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NEWSLETTER October 2010

Highlights

Since our last newsletter of April 2010 our activities have included:

- a range of fascinating talks: Keith Haywood on **'Language. The Big Idea'**, Jo Huddleston on **'Whitehall Civil Servant - Yes Minister'**, Jim Herrick on **'International Humanism'**, Pari Dillon from Surrey County Council on **current council activities and local equality issues**, and Simon Johnson on **'Bell's Inequality – an argument for the existence of God?'**
- members exchanging views on **'What Humanism Means to Me'** and **'What is Lost and What is Gained by Being Non-religious?'**



- a delightful **May bluebell walk** with beautiful views around Dockenfield followed by a pub lunch, a sumptuous **July garden party** kindly hosted by Meg again in her lovely garden, and a joint trip in July with **Berkshire Humanists** to Tom Paine's house in Lewes



- running a stall at Farnham Carnival **promoting Organ Donation as well as Humanism**. The Organ Donor charity **'Live life, give life'** were very appreciative of our offer to share the stall.

[Our talks in more detail](#)

Keith & Christine Haywood 'Language – The Big Idea'

Our May meeting talk, by members of Farnham Humanists, Keith and Christine Haywood, was 'Language the Big Idea'. **Keith followed the evolution trail of language with interesting and amusing inserts from Christine**, including sounds of birds and strong body language - the power of pointing. Language, both body and vocal was and is a means of communication for survival. We learned that birds have no vocal chords. Vibrations in an organ called the syrinx, Greek for pan pipes, produce their delightful song. Maybe they too squawk sometimes! Also, adults have one common passage for food and air, a recipe for choking yet; newborn babies have vocal tracts resembling chimpanzees and are protected. Humans have developed exceptional verbal skills, our brains have grown, our knowledge increased and our ability to utilize the language of mathematics has taken us into the computer world. For further reading Keith recommended, 'Language the Basics' by R L Task.

Jo Huddleston 'Whitehall Civil Servant – Yes Minister'

In June Jo Huddleston gave a most '**Yes Minister**' **humoured talk** about his career in Whitehall. The trials and frustrations of bureaucracy, the demands of ministers, the pressures and deadlines for information and, of course, the games of politics. His quick mind and wit brought the inner wheels of politics to life for us.

Jim Herrick 'International Humanism'

Jim gave us a talk in September on International Humanism ranging from ancient Humanist values - Chabaka, Confucius, Ancient Greece and Rome to the modern world.

He described how in Western Europe today "there is a considerable difference between North and South. The northern countries have a Protestant confessional tradition. In these countries humanism concentrates on humanist values, education for all and humanism for all. Particularly strong in this tradition are Norway, Germany and the Netherlands. In the Catholic countries there is an anti-clerical tradition, a determination to sustain a separation between church and state, for what is called in France *laïcité*. In Eastern Europe, the Orthodox Church takes a similar role to the Catholic Church." Jim also spoke of Humanism in Russia, Australia and India. He concluded with two short quotes: "**My allegiance is to man. Locally to Nigerians, universally to humanity.**" Playwright Wole Soyinke. "**My country is the world and my religion is to do good.**" Thomas Paine. A full version of Jim's talk can be found on the website.

Simon Johnson 'Bell's Inequality – an argument for the existence of multiple universes?'

Simon explained how John Bell, a physicist from Northern Ireland, who was very troubled by the weird concepts behind quantum theory, came up with a rigorous logical argument that he thought could be used to test possibly the strangest aspect of quantum theory.

His argument was to do with a pair of photons of light travelling in opposite directions, each photon towards its own polarised filter which it may or may not pass through. Bell showed logically in 1964 that at least 1/3 of the photon pairs must give different results with a 30° difference between filters. But in the 1930s quantum physics had predicted that 1/4 of the photon pairs must give different results in this situation.

In 1998 the experiment was finally carried out and has been repeated many times since - Quantum theory's prediction was found to be exactly right and Bell's inequality was wrong.

Simon explained that this meant that either **(i) it is possible to travel faster than the speed of light, (ii) the universe isn't real, it's imaginary, (iii) multiple universes exist or (iv) God exists**. Simon included in his evidence **for favouring the multiple universe explanation**: the quantum computer, the anthropic principle and the **experiment which has been done showing that you can blow up a bomb in another universe** without blowing it up in our universe and therefore check that the bomb works before you use it!

[Other current and recent activities are updated as follows:](#)

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. It has published a draft equalities policy which now incorporates most of our own recommendations to reduce religion and belief discrimination. **This shows that we are having a positive influence**. More recently we have raised important human rights issues as the Council moves from directly providing adult social care to financing people to provide their own care. We remain vigilant to ensure that religious organisations do not practice discrimination if the Council contract with them to provide public services. At a recent meeting of the Waverley Borough Council Faith Forum, following a question from David Savage, the Forum struggled to define what they had accomplished in the past year! They are now formulating a scheme for identifying old (90+) people in the borough in case we get another "snow in".

General Election Hustings - We have offered to hold the hustings at the next General Election and met with Jeremy Hunt MP to discuss our proposals. He did not accept our offer saying that Churches Together had traditionally hosted them and he would not interfere with this. We argued that by always using only religious groups other non-religious groups were being denied the opportunity to enter this area of public activity. Mr Hunt said that he was not against our holding the hustings together with Churches Together. He has now confirmed this by e-mail.

Humanist Police Chaplain – Alec Leggatt writes **"I am now a Volunteer Chaplain" to Surrey Police** - and I have a badge to prove it! I was inducted along with seven others. It was a full day at Police HQ with an introduction talk by the Chief Constable. There was a lot of mention of "a period of considerable change" both recent and future. Attitude is more focused on understanding the origins of crime rather than catching criminals. (A monumental task!) The "Diversity" dept of the Force is therefore of increased importance and the chaplaincy is an important part of it. The role of the chaplaincy is both to provide a sort of **service to officers who have a problem** and to provide **an advice link with public attitudes** (e.g. the local vicar will know the mood of his flock).

Surrey chaplaincy really only started a year or so ago and is partly financed by the Diocese of Guildford. It has a salaried co-ordinator, Rev. Jan Moore, and so far 20 volunteers of which 7 are C of E, 2 are RC, 1 Jewish, 1 Methodist, 1 Baha'i, 1 Sikh, 1 Humanist, 1 Pentecostal, 1 Muslim, 1 Christian Scientist, 1 Buddhist and 2 of other Christian churches. The chaplaincy representation compares with the police statistics of
for Police Officers: Christian 40%, None 20%, Unknown 38% Other 2%
for Police Staff: Christian 46% None 24% Unknown 28% Other 3%."

Pastors road sense questioned -The Surrey Advertiser recently ran an uncritical article regarding an 'evangelical pastor' Gerald Coates who was featured praying with members of his flock on a bridge over the M25. The reason was **the pastor claimed there had been an increase in fatal road accidents in the area, caused by 'evil curses' having been recorded onto cassette tapes and strewn around the area**. Mike Adams responded with a letter published the following week, suggesting that our understanding of the causes of road casualty rates was far too serious a matter to be diverted by such nonsense and that a rational approach was needed instead.

[Talk to Farnborough U3A](#) - Following a request from Ivor Manley of Farnborough U3A, Jennie Johnson gave a talk titled “**The Humanist Viewpoint**” at an **all day Multi Faith Study event**. She addressed Humanist beliefs and, as requested, connections between Humanist institutions and religious ones. Other speakers were Shafiq Shahir from the Basingstoke Mosque on The Muslim Faith, Nabil Mustapha on The Baha’i Faith, Jane Clark on Judaism, Pandit Chandra Niraula from the Gurka Community in Farnborough on The Hindu Faith and Reverend Rachel Bennetts from the Church of the Good Shepherd on The Christian Faith. Jennie’s talk can be found on the website.

[Protest the Pope](#) - Seven members of Farnham Humanists took part in the Protest the Pope march against the State visit on 18 Sept. Meeting up at Waterloo station, we made our way to Hyde Park corner where the marchers assembled. It soon became apparent that the projected estimate of a few thousand turning up was vastly exceeded, with **a sea of more than twelve thousand good-natured participants setting off toward Trafalger Square**. We reached our destination in Whitehall after over an hour, having passed groups of Catholic 'pilgrims' heading in the opposite direction. The crowd was addressed by over a dozen excellent speakers, including Andrew Copson from the BHA, Terry Sanderson from the NSS, Richard Dawkins and perhaps most movingly Sue Cox from survivors of sexual abuse. The march achieved very significant media publicity and was by far the largest secular protest in the UK in over 100 years.

[Ceremonies Training](#) - Mike Adams writes - I have been undertaking training with the BHA to be a funeral celebrant. The formal training took place over three days, involving eight course members, together with two tutors who were experienced celebrants. The training covered all aspects of preparing a funeral ceremony, including a family visit, writing a script and delivering the ceremony, which may be a burial or cremation. Course participants are assessed at each stage, including writing and delivering ceremonies, the final day of the course being held at a crematorium. **Each ceremony is unique and designed to celebrate the life of the person**. Often a careful balance needs to be struck in giving a realistic picture of the person and their life, while also being sensitive to the feelings of the mourners, particularly the family. The trainee also benefits from observing and being supported by an experienced local celebrant acting as mentor and I have been grateful to Alec Leggatt for fulfilling this role.

[New planned events](#)

[‘What is Humanism Evening’](#)

We are aiming to hold a ‘What is Humanism Evening’ on Sunday 28th November at 7.30pm with free drinks and nibbles at a local pub. Please contact David Savage 01252 794021 if interested.

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

Our proposal for a ‘Humanism’ course commencing September 2011 has received a good response from the U3A. We intend to have a class once a month lasting one and a half to two hours per session, with a total of 8 sessions.

Topics may include: Historical context of Humanism, Humanism in religion, Humanism in philosophical terms, Present day Humanism – organisation, ceremony, community involvement, Humanism in the Arts, Moral problems and Humanism, Humanism for the community of the future
If you have any thoughts, please contact Jim Herrick 01483 841908 jimherrick@virginmedia.com

[New Year – New Book Club](#)

People have at times considered a Farnham Humanists book club to help discuss and build together our outlook and understanding of the many issues that concern humanists. Sid Clough has offered to co-ordinate a group for an experimental period, based partly on his experience of a similar interest group in the Met Office before his retirement. Members are asked if they are interested in being involved with the group to please contact Sid before the end of November.

[For Provisional Programme for 2010-2011 - please see separate document & our website](#)
http://www.farnham-humanists.org.uk/_private/Events/current%20programme.pdf