The results on the religion and belief question in the 2011 Census have recently been released and those for Leicester make especially interesting reading.

The national results show a continuing decline in religious affiliation generally - and a growth in atheism to its highest ever position (in the UK) of over 25% of the population.

Although the figures on age are not due to be released till March it is known from other surveys that the trend away from religion is especially marked among young people. Thus religious affiliation is likely to decline still further as time passes (hence the push by religions to create more ‘faith schools’ to combat this trend with early indoctrination).

Leicester’s results are more interesting in that religious affiliation is a little higher than in the country generally, no doubt owing to immigration over recent decades from countries where religiosity is more prevalent.

But Christianity of all denominations has declined to just 32% of Leicester’s population and if we take off the assumed representation of denominations like Catholics, Methodists, Baptists, Pentecostals, etc. it is likely the established Anglican Church can claim to have no more than 25% of Leicester’s population as its ‘followers’.

The non-religious (atheists) have for some time been the second biggest belief group in the country, and Leicester, and this group has now grown to around 23% of our population. It would be nice to think the Society’s ‘atheist bus’ campaign last year helped this along though the figure is still 2.5% lower than in the country generally.

Those giving Islam as their religion have overtaken Hindus to become the third largest belief group at 19%. This is probably due to a combination of factors, including high immigration of Somalis and other African and Middle Eastern Muslims and a higher birth rate in Muslim households.

I was fortunate enough to be given the First Person column in the Leicester Mercury to reflect on the import of the results. I argued that a situation where the four largest belief groups were fairly evenly balanced meant that the spokesperson of no single belief group could be considered as ‘moral spokesperson’ for the city as a whole. I argued that each community has something to say in this area.

For the Society I would add that there are tens of thousands of people in Leicester who are either indifferent to religion or actively question its high-profile role in public life. It is among these that we should be seeking to win friends and support so that the next phase of secularisation of society can be pursued more effectively.

Harry Perry
Sikh on Muslim attack not religious but criminal, say police

On the evening of Monday 14th January a Muslim-owned restaurant, the Mogul Durbar, on East Park Road, Leicester, was attacked by a mob of 40 Sikhs and substantially wrecked. In the process several people in the restaurant, including a child, were seriously injured and required hospital treatment. Other premises owned by the same person have also been attacked. Why did all this happen?

At some time in the previous few days (it isn’t clear when exactly) it is reported that a teenage Sikh girl was subject to a serious sexual assault.

Subsequent to that incident local Sikh youths started using social networking media like Twitter and Facebook to spread what the police are calling ‘misinformation’ about the incident to the effect that the perpetrator had been one or more Muslim men, and that the police had CCTV evidence of it but were taking no action. It isn’t known whether or not the alleged perpetrator(s) had any connection with the Mogul Durbar restaurant but it is clear that amidst rising anti-Muslim feeling among some young Sikhs the restaurant was settled on as a target for the ‘reprisal’ raid on Monday evening.

The raid became common knowledge on Tuesday and Radio Leicester began to report the bare bones of the incident, including the dimension of interfaith conflict. The Leicester Mercury’s Wednesday front page shouted the news of the ‘mob attack’ but made no mention of any religious dimension despite it being common knowledge by this time. (The Thursday edition takes a radically different tack.) At some time, probably on Tuesday, the police arrested six men in their twenties on suspicion of being involved in the attack on the restaurant.

By Wednesday evening the police had called together members of the Council of Faiths in an attempt to defuse mounting tension and on Thursday morning the more social media literate from among the council launched a campaign to correct the misinformation. George Ballantyne, of the Council of Faiths, had a lengthy interview on Radio Leicester as part of this campaign and posted on the Council of Faith’s Facebook page. On Thursday the Leicestershire police used their Facebook page to report on the events and this led to lengthy online exchanges – well over 300 comments at time of writing. However, the police report is in standard fashion, who are bitterly hostile to Islam, Muslims assertively rejecting accusations about Islam, and both criticising the police. But many individuals from all sides emphasise that the Highfields communities rub along well normally and should maintain this in the face of a minority who are out to stir up trouble. Incidents elsewhere, and comments on Facebook, however, indicate broader Sikh-Muslim tensions as the backdrop.

The police have now announced (Saturday 19th January) that six males aged from 15 to 39 have been arrested in relation to the original sexual assault allegation. They say the investigation is likely to be complex and lengthy.

Can secularists say anything helpful in these circumstances? Clearly, the most important concern from our point of view is that religious identity should once again be a contributory factor in inter-community conflict. Only when an integrating secular-humanist culture comes to the fore and religious divisions are downgraded, as we have long called for, will incidents like this be routinely perceived and dealt with as individual crimes and not as grounds for interfaith hostilities.

Steps towards that secular culture include the abolition of faith schools and religious education being replaced by education in our common humanity. Local and national government need to have a strategy to make a determined effort to promote integration on these lines.

We can guess, however, that the response from the faith industry will be that what is wanted is not less religion, but more. That response will, regrettably, mean more of the same as divisions become increasingly entrenched through segregated schooling and geographical and social separation.
**Forthcoming events**

**Wednesday 23rd January, 9.30am-12.45pm, Secular Hall:** Outreach workshop for LSS members. If you are an LSS member with some good ideas for enhancing our work in reaching out to the community please do come along and join in this workshop. More details from Harry Perry.

**Sunday 27th January, 6.30pm, Secular Hall:** The birth of God. Michael Golden, UoL student and member of FLASH (Freethinkers of Leicester: Atheists, Secularists and Humanists) discusses how the concept of god came into being.

**Monday 28th January, 7.30pm, Ale Wagon, Rutland Street/Charles Street:** Drink and think. Topic: Superficiality v. depth. Informal discussion group in the bar. Non LSS event.

**Sunday 3rd February, 6.30pm, Secular Hall:** Genes and behaviour. Prof. Bambos Kyriacou of UoL explores recent findings on the encoding in genes of behaviours like aggression and love.

**Wednesday 6th February, 7.30pm, Crumblin Cookie, High Street:** Philosophers in Pubs. Come along to discuss philosophical topics. Non LSS event.

**Sunday 10th February, 6.30pm, Secular Hall:** Was Shakespeare a humanist? Liz Brandow reviews the evidence from plays and prose of the opinions expressed through Shakespeare’s characters.

**Sunday 17th February, 6.30pm for 7pm start, Secular Hall:** The Not So Big Band. Mix and mingle for 30 minutes before the well-known Leicester jazz musician Richard Everitt entertains.

**Tuesday 19th February, 7.30pm, Square Bar, Hotel Street:** What every parent needs to know about Steiner schools, anthroposophy and spiritual science. Andy Lewis looks closely at the origins of Steiner schools as Michael Gove approves further funding for new ones under the free schools programme. Skeptics in the Pub. Non LSS event.

**Sunday 24th February, 6.30pm, Secular Hall:** Transatlantic adventures. Charlotte Jones is a long-term green activist. She reports on being crew on a yacht to the Caribbean and will reflect on long-distance sea travel.

**Wiggins’ Wonders win winter quiz**

The Winter Solstice quiz night on Sunday 16th December was a great success with six six-person teams of members and guests attending.

Trevor Chesterton was welcomed back as Quizmaster and his well-balanced questions were pitched at just the right level to ensure maximum participation.

Apart from the quiz, which was won by Hamish’s Wiggins’ Wonders (right), there were a series of five-minute talks, Just-a-Minute challenges and a great spread of food and drink brought in by those attending. Well done all!

Harry Perry

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**Secular Society Outreach Workshop**

A further brief reminder that all members are welcome to attend the Outreach Workshop on Wednesday 23rd January, 9.30am-12.45pm at Secular Hall. There will be a refreshment break.

If you have not already had my briefing email with attachments please contact me immediately and I’ll forward them to you. Email address and mobile number below.

Topics to be considered will include our leaflets, website, journal, celebrations, events programme, lectures, school talks, outreach work, campaigning, image, etc.

Please let me know if you are planning to attend or if you would prefer to attend an evening session covering the same issues.

I look forward to hearing from you by phone (07795 097635) or by email at: harry.perry1@btinternet.com or by post to the Hall.

Thank you

Harry Perry

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**The Leicester Secularist** 3
A corrective from John Milbank

Thanks Harry [for the Secularist with a review of his talk on 2nd December 2012 - Ed.] – that's mainly a fair summary, though I did explicitly identify as a Labour supporter and am known to be a Christian socialist, close to the new Labour One-Nation thinking of Cruddas, Glasman and Stears, so I thought the attempt to imply I was on the political right was actually a bit underhand. Nor did I exactly say what I was reported as saying re monarchy, etc. But otherwise no complaints.

I'll wish you a very happy Yuletide as at least that's pagan and proleptic of the Incarnation. The prospect of Winterval sounds as grimly municipal as the feeble pun itself. What would Mr Pickwick have made of it one wonders?!

And a very happy new year (Anno Domini) to follow.

John Milbank

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Koran ripping case in Leicester

At the December Board meeting it was resolved to write to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and Chief Constable of Leicestershire to express our concern about the use of criminal prosecutions in two recent cases in Leicester. One of these is no longer sub judice and so can be written about.

This concerns a man who ripped up his own copy of the Koran in front of the Saturday city centre Muslim stall and who was prosecuted for causing 'religiously aggravated intentional harassment, alarm or distress'. Prior to our meeting the trial had ended with the jury being unable to agree a verdict. The CPS had the option of ordering a retrial. After we contacted the National Secular Society for advice the Executive Director, Keith Porteous Wood, wrote the following letter to the local CPS on 31st December 2012.

Dear Ms Meatyard

I am writing to you about the recent failure of the jury to reach a verdict in the trial of [name omitted* - Ed.] for (as reported) causing religiously aggravated intentional harassment, alarm or distress, by demonstrating hostility based on membership of a particular religious group, Islam.

The National Secular Society, of which I am the Executive Director, seeks a society in which everyone is neither disadvantaged nor privileged by virtue of their religion or belief. We are also of the firm belief that freedom of expression is a cornerstone of a democratic society.

We would urge the CPS not to order a retrial, for the following reasons:

- We believe that Mr X's actions were motivated by a wish to demonstrate his disagreement with the contents of the Koran, rather than any intention to harass, alarm or distress Muslims
- A prosecution would constitute an unwarranted interference in Mr X's freedom of expression
- No one should be immune from being offended, and a prosecution would in effect grant such an immunity
- A prosecution would potentially lead to courts in future having to confront the uncomfortable question about which books deemed sacred by believers should be worthy of prosecution, and which should not. It would become difficult to justify not prosecuting equivalent actions involving the Bible, and then lead the courts into deciding whether leading books should be similarly treated relating to, for example, Scientology, Mormonism, the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity 'Moonie church' or to atheism, for example by Professor Dawkins, and a prosecution would create a dangerous precedent for all the above reasons.

Yours sincerely,

K. Porteous Wood

Executive Director

The CPS has since decided not to pursue the case any further and we applaud that decision. In regard to the action complained of, members are, of course, free to show their feelings about religion in any way they choose but the Board would advise, in the spirit of Freethought, that this be done in a courteous manner that is respectful to persons.

False ideas are best combated by debate that draws upon evidence and logical argument.

Harry Perry

President

* Not a member of LSS
The review of Sally Ruane’s talk of 13th January had not hit my inbox prior to the publication deadline but the two comments on the evening below seem to stand in their own right. Ed.

**Political change**

The discussion following Sally Ruane’s very thorough examination of the Coalition government’s new Health Act brought out the deep frustration that many in the audience felt about the possibilities of opposing not only what’s happening to the NHS but what’s happening to social policy across the board. Sally herself was at pains to remind us that it wasn’t only the Tory/Liberal Democrat coalition that was undermining the original purpose of the NHS – New Labour had started the process long before. In fact all the main political parties have been helter-skelter in furthering the neoliberal project since Thatcher first introduced it. Someone in the audience said ‘vote Green!’ Which would be fine if the electorate was aware of the Green Party’s manifesto and it’s commitment to what are, in effect, socialist policies in relation to economics and the social order. But the electorate is not aware. And it won’t be as long as the Greens espouse those policies. The Labour Party leadership, for its part, has always tacitly recognised that policies that too seriously challenge the dominant interests of big business are not an option in Britain. The reason for this is quite simple: big business controls the popular press. It also, indirectly, controls the medium of television. ‘Independent’ TV is in much the same position as the broadsheets – they all depend on advertising to stay in business. The BBC is controlled by more circuitous means: the licence fee. It has to trim its handling of news and discussion so as not to upset the consensus among mainstream politicians about what is ‘uncontroversial’.

So what the electorate get is an unadulterated diet of there being no alternative to the status quo in relation to economic and social policy. Thatcher’s formulation stands: ‘There Is No Alternative’. From her time on the ‘normality’ of the free market was not only unchallenged by politicians – it was actively promulgated. So nowadays a majority believe that our economic situation is like the weather: basically nothing can be done about it – it just is. Inequality, global warming, low pay, cuts, corporate immunity – all are ‘inevitable’. Government debt must be paid off, the bankers must be remunerated. Nothing can be done about the economic downturn – etc., etc. For the above reasons there is unlikely to be much help from most politicians or the media in changing this mindset. So how is a challenge to be mounted? Well, to a certain extent one already has been. Movements like UK Uncut and Occupy openly question the status quo. Largely they are made up of younger people who reject the idea that opposition is about petitions to MPs, marching on demos or working in a traditional party. What needs to happen is that these challenges coalesce into a single movement capable of setting up an electoral campaign – since there is no democratic alternative to electoral politics. Given the likely media distortion and even more likely media obfuscation of any such movement this will necessarily be uphill work.

Doug Holly

**Powerless?**

During the discussion following Sally Ruane’s talk on the Health and Social Care Act (13th January) my thoughts were taken back to the debate we had on voting at the time of the 2010 General Election. I spoke against voting in general elections on the grounds that it is an illusion, that it does not give us any real power. Richard Johnson mounted a rather lukewarm defence of voting and the majority of those present agreed with him. In the discussion, at least two people said that they felt ‘powerless’ to do anything much about unpopular legislation such as privatisation of health and care. It was pointed out that ‘they are all in it together’ when it comes to the neo-liberal stance of politicians of the main political parties. People made it clear that they think things would be little different if there were a Labour government instead of the Coalition. This shows that voting at the last general election was not an exercise of power by the people. The opinion polls show that most of the Coalition government’s policies are widely unpopular. It is clear that it is the interests of the rich, especially finance capitalists, that the politicians serve when they prop up banks and privatise public services. So are we really powerless? People will be all the time they stick to this blind, quasi-religious belief in voting in parliamentary elections. Only taking much more forceful, direct actions are we likely to have any positive impact on the state, both at the national and local levels. We need to withhold votes from MPs and candidates who will not publicly commit themselves to acceptable policies, we need to refuse to pay council tax to councils slashing public services, we need to intervene in and disrupt meetings of politicians and administrators implementing anti-people measures, we need to blockade and occupy public facilities such as clinics and libraries which are being shut down, we need to confront and harass the politicians on every possible occasion, etc., etc.

*Only through standing up and fighting back will we become powerful.*

Ross Longhurst
Smoking, mental health and Alzheimer’s

Christine Keen asked in the December issue of the Leicester Secularist where I had got the idea that smoking might be helpful in reducing/stopping Alzheimer’s.

I am happy to share my sources. As a bipolar historian I don’t approach this with any medical or scientific knowledge, but I remember what other people say to me.

In 2008 I was admitted to the Bradgate Mental Health Unit following a very acute manic episode, sectioned under the Mental Health Act. I and many other inpatients could only go for a cigarette when the overworked staff could find two people spare to escort us, prisoners as we were, down to the snow-covered garden for five minutes’ worth of our addiction - usually at least an hour later than the time optimistically scrawled on the whiteboard in ‘reception’. We queued like zombies awaiting this. My daughter, in her second year of Biomedical Sciences at Sheffield University, visiting every weekend, told me that she had recently learnt how smoking affects the neuro-connectors within the brain positively to increase mental well-being.

Last summer I had what I like to call ‘a blip’. My consultant psychiatrist worked hard from May onwards to try to avoid another admission. He recently pointed out that his main aim was to save the LPT some money, as inpatient provision is very expensive, but I know it’s because he is a very caring psychiatrist. I’ve seen him or spoken to him on the phone weekly or fortnightly since then. Frequently he rings at 6.45 on a Friday night, that being the first time he has free. And he is always running late – as ever, the sign of a good practitioner who gives patients the time they need, not the time allocated.

During one of our sessions I challenged him to tell me of any outpatient he had who had at some time been an inpatient who did not smoke 40 a day. He admitted he would be hard put to do this. We discussed whether this was:

1. an acquired mechanism due to this being the only way we, in our zombified state, could escape for five minutes’ exercise down in the lift then up, a breath of ‘fresh’ air
2. linked to our brains’ ability to recognise what is good for us.

He said, ‘it is a secret that the medical profession likes to keep very quiet about’ that smoking is actually good for three things – (a) mental well-being, (b) stopping/reducing Alzheimer’s and (c) he’d forgotten!

So I offered him a fag and suggested he go outside to smoke it to help him remember (c)! We laughed.

If you ever visit the Bradgate Unit (up behind the Glenfield) you will note that very few of us (in- or out-patients) pay any attention to those laughable ‘No Smoking Here’ signs and a chance to see the sky from the compound; or

3. those nasty pharmacodrugs not only f*** you up, they take away your abilities to do ordinary things. So I googled and found Smoking is Good for You: The truth about tobacco and health exposed, by William T. Whitby [1980 – Ed.]. See also: [tinyurl.com/bc26kr] about the true origins of lung and skin cancer today.

This book, by a qualified doctor, quotes many references you can follow up. For the purposes of Harry Perry’s 800 words [it’s 700 and you just passed it – Ed.] I shall summarise, as I did for my psychiatrist:

1. Smoking helps open the bronchial tubes in the morning, and so helps my COPD.
2. It gives you a five-minute break from a stressful job (and we all know they are not good for mental well-being) and you take deep breaths in.
3. The incidence of smoking/lung cancer correlation was not observed for hundreds, thousands of years (as the natives of the Americas enjoyed it).
4. During WWI generals, when asked what the troops needed to maintain morale in rat-infested, gangrenous giving trenches, replied ‘cigarettes’.
5. Queen Mary sent the British troops at Christmas 1914 special tins of cigarettes and tobacco.
6. Smoking was hugely prevalent throughout the twentieth century, but it was only after 1945 (what happened then? I ask as a historian) that the US government wheeled in many research scientists to try to prove that the sudden increase in lung cancers was due to smoking. They failed, although some animals that had not been exposed to smoke but to radiation did develop lung cancer. Oops, best keep quiet about that!

And on You and Yours on Radio 4 (which we can all trust as gospel truth) last week they said twice that it had taken 30 years for this correlation to be proved. Read ‘Correlation does not imply causation’ - Wikipedia. So please leave me and my addiction alone. I am more likely to die of pneumonia, being forced to smoke outside in midwinter!

Jan Wild-Grant
In last month’s *Secularist* Christine Keen rightly challenged Jan Wild-Grant’s suggestion that Alzheimer’s disease is ‘stopped’ by smoking. The following extract from the abstract of a paper published in *BMC Geriatrics* in December 2008 sheds some light on the subject:

Nicotine may aid reaction time, learning and memory, but smoking increases cardiovascular risk. Cardiovascular risk factors have been linked to increased risk of dementia. A previous meta-analysis found that current smokers were at higher risk of subsequent dementia, Alzheimer’s disease, vascular dementia and cognitive decline. ... This reinforces need for smoking cessation, particularly aged 65 and over. Nicotine alone needs further investigation.

See also: [http://tinyurl.com/aotcg4k](http://tinyurl.com/aotcg4k) and [http://tinyurl.com/aovj6b6](http://tinyurl.com/aovj6b6)

While looking on the internet for articles about smoking and other risk factors for dementia I came across several references to the Nun Study. I had heard of this before as a significant study in the field of dementia, and what I found on the internet prompted me to buy the book* and read it. The more I read, the more impressed I was with the wealth of knowledge and ideas this research has led to.

In 1991 researcher David Snowden recruited 678 nuns living in the seven convents of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in the USA all of whom were at least 75 years old when the research began. The nuns formed an ideal population since they lived very similar (healthy) lifestyles, enjoyed the same socioeconomic status and had access to more or less the same diet and health care.

All the nuns who signed up agreed to undergo rigorous mental and physical tests each year, and – crucially – to donate their brains for examination after death.

The most extraordinary finding of the study, based on post mortem examination of the brains of the sisters as against the results of the tests they underwent in life, is that there was little correlation between symptoms of dementia and brain damage. Some nuns whose brains fell into the category of most severe damage (Braak stage VI) showed few or no symptoms of dementia in life, and others with severe symptoms turned out to have brains which were relatively unscathed.

Snowdon began his physical and mental testing of the nuns in 1991 but he and his colleagues were very fortunate in having access to the short autobiographies that each of the Sisters had been required to write when they entered the convent as postulants in their early twenties. Analysis of these brought up two fascinating findings: the better the writing of the nun (measured in terms of ideas density) the less likely was she to develop the symptoms of dementia; and similarly, the greater the positive emotional quality of the writing the more likely was she to escape dementia.

One very interesting chapter in the book provides an easy-to-understand account of the role of genetics in dementia. The salient fact here is that people who inherit a copy of the APOE-4 gene are believed to have nearly three times the normal risk of developing Alzheimer’s disease, and those with two copies (one from each parent) eight times the normal risk. But the individual fates of the sixteen Sisters identified as carrying two copies of the gene varied considerably. As David Snowden said to a group of the nuns he was working with, 'the more we learn about genes in general, the more we realize that most of them interact with lifestyle and environment. You’ve heard about the nature-versus-nurture debate. We’re now finding that it’s more like nature plus nurture.'

In the 2007 report *Dementia UK* the Alzheimer’s Society estimated that Alzheimer’s disease accounts for 62% of all cases of dementia, vascular dementia 17%, mixed dementia (usually Alzheimer’s with vascular dementia) 10%, and other dementias 11%. However, post mortem examination of the brains of 116 participants in the Nun Study who had had dementia showed that 43% had Alzheimer’s alone, 34% had a mixture of Alzheimer’s and stroke, and only 2.5% had vascular dementia. Snowden’s commentary on this is hugely important:

Our research strongly suggests that small strokes serve as a trip switch in people who have significant numbers of Alzheimer’s lesions [tangles and plaques], causing the symptoms of dementia to emerge. It also strongly suggests that stroke-free brains can compensate for Alzheimer’s lesions to some extent and mute the symptoms of the disease.

If this is true then the most effective way to seek to avoid developing dementia is to avoid the risk factors for stroke. At the head of a list of ten modifiable risk factors for stroke identified by researchers in 2010 are high blood pressure and smoking. We have come full circle.

Homeopathy, celebrities and marketing

Those who subscribe to the cult of homeopathy tend to be afflicted with a continually confused attitude to the concept of evidence. On Wednesday 25th November 2009, the House of Commons Science and Technology Subcommittee convened for an Evidence Check on Homeopathy (http://tinyurl.com/y8r39y7u). Amongst the ‘witnesses’ was Dr Peter Fisher, Clinical Director and Director of Research at the Royal London Homeopathic Hospital (now the Royal London Hospital for Integrated Medicine). Dr Fisher unashamedly described the process of succession (forward to @ 11:06). In case you’re not familiar, this is the action of vigorously shaking/striking a vial of liquid in order to activate the memory of a substance (i.e. the ‘remedy’) that has been diluted out of it, whilst simultaneously detoxifying the effects of all the other stuff that the water will inevitably have come into contact with (because water is promiscuous stuff).

The Government Response to the Committee’s report concluded overall that:

By providing homeopathy on the NHS and allowing Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency licensing of products which subsequently appear on pharmacy shelves, the Government runs the risk of endorsing homeopathy as an efficacious system of medicine.

To maintain patient trust, choice and safety, the Government should not endorse the use of placebo treatments, including homeopathy. Homeopathy should not be funded on the NHS and the MHRA should stop licensing homeopathic products.

However, despite this concurrence, the government then weasely left it to Primary Care Trusts to decide whether to continue wasting NHS funds on homeopathy, under the sopping guise of patient ‘choice’.

(Homoeopathy enjoys sympathy among MPs – including from the Secretary of State for Health.)

The majority of homeopathic products licensed by the MHRA are registered under a 1992 Simplified Scheme that prohibits ‘indications’ – i.e. the associated description of disease/conditions, and medical/therapeutic claims thereof. These MHRA regulations on the advertising of medicinal products thus inform the Advertising Standards Authority, which on 1st March 2011 widened its scope to encapsulate marketing/advertising on UK websites. And thereafter received copious complaints about the online claims made by an array of egregious, fallacious resort to endorsement by celebrity, including (to take just one) the British Homeopathic Association, whose ‘Celebrity Photography Project’ comprises quite fetching images of partaking celebs ‘holding the source material of one of the homeopathic medicines that has helped them’. If I’ve piqued your interest then, rather than take up word space here with quotes, I urge you to peruse for yourself this Goof’s Gallery at http://www.celебhomeopathy.com/

I’m sure these celebrities are being ‘genuine’, in that they believe what they say. (After all, they subscribe to a belief system for people who like to feel all Speh-shull.) But I found this puzzling. Doesn’t that ASA letter apply to ‘those bodies that represent homeopaths and homeopathy in the UK ...’? Which must surely, I figured, encapsulate the BHA. Indeed, the BHA website proudly boasts:

The British Homeopathic Association exists to promote homeopathy practised by doctors and other healthcare professionals. [My emphasis in italic.]

I therefore decided to flag this up to the ASA, because, to my eye, these celebrities are not only making/implying ‘claims directly or indirectly that homeopathy and homeopathic products can diagnose/treat/help health conditions’; but they also imply ‘indications’ for these products, the majority of which are listed as registered under the MHRA Simplified Scheme (which prohibits indications). The ASA letter contains a paragraph I find particularly pertinent here:

Please note that testimonials from patients (which must be genuine) that imply efficacy for homeopathic treatment do not constitute substantiation but may give a misleading impression that efficacy is proven. Therefore it is essential that any testimonials also only make general

(continues on next page)
references to an improved sense of well-being. Clearly, these celebrity statements constitute patient testimonials which imply efficacy for (unsubstantiated) homeopathic treatments. It appears to me that this project overall constitutes website content that (at the very least) ‘claims directly or indirectly that homeopathy and homeopathic products can diagnose/treat/help health conditions’. Which, to reiterate, are ‘claims you cannot make’ under the CAP Code, as applies to advertisers, ‘as well as those bodies that represent homeopaths and homeopathy …’. The ASA declined to pursue this apparent anomaly. I had also written to the MHRA, whose guidelines also prohibit celebrity endorsement, but was informed (even though the remedies named by the celebrities marry with product names in its registration listing) that it only concerns itself with direct advertising of ‘specific homeopathic medicinal product’. As the BHA is not itself selling products, its celebrity endorsement falls outside the MHRA remit, as it constitutes promotional material, and on which it suggested I contact … the ASA. However, the ASA is likewise adamant that this complaint does not come under its remit (in apparent contradiction of its own letter) because the BHA is not itself directly supplying or transferring goods. So much for acting in the public interest. Why does the BHA (and many other homeopathy-promoting bodies) seek testimonials, or mine for quotes, by celebrities? Just when does ‘raising awareness’ become ‘promotion’ become ‘advertising’? Well, I’m trying to raise awareness here – of the patronising logical fallacy that is the appeal to celebrity (presumed) authority. With NHS support for homeopathy on the wane (as of the end of last year; only 15% of PCTs were continuing to fund it: [link], homeopaths and homeopathy organisations have not taken kindly to limitations on the advertising of their wares. It is clear from its website that the BHA resents the ASA’s imposition on its and homeopaths’ activities. Although the BHA does not itself (as far as I am aware) supply products and services, it represents – and promotes indirectly on behalf of – those homeopaths/homeopathic product providers who do. As the latter are covered by the ASA remit and can no longer legitimately advertise, the BHA is, it seems to me, exploiting a loophole – through the under-the-radar guise of ‘awareness-raising’ celebrity testimonials which, in my opinion, are in contravention of the CAP Code.

As if a ‘senior homeopath’ spouting aqueous nonsense without compunction to a parliamentary committee is not ridiculous enough. What we have here, in effect, is a situation wherein, if you sell or provide certain dubious products and/or services, but are barred from making claims as to their efficacy, you can happily watch your representative umbrella organisation, which does not itself directly supply/sell/provide those products/services, make those claims indirectly on your behalf. Hence this permitted proxy-promotion of indication-prohibited, homeopathy products through a bunch of docile celebrities. A snake-oil-lubricated loophole.

Lee Turnpenny
[link]

News from the Board
We held the second meeting of the new Board on the unpromising date of 30th December. There were three absentee, two on holiday and one who presumably was still enjoying the festive season. Mike Burden came as a visitor to discuss items relevant to his role.

Mike is now ‘winding down’ as events co-ordinator and after the current programme events co-ordination will be Allan’s responsibility, with help from the Board. He is committed to organising a lecture for Women’s Day as well as the Sunday lectures.

Council planning notices appeared outside the building consulting on the proposed building improvements. The possible loss of parking for the ballroom is causing concern and is a problem which will need to be resolved. Small improvements to the building continue to be made and Mike is arranging for the stairwell down to the basement to be repainted as soon as possible. We are taking opportunities to publicise the Society as they arise. Allan has now taken over Chris Williams’ former role as our representative at Leicester College and we have a stall at DMU on 21st January which Harry and Hamish are organising.

We spent some time discussing the LSS outreach event on 23rd January. There was a range of opinions on this: an ambitious programme was proposed, whereas another point of view was that we should focus on the narrower range of issues initially suggested, in the hope that this would make positive action more likely. Some felt it could be helpful to set some realistic targets for achievement during the year. We hope the right balance has been struck.

We also discussed the recent cases involving the ripping of the Koran and the ‘pig’s head’ incident and how best LSS could make its voice heard. Harry had sent a letter to the Mercury which probably could not be published in full given the legal situation. We agreed that he should consult with the National Secular Society and the BHA for advice prior to writing to the Chief Constable, Crown Prosecution Service and possibly Leicester’s MPs.

With new officers with different ideas, strengths and weaknesses it is probably inevitable that some differences of opinion arise about roles and responsibilities. These need addressing to avoid creating barriers to effective working. We did not have time to discuss this issue but I rashly said I would put something in writing for discussion at our next meeting. When I thought I would have time to do this I can’t imagine!

The next Board meeting is as usual on the last Sunday of the month at 3.30pm. Observers are welcome by arrangement and items for the agenda can be submitted by anyone. Please contact me – [email] or [phone].

Gillian Lighton
Secretary
How to build a galaxy

On 9th December 2012, the evening started appositely with a tribute to the amateur astronomer Sir Patrick Moore, who did so much to popularise the subject and whose death had been announced earlier that day.

Dr Mark Wilkinson is a Royal Society Research Fellow working with the Theoretical Astrophysics Group at the University of Leicester. He began with our place in the universe, a 4.5-billion-years-old planet orbiting in the habitable zone around a typically sized star, two-thirds of the way out from the centre of a rotating spiral galaxy. There are more stars in the galaxy centre and we see this bulge at night as the Milky Way. The change in patterns of stars in the night sky is measurable over human history - the sun has a 200-million-year rotation period round the galaxy and also ‘bobs’ up and down and wobbles every 50 million years!

Dr Wilkinson’s ‘ingredients’ for building a galaxy are lots of gas, billions of stars (preferably of assorted colours), dark matter and a black hole for the centre. His ‘method’ started with adding gas to dark matter and stirring for a few hundred million years to slowly turn gas into stars, although he admitted that we don’t really know how that happens! His research focuses on dark matter and the origin and evolution of our galaxy, investigating the universe’s 14-billion-year journey of expansion since the beginning of ‘time’ with the Big Bang. This research relies on observation data collected using high-power telescopes. Since 1st December, Leicester University has been part of an international supercomputing facility, necessary for the calculations and huge computer simulations involved. Dr Wilkinson stressed the importance of collaborative work in astronomy.

NASA's Hubble space telescope has provided fantastic images from space for the past 20 years, far exceeding its expected lifespan of five to six! In 2006 Hubble was pointed at an apparently blank sector of space for an 11-day exposure. The resulting ‘Ultra Deep Field’ (UDF) revealed approximately 10,000 distant, older galaxies. In 2012 Hubble focused on one small section of this area for 50 nights and revealed approximately 5,500 even-more-distant and therefore even older galaxies in the ‘Extreme Deep Field’ (XDF).

Astrophysicists now believe there are black holes at the centre of almost every galaxy. In our Milky Way, stars have been observed orbiting around the centre at 36,000 kilometres per second. Only a supermassive black hole would have enough mass (3 to 4 million times that of the sun) to cause this. The stars were tracked quickly for gravity to stop them flying off separately into space. In 1934 Fred Zwicky suggested there must be some unseen matter increasing the effect of gravity and holding galaxies together. In the 1960s and 1970s, Vera Rubin and Albert Bosma estimated that there must be about ten times more of this ‘dark’ matter than visible matter. (Current estimates of ingredients of the universe are 4.6% atoms, 23% dark matter and 72% dark energy.) Dark matter is believed to be a sub-atomic particle, only ‘dark’ because it does not interact with particles we have detected so far.

What of the future of the Milky Way? On a large scale the repulsive effect of dark energy is assumed to be responsible for the overall expansion of the universe but on a small scale gravity wins. Gravitational forces pull the Andromeda galaxy on a course headed straight towards the Milky Way. In 5 billion years Andromeda is predicted to first pass by but then smash straight into ‘us’ on the second approach. Stars themselves are unlikely to collide as most of a galaxy is just space but Andromeda’s material will either be thrown into the centre, starting new star formation, or be kicked out of the galaxy. Presumably the black holes will combine.

When questioned why we should spend money on such research, Dr Wilkinson replied it was purely curiosity! However, it was not very expensive and there were large financial spin-offs in training students for industry.

Dr Wilkinson imparted a vast amount of information in such a short time that it left me keen to find out more.

Glenys Mulvany
Drug-related rape in India

Six years ago we went to Goa in February for a week as our daughter was spending six months of her ‘gap’ year travelling around with her boyfriend. We loved it so much that we had only been back two hours when we booked to go again for the Easter holidays.

This time we didn’t go to a ‘tourist’ bit, but to Colva, a very nice small resort, mostly frequented by Indians on holiday. One evening we were sitting enjoying the balmy night warmth, the attention of our favourite bar/restaurant worker and the fairy lights wound up the palm trees.

I went into the hotel to use the toilet. When I came out, I found an English woman wrapped only in a bed sheet, clearly distressed and disoriented, sitting in Reception crying. I asked Reception staff to fetch my wife. We established she had dined with two Indian men, not from Goa, but remembered little after that. All she kept reiterating was, ‘There were two of them. They raped me. They drugged me.’

We thought the obvious thing to do was call the police. Reception thought otherwise – they didn’t want police involved. We insisted they lock the room as a crime scene. The police eventually arrived and we went to the local police station.

When we got there we were horrified. The police were playing cards and left us sitting outside. They humiliated her as victim and us as witnesses. I went back to our flat to fetch her one of my wife’s dresses. We waited over three hours to be allowed to make a statement. They refused to follow this up. Eventually we left and walked home with our new ‘friend’ – let’s call her Mary (not her real name). They followed us all the way in a Land Rover, noted our home, and returned the next day to harass our landlord and landlady such that they were about to throw us out.

We weren’t happy and my wife can be quite formidable. So the next day we set off by bus to Margao, the local main town. We found the police station, said we wanted to speak to the man in charge, and were eventually ushered up into a large room with a chief policeman sitting at the front behind a desk and about forty local people waiting as supplicants to ask for his help.

We sat. We waited. We waited for a number of hours. We waited till everybody had gone – this is a very powerful technique. Eventually my wife explained to him what had happened. She explained the positions of authority she had held in England (e.g. Principal of Mundella Community College). He was proud he had studied Sociology at Birmingham University, and he agreed that the behaviour of the police had been unacceptable. He said he would sort it.

We don’t know what happened. Certainly our landlord/lady received no further threats. But ‘Mary’ did not get back in touch with us – my wife was a bit upset about losing the dress, but more, we were concerned that she clearly did not trust the Indian police – she had been living there for quite a few years and knew not to ‘rock the boat’, because the police follow their own rules and wielded enormous power, as well as sticks.

Why am I telling you this? Well, obviously the medical student who was raped repeatedly and assaulted on a bus in New Delhi, and died of her injuries, and her boyfriend beaten up trying to protect her, has brought this into public international view. Today I heard on the news that another six men have been arrested in Amritsar for raping a woman. But the horrendous treatment of women in India is more widespread than this.

Widows still get burnt with their husbands – the role of a widow is nothingness. As a daughter you belong to your father, as a wife you belong to your husband. Without a man to own you, you are nothing. There is nothing wrong with the age-long cultural system of arranged marriages: except that some women are married against their will to men who ill-treat them, along with mothers-in-law who beat them. Even in England in 2013 women set fire to themselves (or are made to do this) – well, saris are very flammable!

The middle classes in India think differently. The young generation, growing up in most of the towns and cities, question ‘the old ways’. They dress in Western clothes, they go to good schools then to ‘uni’, they look for good jobs. They want a life that fits with 2013. That’s why there have been so many demonstrations about the medical student’s rape, assault and death.

But ‘the authorities’ and government have yet to catch up. Goa is a ‘modern’ Indian state: what happens elsewhere is much, much worse. We will continue to visit India because we like it enormously. But it does challenge our views of what is acceptable.

Pete Wild-Grant

Striking Women: Saturday 2nd February to Friday 22nd February 2013
The vanguard role of South Asian women in some of the British trade union movement’s most significant battles, from Grunwick to Gate Gourmet, is recognised in a new exhibition to be shown at Highfields Library next month.
For more information contact Highfields Library on 0116 299 5494.

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Meditations of John (22)  
My history

As I drove down the access road to our house one evening a child’s ball suddenly rolled from between a row of parked cars into the carriageway ahead. I stopped almost before I had thought about it. Without too much careful analysis this incident revealed how quickly the brain might respond to a situation from the need to put the value of the child first to the skill of assessing the risk and finally bringing in the use of the brakes.

All this depended on learned experience which had taught me the value of human life: the ability to predict the movement of traffic and the skills of driving. All remembered not as a set of isolated facts but as a theme that could be rebuilt and adapted for current use.

Not only so but the experience of dealing with this emergency will be analysed and the useful pieces of information gathered from it made ready for future use.

That is how we learn. In this case I acted by looking forward into the future and seeing what might happen by using the experiences of the past. I then made the best guess possible to solve the current crisis.

This short story of life serves as a dramatic case of something that goes on more routinely all the time. If I am courting a woman I will be fast learning how to make her happy and at the same time I will be assessing whether we could settle down together. Alternatively a conflict situation will also demand the use of past learning, together with rapid readaptation, in order to ensure a promising and safe outcome.

So every adventure we make in meeting the challenges of the future results in making use of past experience – our personal history, and results in improving our skills to deal with the future – improving that history for future usefulness.

Our lives are finite, transient and historical yet every moment can be full of life and a process of learning, so that we have the opportunity to evolve into someone that is more than what we were in the past.

Towards the end of the incident above I noticed that the motorist coming in the opposite direction had responded in an almost identical way.

In even more complicated situations someone may deal with a crisis better than most, and so our species has evolved one last throw of the dice – we can reflect on our past and study how others have responded and to some extent remould what we have learnt from a wider range of experience than just our own. From a practical point of view we create the history that we need to live life to the full and better than in the past.

John Edmondson

Whoops! An Iberian imbroglio erupts

Regrettably I was unable to attend ‘An Anglo-Spanish poetry evening’. Therefore I have to rely on the Secularist for information on what I may, or may not, have missed.

Having read Richard Byrt’s review of the evening on page 8 of December’s Secularist (No. 46) it appears that not much was missed on 25th November 2012.

Richard lists a number of countries that have purportedly helped participants to connect to the world of Spanish poetry.

But Mozambique ...?

Richard further lists as an influence the Mozambican poet Jose Craveirinha.

• Mozambique, since its ‘discovery’ in the fifteenth century, was continuously a Portuguese colony/overseas province until independence in 1975.

• Mozambique is a full member of PALOP (African Countries with Portuguese as Official Language), which in turn is a part of CPLP (Community of Portuguese Language Countries), these being PALOP, Brazil, Portugal plus Timor Leste.

• Portugal was established as an independent kingdom in 1139 and threw off the yoke of Spanish oppression for the last time in 1640.

• Portugal has been an ally of Great Britain since 1373, in part precisely because of its long running battle against Spanish domination – a struggle which is ongoing today within the EU, as Portugal continues to have to assert its economic, cultural and linguistic autonomy against the Hispanic giant next door.

• Craveirinha, the most renowned Mozambican poet, has as his main influences Portuguese language and culture, from his father, and African (Ronga) language and culture, from his mother. Spanish: I think not.

To include Mozambique and Craveirinha in the realm of Spanish poetry and Portuguese literature and language in an Anglo-Spanish evening is at the very least misleading to the participants and readers.

It is certainly an enormous historical and cultural faux pas, and in my opinion, an insult to Craveirinha and Mozambique specifically, and Lusophones and Lusophiles in general.

A Luta Continua.

Mark Lucas
A positive end to an active year: the 2012 AGM

The AGM on 11th November 2012 was well attended, with 54 members signing in (probably one or two omitted to do so despite reminders) and 21 apologies received. This compares very favourably with other AGMs most of us have experienced and is an encouraging sign of members' commitment to the Society.

The outgoing President, Michael Gerard, gave his report. He reflected on his early days in the Society and expressed his intention to continue to make a contribution, particularly to the organisation of the events programme. He thanked colleagues for their hard work, Ned Newitt who had to stand down from the Board this year, Nick Matthews, Mike Burden, Allan Hayes, John Catt, Harry Perry and Frank Friedmann.

The Chair, Nick Matthews, then gave his report and reflected on the challenges, frustrations and rewards of the year. He had given details of the proposed path towards restructuring the management of the Hall at the half-yearly meeting and the steps outlined at that meeting are going ahead. He thanked the Rationalist Trust for a recent positive meeting with the Board. He repeated thanks given by Michael Gerard to officers and those making a contribution from outside the Board.

John Catt gave his usual impressive report as Treasurer and reviewing accountants were confirmed. The Society's finances are currently unusually healthy.

Mike Burden gave an account of the events programme during the year, which made clear the range and variety, not only of lectures but also of social events. He reported his reasons for standing down as events co-ordinator and emphasised that he is keen to continue to contribute in other ways. Members expressed their appreciation for his enormous contribution.

Harry then presented the detailed plans for the ‘mini-modernisation project’ for the Hall which will, amongst other things, provide us with better toilet facilities. Many members had not seen these before and needed clarification on various points, but the plans were generally well received. These were to be submitted for planning approval imminently.

Some queries and discussion took place about fire safety in the building.

Allan Hayes referred to the narrowing of the gap between the costs to the Society of the mini-modernisation project and the full regeneration of the Hall and hoped that this would be taken into account in our plans for the future of the building.

Thanks were given from the floor to Diane and Alan Waring for keeping the hall clean and comfortable for visitors.

There were no formal motions this year.

Honorary life members were proposed and appointed. The Board wished to express its appreciation in this way to Michael Gerard who has served the Society for many years in a variety of capacities and is now standing down as President. Christina (Chris) Goodwin is a long-standing and loyal member of the kind whose contribution is not always fully recognised. She has worked tirelessly for a number of organisations, helped refugees and has possibly been on more demonstrations than the rest of us put together! She was a popular choice as the volume of applause showed. Michael said he felt honoured but he had already had the opportunity to speak. Chris said that she was proud to be associated with a Society which had provided a meeting place for so many small radical groups over the years.

After a break I announced the success of the Heritage Lottery funding bid and outlined details of the All Our Stories project to look at the history of the Society and the Hall. I reminded members that the scheme is for community groups to investigate their heritage and that it therefore needs the cooperation and participation of members and cannot be delivered by one or two individuals.

Tellers were then appointed for the elections (Hamish Whiteley and Kate Housden) and Harry Perry was elected President, Nick Matthews was re-elected as Chair and Kate Housden and Michael Gerard were elected to the Board.

From the Secretary’s point of view, I feel the Board should produce a written annual report for the AGM and if I am Secretary next year I would be willing to draft one.

And finally, you will all be delighted to know that after the main meeting Wilf Gaunt accepted the honorary life membership which he refused last year!

Gillian Lighton
All our stories ... what’s yours?

The Society’s history group (All Our Stories) is researching all aspects of the history of Secular Hall and your help with this part would be very much appreciated.
This is a list of groups that I am aware of that have met in Secular Hall since the late 1970s. Do you know of any others before or during this time?
National Abortion Campaign
Women’s Voice
Unemployed Youth
Troops out of Ireland
Leicester Anti-fascist Alliance
Unity Against Prejudice
Radical Alliance
Federation of Iraqi Refugees
Leicester Campaign to Stop the War
I.W.W.
LCRM members (Civil Rights)
Civic Society
Socialist Party
Communist Party
Cooperative Society
Palestine Solidarity Campaign
If you were or are a member of any of these groups you may have memorabilia - leaflets, minutes, photos or publications - in your cupboards. Please search for them and let me know by writing to me via the Hall or emailing Gillian or Harry to forward information on to me (contact details on back page).
The history group will be holding an exhibition in the Hall in September and would like to include as much as possible.
It would also be useful to have an overall history of the groups for future reference.
I will be contacting people shortly to tap memories.
Chris Goodwin

Do something amazing - give blood! Phone 0300 123 23 23 to make an appointment.

Have a bit of fun – take control

If you haven’t been pestered by PPI, accident or other cold callers you must be on a different planet from me.
There’s the Telephone Preference Service, but it’s a blunt instrument - and calls still get through from outfits that ignore the rules.
BBC Money Box recently featured Richard Herman who adopted a different approach, billing the callers to listen to their sales pitch, eventually receiving almost £200 in an out-of-court settlement.

So I decided to have a go. I haven’t earned anything yet but I have had some fun. Before I’d just hang up, or ask the caller to hold on while I walked away from the phone – a simple time-waste.
But I’d forget to replace the receiver and miss legitimate calls. The nice thing about the Herman approach is that you can remain polite and civil while staying in control. Here’s some edited transcripts from my log:

Call 1: Elaine from the Recovery Department about your refund for Payment Protection Insurance.
I charge £10 per minute to receive this call. Are you sure you wish to continue?
Have you registered with the Telephone Preference Service?
You can easily stop all marketing calls that way.
No. I’m very happy to receive your call – it’s just that I will bill you for my time. Are you OK with that?
I’m not sure you can do that - is it legal?
Of course it’s legal. I’m just charging you for my time.
OK then. I’ll pay.
Don’t you need to check with your manager? I’ll need full details for sending out my invoice, and I will record the call.
OK – I’ll ask and call you back.
Goodbye.

Call 2: This is the Industrial Hearing Clinic.
Which Industrial Hearing Clinic?
We’re the Industrial Hearing Clinic working for the Health and Safety Department.
I see. Well I must warn you that my charge for receiving this call is £10 per minute, and I must first ask you for your billing details for the invoice.
I’m really busy - I’ve got thousands of calls to make. I can see you’re a really awkward customer trying to waste my time. Click ~

Call 3: Mr xxx, this is Peter at the Computer Service Centre.
I need to resolve a serious problem with your PC.
Thank you for calling me about this. First let me tell you that my charge for receiving your call is £10 per minute. I am going to record this call. Can I have your billing address?
The Computer Service Centre, 2052 MG Road, TE5 9SM, Manchester.
Are you sure that’s right? It doesn’t look like a Manchester postcode to me – let me just google that.

Links: BBC Money Box: bbc.co.uk/news/business-20068927; Richard Herman’s explanatory website: saynotocoldcalls.com/; Telephone Preference Service: tpsonline.org.uk/
Get out Simon …

Years ago the Tory policy of doubling the numbers of university students resulted in all the polytechnics being redesignated as universities. In Leicester in 1992 this created a problem of a new name for the polytechnic, and the new name De Montfort University caused me to write this poem of protest …

Get out Simon …
In Leicester, by the dank canal, Stands the noble Polytechnic, Where ranks of students duly go, To write their essays philosophic.

But though the label ‘Leicester Poly’ Served us all since days of yore, Emblazoned on certificates Issued since the second war, Now polytechnic is too sixties, Far too kitsch and too passé Only ‘University’ Will suit the students of today, And so the good old Leicester Poly Has to find another name To inspire aspiring students To keep their intellects aflame.

Months of meetings, study groups, Consultants in the baggy suits Offer lists to be considered For this changing institute;
A name to conjure modern Leicester Multi-cultured and diverse, Centre for the arts and culture, Focus of the universe!
What name emerges from the portals? ‘De Montfort University!’ White and male and medieval My God! As dull as dull could be!
I’d take this moribund committee, Line them up against a wall. De Montfort is as dull as shaving, He’s got a street! He’s got the hall!

And oh, the chances that went begging, The missed opportunity! How the students would have flocked To Lineker University! The Sue Townsend School of Maths! Joe Orton School of Performing Arts! The Englebert Humperdink Centre for Science! The Showaddywaddy College of Art!

May I make one brief suggestion? I’m serious, don’t take it lightly, But don’t you think that this sounds fine, The ‘University of Hamish Whiteley’?

Hamish Whiteley (Read on the evening of 6th Jan)

All Our Stories progress

This month we held our oral history training day with Cynthia Brown. This was a definite success, I think we all enjoyed it and there was a lot of interesting discussion. Cynthia is always a great source of information and ideas and will help us, on request, with advice at any point during the project.

We now have a group of people who will be able to cover the oral history element of the project. We also have our recording equipment (both audio and video) and once we have all learned how to operate it we shall be able to start interviewing. We hope to do some interviews with longer-standing members focusing on their memories of the Society, which should help us fill in some of the gaps in our recorded history. We also hope to do a number of short interviews asking a range of current members about their personal route to Secularism and how they came to join the Society. Additionally, ‘Mr Leicester’ in the Mercury is putting out a request for help from the general public at some point during the next two weeks.

We now need people who are prepared to help by being interviewed. Our experience is that many people are apprehensive beforehand but find that they enjoy the experience. Please get in touch if you are willing to help.

We are also making plans for the anniversary event at the beginning of March and, if this is to be as successful as we would like, we need volunteers to help as outlined in the last article. There are still a number of people who committed to supporting the project when it was first discussed who have not yet come forward.

In the next few weeks we want to make a start with the written tour of the Hall – more information will be available shortly.

We are very pleased that Frank Friedmann has agreed to organise the photography for the project, which is a big commitment. Mike Burden has made a good start at looking at 160 years of Sunday lectures and is making great use of the material donated by Rupert Halfhide, which is proving invaluable. Eleanor is making a number of important contributions, including taking responsibility for press and publicity and looking at the library at Conway Hall. Kate Housden is researching her ancestor, William Henry Holyoak. Beryl Hawkes is researching J. F. Gould’s Leicester years, which are proving extremely interesting. Nick has done some work on the busts and will be making a contribution on Larner Sugden, the Hall architect. Chris Goodwin is working on Hall user groups over the years. Wilf is helping with the research on some key lecturers. Bessie is looking at the Ethical Guild and Allan has promised a contribution on education. Lyn Hurst has contributed some information on Roy Watts and is sharing his considerable knowledge of the Society since the 1970s. Thanks also to Maggie Ash for information about her family and Tom Barclay and for help with identifying people on a key photograph, to Elaine Gipson who we hope will contribute some childhood memories from the 1940s and 1950s, and to Jean Burbridge for help with photography. Michael Gerard attended part of the oral history workshop and has promised to help. Jan Wild-Grant has just come forward and has lots of relevant knowledge, ideas and mental energy to contribute.

Finally, we will be starting a blog in the next couple of weeks to record the progress of the project and hope this will be supported by members.

Gillian Lighton gillianlighton@hotmail.com Mobile: 07989 122917
The Leicester Secularist

The Leicester Secularist copy deadline

The copy deadline for the next edition is **12 noon on Thursday 21st February 2013**.

We will welcome new articles, letters, jokes, poems, news, cartoons, book reviews, etc. Please send via the Hall or email to Harry at the address in the box adjacent.

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 (and the same goes for handwritten items that might need a lot of typing up).

The subsequent copy deadline looks like being Thursday 21st March 2013.

Thanks

Harry Perry, Editor
Jill Perry, Subeditor

2013 subscriptions

Annual subscriptions are now due! **Please can you pay these promptly.** We need the funds to continue to both campaign for secularism and maintain our home in Secular Hall, so please consider making an additional donation too. These are much appreciated.

The subs rates are: Individuals £21, Households £28, and Low income £7.

Please send your cheques, made payable to Leicester Secular Society, to:

John Catt
32 Bramcote Road
Loughborough
LE11 2SA

If you use internet banking you can credit the Society's bank account as follows:

Account number 20195380
Sort code 08 60 01

Please confirm such transfers by email to leic.sec.society@gmail.com

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

Thank you

John Catt
Membership Secretary/Asst. Treasurer

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