



GALHA NEWS

NEWS FROM THE LGBT SECTION OF THE BRITISH HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

Issue 33

May 2014

COMMITTEE SHUFFLE: THE 2014 AGM



The freshly elected Committee, from left to right: Adam Knowles (Secretary), Paul Graham, Richard Unwin (Chair), James Heather, Malcolm Barnes (Finance Officer), Steve Emmett, Mary Porter (BHA Trustee).

The 2014 Annual General Meeting of Galha LGBT Humanists was held at Conway Hall in London on April 11th.

Outgoing Chair Adam Knowles led the meeting, explaining that the reason for the long interval since the last AGM, on October 13th 2012, was a result of Galha becoming a section of the BHA - the gap allowed us to align our activities with the BHA's administrative calendar.

Adam Knowles introduced the finance report, and explained that Finance Officer Mike Rickwood had been obliged to step down from the Committee this year due to ill health. Malcolm Barnes has been acting Finance Officer in Mike's place. The members thanked both Mike and Malcolm for their work. Malcolm discussed the finance report, which was presented in two parts for the second half of 2012 and the full year of 2013. Malcolm confirmed that some of the figures were erroneous and clarified the correct numbers, as approved by the auditor.

Malcolm explained how the finances have settled in 2013 following Galha becoming a section of the BHA. There were a number of costs to be paid during the merger, which has resulted in a lower balance at the end of 2013 than at the end of 2012. However, these were one-off costs and the finances are now much more stable since the merger.

Adam explained that, since joining the BHA, Galha does not receive subscription income from members, but that the Committee has been able to keep income and expenditure balanced. Adam talked about the need for greater fundraising in future to allow the Committee to organise a wider range of activities. The meeting agreed to accept the report.

The Galha Committee comprises seven members of whom one is an appointee of the BHA - the BHA has appointed Mary Porter to that position. That left six vacancies to be filled.

Adam Knowles then called for nominations for Chair. Richard Unwin was the only nominee and gave a brief statement of his candidacy. He was duly elected.

Adam Knowles explained that as a result of a change in the BHA Bylaws the Galha Committee now has an elected Secretary role. Richard Unwin then called for nominations for Secretary. Adam Knowles was the only nominee and was duly elected. He said:

"I just want to thank members and particularly my Committee colleagues for their magnificent support over the 4 years that I was Chair. It was a fun, worthwhile and productive time. Together we've achieved a lot and I'm very proud of the organisation we are today. I'm convinced that Richard is the right person at the right time to be Chair, and I'm keen to get started working with the new Committee to make things happen."

Malcolm Barnes was the only nominee for Finance Officer and was also elected. Steve Emmett, Paul Graham, and James Heather all gave statements of their candidacies, and were then elected to fill the remaining vacancies. Steve and Paul are both new additions to the Committee.

Adam Knowles then proposed a vote of thanks to all those who served on the previous Committee, and particularly to Derek Lennard who was standing down after several years' service. Adam said:

"Derek has played a pivotal role in Galha for a significant time, and we are particularly grateful to him for his efforts. He has led the events team for many years and worked tirelessly to organise, promote, and host our events at Conway Hall. We hope Derek will continue to lend his considerable campaigning and organisational expertise to Galha from off the Committee."

Richard Unwin proposed a vote of thanks to Adam Knowles for his hard work as Chair for the past four years.

1,000 AND COUNTING!

As of April 2014, for the first time in the organisation's thirty-five year history, Galha LGBT Humanists has more than a thousand members.

Galha Chair Richard Unwin said: "This enormous swell in our membership numbers is extremely gratifying. It's largely due to our becoming a section of the British Humanist Association, which we did back in August 2012. We're currently gaining new members at a rate of almost a hundred a month, which is astonishing. Obviously this rate of growth can't continue indefinitely, and it will be very interesting to see where it levels out.

"Such an increase in the size of the organisation presents opportunities that we are keen to capitalise on - I very much hope that plenty of these new members will become active and involved participants in our work. Projects that we've had on the back-burner for some time, such as the formation of a network of regional Galha groups, suddenly seem much more achievable with the larger pool of potential volunteers and helpers that we now have access to.

"The situation also throws up questions about the way we operate, and I think that

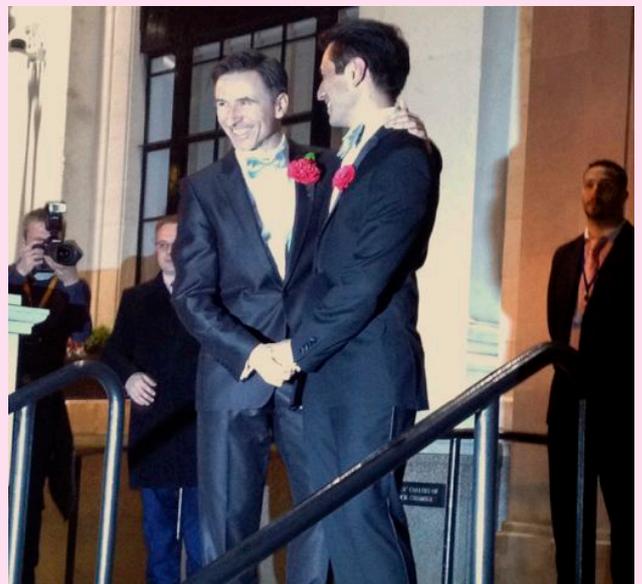


now is a perfect time for us to take a good look at what we do and how we do it. We always want to make sure that we listen to our members, and now, with so many new voices to be heard, we want to be certain that we're steering the ship in the right direction. To that end we have launched an online survey of all members (see overleaf), asking for your opinions on all matters Galha - including events, campaigns, and communications - and very much hope that as many of you as possible will let us know your thoughts. It's your Galha, and we need your help to set the course for the future."

CONGRATULATIONS!

Warm congratulations to Galha members and supporters Peter McGrath and David Cabreza, who became one of the very first same-sex couples to get married in the UK. (Quite possibly the first.) They tied the knot in the spectacular surroundings of Islington Town Hall, at one minute past midnight on the 29th of March 2014 - the exact moment that such ceremonies became legal in England and Wales. Human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell, another long-

term Galha supporter, was the couple's Chief Witness. After the ceremony the newlyweds addressed supporters and press on the town hall steps - emphasizing the amount of work still needed until we see full global equality. Having campaigned heavily for equal marriage, all of us at Galha were thrilled to see two good friends being the first to take advantage of this great leap forward. We wish them an abundance of love and happiness.



Above: Peter McGrath and David Cabreza on the steps of Islington Town Hall.

A QUEER VIEW: CAMERON'S CHRISTIAN BRITAIN



New Galha Committee member Steve Emmett reflects on the Prime Minister's claims that Britain is a 'Christian country'.

The Oxford Dictionary defines Christianity as: The religion based on the person and teachings of Jesus Christ, or its beliefs and practices.

Those beliefs include that Jesus was the son of god, that he was conceived by a ghost and born of a virgin, that he performed magic, that he died and not only was resurrected but that he then ascended to heaven. In Britain today, anyone going around making such claims about themselves would be sectioned under the Mental Health Act, yet the Prime Minister decides to proclaim Britain a Christian country. Why?

Listen to any debate between the pro-religion and no-religion groups and the thing that comes out again and again is the loss of belief in the religious camp. Even eminent members of the clergy can be heard to say that they don't believe in many of the Bible stories, that they are teaching a lesson and not meant to be taken literally. When people who admit they don't believe in god defend the pro-religion group, it begs the question as to why the argument is still so divisive. The problem is twofold: woolly thinking and prejudice.

In his article for The Church Times, Cameron

said: "I am a member of the Church of England and, I suspect, a rather classic one: not that regular in attendance, and a bit vague on some of the more difficult parts of the faith."

In plain language, he means he is an Anglican of convenience, taking what's easy and comforting, and leaving the demanding aside.

He goes on: "But that doesn't mean the Church of England doesn't matter to me or people like me: it really does. I like its openness, I deeply respect its national role, and I appreciate its liturgy, and the architecture and cultural heritage of its churches."

"My parents spent countless hours helping to support and maintain the village church that I grew up next to, and my Oxfordshire constituency has churches – including some medieval masterpieces – that take your breath away with their beauty, simplicity, and serenity. They are a vital part of Britain's living history."

What has this to do with religion? It sounds more like a passage from a dissertation on the preservation of buildings. Atheists and agnostics appreciate fine buildings; the religious do not hold the monopoly.

Is it that by trivialising his message he hopes to conceal the darker side of Christianity? He said he wants to "infuse politics" with Christian "ideals and values" such as "responsibility, hard work, charity, compassion, humility and love".

Well, just as we can all enjoy architecture, so

can we all share those values and ideals – they are not the preserve of the Church of England or any other religion. They are human values first and foremost.

He makes no mention of the Christian ideals and values that speak against the LGBT community. Cameron surely believes he has



Above: Christian activists protest against equal marriage.

won the LGBT vote by ushering in Same Sex Marriage, but it has created deep divisions in his power base (and as if it could be so easily bribed!). First, it is important to understand just how it sets him against his beloved Church. On the 15th February of this year the House of Bishops issued pastoral guidance on same sex marriage.

Among the verbal contortions are some interesting statements:

"We are all in agreement that the Christian understanding and doctrine of marriage as a lifelong union between one man and one woman remains unchanged. "The Lambeth Conference of 1998 said 'in view of the teaching of Scripture, upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage' (resolution 1.10) This remains the declared position of the Anglican Communion."

So, while the C of E remains the Established Church, Cameron himself has created a situation where English Law is at odds with his own Christian law. It matters because there are only two solutions. One is the disestablishment of the C of E. The other is the repeal of Same Sex Marriage. If the Church of England gets its way, it won't be the first option.

And this is why all LGBT people in Britain should be concerned by the notion that we live in a Christian country. Virtually all the hatred and prejudice that has been thrown at us over the years has come from the religious. The divisions revealed by the Same Sex Marriage Bill prove that little has changed.

Having undermined his own faith, Cameron realises he has an uphill task getting his core voters out in the European Elections – a situation worsened by UKIP snapping at his heels – and is desperate to placate them. That is what his Christian Britain is all about. We should take note that he has turned his back on us only days after the first gay marriages took place.

TELLS US WHAT YOU THINK IN THE GALHA SURVEY 2014

bit.ly/galhasurvey2014

Answering these quick questions will help us develop our plan for the future and should only take about ten minutes.



Above: Galha LGBT Humanists were in attendance at the 'After Sochi' event at the Clerkenwell Centre on April 22nd. Organised by 'The List', the evening saw addresses from Boris Dittrich of Human Rights Watch, Jonathan Cooper of the Human Dignity Trust, and Olga Szubert of Stonewall.

Letter from the Chair...

Hello. My name is Richard Unwin, and I'm honoured to have been elected as the new Chair of Galha LGBT Humanists. My first duty must be to pay tribute to outgoing Chair Adam Knowles, who has left the organisation in an extraordinarily healthy state. (Hello to the 700 new members who've joined in the last year or so!) Adam has been a champion of Galha for many years and has achieved remarkable things in his four-year leadership.



When I joined the Galha Committee three years ago, Adam took me under his wing and showed me the ropes. We've been working closely together ever since and have become firm friends. Whether leading public meetings, or beavering away behind the scenes, his unwavering commitment to Galha has been inspirational – he's left big shoes to fill. But fortunately Adam's departure has only taken him as far as the Secretary role, and I'm grateful to have his continued advice and support as we continue to work together to take Galha forward.

I think that Adam's greatest legacy is the merger with the British Humanist Association that took place in August of 2012. That's left us in a very strong position – one that I very much want to build on. I want Galha to continue to expand its activities, I want to see us campaigning more, and I'd like to see us achieve a higher profile and gain a greater presence in both local and national media. I want the voices

of LGBT Humanism to be even louder than ever before, and I want to make sure that they get heard. I'd like to see us having closer dialogues with international groups, particularly in those countries with oppressive homophobic legislation, and listen to their needs and thoughts on what we can do to help. And with the combined efforts of the Committee, our members (without whom we wouldn't be here), and our friends and colleagues at the BHA, I'm confident that these are things that we can achieve.

It's my pleasure to welcome two new faces to the Committee – Steve Emmett and Paul Graham, both voted in at the recent Annual General Meeting. Steve is a writer and BHA funeral Celebrant based in Yorkshire, and Paul is an academic who has recently moved down from Scotland, where he was a member of the HSS (Humanist Society of Scotland). At the time of writing we're only a few days away from the first formal meeting of the new Committee and I'm looking forward enormously to getting down to business and exploiting the talents of these recent additions.

As ever, we're keen to hear your views and opinions, and I'd encourage you to take part in the great Galha survey, publicised elsewhere in this newsletter. And please don't hesitate to get in touch with me at the address below.

Here's to the future...

Richard Unwin (Galha Chair)
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