

Leicester Secular Society Report to AGM, November 2015

1. Officers and directors

Gush Bhumbra was elected President at the AGM in November 2014 and Anthony Matthew was appointed as Chair by the Board. Jean Roseblade was elected as a new director. Ned Newitt and John Catt were co-opted to the Board.

The Board consisted of :

| Office | First Name | Surname | Status | Last appointed | First elected |
|-----------|------------|-----------|----------|----------------|---------------|
| President | Gush | Bhumbra | Elected | 17/11/13 | 2013 |
| Chair | Anthony | Matthew | Elected | 17/11/13 | 2013 |
| Secretary | Jean | Roseblade | Elected | 23/11/14 | 2014 |
| Treasurer | John | Catt | Co-opted | 24/11/13 | |
| Director | Michael | Gerard | Elected | 11/11/12 | 2007 |
| Director | Terry | Larkin | Elected | 13/11/11 | 2011 |
| Director | Aruna | Kapur | Elected | 13/11/11 | 2011 |
| Director | Ned | Newitt | Co-opted | 24/11/13 | |

2. Programme

Hamish Whiteley and Anu Kapur have composed a full and interesting programme for 2015. There was a hustings of political candidates before the general election in May. We participated in the Leicester Comedy Festival in February with a stand-up act from Sanderson Jones, who has been a prime mover for Sunday Assemblies.

We marked Darwin Day in February by a talk on Drug and Alcohol Policy by David Nutt of Imperial College the distinguished neuropsychopharmacologist, formerly chair of the Advisory Committee on the Misuse of Drugs until his opinions became more independent than the Home Office could tolerate. Another particularly controversial talk was given by Gilad Atzmon, saxophonist and ex-Jew, on Palestine from a perspective that some have taken as anti-semitic, though the discussion remained civilised till the end. Peter Flack introduced the Everybody's Reading festival, which ran at various venues in the city for a week, including an evening meeting at the Secular Hall in which everyone was invited to bring a poem.



There were two musical events: the Afro City Swingsters and a flute and piano recital given by Wissam Boustany and Aleksander Szram. There was a visit to Inglewood, an Arts and Crafts house in Stoneygate designed by Ernest Gimson where the present owners have put a great deal of effort into restoration.

Next year the spring programme is being organised by Michael Gerard and the summer by Jamie Smith, then for the rest of the year by some combination of the two which will be finalised later.

3. The Secularist

Ned Newitt has continued as editor and produced five editions so far this year. If you have an opinion which ought to be of interest to the society and which you can express in less than a page the editor will be happy to receive it. We are still considering the costs of printing and one possibility, not adopted so far, would be to print only in black-and-white while the online version would still be in colour. The budget for the Secularist was set at £2500.

4. The Secular Hall

A re-valuation of the business rates we pay has given us a useful saving. On the other hand, the Society is not a charity and therefore liable to corporation tax on profits, i.e. rents, offset by expense on maintenance of the building.

A project to clean the façade on the ground floor and other improvements, including new tiles for the entrance, has been largely covered by a grant from the city council. With the help of volunteers the balcony in the main hall on the first floor was cleared.

Future projects will include improving the accommodation of our long-term tenants, the martial arts in the basement and the dancing class on the upper floor. If the stairs can be made to meet fire safety standards then it will be possible to rent out some upper rooms for office space. We would like to arrange inspection of the large stained glass main window as part of the frontage maintenance review in order to ascertain an estimate of cost for restoring/refurbishing the frontage of the Hall above ground floor.

5. Allied organisations

We are affiliates of the British Humanist Association, the National Secular Society and (new this year) the International Humanist and Ethical Union.

A report from the Leicester Rationalist Trust to be present to the AGM was requested but none received.

We are hoping to collaborate with the Council of Ex-Muslims together with Faith to the Faithless and have also made contact with the Asian Rationalist Society.

6. Sunday Assembly

The Sunday Assembly is a movement which has spread across the country with the aim of providing the social benefits of a church but without the religion. It continues to meet at the Secular Hall on the second Sunday of each month as an independent organisation with its own constitution and finances (though we hope a large overlap in membership with the society) and now pays for the use of the Hall.

7. Our public face

In January there were the murders of the Charlie Hebdo journalists in Paris, to which we responded with a demonstration at the Clock Tower.

Secular Hall was again open to the public on Heritage Open Day in September, relying on the work of Gillian Lighton. Everybody's Reading included several events at the Secular Hall organised by other groups and which helped to spread awareness of the society.

When the refugee crisis erupted, the Society wrote to the City Mayor urging that Leicester should make a contribution and received a favourable reply.



The Society was invited by the Lord Mayor to send a representative to the Remembrance Day ceremony on 8th November.

Apart from our website the Society also has a presence on Twitter. There is a Facebook page which has many members from outside the society. It has been managed by Harry Perry but he is not continuing to do so. Frank Friedmann has been diligent in keeping the website up to date with the assistance of John Catt.