

Next meeting:
Wednesday 11th
May, with guest
Jemma Hooper,
BHA membership
officer

Suffolk Humanist News

May 2005

Membership

subscriptions are overdue. They're still a very reasonable £5. The money helps us to promote Humanism in Suffolk. The easiest way to pay is by standing order. Please let our treasurer have your payment and membership form now, or bring it to the next meeting. We need more committee members too; how about you?

Meet Jemma

At our 11th May meeting our guest will be Jemma Hooper, BHA Membership & Development Officer, who'd like to talk about recruitment, particularly of younger people.

The yet-to-be published research I did last year shows that few local

humanist groups have members under the age of 50, and most members are over 60. Do you have any thoughts about how to interest more people in becoming members of a humanist organisation?

If you're not a BHA or NSS member, why not?

As usual, we meet in Room 4 (next to the back door) at Castle Hill Community Centre, Highfield Road, Ipswich, starting at 7.30pm.

Guests and raffle prizes very welcome. For lifts, or offers of lifts, please phone 01473 658828.

Happy to pay tax

Pam Oldroyd's thoughts on taxation, prompted by the Chancellor's budget:

I was always happy to pay income tax for the very good reason that it meant I was lucky enough to have had an income!

I recognise that I am unable, on my own, to pay for a school or hospital, to pay a teacher, nurse, surgeon or policeman, build a road, etc. etc. so it seems a good idea to club together with my fellow citizens to provide these things, through an organisation known as the

state, as a permanent structure, acting through governments, which come and go at the whim of the electorate.

I'm prepared to pay local council tax just to get someone to take away my rubbish and, particularly, my neighbour's!

Lots of people grumble about paying taxes and yet every time a representative of an organisation comes on the radio touting its cause, he or she always ends up with a demand that the government should put more into its

particular pot.

I'd like interviewers, who invariably end an interview with the statement, 'So you think the Government should give you more money?', saying instead, 'So you think your fellow taxpayers should give you more money?'

And have you noticed that it's often those who protest the loudest about paying taxes who also protest the loudest about poor performance by public services? They want the services, but they want other people to pay for them.

Feedback welcome!

www.suffolkhumanists.org.uk

Suffolk Humanist News

Annual General Meeting



Michael Imison, our new Chair

At our AGM on 9th March the following people were elected as officers and committee members —

Chair: Michael Imison
 Vice-Chair: Peter Davidson
 Secretary: Margaret Nelson
 Treasurer: David Mitchell
 Committee member: Derek Mason

There are vacancies for two more committee members. Please let us know if you're interested.

Chairperson's Report

Margaret Nelson

We continue to meet every other month with good attendances, though no one wants to revert to monthly meetings.

Michael (Imison) attended the BHA AGM and the BHA Groups' Annual Meeting (GRAM) – thank you Michael.

I've continued to do Thought for the Day on BBC Suffolk. David (Mitchell) won't do any more for a while, due to family commitments. We've reviewed the papers a couple of times.

I resigned from the Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource board last year, but continue as a tutor and a member of the Forum of Faiths. There was a forum on Justice at the new Crown Courts in Ipswich in September, and one on Democracy and Citizenship in the new County Council HQ in February this year. I wrote papers for both, as I couldn't attend, and Michael delivered the latter. SIFRE has published the Justice papers in a booklet and is preparing another on Democracy.

I was invited to join a panel of advisors to the new East of England Faiths Agency, run by David and Cynthia Capey of SIFRE. David

(Mitchell) and I went to St. Neot's in Cambridgeshire at the end of February to contribute to a training session on diversity issues organised with EEFA for GO-East – the Government Office for the East of England.

I'm still a member of Suffolk's Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education, which has discussed how to put the new guidelines on RE into effect; a county conference is being arranged.

I'm grateful to Marie (Haworth) for her Music Quiz last May; to Joan and Ted Matthews and Michael for the Music & Poetry Buffet Supper in October; to the Ceremonies Team for their continuing good work and friendly co-operation; to the committee, especially David, and to Derek (Mason), who dealt with the raffles until recently. Thanks to those who've provided lifts to other members, and an especially big thank you to Jan (Schmidt) who's continued to provide our refreshments and refused to be reimbursed for her outlay, so we make a profit at every meeting.

You may remember that last spring I contributed to the County Council's consultation on free school transport for children attending Catholic schools. The council subsequently decided to cease providing free school transport on financial grounds.

Last March our guest speaker was Sue Harrington-Spier from Amnesty, who told us some disturbing things about the situation in Uzbekistan.

David, Douglas (Bell) and I went to Conway Hall in London last year to attend a

meeting on Free Speech organised to celebrate the hall's 75th anniversary, which we thoroughly enjoyed.

Yvonne Peacock can't often get to our meetings but has been flying the flag for Humanism in Colchester at the Colchester Inter-Faith Network.

I've accepted speaking engagements at Kesgrave High School and County Upper School, Bury St Edmunds – I couldn't go to Bury at the last minute, so Michael stood in for me, again. Last night I spoke at Suffolk Fabian Society on Faith Schools.

Our website has had nearly 500 hits (or visits) since the beginning of January. We get a steady trickle of enquiries about ceremonies, membership, etc. Our newsletter goes to many contacts around the country, some of whom have got in touch through the website.

I have to report two deaths. Firstly, some of you will remember Louie Stewart, who used to provide our refreshment before Jan. She was a quiet person who liked music – she brought her CD player to meetings, to play classical music while we had our breaks – and she helped me in a variety of ways over several years. Then Joan Posford died recently. Joan didn't attend meetings but did come to social functions occasionally. I conducted both funerals.

Thank you all for your support and encouragement over the last year.

For a copy of the Financial Statement for the year 2004/2005, please send a stamped addressed envelope to the address on page 4

Membership

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*Thank you
 to everyone
 who helped
 last year*

May 2005

Annual General Meeting

Secretary/Treasurer's Report

David Mitchell

Firstly I would like to thank Margaret and the other committee members for their continuing support, with a special mention for Marie, who often lends her house as a comfortable and welcoming venue for committee meetings.

The addition of new members in the last twelve months has been especially pleasing and some of them have become regular attendees at our bi-monthly meetings, bringing a welcome range of views and experiences with them. I have particularly enjoyed meetings in the past year and I thank those new members, some of whom travel a considerable

distance to get here.

Several members who remain on our membership database have allowed their subscriptions to lapse. These members are still receiving regular newsletters by post or e-mail but I suggest that a final appeal be made to them in the next couple of months to decide whether they wish to pay up and remain as members or have their names removed. Our BHA affiliation fee is based on the number of members and our database should only contain those who really wish to be part of the organisation, if only to keep in touch via the newsletter.

A disappointingly small number of members have decided to pay their annual subscriptions by standing

order. I thank the eight who have for making life simpler for me and themselves by doing so. I would encourage all those members with bank accounts to do the same. It's very simple and really saves an awful lot of time and effort all round.

Because of the problems in bringing in subscriptions our income from them has dropped considerably in the past twelve months but donations have increased, largely thanks to a donation of £200 from a grateful client of Sophie's. That, together with an overall reduction in outgoings has resulted in our balance at the Co-operative bank rising in the twelve months from £208.38 to £533.67 so we remain on a firm financial footing.



David Mitchell, Treasurer

"Getting rid of religion would be a start, wouldn't it?"
The Icelandic singer, Björk, when asked how she would make the world a better place.

Who wants to talk?

Lots of people, it seems.

Before the AGM, I printed out random subjects on cards and asked members to pick one. We ended up talking about two things; 'labels' (the ones we give ourselves, the ones other people give us, and the ones we give other people), and 'travel'. The idea came from a newspaper report on the results of a survey. Apparently many would like to enjoy more conversation, but felt they don't get enough opportunity, or else usually end up making small talk. There were only six of us that night, none with particularly strident opinions.

On 'labels', we talked about how we're expected to define ourselves by what we do when we meet strangers in social situations. Though you may give some information about yourself, if

you don't divulge your profession or occupation your inquisitor may have difficulty attaching a label, and he or she might be at a loss to know what to talk about next. Once someone has given you a label, he or she may not understand you any better; he or she may make inaccurate assumptions. By being a little enigmatic, you may encourage someone to think about who or what you might be - or he or she may simply give up and move on to talk to whoever will play the game.

We talked about travel, and the consequences of air pollution, and whether or not it opens the mind. Perhaps, it was suggested, air traffic would have to be restricted before long, to cut pollution. In the days immediately after 9/11 all air traffic in North

America was grounded, and the skies were clear of the usual haze of exhaust gases. The consensus was that if we want clear and clean skies, we must restrict air travel.

As we were leaving, everyone said how much they'd enjoyed talking. One conversationalist phoned me several days after the meeting. He'd been thinking about what we'd said, and still had more to say, so we talked a bit more.

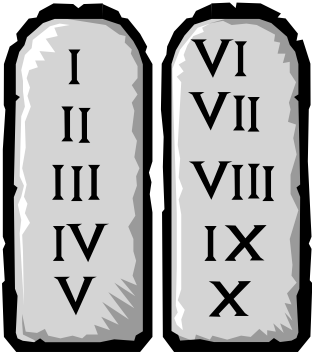
I recently learned that, in France, *Cafés Philo*, or *Philosophy Cafés*, have become popular, and the idea is spreading. They're places where people go for 'organised debate', making philosophy accessible for all. Another example of people being hungry for ideas, and for intelligent conversation.

MN



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The New Ten Commandments



Did you notice that the Ten Commandments deemed appropriate for the present day, resulting from a survey of the public for a Channel Four TV programme at the end of February, didn't include any mention of God?

Here they are:

1. Treat others as you would be treated (the Golden Rule).
2. Take responsibility for your own actions.
3. Do not kill.
4. Be honest.
5. Do not steal.
6. Protect and nurture children.
7. Protect the environment.
8. Look after the vulnerable.
9. Never be violent.
10. Protect your family.

Pam Oldroyd

The Rewards of Being a Celebrant

Sophie Lovejoy, a member of the Suffolk Humanist Ceremonies Team who covers the Clacton and Colchester areas, has discovered how rewarding it can be to provide families with a good funeral ceremony.

One satisfied client wrote: The humanist approach to what can be a thoroughly dismal and almost unbearable occasion when conducted through a religious ceremony, showed my mum for what she was; an individual, who tried to live her own life and not have it lived for her. That is something that conventional faith-based religions try to deny their people; they seem to believe, in my view at least, that life is to be lived on behalf of some intangible being or, worse, a monolithic restricted, and restrictive, society.

Afterwards my relatives and neighbours expressed their approval of the ceremony. I know what sort of funeral I want when the time comes!

A Wasted Opportunity

Colchester Co-op recently opened new funeral premises on Wimpole Road. **David Mitchell** represented our team at the opening ceremony, and reports:

The place reeks of Christianity and they appear to have made little effort to make it a multi-faith venue. Very disappointing, as was the obvious lack of any attempt to make the building environmentally-friendly. With rainwater harvesting it could have been virtually self-sufficient in water, but the vast expanse of roof shoves rainwater straight into the drains. Criminal!

Although it's a brand new building, which could have been so much better with a bit of élan, it's the same old attitudes to death and religion that stick in the craw. The interview rooms have old-fashioned furnishings and I felt as though the clock had been resolutely turned back 100 years.

If some kind humanist benefactor gave me £1 million I'd show 'em how it could be done!



Some of you knew my niece **Kathy Mitchell**, a disabled artist from Ipswich, who attended some of our social events. She was a member of the Mouth & Foot Artists, and exhibited some of her paintings at Ipswich Corn Exchange last year.

Kathy was ill with cancer for a while, but managed to continue painting until recently. She died in St Elizabeth's Hospice on 25th April, aged 37.

Margaret Nelson

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Newsletter contributions to the above address

The Suffolk Humanist group is affiliated to the British Humanist Association, the National Secular Society, and the Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource.