



Members Newsletter, September 2014
Edited by Margaret Godden

Living without religion

A British Humanist Association Partner and
affiliated to the National Secular Society

www.oxfordhumanists.org.uk

World Humanist Congress in Oxford

A report by Teodora Petranova

With less than two months since the WHC – isn't it too early for memories? And how can one pack so many events, meetings, talks, workshops, celebrations... into any type of story? For me, as one of the volunteers who helped ensure the congress ran smoothly, the overwhelming feeling related to this unique gathering was joy.

Yes, there was also local pride: the backbone of the volunteer force were members of Oxford Humanists. They supported the nearly 1000 participants attending events in some of the most impressive buildings in our historic city: the Sheldonian, the Exams schools, and the Town Hall (and that's not counting the glittering evening bash for the participants in the Ashmolean).

Yes, there was also sincere awe for the courage of some of the amazing speakers from so many tricky corners of the world (67 countries were represented in all). And yes, there was also the shared sense of purpose to spread the message of Humanism which we felt was bringing us closer to the great heroes of the movement – the ones from the past, and the ones who are working today around the globe, selflessly, painstakingly, step by step, book by book, campaign by campaign.

And yet – nothing could surpass the feeling of pure joy of just being together with so many bright, kind, well-meaning and dedicated people from so many nations, cultures and traditions!

There were students travelling from other British towns or even from Europe and crashing on local friends' sofas just for the privilege of volunteering for the WHC. There were grannies who delivered leaflets for Secularist initiatives in their local communities. There were authors of inter-

national fame, signing books for dedicated readers, and quiet but determined campaigners from North Africa. There were American activists with the broadest smiles and the largest pins with the figure of dancing humanist, and Germans proudly offering the famous Atheist shoes.

But we were together as equals, united and focused, because there was work to be done, and so we shared ideas, approaches, strategies... this time dedicated to the topic of Freedom of Thought and Expression. But above all, we were together - and we are still together, even though everyone is back to where they came from - because we share a dream that one day this will be the norm: people meeting in peace and joy to discuss the future which they all shape.

Good News (and Bad) from UHST

The schools supported by the Uganda Humanist Schools Trust are doing well. Their pupils are achieving high levels of success at their equivalent to our A Levels and some are qualifying for government-supported university places. They have built proper sleeping quarters for all their girl pupils and are now setting out to do the same for the boys. Three of their head-teachers were sponsored to come to Oxford for the World Congress but in the end couldn't because of a problem over visas.

The bad news is that funding has dropped off recently. They think this is because of the Ugandan government's latest anti-homosexual legislation which has affected foreign support both to the Ugandan government and to Uganda more generally.

UHST has a lively web-site. OxHums has a standing donation to them on your behalf and we encourage all our members to support this excellent and brave organisation. www.ugandahumanistschoolstrust.org



Social media

Our new webmaster, Michèle Walker, has launched us on to Facebook and Twitter with great success. Current numbers are 88 Facebook 'likes' and 166 Twitter followers and those numbers are steadily growing.

If you are already into social media, why not join up? If not, perhaps this is the time to find out how it all works. The links are on our web-site.

The calendar page of our web-site (http://oxfordhumanists.org.uk/wordpress/?page_id=13) now includes most of the Humanist-oriented events likely to interest our members.. So do please make it one of your 'favourite' web addresses..

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Spreading the word in Cornmarket

Our Humanist stand in Cornmarket is not just a means of contacting sympathetic Oxfordians

Oxford is full of foreign visitors and students. To many of them it is a revelation to see non-believers campaigning peacefully in the public space. A woman from the USA Bible Belt said enviously "You couldn't do this where I come from' Young people from theocratic countries are amazed and excited to see us making a public stand for atheism. They take the experience home with them

The more helpers we have the more we can be there, taking the message of free thought to the world. If you think you might be able to help please get in touch with Penny Jaques. You meet a lot of interesting people and you always have a colleague to help with occasional awkward ones.

Have you ever experienced discrimination because of your non-religious beliefs?

If so the Equality and Human Rights Commission would like to hear from you.

They are enquiring into the level of discrimination in the workplace or in receiving public services. Discrimination issues tend to concentrate on complaints from religious groups. The BHA wants to put that right..

So if you have had problems in your children's education, in employment or at Job Centres, or in getting appropriate support services in hospitals or other institutions, because you are a Humanist, please write to <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/religion>

Enough of the serious stuff - let's have some fun too

The first ever OxHums coach trip, to Down House (Darwin's home), was organised by John Webster last May and was a great success. John is now planning a similar visit to Bletchley Park (where the famous Alan Turing worked and home of the 2nd War code-breakers) for next spring.

Marguerite Osborne led two stimulating and very different country walks during the summer and our regular summer garden party, held for the first time at the Restore Centre, was as usual a very enjoyable and well-attended afternoon.

For another source of social contact with unbelievers, the Sunday Assemblies are resuming their regular meetings, first Sunday in the month, 11.0 to 12.30 at the East Oxford Community Centre, Cowley Road.

And then there is our Book Club (flier enclosed).

Your committee will be glad to get suggestions for other activities. An offer to organise one would be even more welcome!!

If you would prefer to receive this newsletter by e-mail, please contact Margaret.