



GALHA NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GAY & LESBIAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

Issue 21

November 2011

EDITOR'S NOTES

My first duty as the new editor of GALHA News must be to thank Malcolm Trahearn and Brett Lock for all the hard work that they have put into this publication over the past few years. I just hope that I can continue to keep up the high standards that they have set. Bravo gentlemen.

The last few months have been bustling with GALHA activity - as well as the extremely well attended regular Conway Hall events, we've had a joint excursion with the Kent and Medway Humanist Association to Down House, a strong GALHA presence at the Secular Europe Campaign march and rally, and, of course, this year's AGM. Plus there's the annual lunch to look forward to in the near future, with special guest Patrick Strudwick, and early next year will see another joint outing with KAMHA - this time a visit to the Natural History Museum to mark Darwin Day. Huge thanks to everyone who has helped make all of these activities the successes that they've been.

However, we're quite aware that whilst most of our meetings and events are London-centric, we have members based all over the country, and indeed the world, for whom making the trek to the Big Smoke can be problematic, or perhaps simply not an option. In an attempt to at least partially address this, I'd like to shift the balance of this organ a little and open it up as more of a forum for your views. We'd like to hear from you, wherever it is that you hail from. Letters, reports of regional activity, photos, opinions, and suggestions would all be most welcome - who knows, we might even get some stimulating debates going. Please send any contributions to the editorial address below. It's your GALHA, let's make it your newsletter too.

Richard Unwin Editor@galha.org

GALHA SUPPORTS THE SECULAR EUROPE CAMPAIGN

On the morning of Saturday the 17th September an estimated 2000 people took to the streets of London to march for a secular Europe.

The high-spirited crowd, among them a pleasingly substantial GALHA presence, made their way from the Victoria Embankment to Downing Street, where the ensuing speeches included an address from our very own chair, Adam Knowles. What follows is an extract:

"The Church has made the lives of so many Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans people miserable in so many ways for so many years - via its influence in Parliament and elsewhere. I want that to stop and I want it to stop now.

"So we're here to say to the Vatican and to the priests 'That's enough'. To the imams: 'I did not ask for your advice'. To the rabbis: 'I disagree and there's nothing you can do about it'. All of whom are men of course.

"This is something my organisation, the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association, has campaigned about for over 30 years, its as relevant now as ever and its vital that you show support like you're doing today, so thank you."

GALHA confirmed it's strong support for the Secular Europe Campaign in a press release on September 5th, and later in the month contributed a video to the campaign's official You-Tube channel, which can be viewed at:

www.youtube.com/myseculareurope

Image courtesy of Nicolas Chinardet



PATRICK STRUDWICK
announced as guest speaker for the GALHA ANNUAL LUNCH. See over for ticket details.



DISCOURSE AND DISCO - THE 2011 AGM

Saturday 1st October saw the 2011 GALHA AGM take place in London.

Despite soaring temperatures setting new records for October weather, there was good attendance from both voting members and general supporters.

The day kicked off with a workshop to discuss and debate the current proposals for the future of GALHA - information about which was sent to all members beforehand, with the Annual Report. For more on this see the 'Letter from the Chair' elsewhere in this edition.

This was followed by the AGM itself, which as well as including further lively debate on the future of GALHA, also saw the election of the new committee to take us into 2012.

The event was rounded off with 'Vinyl Closet 2' - a spectacular presentation by LGBT campaigners Brett Lock and Ted Brown, in which they performed and discussed the sounds of the 1970s and 80s to uncover portrayals of LGBT lives in popular music. A superb end to the day that left the crowd wanting more.



The freshly elected committee: Derek Lennard, Henry Lawson, Mike Rickwood, Adam Knowles, Malcolm Barnes, and Richard Unwin. © LaMir

MARRIAGE BLUES - IS THE BATTLE FOR EQUALITY ABOUT TO GET LESS CIVIL?



Journalist and campaigner ADRIAN TIPPETTS, our new regular columnist, reflects upon recent events in the struggle for equal marriage rights.

A Conservative Prime Minister calling for marriage equality at the party conference speech hit many commentators like a bolt from the blue. All power to David Cameron and his colleagues for making an attempt to show that the Tories are no longer the 'nasty party' that only a few years ago stood against any advance in legal equality.

The gesture is welcome but it falls short of expectations for two reasons. Firstly, the extraordinarily long-winded timescale for implementation - three years for 'consultation' - makes the initiative seem half-hearted. The heart of the spirit of equality is that other people's opinions about whom one loves should *not* count.

Secondly, there are no plans to remove the ban on religious ceremonies. For the Unitarians, the Quakers, the Metropolitan Community Church and the Liberal Jews, this is an attack on conscience, and the government should not be in the business dictating the mind of God to others.

In the coming three years, the resolve of our politicians will be tested to the max.

Despite no danger of any religious group being forced to hold same-sex

marriages, the Catholic Church and hardline zealots are waging a bitter and lavishly funded campaign to sink the bill.

Gutter tactics of hysteria, imagined persecution and clerical bullying have already been seen in Scotland. Archbishop of Glasgow, Mario Conti, shows contempt for democracy by threatening to turn hundreds of thousands of Catholics against the SNP-led government in Holyrood, for simply consulting on the matter. Another Bishop even predicted the downfall of society.

It only takes the pin-prick of reason to deflate this clerical hot air. Religious objections to gay marriage are arbitrary and hypocritical, for there is no outrage at, or petition against, divorcees, pre-marital sex, or childless couples. And society functions as normally as ever in the several nations where gay people have been able to marry, without any disadvantage to faith groups.

They fret over marriage being 'redefined'. But marriage *has* evolved over the centuries, reflecting the morals of the ages. In Biblical times, marriage was about securing property rights and polygamy or marrying cousins was the norm. In today's egalitarian society, we marry for the highest of motives - love. The law should protect the right of everyone to pursue this happiness without prejudice.

If only the all-too-silent majority of well-meaning, tolerant folks of faith would stand up to these loud-mouths, we could all move on.

NATURAL SELECTION

GALHA & KAMHA VISIT DOWN HOUSE

On the morning of Sunday the 4th of September I drove to Down House, the former home of Charles Darwin, to meet up with two groups of Humanists.

If you had to nominate a secular saint then Darwin does seem to fit the bill on so many fronts. The famous paintings and photos of the sage with the domed head and the flowing white beard could represent any number of Old Testament prophets. Then there is the minor fact that he permanently changed our perception of the world, ourselves and where we came from. He managed this, not just with the 'classic' flash of insight that makes what had been under our nose seem blindingly obvious, but by backing it up with painstaking observation and analyses, over several decades, from the beaches of Galapagos to the lawns and flower beds of Down House.

The house itself also tells you a lot about him. Lost in the steep, narrow twisted lanes that lead up to the North Downs – seemingly as far from the madding crowd as you could get, it is hard to believe that it is technically in Greater London.

Seen from the garden it looks rambling and picturesque, partly because of the creepers that are scaling it, partly because of the protrusion of bays and verandas. I last saw the house in the early 90s, when it was owned by the British Association for the Advancement of Science, and a tad run down. Now English Heritage run it and have done a pretty good job of restoring it. Wisely they've tried to keep the ground floor as Darwin would have known it, with all of the exhibitions upstairs. The inner sanctum is of course his original study, facing north, where he wrote *The Origin of the Species* between interruptions from the eight of his ten children who survived infancy.

It's the garden that really brings out Darwin the man and his methods. Even the lawn was enlisted in the cause of science. Most of us see weeds as the enemy. Only Darwin would lay bare an area of lawns so that he could (a) see how many species of plant colonised it and (b) observe how many stay the course (survival of the fittest).

It occurred to me one day that if, as Darwin tells us, our ancestors emerged from the sea aeons ago, then when you stand on the shore you are looking out on an ocean of forebears and relations – and that every instance of "nature red in tooth and claw" is in fact a kind of working out of a family quarrel that has been rumbling away since the earth first gave birth to life. Wherever we go, as long as we live, we are – like it or not – among family.

That for me is a kind of transcendence that in beauty, grandeur awe and numinous subtlety beats the most that the great myths, sagas and religions have to offer us, rich and profound though these are. It links the loneliness of the individual into the vastness of the cosmos as nothing else can.

Then I had a cup of tea.

HENRY LAWSON



GALHA teams up with the Kent and Medway Humanist Association

The GALHA-KAMHA joint outing to Down House was a success on more than one level. Henry admirably portrayed the value of a visit to Darwin's home. It was undoubtedly fascinating. Stronger for me, though, has been the wider sense of community that has been gained. There was also the feeling of being part of something where you did not feel the outsider or the minority.

The follow-on Lunch was key to this connection with others. Here we had the space, the time, to get to know each other. Sharing ideas and stories, hopes and dreams. And you know when this is all working when you hear the laughter.

KAMHA has had a loose tie to GALHA in assisting with the bar at the Conway Hall events for sometime. This co-operation has led to several friendships developing. However, this process gained a boost from the joint outing. I know I didn't get to speak to everyone that was there but I would

recognise them and sense the shared belonging.

This was brought home to me with the events that have happened since, such as the Secular Europe March. I didn't know everyone, but there were plenty of familiar faces. At the pub afterwards, new friends were made, adding to this growing sense of family.

All of this is enhanced with the photos that have been put online. There is a connection through the people you know that you see at an event even though you were not there yourself. It has fostered a positive anticipation for the future.

Further joint outings, next year's Secular Europe March, how else we can work together; all of these have been strengthened. Or, in other words: - "Communication leads to community, that is, to understanding, intimacy and mutual valuing." Rollo May

ALAN TREVETHAN

FROM THE CHAIR...



A few weeks before the AGM we sent all members a mailer that included a detailed proposal on GALHA becoming the LGBT section of the British Humanist Association.

We'd been working on this since January when we heard from the Charity Commission that GALHA did not qualify to become a charity. On the day of the AGM we held a workshop. I outlined the proposal using slides (available online at <http://slidesha.re/pIREBO>) followed by a discussion chaired by Mike Rickwood. Emails received from members with a view on the matter were printed in full and made available to those present and the key excerpts included in the slides.

There was a constructive debate about the pros and cons. Concerns were expressed about:

- a reduced attractiveness of GALHA's proposition to LGBT people if it's subsumed in the BHA
- the degree of control the BHA could/would exert over the GALHA Committee
- the possibility that GALHA would cease to exist within a few years if the proposal goes ahead
- that if GALHA is to formally 'wind up', the Constitution does not explicitly specify what votes are necessary

I understand these concerns but having chaired the organisation for 1.5 years and been on the committee a further year, my strong recommendation - and it's unanimous amongst the Officers and indeed the rest of the recently elected committee - is that our best future lies with the strong support of the BHA, an offer for which we are grateful.

The biggest threat to GALHA is not necessarily financial, but the increasingly

complex administration, which can discourage committee members. Of those that do contribute time to GALHA, I hope I speak for most in saying they'd rather be out meeting people and actively promoting LGBT Humanism: organizing protests, giving speeches, making videos. The organisation is unfortunately prevented from outsourcing admin because financially it already makes an operating loss.

In my experience the resources of the GALHA committee have in large been taken up ensuring a clean break from the PTT, pursuing charitable status, submitting mandatory reports and other administration. This is in the main internal-facing, bureaucratic stuff. While there will always be a need for some admin, we think the time is right to make a strategic move to shift the balance toward activity and hope you'll support us.

During the AGM itself we took the following non-binding votes to capture the mood:

Should we proceed to an SGM with the BHA proposal?

Yes: 67% **No:** 29% **Abstained:** 4%.

What is the best way forward?

BHA: 46% **Ltd company:** 27% **Need more information:** 27%.

The relatively large number of people seeking further information is testament to there being several matters that need to be scrutinized in further detail before a decision can be taken, and the committee will do that.

We will call a Special General Meeting within 4 months to decide the matter and I hope that if you can you'll attend to lend your judgement. Before that, if you have a view, I encourage you to let me know at chair@galha.org which I will share with the committee. Some letters may also be included in the newsletter unless you request otherwise.

With thanks and best wishes,

ADAM KNOWLES GALHA Chair

UPCOMING EVENTS

We Are Family

Friday, November 11, 2011, 7:30pm in the Brockway Room, Conway Hall

Natalie Drew and Ashling Phillips are the founders of the first gay fertility centre in the UK, Gay Family Web. For tonight's meeting Natalie and Ashling will talk about the need for this service, their experience in setting it up, as well as their own experience as parents of two children with the help of an involved donor.

www.gayfamilyweb.co.uk

Annual Fundraising Lunch 2011 with Patrick Strudwick

Saturday 12th November, 12.30pm (drinks) for 1.00pm (lunch)

Tickets can be purchased at: <http://galhalunch2011.eventbrite.com>

Every year GALHA holds a lunch to thank its supporters, celebrate our progress and raise funds toward the next year's activity. Like all GALHA's events this is open to the public: everyone is welcome.

The special guest: We are very pleased to announce that this year's guest speaker will be award-winning journalist **Patrick Strudwick**. Patrick writes for a variety of different newspapers and magazines that include *The Observer*, *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, and *Gay Times*.

In February 2010, Patrick published "The Ex-Gay Files: The Bizarre World of Gay-to-Straight Conversion" in *The Independent*, chronicling a year of undercover investigation of conversion therapy: therapists claiming to be able to "convert" gays and lesbians to heterosexuality. Following the publication of the article and the outrage it provoked around the world, Patrick started the Stop Conversion Therapy Task force (SCOTT). SCOTT aims to eradicate the attempts by therapists, psychiatrists and religious groups to "cure" gay people.

He was named 'Journalist of the Year' at the Stonewall Awards 2010.

The venue: This year we return to **Chez Gérard**, Southbank. The restaurant brings a little bit of Paris to London with the brasserie style interior complementing the food and providing a lively atmosphere.

Imagining the Gay Past

Friday 9th December, 7:30pm in the Brockway Room, Conway Hall

Gregory Woods will read some of his poetry about man-loving men in history, and will ask what purpose such reinventions of the past serve for us in the present and future. Woods is widely regarded as Britain's leading gay poet. His latest poetry collection is "An Ordinary Dog" (Carcenet Press, 2011). Professor of gay and lesbian studies at Nottingham Trent University, he was the first person appointed to such a post in the country. His main critical book was "A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition" (Yale University Press, 1998).

See website: <http://www.gregorywoods.co.uk>

