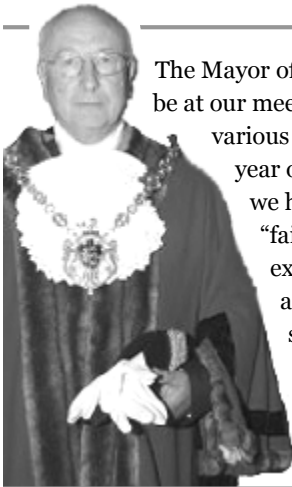


# Suffolk Humanists & Secularists

...for a good life, without religion



**NEWS** April 2010



The Mayor of Ipswich, Cllr David Goldsmith, will be at our meeting next week. He's been visiting various faith groups in the town during his year of office, and now it's our turn. Yes, we have told him that we're not a "faith". It will be an opportunity to explain who we are and what we do and to stress the importance of secularism in local government. The Mayor will be with us from 7.30-8.30pm. After he leaves, we'll begin our AGM.

## Read any good books lately?

Only about eight people turned out for our January meeting to share their book recommendations, thanks to the winter weather, but they enjoyed a lively meeting. Here are some of the books they discussed:

Sue Hewlett recommended *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, which is "enlightening about traditional village life in Nigeria, its systems, beliefs and customs that were totally unrespected by very many missionaries. It's a personal choice as this book resonated with much of my early experience in rural Ghana." Sue also chose *The Story Giant* by Brian Patten: "Quite simply a lovely book, beautiful use of language, compelling and great for a one day read."

John Mellis chose *Tau Zero* by Poul Anderson. He says, "*Tau Zero* is—apparently—a well-known 'classic' sci-fi novel written in 1970 by its American/Scandinavian author. Set in an indeterminate future when the world government is based in Stockholm, it charts the voyage of a spacecraft—the Leonora

Christine—which is dispatched with a crew of men and women to reach a distant planet identified as suitable for colonisation. They are scheduled to accelerate to close to the speed of light (Tau is essentially the difference between an object's velocity and the speed of light) but the ship basically suffers a combination of brake failure and a jammed accelerator. (Yes, we made all the Toyota jokes.) As the ship travels ever closer to light-speed, the time dilation effects mean that time as experienced on ship is dramatically slower relative to outside, so that a day of ship's time soon becomes equivalent to hundreds, then thousands, then millions of years back on Earth. The novel (to this point) is true to proven physics and combines scientific accuracy with an interesting story around the psychological effects on the crew and their personal relationships—nicely done. There is a Wikipedia article ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tau\\_Zero](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tau_Zero)) but beware—it gives away the ending! Better to read the novel—only about 200 pages."

Denis Johnston says, "I really enjoyed Simon Singh's *The Code Book*—from how the Romans cracked codes through the cracking of Enigma to an incredibly lucid explanation of how Public Key algorithms work. *The Soul of New Machine* by Tracy Kidder is all about a team of engineers designing a new computer—despite the company management rather than because of it! At a time when I was doing a similar kind of job.

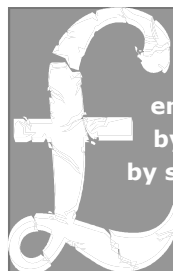
**"Give me a bed and a book and I am happy"**

**Logan Pearsall Smith**

The sentiments of the book, "They don't work for the money", were exactly those that I and others in the team were experiencing at the time. It just resonated with me."

The notes I have from other readers are brief. Colleen Nunn chose Rachel Carson's hugely influential book, *Silent Spring*,

*(Continued on page 2)*



If you don't pay your subscription by standing order, it's due now—see enclosed form. You can pay by cheque by post or at a meeting. If you do pay by standing order, have you updated it?

Our annual subscription is now a modest £10.



Fifteen (two are missing from this picture) assorted Humanists and guests enjoyed a convivial meal at The Seal in Woodbridge on Saturday 3rd April.

## Recommended reading

(Continued from page 1)

published in 1962, which helped to launch the environment movement. Carson detailed the effect of pesticides (used prolifically at that time) on wildlife and the environment, particularly on birds.

Peter Davidson chose *The Pleasure of Finding Things Out* by Richard Feynman, a Nobel laureate who's been described as "One of the world's greatest theoretical physicists", and *The Meaning of Everything: The Story of the Oxford English Dictionary*, by Simon Winchester.

Andrew Morrison recommended *Songs of Distant Earth* by Arthur C Clarke, a science fiction novel described as "a poignant and vivid story of doomsday and beyond".

Marie Haworth's long list of favourite books included Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible*, about an American Baptist missionary, Nathan Price, who drags his family off to the Belgian Congo in 1959. Ill-prepared and ignorant, they soon find that nothing is as they expected and from then on, things can only get worse. Marie also mentioned *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* by John Boyne, an account of Hitler's Germany and the "Jewish problem" from the point of view of a nine-year-old boy who befriends a boy called Shmuel, initially oblivious to what's going on around them.

I wasn't able to get to the meeting but if I had, I'd have recommended *The Suspicions of Mr Whicher, or the Murder at Road Hill House* by Kate Summerscale, winner of the BBC4 Samuel Johnson Prize 2008. It's an account of a real life murder mystery in 1860 that provoked national hysteria, and the attempt by Jack Whicher of Scotland Yard, one of the first police detectives, to solve it. MN

## AGM Reports

### Secretary's Report—Denis Johnston

Membership currently stands at 69. This is much the same as in previous years and suggests that the increase in our membership fee (from £5 to £10) has not affected numbers. I would like to thank Louise for maintaining such a detailed membership list.

Margaret has continued to provide a newsletter. Although most (60 or so) of our members prefer to receive a printed version by post more than a 100 more are sent by e-mail to members who prefer it, to affiliated organisations, and to supporters in the UK and abroad. All members with e-mail addresses also receive the BHA bulletins.

I get the occasional inquiry about membership and ceremonies but most users go straight to the celebrants – probably because the necessary information is available on the website.

Meetings: monthly meetings have been held every second Tuesday of the month at Pinewood Hall (at 7.30 in the lounge). The change to Pinewood was necessary because there

were problems with reliable access to Castle Hill Community Centre. The meetings take many forms and have included invited speakers, brainstorming sessions, a 'book' event, and an 'ethical jury' event. Meetings usually finish before 10.00. We used to have a raffle to cover costs but we have changed this and each attendee is now asked to make a small donation. At present there are usually between ten and twenty regular attendees.

We have also held a number of informal lunchtime pub meetings usually at the Seal in Woodbridge and had a joint pub meeting with Cambridge Humanists in Bury St. Edmunds.

Executive Committee meetings were usually held every other month. These are now carried out over the Internet using Skype Conferencing facilities. This is a totally free service—if you already have broadband. Previously we had used a 'POTS' (Plain Old Telephone Service) tele-conference provider but the price of this increased substantially over the year. So after one or two false starts in which we tried to push Internet technology to the limit using Wi-Fi over SmartPhones we have now got a simple, reliable and free conferencing capability.

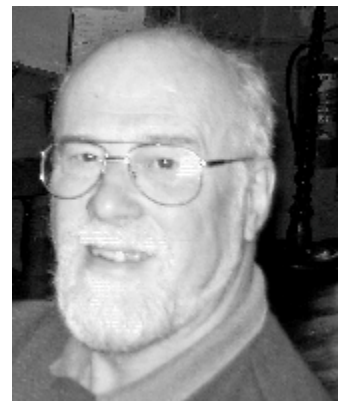
The Executive Committee consists of the Officers - Chair, Secretary and Treasurer - and two members. The current Chair (Margaret) has said that she wishes to stand down as Chair this year and our treasurer (Louise) has also indicated she will not stand this year. Both have served SHANDS diligently for many years and we are all grateful for what they have done and achieved.

The website. Congratulations to Nathan and Margaret it was voted "Website of the Year 2008" by the BHA "for extent of content and relentless blogging"! If you don't know how to access it just type "Suffolk Humanists" into Google.

PR has included a live discussion on the subject of teaching Intelligent Design in schools (Margaret) on BBC Radio Suffolk, and Andrew and I spent a day at Suffolk College during Fresher's week. We were not able to get a display cabinet for Humanist week 2009 but have booked one well in advance for 2010.

Thanks to a major donation from one of our members we were able to purchase and distribute copies of *Humanist Perspectives 2* from the BHA to all secondary schools in Suffolk, and the same donor has offered to fund the provision of car stickers—what they will contain is currently under discussion.

We remain active on Suffolk's SACRE and are affiliated to The British Humanist Association, the National Secular Society, and Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource. John Palmer, Andrew Morrison and Margaret have attended SIFRE Forums and I attended the BHA Group Representatives' annual meeting (GRAM).



## Webmaster's Report—Nathan Nelson

Believe it or not, the SH&S website in its current form has now been going for four years, while Suffolk Humanists and Secularists have now had a website in one shape or another since March 2001. In 2009 we were chuffed to receive the best regional website award from the BHA—in their words: "for blogging mercilessly; providing a content-rich, regularly-updated website".

Overall for the year to 31st March 2010, the website has still been busy but a little less so than the previous year, with visits down 11%. In the last year the website has had 10,570 visitors from 135 countries paying 13,767 visits and viewing 26,183 pages. Our top page, responsible for around 10% of all site visits, is on funeral etiquette (we're the number 3 search result for funeral etiquette on Google UK).

We've continued to update and upgrade the site, but there's always more to do. In 2010-11 I hope we can look at a more contemporary feel, better integration with social media, reviewing the presentation of some of our content, and improving user registration and commenting. Your contributions and feedback are very, very much appreciated.

## Chairperson's Report—Margaret Nelson

I founded Suffolk Humanists in 1991 with a small group of BHA members. Three of them—Madge and Ron Alston, and Marie Haworth—are still members. Since then I've been group secretary, with the exception of about three years in the chair. I think it's time that I handed over these responsibilities to other people, though I'll continue to try to make myself useful.

I'd like to thank everyone who's been so supportive, especially those who've helped me to get the newsletters out—collecting them from the printers, stuffing envelopes and sticking on labels and stamps.

It's very satisfying to know that the group continues to thrive and that we have new members who'll contribute their energy and ideas. In addition to our members, we have lots of supporters who follow our activities with interest—I email news updates to people all over the UK and abroad.

Those of us in the Ceremonies Team (David Mitchell, Sophie Lovejoy and I) continue to provide hundreds of ceremonies, mainly funerals, that have been attended by thousands. We're often told how much people appreciate our work. One of my most recent funerals was for Linn Barringer of Woodbridge, who used to post comments on our website. We'd been friends since I did his mum's funeral.

In December 2011 it will be our 20th anniversary. I hope we can celebrate with a "do" of some sort.

## Treasurer's Report—Louise Armstrong

This is my second and final report to you as treasurer as I am unable to continue for personal and health reasons. The accounting period for this report is 1st January to 31st December 2009. With generous donations and an increase in the annual membership subscription we end 2009 in a much more healthy financial position. It was agreed at last year's AGM that subs should be increased from £5 to £10 annually. If members wish to give more as a donation, that is of course more than acceptable.

More and more members sign up and pay their subscription and donations by standing order; this is by far the best method of payment until members change banks and forget to let us know!

Just a little reminder for those of you who don't pay by standing order that the annual subscription is due at the AGM. All cheques gratefully received.

I wish the Suffolk Humanists & Secularists group and its new treasurer best wishes for the future.

## Financial Statement at 31st March 2010 Period between 1/1/2009 and 31/12/2009

<b>INCOME</b>			
Opening balance		283.85	
Donation		840.40	
Membership + donations		797.00	
Raffle & collections		286.20	
Total other income		1,923.60	1,923.60
Total income		2,207.45	
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>			
NSS affiliation		29.00	
BHA affiliation		70.00	
SIFRE affiliation		25.00	
Annual subscription to G W Foote		15.00	
SAVO		5.00	
Secretary's admin costs		267.60	
Printing		53.22	
Room hire		381.00	
Telephone conference calls		115.69	
Books from the BHA		319.00	
Total expenditure		1,280.51	1,280.51
Balance at Co-operative Bank at 31/12/2009		926.94	

Note: G W Foote publishes The Freethinker.

SAVO is the Suffolk Association of voluntary Organisations. They publish a directory of local organisations.

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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 - note them now!

**Meetings are on the second Tuesday of every month from 7.30-10pm in the lounge at Pinewood Community Hall, Laburnum Close (signed to Pinewood Surgery), Ipswich, IP8 3SL, near the A12/A14 Copdock interchange and Copdock Tesco. The car park is at the end of the close on the right, after the surgery. For detailed directions, or to request or offer a lift, please get in touch.**

**Refreshments are provided. Members and guests are invited to make a small donation, to help pay for the room hire.**

**13th April**—From 7.30pm to 8.30pm, **the Mayor of Ipswich will be our guest** (see page 1). Please come and swell the numbers to demonstrate that we have a thriving group.

When the Mayor leaves, we'll have our AGM with the usual election for officers and committee members. The agenda and the minutes of the last AGM will be provided. We need a new Chairperson, a Treasurer, and at least one more committee member. Note that the committee usually meets by Skype conference call, avoiding the need for

anyone to leave home for a meeting, so you need a computer and a microphone and speakers or Skype headset to participate. Once you have everything, the calls won't cost you or the group anything.

The next monthly meetings after the AGM will be on 11th May, 8th June, 13th July, 10th August, 14th September, 12th October, 9th November and 14th December. Details will be announced when the new committee has met. Suggestions for activities very welcome.

### In Brief...

The process of parliamentary "wash-up", where bills are rushed through before Parliament is dissolved for a general election, has resulted in key elements of the Children, Schools & Families Bill being dropped. Commitments to provide Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) in all state-funded schools, and to include evolution in the primary science syllabus, have been

abandoned. Schools Secretary Ed Balls blames Shadow Schools Secretary Michael Gove for standing in the way of these and other aspects of the bill.

Our thanks to Michael Imison for directing the Ethical Jury at our last meeting. The dilemma we chose to discuss was about marital infidelity, and how it affected a friendship. The verdict was unanimous. Whether it helped, I can't say. *MN*

### An addition to our Ceremonies Team



Sue Hewlett, a retired teacher, is joining our Ceremonies Team. Living in Stutton, Sue is ideally placed to cover Ipswich and Colchester crematoria and the surrounding areas.

As I'm more or less retired, Sophie Lovejoy is only available for a limited number of ceremonies and David Mitchell is kept very busy, Sue will help us to ensure that we can continue to meet demand for our ceremonies, mainly funerals. We also do baby-naming and weddings. *MN*