

suffolk Humanist & secularist NEWS

April 2009

April 14th—AGM in our new venue



Thanks to the efforts of committee member John Palmer (left), who visited lots of potential venues in Ipswich and the surrounding area, we've got a new meeting place—the new Pinewood Community Hall in Laburnum Close, Ipswich, IP8 3SL, at the far end of Hawthorn Drive. The building, owned by Pinewood Parish Council, was only opened at the end of last year. It's a bright, attractive building and the facilities are first class.

Since the arrangements at our previous venue, Castle Hill Community Centre, had been so confused recently (double bookings, last minute room changes, etc.), we decided that the AGM would be a good time to make a fresh start. However, we've changed the regular day of the month for our meetings from the second Wednesday to the second Tuesday, so the AGM will be on April 14th, and not April 8th, as previously announced. Sorry about all the confusion, but we'll be in the lounge at Pinewood Community Hall every second Tuesday of every month from now on.

The hall is near the A12/A14 Copdock interchange and Copdock Tesco. From the interchange, on the A1214 London Road towards the town centre, turn right opposite Tesco into Scrivener Drive. At the 4th right-hand junction, a roundabout, turn right into Shepherd Drive. From Ipswich town centre, follow the A1214 almost to the end and turn left at the traffic lights opposite the A1071 road to Hadleigh into Sprites Lane, which leads into Scrivener Drive, then left at the roundabout into Shepherd Drive. In Shepherd Drive, it's first left into Laburnum Close (signed to Pinewood Surgery). The car park is at the end of the close on the right, after the surgery. There's a map on the website (see the calendar). If you're not on the Internet, phone and I'll post one.

If you need or can offer a lift, please get in touch. New members especially welcome. Guests and raffle prizes always welcome. If you get lost, phone 07901 656463.

**AGM, 7.30pm, Tuesday
14th April, Pinewood
Community Hall,
Laburnum Close,
Ipswich, IP8 3SL**

**Suffolk Humanists
& Secularists
01473 658828
mail@suffolkhands.org.uk**

Agenda—AGM, 14th April 2009

1. Apologies.
2. Minutes of last AGM.
3. Matters arising.
4. Reports:
 - Chairperson.
 - Secretary.
 - PR, speaking & education.
 - Ceremonies.
 - Treasurer.
5. Election of committee:
 - Chairperson.
 - Vice-Chairperson.
 - Secretary.
 - Treasurer.
 - 2 committee members.
6. Motion:
 - The Suffolk Humanist & Secularist group subscription will be changed to a minimum of £10 per annum (see opposite).
7. AOB.

When the business part of the meeting is over, we'll be making plans for the coming year. Do you have an area of expertise you could tell us about? Can you suggest a topic you'd like us to cover, or a guest speaker you'd like us to invite? It's up to you what we do.

Committee changes

Last year, we elected David Mitchell as Chair, Richard Stock as Vice-Chair, me as Secretary, Louise Armstrong as Treasurer, and Andrew Morrison and John Palmer as committee members.

David isn't standing for re-election as Chair but is willing to be nominated for the role of committee member. Richard regrets that, due to work commitments, he no longer has time for the committee. I'm not standing for re-election as Secretary, but would be willing to take the Chair. Andrew's willing to be nominated for the Vice-Chair, and John is happy to continue as a committee member, taking on special projects (like the one he's just completed—looking for a new venue) as and when necessary. Denis Johnston is willing to be nominated for the Secretary's role.

If anyone would like to be considered for any of the officers' roles, or as a committee member, please let us know now or at the AGM—we'd especially like to hear from you if you're interested in organising social activities, such as the pub lunches.

Having been group secretary for most of the last 18 years, I'm very happy to hand over the job, but I'm still willing to publish our newsletter and maintain our website, with the help and support of my son Nathan, our webmaster. Contributions or ideas for both are always very welcome.

Margaret

Subscriptions

We've had the same subscription rate, £5 per annum, for the last 18 years, since the group was founded in 1991. It's probably the lowest group subscription rate in the country. Our members have been generous with donations and we've collected money at every meeting from raffles and refreshments. However, although we're still solvent, our expenses have increased and the money doesn't go as far. Our treasurer has recommended increasing the minimum annual subscription to £10, which will mean that we'll have a healthy margin to cover all eventualities. We hope you'll agree that a £10 subscription would still be good value for money, and that our funds are put to good use, promoting Humanism and Secularism in Suffolk and N E Essex, while providing activities and newsletters for members.

The committee agrees that we should increase our subscription rate. New forms will be available at the AGM in anticipation of your approval.

We'd like to stress that £10 is a suggested minimum; we welcome anything you feel able to contribute above this minimum.

When you renew your membership, we'll ask you to do so by setting up a regular payment by standing order. If you've already set one up, you'll need another form to amend it. You can pay this way every year (or maybe every six months), and of course you're free to cancel this arrangement at any time. It simply means that if you want to keep receiving the benefits of membership, you don't have to do anything, and if you want to cancel your membership, you just phone or email us. It would make life much simpler for our treasurer while enabling us to plan ahead, and you won't have to fill in any more forms or write cheques. It's much easier all round, and the advantage to us is that every single penny of your subscription can go on campaigning, promotion and running an efficient group. Of course, you'll of course still be able to make a one-off annual payment if you prefer. It's up to you.

Jan Schmidt generously provides our refreshments as her donation to the group. Things should be a little easier at the new venue; the hall supplies hot water and mugs, so we don't need to take kettles and stuff. Members are encouraged to volunteer their help with the refreshments and to clear up afterwards.



Annual reports

As our newsletters detail all our activities over the course of the year, these will be brief summaries. Anyone who'd like to know more is welcome to look at our website or ask for printed copies of newsletters from the last 12 months. There'll be an opportunity to ask questions at the AGM.

Chair—David Mitchell

The year that started with being locked out of Castle Hill Community Centre for our last AGM, something that sadly proved the precursor to other accommodation problems at what had been our preferred meeting place for many years, ends at our shiny new venue, with the group in good shape and with more active members than ever before.

I'd like to express my thanks on behalf of all members to Margaret (secretary for the past year) for her never less than total commitment to the promotion of Humanism in Suffolk; to Louise for taking on the task of treasurer, to Richard in his role as vice-chairman and to John, whose dedication to finding our new meeting place was typical of everything he has contributed as a committee member over the past twelve months, and to Andrew who has also contributed time and effort over and above the call of duty. I must also thank Jan and Marie for their support and help in making our regular meetings so enjoyable. Cheese straws never tasted so good.

Because of heavy personal commitments, not the least of which is my wife's continuing ill health, I shall not be seeking re-election for another term as chairman but do offer myself as a candidate for the executive committee where I hope to be of some help in the drive to increase both our membership and our influence in the local community.

In the year of the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin I truly feel we can all look forward in confidence.

Secretary, PR, speaking, education, ceremonies—Margaret Nelson

Membership has increased. Some came via the BHA, none (that I'm aware of) via the NSS, despite our name change, and some through local publicity. We had a double-page spread in the Evening Star and the East Anglian Daily Times last June, a piece in the Suffolk Free Press, and an article on the BBC Radio Suffolk website—all of which were initiated by local journalists, not us.

I wasted a lot of time trying to sort out the bookings at Castle Hill since a change of staff resulted in chaos.

After our meeting last May, we agreed to stop meeting in Colchester as almost all the people who turned up there had travelled from Suffolk.

The committee met by phone using Community Network, a charity that provides cheap tele-conferencing for other charities and voluntary groups. Calls last up to an hour and half, from the comfort of home.

Our Darwin Day display (with leaflets) at Ipswich library attracted favourable comments from one of the librarians and at least one potential new member.

Three of us attended Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource forums over the year, and I led one on secularism.

I visited Thomas Wolsey special school to talk about Humanism and went to Kesgrave and Leiston High schools to talk about different topics, where I was disappointed to learn that most children knew nothing about Humanism, despite the new RE syllabus that was introduced in 2007.

At Suffolk SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education), I initiated the provision of guidance for school visitors who contribute to RE. Among other things, it will prohibit proselytising. We've been working on the provision of guidance for teachers on dealing with Creationism and Intelligent Design in RE.

Demand for Suffolk Humanist ceremonies has been about the same, with David Mitchell doing most of the work as he's consistently available. Sophie Lovejoy has covered Colchester and Weeley crematoria. I've done very few funerals, for families who know me. Since becoming a member of the BHA ceremonies network, Michael Imison has charged the BHA rate, which differs from ours, we've discovered—though we can't confer about this. Since David, Sophie and I agreed that we must all charge the same fees and Michael couldn't commit himself to our terms, we regretfully had to part company.

Website—Nathan Nelson

I like numbers, so here are a few. In the last year, the SH&S website has had 15,436 visits, with 35,523 pages being read by people in 118 countries (including Sudan, Pakistan, Iran, Myanmar and China). Most people who found our website through search engines were looking for advice on funeral etiquette. 242 different websites also linked to us in the last year, including Humanist and other secular organisations, and blogs. The SH&S website now has over 1,000 pages, articles and other pieces of content.

I promise to continue developing and improving www.suffolkhands.org.uk if you promise to continue supporting the site with your comments, articles and feedback.

The Treasurer's report and minutes of the 2008 AGM will be provided at the meeting.

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.



Dates for your diary

Meetings are from 7.30-10pm on the second Tuesday of every month in the lounge at Pinewood Community Hall, Laburnum Close, Ipswich, IP8 3SL.

The cost of our room hire has increased this year. We've relied on those who attend meetings to contribute raffle prizes and make donations in return for their refreshments, which has generally covered most of our expenses. We hope that members and guests will continue to attend with some coins in their pockets or purses.

If you need or can offer a lift, please get in touch.

Tuesday 14th April at Pinewood Hall—AGM. As well as all the usual stuff (electing a committee, reports on our activities over the past year), we'd like your suggestions about what we should do over the coming year. Do you have an area of expertise you could tell us about? Can you suggest a topic you'd like us to cover, or a guest speaker you'd like to invite? It's up to you what we do.

Saturday 25th April, noon—Pub lunch at The Seal, on the corner of Old Barrack Road and Ipswich Road, Woodbridge. If

you haven't been before, look for a copy of the newsletter on a table. We can't book tables at The Seal, so please phone 01473 658828 by 20th April if you plan to come so we can grab enough space for everyone.

Tuesday 12th May at Pinewood Hall—The BHA's role in contemporary Britain. Group member and British Humanist Association trustee Michael Imison will offer his ideas about the BHA's role in society, followed by another point of view from Margaret Nelson, then there'll be a discussion. What do you think about the suggestion that there should be a "Humanist Movement"? Should Humanists and Secularists try to replicate religious services? Should you be able to have legally-recognised Humanist weddings in England and Wales? What might we do to increase our membership? These are just some of the questions we might try to answer.

Meetings at Pinewood Hall will be on Tuesdays 9th June, 14th July, 11th August, 8th September, 13th October, 10th November, 8th December 2009, and 12th January, 9th February and 9th March 2010—details to be arranged.



The Daily Mail got it wrong

Any of our members and supporters who read the Daily Mail may have been alarmed by an article it published on Friday 20th March headed "How cash meant for promoting faith is going to an organisation that campaigns AGAINST Christianity". It referred to a grant given to the British Humanist Association by The Equality and Human Rights Commission. James Chapman, the Daily Mail journalist, could not have got his facts more wrong. The BHA is seeking a correction from the Mail, and has published its own corrections on its website (www.humanism.org.uk/news/view/250). Since then, the story on the Mail's website has disappeared.

There is a report about one of the events that the money was used for on our website. If you're not online and would like a printed copy, please phone 01473 658828.

www.suffolkhands.org.uk