

# GALHA NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GAY & LESBIAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

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## The Vinyl Closet



Ted Brown and Brett Lock delight their audience

About 80 people attended the February meeting and gave an enthusiastic reception to a fascinating presentation of early 20th century black American music. Veteran gay activist, Ted Brown, and GALHA member Brett Lock introduced us to a music culture in which gay and lesbian content was very evident, even celebrated.

Black music at that time was ignored or reviled by a white establishment concerned to observe the notorious Hays Code, which proscribed mention of sexual activity, even heterosexual. Black music enjoyed an enviable freedom. We heard among many delicious numbers Ma Rainey's 'B.D. Women' (Bull Dykes) and 'Sissy Man Blues', which is the title of a CD compilation available on Amazon.\*

Things began to change with the arrival of Elvis Presley, who made aspects of black music mainstream. For many of us at the meeting 'Jailhouse Rock' will never be the same again: 'You're the cutest jailbird I ever did see. I sure would be delighted with your company, come on and do the Jailhouse Rock with me.'

To quote a member of the audience: 'The Vinyl Closet event last night was a fabulous and inspiring evening.' Our thanks to Ted and Brett.

\* Help GALHA by ordering through our website



## GALHA in Pope Protest

On 15th February, members of GALHA joined other groups in the Protest the Pope Coalition in a demonstration organised by Central London Humanists. Over 200 demonstrators marched from Westminster Cathedral to the Italian Embassy demanding 'No Vatican - London for a Secular Europe'. The protest organisers emphasised the need for 'equal rights for LGBT people in the European Union'.

In a speech on behalf of GALHA, committee member Derek Lennard questioned the Pope's ability to give moral leadership. 'No-one in the LGBT community,' he said, 'needs a lesson on morality from a religious organisation that's presided over the disgraceful abuse of children and young adults - not to mention the alleged cover-up that followed'. Lennard complained about the Vatican's attempt to influence UK equality legislation, 'Religious organisations and representatives seem determined to block the progress of LGBT rights in countries such as the UK - and end them altogether in many other parts of the world.'

'Like persecuted members of religions, LGBT people are entitled to say "Let my people free".'

The new chair of GALHA, Adam Knowles, commented: 'GALHA members marched to protest against the Pope's attacks on LGBT rights, his backwards attitude to human sexuality, his hypocrisy when he calls homosexuality an "intrinsic moral evil" and his attempted interference in our democratic institutions to promote those views.'

'GALHA members don't want Vatican interference, don't want their taxes spent on the Pope's visit and don't want this man given a UK platform to spread ill-informed opinions about their lives.'

GALHA is proud to work alongside humanist and secular groups that have always supported LGBT Rights. We urge supporters to visit [www.protest-the-pope.org.uk](http://www.protest-the-pope.org.uk) to find out more.

- The coalition is made up of:
- British Humanist Association
  - Council of ex-Muslims of Britain
  - GALHA
  - International Humanist & Ethical Union
  - National Secular Society
  - North London Humanists
  - One Law for All
  - OutRage!
  - Southall Black Sisters
  - Women Against Fundamentalisms



Derek Lennard addresses the crowd

### TWO NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS

As we go to press, GALHA is delighted to announce that two members, Sue Robson and Julia Wright, have accepted to be co-opted on to the committee. It's no secret that the Association has long wanted to redress the predominantly male nature of its membership, and so Sue and Julia's active involvement is especially welcome. There will be more about them in the next issue. (Sue is carrying the banner with Adam in our news feature above)



### Join GALHA's Facebook Group

Do you have a Facebook account? If so, you may be pleased to know that GALHA now has its own virtual community online. Login to Facebook at [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) and search for "GALHA".

## Editor's Notes

A focus in this issue is secularism, with a contribution from journalist, author, President of the National Secular Society (NSS) and GALHA member, Terry Sanderson. As a humanist organisation, GALHA has natural links with the British Humanist Association in that it seeks to promote a rationally based value system and a secular society in which supernaturalism plays no part. It also supports the NSS, which exists to challenge religious privilege. For LGBT people that means not allowing religious interests to use their political and constitutional muscle to thwart and undermine our freedom to be ourselves. That is not to say that there are not many honourable exceptions among the faithful who want complete equality for LGBT people and see that a level playing field is in everyone's interests. With them we obviously have no quarrel. Indeed, with them we are more than happy to make common cause.

Terry writes of the success of a religious alliance in the House of Lords to weaken the provisions of the Equality Bill that protect LGBT people in the employment of religious organisations. It is a battle likely to go to Europe, where the UK government will have to explain why it is resisting an EU directive.

There is more bad news from across the world. Although the Ugandan government has been forced by an international outcry to backtrack somewhat in passing into law its savage anti-gay proposals, thousands have demonstrated in support of the legislation. And now we read of the prosecution in Malawi of a gay couple who dared to go

through a form of marriage. They face a prison sentence of 14 years. With LGBT people criminalised in 36 African countries, for us Africa is truly the "dark continent". We hope members will generously support the appeal in this issue to bring to Britain the distinguished Nigerian activist Leo Igwe, who is one of the two International Humanist and Ethical Union representatives in Africa. He will be honoured guest and speaker at special events to mark the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO).

And in China the government moved decisively to shut down the country's first gay pageant, which a fledgling LGBT rights movement was attempting to hold. In the US it is looking likely that the issue of same-sex marriage will go all the way to the Supreme Court.

#### Humanist Thought for the Issue

In January the appalling suffering caused by the Haitian earthquake inspired enormous sympathy and generosity from across the world. Just a few of the usual suspects muttered darkly of divine wrath. A humanist will recognise the power of empathy that enables us to share other's pain as we try to imagine how we might feel in those circumstances. As the novelist Ian McEwan has said: 'Imagining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity. It is the essence of compassion, and it is the beginning of morality.' If empathy were to become a universal principle there'd be no need for GALHA's campaign for LGBT rights. Meanwhile, the fight continues.

Malcolm Trahearn

## SPECIAL APPEAL

GALHA is leading the move to bring the distinguished humanist activist Leo Igwe to the UK to speak at the IDAHO event in May (See GALHA Public Events). Leo holds a Nordic Rainbow Award for his support of LGBT rights in Nigeria. Members wishing to make a donation to help cover flights and visa fees can do so via Paypal on the GALHA website or by sending a cheque, made out to GALHA and endorsed on the back 'Igwe Appeal', to GALHA Treasurer, Mike Rickwood, at 1 Gower Street, London, WC1E 6HD.



## FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

All meetings will now be held with disabled access on the ground floor of Conway Hall. Except for the March meeting, which will take place in the Bertrand Russell Room, meetings will now be held in the Brockway Room. Please also note that the March meeting is not as previously advertised and is on a Wednesday. (March 10th).

### WEDNESDAY 10TH MARCH. 7.30PM. FILM

'He's My Girl', a French gay comedy starring Antoine de Caunes.

### FRIDAY 9TH APRIL. 7.30PM. PLAY:

CAPTAIN STORMFIELD'S VISIT TO HEAVEN.

Fire and Brimstone Productions marks the 100th Anniversary of Mark Twain's Death, with a play based on one of his many satirical writings on religion.

"Still blasphemous after all these years." - Bill Maher, "Politically Incorrect".

### FRIDAY 14TH MAY. 7.30PM. SPECIAL IDAHO MEETING

BEWITCHED IN NIGERIA: LGBT Rights, Religion and Superstition.

Marking the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia, we warmly welcome Leo Igwe, the West Africa representative of IHEU and the Director of Nigeria's "Centre for Inquiry", to talk about his experiences of fighting for human rights in Nigeria, including his recent confrontation with witchcraft. Over the next two years IDAHO will campaign to form an international alliance to combat homophobia and transphobic violence based on religious beliefs. Other events over the IDAHO weekend will be organised with our kindred societies. (Details on [www.galha.org](http://www.galha.org) as soon as they are confirmed).

### FRIDAY 11TH JUNE. 7.30PM

CULT STATUS?

Sarah Harvey, Research Officer of "Inform" talks about new Christian movements and cults and their attitudes to LGBT Rights.

### FRIDAY JULY 9TH. 7.30PM

THE BATTLE FOR DOVER SOUL.

A play by Fire and Brimstone Production based on the 2005 court challenge (Kitzmiller v Dover Area School Board), in the United States federal courts against a public school district that required the presentation of intelligent design as an alternative to evolution as an "explanation of the origin of life".

### AUGUST-NO MEETING.

### 3rd - 5th SEPTEMBER:

GALHA WEEKEND, BRIGHTON.

Details to follow. Please indicate whether you are likely to attend by sending in the cut-out slip on this page. This will give us an indication of likely support. Alternatively please email [secretary@galha.org](mailto:secretary@galha.org)

### FRIDAY 8TH OCTOBER. 7.30PM

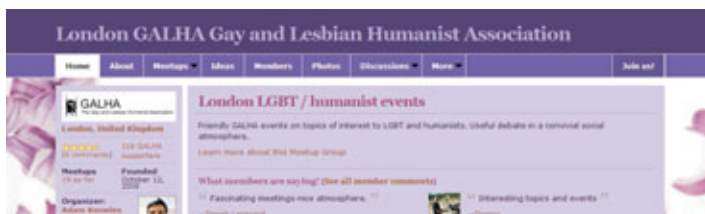
FREE THOUGHT AND CENSORSHIP.

A talk by Julian Baggini, Editor of *The Philosophers Magazine*.

### WEDNESDAY 10TH NOVEMBER

A talk by Matt Cook on the history of gays and the family.

December meeting to be confirmed.



## A new way to manage your GALHA diary

Find out about events via Meetup.com

Our events since November 2008 have run via the specialised online service 'meetup.com'. This provides us a variety of features including discussions, maps, polls, announcements and publicity. The upcoming events feeds into our own website so you can stay up-to-date without leaving the GALHA website, but past events and additional content is available only there: <http://www.galhameetup.com>

# OPINION

## Victory for Religious Right in the House of Lords

By Terry Sanderson

In a major victory for the burgeoning Religious Right in Britain, the Government's efforts to clarify protection against discrimination for gay people in the Equality Bill were thrown out by the House of Lords in January. Religious groups from across the board mounted a formidable campaign to reverse attempts to narrow the exemptions that religion has from the anti-discrimination legislation.

The defeat is not just bad news in itself, but it signals the emergence of a determined and increasingly powerful religious conservatism in Britain. GALHA has been warning for years about the activities of the Christian Institute and Christian Concern for our Nation. We have protested repeatedly against their aggressive agitations against gay rights.

It has taken these groups a long time to achieve this victory and they have had many failures along the way. The court cases they have brought - the Islington Registrar case, the Sheffield Magistrate who didn't want to rule in gay adoption cases, the Relate counsellor who didn't want to counsel gay couples - have all, so far, ended in defeat.

But what happened in the House of Lords over the Equality Bill has delivered to them their first major triumph. They have managed to reverse a Government attempt to increase protection for gay people at work.

More worrying is the fact that these wild-eyed evangelicals were joined in their attack on gay rights by the mainstream churches. The Anglicans and the Catholics conducted their own dishonest campaigns against the Equality Bill. They did it in a dishonest and panic-mongering fashion - the Catholics claiming that it would force them to have women priests and one CofE bishop even



going so far as to say he could be prosecuted for harassment if he said "God Bless You".

It is difficult to know where this will lead - whether it is a fluke that the homophobic Christians will not be able to repeat or whether the tide is turning in their favour and against the gay community.

These fears are compounded by the prospect of the election of a Conservative government and new figures from the British Social Attitudes Survey that indicate that most people in this country now think of themselves as conservative. (The good news from that survey is that social attitudes to gays have eased considerably, with few people now saying that they disapprove of homosexuals.)

It will be interesting to see how the battle between the churches and the gay community pans out in these newly conservative times. But one thing is clear: we can expect from the religious lobby a full frontal attack on the gains we have made over the last couple of decades. Are we prepared?

## A Puff of White:

### Introducing GALHA's new Chair - Adam Knowles

A puff of white (should it be pink?) smoke goes up from the GALHA committee room and I find myself Chair of this vital organisation - a humbling prospect at the best of times made worse by the undeniable excellence of my predecessor Andrew Copson. I join others in offering warm congratulations to him in his new role as Chief Exec at the BHA. I hope good relations between the organisations will thrive, helped by our time on the GALHA Committee together.

To offer insight into my approach from here, I intend to lead from the front but with consensus, taking the organisation only where it wants to go but as fast and decisively as it is able. I know I have the support of a strong, united, able committee and hope to welcome new members to it in the near future. For the many of you I've not yet had the pleasure to meet I hope in time to prove myself - not through words as these - but by the achievements of the organisation toward its stated aims. Those aims, to promote humanism and equality, are as vital now as ever, particularly at the international level. With your support GALHA can and will make



an important contribution toward them. I intend to play my small part in that and help GALHA be everything it deserves to be. GALHA has since its inception over 30 years ago been a democratic, membership-based organisation - and if you have fresh ideas or comments, now is the time to put them forward. Please do get in touch: [chair@galha.org](mailto:chair@galha.org).

### BRIGHTON CONFERENCE - September 2010

I \_\_\_\_\_ being a member of GALHA, provisionally intend coming to the conference.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Post to Malcolm Barnes, GALHA, 1 Gower Street, London, WC1E 6HD