

Coming up

2pm Sunday, 11 March

The AGM provides an opportunity for the Chair and the Treasurer to review events over the past year. It is also a chance for members to ask questions and vent criticisms of the committee, and to vote on the committee that will represent members over the coming year. Judging from recent AGMs it will be not a long affair.

It will be followed by:

Valerie Wright and Susan Herman talking about Refugees and the problems facing them.



We hear about Brexit *ad nauseam*, and the plight of refugees is in danger of going off the radar. Our speakers will refresh our memories and bring us up to date.

The Pavilion
Portswood Residents' Gardens
13 Abbots Way
Highfield, SO17 1QU



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7.30 pm Thursday 22 March

Discussion Group

Abortion — what should be the humanist point of view?

The result of the current referendum in the Republic of Ireland, shortly to be held, is awaited with interest in the UK, where the law is permissive. It does not impose abortion on anyone who does not want one or want to perform one; so even within the law, individuals have to make their own moral choices. Much depends on when human life begins.

What is the humanist perspective on this? Would a humanist favour abortion for a woman who wanted one for trivial reasons, such as her holiday plans? Do the existing members of the family play a role?

We debate this issue at:

10 The Atrium
31 Westwood Road
Southampton SO17 1DH

Noon, Sunday 15 April

First, a good pub lunch in the Abbots Mitre in Chilbolton: the traditional pub in the village



that gets great reviews for its food and local ales. Then, for those feeling energetic there is an interesting 3 mile walk from the pub on relatively flat terrain; it includes pretty

villages, two nature reserves, an old railway line with its overgrown platforms still just visible. The walk borders the River Test so there are wonderful river scenes to enjoy.

Chilbolton is north of Stockbridge off the A3057.

The Abbots Mitre is on Village Street in the centre of the village. Meet in the pub at 12.00. Please let Liz Mizon know, by Monday 9 April, if you will be joining us so she can book a table:

Tel 07811465338 Email liz.mizon@btinternet.com

Recent events

Strange New Worlds:

searching for Another Earth 21 January

You are sure there must be other inhabitable planets, the universe is huge, but how to find them? This was the subject of Matt Bothwell's recent excellent talk.

Obviously as scientists astronomers' approach is systematic. They are looking for planets, the smaller inner planets which are rocky: so do they need a telescope? Sadly telescopes are not much help as planets are outshone by their star. You would not see a glow worm near a lighthouse beam.

There are two techniques used to find planets, both seem incredible. The first is the "wobble" method. Planets have a gravitational pull, thus if when being observed the star seems to wobble there must be a planet nearby. It was as recent as 1995 that the first planet outside our solar system was discovered, poorly named "51 Pegasus B" and sadly a very hot mass gas planet.

The second method used is the "Transit Shadow" technique. Here scientists look for shadows on the star surface caused by a planet passing by; in fact it is a slight dip in the intensity of light coming from the star which is the give-away.

With these methods many planets have been discovered but how to eliminate the uninhabitable ones. This is easily done, those close to the star are too hot and those far away are too cold. In the middle is the Goldilocks zone – “just right”. There are now known to be 12 potentially habitable planets in our galaxy and potentially millions in the universe.

If there are so many inhabitable planets the next big question is, “Where are they and their inhabitants?” We have neither heard nor seen any evidence of life elsewhere. Robin Hanson described a great filter through which planets have to pass to allow the development of a space faring civilization. If we think of the stages through which our earth went to get to our level of biological, societal and technological development, it is clearly a long and complex process. A possible candidate planet had to be in the Goldilocks zone, with water and amino acids (the ingredients for life), these would need to develop into multi-cellular life, then into creatures with big brains which developed a human level society and finally the intelligence to colonize space. The difficult time-consuming stage in this process for earth was the development of multi-cellular life. Perhaps though the more difficult stages are the final two! Perhaps the real problem is producing a society that has the technology to go into space without using this technology to blow itself apart, or ruin its planet by consumption.

Interestingly there was a recent paper reported in the Guardian outlining the discovery of two planets circling a dwarf star which are likely to be habitable and the discovery last year of seven planets round their star, Trappist 1, in a zone where temperatures would not obliterate life. So watch this space.

First thought: is it likely? Enrico Fermi, the physicist reckoned there were 200 billion stars in the galaxy, so there could be 1 trillion planets. The chances of one of these being habitable is one million to 1. Liz Mizon

Discussion Group 25 February

Seven members, led by Norman, met to discuss the topic “What can Humanists learn from Religion”?

In his introduction Norman listed the advantages and disadvantages of religion as he saw it. He appreciated religious music, the support provided by a religious community and the deterrent religion might be to bad behaviour. His list of disadvantages was, not surprisingly, much longer! He felt religious groups were male dominated, largely produced sexual inhibition and a sense of personal sin; the concepts of confession and sin were negative; the belief in an after life, while possibly comforting, could be used personally and institutionally to induce fear and direct lives; proselytising could be aggressive and

unpleasant. He mentioned Alain de Botton. Some of us had been impressed by his TED lecture on this very topic but Norman had not been over impressed by de Botton’s writings, feeling he let religion off too lightly.

The general discussion touched on the definitions of religion, which must include a belief system involving “God” in some form, and faith. We could look at faith as a belief in things for which there was no proof, and which was a prerequisite for membership of some religious groups, or as a confidence in people and outcomes, almost as a hope. Norman gave the example of getting into a wheelbarrow pushed by Blondin across a tightrope! As Humanists we could be regarded as having faith in the potential of human nature.

There was a surprising amount of agreement on what we missed about religion — we had all grown up with religious backgrounds — Catholic, Protestant and Hindu. We missed a religious community with its social support and its help channelling our altruistic tendencies. Yes, as Humanists, we could individually join in with all sorts of good works, and many of us did, but sometimes, we felt, it helped to be part of a group. Although our belief system did not include “God” we still had a sense of our “spirituality” and a desire to develop our humanity positively. Liturgy, festivals, symbolism, music, learning from the experience of others — some sort of direction — even smells and bells, could be used to manipulate emotions, but providing we understood the dangers, we felt they could have a place and be helpful.

The Rolles had had some contact with Non-Theist Quakers and felt they could understand why, in spite of a lack of ‘religious’ belief, this group wanted to stay within the Quaker community. Liz had valued an experience at the Unitarian church and Veena enjoyed celebrating both Divali and Christmas. A group called “the Sunday Assembly” had clearly felt similarly to this discussion group and had become widespread, providing essentially a secular “church”.

In summary this group felt Humanism could take from religion an increased sense of community, both as a social support for members and as a framework for joint action; more activities providing inspiration and motivation for personal development, and a greater awareness of the “spiritual” as opposed to the “supernatural” needs of its members.

Toni Rolles

Visit to Down House, 11 February

Our visit to Darwin's home might be short-listed for a comedy turn: several people had dropped out for one reason or another, so there were 11 of us in a 17 seater mini-bus driven by Stephen Starr; on arrival at the pub, at 11.45, we found that the road to Down House was closed owing to a gas leak; at noon, we were 60 minutes before we were served an indifferent lunch, starters followed by mains, so we completed our meal and settled the bill at close on 2.30pm; at some point Norman announced that Down House closed at 4pm; most people walked to Down House, David and Anne chose to take a taxi promised within 10 minutes but 30 minutes later it arrived, but the taxi driver didn't know where Down House was; after a lengthy exchange with base and after miles and miles, we eventually arrived at Down House at 3.10pm. That

is not all. Stephen decided to go by the roundabout route to pick us up, so he walked to the pub where the minibus was left, only to find he was blocked in for half an hour, he then used his sat nav that brought him back to the pub, three times! We were worried, fearing all kinds of things, and the majority of us walked back to the pub. Eventually he arrived at Down House, and picked up the rest of us at the pub, and we set off home at 5pm. Much of it due to the lame amongst us, ie yours truly!

In spite of these fun and games I think people enjoyed their visit, especially those who had not been there before. Outside, the greenhouse provided welcome warmth, but it was too cold to venture on the Darwin 'walk', apart from the limited time.

Top marks to Stephen for his excellent driving and for his patience.

IN MEMORIUM

The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is often credited to someone else's hand
Because it springs from quiet deeds
Unadvertised, unspoken and not grand.

The incremental betterment of someone else's life
By caring or by counselling in woe;
The kindnesses a man performs for his disabled wife
That only he or she will ever know;

The raising up of children to be confident and strong
Against the craven superstitious clime,
To make their own decisions on the case for right and wrong
According to their conscience at the time;

These are the things that make the world a kinder, gentler place,
That help to shape the climate of the age.
They serve to build the sound platform and then create the space
For larger actors on the world-wide stage.

But what about those evil men whose deeds will linger on;
The bigots and the sadists and the mad
Whose greed and self-aggrandisement cast shadows when they're gone,
Whose actions leave the world both poor and sad.

They strut their stuff around the world, and briefly hold the ring,
With full reign for their pompous power-lust,
But in the last analysis humanity will bring
Their reputations down into the dust.

Hazel Khan

Hazel is a founder member of South Hampshire Humanists and former Chair. She wrote this poem some years ago. Are there any poets among our members?

I bought a video when we visited Down House called *Creation — how Darwin saw the world, changed it for ever*. The video provides an insight into Darwin's life rarely seen, and received top awards from the Press, one of them describing it as 'Handsome, Intelligent and Moving'.

The video includes 'special features' that are well-worth watching.

It is based on the book, *Annie's Box, CHARLES DARWIN — his Daughter and Human Evolution*, by Randal Keynes, the great-great-grandson of Darwin.

Annie had a profound influence on Darwin's life. When she died, the pain of her loss affected his thinking about the natural world and the struggle for life.

I would gladly lend it to anyone who wishes.

You will need a DVD player or compatible equipment to play it. DLB
02380550204
bthwll@globalnet.co.uk

News



New Zealand Justice Minister Andrew Little has confirmed that he will ask the country's Law Commission to review the country's abortion laws with a view to potentially removing the procedure from criminal law. Humanists UK, which campaigns for the decriminalisation of abortion in the UK as part of the We Trust Women coalition, has welcomed this announcement and called again upon the UK Government to review its own abortion regulations.

The Labour Party has proposed mandatory labelling of meat to indicate if the animal was stunned or not during the slaughter process, as part of a new policy on animal welfare launched today. Pre-stunning is already mandated by law but there are exemptions for religious groups to provide kosher and halal meat.

A number of fundamentalist and fringe religious groups are seeking to undermine the Government's plans for relationships and sex education (RSE) in English schools by opposing teaching about same-sex relationships.

The Bailiwicks of Jersey and Guernsey have both announced intentions to introduce an opt-out register for organ donors, similar to the one in place in Wales since 2015. This follows on from announcements in 2017 by the UK and Scottish Governments that England and Scotland will both be adopting this approach.

Applications for RE teacher training have dropped by almost 40% since last year. The Religious Education Council of England and Wales has responded by calling for higher bursaries for RE trainees.

A Muslim man is mounting a legal challenge over a prohibition on edging, or borders, around individual graves in his local cemetery. He claims the ban breaches his right to freedom of religion.

The Government is too politically correct to enforce rules on hijabs in schools, leaving teachers 'alone, isolated and vulnerable', Sir Michael Wilshaw has warned.

Richard Dawkins's book *The God Delusion* is being adapted into a stage production. The 90-minute show has been described as a cross between an 'atheist support group and watching a great stand-up'.

Bulgaria's ruling GERB party is withdrawing a European treaty designed to combat violence against women from ratification in parliament over strong opposition expressed by religious and political groups.

Conservative Muslims in Indonesia have banned Valentine's Day, with police rounding up couples caught celebrating it in major cities.

A sacked magistrate is suing the Lord Chief Justice for religious discrimination. Richard Page was found to have been influenced by his personal religious beliefs and not the evidence in front of him when considering an application by a same-sex couple to adopt a child.

The Catholic Church in Kenya has vowed to colour towns and villages purple to counter the red that is normally associated with Valentine's Day. The Church also said it would also oppose efforts to celebrate World Condoms Day.

The BBC has announced that coverage of religious themes is to be increased. They cite research that people of all ages, and of all faiths and none, that reveals that it is important to learn about religion in general. Whilst acknowledging that approximately 50% of people in the UK have no religion, it states that 'it was not intended to be strictly representative of the religious make-up of the UK population'. *Thought for the Day* will continue to be a religious slot. *(I have the full report should anyone wish to borrow it)*

JANUARY	Sunday 14	2.00 pm	The Pavilion	Matt Bothwell on <i>Strange new worlds; searching for another Earth</i>
	Thursday 25	7.30 pm	Discussion Group at Chris & Toni Rolles	What can humanists learn from religion?
FEBRUARY	Sunday 11	12.30 pm	Visit to Down House	
MARCH	Sunday 11	2.00 pm	The Pavilion	AGM + Velarie Wright & Susan Herman on <i>Refugees</i>
	Thursday 22	7.30 pm	Discussion Group at David Bothwell's	Abortion — what should be the humanist view, especially in the light of recent medical advances?
APRIL	Sunday 15	12 noon	Chilbolton	Pub lunch + walk
MAY	Sunday 13	7.00 pm	The Pavilion	John Harding on <i>A life of crime: reflections on working with offenders</i>
	Thursday 24	7.30 pm	Discussion Group at Joy Macfadyen's	What would be our Ten Commandments for today and in the future?
JUNE	Sunday 10	TBA	Hawk conservancy	Visit to Andover to view large birds of prey
JULY	Sunday 8	7.00 pm	The Pavilion	Roger Brown on <i>Current developments in Higher Education</i>
	Thursday 19	7.30 pm	Discussion Group at Veena Spratt's	How can a country be governed in the era of fake news?
AUGUST	NO MEETINGS THIS MONTH			
SEPTEMBER	Sunday 9	7.00 pm	The Pavilion	Artificial Intelligence: Speaker to be announced
	Thursday 20	7.30 pm	Discussion Group at Norman Maclean's	Is Britain a democracy?
OCTOBER	Saturday		Theatre trip	
NOVEMBER	Sunday 11	2.00 pm	The Pavilion	Steve Rolles on <i>After the war on drugs?</i>
	Thursday	7.30 pm	Discussion Group at Catherine Griffiths'	Death and dying — what do we think about our own death and that of others. What comfort can humanists give?

Winchester Skeptics in the Pub

7.30pm on the last Thursday in the month at The Winchester Discovery Centre, Jewry Street, SO23 8SB.

Contact <http://www.hampshireskeptics.org> for information about events

Contacts	Secretary	Stephen Starr	bookrover@virginmedia.com	023 80362517
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	Newsletter	David Bothwell	bthwll@globalnet.co.uk	023 8055204
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Humanist Celebrants

W=Weddings
N=Namings
F=Funerals

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If you have not already paid, subscriptions are new due

South Hampshire Humanists: Membership Application/Renewal 2018

The normal annual subscription is £10 per person. For existing Humanists UK members, joining South Hampshire Humanists **for the first time**, the rate for the first year only is £5 per person.

Please choose between the following options —

(a) Transfer electronically direct to:

Name:	South Hampshire Humanists
Account No	13910981
Sort code:	560068

Please include your own name for identification purposes.

Please also email the treasurer [barbara130400@hotmail.com] and the secretary [bookrover@virginmedia.com] that you have done this. For a new application please also let them know your contact details as below.

OR

(b) Hand cash or cheque (payable to South Hampshire Humanists) to the Treasurer at a meeting.

OR

(c) Post a cheque to: Barbara Cummins, 33 The Street, Old Basing, Basingstoke RG24 7BX

I/We enclose £ for 2018 membership plus (optional) donation of £

I/We agree that this personal information may be kept on computer. (Please initial)

Are you a member of the Humanists UK? YES/NO?

Name(s) [please print]

Address

.....

Telephone email

Signature Date