



GALHA NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GAY & LESBIAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

Issue 22

January 2012

FOOD FOR THOUGHT - THE 2011 ANNUAL LUNCH

The guest speaker at the 2011 GALHA annual fundraising lunch was award winning journalist and campaigner **Patrick Strudwick**, who delivered a compelling, and, at times, harrowing account of his fight to end the abusive practice of 'conversion therapy' - dangerous and misguided attempts to 'cure' gay people of their homosexuality. What follows is a small extract from his informative and personal presentation:

"A lot of people might think that this is a fringe issue, that it's just a few crackpots,

but there is a fundamental principle here, one that's about the gay rights movement, about religion, about science, about what we're all doing in this room. If we don't win the argument about the nature of homosexuality, if we allow the narrative to continue that homosexuality can be changed, that it can be cured, that it can be treated, if we allow that message to go unchecked, when and where and how are we ever going to achieve equality? If people think that we don't have to be gay, that we can be something else, that we can be straight, then why give us any rights?"



GALHA Chair Adam Knowles said: "Patrick's insightful description of his experiences with the regulators of psychotherapy in this country shows a dire need for reform in that area. The government needs to do much more to ensure that the mental health of LGBT people isn't at risk from those who believe in 'conversion therapy'.

"I assured him of GALHA's support for the ongoing action and encourage supporters to find out more about his investigation and spread awareness of the issues. The lunch itself was very enjoyable: thanks to all of those that came to support the event and to our wonderful Guest of Honor Patrick Strudwick."



Guest speaker Patrick Strudwick (left) is presented with the annual GALHA award

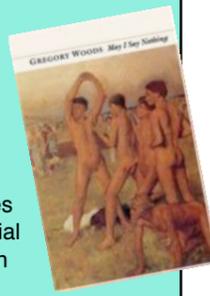
EDITOR'S NOTES

I'd like to echo Adam's sentiments on the Annual Lunch (see article opposite) - it really was a most excellent affair. Guest speaker Patrick Strudwick was able to convey a very serious message whilst simultaneously wielding wit like a rapier. And with splendid repast from the good people of Chez Gerard, the afternoon proved to be a treat for both the brain cells and the taste buds.

Apologies to Rolf Solheim who sent us a report on the activities of GALHA members in Norway and Sweden. I just couldn't quite squeeze it into this issue and promise to find space for it in the next edition. Do please keep regional reports and letters coming in.

COMPETITION!

The special guest at December's public meeting was leading gay poet, Gregory Woods. We've got a copy of his poetry collection 'May I Say Nothing', signed by the man himself, up for grabs. For a chance to win you need to write a poem of no more than 150 words, covering any aspect of LGBT Humanism. It could be tragic or comic, political or erotic - time to get creative! The winning entry will be published next issue. Entries should be sent to the editorial address below, no later than the 1st of February, 2012.



Richard Unwin - Editor@galha.org

MANCHESTER MISSIVE

SUSAN BADHAM reports on recent activity of a Manchester based regional group, jointly set up by local members of GALHA and the Greater Manchester Humanists:

When it comes being gay in Manchester some of us are newcomers and some of us have been there, got the T shirt, and accessorised it to make it more stylish before going down to the Village in it... As a result it was probably inevitable that the walk on the 20th of November, led by Katherine Trueman and following the route of the existing LGBT Heritage Trail, was going to be a diverse affair. This had several advantages - we got the unofficial as well as the official history in the form of anecdotes from people who had actually been involved and there was a real feeling that the walk reflected many aspects of Manchester's LGBT history.

We started at the Alan Turing statue in Sackville Gardens (see image), progressing to the center of town via the Beacon of Hope memorial and the present day Village. Needless to say the New Union and Rembrandt hotels got a favourable mention. The old police court building, scene of many a prosecution for 'immorality', sparked a lively discussion about how the law's attitude to what had been perceived as deviant sexuality had served to reinforce society's unspoken power structures around class and gender.

Listening to tales of past meeting places and hearing about pressure groups like the offices of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality and the Lesbian Switchboard, it was hard to reconcile modern attitudes with that history. Yet the buildings provided continuity, as did the accounts of those who had lived through those times.

The evidence that queer people have been here for a long time was brought home by the existence of historical accounts from the eighteenth century - like the dance at a Temperance Hall in which all of the (male) participants had worn dresses and been bound over to keep the peace when the constables intervened, and the married couple who were discovered to be two women, with one dressing as a man and working as a bricklayer. Physical locations where pioneers like Edward



Carpenter had spent some of his working life, now Affleck's Palace, also emphasised our links with the past.

We finished our walk with another tradition - sitting down for a meal and a pint.

THE GOVERNMENT'S TWO-FACED APPROACH TO HOMOPHOBIA



Article by **ADRIAN TIPPETTS**.

No right mind can criticise the great strides to eradicate homophobia in sport, about which

the government has made a fair amount of noise this year. David Cameron devoted the official July London Pride reception to the issue, as will Schools Out's LGBT History month in February. But what creates an atmosphere where a hard man of rugby like Gareth Thomas even thought of suicide, rather than coming out? The homophobia we hear about on playing fields and sports stadia are symptoms of the society we have created in which people can go through life without having prejudices and fears challenged.

The one place to challenge attitudes is in school, yet the government is failing young people at a time when homophobia and incidences of sexually transmitted disease are at crisis levels. True, it is welcome news that from April next year, Ofsted will record promotion of LGBT equality in its public sector school inspections. Efforts are being made to give teachers greater resources too, in order to teach effectively. However, the sterling work of the Theresa May and Lynne Featherstone's Government Equality Office is being undermined by Michael Gove at the Department of Education.

His department is heavily influenced by Christian fundamentalists with extreme anti-gay agendas and whom are peddling discredited abstinence programmes. Gove has already ruled out making sex and relationship education compulsory, or ending parents' right to withdraw. This very threat of withdrawal is why, according to sexual health charity Brook, many schools are editing content to avoid controversy. With all the exemptions accorded to faith schools, which comprise almost a fifth of all UK secondary schools, and the hundreds of new autonomous Free Schools, Section 28 may as well still exist. Michael Gove even penned an editorial in the Catholic Herald, encouraging schools to transfer to Academy status, so they could be 'out of reach of meddling secularists'.

It's fine to teach the idea that gay people are disordered and perverted and should live a loveless life of celibacy as a reasonable opinion. It's fine to withhold any message of reassurance or empowerment. If you're gay and at a faith school, you're basically on your own.

If the government were remotely serious about ending homophobia in the changing room, all schools would be required to provide objective, evidence based sex and relationship education, without exception. By comparison, the focus on sport is mere window dressing.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Film - 8: The Mormon Proposition. (2010)

Friday, January 13, 7.30pm in the Brockway Room, Conway Hall

This controversial film examines the successful campaign against gay marriage in the US that was heavily financed by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, which is implacably opposed to homosexuality.

This film will be introduced by Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society.

Vinyl Closet: LGBT History Month

Friday, February 3, 7.30pm in the Brockway Room, Conway Hall

GALHA campaigners Brett Lock and Ted Brown illustrate the LGBT presence in popular music from Harlem in the 1920s to preset day sounds. Live and recorded music and anecdotes. GALHA Fundraiser - £5 admission.

Against Nature? Homosexuality and Evolution

A lecture by Professor Volker Sommer - Special Darwin Day event

Friday, February 10, 7.30pm in the Brockway Room, Conway Hall

Same-sex behaviour is often condemned on the grounds that it is "against nature". Indeed, selection favours those who leave more offspring. Nevertheless, homosexual behaviour is widespread - not only amongst humans, but other animals alike. Doesn't this constitute a paradox for Darwinian theory? The talk will address these

controversial topics. Volker Sommer is Professor of Evolutionary Anthropology at UCL. His research centres around field studies of monkeys and apes in Asia and Africa, and his expertise includes the evolution of social and sexual behaviour.

Darwin Day Outing to The Natural History Museum, London

Sunday, February 12, meet at the main entrance to the museum at 11am.

Following the success of Septembers trip to Down House, this is another joint excursion with the Kent and Medway Humanist Association, to mark Darwin Day. The visit will be followed by an informal lunch.

Queer London in the late 19th Century

Wednesday, March 21, 7.30pm in the Brockway Room, Conway Hall

Queer London in the late 19th Century. A talk by Matt Cook, Senior Lecturer in History and Gender Studies, Birkbeck College, University of London.

Please note that this meeting is on a Wednesday.

GALHA Annual Residential Weekend

21-22 April

This year's weekend will take place in Manchester and will include a Special General Meeting to decide the future of GALHA. More details to follow - see next issue and keep an eye on the GALHA Facebook and Meetup sites (details at bottom of page).

GAY FAMILY WEB

Speaking at the November GALHA meeting at Conway Hall in London were Natalie Drew and Ashling Phillips, founders of the first gay fertility centre in the UK.

The fascinating talk covered their experiences in setting up the groundbreaking venture, and also becoming mothers to their own two children with an involved donor. The evening included a question and answer session, highlights of which are presented here:

Has there been any negative reaction?

We kind of got what we expected from the church who said that what we were promoting was unnatural. But nothing's been directed at us personally. In fact both our son and our daughter attend a Roman Catholic nursery, which is a bit bizarre. The other mums know that we're gay and everyone's been fine with it. In reality the issues that the media say are there aren't always there.

How common is it for the donor to choose to be involved in the child's life?

We're now getting more and more guys who want to be involved donors, and they get snapped up quickly. Last week we had one guy in his 40's who had been discussing the possibilities of starting a family with his partner for some time. We signed him up on the Wednesday and by Thursday morning he'd been matched with a single lesbian. They're now getting to know each other and are looking at going down the road of co-parenting - she's happy for them to have the child at the weekends, that sort of thing.

In terms of 'supply and demand', what's the ratio of men to women?

There are loads more women looking for donors than there were five years ago. There are more and more guys that are thinking about starting a family and initially

want to have their own baby. But surrogacy in the UK is such a grey area - you're not allowed to advertise, strictly speaking you're not allowed to pay, and if you go abroad it becomes incredibly expensive. It's very difficult for a gay male couple to have a baby in the UK. It's easier for lesbians in that respect. So becoming a donor with a view to co-parenting is an attractive option.

Can a donor be matched with more than one woman?

Yes. We've got one guy in Coventry who's in very high demand because he's so fertile. He's donated to fourteen women now. It's getting to the point where we're thinking that we can't match him with any more women in the Midlands, for the sake of local genetic variation! We leave it down to the donors to decide how many times they want to donate - obviously not every guy wants to donate that many times. Unlike other clinics that have set limits on donations, we prefer to leave that to personal choice.

Do you run Gay Family Web as a business?

Sort of. But we get very angry with companies that charge a fortune. It can be as simple as costing £1.50 for a syringe and a pot, and when you break it down like that we see our role as one mainly of advice and support. We do run it as a business, but we don't make a fortune. It's more of a passion for helping others and when you see those babies come along and you know that it was worth it - that's payment enough.

If people are interested in using the service, what's the first step?

Go to the website at www.gayfamilyweb.co.uk and click on 'register'. Then we can give you a call and take things from there.

Letters



The following letter has been edited for reasons of space:

I am opposed to the proposal that GALHA become a section of the BHA. I have been a staunch supporter of the BHA for over 40 years, have served on what used to be called its Executive Committee and am a founder member and currently chair of one of its affiliated groups - Coventry & Warwickshire Humanists. The founders of GALHA, including myself, opted to set up an autonomous organisation and I think it should remain so. From the latest Chair's report and the accounts, GALHA is still flourishing. If one of the reasons (or the reason) for this move is the committee's liability in case of litigation, this has always been the case ever since the Group was founded in 1979, especially given the risk of anything libelous in the magazine.

I note that one of the reasons - and perhaps the main one - for the committee's decision is that it is finding the administration of the Group too onerous. I find this rather odd as I managed to cope with this when I was secretary for all of 25 years, though admittedly found it a bit strenuous at times. I was retired, had plenty of time to spare and was very committed, but I understand that the current secretary, membership secretary and treasurer are also retired. Also the latest figure for membership of 277 is hardly more that it used to be, so there can't be much more involved in administering it.

As a founder member of the Group and one of its vice presidents, I urge the committee to think again.

Kind regards, **GEORGE BROADHEAD**

Current secretary MIKE RICKWOOD responds:

I fully acknowledge the huge debt GALHA owes to its founder members, George Broadhead in particular. For many people George was GALHA. In the late 1970s, prejudice and bigotry were everywhere. People made great sacrifices for the cause.

However, although George says we have always lived with the risk of being sued, I'm in no doubt that today people are much more litigious. Indeed it's something we were threatened with only a couple of years ago and need to be protected from. At the very least, GALHA would have to become a limited company, with all the additional bureaucracy that would inevitably entail.

George is right that the primary reason for becoming a BHA section is to shift our efforts away from administrative activity. It is also true that the Treasurer/ Membership Secretary and I are retired. But unlike George I didn't come to GALHA with a mission to change the world. I came because I'm gay and a humanist and was happy to help. To be honest, I was quite surprised that as a Humanist Association GALHA wasn't already part of the BHA. I never aspired to high office. I became Secretary because no-one else was willing. I have other commitments which take up time.

As a relative newcomer two things strike me about GALHA. First, it is very male, white, middle class, middle-aged, and most of its activity is in London. And second, not enough people come forward to do the work that's needed now. Ever increasing administration means the things we exist to do suffer. Even if volunteers could be found to do the admin, time spent on it is time not spent doing more important things. I understand why members who've been involved for many years want to preserve GALHA's independence. For me what matters most is the external impact GALHA has. I want GALHA to be more diverse and to involve LGBT humanists across the country. And I want it to spend as much time as possible promoting Humanism and working on behalf of the LGBT community as a whole. In my view becoming a section of the BHA offers us a much better chance of doing that.

We also heard from YVONNE LU. October's Gay Family Web meeting was her first time attending a GALHA event:

This meeting was exactly what we needed as we are seriously planning to have a child of our own. It was very reassuring to hear from two total strangers on their path to parenthood. We think GALHA is full of very passionate people! As a first timers, we were a little worried about being accepted by the group but obviously we were just silly! It was an honor to be part of the supporters and we certainly look forward to future events. Thank you very much.

As ever, GALHA News is always happy to receive your letters. We'd be particularly interested to hear your views on the proposed merger with the British Humanist Association. Let us know what you think at:

Editor@Galha.org



Natalie Drew and Ashling Phillips with GALHA Chair Adam Knowles