

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING February 16 2014

The tenth annual general meeting of Farnham Humanists was held on 16th February 2014 at the Hop Blossom Pub.

Present included: Jennie Johnson, Simon Johnson, Joyce Hurd, Catherine Johnson, Pam Leggatt, Alec Leggatt, Harold Hillman, Peter Thurston, Averil Marks, Linda and Alan Montgomery, May and Alan Hackett, David Savage, Vincent Marks, Mark Heal, Mike Adams, Peter Thurston, Catherine Johnson John and Ruth de Prey.

28 attended.

Apologies: Sue Shaw, Charles Stuart, Jim Sweetnam, Ailsa Davies, Tricia Wallis, James Wallis, Sue Wilson, Sylvia Harper, Elizabeth Hillman

Approval of the minutes of the last meeting: No objections were raised. Minutes approved.

Matters arising: there were no matters arising.

Chairman's report: Jennie Johnson reported on a full and active year for Farnham Humanists, as follows:

Farnham Humanists' Chair's Annual Report February 2014

Our monthly Sunday meetings

We've been fortunate to host some excellent speakers

- Janet Heimlich on 'Religious Child Maltreatment (and how to stop it)'
- Peter Susman giving us a personal view on Judaism
- Mick Day, Diversity Manager Surrey Police on 'Equality and Diversity in the Police'
- Caroline Bowlby, lecturer in family law on 'Gay and Civil Partnerships'
- Peggy Kelsey describing her 'Interviews with Afghan Women'
- David Savage leading a discussion on 'Meaning of Life' and 'Morality'
- Despite dire weather warnings, on the night of the October storm, Dr Peter Stott, Head of Climate Monitoring at the Met Office talked to us appropriately about 'Climate Change'

More details are to be found in the April 2013 and October 2013 newsletters on our website where we've also posted Dr Stott's Climate Change presentation.

Public meeting

In November, instead of our annual debate, we held a lively panel discussion centred on the question "What's happening to our NHS?". Panel members were Sir Mike Aaronson, Chairman of the Frimley Park NHS Foundation Trust, 2 local GPs: Dr David Brown and Dr Jane Dempster and a patient representative Harry Baker. Belinda Schwer chaired the event with the audience contributing a range of opinions and experiences. Nearly £250 was raised for Disability Changers and Macmillan Nurses. A video of the debate can be found on our website and Youtube.

Community

Our second U3A course was successfully completed in Summer 2013. Thank you to David Savage and Sue Shaw for running the course and to the many contributors.

Ruth de Prey continued in her role as the voluntary Humanist Listener working alongside Religious Chaplains for Surrey police. David has been trying with the BHA to develop humanist pastoral support for non-religious people in hospitals and prisons in the same sort of way that humanists developed funerals and other ceremonies for non-religious people years ago. He has been providing support at Guy's Hospital in London. We have arranged for Amy Walden to come to talk to us in May about her pioneering work on humanist pastoral support in Winchester Prison.

David has also continued to promote equality of religion and belief at the Surrey County Council Equality Group. Alec Leggatt has been representing the non-religious viewpoint at the Waverley Borough Council Faith Forum but this Forum is now being wound up as nothing significant was coming out of it.

Churches Together have turned down our approach to share the hosting and associated costs of the next General Election Hustings in Farnham.

Ceremonies

Ailsa Davies has continued to provide Baby Namings, Weddings, Civil Partnerships and Funerals and Alec Leggatt to offer Funerals. Ailsa has also been appointed to the Mayor of Basingstoke's Pastoral Team.

Education: Schools, Colleges, University

In February David and Jennie were invited by the sixth form to debate the motion 'The cost of religion outweighs the benefits' at Farnborough Hill Independent Catholic School with 7 others from a range of faiths.

Following an invitation from Kauser Akhtar (Guildford of Diocese's Muslim Faith Links Advisor), Jennie gave 7 lessons to 11 to 14 year olds on Humanism at a Multi Faith Day at The Warwick School Redhill. The faiths represented were Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Bahai and Judaism.

John de Prey has given two one hour talks to schools following requests received by the BHA: the first to sixthformers at Churcher's College Petersfield on the need for a non-religious perspective on ethical issues and the second to Handcross Park School, Haywards Heath, on Humanism and its view on morality.

In the Summer Sue Willson and Jennie approached Farnham's two main secondary schools with offers of support for input to RE lessons and Assemblies. Jennie was invited into Heath End and learnt that their main requirement was for more support on Christianity! Weydon initially responded positively suggesting provision of an Assembly but have failed to respond to three follow up emails.

Tricia Wallis and other members of the group have inspired students at Godalming Sixth Form College to start a new inclusive secular humanist group. They have now had a couple of meetings and plan to hold a debate on whether you need to be religious to be moral.

Jennie Johnson continues to support the Surrey SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for RE).

In December, David spoke in a University Debating Society debate in favour of the motion "This house proposes that religion is becoming less relevant in the 21st Century" which was opposed by Dr Matthew Knell from the London School of Theology. We now have links with the previous Chair of the University Atheists and Skeptics group Tom Kilworth and an undergraduate Peter Thurston who is keen to restart the group.

Social events

We continue to meet for a chat over a pub drink on the first Wednesday of the month at 8:00. We've also enjoyed a pub walk, garden party, visit to Darwin's House, festive gathering and an annual dinner. Our book Club continues to thrive.

Web Development and IT

The current Frontpage website has run out of memory space and is difficult to maintain. The committee have decided to fund Chris Street of Dorset Humanists to build a new website in Wordpress which can be hosted for free by the BHA and more easily supported by several people at once. Farnham Humanists is also reinvigorating their Facebook group so please join!

New Programme

This is our 10th Anniversary year. Our first celebratory event to host Professor Jim Al-khalili has nearly sold out. Other events include two evening workshops in Guildford titled "Exploring Life – a non-religious view", a Garden Party on 22nd June at Farnham Museum which Andrew

Copson is attending and a public debate related to Faith Schools which was the subject of our first debate 9 years ago. Our full programme can be found on our website.

People

We are sad to have lost Roy Weedon's many valued contributions to the committee and Farnham Humanists due to his move to Suffolk. We have also said good bye to Jim Herrick who moved to Cambridge in September. Our committee has been re-energised by gaining Tricia Wallis, John de Prey and Ruth de Prey and despite formally leaving the committee, we have also been fortunate to benefit from Alec Leggatt's many valued inputs.

Our secretary Sue Shaw has again been tireless in supporting and organising the group despite being busy with other commitments. It has been bad luck that she seems to have had all the work and none of the fun being unable to come to our two recent social events – our festive evening and annual dinner.

So a big "Thank You" to Sue (S) - the group is very appreciative of all your work over the year.

Jennie opened the meeting. No comments were made.

Treasurer's report: Mike Adams reported that there are currently 47 members. Mike thanked Linda and Alan Montgomery for their generous donation of a projector. The bank balance is healthy due to a generous anonymous donation of £500 and several other small donations. The group paid a £50 donation to the Hop Blossom pub to improve lighting. Expenditure for next year will be increased due to the costs to be incurred for the proposed banner, website and debate. The meeting agreed to keep subscriptions will be held at £12.50. The accounts were accepted.

Subscriptions:

Subscriptions are now due and cheques should be made payable to Farnham Humanists and sent to the new Treasurer Alan Montgomery (see below). Alan's address 8 Fitzroy Road, Fleet, Hants GU51 4JH, Tel: 01252 617112 and e-mail: alan.montgomery@btinternet.com

Election of Officers and Committee

- **Election of Chair:** Jennie Johnson. Proposed by Ruth de Prey and endorsed by Pam Leggatt
- **Election of Vice Chair:** Mike Adams. Proposed by David Savage, seconded by Alan Montgomery
- **Election of Treasurer:** Alan Montgomery. Proposed by Mike Adams, seconded by Jennie Johnson

- **Sue Shaw has agreed to continue as secretary for another year - no election was required.**

Appointed to the committee:

- Ailsa Davies. Proposed by Pam Leggatt and seconded by David Savage
- James Wallis. Proposed by Jennie Johnson and seconded by Mike Adams

Appointment of Auditor: Simon Johnson was reappointed.

Affiliation to BHA and NSS

Affiliations to the British Humanist Association (BHA) and National Secular Society (NSS) were discussed. It was agreed that Farnham Humanists would remain affiliated to the NSS but become a partner of the BHA.

Any other business:

A vote of thanks was given to the Chair for her outstanding and valued work for the group.

A vote of thanks was given to Mike for his excellent service as Treasurer.

A vote of thanks was offered to all of the committee for their efforts to encourage a thriving and growing group.

Car sharing on the occasion of the JAK talk is to be encouraged, and anyone interested should contact Jennie Johnson.

The meeting was closed.