



# GALHA NEWS

NEWS FROM THE LGBT SECTION OF THE BRITISH HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

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## THANK THE LORDS!



Galha members and supporters were among the crowds that assembled outside the House of Lords on the 3rd and 4th of June.

The gathering was a vigil in support of equal marriage - timed to coincide with the debate on the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill taking place inside the House. There were pro-equality speeches from several high profile supporters of the bill, including **Lynne Featherstone**, **Chris Bryant**, and long time Galha supporter and human rights champion **Peter Tatchell**.

The London Gay Men's Chorus were also on hand, providing vocals that could apparently be heard inside the House itself.

A 'wrecking amendment' tabled by Lord Dear was soundly defeated by the Lords voting 390 to 148 against, marking another step along the long road to equality. But the debate rumbles on and as we go to press, further amendments are being tabled.



## SQUARE DANCING

For this year's International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO) Galha, in association with the Central London Humanists and London Community Pride, arranged an equal marriage themed flash mob in Trafalgar Square.

**Derek Lennard**, IDAHO-UK co-ordinator said:

"This year's London IDAHO was a great example of communities working together. We're grateful to The Place, Galha, and The Central London Humanists for rehearsing their moves. It was an enormous boost to campaigners tackling gender identity discrimination everywhere. Only this week we read of another horrific hate crime in Russia, and many of our own LGBT+ hate crimes still go unreported. IDAHO is proving to be a positive movement for change, empowering communities affected by discrimination to link hands around the world and put on their own events."

Huge thanks are due to **Baptiste**

**Bourgognon** for choreography, rehearsal space, and loan of dance students!

A video of the event can be seen at: [londoncommunitypride.org/news/2013/05/historic-moment-pride-london-idaho](http://londoncommunitypride.org/news/2013/05/historic-moment-pride-london-idaho)

Also to mark IDAHO, Galha has uploaded a video of the Transphobia Panel Discussion that we hosted earlier in the year on April 12th at Conway Hall. This can be seen at: [youtube.com/watch?v=QpTXOSB1s34](http://youtube.com/watch?v=QpTXOSB1s34)



## INTERVIEW: Adam Knowles

Hello Adam. You are the current Chair of Galha. What does that mean and what does it involve? What are your responsibilities?

It means I get the penthouse at Galha Towers and a team of minions to cater to my every desire. Jokes! It means I head up our core team of six people (the committee) responsible for setting and executing Galha's strategic work on behalf of the group's members. I'm responsible for chairing meetings (both public and committee) and acting as a spokesperson for the group, and I work across various areas including online promotion, designing materials and also, with the help of Finance Officer Mike Rickwood, ensuring that we stay afloat operationally.

How did you come to be involved with Galha?

I was living in Manchester and somehow found 'Gay Humanist Quarterly' (the old Galha magazine) on the internet. I subscribed immediately and read it with great interest. I felt I'd finally found a worldview that felt right for me. A year or so later I moved to London and started

coming to the public events. After the second meeting I was working on the bar and by the third I'd been co-opted onto the Committee. When (previous Chair) Andrew Copson was snapped up by the BHA, I saw my chance for world domination and immediately grabbed the opportunity (to stand for democratic election).



Galha recently became a section of the BHA. What were the reasons for this? Has it changed things much, and how do you see the relationship developing?

Our application to become a charity, on which we'd worked for years, had been declined. Admin was increasing and so were professional fees, while membership was stagnant. We needed to take a bold

positive step to protect the future of the LGBT force within the humanist movement. The BHA was very supportive from the outset and our members overwhelmingly agreed that we should form a new, more substantial relationship. It's already helped enormously. There's less admin and frankly it's more fun. We have more time for the campaigning and creative things such as the Flashmob that we recently helped coordinate.

What, in your view, are the most important LGBT Humanist issues that we need to be tackling?

In the UK, equal marriage is the current focus. Internationally, there are several countries still executing people for being LGBT, and many others maintaining a variety of other sanctions. Galha has long supported IDAHO (the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia), and we want to do more to help secure true global equality. That's a long road and we need our members and supporters to help us travel it.

What's your reply if someone asks you 'What is Humanism?'

I say that Humanism is a naturalistic worldview that emphasises living an ethical life with morality based on free and critical enquiry. It trusts the scientific method as the most reliable path to knowledge and truth, and acknowledges that we generate

meaning in our lives through our relationships with other people. As a humanist I celebrate the joyful experience of being alive, in this world, here and now. Humanism warrants no dogma, including this one.

What's been your personal highlight of your involvement with Galha?

So many! Meeting Stephen Fry for the annual lunch was pretty amazing. And I remember with great fondness a few years ago being bundled off-stage by the outrageous Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence during an IDAHO event, while attempting to give a speech in the main space at our beloved Conway Hall. They stole the show!

If we could have any LGBT/Humanist personality, dead or alive, as a speaker at a Galha event, who would you pick?

Albert Einstein. Maybe that's controversial: he refused to be labeled an atheist and didn't like being quoted in arguments against God. He thought that 'negative' atheism wasn't enough, that humans need a sense of themselves and their purpose and place. The Humanist tradition is an attempt to offer that without religious shackles. I'd love to hear more of what old Albert thought about it all.

Adam, thank you.

# THE STATE WE'RE IN...

## Adrian Tippetts sees progress in social acceptance but vigilance is essential

### A to-do list...

#### 1. Full equality under the law

Some notable feminists are astonished that progressives are campaigning for marriage. Isn't it a patriarchal institution, centred around the idea that a woman is a man's property? But the battle for marriage equality isn't just about marriage. This campaign has been about ensuring LGBT people have the same rights, recognition and protections under the law. It is about outlawing, once and for all, segregation and discrimination of people because of their sexuality or gender. There is no half-way house: you either have equality or you don't. That's why amendments to the bill must be resisted with contempt.

#### 2. Compulsory sex and relationship education in schools

As well as legal equality, we need to tackle the lingering rump of homophobic prejudice. The best remedy is to tackle homophobia where it is most extreme and where LGBT people are still vulnerable - in schools. Research by Stonewall in 2012 showed one in sixteen gay and bi men aged 16 to 24 attempted to take their own life in the previous year. Gay and bisexual men are also more likely to self-harm, catch sexually transmitted infections and have depression, compared to their straight peers. An ongoing survey by The Metro Centre suggests that people become aware of being LGBT from the age of 14, and that it takes on average another two years to come out. Nearly three quarters of respondents said they needed emotional support during this period.

Compulsory, unbiased, inclusive sex and relationship education at schools - provided by health experts, not religious ideologues - is the way to address homophobic bullying, and poorer rates of mental and sexual health that LGBT people suffer from. Some schools, like Stoke Newington in North London, in association with Schools Out, have pioneered programmes to raise awareness of different families from a young age, and educate about the nature of sexuality by adolescence.

Schools must make a commitment to providing an environment where young LGBT people are accepted and empowered to be open about their sexuality. Adolescence should be a time of learning to form healthy relationships. Arguably, the years of repressing sexuality and inexperience in relationship building, is a contributing factor in the heightened occurrence of STDs and drug abuse within the gay community.

Sadly, Conservative and Liberal Democrat MPs voted down proposals to make sex and relationship education compulsory in England and Wales. Faith schools can set their own agenda and teach about sexuality 'according to their religious ethos'. In her Independent article last month, Becky Smith summed up how the school system is failing pupils, gay, bi, trans and straight:

*"It is only in the four years since leaving school that I have come to realise how sparse the sex education I received was. 'Wait until you're ready' became a recurring theme. 'Ready' implied being in a stable, long-term, heterosexual relationship at some point in the vague future. The notion that it is possible to have healthy sexual relationships outside of this context was not even entertained."*

In many schools, the very existence of LGBT people, their needs and their



relationships are barely recognised. OFSTED now monitors schools according to their record on dealing with homophobia and inclusion. Be thankful for small mercies, but make education the hot topic at the next election.

#### 3. Eliminate Transphobia

Before we get carried away the story is not so wonderful for trans people who are routinely vilified, outed and even depicted as perverts or predators. The deplorable case of Lucy Meadows, the Lancashire teacher who committed suicide after a vicious media campaign - notably by Daily Mail writers like Richard Littlejohn - calling for her to be sacked, reminds us that, given the chance, the populist press will seek out the weakest members of society simply because they cannot defend themselves. The law criminalises those who do not disclose their gender.

A recent survey of trans people found that 73 percent received verbal insults, 48 percent had attempted suicide, 24 percent lied to psychologists to get treatment and 8 percent have been victims of physical assault. There is a need to raise public understanding of transgenderism, to train health professionals to treat trans people with dignity, and ensure inclusion in schools and the workplace. Thankfully politicians of all parties are waking up to the scale of the abuse. The gay community at large should show more solidarity though.

#### 4. Rally for Russian LGBT community

The Russian parliament unanimously passed a law that criminalises virtually any LGBT expression, under the pretence of protecting minors from 'propaganda' about "non-traditional sexual relations" to minors. It will almost certainly criminalise any public advocacy of LGBT equality, expression of same-sex affection, and as Peter Tatchell noted, make LGBT organisations, meetings, festivals, marches, posters, newspapers, books, films, counselling and safer sex education likely to face criminal prosecution. Freedom of expression is the most basic of rights, for without it, no platform is possible to reason or argue the case for other liberties. President Putin, egged on by the Russian Orthodox Church, is making the country a living hell for LGBT people. Even though Russia has been found guilty of breaching the European Convention of Human Rights for its homophobic legislation, the Council of Europe has done nothing. It's time for governments, human rights groups and global corporations to put pressure on Putin and to urge the Council of Europe to act.

#### 5. A UN Declaration is Overdue

The UN is at last making bolder statements

in support of LGBT people. We must keep pushing for a full declaration against criminalisation of same-sex relationships. Sadly attempts to make such a declaration have been repeatedly scuppered by the Vatican, Russia and several Islamic countries.

#### 6. Confront Islamist Extremism

Liberals and those in the LGBT community are fearless when standing up to Christian bigotry, but shy away from bigotry from Islamist extremists, often because they fear being labeled as racists. Anti-fascist groups like Unite Against Fascism have done a sterling job in confronting the British Nationalist Party and the thugs from the English Defence League, but have never taken on Islamist extremism. But we must call out extremism wherever we see it. If we are afraid to call out such hatred, we should at least be honest about it, and why. The extremist preachers calling for death to gays and non-Muslims are primarily a threat to other Muslims. It is sad that it has taken the slaughter of a British serviceman in Woolwich to galvanise politicians into addressing extremism on University campuses. Thanks are due to Student Rights for their documentation of this problem.

#### 7. Inclusion in Sport: where is the Leadership?

Sport seems to be the one place where gay men fear coming out. High-profile examples of cricket's Steve Davies and rugby union's Gareth Thomas make us wonder if such fears are overrated. The problem lies with how to deal with a small faction of fans and the attitudes of senior managers - mostly white, male dinosaurs, who resist change. Awarding Russia and Qatar with the privilege of hosting the soccer World Cup shows how much FIFA senior executives care about human rights in general.

Only a quarter of football clubs have signed up to the Anti Homophobia charter. Racist chanting leads to club points deductions; homophobic chanting does not. Where is the leadership?

Maybe pressure will come at supporter level. Homophobic fans would be frightened out of their wits if footage of their chanting circulated on social media. Sponsors, who usually insist on a prominent placement across the official team shirts, do not want

associated with such thuggery either. Never mind about the professional player, though: think about how all this affects vulnerable adolescents in the youth teams. All clubs should be implementing diversity programmes and making football an accepting place for LGBT players, staff and fans.

#### 8. Show solidarity with other minorities

There is a long, hard road ahead to reach full liberty and equality. But the journey can be quickened if our politicians and our straight allies put the principle of equality under the law without compromise before the need for a comfortable life.

It's a principle that needs to be applied regardless of time and space. Be eternally vigilant in protecting and upholding it for others, as well as ourselves. Evil prevails when good men do nothing. Consideration for others makes the journey more pleasant, even if you have to take a few knocks and bruises.

## LYNDON SCARFE

GALHA members and supporters will have been very sad indeed to learn of the death of Lyndon Scarfe last March.

A long time enthusiastic GALHA member - he and his life time partner Bryce attended numerous GALHA Lunches and Weekends. Until the onset of his illness, they were both among the most consistent attendees of GALHA events at Conway Hall.

All who had the privilege of seeing Lyndon at these events can hardly have failed to notice his openness and kindness, enthusiasm, warmth, honesty and lovely sense of humour. He was also a tremendous "networker" - successfully and effectively conveying his enthusiasm for the many LGBT groups to which he devoted his time and love.

Our hearts go out to Bryce, the love of Lyndon's life, and we wish him the very best for the future.

## EDITOR'S NOTES

I've just about recovered from the BHA annual conference that took place in Leeds a couple of weekends ago - those BHA officials certainly know how to work hard and play hard! It was great to see quite a few Galha members and supporters at what turned out to be a tremendous weekend - we even managed to sign up a few new members.

There were fascinating talks on topics as diverse as astronomy, quantum physics, William Blake, and free-will, with plenty of opportunities to mingle and chat with the speakers. A personal highlight was an encounter in the bar with comedian Robin Ince, during which he showed Galha Chair Adam Knowles and myself a copy of 'Jenny Lives With Eric And Martin' that he had recently obtained from eBay - the book that prompted Section 28!

In other literary news - we've recently been contacted by Galha member Ed Watt, who has a large collection of 'Gay Times' magazines that he'd like to donate to a good home. The run is from 1995 to the present day. Contact us at the editorial address if interested.



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