



Dorset Humanists

Bulletin – January 2012

Forthcoming events...

■ Saturday, 14th January 2012

Moordown Community Centre,
Coronation Avenue, BH9 1TW

The Campaign Against Faith Schools



*A talk by Richy
Thompson, Faith
Schools and
Education
Campaigner at
the British
Humanist
Association*

Is it really the job of publicly funded schools to instill their parents' religious beliefs in children? BHA Education Campaigner Richy Thompson explains why faith schools are 'unnecessary, discriminatory and divisive', and provides a progress update on the continuing campaign against faith schools.

Richy Thompson graduated from the University of Oxford in 2010 with a first in Computer Science and was President of the National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies (AHS).



**Christopher Hitchens, champion of the
'New Atheism', has died aged 62.
See *Chairman's View*.**

■ Thursday, 26th January 7.30pm

The Limits of Morality

*An introduction to the radical ethical
philosophy of Peter Singer*

Philosopher Peter Singer helped launch the worldwide animal rights movement and has also done significant work towards soliciting vastly more aid for the world's poor. But is he justified in suggesting we are morally obliged to sacrifice many of our modern pleasures to reduce suffering? Are there limits to the demands that morality can make on us? Mat Coussell and David Warden lead the discussion.

Book now for Darwin Day 2012

We've now sold most of the lunch tickets so don't leave it too late to book!



On Saturday, 11th February our Darwin Day Lunch will be in the splendid surroundings of the Bayview Suite at the

International Centre and we're delighted to announce that Robin Ince will be our very special guest speaker. Winner of the *Time Out* Award for Outstanding Achievement in Comedy, Robin also has a passion for evolutionary science and he has recently embarked on a sellout UK tour entitled *Happiness Through Science*. Reserve your place now to avoid disappointment. 'Talk only' tickets are also available.

☎ Jane 01202 428506

■ Sunday, 29th January 2.00pm

Holocaust Memorial Day

The Bournemouth and Poole Holocaust Memorial Day Committee has invited us to the commemoration of Holocaust Memorial Day.

Multifaith Chaplaincy
Bournemouth University
Talbot House, Fern Barrow
Poole BH12 5BB

As well as an act of commemoration, there will be a presentation from a student who has recently taken part in the 'Lessons from Auschwitz' project, readings appropriate to the theme 'Speak up Speak Out' and the opportunity of signing the pledge to challenge the language of hatred and commit to using words which reflect respect for the dignity of those around you.

■ Thursday, 26th January 7.30pm

West Dorset Humanists, Dorchester

Science and Religion: Contradictory or Complementary?

A talk by David Nunn

Wessex Royale Hotel, 32 High St.
West Dorchester DT1 1UP

✉ westdorsethumanists@hotmail.com
☎ 07921 311518

Bournemouth's first ever Humanist civic funeral

On 21st December, around 200 people attended a memorial ceremony for Dorset Humanist Keith Rawlings, including the current Mayor of Bournemouth and two former mayors Sheila McQueen and Douglas Eyre. Dorset Humanist Maggie Pepin conducted the ceremony in the main hall at Bournemouth School for Girls. See *Members' Column* and *Chairman's View* for further comment.

Committee changes

After many years of unstinting service **Phil Mayer** has decided to step down for health reasons. We send effusive and heartfelt thanks to Phil. We're delighted to announce that **Geoff Jones** has rejoined the committee after a sabbatical. Geoff has been a member of Dorset Humanists for many years and has helped co-ordinate our appearances at Summer Festivals.

■ *The committee is formally elected at the AGM in March. Nominations are now open. Pick up a nomination form at one of our meetings or phone 01202 768212. We welcome expressions of interest to join the team. Younger people are currently under-represented.*

Humanist comedians in Bournemouth

Lyn Glass

Twelve laughter-loving Dorset Humanists enjoyed a very pleasant evening out together at Lighthouse, Poole to watch Shappi Khorsandi's latest touring show. Shappi entertained us with witty tales of her trials and tribulations growing up in Iran and Britain. A fine representative of Humanism. Well-known Humanist comedian Richard Herring appears at the Bournemouth Pavilion on 18th January, our Darwin Day speaker Robin Ince is appearing at the Wimborne Tivoli on the 8th March, Dara O'Briain is at the BIC on the 7th April and Stewart Francis at the Bournemouth Pavilion on the 29th April. If you fancy a Humanist group outing to see any of these Atheist Comedians, let me know at a meeting, or email lyn.glass@btinternet.com

Is Britain a Christian Country?

An open letter to the Prime Minister from Dorset Humanist Geoff Jones (abridged)

Dear Prime Minister

Your recent King James Bible Speech

I was fascinated to hear your opinions about Britain being a Christian country. This belief, of course, is not backed up by the recent 'British Social Attitudes' survey which showed that most of us consider ourselves to be completely non-religious. Furthermore, recent statistics show that more Muslims attend mosques regularly than Anglicans attend church.

I assume that when you refer to Britain's waning set of 'Christian' morals and values your yardstick will

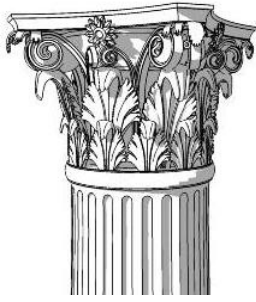
be the Ten Commandments. Not all are pertinent but God's sixth commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' is particularly interesting. Let's examine 1 Samuel 6:19 where God killed seventy men of Beth Shemeth simply because they looked into the Ark of the Covenant. Secondly, if we examine Numbers 17:28-33 where God, wanting to prove a point, killed all the men, women and children of Korah by opening the ground beneath and sent them screaming to their 'graves.' Maybe it's not as bad to kill people as we thought, particularly as God sets the example by ignoring his own commandments.

Next, let's look at Commandment 8 and 9: 'Thou shalt not steal' and 'Thou shalt not bear false witness'. It doesn't need a God to tell us that stealing and lying wouldn't be good for society. Mr Cameron, it's a pity that your colleagues in Parliament weren't aware that claiming expenses to which they weren't entitled would have had such a catastrophic effect on your Big Society concept and, possibly, set the tone for the recent London riots. Returning to God's actions once again, let's investigate Genesis 22:3 when God orders Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering but then tells Abraham he hadn't been really serious about this in the first place. I wonder what effect God's false witness would have on poor Isaac lying there covered in kindling and waiting to be ignited.

Commandment 10 is: Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, wife, manservant, etc. This one's right up your street! It's obviously addressed to the servant and house-owning fraternity. Furthermore, it puts wives into the 'other goods' category. So David, is it a case of do as God tells you or not?

Happy New Year to you, Geoff Jones

(Written with some assistance from the late and much lamented Christopher Hitchens.)



MEMBERS' COLUMN

Write to Dorset Humanists,
58a R L Stevenson Avenue
Bournemouth BH4 8EG or
email chairman
@dorsethumanists.co.uk

From Dave Haith on former Mayor and Dorset Humanist Keith Rawlings who has died aged 81

I remember Keith Rawlings as a teacher when I was a pupil at East Howe Secondary School. Years later as a young news reporter I heard that in Religious Instruction lessons he used the then popular Erich von Daniken book *Chariots of the Gods.....Was God an Astronaut?* I wrote a story about it and poor Keith had hell to pay with the establishment. But he was always one to think deeply and speak his mind. We know that he later became an atheist and I last met him at a humanist meeting a few months ago. He was very short of breath but managed to laugh about his Space God gaffe. I didn't know it was the last time I'd see him before his own symbolic journey among the stars.

Bon Voyage Keith!

From Sam Story on prayers in the Council Chamber

As always I enjoyed reading the Bulletin and your letter. This month I have a strong view about the letter and so wanted to give my twopence worth.

In the letter you didn't say how many of the councilors are against prayers in local council meetings? Nor the majority required to get this motion voted in. I think both of these points are critical in coming to a conclusion. I am going to assume Clive Bone is in the minority. I believe that the democratic process is a far more important concept than championing a specific religious/atheist view. If you

give up trying to change a people's view using the democratic process then you give up on the most important concept that humans have come up with.

We live in a multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-faith society and we gain huge benefits from it, but we gain them by giving up small personal freedoms to the majority. If they are in the majority, I believe a group of people should be able to practice their faith in public. To me it appears very immature if a small minority runs to a "higher power" (European Convention) if they are not able to get their way through discussion, persuasive arguments and the democratic process.

Prayer offers religious people a time for reflection and contemplation, this seems a very sensible thing to do at the start of an important meeting and there is nothing to stop an atheist from using this time to do the same. However if prayer time in the council is just used to read out a dogmatic script and offers none of these benefits then this would be a valid challenge. Maybe if Clive Bone proposed using prayer time for reflection and contemplation rather than a specific rhetoric he might get more support and be able to create change democratically.

From Phil Mayer

I see nothing against those councillors who are Christians praying for divine guidance in reaching correct decisions on Council matters. Any Muslim councillors might want to do the same, but separately. It would make sense for those who believe to have their group meetings before the start of the Council meeting. As a scientist I would like the experiment to be tried with and without prayers to see what difference it made to the deliberations.

Deadline for next Bulletin

Contributions for the next Bulletin should be received by the end of January.