

## **SELHuG AGM 2023: Minutes**

Thursday 6 July at 7.30pm on Zoom

*Present:*

Committee members: Ann Pickering (Treasurer); Hester Brown (Secretary); Sam Becker; Helen Warner; Tony Brewer

*Also:* David Lewis; Barbara Chandler; Audrey Simmons; Anna Tagliaferro; Jenny Laney; Roman Bednarz; Denis Cobell; Gregory Boon; Becky Tee

*AGM chaired by Hester for items 1-5 and she then handed over to the group's new Chair, Sam.*

### **1. Apologies and notices**

Apologies from:

David Smart; Gini Bevan; Chris Weir; Fiona from MeetUp

Notices:

- **Two summer outings** to look forward to: drinks at riverside pub the Oystercatcher in Greenwich in July, and summer picnic in Greenwich Park in August
- From Gini: annual **Hiroshima Day Peace Picnic** on Sunday 6th August
- **Bromley August meeting** (no meeting in July) on life of Palestinians under the Israeli occupation and a scheme called 'Ecumenical Accompaniers'.

### **2. Secretary's report on the year's activities**

#### The plan

We decided at the AGM last year to stop the hybrid meetings experiment and hold all the monthly meetings on Zoom. To compensate for not meeting in person, we aimed to hold several socials during the year, every one or two months, and to continue with regular fixtures such as having a stall at the Nunhead Cemetery Open Day, having a summer picnic, and at least one meeting session given to solving ethical dilemmas.

#### The committee

We started the year without a Chair, again. Noone volunteered last year. So we continued to work as a collective, sharing the organisation of meetings and events, sharing the chairing, and sharing writing articles. Sam does the lions share of communications, taking responsibility for the website, the newsletter and all social media. The five of us did well and we have kept everything going, but wondering how long it can last.

#### Meetings

We benefited this year from talks from several leading UK humanists: Boyd Sleator, full-time Coordinator of Northern Ireland Humanists gave a wonderful talk about how humanism is providing new, non-sectarian spaces for people from all backgrounds to come together to improve life in Northern Ireland from rescuing the night-time economy to decriminalising abortion and winning legal recognition of humanist weddings. Maddy Goodall of the Humanist Heritage project revealed the significant impact of humanist values in politics over the last century including in the

achievements of Anuerin Bevan and his wife Jennie Lee, driving post-war reform including the creation of the NHS.

Humanists UK's Head of Public Affairs Richy Thompson described its campaigns and recent challenges to human rights such as the government's Bill of Rights, and its watering down of commitments to women's reproductive rights. President of Defence Humanists Roger Hutton, who was Director of International Security at the Ministry of Defence until 2020, explained the work of Defence Humanists to represent the interests of non-religious people in the armed forces and develop secular and humanist support services.

Other meetings included SELHuG committee member Sam Becker talking about secular Buddhism, Sean Bradley, a Sustainable Urban Designer on how cities can be designed for humans and nature to flourish, and a group of humanist celebrants talking about their work taking non-religious funerals, weddings and namings.

### Socials

The social calendar got off to a great start with a well-attended picnic in Greenwich Park with guests from East London and Central London humanist groups. We also teamed up with East London to watch 'Inherit the Wind' at the gorgeous Sands Film Studio in Rotherhithe. Tony's walk around the humanist landmarks of Bloomsbury (a Humanist Heritage initiative) went down a treat. Greenwich was the scene of several outings – another great guided walk, a 'horticultural tour of Greenwich Park', Sunday lunch at the Cutty Sark and two exhibitions at the National Maritime Museum: Astronomy Photographer of the Year and The World Reimagined which explored the slave trade 'in order to make racial justice a reality'. Award-winning Horniman Museum was also visited.

### Other

SELHuG contributed to Barbara Smoker's centenary memorial event, a great evening of stories and humour about our founder and life President's contribution. And this year five of us attended Humanists UK's annual convention in Liverpool and found it very worthwhile.

As a Partner Group of Humanists UK we have kept abreast of the discussion about Humanists UK's pilot to introduce Branches as an alternative model to Partner Groups, and are part of the current consultation lead by Chief Executive Andrew Copson to see how Humanists UK, groups and branches can work more productively and supportively together in the future.

### Summary

A good year with plenty to engage and enjoy but not without challenges:

- Zoom presented problems which stopped two meetings happening at all and disrupted a third;
- We missed being together in person at the monthly meetings;
- Attendance of the monthly meetings declined on previous years
- The committee is stretched and needs new volunteers.

*Hester Brown, July 2023*

### 3. Communications report

	2022/23	2021/22
Newsletter subscribers	244	229
Meetup	401	285
Facebook	338 followers 314 likes	307 followers 280 likes
Twitter followers	1, 542	1, 562

### 4. Treasurer's report

	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
<b>INCOME</b>			
Membership subscriptions	£180.00	£128.00	£196.00
Monthly attendance subs	£189.00	£286.00	£190.00
Nunhead Booksales	£131.75	£332.22	£0.00
David's other book sales	£66.78	£108.42	£75.30
General donations		£0.00	£30.00
Exceptional donation		£0.00	£220.00
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£567.53</b>	<b>£854.64</b>	<b>£711.30</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>			
Rent		£180.00	£0.00
Meetup: social networking portal	£67.67	£30.16	£29.39
Affiliation fees: NSS: £34; Humanists UK £75	£68.00	£34.00	£109.00
Donations:			
to AFRIL	£100.00	£101.00	£520.00
to Uganda Humanist School	£200.00		
Stand at Nunhead Cemetery Open Day (for Sept 2021)	£40.00	£35.00	£35.00
SUMIT card reader	£22.80		
Zoom subscription	£86.33		
Web upkeep		£0.00	£31.18
<i>Little Book of Humanism</i> purchase		£0.00	£49.00
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£584.80</b>	<b>£380.16</b>	<b>£773.57</b>
<b>Transfer of funds (+/-)</b>	<b>-£17.27</b>	<b>£474.48</b>	<b>-£62.27</b>

<b>Bank Balance as at 30 June 2021 (As per Bank Statement)</b>	<b>£924.45</b>	<b>£941.72</b>	<b>£467.24</b>
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## Notes

### 1. Income changes explained

Membership subscriptions rose

Monthly attendance subs dropped presumably as fewer people attended

Payments into the account from individuals remains roughly the same

David raised £198.53 in book sales but this was less than last year

### 2. Donations made by SELHuG to other organisations

The treasurer arranged payment to Uganda Humanist School Trust (UHST) on 1st July 2022 and 6th April 2023 (ie. the two years' payments fell in one accounting period)

We made the usual £100 donation to AFRIL. This was match funded.

### 3. Expenditure changes explained

All meetings were held online and a Zoom subscription was purchased for this

No Humanist UK affiliation fees have been payable until 2023 but have yet to be paid

Two sums of affiliation fees were paid to the National Secular Society in error (£68 total)

## 5. Elections to the committee

Chair: Sam Becker stood and was voted in unanimously

Treasurer: Ann Pickering continues for third year with unanimous support and thanks.

Secretary: Hester Brown stood down after two years because she is moving to Hong Kong. Tony Brewer agreed to fill the post until another person could be found, with unanimous support.

Committee members:

Helen Warner continues on the committee with unanimous support and thanks.

A new volunteer, Chris Weir, will be joining the committee as Humanists UK liaison officer, to be the Partner Group contact, engage with campaigns etc.

## 6. Committee's report (in lieu of a Chair's report) reviewing where we are and planning for the future

*First, thanks and appreciation to Hester for her huge contribution over many years on the committee, as Chair and Secretary. She has been a very secure anchor for the group over this time, bringing with her huge experience in Humanist matters, along with careful thought and immaculate organisation. She has also a big influence on the direction of the group due to her compassionate and curious interest in peoples' lives, especially in the area of human rights and the wider world. She has helped shape the group to be more inclusive and nuanced in its exploration of themes and ideas. We are very grateful that she has been involved and look forward to seeing her whenever she is around.*

Current thoughts about state of the group and what we can manage

We are a large group looking at social media and newsletter list. Not translating into engagement (ie. attendance at events).

With Hester leaving, the committee is very stretched and can not manage talk + another event each month, along with newsletter etc.

Changes to meetings for next year - frequency/flexibility; online/real life; mix of talks/social

We aim to commit to regular events - mix of talks/social - at least one a month. (ie. may not be a talk + another event *each* month, as currently)

Not necessarily first Thursday of month - gives us flexibility with social events, booking one-off venues, and people's availability.

Aim to mostly meetings in real life and only do zoom online meetings when appropriate; feeling is that people are tired of it and numbers have dwindled.

#### Potential changes to membership and what we are trialing this year

Considering changing membership to model of Central London Humanists. They don't have paid membership but charge more for events.

See info below from their website.

*If you would like to be counted as a member of our group then please tick below. There is no obligation to join and you will still be most welcome at any of our events. The benefits of becoming a member are that we will keep you informed of any decisions that are made about how the group operates. Membership will also allow you to participate in our AGM and influence how the group is run. You will receive one or two emails per year.*

*If you would like to vote at our AGM or become a committee member you will also need to be a member of Humanists UK.*

For this year we are proposing:

Membership subs down to £0

Meeting fees going up + fees for social events we organise.

*This is to simplify organisation - at the moment we have people paying monies for membership subs; meeting fees; donations and sometimes all at the same time - all of this needs to be noted down separately and accurately. It would be so much easier for it all to be considered 'donations'.*

Considered member of SELHuG if already paid-up member of Humanists UK

Once we trial this, we can see what is working well (or not) for us and make relevant formal changes at next year's AGM.

## **7. Discussion on the Committee's report**

Discussion primarily hinged around two logistical things:

1. Membership, eg how would people know if they were a member of SELHuG or not, and how would they prove they were Humanists UK members in order to vote at AGMs? It was agreed to check how Central London manage.
2. How to pay for each event? Central London take payments with a portable card reader and SELHuG could do the same. Not everyone wants to use plastic to pay, and some would rather pay a single sum at the start of the year to cover the whole year's events.

DECISION:

3. It was agreed that membership of SELHuG would be reduced to £0 – ie. nothing - for the coming year.
4. For the committee to consider the various proposals on how people can pay to attend meetings and events, including Ann's proposal that there could be an option to pay a flat fee or suggested donation at the start of the year, which could be paid in cash or bank transfer, rather than a card transaction at each event.

Also, the question of SELHuG's status as a Partner Group of Humanists UK was raised and whether we were considering becoming a Branch (ie. part of Humanists UK and directed by them rather than an independent group in partnership with Humanists UK). Barbara said this was something that should be discussed by the whole group if it was ever considered. She would not want to be part of a Branch. Hester said there was no plan to convert to a branch. Humanists UK are still piloting branches and it looked as if there would be both branches and partner groups going forward for the foreseeable future. The branches pilot has thrown up a lot of questions which both branches and groups are interested in, and Andrew Copson has taken on responsibility for branch and group development for the time being.

## **8. AOB**

Audrey suggested that SELHuG could work more closely with other groups, following closer relations with East London over the last 12 months, and our cooperation with the Bromley group. Denis reported on the situation at Bromley where Ken MacGowan is managing single-handedly, and Sam suggested we could do an event with Bromley.

ENDS