



“Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.”

The concluding paragraph from *On the Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin



Charles Darwin aged 31

The Darwin Bi-Centenary

The bi-centenary of the birth of Charles Darwin on 12th February 2009 was celebrated in a variety of ways in the UK and around the world, including lectures, exhibitions, and TV programmes (see www.bbc.co.uk/darwin).

We marked the event with an exhibit in one of the display cases at the entrance to Suffolk County Library in Northgate Street, Ipswich, from 9th—15th February. We also provided leaflets with a suggested reading list and our contact details.

My thanks to new member Dan Clery for writing the introduction to Darwin featured in the exhibit and on our website (www.suffolkhands.org.uk/node/984), to Sharward Services for printing the posters and leaflets so quickly, to David Mitchell, Jenness Proctor and Andrew Morrison for helping me to arrange the exhibit, and to John Palmer for taking it all apart. MN

While we were celebrating Darwin Day, the creationists were busily displaying their ignorance, including a couple from Clacton who wrote to the East Anglian Daily Times to complain that “The BBC and others will very probably again be showing a bias in favour of evolution throughout the New Year in their contribution to the anniversary celebrations.” The EADT published a letter from me: “The BBC also shows bias in favour of the Earth being round, the Sun being at the centre of our solar system, and the sky being blue. Shocking, isn’t it?”

We might be encouraged by a report from The Guardian’s science correspondent, Ian Sample:

“The east of England may be the most

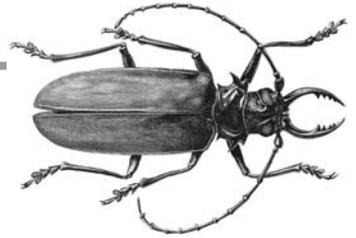
godless region of the UK, according to a ‘belief map’ published by a theology think-tank* today. Almost half of adults there believe the theory of evolution makes God obsolete, and more than 80% disagree with creationism and intelligent design, which propose that humans were created by God in the past 10,000 years, and that life owes its complexity to divine intervention.”

If you know any of these “godless” (we prefer “god-free”) people who haven’t heard of us, please pass on a copy of this newsletter and suggest they get in touch. MN

* Theos—www.theosthinktank.co.uk

 The illustration at the top of the page is a collage of two 19th century prints—Charles Darwin, and a chimpanzee. We share 96% of our genetic material with our closest living relatives, the chimps, having split from a common ancestor five to seven million years ago.

There’s no meeting this month (March), as a suitable venue isn’t available. We’ve had some problems with our usual meeting place lately and we’re looking for an alternative. Our AGM will be on Wednesday 8th April in the hall at Castle Hill Community Centre, Ipswich.



Wanted: group secretary

I'm retiring as group secretary at our AGM next month (April 2009), having done the job for most of the last seventeen years. We need someone to take over our administration as a volunteer, which involves:

- Arranging group meetings, including organising the venues and liaising with guest speakers.
- Booking committee phone conferences.
- Preparing and circulating agendas for committee meetings and the AGM.
- Dealing with phone enquires and emails on behalf of the group, some of which come via our website.
- Dealing with media enquiries and referring them when necessary.
- Correspondence with enquirers, including prospective members.
- Communicating with staff at the BHA, NSS, and SIFRE on our behalf.
- Liaising with the chairperson, newsletter editor, membership officer, and webmaster.
- Arranging collection of newsletters from the printers, and organising their mailing with volunteers.

You'll need:

- A computer with Internet access, preferably broadband.

- Microsoft Outlook, Word and Excel.
- A phone line with an answering service or machine (can be supplied).
- Space for files and stationery.

Other committee members and volunteers will work with you, and I'll provide support during a transition period—say, three months. Committee member Andrew Morrison has offered to write the minutes.

You may find that there are one or two phone calls or emails to deal with most days, otherwise the work is mainly concentrated on the meetings and newsletters. The committee meets several times a year, and there are monthly group meetings. All expenses are paid.

Please note that my decision is final; I won't be able to continue even if no one volunteers, due to health problems and decreasing eyesight. I'm willing to continue as a committee member, Humanist speaker, SACRE member and SIFRE tutor, and I'll continue to design and edit the newsletter for as long as I can, but as this may not be for long, it would be helpful if one or more people could volunteer to do this too—training can be arranged.

My son Nathan, our webmaster, will continue to maintain our website. Sophie Lovejoy has agreed to help with this.

Margaret Nelson

Schools mailshot

Through my membership of Suffolk's SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education), I helped devise the new Suffolk RE syllabus that was introduced in September 2007. It includes Humanist and secular world views. However, I get the impression that not many RE teachers have got far with that part of the syllabus. Our county RE advisor has invited several teachers to talk about their approach to the subject at SACRE meetings, and I've usually asked them how they teach about Humanism. So far, their answers haven't been encouraging. One said he didn't really know much about Humanism, another said she hadn't got around to it yet. None could report anything much, and none seemed to know about the BHA's website for schools, though they were all supposed to have been circulated with the details. Our committee has agreed that we should send information about resources for teachers, including the BHA's EdLines education newsletter, to all the schools in the county. We'll arrange an envelope stuffing session soon. If you're willing to help, please get in touch.

MN



Our pub lunches are increasingly popular. Some members prefer them to the evening meetings. I've given up worrying about themed discussions; it's impossible to get a word in edgeways when a bunch of us get going.

Here, Gary Proctor, Dennis Johnston and John Benford are in earnest conversation at The Seal, Woodbridge, on 17th January.

Jim Herrick in Suffolk



At our December meeting, members were lucky enough to share an evening with Jim Herrick (left), one of the leading Humanist thinkers and writers in Britain today. Jim is a former editor of *New Humanist* and *International Humanist News* and author of several books including *Humanism: an Introduction*, and *Vision and Reality: a Hundred years of The Freethinker*. With John Pearce, he edited *Seasons of Life*, an "anthology of prose and poetry for secular ceremonies and private reflection", an indispensable volume for Humanist Celebrants like me. Jim called his talk "The Humanist Heritage". We hope to add a podcast to our website. David Mitchell

Evolutionary ethics

Charles Darwin didn't anticipate that within less than two hundred years many of the species he observed would be under threat of extinction. Deforestation is one of the biggest contributors to climate change and the loss of species. Uncontrolled logging to meet the developed world's insatiable demand for wood pulp (used in toilet tissue and other products) and hardwood, and the destruction of the rainforests to plant palm oil and soya crops for a variety of products, has resulted in the threat of extinction to birds like the one shown here, and to many reptiles, mammals (including the orang-utan) and invertebrates.



When shopping, buy recycled paper goods, avoid palm oil (often labelled vegetable oil), and look for the forest stewardship logo on any timber and furniture products.

Illustration—19th century engraving

"Lord" Murphy O'Connor? The Times reported last week that the Government is considering offering a peerage to Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor, soon to retire as leader of the Catholic Church in England and Wales. In the 1980s Murphy O'Connor was the bishop of Arundel and Brighton. Although he was aware that one of his priests—Michael Hill—was a dangerous paedophile, he did nothing to prevent his access to children. Instead, he moved Hill from parish to parish, where he abused more children. The BBC was investigating the matter but inexplicably dropped the story after complaints that Murphy O'Connor was being "persecuted". Hill was eventually caught by the police. Please write to your MP, suggesting that a parliamentary question might be appropriate. O'Connor should be accountable for his inaction, not rewarded with a peerage.

Bill Potts (President of the Humanist Association of the Greater Sacramento Area in the US) read our recent email about this, and replied:

"If the Catholic Church were a business (or, officially a business), the behaviour of its priests would have put it out of business by now. It appears that official investigations and those of investigative journalists have been suppressed to an extent not seen here in the US. The First Amendment to the US Constitution is somewhat helpful in that regard.

"One of the greatest mistakes made by Ronald Reagan (and he made many) was diplomatic recognition of the Vatican and the consequent appointment of an ambassador. As with America's uncritical support of Israel, a presidential reversal of that is tantamount to political suicide."



A big thank you to all those who attended **the Orwell Observatory visit on the 27th November**—it seems the rain didn't put too many of you off.

Mike Whybray from the Orwell Astronomical Society opened the evening with a brief history of the observatory and the man that commissioned it—George Tomlin. The main dome is on the third (and obviously final) floor of the tower around 70 feet up and houses the 12 foot refractor telescope. It was built in 1872 by Wilfred Airy, son of the then Astronomer Royal and resident of Playford.

Unfortunately, it seemed the weather was against us, which meant that we didn't get to see any night sky objects but instead used the clock tower on The Royal Hospital School in Holbrook as a demonstration. I think during the evening an empty bar at The Butt and Oyster was also spotted, at which point a couple of members scaled the stairs two at a time and were last seen rowing for the opposite shore for last orders.

Another visit has been suggested, perhaps in the summer when the weather will be a bit more favourable and if anybody is still interested, I can make enquiries. Thank you all again, Andrew Flynn.

Marie Haworth would like Andrew to know how much she enjoyed the evening, and says thank you!



February meeting—Ten Minute Topics, and other matters

When we have “Ten Minute Topics”, everyone writes something they’d like to discuss on a piece of paper. The topics are drawn at random. At our February meeting they included the nanny state, religious aid organisations and whether we should have Humanist ones, whether global warming is a myth, and a New Scientist article that suggested that belief in a god is an evolutionary advantage. As tends to happen when a bunch of freethinkers get together, there was some lively discussion.

When we were talking about religious and non-religious aid organisations, there was some confusion about The Red Cross, because its symbol was assumed to be religious. It isn’t. In August 1864, the First Geneva Convention was adopted and modern international humanitarian law was born. It recognised the red cross on a white background as a single distinctive emblem. Since the emblem was to reflect the neutrality of the armed forces’ medical services and the protection conferred on them, the emblem adopted was formed by reversing the colours of the Swiss flag. It’s easily recognisable from a distance. The white flag was and remains a symbol of the wish to negotiate or to surrender; firing on anyone displaying it in good faith is unacceptable. The Red Crescent was introduced after the Ottoman Empire authorities said the cross was “offensive” to Muslims.

During the meeting, member Jean Platten said that she’d had difficulty ordering some books from Suffolk County Library. It was alleged that in Suffolk, new books are ordered by a group of librarians, while in Essex, new books are ordered on demand when a certain number of

requests are made by borrowers. I said I’d contact the library service to find out more. Roger McMaster, Head of Suffolk Libraries, has emailed:

“Your colleague is quite correct in that we have a small team of librarians who select new books, including deciding on how many copies to buy. They do this usually three to six months before the publication date. The initial choice is adjusted, if necessary, in terms of quantities in response to customer demand, which we judge from the number of reservations the title attracts. As with Essex an increased number of reservations for the book triggers the purchase of additional copies. So far this seems quite close to the experience that your colleagues and members report.

“However we are very aware that while this process allows us to select books and to have them ready of use on publication date, it cannot be the only way of choosing books for our libraries. Therefore we supplement this selection by buying in response to customer requests and suggestions. This is particularly important to us for older and possibly less popular books.”

Mr. McMaster also wrote,

“If you would like me to investigate the particular difficulties your member has encountered, please send me some examples and I would be happy to do so.”

Since the meeting, Jean has gone into hospital for surgery for breast cancer, followed by a course of chemotherapy. We hope that she’ll soon be on the road to recovery and send her our best wishes. *MN*

Replicating the social functions of religious organisations

On page 5, John Palmer asks, “There are no Humanist community projects, so far as I know. Should there be a Humanist equivalent of the church groups, going out to do good works but spreading the word at the same time? Or is it enough for us to volunteer and do the good work in existing projects and hope that Humanism is promoted by our example?”

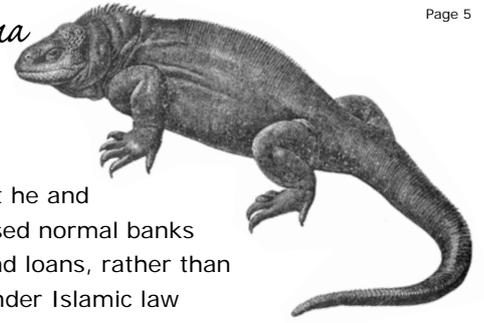
There’s been a thread along the same lines on the BHA website members’ forum, with some very different opinions. Some regard “spreading the word” as a form of evangelism, and if we don’t like religious evangelism, why should it be acceptable for us to do it?

We know that many Humanists do voluntary or charitable work for a variety of organisations, but not under a Humanist or atheist banner. Perhaps because some are sensitive about the accusation that we don’t offer

specifically Humanist services, they might say we should, if only to prove that we have a social conscience. Is that a good enough reason?

This subject may come up again soon, when our member Michael Imison will talk about “The BHA’s role in contemporary Britain” at one of our next meetings. Michael would like to develop a “Humanist movement”; we hope you’ll come to find out what he means by that.

Incidentally, newer members of Suffolk Humanists & Secularists won’t know that when the group was smaller and I was fitter, I used to visit elderly and housebound members whenever I could. Increasing pressures on my time and my own health problems put a stop to that. If anyone would like to volunteer for some pastoral care, feel free, though I suppose you’d be expected to have a CRB check nowadays. *MN*



Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource February Forum

SIFRE (Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource) held a Forum of Faiths at University Campus Suffolk on February 10, on the subject of "The impact of the credit crunch on the faith communities of Suffolk and their members". Andrew Morrison and I from Suffolk Humanists & Secularists were there, as well as Christians of various sorts, Buddhists, Sikhs, Muslims and Bahá'ís. A few people claimed to be of no particular persuasion. SIFRE also has Jewish and Pagan members.

A representative of the Triangle Church spoke about the work done on the Triangle Estate, Ipswich, where people needed help with debt, drug addiction, skills acquisition and general advice on improving their finances. The Church works with Christians Against Poverty to provide loans and financial advice. More money and volunteers were needed.

Ipswich & Suffolk Credit Union was explained by a delegate. Its purpose is to promote thrift among members by the accumulation of savings, to provide credit at fair and reasonable rates of interest and, importantly, to give advice on financial matters. The union enables people with little income to stay in the real financial world by organising bank accounts and even debit cards. It also tries to help the old and the long-term sick, who encounter special problems when dealing with banks. Credit unions are neither religious nor political. Volunteers are needed here too.

Borough Councillor Roger Fern gave a presentation on the Umbrella Trust, a charity concerned with alleviating homelessness. He described the Wilbury House shelter, whose facilities are very limited and whose funding is about to end. He also talked about the Ipswich Community Resource Centre, a day centre where help is available with benefit claims, immigration problems and language translation, among other things. The trust aims to help people access all relevant resources, but there are other organisations doing similar work. It would like to bring all resources under one "umbrella", hence its title. Mr. Fern described the problems of homelessness, mental health, alcoholism and debt in Ipswich and suggested the need for an assessment centre and hostel where overnight shelter and support could be provided. He strongly defended the secular status of the trust.

A Muslim with a restaurant in Ipswich described the effect of the crunch on his business and community. Mosques were only used for prayer, but they had associated community areas. Family help and support were important. His restaurant had suffered a decrease in turnover during recent months, as had the taxi businesses of family and friends. These losses came about because people could no longer afford to eat out as much, or enjoy other entertainments. Interestingly, the

speaker said that he and many Muslims used normal banks for mortgages and loans, rather than banks running under Islamic law (Sharia). Sharia prohibits the payment of fees for the renting of money for specific terms.

Bishop Paulo Pereira of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (the Mormons) talked about the projects his community undertakes and how they are funded. Mormons are expected to fast for 24 hours every month, from ten years of age. The money saved is donated to welfare. The Mormons accept no government benefits and are expected to be self-sufficient. They carry out community projects, large and small, with volunteer days where task-forces are organised to quickly complete work, apparently along the lines of "Ground Force". The bishop said that their projects are not limited only to members of the Mormon Church. The church also offers help with financial planning and employment.

Living a simple life was how Buddhists responded to financial problems, in bad times or good, according to Jnanamitra Emmett of the Western Buddhist Order. The intention was to be "innocent" in relation to money. The Buddhist community looked after itself. Money was raised through fasting. The speaker said that the receipt of a state pension raises community members' incomes considerably.

Bhupindar Singh Sually spelled out three Sikh precepts: Remember God; earn an honest living; share what you have. Emphasis was placed by him on respect for the elderly. This, and the way that Sikhs share meals and eat together, lead to community care of vulnerable people, at all times, not just in times of depression.

A YMCA representative described the work his organisation is doing to help with housing the displaced young, and what it hoped to do with a projected community and skills project.

Even before the credit crunch, the need for more finance was a major factor for some communities. Other communities carry on working as they have always done, but with more calls on their resources. And, where relevant, there is the continuing need for more volunteers.

There are no Humanist community projects, so far as I know. Should there be a Humanist equivalent of the church groups, going out to do good works but spreading the word at the same time? Or is it enough for us to volunteer and do the good work in existing projects and hope that Humanism is promoted by our example?

John Palmer



BHA annual groups meeting, October

The British Humanist Association affiliated local groups meeting (GRAM) at Conway Hall, London, on 15th October, was attended by staff and over fifty delegates. Agenda items ranged from a talk on Humanist schools in Uganda, an amusing pre-lunch "aperitif" from Dennis Cobell (Lewisham), to reports about local group support and the new Humanist science group. A show of hands indicated that for more than half those attending, it was their first such meeting.

Steve Hurd, from South Cheshire and North Staffordshire Humanists (SCANS), spoke about three Humanist Schools in Uganda, which have been sponsored in part by members of the North East Humanist group. Through the work of this group, along with Steve Hurd, the International Humanist & Ethical Union got involved, resulting in more sponsorship and funding for some of the schools.

Darrell Thomas from Essex gave a presentation about membership and recruitment. The Essex group has about 100 members. After an analysis of their postcodes, a drive to recruit in the Southend area is starting, with a local discussion group. Future initiatives will be aimed at publicity, schools, and the west of the county. Sunday morning meetings followed by a pub lunch have proved popular.

Hanne Stinson, BHA Executive Director, outlined the BHA's initiatives:

- Campaigning, national and local;
- Emphasis on education issues;
- Promotion of the understanding of what Humanism is;
- Publicity initiatives, like the forthcoming "atheist buses" campaign;
- Ceremonies, as a way of "doing Humanism";
- Humanism in communities;
- Humanist chaplains;
- International work.

The important current objectives of the BHA are:

- To ensure that every person who is a Humanist can identify with a Humanist organisation;
- To ensure that the UK's laws contain no discrimination based on belief;
- To ensure that public services are secular;
- To ensure that Humanist ceremonies are widely available.

Someone asked about a merger between the BHA and the National Secular Society. Hanna responded that the

BHA is a charity and the NSS isn't, making a merger impossible, and that the NSS was a campaigning society, widely regarded as anti-religious, while the BHA was seen as being more tolerant and gains advantages from this in government circles, etc.

The BHA has financial issues, brought about by the current financial crisis.

Dennis Cobell's pre-lunch contribution was a funny item, quoting from "The Dog Allusion", written by Martin Rowson and published by Vintage Books.

Danny Collman from Birmingham began a discussion called "Are Humanists against religion?" by saying that Humanists don't sing, and asking why there's no Humanist choir. Presumably, this was a reference to the Salvation Army or Christian happy-clappies, but his point was lost on most delegates. Then there was a lively exchange between Danny and Sue Lord from Bromley, barely relevant to the subject. Amidst the verbal sparring, Danny revealed that the Birmingham Humanist group had voted "overwhelmingly" that Humanism *is* against religion.

Bob Churchill, BHA membership officer, spoke about local group support and the benefit to a group of an effective website. Up to date meeting details and calendars were important, and photos of group meetings helped to foster group awareness. Flexibility of subscription periods can help membership renewal. A competition for the best group website led to a short list of six, one of which was our site, but the prize was won by Berkshire Humanists. The BHA welcomes short articles from group members for inclusion in the BHA Newsletter; several delegates expressed surprise at the existence of such a newsletter.

Pepper Harow spoke next, reviewing her BHA Local Development Project. 150 volunteers are enrolled in the project and have contacted 200 local authorities on the project's behalf. The general approach was to ensure that "faith" agendas became "religion or belief" agendas. Most of the talk by Pepper was made up of the content of her Suffolk H&S presentation earlier last year.

Michael Imison, representing the BHA and the Norfolk group, posed the question: what are groups NOT doing? It was suggested that Humanism should occupy the area covered by religion and that Humanism should find ways to celebrate humanity.

The Promotion and Marketing Group presentation, by Kim Northwood, covered membership-raising projects, re-usable leaflets, posters and flyers, business cards and books. The group has a website—www.Humanism-pmg.org.uk—and a Yahoo e-group. One of its most effective projects was a tie-up with the organ donor

(Continued on page 7)



“Man is descended from a hairy, tailed quadruped...”

BHA local development.

The BHA's Local Development Officer, Pepper Harow, spoke at our October meeting about the BHA's Local Development Project. The BHA wants “inclusion in local authority work” and “equality for the non-religious”. The project's aims are:

- To engage representatives of humanists and other non-religious people within local activity
- To identify how humanists and non-religious people might contribute effectively to the work of local authority equality bodies and networks
- To work with local authorities to improve their work in the religion and belief field
- To set up a network of volunteers.
- To set up a support structure—Yahoo e-Group, Workshops, Local Development Officer.

Volunteers are individual members of the BHA; groups aren't involved. However, we're already involved with Suffolk local authorities, through Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource and our own initiatives.

If you weren't at the meeting and would like a copy of Pepper's presentation, please email or send a SAE.

(Continued from page 6)

campaign, where Humanists research and promote organ donation in public places and at the same time take the opportunity to distribute Humanist information. Devon Humanists found this approach useful.

The science group continues to develop, with a website—www.bhascience.org.uk—and a Yahoo e-group. Its members may be available for talks at group meetings. A name change to “Humanists for Science” is being considered.

Issues arising from the meeting were:

- Most groups seem to operate with about 80 to 100 members, with a hard-core of a dozen or so regulars.
- Recruitment is a significant issue.
- A variety of meeting types, such as Sunday morning discussion groups/pub lunches, seem to promote interest.
- Campaigns tied to other subjects, like organ donation, are useful.
- Current membership analysis could lead to areas of development.
- Flexibility of membership terms/costs can improve renewal.

John Palmer & Andrew Morrison

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

www.humanism.org.uk
www.richarddawkins.net
www.atheistcampaign.org

The Atheist Bus campaign has been a huge success, with buses bearing the slogan “There's probably no God, now stop worrying and enjoy your life” all over the country. The idea even spread abroad. The nearest atheist buses to us were from the Norwich bus depot, some of which crossed the border into north Suffolk. However, if you didn't see one, you can have a car sticker instead. Ask if you'd like to know how to get one.

The only problem with the bus adverts is that lots of people didn't understand why they said “probably”, and why they might be worrying. They were a response to some ads from a Christian organisation that promised non-believers an eternity in a lake of hellfire. We thought we might have some Suffolk car stickers, with a different slogan and our website URL. Any suggestions what the slogan should be?

Our website attracts lots of visitors from all over the world and the number of registered users is growing, but what we can't understand is why they're so shy. More comments and forum topics please!

We weren't upset that we didn't win the group website competition. The new Berkshire website is very good (www.berkshirehumanists.org.uk), but ours has far more traffic (10,000s of hits) than any other and many more pages of stimulating content, as well as a brilliant design (thanks to webmaster Nathan). Besides, hardly anyone knew about the competition—who voted?

We have a flexible payment system; our members can pay by standing order, which means their membership starts at any time of the year—and we're cheap! A basic £5 for everyone, plus whatever you care to donate (we have some very generous members). If you haven't joined yet, why not?

Our membership has steadily increased over the last couple of years (it's currently 75, with a few more poised to sign up), and the average age of our members is going down, so we must be doing something right.

Suffolk Humanists & Secularists are affiliated to the BHA and the NSS; we're not a branch of either. Like all local groups, we're autonomous. Some local groups are more independent than others, some are more active than others. Our success depends on having a core group of committed members with time and energy to spare.



Margaret Nelson

SUFFOLK HUMANISTS & SECULARISTS

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The Suffolk & N E Essex Humanist group was founded in 1991 to promote Humanism and Secularism, and to provide fellowship, education and support for non-believers in Suffolk and North East Essex. We changed our name to Suffolk Humanists when the Essex group was formed, then again in April 2008, to reflect the importance of secularism when religious organisations are being increasingly assertive.

We're affiliated to The British Humanist Association, The National Secular Society, and Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource (SIFRE). The group is a member of SAVO—the Suffolk Association of Voluntary Organisations.

Sympathetic non-members are welcome, but by joining us you'll help us to raise awareness of Humanism and Secularism, and to challenge the increasing influence of religion in public life, the arts and the media.

The Suffolk Humanist Ceremonies Team, which is independent of the BHA network, has an unblemished record for high standards. We provide non-religious ceremonies for all occasions. For more information, see the contact details above.

HUMANISM: an ethical approach to life without religion; Humanists think we can be good without God.

SECULARISM: the belief that religion should have no place in civil affairs; that the church and state should be kept separate.

This & that

* Universal rights

While the group was enjoying Jim Herrick's talk on 10th December, I was providing a Humanist contribution to a Celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Declaration of Humanist at the Unitarian Meeting House, Ipswich.

Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

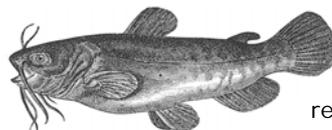
Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

I referred to the ideas of the America Humanist, Gene Roddenberry, creator of the Star Trek TV series, ending:

"If you think about it, the way that the crew of the Enterprise regard each other and the alien races they meet is 'without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.'

"What does that matter, you might think; it's fiction. This is true, but it's inspirational fiction. If Star Trek encourages people to think about how the characters relate to one another, and about how we do things in real life, they might, just might, begin to use their imagination to resolve some of the problems we face as a race; the human race.

"Gene Roddenberry died in 1991. He's



reported to have said, 'I believe in humanity. We are an incredible species. We're still just a child creature; we're still being nasty to each other. And all children go through those phases. We're growing up, we're moving into adolescence now. When we grow up – man, we're going to be something!' I hope he's right."

* Apology, sort of...

Sorry it's taken so long to get this newsletter out—it's been four months since the last one. So much to do, so little time. However, when someone takes over the admin jobs (see page 2), I'll have more time, won't I?

* April AGM

Our AGM will be on 8th April, when we elect our officers and committee and make plans for the year.

Those of a nervous disposition needn't worry—we don't bully anyone into volunteering—but it would be wonderful if you did. The committee meets at least four times a year, more often if we've got a lot to plot. As we're so widely scattered and we're all busy people, we usually have phone conferences organised through the charity Community Network that last up to 1½ hours. The limited time slot means there's no waffle (or very little), and we get things done.

As far as I know, the current committee members are all willing to stand for election again, though not necessarily for the same roles. We could do with a Social Secretary, to organise informal gatherings of one sort or another, but anyone with some spare time will be welcome, provided he or she is willing to make an active contribution.

Thanks, Margaret

