirm by email if you are using this method (address on back page).

Alternatively, hand the money with a note to a Board member at a meeting.

Many thanks

John Catt
Treasurer /
Membership



This month's

Leicester Secularist

A lively and interesting edition this month, I think, with several responses to my piece on 'spirituality' (my response to the responses has had to be deferred to next month due to space limitations), but nobody has taken up cudgels against Terry Larkin's defence of inequality, so I assume we all agree.

Several items appeal for volunteers. The need for these really has to be stressed. Do offer help if you possibly can. Thanks.

The difficulties of being a 'community journalist' are touched upon on page 4 while on the same page Darren Rushin's comments make me think it worth stating the guidelines I am working to in accepting copy for publication. I set these out in brief below:

1. Libel must be avoided at all costs.
2. Items that consist largely of 'copy and paste' text from the internet are frowned upon, especially if unattributed. Copyright must be respected.
3. Unnecessary use of bad language (where it is not material to the item) is not accepted.
4. Abusive attacks on speakers at the Hall are not acceptable. Criticism of others' ideas should be temperate and reasoned.
5. Be vigorously polemical if you wish but offensive personal remarks about other LSS members are not acceptable.
6. When over-supplied with copy the Editor decides what to postpone or shelve. Quality of writing is a factor. Being a free speech journal does not mean that things will be published regardless of merit.
7. All items must be submitted on the understanding that editing will take place. If drastic editing is necessary the item may be referred back to the author so authors should check their inbox frequently before deadlines.
8. We try to check sources and quotes so please state references where known.



Enjoy the read!

Harry Perry, Editor

AFRO CITY SWINGSTERS

JAZZ FROM THE APARTHEID ERA
AT THE SECULAR HALL

75 Humberstone Gate Leicester
5.00pm SUNDAY 29th JANUARY

The Afro City Swingsters is a 10 piece band. They play South African jazz and township swing. Ned Newitt will also provide a historical background to the development of South African music. Illustrated by contemporary photographs and images.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY

'I believe in Michelangelo, Velazquez and Rembrandt, in the might of design, the mystery of colour and the redemption of all things by beauty everlasting.'

George Bernard Shaw
from Mary Essinger

Forthcoming events

REMEMBER – 5pm START, 6.30pm FINISH ON SUNDAYS!

Sunday 22nd January, 5pm, Secular Hall: Cuba: News and views. Caroline Moles and Michael Gerard report on their recent visit.

Sunday 29th January, 5pm, Secular Hall: Jazz with the Afro City Swingsters. Music inspired by South African townships of the Apartheid era.

Wednesday 1st February, 7.30pm, Crumblin' Cookie, High Street: Philosophy in Pubs. Come along for some spontaneous philosophical chat. Non LSS.

Sunday 5th February, 4.15pm, Secular Hall: The Morning Star - a short film, 'The Daily Miracle', followed at 5pm by a talk by Tony Briscoe on the challenges of producing a daily left-wing newspaper on a shoestring. The film will be shown again after the talk.

Thursday 9th February, 7.30pm, Secular Hall: Darwin Memorial Lecture. The dinosaurs of Crystal Palace. Dr Joe Cain of UCL talks about the 1845 attempt at life size modelling of dinosaurs at Crystal Palace.

Sunday 12th February, 5pm, Secular Hall: Life as a Moscow correspondent. Kate Clark was Moscow correspondent of *The Scotsman* and the *Morning Star* during the perestroika period.

Sunday 19th February, 5pm, Secular Hall: Between Dawkins and God. John Holroyd analyses the claims of the new atheism regarding Islam. He is a teacher and contributor to *New Philosophy Magazine*.

Tuesday 21st February, 7.30pm, Square Bar, Hotel Street: The myths that surround sex work. Dr Belinda Brooks-Gordon reviews evidence on sex work and the law. Skeptics in the Pub. Non LSS.

Sunday 26th February, 5pm, Secular Hall: Histories of empire. John Newsinger reviews recent publications by Jeremy Paxman and Richard Gott.

Pragmatic view of the Hall

The AGM in November made me think the Society is predominantly concerned with the ownership, management and maintenance of a building, rather than the advancement of secularism.

An option for LSS is to leave Secular Hall - a 130-year-old building lacking modern facilities. Many would not choose this option. They consider that the Society and the Hall are, historically, inextricably linked. They might draw the parallel of a religion without its church/mosque/temple. Both the religious and the non-religious

could meet in a building not specifically designed for them.

If the Hall were put up for sale, who would undertake the heavy investment needed to bring it up to date? This need would presumably be reflected in the sale price.

The building's status places severe restrictions on what could be done to it. The bookcases in the Francis Ridley Room could not be touched. Neither could the figures on the frontage - could a new owner live with them?

The Hall could continue as a sports centre and dance hall. It could still be used for meetings - though I gather there is no shortage of conference

accommodation in Leicester.

I'm inclined to take a pragmatic and not an emotional view of the issue. But in supporting the option I mentioned earlier I realise that I may be advocating the impossible. I am still a relatively new and inexperienced member of LSS and my thoughts are definitely not set in concrete.

That brings me to somebody who was *not* a new member: Wilf Gaunt, who has resigned in protest at the time spent on debating Hall modernisation.

I hope somebody can persuade him to change his mind.

Terry Larkin



the common soldier than to the officer class. And in poems like 'McAndrew's Hymn' he showed that he was one of the few poets who understood the importance of work, mental and manual, in fulfilling human aspirations.

I'd be interested to hear what your Indian readers think of this assessment.

David Grove

(Apologies to David for the delay in publishing this contribution - Ed.)

Kipling - man of the people

I was delighted to read 'Pilgrim's Way' - a poem I'd not come across before [in the September 2011 *Secularist* No. 32]. As Nick Matthews said, this tribute to the people is surprisingly radical coming from Kipling. He was an imperialist who coined the deadly phrase 'the white man's burden'.

And yet ... Kipling was a very unusual imperialist. Readers of his great novel *Kim* will recall that he knew far more about the Indian people than most of the colonial masters. And he loved them all, of whatever faith, caste or colour. In many of his short stories it is the natives who are the free spirits, while the British rulers are constrained by ignorance and prejudice. As his *Barrack-Room Ballads* show, Kipling was more sympathetic to

Report hate crime

Harry Perry's 'evidence' in the case of the attack on Rhea Page, which he reported on the front page of the December *Secularist* (No. 35), came straight from the right-wing press. Yet he treats it as fact. Even the *Leicester Mercury* did not report any racist abuse.

Neither Harry Perry nor I was in court for the hearing or have interviewed any of the parties concerned. But it is possible that as a support worker she had tried to influence their behaviour.

What is of more concern is the

number of attacks, especially racist attacks, that go unreported or are not brought to justice. Not many people know to go to the library or museum to report racist attacks.

The EDL were totally opportunist in holding their brief protest in the pouring rain against the attack on Rhea. The leader of the EDL Stephen Yaxley Lennon, ex-public school boy, has joined the fascist British Freedom Party. The attitudes of the EDL represent fascist ideology. They have been responsible for attacks around the country on Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus, socialists and Palestine Solidarity. In Leicester

a young Muslim was attacked at a Rock Against Racism event, and Occupy Leicester was harassed and a Free Palestine placard removed.

The EDL are anti-Muslim, anti-Irish republican, pro-Zionism, anti-immigration. They have stated that trade unions are undemocratic and are ultimately a threat to us all.

Support the Leicester UAF demonstration against the national EDL mobilisation in Leicester on 4th February.

Chris Goodwin



Problems of reporting the facts

Chris Goodwin's comment (above) on my front-page article in December (*Secularist* No. 35) is odd, I feel. True, neither of us was in the court and so don't have first-hand knowledge of the evidence of racist abuse against the white woman Rhea Page by the Somali women who attacked her. But then Chris doesn't have any evidence to the contrary either. Yes, the racist abuse was widely reported in 'the right-wing press'. Unfortunately that is where most of our information comes from. Is Chris saying we should accept nothing as fact unless it is reported in a socialist newspaper? That would leave us, I think, with the *Morning Star* and possibly the *Socialist Worker*. Mmmm.

Oh, but she does give the *Mercury* a thumbs-up as it 'did not report any racist abuse'. But it did, on 24th November 2011: 'During the hearing, James Bide-Thomas, prosecuting, said Ambaro Maxamed, who started the violence, had called Miss Page a "white bitch" during the incident.'

It is difficult for me to validate what is reported elsewhere before quoting it, but in this case I did try to contact Rhea Page via Facebook before the December publication. It is only in the past week that she has replied and so far I have not had a clear response about the quote used as she's waiting for a reply from the court. (I'm pleased, though, that she has told me that 'the EDL has nothing to do with me - they're just using my story'.) It was, in any case, a very minor element of my report.

What I do avoid doing is making

the type of assumption that Chris makes: 'But it is possible that as a support worker she [Rhea Page] had tried to influence their behaviour.' I'm not sure what this is supposed to mean but it seems to incorporate a huge assumption on the back of someone's job. I call that stereotyping.

And as for the right-wing press - it was the *Daily Mail* which reported the phrase 'kill the white slag'. It was also the *Mail* which on its front page named the killers of the black youth Stephen Lawrence and campaigned for them to be prosecuted for their racist crime, putting its money where its mouth is by challenging them to sue.

Newspapers may be in black and white, but the facts rarely are.

Harry Perry



Tattoos, boxing and sadomasochism

As a relatively new reader of the *Secularist*, I'd like to applaud the excellent 'Cherie law' article in December's publication - that rightly confronts an issue that many PC liberals would steer clear of, while managing to avoid the careless racist-baiting conveyed by other sources.

Similarly, the issue also included interesting reads on dementia and the British Social Attitudes Survey findings on levels of religiosity in the UK. However, I take issue with one particular article.



Image: www.trendyinternational.com

While I understand and value the need for freedom of thought and expression in this publication, I also understand that contributions should 'avoid being unnecessarily offensive'. With

this latter point, I refer to Terry Larkin's piece on 'kinky sex'. Points about the careless and potentially homophobic title aside, I'm bemused that a third of a page was provided for such a bizarre and contradictory article.

Like Terry, I *accept* consented sadomasochistic sex, but don't *understand* it, and of course agree with his views on paedophilia. However, I take issue with his argument that 'no sexual practice between consenting adults should be regarded as illegal, immoral or unnatural', since he doesn't clarify to whom he refers. I agree that *the state* should not

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regard consented (albeit unusual) sexual practices as illegal, but surely other individuals are free to judge such practices as *immoral* or *unnatural* if they so wish?

Anyway, this is still not my point. My main objections are with Terry's assumption that horror films are 'probably watched by people who pierce their bodies and cover them with tattoos', and his comments that immediately follow this point in which he

labels people who 'deface their bodies' as 'primitive'. Not only is this perhaps classist, ethnocentric and dismissive of many members of the armed forces, football clubs and alternative youth subcultures who decorate their bodies; Terry's remarks also show how out of touch he is with younger generations. Tattoos and piercings are widespread, found among a diverse range of social groups in contemporary Britain – and not just the 'deviant' ones. Moreover, I find it contradictory that Terry sees it as wrong to

view whipping, genital mutilation and other forms of 'kinky sex' as unnatural, but at the same time himself have such opposition to consenting adults entering a boxing ring or getting a tattoo! Surely, I'm not alone in my bemusement at this article?

Darren Rushin
(Who is indifferent about horror films and boxing, but has one tattoo and no piercings.)



One law for all

The front page of the December *Secularist* (No. 35) rightly attacks religious privilege when it comes to the application of the law, especially in regard to Islam, as this is the religion most demanding at the present time, and the most damaging to the majority of people since its victims include 50% of the populace, i.e. women.

The women who suffer from Islamic injustice at the moment are mainly born into Islam. It is now being recognised that the number of 'honour' punishments, and forced marriage, is ten times what had previously been assumed, and that they have been ignored by the law, in a form of unofficial relativism.

This turning of a blind eye could not continue as the numbers of abused increased, and women turned to secular law, filling refuges, and asking groups such as Southall Black Sisters to help them.

Another group, whose numbers are unknown, are girls taken out of school and taken abroad for female genital mutilation. It seems another blind eye is turned to implementing the law, and minority girls' rights are again being sold down the river by relativism.

When the numbers of victims was low, it was easier for society to ignore them under the banner of 'multiculturalism'. It was probably widely expected that these practices would fade out with new generations who would

become assimilated to universal values – as indeed most people have.

But the determined minority is in fact a large, and growing, number, made more obvious every day, from burkas on the streets to students walking out of lectures when the lecturer touches on evolution etc., as reported by Richard Dawkins.



The dilemma felt by some members is the fear of being labelled racist for criticising Islam, a point covered by our feminist speaker on 6th November, Cynthia Cockburn. Here I quote from the *Secularist* review of her talk:

'On multiculturalism she said that governments had found it easy to deal with religious leaders and imagined they were community leaders – leaving women sidelined again. Ethnicity elided with faith. Now the Muslim Arbitration Tribunals are

introducing some aspects of Sharia law and this also reflects a racist response as they deprive Muslim women of the protection of secular law.

'Some left-wing anti-racists are left terrified of criticising Asian groups that ignore secular-minded people in those traditions as they fear being called racists themselves if they line up with the anti-Muslim policies of the state. These left-wing groups then end up supporting the Muslim right uncritically.'

Cynthia's last point can easily be applied to secularists, as our reticence to grasp the nettle has led to self-censorship, and left a vacuum that the right and reactionary press have filled, leaving unsupported those brave and progressive women, such as writer Tasleema Nasreen and activist Maryam Namazie, along with all the women who came to Britain to escape Muslim 'culture', while those who revel in their own subjugation and who contribute nothing to women's equality are constantly defended.

Secularism and secularists must support and argue for universal rights. The longer this issue goes unchallenged, so more and more people will be affected and the harder it will be to obtain universal rights for all British citizens, let alone the world.

Lyn Hurst



A few introductions

At the last Board meeting it was suggested that new Board members might like to introduce themselves to the membership through the pages of the *Secularist*, not having had the opportunity to do so at the last AGM.



Anu Kapur

I was born in Pakistan and became a refugee when India was partitioned on religious grounds in 1947. My family was given refuge in an ashram (a religious institution) in Haridwar, India. Growing up in such a place gave me some insight into religious hypocrisy and bigotry at a very young age. I came to Britain in 1967. I was shocked to find out the only compulsory subject in schools was RE and still is.

I taught in primary schools for many years and later, in 1991, trained as a teacher of hearing-impaired children, and I retired in 2006. I represented NUT on the Board of SACRE when it was initially set up for allowing schools to apply for an opt-out from compulsory Christian assemblies. To my disappointment many schools still spent many hours a week in order to comply with this unnecessary collective worship requirement. I believe schools should be free from any religion and therefore I have campaigned against the increasing formation of new faith schools which in my opinion are divisive and restrict

freethinking in young minds. I have been a member of the Secular Society for many years, however my attendance at Sunday gatherings has been less regular than I would have liked. I was surprised to be nominated to serve on the Board and now as a Board member would like to promote the ethos of the Society to the best of my ability. One of the main challenges in the new year seems to be restoration of this historic building. I would help along with other members to bring all sides together to achieve this goal and thus welcome the proposed inclusive open day in February 2012.



Terry Larkin

When I was around 12 I attended church. Two years later I was secular.

What brought about this change?

Nothing complicated or dramatic. I simply asked myself: How can we make positive statements about the existence of a supreme being when we can neither prove nor disprove his (her?) existence, using our senses or our reasoning. Many years later (I'm not going to say how many, I'm anti-ageist) that is still my position.

I strongly support three of the main practical objectives of secularists: to remove religious teaching from schools - if it is taught, it should be by parents; to end bishops' ex officio membership of the House of Lords - if they are in the Upper House, it should be on individual merit; and to separate the Church of England from the state - the CofE does not truly represent most people.

Some of my other views:

Politics: the words right and left should be consigned to the dustbin. If they are retained, each has its virtues and its vices. I do not lean heavily to the left, as

some secularists do.

Race/immigration: I am colour blind. Immigrants generally enrich a community, economically and/or culturally. Only a few exploit this country's welfare system.

The individual: We should aim to be all-round people.

More about me:

My first love is music, most kinds, closely followed by films - also most kinds. My main physical activity is long-distance walking. I am a keen whist player and pub quiz contestant.



Hamish Whiteley

I was brought up in a family that believed in hymns and harvest festivals without showing any evidence of faith or belief. I remember very clearly the moment when I was actually singing in a church choir and it dawned on me that we were supposed to really believe in all the things we sang and talked about. Atheism came to me like a kind of divine revelation, and everything since has confirmed that conviction. I think that atheists generally overestimate the importance of belief and overlook the importance of ritual and practice and fellowship in

people's religious adherence. All my working life was spent in education and the arts, and I had to come to terms with the fact that many people all over the world have drawn comfort and inspiration from religious practice and teaching, an inspiration that has led to both positive and negative outcomes. Secularism in my view aims to restrict religion to the private sphere, where people are free to believe what they choose. Public life and institutions should be free of religious influence, whether it be government, schools, hospitals or even the voluntary sector. I have always been on the left politically, think of myself as a republican socialist and have been active in

CND and trade unions. I believe in outdoors before indoors, children before adults, reading before television, bicycles before cars. I have two allotments and four (soon to be five) grandchildren who occupy a good deal of my time.

I believe that Secular Hall is a building we should treasure, that we should do everything we can to overcome the recent impasse and that the ideas put forward recently by Nick Matthews represent the best way forward. I also believe that we should be more outward looking and engaged with the city and its inhabitants and that we should make it a priority to think about how we might best do this.

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Gillian Lighton

This is what I would have said at the AGM if there had been the opportunity!

I have been a member of the

Society off and on for many years (to be truthful more off than on!). During the last three years I have been an active member and have attended Sunday meetings very regularly. Having served my apprenticeship as duster of books, tidier of shelves, deputy kitchen maid and sweeper out of the porch, as well as trying to organise the library and to set up the History Group, I now feel the need for a small promotion so that I can contribute more effectively to the wider development of the Society.

What will I be able to offer as a member of the Board? Frankly, I

am not entirely sure, though I like to see myself as being fairly practical and having a certain amount of common sense. I am certainly prepared to work hard on behalf of the Society. I am pleased at the increase in the number of women members in recent times and want to see more women feeling able to take a wider role in the Society. I would also like to see the members generally having greater involvement and for the Board to communicate more effectively with the membership so that they have more information about the workings of the Board during the year. And I would like people to have a good time when they come to the Hall. No one should ever have to sit through another AGM like the last one!

What are my beliefs? I am a lifelong atheist (not an agnostic) but I don't have any missionary ambitions. I do not, however, subscribe to the view that

secularism is just about the separation of church from state. I want the Society to provide a home for unbelievers who are prepared to be clear about their unbelief and for those on the journey towards secularism (which can be so difficult for people brought up in religious traditions).

I don't expect a group of freethinkers to think alike and it does not trouble me greatly that we don't. How could we, given our greatly differing backgrounds and experience? But I would like to see a bit more tolerance of other views within the Society. Personally, I love the mix of people who attend Society meetings, many of whom I would never encounter elsewhere.

I am a fourth-generation member which perhaps gives an extra dimension to my commitment to the Society (and to its wonderful, if decrepit, building).

Gillian Lighton

Meditations of John (14) Splitting

Robert Louis Stephenson wrote a novel about a Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde in 1886. It describes one person presenting as two very different personalities.

The idea that this could occur in real life may seem a great stretch of the imagination, yet the International Classification of

Diseases officially lists split personality disorder, rare cases of which can be quite extreme.

Although less obvious, there have been people like commandants of Nazi extermination camps who are remembered by their children as loving fathers; research on al-Qaeda suggests that many have the same attitude to life as that of soldiers. Even so it is often forgotten that soldiers can be good parents and messmates and yet terrible killers on the battlefield. Some splitting is so commonplace that it hardly passes for comment. We almost expect people to behave differently at work as opposed to being at home.

Then there are paedophiles who

can prove to be exemplary men (and women) while at home, at work or on political or church committees.

But it is in the field of ideologies that splitting is probably most common and yet very insidious. It would be easy to think that people who believe in life after death are thereby going to be irrational

For some reason people, even of high intelligence, seem able to have two systems of thought going, one while in church or among believers and another at work or in the lecture theatre.

about everything. But this is not the case. For some reason people, even of high intelligence, seem able to have two systems of thought going, one while in church or among believers and another at work or in the lecture theatre.

Despite this, evidence of a split can be detected. I recently heard that some Islamic students of biology and medicine refuse to attend lectures on Charles Darwin and evolution. In contrast, those who are committed to an evolutionary interpretation of life have no problem in studying the arguments of their opponents. Another symptom I have detected is a tendency to fall back on a kind

of resuscitative repeating of the same point endlessly like 'It's in the word of God'. It is important to remember that ideological positions other than those upholding religion are liable to splitting. Take the fear of freethought in places like China even now. One can feel confident that a real test of freedom for individuals and societies is a

willingness to study different opinions.

For me this meditation proved to be one of the most difficult as I increasingly realised that splitting was more

common than I had thought, although it is often temporary and only affects small areas of thought.

Listening is probably the more important approach in breaking down the barriers of those who have started splitting than an aggressive form of argument. But beware! People who have an established form of split have often developed many skills to support both their positions and are quite good at wrong-footing people. When you want to listen, they want to argue; when you want to argue they sit back and listen - or ignore.

John Edmondson



Spirituality – should we or shouldn't we?

In Harry Perry's thought-provoking piece (*Secularist 35, December 2011*) on the use of the term 'spirituality', he says that we *shouldn't* use it because it is too close to the religious concept of spirituality, in which it is entwined with the concept of a god. Harry also explains spirituality as being merely 'heightened emotions'. However, one can feel heightened emotions at a football match, for example, or when angry, so the term on its own simply does not, and cannot, encompass or describe *particular* emotions and feelings that arise in us naturally from our interaction with each other and the world. This range of experiences that we all know (as documented by Harry, e.g. awe) I classify as 'our spirituality'. It springs from our physicality – we are material physical beings in a material physical world. Both Dawkins and Hitchens refer to the 'transcendent' or the 'numinous' – terms which they use, as I do, because they are much deeper, more intense and more meaningful than being merely 'heightened emotions'. Indeed, Hitchens says that the numinous is too important to be left to religion. Reclaiming those words back from religion and from individualistic relativist New Age practices is part of what we are about. Surely we can use those words for ourselves without having to attribute the feelings and emotions encompassed therein as being mediated through a god, guardian angels or any supernatural concept. And we don't have another word to replace spirituality either (disregarding heightened emotions). To invent one would

be counter-productive – remember how 'Winterval' was widely derided! Words, and their usage, have to grow organically – maybe one will – but for now, spirituality does it for me. So – don't throw the baby out with the bath water! Atheists, I feel, often fail to fully recognise that many have a common need to acknowledge these feelings and even to have a routine place for them in their lives. If we don't have a satisfactory replacement for religion in order to meet those needs then religion will keep rearing its head. As noted in the *Secularist*, similar



Image from: *Daily Spiritual Tools* by Sherry Woodcock: <http://tinyurl.com/6uajpax>

myths pop up time and again. Some myths endure because they are powerful in having a poetic and mythic reality which resonates with humans, in that we are poetic, symbolic beings; and because many humans *do* have such needs – for coming together, for a bit of a ritual, for acknowledging and giving expression to those spiritual feelings. This has happened throughout history via religion. But surely we can accept and respond to these feelings and express them without reifying and deifying them? However, for many, atheism and secularism do

seem to have a bit of a reputation for being argumentative, arid and male dominated (which I think has fed into the widespread antagonism to Dawkins' *The God Delusion* – although I do wonder how many critics actually read it). Nevertheless, I am part of a group which sees itself as spiritual, and which neither worships nor prays – 'hands that work are better than lips that pray'. We meet together monthly to try to harness those particularly spiritual feelings by singing together, listening to all sorts of music, and having poetry or readings from varied sources. We also float petals on water to briefly share our joys and concerns, acknowledging these as simply a comfort and support – we're not there to do therapy. Plus we have a short talk, which is hopefully interesting/challenging; then we have a period of silence so that people can meditate, think, or just have a bit of quiet. We find our own meanings in life, one of those being to try to be good people who make a difference in the world. Not buying into religion's didacticism or its claims to be the answer to the 'mysteries' of life gives me the freedom to occasionally use its symbolism/poetry for my own inspiration, without subscribing to its dogma or messages of derision to those outside its own power structures. (For example, I particularly like the myth of Persephone and the seasons.) I am a spiritual atheist and so I say yes to spirituality. If we want to – let's do it!

Rowan Songsmith



Why atheists should do spirituality

In reply to Harry Perry's article 'Why atheists should not do "spirituality"' (*Secularist 35, December 2011*), I agree with Harry's point about the elasticity of the word. The dictionary seems to give three distinct meanings:

(1) a belief in an immaterial reality, (2) the search for an absolute God and (3) the search for the deepest values and meaning by which to live. Many people who are bound to a particular religious tradition are likely to accept all three

definitions. However, I would argue that during the late twentieth century with the rise of secularism, the word 'spirituality' is increasingly used to mean just number (3), the search for the deepest values and meaning by

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which to live.

As an atheist, I do not think that consciousness exists apart from the body. I do not agree with the mind and matter divide and think that philosophers like Descartes ('I think therefore I am') muddled things up. I think that the word 'spirituality' has meaning when it is used to refer to the interconnections between all life on earth (and the wider universe). Harry Perry argues that atheists like Dawkins and Hitchens use the word spirituality to also mean 'heightened emotion', but what's wrong with this? Realising our place in evolution can be an emotional feeling.

This view has not interested those who make up the authority

of the Church. The Church authorities discourage these thoughts, as they demand that religious (or spiritual) experiences are group activities under their supervision, like taking the sacrament. Defining spirituality in a way which doesn't require a priest or bishop, brethren or elder to mediate between the people and God and is about affirming our own rightness and worth, is something the Christian church denies. The Church teaches that we are born in sin and we have to be grateful to God for allowing us intrinsically bad and unacceptable beings to be born. We need to depend on those in power over us to tell us what to do, and to save ourselves we have to be obedient. At Sunday schools we learned that our sin

hurts Jesus and we should feel guilty. We learned that God punishes wickedness.

The 'spirituality' that Dawkins and Hitchens refer to is completely opposite and comes nowhere near any Christian religious concept because it isn't anything to do with God or a non-material 'soul'. The word means more than 'heightened emotions', as Harry claims, because for me it is also about the realisation that we can value ourselves and our interconnections. It is unfortunate that this word 'spirituality' comes with a lot of baggage.

However, I say that I am a spiritual atheist.

Helen Pettman



What word can substitute for 'spiritual'?

Harry Perry's feature 'Why atheists should not do "spirituality" in the December Secularist brought to my mind words from Ludovic Kennedy's marvellous book All In The Mind, subtitled A Farewell to God:

'The Church has always assumed that it alone is the guardian of the spiritual, and that a sense of the spiritual plays no part in the make-up of non-believers. It is wrong ... I have gained more refreshment from nature and art than any other single source.'

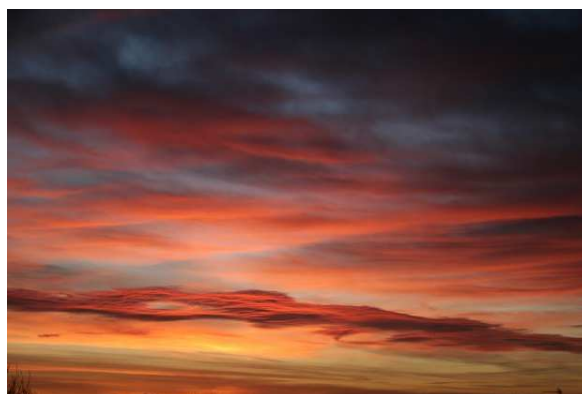
I wish I'd written those words. (I think Kennedy's subtitle should have been his main title.)

A problem is the word 'spiritual'. As Harry said, it is 'irrevocably tainted' by its link with religion. The same goes for the word 'soul'. The word 'heart' (just a pump, after all!) is frequently used erroneously, though an emotional upset can physically affect the heart.

It is difficult to find satisfactory substitutes for these words. What is termed 'spiritual', like what is termed 'rational', emanates from the mind, which is

linked to the brain.

Harry quotes Dawkins' '*frisson* in the breast', when seeing a star-filled night sky or a colourful sunset. A *frisson* has nothing to do with the breast. It is an emotional thrill, coming out of the mind. Both Dawkins and



Harry might experience the same *frisson* when hearing an awesome piece of music or watching an exciting film - I would.

As well as my brain, the part of my anatomy that is also stirred by nature and art is my stomach!

I like Harry's term 'nominally religious'. For me this would include 'wheeled Christians' - those who go to church three times in their lives, and each time they are on wheels: when they are christened, then they are in a

pram; when they get married, then they are in a limousine; and after they are dead, then they are in a hearse!

Millions of 'nominally religious' people have just celebrated Christmas. For them it is a consumerfest.

The comedy actor Leslie Phillips told of going into a shop to buy Christmas cards. He picked up one showing a nativity scene and remarked on it to the woman behind the counter. Her response was: 'Yes, they're even bringing religion into it now.'

Harry makes the point that the multiplicity of religions in modern Britain has driven their practitioners 'to emphasise a commonality of their various religions', though until recently the sects in Northern Ireland were not so driven, nor are Islamic fundamentalists.

Certainly today we could not have repeats of the Crusades or the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre, or burnings at the stake!

Terry Larkin



Who called Mother Teresa ‘a lying, thieving Albanian dwarf’? Christopher Hitchens. Who else?

Christopher Hitchens died of oesophageal cancer on 15th December 2011 aged 62. A combative and at times perplexing figure, Hitchens was impossible to ignore, and for his entire career argued implacably against religion and religious influence. Hitchens has been characterised as confused and reactionary and as an intellectual adolescent, turning on his friends and frequently refusing to listen; but I believe nonetheless that with his death we have lost an important champion of secularism.

Hitchens began his career working for the *New Statesman* and contributing articles to the *Socialist Worker*, spending his days agitating at factory gates and his evenings addressing the Oxford Union or dining with the Warden of All Souls. This duality pervades Hitchens' life, sexually and politically, often to the intense frustration of his friends. By the 1970s Hitchens was firmly established in Fleet Street where he was part of a set that included James Fenton, Martin Amis, Julian Barnes, Clive James, and Ian McEwan who described Hitchens as having 'instant neurological recall' of anything and everything he had ever read. In 1981 Hitchens left for America where he wrote for *The Nation* and *Vanity Fair* as well as the *New York Review of Books*. Hitchens also became a familiar figure on TV talk shows, a format that suited him perfectly and where he could espouse his views, which he defended in the US not as 'liberalism' but 'socialism'.

Hitchens' ideas owed much to one of his great heroes, George Orwell. Both lived on the political left but both slowly and inexorably moved towards a position that saw the fight against totalitarianism, whatever its source, as the first priority.

To be fair, Hitchens never adopted the popular left-wing pro-Mao and Castro sentiment in the 1970s, but his belief that Islamic fundamentalism represented a totalitarian threat alienated many of his friends, as had his support for Thatcher's Falklands Campaign some years earlier. Many found the spectacle of Hitchens, who had once tried to take Kissinger to court for war crimes, supporting the Allies' invasion of Iraq hard to swallow, even though one might concede there was a certain consistency to his position.



His targets were many: the royal family - 'Together, Margaret and Charles set the tone for the dowdy, feckless, can't-stay-married shower of titled descendants with whose names, let alone doings, it is near-impossible to keep up. There are so many of them! And things always have to be found for them to do'; Mother Teresa - '[Mother Teresa] was not a friend of the poor. She was a friend of poverty. She said that suffering was a gift from God. She spent her life opposing the only known cure for poverty, which is the empowerment of women and the emancipation of them from a

livestock version of compulsory reproduction'; and George Bush - 'He is unusually incurious, abnormally unintelligent, amazingly inarticulate, fantastically uncultured, extraordinarily uneducated, and apparently quite proud of all these things.' Hitchens also said things that I abhor and reject, particularly his comments on the conduct of the 'anti-jihadist wars'.

Perhaps Hitchens' enduring legacy and where he will be seen at his best will be his two books, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* and his collection *The Portable Atheist*. This latter collection shows Hitchens at his finest: largely free from his more purple invective it offers a comprehensive overview of both atheist and secularist writings with informative and sensitive introductions. And with Hitchens there is always the challenge, the provocation: 'Beware the irrational, however seductive. Shun the "transcendent" and all who invite you to subordinate or annihilate yourself. Distrust compassion; prefer dignity for yourself and others. Don't be afraid to be thought arrogant or selfish. Picture all experts as if they were mammals. Never be a spectator of unfairness or stupidity. Seek out argument and disputation for their own sake; the grave will supply plenty of time for silence. Suspect your own motives, and all excuses. Do not live for others any more than you would expect others to live for you.'

A complex and at times disarming and frustrating figure, Hitchens was nonetheless a convinced and powerful champion of secularism and we should greatly mourn his passing.

Hamish Whiteley



You are being watched

Being watched via cameras is much older than most people would imagine. Chris Williams (11th December 2011) showed some film from the 1930s in Ashbourne where the police filmed people placing what were then illegal bets on horses. But the case was thrown out. It was ruled that just because a suspicious group of blokes were hanging around on a corner and giving each other bits of paper did not mean they were guilty of anything.



It is in reality quite difficult to establish actual guilt through video surveillance.

Where video seems to have been more 'effective' in its use by the

police has been in finding out what was going on in a demonstration and using video information to marshal police quickly.

What is important also is when video fails to record as, for example, in the slaughter of John Charles Menezes by police officers. In this case the records from nine video surveillance cameras mysteriously did not exist.

Chris's talk was factual, intelligent, entertaining and thought-provoking. Just what a Secular Society talk should be.
Michael Gerard



Headstrong meeting

This was the best-attended meeting of this type that I can recall, with 16 present, on 8th January 2012, the first of the 5pm starts. Those who come are welcome to share concerns and issues with others. The main contributor this time was Helen Everett who updated us with

regard to lap dancing clubs in Leicester. Currently Leicester City Council allows for five such clubs. Licence renewal is in process and two locations have had their licence withdrawn. I cannot do justice to all that Helen said but the discussion ranged around issues of exploitation and freedom of action. What should be our response to these clubs as

secularists? As there are now three such clubs in Leicester, I guess there will soon be further applications for two new venues if proprietors want to take advantage of the maximum allowed. Keep an eye on the press.

Mike Burden



Blasphemy, religious hatred, and human rights: who speaks for the sacred?

Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, Holborn, London
WC1R 4RL

28th January 2012

Registration 10.30am for a 11.00am start -
Finish - 6.30 pm

Introduced by Dr Stephen Law of Heythrop College, University of London, Editor of THINK (Royal Institute of Philosophy) and Provost of the Centre for Inquiry UK.

This event focuses on the criminalisation of religious hatred, defamation and insult under European human rights, and how this functions as a de facto blasphemy law.

TICKETS

Book at: <http://www.humanism.org.uk/shop/128>

General: £10 general public

Members and students: £8 BHA, AHS and SPES members and students with valid ID

Directions to Conway Hall <http://www.conwayhall.org.uk/#Find-us>

A really good round-up of the opinions of 50 leading scientists and academics on 'God':

<http://vimeo.com/26991975>

A nest of bees in the rafters of a Catholic church in the USA were making such a row with their buzzing that the priest eventually had them cleared out. Later some bees returned to the church but the rest had converted and become WASPS! [Groan - Ed.]

From Michael Gerard

Modesty

Would it be better if men were more spared,
women stopped praising he-men who dared?
Would it be better if tenderness reigned?
Those blood and guts, nerviest held, restrained.

Would it be better if modesty prevailed?
If we kissed, caressed, all those who failed?
Ticker-tape welcomes for those who are quiet,
who mind their own business refusing to fight.

I think 'twould be better to stop making guns,
by spending the money on laughter, puns.
I hope in the future we'll think again,
governments think deeply about women, men.

The animal kingdom's no problem at all,
it's humans that's spreading, taking it all.
Should we consider our productive rate,
lessen our urge to procreate?

China had fun with this little game,
should we take stock, do the same?
Nature tells us to watch our stock.
Or we could be in for a blooming big shock.

Jobee

Urgent website help needed

Our Webmeister, Frank Friedmann, has let me know that his father has just died and so he will be tied up for some time with sorting out his affairs. I am sure you will join with me in extending our condolences to Frank and Eleanor at this time.

In the circumstances Frank will not be able to spend any time maintaining the Society website and so we are appealing for a volunteer who, as a minimum,

will take on the routine maintenance of the site, updating the calendar, etc. This level only requires someone who will log in regularly to fill in online forms with relevant information. The rest of the site mostly isn't very dynamic and can just sit there - but Frank would be happy to hand over completely to someone (or a group) with ideas for carrying it on.

If there is anyone really keen to get involved with this side of

things, Frank feels that a complete redesign and rebasing of the site (possibly on the back of a blog template) would not go amiss.

If you are willing to help out in either way please contact Frank Friedmann on 0116 292 1964.

Many thanks

Harry Perry

(pp Frank Friedmann)



Gay Humanists relaunch online magazine

The UK gay Humanist charity the Pink Triangle Trust (PTT) has relaunched its online magazine with a new title, *The Pink Humanist*.

The PTT, which was founded in 1992, started publishing a printed magazine entitled *Gay & Lesbian Humanist* back in 1993 and continued this until it went online in 2008.

Though described as an LGBT publication, the new magazine is aimed at all atheists, Humanists, sceptics and freethinkers and is the only one of its kind worldwide.

The editor of *The Pink Humanist* is Barry Duke who is well known in UK atheist and Humanist circles as the editor of *The Freethinker*, a monthly journal which was founded in 1881. Duke was also closely associated with the National Secular Society for many years.

Contributors to the first issue of *The Pink Humanist* include Russian gay activist Nikolai Alekseev, who has been praised by human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell 'for his amazing, ground-breaking work over many

years'.

Barry Duke said: 'As editor of the oldest freethought magazine in the world, I am delighted to have been invited to launch the newest.

'Since 1974, I have devoted my life to promoting LGBT rights, atheism, Humanism and rationalism, and *The Pink Humanist* will, I hope, help raise awareness of the need to challenge religious privilege wherever it occurs in public life, and stem the rising tide of homophobia, especially in Africa where mainly foreign evangelicals have been allowed to muddy the waters of tolerance and generate unprecedented levels of hostility towards the LGBT community.

'My hope, too, is that freethought writers from all over the world will donate original articles, comments and reviews for inclusion in future issues of the publication.'

George Broadhead

www.pinktriangle.org.uk/

Blog: www.ptt-blog.blogspot.com/



Progress on the mini-modernisation

With the formal letter of approval from the Leicester Rationalist Trust for the mini-modernisation

plans I am pleased to report that the local architecture practice RG+P has now agreed to work 'at risk' until we have clear proposals that conservation officers can agree to. Once agreed, RG+P will provide

estimated costs for fundraising purposes.

We are now seeking a meeting with planners to discuss the proposals in detail.

Harry Perry



Ariperi Cycling Club

Society members Hamish Whiteley and Christine Keen are both British Cycling trained cycle ride leaders and are interested in forming an informal occasional Secular Society Cycling Group, which we want to call the ARIPERI CYCLING CLUB. The idea would be to go on some fairly leisurely rides on a Sunday afternoon, perhaps meeting at Abbey Park at 1.30pm and returning by 4pm in plenty of time for the meeting at 5pm. We

were thinking of beginning after Easter when the weather may be more cheery. The routes would initially be flat and easy and largely on quiet roads or cycleways. Riders would need a bicycle in good condition, a spare inner tube and something to drink. The speed of the group would be determined by our slowest riders. Gentle open-air exercise and convivial conversation would be our aim initially although in time the group may well develop its own

aims and ambition.

Anyone interested should e-mail hamish.w@ntlworld.com so we get an idea of possible interest. Hamish Whiteley and Christine Keen



2012 Darwin Memorial Lecture

Secular Hall, 7.30pm Thursday 9th February
The dinosaurs of Crystal Palace
Dr Joe Cain, University College London

The world's first 'Dinosaur Park' was opened in 1854 at Crystal Palace Park and caused outrage to some with its theory of evolution, as depicted in the dinosaur models.

Preamble to 'Wistow'

Beorhtfrith, a relative of the Mercian Prince Wigstan, conceived a desire to marry Wigstan's widowed mother, Aelfflaed, and sent envoys to ask for her hand. Wigstan persuaded his mother to refuse, which incensed the would-be suitor. He invited Wigstan to a meeting on 1st June 849 and, while giving him the kiss of peace, he beat in Wigstan's head and his servant riddled the body with his sword. Overnight the body rested in the church. [The church pictured below was built some 400 years later - Ed.]

Wistow

**Did these green green fields echo to
The clip-clop of horses bearing willow
Panniers overflowing with gifts and hope
As the young prince came riding
Under his standard of the ramping lion,
In a tabard of yellow embroidered all with leaves of myrtle?**

**Was it here on the bridge of the little river Sense
Where trout curl and flick in the shadows,
Was it here that he fell by the wall, crying out for his mother?**

**Or was it by the gate that blade found bone,
Did the deer look up for a moment?
And the tabard change to orange with the creep and seep of scarlet?**

**Or here beneath the elms
Where the rooks took flight as he howled,
Or was the hurt too deep for howling?
Did sinews recoil and bowels turn to water?**

**Was it quiet all night in the little church
With the smell and splutter of candles?
Were mice surprised by their visitor?
And when darkness muffled the trees
Were the nightingales silent?**

Mary D. Essinger © 2011

St Wistan's (13th C), Wistow
Image: www.panoramio.com

News from the Board

Following the AGM, the new Board met for the first time on 12th December. The 'new' people (Chair and four Board members) outnumbered the 'old' so we were all somewhat feeling our way.

Though the President and Chair had been elected at the AGM, we still had to confirm John Catt as Treasurer and Mike Burden as Building Manager. I am now Secretary.

The big news is that the Rationalist Trust has written to confirm their agreement to the mini-modernisation project (they thought they had already made it clear but this clarified the situation), so we have been able to ask Harry Perry to obtain costings on Phase 1 of the project.

We agreed the minutes of the AGM. We also discussed the motions passed at the AGM and any matters arising which require action. The letter from the Rationalist Trust has enabled us to make a very positive start. At our next meeting we will be planning and setting a date for a 'strategy day' - the first one was held last year, and such days give an opportunity for the Board to discuss important issues in more detail than is possible at regular meetings. On this occasion we hope to extend an invitation to the Rationalist Trust to join us for at least part of the day.

There was a suggestion of setting up a small group to make recommendations as to ways to ensure that future AGMs were more effective. This was deferred to our next meeting.

Four new membership applications were confirmed. We discussed the case of an asylum seeker who has been to meetings

on a few occasions and is now in detention. We agreed to ask him if he would be prepared to accept honorary membership in recognition of his attempts to promote secularism.

We shall be trying to work to some general principles. First, we want to keep the membership more fully informed about discussions at Board meetings during the year. As a first step, I shall try to write up the proceedings more fully in the *Secularist* each month and we have consulted Frank Friedmann as to the possibility of putting minutes online.

Secondly, we would like to see more of the membership involved in the general running of the Society (as introduced under 'Volunteers needed'). We hope that small groups will be able to discuss different issues during the year and make recommendations to the Board. A Board member might join each group to aid general communication, but we want to move away from the idea that the Board should try to do everything and the membership complaining when they can't. The Board's role should be to take overall responsibility, set a direction, organise and coordinate.

Thirdly, we want to ensure that more than one person is familiar with the key tasks of each role within the Society. This will take some time to establish but as a start Hamish has offered to 'deputise' as Secretary when necessary, Michael Gerard and I are learning interesting aspects of the Building Manager's role (meters and fire alarms) and I am helping Mike with lettings as necessary. Nick has agreed to contact Hamish if he is unable to

attend and chair any Sunday meetings. Hamish will then organise a rota of Board members who will cover.

We talked about ways of financing smaller projects and Michael suggested that we think about repairing and refurbishing the piano.

And what about promoting secularism? A key aspect is our Sunday lecture programme which is a standing item on our agenda. We are also making 'promoting secularism' a standing item so that we do not lose sight of this key aspect of our work. At this meeting we agreed that Terry Larkin (who has experience in this area) will take on the role of Press and Publicity Officer.

There were lots of other small items but Harry will not thank me for further exceeding my word limit. The meeting was positive and good humoured. We are not going to agree about everything but so far we are all still speaking to each other!

Last but not least, we recorded our appreciation of the work done by outgoing members of the Board, Chris Williams and Richard Hopper, who have both served as Secretary at different times and who have worked hard for us all. They will be missed.

The date of the next meeting of the Board is 29th January. A *reminder - any member can ask for an item to be placed on the agenda. Please contact me if you wish to do so. It will certainly be discussed, though not necessarily at the next meeting.*

Gillian Lighton



Volunteers needed!

There is likely to be a number of requests for volunteers in the coming months. The Society has too many tasks to be covered adequately by Board members and the small number of other regular volunteers. We want to ensure that current

activities operate efficiently and consistently before we begin to extend what we do in line with the wishes of the membership. To do this we need more help with general organisation. A regular commitment may be needed, but not necessarily a

great deal of time. In addition, we probably all agree that there should be more than one member who is familiar with the requirements of each job within the Society, so that there is cover when people go on holiday, get

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ill, want a rest or fall under a bus (and yes, sadly, Trevor, our quizmaster, has demonstrated that it does happen!). However, this needs people willing to learn key aspects of each role and to offer occasional cover.

Organisation of events

At present, Mike Burden and Michael Gerard organise most of our events, in particular the Sunday lecture series which has been so successful over recent years. However, this is a very big commitment and they need at least one other person to help with the practical tasks involved (for example, putting together the programme, emailing lecturers and members, publicising events). It would also be extremely helpful if those with

an idea for an event were prepared to take the lead in organising it. And of course, if you have any ideas as to possible lecturers or lecture topics, please do not hesitate to pass them on.

Organisation of Sunday lectures

There is often a lot to be done in quite a short time, for example, putting out chairs, setting up the projector, greeting people as they arrive, taking money, organising juice, tea and coffee, clearing and locking up.

This needs a team of people, not just one person with some occasional helpers! Is there anyone who is willing to help? You need to be available reasonably regularly, though not every Sunday. We then hope to organise a meeting to set up a

system to ensure that each Sunday is properly covered (well, we can dream!).

Lifts

As the Sunday bus service continues to deteriorate, there is an increasing need for lifts home from those who are able and willing to offer them. It is very sad to hear of members who would like to come to events but are unable to get here by public transport. We hope to have enough volunteers to arrange a better system than we have at present.

Please offer to help if you can. Women volunteers particularly welcome. Queries to either Mike Burden or me.

Gillian Lighton



Discovery of ballroom tiles

Many of you will have heard me announce this discovery at a Sunday meeting but other members may still be unaware of it.

While looking through some old documents found gathering dust in a corner of the Hall, the History Group found reference to tiles in the ballroom which had been boarded up. About 20 years ago Jim Cartwright, who had been a member of the Society all his life and was then in his nineties, made reference to them in a radio interview. A former secretary, Bert Anderson, who at one time organised the dances in the ballroom, was said to have disliked them, claiming they made the place look like a butcher's shop! He had them covered up, we are not sure exactly when, but certainly many years ago as he died in the mid-1940s. With the help of Mike Burden they have been found - an exciting and important discovery.

Newspaper reports from 1881, when the Hall was opened, made it clear that they are William de Morgan tiles, as are those on the outside of the building which were rediscovered by Emma Chung earlier last year. They are behind the mirrors in the

ballroom, probably so that the mirrors could be lifted off fairly easily to view the tiles. Unfortunately this is no longer a simple matter without damaging the ballroom walls and decoration. We have found three designs but there could possibly



be more. They include a panel of sunflowers and one of daisy-like flowers (probably passion flowers - thanks to Felicity for the suggestion). There is also a panel which we have been unable to uncover fully. These tiles are of an old Dutch tile design, usually known as the 'tulip and carnation' design, but as Hamish pointed out, the 'tulips' are in fact fritillaries. It seems likely that there is a panel of plain tiles around the room with the decorated panels at regular

intervals.

We have informed the William de Morgan Society, TACS (Tiles and Architectural Ceramics Society) and the local Civic Society. TACs keep a national database of important architectural tiles and are adding both the tiles on the outside of the building and the ballroom tiles. The photographs are being circulated round their committee of experts for an opinion.

This is an interesting example of how important knowledge can be lost. A few members knew that there were some tiles and had actually looked for them without success, former member Woody knew where they were, and Clare from the ballroom had been told about them but had never seen them. However, information had not been shared or pursued and within a few years could easily have been totally forgotten.

We are hoping to be able to show the tiles to members in the not-too-distant future and we also hope to organise a Sunday lecture about William de Morgan later in the year.

Gillian Lighton



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Reg. No. 06292639

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Keyholders: Michael G and Mike B are 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.

Carpe ampullam!

Dear Optimist, Pessimist and Realist

While you guys were arguing about the glass of water, I drank it.

Sincerely

The Opportunist

The Leicester Secularist copy deadline

The copy deadline for the next edition is **12 noon on Thursday 16th February 2012.**

Articles, letters, jokes, poems, news, cartoons, announcements, book reviews and adverts are all welcome. Please send via the Hall or email to me at the address in the box adjacent.

When emailing copy please compose in 10pt with single line spacing, 3pt paragraph breaks and single quotes.

Include photos or illustrations where you have them. Please aim for 700 words max. Longer articles may be accepted where appropriate but please ensure they are submitted well ahead of the deadline.

The copy deadline for the subsequent edition currently looks like being Thursday 15th March 2012.

Thanks

Harry Perry, Editor

Jill Perry, Subeditor

Enlargement options on computers

Some members may occasionally find they have difficulty reading the font size of emails or documents on their computer screens.

There are, however, 'tricks of the trade' that allow computer users to enlarge what they see on screen.

One method is to set the default display fonts on the computer to always show large text and in bold.

There is also usually a magnify option, depending on the operating system, but often by using function key F5 or hitting 'Control' and the '+' key at the same time. Repeatedly pressing keeps enlarging.

This article may help with more detailed instructions and options:

<http://support.microsoft.com/kb/308978>

The RNIB can also help and has much useful advice at:

<http://tinyurl.com/7ml99yf>

Hope this helps!

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