



North East Humanists

Monthly Bulletin — July 2022

RECAP OF RECENT NEH EVENTS

Teesside members at their monthly social lunch on 11th June

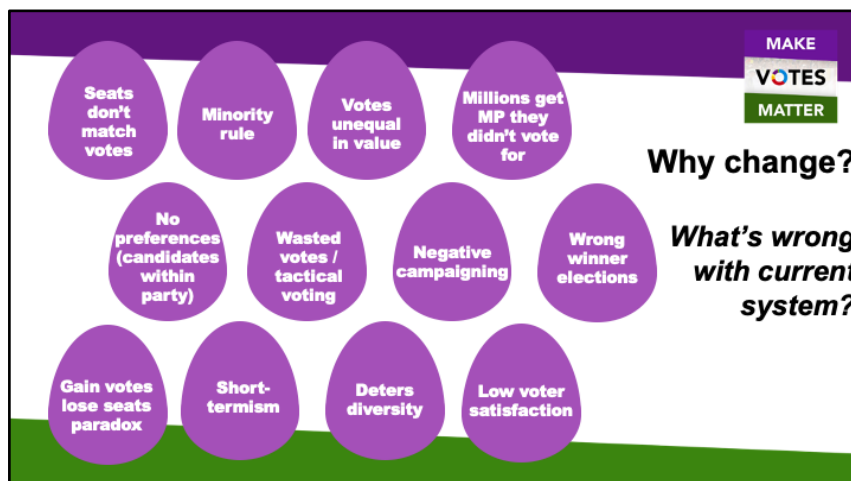


Election Reform: Make Votes Matter

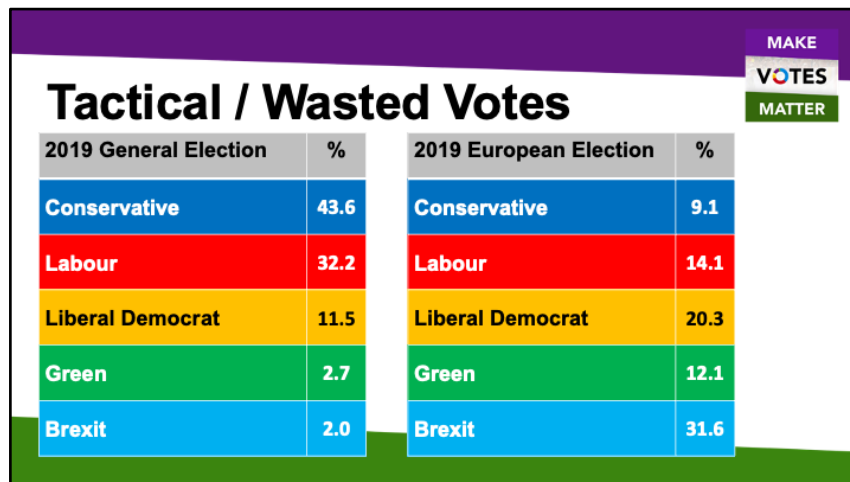
Did you know that 71% of votes didn't affect the outcome in the last general election? That's outrageous in a so-called democracy! But there are ways to fix this.

On Thursday, June 16th, we hosted a discussion with David Gallagher from the organisation [Make Votes Matter](#). MVM is the cross-party campaign whose mission is to replace "First Past the Post" with "Proportional Representation" for the House of Commons.

David's presentation included lots of shocking reasons why our current First Past the Post system just doesn't work.



A side-by-side look at the way the country voted in 2019 in the General Election and the European Election showed just how much people's true party preferences were not being captured. And this resulted in enormous consequences for the country that were supported by only a minority of voters.



Proportional voting systems have already fixed this in many democracies around the world. In fact, only two countries in Europe still use First Past the Post for their general elections: one is the United Kingdom, and the other is the dictatorship Belarus. To help end this, you can [support Make Votes Matter at their website](#).

Our discussion with David touched particularly on ways of overcoming the apathy of voters (if your vote doesn't count, why bother), and engaging with younger people. A younger person present mentioned that the ways politicians try to engage with the populace are irrelevant. He mentioned the importance of memes in communicating with people these days.

A good chunk of people stayed for a drink afterwards, which always provides a great opportunity for sharing even more ideas than we can report on here.

World Refugee Week June 20–26 by Les Milne

Beginning with World Refugee Day on the 20th of June, the theme of this year's World Refugee Week is "Healing". Sadly, here in the UK, the Government's approach to refugees seems very remote from the idea of healing. Many have condemned the policy of sending the so called "illegal" refugees to Rwanda for processing, including Humanists UK. At their AGM in Belfast on Saturday, June 26th, HUK members adopted a call for the policy of deporting asylum claimants to Rwanda to be brought to an end, calling the policy "dehumanising and immoral."

Here at North East Humanists, at our AGM in March, we showed our support for refugees and asylum seekers through voting to make a charitable donation of £1000 to the Comfrey Project in Gateshead. As reported in the April Bulletin, Mike and Moira Turner presented our cheque for this to the Project Director Eleni Venaki.

On Friday, June 25th, Joan and I had a walk to the project to meet Eleni and we saw that the centre was very busy. An art project was underway, and we met several Turkish refugees who gave us Turkish tea and baklava. We were then offered a Nigerian lunch, prepared by refugees from that country, whilst the diners included

women from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). There was a friendly buzz about the place and I'm sure our donation is being put to good use.



Nigerian Lunch

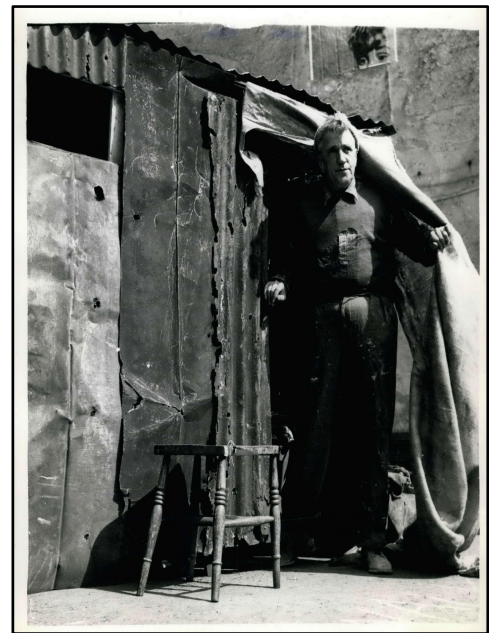


Turkish Tea

I was able to show Eleni and her colleagues a photograph of the former Gateshead MP Harry Randall who, in April 1960, in an effort to raise funds for World Refugee Year, lived for two days as a refugee on a corner site on High Street in Gateshead. He used a tin hut, makeshift table and chair, bed, candles, and refugee rations. He cooked his meals on a wood burning brazier on the kerbside as traffic passed.

He was regarded by politicians on all sides of Parliament as the most knowledgeable MP on the subject and he was a British delegate to the Council of Europe as well as a United Kingdom Representative on the Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commission Programme for Refugees (UNHCR).

In Parliament, he said: *"All the refugee asks is to cease being a refugee. My hon. friend referred to the fact that during the Easter recess I spent two days as a refugee. In order to arouse the conscience of the people in my constituency, I decided that I would live in a refugee hut for a couple of days. I lived on 1s (5p) a day and it was pretty rough, but 1s a day is approximately how much a refugee has to live on."*



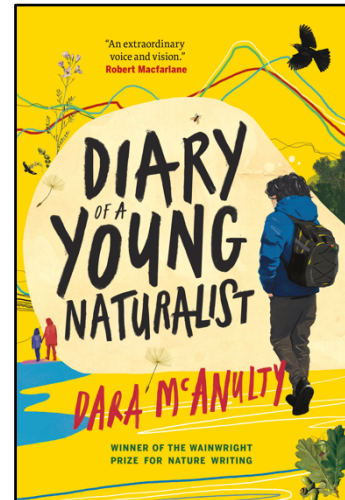
I suspect Harry Randall would have been proud that the community he represented was hosting the Comfrey Project, albeit dismayed at the number of refugees in the world, and certainly horrified at the current UK policy.

NEH Virtual Book Club on Thursday June 28th by Jan Mole

Once again we were a small group, but this time we had a big agenda as we attempted to evaluate two books this evening within the time restrictions of a free Zoom meeting.

We read *Bel Canto* by Ann Pratchett in May and memories were rather jaded. It was a well written book and the story of hostages taken by a terrorist group at a private event had great potential. We felt it began well and the atmosphere and tension were evident. Thereafter, apart from the feeling of continuing menace, the book seemed to run out of steam as the author introduced red herrings that never came to fruition. There were many characters, perhaps too many, as some were rather insubstantial. The relationship between hostage and captor was reminiscent of the Patty Hurst story for those of us who remember it. Particularly, we felt the author ran out of ideas as to how to ultimately conclude the book.

Secondly, we discussed *Diary of a Young Naturalist* by Dara McAnulty. This was definitely a book that appealed to our small group! Written by the exceptionally talented fourteen-year-old environmentalist, it ticked all of the boxes. Fascination with nature in all its forms, wonderful descriptive language of both the natural world and how it feels to be autistic, and the value of a loving family. I'm even rereading it as from today.



For the future, we have decided not to meet until September when our book for discussion will be [Underland](#) by Robert MacFarlane. The book received [a glowing review in The Guardian](#), and according to the book's publicity, "Robert Macfarlane delivers an epic exploration of the Earth's underworlds as they exist in myth, literature, memory, and the land itself."

The NEH book club will be changing its scheduling in the future. We plan to continue as a winter activity only, whereby we meet bi-monthly, and preferably in a social setting where we can have a drink, perhaps a meal, and an improved quality of conversation than is offered on Zoom. We would heartedly welcome new members with suggestions of "must reads." We meet on the 4th Tuesday of the month at 7:30 PM so the next discussion will be on September 27th. If you are interested in joining, please contact Jan Mole at 0132 535 6029, 0780 466 7390, or janet.mole@ntlworld.com.

UPCOMING NEH ACTIVITIES

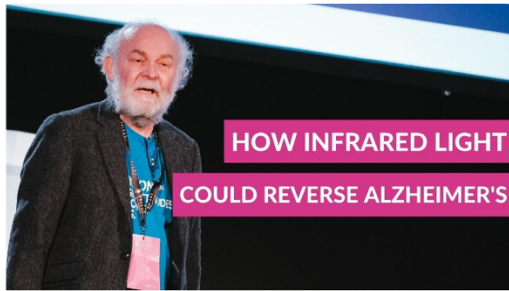
Shedding New Light on Dementias, Thursday, July 21st

We are pleased to welcome Dr Paul Chazot for this event. Dr Chazot will discuss the rationale and use of a new, effective, safe, non-invasive way to treat Alzheimers and Parkinson's disease, based on a specific wavelength of infrared light. This is built on over 20 years of basic science work here in the North East, which has started to bear fruit with clinical success in the US and in the UK. Dr Chazot will discuss the trials his group will be recruiting for later this year, which will be the first of their kind in the UK.

Dr Paul Chazot is an Associate Professor of Pharmacology based at the University of Durham, and a Fellow of the British Pharmacological Society. He heads up the Pain Challenge Academy in the Durham Wolfson Research Institute of Health and Wellbeing, and he was formerly the President of the European Histamine Research Society (EHRS) and the Durham branch of Parkinson's UK.



Shedding New Light on Dementias



A Public Discussion with Dr Paul Chazot 7 to 9 PM, Thursday, July 21st

Who: Dr Paul Chazot

When: Thursday July 21st at 7:00 PM

What: A short talk followed by Q&A

In Person: Tyneside Irish Centre, NE1 4SG. Doors open at 6:30. £1 for NEH members. £2 for non-members. This includes tea, coffee, and light refreshments.

Online: Zoom opens at 6:45 PM. Register using the Eventbrite link: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/shedding-new-light-on-dementias-tickets-373266479087>

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.

OTHER NEH NEWS

The Cuppa Club — a Microgrant for Support and Grow

As we have mentioned in previous editions of the bulletin, the NEH Community Fund awarded several microgrants for small, local projects. One of last year's awardees — [Support and Grow North East](#) — now has their "Cuppa Club" up and running, using funds from a microgrant from NEH.

Support and Grow aimed to set up Cuppa Clubs in 3 areas of deprivation in the North West of North Tyneside. A trained Support and Grow volunteer is in attendance at every group meeting, offering support, community information, and access to their other services. They can also arrange a for another community volunteer to support clients in getting to the Cuppa Club.

Cuppa Clubs are held in a local venue that has the appropriate friendly, inclusive culture. These are safe, comfortable environments. The Support and Grow Volunteer

in attendance assists individuals in getting to know each other and forming supportive friendships outside the groups.

As the Cuppa Clubs develop, guests are being invited to some of the sessions to give useful information. An example may be a benefits advisor or some other charity that can explain the services they offer. Experience has taught Support and Grow that community is not a building; it is a feeling that comes from groups of people coming together to share ideas and experiences.



Louise Jones, the Chief Operations Officer for Support and Grow, wrote to tell us:

"We have been delighted by the response of the community, and the feedback from clients. They love that all activities resulting from these clubs (planned summer outings and events, fundraising, volunteering opportunities etc.) are planned and carried out by attendees from the community, with our support. As well as addressing loneliness and isolation, these clubs have impacted personal confidence and growth and engagement of individuals with the wider community. It has also addressed wider issues, as we have celebrated differences with activities at our Cuppa Clubs. An example is our 'love not hate' campaign. Feedback from attendees has informed our strategy of provision and advocacy going forward. We are currently planning a Pride Festival in a field in the middle of a council estate in Shiremoor, following feedback from members of our LGBT+ community. This will involve

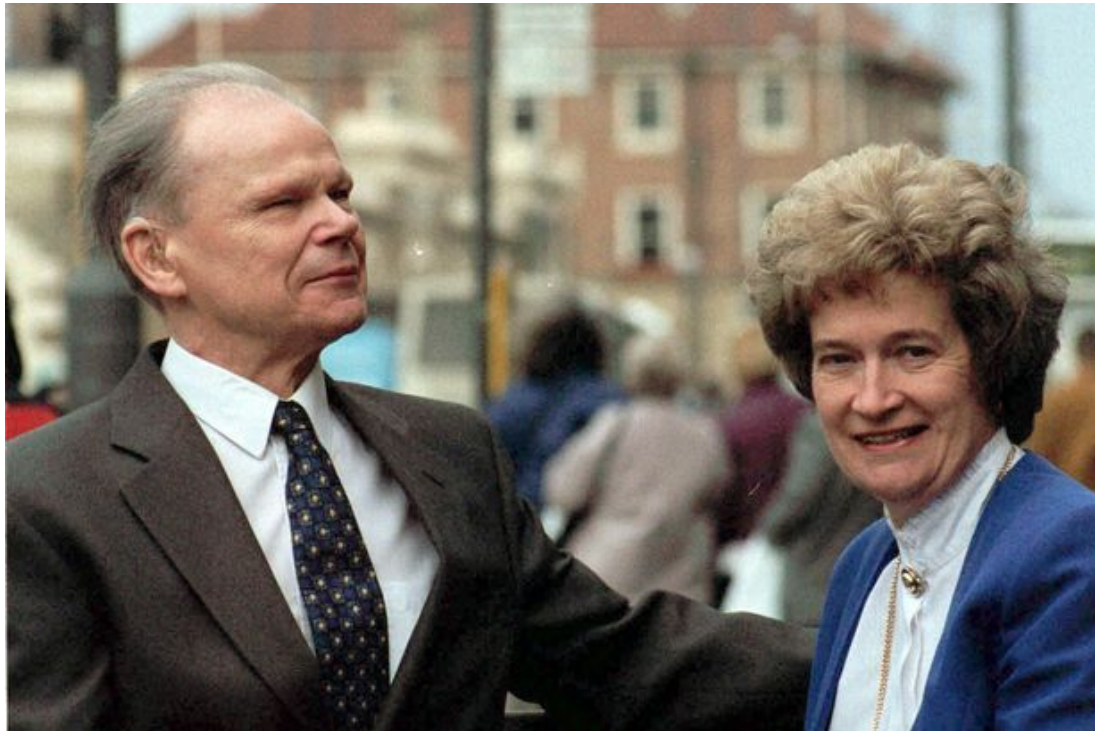
communities in neighbouring villages and estates. Thank you again for your grant and your support.”

The NEH Community Fund closed on the 31st of January, 2022. The Management Committee is currently conducting a full review of this project and will report back in a few months. While full details are being gathered, we are very happy to share images and stories like this about Support and Grow's Cuppa Club. Thank you to all NEH members and volunteers who help make things like this happen.

Obituary for Ann Cains

We were saddened to learn of the death of one of our longstanding members, Ann Cains, who died suddenly on May 25th.

Ann, a kind-hearted lady with an engaging personality, was, along with her husband Dick, a stalwart supporter of Teesside Humanists. Well known and active in the local community, Ann was a former councillor and one-time mayor of Stockton-on-Tees and was described by one of the councillors as someone who dedicated herself to public service.



[George Glass and Ann Cains in Stockton, 2000 \(Image: Ian McIntyre/Gazette\)](#)

She will be greatly missed by all who had the pleasure of knowing her, especially the members of the Teesside Humanist Group, which she attended regularly and where she was liked and respected by everyone. A lovely person. Our condolences go to Dick and their family.

NEH Ceremonies Poster

Kate Hinton and the Education Subcommittee have produced several posters over the last couple of years to help spread the word about Humanism in clear and compelling ways. Their latest effort about Humanist ceremonies is now available on

our website on [our Education page](#). These are publicly available resources so feel free to share them far and wide!



CEREMONIES

Humanists celebrate important times and events in people's lives. Trained celebrants lead the ceremonies.



BABY NAMING

'I promise to take care of you. Make the most of your life, be happy and be good to other people'.



WEDDING

'I love the person you are and I promise to give you space to be yourself. I pledge to care for your well-being while we both live'.



FUNERAL

'The comfort of having a friend may well be lost but the comfort of having had that friend is never lost'.

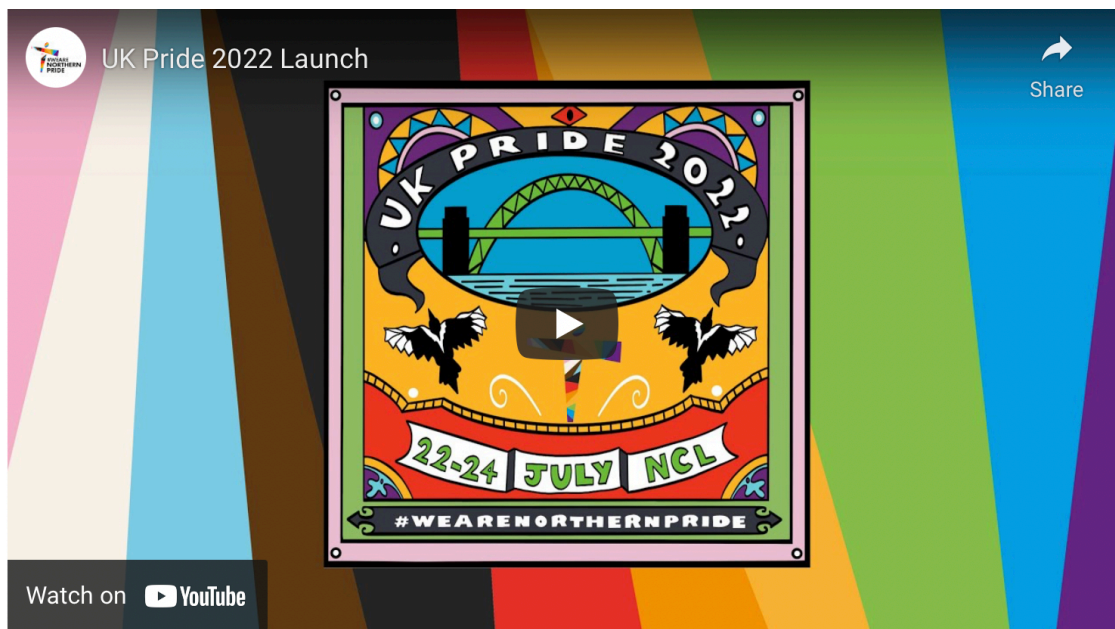
OTHER HUMANIST NEWS

Northern Pride Reveal Plans for UK Pride 2022

Northern Pride have unveiled ambitious plans for their 2022 festival, as they bring UK Pride to the North East.

The Northern Pride festival will return to Newcastle's Town Moor from 22 to 24 July, with a packed programme of events planned for the lead up to the festival.

And this year's theme has been revealed as "Remember, Resist, Rise Up", with organisers releasing [a video preview](#) made with local artists and activists to illustrate what this means to them.



Northern Pride was originally awarded the UK Pride title in 2018 but this was postponed due to the pandemic, with organisers hosting virtual events for the 2020 and 2021 celebrations. Jenny Dewsnap, Co-Chair of the UK Pride Organiser's Network, is delighted that UK Pride will finally be coming to Newcastle in 2022.

“We were impressed with Northern Pride’s bid way back in 2018 and, while the pandemic put a hold on their plans, it was fantastic to see them host virtual festivals in its place to bring the community together online.”

“It’s shaping up to be a really exciting programme, with something for all ages to enjoy, and we can’t wait to see their plans come to fruition.”

[<< Click here for more information on all the events at this year’s Pride Festival >>](#)

Happy World Humanist Day! — A Message from Andrew Copson

Andrew Copson, the Chief Executive of Humanists UK shared the following message on his blog celebrating World Humanist Day on June 21st.

It’s World Humanist Day! Today humanists from around the globe are coming together to celebrate the values of humanism – kindness, equality, rational thought, and working towards a world where everyone can live a flourishing life.

World Humanist Day is celebrated on June solstice, an event that by its nature is shared globally – summer solstice in the northern hemisphere (the longest day of the year) and winter solstice in the southern (the shortest day of the year). The event originated in the 1980s, its date inspired by the echoes of ancient communal gatherings and humanity’s growing understanding of the universe. Summer solstice was one of the earliest astronomical observations in human prehistory, its discovery marking the beginnings of neolithic humans making predictions about their environment in order to survive. As well as being a milestone of human progress, it also represents togetherness and global community.



Today, we also reflect on the achievements of the last year – all down to the support of Humanists UK's members. In the last 12 months, we've had major successes with our assisted dying, blasphemy, abortion, and humanist marriages campaigns; eight years of our campaigning on education has culminated in a new bill that will close illegal schools; our coalition to defend human rights and judicial review now has more than 200 organisations as members; and we've continued to grow our network of school speakers, non-religious pastoral carers, and celebrants.

And while we can celebrate progress at home, let's not forget that this day is also about supporting those of us who face persecution and violence. In many countries around the world, you would scarcely mention you were a humanist, let alone celebrate humanist values in any public way. World Humanist Day serves as a timely reminder of the systemic discrimination humanists, atheists, and the non-religious are still subjected to. If you'd like to learn more about this, I encourage you to read Humanists International's [Freedom of Thought Report](#).

However you celebrate today, whether it's a picnic in the park with friends, a quick flick-through *The Little Book of Humanism*, or a look at some of our [online courses](#) and [YouTube videos](#), we encourage humanists and those interested in humanism to reflect on their own values, convictions, and beliefs. Ask yourself what can we celebrate about being human, what would a humanist vision for the world look like, and what would you like to do to bring about a better world? Happy World Humanist Day!

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 [June](#) issue focuses on how we age. The issue includes features on sex and the over-70s, the Glasgow Humanist conference, why are Humanists so old?, the abolition of ageing, World Humanist Day, and the Elixir of Youth. There is also an extended letter to the editor from NEH trustee Ed Gibney.

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 several new members to NEH: Ian and Karen Hunter, Nigel Smith, Kevin and Nicki Shaw, and Paul Richardson!

The monthly bulletin is free for members and supporters of North East Humanists. If that's more of a commitment than you can make, 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.