



GALHA NEWS

NEWS FROM THE LGBT SECTION OF THE BRITISH HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

Issue 36

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MARK OF THE FEAST!

On November 30th 2014 we were thrilled to welcome actor and writer Mark Gatiss as guest of honour at our annual fundraising lunch, and to present him with the Galha LGBT Humanists Award 2014. Presented here are some excerpts from what Mark had to say:

"Thank you very much for this award – I'm honoured and humbled. It's an extraordinary thing to be given this. I think we're living in very 'interesting times', as the old Chinese curse says, for everyone in this community, here and around the world. There are a lot of battles that have been won, and many that we assume have been won – it's a strange, sort of febrile atmosphere at the moment. Lots of two steps forward, one-step back.

"I've never been in the closet. That was never a big political thing for me – to try and pretend I wasn't gay. I always thought – I just want to be happy. And I know a few actors who still wrestle with the notion of coming out because they think it'll damage their careers. I always say to people, you've just got to think, long term – do you want to be a happy human being? Some of them obviously don't! It's still a very pervasive thing – there are lots of big Hollywood names we could mention, in private, who still can't come out, even though the entire world knows they're gay. Pretty much because the system they are part of will not allow them to. Someone like Zachary Quinto – who plays Mr Spock in the Star Trek films – for him to come out, that's extremely brave. And who knows – it may not work for him, but I think he'll actually just be a happy person for it.

"Things are just much more relaxed here in the UK, they always have been. I think it's definitely tougher over there. But even so – I have a friend, here, who was advised by his agent only a few years ago not to come out. I was very depressed by that – that sort of attitude makes you think we're never going to make any progress.

"As a viewer, obviously we've all noticed huge changes. It's very difficult this, because it's all tied up with Blair and what's happened subsequently. We can all blame Blair for everything now, because, of course, he's gone mad! And everything about Iraq has sort of stained the fact that that '97 Labour government did an incredible amount. A lot has changed in this country. We're obviously not there yet, but an awful lot more has changed than you might think. We're all aware of how much more visible gay people are, across the spectrum, but to me the difficult part is – and I feel very strongly about this – getting past that thing of having to do issue based drama. The real triumph would come when you do an ITV detective series and twenty five minutes after it starts the lead character goes home and he's married to another man, or she goes home and she's married to another woman, and nobody says a thing – because then it just becomes normalised.

"I was brought up in a kind of lemonade-weak Church of England environment. From a personal point of view, I like going to Christmas carol concerts and get vaguely weepy at Jerusalem, things like that, can't help it! But I think religion is a terrible thing. Organised religion is the cause of virtually all the misery in the world.



Galha Chair Richard Unwin presents Mark Gatiss with the LGBT Humanism Award 2014

"I think religion is a terrible thing. Organised religion is the cause of virtually all the misery in the world."

The more it is wheeled out as a gavel to smash people over the head with, the more it sickens me. The fact that you can have someone like Ann Widdecombe say the Catholic Church has apologised enough for an on-going abuse scandal, the true dimensions of which we will never know, makes me feel physically sick. A friend of mine went to St. Peters recently and ran out because he was made to feel sick at the disgusting display of wealth. We have a quite nice old man as the current Pope, who, because he doesn't wear gold, and because he lives in a smaller apartment, is made out to be a fucking saint! If he were to be really radical he'd say 'It's over. Use condoms – don't die of AIDS. This is obscene'. But of course it would never happen – they'd kill him. So just by being a teeny bit less of a monster than his Nazi predecessor, he becomes a saint!"

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR...

One of the first things you might notice about this newsletter is that you're reading it on a screen, rather than as a physical paper copy. That's because as our membership has risen to almost one and a half thousand, the costs of printing and mailing out this esteemed organ have risen too - to the point where we had to seriously ask ourselves if it was the best use of our limited funds.

In our 'Great Galha Survey' that we conducted last year we asked you, our members, if you agreed that the sensible thing to do would be to go digital. And the vast majority of you agreed that this was the wisest course of action. (Thanks to everyone who responded to the survey, by the way - we've taken all your comments and feedback on board.)

So, unless there's an enormous unexpected backlash, we'll proceed with this virtual version. (You could always print it out if you really miss the physical item. Actually - why not print out a few and leave them on trains and in dentists waiting rooms...?)

We will, however, still be printing a limited number of paper copies for distribution at our events. (Hello if you're reading one of these, and welcome!)

As you can see from the reports in this issue, we've had some truly excellent speakers of late, and the events schedule for 2015 is shaping up nicely. (See overleaf.)

However, we know that it's not always easy for all of our members to be physically present at Galha gatherings, so we've been filming them for you. (Huge thanks to our volunteer cameraman Jon Bagge!) Head over to our YouTube channel to see the latest Peter Tatchell talk, as well as all four speakers from our recent Trans*Figurations event. (Just search for 'Galha LGBT Humanists'.) And keep an eye out for exclusive new content coming soon - including our full length exclusive interview with Annual Lunch guest Mark Gatiss.

Richard Unwin
Chair - Galha LGBT Humanists



CONGRATULATIONS!

Congratulations to our Patron Stephen Fry and his husband Elliott Spencer on their marriage, which took place on January 17th. We wish them both every happiness together.

PETER TATCHELL: ORGANISED RELIGION IS THE GREATEST GLOBAL THREAT TO HUMAN RIGHTS

On November 14th 2014 we were honoured to welcome veteran human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell as our guest speaker at Conway Hall. Peter's talk was entitled 'Organised religion is the greatest global threat to human rights'. We reproduce here his opening remarks on why it's important to work with progressive individuals of faith:

"Thank you all very much. It's great to be with you again for what is fast becoming my annual Galha lecture! Tonight's proposition is that organised religion is the greatest global threat to human rights.

"I say organised religion because I want to make a distinction between religious establishments and hierarchies, and ordinary people of faith. I don't think they're always the same. I think organised religion and religious leaderships around the world are deeply implicit in human rights abuses across this planet. They are the ones arguing against equality and in favour of discrimination, particularly when it comes to the rights of women, who comprise 52% of the world's population, and LGBTI people. But there are individual people of faith who stand for human rights, and whose faith has motivated them to do great things for the betterment of humanity.

"People have done great important things for human rights, motivated by their faith. So I would never say that people of faith are the enemies, or the perpetrators of human rights abuses. It's the leaders who are mostly culpable, not necessarily the grass roots. I'm sure you're all aware of the tremendous role Archbishop Desmond Tutu played in the struggle against apartheid. And since then in championing the cause of women's rights, and the rights of LGBTI people, across the world, and particularly in Africa. He, to

me, and many others, are allies in the struggle for human liberation and freedom.

"If we look though across the world, in history, going back centuries, and the present day, we can see time and time again that the leaderships of religion have so often been on the side of human rights abuses rather than human rights achievement. And that's the case with all the major faiths. There are some exceptions - the Unitarians, the Quakers, The Metropolitan Community Church - on the whole they have been always on the side of human liberation and human rights. They have stood for the rights of women, colonial peoples, LGBTIs, and so on. So I wouldn't lump them together with, say, the leaders of the Church of England or the Catholic Church, or the leaders of Orthodox Judaism, or the leaders of Islam. Those minority faiths are different and we need to make that distinction.

"Many of us have been rather struck by the new tone of Pope Francis - a very different tone from his predecessor Pope Benedict. And I would say that his change in tone, although it is a change in tone and not in substance - no major policies have been changed in terms of catholic policy. I mean the cataclysm hasn't been rewritten, the bans and prescriptions on X, Y, and Z have not been revoked - but I would say that his change of tone has been welcome, small and modest though it is. Because in that tiny space is where so many millions of people are struggling for survival. And I think for LGBTI people and women in the Catholic Church, or impacted by the Catholic Church, his change in tone is a step in the right direction. It has certainly put the traditionalists on the back-foot, creating such a backlash that he's had to row back somewhat from his initial pronouncements. And I welcome that struggle within the Catholic Church to reclaim it for a more humane theology.

"Even though I'm not a person of faith, I



BHA Chief Executive Andrew Copson, Galha Chair Richard Unwin, and guest speaker Peter Tatchell.

salute the 'We Are Church' people, the grassroots Catholic movement across the world, which aims to reclaim the Church for ordinary people, for the laity. Who condemn the hierarchy and condemn their policies, and want to see fundamental change - both democratisation, to make it truly a church of the people, not of the Pope, but also to reclaim it for fundamental humanitarian values. Now of course some people who share my humanist, atheist, and secularist view made demure. They may say "Well look, all religion is bunk - to hell with all of them." I think we have to think tactics. We need to recognise what opportunities there are, and we need to ally with those who are making change, even though the change seems very small and may take a long time.

"So that's why I work with Progressive people in all faiths who are struggling to challenge the homophobic, sexist, and dogmatic views of their faith leaders. I do that while I am an atheist, while I don't share their religious faith, because I recognise that to make movement, wherever that movement may be - inside the church or outside the church - to make movement towards greater respect for human rights, in whatever institution, is a positive human gain."

Our thanks to Peter for once again coming to speak to Galha LGBT Humanists. You can watch the rest of this speech on our YouTube channel here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ca1RfVBghvU

GALHA GALA FUNDRAISER!

On December 5th 2014 Galha held its annual comedy fundraiser, this time in aid of the Albert Kennedy Trust - the charity for homeless LGBT youth.

We were delighted to be joined by two fabulous comics - stand-up Stephen Bailey and character comedian Lindsay

Sharman. Our thanks to both of these acts for donating their time and helping us to raise £164.30 for the AKT.

Galha Chair Richard Unwin will be abseiling off of The Orbit in the Olympic Park to raise additional funds for the AKT on March 22nd. Sponsor him here: www.justgiving.com/Richard-Unwin1



Comedian Stephen Bailey with Galha volunteer Joshua Lewin

EVENTS DIARY

From Perversion To Pride: The Treatment of LGBT People
Friday 27th March, 7.30pm, Conway Hall, London

Even though western healthcare societies are now ardent advocates for LGBT human rights, alarming mental health disparities remain for LGBT people living in both the UK and US. How can there be so much historic change, yet our mental health remains imperilled? Weaving the past with the present, Dr Markus P. Bidell, Associate Professor of Counselling, Hunter College (USA) will explore these epoch social science and public policy shifts juxtaposed to current and on-going LGBT psychosocial disparities and inequalities.

Annual General Meeting 1015
Friday 24th April, 6.30pm, Conway Hall, London

Join us for the 2014 AGM. We want to hear your feedback on Galha and our work. Please note the 6.30pm start time - this year's AGM will take place immediately before our 'Galha Election Special' event. All are welcome to attend, but only members are eligible to participate in votes/elections. Full details will be issued in advance of the meeting.

Galha Election Special
Friday 24th April, 7.30pm, Conway Hall, London

In preparation for the forthcoming general election, we will be inviting representatives from the major political parties to discuss and answer questions on issues important to Humanists and LGBT people.

Objections To Humanism
Friday 22nd May, 7.30pm, Conway Hall, London

Andrew Copson, the Chief Executive of the British Humanist Association, will speak to us about the 'Objections to Humanism'. Not everyone likes Humanism, but why? Andrew will be presenting a number of frequently expressed objections to the principles on which Humanism is based, and demonstrating the fallacy of each.

The Challenge Of HIV Prevention
Friday 19th June, 7.30pm, Conway Hall, London

Matthew Hodson, the chief executive of GMFA (The Gay Men's Health Charity), speaks about the ongoing battle to prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS.

