



GALHA NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GAY & LESBIAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

Issue #07 **30th ANNIVERSARY ISSUE**

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July 2009

Atheists “Not Fully Human” declares Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor

This insulting – and rather chilling – statement provoked a furore when made by the retiring Archbishop of Westminster in a radio interview in May. Where in the scale of humanity does that leave LGBT Humanists, one wonders?

What he actually said was: "Whether a person is atheist or any other...there is in fact, in my view, something not totally human, if they leave out the transcendent. If they leave out an aspect of what I believe everyone was made for, which is, uh, a search for transcendent meaning, we call it God. Now if you say that has no place, then I feel that it is a diminishment of what it is to be a human, because to be human in the sense I believe humanity is directed because made by God, I think if you leave that out then you are not fully human."

The statement invites the conclusion that people of no faith are of less worth in the cardinal's opinion. Humanists who may have examined the claims of religion and found them wanting, preferring a rational view of things, cannot enjoy the full human identity of those who believe in miracles.

But more disturbing perhaps - and one hopes unintended - is the association the phrase carries of mass-murdering dictators and eugenicists. If you dehumanise your victims you somehow justify your inhuman behaviour to them. And with church attendance at an all-time low there must be legions of the *untermenschen!*

It's another PR disaster for the Catholic Church. The cardinal's only excuse must be that he has a history of appalling misjudgement.

When he was Bishop of Arundel and Brighton, it was brought to his attention that a priest, Michael Hill, was a child sexual abuser. Instead of reporting Hill to the police, Murphy-O'Connor allegedly allowed the crime to be covered up.

There appears to be a plan to elevate him to the House of Lords in advance of the Pope's visit next year.

Members and supporters can register their disapproval with thousands of others in an online petition to Downing Street:

<http://www.petitions.number10.gov.uk/nocormacpeerage/>

GAHLA in BIRMINGHAM



GALHA was well represented at Birmingham Pride over the May bank holiday. Paul Allen ran the stall and Ifor Griffith, outrageous in tutu, helped. There was a steady flow of enquirers, especially women. It was heartening that so many had heard of Humanism and signed up to have further details emailed to them. Even a representative from Changing Attitude, the Anglican campaigning group, seemed quite interested – but perhaps he was after one of our ever-popular pens. *Pictured stopping by at the stall are David Henry, a GALHA member and active in Queer Youth and, with Paul, Adrian Bailey of Birmingham Humanists. A long-time supporter of GALHA, Adrian has recently set up an atheist group using www.meetup.com. There were 65 people at their first meeting.*

Editors Notes

Some readers of our last issue expressed curiosity as to the identity of the editor, so I have decided to come out! In April, having been co-opted onto the committee, I succeeded an over-worked Derek Lennard, who for the previous three issues had added Editor to his many functions - they now include Drama Queen Co-ordinator (self-styled). We are all indebted to Derek for his tireless efforts. As this issue goes to press, he is heavily engaged with preparations for the 30th Anniversary celebration at the Bishopsgate Institute.

My association with GALHA dates almost from its foundation in 1979. My partner Ifor Griffith and I, then newly an item, were on the Gay News prosecution protest march that started it all off. We had met at a local meeting of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE), which in the days before the burgeoning of the commercial scene was enormously important for gay and lesbian people making their way in a world much more hostile than it is now. GALHA pays tribute to CHE and is delighted that they have chosen to celebrate their 40th anniversary with us at the Bishopsgate event, where they are presenting the first Derek Ouston Award.

It is natural to look back at such a time,



but proud as one can be of the past, I am as much impressed with what GALHA is doing at the moment. This year we again have stalls at no fewer than six local Prides, the next one in Edinburgh and then London. We have particularly Paul Allen to thank for that. The Internet is another focus of this issue. Adam Knowles describes the website, which now has a professional appearance and functionality. He has done wonders. The website includes a guide to joining our online communities, such as Facebook.

Your committee, pictured overleaf, has worked hard on the documentation and on the charity application. Wheels at the Charity Commission are turning – just – and we hope to report the outcome soon, possibly to the AGM at the Newcastle weekend conference. By the way, bookings are up for the weekend, so don't delay if you want to secure a place.

Happy Anniversary, GALHA!
Malcolm Trahearn



High turnout for Hustings

About 50 people attended the European Elections Hustings in May. The speakers were of particularly high quality. Discussion ranged over concerns about the growing demands of the religious agenda in Europe, particularly of the Catholic Church, the privileging of religion in the Lisbon treaty and Turkey's prospective membership. There was a noticeable agreement between speakers on the need to protect LGBT rights. Andrew Copson ably chaired a lively meeting.

Pictured above: Andrew introduces the speakers: Jonathan Fryer (Lib Dem), Warwick Lightfoot (Con), Mary Honeyball (Lab) and Jean Lambert (Green)



GALHA and Romanians join European Humanist Federation

GALHA's membership of the European Humanist Federation (EHF) was enthusiastically confirmed at its General Assembly held at Conway hall on 5th June. Confirmed as members also was the Romanian Humanist Association, which has recently received the 2009 Nordic Rainbow Award for their strong support of the Romanian LGBT community. In his speech to the meeting Derek Lennard, our Events Organiser, said: "GALHA is proud to be joining at the same time as such a distinguished humanist organisation." *Pictured above, flanked by Andrew Copson (GALHA Chair) and Derek, is Popescu Octav, Vice-President of the Romanian Humanist Association.*

Talking Point - “Twetters”

My effort in the last issue to encourage debate by inviting supporters to email, text message or write a very short response (138 Characters or fewer) to the proposition that the GALHA AGM should not be held at the weekend conference received only a modest response. Thank you, David Christmas. Ed.

"GALHA needs a new social event in its calendar built around the AGM. London obviously. Summer Afternoon Garden Party perhaps?"

Contributions (“Twetters”?) by letter to: Galha Newsletter Editor, 1 Gower Street, London, WC1E 6HD; by email newsletter@galha.org.uk; or text message 07971579544. Ed.



YOUR COMMITTEE AT WORK

Caption: At work at the June meeting: David Christmas (Secretary), Keith Angus (retired Treasurer), Henry Lawson (Press), Mike Rickwood (Treasurer), Malcolm Trahearn (Newsletter), Adam Knowles (Website), Derek Lennard (Meetings Organiser). Tony Kemp-Jones (Weekend Conference) was taking the photo and Andrew Copson (Chair) sent his apologies.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

GALHA ANNOUNCES PROGRAMME OF PUBLIC MEETINGS TO MARK 30TH /PEARL ANNIVERSARY IN 2009.

Meetings at Conway Hall Library starting at 7.30pm unless otherwise stated.

JULY 10TH GALHA SPECIAL 30TH ANNIVERSARY EVENT AT THE BISHOPSGATE INSTITUTE.

Please note the full address of the Bishopsgate Institute is 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2M 4QH, and this meeting starts at 6.30PM and ends at 8.30PM. A truly unique and special event to celebrate GALHA's 30th Anniversary, which includes an exhibition about GALHA's work, reflections and recollections of GALHA founding members about the organisation's early years, and talks exploring the historical context of LGBT campaigning. Speakers will include veteran human rights campaigner **Peter Tatchell**, and GALHA Vice President, **Michael Cashman**. Other luminaries of the humanist/secularist and LGBT worlds will also be contributing to this event*. In addition to all this, the CHE/Derek Oyston Award in conjunction with GALHA will be given to the winning campaigner who has made a particularly outstanding contribution to the LGBT community. GALHA is pleased to welcome the Campaign for Homosexual Equality to this event who will be celebrating their 40th Anniversary. Catering will be provided. Free admission: places can be reserved in advance or will be available on the door. (Phone 020 7392 9200). www.bishopsgate.org.uk. *GALHA Guests include GALHA VPs George Broadhead, Jim Herrick and Maryam Namazie.

SEPTEMBER 4TH TO 7TH: GALHA WEEKEND AND CONFERENCE AT THE VERMONT HOTEL, NEWCASTLE. See website for details, or write to GALHA's Secretary at 1 Gower Street, London, WC1E 6HD.

OCTOBER 9TH. THE GAY DIVORCEE-A TALK BY PAUL BURSTON.

Award winning author and journalist, **Paul Burston** will talk about his new book "The Gay Divorcee", ("Some partnerships aren't that civil"). He will be talking partly based on his own experience about the reality of gay civil partnership and divorce. You can read more about Paul on www.paulburston.com/biog.html

NOVEMBER 13TH. EDWARD CARPENTER-A LIFE OF LIBERTY AND LOVE.

Sheila Rowbotham, drawing on her well received biography of Carpenter considers the lives and loves of this gay socialist pioneer.

SATURDAY 14TH NOVEMBER: GALHA LUNCH. CAFÉ DES AMIS, SOHO, LONDON. 12.30PM FOR 1.00PM. Food, wine and a very special guest of honour.

DECEMBER 11TH. CONWAY HALL - A CELEBRATION.

Our final celebratory 30th Anniversary Event will celebrate the public meetings which have been held at Conway Hall. There will be readings from some of the guests who have kindly given us talks during the year and surprise guests. Plus of course, mulled wine and mince pies.

GALHA secretary David Christmas looks forward to the group's 30th Anniversary event

"This is expected to be a fun event, but it also has a very serious point. Both GALHA and the LGBT Community in general have achieved even more than we could have dreamt of in the dark days back in the 70s and 80s when people like Mary Whitehouse tried to use the law to bully us into silence.

"However, while we may have seen off the bigots of thirty years ago, our very success has provoked a new generation of religious fundamentalists who are determined to roll back gay rights across Europe and North America, and to ensure that gay people continue to be denied freedom and equality in other parts of the world.

"The next 30 years will probably determine whether gay equality becomes a permanent fixture across the globe.

"However GALHA is about much more than exposing the intellectual and moral flaws of religion. Through our program of regular events and activities, and our campaigns, our aim is to build a community in which gay people with no religious beliefs gain a sense of belonging, and contribute to building a better, fairer and happier society.

"We look forward to welcoming a wide range of gay people and humanists to this event, to find about GALHA and our approach to life.

ANNIVERSARIES

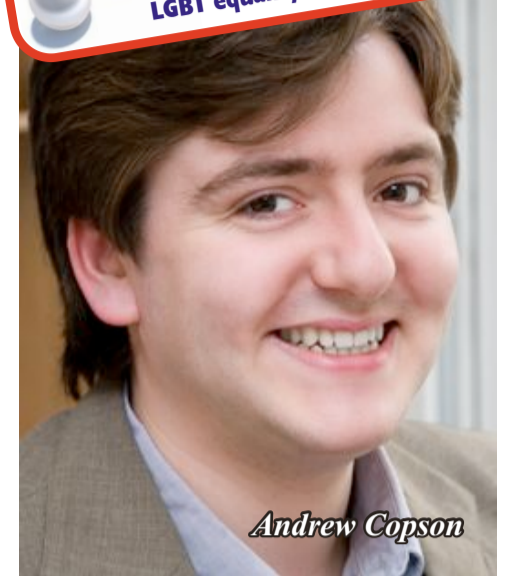
THREE DECADES OF GALHA
2009
 Promoting Humanism and
 LGBT equality for 30 years!

Anniversary thoughts from Andrew Copson, Chair of GALHA

One of my earliest memories is of Mary Whitehouse.

When my primary school class visited the local museum in Nuneaton, the town where I was born and grew up, we were told the names of famous people who had been born in Nuneaton and had to write them down: George Eliot, Mary Whitehouse and Larry Grayson (quite a mixed bag, with hindsight).

The name meant nothing to me at the time, and I had no reason to know that she was a woman to whom I would later have reason to be grateful, because a year before I was born her bigotry and religious homophobia stimulated the formation of the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association, which is thirty years old this year. Like many of the readers of this newsletter, I've found friends in GALHA, and admired the dedication of the many GALHA members who give up their time to make its varied events and



Andrew Copson

campaigning work happen.

With our move now towards charitable status, a larger membership than ever before, a brand new website and newsletter and a dedicated committee, we are in a great position to grow and succeed in the next thirty years and beyond.



THE WEBSITE

The GALHA website has recently been redesigned, please visit and check it out: <http://www.galha.org/> This project, led by Committee member Adam Knowles, took many months of work and we hope you agree the result is worthwhile. The goals of the re-design were to update the look and feel, to increase the focus of the homepage, to keep information easy to find and to make use of recent technology where appropriate.

Features of the new site:

- New visual design to provide a good impression to visitors.
- Details of our upcoming events (powered by meetup.com).
- Comprehensive search engine to help locating content.
- Powered by a system that makes it easy to update by anyone on the Committee or beyond. This should help the website stay relevant while making it easy to find out what GALHA is doing.
- An archive of the postal newsletters.
- Prominent button to join the organisation.
- A humanist 'thought of the moment'.
- Link to Youtube so people can see GALHA in action.
- Links to our members' websites (get in touch to add yours).

Much content from the old site has found a home within the redesigned site, but some is yet to move. Future improvements include adding more articles, adding content from GALHA's history, perhaps a booking facility for the events, annual lunch and weekend conference, adding photos of GALHA events (if you're on Flickr.com, please upload yours and tag them 'galha') and improving rankings in the search engines.

We'd like to take this opportunity to thank all those that contributed to and maintained the old site which will co-exist with the new site for a time, see <http://www.galha.org/site/map.html>.