



North East Humanists

Monthly Bulletin — September 2021

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

As we reported in last month's bulletin, we took a break in July and August from running any public lectures, but the Management Committee have been hard at work scheduling our lineup for the autumn and winter. Details for these events will be announced online and in these bulletins shortly before they occur, but we're excited to share a quick outline of them with you now.

September 23: Pacifism and Remembrance

Barbara Chandler, Humanist Celebrant and HUK representative for the London International Conscientious Objectors' Day event

October 21: Food Security

Tim Lang, Professor Emeritus of Food Policy, City University of London

November 18: Decolonisation and Empire

Philip Nathan, North East Humanists Trustee and author of *Living Humanism*

January 20: Public Health and the Covid Pandemic

Allyson Pollock, Clinical Professor of Public Health at Newcastle University

February 10: Darwin Day Lecture

Ella Al-Shamahi, Explorer, Paleoanthropologist, Stand-up Comic, and Presenter and Producer of BBC2's *Neanderthals*

Be sure to mark your diary for these, as they promise to be very interesting. Even better, though, we're also thrilled to announce that these events will finally be hosted in person! Some health and safety guidelines for this are listed in an article below, but for those who may prefer or not be able to meet up, we are planning to put our pandemic skills to use and simulcast our events online now too. We're hoping this will be a welcome addition to North East Humanists since we cover such a large area of the country and travel to our events is not always easy.

It will be so nice to see you all again soon, so please do come along if you can. We also look forward to meeting the new members who have continued to join us during these difficult times—that includes our most recent members Mandy Robinson, Eileen Lauster, and Elliott Sabin-Motson. Thank you, all of you, for your continued support which helped us get here and continue to be in a strong position for growing and sharing Humanism in the North East.

RECAP OF RECENT NEH EVENTS

Outreach to the Public by Irene Wilkinson

Sunderland Market Square Saturday August the 7th 2021

Les Milne and I were joined by young Humanist Ambassador Rebekka Hill and together we battled with the wind to set up our stall in Sunderland's market square. Luckily, we were sheltered somewhat by the Halifax Building Society and good teamwork helped us to set up pretty quickly. A special thanks to the security guard who helped us to carry the heavy table through The Bridges shopping mall and who also advised us on the best place to set up our stall.

The footfall was not great but there were activities going on nearby. These included a bouncy trapeze for the kids and some rather exotic stilt walkers, both of which drew a straggle of people to our vicinity. A home match against Wigan Athletic (which Sunderland won!) brought some more people past the stall, although most of them just gave us a quick once over before passing on by.

In all, fourteen people engaged with us, three of whom did not speak at all, but did take a leaflet, though probably out of politeness I expect. One young man who did stop to talk to us, told us he was an RE teacher in Newcastle. He seemed genuinely interested in the leaflets we gave him regarding the resources for teachers on the Humanists UK Website. Several people, including a young Sikh, and a tipsy football fan stopped by fleetingly to ask us what Humanism was about and then went on their way. We also engaged in a long conversation with a gem of a guy who told us that he had cared for his mum until she'd died at the age of ninety-five. He informed us that he was a folk singer and at one point, according to Rebekka, he sang a quiet ditty in her ear!



The Rev. Chris Howson, who is well known in Sunderland as a clergyman, activist, and avid Sunderland football fan, came across to say hello. He asked us to sign a petition to stop Tesco from making their city centre store into a Tesco Local as that would cause a hike up in their prices. We signed!

We were pleased to chat to John Watson who has maintained links with North East Humanists for several years. He told us that he was a regular reader of our monthly bulletin, so John, if you are reading this, thanks for coming to talk to us. It was good to meet you!

... And finally, there was one person who said, as he whizzed off to the match, "If there is a god, I'm in trouble!"

In addition to meeting the public, it was a great opportunity for Les and I to discuss a range of issues with Rebekka Hill. It was a pleasure to meet her and, judging from

her engaging personality and passion for Humanism, I think that she is an excellent Young Humanist Ambassador.

***** Next stop Darlington, High Row (Near Binns), Saturday September 25th *****

Please come and visit or join us sometime on that day if you can. We will be planning more such occasions in different parts of the region, so please make suggestions for venues or events in your locality too.

Calling All Young Humanists!

As stated above, our member Rebekka Hill is a [Young Humanist Ambassador](#) for Humanists UK. She is keen to start a group for those aged 18-35 within NEH and would love to hear from interested members. To join in or share ideas on what this group can do, you can contact Rebekka by email at rebekkahill@hotmail.co.uk.

NEH 2021 Summer Social

On Sunday the 15th of August, we held a summer social event at the home of Ron and Liz Armstrong. The weather wasn't kind, but everyone was in good spirits. It felt good to actually see people after 18 months of talking to Zoom 'above the waist' images!

Twenty-two people had hoped to come and in the end there were nineteen of us. We were sorry that two new members—Amy Moone and partner Jamie—were unable to come along but we were able to welcome two others, Violet and Robbie Sherwood. It was really nice to have our president Peter Warburton with us too.

Everyone came bearing the usual eclectic mix of really tempting food and if the noise level was anything to go by there was no problem about thinking what to talk about. Overall, everyone made it a success. Here's to next year when, with luck, the sun might shine.

UPCOMING NEH ACTIVITIES

Public Lectures & House Groups — Living with COVID-19

As mentioned above, we are now ready to start meeting again in person. We received a communications support pack from the Government in mid-August for community leaders, groups, and charities which is helping us navigate this return. The following items of information and advice were contained in this support pack.

We have moved to the final step of the Government's roadmap for managing COVID-19 and there are new changes we all need to be aware of. The pandemic is far from over and the number of cases is rising but we will need to live with the virus. We have growing evidence that our vaccines significantly reduce the chance of an infection leading to hospitalisation or death.

Everyone aged 16 or over can now get vaccinated against COVID-19. The vaccine works against all known variants in the UK and protects people from becoming seriously ill. To have maximum protection you need two doses. All COVID-19

vaccines offered in the UK have been through rigorous clinical trials, are safe, and provide enhanced protection against being ill, going to hospital, and dying. To learn more about the vaccination go to: [vaccine facts](#).

As of Monday 16 August, if you have received both doses of the vaccine or are under 18, you no longer need to isolate if you are a contact of a positive case and don't have symptoms. However, it is vital that we continue to be cautious. 1 in 3 people who have the virus show no symptoms. The more people who get tested and who self-isolate when positive, the more we can slow the virus from spreading. It's important that everyone helps by getting tested if they are asked to do so. Even if you are vaccinated there's a chance that you can spread the virus.

We are all encouraged to meet in well-ventilated areas where possible, such as outdoors or indoors with windows open. Wear a face covering when you come into contact with people you don't normally meet in enclosed and crowded spaces, including public transport. Cover your nose and mouth when you cough and sneeze; stay at home if unwell, to reduce the risk of passing other illnesses onto friends, family, colleagues, and others in your community. Take a PCR test if you have even mild symptoms. Please consider individual risks, such as clinical vulnerabilities and vaccination status.

Even if you do not have symptoms, you are still eligible for free regular rapid lateral flow tests. Please consider having a rapid lateral flow test twice a week (every 3 to 4 days) to check if you have the virus. You can pick up free rapid lateral flow tests at pharmacies or order them online. If you do have symptoms (high temperature, new continuous cough, loss or change to your sense of smell or taste), you are eligible for a free PCR test. PCR tests are generally more accurate than lateral flow tests as the sample is sent to a laboratory for testing. [Click here to order a free PCR test online.](#)

We strongly encourage everyone, even those fully vaccinated, to continue using the NHS COVID-19 app to understand what is happening around them and help control the spread of the virus. The app reduces the spread of COVID-19 by around 4.3% each week, and for every 200 to 250 tests entered and shared in the app one person is prevented from being hospitalised from the virus.

For any questions about this advice, or if you would like to discuss it in more detail, please get in touch with us at: regionalcomms@dhsc.gov.uk.

Pacifism and Remembrance (Online and In-Person)

In this talk, Barbara Chandler will provide some history of conscientious objection, especially by Humanists. She will also focus on the history of International Conscientious Objectors' Day, which is held to remember "all those who have refused to bear arms and participate in war, throughout history and today", who are honoured with events each year on May the 15th.

Barbara will share the history of the Conscientious Objectors' Memorial stone in Tavistock Square, at which the London CO Day memorial event is held. She will ask us to consider whether there is a place for building a national Humanist Peace Network within Humanists UK.

Barbara Chandler retired from teaching the teaching of adults in 2011 and became an Accredited Humanist celebrant, leading non-religious funerals and naming ceremonies as a member of the Humanist Ceremonies part of Humanists UK. She currently represents Humanists UK on the organising group for the London International CO Day event.



Who: Barbara Chandler

When: Thursday September 23rd at 7:00pm

What: 45-minute lecture plus plenty of time for interactive Q&A afterwards

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

Online: Zoom opens at 6:45. Register using the Eventbrite link: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/pacifism-and-remembrance-tickets-169243468771>

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.

This talk will also be available to watch live on YouTube at the following link: <https://youtu.be/o70S-7UMYCw>. Viewers can post their questions in the chat.

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.

Recurring Virtual Events

- Virtual Book Club — Discussing a variety of books, this club meets every month on the third Tuesday. If you are interested in joining, please contact Jan Mole at 0132 535 6029, 0780 466 7390, or janet.mole@ntlworld.com.

OTHER HUMANIST NEWS

Coping with International Misfortunes by Jan Mole

NEH Trustee Jan Mole is also a non-religious pastoral support worker (i.e. Humanist Chaplain) at Durham Prison where she has worked since 2016. She wrote this short piece for a service that ended up going out by email to all of the staff.

The news from Afghanistan has deeply affected many of us and it is such a difficult situation to process and to make sense of it all. You will probably know that I am a Humanist and as such it is good to get the opportunity to talk to you at this time and perhaps offer an insight into how someone without religious beliefs copes with events such as these. Putting aside the political, military, religious, and financial implications where there is so much to be discussed but so little that we as individuals can do in the short term, I have taken my inspiration from another source.

Some years ago, I arranged a Humanist conference in Newcastle and one of our speakers was a representative of the Linda Norgrove Foundation. Linda, you may recall, was a young graduate aid worker in Afghanistan who was kidnapped in 2010 and was subsequently killed by US special forces attempting to free her. She had worked initially with Afghan widows and then focused on education for Afghan girls. The foundation now run by Linda's parents has continued to support the work Linda had started and I received a news bulletin from them the other day in which the initial feelings of despair and futility were countered by a more positive message. Linda's mum said, "The women have had an education, and this is something the Taliban cannot take away from them and they can pass on their education to their families and communities."

Once the seeds of freedom are sown, they cannot be obliterated. As a Humanist, primarily focused on Human Rights, I am heartened by this and by the sacrifices made by people like Linda and the members of the armed forces who facilitated these changes during the last 20 years. As an individual, I can only support these causes in whatever way I can and by calling out injustice and repression through channels which are open to me. This is how I cope.

August Comte's Humanist Ideas by Mike Turner

I have just been reading a book called *Humanist Essays* by Gilbert Murray. Murray was a prominent humanist and served as President of the Ethical Union (now Humanists UK) from 1929–1930 and was a delegate at the inaugural World Humanist Congress in 1952 which established Humanists International.

I was very impressed with an essay entitled "What is permanent in Positivism", which was the "Annual Comte Lecture" from 1939. So many of August Comte's ideas were a precursor to Humanism as we know it and I was pleased to see the Humanist Heritage website has [a good entry on Comte](#) from which I have extracted the following excerpt:

Auguste Comte (1798-1857)

Auguste Comte was a French writer, philosopher, and social scientist, whose theory of [positivism](#) was a significant influence on the development of organised humanism. Comte's '[Religion of Humanity](#)', like humanism, removed supernatural sanction and motivation from ideas of human morality. Instead, it sought to place humanity and its achievements at the centre of social action, and introduced a kind of 'secular worship', found later in [Stanton Coit](#)'s 'Ethical Church'. Though distinct and different from humanism, positivism's three tenets (love, order, and progress) were influential on pioneering figures in the organised humanist movement.



Life

Auguste Comte was born on 19 January 1798 in Montpellier, France. He was a gifted student and attended university in Paris. In 1824, he married Caroline Massin in a civil ceremony, and was later devotedly tended to by her following a breakdown in his mental health.

Comte's most notable influence on the development of organised humanism in Britain, began with his *Course on Positive Philosophy*, published in six volumes between 1830–1842, and later translated and condensed by freethinker [Harriet Martineau](#) as *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte* in 1853. By the time of this publication in English, Comte had also founded the Positivist Society, and developed his 'Religion of Humanity', gaining adherents throughout the world.

Comte's positivism has been considered a 'humanist' philosophy in so far as it placed moral agency with human beings, and dispensed with gods or any external, supernatural forces. However, Comte believed a philosophical elite was necessary to maintain order in a positivist society, and his 'Church of Humanity' became increasingly ritualised and autocratic. This led many who had once admired Comte's idealist philosophies to criticise their physical implementation. Among these was [John Stuart Mill](#), who saw positivist worship as 'ludicrous'. Similarly, [T. H. Huxley](#) decried it as 'Catholicism minus Christianity.'

Despite criticisms like these, Comte's philosophy was a noted influence on the humanist ideas expressed by other major thinkers, including John Stuart Mill and Rabindranath Tagore, who developed and humanised Comte's Religion of Humanity. A prominent positivist in England was Frederic Harrison, who was a long-time member of the [West London Ethical Society](#), and celebrated the 'ethical marriage' of Stanton and [Adela Coit](#) in 1898 – a precursor of today's humanist ceremonies.

Through the development of positivism, Comte coined a new term, 'altruism', to convey an ethic of godless selflessness (literally 'living for others'). This was a distinctively humanist innovation which reframed morality as based in relationships between human beings and in human societies, rather than, as in Christianity, the product of a moral order handed down to human beings from on high.

Comte died on 5 September 1857 and was buried in the Père-Lachaise cemetery.

Influence

The 'positive philosophy' of Comte, and the translations of his works into English, were a significant influence on the thought and action of numerous positivists and humanists in the 19th century and beyond. Freethinking writer [Harriet Martineau](#) translated Comte's writings into English; long time ethical society member Frederic Harrison 'preached' positivist philosophy; pioneering humanist educationist [Frederick James Gould](#) was deeply influenced by Comtean ideas; and foundational figure of the modern welfare state William Beveridge was raised in a home steeped in positivist philosophy. He was also a profound influence on the novels, essays, and poems of [George Eliot](#). In removing the need for gods from ideas of goodness and morality, Comte helped to lay the foundations for the organised humanism of today and introduced ideas which helped to guide those who pioneered and developed the humanist movement.

Faith & Belief 2040: Fostering Social Cohesion

In November 2020, Cumberland Lodge hosted [Faith and Belief 2040](#), a virtual conference examining what the UK's faith and belief landscape is likely to look like by 2040, based on current trajectories, and the implications for social cohesion.

Held in partnership with the Faith & Belief Forum and Humanists UK, this conference included four sessions over the course of a fortnight, involving a diverse delegation of participants, representing a range of ages and faith and non-faith backgrounds, from across the UK.



Cumberland Lodge's freelance Research Associate for this project, Hannah Timson, captured key themes and perspectives from every session and distilled them into areas of focus to inform future policy and practice, which has now been published in [a summary report](#). Here are some highlights:

The faith and belief landscape of the UK is shifting. Over the past 40 years—and hence, within the lifetime of a significant proportion of the population—studies show that Britain has seen a continuous decline in religiosity (those who state they are religious) and in overall church membership among Christian denominations. At the same time, British society has become more multicultural, with a corresponding increase in religious diversity. If these trends continue at their current rate,

projections show that the faith and belief landscape of the UK in 2040 will be markedly different from a historical perspective.

In particular, Christianity, which has been central to British cultural identity since the fourth century, is in rapid decline in terms of organisational membership and self-reported affiliation. In contrast, the number of Muslims in England and Wales has been rising significantly, from 1.55 million in 2001 to 2.71 million in 2011. However, as well as growing diversity, the 2018 British Social Attitudes Survey also showed, for the first time, that the majority of the UK population (52%) self-identified as not 'belonging to any religion'.

A YouGov survey carried out on behalf of Humanists UK in 2017, meanwhile, suggests that 22% of the UK population may have humanist beliefs and values because they are non-religious, use science rather than religion to understand the universe, and take a non-religious approach to ethical decisions.

There was a consensus among participants that, as we move towards 2040, the Church of England (and by implication other denominations) will be increasingly challenged to become more representative of the population and inclusive in terms of ethnic diversity, to retain or increase minority-ethnic membership.

The conference focused on the implications of the decline of Christianity in terms of moving into a 'post-Christian' era – in the sense that Christianity is no longer a dominant factor in shaping society. This led to discussions about the use of religious buildings, the place and role of established churches, and the delivery of education, in which Christian denominations have historically played a major role and continue to do so.

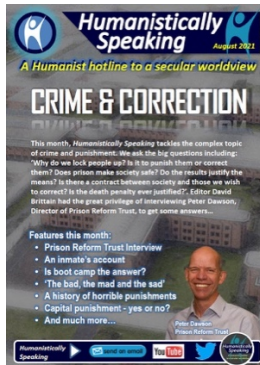
The church-state connection has long been an issue of contention between those who believe that religion should have a formal role in shaping public life and those who do not, but there was not a significant challenge to the issue of Establishment while the majority of the English population were affiliated to the Church of England. With declining affiliation, this may change. The 2018 *British Social Attitudes Survey* showed that only 12% of the population of England self-identified as belonging to the Church of England – a fall from 40% in 1983.

The last time disestablishment became a major issue in the UK it was triggered by the 1861 Census, which showed that only one-eighth of the population of Ireland (which was then part of the UK) were members of the established Church of Ireland (the large majority being Roman Catholic). This made a compelling case for disestablishment, which subsequently took place in 1869. If the numerical decline of the Church of England and Church of Scotland continues as predicted, it is possible that the 2021 or 2031 Census results could lead to calls for disestablishment.

What became clear, during the conference, is that a range of inter-related and complex issues concerning religion, public life and social cohesion are already 'live' and, if projections about the changing landscape of faith and belief are correct, these will become increasingly prominent over the over the next two decades.

[<<< Click here to read the entire Faith and Belief 2040 report >>>](#)

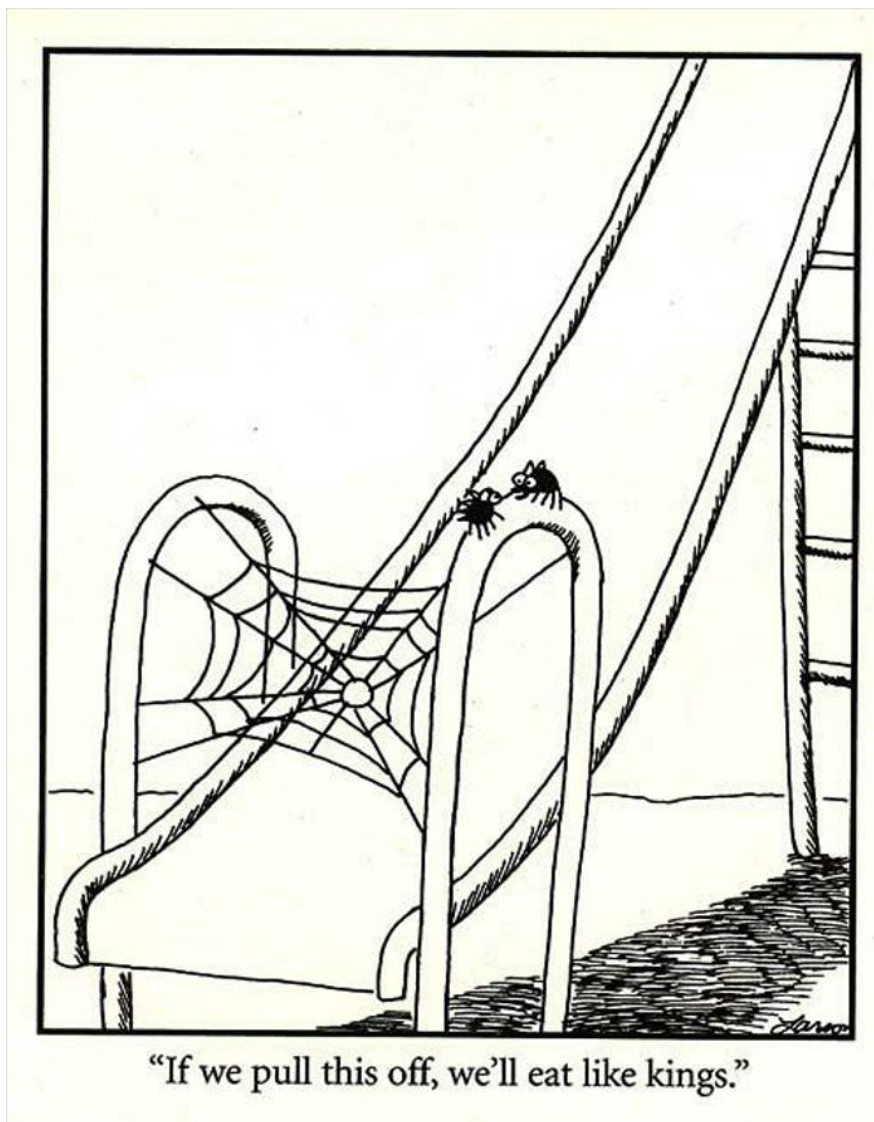
Latest Issue of Humanistically Speaking



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 [August](#) issue has a particular focus on crime and correction and includes features on the Prison Reform Trust, an inmate's account of life in prison, whether boot camp is the answer, a history of horrible punishments, debating capital punishment, Dear Darwin, and much more.

ALWAYS LEAVE 'EM LAUGHING

Beware of large cobwebs as we re-enter public spaces.



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 on [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.

The monthly bulletin is free for members and supporters of North East Humanists. Join NEH for as little as £6 per year by visiting [the membership page of our website](#). 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.