



**farnham HUMANISTS** [www.farnham-humanists.org.uk](http://www.farnham-humanists.org.uk)

covering W. Surrey and N.E. Hampshire.

- **Schools – Jim Herrick writes** "Recently I had the pleasure of giving a talk on Humanism to the pupils of Bedales School, which is a progressive, co-educational, and independent school set in the heart of the Hampshire countryside. The children call teachers by their Christian names but the atmosphere is orderly. As someone who hated sport at school, I was pleased to hear that they could do outdoor work on a nearby farm as an alternative to games.

My talk was to provide the basis of an evening assembly - being a boarding school they often programme an event in the early evening. The event started with a song sung by a young girl with an attractive voice. I **talked for twenty minutes and answered questions for ten minutes**—which was not really enough. **The youngsters responded very enthusiastically and came to ask me questions afterwards.** Apparently the event usually ends with handshaking among the 400 pupils and staff. I would have liked to have observed the psychological and social effect of this – but it was abandoned because of swine flu.

It pleased me to hear that **a well-known Christian was speaking on the following day. Such lively and approachable minds should be considering all views.** If you get the opportunity to talk about humanism at a school, remember it can be very enjoyable."

- **Religious Education (SACRE) – Jennie Johnson writes** "RE is the only subject that does not have a national curriculum. Each Local Education Authority has a Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) which is responsible for providing the RE syllabus for local community and voluntary controlled faith schools. The National Framework for RE is used for syllabus guidance **but it is non-statutory**. Voluntary aided faith schools are allowed to set their own RE syllabus.

The **National Framework for RE** and other recent education documents make much use of the term "**religion or belief**" spelling out that **this includes non-religious beliefs such as Humanism**. Despite this it can be very difficult to achieve Humanist representation on a SACRE. The Surrey SACRE have allowed Farnham Humanists to provide a Humanist representative since 2006, **but I am only a co-opted temporary member with no voting rights**, unlike the members representing local religions who have full membership status.

**In April** the Government issued **new draft guidance** on the teaching of RE. This states that **only representatives of religions can be full SACRE members** despite it stating in addition that "SACREs should also make sure that **their membership reflects, where possible, the breadth of study of religions and beliefs** referred to in the non-statutory National Framework for RE thus embodying a commitment to a RE which is inclusive, broad and balanced". Needless to say Farnham Humanists have been actively supporting the BHA's campaign to change this guidance to allow full Humanist membership.

My temporary membership of Surrey SACRE expired in February 2007 and I am awaiting the response to my request that this is resolved. It is also interesting to note that on at least one occasion recently Surrey SACRE would not have been quorate if it hadn't been for its Humanist! (but then was it really quorate?!)"

- **Local Development – David Savage writes** "As part of Farnham Humanists' aims to engage with our local community, reduce religious privilege and end discrimination of religion and belief, we have joined a number of groups. These are the **South East England Faith Forum (SEEFF)**, **Surrey County Council External Equalities Advisory Group** and **Waverley Borough Council's Faith Group**.

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**NEWSLETTER 16 – October 2009**



Since our April newsletter our various activities have included two local rambles with pub lunches, a stall at the Charities Fair in Gostrey Meadow (our cardboard Charles Darwin managed to stay standing despite the rain), fascinating talks on Erasmus Darwin, Infinity, Why humanists should not believe in representative democracy, Sea of Faith and Humanist ceremonies. Our mid Summer party was a great success kindly hosted by Meg Howson in her delightful English cottage garden with strawberries, croquet and many culinary delights provided by members

Our new venue for our monthly Sunday evening meetings – the Hop Blossom pub (Long Garden Walk, Farnham, Surrey, GU9 7HX) is proving to be popular. (We use an attractive separate room on the ground floor which is suitable for wheelchair access.) We are also continuing with our informal pub evenings at the Fox Inn Lower Bourne, Farnham GU10 3PH, the first Wednesday in every month.



Other current and recent activities are updated as follows:

- **Annual Debate November 2009** – We are debating the motion "Britain should become a secular state" on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> November at 8:00 at South Farnham School, Menin Way, Farnham GU9 8DY. The main speakers will be **Bishop Dr Chris Herbert former Bishop of St Albans** and **Lord Meghnad Desai Emeritus Professor of LSE, Honorary Associate of the National Secular Society**. Supporting them will be Dame Elizabeth Anson Retired Barrister and Carla Revere Barrister, Chair of the Lawyers Secular Society. Admission is free with a collection for Disability Changers and WaterAid at the end after the vote.

The Government have put considerable funding into SEEFF, partly to encourage the development of 'Faith Based Welfare', a scheme for religious organisations to provide public services. Religious organisations providing public services may be satisfactory if their governance, employment practices and actual provision do not discriminate based on religion or belief. We fear that such discrimination will occur. This fear exists because religious organisations have fought against a code ensuring these provisions. Farnham Humanists put a motion **to the SEEFF Board to say 'That SEEFF would not practice or promote discrimination based on religion or belief'. The Board rejected this motion.** They are now considering if it is appropriate to allow Farnham Humanists to be members of SEEFF. We await developments.

At our first meeting with Surrey County Council the church was pressing the Council to give greater priority to promoting faith. Indeed its draft equality papers continually stressed the importance of faith. **We argued** that the **Council's role was to promote equality and end discrimination reference to religion or belief** and that their **equality and diversity papers be rewritten to reflect this**. This was accepted and almost all their papers were changed accordingly. **The Council have also accepted and published, for internal use, the BHA guidelines for dealing with religion or belief issues.** The Council is trying to make progress but it is not always clear if the Council recognise that religious organisations often want to maintain and promote discrimination. Preventing discrimination in the governance, employment practices and actual provision of Council services provided by third parties will be an important area of attention. We will continue to work with the Council but advances will probably be small.

You may remember that a few years ago Surrey Heath Borough Council used public money to establish 'prayer points' throughout the Borough. One of our members complained and made the front page of their local newspaper. We aim to promote more sensible behaviour by Borough Councils. Waverley Borough

Council published a consultative equalities document which referred to its provision of a prayer room and, like Surrey, **talked of faith rather than ending religion and belief discrimination. We suggested to the Council that these things be changed; they accepted our suggestion and made the changes.** The Council has a faith consultative group. We asked to join it (having not been originally invited). We have been warmly accepted into the group and attended one meeting to date. **Again our main aims are to promote understanding between peoples of different religions and beliefs and end discrimination based on religion or belief. We will keep you informed of progress."**

- **Ceremonies** – Alec Leggatt and Barbara Burfoot continue to provide officiant support for Funerals, Weddings and Baby Namings. They together with Jim Herrick gave us a fascinating talk about their experiences (including several humorous anecdotes) in September.

**Alec Leggatt writes "Have you ever thought of becoming a humanist celebrant?** The work is rewarding in that you are helping people who are often in a distressed and bewildered state. The first meeting with the bereaved family can be full of surprises. Some of the humblest dwellings yield a richness of love and understanding. Sometimes the deceased has requested a fun funeral **so there is an enormous variety of approach to celebrating a life.**

You would be paid a fee (I charge £130 for a funeral and more is charged for weddings if you undertake those as well) but there is quite a lot of work. I suppose I spend about five to seven hours on a funeral including meeting(s) and composing and conducting the ceremony.

The BHA run **excellent training courses** over two weekends. It might take one or two ceremonies to build up confidence but you would have an experienced celebrant as mentor and supporter. If you would like to talk to me about this contact me on 01252 716725."

- **Website** – Further changes have been made to Farnham Humanists' website. Any comments for improvements or offers of help would be very welcome – please contact Jennie Johnson by e-mail: [jennie.johnson@virgin.net](mailto:jennie.johnson@virgin.net)
- **Further Education Talks** – Following a request from a tutor at Farnborough College of Technology to Farnham Humanists, Jim Herrick and Jennie Johnson will be talking about Humanism in November to students taking a counselling course. Specific topics will include where counselling fits in with belief and religion, death and bereavement, ethics and morality, freedom of choice.
- **Membership – Just a reminder that** at our AGM on February 22<sup>nd</sup> we decided to keep the membership at £10 per year with a voluntary £5 donation. Any membership fees/donations for 2009 can be sent to Mike Adams at 10 New House Farm Lane Wood Street Village Guildford GU3 3DD, cheques to be made payable to Farnham Humanists.

## Programme for 2009/2010

We meet **in the middle of each month on a Sunday evening at 7.30 at the Hop Blossom Pub**, Long Garden Walk, Farnham, Surrey, GU9 7HX just off Castle Street in Farnham. Enquiries to 01252 794021.

Also, **on the first Wednesday of every month at 8.00, we have an informal gathering at The Fox**, Lower Bourne, Farnham GU10 3PH. All are welcome at both events. Enquiries to 01252 794021.

**Our programme for next year includes:** annual dinner, ramble, paddle steamer trip, garden party, Christmas entertainment, together with talks given by invited speakers and group discussions on the following subjects: "What Humanism means to me", "What is lost and gained by being non-religious", "Moral maze", "Old age rational suicide", "Language – humans vs. other animals", "An introduction to Judaism", "International Humanism", "Bell's Inequality – an argument for the existence of God?"

See the separate full 2009-2010 programme for dates of each meeting which can also be found on the Farnham Humanist Website. Alternatively please make contact with

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