



# GALHA NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GAY & LESBIAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

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## GALHA TO JOIN FORCES WITH THE BRITISH HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

**On Saturday 14th April 2012 a Special General Meeting took place at Conway Hall to decide the future of GALHA.**

Members gathered to vote on the proposal that GALHA becomes a section of the British Humanist Association. As GALHA Chair Adam Knowles outlined in his introductory speech:

"We returned to the existential question: what is GALHA for? We decided it's to promote Humanism and LGBT rights in the UK and abroad, and to ensure it can sustainably do so in future, rather than to protect itself as an entity. The goal we set ourselves was to establish the firmest foundation for the future, the future of the LGBT Humanist movement in the UK. The Committee and I think we're better off with the BHA and hope you do too."

The overwhelming response was 'Yes', with 24 votes in favour of the proposal, 1 against, and 3 abstentions.

While there was no postal vote, members who were unable to make it to the meeting were encouraged to let their views be known in writing. Sixteen such replies were received, the majority of which were in support of the proposal.

Speaking after the vote, David Pollock, one of the BHA trustees who attended the

BHA Trustee David Pollock with GALHA Chair Adam Knowles



meeting on their behalf, said:

"I'd like, on behalf of the BHA, to formally welcome GALHA and say that we're looking forward to a prosperous and useful life together."

Adam Knowles later commented:

"The move into the BHA is something of an end of an era for GALHA, but also the start of

a new one about which I am tremendously excited. I'd like to thank Mike Rickwood and Malcolm Barnes particularly for all the work they put into this, but also the rest of the Committee and those members whom wrote in or gave their views. I'm delighted that so many GALHA members old and new attended to vote - and look forward to building on our past but in a form suited to future success."

GALHA secretary Mike Rickwood said:

"The officers will be meeting the BHA shortly to agree how to handle the transition. We will let you know the outcome in due course. We will also shortly begin work to develop a vision of the new direction GALHA should now be moving in to take advantage of its new situation - the new things it might do and how it might do them - which we'd like to discuss and seek your endorsement for at the Manchester weekend, which will be held on the 12-14 October." Full details of the weekend can be seen overleaf.

The current committee after a landmark decision



### EDITOR'S NOTES

A huge thank you to everybody who attended the SGM and voted, and to those who let their feelings be known by post. It was an ever so slightly surreal day, with Conway Hall also playing host to a performing arts festival that assured madcap antics in every available corner of the building....

Despite this promise, proceedings were relatively sober in the small cramped room allocated to GALHA. Thanks to Mike Rickwood, GALHA's current secretary, for chairing the meeting so smoothly and efficiently, and to our Chair, Adam Knowles, for his eloquent proposal of the motion.

It was encouraging to discover that the majority of GALHA members who expressed an opinion support the Committee's proposal that the organisation becomes a part of the BHA. We're excited about the future of GALHA and hope that you are too. As Mike Rickwood commented in his closing remarks:

"Now the work really starts!"

As summer approaches, Pride season is looming once again. As mentioned last issue, we are still looking for volunteers to help run the GALHA stalls at the various events:

- Birmingham Pride - 2/3 June
- Pride London - 7 July
- Manchester Pride - 25/26/27 August

We've had to reduce the number of Prides we attend this year due to lack of volunteers - but remain very keen to support anyone who wants to attend their local pride and perhaps run a stall or distribute leaflets promoting LGBT humanism. Do get in touch with pride co-ordinator Paul Allen at: [mail@peacenik.me.uk](mailto:mail@peacenik.me.uk)

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## EVENTS DIARY

### IDAHO Event

**Friday, May 18th, 7.30pm in the Brockway Room, Conway Hall**

A major event in the form of a panel discussion to focus on the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia 2012 theme of "Fighting homo/transphobia in and through education".

Members of the panel are **Tony Fenwick**, Co chair of Schools Out and LGBT History Month, **Elly Barnes**, Music teacher and Diversity Course Leader at Stoke Newington School, **Janet Palmer**, HM Inspector, Ofstead, National Advisor for Personal Social, Health and Economic Education, **Lydia Malmedie**, Stonewall Education Officer, and **Adrian Tippetts**, Freelance journalist and NSS Council Member.

Short films will also be shown that have been made in Europe to combat homophobic and transphobic bullying in

schools, and in another short film we will see Stoke Newington School pupils and teachers celebrating LGBT History Month.

### Film: This is what Love in Action looks like

**Friday, June 15th, 7.30pm in the Brockway Room, Conway Hall**

In the summer of 2005, parents of gay teenager Zach Stark packed their son off to 'Love in Action', an 'ex-gay' ministry purporting to 'cure' youths of their homosexual desires.



Following the film there will be a discussion about how to campaign effectively against 'conversion therapy'. Key campaigners have been invited to attend.

### Robert Ingersoll: A Talk by Derek Lennard

**Friday, July 14th, 7.30pm in the Brockway Room, Conway Hall**



Robert Ingersoll (1833—1899) is one of the great lost figures in United States history, all but forgotten at just the time America needs him most. An outspoken and

unapologetic agnostic, fervent champion of the separation of church and state, and tireless advocate of the rights of women and African Americans, he drew enormous audiences in the late nineteenth century with his lectures on "freethought." His admirers included Mark Twain and Thomas A. Edison, who said Ingersoll had "all the attributes of a perfect man" and went so far as to make an early recording of Ingersoll's voice.

Derek Lennard, who has studied Ingersoll's life and work since 1999, and wrote and performed in a play about Ingersoll called "The Time to be Happy", argues that Ingersoll is more relevant to us today than he was in his lifetime, and will illustrate this with extracts from his talks and speeches.

### GALHA weekend in Manchester

**October 12-14th**

See overleaf for more details.

**Peter Tatchell: The Unfinished Battle for Human Rights**  
**Friday, November 9th, 7.30pm in the Brockway Room, Conway Hall**





# 2012 GALHA WEEKEND

## FRIDAY 12TH OCTOBER - SUNDAY 14TH OCTOBER

### MANCHESTER

The GALHA Weekend event will be held in Manchester from Friday 12<sup>th</sup> October to Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> October. We are running it in conjunction with the NW England LGBT Humanists.

The group hotel will be the Mercure on Portland Street, overlooking Piccadilly Gardens, and is a short walk from the gay village, Chinatown and Piccadilly Station.

#### Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> October

The day will begin with a discussion about how GALHA can take advantage of its new status and redeploy the resources it was previously devoting to administrative activity.

After a buffet lunch, we will hold the **first AGM of GALHA in its new incarnation** as a section of the British Humanist Association. The Chief Executive (and former GALHA chair) of the BHA, Andrew Copson, is expected to attend the meeting.

Saturday's meetings will be held at the Lesbian and Gay Foundation (LGF), one of the UK's leading LGBT charities and a stone's throw from the Mercure Hotel.

In the afternoon, we plan to visit an exhibition marking the centenary of Alan Turing's birth at Manchester Museum (University of Manchester).

In the evening there will be a private dinner with guest speaker (19.00 for 19.30).

#### Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> October

On the Sunday morning there will be a guided walk through Manchester's gay history., while for those staying over on Sunday evening there will be free time to explore Manchester's many other attractions.

#### Booking

A booking form is enclosed with this newsletter and online booking will shortly be available.

## MY OWN PUBLIC IDAHO

**GALHA events organiser and veteran campaigner DEREK LENNARD discusses his work for IDAHO.**



For the past 7 years I've been co-ordinating the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO) on behalf of GALHA. During this time I've had various strange experiences.

For example, narrowly missing violence at the 1st Moscow Pride, only to become close to becoming a gay martyr, thanks to the reckless driving of the taxi driver on the way to the airport.

Or the time when I offered a coffee to a very religious Ugandan LGBT campaigner who was staying with us at the time, without realising it was a National Secular Society mug with the message "Religion is the problem, not the answer" on it. Then was the time very late on IDAHO night, when the receptionist at the BBC World Service asked this very tired and confused campaigner "How was the journey from IDAHO...?". 7 years of IDAHO events in the UK has been long enough to establish certain 'traditions' about what takes place on May 17th. 'Traditional' in the sense that certain parts of the country mark IDAHO every year in their own particular way, but also that what they do seems to tap in to ways of defining 'community' in this country which go back hundreds of years.

In Sheffield for example they will mark IDAHO as they traditionally do with a 'minute's noise', to "speak out loudly and clearly that homophobia and transphobia are unacceptable and have no place in

our society". Having witnessed this occasion last year I can tell you this is quite an experience! Campaigners gather together in the ironically named 'Peace Gardens' and after about 30 minutes of speeches from a variety of groups, they let out an enormous roar and various people in the crowd bring out musical instruments and start playing them. The resulting din, is strangely moving - a unique experience. There really is a sense of a community coming together and something primeval about the roar.

Each year I - and no doubt many other campaigners - experience conflicting emotions about IDAHO. On the one hand, I feel despairing and angry about the way LGBT people around the world are deprived of their human rights, and on the other hand I want to celebrate that under the most difficult circumstances imaginable, people are fighting back. This difficult mix of emotions is well addressed in the Brighton "celebrations" of IDAHO. Thus:

- Performances from The Rainbow Chorus.
- A 'minute's noise' in partnership with the B&H LGBT Workers' Forum to remember the international victims of homo, bi and transphobic violence.
- Release of Sky Lanterns symbolising the 70 countries where it is illegal to be gay. At the same time their light represents the hope that one day there will be a positive change.
- Key notes speakers from across the LGBT community, LGBT students, younger peoples LGBT groups, local activists and Education.

Finally, there is no more traditional role in this country than the Speaker of the House of Commons. This year John Bercow will speak about LGBT Human Rights to mark IDAHO. Just a few years ago who would ever have thought such a thing would happen? Indeed I'm sure I can hear his long list of illustrious predecessors rising from their graves and screaming "Order! Order!!!"

## VIGILANCE IS ESSENTIAL



Column by  
**ADRIAN TIPPETTS**  
Activist and freelance  
journalist

The sustained, vitriolic campaign by the Coalition For Marriage, who, at the time of writing, have gained half a million signatures against allowing LGBT people to marry, should wake us from any complacency. Even though the majority of ordinary people do not consider LGBT equality to be an issue and surveys repeatedly show a moderate majority supporting equal marriage, the various hardline groups behind the Coalition for Marriage have managed to dominate news headlines for the past two months. Should we be concerned? Well, yes, we should, and not just on account of the fanaticism of our opponents, but because of the complacency and unwillingness on the part of LGBT-friendly politicians to stand up for what they believe is right.

We are up against a very organised, persistent, disciplined and determined movement that will stop at nothing to derail any legislation that promotes equality. They have foot soldiers in their mega churches who are motivated by the call to be 'salt and light' to others. When it comes to a leafleting campaign, they will literally walk the extra mile.

However, the reason fundamentalists have been able to dominate the news is also down to journalistic incompetence and apathy on the part of those who should be standing with us. The prominence given to reactionary religious opinion in the media, especially at the BBC, is way beyond their representation. A sixth of the population attends church regularly, yet even among lay congregations, opinion against marriage equality is in the minority. However, the main news channels present the homophobic proclamations from senior clergy, unquestioningly, as if it represented all Christians, as headline news. The opinions, and feelings of LGBT people, whose loving relationships are declared to be 'shaming the nation', are rarely given airtime. Instead of calling ministers, police commissioners and the judiciary to

account, discussions on *Newsnight* have centered around whether Christians are being discriminated against.

The anti-marriage campaigners are attempting to generate as much hysteria as possible, and by doing so, potentially tarnishing the reputation of a respected polling agency. The Coalition for Marriage has co-opted ComRes to conduct surveys to see if allowing marriage equality has any influence on the voting intentions of the general public. The poll in fact found that most voters are not remotely interested; 10% of voters would be more likely to vote Tory, 13% less so, making a negative difference of three percent. However, this didn't stop the Christian Institute claiming that the proposals would be 'devastating', costing over a million voters and 30 seats in an election! Thanks to diligent work by PinkNews, it turns out the figures were extrapolated from surveys of former Tory voters only.

Even though C4M misused the data publicly, ComRes made no attempt to deny the wildly wholly untrue claims made by their fundamentalist paymasters. Expect LGBT causes to be scapegoated as the cause of the government's woes, too. Within hours of the polls closing, C4M supporters, including the junior minister Gerald Howarth, were lining up to blame the huge losses on gay marriage.

We must remain vigilant in exposing the myths through blogs and opinion pieces. We must write to our local MPs to explain the necessity for equality under the law, and to ask them to show more vocal support. David Cameron rightly reiterated his commitment to LGBT equality in an interview with the Evening Standard. That commitment needs to be reiterated by other party leaders too. There needs to be a more unified stand with progressive religious communities, whose voices are under-represented. This is a matter of urgency, as the church and conservatives attempt to deflect the challenge to their privileges by labeling secularists as the extremists.