



# Annual Report

# 2010

national  
**secular**  
society

challenging religious privilege

## Secular Charter

As part of the preparatory discussions for a revision of the Society's Objects, Council agreed the following wording at a recent strategy meeting:

The Society promotes the separation of religion and state where law and the administration of justice are based on equality, respect for Human Rights and objective evidence without regard to religious doctrine or belief.

We campaign for the following constitutional principles:

1. There shall be no established state religion.
2. The state shall not engage in, or fund, religious activities or practice.
3. All public and publicly-funded services must be non-discriminatory and non-religious [no proselytising or preaching or religious requirement to access services].
4. Publicly-funded schools shall be non-discriminatory in admissions and employment and there shall be no religious instruction or organised worship.
5. The state shall not have the right to amend religious doctrine nor interfere in religious hierarchies.
6. The state or any emanation of the state shall not express any religious beliefs or preferences.
7. Religious beliefs, ideas, organisations and people shall not enjoy privileged protection from the right to freedom of expression.



## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

# A new, sharper focus for the NSS – let the debate begin

The Pope's fears about "aggressive secularism" are, of course, entirely ill-founded. Secularism is not about destroying religion. It is not about oppressing believers. It is not the instrument by which atheism will be imposed on an unwilling population.

Secularism is the structure that would permit all of us, from whatever creed or none, to have the same rights in the society we must share.

In a truly democratic, secular society, religion has its place – not in parliament – or the corridors of political power but in places of worship and in the homes of the faithful.

Religious believers are citizens with the same rights as anyone else in a democratic society. If they want to bring their religious values with them into political life, that is fine. But if the electorate don't share their values or don't like their philosophy, they must accept that they can be rejected at the ballot box.

Secularism is not about controlling religious organisations or telling them what to do or say, it is about ensuring that they cannot bring disadvantage to those who do not agree with them.

No one can be permitted to use the law or the state to impose their view of life onto others unless it has been democratically agreed. The law must remain impartial, democratically formulated and applicable equally to all. There can be no parallel legal systems that are not answerable to democratic control.

Similarly, there can be no established church. The right to freedom of religion should always be tempered by the right to be free from religion.

Human rights should be the ultimate test; religious exemptions should be limited to the absolute and justifiable minimum. Religious bodies must understand that human rights are to protect individuals, not religious groups or ideas.

In a secular society, religions would only have access to public money for the common good, not to promote their particular view of life. There would be no taxpayer funding for "faith schools"; there would be no hijacking of public events – such as Remembrance Day – so that they become the property of any particular religion. Publicly-

funded welfare and medical services would be resolutely secular and open to all without question and without religious demands, even if they are being run by religious organisations. Nor could there be any religious employment discrimination in services funded by the taxpayer but run by religious bodies.

On the other hand, the state would have no power to interfere with the internal decision-making of religious bodies. As long as they obey the law, religious bodies would be free to pursue their own interpretation of their holy scriptures and arrange their own internal structures without question.

Your NSS Council has worked together to produce a Secular Charter which we think can provide a new focus for the NSS's work in the twenty-first century. It seeks to be fair to everyone, to be achievable and to be benign. You can read this initial version of the Charter opposite.

I want the NSS to adopt this Charter as the basis of its ambition to create a properly secular society. I would like us to position ourselves as a purely secularist organisation with a focused objective, that will not only champion human rights above religious demands, but will also accept that religion has a place in society for those who want it, but on terms of equality, not privilege.

We will leave humanism for the humanist groups, atheism to the atheist groups and fix our sights uniquely on secularism.

The NSS must be at the forefront of the big debate about the place of religion in society. We must be ready to fight the myriad battles that will lead to the kind of society that we want. A society that is fair for all – religious people included.

Secularism protects the rights of everyone, religious and non-religious alike. Let the debate begin.

*Terry Sanderson*

P.S. I would appreciate members passing this Annual Report to friends who can find joining details on the inside back cover.

*Terry*

## POPE'S STATE VISIT

The Pope's visit galvanised many into demonstrating their secularist concerns for the first time. The Society's profile has been raised significantly and this has generated an influx of members. The unprecedented media coverage of his visit, however was – as we predicted – unrelentingly fawning. The important distinctions between news, comment and worship all but disappeared, particularly on the BBC. Several of their staff privately expressed to us their discomfort about this. Both the visit and its coverage were profligate and our attempts to establish just how costly are being resisted at the very highest levels. We will persist.

Diminished crowd sizes, despite massed bussing in of children at the last minute, reflected the decline of Catholic adherence as well as the unpopularity of this present Pope, reactionary even by Vatican standards and mired in unending revelations over clerical child abuse.

There were nearly 300,000 in Bellahouston Park in Glasgow for the papal visit in 1982; this time round it was barely 60,000. Empty seats and large swathes of unoccupied grass were evident at the Cofton Park Birmingham venue as the Pope and entourage were flown in by two huge helicopters. Miles of barricades were

“Easily the largest public protest Benedict XVI has ever faced on one of his foreign trips, and one of the largest protests against a Pope in modern history”

– *National Catholic Reporter*

erected in the streets through which he drove, but even in central London ‘crowds’ were often only around two deep.

### Our objections

We would have had no objection to the visit had the trip been a purely religious one, like its predecessor, without recourse to the public purse. The objection to the cost is given hugely more weight given the period of austerity which we are now facing and which for some will reach levels unseen since WWII.

The Government is claiming that the visit's cost to the taxpayer will be in the order of £10–12 million – deftly stonewalling enquiries about the cost of policing, which we



NSS Honorary Associate Johann Hari addresses the crowd





Abuse survivors speak at the press conference

are convinced will be much greater, but Lord Patten dismisses this as “poppycock”. Let’s hope he is right.

It is still not clear why a state visit was justified at all. A 2009 press report suggested that a “trip by Benedict XVI in the next year could provide a major boost for the Prime Minister ahead of the next General Election”. As we now know, the timing did not work out so conveniently for Mr Brown, but his successors were only too happy to play host.

The Vatican is so small that even our embassy to the Holy See is situated in another country – across the road in Italy. Nor is it clear why the UK should be honouring a “state” with such contempt for Human Rights. It is also one which does not satisfy the Montevideo statehood criteria, and is the last absolute monarchy in Europe.

The Church also seeks to undermine democracy itself through pressure on Catholics in public life to use their positions to seek to impose its dogma – so widely disregarded by its followers – much more widely. That dogma, particularly on contraception and abortion, is enforced on the developing world with such disastrous effects because of this “state’s” influence in the United Nations.

Despite having paid through the nose for this state visit, we had to endure the Pope using the visit “as an international platform from which to seize the initiative in the fight against secularisation” and to criticise our equality laws. There was of course no opportunity for the Pope to be challenged.

### What we did

The NSS was the only organisation named in the infamous [leaked Foreign Office memorandum](#) as being “negative” to the Pope’s visit, perhaps on account of the petition that we organised opposing the visit, which garnered 28,000 signatures in just three weeks. This was [delivered to Downing Street](#) by the President and the staff of the NSS.

Well ahead of the visit, we created the Protest the Pope website and brought together a coalition of activists to arrange the opposition to the Pope’s presence in this country.



NSS President Terry Sanderson presents our petition to No. 10



We helped arrange well-attended press conferences, one in which the survivors of sex abuse from England, Scotland, Ireland and Australia told their stories. Thirty film crews and battalions of journalists from all over the world turned up.

NSS member Sue Cox, an abuse survivor, spearheaded this aspect of the campaign, rapidly becoming a widely quoted spokesperson in this field and proving herself an accomplished media personality. Her moving articulation of her own plight and that of so many who have been abused by priests – and the church letting them get away with it – captured the media’s imagination and was widely reported.

Protest the Pope’s crowning glory was between 10,000 and 20,000 people (according to estimates) amassing in the very heart of London, “protesting the Pope” in a good humoured and witty march with a serious message. The march was expertly co-ordinated by Marco Tranchino. It stretched for about three quarters of a mile and was far too big to fit in to Whitehall, where the final rally took place. Even a Vatican-connected news agency reported the protest and admitted it was unprecedented.

Speakers at the rally included Richard Dawkins, Johann Hari, Geoffrey Robertson QC, Peter Tatchell, Maryam Namazie, Pragna Patel and others. The NSS President’s contribution went out live on the BBC1 news. We apologise to the thousands who were unable to hear these speeches because the rally attracted so many more supporters than anticipated. We also had a presence at Cofton Park in Birmingham.

We hope that this campaign and especially the march will have energized many for the fight for secularism that is under increasing attack from religious interests.



## VATICAN SLATED OVER CHILD ABUSE AFTER OUR ATTACK

At the United Nations in Geneva, the NSS executive director Keith Porteous Wood once more [accused](#) the Roman Catholic Church of breaching the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. He accused them of protecting the offenders from criminal sanctions, behaving in a manner that facilitated further abuse, and of secrecy and apparent indifference at the highest level.



He was speaking in March 2010 at a plenary session of the Human Rights Council as a representative of our international affiliate, the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU). We are grateful to them for providing a platform. We believe these to be unprecedented attacks on the Vatican in such a forum.

In [response to his first attack](#) there in September 2009, the Vatican’s Papal Nuncio had exercised his Right of Reply. It was so duplicitous, evasive and complacent that it prompted an uproar widely reported in the international media.

Such was the scale of disapprobation then that even the Vatican was not prepared to risk worldwide wrath again by exercising a Right of Reply to this second, even stronger, accusation. Instead, the Papal Nuncio had to sit expressionless through the barrage, poring over the written version of the speech, discussing it with his assistant.

We placed on record that the Vatican had not denied the specific accusations we had made of breach of specified Articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. We pointed out that their mandatory quinquennial report was more than ten years overdue, the very one that the Vatican had claimed six months earlier would be “finalised as we speak”. Even as this Annual Report goes to press – over a year after the Vatican’s undertaking to fulfil its responsibilities over this – it has still not done so. Above all, we called for the Church to co-operate with secular criminal authorities and open up its secret files on child abuse.

Six months later, Geoffrey Robertson QC’s book [The Case of the Pope](#) was published, to coincide with the Pope’s visit. He has come to many of the same conclusions about the breaches of the UN Convention and we are grateful for the authoritative confirmation of the accusations we made; indeed, he alleges yet more breaches.

We have also criticised the Vatican’s extraordinary decision to appoint Cardinal Murphy O’Connor to head an abuse inquiry in Ireland, drawing attention to his own lamentable record on managing child abuse in the UK. The Catholic Church in Britain strives to create the impression that child abuse is not a problem here. But with prompting from the NSS, a national newspaper reported in September that: “A staggering 415 alleged victims of sexual abuse by Catholic priests in Britain are still fighting for justice”.

## COUNCIL PRAYERS

We were approached by a councillor on Bideford Town Council who was outraged that prayers were being said as part of their meetings. This sparked our interest and, with the help of members around the country, we ascertained that the majority of councils adopt this outdated practice. This is a clear example of the failure to separate religion from politics. Our lawyers advised us that the practice breaches the European Convention on Human Rights, so we decided to pursue it.



We first sought to dissuade Bideford from the practice; our lawyers sent them a detailed explanation of why it is unlawful to include prayers as part of the council agenda. Bideford councillors had also received similar advice some time ago from the National Association of Local Councils. Despite corroborative advice, the councillors decided not to back down.

Consequently, our lawyers filed an application for a Judicial Review at the High Court to determine whether or not Bideford Town Council's prayers were lawful. The Council then had either to agree to stop the practice or inform the court why they should be lawfully allowed to continue with prayers as part of council meetings. Had they decided on the former course, the matter would have cost them practically nothing, and we would simply have chosen another, larger, council. Instead, they decided on the latter course, thereby enabling the matter to be determined.

Bideford Council's lawyers are reportedly acting *pro bono*, so we are hopeful that the council tax payers of Bideford will not have to shoulder any burden. The Council is reportedly working "with the Christian Institute to defend the case" and top flight QC James Dingemans is acting for them. He also acted (ultimately unsuccessfully) for Lillian Ladele, the Christian registrar in Islington who refused to conduct civil partnerships. It is no coincidence that this is a case on which we have been widely quoted.

### Costs

The High Court has decided that our challenge to Bideford council on the saying of prayers in council meetings satisfies the necessary criteria to proceed. One of these was that the matter should be of sufficient public importance. Former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Carey, demonstrated that it is by attacking us in the *Guardian*, just for bringing the case.

We are claiming that, in view of the public interest of the case, we should be largely protected from Bideford's costs if we are not successful. Bideford, however, is opposing



Lord Carey described our defence of secularism as "an attack on freedom"

– *Guardian*

any limit on the costs we should bear. Costs could be substantial, particularly as any decision is likely to be appealed to still higher courts. Either side can still withdraw at any stage, although there are likely to be costs implications of doing so.

Frequently asked questions about this campaign can be found on the NSS website, which will be kept updated.

We hope you will contribute to NSS funds to help us fight this expensive but important battle. We still have a considerable way to go to reach our initial £25,000 target. You can support the campaign by using the "Donate" button on the website [www.secularism.org.uk](http://www.secularism.org.uk). We would also welcome cheques made payable to "NSS" at the office.

## CHERIE BOOTH QC COVER-UP



Cherie Booth QC (the professional name of Cherie Blair) gave a suspended sentence to a man who had committed a serious assault on the grounds that the assailant was "a religious man".

He had broken the jaw of an innocent bystander because of apparent "queue rage" at a local bank.

We reported the sentencing remarks to the Office for Judicial Complaints (OJC) as it could be interpreted that the offender had received more lenient treatment on the grounds of his claims to religious adherence.

## Rap on the knuckles for Cherie from top judge

The OJC later issued a press release stating that no disciplinary action was necessary as Recorder Booth's actions did not constitute judicial misconduct. The press understandably took this to mean that Recorder Booth had been completely exonerated.

However a letter from the OJC, only received after the press reports had been published, acknowledged our concerns and stated that our complaint had been "partially substantiated". Booth would receive "informal advice from a senior judge", some way short of the implied complete exoneration that the OJC had reported to the press.

We then issued our own statement some days later to put the matter straight. This prompted the OJC to threaten us that any disclosure would breach Section 139 of the Constitutional Reform Act. But by then journalists were pressing the OJC for an explanation and the cat was out of the bag. We heard no more.

The story received a great deal of coverage. It developed from the original incident to our complaint, and from the supposed "exoneration" to questions about a cover-up.

## THE GENERAL ELECTION

### All change in Parliament

The Academies Bill, as introduced before the summer recess, was already manna to those favouring a proliferation of religious schools. As detailed in the education section of this Report, amendments made to it that further bolstered the religious privileges were supported by the new Government while attempts to curtail them were rebuffed.



Baroness Warsi

Conservative Party Chairman Baroness Warsi has insisted that the coalition Government not only “does God” but that faith groups should have a greater role in public services under the auspices of David Cameron’s Big Society. She told a meeting of Church of England bishops in Oxford

that the coalition intended to be “on the side of” faith.

Extraordinarily, she claimed that the Labour Government had seen religion as “essentially a rather quaint relic of our pre-industrial history”. Given our litany of complaints over the years about Labour’s unhealthy closeness to religion, including appointing thirteen faith advisors in January, we can only hope Lady Warsi was just playing to the gallery.

We have been progressively increasing our contact with the Conservative Party. We will try to capitalise on it being a “new broom”, less defensive of the past. Maybe the libertarian wing of the Party will open up some new opportunities and we have noticed some signs of a willingness to look at issues afresh. The Lib Dems in government may also be receptive.



Angela Eagle MP

Ed Miliband is of course Labour’s first atheist leader in twenty years and we believe his shadow cabinet includes some secularists, including NSS Honorary Associate Angela Eagle MP. We offer her our congratulations.



Graham Allen MP

Sadly, Dr Evan Harris lost his Oxford West and Abingdon seat: please see tribute on page 14. Paul Holmes, also a LibDem, lost his Chesterfield seat. We are grateful to Paul too as we are to Robert Marshall-Andrews QC and Colin Challen who stood down. We are pleased to report that Graham Allen (pictured) retained his seat on the Labour benches.

## EDUCATION

The National Secular Society remains steadfast in our near 150 year opposition to faith schools.

### Academies Act

The Academies Bill was rushed through Parliament at breakneck speed before the summer recess to enable academies to start with the new school year.

As the Bill progressed through Parliament, we highlighted our concerns to all parties and in particular education ministers. Our primary concerns over the academies plans relate to the inevitable proportional increase of religious schools. This brings with it more unfairness, an increasing threat to community cohesion, more admissions injustices, further employment discrimination, more collective worship, more intensive religious education, and an increasing threat to sex and relationships education.

Worthy attempts to amend the Bill were made in the Lords by Honorary Associate Baroness Massey and in the Commons by the new Lib Dem MP for Cambridge, Dr Julian Huppert.

We are grateful to them, but unfortunately, they made minimal progress.



Baroness Massey



Dr Julian Huppert MP

On the other hand, the Government caved in to the bishops’ demands for existing “faith” schools converting to academy status to be able to retain their admissions criteria. In the case of voluntary aided schools, these can result in 100% selection on religious grounds. Worryingly, there is now even doubt as to whether the 50% limit for non-converting and free schools will even be observed in practice for new academies and free schools.

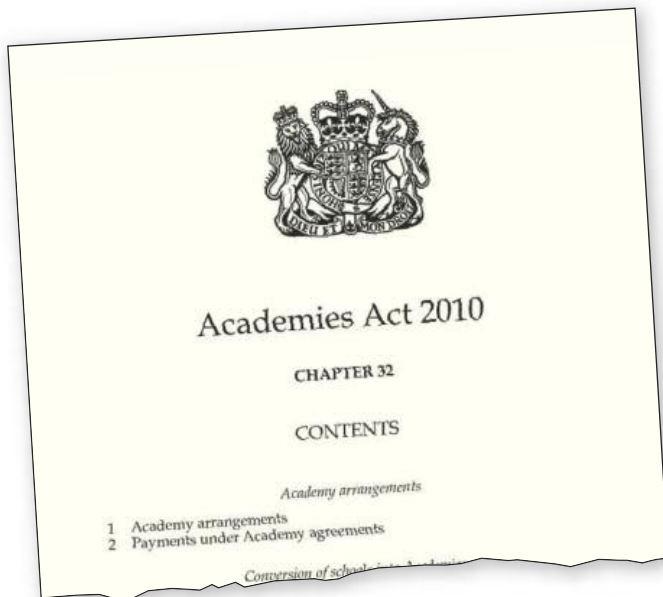
Education Secretary Michael Gove is reported to have told the *Jewish Chronicle* that “new free schools could still have a clear Jewish ethos and once the 50 per cent quota had been reached, the remainder of places could be filled with Jewish children – as long as the admissions board did not enquire about faith.”

We urge Mr Gove to think again, especially over minority faith (and some minority Christian denominational) schools. Most reinforce the isolation of communities that are already dangerously apart.

At the heart of the Government’s programme are ‘free schools’. These are new independently run state-funded schools that enjoy the same freedoms as traditional academies, which include setting their own pay and conditions for staff and freedom not to follow the National Curriculum.

Nearly half of the first wave of sixteen free schools will be





religious. Two are Jewish, one Sikh, one Hindu and three are Christian.

The NSS received a detailed reply from Education Minister Lord (Jonathan) Hill to a long list of concerns we raised about the Academies Bill. One related to any steps being taken to prevent extremist ideologies being introduced through the new free schools and academies system. He replied: "On the issue of proselytising, which you also raise, we do not think it appropriate to legislate in this area. Parents will choose a school based on its ethos. That ethos may be Christian, Muslim or Jewish or it may have no faith ethos at all. Parents should be free to choose schools on the basis of their ethos. I would like to believe that parents consider these issues carefully and send their children to a school fully aware of its faith or other ethos."

We are alarmed at the prospect of extremist religious groups taking control of these schools and using them to brainwash children. Our concerns over this and Lord Hill's letter were carried in a prominent article in the *Times Educational Supplement*.

### Religious discrimination against teachers

The NSS chose a prestigious conference at Windsor Castle – *Faith Schools:*

*Freedom of Choice or Recipe for Division?* –

to accuse the Government of unwarranted employment discrimination against teachers who are non-religious, or who are of the 'wrong' religion, in faith schools.



Keith Porteous Wood [told the conference](#) of education academics and officials – and religious leaders – that in 2006 the Government had even increased the already unacceptable discrimination. They had done this at the direct bidding of bishops in the House of Lords and without consulting the largest teaching union.

The story was picked up by the Press Association and the BBC, to the fury of the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). So anxious were they to support this unwarranted discrimination in "faith" schools at any cost, they launched a counter attack on the NSS by issuing a press release using such phrases as "This is a distortion of the facts ... It is nonsense to infer...".

The DCSF was later forced to withdraw their press release due to their own factual inaccuracies after we challenged them and took the matter up with lawyers. The episode provided a rare public insight into the pro-religious bias that pervaded much of the DCSF.

### Protecting community school provision

On a brighter note, there has been a successful outcome following our campaign to protect community school provision in Dorset. Swanage First School is the only community school in a 14 mile radius and was earmarked for closure by Dorset County Council. Last year we instructed solicitors to write to Dorset CC, pointing out the legal implications of reducing diversity of provision and denying parents the choice to send their children to a non-faith school.

Dorset CC has now decided to maintain community school provision. It expanded Swanage First into a primary school rather than, as had been planned, merge it with an Anglican school. This means local parents will still have an option other than to leave their children's education in the hands of the Church.

In the piece on the Windsor conference, we drew attention to the DCSF's fierce protection of the churches' privileges at national level. There is also compelling circumstantial evidence in relation to Swanage of behind-the-scenes Church of England involvement at county and/or local level to promote its own self-interest to the detriment of both pupils from non-religious families and non-religious staff. Indeed, the inclusion on Local Education Authorities of diocesan representatives who are privy to information denied to organisations such as ours and who also have the right to vote, even on matters beyond "their" schools, means the cards are very much stacked in their favour throughout the country.

### Sex & Relationship Education (SRE)

With rising teenage pregnancies and rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), we feel it is vital that SRE be compulsory in all schools. We made this point in two submissions we made this year to government consultations.

In February 2010, following extensive lobbying from religious groups, the then Labour Government reneged on its commitment to ensure all children will receive broad, balanced and objective SRE after religious pressure was applied.

We argued that children in faith schools are entitled to the same objective teaching on issues such as contraception, safe sex, sexuality, STIs and abortion as children in community schools. We will continue to fight this battle which we anticipate will become more intense.

## EQUALITY BILL

Our prime targets during the passage of the Equality Bill were discrimination against non-religious teachers and headteachers and discrimination by religious organisations engaged in faith-based welfare. The Society's campaigning on the Bill involved all major parties.



Baroness Turner

We are grateful for the active support on the Bill of Dr Evan Harris and Honorary Associate Baroness Turner of Camden who kindly tabled amendments for us.

Keith Porteous Wood witnessed the Bill's passage in the Commons. The Solicitor General refused to answer eight incisive questions Dr Evan Harris asked about discrimination against teachers, blustering that she would not "override substantive education legislation".

Evan did however provoke her into admitting on the record that the Government had in effect (shamefully) refused to sign the EU Directive unless it permitted discrimination against non-religious teachers.



Lord Avebury assisted on caste

## Europe backs NSS initiative, but government is rendered impotent by the bishops

A complaint made by the NSS in 2004 led this year to the European Commission issuing the Government with a "Reasoned Opinion". It required the removal of carte blanche exemptions enjoyed by religious organisations to discriminate against gay people in employment. The Commission considered them to breach the EU Employment Directive passed in 2000. The exemptions complained of were contained in the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003, later to be replaced by provisions in the Equality Act 2010. The Equalities and Human Rights Commission congratulated the Society on this success over the Reasoned Opinion.

The timing of the Opinion implied that the Commission was expecting that the Government would take the opportunity of the then imminent Equality Bill to make the necessary corrections.

Keith Porteous Wood was in the Lords to see the debate degenerate into an historic pitched battle between the Government and the religious lobby:

"The Lord bishops were determined to block the Bill being changed to accord with the EU's Reasoned Opinion.

## SECULARIST OF THE YEAR 2010

The 2010 Irwin Prize for *Secularist of the Year* was won by Southall Black Sisters. This group provides a secular space for women to escape violence or injustice – often caused by religious attitudes. Director Pragna Patel said in her acceptance speech: "If you had asked me 20 years ago what one of the biggest struggles would be in 2010, I would not have said the struggle for a secular society. Yet here we are today." She has also had to struggle to keep funding for the group.

Religious vested interests have been putting pressure on councils throughout the country to divert funding from secular groups to religious groups, often the source of the oppression from which the women are attempting to escape.

Samantha Stein was given a special award for setting up Camp Quest, the UK's first residential summer camp for children teaching them the value of rational thought and scientific enquiry. The promoters had endured vilification at the hands of the media, one newspaper even accusing Richard Dawkins of "grooming" atheists, even though he had had no connection with the organisation or running of the camp, and had simply given a modest donation. Keith Porteous Wood and Terry Sanderson spent a great deal of time in TV studios and on radio defending Camp Quest.

Dennis Penaluna, who has also set up Nottingham Secular Society, was awarded the Volunteer of the Year prize for his work on the hospital chaplains' campaign. We would also like to put on record our thanks to the volunteers



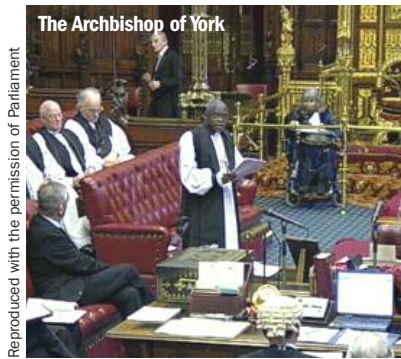
Pragna Patel



Dennis Penaluna, Volunteer of the Year



The 'Rev Dr' Peter Hearty



Reproduced with the permission of Parliament

Incredibly, after an intransigent speech from the Archbishop of York, the bishops – out in force – and the religious lobby defeated an attempt by the Government to go some way to meet the concerns expressed in the Reasoned Opinion. In one of a series of

wrecking amendments leaving the Bill in disarray, the Government lost by 5 votes after 8 bishops voted against them. I was later told that the Government were furious since it had already conceded ground to satisfy the bishops. This is also probably the first time in living memory, however, that the bishops' votes have tipped a vote against a government. A sad piece of history was made that day.

“More importantly, the European Commission is likely to take a very dim view of the failure to make progress. The law now is as unacceptable, if not more so, to the Commission as when it first complained. The bishops' bid for supremacy over EU law could yet end with the Government in the dock at the European Court of Justice.”

## Caste Discrimination

We made progress in the Lords on outlawing caste discrimination, an unwelcome import from the Indian subcontinent. Lord Avebury led the initiative, assisted by Keith Porteous Wood who tracked down experts and helped bring together a plethora of groups affected by caste discrimination.

This led to Baroness Thornton (one of Ministers responsible for the Bill) inviting the groups, Lord Avebury, Lord Lester of Herne Hill and Keith to discuss their experiences and suggest a way forward. Despite predictable opposition from the Hindu community and some official quarters, the Minister agreed as a result of what she had heard at the meeting to include a clause in the Bill enabling caste discrimination to be outlawed.

This can be triggered by a ministerial order. It is hoped this will be laid before Parliament after the completion of a study already in progress into the extent of discrimination.

We would also like to thank Baroness Flather for her expert advice and help.



Baroness Flather

throughout the country working on this project on behalf of whom Dennis was also collecting the prize.

The event was held in a glitzy central London location and special guests included former winners Lord Avebury and Dr Evan Harris, and Ariane Sherine. Honorary Associates Professor Peter Atkins, Lord (Dick) Taverne and Baroness Turner were also on hand to help us celebrate.

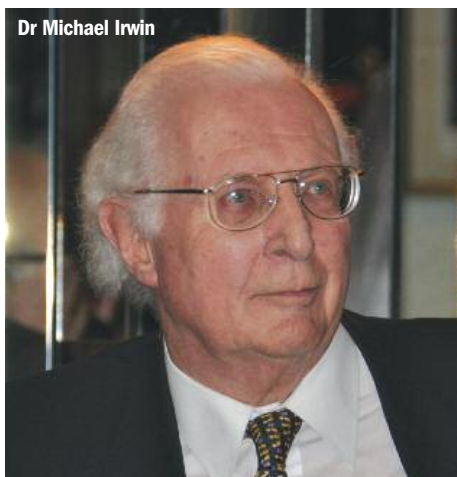
Guests were entertained at their tables by the impressive magician Neil Edwards – he even managed to bamboozle Professor Peter Atkins. The “Reverend Dr” Peter Hearty reduced the audience to tears of laughter with his critique of the most platitude laden *Thoughts for the Day*, which he dubbed *Platitude of the Day*. The winner was the Bishop of

Liverpool, who was sadly not present to collect his prize, which was therefore auctioned off for Society funds. This was payback time for our drubbing at the hands of the BBC Trust.

The event was conceived by Terry Sanderson with help from Stephen Evans and Tessa Kendall and was compèred by Keith Porteous Wood.

We thank Dr Michael Irwin for his great generosity in sponsoring the £5,000 prize once more.

**The next *Secularist of the Year* event will be on Saturday 19 March 2011 – please make a date in your diary.**



Dr Michael Irwin



Sam Stein

## MEDIA

The NSS has an increasingly high profile in the media, which helps our work spreading the secular message and at the same time attracts new supporters. We also work with journalists behind the scenes researching stories and giving advice.

President Terry Sanderson said: “The media is our most potent weapon in the fight for secularism and we try not to miss any opportunity to use it”.

As well as our public presence in the UK, we are increasingly appearing in the international media. Our main story of the year was of course the Pope’s visit. The UK media coverage of the visit was almost entirely sycophantic and uncritical. But before the Pope arrived and during his visit, our comments were carried in print, electronic media, TV and radio in the UK as well as on every inhabited continent, even the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* covered our protest. We spoke about the cost to the taxpayer as well as the diplomatic propriety of the Pope commenting negatively on UK equality legislation and freedom of expression. We also mentioned the child abuse cover-ups. Our Pope Nope T-shirts gained infamy from Ireland to Australasia.

Other subjects we have covered in the last year include: our High Court challenge to council prayers and our complaint about sentencing remarks by Cherie Booth QC, which ended up turning the spotlight on the Office of Judicial Complaints itself.

Website hits generated from the Pope visit and the Cherie Booth stories reduced it to near collapse, and there were sometimes just too many NSS media mentions to include in *Newsline*.

Other topics included our criticism of Catholic adoption agencies seeking to evade the law under which they must also be open to including gay prospective adoptive parents, Christian B&Bs, numerous cases of evangelical Christians claiming they are “victims” of equality legislation and seeking privileged exemption from it, religious conscience opt-outs for pharmacists, the alleged healing power of prayer being claimed in advertisements, Archbishop



Keith Porteous Wood being interviewed on the march



Vincent Nichols’ attack on the Labour Government, the absence of labelling of meat (and meat products) from slaughter without stunning, the Church’s evangelising Christmas poster and *Thought for the Day*. In Wales, NSS opposition to hospital chaplains was covered in the national and local press, as was our response about the creationist Noah’s Ark zoo farm.

In addition to Keith Porteous Wood and Terry Sanderson, staff members Stephen Evans and Tessa Kendall were interviewed on a range of subjects and senior volunteers John Dillon and Dr David Holohan joined us to comment on the Pope’s visit.

### Thought for the Day

Our optimism about a positive outcome to our complaint to the BBC Trust about the discriminatory *Thought for the Day* slot turned out to be misplaced. The summary judgment from the Trust read:

“The Trust found that the editorial policy of only allowing religious contributors to participate on *Thought for the Day* does not breach either the BBC Editorial Guideline on impartiality or the BBC’s duty to reflect religious and other beliefs in its programming. However, the Trust confirmed that *Thought for the Day* must comply with requirements of due impartiality and that any future complaints on particular broadcasts of *Thought for the Day* would be judged against these standards on a case-by-case basis.”

One of the negative replies we received at an earlier stage of the complaints process was from Mark Damazer, until recently Controller of Radio 4. We later learned it had also been [posted on the BBC website](#). Less than one in six of the hundreds of the comments on the article supported Mr Damazer’s attempted justification for the ban to remain.

Damazer was denied his ambition: “I won’t leave this job until I have got the Pope doing *Thought for the Day*”

Recognising the intransigence we were facing, we suggested some alternatives, such as a separate regular slot for those excluded, but none of these suggestions was taken up.

The NSS considers that this adjudication adds to the long list of betrayals by the BBC over our complaint that spans half a century. The BBC would not dare to restrict the participation of any other minority in the way that it does the non-religious over this programme.

## FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

### Council of Europe

Concerned about increasing religious intolerance of freedom of expression, the Society compiled a hard-hitting [submission](#) for a Council of Europe conference in September on *The role of the media in fostering intercultural dialogue, tolerance and mutual understanding: freedom of expression of the media and respect towards cultural and religious diversity*. The submission was prepared on behalf of the International Humanist and Ethical Union and the majority of conference participants were from religious organisations.

### BBC

The Society also attacked new BBC guidelines on religion as placing a dangerous restriction on freedom of expression. The President described them as “an entirely retrograde step that will put severe restrictions on comedians, documentary makers, satirists and commentators who want to be critical of religion. ... This is dangerous in these days of dangerous fundamentalism, when it has never been more important to hold religion up to forensic scrutiny, even if it offends followers. This has done a disservice to its journalists, its entertainers and to the country as a whole by putting this wholly unjustifiable restriction in place. ... It diminishes freedom of expression in Britain at a time when it is already under severe threat from religious quarters.”

The new guidelines run entirely contrary to the recommendations we had made in a submission. The BBC did not report our criticism of the guidelines despite them being widely circulated, including on the Press Association’s newswire.

### Religious “distress”

Harry Taylor was sentenced to six months in prison (suspended for two years) for leaving anti-religious cartoons in a Liverpool Airport prayer room after the airport chaplain claimed in court to have been “insulted, deeply offended and alarmed”. He was convicted of causing “religiously aggravated intentional harassment, alarm or distress”. We condemned this as “creating a new blasphemy law that will open the way for every religious extremist to persecute and prosecute their critics.”

### Global Blasphemy Protest

In the spring, the NSS joined over 100 other groups from more than 20 countries to protest against the United Nations’ “global blasphemy law” proposal. For the first time ever, a UN body proposed a legally-binding treaty against defamation of religions. This would be a serious threat to freedom of expression and any criticism or debate about religion. This concept of defamation is fundamentally inconsistent with the principles outlined in the United Nations’ founding documents, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which affirms the protection of the rights of individuals, rather than ideas.

## PALLIATIVE CARE

Keith represented the Society at an agenda-setting meeting of Dying Matters, a broad coalition of groups engaged in end of life issues, but not voluntary euthanasia. Work on palliative care, so-called “well-being” and chaplains is now being handled for the Society by Dr. Robert Stovold. As this Report goes to press, Robert is preparing to represent the NSS at a conference on Spirituality in Palliative Care. He will say that public funds should not be spent on chaplains, and express concern at the way the terms “spiritual care” and “spiritual needs” are being used as Trojan horses to insinuate religion into the NHS by the back door. Dr. Stovold’s background is in the biological sciences rather than medicine. He is both an active member of the National Secular Society and Brighton and Hove Humanist Society and wrote *Did Christians Steal Christmas?*



Robert Stovold

## SUBMISSIONS

As well as our more high-profile campaigning work, the NSS is often invited to submit consultation documents to the Government and other bodies.

Subjects we have covered this year include three consultations for the BBC about *Thought for the Day* and religious programming as well as religious bias in radio such as on the *Today* programme.

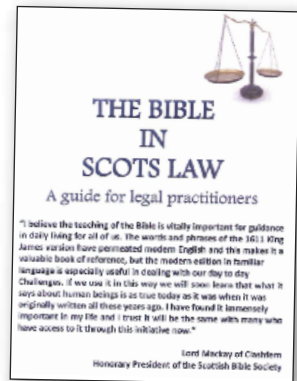
We also made [two submissions on PSHE and SRE](#) (sex education). With rising teenage pregnancies and STI rates, it is imperative that this subject is compulsory in all schools but the current government will allow each school to determine what is taught and whether even limited facts are mixed with religion-based moral judgement.

A [submission](#) was made to the General Pharmaceutical Council objecting to pharmacists being permitted to refuse to sell emergency contraception and another to the UNHRC on child abuse.

We are pleased to report that a [submission](#) we made last year has resulted in ancient remains at Avebury remaining there for scientific enquiry and public interest rather than being given to Druids who claimed a religious right to them. This result has become especially pertinent as Druidism is now officially recognised as a religion.

## SCOTLAND

■ We drew national attention to former Lord Chancellor and Lord Advocate Lord Mackay of Clashfern's preface to a booklet published by the Scottish Bible Society which they had sent with Bibles to Scottish courts. It advised them to take biblical law into account when dispensing justice.



\*See page 16 for full reproduction of leaflet text

The booklet even listed biblical references – mainly from the Old Testament – for specific topics and circumstances. Notably absent was any reference to the Enlightenment, democratically determined law, or Human Rights. The booklet was launched with great pomp at the Signet Library in Edinburgh by the leaders of the current Scottish legal establishment.

■ We are asking Honorary Associate Patrick Harvie MSP to press for the removal of a time bar which is a major obstacle to mounting civil cases against alleged child abusers in Scotland, which we became aware of when meeting victims in the context of the Pope's visit.

■ An organisation called the Centre for Intelligent Design has been set up in Glasgow. "Intelligent Design" (ID) is generally regarded as creationism dressed up in specious scientific language. We wrote to both Michael Russell MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Lifelong Learning, and to Learning and Teaching in Scotland (the principal curriculum body) asking them to state that there is no place for ID in science classes.

The Centre appears to be closely allied with the US based Discovery Institute which explicitly seeks to replace teaching of scientific explanations of origins with "the theistic understanding that nature and human beings are created by God".

Scotland is vulnerable to such initiatives because the Scottish curriculum does not proscribe the teaching of creationism in science lessons. In England and Wales, Ofsted has stated that creationism may be taught in schools only as a religious idea and not as a credible scientific alternative.

Members in Scotland who are concerned about this issue can write to Michael Russell here: [Michael.Russell.msp@scottish.parliament.uk](mailto:Michael.Russell.msp@scottish.parliament.uk)

## MEAT FROM SLAUGHTER WITHOUT STUNNING

The Society lobbied the European Parliament in support of an amendment that would require meat from slaughter without stunning to be so labelled. The amendment was passed, and a report from Brussels suggests our work may have played a part in this. Nevertheless, opposition is fierce and the amendment has further stages to survive before the regulations are finalised.

Henry Grunwald QC, chairman of Shechita UK, has sought to dissuade MEPs from supporting labelling of such meat

with the argument: "It would have a significant impact on the kosher meat industry, ultimately making shechita economically unviable." This implicitly acknowledges that a high proportion of this meat would not be sold if purchasers knew how it had been slaughtered. It also seeks to justify keeping consumers in ignorance of the slaughter method so that they continue, albeit unknowingly, to subsidise or even underpin a slaughter method of which they do not approve.

We have accordingly been lobbying in the UK, at the most senior level at the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the Food Standards Authority and have been collaborating with the Farm Animal Welfare Council.

Politicians fearful of upsetting the well-organised lobbies so determined to retain religious slaughter may now have an even more vociferous lobby to contend with. Prominent stories have appeared in a number of newspapers exposing well-known restaurant and fast food chains, caterers and schools serving halal meat, unbeknown to their customers. The Society's concerns were quoted in most of these stories.

So far, the new Minister, James Paice, seems reluctant to back even the modest amendment to label meat. Rather than leaving member states to act as they wish, we believe the Minister should be calling for the labelling amendment in the European Parliament to be extended to include food outlets. Our negotiations with Mr Paice are continuing.

## SECULAR MEDICAL FORUM

Antony Lempert, chair of the Secular Medical Forum, led a strategy meeting in London for medical and legal experts on the topic of circumcision. The SMF has met with the doctors' regulatory body the GMC outlining why non-therapeutic excision of the foreskin (NTEF), "ritual male circumcision", violates the GMC's own ethical framework. At the instigation of the SMF, the Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence (CHRE) is determining whether or not the GMC is failing in its duty of care to protect children by not regulating against such harmful and unnecessary surgery.

The SMF made a submission calling for pharmacists' guidelines not to permit conscience opt-outs. The SMF and NSS responded jointly to the DPP's interim guidance on Assisted Suicide. In July, the GMC published new guidance on End of Life Treatment and Care. Against SMF advice, the GMC is preparing for doctors with 'religious, moral or other personal beliefs' to withdraw from providing care if they object to a competent patient's decision to refuse such treatment.

SMF members spoke to delegates at the British Medical Association meeting in Brighton on life care, homeopathy and religious attempts to change people's sexual orientation.

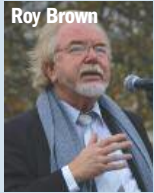
The SMF is also working with the Royal College of Nursing in Wales to explore a more equitable and cost-effective chaplaincy service for Wales.

## Other Activities

### INTERNATIONAL

#### Foreign Office and Human Rights

At the beginning of the year, Keith Porteous Wood made one of his regular visits to one of the permanent secretaries at the Foreign Office. These are to discuss the work of the International Humanist and Ethical Union's delegation to the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. Keith is part of the team. He was delighted to go with NSS life member Roy Brown who has done a great deal of important work heading the delegation. Roy said: "We were warmly received and it was an invaluable opportunity to exchange helpful information."



After a long stint as head of the Geneva delegation, Roy is handing over to Jack Jeffery, who has until recently spent many years on IHEU's board and who happens to be another NSS life member.



#### NSS in Brussels

The NSS has a seat on the Advisory Board of the European Parliamentary Platform for Secularism in Politics which was reconstituted and renamed after the May elections. We are represented on the Platform by Council member Elizabeth O'Casey, and either Stephen Evans or Keith Porteous Wood from the staff. The Platform is chaired by the tireless Honorary Associate Sophie in 't



Veld MEP. We have also been working closely on secular matters in Brussels with Michael Cashman MEP for many years and more recently with Mary Honeyball MEP.

#### EU Fundamental Rights Agency

We are continuing our close co-operation with the senior management of the Fundamental Rights Agency in Vienna on matters of mutual interest and concern. They have expressed their gratitude for our work.

#### UN Special Rapporteur's retirement

The NSS formally thanked UN Special Rapporteur on Religion and Belief Mrs Asma Jahangir at a UN Human Rights Council session in Geneva and paid tribute to this brave Human



Rights campaigner. In her valedictory speech, Mrs Jahangir drew attention to the harmful effects of religion on women, growing religious intolerance and the spread of Sharia. She noted that it is countries with poor human rights records that are most in favour of "defamation of religion" legislation.

The NSS is proud to have facilitated her address to the European Parliament in June 2008, similar to those made by heads of state. She is one of the few, and perhaps the only, woman to have done so.

## VICTORIES OVER QUESTIONABLE CLAIMS

The NSS has had several successful adjudications after reporting religious groups who claim to cure cancer and other diseases to the Advertising Standards Authorities and Trading Standards. Staff and individual members have made formal complaints about posters and flyers including the United Church of the Kingdom of God in London, Body of Christ International Ministries in Manchester and Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries in Edinburgh. Our thanks to all involved. If you would like information on how to challenge questionable claims in your area, please contact the office.

## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Keith Porteous Wood spoke about the work of the NSS to civil servants in the Department of Health in London and was relayed interactively to the Leeds office so employees there could participate. The presentation was followed by an enthusiastic discussion and we were told it was the best attended of the series.

## STUDENT NEWS

We are increasingly hearing examples of religious groups on campus objecting to atheist and secular groups at Freshers' Week Fairs, or to such groups winning awards. There has also been vandalism at events, problems with security, complaints about posters and even death threats. We are stepping up our support for such groups to resist extremism.

We have strengthened our links with student groups over the last year, providing them with speakers and materials for Freshers' Weeks. Over the summer, we had meetings with the new officers of the National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies (AHS), and continue to work closely with them. Our concessionary rate of £9 a year for students has brought us many more individual student members.

Our series of eight informative leaflets on secular topics primarily aimed at students have proved popular throughout the year. They are free to student groups or they can be bought through our online shop.

If you would like information on how to set up a student group, the office will be pleased to help you. We will also be happy to help with speakers, materials and any problems.

## HONORARY ASSOCIATES

|                       |                                      |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Graham Allen MP       | Baroness Kinnock                     |
| Prof. Peter Atkins    | Stewart Lee                          |
| Iain Banks            | Graham Linehan                       |
| Lorraine Barrett AM   | Baroness Massey of Darwin            |
| Edward Bond           | Jonathan Meades                      |
| Michael Cashman MEP   | Sir Jonathan Miller                  |
| Nick Cohen            | Maryam Namazie                       |
| Prof. Richard Dawkins | Taslina Nasrin                       |
| Lord Desai            | Lord O'Neill of Clackmannan          |
| Angela Eagle MP       | Lord Peston                          |
| Baroness Flather      | Sir Terry Pratchett                  |
| Ricky Gervais         | Philip Pullman                       |
| Lord Goodhart QC      | Martin Rowson                        |
| Prof. A C Grayling    | Joan Smith                           |
| Johann Hari           | Dr. David Starkey                    |
| Dr. Evan Harris       | Lord Taverne QC                      |
| Patrick Harvie MSP    | Polly Toynbee                        |
| Christopher Hitchens  | Baroness Turner of Camden            |
| Prof. Ted Honderich   | Sophie in't Veld MEP                 |
| Mary Honeyball MEP    | Gore Vidal                           |
| Kelvin Hopkins MP     | Prof. Lord Wedderburn of Charlton QC |
| Virginia Ironside     |                                      |
| Professor Steve Jones |                                      |

### Dr Evan Harris loses parliamentary seat

Recent winner of Secularist of the Year Dr Evan Harris narrowly lost his Oxford West and Abingdon seat in this year's General Election following smear campaigns by religious opponents and by animal rights activists. His courageous work and immense effectiveness in Parliament particularly on secular and scientific fronts made him many enemies. Parliament will be the poorer

without his many talents and unstinting work. We are immensely grateful to him for his hugely effective support for secularism and hope he will be back in Parliament at the first opportunity.



Dr Evan Harris

We are pleased to welcome four new Honorary Associates:



© David Bird

Sir Terry Pratchett

**Sir Terry Pratchett** was awarded an OBE in 1998 and in 2009 he was made a Knight Bachelor 'for services to literature'. He has written forty-nine books and co-written a further fifty. Sir Terry is a strong supporter of secularism and an active campaigner for the legalisation of assisted dying.

**Professor Colin Blakemore** is a neurobiologist at Oxford University specializing in vision and development of the brain. He has been chief executive of the British Medical Research Council and President of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. He is an outspoken critic of the teaching of creationism and of the expansion of maintained religious schools.



Professor Colin Blakemore



Lord Goodhart

**Lord Goodhart QC** is a leading human rights lawyer, a spokesman for the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords and previously served as the LibDem Shadow Lord Chancellor. He was knighted in 1989 and was created a life peer as Baron Goodhart of Youlbury in 1997.

**Virginia Ironside** was an agony aunt at *Woman* magazine. She later became problem page editor for the *Sunday Mirror* and *Today* and currently writes for the *Independent* and the *Oldie*. She was strongly critical of the Pope's visit.



Virginia Ironside

Four of our Honorary Associates have died this year:



Claire Rayner

**Claire Rayner OBE** (1931 – 2010) One of our most valued and loved honorary associates, Claire will be sorely missed by all at the NSS.

**Michael Foot** (1913 – 2010) was a Labour Member of Parliament from 1945 to 1955 and from a by-election in 1960 until 1992.

He was also the Leader of the Opposition from 1980 to 1983.

**FitzRoy Somerset, Lord Raglan** (1927 – 2010) was a hereditary peer who represented our interests in the House of Lords.

**Lord (Andrew) McIntosh of Haringey** (1933 – 2010) was greatly respected in both the House of Lords and the Council of Europe, by political opponents and allies alike.

All were committed secularists and campaigners. We greatly valued their support and regret their loss.



## YOUR COUNCIL AT 30 SEPTEMBER 2010

### President

Terry Sanderson

### Vice President

Carla Revere

### Honorary Treasurer

Stephen Dunkling

### Other Council Members

Dan Bye

Zoe Cox

Surendra Lal

Ray Newton

Elizabeth O'Casey

Martin Perry

Gerard Phillips

Afonso Reis e Sousa

Peter Vlachos

Council members standing down at the 2009 AGM were Vice President Dr Anna Behan, Treasurer Jim Nugent and council member Jennifer Jaynes. We would like to place on record our thanks to: Dr Behan for her hard work, particularly as Chair of Council and on the Equalities Bill; to Jim Nugent for his role in implementing new management and accounting systems (and his continuing assistance with accounting); and to Jennifer Jaynes for her years of service.

As noted in the last Annual Report, Denis Cobell and Jim Herrick also retired after decades of service on Council during which they served as President and Vice President respectively.

We were delighted to welcome Stephen Dunkling as the incoming Honorary Treasurer and new Council members Zoe Cox and Gerard Phillips.

## COUNCIL MEMBERS' ACTIVITIES

Terry Sanderson masterminded our highly successful Protest the Pope campaign. He was on the platform at the Fabian Conference with Government Minister Sadiq Khan debating Faith and Secularism.



Carla Revere

Vice President Carla Revere, who is also Chair of Council, has worked closely with Keith Porteous Wood on our long term campaigns to pressurise the Government to remove the unfair discrimination against non-religious teachers in publicly-funded schools and academies. She also contributed to *Sharia Law in Britain: a Threat to One Law for All and Equal Rights* (co-authored by NSS Honorary Associate

Maryam Namazie. Other contributors included Keith Porteous Wood and NSS life member Roy Brown). Carla also debated 'Britain should be a secular state' with Farnham Humanists.

In June, Gerard represented the NSS at the demonstration against Sharia in Whitehall and at the launch of the new report *Sharia Law in Britain: a Threat to One Law for All and Equal Rights*. He also helped out on the Protest the Pope campaign.



Gerard Phillips



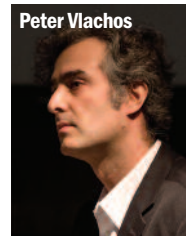
Elizabeth O'Casey

Council member

Elizabeth O'Casey is one of our representatives in Brussels and (with staff member Tessa Kendall and volunteer Mazin Zeki) attended a meeting at the Ministry of Justice to discuss proposals for a new UK Bill of Rights. Elizabeth gave a talk to the Enfield Young Conservatives and

attended a conference at the British Institute of International and Comparative Law on "Islamic Law Before the Courts". She has also prepared briefing notes on Sharia law.

Peter Vlachos debated at Brentwood School (Essex) and represents the NSS at the EHRC's Religion and Belief Consultative Group. Peter also responded to the Chartered Management Institute consultation on chaplains in the workplace.



Peter Vlachos

Terry is our principal media spokesperson (particularly onerous with the Pope's visit), editor of *Newsline*, compiler of the daily updated *What the Papers Say*, and plans *Secularist of the Year*.

## INTERNAL MATTERS

Stephen Dunkling, Ray Newton and Carla Revere are members of the staff sub-committee. Stephen Dunkling, Martin Perry and Keith Porteous Wood are members of the investment sub-committee.



Stephen Dunkling

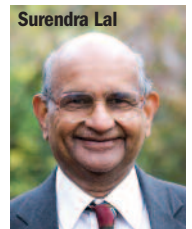
Stephen also led the project to modernise the Society's Memorandum and Articles of Association. He ran our stall at the Fabian Conference along with Gerard Phillips.



Dan Bye



Zoe Cox



Surendra Lal



Ray Newton



Martin Perry



Afonso Reis e Sousa

## VOLUNTEERS AND DONATIONS

As ever, our thanks go to our volunteers. We are very grateful to the growing band of people who give their time, energy and skills to our events and on research projects, whether in our offices or remotely.

We would also like to thank all the members who have helped us in our campaigns, including complaining to the BBC about *Thought for the Day* and similar issues. Also thanks to members who gave out leaflets and wore our Pope Nope T shirts at various Gay Prides around the country and the London march.

We are grateful to members who run stalls at local events, get involved in local campaigns and alert us to local issues. If you would like to get involved with our work, please contact the office.

We once more thank all those volunteers who we have named in the regular bulletins. The NSS Council sends thanks to all our members who have made donations in the last year or remembered us in their wills.

As well as one-off donations, we very much appreciate the growing number of members who are taking out standing orders that allow us to commit to future campaigns as well as funding our current work.

We welcome donations and you can request a standing order form (for a new standing order or to increase your existing one) by clicking the Donate button on the website. Alternatively, the office will be pleased to help you with these or leaving us a legacy.

We are funded entirely by memberships, standing orders and donations and, in order to maintain our independence, we neither receive nor seek public funding.

**Our fighting fund in the legal battle against council prayers is still short of its target and we would really welcome your support for this important campaign, which you can help with by donating online or by sending a cheque made out to NSS to the office.**

This is developing into a totemic battle between secularism and religious privilege. Our opponents are both determined and very well funded.



Volunteers at the 2009 AGM

## GROUPS AFFILIATED TO THE NSS

Bedfordshire Humanists; Belfast Humanist Group; Birmingham Humanists; Brighton & Hove Humanist Society; Chiltern Humanists; Cornwall Humanists; Cotswold Humanists; Coventry & Warwickshire Humanists; Cumbria Humanist Group; Devon Humanists; Durham University Humanist and Secularist Society; East Kent Humanists; Essex Humanists; Farnham Humanists; Greater Manchester Humanist Group; Hampstead Humanist Society; Havering & District Humanist Society; Humanist and Secular Liberal Democrats; Humanist Society of West Yorkshire; Isle of Wight Secular Humanist Group; Lancashire Secular Humanists; Leicester Secular Society; Lewisham Humanist Group; Norfolk Secular and Humanist Group; North London Humanist Group; Nottingham Secular Society; Oxford Humanists; Sheffield Humanist Society; South Hampshire Humanists; South Somerset Humanists; Suffolk Humanist and Secularist Group; Sutton Humanist Group; Welsh Marches Humanist Group; West London Humanists and Secularists.

## GROUPS THE NSS SUPPORTS

Abortion Rights, Amnesty International, Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain, Dignity in Dying, European Humanist Federation, European Women's Lobby, International Humanist and Ethical Union, Lawyers Secular Society, Liberty, National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies (AHS), Secular Medical Forum.

\*Full reproduction of leaflet text from page 12

### **The Bible in Scots Law – A guide for legal practitioners**

*"I believe the teaching of the Bible is vitally important for guidance in daily living for us all. The words and phrases of the 1611 King James version have permeated modern English and this makes it a valuable book of reference, but the modern edition in familiar language is especially useful in dealing with our day to day challenges. If we use it in this way we will soon learn that what it says about human beings is as true today as it was when it was originally written all these years ago. I have found it immensely important in my life and I trust it will be the same with many who have access to it through this initiative now".*

Lord MacKay of Clashfern, Honorary President of the Scottish Bible Society

# Britain's only organisation working exclusively towards a secular society

## JOIN US

**If you believe, as we do, that a secular Britain is our best way to achieve true equality for all citizens, regardless of their religious beliefs, then please join us and become part of what is possibly the most important debate of the 21st century. Together we can create a fairer and more equal society.**

You can join us online at [www.secularism.org.uk/join.html](http://www.secularism.org.uk/join.html) or by contacting the office at [admin@secularism.org.uk](mailto:admin@secularism.org.uk) or by calling **020 7404 3126**

Annual membership is £29, £17 for unwaged and £9 for students

Joint membership, for two people at the same address, is £45 and overseas membership is £51.

### Start a standing Order

A monthly standing order is the most effective way to join and donate to the NSS: it allows us to predict how much money we will have available, and also cuts down on administration costs, enabling us to considerably increase our scale of activities. A form can be obtained by contacting the office.

### TWITTER

Find us @natsecsoc – or click the link from our homepage – for the latest news, views and campaign updates.

### FACEBOOK

You can join us at *Friends of the NSS* for news updates, to connect with other supporters and debate the hot issues.

“The National Secular Society is Britain’s most urgently needed pressure group.”

— Nick Cohen, *Observer*.

**[www.secularism.org.uk](http://www.secularism.org.uk)**

National Secular Society, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL | Tel: (020) 7404 3126 | Email: [admin@secularism.org.uk](mailto:admin@secularism.org.uk)  
Executive Director: Keith Porteous Wood FCA | Senior Office Staff: Tessa Kendall, Stephen Evans