

Suffolk Humanists and Secularists

Newsletter December 2017

No meeting in December - but we will "Meet the Quakers" in January

Next meeting on Tuesday January 9th "Meet the Quakers".

We won't meet in December as our usual venue, Arlington's is not available during the festive season so our next meeting will be on January 9th. Barbara Richardson-Todd of Ipswich Quakers will come along and tell us about their current thinking. The Quakers have a very radical tradition emphasising peace and social justice above 'religiosity' and today happily embrace a wide range of beliefs from Christian evangelical to 'non-theistic'. 7:30 on 9th January in the Darwin Room upstairs at Arlington's Brasserie, Museum St, Ipswich.

United Nations Association Celebration

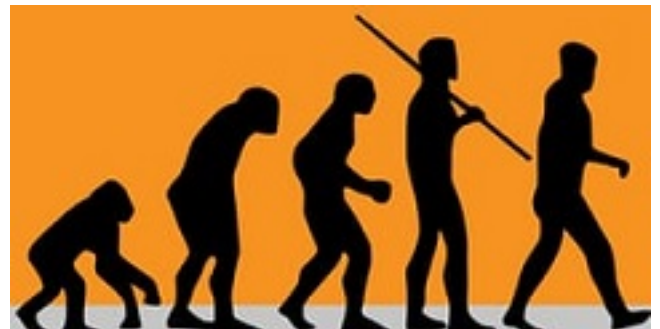
This was on 8th December and was hosted by the Ipswich Unitarians at their Meeting House. John Mellis gave our contribution. This year's theme was Article 1.- 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.' . Observing that this was pretty good definition of humanism John said that for him it was the third part about acting toward each other in the spirit of brotherhood that was the most important as it encapsulated the 'Golden Rule' from which all else followed.

Those present were mainly representative of the smaller religious groups or charities. Unfortunately the Mayor of Ipswich was unwell and unable to be present but a very welcome attendee was Sandy Martin the MP for Ipswich. I have been attending these events for at least six years now and I think that this is the first time a local MP has been present.

"Speaking Darwinian".

Our November meeting was a talk by George Bethell with the title "Speaking Darwinian". George first presented us with examples of recordings taken from popular television programmes and asked to listen carefully to how evolution was described. These included presentations by such luminaries as Richard Attenborough. He then examined the language that was used and showed that it often totally misrepresented the evolutionary process. For example it was common to see phrases such as "...the fish evolved in order to..." suggesting that the evolutionary process was something determined by the fish or directed in some way.

He then showed that the same misunderstanding was also evident in a number of images such as the following.



He explained that problem with these is that there is an implied 'progress' or 'improvement' as if evolution was something that caused things to happen which is not the case. Evolution is a consequence of adaptation, not the driver. The talk opened up a perspective on evolution and how to communicate it accurately in a way that many of us had not appreciated before: "Speaking Darwinian" was far from easy! A few days after his talk George came this across an article in the Boston explaining the same issue and may

be of interest:

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2012/10/27/what-our-most-famous-evolutionary-cartoon-gets-wrong/drKMD5121W6EUxXJ4pF0YL/story.html>

Denis Johnston

Humanism in Schools

At the end of November I attended a Humanist UK event in London which combined the annual schools speakers event with the SACRE representatives meeting. SACRE stands for Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education and it is a legal requirement that every Local Authority has one. It has several functions, including one that requires it to oversee Religious Education(RE) in schools including checking that schools are complying with the 1944 Education Act. In practice, SACREs have almost no resources or funding and their role is limited to determining the syllabus for RE. What has happened of late is that because academies are no longer under LEA control the farcical situation has arisen where the SACREs are legally required to do their work providing an RE syllabus etc. but there are few schools left under LEA control to use them. At the same time individual academies and free schools are buying "off the shelf" syllabuses from commercial organisations - often at high cost and from dubious suppliers - because they provide a package including lesson plans.

What was very encouraging is that the number of humanist speakers being invited into schools has grown substantially over the past year. It might be a coincidence but this month we have been invited into four different schools - which is more than I can recall having in previous years.

The main speaker for the day was Alan Brine from the Commission on RE. This organisation has just released an interim report entitled "Religious Education for All" which covers what it refers to as "the perilous state" of RE in UK schools today. It also points to some very obvious solutions. You can download it from: <http://www.commissiononre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Commission-on-Religious-Education-Interim-Report-2017.pdf>. Well worth a read.

Denis Johnston

Programme for 2018

Next year we propose to continue our lunchtime meetings on the last Saturday of the month and also have a provisional programme for 2018 which is shown below.

Note: there will be no lunchtime meeting on December 30th 2017.

Future meetings - dates for your diary

9th January : Meet the Quakers.

February 13th : Darwin Dinner

March 13th: Thomas Paine speaker and visit

8th April: The Margaret Atwood trilogy "Oryx and Crake"

May 8th: Bertrand Russell

June 12th: Artificial Intelligence

July 10th: BHA or NSS presentation

August 14 AGM and barbecue

Sept 11 The ethics of being a vegan

Nov 13th War poetry

In the meantime to all our readers have a good Holiday/Christmas/Hannukka/Bodhi day/Saturnalia/Yule/Dongzhi (delete as appropriate).

and a Happy New Year.

Suffolk Humanists & Secularists

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