

Hastings Humanists *Newsletter* September 2009

Our blog address is: <http://hastingshumanists.blogspot.com/>

Thursday 10 September. First Annual General Meeting of Hastings Humanists. White Rock Hotel, 7 pm, in the Notley Room. Members may convene in the bar area from 6:30 pm. This is an important meeting to discuss the future of the group, and whether it should remain informal or be formalised in any way by the appointment of a Committee and writing a Constitution. We can also discuss ideas for further meetings, and any other issues that members would like to raise.

Our Last Meeting: Thursday 13 August: was to have been a presentation by George Jelliss on *History of Humanism, Part 2*, but unfortunately only one person besides the speaker turned up. I hope this was because everyone was on holiday, rather than lack of interest in another boring talk from me. Other Humanist groups, such as the much larger one in Brighton, do take a break in August, so perhaps we should do the same. The person who turned up was a new member hoping for a lively discussion or argument. I hope he will not have been put off permanently.

The proposed extra social meeting on **27 August** was accordingly cancelled.

Response to Questionnaire. Out of 22 questionnaires sent out to people who have attended our meetings or have expressed an interest I received 11 replies. The following is a summary of the responses received to the six questions.

(1) Four people confirmed they would be coming to the AGM, five others indicated they may come, two definitely would not.

(2) Seven would prefer the group to remain informal, two would like more formality but perhaps when we have more members.

(3) Six were OK with weekday evening meetings, one would prefer Wednesdays, another suggested occasional Sunday morning meetings.

(4) Four respondents are members of the BHA. (Unfortunately one of the BHA member has indicated that she will not be able to take part any more due to other commitments away from Hastings.)

(5) Two were willing to join the Committee if one is formed, and two others may be able to lend a hand for particular purposes.

(6) Most respondents would like a mixture of social meetings together with more formal lectures or discussions on prearranged subjects.

Many of these issues will come up for discussion at the AGM. Perhaps I should also have asked whether the present venue is OK. Its main problem is lack of disabled access, and for non-drinkers the pub atmosphere.

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The Obscurer and Obscurantists. On page 39 of *Hastings Observer*, for 28 August, next to the crossword puzzle, there is a large advertisement for "An Evening of Clairvoyance" with Stephen Holbrook, who is described as "One of Britain's Most Accurate Clairvoyant Mediums", presented "in association with" the Observer series of local newspapers.

At one of his meetings in 2006 in Blackburn he was arrested after he punched a member of the audience who accused him of being a fake. According to the Yorkshire Evening Post the Office of Fair Trading has found that people spent £40m on psychic mail-outs offering spiritualist services in return for payment in 2006-7. Online, telephone and TV psychic services are also big business. As well as scores of mediums up and down the country there are also more than 300 spiritualist churches. What mediums can claim is also now restricted by new Consumer Protection Regulations.

The show is on at the Phoenix Arts Centre, which is on the campus of William Parker Sports College, which is a Church of England voluntary controlled school. How the C of E views this support of spiritualism I don't know.

It costs £15 to attend the event, on 22 October, so I don't think I'll be in the audience.

In the same issue on page 29 there is an article advertising a book on UFOs by Malcolm Robinson who is described as a "Paranormal Expert from Hastings". There were stories about him in the paper earlier in the year, and I've a recollection that he at one time worked for the paper. His book will be available from Healings of Atlantis dot com!

What is it with "The Obscurer"? (the nickname goes back at least to Robert Tressell) that they have to provide so much support to these obscurantists?

Alan Turing. There is a campaign for the authorities to issue an apology for the way that Alan Turing, the mathematician, code-breaker and pioneer of computing was persecuted for homosexuality in the 1950s. No doubt there were others similarly treated at the time, but less well known. I'm not sure that this type of retrospective apology, similar to the ones about the slave trade, do much good, but it would be an acknowledgement that the *Zeitgeist* (as Richard Dawkins terms our evolving ethical judgment) has moved on, and we have become more enlightened. There is a petition on the No 10 website.

The Atheist and the Bishop has been a series of three programmes on Radio 4 in which the former Bishop of Oxford, Richard Harries, converses with assorted atheists (Miranda Fricker in the first, A. C. Grayling in the second, and Julian Baggini in the third) while interviewing various other people. I thought A. C. Grayling did quite a good job, but the others were far too accommodating to the Bishop's views. Baggini in particular seemed far too ready to allow that we owe a lot to Judeo-Christian influence in our history and the development of ethical principles, where I would have placed more emphasis on Greek philosophy, Enlightenment rationalism, and Freethinking reformers.

Sorry this issue is short on material, but I've been busy on other matters.