



# GALHA NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GAY & LESBIAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

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## GALHA in Newcastle



Twenty-nine members enjoyed a very successful conference in Newcastle in September. Events included a guided tour of the city, an interesting address by Dr Matthew Waites on Humanism and LGBT rights, which is summarised in this issue, the AGM and a discussion led by Mike Rickwood on a plan for GALHA's future. Some members managed to squeeze in a visit to nearby Durham. There were also of course plenty of opportunities for informal discussion or just socialising with fellow members in a very comfortable and well-appointed hotel. Thanks are due to Tony Kemp-Jones for organising the event. A raffle held during the weekend raised £130 for LGBT activists in Iraq.



Andrew Copson, Bill McIlroy and Derek Lennard

## GALHA leads protests against Pope's state visit

GALHA spearheaded a demonstration outside the Labour Party conference venue in Brighton against the planned visit of the Pope to the UK in 2010. Eight members gathered and were supported by representatives from Brighton and Hove Humanists. Derek Lennard, who worked hard to set up the demo, said: "We seemed to get the attention of many campaigners and activists who took our flyers and even the Justice Secretary, Jack Straw, deigned to take and read our leaflet. We are very proud that we are the first organisation to organise a protest since the visit was announced."

In a press release GALHA denounced Gordon Brown's invitation to the Pope, which would include a formal reception at Buckingham Palace and meetings with the Prime Minister and other officials and dignitaries. The Association drew attention to the harmful consequences of the Vatican's policies on condoms, birth control, abortion, gay rights and its failure to address and make amends for the many documented cases of abuse committed by Catholic priests around the world.

Commenting, GALHA Secretary David Christmas said: "As a European citizen and leader of a religious group with a significant following in the UK, the Pope is of course welcome to visit Britain, provided that he obeys our laws. However, the idea that he should be feted and lauded as some kind of hero is a direct insult to all of those people whose lives have been blighted by his extreme doctrinal positions."

David condemned the Vatican's record on gay rights: "The church that claims that sex should be part of a loving and committed relationship has bitterly opposed any recognition of such relationships between gay

people. Gay couples offering to devote themselves to bringing up children have been snubbed. The message, perversely is that love and commitment count for nothing if you happen to be gay."

If the Pope's state visit does take place, then it is expected that GALHA will be to the fore in protests against the deeply reactionary and harmful nature of his doctrines.

**MEANWHILE IN EUROPE** - In a hard-hitting speech on behalf of IHEU delivered at the Human Rights Council of the United Nations General Assembly, GALHA member Keith Porteous Wood accused the Vatican of covering up child abuse and being in breach of several articles under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Keith said the Holy See had not contradicted any of his accusations. "The many thousands of victims of abuse deserve the international community to hold the Vatican to account, something it has been unwilling to do, so far. Both states and children's organisations must unite to pressurise the Vatican to open its files, change its procedures worldwide, and report suspected abusers to civil authorities."

Clearly stung to reply the Church declared through a spokesman that it was "busy cleaning its own house" and that other churches also had a problem. The statement went on to say, in an apparent attempt at mitigation, that rather than paedophilia, it would "be more correct" to speak of ephebophilia, a homosexual attraction to adolescent males.

"Of all priests involved in the abuses, eighty to ninety percent belong to this sexual orientation minority which is sexually engaged with adolescent boys between the ages of 11 and 17."

### Committee Changes

Stepping down at the Newcastle AGM were Tony Kemp-Jones and, after many years, Keith Angus. Our thanks to them. Joining the committee is Tyrone Curtis, "fresh off the boat" from Australia and with a deep commitment to Humanism.

Tyrone Curtis (left)



## Editor's Notes

### On Bullying

"My Drama teacher's gay," announced our niece casually, flinging off items of her new school uniform after a first day at secondary school that had not been the trauma she feared.

"How can you tell?" we asked, thinking a gaydar refined through a childhood populated by more uncles than aunts would have enlightened her.

"He told us," she said. "He said, 'I'm Mr \* and I'm gay.'"

As an ex-teacher, I sometimes run into former pupils, and this happened recently at a gay group that gathers in a local pub. I hadn't seen Steve for about 30 years and he'd changed a bit, so I didn't recognise him, but he had a clear memory of me and said some kind things. Of one of my colleagues, however, he was still very bitter. The man had subjected him to sustained homophobic bullying in class. Knowing the teacher well, I was amazed, especially as he was gay himself!

I'd like to think we've moved on and that the healthy atmosphere in our niece's school has become the norm, and that, in line with humanist values, both pupils and teachers can feel safe and respected in their sexuality.

Sadly, this is still not the case, particularly in faith schools. Stonewall have found that while 65% of pupils in non-denominational schools have experienced homophobic bullying, this rises to 75% in faith schools. Also students experiencing such bullying in these schools are also far less likely to report it.

In this issue we focus upon bullying in the run-up to Anti-Bullying Week (part of LGBT History Month) in mid-November and publish an article by Tony Fenwick, co-chair of Schools OUT, to whose campaigning in this area we pay tribute. We have recently become affiliated to the organisation.

### On the Vatican

We report in this issue the Vatican's response to criticism of its record on dealing with child abuse. It attempts to justify itself by suggesting, like criminals down the ages, that because others are guilty their own guilt is somehow less. And since most of the abuse is homosexual, it implies, it doesn't really matter. It should understand that all sexual abuse of minors, whatever the orientation of the perpetrators, is simply criminal. No argument. No mitigation.

Malcolm Trahearn



**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".



Andrew Copson in conversation with Matthew Waites (arguably now the tallest GALHA member.) See Matthew's article on 'Humanism and LGBT Rights' on this page.

## Membership Surge in 2009

There has been a highly gratifying 16% surge in membership this year, which confirms impressions that we have been getting things right lately. No particular cause can be identified, but exposure at eight local Prides, a spectacular 30th anniversary celebration, a new website, popular London meetings, an active press office and a revamped newsletter must have played a part. We warmly welcome our new members.

## FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

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

### FRIDAY 13th NOVEMBER

**SHEILA ROWBOTHAM, "Edward Carpenter-A Life of Liberty and Love".**

GALHA is delighted to welcome Sheila Rowbotham, professor of Gender and Labour History at the University of Manchester and a fellow of the Royal Academy of Arts, who will give a talk based on her widely acclaimed biography of Edward Carpenter, famous social visionary and early gay activist.

### SATURDAY 14th NOVEMBER

**GALHA LUNCH.**

BROWN'S BAR AND BRASSERIE, SOHO, LONDON. 12.30PM FOR 1.00PM.

Guest of honour, Stephen Fry.

### WEDNESDAY 9th DECEMBER

**CONWAY HALL – A CELEBRATION**

(Please note change of date, and this meeting is in the Main Hall, not in the library).

To celebrate the 80th Anniversary of the opening of Conway Hall, we recall some of the highlights of this important landmark of London's independent, intelligent, political and cultural life. Followed by a solstice celebration.

### Friday, January 8th

**FILM "The Power of Harmony"**

Introduction by Terry Sanderson, President, National Secular Society. Through the personal experience of a gay man's chorus, this film takes a moving and intimate look at controversial issues of the day such as gay marriage, religious views on homosexuality and gay adoption.

## The Turing Apology:

### GALHA Member on Radio 4's "Broadcasting House"

Bobby Mill, a long-standing member of GALHA, was interviewed on the Sunday programme in September, along with Sir Ian McKellan. During the week Gordon Brown had issued an apology to Alan Turing, the WW2 code-breaker, the prosecution of whom for a gay "offence" led to his suicide in 1954. Bobby was interviewed about what it was like being a gay man in the 1950's, a time when sexual relations between men were still totally illegal.

Bobby spoke movingly of how he had dropped out of university after experiencing a nervous breakdown, the result of the extreme pressure caused by suppressing his gay nature. He described how emotionally he was "frozen", although he had had a "wonderful" childhood, was naturally optimistic and was already known for the distinctive laugh "that would announce my presence a mile off".

Being unable to share his secret with his family, he had approached a GP, who treated him "like an animal, as something contemptible" and referred him for psychiatric treatment. He was diagnosed as what is now called bi-polar, but Bobby is convinced that the psychiatrists had no idea of how much he had been undermined by the denial of his nature.



Bobby Mill gives vent to his "distinctive" laugh

More than fifty years later, Bobby saw modern young gay people so relaxed about themselves, their relationships and their feelings. It was an "absolutely wonderful" change.

Sir Ian speaking later as a Stonewall representative acknowledged how much young people were now at ease with gayness, although bullying was rife and teachers were still inhibited by the effects of Section 28. Faith schools were a special problem.

# OPINION

## Homophobic and transphobic bullying

By Tony Fenwick of Schools OUT

Homophobic and transphobic bullying remain rife in our schools. The Stonewall School Report of 2007 found that 70% of LGB adults had skipped school because of homophobic bullying. The Oldham NUT report of 2008 found that 98.8% of teachers had seen or heard a homophobic incident in their schools during one term and 56% of teachers had been victims of homophobic abuse themselves.

Transphobic bullying is less well recorded because of the relatively small number of gender variant pupils, but at Schools OUT we have evidence of transitioning children receiving treatment at school varying from the highly supportive to the horrific. The bullying varies from the casual use of the term 'gay' to mean dysfunctional, through the thoughtless offensive comment, to the systematic isolation and destruction of individuals.

To be fair, the Government has been proactive on this issue. Section 28 has been scrapped; it's illegal to discriminate against LGBT people in the workplace and in the provision of goods and services; the DCSF has guidelines on homophobic bullying on its website and is about to launch guidelines on transphobic bullying, as well as endorsing LGBT History Month as a tool for challenging homophobia and transphobia; and Ed Balls has announced his intention that all forms of bullying be monitored, not just racist incidents, as is the case now. The Quangos have also played their part. OFSTED can 'debit' schools that don't demonstrate their commitment to diversity and The General Teaching Council makes it incumbent on teachers to show support for equal opportunities.

So what more can be done? If the bullying

comes from the staff there are laws and guidelines to deal with it and they should be implemented effectively. If, as is more often the case, the bullying comes from the 'clients' – in this case the pupils – then it is more problematic. According to a recent European Union report, the UK is passively accepting of homophobia and transphobia in its public services.

One answer is to stop using the school walls to protect criminal behaviour. Homophobia and transphobia are hate crimes and most bullies would be liable to prosecution if they were carrying out their activities in the streets. Schools must be safe spaces for all their communities and, not, as some still are, boot camps where the majority rules and there is institutional impunity.

Another answer is prevention rather than cure. This means more work like that of No Outsiders and Out for Our Children in primary schools, so that LGBT people are seen as a part of our community by young children. It also means using the curriculum to celebrate LGBT events, like LGBT History Month, International Day against Homophobia (IDAHO) and Holocaust Memorial Day. It also means more work by outside agencies, like the competition run by Kent Police in LGBT History Month last year, in which they set an essay title for pupils in Maidstone schools: 'What Does Diversity Mean to Me?'

The two fundamentals when it comes to eradicating homophobia and transphobia in our schools are first: to ensure that all stakeholders in education are doing something to eradicate it, and second: to generate positive images of LGBT people and their communities rather than portraying us as victims.

## HUMANISM and LGBT RIGHTS

Dr Matthew Waites, senior lecturer in sociology at the University of Glasgow, was guest speaker at GALHA's annual weekend conference. He began his talk by saying that he had long been interested in GALHA - ever since he was exposed to "religious nonsense" in his school assemblies. His talk would be about what sociology could contribute to an understanding of gender, sexuality and human rights.

He noted the enormous progress made in the achievement of formal equalities and challenged the notions of family decline promoted by conservatives and right-wing journalists. However, there was a need to tackle inequalities in the social and cultural environment that were beyond the reach of legislation, and here sociology could help by identifying "the gulf between appearances and underlying realities".

He complimented GALHA as being "ahead of the game" in that "its challenges to various religions have long been addressing the cultural forms and forces which underpin many of the inequalities we face with respect to sexuality and gender".

Moving on to consider how humanists should understand human rights, Matthew reviewed recent key developments, in some of which LGBT activists had played a part. For example, the Yogyakarta Principles had given weight to legal challenges resulting in the decriminalisation of homosexuality in India, an enormous victory. However, sociology, by taking account of cultural differences, was seeing problems in the notion of the universality of human rights.

Defining "human" was not straight forward. Was it a capacity for reason or should it be defined in terms of vulnerability?

Assumptions about heterosexuality showed how cultural factors could shape ideas about human rights. Indeed the concepts of "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" had not been present in the Universal Declaration and the European Convention, but had only crept into interpretations of human rights through case law and LGBT activism. Furthermore, the concepts of orientation and gender identity were themselves problematic and LGBT activists risked "reproducing certain heterosexual assumptions and exclusions". "Privacy" too was very culturally specific.

In spite of these complexities, Matthew was confident that human rights were a valuable concept though one in need of reinterpretation; for example, marriage could be redefined to include same-sex marriage. Addressing the question of how humanists should understand human rights, he argued that they "need to be approached not as expressing an eternal, essential human nature, but rather as a cultural construct produced by human beings themselves". It was on that basis that they could be reinterpreted.

Check out Matthew's website:

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/departments/sociology/staff/matthewwaites/#d.en.26094>

(We are delighted to report that during the weekend Matthew joined GALHA. Ed)