



farnham HUMANISTS www.farnham-humanists.org.uk
covering W. Surrey and N.E. Hampshire.

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NEWSLETTER April 2011



Highlights since our last newsletter in October

Since our last newsletter of October 2010 our activities have included: our Annual debate on Electoral Reform, laying a Remembrance Day wreath at the Farnham War memorial, 'An Evening's Entertainment on a Humanist Theme' Christine Haywood, involvement with Resolution Revolution, a well attended annual dinner in January, our AGM, talks on 'British Humanism and How It Works' by Naomi Philips from the British Humanist Association (BHA), 'Police Chaplaincy' by Rev Jan Moore and support of the BHA Census campaign.

DETAILS OF OUR PAST EVENTS AND CURRENT ACTIVITIES

10 to 1 voted in favour of Electoral Reform at our public debate

"First past the post is the best method of electing our MPs" was the motion for our latest free public debate held annually in Farnham to discuss ethical, moral and current issues of common interest

Speaking twice for the motion, Mr Craig Rimmer, of the conservative Bow Group, gave two main reasons for keeping the current system (i) the intimacy of one MP representing a local community; and (ii) the clarity and accountability of a government to its election manifesto. Mr Rimmer emphasized the problems Austria, Denmark and Holland have also had with extreme parties in coalitions and how the current system delivers change when it is needed, e.g. in 1979.

Against the motion, Dr Simon Usherwood, Senior Politics lecturer at Surrey University, said that the last time a Government was voted in by the majority of the voters was 1935. Dr Ken Richie from the Electoral Reform Society (ERS), described how in 2005 Labour won with only 35% of the popular vote. With the current coalition, 60% of people voted for MPs who at least have a share in government. Currently seats are so safe that the ERS congratulated 70% of the candidates before the last election campaign had even begun.



Following contributions from the floor and a vote, debate chair Norma Corkish (Chair of Waverley Citizens Advice Bureau) announced that the motion had been passed by 77 to 8 (with 3 abstentions). A charity collection of £283.24 was split between UNICEF and Waverley Citizens Advice Bureau. A more detailed write up of the debate can be found on the Farnham Humanists website www.farnham-humanists.org.uk under **What's New?**

Revolution Resolution – Farnham Humanists on the radio and a fitness offer

In November the British Humanist Association launched a new and innovative twist on traditional New Year resolutions with resolutions to do good for others rather than just for ourselves e.g. instead of “giving up smoking” or “going on a diet” which arguably are just for us, we should go for resolutions such as “sweep a neighbour's icy path”, “volunteer with a local charity”, or “carry an organ donor card”. Of course we in fact gain as well, as we feel better about ourselves because we know we're helping others.

Following a request by Sarah Gorrell, a presenter with BBC Surrey Radio, Jennie Johnson was interviewed live about the initiative in early December. Sarah couldn't have been more positive about the idea and Jennie managed to make some general references to humanism as well. Afterwards Sarah suggested that we did a daily slot for a week in January, with one person a day talking on her show about their altruistic New Year Resolution. This we did with Farnham Humanists Belinda Schwer and David Savage, a Disability Changers' supporter Anne Whatley and a local schoolgirl Izzy Englefield. The resolutions ranged from helping neighbours, a Swimathon for Marie Curie Cancer Care, collecting items for charity, offering fitness equipment for others to use, reading to younger school children, a triathlon in May for Disability Changers. David has now completed his swimathon and raised over £200 for Marie Curie!

Belinda's offer of making available fitness equipment for others to use is given below.



Belinda writes about her fitness offer:

“We live in Farnham and have got a garden building with a few bits of decent gym equipment – a running track, a rower, a bike, a bench etc – and there's also a loo in there and somewhere to park, outside.

I'd be delighted if people who are at least associated with the Farnham Humanists in some way or another, would like to come and use the equipment for no cost, other than a contribution for the heating and hot water.

I mention the Humanists link not because I only want Humanists to get fit, of course, but because I can't think of any other obvious way of limiting the scheme, so that I don't have total strangers wandering in.

I thought it might be good for people recovering from a stroke, or a muscle wasting condition - or someone with a weight problem that means they don't feel comfortable about going to the gym. I'm sure that there are plenty of people who can't afford a gym membership, too.

The security is by way of a key pad lock on the door. The invitation is restricted to 9-5pm weekdays. All I need is a text or phone call or email to let me know someone's coming. Having it wholly to oneself could not be guaranteed. People will be using the equipment as if they were a friend or neighbour, and we use it too, so will be keeping an eye on its condition – but are not holding it out in any other way as being of any particular standard.

The telephone number of a personal trainer will be there, in case people want to get in touch with him, but no advice or tuition can be given, because we don't want to hold ourselves out as in any way offering anything for which we could be made liable. We've told our home insurers, who are ok about the scheme.”

Belinda hopes that many will take up her offer. If you are interested then please contact Belinda initially through David Savage Tel 01252 794021 David.savage44@btinternet.com

Naomi Phillips from the British Humanist Association and the Census Campaign

Following the AGM in February, Naomi Phillips, Head of Public Affairs for the British Humanist Association, gave a talk entitled 'British Humanism and How it Works'. Over the last 4 years the BHA has grown significantly in membership and staff. Together with supporting humanist ceremonies and education on humanism, campaigning and liaising with MPs for a more just and open society is a core function of the BHA. She gave particular reference to how various campaigns relate to the equality act and educational legislation.

With the Census only a month away, Naomi went on to focus on the BHA census campaign and the census form which included the question 'What is your religion?'. For a more accurate statistical count of non religious peoples, she said we should tick the first box 'no religion' and not write 'Humanism' under the 'Another' option. The BHA slogan, 'You're Not Religious For God's Sake Say No', was debated by members. Most felt that use of the "pun" was too antagonistic.

Naomi's talk inspired us to write letters to local newspapers explaining why non-religious people should tick the 'no religion' box and to put a banner over The Borough in Farnham. The banner strongly featured the Happy Humanist logo and Farnham Humanists. Farnham Town Council and



Surrey County Council agreed the banner. It had only been up two days when Farnham Town Council informed us they were going to take it down that evening. Someone, probably a Councillor or a member of the

Council staff, asked if such a banner was appropriate. They contacted the Census Campaign office and concluded that the banner must be removed immediately. Following discussions between the Town Clerk, Farnham Humanists and the Census Campaign Office we found that there was absolutely no reason to remove the banner. It stayed up. The actions of Farnham Town Council are worrying.

[Talk on Police Chaplaincy](#)

In March Rev. Jan Moore gave us a talk about her role as Chaplain/Faith Coordinator for Surrey Police. Just over 2 years ago, an 18 month pilot scheme was set up funded, including Jan's salary, 50% by the Diocese but also 50% public money. The role of the chaplaincy is to provide support to officers and staff who have a problem and to provide training and information about different religions in the community. She has organised a network of 21 volunteer religious chaplains of various faiths. A survey of Surrey police officers and staff, 30 June 2010, found 30% 'religion not known' and 20% 'none'. Farnham Humanist Alec Leggatt, after months of talks is the one and only non-religious volunteer but he is only an Associate Chaplain. Jan's belief that chaplains should be religious was strongly challenged. Jan's reflections on the evening received by e-mail 2 days later indicated that she had also learnt much from us.

[General Election Hustings](#)

We have offered to hold the hustings at the next General Election. Jeremy Hunt MP agreed that we should seek to hold a joint event with Churches Together. We wrote to Churches Together in January suggesting that we meet to discuss this proposal. To date, despite prompting, they have not had the courtesy to reply. We will continue to pursue the proposal.

[New University of the Third Age course 'Humanism'](#)

Beginning next February it is now confirmed that Farnham Humanists will be running the first U3A course in the country on humanism. The leader will be Jim Herrick -- author of books on humanism. He will be supported by other Farnham Humanists. The course will run for six weeks from 14 February 2012. Each session will last two hours and cover two major topics. There will be plenty of opportunities for questions and discussion. Some of the moral issues of the day will certainly arise.

A provisional list of topics includes: What is humanism?; humanism in the past; humanism and God; moral behaviour; the role of science and the arts; international humanism; the meaning of life and a fulfilled life.

This new course is open to all and is not about making conversions -- but rather to provide the opportunity to learn what humanism is and to discuss its ideas in depth. Tell your friends about it!

Local Development

The Surrey County Council's External Equalities Advisory Group consists of people representing disabled, old, young, gay, transsexual, BME, religious and humanist people. It advises the Council on equality and diversity issues. The Council recently announced service cuts without first consulting with affected vulnerable groups. The Advisory Committee objected to the Council who will improve its consultation in future. Over the next period each committee member, including humanists, will present information about itself to the Council equalities and corporate policy staff. This will be an opportunity to improve their understanding of humanism.

Surrey County Council are considering withdrawing free school transport to sectarian ('faith') schools. The Churches have launched a campaign to keep this discriminatory practice. Our members have responded to the consultation supporting removing this subsidy.

OUR COMMITTEE

At our AGM we voted in our committee for the year. To help remember names and faces - this is who we are and roughly the activities we are especially involved in:

Chair: David Savage (BHA Trustee, SEEFF, Surrey County Council, Hustings)



Secretary: Sue Shaw



Treasurer: Mike Adams
(Education Liason Officer)



Vice chair: Jennie Johnson
(Website, SACRE)



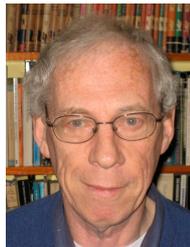
Vice vice chair: Belinda Schwer (covering Jennie's sailing absences)



Member: Alec Leggatt
(Celebrant, Police Chaplain, Waverley Borough Council)



Member: Jim Herrick
(Author on Humanism, U3A course)



Member: Roy Weedon
(Celebrancy training)



Member: Alan Montgomery
(School talks) (no photo)

FUTURE EVENTS

- **May 22** Sunday 7.30pm 'Skeptics in the Pub movement, Winchester Skeptics' James Thomas
- **June 5** Sunday Walk and pub lunch – details to be arranged
- **June 26** Sunday 7.30pm An Ethical Jury run by Michael Imison
- **July 3 or 31** Garden party – venue TBC
- **July 17** Sunday 7.30pm 'The role of Defence in the 21st Century' Gerald Howarth MP
- **Sept 18** Sunday 7.30pm 'Conscientious Objection' Alan Howarth political philosopher
- **October 16** Sunday 7.30pm Prof Richard Norman 'Humanism and the arts'

[For a full future events programme - please see separate document & our website](http://www.farnham-humanists.org.uk/private/Events/current%20programme.pdf)
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SEEKING YOUR VIEWS ON A FARNHAM HUMANISTS 'TIMEBANK'...

Timebanking is a community development tool. It works by facilitating the exchange of skills and experience within a community. It aims value and reward the work done in the community of the family and the neighbourhood.

A Time Bank uses an alternative currency - time; not money. For every hour you spend helping someone else, you are entitled to an hour's help in return from another participant. Help can be in many forms - performing practical tasks, befriending someone, running errands, sharing food grown in the garden, etc. All manner of skill or effort is recognised, from walking with someone, to baking a cake. Helping someone with computer skills is worth the same as an hour spent keeping an isolated person company, walking a dog, or helping someone fill in a form. Other examples are clearance/de-cluttering, simple DIY, gardening, befriending, escorting to shops, admin, shopping, help with CVs, picking up prescriptions, chair based exercises, organising a poetry group, workshops etc.

Time Banks often involve people who would not normally volunteer - a housebound elderly person, who still has sewing skills for instance. **In the system that is being considered, even a person who was already caring for a relative and who had no spare time at all, could benefit, because this special Humanist-flavoured Timebank would credit carers with 3 hours a week, in recognition that their care is contributing not just to their relative's well-being, but to society's as well.** And any actually contributing member could volunteer to waive the hours due back to them, for the good of people in the group who can't feasibly manage to put hours in. Carers who *could* positively contribute by (for example) making regular phone calls to befriend someone in a similar situation, could bank such hours in the normal way in their own 'account'.

These transactions are done via a co-ordinator / broker who keeps all the accounts and matches people who want help, with someone who can help them. When the task is complete, the accounts will have a record of the number of hours traded by each person. There is software to assist doing this part of the administration.

A good scheme will develop about 200 members - and of course they would not all be humanists! Farnham Humanists would simply be running the scheme, which would raise the profile of the organisation in the local community anyway. Referrals could be encouraged from churches, schools (16 years old and above), GP practices, social care service providers, social services support brokers and independent support groups. Organisations and community groups could also be members of a Time Bank. They can use Time Banks to trade skills, expertise, and additional hours of volunteer help when needed.

Strengthening civic society and building stronger communities is what time banking has been about for over a decade in the UK where there are 195 time banks and new ones emerging. Timebanks alleviate isolation. As people start to help and get to know their neighbours, they rebuild a sense of trust, and start to feel that they are part of a community/neighbourhood again - they rebuild community wealth, and health. There is evidence that it is therefore good for people's mental and physical health and well-being.

The link with humanism is that a Timebank allows people of different ages, cultures, backgrounds and abilities to interact with each other on an equal footing and with mutual respect and understanding.

Please give the Committee your views.