

HUMANIST viewpoints



FIFTY YEARS AGO THERE WAS A DIFFERENT HUMANIST HOUSE - at 194 Crown Street. The photos above left show it as it looked back then, and as it appears now on Google's Street View. At some point the society sold that house and moved to the Chippendale site we now hold. The photo at the right is a Street View on our current building - no doubt this appealed more as a clubhouse than the traditional terrace house did. Yet, as an investment, Crown Street might have held value better - perhaps around \$3 million these days. Could anyone hope the Shepherd Street building might fetch such a figure?

The Crown Street story is an interesting historical aside, but our real asset base is tied up in our beloved 'Off Broadway' headquarters. We talk about saving for 'a rainy day', and I spent a very wet one recently in Humanist House. I could hear the water pouring in at the peak of the downpour - fortunately it happens down at the bottom end, where it's tiled, and there's a drain. But anyone with a nose knows that water is getting in elsewhere too - slowly but surely. The roof has perennial problems with leakage. The building is held in high affection by many, and a vital part of some members' lives. There is a protection order limiting renovations. Can we modernise this building? Would doing so be a sound investment?

Our neighbor, the Catholic Notre Dame University, slowly surrounds us. Probably not the neighbor we would have hoped for!! Yet tough thinking, and tough negotiations, may lie ahead of us. It's important we make decisions in the best interest of the future of the Humanist Society. What will Humanism be in this new century? Will it be more of the same, or do we need a new approach? It would be great to hear wider views, especially from younger people and members. MURRAY LOVE, PRESIDENT

EXPLORE OUR SOCIETY AS IT WAS 50 YEARS AGO IN A HISTORIC REVIEW ON PAGES 8-11

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THERE IS NO HUVAT OR OTHER EVENT ON SUNDAY 9 APRIL DUE TO THE CAHS CONFERENCE IN MELBOURNE

NSW HUMANISTS MEETUP WILL EXPLORE HAPPINESS ON APRIL 23RD AND SOCIAL MEDIA ON MAY 28TH

HUVAT RETURNS 3.00 PM SUNDAY MAY 14TH WITH JOHN AUGUST ON MARVELS OF HUMAN INGENUITY

ON SUNDAY JUNE 18TH WE'LL CELEBRATE WORLD HUMANIST DAY AT HUMANIST HOUSE COME ALONG AND JOIN IN THE FESTIVITY AND THE DISCUSSIONS -CHECK OUT ALL OUR ACTIVITIES THIS QUARTER ON PAGE 6

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VISITING THE CHILD ABUSE HEARINGS

The following are my own personal observations based on several visits to public hearings of the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* plus my readings of media reports, and what I've learnt from contacts with interest groups. I recommend anyone in the Humanist Society, or anyone else for that matter, should go and sit in a public hearing for a day, to see the system in action.

The Royal Commission has so far taken 4 years, and cost \$300M when last heard. The Catholic Church has revealed 4,444 alleged cases - Boys 90%, average age 11.5; girls 10%, average age 10.5. The abusers include ordained priests, non-ordained brothers in monasteries, and lay people. Abusing clergy have been estimated at 7% in Australia! Only a small proportion of alleged offenders have admitted to or been convicted - but there are very few false accusations, so it is likely that nearly all of these 4,444 reported events were real.

I fear there are many further offences not included in these figures, due to several factors. These include the distribution of reporting age (average 33), those too traumatised to report, and deaths before reporting. Then there are those who did report at the time, but were not recorded by the church, and who have not come forward a second time.

Another factor is the degree of severity (touching, talking dirty, etc.) I myself was groped by a minister as a child in the 1950s. I regarded this as too minor to mention in the mores of the time, but it would now clearly be regarded as sexual abuse.

Recommendations are being developed for treating survivors. Mistrusting authority, they need shorter more frequent interviews, with the Police out of uniform. Some victims prefer a guilty plea so it's all over without trauma, others want a trial where they can speak, hear a jury say the word guilty, and maybe even see a jail sentence imposed. (In NSW, an early guilty plea can attract a reduction in sentence of up to 25%)

Churches have provided only fragmentary compensation. The Commonwealth is silent. The States have a mish-mash of compensation schemes. The survivors group *Broken Rites* has recommended an Australia-wide government-run scheme, with money coming from a special-purpose Catholic fund. The average payout of \$40,000, to say 5000 survivors, would total \$200 million, but proper compensation could run to \$2 billion.

Laws were haphazard and ineffective in the 20th century when many offences occurred. Plus an attitude of church privilege, where police often let the churches handle it 'in house'. All states now have mandatory reporting laws, which includes even suspicions of sexual abuse. I've been an ethics teacher in primary schools for seven years, and we all redo child protection training and police checks each year.

The Royal Commission takes opinions from academics, public servants, survivors groups, and Church officials. Hopefully the Commission will eventually make clear pronouncements on how to reform the offending Institutions.

Abuse sometimes came to light for the first time when one priest confessed to another. South Australia still exempts disclosures made in the confessional. That exemption must be absolutely removed. All State laws must take precedence over any Canon Law coming from the Vatican. There is a problem with separation of the Confession system (sin and repentance) from the Justice system (crime and punishment).

Various 'experts' I have heard recommend they screen incoming recruits for the priesthood and religious orders. They have limited ability to do that. Can they allow marriage for their priests? Celibacy has been acknowledged as a contributing factor but not a cause. And women need to be involved in boards and in investigations.

The attendance of the Jehovah's Witnesses at the Commission was reported in detail by Paul Grundy (an escaped JW) at a recent talk. The church does not allow masturbation, and youths are questioned every week by a male church elder. Surely this is child abuse? Covering up abuse can lead to 'shunning' - parents reject their own children! More abuse.

Church rules regarding allegations of misconduct by church officials require two to three witnesses before any action is taken. This reminds me of Moslem countries where a rape victim is not believed without four witnesses! Victims could remain trapped in the church with their abusers, without any authority to turn to. Unless they remain silent they can be shunned by their own parents.

The JW church offered a small concession in their rules - the 2 complaints required to trigger reporting can now cover 2 separate events such as 2 different children complaining about an abuser. Yet it still happens that a complaint involving a single child does NOT trigger the vitally needed action!

Some of the Jehovah's Witnesses have claimed an 'apostate-orchestrated attack' at the Royal Commission! Do they think they're above the laws of the land? As with other churches, committees are run by men only - who are less sympathetic to child welfare than women would be.

What can Humanists do? First we must end religious privilege. The 'veneration' of church organisations both in attitude and in law is a major problem. Church rules, such as Canon Law should include up front, a statement that the rules of the State take precedence, and that any report or suspicion of child abuse must be passed on immediately to police.

'Freedom of Religion' should not entitle parents to impose their own religion on their children. The child becomes locked in, unable to make up his or her own mind even as adults, and unable to find redress when abused. I believe it is another form of child abuse to be indoctrinated into one particular faith!

Instead we should teach them ethics. The Primary Ethics classes have now reached 50% of students in enlightened Inner Sydney. The skills they teach would go a very long way to preventing child abuse, or enabling children to get it dealt with. The children learn what it means to 'think for yourself', and how to talk to other kids about ethics. They learn what makes a valid authority, and when it is OK to question authority.

They learn where rules come from, and what makes a good rule. They learn how to recognise and trust scientific knowledge, and about evidence, reason, and critical thinking. As they grow, these children can gradually take over responsibility for their own welfare.

The Royal Commission is entering its terminal phase, and we look forward to its recommendations.

Ian Bryce



MEMBER NEWS AND VIEWS

Please Consider Making a Donation or Bequest

From \$5 to \$10,000, any amount can help protect and sustain the diverse efforts of the NSW Humanist Society. Please also consider us in your Will. All bequests contribute to the longevity of the Humanist Society of NSW and Humanism.

President's appeal to members to volunteer

We have depended on elder members who have been outstanding workers for humanism in NSW. We wish them a long life, but cannot expect them to carry the load indefinitely. Times change and modern generations do find competition for their voluntary time in the twenty-first century. So let's look for new ways to volunteer in smaller amounts at a time! There are many ways to help, and if you can send us your expressions of interest, indicating your availability, we can build a new corps of volunteers, to rebuild our NSW Humanists community. We particularly appeal to members between 20 and 70 years of age, to assist in growing a future for this organization, now 57 years young with assets to be treasured, a heritage to be celebrated, and a world network of information, and a positive philosophy to be shared. Please email the President at lovemuz@gmail.com advising the skills you'd like to use, and the kind of hours you can offer - however small, With job-sharing teamwork we can carry on the Humanist tradition. (Response has not been strong so far, but this call will regularly feature on our member page.)

Do You have items for Book Room & Library

If you have any good-quality (particularly good non-fiction) surplus 'hard copy' books, then consider donating them to the Society's Library or for sale in the Bookroom. Volunteers in the Bookroom are often frontline contacts with those who enquire about Humanism while they browse the items around the walls. Gillian has reappeared for a few hours a week but other suitable volunteers would be welcome.

Please Send Member Contributions to Viewpoints

Some members are not on the Internet and some live far from Sydney. Attendance and interaction get more difficult as we age, and distances need more assistance to overcome. Stronger, younger and newer members can assist. A newsletter is one thing all members can share in. We include material on what's happening at Humanist House through the year, but also need contributions from individual members of the Society. You are welcome and encouraged to send in news and views for publication. These can be controversial - there's no party line. They can be on diverse topics - Humanism has a broad range. We really love to hear from members who haven't contributed before. Even a little 'letter to the editor' is fine. You can disagree with anything you see - or share why you do agree! Of course we can't guarantee everything will be used, but with patience and flexibility we'd love to include all we can. Communication by email is preferred. Handwritten and typed contributions might get postponed. Be careful items don't appear in both local and national journals. Email items to lovemuz@gmail.com.

Member News

This quarter we warmly welcome two more new members Kamille Zaiter & Sarah Lonsdale. We mourn the passing of one of our earliest leaders, Doctor Ian Edwards. We shall have an obituary in the next issue.

Please keep supporting the Humanist Society of NSW in all the ways you can.

Australian Humanist Convention Melbourne - April 7-9 2017

Peter Singer: Public ethics in the Trump era

Clive Hamilton & Katerina Gaita: Humanism & the Anthropocene

A C Grayling: Humanism, the individual & society

Joanne Roberts - Humanist ethics in primary schools

Monica Bini - World-views in the school curriculum

Meredith Doig - Inter-belief presentations in schools

A.C. Grayling & Dr Tim Soutphommasane: Xenophobia & nationalisms

Humanism in action: Geoffrey Ballard, Lyndon Storey, Douglas McCarty

Engaging kids in ethical inquiry: Philip Cam

Advocacy and Ethics: Ian Storey, Matt Awad, Ali Sayed, Alice Carr

Genital Autonomy, Humanism & Human Rights: Meredith Doig, Jonathan Meddings, Travis Wisdom

PathWays interbelief demonstration: David Mould

Adam Ford & A. C. Grayling: The future of humanity matters

James Fodor: A naturalistic worldview

Dr Rodney Syme - Time to die

Pauline Brown: Immigration detention: Australia's response to a humanitarian problem

Kevin Bain: Breaking the stalemate in refugee policy

<https://humanist.org.au/convention>

It still might not be too late to register and pack your jalopy for a quick trip to Melbourne. Or at least drool over the amazing list of speakers.



Humanist
Society of Victoria

FROM THE PRESIDENT/EDITOR'S DESK

2017 was off to a shaky start after the newly-minted *Leader of the Free World* abandoned his post to concentrate on *The Real Amerika*. He told us the USD is not a global currency and he is not a global leader. Apparently the only global currency left is fake news! At least there's plenty of that to go round.

Still we have Pauline Hanson to help us keep things real here in Australia. She's discovered Islam isn't a religion. Apparently it's actually been a bunch of bearded foreign *atheists* that have been causing all the trouble in London, Paris, and Mosul.

Here in Australia we can't decide whether we want to insult and offend our various neighbours, or just harass and humiliate them. It's a shame we still have to legislate basic human decency. No-one seems to be campaigning about those new limits on speech, thought, and even habeas corpus, legislated under the Howard and Abbott governments. Things we wouldn't have done even in McCarthyist Cold War days.

Freedom of speech seemed a simpler thing to all hope for, back in the sixties - fifty years ago. We look back at those times on pages 8-11 of this very retrospective issue of our newsletter *Viewpoints* which has run since 1963.

I remember the sixties, so some ask if I was really there, but my teenage eyes and ears were wide open. There were certainly a lot of words we couldn't say back then. But only the rich and powerful could prevent commentary on their failings.

I thank goodness the days are gone when people would 'kick down', and 'kiss up', at all levels of Australian society. In the last lingering days of the British Empire there was always some 'inferior' for even 'the worst of us' to feel superior to. Unfortunately these days 'the worst of us' seems to miss that. And even the best of us can enjoy some feelings of superiority.

Back in 1967 it wasn't the hip-pocket sting of lawsuits we worried about. Those who spoke out of turn might feel the dull thud of the policeman's truncheon and the cool draft from the high cell window - at least till bailed out or fined.

Hairstyle was a political statement and, growing up in Queensland, I still remember the day we smuggled home an under-the-counter LP of the musical *Hair* - a banned item - along with the *Kama Sutra*. Eastern Religion seemed more appealing back then! An *Age of Aquarius* seemed a great idea - we knew gravity guides planets but we deeply wanted change.

All the same, memorising words about abounding sympathy, harmony and trust, along with understanding, no more falsehoods, love, peace, and true liberation of the mind, turned out to be good foundations for building a humanist outlook. But perhaps I was a 'lone wolf humanist' back then.

Bertrand Russell was famous then as an opponent of nuclear bombs - later on I found out he wrote a few good books too. The very icon of peace was the atomic energy industry, seen as the ultimate 'ploughshare'. The bomb was the 'sword'. I read voraciously about both. The system of conscription made 'peace' a very personal concept for a sixties teenage male.

John Lennon became a huge influence and pop songs taught me everything I knew. University came in 1969 for me, and my reading and protesting matched with the kind of things I now see were happening in the early days of the Humanist Society.

A mix of esoteric, hippy stuff along with Marx, Fromm, Kropotkin, Russell plus Herman Hesse and Bob Dylan filled my

head - though I was often in trouble with other young people for thinking too much and 'analysing everything'. I had done physics, chemistry and all forms of mathematics in high school but switched to an Arts course at university. I've always enjoyed an 'interdisciplinary' approach to thinking since then.

You might be wondering why I'm banging on about the sixties so much this issue. It's because Doctor Ian Edwards died very recently and his daughter asked for information on his time as our leader. My research involved spending a rainy day in Humanist House with our old newsletters and journals.

It turned out his time as Chairman was 1964-1967 and I found that the mid-sixties were very fruitful times for the society, and they documented their achievements in the newsletter. I thought this was worth sharing. Our long heritage is part of what we have to offer in attracting members.

Also I'm sharing my own past so members might know me a little better. Sorry if it's self-indulgent, that's not my intention. Someone like Victor was a member way back, and yet talking to Victor, and reading what they did, and the articles they wrote, they sound a lot like the kind of people I used to hang around with back then, at least once I went to university.

So even though after eight years in the society so many still seem to look at me as a new kid on the block, I think my insights into Humanism draw on roots as deep as anyone's.

Whether some think in my longer journey from Christianity to Humanism I dabbled too much in esoteric, mystical and eastern stuff I can't say. But it does give me some insight into the potential of the young people turning up in our Meetup - now ten times larger than our actual paying members.

Young people need to be free to be 'open-minded' about things we elders can be pretty sure aren't true. In their quest to be upstanding ethical human beings, they will inevitably attach themselves to fashionable ideas, while looking for ways to establish 'values'. They are open to ideas - not haranguing.

We can only help them think things through. We may have true facts, yet if we present them 'dogmatically' we are still dogmatists. We need to be accepting, listening and persuasive through our own well-prepared and well-presented thoughts - which takes time and effort. Just being right isn't sufficient.

Getting back to 1967 it seems to have been an axial year for me. My Sunday School upbringing started sliding off me, as the more colourful idea of 'going to San Francisco' took hold. The 'Summer of Love' took place during our winter here - but a winter's day didn't stop us 'California Dreaming'. Of course 1968 came and things got darker, though for a while it felt like the young were taking charge. I'll admit I liked the 'love' bit. Maybe I've never really gotten over 1967! (Or being 16 ☺)

The 1960s Humanists seemed a highly educated lot. This was before Whitlam opened things up further with the abolition of fees (later turned into loans). A survey conducted by *Australian Humanist* fifty years ago showed more members qualified in the humanities than in science and technology. There were lots of doctors. These days I might be the only member of the committee with a degree in the humanities.

University educations were harder to get back then, so many humanists came from well-off families, often on the North Shore. Was it a '*bourgeois*' crowd? The then NSW Rationalists

wrote in 1968: *"It is claimed that humanism is an advance on earlier freethought - that it has moved from theory to social action. Has it though? In what area? Strong for sex and related matters certainly....Do humanists adopt any sort of radical position on racial questions or just a vague hope that a basically benevolent government will eventually see the light?...is it too convenient (and more respectable) to adopt the attitude that not much can be done and therefore it is no use trying?"* Sounds like Trotskyists or Maoists talking!

Yet this item was found on the back cover of an *Australian Humanist* so the Humanists didn't hide from challenge and criticism. But they were vulnerable to be seen as 'respectable'. Yet their own literature used the word 'radical'.

The present-day Humanist Society badly needs the support of the kind of confident, competent, professional people in the prime of life we had plenty of, fifty years ago. Our membership records don't record age, education or skills. So we may have quite a few, but we need them to come forward. I will keep repeating the call for fresh volunteers.

QUARTERY REPORT JAN-MAR 2017

We didn't have a HuVAT in January - the second Sunday came far too quickly after Christmas and the New Year.

My wife Fay (who is Secretary of HSNSW) and myself were going to be away on a trip for the whole of February. This was an awkward time to be absent, but season, value and quality came together too well in this case for us to resist. We saw Antarctica and Inca Peru and other fascinating places in between. We learned a lot and expanded humanist horizons.

We could, however, manage a Meetup on January 22nd. Being an isolated event, I thought it an opportunity to engage with a minority of Meetup members - those with 'Spirituality' in their list of interests - along with other interests like science, humanism etc. This is still several hundred people.

I had tried this once before, and knew it was hard to reach these people, but if we could discuss what they meant by this word, we might find much in common with the humanist ethical ideal. 'Spiritual' practices - stoicism, even yoga, some kinds of mindfulness are compatible with humanism.

And some might simply use the term to connote they care about more than accumulating material goods, or think about more than personal pleasure. Some might just find it a way to keep proselytisers off their back! We all meet the '*spiritual but not religious*', and humanists need to be reaching out to such people, or the churches' statisticians will claim them all.

I knew this might bother some members, but also felt there would be other members who might join in in this outreach. So I advised in *Viewpoints*: *"If discussing stuff like this concerns you, then please avoid this special afternoon ... but the more who come with open hearts the better it will go. If this appeals to you, give it your support."*

I thought this was pretty clear. Some members came and shared 'in good spirit' (pardon the French). But others came with apparent intent to disrupt with contrarian views. Fortunately I have a process favouring equality of opinions in running the meetings. I hope I minimised the damage of this behaviour appearing as rejection by the society itself.

Most new Meetup members actually just came to check us out as they began a new year. There wasn't a strong showing of the people I hoped to engage with. Maybe that was

fortunate, in the circumstance. But the experience disturbed me, and being away, and seeing other retired people just enjoying themselves, made it hard to think ahead. Still I've gradually got back in harness during March. I saw an old article with Jim Woolnough excoriating Sir Julian Huxley for daring to use the word 'divinity' in a secular way. I'm in good company as Sir Julian is the greatest Humanist of them all.

Fay and I will be the delegates at the April CAHS meeting in Melbourne and I've been working on securing a broader base for the national executive, so that progress can follow good communication flows around the state societies. I will wait till all is confirmed in Melbourne and report in the next issue.

Events in February seem to have gone as planned. Darwin Day was well attended as was the discussion on 'Humanism & Determinism' on the 26th. The discussion of determinism was enjoyed but consensus is hard to get on intractable subjects! Thank you very much to John August, and Ian Bryce, the two Vice-Presidents, who kept the society alive and kicking during the month of February. We will work to get some articles out of these discussions, for future issues of *Viewpoints*.

We had a very good Activism Meeting on March 12th. Ian Bryce delivered a valuable report on his attendances and readings on the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*. This has become the article on page 2. We were treated to a high pressure talk on the warming planet by Howard De Witt of the Citizen's Climate Lobby. We promoted the forthcoming Melbourne Conference. Max Wallace reported on secular developments in the Pacific—particularly Fiji. There was lots of talk about Trump and a catchup on Assisted Dying.

All of the events this year seem to have exceeded 15 people so that's a reasonably heartening start. This also happened when I got my own series of Meetups underway again on March 26. This time I included a statement in my introductory address: *"I do especially ask those who 'come here often' to make the effort not to become too comfortable in expressing their views, and to remember that others are here who aren't yet so 'at home' in Humanist House but still have important views we all want to hear. In managing the discussion, I will particularly be encouraging all the new people to be fully engaged in the sharing and exploring of ideas that come up."*

I will include something like this at the start of each Meetup in future. And it applies well to other meetings where new people have come along. Even some who have come before benefit from fair sharing of opportunities to contribute.

I know some do feel they have important things to say, but in rebuilding a community we need to yield to others. If anyone feels they have big things to say, they are welcome to develop a full presentation of their own. But these too should be polished up to maximise audience appeal and enjoyment.

The 'What is Human..' discussion seemed to be well enjoyed. We made a rule that we didn't discuss 'Who is Human?'. Yet how we actually treat one another is so very indicative of our real thoughts on this question.

I've done a lot to fill this issue, and I hope you like it. But we need participation across our membership. Please send in items however small.

Murray Love



CALENDAR FOR APR-JUN 2017

THERE IS NO HUVAT FOR APRIL OR JUNE —SEE YOU AT JOHN'S SHOW IN MAY & WHD CELEBRATION

2017 AUSTRALIAN HUMANIST CONVENTION, MELBOURNE FRIDAY – SUNDAY, 7-9 APRIL

The reason there isn't a HuVAT in Sydney is because everything's happening in Melbourne that weekend. See page 3.

NSW Humanists Meetup 'New Humanists Sunday Open House' 3-6PM on Sunday 23 April 2017

On Sunday 23rd April we will be discussing **THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS & ITS DISCONTENTS**. The speaker will be Murray Love. This will be a more down-to earth and certainly much less expensive offering than the sold-out 'Happiness & its Causes' conference in June. You can spend over \$1800 buying the secrets of happiness or come and join us for just a few dollars for food and drink. (It's hard to be happy on an empty stomach!) Happiness is a serious business and as Ry Cooder once sang: "all the money in the world's spent on feeling good". It's like there's a happiness industry out there - and watch out if you don't 'keep smiling'! So we'll have a serious discussion of our own. **We'll look at the historical, biological and ancient philosophical roots of our ideas of happiness and the confusion this ambiguous word creates.** Happiness gets lost in a forest of other concepts, but the pursuit of 'happiness' goes way back to evolutionary beginnings.

Things were simple, though not easy, in stone-age days - happiness get very complicated in modern easier times. There's much to discuss in a topic so dear to humans and so central to the humanist life. Please come and listen and share your thoughts.

[An earlier version of this talk was delivered at one of our Meetups in February 2014.]

SHARE SPACE WITH A DIVERSE HUMANIST MEETUP COMMUNITY AND ENJOY A MIX OF DISCUSSION, SNACKS AND SOCIALISING

HuVAT Sunday 14th May 2017 3.00 for 3.15 p.m. will be John August on MARVELS OF HUMAN INGENUITY

Vice-President John August gives a spoken and visual presentation on his many technological adventures. We'll see engineering and industrial history, and also interesting and cute artifacts encountered both in Australia and internationally: the Roman cistern beneath Istanbul; the pyramids of Wollongong; the Celtic stone circle of Glenn Innes; the thin innovative dam at Medlow in the Blue Mountains, scoffed at by British engineers, it still stands as a tribute to Australian ingenuity; the elaborate bypass system which pushes sand from Tweed Heads, NSW back into Gold Coast, Qld. There's the Egyptian inspired dam near Picton, the rocket launch pads at Woomera, the shale oil works at Newnes, and the steam mining pump near Prestonpans, Scotland (site of a rare Jacobite victory in the 1745 rising). **And John promises many more items, 'plain, curious, odd and bizarre' from Australia and around the World. The simple enjoyment and sharing the lessons of human ingenuity is an important aspect of humanism.**

REMEMBER HUVAT & ALL OUR REGULAR SUNDAY EVENTS NOW COMMENCE EACH TIME AT 3.00 PM

NSW Humanists Meetup 'New Humanists Sunday Open House' 3-6PM on Sunday 28th May 2017

The topic is **SOCIAL MEDIA AS SELFDEHUMANISATION** and our speaker on Sunday 28th May is Arash Sanghvi. Arash is concerned at how social media interaction creates an exaggerated, prolonged identity crisis. Adolescents are anxious and conformist about superficial identity - for a while - but sites like Facebook can generate addictions that carry this longer and further. **Young growing lives become a video game** accumulating scores of Likes, Pokes etc. **Superficial values are internalised**, 'sharing' replaces thinking and learning, individual identity is commodified, challenging ideas are swept away by packaged ideologies - matched to known interests and fed by automated marketing software. **Thinking for oneself is lost in an echo chamber which reinforces prejudice at a frightening rate.** Little people are crunched into Big Data. Psychologists and Sociologists might learn a lot about the dark side of humanity from this, but - as a student of these disciplines - **Arash is concerned the price in dehumanising a generation is too high.** Would this pass an ethics committee? **Humanism as a way of life seeks to foster individual growth in a community valuing the real needs of human beings and the full opportunities human life can offer. One way to get this happening is to come together and discuss serious matters with other sensitive, intelligent humans.**

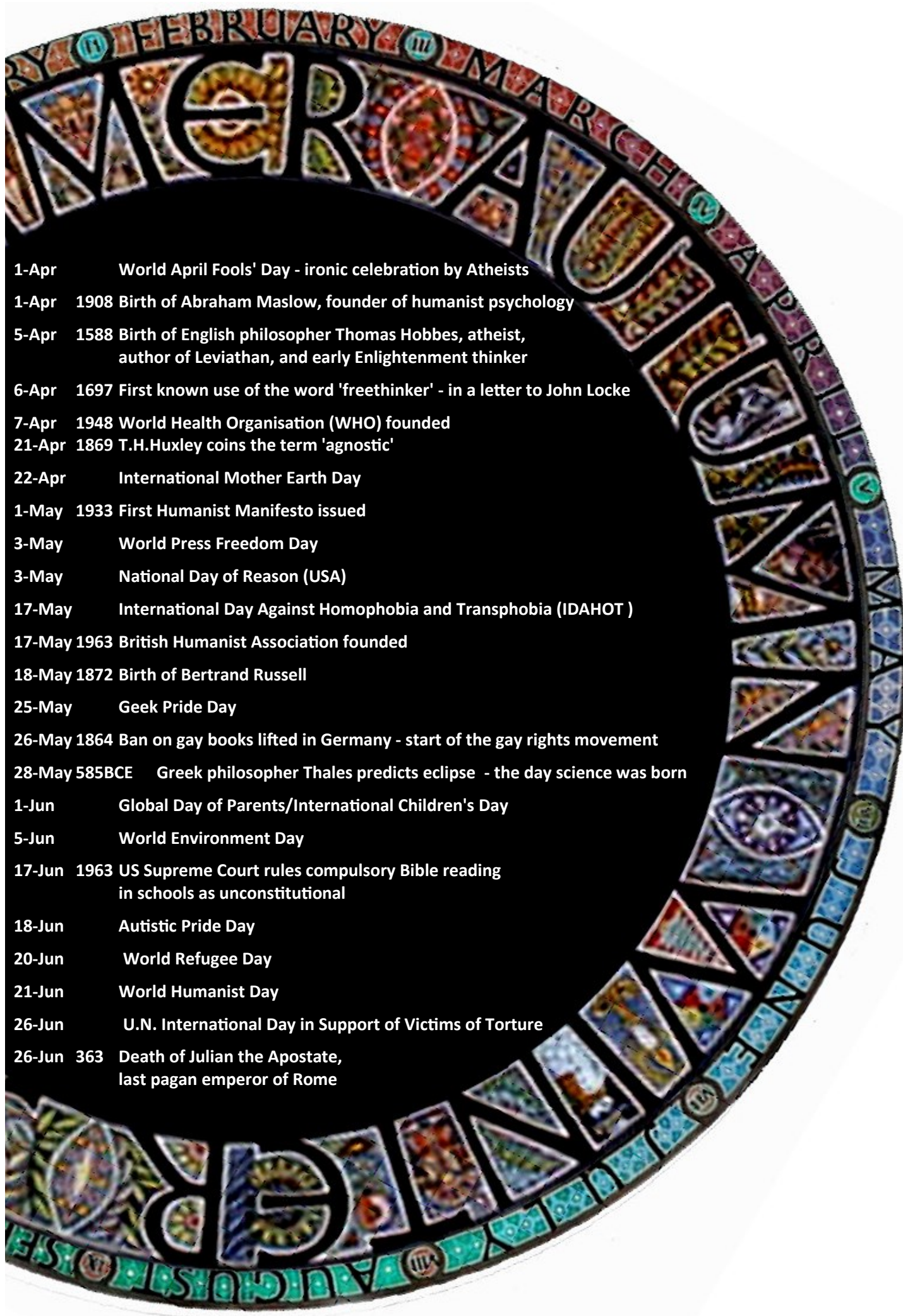
SHARE SPACE WITH A DIVERSE HUMANIST MEETUP COMMUNITY AND ENJOY A MIX OF DISCUSSION, SNACKS AND SOCIALISING

Sunday 18th June 2017 1.00-5.00 p.m. will be our WORLD HUMANIST DAY CELEBRATION

It's a special day for Humanists and we'd love to see a big turnout just to celebrate together. If there's 'one day of the year' to try to make it along just to see all the other Humanists this is it. Please come and share food and drink and discussion and celebrate Humanism. **It's a way of life needed more than ever in the 21st century.** It's great to get people out to see particular speakers on topics that interest them but Humanism is always a topic that should interest you. We will discuss Humanism on the day in several different ways, drawing on ourselves and the 2017 conference. Lyndon Storey the Humanist Chaplain in Canberra will be able to travel up and attend, to engage in a sharing of extraordinary experiences dealing with non-religious people (and a few religious ones) having dark and difficult days in their lives - even their last days. We'll try to bring along some input from Charles his predecessor. Naturally privacy and sensitivity will be respected but there is more than enough experience left to learn what insights and emotional growth experiences can come out of such fascinating work. But we'll have more besides. Another programme will be issued closer to the time, but please put the date in your diary today. We need your involvement.

ALL EVENTS ON THIS PAGE ARE HELD AT HUMANIST HOUSE 10 SHEPHERD STREET CHIPPENDALE NSW

'Open Forum' continues to meet each Wednesday night at Humanist House 8.00pm as it has done for many years. Open Forum has a diversity of speakers and does not represent the views of the Society.



- 1-Apr World April Fools' Day - ironic celebration by Atheists
- 1-Apr 1908 Birth of Abraham Maslow, founder of humanist psychology
- 5-Apr 1588 Birth of English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, atheist, author of Leviathan, and early Enlightenment thinker
- 6-Apr 1697 First known use of the word 'freethinker' - in a letter to John Locke
- 7-Apr 1948 World Health Organisation (WHO) founded
- 21-Apr 1869 T.H.Huxley coins the term 'agnostic'
- 22-Apr International Mother Earth Day
- 1-May 1933 First Humanist Manifesto issued
- 3-May World Press Freedom Day
- 3-May National Day of Reason (USA)
- 17-May International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT)
- 17-May 1963 British Humanist Association founded
- 18-May 1872 Birth of Bertrand Russell
- 25-May Geek Pride Day
- 26-May 1864 Ban on gay books lifted in Germany - start of the gay rights movement
- 28-May 585BCE Greek philosopher Thales predicts eclipse - the day science was born
- 1-Jun Global Day of Parents/International Children's Day
- 5-Jun World Environment Day
- 17-Jun 1963 US Supreme Court rules compulsory Bible reading in schools as unconstitutional
- 18-Jun Autistic Pride Day
- 20-Jun World Refugee Day
- 21-Jun World Humanist Day
- 26-Jun U.N. International Day in Support of Victims of Torture
- 26-Jun 363 Death of Julian the Apostate, last pagan emperor of Rome

50 YEARS AGO: THE HUMANIST SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES AS IT WAS IN 1967

Elsewhere in this issue we report the death of Dr Ian Edwards who was one of the earliest leaders of the Humanist Society of NSW. He retired in 1967 when he was round 38 years of age. Apart from our beloved John August we do not have much in the way of leadership so 'young'.

The records of the HSNSW have not been well preserved, but we're lucky to have a good picture of how things were in the mid-sixties, where some documentation has survived. It's interesting to see the Society in 1967 - the year of the 'Summer of Love' and 'Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band' - now fifty years gone - and the contrast with our present situation.

The society was growing steadily, and by mid 1967 there were 770 members, having gained 210 and lost 30 in the previous year. (This growth went on till we exceeded 1000 - but then we went into slow decline. Our 2017 financial membership sits around 125!) Humanist House was in a different location at 194 Crown Street, Darlinghurst. I haven't found a story of why they moved. The old place seems worth more in today's market!?

The society's public meeting attracted crowds of around 200. Their speakers included Dr Knop from the Dutch Humanist League and an even more exotic visitor—a Professor of Atomic Physics from Moscow University—Sergei Kapitzka.

In June 1967 Dr K Rivett & Mr Ian McDougall felt a need in those days to present "A Case for Non-White Immigration"! The famous academic Max Teichmann, at that time a prominent anti-war leftist, spoke on "Australia, Armed and Neutral?".

Dr Kemp Fowler spoke on the *Pugwash* movement which is still going and based on a call by Bertrand Russell & Albert Einstein

for scientists to work together on eliminating nuclear weapons. Psychiatrist, Professor David Maddison spoke on criminality. Mr GW Ford spoke on "*Poverty in Affluence*" - an issue still with us.

Craig McGregor, a journalist and academic who had interviewed Bob Dylan the previous year spoke on "*Political Man, Pop Man, and Just Plain Man*" a work by the cartoonist Martin Sharp of *Oz* magazine who did covers of the 60s super-group Cream. Dr Sidney Sax (a major figure for decades in study of ageing) spoke on "*Modern Society and the Aged*".

Many would call for speakers of this quality at our events today and it is hard to disagree. But it needs audiences of a good quality too, and it is so hard to get today's Humanists gathered in sufficient numbers to warrant major speakers. Sydney Atheists can get 60 along for a range of secular and skeptical speakers. As they say "Nothing Succeeds Like Success".

Today professionalised bodies organise book tours, plus ideas and writers festivals - the Humanists let many of their most appealing functions and concerns pass to specialist organisations, and are 'left behind', despite having been 'in on the ground floor' for many 'big issues' still pertinent today.

There was a veritable plethora of sub-committees in the sixties, examining issues like state aid, censorship, abortion, contraception, divorce, sex, sterilization, funerals, drugs etc and generating pamphlets and submissions to government.

One thing we can say, is that our newsletter *Viewpoints* has grown since the four page folded foolscap editions of that time. No illustrations back then, in an age before desktop publishing, but the issues resounded with reports of abundant activity.



GLOBAL EVENTS HAPPENING IN 1967

A Gathering of the Tribes for a Human Be-In in San Francisco

3 astronauts die in a fire on the launch pad of Apollo 1

The Red Guards return to schools in China

Stalin's daughter Svetlana defects to the U.S. via New Delhi

Israel wins the Six Day War in the Middle East

A coup in Greece establishes the regime of the 'Colonels'

Boxing champion Muhammad Ali refuses military service

Elvis marries Priscilla in Las Vegas

400 million see Beatles' record "All You Need Is Love" by satellite TV

British Parliament decriminalises homosexuality & legalises abortion

Race riots break out all over the USA throughout the year

Tennessee repeals the "Monkey Law" used in infamous Scopes Trial

Biafra, in Nigeria, announces independence. Brutal civil war ensues.

The Monterey Pop Festival begins and is held for 3 days

Christiaan Barnard does first heart transplant in Cape Town

Gabriel García Márquez publishes One Hundred Years of Solitude



been a sustaining force within the Society itself. Or has It? Does anyone know what became of these youngsters?

Another extraordinary development was the proliferation of suburban and country 'branches' and subordinated groups—often with their own committees. The districts blossoming at that time included: Ryde-Parramatta; St George; Sutherland Shire; Western Suburbs (what we'd call Inner West these days); Kuring-Gai; Lower North Shore; Eastern Suburbs; Newcastle; Wollongong; Blue Mountains-Nepean.

The biggest suburban event they organized was three speakers on the topic “Is Asian Communism a Threat to Australia” which was attended by 200 people (the location wasn’t given). This wasn’t a large attendance for a question as huge as this was in those days. But perhaps most people then thought there was a simple answer to that question, and nothing to talk about—let alone listen. Discovering the true history and complexity is still happening slowly. Not to mention the simplistic solutions proffered for today’s global clashes of culture.

The suburban groups would be struggling to accommodate more than twenty members at a time, often in private homes of prominent members, with up to forty at some venues. Figures we these days might hope for to in our city events!

The adult suburban humanists held parties where the ‘wine & cheese’ flowed freely, but also sought to be active with “*social reform, organized charity, political involvement, rationalism, communal social work, involvement in local affairs and self education*”. Such self-development included humanism itself. One group spent two years working through Sir Julian Huxley’s *The Humanist Frame* together - chapter by chapter. They circulated taped discussions of humanism. They discussed articles in British humanist journals they all subscribed to.

They were a well educated crowd with perspectives from “medicine, architecture, engineering, advertising, education,



Gough Whitlam became the leader of the Australian Labor Party

Australian Catholic bishops declared opposition to the war in Vietnam

New England region of NSW voted against becoming a separate state

90% support referendum normalising treatment of indigenous people

Humanist Don Dunstan became Premier of South Australia

Lake Pedder in Tasmania had its status revoked to allow damming

The four digit postcode system was introduced into Australia

We got a \$5 note filling the gap between the \$2 note and the \$10 note

John Farnham told us in song about Sadie the Cleaning Lady

Prime Minister Harold Holt disappeared off a Victorian beach

The Aussie soap opera Bellbird began airing on ABC television

The Australian Cricket Team toured apartheid South Africa

Australia Square Tower, our first true skyscraper, completed

We begin immunising with the new Sabin oral Polio vaccine

Our yacht Dame Pattie fails to win the America's Cup

By Truth Reporter Egan Whitton

**He did not
flinch on
the gallows**

Pentridge a few seconds after 8 am on Friday—the scheduled time for his hanging.

The tall, grey-suited hangman pulled the fatal lever at 10 seconds past eight o'clock.

Ryan was brought from the condemned cell in D Division—only a few yards away from the built-in gallows—only moments before the execution.

Ryan gazed silently at the hangman as the big man in dark glasses and peaked cap adjusted the halter around his neck.

CONTINUED PAGE 2

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63 Rover 3-Litre Automatic £1095
This superbly maintained, fully imported 3-litre Saloon will be of great interest to all Rover fanciers. It is in completely original condition, a great deal of time and expense having been spent to keep it that way. Finished in deep Maroon with leather trim. PS radio, heater, a/c/belts, etc. Inspect at



1963 Jaguar Mk. X Automatic £1995
This fully imported prestige limousine has been meticulously maintained and is guaranteed by Jaguar experts to be, since new, in. It is equipped with power steering, power windows, P18 radio, heater/demister, safety belts, CIP, thick-skin carpeting, etc. Inspection invited at RICHMOND. Liberal finance arranged to suit.

50 YEARS AGO: THE HUMANIST SOCIETY

fine arts, zoology” - given the times, the list also included “homemaking”. Women had much less paid work than today, even though they’d increasingly been getting an education.

Speakers would be mostly their own people, but would include visitors from other suburbs and even ministers of religion. Even amongst themselves the humanists would often have to “agree to disagree”. If anyone they knew had travelled to exotic countries they would be expected to share their experiences.

Speakers with named topics discussed in those days offered: “Ethics in Theory & Practice”; “Personal Freedom in Society”; “The impact of Sociology”; “Is Humanism a Subculture”; “Humanism & Anarchy”; “Humanism vs Paternalism”; “Humanism & Social Responsibility”; “Community Welfare”; “Radical Catholicism”; “Ending the Vietnamese Conflict”; “The Existence of God”; “The Historical Jesus”; “The Oedipus Complex”; “The Middle East Crisis”; “The Immorality of Marriage”; “Is Father Really Necessary”.

The last two talks on family issues came from two married doctors - Iza and Reuben Segal - who enjoyed provocative topics - though their ideas might seem ordinary today. They’re presence on Google now is as parents of Graeme & Lynne - British academics famous enough for Wikipedia entries. Lynne’s entry infers she grew up intellectually “immersed in the anti-authoritarian milieu of the Sydney Libertarians - known as The Push”. This suggests her parents also had that milieu, and it would be interesting to know the connections between the Humanists of the sixties and the notorious ‘Push’ circle.

A very prominent NSW Humanist in 1967, and right through the sixties, was Alex Carey. He was described as a founding member. He was another of many academics we had in those days, this time at the University of NSW in Psychology. He’s been described by no less than John Pilger as ‘a second Orwell’! Along with recently deceased Ian Edwards, he also participated in exchanges on radio, TV and newspapers in the mid-sixties as a representative of Humanism. Plus many articles in the early issues of *The Australian Humanist*.

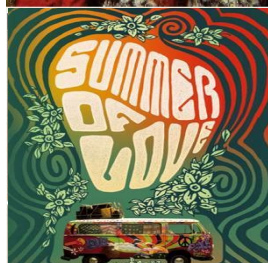
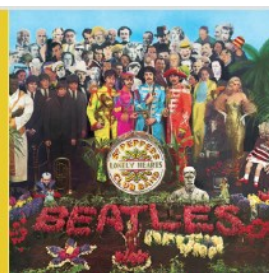
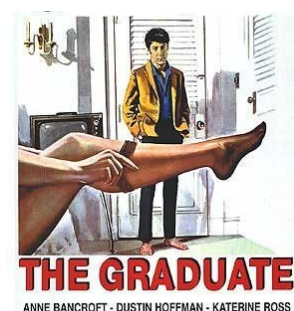
But Alex Carey’s life ended in suicide before his 65th birthday, at the time of the 1987 stockmarket crash. He also has a daughter with a story. Gabrielle Carey had early fame as one of the authors of *Puberty Blues*—a fictional exposé of the rampant sexploitation in youth beach culture in the seventies.

Yet her life changed. Wikipedia describes: “[Gabrielle] Carey was born in Sydney and was raised in an atheist, humanist household. While in Ireland in the mid-1980s she converted to the Catholic faith, becoming convinced of the importance of spirituality in everyday life”.

Is this where some of the children of humanists have gone? Not in all cases I’m sure, but things like this do happen. There is, for example, a distinguished Catholic academic some of us encounter around Humanist House who also came from an atheist family background. We need to try to understand what has driven such people back into the maw of ‘our worst nightmare’. Yet efforts to reach out to such people often run foul of the insensitivity of hard-boiled skeptics who drive them away with patronising questions - or worse.

Most of this article has been drawn from the details in a bumper 12 page issue of Viewpoints V6 No1 January 1968 headed ‘A LOOK AT OURSELVES’ surveying the Humanist Society in 1967 after seven years of operation. To quote: “During the past seven years the Society of has concerned itself with social and ethical questions affecting the community as a whole and has not restricted itself to a narrowness of outlook that has afflicted some secular groups in the past. Consequently the N.S.W. Humanist Society has earned widespread recognition and respect as a responsible organization...and issued statements that that have made it accepted as a leader in radical social thought”.

Progressive thinking comes with a broad outlook not narrow or rigid ideas on what is ‘acceptable’. Maintaining discipline in one’s own thinking is valuable, but judging others prematurely is destructive. Cutting off dialogue is never a good idea.



OF NEW SOUTH WALES AS IT WAS IN 1967

The special issue also quotes the older 1952 IHEU declaration: *"This congress is a response to the widespread demand for an alternative to...religions...based on revelation...and totalitarian systems. ...Humanism...is not a sect, but the outcome of a long tradition that has inspired many of the world's thinkers and creative artists and given rise to science itself. Ethical Humanism unites all those who cannot any longer believe the various creeds and are willing to base their convictions on respect for man as a spiritual and moral being"*.

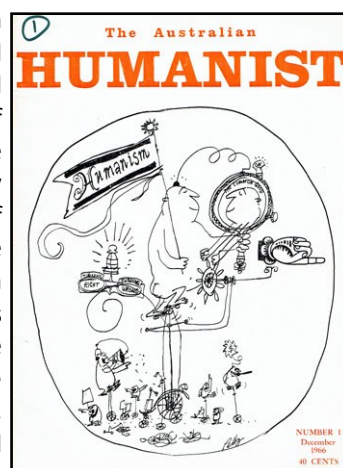
Words like "tradition", "inspired", "creative" and even "spiritual" were not excluded from the vocabulary of Humanism. There were generations from a Spartan age of Great Depression and the grimness of war, and an aesthetic where 'form followed function' towards a brutal bare concrete cityscape. But younger people then wanted colour in their black & white lives, and newer generations have grown up with Harry Potter, special effects, vampires, zombies, and virtual reality games. The first fifty years of IHEU saw the boom in 'secular humanism' but is there a danger of cold secularism obscuring the real appeal of ethical humanism.

The special issue quoted further from the IHEU declaration: *"The fundamentals of modern, ethical Humanism are as follows: It is democratic; It seeks to use science creatively not destructively; It affirms the dignity of man and the right of the individual to the greatest possible freedom of development compatible with the rights of others; It insists that personal liberty... not be sacrificed to material conditions; It is a way of life, aiming at the maximum possible fulfilment, through the cultivation of ethical and creative living"*. Clearly humanism was never just about being right on the god hypothesis, and feeling superior to less 'critical' thinkers.

The final extraordinary thing to share about 50 years ago is the work of the 'The Humanist Players'. Yes there was a theatrical troupe! Formed in July 1967 and soon 35 in number, they started out with *The Respectable Prostitute* by Jean-Paul Sartre - *"playing to a full house for five nights"*!

They also came to present a number of satirical reviews, and to raise hundreds of dollars for the Humanist Society of NSW.

In 1967 The Australian Humanist was new and exciting. The first issue had come out at the very end of 1966, and issues were available in bookshops, newsagents, city street kiosks - and by mail of course. We even got our one and only Bruce Petty cartoon for the front cover. Petty's visual commentary on the times was a vital part of those days in my own recollection. He draws us, a little pleased with ourselves, reflecting in the mirror of 'the common good' and awkwardly steering our way through the public debate with our lamp, and our finger (upside-down) pointing the way ahead.



I hope this article is a stimulus to others to look back at our history. We have lost a lot of the records of the society but at least our journals have retained some valuable historical info.

So many have died and memories are not very forthcoming although they might be stimulated by research. This is one area that might appeal to volunteers within our society - researching our heritage, and even getting in touch with our elder members and former members.

It would interesting to find out more about the children of those early members of the society who appeared to embrace something of the humanist lifestyle, if not the institutional duties of carrying the movement on. We'll put more and more old documents up on our website, so history can be explored.

Please get in touch if you are interested in helping understand our history and heritage.

Murray Love



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