



Living without religion

Affiliated to the British Humanist Association and the National Secular Society

www.oxfordhumanists.org

Web-site, pub nights and a virtual library: *we just keep growing!*

There are several new developments to report since our last edition.

Our web site At last our website is up and running and we are pleased with it. Do visit it at www.oxfordhumanists.org.uk and see for yourself. At present it is primarily directed at non-members seeking us out, but it also has items of recent news and upcoming events.

WE owe a big debt of gratitude to Graham Pierce who oversaw the design of the basic site, and to Tony Boutle who is in the process of setting up a members' area and has undertaken to act as administrator. So there will soon be a humanist chat room where members can exchange views on the issues of the day. Not all our members will want to use the site, but Graham and Tony will welcome feedback from those who do as to how well it is working for them.

Pub nights are a good way for groups to get together, especially – but by no means exclusively – for younger people. Joe Trakalo and Graham Pierce will be found at the Chequers pub in Oxford's High Street on Thursday 23 June from 6.30 onwards. WE are all invited to join them for a drink and some humanist, and presumably non-humanist, chat. Non-members are welcome. This could well be a good way to introduce new younger members to our group. For future dates, consult the website.

The Virtual Library is something else that Joe has offered to manage for us. We have a collection of books and are entitled to one copy of everything the BHA publishes. We also think that many of our members may have books they might be willing to lend directly to fellow members. Joe is working out how this could be managed using the website as the point of contact. Meanwhile, if you would like to join – as a borrower, a lender, or a donor, please get in touch with Joe

If you would prefer to receive this newsletter by email, please contact Margaret



OxHums members, Joe Trakalo and Teodora Petranova join students at the Think Week Stand

Think Week 2011

It is heartening to know that over the past 2-3 years atheist societies have flourished throughout UK universities. Here in Oxford some of our own members have made a significant contribution to this, in close co-operation with the leaders of Oxford University's Student ASH (Atheist, Secular Humanist) Society.

After decades of Student "Christian" Weeks, more and more student groups are organizing "Reason" Weeks as an antidote. OxASH's ThinkWeek 2011 was awarded first prize in this category by the 30 strong National Federation of AHS Student Societies [www.ahsstudents.org.uk].

Held throughout the last week in February, ThinkWeek 2011 organised 10-12 different events, Each involving one or more leading UK professors, politicians, or BHA/NSS representatives. OxHums members were invited to join the students at these meetings, which must make us the best-served Humanist group in the country

OxHums stand keeps busy

Apart from appearing regularly in Cornmarket, where it continues to be largely welcomed by passers-by, our stand has been at Burford's Levellers Day, the Lord Mayor's Picnic, the Headington Festival and the Pride event and is booked for the Cowley Road Carnival in August. At Burford we established a link with the Cotswold Humanists and have agreed to share a joint stand at future Levellers Days.

The stand now has a gazebo to protect us from rain and sun (on permanent loan from Joe) and an eye-level banner (funded by David Lahee).

In the run-up to the Census we concentrated on getting the message out that non-believers should tick the 'No Religion' box. We are now waiting to see how much effect the BHA campaign has produced.

Penny Jaques, who organises the helpers rota, would be glad to have a few more people on her list. You would do a 2-hour shift, together with at least one other person and it really is a fun thing to do. **Please contact Penny if you think you could help.**



Meetings

OxHums members have been involved in some impressive meetings so far this year. During the students' Think Week, the combination of Richard Dawkins and A C Grayling packed out the Examination Schools. Our own Friday meeting venue at Restore, though much smaller, was similarly overwhelmed by the number of people turning up to hear Evan Harris on Secularism. The BHA brought their Shelley Lecture (Ann Wroe on *The Necessity of Atheism*) to Oxford and Sam Harris filled the Sheldonian with a talk about his new book, *The Moral Landscape*. Joe had persuaded him to come to Oxford as part of his book launch. It was one of only four appearances in the UK.

Meanwhile your committee tries to keep a varied programme of subjects for our Friday public meetings and our Sunday members' get-togethers. Please remember that lifts are available for those who need them. Contact Graham Pierce if you need, or can offer, a lift.

AGM 2011

It was encouraging to see over 20 people at our AGM in March. (AGMs are not usually the most popular events in any organisation).

Two committee members, Dane Clouston and Francis Kaufmann a long-serving member and former Chair, had decided to stand down this year. Their places were taken by Jane Ferguson and Tony Boutle, who has taken on the job of Secretary, and David Lahee has also since been co-opted. The advertised changes to the membership charges were agreed. John White was re-elected as Chair and the meeting expressed their appreciation of the enormous amount of work he does for us.

As usual, members who wished to do so brought readings to share. A particular favourite this year was Margaret Atwood's 'Our Cat', read by Jenny Perry. It should soon be available on our web-site..

Two Ways to Help

Members may like to know of two charitable projects that Oxford Humanists might support.

Ugandan Humanists Schools Trust supports three schools in Uganda which are run on Humanist lines. Most schools in Uganda are funded by the churches and the Humanist schools struggle to find money for their needs - books, equipment, buildings, furniture, teachers' salaries etc. The schools do not discriminate on grounds of religion.

When the Trust's chief executive, Steve Hunt, came to talk to us we were very impressed with his enthusiasm and the tale he had to tell. You can find out more at www.ugandahumanistschoolstrust.org.

Tandem is based at Restore, where we hold our meetings. It seeks out and trains volunteers to befriend people with mental health problems. Once the link is made the two people make their own arrangements about how, and how often, they will meet. People with mental health problems often lack confidence in dealing with life and a friend to share things with is a great help. You can contact the scheme at www.tandembefriending.org.uk or by phone on 01865 724225.

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