

Welsh Marches Humanist

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Newsletter

No. 54

Previous Meetings

On 13th October a sizeable audience was treated to a talk on 'the basis of morality' by well-known humanist David Pollock. As usual his thought provoking talk was followed by an extensive and wide-ranging questions and answers session. Afterwards David was presented with a hardback copy of Richard Dawkins's latest book "The greatest Show on Earth".

Future Meetings

On **Tuesday 10th November** (Quakers' Meeting House, Ludlow – 7.30 pm) there will be talk by the two Tonies on the "**Life and Works of Bertrand Russell**"



Tony A will give a biographical overview of Russell's long life whereas past chairman Tony Mason will concentrate on some of Russell's philosophical and ethical writings.

The Winter Social, scheduled for **Tuesday the 8th December, 7.30 p.m.** will

once again be held at the **Women's Centre, Ludlow**. The centre is located off Church Street, behind the Rose & Crown pub. There will be the usual games and quizzes. To facilitate the catering would people intending to come please confirm to 01584 876759

Website

Group member Richard Burnham very kindly has put a lot of work and expertise into rebuilding a website for the group. The result can be seen at <http://welshmarcheshumanists.org.uk/>

Unintended Levity

To stay in tune with modern times the Church of England nowadays likes to present the jolly side of religion. Hell fire and damnation have been pushed into the background and music, happy clappy and other forms of levity are the new marketing tools to keep the punters entertained. Even jokes and laughter (God forbid!) are creeping into the services. But because humour is an unpractised late-comer in church affairs

the best examples still are the unintended howlers that escape the notice of humourless secretaries writing announcements in church newsletters and notice-boards:

- The Fasting and Prayer Conference includes meals.
- The sermon this morning is "Jesus walks on the water". This evening's sermon will be "Looking for Jesus".
- Do not let worry and depression kill you off. Let the church help.
- Pot luck supper on Sunday evening will be followed by prayer and medication.
- Weight watchers meet in the church hall on Wednesday at 7 pm. Please use the large double doors at the side entrance.
- The Low Self Esteem Support Group will meet on Thursday at 7 pm in the church hall. Please use the back door.
- The ladies are asked to bring along their electric girdles for the pancake breakfast on Sunday.
- The ladies of the church have cast off clothing of every kind. They may be seen in the church hall on Friday morning. The Bishop has decided to grace us with his presence for this much anticipated event.

Lib Dems pass secularist resolution

The Lib Dem regional conference passed the following resolution last month:

Conference notes:

1. That Britain is becoming more multicultural every day and virtually every religious faith in the world is now actively practised in the UK;
2. The steady decline in attendance at traditional Christian Churches and
3. That the Church of England is still tied to the Monarchy and the State;
4. That much discord in the world arises from strong religious belief or none.

Conference believes the time is right to separate all religious belief from its ties with Government and the Monarch at all levels so

that all such belief and none is seen to be treated equally across the whole Electorate, reflecting today's modern British society where humanity and equality are seen as paramount and religious belief is simply personal. We ask Government to set up a Commission to implement this proposal.

The motion was proposed by Chris Marriage and the summation was by Dr Evan Harris, MP.

Ludovic Kennedy

Sir Ludovic Kennedy, the broadcaster, author and journalist has died at a nursing home in Salisbury. Kennedy, who would have been 90 early next month, had been ill for some time after developing pneumonia following a fall.

Born In Edinburgh, he was educated at Eton and Christ Church college Oxford, and went on to enjoy a long career as a writer and television presenter that spanned six decades.

He became best known for writing about miscarriages of justice, and his 1961 book *Ten Rillington Place*, which argued that Timothy Evans should not have been executed for the murder of his baby daughter because the crime was committed by serial killer John Christie, resulted in a posthumous pardon for Evans. Kennedy was best known to TV audiences as an ITN news reader and, later, a prominent Panorama presenter.

He was a leading liberal, serving as President of the National League of Young Liberals for two years from 1959 and later standing, unsuccessfully, as a parliamentary candidate for the Liberal Party. Kennedy wrote more than a dozen books and numerous television films, including many about the second world war.

He was also a passionate advocate of assisted dying in his later years, and stood for parliament a second time in the 2001 General Election as an independent on a pro-euthanasia ticket.

What has been less widely reported was Kennedy's thorough dislike of religion which he made clear in his book *'All in the Mind – a Farewell to God'*, published in 1999. He was a Distinguished Supporter of the BHA. He contributed to *New Humanist* magazine, he was an Honorary Associate of the NSS as well as a Distinguished Supporter of the Humanist Society of Scotland.

New Tory MP declines to take religious oath

A new Tory MP has declined to swear a religious oath as she took her seat in parliament. Chloe Smith, MP for Norwich North, did not recite the traditional oath, which includes two references to God, but instead said: "I do solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to the Queen." "I count myself an atheist, and I thought it was far better to be honest about that. I acted in accordance with my beliefs," she said afterwards. Ms.

Smith said that she had no problems working with religious groups and had done so in her election campaign. She would continue to do so "in the service of Norwich North".

At 27, she is the youngest MP, and one of her two sponsoring MPs for the Commons initiation ceremony was the oldest Conservative MP, 79-year-old Sir Peter Tapsell, who represents Louth and Horncastle in Lincolnshire.

BBC speaks with forked tongue

The BBC quite rightly argues that because of its responsibility of due impartiality it was obliged to allow BNP spokesman Nick Griffin on to the 'Question Time' programme. Deputy Director Mark Byford said it is not for the BBC to censor the BNP and only the government can decide which organisations should be banned from the airwaves. The BNP speak for a sizeable minority and have a democratic right to be heard. All very laudable sentiments, leaving just one pertinent question to be asked: 'Why then ban humanists from Thought for the Day?'

New evidence shows that religious slaughter is painful for animals

Research in New Zealand has shown that animals being slaughtered without pre-stunning do feel pain. The investigation was carried out by Dr Craig Johnson and his colleagues at Massey University, New Zealand. They were awarded a prize for their work by the Humane Slaughter Association. The research shows that calves do appear to feel pain when slaughtered by *dhabihah* (Muslim) and *shechita* (Jewish) ritual methods, which involve hanging the animal upside down and slitting its throat, allowing it to bleed to death. "I think our work is the best evidence yet that it's painful," says Craig Johnson.

Christopher Wathes of the UK Farm Animal Welfare Council said the findings increase pressure on religious groups that practise slaughter without stunning to reconsider.

"It provides further evidence, if it was needed, that slaughtering an animal without stunning it first is painful," he said.

Craig Johnson commented: "It wasn't a surprise to me, but in terms of the religious community, they are adamant animals don't experience any pain, so the results might be a surprise to them."