

## **BHANews Announcement**

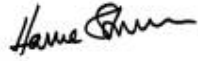
This will be the last time I write to you as Chief Executive as, after eight years, I am retiring in November. Those eight years have been incredibly busy and, with our highly committed and effective staff team, I think we can claim to have achieved a huge amount over that time. When I joined the BHA in December 2001, I knew that I was taking on a challenge. Those of you who were around at the time will remember a much smaller organisation, with far fewer members and a very small staff team. It was doing really good work in some areas, our education work and our campaigns on education issues for example, and, despite the absence of any staff working to support the network, our celebrants were providing a growing number of funerals and other ceremonies to a generally very high standard. But our financial situation was dire and our profile outside education circles was limited to some public awareness of humanist ceremonies. Despite all the hard work being carried out by staff and some highly committed volunteers, it struck me as an organisation that needed to grow if it was going to survive, let alone become an organisation that could influence public policy and support and represent its members and other people with non-religious beliefs. And in order to achieve anything it needed a much higher public profile and it urgently needed to increase its income from all sources – as indeed it still does!

2001 was the year in which the census first asked about religion and, with a leading question, had just produced the startling conclusion that over 70% of the UK population was Christian. But we had also just been given an immensely useful tool when the Human Rights Act came into force in 2000, giving us, for the very first time, a legal ‘hook’ on which we could hang our various campaigns for equality for the non-religious. Government could no longer ignore us. That has been crucial in enabling us to develop a ‘virtuous circle’ with our campaigns and education work giving us the higher media and public profile we needed to recruit more members and increase our income, and with that in turn allowing us to take on more staff and do more work and further raise our profile, etc, etc. We also, very early on in my time with the BHA, took the decision to provide the ceremonies network with staff support, and work to develop a truly professional service, and that too has helped raise our public profile. With our increasing resources, we have also been able to professionalise our membership services, provide more support to affiliated groups, and develop income generation.

Leaving the BHA is going to be a huge wrench, but I think I am leaving it in pretty good shape. When I ‘took on’ the BHA in 2001, I felt it was an organisation with a lot of potential. That is just as true now as it was then, and I feel sure that a new Chief Executive will be able to build on what we have achieved in the last few years to create an even more influential organisation. I am sure that he or she will have the support of the Board, of a committed, professional and highly effective staff team and – equally important – our growing and increasingly active membership.

I am not quite sure what I am going to do next, and don’t intend to rush into anything. Having just had a wonderful holiday in Borneo (achieving a lifelong ambition to see orang-utans in the wild) and Papua New Guinea (visiting my elder daughter who is working there) I must admit that the idea of a ‘gap year’ seems very attractive. Or perhaps another job, or just a peaceful retirement – although I think I would very quickly get bored with that. Whatever I end up doing, it will be great to be able to look back on eight challenging and exciting years with the BHA.

I would like to thank the Board, the staff team and all of you for all the support I have been given over the years, and I look forward to watching how the BHA develops in the coming years. I am sure it has a great future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hanne Stinson', with a stylized, cursive script.

Hanne Stinson