

# farnham HUMANISTS

covering W. Surrey and N.E. Hampshire.

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## NEWSLETTER 15 – December 2008

Since our July newsletter we have discussed "A Humanist's attitude to the Church"; visited the Hindhead Tunnel excavations, enjoyed an illuminating talk on Quaker Beliefs by Michael Gittins and held a public debate on Nuclear Power (more below).

We have a full and varied programme set out for 2009 (see at the bottom of the newsletter) starting off with a discussion on adoption - reality and practice on Sunday 14th December, our annual dinner on Sunday January 25th and a talk by Andrew Copson BHA Education Officer at our AGM on February 22nd.

We are continuing with our informal pub evenings at the Fox Inn, the first Wednesday in every month. If you haven't been along yet why not join us at our next one on Wednesday January 7th at 8pm.

Other current and recent activities are updated as follows:

- **Annual Debate** – This year's debate on the motion "Britain needs nuclear power" on October 31st was highly stimulating and several of us found ourselves voting differently to how we expected. Malcolm Wicks MP, former Minister for Energy and Jean Llewellyn, Chief Executive of the National Academy for Skills (including Chair of the Nuclear Skills Advisory Group) spoke for the motion; and against the motion Nathan Argent Greenpeace spokesperson for nuclear issues and Antony Froggatt Independent Consultant on EU energy policy. Former Mayor of Farnham, Carole Cockburn, chaired the lively contributions from the floor. The motion was narrowly lost by one vote. Around £300 was raised shared between Oxfam and Disability Challengers.
- **Local Development** – The BHA are concerned about a lack of representation at local level for non-religious people which means that, unlike religious people who can be consulted through recognised methods of communication, non-religious people's needs and views can be excluded from decision making bodies.
  - Spurred on by this, Farnham Humanists are now included in Surrey County Council's Equality and Diversity contacts list.
  - David Savage and Jennie Johnson attended the South East South East England Faiths Forum event on 26th November as the only Humanists present out of a 100 or so present. It appeared that a Government objective was to use interfaith groups to encourage local authorities to cooperate with faith groups to provide 'welfare services'. David highlighted that the role of the non-religious to provide such services should be fully recognised.
  - Through communication with Monica Wambu, Surrey County Council senior manager for equality, and Councillor Helyn Clack, Executive Member for Safer and Stronger Communities, David and Jennie also attended a Surrey County Council exploratory meeting on Monday 8 December 2008 to consider the possible membership of an external equality group and to discuss how such a group might work. The meeting was chaired by County Councillor Denise Saliagopoulos, Executive Member for Policy and Performance, who has equality and diversity within her remit. Council provided services and means of consultation will be discussed at the next meeting in January.
- **Conferences** – David Savage and Jennie Johnson attended the local Humanist groups annual meeting known as GRAM on 15th November. The agenda covered Humanist Schools in Uganda, recruitment of new members and Hanne Stinson detailing BHA current objectives. Updates were provided on the Science Group, Local Group Support and the Humanism Promotion and Marketing Group. The extended buffet lunch provided

good opportunities to network with people from other groups from across the country. A group of Farnham Humanists attended the National Secular Society AGM on 29th November and treated themselves to a meal afterwards.

- **SACRE** – Jim Herrick attended a meeting of the Surrey Standing Advisory Council for RE in November. It was agreed that the next SACRE meeting on 3rd February would start with a presentation by a few Humanists of what it means to be a Humanist in Surrey today. Any comments for inclusion please contact Jennie Johnson [jennie.johnson@virgin.net](mailto:jennie.johnson@virgin.net) or Jim Herrick [Jim1herrick@aol.com](mailto:Jim1herrick@aol.com)
- **Humanist Chaplaincy support** - After some years of very slow progress, David Savage and Alec Leggatt met the C of E Chaplain of Send Woman's' Prison for a friendly and constructive meeting about establishing a non-religious chaplaincy role. We will develop this role, providing the prison with Humanist books, leaflets and attending the Prison's regular 'Faith Fairs', as well as visiting individual prisoners when requested. As far as we are aware this is the first time there has been an agreement to establish a non-religious chaplaincy role in prisons in England.
- **Ceremonies** - Alec Leggatt and Barbara Burfoot continue to provide officiant support for Funerals, Weddings and Baby Namings. Apart from providing a social service BHA officiants gain a great sense of fulfilment when the many unsolicited compliments arrive, especially from the bereaved family. If you would consider training as an officiant, talk to Alec or Barbara or go to the BHA website.
- **Articles/Letters in the press** – A write up of the debate produced by Farnham Humanists was published in the Herald and the Surrey and Hants Post Gazette which was accompanied by an excellent photo of the speakers in front of our banner.
- **Remembrance day** – Sunday 9th November 2008 – As for the past two years, members from Farnham Humanists attended the 11:00 ceremony at the Farnham Memorial and laid a wreath. A warming coffee was very welcome afterwards.
- **Contact with other Humanist Groups** – Several Farnham Humanists participated in South Hampshire Humanists' lively debate on 30th November on "Christianity – A force for Good?" with main speakers are Richard Harries, former Bishop of Oxford, and Julian Baggini, Philosopher and Humanist.

## Programme for 2009

Except for the December 14th 2008 meeting, we are now meeting at the Café Rouge, The Borough, Farnham on a Sunday evening at 7.30

The programme for our Sunday meetings is:-

December 14th 2008 Adoption: Reality and practice: Joe Ansah. NB the location for this meeting only is at the kind invitation of the Society of Friends at the Quakers Meeting House, 36 Tilford Road, Farnham GU9 8DL

January 25th 2009 Annual Dinner (at The Lobster Pot, Hale.)

February 22nd AGM. + Andrew Copson, BHA Education Officer.

March 15th. Censorship : Jim Herrick

April 19th. Infinity: Alec Leggatt

May 17th. Erasmus Darwin: Desmond King-Hele.

June 14th. Why humanists should not believe in representative democracy: Jane Cullen.

July 12th. The Sea of Faith: Barbara Burfoot

September 13th. Humanist Ceremonies: Barbara Burfoot, Jim Herrick & Alec Leggatt.

October 11th. Construction Projects and the Hindhead Tunnel: Alec Leggatt.

November 8th Wreath laying at the Remembrance Ceremony at the Farnham Memorial

November 15th. Prison Chaplaincy: speaker to be confirmed.

December 13th. Faith-based Schools: Canon Derek Holbird, Director of Education Diocese of Guildford

We shall as well organise our annual debate for Autumn 2009 (motion to be determined), some rambles and a garden party in the summer.

And don't forget our informal pub evenings on the first Wednesday of every month at the Fox Inn, 21, Frensham Road, Lower Bourne, Farnham starting at 8:00pm.