



# Humanistically Speaking

December 2022

Speaking out for the non-religious. On values. On issues. On life.

## Poverty & Prejudice

I look down  
on him

I look down  
on him

I know my  
place

Is humanism too middle class?

Anthony's antidote to doom and gloom

The staggering wealth of Nigerian pastors

Uganda Humanist Schools face 'perfect storm'

When Maggie was dumped by her new friend

The digital future of *Humanistically Speaking*

Humanist Climate Action COP27 Declaration

A seasonal message of goodwill from Santa

Image: Flickr

Humanistically  
Speaking



send an email

YouTube



# In this Issue

*Come in, sit down, put your feet up...*

**David Brittain**  
Executive Editor



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## CONTENT DISCLAIMER

Our editorial team consists of humanist volunteers. Articles are written by them, or by our readers and contributors, and published at the discretion of the editorial team. We strive to publish content in line with humanist aims and values, but views expressed by writers are their own and not necessarily shared by any associated Humanist groups or Humanists UK.

Our themes this month are poverty, class, prejudice and discrimination. We often read in the media about 'unconscious bias' as it relates to different skin colours but we often ignore, or even tacitly accept, the prejudice which is staring us in the face – the one which is based on class and social origins. I'm proud of the fact that our team of editors here at *Humanistically Speaking* Towers hail from a wide variety of different social and educational backgrounds. Some of our editors and contributors have PhDs whilst others left school at sixteen. For this reason, I believe we are uniquely well-placed to explore our chosen themes this month and I hope you will agree with me that our editors have written some fascinating, and very personal, stories about their origins and journeys through life.

When we launched *Humanistically Speaking* magazine nearly three years ago, I was advised not to display the number of each edition on the front cover, in case we disappeared after just a few editions. But I would like to let you into a little secret. This is our thirtieth issue! I'd like to thank our incredible team of hard-working writers and editors for this amazing achievement. I'd also like to thank *you*, our loyal readers, for coming with us on this journey. We've come through the death of Queen Elizabeth II, the Covid-19 pandemic, Black Lives Matter protests, the invasion of Ukraine, three Prime Ministers, and countless other events. Each and every one invites a humanistic response and we have done our level best to stimulate discussion and debate in the humanist community in the UK and beyond. I'm especially pleased about the links we have made with our humanist friends in Africa.

I'm also sad to be saying farewell to our PDF format which has been such a pleasure to create. But I know what a burden it places on our dedicated team of volunteers, and I'm also conscious of the fact that the future is digital. And so, from January 2023, *Humanistically Speaking* magazine is going fully digital. But we will still be creating the best possible content for you, and we are confident that through social media we will reach many more thousands of readers in the months and years ahead. *Happy reading and compliments of the season.*



## Humanist Climate Action COP27 Declaration and call for climate justice

Humanist Climate Action has called for a redoubling of efforts to tackle the climate crisis. The network welcomes the 'centring of climate justice and voices from those countries that have contributed least to the climate crisis but will often be affected most'. They have called for the ending of public financing of coal, oil, and gas projects in the UK and overseas, facilitation and promotion of low-carbon lifestyles, faster progress towards net zero, and a recognition that richer countries are responsible for most past use of fossil fuels and are more able to pay for the transition to net zero.

Humanist Climate Action is a volunteer-led network of Humanists UK members and supporters committed to redefining lifestyles and campaigning for policies that promote low-carbon, ethical, and sustainable living in the light of the degeneration of the Earth's climate and biodiversity. Humanists seek to engage in dialogue and debate rationally, intelligently, and with evidence, and promote the belief that humans are part of a wider natural world which must be treated sustainably for the sake of current and future generations.

More [here](#) and see event details below ▾





## Windsor Humanists Host Interfaith Dialogue

In October, Windsor Humanists hosted an interfaith dialogue forum on the topic 'What Makes Us Human?' Windsor Humanists volunteers put on a great spread of tea, coffee, cakes and biscuits for our guests, and we got great feedback about the event from Paul Samuels the co-ordinator of the series and co-chair of the Windsor & Maidenhead Community Forum - one of the local interfaith groups in East Berkshire. There were guests from several faiths, including Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and Baha'is, and, of course, humanists.

Paul said, 'Congratulations! Although we didn't have big numbers, the quality was

superb. I think it was one of our best dialogues. It was great seeing the support you got from your fellow humanists. It was well organised, and you can see people were lifted by the experience.'

There were no great revelations – just a realisation of how hard it is to answer simply the question posed! Participants said that humans can be both humane and inhumane to each other and nature, that we all mostly have a sense of wonder at existence, that we do care for each other, we are social animals and have a deep need to belong and feel part of our communities.







Editorial Conference: Aaron, Alan, Tony, David B, Karen, Anthony, John, David W



## ***Humanistically Speaking* goes fully digital**

In August this year, the *Humanistically Speaking* team met for their annual conference near Basingstoke to discuss the year ahead, issues arising, and other matters. Our host for the day, a newcomer to humanism, complimented us on our message but challenged us to think differently about our medium. Fewer and fewer people, especially young people, have the attention spans to read long-format magazines and most media content is now distributed in bite-size chunks. And so we took the radical decision to say a fond farewell to our PDF format and deliver the same great content to you in a different way. Let's spell out what this means for you:

- We will still have a monthly theme and focus
- Articles will not be constrained by current word limits. We can now offer you a mix of short and long reads and we will indicate what to expect at the top of each article.
- As a valued subscriber, you will have access to the whole month's content from your monthly email, but we will also 'feed' our content out to social media during the month. Our website will retain everything in themed monthly blocks, so if you miss any, you can go back and access them.
- There will be more user interaction – you will be able to add comments underneath our articles. Just create an account and log in to do this. Individual articles will ▷



All readers are reminded that our PDF format terminates this month. Please follow the link in future emails or on our website for continuation of our great service. Please mind the gap!



# Humanist News



be shareable on your social media, thus widening our interaction with the world. If you want to chat about something with friends, sharing the link makes it easier.

- We can expand our scope with polls and surveys, and hopefully find out what you, our readers, really think about the issues of the day.
- We won't be limited to a maximum of just one or two photos, so coverage of special events and conferences will be more visually appealing.

Our dozen-strong volunteer team has been working hard in the background these past few months, developing, shaping and getting ready to deliver this new medium to you. The current PDF format, although loved by some, including the team itself, takes over thirty hours to create, and as many of our editors also run their own humanist groups, this has become unsustainable for a fourth year. But that wasn't the clincher. It's the way people now interact with media that made the decision for us.

*Humanistically Speaking* has grown from its original four creators to a whole network of editors, writers, guest writers and technology support members and business advisors, who bring you 360+ pages a year of humanistic content. Our first, pre-Covid, edition was printed. We then went virtual and increased from bi-monthly to monthly and now we are reaching out further across the digital universe. Planet-wise, we are already present

in half a dozen countries, with a regular writer in South Africa, and guest writers from New Zealand and Norway.

The humanist voice is reaching across the globe and, together with our friends in other humanist organisations, we are doing our bit to promote reason, critical thinking, planet preservation and humanity to the bipeds of the world. If our little magazine can help make anyone out there stop, pause and rethink their approach to any of the interesting themes we explore, then we've done our job.

*Humanistically Speaking* is a free publication. We give our time for free and our contributors write for free, but sadly technology and communication are not free. As always, if those with the largest pockets are able to help fund us, we would be extremely grateful. No hard push, no emotional blackmail, no frequent letters or emails, but if you're able to then visit [here to donate](#).

*A big thank you from all of us.*

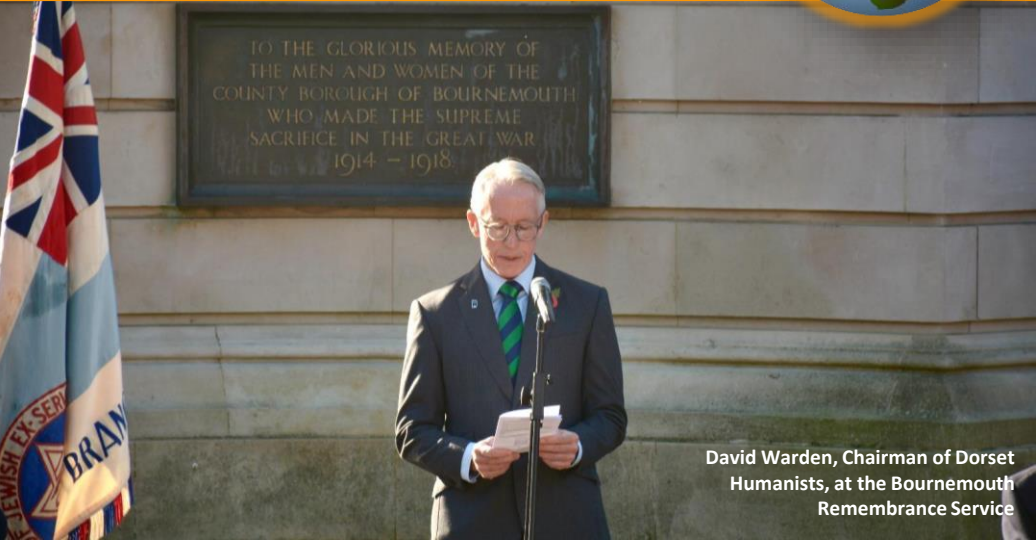
## Have you visited our website yet?

We know it's hard to believe, but some of you haven't yet visited our website! It's taken hundreds of hours of our volunteers' time to create, and it will be 'our future home' more so than in the past. Why not click the link below and have a browse, so that in January it's not as scary a change. As always, we welcome feedback.





# Humanist News



David Warden, Chairman of Dorset Humanists, at the Bournemouth Remembrance Service

## Humanists at Remembrance Service

David Warden has taken part in the civic Bournemouth Remembrance Service since 2013, alongside clergy of the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church, the Salvation Army, Free Churches, Orthodox and Reformed Synagogues, and a local mosque. These are the words he says, the only secular part of an otherwise religious service:

*Peace begins with respect. If we cannot accept a world of human difference we will never enjoy a world of peace.*

*Peace needs humility. If we are willing to see our own faults then the bridges of trust can be rebuilt.*

*Peace needs co-operation. If we realise that most of what we desire cannot be secured by ourselves alone we will cultivate friendship.*

*Peace needs compromise. It needs a willingness to tolerate a world that is less than perfect.*

*Peace requires justice. We must be willing to share the world's resources fairly.*

*Peace is hard work. There are no laws of history that will guarantee its arrival.*

*So let our tribute to those of all beliefs who have suffered and died in conflict be our resolve to work for peace.*





## Group Successes and Challenges

*Humanists UK Branch Pilot Project Manager Alastair Lichten recently surveyed Humanists UK Partner Groups to find out about their successes and challenges. These are some of his findings!*

**Birmingham Humanists** set up a friendship group (BrumHumsChums) on Zoom, which takes place once a month and is hosted by two members of the committee. It is helping to build a sense of community in the group.

**Brighton Humanists** increased engagement through use of more 'professional' mailings using Mailchimp. They are also expanding their activity to include socials as well as educational talks and introducing new members to the group this way.

**Bristol Humanists** gained permission for a Blue Plaque in honour of Emma Martin, a mid-19th century Bristol free-thinker. They also broadened their activities including stalls at two community events, a walk and picnic, and a humanist history walk which have attracted new people.

**Dorset Humanists** supported Bournemouth LGBT Pride with a display in the town centre, took part in three freshers' fairs at Bournemouth University and refreshed their humanist library at their main venue.

**East London Humanists** accepted six invitations to speak at civic vigils for Queen

Elizabeth II in three London Boroughs, and held an interactive stall at a local festival in October which attracted many positive responses.

**Ely Humanists** kept going through Covid-19 and they have just hosted a very interesting talk on Humanist Weddings, Namings and Funerals by a Humanists UK Celebrant.

**Farnham Humanists** held their annual Garden Party in July with 35 attendees. They are back to having monthly in-person speaker events, often with an outside speaker. They also have a Zoom link for the events, so that people who aren't able or keen to meet in person can still hear the talks and ask questions if they wish.

**Gloucestershire Humanists** had a stand at the local Pride festival and really enjoyed being together and had no trouble getting volunteers. Sunday breakfasts are still really popular with minimal fuss – they just set the date and meet at Wetherspoons. They sent copies of *The Little Book of Humanism* to all county secondary schools and got some great feedback. ▷







# Humanist News



**Peterborough Humanists** have introduced social meet ups alongside regular group events which have been popular and made links with other local community groups and invited them to speak at their events.

**Plymouth Humanists** survived Covid with e-talk, quizzes, and socials). They have resumed their programme of talks and social and cultural events.

**Reading Humanists** had a stand at Reading Pride and gained a 35% increase in subscribers. They contacted Reading Mayor and have been invited to the Remembrance Day parade. They ran the *What is Humanism?* Course, describing it as 'iffy' but it attracted some new members.

**Shropshire Humanists** had stalls at two local multicultural and interfaith gatherings which stimulated lots of interest. They are developing connections with Indian secular and atheist groups with a view to holding a joint Zoom event.

**South East London Humanists** had a really good summer picnic in Greenwich Park with neighbouring East London Humanists. They have supported their local refugee charity Action for Refugees in Lewisham over the years and managed to raise a few hundred pounds on a couple of occasions recently with Zoom story-telling and poetry reading events.

**South West London Humanists** held a 'Secular Verses' poetry evening (on Zoom) with Alex Williams and they are active in local interfaith forums and SACRES.

## Challenges – a selection

Many groups report that they are still struggling to get back to where they were pre-Covid. Key challenges include an ageing demographic, low attendance at events, attracting new members and volunteers.

*'A fear that partner groups are increasingly being left to their own devices.'*

*'Attracting and retaining the interest of younger people.'*

*'Keeping the website up-to-date.'*

*'Ideas on successful and popular venues and styles of meetings to allow for more variety in our programme of events.'*

*'Managing communication – it would be interesting to know how much communication other local groups offer their members and the nature of this.'*

*'Still a hangover from Covid-19, members being reticent about meeting in person.'*

*'Costs are increasing. We have often held a Yuletide dinner in a local restaurant - now we need to pay a room booking fee in addition.'*

*'How to increase membership and find more volunteers.'*

*'Difficulty getting speakers as we cover a very rural area.'*

*'Persuading members to train as school volunteers.'*

*'I listen with envy to humanist groups who seem embedded in their community.'*





## Humanist Schools in Uganda ‘facing perfect storm’

*An appeal to UK Humanist Groups from Steve Hurd, Chair of the Uganda Humanist Schools Trust*

I should be most grateful if you could arrange for your readers to be informed of the Appeal we have mounted to help the Humanist Schools in Uganda. They are facing a perfect storm of crises due to slow post-Covid recovery, drought and high food prices, and high energy costs due to Russia's war against Ukraine. The schools need financial help if they are to survive until local families can pay full school fees again.

Uganda Humanist Schools Trust now supports four more Humanist primary schools; two that we have built (both schools are in areas that have experienced huge strife) and two, former religious schools, that we have bought and turned into inclusive Humanist ones. Further work needs to be carried out to bring them up to scratch and to help them during their infancy to pay their teachers and other essential costs. For this, we need to increase our regular inflow of funds in order to make regular monthly support transfers to the schools.

Our existing supporters are already covering most of the costs, but if others in the Humanist community would help, it would

make a huge difference. At the present time, the best way in which new supporters could help the schools would be by providing regular monthly payments through standing order or PayPal. The focus of this appeal is to raise funds to help the Uganda Humanist Schools financially through to 2023, by which time we hope that economic conditions and school fee income will have recovered.

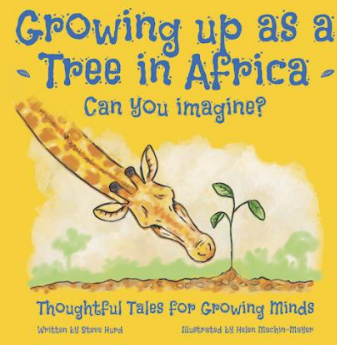
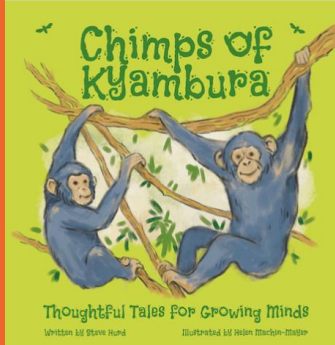
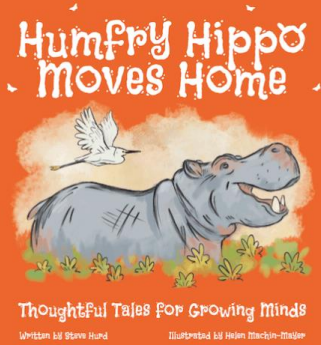
Finally, please convey my thanks to those of your readers who have been supporting the schools through UHST. Many have done so for many years and they have opened up life chances for many young people in Uganda.

### How to donate

Details of how you may make payments to save these path-breaking Humanist Schools can be found on the [UHST Donate Page](#). All donations will be acknowledged and we will, if you choose, send periodic updates on the schools' progress. Updates are also posted in the [News section](#) of our website: [ugandahumanistschoolstrust.org](http://ugandahumanistschoolstrust.org).

**You can also buy Steve's children's books.**  
See next page for details ►





# Thoughtful Tales for Growing Minds

These three brilliant books for children have been written by Steve Hurd, teacher and Chair of the Uganda Humanist Schools Trust, and they are beautifully illustrated by Helen Machin-Mayer.

The books are an outcome of the Human Studies Project, an initiative which helps children to develop a moral compass for a secular age. They will appeal to parents and teachers wishing to nurture thoughtful and caring children who wish to create a good life for themselves and for the global community. The stories aim to stimulate a love of the natural world and an appreciation of the challenges it faces.

## Humfry Hippo Moves Home

In this set of tales, Humfry has to cope with thirst, hunger, loss of friends, loneliness, how to react to strangers, making new friends, and settling into a new home. These thoughtful tales are designed to be read aloud to children by adults and they contain clear jumping off points to encourage children to talk about their feelings and what they would do in Humfry's position.

Contains notes for parents and teachers on empathy, jealousy, forgiveness, and more.

## Chimps of Kyambura

Chimps of Kyambura (pronounced Chamboora) introduces children to a wonderful place in Africa where about 28 chimpanzees share a narrow gorge with a rich variety of plants and other creatures. The stories give an insight into chimp lives and behaviours and the natural history of the gorge. Contains nature notes and other ideas that parents and teachers might want to talk about with their children, such as learning and sharing.

## Growing up as a Tree in Africa

The Entandrophragma tree (mahogany) has lived for 600 years. Children are invited to imagine growing from a seed to a fully grown Queen tree of the forest. The stories describe the life of the forest by day and night and the impact of the growing human population. But if we act now, all is not lost.

**Proceeds from sale of these wonderful books will help Uganda Humanist Schools Trust in its quest to provide the life-enhancing gift of a decent education to children from deprived rural communities in Uganda.**

Buy all three [here](#)





# Dear David...

## Emails to the Editor

*This is your letters page; you don't have to be a humanist to tell us your thoughts.*

### The Future of Humanism

Reading the report of "The Future of Humanism" meeting in the November edition of *Humanistically Speaking*, one gains an impression of a proportion of Humanists UK members who have an appetite for greatly expanding the goals of the organisation. While the concern for the future and the enthusiasm of these members is appreciated, the practicality of such a venture must be questioned.

Humanists UK is a small organisation with limited and insecure funding. I understand it to have a relatively focussed core remit - principally the promotion of Humanism as a worldview alternative to religion. For this the road is indeed long and hard, and is most appropriately pursued in schools and parliament. Humanists UK also supports a number of campaigns on issues that are central to Humanist philosophy, such as rights and equality, secularism and some ethical issues where Humanists are in broad agreement.

The prospects of this organisation being able to impact the suggested vast and complex problem areas such as media misinformation, the presumed negative overall impact of artificial intelligence, and global economic development, must be remote. Also, should these be adopted as areas of involvement for Humanists UK, the prospects of formulating consensus Humanistic solutions to such vast and complex challenges must also be remote, as Humanism embraces those with a wide

**"...broadening the remit of Humanists UK to a vast panorama of current global problems is an exercise in futility"**

variety of views on issues that are not necessarily central to Humanism.

I would therefore suggest that broadening the remit of Humanists UK to a vast panorama of current global problems is an exercise in futility and a distraction from the appropriate and already extensive core goals of Humanists UK.

*Barry Newman, Dorset Humanists*

### Too soft on Boris

Another thought-provoking issue of *Humanistically Speaking*. My book recommendation this month is Sam Harris's book *Lying* (2013). It's short and very interesting!

I would like to take issue with Aaron Darkwood's article. 'Poor old Boris', eh? Now I think that the FIRST thing on any Prime Minister's mind should be to uphold the law of the land to set a good example to the population and to demonstrate leadership ▷



**We love hearing from our readers, so why not drop us an email and let us know what you think...**



# Dear David...

## Emails to the Editor

*This is your letters page; you don't have to be a humanist to tell us your thoughts.*

and trustworthiness. In his article, Aaron gives Mr Johnson far too much slack. Mr Johnson has a history of lying (previously sacked by Tory Party leader Michael Howard and by the editor of a national newspaper for lying to them) and although past history doesn't prove that he lied over Partygate, the Pincher affair and more, I think his past behaviour must be taken into account. Also, what sort of person, let alone a leader of the country is it that doesn't know what is going on in his own house? Unbelievable. The obvious reason Mr Johnson lied and continues to tell so many lies is because he has always got away with it in the past. He did know what was going on. Part proof of this is the fact that he kept changing his story as more and more Partygate events were exposed.

Secondly, I take issue with the article about crashing the economy by David Warden. The big difference between the Banking Crisis in 2008 and the Mini-Budget Crisis in 2022 is that, in 2008, the Labour Government did not cause the crisis. In 2008, and still today, the Conservative Party and their lapdog press continue to spout the mantra that the Labour Government in 2008 caused the worldwide mess. This is utterly untrue. However, in 2022 the crisis was caused by the UK government. In the end the only reason that the economy didn't 'crash' more, whatever technical economic meaning that 'crash' has, is because the Government did a massive U-turn and abandoned the policies that caused the 'crash' in the first place. The only reason for the U-turn was not because the 'Growth Plan' policies might be more beneficial to the rich

**"I take issue with the article by David Warden about crashing the economy... the crisis was caused by the UK government"**

rather than the poor, it was because Conservative MPs thought they might lose their jobs. Truss was an electoral liability.

The Discount Energy Support Scheme was mooted by the UK government long before the 'Growth Plan' of 23rd September but it is not a free gift. This part did not spook the markets because it was costed, unlike the tax cuts. The markets knew what was coming with the Discount Energy Support Scheme. The Government has chosen to pay for this by creating debt.

In summary, it was choices made by Mr Johnson and others in the government that led to them telling lies and/or nearly causing an 'economic crash'. Never forget when trying to defend these people that they had a choice of what path to take. Mr Johnson could have stuck to the law and he then would not have been forced to tell lies. And the government didn't have to have the unfunded tax cuts part of the 'Growth Plan'.

I look forward to next month!

*Neil Camp*



**We love hearing from our readers, so why not drop us an email and let us know what you think...**



# Education and Upbringing *Advantage or Hindrance?*

by John Glazer



*John Glazer explores the relative importance of genetic factors in determining success in life, as opposed to parental attitudes and the quality of education*

Study after study has shown that the larger a father's income, the larger will be his offspring's income when they have grown up and spent time in the labour market. The question is 'Why?' Higher income allows parents to invest more in their children's education. In addition, children of richer parents may have characteristics, either genetic or learned, which make it easier for them to acquire education. A study published in 2018 by University College London (link below) found that nature is far more important than nurture when it comes to getting good academic results. While peer pressure, teaching quality, parental attitudes and the school you attend make key contributions, the researchers found that genetics account for 57 per cent of your 'A' level exam grade. Much of this is in the form of inherited intelligence but motivation, perseverance and effort are largely genetic as well – although the environment also plays a role in how hard a person is prepared to work.

The study found that genetics also account for 46 per cent of a student's academic achievement at university. Dr Emily Smith-Woolley said, 'We have shown for the first time the extent of the genetic influence on educational achievement in higher education' adding that 'Our results also demonstrate that



**A University College London study found that nature is far more important than nurture when it comes to getting good academic results**

the appetite young adults have for choosing to continue with higher education is, in part, influenced by their DNA'. The researchers also found that shared environmental factors – such as families and schools – influenced the choice of whether to go to university, accounting for 36 per cent of the differences between students.

The results were based on studying 3,000 pairs of twins from the UK as well as 3,000 individuals. Comparing identical and non-identical twin pairs allows researchers to determine the overall impact of genetics on how much people differ on measures like exam scores. If identical twins' exam scores are more alike than those of non-identical >



twins this implies the difference between twin pairs is due to genetic factors. So, although genetics appears to be the most important driver of success, 36 per cent is due to family and educational influences.

In general, more education leads to higher earnings. The education system can therefore be viewed as playing a key role in improving social mobility. If access to education and the returns to given education levels are equal regardless of family background, then education will provide a meritocratic route for the most able children to become the most well-paid adults. But there is more to getting on in life than just access to a better education. Many of the differences between children from different ends of the socio-economic scale relate to factors such as poverty and poor living conditions as well as more intangible factors such as attitude to work, expectations of parents, peer pressure and the advantage of networking while in education.

### **A high income is not the only important metric**

I am concentrating here on financial success as a way of measuring advantage. However, not everyone views this particular metric as being the most important. There are many other aspects to life than just a high income including satisfaction with the job being carried out, a work life balance that puts more emphasis on family, and having more free time to pursue other interests. These may be viewed as even more valuable than spending long hours at work striving for more and more promotions. But it's much harder to measure these intangibles.

I know from my own experience of life which, although only a sample of one at least has the benefit of a long timescale, that when it comes to measuring success, one's attitude

***"In my experience, the magic factor that singles out the successful individual is a combination of hard work, working smarter, and belief in oneself"***

to life may be even more important than educational achievement. As both an employee in my first decade after leaving school and then self-employed, working on my own and eventually as an employer, I have observed what it is that singles out those who will go on to succeed from those that don't. In most cases, it is not necessarily intelligence, although this is important, but how you apply that intelligence. Working harder helps, but working smarter is even better, and combining the two is the magic factor that singles out the individual who will rise to the top. But where does that attitude come from? Again, in my experience it is likely to be enhanced by the expectations of parents and later by the education system. It is also partly, and maybe most importantly, strongly influenced by belief in oneself.

So, what are the hindrances that I have observed? Two aspects that stand out are a lack of critical, rational, and logical cognition and a reliance on emotional thinking to solve or at least influence problems and situations. Thinking logically is vitally important, but so too is an ability to get on with colleagues and employers. Social skills may be intangible but possessing a high level is one of the contributing factors which lead to success.

In conclusion, I think we can say that, at least in the present UK context, your genetic inheritance is the most important factor in determining success in life, but your family's approach to child rearing and the school you attended also play a vital role.



# Aaron Explores

## Class prejudice and expectation... a personal journey



***“Where does the magic factor come from? In my experience it is likely to be enhanced by the expectations of parents and later by the education system. It is also partly, and maybe most importantly, strongly influenced by belief in oneself.”***

In reading John Glazer’s article, I found myself reflecting on why I didn’t succeed in school. For sure, I didn’t believe in myself, a deficiency which very likely comes from my mother’s side. My sister and her children also inherited that. But is this inherited genetically or through behaviour? Why did we go through life, right from the starting blocks, believing we weren’t good enough? None of us went to university, none of us excelled at school, and my mother left without exam results. Added to this, there was no wealth in our families, and although my dad was self-employed for a while, in the latter half of his career he preferred hands-on work rather than climbing the ladder of promotion.

On the other hand, to quote Han Solo from *Star Wars*, I had ‘delusions of grandeur’: dreams of joining the Royal Navy and commanding a ship. My sexuality closed that dream down pretty quickly due to it being banned in the Armed Forces until 2000, but I also had the ‘not good enough’ gene holding me back. Throughout my work life, I struggled to climb ladders countless times, but I was not educated enough. Lacking college or university education was a real hindrance. I gained an NVQ3 which helped but then I



**Class hatred: Jacob Rees-Mogg** Image: The Metro

couldn’t progress because I hadn’t been in charge of people – another essential on the council’s promotion chart. These drawbacks stopped me from getting an interview for half a decade.

Did lack of money in our home stop me going to university or college? None of our family had gone to college. It was what ‘other people’ did. Were we the downtrodden working class that Labour like to talk about? ‘We’ were not management material and being in charge was not our destiny. My grandad, a Labour union representative, would have hated any managers in his family. They were the enemy.

These days I have a very different outlook, but inside I still feel like an outcast. Humanism, by its very nature, is filled with educated, wealthy, university types. Their success in life has given them surplus time to think about the world, to read, explore, travel... whereas the poorer in society are so busy trying to earn money they don’t focus on anything other than survival. I’ve raised this in my humanist group when friends casually use Latin phrases, such as *inter alia*, which they have to translate for me, the uneducated. ▷



Should humanists dumb down their language to reach the lowest common denominator, or should they encourage the undereducated to reach for a dictionary from time to time?

Other friends have an overt hatred of the 'posh' and the educated. Jacob Rees-Mogg is hated because he speaks well, went to Eton, and carries himself openly as upper-class. They despise him purely because of how he talks. I wonder if this prejudice is carried across to the rest of society who dislike him? I quite like him myself, in spite of our faith differences. I've listened to him talk, enjoy his speeches, value his humour and would like to meet him in person one day.

So is personal drive and ambition inherited genetically? Is the class divide based on money or family attitudes to life? Far more people go to university now than when I left school in the 1980s. We just went out to work. Class, in the younger generation, seems far less relevant now, and a person can succeed if they want to, choose to, and make the right moves.

## Labour vs Conservative attitudes

I would like to view us as a classless society. Yes, there are the Royals, but outside of them, life is an open door to go through or not. Some of us want to be hands on, make things, produce things, explore artistic expression or creativity, and others are organisers, coordinators and managerial types. These are not classes. One can earn more money being a manager rather than an employee, but not exclusively. One route requires an educational background of high achievement, but not exclusively.

If I can venture into the political sphere for a moment, Conservatives like to view the nation as one working population, with each individual playing their part, no matter who

you are, your involvement is valued. Whereas Labour plays to the working class, the underdog, the downtrodden. Their very nature seems to perpetuate class divide, addressing people who 'know their place' and cannot escape, because if you do want more and you succeed in life then that involves you crossing the line. You become a Conservative. Your family will disown you and your friends will despise you. Why would a political party want to hold you back? It's as if they like being the victim. Someone has to make decisions, but you don't want to, and you hate anyone that does. But *'In charge is bad, we want to be in charge'* makes no sense either.

It's all very tribal, and we are no closer to an answer. We all know money can buy a better education, leading to college, university, management or research. Yet we've all seen the rich kids who drop out, who have no need to work hard because they hold wealth, it's given to them. What of them? Lack of parental pushing, or lack of inbuilt drive or self discipline?

T levels (technical-based qualifications) and an apprenticeship route now offer an alternative pathway for those who are more hands-on, inspired by their innate desire or need to create, express, and construct. The government has recognised that university is not for everyone or a pathway to all valued career paths. The greatest bricklayer, carpenter, plasterer or plumber will still be that without a university degree, yet society still rewards graduates. You are still judged by your profession wherever you go.

**I fear being on a game show, or being introduced as a guest speaker, because I think of myself as a nobody. A path of lacklustre career moves, a plethora of outside interests, and just me. I may be an unqualified underachiever. But I'm not a victim.**





# Have you got a victimhood mindset?

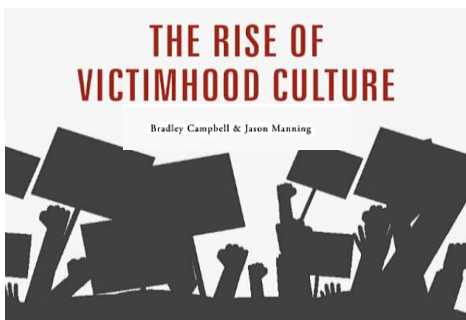
**The big issues of poverty, inequality of opportunity – and even climate change – are being neglected because society seems to be consumed by ‘culture wars’, a key feature of which is ‘victimhood culture’ which has generated a society of people who identify first and foremost as being oppressed.**

Victimhood can become a central part of an individual's identity. Those who have a perpetual victimhood mindset tend to have an ‘external locus of control’. This is the belief, according to cognitive scientist Scott Barry Kaufman, that ‘one's life is entirely under the control of forces outside oneself, such as fate, luck or the mercy of others’.<sup>1</sup>

Based on clinical observations and research, it has been found that interpersonal victimhood consists of four main dimensions:

- Constantly seeking recognition for one's victimhood;
- Moral elitism;
- Lack of empathy for the pain and suffering of others; and
- Frequently ruminating about past victimisation.

It's thought to be an acquired trait, but clearly not all who have suffered misfortunes are trapped in an image of victim mentality. It all depends how you interpret situations.



## What are the signs?

This is by no means a comprehensive list of the signs of a victimhood mindset:

- You feel as though everything is stacked against you
- When you feel sorry for yourself, it makes you feel a bit better
- You tend to hang out with others who also like to complain and blame others
- You feel like you lack support from other people
- You feel others should recognise that you have been a victim
- You want those who have done you wrong to recognise what they did
- You lack empathy for other people's problems
- You have a constant feeling of helplessness

In effect, there is a large element of catastrophising, an unhealthy coping mechanism, and interpretation bias. ▷





## Causes of victim mentality

These are some of the most common causes, again not comprehensive:

- Experiences of past trauma where this mindset was developed as a coping mechanism
- Multiple negative situations where you had no sense of control
- Ongoing emotional pain that makes you feel helpless so that you give up
- Having someone betray your trust in the past makes you feel like you can't trust people going forward (especially a parent or partner)
- A secondary gain after the initial period (e.g., making others feel guilty so that you get attention) is the pleasure felt when the 'victims' receive attention or pity as a result of their misfortune. They may also get a perverse 'thrill' from showing off the 'injury' caused by others and creating a sense of guilt

The underlying causes may lead to 'learned helplessness' (a concept developed by positive psychologist Martin Seligman) yet, if victim mentality is learned, it can also be unlearned. Taking no responsibility for a problem and laying it at the feet of other(s) can be liberating. This victim signalling – often promulgated on social media – can, predictably, lead to a flood of sympathy which, of course, is what it was intended to do. Such an outpouring can itself be addictive, and like all addictive drugs there is a dark side; its effects begin to wane, requiring the user to increase their dose until no matter how much they have, it still doesn't have the effect they're after.

## Group victimhood

A group that is completely preoccupied with its own suffering can develop what psychologists refer to as an 'egoism of victim-

hood', or the 'psychopathology of victimhood', whereby members are unable to see things from the rival group's perspective, unable to empathise with the suffering of the rival group and unwilling to accept any responsibility for harm inflicted by their own group.

## The Rise and Rise of Victimhood

Victimhood culture actively 'promotes constant vigilance and outrage' to detect micro-aggressions and divergences from approved opinion. The commitment to ideological purity – as evidenced by always being seen and heard to say 'the right thing' – can be tricky territory, even for activists: with a single slip, one can attract social shaming. Because victimhood culture is now claimed to confer the highest moral status on victims, sociologists Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning<sup>2</sup> argue that it 'increases the incentive to publicise grievances.' It gives rise to virtue signalling where the signaller makes public statements with the intent of placing themselves on a higher moral plateau. Injured and offended parties, who might once have thrown a punch or filed a lawsuit, now appeal for support on social media. Competitive victimhood – where the two sides of a conflict vie to present themselves as the *truly* victimised party – has been referred to as 'Victimhood Olympics' and may exacerbate ongoing conflicts.

Victim mentality, with the assistance of social media, has become pervasive and toxic. It has become a prized cultural asset in the new aristocracy of celebrities, influencers and activists. Is this healthy?

## Further reading

<sup>1</sup> Kaufman, S.B. (2020). Unravelling the mindset of Victimhood. Scientific American.

<sup>2</sup> Campbell, B. & Manning, J. (2018). The Rise of Victimhood Culture. Palgrave Macmillan.



# Faith, Privilege, and Exclusion in Africa

by Lynda Tilley

**As Africa slowly recovers from two years of the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting local and international travel bans, school and business closures, public gathering restrictions and job losses, one thing has become abundantly clear: despite high levels of unemployment and drastic increases in food and fuel prices, the one business sector that HAS managed, not only to keep its head above water but possibly even to run at a profit, is the long-established business of *religion*.**

The Covid-19 pandemic was every church's dream. A once-in-a-lifetime, unexpected event which provided all sorts of new income opportunities. With 'social distancing' and 'public gathering' rules in place, churches quickly started offering 'online' services: church services, prayer and youth groups, and Bible studies. Some of the larger, more established churches broadcast their weekly services on television or radio and all had additional, 'bonus' services and prayer events held during the week (to 'pray for protection against Covid' of course!)

With many people tragically losing their lives, many churches were often fully booked up with funeral services during the week. (Limited numbers of grieving family members allowed and all major credit cards accepted.) People spend lavishly on funerals



**A Nigerian megachurch in Lagos**  
**Covid-19 provided new income opportunities**  
[10 most expensive church buildings in Nigeria](#)

in Africa, where it seems that the amount spent on the entire event is an indicator of just how much the dearly departed was loved and will be missed. Funerals were a huge 'bonus' money spinner for churches during this time. Tithes, donations and funeral fees were all expected to be paid via online banking, credit card or PayPal type platforms. God's love and kindness, it would seem, did not extend to him allowing his beloved children a reduction in funeral costs or a break from tithing during a global pandemic and rising levels of unemployment, and nobody dared stop attending these online events, as they were, of course, the one thing really protecting them from the virus. It was 'thanks to God', praise Him, that we've all survived the worst of it and are still alive today. The fact that an estimated thirty million more Africans have fallen into what is considered 'extreme poverty' (living on less ▷





**Nigerian bishop David Olaniyi Oyedepo and his wife Faith. Oyedepo is founder of the Living Faith Church Worldwide and reputed to be worth US\$200 million**

Image credit [Wikipedia](#)

than US\$1.90 per day) since the Covid-19 outbreak seems lost on the faithful flocks of millions, who still offer their thanks, and tithes, to churches across the continent. Poverty levels are forecast to decrease here in the future but figures indicate that we'll still remain the poorest continent globally. [Statista indicates](#) that one third of our population already lives below the extreme poverty line of US\$1.90 per day and around ninety-six percent of our population is religious.

### **Staggering wealth of Christian pastors**

Nigeria, which has the highest GDP of African countries, contains twelve percent of the world population living in extreme poverty, yet also has seven of [Africa's ten wealthiest pastors](#). Nigerian Bishop David Oyedepo, has a net worth of US\$200 million. He's followed by Prophet Shepherd Bushiri, from our fourth poorest country, Malawi. Place number six goes to Zimbabwe and place number seven to South Africa with the remaining places all taken by Nigeria. Aside from income earned from weekly 'tithes' (donating one tenth of your income), churches also earn income from ceremonies such as christenings, baptisms, weddings and funerals.

Our smaller towns have basic churches with less wealthy pastors but there's still a distinct difference between pastors and the local community. Pastors, typically, have their own cars and houses and are automatically treated with respect – often called on when input is needed for anything from domestic to town or village issues. Pew Research Centre reports that most Africans have higher levels of public trust in their pastors than in local politicians and that 'seventy four percent of South Africans said that religion played an important role in their daily decisions, values and shaping of their morals.'

### **The root cause of most of Africa's problems today**

Africa survived the deadly global Covid-19 pandemic but I'm afraid we now face a pandemic far worse than that. It's the religious pandemic which is sweeping across our continent just like a virus, attacking the brain and damaging our ability to reason and think for ourselves. It's the root cause of most of Africa's problems today and as there seems to be no vaccination against it at this stage, I fear that this pandemic, if not contained soon, will be the death of not only all our people, but of our beautiful continent, as well.



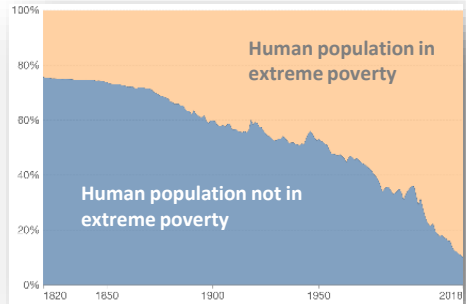


# The Great Acceleration

In this article, Anthony Lewis offers an antidote to the ‘doom and gloom’ which often assails us in the mainstream media. The achievements of humanity over the past two centuries have been incredible whilst future growth and prosperity, if decoupled from CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, promises to eliminate poverty.

Over the last four decades in particular, we have witnessed one of the most impressive achievements in human history. The proportion of humanity living in extreme poverty has decreased over this period from about 40 per cent to about 9 per cent today ([Our World in Data](#)). This has been achieved despite the large increase in the world’s human population which is now about 8 billion. The [UN](#) aims to eliminate extreme poverty by 2030 as one of its Sustainable Development Goals though progress has been somewhat set back by the pandemic. Rising inflation and the war in Ukraine may have a further adverse effect. A second goal for 2030 is to reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.

In his BBC2 documentary [Don’t Panic](#), the inspirational Swedish physician Hans Rosling, who died in 2017, shows how world population will eventually stabilise at around 11 billion and how this improves the ability to reduce poverty. In his last book, *How I Learned to Understand the World*, published



**1820-2018: Human population living in extreme poverty is projected to reach zero by 2030** [Our World in Data](#)

just before his death, he explained that the three main factors driving the elimination of global extreme poverty are economic growth, improving health care, and the education of girls. These factors in combination positively reinforce each other to help countries reach demographic transition. Fertility rates dramatically fall when infant mortality is reduced due to better health care and also when women’s emancipation improves through education, which then all feed into higher incomes through economic growth.

World population is currently projected by the [UN](#) to reach 10.4 billion during the 2080s and remain at about that level until 2100 (by their medium scenario). This is a little lower than previous estimates. Most of the future population growth and most of the roughly one in ten people in the world still living in extreme poverty are in Africa, which will be a major focus area for the UN as it seeks to reduce poverty in all its forms. ▷

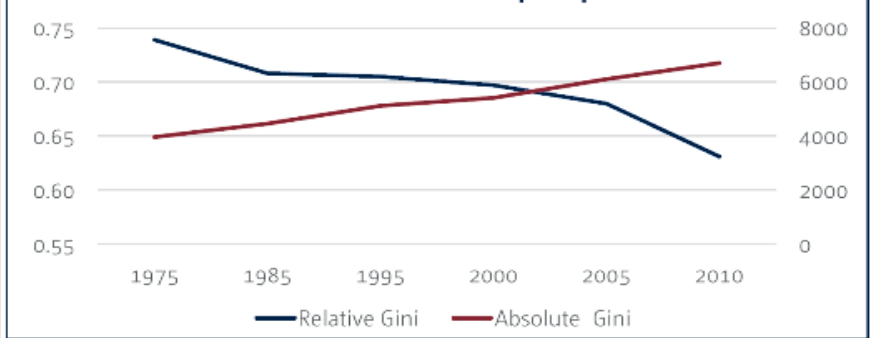


## 'Relative' versus 'absolute' inequality explained

What's the difference between 'relative' and 'absolute' measures, and which trend is more important? Finn Tarp, one of the authors of a study published in the [Review of Income and Wealth](#), explained: 'Take the case of two people in Vietnam in 1986. One person had an income of US\$1 a day and the other person had an income of US\$10 a day. With the kind of economic growth that Vietnam has seen over the past 30 years, the first person would have now in 2016 US\$8 a day while the second person, US\$80 a day. So if we focus on absolute differences, inequality has gone up [by \$72], but if you focus on relative differences, inequality between these two people would have remained the same' [the second person still earns ten times the first person]. [University of Oxford](#)

As the world has become more prosperous over the last few decades, relative inequality between countries has decreased, due mainly to the extraordinary economic growth in fast developing countries, such as China and India. But it has increased within countries, much of which is due to slower economic development in rural areas. In many city centres in India, for example, information age workers enjoy incomes and lifestyles on a par with those in OECD countries whilst subsistence farming continues to be the norm in many poorer rural regions. In conjunction with the general increase in real incomes with growing prosperity, this explains why the absolute Gini has increased. Paradoxically, therefore, the global increase in absolute inequality is being driven in part by positive factors such as the rapid economic growth in urban areas across Asia and South America. This demonstrates the need for care in interpreting broad statistical measures, to avoid jumping to conclusions that may be erroneous.▷

**Figure 1: Trends in global inequality from a relative and absolute perspective**



The global relative Gini (left-hand scale) has decreased significantly but it remains higher than the national relative Gini in nearly all countries – for developed countries this is now typically in the range 0.30-0.40, but it is higher in many developing countries, with South Africa highest at 0.63.

The absolute Gini (right-hand scale, determined in 2005 US\$ at purchasing power parity) has increased.

There are two reasons: growing prosperity in nearly all countries, and increasing inequality in many countries. Source: [University of Oxford](#)





## The Great Decoupling

Another positive trend is that countries such as the USA, Germany and the UK are progressively decoupling their economic growth from rising CO2 emissions. In the UK, Over 40 per cent of electricity – and rising – is now generated from renewable energy. This ‘Great Decoupling’ of the world’s economies will accelerate as more countries adopt greener energy sources to meet their ‘net zero’ targets. In addition, world economic growth will increasingly be driven by information-based businesses and activities which are less carbon intensive than traditional industries.

## The Great Acceleration

It is also likely that there will be a ‘Great Acceleration’ in global innovation, science and technology over the next few decades driven by today’s youth. They are the first generation ever to have direct access to the whole of the world’s library on their mobile phones with near universal access to education. Developing countries are predicted to reach the demographic transition faster than ever, driven by these new global knowledge economies. Despite these positive trends there is still much to do, given that 85 per cent of the world population lives on less than US\$30 a day, currently considered the poverty threshold in rich countries such as Denmark.

However, even here there are positive indications that the ‘Great Acceleration’ is already impacting developing countries’ economic growth. We can observe the paradox of the ubiquitous ownership of mobile phones even in the poorest rural areas in Africa for example. Gale Pooley and Marian Tupey in their book *Superabundance: The Story of Population Growth, Innovation, and Human Flourishing on an Infinitely Bountiful Planet* (2022) demonstrate that traditional

***‘Cavemen had the same natural resources we have today – the difference is the greater knowledge we use today.’***

**Thomas Sowell *Knowledge and Decisions* (1980)**

economic theory is inadequate to explain the ubiquity of mobile phones and the true global impact of information technologies. They use the ‘time price’ of goods, which represents the length of time that people must work to buy something, to demonstrate that the world has been getting wealthier faster everywhere than many traditional economists estimate. They clearly show that mobile phones are ubiquitous because they are now affordable even for many of the world’s poorest. They argue that the best way to help those on low incomes today is to continue with the existing UN development pathway – economic growth, improved health care and female education – to empower the next ‘connected’ generation, especially women, ‘to think, speak, associate, and innovate’. In this way, economic growth will accelerate due to the creation of new, greener, lower-impact and knowledge-based businesses, technologies and scientific advances across the world.

**There are already clear indications that despite the economic damage of the pandemic, humanity is on the verge of another great acceleration. Economic growth decoupled from both CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and traditional resource limitations will be driven by greater access to information and knowledge. But this time harnessing the talents and drive of all humanity.**





# Am I middle class?

By David Warden

**I know, the answer to this question may be blindingly obvious to anyone who knows me. But examining our relationship to English social distinctions is an interesting exercise, especially in relation to humanism which is, after all, supposed to be a philosophy based on equality and our common humanity.**

My father was born in a pub called *The Bull and Butcher* in the Midlands on Hitler's birthday (20<sup>th</sup> April) in 1923. My atheist grandmother had been disowned by her well-to-do family for wanting to 'go on the stage' – a profession as disreputable as prostitution in her day. My grandfather was a gambler and often had his hands in the till. To make a new start, they moved to Bournemouth in 1936 to run a hotel on the West Cliff, about a mile from where I now live. My father left school at the age of fourteen and got a job as a technical draughtsman in a sign-making firm. My mother was born in Kenfig Hill, South Wales. Her family also moved to Bournemouth in 1936 in order to open what became a thriving drapers' shop selling curtain material and similar goods. She went to the local grammar school but left at the age of sixteen. She was far more interested in boys and dancing than further education.

My two sets of grandparents, therefore,



**That's me (on the right). I was called 'Little Lord Fauntleroy' by my family because of my interest in smart clothes. I like Harris Tweed jackets and I get my brogues from Jermyn Street.**

were moderately prosperous and fairly genteel small business owners. My parents, if anything, had dropped down a notch or two in the social pecking order. My father considered himself to be working class and he earned a weekly wage which kept a family of five. By the time I was five years of age, however, he had started his forty-year battle with Parkinson's Disease. He lost his job when I was still at primary school, after which he would take any job he could get including litter collecting on Bournemouth Beach. To make ends meet, my mother ran our family home, itself partly bought from a modest ▷



football pools win, as a holiday flatlets business. My brother and I were squashed into very small bedrooms on the ground floor. A wealthy friend called Freddie, whose dad owned the Sandbanks Hotel and a Rolls-Royce, memorably exclaimed "*Struth!*" when he saw how we lived.

At the age of eleven, I went to one of the local secondary modern schools and was placed in the so-called 'G' stream. It's only in recent years that I have discovered that there was a deliberate policy in Bournemouth to restrict the number of children who could go to the grammar school. It was thought better to put moderately bright children into streamed secondary schools. I never felt hard done by, but in another town I would have gone to the grammar school. I did, at age sixteen, eventually make it to the grammar school to do my A Levels, but our home was not 'bookish' and I had never been taught how to study or manage my time. I made a complete hash of my exams first time round. After an extremely depressing third year in the sixth form, I managed to scrape sufficient grades together to study theology at the University of Kent in Canterbury.

### **My mother described people beneath her as 'common'**

I was following in my brother's footsteps. We were, of course, the first members of our family to make it to university – one of the main gateways to 'middle class status'. I remember my mother anxiously expressing the hope that we wouldn't come to look down on them as uneducated. My parents *were* relatively uneducated but I never looked down on them, even though my mother described people beneath her as 'common'. But my social pretensions were given further opportunities to flourish. I mixed with students who could afford cars and cocktails.

Eventually, I married 'up'. My husband went to private boarding schools and Cambridge. *His* father had a Rolls-Royce and his grandfather was a wealthy hat manufacturer. I am sometimes painfully reminded of my lowly origins by my failure to know the difference between city dress and country dress. But I do say *napkin*, not *serviette*, and *sitting room*, not *lounge*. I do my best to follow the code.

### **Humanism and class**

One of our members recently said that 'Humanism needs to appeal to "white van man"'. I think we should try to avoid stereotypes like this. I know that we do have some members with working class origins in our humanist community. I also know that we have members in millionaire homes and others who struggle to buy food. But what brings our people together is an interest in ideas. A humanist group largely functions as a philosophical and ethical society. It's not a 'working man's club'. If we attract mostly university-educated people I think that's OK. I know for a fact that non-graduates also get a lot from our events. We are a mini-university in our own right. I have attended around 300 free talks since joining Dorset Humanists and they are not all 'high-brow'. We try to pitch things at a moderate level.

**A humanist group should, of course, be welcoming and inclusive to all classes of people. We do need to be aware of 'unconscious bias' such as disliking someone on account of their diet, or clothing preferences, or lack of a university education. I am very proud of our record on this. I will continue to wear my Jermyn Street brogues and Harris Tweed jackets but if others wish to rock up in clothes from Sports Direct that's fine by me.**





# Thought for the Day

by Aaron Darkwood

*In this candid and courageous article, our design editor Aaron asks: “Am I poor?”*

I wasn't going to write this article. Co-editor David Warden asked me if I was going to write a personal article on poverty and I had decided against it because I didn't want to do the 'poor me' vibe. But if no one talks about it, everyone assumes all is good. It needs to be spoken about.

We're better off than we have ever been at any point in history, whether it's 'we' as in humanity, 'we' as in British, or 'we' as in the poorest in society. And yet 'we' still struggle. Imagine going into a time machine, returning to just 100 years ago, and telling a person on the street how we struggle in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to pay our electricity bills, keep our internet going, that our clean and fresh running water is costly, and that food delivered to our front doors from anywhere in the world the same day, is expensive. Can you imagine the look on their face? Yet we don't have to fire up our time machine. We could visit parts of Africa, India and China to find people living even less well than Britons a century ago.

Walking through any town centre you will be approached by charities wanting you to sign up to something. Now I'm a poor person, I'm on benefits, I volunteer in the humanist



Charities: should I donate to those even worse off than me?

community and could well be described as 'in poverty...'. Yet I can eat, I can pay my bills (just) I have a TV, internet connection, and I even eat out at Wetherspoons. So no, I don't consider myself to be in poverty, yet I don't have spare to give away. Like many others, I have no heating on at the moment, my hot water tank is permanently turned off, my food budget is very carefully accounted for and giveaways like birthday presents, or alcohol, simply don't happen. I *am* better off than many people in Africa and other places, but I don't consider myself to be living a life of lavish luxury.

Having just completed this [minimum income calculator](#), which informed me that I need to earn nearly £25,000 for a 'decent' standard of living, it seems I am considered to be in some kind of relative poverty, but I am certainly not in extreme or absolute poverty. I do have ▷



By their calculations, for a single person household anything less than £19,200 a year, before tax, counts as low pay. 4 Feb 2022 (UNISON)

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one ‘fast day’ each week but this is not because of food poverty. It’s because I want to lose weight! My actual annual income is £14,170, but I am not forced to go without food. My debts are managed, my bills carefully budgeted for, I get by. I feel okay.

I’m certainly in the bottom fifth for wealth in my humanist group. But there is at least one person poorer than me (that I know of) and maybe others I’m not aware of. I would very much invite you to reach out to those you think might be struggling, and if you can, help.

Many people are on low incomes but don’t qualify for food banks or reductions in bills. Right now, I have money in the bank, but without additional government help this winter I would have been cleaned out by next spring. Or would have been, were it not for the fact that I would simply not turn my heating on. There will be others out there making these choices. I have had many sleepless nights doing calculations, budget sheets, revaluating stuff, and going round the house unplugging things.

Could I donate to charities? No. I would have to remove something from the spreadsheet to make that gesture. In the past, when working, I made several monthly donations to some of the big charities. But how do you make that choice? Out of thousands of good causes, who misses out?

Poverty in the UK

According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s UK Poverty Profile 2022, around 14.5 million people in the UK are living in relative poverty, defined as receiving an income after housing costs less than 60% of the median for their type of household. That’s more than one in every five people. Of these, 8.1 million are working-age adults, 4.3 million are children, and 2.1 million are pensioners.

Everyday Items

- Eat everyday
- Pay bills on time
- Have clothes
- Can heat home
- Eating out
- Cinemas
- Restaurants
- Holidays
- Gym member

Luxuries

- Run a car
- Smoking
- Buy Alcohol
- Drugs
- Enjoy hobbies
- Smartphone
- Large TV
- Dishwasher
- Tumble dryer

Yes Sometimes No

Aaron’s lists – how many luxuries can you afford?

For the record, I am *not* a drug user, but I included it in the table above in case anyone thought that’s where all my money went. I drink alcohol occasionally, but it’s typically gifted by a friend. Not affording a tumble-dryer or dishwasher has the benefit of keeping my carbon footprint down, but if given one and had space, I couldn’t afford to run them. I do consider them as luxuries, and if you drive a car, I do consider you well off!

My hobbies include jogging, walking and cycling for free. I also have weights for the in-between days, so they have no extra cost. Looking after my fitness costs nothing.

**Existing on a budget can be done, but it is *existing*. In work, out of work, my life has always been on a budget. I can’t give money, I don’t have it, so I do give time. Both to my local humanist group, to *Humanistically Speaking*, to various other groups over the years, and helping out friends here and there. We’re only here once, but we can still make a difference without wealth.**







# Musings by Maggie

## Don't drop your aitches

***As a four-year-old, Maggie was dumbfounded when the mother of her new friend told her “I don’t want you playing with Margaret again”.***

**When I was four, a new family moved into our street with a little girl of about my own age called Hilary. These were the days when even in a London street it was considered perfectly safe to allow children to play outside, as long as they knew they mustn't go near the road, so it wasn't long before I got to know Hilary and one day, she asked me back to her house to play in the garden.**

I clearly remember that it was a sunny summer's day, and we were playing at being gardeners, watering the flowers with a brightly-coloured toy watering can, laughing and chattering as only four-year-olds can and getting on like a house on fire. I was really happy to have made such a nice new friend.

After a while, Hilary was called into the house by her mother and, unknown to them, I overheard their conversation. 'Hilary, I don't want you to bring Margaret again and I don't want you playing with her'. Hilary was clearly shocked by this. 'But why? She's nice!' 'She's just not the sort of little girl I want you to play with.' The voice was stern and uncompromising. *'Do you understand?'*

Hilary reappeared in the garden looking sad

and sheepish. For myself, I was dumbfounded and near to tears but, determined not to let on that I had heard the conversation, I made an excuse about it being nearly tea-time and quickly ran home, feeling devastated by such a cruel rejection. I never saw Hilary again.

What had I done to deserve such opprobrium? Nothing at all. Even at such a young age I had quickly learned that the way I spoke labelled me as being of an inferior class of person to those from a different background who spoke differently. You see, Hilary's family *were* from a different background; better off and better educated than mine, and their accents reflected this. So did mine. It was simply not acceptable to them to allow Hilary to pick up my bad language habits. God forbid that she should be contaminated with dropped aitches, glottal stops or estuary vowels.

The fact that I still remember this incident in such detail so many years later is an indication of the lasting impact it had on me. I became very conscious of the way I spoke and over time changed it, especially when in the company of others whose own speech took the form of what is usually known as 'received pronunciation', and in the field of sociolinguistics as a 'prestige variety', i.e., a standard form of spoken English with no ▷



regional influences, traditionally associated with the middle and upper classes rather than the working class from which I most definitely sprang. It also meant that I developed a very good ear for speech, dialect and accent and came to view the whole subject as fascinating. In addition, I developed a great love of drama and acting and was involved in amateur theatre for many years, eventually gaining a teaching qualification and becoming a Teacher of Speech and Drama in later life, running a private teaching practice for ten years.

One of my earliest private students was a lawyer who, quite co-incidentally, happened to hail from the same part of South London as myself. He worked with a large and prestigious law firm, but he told me that he often felt overlooked and undervalued as all of his colleagues had what he termed 'Oxford accents', whereas he had retained the tell-tale tones of his humbler origins. Sadly, this was not unusual. Quite a number of my students came for similar reasons, and although I always made it clear to them that I found nothing wrong with the way they spoke, as long as it was clearly intelligible and interesting, the sad fact is that there is much evidence and many studies showing that certain assumptions are held, albeit often unconsciously, about people based on the way that they speak. In the UK, people with northern accents are usually judged to be friendlier than those with southern ones. Scottish accents are generally associated with trustworthiness, unless, of course, your dialect is heavy Glaswegian.

Darren McGarvey, Scottish rapper and author, who is himself from a Glaswegian background of extreme poverty, gives some insight into this in his recently published book, *The Social Distance Between Us*, in which he examines the problems posed by what he terms the

***"It is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman hate or despise him."***  
***George Bernard Shaw.***

'lack of proximity' of those who run our country to the large number of people in need of the services they are supposed to provide, i.e., those experiencing poverty. He wrote: 'The question I least enjoy answering is also the one I am asked most frequently: "Where did you learn to speak so well, Darren?" ...What these people are really broadcasting is that they are somewhat surprised by my ability, as a working-class person, to string a coherent sentence together without soiling myself.' You can find a very interesting short interview about the Glaswegian accent with Darren and Professor Jane Stuart-Smith of Glasgow University [here](#).

There is much more to be written about the link between accent and class which challenges the notion that there is any such thing as a 'classless society'. If you have an accent that marks you out as working class, I'm afraid it's still likely to make any effort to attain social mobility quite difficult unless you can manage to tone it down, and that still makes me quite angry.

Class and accent was the theme of George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*. Illustration depicts [Mrs. Patrick Campbell](#) as [Eliza Doolittle](#) in a 1913 production.





# Ethical Encounters

*Paul Ewans explores moral questions*



***Donating money to charity is an effective way of helping to relieve poverty, but many people give very little money to charity each year and a large proportion of us never donate any money at all. Why is this?***

The Charities Aid Foundation conducts research annually into charitable giving by British citizens. Their most recent report (2019) based on 12,000 interviews, found that 43 per cent of the people surveyed had given no money to charity in the previous twelve months, and that those who did gave only £43 on average in the course of the year. And only 11 per cent of the donations went to overseas aid and disaster relief.

Some people say that donating money to charity is futile because there are so many people living in poverty that any help we give will be only 'a drop in the ocean', while others say that charities generally waste the money they are given. But as Anthony Lewis shows in his article, action to relieve poverty is very effective, and in fact charities waste very little money. Those who doubt this can easily do their own research so that they can be confident that they are supporting the most effective charities.

And then there are those who believe that they are already doing enough by paying taxes to the government. It is of course true that some of the tax we pay is used by the government to fund aid and development

abroad, but this does not fulfil our moral obligations. Morally good actions are voluntary but paying tax is obligatory. We earn no moral credit by paying tax.

Nevertheless, some people say that we have no obligation to help foreigners because people work hard to create the wealth of our country, and there is no reason why we should give any of it away. But most of this wealth was created by previous generations and not by us, and although we can do what we like with our inheritance, it is pure luck that we happened to be born into a rich society. It is not the fault of the poor that they were born in less developed countries.

The fact is, nearly all of us could be more generous without sacrificing anything that is essential to our happiness or that of our families. And although it is natural to hesitate when asked to donate to charity, this hesitation is largely the product of habit. We do not donate because we have not formed the habit of donating. This is a shame because giving money to charity is personally rewarding. We will have happier and more fulfilling lives if we do what we can to help those who badly need our help.



# Paul Ponders...

## *Poverty and Global Warming*



**The United Nations recently warned that the results of decades of work to reduce poverty in Africa are currently being reversed. This is largely due to the impact on food security caused by increased fuel prices, the Covid pandemic, and armed conflict. But the climate crisis is also a significant factor.**

According to the UN, Africa is moving backwards in its efforts to end hunger and malnutrition. About 278 million people – about one-fifth of all Africans – went hungry in 2021, and this is projected to rise to 310 million people by 2030. But although attention is almost inevitably focussed on Africa due to the looming East African famine, the Arab region is arguably even more at risk from global warming due to the insecurity of its water supplies and its greater dependence on imported food. More than 40 per cent of its population of 357 million people are already exposed to drought, and this number seems likely to increase as temperatures in the region rise much faster than the global average, perhaps by as much as five degrees Celsius by the end of the century.

The United Nations Development Programme estimates that global warming will push an additional 120 million people around the world into poverty by 2030, and that a further 200 million are likely to be displaced by extreme climate events. Richer countries

generally have the resources they need to adapt to the consequences of the climate crisis. But poorer countries have fewer resources and their infrastructure – such as water systems and housing – is less resilient.

Weather extremes disrupt agriculture. Variable rainfall leads to both flooding and drought, and higher temperatures make large areas of land unsuitable for growing food. People are thus forced to migrate, and this almost inevitably throws them into poverty. The UN estimates that 1.3 billion people are now trapped on agricultural land degraded by soil erosion, and a further 1.8 billion are at risk of water shortages. Global agricultural output may thus decline by up to 30 per cent in the coming years.

About 37 per cent of us live in coastal communities and are threatened both by rising sea levels and extreme weather events. The UN believes that more than 570 coastal cities could be affected by sea level rise by 2050, causing as many as 1 billion people to be displaced when hurricanes and other natural disasters are taken into account. Most of these victims of global warming will lose their homes, their jobs and their support networks. For the great majority, poverty will be their inevitable fate.

The impact of global warming is of course very hard to predict in detail, but one thing does seem clear. Many of the world's poorest people will become even poorer.





By John Coss

Humanists in profile

# William Beveridge

*Continuing our series of profiles of Humanists who are not as widely known as they should be, including distinguished men and women not generally known to be Humanists.*

***“Want is one only of five giants on the road of reconstruction; the others are Disease, Ignorance, Squalor, and Idleness.”***

**William Beveridge** (1879-1963) was an economist and social reformer. He is best known as the author of the 1942 Beveridge Report. His mother was a Unitarian, and his father became a follower of Auguste Comte, whose idea of a secular Religion of Humanity was a lasting influence on Beveridge’s thinking. He described himself as a materialist agnostic, and developed a strong social conscience and desire to bring about genuine change.

From 1903 to 1907 he was a very active resident (and initially the Sub-Warden) of [Toynbee Hall](#) in East London, bringing him face to face with poverty and squalor. This seminal experience motivated him to do something to promote social justice and eradicate hardship. By 1908 he was a leading authority on unemployment issues, and joined the Board of Trade, where he organised the national system of labour exchanges and unemployment insurance. During WWI he was involved in mobilising and controlling manpower, and he was later permanent secretary to the Ministry of Food.

In 1919, he became Director of the London School of Economics, which he established as a leading centre for the social sciences. From 1926 to 1928 he was also Vice-Chancellor of



Image: Wikipedia

***“There is a very important distinction between a critical attitude of mind and a sceptical attitude.”***

London University. He left the LSE in 1937 to be Master of University College, Oxford.

In June 1941, the Government set up the Inter-Departmental Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services to survey existing national schemes of social insurance and allied services and to make recommendations. Beveridge was the Chairman, and at an early stage it was recognised that he should be solely responsible for the recommendations. The [Beveridge Report](#) was published in November 1942 and formed the basis for the post-war reforms known as the welfare state, which included the expansion of National Insurance and the creation of the National Health Service.

In 1944, Beveridge was elected as Liberal MP for Berwick-upon-Tweed. After losing his seat in 1945, he was elevated to the House of Lords, where he became Liberal Leader. He retired from public life in 1954.

For more on Beveridge, see links below.





## *A seasonal message from our esteemed Editor*

Santa Claus

**Christmas Day will arrive soon. Now, you might expect us humanists to rail against the very idea of Christmas, and respond, like Scrooge, with ‘Bah, humbug’ to any passers-by who might be within earshot, creating grumbling discontent and cynicism throughout the neighbourhood. But it might come as a surprise that many, if not most, humanists do celebrate Christmas (although they may call it something else, like Yule or Winter Festival). After all, it is a family event in the real world.**

But Christians have challenged me in the past by asserting that if I am not a Christian, I should not be celebrating Christmas, and I have often answered with comments about Christmas originally being a pagan festival.

But there is a deeper, more profound answer to that question. The very assertion that Christmas is exclusively for Christians misses the point. That’s because Christmas is a time of goodwill to all, and humanists can certainly buy into that idea. It is (or it should be) a time when men and women can put their differences (and even their weapons) to one side, as famously occurred at the Western Front in 1914.

Of course, most religions have their own, similar celebrations. Jews celebrate Hanukkah, Hindus have Diwali, Sikhs have Guru Nanak’s birthday, Muslims have Eid, and the Zoroastrian New Year is Nowruz. All of these celebrations have one thing in common. They are meant to be times of mending, of reconciliation, of closing the gap between us, and recognising each other’s humanity. And humanity is the key word.

Humanism stands for the idea that we all belong to the same family and that we all have the same worth. We are brothers and ▷



sisters, because we are all from the same stock and the same human genome. It is our kinship that makes us all human, with the same needs, aims and loves, and any dogma that tries to deny the fact is bound to be false.

The festivals I have mentioned offer an opportunity for us to love one another, and we should always aim to bear those sentiments in mind and keep that love in our hearts.

The challenge about why someone like me – who does not worship a god – should celebrate Christmas is a nonsense. These festivals of goodwill belong to us all, and in recognition that we are all human, with the same cares and woes, loves and joys, aspirations and challenges. We love our children, worry about our health, feel apprehension for our future, seek the joy of love, and aim to live happy lives. We need to belong. We need each other. We are one, and

even our various beliefs – sincerely held as they may be – should never be allowed to divide us.

So it is as a humanist, and with the greatest respect and humility, that I will want to wish everyone, whether Christian, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Zoroastrian or humanist, the very happiest of Christmases, with all the tinsel, the bright lights, the giving, the feasting the silly hats and those joyful moments of fun and laughter with our family and friends.

**My wish for the future, and for all those who represent us, is that one day a Jew will give a Christmas gift to a Muslim, and that a Zoroastrian will offer a happy Diwali wish to a Sikh. Because when that happens, we all become one family.**

**[Watch Santa being interviewed here](#)**

## Santa's wish is coming true!



**Multifaith friends: David (Humanist), Sali (Buddhist), Lynda (Jew), James (Christian), and Tama (Muslim)**

The Dorset-based 'Many Faiths' team has been visiting schools for a number of years, demonstrating to schoolchildren that people of very different faiths and beliefs can be friends whilst being able to *disagree agreeably* on a wide variety of issues from life after death to ritual male circumcision. The team was set up originally with some Home Office funding but now they are seeking

funding from other sources.

In November, they ran an event for Interfaith Week at Bournemouth University/Arts University Bournemouth. Three members of the group (David, James and Tama) are also chaplains or advisers in the university Faith and Reflection team.

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# The Pauper's Ballad

Feeling real low coz my shrapnel's shredded  
Haven't got a penny for a loaf of bread it  
Leaves me with a hunger that I just can't fix  
Gonna take more than porridge or Weetabix

*When you need a top up someone's got to pay  
Put your hand in your pocket, it ain't much use to pray*

Calling up my friends for emergency assistance  
Expecting and deflecting their foreseeable resistance  
Money's right tight for the whole of my crew  
But when you're on the edge, what else you gonna do?

*When you need a top up someone's got to pay  
Put your hand in your pocket, it ain't much use to pray*

Trying to survive in this Bombay slum  
All the work's dried up and the monsoon's come  
Got a wall on the floor and some floor on the ceiling  
Bed's broken up and the paintwork's peeling

*When you need a top up someone's got to pay  
Put your hand in your pocket, it ain't much use to pray*

You search for a space that is safe and dry  
But they're all filled up, three guesses why  
Budge up, budge in, can you make some space  
Sometimes finding shelter is a human race

*When you need a top up someone's got to pay  
Put your hand in your pocket, it ain't much use to pray*

Beaten and bruised coz I'm bullied and berated  
Apparently being poor is a reason to be hated  
Can't find cash for food or favours  
Poverty comes in 38 flavours

*When you need a top up someone's got to pay  
Put your hand in your pocket, it ain't much use to pray*

I don't need words, shove 'em under a bus  
Everything we are is everything in us  
So give me what I need and give it me to keep  
Or get on your bike and let me sleep.

*When you need a top up someone's got to pay  
Put your hand in your pocket, it ain't much use to pray*



By Alex Williams



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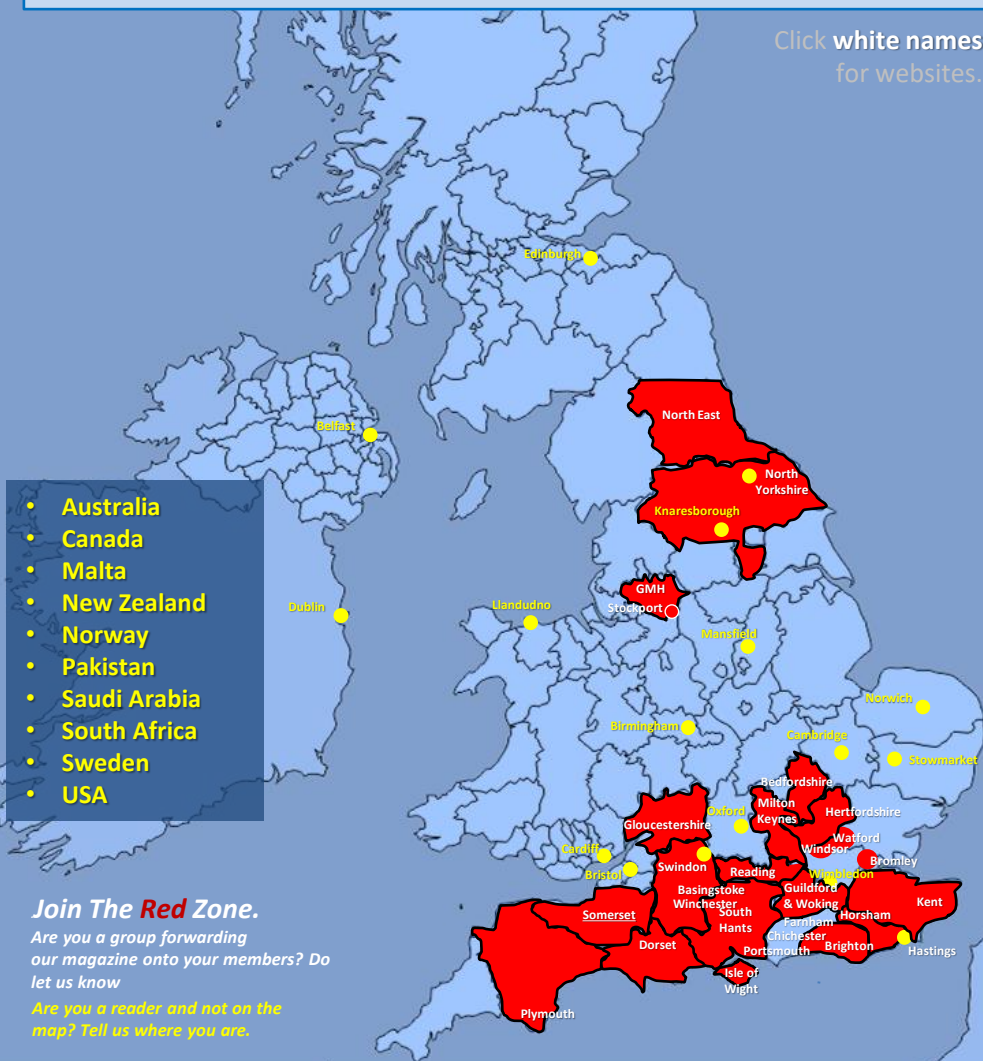
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