

Chiltern Humanists

Newsletter No. 123 August 2016



This life is all we have - make it good to be alive

Our Newsletter

After a break of just over twelve months, I am pleased to present edition number 123. In the interim, we have issued two e-bulletins to keep members up to date with what been going on but hopefully newsletters will now continue in the future. Firstly we need to recap on what has happened since the last e-bulletin.

Barry Foxcroft

As most of you will have heard, we lost Barry recently. He was a long standing member, a dedicated part of the committee and, most of all, a good friend. He will be sorely missed.

Annual General Meeting

Though attendance at the AGM on April 12 was rather low, there were lively discussions especially on finance and publicity.

Antony Chapman as Vice-Chair led the meeting. During the preceding year, nobody was willing to take the role of Chairman so the duties had been shared with Committee members chairing members' meetings and Committee meetings as necessary. This had worked reasonable well.

Antony gave an overview of the year and of our varied speakers. Mary Peeler was thanked for the reports of our meetings and Pat Bryant for organising the refreshments. It was noted that informal discussions before the meetings had been favourably received.

Richard Jakeman tabled the accounts showing

a healthy balance and it was agreed to donate £100 to "The One Law For All" and £200 to the BHA to support their work against illegal unregistered faith schools. A vote of thanks was passed to John Dablin, the Independent Examiner and he was re-elected.

At the end of 2015, Membership stood at 75 which is a small drop of 8, mainly due to health or moving reasons. There were 5 new members.

We continue to support Elaine Lever in her work with SACREs (Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education). Her report was circulated with the AGM papers. (Elaine has agreed to talk to our group in October – more details below). Concern was expressed that Humanism was being squeezed out of religious teaching particularly in Academies. Should we ask schools what they are teaching?

Future publicity was discussed including the possibility of a stall at the Wendover's Mayday celebrations. As this was imminent, Mary Peeler agreed to report on the occasion with a view to our participation in 2017. Derek Patton showed us a copy of our new leaflet which received unanimous approval and he was thanked for his efforts.

All eight committee members (Steve West, David Harding, Antony Chapman, Richard Jakeman, Barry Foxcroft, Peter Norman, Pam Crawford and Bob Sampson) were willing to stand again were duly re-elected.

Barry made a plea for help putting the chairs away at the end of meetings.

Finally, as part of our 25th Anniversary celebrations, Steve West had a special proposal. Recognising his part in founding Chiltern Humanists in 1991 and his uninterrupted service since, it was agreed by members present that Antony Chapman be granted Honorary Lifetime Membership. There followed a presentation of a certificate and a bottle of Champagne. Well done Antony!

Maryam Namazie

At the meeting on the 11th May two topics were discussed before the speaker. There is a proposal to use unwanted fertilised embryos for research. There are fears of what outcomes might come from such experimentation. It is a complex and controversial issue to which we may return.

Also discussed was doctors' right to strike. The important issue would appear to be the working conditions including how many hours a week on duty and weekend working. It was generally felt that in an emergency all doctors were likely to respond and break their strike.



The speaker was Maryam Namazie who is the spokesperson for The One Law For All Campaign and for the Council of ex-Muslims of Britain. The title of the talk was "Multi-culturalism: can it work?" Maryam gave us an alternative title "Apostasy, Blasphemy and Resistance to Islamism."

The One Law for all campaign argues that Sharia Law is unjust and discriminatory

particularly against women and children. Segregation of women within their societies is a violation of women's human rights. The Sharia Courts in UK support and promote segregation of women.

Maryam had been denied the opportunity to speak at Universities as their view is her speech will provoke violence. She cited Goldsmiths University where Muslim men shouted, lay on the floor and unplugged her computer. The female students all sat at the back of the lecture theatre whilst the staff did not intervene to ensure her right to speak and to be heard.

Brave women like Maryam do protest in many countries and often pay a heavy price such as imprisonment and occasionally death. One brave young female protester in a Muslim country had written on her naked breasts "I would rather be a rebel than a slave"

Protestors in Iran and Saudi Arabia are labelled as terrorists not revolutionaries. The Theocratic Governments see secularism as a threat. There is no space for protest for women's rights, the freedom to wear a veil or to enjoy music. The fight against Sharia Law is clearly a defence of individual rights and freedoms not an attack on Muslims.

Islam is not a homogeneous group. There are Shias, Sunnis and other smaller divisions within the belief system of Islam. In response to the evidence that ex-Muslims often have to lead a double life, the Council of ex-Muslims was formed to support these men and women who are labelled as apostates. In the UK an ex-Muslim often feels unable to tell his family and therefore leads a secret life

Maryam recommended a book to be published in June - "Women and Sharia Law, the impact of legal pluralism on the UK" by Elham Manea (ISBN: 9781784537357).

Mary Peeler

Stewart Lansley

On the 14th June Steve Walker from the St. Albans Humanist Group told us briefly about his very active group. They are forming a Humanist Action Group to see what they can do in their community to promote Humanism. More information is on their website.



Stewart Lansley spoke on “Divided Britain – the impact of rising inequality.

Business practice has changed, e.g. moving production to S.E. Asia, more aggressive relationships with suppliers and a great deal of profits placed off shore. This results in tax evasion which in turn weakens the home economy. The theory of the “trickle down economy” does not work.

Canada, Holland and France are experimenting with social wealth funds funded from privatisations. Asset stripping is a short term policy, profits are lost to the state as evidenced in the sale of North Sea oil, the Royal Mail and currently, probably, the Land Registry. A universal minimal income is another way to redistribute the wealth of a country. Society is now very divided. In his book “Breadline Britain” Stewart paints a devastating picture of the reality of poverty today and its causes, shattering the myth that poverty is the fault of the poor and a generous benefit system.

Mary Peeler.

25th Anniversary Lunch

On 24th July, 20 members celebrated with a fine lunch hosted at the home of Antony and Carol Chapman in the countryside just outside Wendover. This was capped with an excellent cake made by Carol.



Membership News

Welcome to our latest new member Arnold Landau from Brierton.

Good luck to Colin Mills moving to a new home in Sidmouth.

Next Meeting

Andrew Copson CEO of the British Humanist Association will talk on “Humanist Heroes” in Wendover on Tuesday 13 September 2016 starting at 7:30.

Forthcoming Events

*Bring a friend to the next meeting
All meetings are open to anyone interested*

Tuesday 13 September - Wendover - 7.30pm: Following our 25th Anniversary, our new season starts with special guest Andrew Copson BHA CEO: “Humanist Heroes”

Tuesday 11 October - Amersham - 2:00pm (NOTE TIME): Elaine Lever on SACREs.

Tuesday 8 November – Wendover - 7.30pm: Phil Cheatle “My Death, My Decision”

Wednesday 14 December – Amersham – 7:30pm: Terry Sanderson (NSS) “Religion: A Threat to us All” (This will be in the Large Barn Hall).

Suggestions for future meetings, events and activities are always welcome

Our usual venues:

Wendover Public Library, High Street, Wendover HP22 6DU. We meet in the room on the left as you approach the Library entrance. There is ample free parking.

Amersham Community Centre, Chiltern Avenue, Amersham-on-the-Hill HP6 5AH. The Community Centre is close to the station with a large adjoining car park (free after 6.30). We normally use the Small Barn Hall.

For any queries about Chiltern Humanists or Humanism generally, please call Steve West on 01494 726351 or email: west@waitrose.com

For the latest news about Humanism locally and nationally keep an eye on our website www.chilternhumanists.org.uk . Comment on or submit material to the website via the ‘Contact Us’ page.

Please send any contributions, comments or letters for Newsletter No. 124 to Steve West - Email: west@waitrose.com

The photos of Maryam Namazie and Stewart Lansley were taken from Wikipedia

Chiltern Humanists works in partnership with the British Humanist Association and is affiliated to the National Secular Society.

Please note that we maintain a computer record of our membership. The record is used strictly for administrative purposes and is not divulged to third parties.