



North East Humanists

Monthly Bulletin — March 2023

RECAP OF RECENT NEH EVENTS

An Evening of Your Choice of Poetry on 16 February

This meeting was rather different than usual — it was an opportunity for members to read a poem and to explain their choice. Eleven of us did so, resulting in an eclectic range of poetry covering works produced throughout the ages, including one written recently by one of our members herself! Many of the readers also explained how their choice was linked to a significant event in their lives, which made the evening all the more moving.

This point — that poetry often links us to our experiences — was made by Clare Jackson, whose excellent introduction about the appeal and value of poetry prepared us to listen and read with greater understanding. She commented that poetry conveys feelings and instincts where ordinary language and everyday prose is not enough. Oral in origin, it resonates with our primary senses. Before anything was written down, there was poetry.

Through examples, Clare showed us that the sound of poetry can evoke harmony (*The Birthday* by Christina Rossetti) and disharmony (*Poem* by Simon Armitage). A spirited reading of early English (*The Battle of Maldon*) demonstrated that rhythm expresses mood. The use of repetition to reinforce and intensify was demonstrated

in *Sonnet 43* by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. And finally, through a range of examples, she showed us how poetry allows us to pinpoint and reflect on particular events: personal, social, and political.

After the readings had taken place, Clare deftly analysed what she had heard. She noted several connecting themes and techniques such as aspiration, hope, listening to moments, feeling urgency, and paying attention to soundscapes. In particular, she observed that many of us described poetry as a companion, both personal and to be shared, which makes it an immensely human part of life.



For those wishing to review or recreate the readings of the night, here is the list of poems that were shared:

Les Milne shared [A Humanist Credo](#)

Susan Walker shared [Counting the Beats](#) by Robert Graves

Ian Hunter shared [Who Learns My Lesson Complete?](#) by Walt Whitman

Alan Bill shared [Vital Lampada \(They Pass On the Torch of Life\)](#) by Henry Newbolt

Mike Turner shared [Desiderata](#) by Max Ehrmann

John Watson shared [Life's Brief Candle](#) by William Shakespeare

Kate Hinton shared [He Tells Her](#) by Wendy Cope

Irene Wilkinson shared *I Am Eagle* by herself as part of a creative writing class

Moirra Turner shared [Invictus](#) by William Ernest Henley

Courtney Ward shared *A Walk in the Woods* posted in a local park

Liz Armstrong shared [I, Too](#) by Langston Hughes

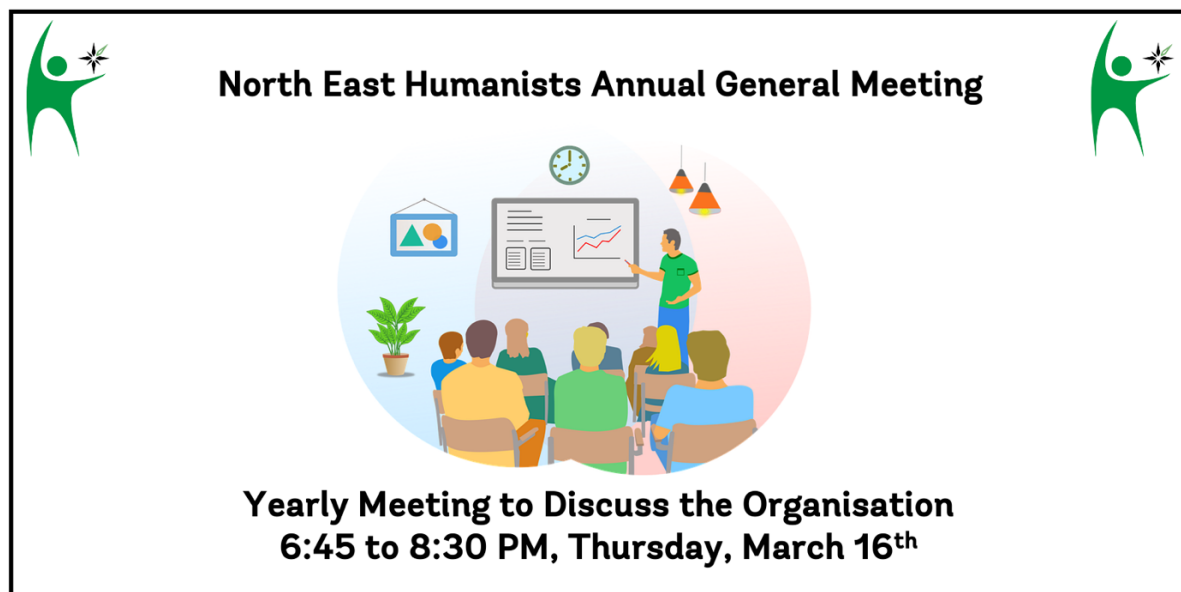
Jan Mole shared [The Road Not Taken](#) by Robert Frost

UPCOMING NEH ACTIVITIES

AGM and Topics from a Hat March 16th

The 2023 AGM for North East Humanists will be held on Thursday, March 16th from 6:45pm to 8:30pm. After the business of the meeting, we will also hold a general discussion using our "Topics from the Hat" format.

Reports for the meeting have already been circulated to NEH members via email, which you can [view here](#).



What: AGM plus Open Discussion

When: 16 March 2023 at 6:45 PM

In Person: Brunswick Methodist Church, Brunswick Place, Newcastle, NE1 7BJ.

(PLEASE NOTE THE CHANGE IN VENUE! This is Located Near Monument Metro.)

Doors open at 6:30. Meeting to begin at 6:45. Discussion to end by 8:30 so we can clear the space by 8:45. The cost is £1 for NEH members. £3 for non-members.

This includes tea, coffee, and light refreshments.

Online: Zoom opens at 6:30 PM. Register using the Eventbrite link:
<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/neh-2023-agm-tickets-559530720447>

If you prefer not to use Eventbrite, you can send an email to Susan Walker at northeasthumanist@gmail.com and she will send you a Zoom link directly.

Anyone is welcome to our online events. Whilst we do not charge for joining these, we are a registered charity that you may donate a few pounds to by using [the donation page on our website](#). We suggest £3 for these donations but all amounts are greatly appreciated.

Book Club Reminder by Jan Mole

Our next choice is [Good Behaviour](#) by Molly Keane, a Virago classic and described as an elegant and hugely entertaining portrayal of the discovery of freedom and loss of innocence. Told through a narrator initially entrapped in her inherited codes of conduct, this is a sparkingly witty black comedy of manners.

Join us for our next meeting at [The Duke of Wellington](#) in Durham on Tuesday 14th March at 7pm. You will be very welcome, just let me know. Jan Mole 0780 466 7390 or janet.mole@ntlworld.com.

OTHER NEH NEWS

Resources about the threats to Women's Rights under the Gender Recognition Act 2004 and the Equality Act 2010

At our January event inquiring into Trans issues, audience member Diane Jones offered to share several resources that she has compiled about this topic, which you can now see below.

[Woman's Place UK](#) "Violence against women and sex discrimination still exist. Women need reserved places, separate spaces, and distinct services."

[Fair Play For Women](#) is a campaigning and consultancy group which raises awareness, provides evidence and analysis, and works to protect the rights of women and girls in the UK.

[Transgender Trend](#) "We are an organisation of parents, professionals and academics based in the UK who are concerned about the current trend to diagnose children as transgender, including the unprecedented number of teenage girls suddenly self-identifying as 'trans'."

[Keep Prisons Single Sex](#) was established in 2020 to campaign for the sex-based rights of women in prison to single-sex accommodation and same-sex searching. We also campaign for data on offending to be recorded by sex throughout the criminal justice system.

[Detrans Voices](#) is a community resource created for, by, and about people who have detransitioned and/or desisted from transgender self-identification. We are

dedicated to raising awareness and improving the well-being of detransitioned and desisted people.

[Genspect](#) is an international alliance of professionals, trans people, detransitioners, parent groups, and others who seek high-quality care for gender-related distress.

[Adulthood Human Female](#) — This is the first UK documentary feature to look at the clash between women's rights and trans ideology.

Lynn Alderson on "[Alphabet Soup: Why LGBTQI+ is not a thing.](#)"

[Bayswater Support](#) offers parents whose children have a transgender identity somewhere to talk, share, and be understood. We are wary of medical solutions to gender dysphoria, when exploring gender roles is part of normal child development.

[Thoughtful Therapists](#) has come together with a shared concern about the impact of gender identity ideology on children and young people. We want to protect the integrity of the open-ended exploration of thoughts and feelings that has always been, and is still now, the basis of ethical and effective therapy.

[Paradox Institute](#) is an independent science education group exploring the complex topics of sex and gender through clear and concise animated videos.

For more, you can contact Diane Jones at diane@dianjo.co.uk.

Humanist Group at HMP Frankland by David Wright

Hello. I am a member of the NRPSN (Non-religious Pastoral Support Network) and NEH. I run a weekly discussion group at [HMP Frankland](#) in County Durham, which I have managed to make "official" as part of the chaplaincy programme. The prisoners are able to get credit for attending this event because of the official status. Nominally there are five men who attend and more are expressing some interest. They have to designate themselves as "Humanist" in order to join the group.

Discussions are very free ranging but usually focus on some topical issue or some other ethical/philosophical issue which I or another of the group want to raise. The men are very positive about the opportunity to share thoughts in this forum and have asked whether they can become members of HUK. I have raised this request through NRPSN and await a response from HUK. I suppose there might also be an opportunity for them to become members of NEH.

I am troubled by the problem that I cannot always attend weekly meetings, which means that the meeting does not happen. Indeed, when I am on holiday there are long gaps in the programme. It would be very helpful if there is anyone who is interested in sharing some of the responsibility for this group with me so that more continuity could be established. I am happy to discuss in more detail with anyone who would consider it. (There are some hurdles to negotiate in order to get access to Frankland and also be accepted by the chaplaincy.)

If interested, please contact me by email at wrightdavidg@gmail.com.

The Power of Poetry in Ukraine by Ed Gibney

For those who don't know him, Taras Shevchenko ([1814-1861](#)) has been described [as](#) "not just the founder of the modern Ukrainian literary language, he is also the most important symbol of modern Ukrainian nationhood." When I lived in that country as a Peace Corps Volunteer from 2003-2005, we volunteers joked about playing "Where's Wally?" with Shevchenko statues in every town and city because there was always one somewhere! Ukrainians all get taught his poems by heart, and here is one that I recently found to be extremely prescient:

Untitled

When I die,
let me rest, let me lie
amidst Ukraine's broad steppes.
Let me see
the endless fields and steep slopes
I hold so dear.
Let me hear
the Dnipro's great roar.
And when the blood
of Ukraine's foes flows
into the blue waters of the sea,
that's when I'll forget
the fields and hills
and leave it all
and pray to God.
Until then, I know no God.
So bury me, rise up,
and break your chains.
Water your freedom
[Photo by Andrey Denyer](#)
with the blood of oppressors.
And then remember me
with gentle whispers
and kind words
in the great family
of the newly free.



Translated by Alexander J. Motyl. Original publication: Taras Shevchenko, Untitled "(lak umru to pokhovaite)," *Zibrannia tvoriv u 6 tomakh*, Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 2003, 1: 371. *Ukrainian Literature*. Volume 4, 2014.

How awful to have to say this! But also, how inspiring! This is exactly the kind of poem that permeates Ukraine. It's the kind of poem that many Ukrainians know by heart. And after this month's night of poetry with Clare Jackson, where we learned much more about the power of poetry, perhaps we shouldn't have been so surprised at the Ukrainian resistance to Russia's latest invasion of their lands. May they join "the great family of the newly free" again soon.

NEH Donation to Uganda Humanist Schools Trust

During the February meeting of the Management Committee, our Treasurer Mike Turner suggested that the Committee should consider the possibility of utilising

some of the reserves we currently hold to support other suitable and worthwhile causes. It was agreed by the Committee that this would be appropriate, especially now since we have a history of making charitable donations at our AGM. The Committee agreed that a £1,000 donation could be made to the Humanist schools in Uganda, which Mike arranged soon after our meeting.

Steve Hurd, the Chairperson of Uganda Humanist Schools Trust, responded: "Please convey our heartfelt thanks to your members. The long-term support you have all provided has made a big difference to the education of many children. Our current aim is to boost the stock of books in all the schools, and play materials in the four primaries."

Places to Visit in RE Syllabuses by Kate Hinton

As part of my work as our Education Officer, the idea of replacing "Places of Worship" in RE syllabuses has been brewing in my head recently. The original idea came from an HUK Education Day I attended. And now, I have written a short paper on this, which is on [our website](#), and I have shared it with the Newcastle SACRE. Please take a look and [send me any comments](#) you may have.

Places of Worship

RE syllabuses have traditionally included places of worship as the physical centres for a range of religions. They have also encouraged schools to arrange visits to local ones such as churches, synagogues, mosques, temples and gurdwaras.

It is undoubtedly valuable for pupils to be taken to such places, to meet adherents of the faith, learn about the significance of the building and the activities that are housed there.

However, now that syllabuses are increasingly requiring RE to include non-religious world views, such as Humanism, this approach is limiting and not inclusive of these sources of beliefs and values. Although they do often hold regular events, they do not have their own buildings.

An alternative would be for syllabuses to refer to Places to Visit or Significant Buildings.

Significant Buildings

This title would, of course, include places of worship but would also include the many community, social and cultural buildings that are important to us all and are clearly supportive of the main Humanist beliefs and values. Using our summary of these beliefs and values, from our series of posters available on our website, (<https://www.northeast-humanists.org.uk/education.html>) here are a few examples of significant secular buildings that could be visited.

Being kind, Showing respect, Upholding rights

- Social and community centres
- City and town halls
- Law courts
- Citizens Advice Offices
- Local charities

Asking questions, Using evidence, Testing theories

- Libraries and bookshops
- Museums
- Astronomical observatories
- Universities

Finding happiness, Having a good life, Feeling fulfilled

- Leisure and sport centres
- Art galleries
- Music venues
- Theatres and cinemas
- Local charities

Visits to some of these places could well provide good educational experiences, especially if there was someone available to explain what they offer and how they work. Teachers can then explain how they contribute to the main Humanist beliefs and values. In fact, schools may well already include visits of this kind in a different context. So links could easily be made to their significance to us all and in particular to non-religious people, such as Humanists. Certainly, they should be included in connection with places of worship as examples of other significant buildings and places to visit that are an important part of our community.

OTHER HUMANIST NEWS

Humanists UK Reports on the 2021 Census Results for the UK

It's official! The non-religious outnumber Christians among all people aged 66 and below, according to [Census figures](#) released recently. The significance of this can't be overstated. Just ten years ago, Christians were the majority of the population, and outnumbered the non-religious in every age group. [This is no longer the case.](#)

We are not a Christian country and religion is in a steep decline. Why, then, are children required to pray, by law, in our state schools? What justification is there for the 26 unelected bishops who sit, speak, and vote in our House of Lords? Will the overtly Anglican nature of King Charles III's Coronation in May truly represent the country? The evidence, provided by the 2021 Census says no, it will not. Religion's claim to institutional power, and hold over our education system, is now completely unjustifiable – and we are working around the clock, inside and outside Parliament, to amplify this message.



Recently, we've put the story of the [rise of the non-religious](#) in front of millions of people by being featured in the [Telegraph](#), [Times](#), [Guardian](#), [Independent](#), [Mail](#), [Evening Standard](#), [Wales Online](#), [Belfast News Letter](#), [RTE](#), and across hundreds of local papers. We've received a record-breaking amount of press coverage on the Census in the last few months. It's abundantly clear that our message – that

religious institutional power should be a thing of the past – is resonating. It's time we do away with these anachronistic hangovers that do not represent where we are as a country, and get with the times.

Keeping the Faith? With the Accession of King Charles III, We Have a Historic Opportunity to Modernise the Monarchy.

Andrew Copson, the Chief Executive of Humanists UK, wrote this article for the winter 2022 edition of New Humanist magazine.

If the establishment of the Church is not often on display to the British public, it certainly was during the accession of King Charles III. Around the country, as public authorities proclaimed the King's accession, God and the Church of England have been not just prominent, but very often presiding. Charles was proclaimed king "by the Grace of God", and after much speculation, it has been confirmed that he will bear the title "Defender of the Faith", rather than "Defender of Faith" as some (though not him) had suggested. Like almost all English monarchs in the 500 years since it was first awarded, he will bear the traditional title of the supreme governor of the Church of England.

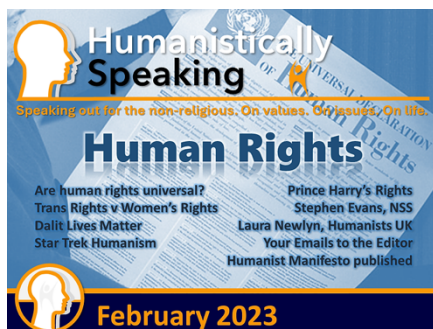
But for the first time in recent history, the Church of which the new monarch is the supreme governor is not the Church of their subjects. Most of those subjects don't even believe in God. Putting aside doctrine and practice (which has never been a majority activity), when Queen Elizabeth II acceded to the throne, most of her subjects in Britain probably at least identified as Anglicans and certainly looked to that Church for life events such as weddings and funerals.

In 2022, only 12 per cent of the new king's British subjects say they are Anglicans, most funerals are non-religious, and only 10 per cent of weddings are Anglican. Being a committed Anglican no longer makes a monarch of like mind and habit with their people; it sets them apart.

Does this matter? Those from the "No God, No Master" school of the humanist tradition will give a resounding "No!" – down with the whole lot and a secular republic yesterday, please! But there is an arguable rational basis for a constitutional monarchy, and so there are others who would like a monarchy they can support with a clear conscience and which can play a unifying role.

[<< Click here to read the entire article in New Humanist >>](#)

Latest Issue of Humanistically Speaking



North East Humanists are affiliated with *Humanistically Speaking*, which is a monthly magazine published since 2019 by members of the South Central England Humanist Network. You can subscribe to this free magazine and view all previous issues at [their website](#). Their latest [February](#) issue focuses on human rights and it is presented in *HS*'s new digital format where you can share and interact with each individual article.

CONTACT US FOR MORE

North East Humanists

All of the latest information about North East Humanists is available on our [website](#). You can also follow us on social media via [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#). Interacting with us there is a great way to help spread the news about Humanism.

Please consider a membership with us if you do not already have one. You can [join NEH](#) for as little as £6 per year. Our fees are very low, but they really do support so much local grassroots work, as we hope you see in these bulletins. This month, we are excited to welcome **Allyson Hayter**. Thanks for joining!

The monthly bulletin is free for members and supporters of North East Humanists. If membership is more of a commitment than you can make, you can be a supporter if you just [sign up to our email list](#). For NEH members without email, the bulletin is printed by Mike and Moira Turner and sent by post. Contact them at 0191 272 8376 to arrange this if you need it.

Durham Humanist Group

This local house group is run by Susan Walker. Contact her at 0191 384 1432 or susan.humanist@gmail.com if you would like to attend events here.

Teesside Humanist Group

If you would like to join this group, please [contact us](#) for more details. You can also follow them on Twitter [@Teeshumanists](#) or like the [Teesside Humanists](#) group on Facebook run by Terry Waites and Ben Collier.

Humanist Funerals, Baby Naming Ceremonies, and Weddings

Anyone who wants advice on how to organise these should contact Les Milne at 0795 267 1533 or go to www.northeast-humanists.org.uk/ceremonies.html.