



2007— A truly remarkable year for NEH!

A full account of our activities is being sent as a separate annual report to all members – but here are some highlights

- We reached the golden anniversary of our formation on September 17th 1957
- The joint celebratory meeting with Newcastle University addressed by A.C. Grayling was an outstanding success with 360 participants
- Our end of year membership was a record 241
- In the two year period 2006/7 during which we have been supporting the Isaac Newton High School in Uganda, we sent a total of £7,080 to provide scholarships and uniforms to deprived children
- A sad note is that our President for 40 years, Neil Jenkins, died just before his 93rd birthday

Media Censorship, Culture and Globalisation

Robert Beveridge, Lecturer in Media Studies at Napier University, Edinburgh, who spoke to us in 2004 on Public Service Broadcasting, returned on November 15 to consider Media Censorship, Culture and Globalisation. He has kindly written some notes on his visit.

After an introduction by Robert, members split into small groups to read and discuss a number of Independent Television Commission adjudications of complaints about television advertising. These mini-case studies provoked a lively, enjoyable and wide ranging discussion regarding the legitimacy of censorship and media regulation, the balance between freedom of speech and the need to take account of differing cultural sensibilities and values, together with the impact and the consequences of the increasing commercialisation of culture and the sexualisation of media, culture and society.

The evening allowed members to explore issues and ideas from a Humanist perspective and reactions varied from personal, social and cultural distaste for some advertising through to astonishment that some folk would have the time and energy to complain about what seemed to others to be comparatively minor issues.

The need to protect children was, of course, a concern. Recent efforts by the UK government to address issues of child health and obesity via the introduction by the media regulator OFCOM of a range of restrictions on junk food advertising, had proved problematic. The amount of home-grown children's programming on ITV had declined as a direct result, ITV claimed, of the reduction in advertising income.

We do ban the advertising of tobacco. The current and future debate around the advertising of junk food centres on the detail - what is junk food precisely? Will restrictions on advertising achieve the objectives we seek? How does one define children's programming and what about the fact that children do watch television past the watershed, never mind on the internet?

Robert is a supporter of media regulation and it was not surprising to hear him supporting and championing the process and values and the need, in a globalised internet world, for some form of media regulation to ensure that citizen and consumer interests and standards are articulated and applied. Striking an appropriate and sustainable balance between differing concepts of what is and is not acceptable content is difficult in multi cultural and multi faith societies.

The development of various codes of practice and guidelines – for film, television programmes and advertising does give work to lobbyists and lawyers. Civil society, including the Humanist movement, should also be involved so that decisions and policies can reflect the range of democratic views. After all, the media do exert influence and affect our culture and society and all that money would not be spent on advertising, were there not some return.

The media are a mirror: let them reflect both good and bad – we are human and nothing human is alien to us - but let us make sure that our humanity is put to good use and ends in regulating for the public interest.

Forthcoming Meetings

Tyneside Humanist Group

Meetings are held on the third Thursday of each month at **The Literary and Philosophical Society**, ('Lit & Phil') 23 Westgate Road, Newcastle.

Tea/coffee is available at 6.45 pm for a 7.15 pm start.

February 21 Face to Face

An evening of discussion in small groups to be led by John Hodge.

March 20 Annual General Meeting

An opportunity to learn more about NEH activities and to discuss the proposals made by a Vision and Strategy Group.

April 17 Campaigning for Humanism

Andrew Copson,
Education and Public Affairs Officer, BHA

Teesside Humanist Group

For information on meetings and social events please contact: CHARLIE McEWAN Tel. 01642 817541

Cumbria Humanist Group

Meetings commence at 7.30 pm on the third Wednesday of the month in Carlisle (Morton Community Centre) or Penrith (Eden Local Foyer).

February 20 (To be announced)

March 19 Pepper Harow (BHA's Local Development Officer) will talk about her **Local Initiative Project** (Carlisle)

April 16 Anne Bell, a Quaker from Penrith Meeting, will talk about **shared values between Humanists and Quakers** (Penrith)

For further information, please contact
Chris Allen 01228 810592

New website! www.cumbria-humanists.org.uk

Diary.....

Friday 1 February

A guided tour of the Shipley Art Gallery, Prince Consort Road, Gateshead, has been arranged by Marjory McNaughton.

Meet at 2.50 pm in the foyer for a 3 o'clock start. For any enquiries, please telephone Marjory at 0191 284 4902.

Ceremonies - For information about Humanist Wedding, Baby Naming, Affirmation and Funeral Ceremonies, please contact our Secretary John Hodge on 0191 281 2808 or email johnhodge@blueyonder.co.uk

DISCLAIMER: The views expressed in articles and letters are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the North East Humanists.

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Humanism as a force for change - NEH Regional Conference

As part of our 50th anniversary year celebrations we have arranged to hold a one-day conference in the **Senate Suite of Durham Castle** on **Saturday 17 May, 2008.**

The general theme of the conference is Humanism as a force for change in this complex world. We have already secured Professor Richard Norman, author of one of the best books on Humanism as the keynote speaker. Michael Imison of the Suffolk Humanists, who is a BHA trustee, will share with us practical aspects of Humanism. Workshop sessions will provide ample opportunity for discussion of the theme in small groups.

Full details of how to sign up for this important event will be sent to all members and to adjacent Humanist groups.

In Brief.....

Topics from a Hat.

The last Lit and Phil meeting of 2007 on 20 December was attended by 40 members and guests. As usual, more topics went into the late Roy Hilton's top hat than there was time to discuss. The topics included questions such as 'Should the BHA actively campaign for the separation of church and state', 'Should Humanism have a festival of its own at this time of year?', 'Do you think that life is absurd?', Other questions were on recycling, penal sentencing, altruism, political involvement, badger culling, positive discrimination. The animated conversation continued over drinks, snacks, and mince pies.

New Year's Party

50 members and friends enjoyed the hospitality of Peter Latham and Judith McSwaine at their attractive house in Forest Hall on Sunday January 6th. The buffet provided by members was quite outstanding.

It was an especially good opportunity to meet many new members. The raffle and bring and buy sale raised £77.50 for NEH funds.



Have your say.....

We welcome letters for publication of around 150-200 words; also longer articles by arrangement with the editors:

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Our next deadline for receipt of material is **March 25th**

Visit our website for more information
www.northeast.humanists.net