

Chiltern Humanists

Newsletter No. 125 December 2016



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

Humanist Heroes

Whilst our speaker for our September meeting, Andrew Copson, had to cancel for health reasons, he now hopes to come to talk to us next year.

As agreed at the AGM in April, we have sent a cheque to the BHA for £200.00 to help them with the costs of campaigning against illegal so-called faith schools which do not even try to follow the National Curriculum.

My Death, My Decision



The speaker at our meeting on the 8th Nov. was Phil Cheatle from the organisation “My Death, My Decision” (MDMD). This is a right to die campaign which wants to see a more compassionate approach to dying in the UK.

It was Phil’s experience of caring for his Mum, aged 93 years, who had dementia and other physical health problems that made him decide to join MDMD.

What is a good death? It will be different for everybody, but it must be patient/person

centred. It is a very personal decision, a rational one. When is life complete? Phil stressed the importance of talking to friends, family and professionals on this topic.

The options are-

1. Assisted dying which is illegal in the UK. For such assistance, the courts could, but never have, give a prison sentence of 14 years.
2. Palliative care
3. Rational suicide-legal since 1961
4. Medically assisted suicide.

OTHER COUNTRIES:

Switzerland in 1942 legalised assisted suicide.
Netherlands legalised voluntary euthanasia.
Oregon USA accepts death with dignity.
In Canada medically assisted suicide is legal.

Phil senses there is a shift in attitude towards end of life decisions. A Bill in the House of Commons was defeated in 2015, but no doubt there will be future attempts to change the law.

The arguments against changing the law are the worry of protecting vulnerable people. Safeguards are essential. Advanced Decisions and Extended Advance Decisions (EAD) are becoming more widely known. The document is available on the internet, there is no charge. It just needs a witness your signature and a copy to your GP.

To support MDMD it is necessary to promote advanced decision making, share one's views. Phil's Mum's plea was “make them see sense” was the spur that brings him today to tell us in detail the issues around quality of life and death. See www.mydeath-mydecision.org.uk

Mary Peeler

National Secular Society “Religion A threat to us all?”



On the 14th December in Amersham, Terry Sanderson (above) President of the National Secular Society since 2008, gave a talk on the work of the society, ably assisted by Keith Porteous-Wood, NSS Executive Director,

Charles Bradlaugh (below) founded the NSS in 1866 and it still exists to be the “leading British pressure group speaking out for the rights of atheists, agnostics and all other non-believers”



Terry Sanderson has been a gay rights activist for many years, but now the law has changed in spite of a continual opposition from churches. The churches are now in decline in UK and losing their ability to dictate the law. The NSS for example is working towards removing the bishops from the House of Lords. Another very important issue is the separation of state and religion. This is an essential part of

promoting justice and ensuring cohesion and equality between citizens. This aspiration is threatened by the spread of faith schools. A third of publicly funded schools in the UK are now religious.

Migration has brought Islam to the west, with the problem of extremists. A worrying fact is that until 1970 suicide was forbidden by the Muslim faith. In 1970 that fatwa was abolished. Religious fanatics exist also in evangelical Christian groups challenging change in state law.

Terry Sanderson is less optimistic now than a few years ago. Some EU countries, for example Poland, have a fervent Roman Catholic leader which is a threat to the hope for changes in the law. In Turkey the President appears to be moving towards a more radical Islamic mode of government. The NSS promotes secularism as it protects democracy, equality, free expression and social cohesion.

Is he right? Is religion still a threat to us all?

At the end of the meeting, after thanking Terry & Keith for coming, as agreed at the AGM, Steve presented them with a Chiltern Humanists cheque for £150.00 - £1.00 for each year of the existence of the NSS.

Mary Peeler

January 2017 Diary Date

Our New Year Lunch is scheduled for Saturday 21 January at 12:30 for 13:00. Venue is The Russell Arms, Butler's Cross. Details to be sent to members soon.

Members Library

Following the loss of Barry Foxcroft, we are delighted that Chris and Mary Peeler have now taken over the Library. A full list of available books is on the website. If anyone wishes to reserve a book, the Peeler's can be contacted on 01296 624089 or email chrispeeler@ntlworld.com

Yuletide and 2017

I trust you all had a good Yuletide and as the days begin to lengthen, my best wishes to you all for a healthy, happy, Humanist 2017.

Steve West

Forthcoming Events

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

Tuesday 14 February - Wendover Library 7:30 pm: Peter Naish – “The Consciousness Conundrum”

Peter is senior lecturer in cognitive psychology at The Open University. He will discuss the nature of consciousness, and how do physical processes in the brain give rise to the subjective life of a conscious mind?

Wednesday 8 March – Amersham – 7:30pm: John Webster “Percy B Shelley”

Suggestions for future meetings, events and activities are always welcome.

If anyone needs a lift to a meeting, please contact Steve West and we will try to help.

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. 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. 126 to Steve West at west@waitrose.com

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.