



## Newsletter October 2013

### Our August Garden Party at John and Ruth's



A big 'thank you' to Ruth and John du Prey who hosted our garden party on 18 August. The weather

was perfect though a few black clouds threatened. They had mowed the lawn, gathered tables and chairs under a gazebo and greeted us all with a big glass of Pimms. There must have been about 25 of us at least, everyone brought the most delicious selection of food and Ruth's table was laden with tasty temptations. The afternoon was relaxed, conversation flowed, and I'm sure you all enjoyed the time as much as I did.  
*[Sue Shaw]*

### Sunday Meetings

**April 2013**

#### 'Judaism- a personal view' Peter Susman



Peter Susman, a QC, gave a talk on Judaism. He explained how the Jewish rituals and community serve to nourish his identity. Surprisingly, his synagogue saw no problem in his inclusion despite his declared atheism. Much of Peter's talk was in the form of jokes, often on how rabbis found ways to circumvent angular rules. Most interesting were his descriptions of the Hasidim Jews in Israel, the Hebrew language and how the meanings of "biblical" statements are subtly different when read in Hebrew, particularly relating to the story of Abraham and Isaac. We appreciated the insight into how a religious culture can enhance a life without inhibiting freedom of thought. *[John de Prey]*

**May 2013**

**'Equality and Diversity in the Police' - Mick Day, Diversity Manager, Surrey Police**



On Sunday 19th of May, we enjoyed a presentation by Mick Day, Diversity Manager, Surrey Police, called "Equality and Diversity in the Police". Mick explained that legislation, enforced compliance and training alone cannot bring about respect for human rights, sex, ethnicity, religions and disabilities; it can only come from a change in attitude. A problem is that, for Police posts, some ethnic groups only produce less educated applicants who experience little progression and retention. We were interested to learn that women Police officers on the beat tend to diffuse tense confrontational situations. He openly and frankly fielded questions from the floor on corruption, Police use of firearms, the recovery of stolen goods and the "Abrahamic Faith" bias in chaplaincy. He pointed out the paid Anglican Chaplain to the Police simply comes about for budgetary reasons. Such was the appreciation, his "45 minute talk" lasted one hour and a half. *[John de Prey]*

**June 2013**

**'Gay and Civil Partnerships' Caroline Bowlby, lecturer in family law**

Caroline Bowlby, lecturer at Westminster University and lawyer specialising in family and marital law, gave a talk titled "Gay and Civil Partnerships". She said in Common Law "marriage" is between one man and one woman for procreation and to prevent fornication. It was largely defined in terms of sexuality and thus makes same sex relationships institutionally unequal. The current "Civil Partnership" effectively describes Gay partnerships as different but equal.



The solution, Caroline suggested, is not to redefine or abolish marriage, but that Civil Partnership should exclude consideration of sexual acts such as consummation and adultery, and should be for everyone. This secular Civil Partnership should be available to all as the primary recognition of a relationship, as is current in France. A couple can then have a religious marriage ceremony later if they wish.

Responding to the question whether children raised by a same sex partnership might be deprived of their innate need for a mother as well as a father, Caroline pointed out the large proportion of single parent families today, and how a same sex couple can provide interaction for their child with both sexes outside the nuclear family. *[John de Prey]*

**July 2013**

**'Better morals without God?' - discussion led by David Savage**

David started his talk by posing the question "Are humanists just like religious people except for their lack of belief in the Gods and the supernatural? Are we just 'Good without God'?" He went on to ask if the decline in religious belief is being driven in part by people adopting better moral values? He argued that there are a number of areas where moral perspectives are different, including leadership role of women, homosexuality and same



sex marriage, voluntary euthanasia, IVF treatment and stem cell research, genital mutilation, use of condoms, birth control and alcohol. Whereas Humanists have one moral relationship, namely that with other people based on human experience and rational thought, religious people also have a moral relationship with their God(s). This is based on sacred texts and pronouncements of religious authorities e.g. popes and ayatollahs. A lively debate followed David's challenge to traditional thinking on morality. *[Jennie Johnson]*

### **September 2013**

#### **Valued object/reading/piece of music shared with group - led by Sue Willson**



An odd assortment of objects, such as might be found in any antiques market, sat on a round table in the Hop Blossom. The owner of each explained why it is highly valued. For instance, we heard how an Edwardian police whistle led to the unlikely first meeting of grandparents, how a beautiful double set of patience cards was played by a little girl in a wartime air-raided shelter, how a bronze Buddha can prompt thought about the nature of religion, and how a beautiful statuette of the Madonna and Child can nourish the eye of an atheist, how the DIY modifications to a saucepan can evoke a father and family values, and a tiny piece of coal reminds us of the awful lives of mine workers in the past. We learned how an engineer's slide rule, compared with computer packages, reflects an alternative approach to design, how a folding bicycle can become a mainstay in a busy life, and how a delightful crafted pot can be a mute witness to a family's history. The event was conceived and sensitively orchestrated by Sue Wilson of Farnham Humanists on 15<sup>th</sup> September. *[John de Prey]*

### **Other events**

#### **June 2013**

#### **Summer walk and pub lunch organised by Roy Wheedon**

Thank you to Roy and Caroline for organising our summer walk in the lovely Tilford area earlier this month. The weather was fine and the Barley Mow food good, though the beer a bit expensive. *[Sue Shaw]*

### **September 2013**

#### **Visit to Darwin's House, Downe, in Kent, organised by Sue Shaw**



We were a small group of three visiting Charles Darwin's home at Downe in Kent, taking an attractive route through seemingly unchanged villages and small towns. Probably Darwin's home is already familiar to most Humanist members but if not it can be thoroughly recommended as a most rewarding day's outing on several levels.



The Heritage Trust has presented Darwin, his history and his home in an innovative manner to appeal to all ages and interests, visually, historically, and educationally, and we each came away having considerably increased our knowledge of his life, his achievements, his struggles, his humility and his phenomenal curiosity.

From the imaginative depiction of his family tree we became engrossed in his family members, and their occupations and variety of interests. We became acquainted with his wife, Emma, who was Catholic, and to whom he was devoted; that he had 10 children, suffering the most severe loss when his daughter, Anne, died aged 10. Seeing the comfort of the homely furnishings we could conclude that Darwin was a most loving and understanding husband and father. One room in the house is devoted to children, where two boys aged about 10 were playing with a very large chess set.

Upstairs in this beautiful house the hold in the Beagle had been recreated with an amazing lifelike digital image of Darwin aged 22, making notes in these cramped quarters. It was so real that it was quite astonishing when it suddenly disappeared.

We learnt also of Darwin's remarkable energy: he wrote literally thousands of letters despite frequent and considerable bouts of ill health; in his last years he conducted parish affairs in his dining room. We followed his daily walk through to his tropical greenhouse all the time marvelling at his patience and intellect.



This is a visit to be repeated as there was so much to be appreciated. *[Greta Thomas]*

## Book Club

The book club forges steadily ahead. Nothing spectacular, we haven't been booked to lecture at Hay-on-Wye or anything, but we continue to meet every six to eight weeks and talk about books we'd never have thought of reading otherwise - or even never known about.



Here we are at our October meeting when we talked about George MacDonald's "Lilith". Now there's a book that's different - a kind of Victorian journey of the mind. We may look relaxed, but we struggled to work out what he was getting at and we weren't as impressed as the blurb on the cover promised. But nevertheless it was intriguing to see how an author of his era put forward ideas of the human mind and its unconscious functions at a time when hardly anybody seemed to know much about it and would be thought batty if they talked

about it other than in riddles.

Do come if you fancy discussion that won't make a jot of difference to the world. On 26 November we meet to talk about "Chavs, the demonization of the working class" by Owen Jones. After that we're moving to fiction, probably about time, and the next meeting after November, early in the New Year, will be on Colm Tóibín's "The Testament of Mary".

Details and directions from me, Tony Newton, group coordinator 01483 428254  
email [christonynewton@mypostoffice.co.uk](mailto:christonynewton@mypostoffice.co.uk) *[Tony Newton]*

## Ceremonies and Community



Celebrant and Farnham Humanist Ailsa Davies tells us that “I have been appointed to the Mayor of Basingstoke’s Pastoral Team. This used to be called The Chaplaincy Team but after a chat with David Savage I suggested to the Mayor that he change the name which he did! Duties are not onerous; so far I have attended the Mayor-Making Ceremony, the Basingstoke Variety Show put on in aid of the Mayor’s charity appeal, and I have given the ‘Thought for the Day’ at the beginning of a Council Meeting. I am scheduled to do another TFTD and expect to be invited to the Remembrance Day ceremony. Actual ceremony work, mainly funerals and baby namings, continues and appears to be increasing slightly.”

### **Other news**

In March Sue Shaw set up a stand in the Farnham Library focusing on Humanist ceremonies and our group in Farnham. In October she will be back at the Farnham Library with a stand to promote our public, non-political, panel discussion evening on the NHS 'What's Happening to our Health Service' on Tuesday 12 November.

Farnham Humanists have been invited to address the AGM of Farnham Churches Together on our invitation to jointly host the next General Elections hustings meeting.

## Schools – invitations and offers of support

- Luke Shilling, Head of RE at Oakwood School Horley, has asked if Farnham Humanists could provide a Humanist speaker to debate “Is faith compatible with science?” with a Christian Speaker. A series of 12 debates, for year 8 and 11 children, is planned for March 2014. This topic is one of the core option units on the Surrey Agreed Syllabus. We will let you know how we get on.
- Our thanks to Sara Passmore at the BHA for passing on a request from Churcher’s College Petersfield. In January a speaker from Farnham Humanists will give an hour’s lecture to their students about “how in a pluralist society there is a need for a non-religious perspective on ethical and moral issues”.
- Farnham Humanists provided a Humanist/Secular stall at Godalming College’s September Fresher’s Fayre. Godalming former student and Southampton University Atheist member Jordan Milton kindly supported James Wallis and Jennie Johnson running the stall. In October Mike Adams, James and Jennie returned to the college and we enjoyed an hour sharing ideas with a group of lively, articulate and impressively knowledgeable students. It’s now up to the students to organise their meetings during the busy



Godalming College The Secular and Humanist Society

Stephen Fry  
"I am a lover of truth, a worshipper of freedom, a celebrant at the altar of language and purity and tolerance. That is my religion..."

Professor Brian Cox  
"Skepticism must go hand in hand with rationality. When theories are shown to be false, the correct thing to do is to move on!"

Some things to look forward to...  
• Debates & Discussions  
• Guest speakers  
• Trips  
• Book club

First Meeting 17<sup>th</sup> October  
Room 333, 12:15-1:15!

Cakes and Cookies included!

limited lunch period when societies such as Amnesty International, Gay Society and Philosophy also meet. Many thanks go to Tricia Wallis for facilitating the event.

- Sue Willson and Jennie have also written to two local secondary schools offering support to RE lessons and Assemblies. This has been followed up by a visit to Heath End School RE department to offer more detailed RE support.
- Lastly, Sue is using her experience of going into schools to provide an afternoon workshop for us in the next few weeks which will include consideration of the questions classes have asked her in the past. Please make contact with Sue ([suewillson62@btinternet.com](mailto:suewillson62@btinternet.com)) if you would be interested in coming along.

[Jennie Johnson]

## Events for your 2014 diaries - our 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year!!

- **Sunday January 26<sup>th</sup>** - 7 for 7:30pm - Annual Dinner
- **Sunday February 16<sup>th</sup>** 7:30pm - AGM & "Humanism in Education" Sara Passmore - Head of Education BHA - Hop Blossom Pub, Farnham GU9 7HX
- **Wednesday February 26<sup>th</sup> 7.00pm "How to Live Happily in a Deterministic Universe"**  
**Professor Jim Al-Khalili Physicist, Broadcaster and President British Humanist Association**  
Trinity Centre, 5 Trinity Churchyard, Guildford, GU1 3RR
- **Sunday March 16<sup>th</sup>** 7.30pm – "Tax Havens and the Revolt Against" John Christensen  
Democracy Director, Tax Justice Network Hop Blossom Pub, Farnham GU9 7HX
- **Sunday April 13<sup>th</sup>** 7.30pm – TBC Amy Walden - working with prisoners HMP Winchester
- **Sunday June 22<sup>nd</sup>** 3pm - 10th Anniversary Celebration Garden Party Farnham Museum

## Also for 2014 an international event based in the UK



### **World Humanist Congress 2014**

**Oxford, United Kingdom**

**8-10 August, 2014**

The World Humanist Congress, held every three years, is next year taking place in Oxford from 8-10th August. <http://whc2014.org.uk/>

It is being hosted by the British Humanist Association on behalf of the **International Humanist and Ethical Union** and will bring together humanists from over forty countries. It should be a fantastic event. **Several of our members** have thoroughly enjoyed previous World Congresses. Registration is open now.

The programme includes plenary sessions in the Sheldonian Theatre, and workshops, talks, panel discussions and a gala dinner with special guest speakers in the 19th century Oxford University Examination Schools. Over 35 speakers will be attending including Philip Pullman, Jim Al-Khalili, Peter Tatchell, Richard Dawkins, Kenan Malik and Simon Singh <http://whc2014.org.uk/speakers/>.