

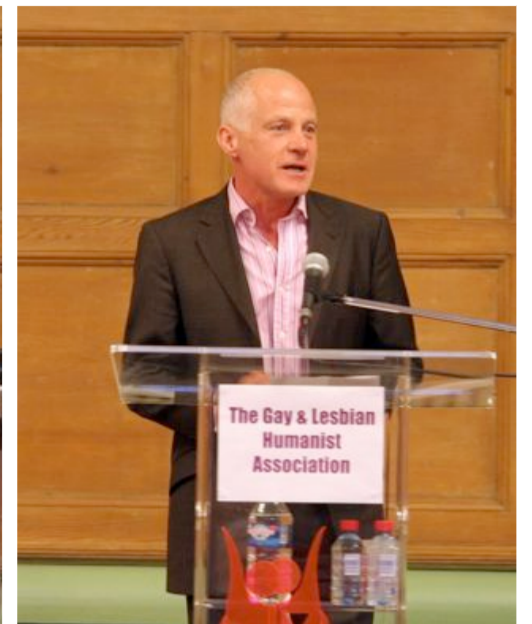


Anniversary Success!



120 people crowded into the Bishopgate Institute to celebrate GALHA's first 30 years. Messages of support included ones from from the British Humanist Association, the National Secular Society, The South Place Ethical Society, and the Council of Ex Muslims.

Commenting GALHA Secretary said "This wonderful event highlights what we have already achieved but also that there are so many more battles to be fought and won all over the world. This in turn shows why there is still likely to be a need for organisations like GALHA in another thirty years time."



Tatchell and Cashman warn against complacency

Peter Tatchell and Michael Cashman, main speakers at GALHA's highly successful 30th Anniversary celebration in July, both warned against thinking the battle for LGBT rights had finally been won.

Praising GALHA as "a voice of reason and evidence-based thought", Tatchell identified religious fundamentalism as "the biggest threat to womens' rights and LGBT rights around the world". The LGBT community needed to recapture some of the energy shown by the Gay Liberation Front and early law reformers to confront this religious challenge to equality.

For his part, MEP Michael Cashman asked the question: "Why are we still fighting for gay and lesbian rights in 2009, and why will we still be doing it in 2029? It is because hatred never goes away. It merely shifts its focus."

He pointed to the struggle that was going on to secure human rights across Europe, and the key role of the European Parliament, for example in requiring all EU members to respect rights for minorities including LGBT people. Often opposition to this was

religiously motivated.

"Unless we can separate religion and politics, we will never advance," he insisted.

He also left the audience with the thought that "Religion and faith are perhaps the most private experience that any of us can ever have, apart from an orgasm that is."

Both speakers were given an enthusiastic reception by the 120-strong audience.

Also speaking were committee member, Adam Knowles who expressed his confidence in the younger generation ("Democratic, rational, questioning and fundamentally optimistic, in many ways they are already humanists in all but name") and Stefan Dickers of the Bishopgate Institute, who said that the Institute was delighted at receiving the GALHA archives, and explained how they would contribute to the Institute's ongoing work.

Derek Lennard fronted the event and as GALHA's events organiser worked hard to bring it about.

The speeches can be viewed online at GALHA's new YouTube channel at <http://www.youtube.com/user/GALHAnews>

Editor's Notes

Doing the Vatican Rag

On YouTube recently I discovered a delicious satirical song by the American sixties comedian Tom Lehrer, beginning:

*First you get down on your knees
Fiddle with your rosaries
Bow your head with great respect
And genuflect, genuflect, genuflect, etc*

He would be unwise to try the same mockery on Islam, many of the adherents of which are not known for their tolerance of satire. One has to concede though that many Catholics quite enjoy laughing at themselves, and there's plenty to provoke merriment in their brand of Christianity. But their leaders, particularly the Pope, are deadly serious about their homophobia, which finds its political expression in Europe in the likes of the Polish right-winger Michal Kaminski, now courted by David Cameron. So anyone pleased by Cameron's apology for Section 28 ("We got it wrong. I hope you can forgive us") should be aware that the party most likely to form the future government of the UK has some very nasty bedfellows in Europe. And Roger Helmer Tory MEP has described "homophobia" as "merely a propaganda device designed to denigrate and stigmatise those holding conventional opinions". Some Conservatives are as concerned as GALHA members will be.

This puts into context warnings against complacency from Peter Tatchell and Michael Cashman at our recent anniversary celebrations and reported in this issue.

Talking about Catholics laughing at themselves, we should avoid being too pofaced about Humanism. American philosopher and humanist Ronald A Lindsay tells a light-bulb joke:

"How many humanists does it take to replace a light-bulb?"

"As many as are prepared to spend three hours discussing the pros and cons of replacing the light-bulb."

The Alpha Course

Our webmaster, Adam Knowles, reports that the Alpha course item on the site receives more hits than anything else. Worrying perhaps! GALHA Secretary David Christmas wrote to the committee: "I've just had a call from a woman who is very concerned about her gay brother. He has been attending an Alpha course and as a result is now being given 'gay-cure' counselling by the church. She says he is deeply depressed, spends all his free time with the Alpha people and has withdrawn from his family. (Classic cult symptoms I think). She wanted to know if it is legal to preach homophobia at him and also if there was anyone who might be able to rescue him from these people. Any suggestions?"

One suggestion was to advise her to seek help from PFLAG, the support organisation for parents of LGBT children, or to approach the LGBT Christian groups. I recall Derek Lennard saying that they made common cause with us against "gay-cure" at the demo earlier this year. The guy, and perhaps his sister, should understand that there are plenty of religious people for whom bigotry is anathema and that if he's a Christian he should be in touch with them.

Much as they have decided that there is no truth in faith and it is not for them, LGBT humanists accept that for some people it is important and would certainly support gays and lesbians struggling to express their identity within organised religion.

Malcolm Trahearn

Sue Sanders receives Derek Oyston Award

The 30th anniversary event saw the presentation to Sue Sanders of the first CHE/Derek Oyston Award for services to the LGBT community, sponsored by the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) in memory of Derek Oyston.

The award was presented by journalist and CHE Vice President Ray Gosling, who praised Sanders for her key role in the 35 years of "School's Out".

In reply Sanders spoke of the enormous strides that had been made since the days when teachers could be sacked simply for being gay and commented: "I can't tell you how much it means to receive an award like this from the community." She also paid tribute to the work of the late Paul Patrick and to other members of the organisation.



Talking Points - "Twetters"

Let us know what you think in 138 characters or fewer.

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.

CONFERENCE SPEAKER

We are pleased to welcome as speaker at the Newcastle Conference, Dr Matthew Waites, Lecturer in Sociology in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Applied Social Sciences at the University of Glasgow. He is author of *The Age of Consent – Young People, Sexuality and Citizenship*, which appears in paperback in September. Reviewing the book, Professor Jeffrey Weeks of London South Bank University said: "This book is an impressive and invaluable contribution to a controversial debate."



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.

Friday 4th-7th September:

GALHA weekend and Conference at the Vermont Hotel, Newcastle

Friday 9th October

Paul Burston. A talk based on his book "The Gay Divorcee". There will be a book-signing.

Paul Burston is an award winning author, journalist, curator and accidental DJ, whose books include his best selling first novel "Shameless". His latest novel, "The Gay Divorcee" about a civil partnership, caused one reviewer to call him "Gay London's Jane Austen". He will not only read from his book but will "perform" some of the real life scenes from his own civil partnership including his honeymoon night!

Friday 13th November

Talk by Sheila Rowbotham based on her biography of Edward Carpenter, "A Life of Liberty and Love".

Edward Carpenter had an extraordinary impact on the cultural and political landscape of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but even more impressive is the fact that his views seem as relevant today as they were then. He was an advocate of free love, gay rights, recycling, nudism, women's suffrage and prison reform. He even set up and lived in an "alternative community". His wide circle of friends included Oscar Wilde, Walt Whitman and EM Forster. GALHA is delighted to welcome Sheila Rowbotham, who is a Professor of Gender and Labour History at the University of Manchester, and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. Her biography of Carpenter has received excellent reviews and has been highly praised by Peter Tatchell.

Saturday, 14th November:

The GALHA Lunch.

Brown's Restaurant in Covent Garden.

Guest of Honour, Stephen Fry.

Friday 11th December.

Conway Hall – a Celebration.

Looking back at the end of GALHA's highly successful 30th Anniversary year on those who have informed, stimulated and entertained us at our public meetings, we pay tribute to our friends at Conway Hall, who have enabled these meetings to take place, and drink a toast to GALHA's next 30 years! Expect some surprise guests!

OPINION

Humanism with bite

Sitting in the dentist's chair recently I was glad that my dentist was a man of science rather than prayer. For a terrible half-hour – I couldn't talk. Now humanists like talking – put a few humanists together and they will talk the hind leg off the proverbial donkey. Occasionally after a humanist meeting I yearn for silence – a contemplative peaceful moment. I almost envy the Quakers and their periods of silence – not that I want any contact with the transcendent or supernatural.

Among the yammer which you find humanists at is whether to be a secularist or humanist, an aggressive anti-Christian or a woolly do-gooder. Well I hope to be both and call myself a secular humanist.

Talking with straight friends about gay rights they say to me – "Well, haven't you got everything now? What more do you want?" I concede that a lot has gone our way – decriminalisation, civil partnerships (not marriage), out MPs and so on, but I have to point out signs of religious backlash.

Islam particularly has a special brand of homophobia. And young Muslim gays have a terrible time. Christian leaders increasingly claim that they are being discriminated against and should have their own rights. And they are bringing court cases to prove it – airport receptionists should be able to wear large crosses, registrars should be entitled to be exempt from carrying out civil partnerships. There will be more. And this is happening on an international scale with the Organisation of the Islamic Conference at the United Nations trying to curtail free discussion of religion.

Strides towards equality may have been made in the UK, but the global situation is worrying, and this is where GALHA is active and forthright. The recent shooting in Tel Aviv of LGBT young people in a club where they are being helped to come to terms with



Jim Herrick

their sexuality is outrageous. Who seems to bear some of the responsibility? Mike Hamel, who runs the club, said religious incitement was to blame:

"Beyond the pain, the frustration and the anger, we are facing a situation in which the incitement to hate creates an environment that allows this to happen."

In India recently, a senior court declared there was no case for keeping the nineteenth century British law to prosecute gays. In fact India has a long tradition of accepting sexual diversity. Immediately, religious leaders from the country's wide range of religions came together to denounce freedom for gays and lesbians.

GALHA is valuable globally, nationally and within the gay movement. In fact it can help to create (and I think of my dentist) humanism with bite.

A distinguished secular humanist, Jim is a founder member of GALHA, former editor of The New Humanist and The Freethinker, and author. The 2nd edition of his 'Humanism: an introduction' is available from the British Humanist Association or Amazon.

Press Releases 15 June - 15 August

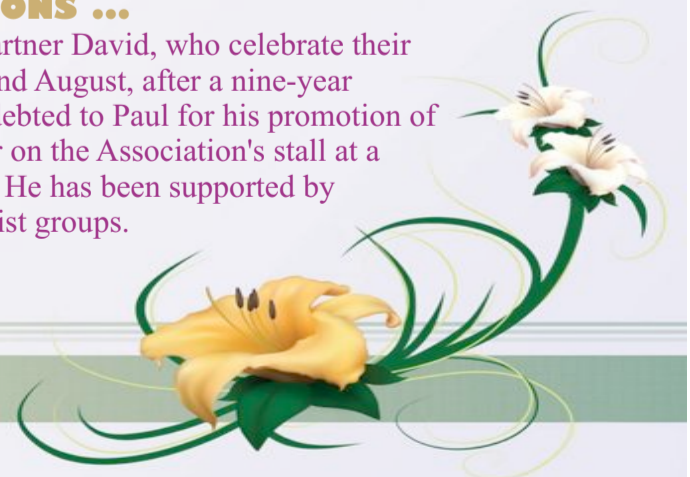
Our press officer, Henry Lawson, issued the following press releases:

- On the Bishop of Rochester's shameful attack on LGBT people
- Reporting our highly successful 30th Anniversary celebrations
- In support of Alan Rees following his arrest for accompanying his terminally ill partner to Switzerland for an assisted suicide.
- Welcoming the Quaker's "conversion" to become the first mainstream Christian denomination to support full gay marriage
- Condemning religious lobbying to extend exemptions to the Equality Bill.

All our Press Releases are available online at www.galha.org, which means that they can be picked up by people searching the web for information on subjects of interest.

CONGRATULATIONS ...

to Paul Allen and his partner David, who celebrate their Civil Partnership on 22nd August, after a nine-year relationship. We are indebted to Paul for his promotion of GALHA again this year on the Association's stall at a number of local Prides. He has been supported by volunteers from humanist groups.



Correction: In the last issue we reported that David Henry is a member of GALHA. Apologies to David. He isn't, but we are working on him!

STOP PRESS

Fry up for GALHA's Annual Lunch!

Stephen Fry has agreed to be guest of honour at the GALHA lunch on 14th November at Brown's restaurant in Covent Garden. He will receive an award for his work campaigning against religious intolerance. Bookings are open to the wider public, but members will have priority and enjoy a special rate. Details should have been received.



Adam on the box



Adam Knowles appeared on BBC 1's *The Big Questions*, 23rd August. The Question was: "Should religions tout for business?" Representing GALHA, Adam was having no truck with religion anyway and asserted that answers to the Big Questions were to be found "in the best of human thinking and understanding, not in a church".