



Living without religion

A Humanist UK Partner and
affiliated to the National Secular Society

www.oxfordhumanists.org.uk

John White OxHums Chair, 2006 – 2018 An appreciation

John and his wife Viv had been active humanists since university days so it wasn't surprising that they joined Oxford Humanists in 2004 when they moved into the area. I joined about that time too and I remember being disappointed to find it was such a small group.

Then in 2006 John was elected to the Chair and things began to change. Our membership and the attendance at meetings grew, largely through John's assiduous use of email to keep in touch. At the same time, he gave unstinting support to the student Atheist, Secularist and Humanist organisations which were active in Oxford's two universities for some years, as he also did to the short-lived Sunday Assembly.

At a time when the OxHums committee were somewhat divided about how much, if at all, they wanted to fraternise with faith groups, John got to know a number of significant people in a variety of faith groups which has undoubtedly helped to raise the profile of humanism in the community. I am very pleased that John is happy to continue to be our representative on the Oxford Council of Faiths.

Perhaps the greatest legacy of John's tenure as Chair is that, using his networking abilities to the full, he finally persuaded the City Chaplain that Humanists should have full representation in the Remembrance Day celebrations.

A great skill of John's is his ability to write persuasive letters so whenever the theme of religion rears its head in the 'letters to the editor' page of the Oxford Times he (and two other OxHums members) are always quick to enter a debate in print.

John has also spoken on local radio, putting a humanist point of view on a number of issues. The last public appearance before he retired was as a speaker in a debate at the Oxford Union, opposing the motion: 'This House believes we cannot thrive without religion'. The motion was defeated. What a great way to end his career as our Chair!

We showed our appreciation of all his work for OxHums by presenting him with £200 of garden tokens.

We all hope John will enjoy having more time in his garden and we are deeply grateful for his many years as our Chair.

Penny Jaques



John White and a soldier member in 2013

Remembrance Sunday

We shall be represented again at the Remembrance Day event in St Giles on 11 November. John White will be speaking on our behalf and we hope our wreath will be laid by a uniformed member of Defence Humanists.

This is what John will say:

Humanists pay tribute to all those who died in war.

Some were inspired by a belief that they were fighting for a just cause.

Others simply accepted their duty to their country.

We honour them all for their bravery and self-sacrifice.

Many of these men and women had no expectation of any reward in an afterlife. They were sufficiently inspired by the rights and needs of their fellow human beings.

We look forward to a time when there is greater personal acceptance of our shared responsibility for all human beings - and when international warfare becomes a thing of the past.

Dates for your Diary

Friday September 21 8 pm. Corinne Grimley Evans on Olive Planting in Occupied Palestine.

Friday October 19 8 pm. Oxhums Quiz Night. Another chance to show off your knowledge of things more or less related to humanism. Bring friends and family.

Friday 16 November, 8 pm. Graham Pierce on Scientology and its many Front Groups.

Friday 21 December 6-9.30 pm. Winter Solstice Party.

All at our usual venue, the Restore Centre, Manzil Way, off Cowley Road, OX4 1YH.. For 8 pm meetings the door is open from 7.30 for tea/coffee and chat.

Awareness Day in Abingdon Saturday 3rd November, 9am - 5pm

This is a new venture for us, being organised by committee member Mark Blazing Rolling at the Abingdon Free Space, The Precinct, 18 Bury Street, OX14 3QT. You are invited to drop in and see what is happening on the day or, better still, to contact Mark now to offer help.

Mark says:

This will be run much the same as our usual Oxford stand, within the comfort of a decent-sized shop space, with members of the public encouraged to get more information about humanism and the Oxford Humanists.

I am a sign writer and will supply and write signs such as 'LIVE AND LET LIVE', 'FOR A TOLERANT WORLD WHERE RATIONAL THINKING AND KINDNESS PREVAIL' and 'FREEDOM, TOLERANCE, JUSTICE'.

This is a good opportunity for promoting humanism and secularism beyond Oxford city and could possibly lead to a regular winter slot to complement our summer stands in the city.

There are 4 car parks nearby offering 2 hours free when entering your car registration number and the multi story offers a longer stay if you'd like to enjoy the river, museum or restaurants.

If you are willing to go on a rota to talk to passers-by, please contact me on 07870 114421 or markwritestuff@aol.co.uk .

Even if you can't make it, I'd love to hear your ideas for the day. Please do inspire me.

Our library has become a bookstall

When our long-term member, Jean Davies, died 2 years ago we inherited her extensive collection of humanist literature. Attempts to run this as a library, with members able to borrow books, proved to be impractical.

So instead we have started to bring a selection to our normal meetings and invite members to buy anything that takes their fancy for a modest price. So far we have raised £35. Look out for our mini bookstall.

Our Committee team:

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

Talking to schools

The County Council has been reviewing its procedures for arranging 'faith' representatives to speak to schools. They want it to include Humanists.

If you would like to be involved in this you will need to attend a short HUK-organised training course. This is being run in various parts of the country and if 5 or 6 of our people would like to be involved the HUK might even run a session in Oxford. Two of our members who have attended the course say it was interesting and helpful.

Please contact Penny or Graham if you are interested in doing this. It is really valuable work.

Wanted: strong people to get our stand on the road - literally

We have the people to staff the stand, the literature (lots of good new stuff from Humanists UK), the banners and, most importantly, the crowds of Saturday shoppers in Cornmarket needing to be reminded that there is an alternative to religion.

We badly need a few strong people, not necessarily OxHums members, but from our families or friends, to get the stand in place. This means collecting the equipment from the garage of one of our members who lives near the city centre, and setting it up for a 10am start, then dismantling it and returning it at the end of the day.

It takes three normally fit people, male or female, with ideally at least one tall person, to do it safely and without damage to our increasingly fragile gazebo, table and banners. If you think you could help, please contact Penny.

We are winning the arguments

Both Humanists UK and the National Secular Society are celebrating significant advances in their campaigns.

* A proposal for new fully selective faith schools was abandoned

* A Commission on Religious Education recommends the subject is renamed 'Religion and Worldviews' and should include atheism, humanism and secularism

* Children in Scotland to be able to opt out of collective worship

* The NHS to end the funding of homeopathy

* Humanist marriages in Northern Ireland legalised

* Defence Humanists represented at the Ypres commemoration

* Right to Die legislation back for discussion in parliament

and....

the latest Social Attitudes Survey shows 52% of people in the UK have no religion.

Our Manchester colleagues are campaigning to get Humanist speakers on Radio 4's Thought For the Day and would welcome our support. Contact them on www.gmh.humanists.org.uk/join-gmhs-thought-for-the-day-campaign.

