



# GALHA NEWS

NEWS FROM THE LGBT SECTION OF THE BRITISH HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

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## GALHA WEEKEND 2012 - MANCHESTER



**A thirty-strong group of LGBT humanists converged on Manchester for Galha's first Annual General Meeting as part of the British Humanist Association on October 12-14. Report by JOSEPH BROOKS**

After a late Friday night out for some members, Saturday morning began with a guided tour of the Manchester Museum's exhibition about the well-known code breaker and mathematician Alan Turing. The exhibition documented Turing's influential work and gave insight into his time at the University of Manchester. Especially interesting was substantial coverage of his lesser-known work on morphogenesis completed just before he died.

The AGM on Saturday afternoon was hosted at the Manchester Lesbian and Gay Foundation in the heart of Manchester's gay village. In addition to hearing from Andrew Copson, chief executive of the BHA, candidates standing for election to the committee gave their views on the future of Galha. All were confirmed including a new addition to the committee, James Heather. Galha Chair, Adam Knowles, also led a discussion which solicited opinions on the future directions and priorities of Galha in its new form.

That evening, after dinner at the Mercure Hotel, we enjoyed a first-hand account of Manchester's extensive gay history from Manchester City Councillor Paul Fairweather. (Pictured bottom right)

The weekend wrapped up with a visit to the Manchester Museum of Science and Industry's exhibition on the development of Manchester's LGBT community. The 2012 AGM weekend was a fantastic combination of social, local Mancunian, and intellectual stimulation and also provided the opportunity for Galha to build constructive links with local North West LGBT humanists.



Turing and friends



The freshly elected committee: Richard Unwin, James Heather, Adam Knowles, Derek Lennard, and Mike Rickwood. (The new committee also includes BHA Trustee Mary Porter, not pictured.)



Galha Chair Adam Knowles with City Councillor Paul Fairweather

### EDITOR'S NOTES

Apologies for the slightly-longer-than-usual wait for this edition of Galha News. The delay has been a result of synchronising our publication schedule with that of the BHA. Normal service will now be resumed.

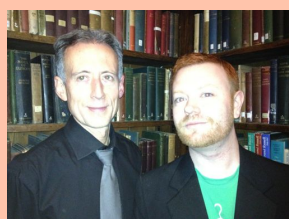
This year's Galha weekend in Manchester was a splendid success - see the report above for more details. Huge thanks to Mike Rickwood and Trevor Dunn, who were the driving forces behind the organisation of the event. And special thanks also to Galha Chair Adam Knowles for introducing some of us to the palatable delights of Canal Street...

One of the points to come out of the event's 'Vision Workshop' was that members based outside of London wanted more online representation of our often capital-based events and speakers.

On Friday 9th of November we were delighted to have Peter Tatchell as the

guest speaker at one of our public meetings at Conway Hall, London. Peter's talk - The Unfinished Battle for LGBT Human Rights - will shortly be available for viewing on the BHA's YouTube channel: <http://www.youtube.com/user/britishhumanists>

And you can hear Galha Chair Adam Knowles and myself in conversation with Peter in Episode 163 of popular Humanist podcast - The Pod Delusion: <http://poddelusion.co.uk/blog/>



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### UPCOMING EVENTS...

**Queer Humanism: A talk by award winning author and lecturer Jonathan Kemp**

Friday 14th December, 7.30pm in the Brockway Room, Conway Hall. Jonathan will read from his novels "London Triptych" and "Twenty six".

**Film screening - Call Me Kuchu**

Friday 11th January, 7.30pm in the Brockway Room, Conway Hall.

In Uganda, a new bill threatens to make homosexuality punishable by death. David Kato - Uganda's first openly gay man - and his fellow activists work against the clock to defeat the legislation while combating vicious persecution in their daily lives.



**Vinyl Closet 3 - For LGBT History Month**

Friday 8th February, 7.30pm in the Brockway Room, Conway Hall.

In the Vinyl Closet 3, Ted, Brett & Chris will be performing songs rescued from the archives to reveal the surprising variety of representation both by and about LGBT people in popular music. The format of the show focuses on musical performances with added discussion about the context and significance of the songs as documents of LGBT experience and history.

**The Fruits of Philosophy - A new play from Fire And Brimstone Productions**

Friday 15th March, 7.30pm in the Brockway Room, Conway Hall.

Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh - the most famous free thinkers - are put on trial for publishing a pamphlet aimed at poor people and advocating contraception.

# VILIFICATION AS A MORAL NECESSITY

There's a cartoon doing the rounds, showing a gay rights activist [trying to resist crucifixion](#) by a baying mob of religious fanatics. As he struggles to avoid the hammer blows, there is yelling from the crowd: 'Quit squirming!! you're oppressing our religious freedom!!!! It would be funny if it were not so true a reflection of the bitter, powerful religious forces opposed to equality. And no major institution expresses such a visceral, vindictive loathing of gay people as the Catholic Church in Scotland. Yet should anyone dare to answer back, one merely has to start the clock and count for the self-pitying squeals of imagined persecution, lapped up by media and politicians who are so scared of upsetting the clerics, they have forgotten who the real victims are.

The one-sided condemnation aimed at Stonewall last month for hosting its Bigot of the Year award illustrated the hypocritical stand of an establishment whose commitment to ending homophobia is nothing but puff and flannel. The award has only ever been a light-hearted way of exposing and ridiculing the animosity that LGBT people are accustomed to. This year, the candidates were in a league of their own. Two of them represented the

Catholic Church in Scotland: its head, Keith O'Brien, and the bishop of Glasgow, Philip Tartaglia. In reality, the upper hierarchy of the Church could have been treated as one entity. The slightest research would have shown that these recipients were not, as the Guardian's Andrew Brown suggested, being vilified for disagreeing with gay marriage. True, Cardinal O'Brien called recognising gay marriage 'grotesque' and comparable to supporting 'slavery'. But it was merely the debate on marriage equality that gave the opportunity for clerics to attack the dignity of people merely for their nature and to demonise gay relationships by spreading outright lies.

The full sinister vision of O'Brien's opinions can be read in a 2011 article in *Scottish Catholic News*. On same sex relationships he said: "These measures were not in the best interests of our society. The empirical evidence is clear, same-sex relationships are demonstrably harmful to the medical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of those involved, **no compassionate society should ever enact legislation to facilitate or promote such relationships**, we have

failed those who struggle with same-sex attraction and wider society by our actions."

Philip Tartaglia's fundamental opposition to civil partnerships is well documented, but it is the untruths he is prepared to tell to further his cause that makes him so repugnant. Tartaglia reached new depths when, in a debate on marriage, he volunteered - unprompted - that the death of 44-year old David Cairns, a man the bishop knew well and whose funeral he had even helped organise, was due to [his sexual orientation](#). This was not just a careless slip of the tongue: it is the official position, as just days later, the press secretary Peter Kearney made the same claim that the [average lifespan of gay people was 42](#). This in itself tells us who is informing the Catholic hierarchy in Scotland. For the source of this research is not any reputable medical, psychological or psychiatric institution. The findings can be traced back to an American fundamentalist, discredited psychologist Paul Cameron, of the [Family Research Institute](#), based in America. This research appears in no respected peer-reviewed titles and has been widely discredited for poor

methodology, but has been used widely by the US Religious Right to further anti-gay legislation.

However, there is a more sinister consequence of rhetoric from O'Brien and Tartaglia. While in the UK such examples of vitriol are met with rolling eyes, their words are taken deadly seriously in other parts of the world, where gay people are in fear for their safety. The Catholic Church in Uganda, for instance, is [actively calling](#) on the government to pass the notorious 'kill the gays' bill.

O'Brien is not being condemned or vilified for his nature, or because he is a Catholic. He is being held to account because of what he and his fellow clerics say and do. The media would rather we shrug our shoulders. To do so would be to shrug at those who are so drummed with shame, they dare not speak out. For those who suffer silently, it is a moral obligation we continue to voice our outrage. Long may the bigot award continue!

ADRIAN TIPPETTS

# BIBLE BASHING - PETERSON TOSCANO

Peter Peterson Toscano is a US-based theatrical performance activist who uses comedy and storytelling to address social justice concerns and queer issues. After spending 17 years and over \$30,000 on three continents attempting (and failing) to change his gay orientation, he has emerged as a queer cheeky voice of reason in the midst of the culture war.

On September 14th he presented extracts from his latest play 'Jesus Had Two Daddies', in which he mercilessly dissects the Bible to comic effect, for an audience of Galha members and supporters at Conway Hall, London. The performance was followed by a Q&A session, highlights of which are presented here:

**You've been through the ex-gay movement and mentioned that a lot of the leaders of these groups are 'ex-gay' men. Are the evangelical groups exploiting internalised self-hatred?**

I was asked a couple of years ago if ex-gay groups were hate groups, and I said, well, yes, but, they're more like self-hate groups. But then the hate spills out. Because often the leaders of ex-gay groups are gay themselves, and in some ways you can see they've created some weird-ass inverted LGBT community for themselves, where they're around gay people all the time. And they can be unbelievably camp! I mean some of the campiest behaviour I've ever seen has been at ex-gay conferences. Also, what we see time and time again is some homophobic politician or religious leader caught with their pants down - or a cock in their mouth - and people act shocked. That internalised hate is a very powerful force. I remember when I was an evangelist, there was so much crap about the gays going into the schools and trying to recruit and convert children to homosexuality. They made millions and millions of dollars off of that scare, and I believed it at the time. Then years later I realised, hang on - that's what the evangelicals do, with their child evangelism and all that. They're so often trying to worm their way into schools and being deceitful, that they think that just like them we're using all these underhand methods to convert people. We're not interested in converting anyone, we just want things to be safe for those who are LGBT. We're not interested in making new gays, we just want to protect the ones that exist. So, I

think they just put their world view on us, it's a projection, and then that self-hatred gets out there, and it's a very strong, vile force.

**You identify as a Christian. How do you balance that with your criticism of the Bible?**

That's a very fair question. And it's one that I've asked myself for a long time. In fact, one of the first questions that I asked that helped me get moving was, I had to ask myself "Am I a christian struggling with homosexuality, or a homosexual struggling with christianity." And I was a homosexual struggling with christianity, particularly how it was taught to me. One of the reasons I still choose to be a christian is because I'm a dissident. And I think we need dissident voices. That's why straight people can be dissidents around other straight people, around LGBT issues - when they hear a joke, when they hear someone trashing queer folks, they stand up as a dissident. When they're at the PTA meeting they stand up and say "What about the needs of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered students? Or gay parents, bi parents, trans parents... what are we going to do about them?" They stand up as a dissident. So, for me, with the work I'm doing within these communities, I'm a dissident voice, and that's critical. The other reason, and this may not be a satisfactory answer for some people - I feel like I'm just wired for God. I've always been someone who's fascinated with religion, and with God, and with the big questions, so I'm always drawn to spiritual experiences and things. I choose to be a christian because it's what I know, and I've found a place among the quakers where it's not critical - I don't have to adhere to a certain set of beliefs. For me my faith isn't something I talk about much - that's why I like being a Quaker, my husband and I are both quakers - we sit in silence for an hour!

The Bible is a very troubled text. For every beautiful, affirming passage there are unbelievably horrendous things that can't be redeemed. As a scholar, as a performer, as a Christian, I have to acknowledge that and say that to people. We need to take that seriously - so that people are not establishing laws and foreign policy on this book. We need to find other texts and other voices, of all sorts of backgrounds, to enrich our libraries and not stick with this single book.



Plot holes? Peterson with Galha Chair Adam Knowles