

North East Humanists

Monthly Bulletin — August 2022

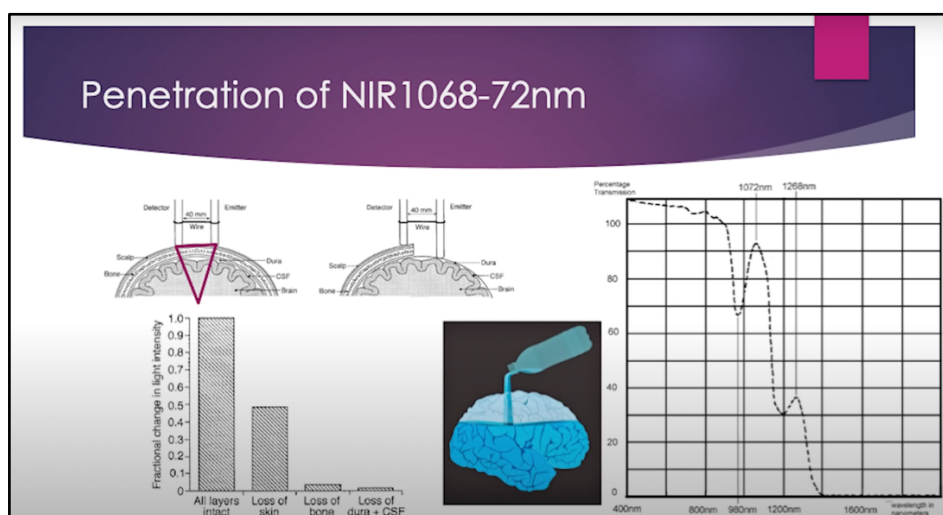
RECAP OF RECENT NEH EVENTS

Shedding Light on Dementia

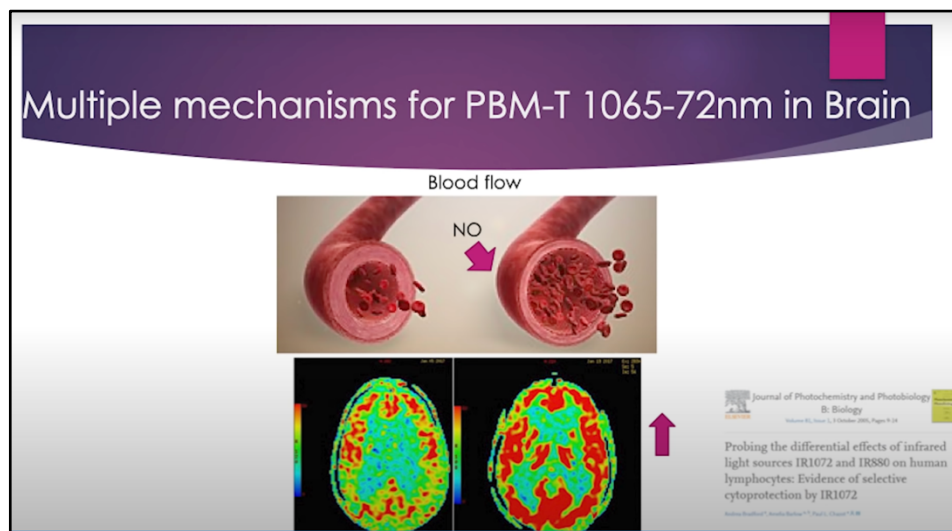
On Thursday, July 21st, we hosted a fascinating lecture from Dr Paul Chazot who is an Associate Professor of Pharmacology based at the University of Durham. Dr Chazot and a host of colleagues have developed a seemingly incredible form of treatment for a variety of dementias including Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, which is based on a simple light therapy that produces dramatic results with no known side effects. Treatments look like this:



How could this possibly work?? It's all down to a little-known band of infrared light that actually penetrates the thickest parts of our skulls.



Once this light gets in to the right places, it apparently causes a chemical reaction that produces a very specific gas — nitric oxide, chemical symbol NO, which is not the same as nitrous oxide or laughing gas, which has a chemical symbol N₂O — and this gas helps to expand blood flow in the brain, causing numerous benefits.



For more on this extremely promising line of research, Dr Chazot recommended this 30-minute talk, from which the above pictures were taken:

[How Infrared Light Could Reverse Alzheimer's](#)

Dr Chazot also heads up the Pain Challenge Academy in the Durham Wolfson Research Institute of Health and Wellbeing, and he recommended two other websites for more information about his research on pain. The first is a 2-hour video; the second is a website with useful reading material.

[Community-based chronic pain self-management. Confidence and skills, not pills.](#)

[Ten footsteps towards supporting your patients to live well with pain](#)

We really want to thank Dr Chazot for coming to tell us about his amazing research and we obviously wish him well in continuing the fight against these scourges of humanity. Thanks also to Mike and Moira Turner for finding this great local research so that we could highlight it for our local members, supporters, and general public!

Humanists UK Convention 2022 by Kate Hinton

The HUK Convention was back in face-to face-mode this year in Belfast. As I have been wanting to visit Belfast for some time, I went to the convention with my friend John (member of HUK). We had an excellent four days in Belfast on account of both the Convention and visting parts of Belfast City.

The Convention was well attended with apparently half-and-half Irish and British attendees. As is usually the case at such events, I found some sessions more interesting than others so here are a few highlights and one downlight! A.C. Grayling opened the proceedings with an extraordinarily depressing account of the state of the world, with really no suggestions for addressing the concerns he focussed on. Enough said!

In contrast, one of the sessions comprised a panel of Irish speakers, led by Boyd Sleator who is the Northern Ireland Humanist Coordinator, all of whom reported on a number of positive social initiatives. By far the most significant of these was an account given by a politician, Kellie Armstrong of the NI Alliance Party, about her success in getting an Integrated Education Bill through the NI assembly in March/April 2022 (never worked out quite how she did this), which will pave the way for integrated schooling. Apparently, the majority of parents want this, and, as I understand it, the bill will require the education provision to follow their wishes.

This, of course, has the potential to make a major contribution to the Catholic / Protestant divide, which was only too shockingly evident on our walkabout in West Belfast. One of the so-called peace walls extends a long way and is not far short of 40 ft high if you include the wire mesh, and it contributes to the opposing communities feeling safer. In the meantime, Sinn Féin quite openly has its head office nearby as well as a tourist shop with everything from serious books to t-shirts and tourist knickknacks! They have come a long way.



I very much enjoyed a talk about information technology and artificial intelligence from Kate Devlin (Reader in Artificial Intelligence and Society) who as far as I could tell is an out and out feminist who pointed out how the roles of men and women in the field have changed over time to the disadvantage of the latter. Fortunately, she was both witty and able to offer some positive observations.

Our new President, Dr Adam Rutherford, was programmed on the Sunday afternoon to follow a most entertaining magician, Richard Wiseman (also Professor of Public Understanding of Psychology). So, just a bit of a challenge, which Adam acknowledged. Anyway, he gave a spirited final session based on his new book [*Control: The Dark History and Troubling Present of Eugenics*](#) where he discussed the troubling role played by scientists and other thinkers from the 19th and 20th centuries. Not a good story, of course, but with quite a different anti-racist position, and with the good news that Charles Darwin steered clear of eugenic views.

So, a most interesting convention and visit to Belfast, which included the Titanic Museum of course, but that is another story.

UPCOMING NEH ACTIVITIES

North East Humanists Summer Outing — Sunday 7 August 2022

This is just a quick reminder about the NEH summer outing to Ushaw Historic House, Chapels, and Gardens, just outside Durham City. (Sat Nav is DH7 7DW.)



Anyone is welcome to attend. Our members received the [full details](#) in an email two weeks ago. Not a member yet? Consider joining [here](#) for as little as £6 per year.

Ushaw College was a Catholic seminary and is now a heritage and cultural tourist attraction. The college is known for its Georgian and Victorian Gothic architecture and listed nineteenth-century chapels. It hosts a programme of art exhibitions, music and theatre events, alongside tearooms and a café.

Entrance to the grounds is £8. We plan to meet in front of the Bounds Takeaway Café, which is near the entrance point, at 11:30 AM.

Please let NEH secretary Liz Armstrong know if you are coming by sending her an email at liz_armstrong2000@hotmail.com. If you need a lift, we can try to organise that for you too.

NEH Virtual Book Club

This is just a quick reminder that the NEH book club have decided not to meet until September when their book for discussion will be [Underland](#) by Robert McFarlane. 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. They plan to continue as a winter activity only, whereby they meet bi-monthly, and preferably in a social setting where they can have a drink, perhaps a meal, and an improved quality of conversation than is offered on Zoom. We would wholeheartedly welcome new members with suggestions of "must reads." The book club meets 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.

OTHER NEH NEWS

New Playground Equipment for the North East Autism Society

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, the [North East Autism Society](#), now has their playground equipment installed at a "Special School" site at Thornhill Park. The £500 from NEH was used to contribute one item of play for this new site.

As we were told by the North East Autism Society, "The new equipment will enable our children and young people to further develop their gross motor skills through running, jumping, and climbing. It will also enable pupils to further explore the outdoors environment and it encourages a healthy and active body and mind, as well as building confidence and self-esteem. As you can see [in the pictures below], our young people were very excited to try out and explore the new play equipment."



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. Thank you so much to all of the NEH members and volunteers who help make things like this happen.

Philosophy Discussions in Newcastle Pubs

For those of our members and supporters who have a philosophical interest, we have been alerted to a new group that is meeting up in Newcastle to discuss such things. In July, the group hosted a discussion about abortion. Upcoming talks are scheduled for open borders, dualism, and conservatism. For more, see here: <https://www.meetup.com/philosophy-in-pubs-newcastle/>

OTHER HUMANIST NEWS

Humanists UK Campaign for the Human Rights Act

Recently, Humanists UK sent out a request to [write to your MP](#) about a piece of proposed legislation that could have a major impact on Humanist groups. As HUK noted, the UK Government is [planning](#) to repeal the Human Rights Act and to replace it with a British Bill of Rights. If this happens, this will have a devastating impact on the rights and freedoms of non-religious people, such as Humanists.

The government has [announced](#) that it is committed to updating the Human Rights Act 1998, but you can still tell your MP to be vigilant about the final results. To illustrate why this is important, see the following letter that one of our members received from MP Alan Campbell of Tynemouth:

Thank you for contacting me about the proposed reform of the Human Rights Act (HRA) 1998. I share your concerns about the Government's proposals to overhaul the Human Rights Act and I strongly oppose any attempts to replace it.

I am proud that in 1998, the then Government introduced the HRA, which brings important rights home, giving our most vulnerable citizens a powerful means of redress. It protects the powerless against the might of the strong and the dictates of the State. That is why I robustly defend the HRA, as well as Britain's continued membership of the European Convention on Human Rights.

You are right that, unlike under Section 3 of the HRA, the Government's draft Bill of Rights makes no provision for courts to 'read in' human rights-compatible language into statutes. The Government argues, mistakenly in my view, that its proposals rebalance the relationship between the courts and Parliament by requiring that, where legislation cannot be read compatibly with the Convention rights using "orthodox principles of construction", it is for Parliament to address the issue.

The repeal of S.3 of the HRA will be accompanied by a regulation-making power allowing the preservation of interpretations already made under that section. This is to ensure legal certainty in situations where S.3 has previously been used.

I recognise your concerns that the repeal of S.3 could limit the ability of groups, such as humanists, to challenge practices in the future that they believe to be unfair and discriminatory in areas such as education, employment, and marriage law.

In my view, should this draft Bill become law, it will impose enormous amounts of red tape on victims of crime seeking justice. I also fear that it is an attack on women who can currently rely on the HRA to challenge the police when they have either failed or refused to investigate rape and sexual assault cases. For these reasons, I urge Ministers to listen to the concerns of lawyers, academics and human rights groups and change course by committing to keep the HRA.

This country's criminal justice system is in crisis. There are record backlogs and delays in the Crown courts, drug use by prisoners is out of control, and just 0.6% of rape cases reported by women and girls ever result in a charge.

I believe that Ministers should focus on tackling these problems and restoring confidence in the system, rather than proceeding with this Bill.

I can assure you that I will be watching developments on this matter very closely. Thank you once again for contacting me about this important issue.

*Best wishes,
Alan*

Sent on behalf of Alan Campbell MP, Tynemouth

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 [July](#) issue focuses on religion and sex. The issue includes features on a Catholic priest defending celibacy, a new declaration of Humanism, how masturbation is good for you, the future of Humanism, Mary Wollstonecraft, whether or not God is a voyeur, and a book review of *How Woke Won*.

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 new members **Cath York**, **Susan Ball**, and **George Armstrong**. Thanks for joining!

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.