



# North East Humanists

## Monthly Bulletin — December 2021

### SEEKING TRUSTEES FOR NEH

Would you like to be a trustee of a successful and long-running charity? The management committee of North East Humanists consists of up to fifteen volunteers. There are officer roles and non-officer roles, but all trustees can influence the decisions taken about how the organisation is managed and how best to use the income received from members and supporters.



Historically, the committee meetings were held in the homes of trustees and then, more recently, in central Newcastle. Both arrangements were off-putting for many prospective trustees as they involved travelling at night. However, the management committee has now decided that future committee meetings will take place on Zoom. Hopefully this will encourage people from all over the region—from Berwick to Middlesbrough to Allendale—to think about joining us.

North East Humanists will not survive in the long term as an organisation unless we have an active committee with a range of experiences and skills. We meet once per month, normally on a Wednesday evening from 7:00pm until about 8.30pm. If you are interested in joining us, please [contact our secretary Liz Armstrong via email at liz\\_armstrong2000@hotmail.com](mailto:liz_armstrong2000@hotmail.com) and she will be pleased to provide you with any additional information that you need.

Currently, we have officer positions for the Chair, Treasurer, Secretary, Education Committee, Membership and Welfare, and Publicity along with several non-officer positions. The normal “route of entry” on to the committee is via a non-officer role, but we are open to other arrangements depending on your interests and expertise. You could, if you wish, join a meeting as a guest before committing to being a trustee. More information about the history, constitution, bye-laws, and strategic plan of North East Humanists is available on the [About Us](#) page on our website.

We do hope you'll consider this fun and rewarding position and contact us soon!

## RECAP OF RECENT NEH EVENTS

### Bequest from Peg Tumber

Margaret (Peg) Tumber was the oldest member of NEH when she died on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2021. As noted in previous bulletins, we wished Peg well as she [celebrated](#) her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October in 2020, but we [shared her obituary](#) only a few months later after she sadly died. Several months later, we were very grateful to receive a bequest of approximately £2000 from Peg's estate and this will go a long way towards our continued operations. At our management committee meeting in November, it was agreed that this generous gift should be used to fund talks, including the Darwin Day Lecture, and purchase better equipment to improve the quality of electronic communication during these lectures. We trust this will honour her memory and commitment to North East Humanists, for which we are all very thankful.



### COP26



The official conference in Glasgow with world leaders may have received [mixed reviews](#) (to say the least), but that doesn't stop us from continuing to organise and act at the local level to try and change the destructive parts of our path going forward. For example, although the turnout wasn't large in Darlington on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November, there was plenty of enthusiasm from the small band of demonstrators. NEH trustee Jan Mole and her husband George joined the mini throng. Thanks for sharing this wonderful picture of your activities!

### Remembrance Sunday – November 14<sup>th</sup>

As we mentioned in last month's bulletin, North East Humanists participated once again in several [Remembrance Sunday](#) events around the region. We received two photos of these, seen below. Liz Armstrong sent the photo of her setting off from home to lay a wreath at Eldon Square in Newcastle. The wording on our wreath came from John and Grace Hodge several years ago. And Irene Wilkinson sent us the nice photo of our Chair Susan Walker, which Irene took at the Remembrance Day service at Durham Cathedral. Susan attended in a civic role and Irene was there as a wreath bearer on behalf of NEH Humanists.



Also, we know that Jan Mole couldn't get any photographs of her participation, but she led the multifaith service held at Durham HMP for staff and prisoners with contributions from others. Thank you very much to all NEH members who represented humanists at such Remembrance Day events.

### **Public Discussion about Decolonisation and Empire on November 18<sup>th</sup>**

Thank you to Philip Nathan, an NEH trustee and author of [Living Humanism](#), for leading a discussion about the thorny subject of decolonisation. Rather than offer our typical recap of our public events, we'll leave that discussion in the room and just provide a few links for your continued reading. Thanks again to everyone who participated.

[Decolonization](#) entry on Wikipedia

[Explainer: What is Decolonisation?](#) from *The Conversation*

[Decolonising the Curriculum](#) by BBC Bitesize

[Addressing Our Histories of Colonialism and Historic Slavery](#) from the National Trust

### **Obituary for Joyce Harrison**

The 96-year life of long-standing member of North East Humanists, Joyce Harrison, was celebrated at Kirkleatham Memorial Park & Crematorium on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2021.

An active member of the Teesside group, Joyce enjoyed the lunch meetings for their fellowship and the interesting talks, to which she could always be relied upon for some insightful comment or probing question.

She would have liked to have gone to university, but in those wartime years her parents couldn't afford to send her. She did train as a teacher and taught at Linthorpe Junior School, a job she enjoyed until retiring to care for her husband George who had suffered a stroke. After his loss in 1986, Joyce travelled widely, visiting family overseas as well as going on many holidays. She also went on to fulfil



her ambition of university, graduating with a BA Honours degree in Humanities, from the Open University.

Joyce enjoyed good company at the Townswomen's Guild, her Mah-jong group at the U3A, as well as being part of the Saltburn Women's Institute. She wasn't keen on the WI tradition of singing hymns, indeed she hated them with a passion, especially so *Jerusalem*. She would stay silent when it was being sung, muttering to herself that it was a silly song.

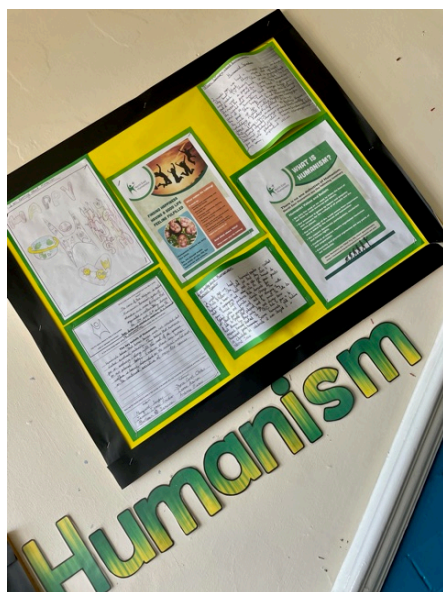
She leaves daughters Susan and Claire, grandchildren Stephen, David, Daniel, and Emilie, and great-grandchildren Max and Finn, all of whom will miss her dearly, as will her friends.

### Learning about Humanism at Blaydon West Primary by Kate Hinton

I was asked by Carolyn Hall, a Higher Level Teaching Assistant at Blaydon West Primary School, to do a virtual visit for their Year 6 class. As you can imagine, I prefer to do face-to-face visits, but nonetheless virtual visits can work well and this one certainly did! The children paid full attention to the favourite objects I showed them, and to my explanations about how they connect to Humanist beliefs. They were full of questions so the whole session went on for an hour. Afterwards, the teacher was very complimentary and said:

*"Everything went well! Kate was very clear and easy to understand, the children were very keen to ask questions and listened carefully to the answers. We all appreciated the session; it gave us a great insight into Humanism. The children were all engaged, this was clearly a big success. Thank you so much for your time."*

I later received the photos below of a Humanist display she put together in their classroom. As you can see, these use our recently produced posters, as well as children's written work and photos of the session in the classroom. Congratulations to the Blaydon West Primary School and Carolyn Hall for encouraging such good learning about Humanism!



## Virtual Book Club by Jan Mole

We were a small group of book enthusiasts this month mainly because, as the festive season rolls on, there are other priorities on our time. We do hope that in the new year we may be able to encourage new members to join us. Most of us enjoy broadening our literary genres and admit that we have sometimes been obliged to read books we may not have chosen but nonetheless enjoyed. Anyway, if you need Zoom company during next year, why don't you give us a try?

On November 23<sup>rd</sup> we discussed [\*Clock Dance\*](#) by Anne Tyler, an award-winning American novelist with many bestselling books to her name. The main character in this novel was Willa, a middle-aged woman with a troubled childhood who was living a pleasant but unsatisfactory life with her second husband. She breaks free from the boredom of her existence by travelling to the other side of the USA to look after her son's ex-girlfriend and her daughter. Up until that point, I think that most of us found her an extremely frustrating heroine who passively accepts her boring life and the mostly unpleasant characters that are part of it. However, when Willa becomes involved in a lively community, she becomes another person, albeit only temporarily. It was agreed that this book was well written, enjoyable, and easy to read. There were a number of themes and messages, but its depth was perhaps only apparent later upon reflection.



We discussed a few options for our next book before ultimately deciding to skip meeting during the holidays and take two months to read Susan's choice of [\*Blackberry Wine\*](#) by Joanne Harris. This is a book that blurs boundaries and falls within the magical realism genre. Joanne Harris is the bestselling author of *Chocolat*, and this novel is set in the same little French village of Lansquenet.

The NEH Zoom book club meets on the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of the month at 7:30 PM so the next discussion will be January 25<sup>th</sup>. If you are interested in joining, please contact Jan Mole at 0132 535 6029, 0780 466 7390, or [janet.mole@ntlworld.com](mailto:janet.mole@ntlworld.com).

## UPCOMING NEH ACTIVITIES

### Winter Holiday Lunch Social — December 12<sup>th</sup>

This year's winter social will be held at the home of Mike and Moira Turner from 12:00 noon until 3:00 pm on Sunday, December 12<sup>th</sup>. As before at such events, please bring a food contribution with you for sharing. It's great to be able to socialise again and we look forward to seeing you!

Here are the details on how to get to Mike and Moira's home:

**Address:** 26 Albury Park Road, Tynemouth NE30 2SH

**Telephone:** 0191 272 8376 (landline) or 0774 042 7132 (mobile)

**From Newcastle**

**By metro:** At Tynemouth, from platform 1, leave the exit and take the steps on your right and slightly ahead of you. Turn right at the top and walk down the path that will take you to Albury Park Road. Turn left and the house is halfway along on the left.

**By car:** Take the coast road A1058. This leads on to Beach Road. Go straight on at the roundabout where the swimming pool is on the right and Morrisons on the left. At the next roundabout turn right on to the red road, A193. At the next roundabout (Holy Saviours Church), go straight on but almost immediately turn right into Birtley Avenue. The road does a sharp turn to the right and this is Albury Park Road. The house is just over halfway along on the left.

### **From the Tyne Tunnel**

Continue on the A19 and take the second slip road to join on to the A1058 Coast Road – follow instructions from above. Note that the tunnel is now cash free and barrier free. You can either pay in advance on the Tyne Tunnel website or you have to pay the fee within 24 hours.

Mike and Moira also note that there are parking restrictions in their street that are applicable on Sundays, but they have tickets to cover those wishing to come by car, and there is free parking at the top of the street.

For those unable to make this event, we are also planning an informal outing to a pub in Newcastle some night in December. Watch your email for details on that!

## **OTHER HUMANIST NEWS**

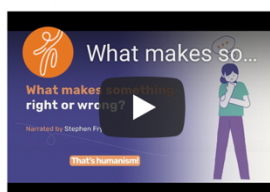
### **Humanists UK: That's Humanism!**

Throughout history, there have been non-religious people who have believed this life is the only life we have, that the universe is a natural phenomenon with no supernatural side, and that we can live ethical and fulfilling lives on the basis of reason and humanity. Today, we call those people humanists.

Humanists UK have teamed up with their patron Stephen Fry to explore humanist ideas about some of life's biggest questions with their new social media campaign [That's humanism!](#) They've updated four animations narrated by Stephen, to highlight how the humanist perspective, grounded in rational thinking and kindness, is an empowering, motivating, satisfying, humbling, and even liberating approach to life.

You can see all four new videos on our own NEH website page about [Humanism](#). Follow the links there to see videos about:

- What makes something right or wrong?
- How do we know what is true?
- How can I become happy?
- What should we think about death?



What makes something right or wrong? (3:03)



How do we know what is true? (2:19)



How can I be happy? (2:33)



What should we think about death? (2:15)

Now is a great time to watch these and share them with your friends. HUK is hoping these will help connect with the many millions of non-religious people who already hold humanist beliefs but don't yet know that there's a name for them (humanist!) as well as a community of like-minded people. Let's help this movement grow!

## Humanists International launches 2021 Freedom of Thought Report

Launching 16 November, the [Freedom of Thought Report 2021](#) by Humanists International, now in its tenth annual edition, examines the legal and human rights situation for humanists, atheists and the non-religious around the world. We know of Humanist organisations from at least 75 countries which are members of Humanists International.



The report finds that humanists are discriminated against in **144** countries across the globe through a combination of the following:



- There is a state religion in **39** countries.
- State legislation is derived, in whole or in part, from religious law in **35** countries.
- Government figures or state agencies openly marginalize, harass, or incite hatred or violence against the non-religious in **12** countries.
- Blasphemy remains a punishable offence in at least **83** countries across the globe; among those, the death penalty may be applied in **6** countries.
- It is difficult or illegal to run an overtly humanist organization in **16** countries.

Introducing this year's report, President of Humanists International, Andrew Copson, stated:

*"This year's Freedom of Thought Report offers, once again, grim reading. In it we detail the discrimination which humanists and other non-religious people continue to face as a result of daring to express their beliefs and to try to live according to their conscience. Last year, we drew attention to the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on every vulnerable minority. This year, especially with COP26, our attention is recalled to the climate change crisis. That must surely be foremost in our minds and we consider the long term prospects for those whose marginalisation and persecution this report highlights."*

The main focus of the report is on the treatment of atheists and humanists, but attention is also paid to people belonging to any religions that are in a small minority in their country. Apostasy and blasphemy laws are closely scrutinized, as are other discriminatory laws, such as family law, and practices concerning the treatment of girls and women, as well as people identifying as LGBTI.

Each country is graded for four aspects:

- constitution and government
- education and children's rights
- family, community, society, religious courts, and tribunals
- freedom of expression, advocacy of humanist values

A scale is used for each of these aspects:

- grave violations
- severe discrimination
- systemic discrimination
- mostly satisfactory
- free and equal
- no rating

Our education officer Kate Hinton has read through this report and offered the following thoughts on the moral dilemmas it raises:

*The report starts with a lengthy analysis of Afghanistan. As you can imagine from the information reaching us through the world media, all four aspects are placed in the 'grave violations' category. Expression of non-religious views are severely persecuted and are likely to meet with violence. Girls' and women's rights are being curtailed and same sex relations are criminalized. And so the story goes on, with many people suffering not only from discrimination but also from shortages of food and medical services.*

*This, of course, presents us with a moral dilemma. Should we provide aid to support the poorest people and the health facilities, despite the human rights violations?*

*Other countries with grave violations across the board include Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. In Pakistan the legal environment is notably repressive with systemic discrimination and blasphemy laws; there is chronic sectarian violence against religious and non-religious minorities. In Saudi Arabia, despite claims to be making improvements, anti-terror law continues to suppress many forms of dissent and prosecutions have been made in recent years for apostasy or promoting atheism. Women's rights also remain curtailed.*

*Again, we have a moral question—should we accept Saudi Arabian funding for activities such as sport?*

*As I am sure you all be aware, Newcastle United Football Club very recently decided to do so but it is highly contentious. Amnesty International questioned whether the Saudi owners should have been allowed to take over the club and called on the Premier League to beef up its Owners' and Directors' Test, so that human rights were considered in any future takeovers. I suspect many Humanists would agree with that position.*

*To put things into perspective, France and the Scandinavian countries are the only ones within Europe to be judged 'free and equal'. Further afield, countries which are largely 'free and equal' include the USA, South Africa, Mongolia, and Bolivia. Many countries show a mixed picture across the four aspects. The UK continues to be graded in the 'systemic discrimination' category largely because of the privileged connection here between church and state.*



The full report can be read at

<https://humanists.international/what-we-do/freedom-of-thought-report/>

## **Uganda Humanist Schools November Update from Chair Steven Hurd**

You can always read the latest news from the Humanist schools here:

<https://ugandahumanistschoolstrust.org/latest-news/>

All of the schools are preparing themselves for reopening, after the latest Covid closure, on January 12th.

I will be in Uganda from 3-21 January, travelling around the country with Peter Kisirinya and Moses Kanya, Chair and Secretary of the Uganda Humanist Schools Association. We intend to visit all 7 of the currently supported schools, and 3 new Humanist Schools with a view to bringing them into the UHSA family.



From 7-10th January we will hold the 3rd Humanist Schools Conference at Isaac Newton High School. The aim of the conference is partly to boost morale after the disruption caused by Covid and to give the Humanist Schools' Association renewed impetus. The three main themes of the conference will be:

- Sharing and developing the Humanist Ethos
- Sharing strategies for creating a cooperative climate within the schools with positive non-coercive discipline (safeguarding children and especially girls)
- Raising educational achievement and fostering a spirit of enquiry in both primary and secondary schools.

We are bringing in speakers and workshop facilitators from [Raising Voices](#) (the child and female safeguarding charity), Uganda National Exam Board, and the National Curriculum Development Centre.

We are really grateful to you for your ongoing support. Should you wish to know more about any of the schools and what we are doing as a charity to help them, do feel free to contact us.

## Latest Issue of Humanistically Speaking



North East Humanists are affiliated with *Humanistically Speaking*, which is a monthly magazine that has been 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 [November](#) issue focuses on interfaith issues and includes features about Rabbi Dr Jonathan Romain, Angry Atheists, Dialogue not Debate, Remembrance Day, Ethical Encounters, Your Letters, and the Poet's Corner.

## ALWAYS LEAVE 'EM LAUGHING

*May you get something truly meaningful this holiday season.*



## 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 so we can grow and accomplish even more.

Please consider a membership with us if you do not already have one. You can join NEH for as little as £6 per year by visiting [the membership page of our website](#). Our fees are very low, but they really do support so much local grassroots work, as we hope you see in these bulletins.

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](mailto: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 Facebook Group](#) 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](http://www.northeast-humanists.org.uk/ceremonies.html).