



North East Humanists

Monthly Bulletin — March 2022

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

In just over a week, we will be holding our AGM to discuss several administrative and strategic decisions for our charity. Members have already received a message about this, and further details can be found below. For this event, we have sent links to seven files to be read ahead of the AGM ([which can be found here](#)) so we've decided to keep this bulletin a bit shorter than usual. We hope you don't mind.

As previously communicated, we have also asked members to **vote for one of three charities** that have been nominated to receive a £1000 donation from NEH. If you haven't voted yet, please send your choice to Mike Turner before the 9th of March. He can be reached at miketurnerhumanist@gmail.com or 0191 272 8376. The three charities that have been nominated are:

1. Smile Train (smiletrain.org.uk/)
2. Sense (sense.org.uk/)
3. Comfrey Project (thecomfreyproject.org.uk)

For more details on these organisations, see [our message to NEH members](#).

RECAP OF RECENT NEH EVENTS

Darwin Day Lecture — The Handshake: A Gripping History...and a Biological One by Ella Al-Shamahi on Thursday February 10th

We were treated to a fascinating Darwin Day Lecture this year by archaeologist, Neanderthal specialist, stand-up comedian, and TV presenter Ella Al-Shamahi. Ella shared with us just some of the many details from her book [The Handshake: A Gripping History](#), which was published by Profile Books in March 2021.

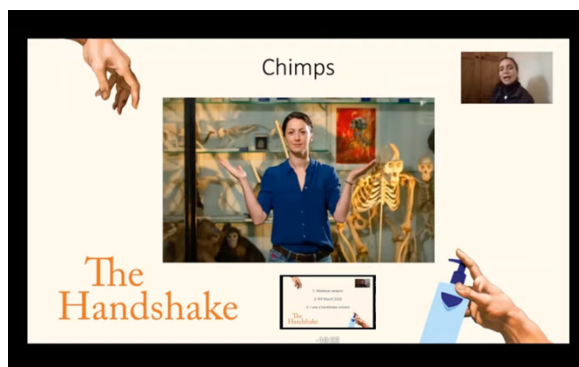
Her entire talk is now available to [watch on YouTube](#), but here are a few highlights.

Like many anthropologists, Ella has been obsessed with studying uncontacted tribes. She shared a funny story about a video she saw from 1991 where members of one of these tribes were gesturing to outsiders that they should leave, and the gesture was a familiar one involving their...um...members. We've probably all seen this rude gesture while watching movies and television, but that wasn't a possible source for the uncontacted tribe. And this means that the gesture is likely very ancient! All of this got Ella thinking about the handshake and whether or not it too was something that has been around for far longer than is usually believed.

With the onset of Covid, and the social distancing rules that followed, many articles began to appear in the press about “the death of the handshake.” Ella surmised (a little in jest) that these articles probably came from journalists who have always hated human contact and were *finally* allowed by their editors to share their prickly beliefs. A problem with them, however, was that many of these articles repeated the same trope that the handshake was some kind of gesture meant to show that you didn’t have a weapon in your hand. But Ella pointed out that this didn’t make any sense since all you were really doing with the handshake was bringing people closer to you and actually making yourself more vulnerable to hidden weapons. So, she started doing lots of research about just how old the handshake really is. (The picture below gives a slight hint about the answer!)

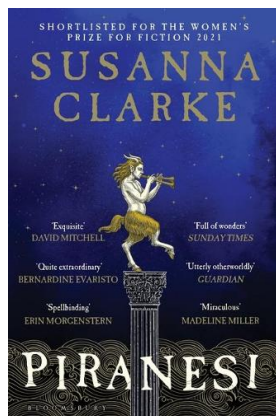
For details on what she found and why the handshake isn’t likely to go away any time soon, it really is best to [watch Ella’s talk on YouTube](#). She’s a talented speaker and performer and the story she laid out is an interesting one full of amusing anecdotes, pictures, and videos. Thanks to Newcastle University’s Insights Lecture Series for co-

hosting this event with us and for arranging many of the logistics. These Darwin Day Lectures are usually a highlight of our year and this one was no different.



NEH Virtual Book Club on Thursday February 22nd by Jan Mole

This month’s meeting produced perhaps the most diverse opinions on a book to date. We had read Susanna Clarke’s [Piranesi](#) and the responses from the seven of us definitely fell into two camps. No one actually gave up on the book completely, however, and even those who didn’t like it stuck with it and were driven to find out how it ended.



Positive comments included: ‘a wonderful book’, ‘cleverly crafted’, ‘easy read’, ‘mathematical research’, and ‘delightful character’. Negative comments included: ‘unbelievable’, ‘against it from page two’, ‘repetitive’, ‘tedious’, and ‘struggled to stick with it’.

For March, we will be discussing Kate’s choice of [The Mersault Investigation](#) by Kamel Daoud. His first novel, it is a retelling of the 1942 existential classic *The Stranger* by Albert Camus, but told from a purely Algerian perspective. The novel has won several prizes and according to its publicity it is “not only a profound meditation on Arab identity and the disastrous effects of colonialism in Algeria, but also a stunning work of literature in its own right, told in a unique and affecting voice.”

The NEH Zoom book club meets on the 4th Tuesday of each month at 7:30 PM so the next discussion will be March 22nd. 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

AGM Plus Talk on Food Security — March 10th

The annual AGM for North East Humanists (a registered charity) will take place on Zoom and will also be 'live' at the Newcastle Irish Centre. Doors opens at 6:30 PM and tickets will be £1 for NEH members, £2 for non-members. This includes tea, coffee, and light refreshments.

The business meeting will be preceded by a talk titled, "Food Security—What is it? What are our options?" by Professor Timothy Lang, Emeritus Professor of Food Policy at City University London.

All papers for the AGM, including the agenda, can be viewed [here](#).

Who: Professor Tim Lang and the NEH Management Committee

When: Thursday March 10th at 7:00 PM

What: A short talk with Q&A followed by the official business of the AGM

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/2022-agm-talk-on-food-security-tickets-275535783947>

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 button at the bottom of our homepage](#). We suggest £3 for these donations but all amounts are greatly appreciated.

OTHER HUMANIST NEWS

AHA's Ten Commitments at Work in Uganda

Members of North East Humanists have supported the Uganda Humanist Schools Trust (UHST) for many years. Recently, this group was profiled in the magazine for the American Humanist Association, which we thought would be of interest.

[UHST](#) was established in 2008 as a charity to raise funds in support of the efforts made by Ugandan Humanists to found and support schools that offer students a liberal, secular, humanist education in Uganda. Five schools are now in operation, including Katumba Parents Humanist Primary School in Bundibugyo, which was founded in 2014 by a group of area parents.

All UHST schools teach the Uganda national curriculum and prepare students for public examinations. At the same time, they aim to develop self-confident students who care for each other and their local communities. The schools encourage students to be open-minded and questioning. They are taught to respect evidence

and to appreciate the need for shared human values. In order to foster a spirit of understanding, students are introduced to both religious (as required by the national curriculum) and secular humanist life stances.

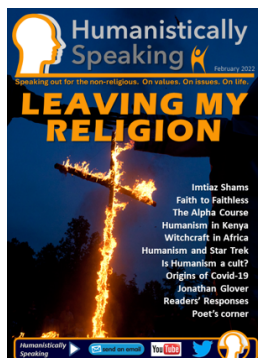
Recently, parents and teachers at Katumba Parents Humanist Primary School joined together to form a Parent-Teachers Association, an important landmark in the school's development. The school has chosen to place the [American Humanist Association's Ten Commitments](#) at the forefront of its efforts to promote positive humanist values in the school and community.



The Ten Commitments now adorn the front wall of the school building. Katumba and other humanist schools in Uganda are finding that local people embrace this inclusive statement of values, whatever their religious or personal beliefs are, and view the Ten Commitments as an excellent template for a good school and society.

[<< Click here to read the rest of the story at TheHumanist.com >>](#)

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 [February](#) issue focuses on issues of leaving one's religion and includes features about Imtiaz Shams, Faith to Faithless, The Alpha Course, Humanism in Kenya, Witchcraft in Africa, Humanism and Star Trek, Is Humanism a cult?, the Origins of Covid-19, Jonathan Glover, and Readers' Responses.

ALWAYS LEAVE 'EM LAUGHING

No scary surprises at our AGM. We promise.



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. This month, we are excited to welcome Silvie Fisch to NEH!

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 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.