

Suffolk Humanists Monthly Bulletin

July 2021

Meetings update

As before this news bulletin is fairly brief. We had hoped to have some sort of meet-up event this month and had pencilled in July 13th but with ongoing restrictions that clearly cannot happen.

Possibly we can do something in August but despite the government's current upbeat attitude I don't see it as being a responsible move before the Covid infection numbers have fallen dramatically.

Collective worship in schools – an opportunity for change

The law currently requires every school in England to provide daily collective worship and every child up to the age of 16 must take part unless formally withdrawn by parents. Over the age of 16 (sixth form) the law requires that schools provide the opportunity for collective worship but there is no legal requirement for students to attend.

The law also requires that collective worship be of a 'broadly Christian character'.

In practice few schools (even before Covid) adhere strictly to these requirements. Many do not have the space to allow assemblies every day and the 'broadly Christian character' is rarely observed.

There is (or rather was) an option for schools to opt out of the requirement by applying for a 'determination' from the Local Authority. This would be the case if a headteacher was able to show that broadly Christian acts of worship were inappropriate to the family backgrounds, ages or aptitudes of the pupils.

However with academisation where schools are beholden to the Secretary of State for Education this route is no longer available – only three Suffolk secondary schools are not academies.

As long ago as 2004 the head of Ofsted announced that it would no longer inspect the provision of Collective Worship and stated that 76% of secondary schools were not compliant with the law.

Since then there have been on/off attempts to revise the law but nothing has changed.

There is however a (very) slight glimmer of hope as the Educational (Assemblies) Private Members Bill was submitted in the the House of Lords in May. There is detail at <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2579>

If passed by the House of Lords it would of course still need to get through the House of Commons. Watch this space

AGM

We held our AGM over Zoom in April. Below is a summary.

Chair's report

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Needless to say this has been a year (or rather 18 months) unlike any other and since February 2020

our activities have ground to a halt due to Covid19.

Up to the first lockdown we had managed regular monthly meetings and numbers, although always

a bit erratic, did seem to be growing. Indeed we were speculating that we would need to find a bigger place to meet. Regular monthly News Bulletins were going out and thanks to George Bethell, a three monthly News Letter was also being produced. The number of invitations to visit schools was increasing and there were plans in place to attract new members.

After many (nearly 20) years of managing our website Nathan Nelson has moved to Norfolk and closed down his hosting service. So thank

you to Nathan for all his work over the years. We now have a new website with all the blogs and articles, especially those written by Margaret Nelson over many years are now indexed and provide not just an historical record but a useful resource.

The situation at the moment remains uncertain but hopefully we can have some events during the summer.

Finally on their standing down from the committee I would like to thank John and George for all their help and support.

Election of committee.

There were no new offers to join the committee and with the exception of John Mellis and George Mellis who had stood down the existing committee was re-elected. Mike Whybray was elected treasurer.

Motions

* As our bank balance is more than we need for the immediate future that £250 be donated to the Ugandan Humanists Schools Trust

* That £100 be donated to Humanists UK (in lieu of paying expenses for invited speaker) were passed.

Other news

Suffolk SACRE is planning to make a series of videos for use in RE lessons in schools. The idea is to identify several 'BIG QUESTIONS' and ask members of various, mainly religious, groups to give a 'talking heads' response. These will be age appropriate and ideally will be answered by young people. I know we have no very young members registered in Suffolk but I am sure we have children/grandchildren who might be willing to help. Please let me know if you have any potential stars who would be happy to contribute.

Finally

You possibly saw the widely televised celebration of the 70 years of the NHS involving royalty, a prime minister and people in big hats.

Less well publicised was the National Memorial event led by Humanists UK Chief Executive Andrew Copson last Saturday. This was organised by NHS England to remember NHS workers who died during the pandemic. The memorial was also dedicated to the tireless work of NHS staff in caring for the 400,000 Covid patients who have been hospitalised.

It took place in the Blossom Memorial Garden in Stratford, London and included readings, poetry, and personal reflections from Prerana Issar, Chief People Officer, NHS England and other senior NHS officials.

As a footnote: (from Wikipedia) Anuerin Bevan who established the NHS was a great humanist. Clement Attlee, Prime Minister at the time, when asked if he was an agnostic replied 'I don't know'.

Suffolk Humanists

23 Ipswich Road, Woodbridge, IP12 4BS
01394 383122
elisabeth.thompson90@gmail.com (secretary)

www:suffolkhumanists.org.uk
email: denisjohnston@btinternet.com (chair)
www.facebook.com/suffolkhands
Twitter (@suffolkhands)