**North East Humanists Annual reports for 2023, written for the AGM in March 2024**

**Report of the Chair of Trustees – Les Milne**

In reviewing North East Humanists for 2023, the most striking observation is that whilst events continue to be of high quality the attendance at talks has been disappointingly low.

The talks programme has delivered some excellent, topical, thought provoking and stimulating discussions on a variety of subjects, ranging from current issues such as the Transgender debate, the Regional Mayoral Elections/regional development and Artificial Intelligence. Wider issues have included the need for a Secular State and the Evolution of Empathy. The talks have been in hybrid form, allowing face to face discussion as well as remote access via Zoom. Whilst remote access was essential during the Covid pandemic it has been continued, so as to allow those with difficulties in travel to be involved. The number of members attending has been low, sometimes little more than the Management Committee.

Social events have been enjoyable, well received and well attended albeit sometimes limited by the restrictions at the venue. The visits were to Grassholme Observatory, Durham Botanic Gardens and The Tyne Theatre & Opera House, with the Yuletide social and quiz, being at the Merryoaks Community Hall in Durham, which has also been the venue for the increasingly successful Secular Salon.

As ever, the Committee is open to suggestions for talks and visits that members feel would be of benefit. NEH is not alone in facing the challenge of reduced participation and member retention that is all too common among many long standing organisations. To address the low attendance at talks combined with a gradual fall in total membership, the Management Committee has begun considering how NEH could adapt and adjust to the changing environment in which we now find ourselves. (Darwin would endorse such an approach!) Hopefully 2024 will see a positive outcome.

There are still many positive outcomes being achieved most notably on the education front with the number of school talks and the region wide involvement in Local Authority SACREs (Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education), for which Kate Hinton and the Education Panel should be praised. We also need to recognise the continuing good work done by those members who offer pastoral care as well as our celebrant members who between them provide vital services to the community.

Another success story is that of the Bulletin. Stepping into Ed Gibney’s shoes, John Sargent has built on Ed’s good work with the monthly editions being superbly informative

and always a good read. The obituaries that appear always create an element of sadness but as humanists we recognise that the here and now is the only life we have and it is up to us to make the most of it. It has therefore been life affirming to read about the full and fascinating lives that have been led by our members. We learned of the loss of Jean Berkley, Gerldine Wilkes, Willie Thompson, Norman Leslie, Andrew McQuillin, Mark Rice and Harvey Hitchenes (who died in 2022, but we only found out in 2023.) Their contribution to not only NEH but to wider society has been significant.

In a year of the unending news of tragedies and conflict around the world it is good to be able to reflect on the fellowship that NEH brings. Accordingly, I want to pass on my thanks and those of the wider membership to all the members of the Management Committee and those other members without whose commitment and diligent work NEH couldn’t function. For me as chair, it has been a humbling privilege to have their support.

Les Milne

**NEH Treasurer’s report -Mike Turner**

This report refers to the accompanying tabulation of the 2023 income and expenditure relative to 2022 and the budget for 2024.

1. Membership fees and donations have reduced. The committee are looking at ways to alter this trend, but I have budgeted for a further small reduction.
2. Income from meetings has gone up in 2023 due to the introduction of secular meetings in Durham.
3. Public meeting expenditure has increased in 2023 due to the room hire charges going up after the enforced transfer from Mea House to Brunswick Methodist Church. The budget forecast assumes regular monthly meetings in Durham and occasional meetings in Newcastle.
4. The cost of Committee meetings includes the fee for using Zoom (we paid for 3 years in 2022) and occasional strategy meetings.
5. Wreaths for Remembrance Sunday are still being laid on behalf of NEH but people are paying for this privilege with their own money.
6. We were affiliated to HUK, Humanists International and the European Humanist Federation. The last of these has been dissolved and HUK have not charged their partner groups (like us) for over two years. Fees are expected in 2024.
7. We gave £1000 to the Ugandan Humanist Schools Trust in 2023.
8. Following the success of the 2021/2022 Microgrant scheme we are hoping to repeat this in 2024.
9. As seen in the accounts for the years 2022, 2023 and 2024 we are purposefully reducing our reserves down towards a practical minimum. This is being done primarily by contributing to the local community and international charities as appropriate.
10. The Trustees agreed to reduce the minimum reserve to £3000.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **budget** | actual | actual |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | **2024** | for 2023 | 2022 |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Income**  |  |   |   | **Comments in the report** |  |  |  |  |
| Members Subs and donations | 1950 | 2120 | 2352 | 1 |  |
| Public Meetings  | 500 | 354 | 248 | 2 |  |
| Other income | 0 | 29 | 124 |  |  |  |  |  |
| HMRC Gift Aid  | 450 | 508 | 437 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Income from savings account | 40 | 59 | 7 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Grassholme trip 2023 | 0 | 70 | 333 |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Totals** | 2940 | 3140 | 3501 |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Outgoings** |   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Post,Stationery & Printing | 400 | 435 | 789 |  |  |  |
| Public Meetings  | 600 | 1476 | 754 | 3 |  |
| Committee Meetings | 300 | 70 | 394 | 4 |  |  |
| Web and Social Media costs | 150 | 117 | 138 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Outreach displays and Education | 200 | 156 | 65 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Wreaths for remembrance day | 0 | 0 | 104 | 5 |  |  |  |  |
| Affiliations | 200 | 65 | 122 | 6 |
| NEH Donations to others | 0 | 1000 | 2050 | 7 |  |  |  |  |
| Grassholme trip 2023 | 0 | 404 | 0 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Other costs  | 100 | 165 | 260 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Bank Fees inc Paypal | 10 | 11 | 13 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Microgrant donations | 5000 | 0 | 700 | 8 |  |  |  |  |
| **Totals** | 6960 | 3899 | 5389 |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Income minus expenditure | -£4,020 | -£759 | -£1,888 |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| reserves start Jan | £9,595 | £10,354 | £12,242 |  |  |  |  |  |
| reserves end Dec | £5,575 | £9,595 | £10,354 | 9 |  |  |  |  |
| Minimum reserve  | £3,000 | £4,000 | £4,000 | 10 |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |

**Education Report - Kate Hinton**

**Membership of Education Panel**

Kate Hinton, Irene Wilkinson, Jan Mole, Susan Walker, Stuart Dearlove, Les Milne, Roger Cawkwell, John Sargent, Ian Hunter, Lesley Davies, Victoria Bainbridge.

We welcomed Ian Hunter, from Gateshead, who has recently trained as a school speaker and is already doing visits, and Lesly Davies, from Hartlepool, who has recently joined the Hartlepool SACRE.

**Meetings**

The panel has had two meetings this year, in July and December, both face to face in Durham. We reviewed school visits and other talks, shared good practice and ideas, updated our information about SACREs, as well as discussed information about our own and national HUK developments.

**School visits and talks 2023 / 4**

Primary / Middle school lessons or assemblies (KS1 / KS2) 19 schools

Secondary / Middle school lessons or assemblies (KS3 / KS4 / KS5) 6 schools

Other visits 1

A new development in sessions is with KS5 Y12 and 13 (6th form)

Of these, requests came via

NEH website or direct personal communication 20

HUK website and forwarding system 6

**SACRE representation**

Currently we have representation on 10 SACREs in the region: Newcastle, North Tyneside, Gateshead, Northumberland, Durham, Darlington, Middlesbrough, Hartlepool, Redcar and Cleveland, Stockton.

Roger Cawkwell recently joined the Stockton SACRE.

Lesley Davies recently joined the Hartlepool SACRE

Sunderland, South Tyneside and North Tyneside seem to be barely functional.

Humanists are gradually becoming more accepted as full voting members, as we should be and as was confirmed in Wales and more recently by the government. We currently know of 6 full members.

We continue to look for opportunities to influence the Agreed Syllabuses as they are reviewed and up-dated. Increasingly syllabuses include reference to non-religious worldviews, with Humanism always given as the main example. We try to make sure that these references are accurate and fully explored.

In some authorities, such as Newcastle and North Tyneside, there are opportunities to attend teacher network or training sessions and to provide information about Humanism as well as the relevant resources, both from the North East and Humanists UK.

**Religious Education Resource Centres**

**The Mystery Box : Exploring Humanism.** There are now two of these boxes, one in each Resource Centre,. Each box contains a good variety of relevant small objects selected to illustrate our 5 posters as well as copies of the posters and teaching notes. They are intended to provide an interesting way of learning about Humanism. These are now in use in primary schools and limited feedback shows they are working well.

The Centres have been supplied with our latest resource – Darwin Day for Schools

**Resource Development**

We agreed to highlight Darwin Day on February 12th as a special day for Humanists. So we have produced a Darwin Day for Schools Pack KS2 / 3. This provides information for teachers and some pupil activity.

The pack has been distributed as best we can. It is on the NEH website, has been sent to the Religious Education Resource Centres, the Newcastle RE Teachers Network and the Museum of the North. It was used on February 12th by Kate in a primary school.

It was also highlighted in a radio broadcast on Radio Newcastle and Radio Tees. See below.

Additionally ,we have shared it with HUK in the context of a HUK School Speaker webinar about Science and Humanism.

**Outreach**

The main outreach activity has been an item in a radio broadcast on Radio Newcastle and Radio Tees. This went out on Sunday Feb 4th (8.00 – 9.00am) as part of the programme hosted by Gilly Hope and available on BBC Sounds. It took the form of a highly edited interview led by Gilly Hope with John Sargent and Kate Hinton. A link to part of the interview is available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0h8xz5x>

Many thanks go to Lesley Davies who arranged this for us.

**Bishop Auckland Faith Museum** has now opened and includes brief reference to Humanism, about which we were consulted, as well as information about evolution and Darwin.

**Preston Park Museum** is still in the process of considerable updating and development, We have provided material which may be included and Jan Mole is keeping in touch.

**Involvement with HUK**

We continue to have regular communication with HUK about school visits and SACREs.

A few of us attended the annual Education Day which was again run remotely. As usual, this gave us a lot of useful material and information, especially about the HK Understanding Humanism teaching resources and HUK campaigns.

Several of us also attend the ongoing programme of webinars for school speakers and SACRE representatives.

**Membership Secretary’s Report -Moira Turner**

At the start of 2023 we had 198 registered members. (This compares with 201 at the start of 2022). By December this number had gone down to 184 with 27 losses and 13 gains. Most of the losses were for non-renewal of membership, with 4 resignations and, sadly, 7 deaths. There were 13 new members.

**Attendances**

‘Blended’ meetings (in-person and on zoom) continued last year, and for statistical purposes I have added the number of attendees to the number of screens, so the figures are not exact. Also, guests are included in the total.

There were 9 main meetings/events in Newcastle last year, with the 10th - the Winter Social - being held in Durham in December. One speaker cancelled at the last minute in October and a speaker could not be found for July. Including the Winter Social there were 228 attendees, with an average of 23 per session.

Numbers were boosted from June when Susan Walker started the Secular Salon in Durham. All attendances there are in person and since June the talks have attracted 137 people, with an average of 23 each time. The total from Newcastle and Durham is 365 attendances over the year, slightly up from 2022.

**Welfare**

I continue to keep in touch by phone with some of our members who are unable to attend meetings, are ill, or do not have on-line links with NEH.

Some NEH members are also members of the Non-Religious Pastoral Support Network (NRPSN). This comes under the ‘umbrella’ of Humanists UK (HUK) and the members provide pastoral support in prisons, hospitals, and hospices.

**Acknowledgements**

Thank you to our treasurer Mike Turner, with whom I work when dealing with membership subscriptions. He also provides IT help when needed and assists with printing the monthly bulletins that are sent by post to those who do not have email, and printing and collating other NEH leaflets and documents.

Thanks also to my fellow trustees for their commitment to NEH, and to all the members who continue to support us to maintain a Humanist presence in the North East.

**Publicity Report - Susan Walker and John Sargent**

Ed Gibney, who was responsible for publicity until March 2023, had done considerable work improving the efficiency and efficacy of our systems. He kindly gave Susan Walker and John Sargent a comprehensive handover, and they took it from there.

**The Bulletin**

The bulletin has been enhanced during the year. It now carries a varied diet of information and articles from national and international sources as well as comprehensive the activities of NEH.

In March 2023, we had 296 subscribers to the bulletin. We now have 314, an increase of 6.08%

**Website**

The website is serviceable and meets the requirements of NEH. It requires regular updates which are carried out when time allows.

It sits on a basic platform which is free of charge. While this is obviously beneficial financially, it does not provide is with data or analytics.

**Social media**

We have 1.2k Facebook followers. and 58 Instagram followers. If members shared their pictures and stories we could begin to build our following on both platforms.

**Traditional Media**

We have made little use of traditional media this year. However, a press release in relation to Darwin Day did lead to an interview on BBC regional radio (Newcastle and Tees) when two of our members were able to discuss Humanism and its key features as well as the importance of Charles Darwin to us.

**Book club report – Jan Mole**

We meet bi-monthly in Durham as it is the ideal location being roughly midway between Tyneside and Teesside.

We usually have a meal and review our latest reads at ‘The Duke of Wellington’ pub on the second Tuesday of every alternate month at 7pm. However, we are in the process of exploring different times and days which may encourage others to join us.

We continue to enjoy members’ choices, both fiction and non-fiction and the discussions that ensue. Books read recently include, ‘Case Histories’ by Kate Atkinson, ‘How Religion Evolved’ by Robin Dunbar and ‘Demon Copperhead’ by Barbara Kingsolver.

We always welcome new members who can join at any time by contacting Jan Mole. janet.mole@ntlworld.com.