

**HISTORY
OF
THE HUMANIST SOCIETY OF VICTORIA INCORPORATED
50TH Anniversary
1961-2011**

1. INTRODUCTION

A history of the Humanist Society of Victoria (HSV) cannot be embarked upon without a Statement of Purposes as set down at the AGM of November, 2001.

These will explain the preoccupations with issues found in this history but will not always explain divisions in opinion found there.

One such issue that has arisen since the beginning was whether Humanism should be accepted as a religion in order to tap into both government funding and to give our ethics program access to state schools. Like Buddhism, it is a life stance and like a religion, it dictates very much how an individual will approach life, their beliefs and attitude to the rest of society. It also affects how we relate to the ecosystem on which we are so dependent. This is not high on the agenda of most religions.

So there are differences in the philosophical content but, like religion, Humanism's roots lie deep in Western tradition. It is well that it sees itself in the historical context from which it is derived, starting earlier than the Greeks with the Golden Rule, which seems to have been with humanity from the earliest times, to the Greeks and the Enlightenment from which our relationship to scientific method and enquiry derives so much.

It must be said that many Humanists have religious backgrounds and it seems that the norm has been to actively choose it and atheism rather than simply lapsing.

Religion, it seems, will always be with us to a greater or lesser degree. Apart from fundamentalists, it seems that Humanist causes such as the humane treatment of refugees are shared with it and so cooperation with religious bodies is possible and desirable.

On many issues we will disagree such as embryonic stem cell research, abortion and homosexuality and the belief in absolutes and dogma.

Here then, is the HSV Statement of Purposes.

A. To help create a civil society in which people can lead satisfying and fulfilling lives, relying on human compassion, creativity, ingenuity and reason, free from supernatural beliefs. The human centred, philosophical and scientific approach is called Humanism.

B. To organise public lectures, discussions and conferences

C. To provide a social support network for Society members

D. To support the human rights and civil liberties of individuals and groups, especially those experiencing discrimination.

E. To promote secular education as a means of helping peoples of different beliefs to live harmoniously together.

F. To advocate ethical decision making and responsibility for one's actions, based on respect for individual autonomy, peaceful coexistence between peoples with differing ways of life, and the maintenance of a sustainable environment.

G. To administer the Humanist Education Trust.

H. To publish a regular newsletter and other material that promotes Humanism.

I. To express Humanist values in submissions and representations to governments, parliaments, royal commissions, tribunals and other public enquiries.

J. To maintain a library of resource material for members and other inquirers.

K. To undertake other related activities appropriate for furthering Humanism.

For the earliest statement of aims and purposes, see *Appendix 111*

I am indebted to members who shared their knowledge of the Society, particularly Rosslyn Ives, Halina Strnad, Stephen Stuart, Harry Gardner and Mary Bergin who loaned me relevant material and those who proofed, formatted and loaned photographs.

The history was compiled from back issues of the *Victorian Humanist*, the *Australian Humanist* and the minutes of the Society's committee.

I also referred to biographies of Humanists found in Ray Dahlitz' book, *Secular Who's Who*.

2. THE BACKGROUND

(2a) The Background

From the ancient Greeks to the present day, there have been freethinkers. During the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, free thought was seen as a way of escaping the yoke of the Church and was associated with the advancement of scientific thinking.

The mid 1800s saw the British Humanist Religious Association formed and, in 1877, Felix Adler's new movement, Ethical Culture, in New York.

By the 1920s, allied freethinking movements were being created and, in 1929, Charles Francis Potter founded the First Humanist Society of New York, with such luminaries as Julian Huxley, John Dewey, Albert Einstein and Thomas Mann. In 1930, Potter, with his wife, Clara, published *Humanism: A New Religion*. In it, Humanist causes such as women's rights, birth control, 'civil' divorce laws and opposition to capital punishment were espoused.

In 1933, the first *Humanist Manifesto* was published which claimed religion without a god and in 1939, a group of Quakers formed The Humanist Society of Friends, which is now known as The Humanist Society and is "an adjunct of the American Humanist Association. (AHA)" which was formed in 1941 and has responsibility for fostering new AHA chapters and celebrants. It counted among its presidents, Isaac Asimov, Kurt Vonnegut and Gore Vidal.

The flowering of Humanism occurred after the war when the United Nations was formed, and notable Humanists took leading roles. Sir Julian Huxley was the first president of UNESCO and the Humanist body, the International Ethical and Humanist Union. Lloyd Boyd-Orr, was head of the Food and Agricultural Organization (now World Food Organization) and Brock Chisholm led the World Health Organization. All identified as Humanists.

How is this relevant? In many ways, the strands of which will be seen throughout this History. These strands are reflected in what the United Nations stood for. The need to 'develop humanitarian concern for the human condition ... beyond religion and ideology';

to curb the power of nation-states so that nothing as appalling as the carnage of the Second World War could ever happen again; to formulate a universal declaration of human rights; establish a security council to collectively prevent future wars; to have a world court and an international police force.

The *Humanist Manifesto* of 2000 expressed the need for a world parliament representing people, not nation-states; a security council beyond the US, UK, France, China and Russia; a world-wide tax on financial transactions or Tobin Tax to alleviate poverty and improve education and health in the world's poorest nations; regulation of trans-national corporations and open access to media communications. Each person was to have equal value and dignity so that they could live their lives in liberty and justice while its writers embraced the concept of a global ethic, independent of politics and culture.

This was the political and intellectual climate into which the Humanist Society of Victoria was born and sustained.

(2b) The Early Days

The Humanist Society of Victoria was mainly a product of members of the Unitarian Church and the Rationalist Society of Victoria. Its founders considered that, although various organisations of freethinkers existed, it was considered that a society dedicated to Humanist values was needed. They thought the Unitarians too left wing, despite calling themselves a church and with clergy, and the Rationalists too academic to get the broader message across to the public.

With the formation of a Humanist society in mind, in October 1959, Ray Dahlitz of the Rationalists wrote to seek advice from the Rationalist Press Association Ltd in London with connection to *The Humanist* (UK), to seek guidelines as to how to set up the planned society.

Dr LMM "Miffy" Beadnell of the Rationalists placed notices in *The Age* and other journals, calling a public meeting, which took place on 15 March 1961, for the purpose of inaugurating the Humanist Society of Victoria.

There, a provisional committee was convened by Ray Dahlitz and instructed to draft a constitution. It consisted of Dr R Traill, Mrs L Salmon, Mr G Cook, Mr Jack Dunn, Mr Moore, Rev V James, Mr R Dahlitz, Mrs J Clayton, Mr J Hamilton, Mr K O'Mara, Mr T McAughtrie, Mr C P Halik, Dr C Sandy and Mr R J Taylor, who represented Rationalists, Unitarians and unaligned. There were 72 intended members. The appointed office holders were Dr Clive Sandy, president, who remained president until the end of 1966, and Mrs Joyce Clayton, secretary/treasurer. A list of office holders can be found in *Appendix 1*.

A meeting was called for 10 April 1961, and the Constitution was accepted at a General Meeting held on 19 July of that year, when the first elected committee was formed with office bearers, Dr Clive Sandy, president, Dr "Miffy" Beadnell, secretary and Mrs J. Clayton, treasurer. When Mrs Clayton resigned in 1963, Dr Beadnell was, for a long time, secretary/treasurer. She remained secretary until 1980 and was responsible for publishing a brief newsletter until the *Victorian Humanist (VH)* came into being in May 1965, of which she was the editor. It was issued each month with a special Winter and Summer edition containing lengthy contributions from members and like-minded others. The first Winter edition contained a comprehensive definition of Humanism. From September 1965, it was posted to members on a monthly basis.

Dr Beadnell came from a family of Scottish Rationalists and was a prime mover in the success of the HSV. She hoped that the Society would have its own office space and library, an ambition only partly realized to this day. Meanwhile it continued to meet in the Unitarian Church and other city venues.

By the end of 1961, the membership of the Society was 40 and grew steadily for the next few years, although records show that people were not always prompt in paying their subscriptions. Occasional meetings were held during 1962 but, by March 1963, regular monthly meetings were organised, speakers engaged and the *Newsletter* sent out.

Speakers in that second year included Lorraine Salmon, Myra Roper, Gordon Thomson, (Deputy Director of the National Gallery) and the Secretary of the Indian Radical Humanist movement.

Members were encouraged to form associations with other state Humanist societies, then only NSW, and to send letters to newspapers, government officials and MPs to raise the Humanist profile and spread its message.

In 1963, the Bendigo Humanist Society was formed which burnt bright but soon expired. During its life, it received many visits from metropolitan members of the HSV.

Meanwhile the HSV had affiliated with the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) and the United Nations Association of Australia – Victorian Division.

The Geelong Humanists also formed at about this time although the exact date has not been recorded clearly.

(2c) Causes

Dr Beadnell believed that the Society should have active charity involvement, a view not always shared, but her view prevailed. During these early years, it donated money to the Freedom from Hunger Campaign, and the Anti-Hanging Committee and affiliated with the Howard League for Penal Reform. Members were encouraged to gift their corneas to the Eye Bank and good will extended to members of the Society as well. They were encouraged to visit any members who were ill or, for some reason, in distress. This practice still continues.

Social issues of the day greatly engaged the Society. Among these were the plight of Aborigines, world poverty, population control, family planning, abortion and adoption laws, Sunday observance, human rights and censorship.

The Society affiliated with the federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and contributed to provision of scholarships and books to the Highfield Community School in Southern Rhodesia, particularly for a boy named Sam Chokuda.

The approbation given to Humanism in China at this time is a surprise to the author, given the situation there regarding human rights.

There was the case of the Humanist called as a witness in a trial to swear on the Bible. He chose to affirm and was subjected to prolonged questioning about his beliefs. Shortly after this, some MPs began to affirm and it is now allowed both in court and in citizenship ceremonies.

At about this time, the HSV ran into opposition from the churches to using their halls for meetings.

The neutral venue of the Australia+America Centre was finally arrived at.

On occasions, over 100 members and visitors attended these meetings.

Dr Beadnell was very enthusiastic about member drives and advertising which appeared to have paid dividends. Part of this was to ask prominent Victorians to allow their names to appear on the Society's letterheads as honorary vice-presidents. They were distinguished Humanists and their names were seen as publicising the Society by association. These were, Prof. Geoffrey W Leeper (1964), Mr Oscar A Mendelsohn (1964), author and musician, Prof. D Hector Monro (1964) Mr Louis Roet (1964), businessman, Dr R Traill, (1965) vice-principal, RMIT, Mr H Carter (1965) lawyer, Mr David Martin, author, Prof. Sydney Rubbo (1968), Phillip Adams (1972) and Prof.

F H Shaw.

Prof. Leeper resigned in 1975 over Council of Australian Humanist Societies support for People First. By the late 70s, the practice of appointing honorary vice-presidents ceased, partly as a result of death and natural attrition and a possible lack of enthusiasm.

Speakers of note, in 1964, were Stephen Murray-Smith and Jim Cairns, MHR.

(2d) Formation of the Council of Australian Humanist Societies (CAHS)

Discussions were inaugurated in 1965 with the Humanist Societies of NSW, ACT and South Australia to form a national body, the Council of Australian Humanist Societies, and a draft constitution was drawn up. It was agreed to hold an annual conference at Easter time rotating among the states. The foundation societies of Victoria and NSW were joined by Western Australia and by Queensland, which had changed its name from Queensland Rationalist Society to the Humanist Society of Queensland.

At this time, the political situation was becoming more complex, as Apartheid in South Africa was a live issue and the war in Vietnam had begun. A special closed meeting of the Society was held to determine what political stance should be adopted. Its members had already participated in

demonstrations against apartheid but a more coordinated approach was needed. On the Vietnam issue it was decided to lobby the federal government to press for a negotiated peace.

The Humanist opposition to state aid to non-government schools was a less divisive issue. This campaign was led by Harry Gardner and Jack Dunn until Jack's death in 1986.

Catholic education was in crisis and needed funding from the government to be a viable alternative to state schooling. A Catholic school in Goulburn, NSW, actually closed because of inadequate toilet blocks and the children moved to state schools for which there were insufficient places. This militancy was very effective. This happened in 1962 and was generally held to be a major reason for Labor's loss of the 1963 election.

As a result of this pressure, state aid had been introduced by the Menzies Government in 1964 to give funds to government and non-government schools for the funding of science laboratories, a decision influenced by the Democratic Labor Party, which was mainly Catholic. This funding proved to be the thin end of the wedge.

In 1972, the newly elected Labor government won back the Catholic vote by granting more aid, mainly to the impoverished Catholic system but the Coalition won the right for all non-government schools to receive aid, including the elite ones. This funding is seen as socially divisive, by the Humanists as it encourages children, not to integrate and learn tolerance, but to see themselves as separate.

(2e) An eventful few years

At about this time, there were more moves to set up suburban branches among the first of which was Beaumaris (Mentone) and Blackburn. There was also an attempt to get a youth group going, starting with film afternoons for children.

By the end of 1965, the membership was 170. Dr Clive Sandy retired as president to be replaced by Nick Renton. Dr Beadnell had appeared on 3AW speaking on *What is Humanism*. She also remarked on the difficulty of getting members' letters published in the press.

In 1966, the Society supported the coming referendum, firstly for counting Aborigines in the census and secondly to break the nexus in size between the Senate and House of Representatives. If the nexus had been continued, it would have allowed the possibility of more DLP senators. Other issues on which the HSV campaigned and for which it had formed sub committees were the right to civil weddings and opposition to Sunday observance laws. These committees functioned until 1969.

CAHS, meanwhile, was active in opposition to conscription for the Vietnam War.

Members of the Society were instrumental in the formation of the Victorian Council for Civil Liberties, the Voluntary Euthanasia Society Victoria (VESV) now Dying With Dignity Victoria and the Women's Electoral Lobby founded by Beatrice Faust, an early HSV member.

It was decided to hold meetings on regular evenings from July 1966. July also saw two short discussions on Radio 3AW and the possibility of three television appearances with Crawford Productions. The Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) promised to broadcast a series called 'Inquiry Into Humanism' on the program, 'Encounter'.

Mary Tarbit became Victorian Editor of the new *Australian Humanist (AH)* in 1966 and Len Bergin was appointed Liaison Officer to the United Nations Association.

The Society continued to support Sam Chokuda through donations to Community Aid Abroad. When this project was completed in 1968, this money was given to the Aboriginal Advancement League to provide recreational equipment for the hostel that was being built for Aboriginal youth. Support for the hostel continued for many years.

In 1967, the Native Welfare Conference concluded that the only Aborigines that had problems were the 'full bloods' of Northern Australia although, in Victoria, any person who called himself an Aborigine was deemed to be one. However, Paul Hasluck, MP, had said that the problems of Aborigines in this state were just as deep. Despite the more enlightened rhetoric, not a great deal has changed. Housing and education remain inadequate and the condition of aboriginal health, a national tragedy and disgrace.

The campaign for family planning clinics was continued. In the UK, this project was supported by the *Eugenics Review*. There is now some stigma attached to the word 'eugenics'.

Beatrice Faust spoke on the difficulty of getting a legal abortion and how the law discriminated against poor women who were forced into unsafe 'backyard' procedures.

When the draft legislation on abortion law reform came up in 1969, the Parliament agreed on a conscience vote and it passed into law but this is not uniform in all states.

A letter of protest was sent to the Government against churches having exemption from taxation. This continues to be a live issue.

The Society was very divided over our involvement in war in Vietnam and only 12 members signed the petition against it. A negotiated peace was still its position and this or the Society's stance on religion may have been the reason why, in 1967, its use of the Australia+America Centre was terminated.

One item of concern was that speakers the society engaged were not always familiar with Humanism.

In 1967, short biographies of the honorary vice-presidents appeared in the *VH* and Sue Soesman took over as treasurer from Dr Beadnell. At this time, the latter issued a long statement on voluntary euthanasia.

The College of Adult Education courses by the Humanists were very successful in 1967 and 1968, although enrolments declined steeply in 1969. The lectures appear to have been patronised mainly by Humanists, and interest was waning. Members who delivered lectures were Mendelsohn, Carter, Renton, Max Teichmann, Lynn, Dunn, Myra Roper, Dr Beadnell and Prof. Leeper.

(2f) Young Humanists – if only!

The Young Humanists formed in 1967 with President Robb Wallace. They published their own newsletter but ran into financial trouble and had problems of continuity caused by members taking exams and leaving over university breaks. By 1969, the membership had fallen from 25 to four.

They were not the only ones with financial problems as the Society continually failed to cover the costs of venues and publicity by donations at the door. The membership was 220, with attendance at meeting ranging from 120 to 220, consisting mostly of people in the 20-35 age range and many visitors. Now, in its 50th year, the Society can only dream of such attendance.

The Society was getting good exposure on radio and TV. On Easter Sunday 1967, Nick Renton debated against Max Charlesworth on Channel 9; the topic, 'Man still needs God'. On 6 June, Peter Lynn debated against Rev. Fr Graham Duncan on the ABC: their topic was, 'Is it ridiculous to maintain that the Ten Commandments are implicit in modern ethical thinking?'. On 3 Nov, Channel 7, in the 'Fighting Words' series, Peter Lynn spoke on 'This I believe'.

After the hanging of Ronald Ryan, capital punishment continued to be an issue for the Society, but it was generally felt that there was a lack of major causes among its concerns although it was suggested town planning was somewhere to start. By 1968, Vietnam had not been discussed for three years.

Dr Beadnell was very impressed with the abortion laws in Russia noting that liberalisation had not, as far as she could tell, led to moral decline and family breakdown. She did not remark on the huge number performed. Members of the Society were somewhat uncritical in their attitudes to Communist regimes; they were left-leaning then, as now, but no longer uncritical.

Progress was being made on the family planning front as the Brotherhood of St Laurence set up a 'contraceptive' clinic.

(2g) Membership numbers not seen again until the 'noughties'.

Jack Dunn who became president in 1969 taking over from Nick Renton, spoke at Haileybury and Kingswood Colleges on Humanism while Drs Gardner and Beadnell spoke to church groups. Jack supported legalised prostitution although Dr Beadnell was against it. This, like many other social liberalisation issues, which the Society supported, came to pass, at least for those women and men in brothels, but the law still varies from state to state.

In 1969, the dissolution of the sub-committees on civil marriage and Sunday observance laws occurred. New ones on finance, divorce laws, publicity and social activities, were created with mixed success.

A branch of the Society was formed at Dandenong although it appears to have been short lived. A branch was also formed at Upwey and proved to be very active throughout its life. It appears to have disappeared in 1976. There was a general anti-conscription feeling but the Society was divided over whether Australia should be in Vietnam.

At the end of 1969, Sue Soesman retired as treasurer to be replaced by R J 'Reg' Taylor.

(2h) The Decline

When the Society moved its lectures and public meetings to the Employers' Federation rooms, the Finance Sub-committee was asked to investigate establishing a building fund. This was actively pursued for many years until it became obvious that it was beyond the Society's means.

In hindsight, it may be said that, if less energy had been devoted to raising money for the blind and more directed to the building fund, then it may have been a feasible proposition. However, the Special Aid Project for the Blind Citizens' Community Centre was very popular among members and no one could doubt that it was a very worthwhile cause.

In 1970, the Young Humanists were reformed and, by the end of the year, were holding regular meetings. It was a lively social and political scene until its convener, Robb Wallace, went overseas in 1972. He had been a very active anti-Vietnam War campaigner and had had his claim as a conscientious objector recognised. Despite divisions within the Society, in 1971, support was given for the Victorian Moratorium Committee. 'Humanists for Peace' was set up and members of the Society marched under the HSV banner. Nevertheless, there were accusations from within it saying the Society was becoming 'quasi-political'. Other members were against becoming engaged in social issues such as censorship and abortion. Unanimity is not a feature of a society of free- thinkers!

In this year, Dr Carl Reinganum led the formation of a subcommittee on homosexual law reform. A questionnaire was sent out to 600 homosexuals and an influential pamphlet was published, called *Homosexuals and the Law: A Humanist View*.

This was a case that was repeated several times. Other examples having been mentioned already, where the Society provided the ground from which significant single-issue organisations sprang. In adopting a broad platform, HSV was a home to activists for social progress.

Dr Beadnell was campaigning for family planning clinics and for contraceptives to be advertised. As yet, safe sex wasn't an issue for either sex, the new meaning of 'gay' was not yet current and HIV was unknown.

Meanwhile, suburban branches and house meetings had begun to proliferate. The Upwey Branch was engaging in 'practical Humanism' by helping with the aged and other disadvantaged groups within the community.

In 1971-72, HSV provided the executive for CAHS. They were Jack Dunn, president, Janet South, secretary and Kate Thomter, treasurer.

Jack Dunn retired as president in 1972 and, in April, Reg Taylor went overseas and handed over the position of treasurer to Ron Simpson. At the end of the year, this was formalised. There were now 309 members, the most so far.

At around this time, there were moves to join the Zero Population Growth Society and censorship, religious instruction in state schools and the issue of civil marriage was being discussed. The Unitarian Church was of the opinion that it provided the latter service and it was unnecessary for the Humanists to duplicate it.

This was a time of great social activity within the Society, there being picnics, film and play nights, dinners, hikes and concerts.

1973 was generally uneventful. Harry Gardner assumed the presidency, Dr Beadnell remained secretary and Ron Simpson formally became treasurer.

In this year, Jack Dunn was appointed a Civil Marriage Celebrant by Lionel Murphy, Attorney-general in the Whitlam federal Labor government.

(2i) Misplaced optimism

Dr Gardner was optimistic that the campaign against Religious Instruction (RI) was going well and in July, the HSV appeared before the Victorian Education Department regarding religious education asking that RI be abolished and be replaced by ethics and comparative religion. The Committee reported in favour of the Society's recommendations, allowing regular teachers to teach these subjects but nothing came of it. This is a battle still being fought.

3. HUMANISM IN THE SUBURBS

(3a) Humanism in the suburbs

It was thought that the Constitution might need to be amended to accommodate the suburban branches. Despite the spread of resources, the finances were healthy enough.

In 1974, President, John Browning, who took over from former president, Harry Gardner, was very supportive of the branches. Yvonne Foster became treasurer. Dr Beadnell remained secretary.

The Upwey branch was attracting an audience of around 30 at its meetings and was, generally, very energetic. However, it abandoned regular monthly meetings and had public meetings only on special occasions. It also discontinued its Newsletter and relied on the *VH*. In 1974, Upwey formed the advisory bureau, Children by Choice, which provided advice on family planning and was firmly against RI in state schools, which remained Humanist policy. It was strongly opposed to nuclear power stations and was close to the Women's Electoral Lobby. In 1975, the branch formed People Against Rising Prices and its members demonstrated outside supermarkets

Jack Dunn and Kate Thomter did sterling service in speaking to schools.

Voluntary euthanasia was becoming an issue; Dr Beadnell was vocal in supporting selective abortion to screen out defective foetuses.

There was discussion within the Society as to what its objectives were. This resulted in an explanatory leaflet being distributed on Humanism. Kate Thomter raised the issue of whether the Humanist Society was really necessary when special interest groups, with origins in the Society, existed.

A very successful weekend conference was held at Warburton attended by 30 members, but lack of attendance at Committee meetings was becoming a continuing issue.

In 1975, new meeting rooms were obtained at the Victorian Railways Institute in Flinders Street. Over the years, many venues were tried and for reasons of location, cost or aesthetics, finding appropriate ones remained a continuing problem with the executive favouring city over suburban venues. It was felt that a central location was the easiest for members to get to but, as the membership got older, this may not have been the case as membership and attendance was dropping.

In 1976, the practice of featuring Humanist the honorary vice-presidents on the letterhead was discontinued. John Young assumed the presidency and Ron Simpson became treasurer. Dr Beadnell remained secretary and published a booklet called *Are You As Healthy As You Can Be?* The profits from this went to the Society.

Access Radio hosted Humanist sessions providing valuable publicity. In 1976, the Society was represented on the ABC's 'Encounter' with 'Voyage to Unbelief, The Life of Charles Darwin', content supplied by Dr Beadnell. The ABC did not acknowledge her input. Peter Lynn also spoke on the 3AR 'By the Way' series with 'Ethics Without Religion'. The Society was still objecting to the place given to religion on the ABC, which stated that presenting religious programs was part of the diversity for which it aimed. The Society noted a resurgence of fundamentalist religions in the community.

(3b) Not only suburban branches...

At this stage, some of the suburban branches began to fail. This was because they owed their existence, often, to one person who initiated their formation and continuance. If this person moved away or, became otherwise occupied, they tended to disappear. That said, there was a general crisis in membership occurring. The weight of keeping the Society relevant fell to people like Dr Beadnell, Jack Dunn, Nick Renton, Kate Thomter, Len Bergin, Peter Lynn and David Miller. Kate resigned from the Society in the following year. It temporarily lost a valuable member. She returned some years later under her maiden name, Kate Oldaker.

In 1977, John Young became president. Membership had dropped to 152, and attendance at meetings was low. It was surmised this may have been owing to the introduction of colour television but this had been in some time by then. Lack of publicity may have been a factor but also, homosexual members left to form their own organisation. Members of the committee were tending not to turn up to committee meetings and Dr Beadnell often had to take over as president and take decisions for the Society unilaterally. Eighteen months previously, there had been no treasurer and Hans Falkenstein had stepped into the breach.

In this year, the CAHS Convention was held in Melbourne

Finances were also low so money was borrowed from the Building Fund for an expansion drive. Continued support for the blind only got through by a very narrow majority at a small AGM.

By 1978, membership had dropped to 139 and the Society was just solvent. Harry Bench became treasurer. The suburban branches had disintegrated and there were now, few young members. Dr Beadnell, who was wanting time to enjoy her retirement, had turned 70 and, after years of long service as secretary, she wanted to hand the job over. In addition, the Secular Society had started up and drew some members away. The Council for Civil Liberties had also formed, while members were looking to create the Humanist School of Philosophy causing some dissent. The prime movers for this were Edith and Hans Falkenstein and Victor Bien. However, Victor left for Sydney in May or June 1980.

It was decided that public meetings should consist of the first half to be a lecture and the second half, audience participation, a practice followed to this day. The meetings were to begin after

Easter but, for speakers, the Society was heavily dependent on active members such as Jack Dunn, Nick Renton and Peter Lynn.

Debate continued about support for the blind but it was considered an activity where the Society's profile was raised. Live issues for the Society were contraception and the legalisation of abortion. It was noted that Italy had legalised the latter this year on very liberal criteria.

Other debates were going on as to the role of emotions in ethics. At this stage, the consensus fell to pure reason. The author notes that this conclusion is being challenged by recent research using brain scans, biochemical testing and studies of animal societies where embryonic ethics are in evidence.

1979 saw a proposal to merge with the Rationalist Society but nothing came of it.

The voluntary euthanasia debate was still on, but apart from that, the Society saw itself as lacking burning issues. It was losing its way.

(3c) ... the Committee also

There was also conflict within the committee and attendance was down three. Twelve was too large a number to maintain and was unwieldy. Active members were lacking in the Society and things were looking grim.

In 1979, Colin Duncan, a conciliatory and committed man, became president. Harry Bench was assisting Dr Beadnell and as a result of the ensuing crisis, Jack Dunn took over the presidency in 1980 for one year only. Dr Beadnell was again secretary but for the last time, and Harry Bench, reluctantly, became treasurer again. Dr Beadnell had served in the capacity of secretary and editor of the *VH* for almost 20 years. As a consequence, a new editor was being sought and the whole committee was to retire at the end of the year.

Harry Bench saw the crisis within the Society as being generated by a change in the 1978 committee's attitude. In a statement sent to CAHS, he said that '[CAHS] should make much more effort to criticise on every possible occasion, religious interference in public and private life' and should consider this 'its first priority, to take precedence over other humanitarian and social issues.' On the other hand, Harry proposed that the Society's aim was converting people to the concept of Bertrand Russell's 'enlightened self-interest', which illustrates the rift. As a result of the committee's attitude, support for the blind was discontinued and the connection with the United Nations Association put on hold, as these were said to lead to a dissipation of resources.

There remained a 'considerable' amount in the Building Fund but this was soon to be used for what were seen as more pressing financial issues. The money was transferred in 1982, the Society promising refunds of donations for those who were unhappy.

Dinners and picnics as well as other social events were still being held and there were several notable speakers such as James Robertson, Ralph Nader and Sam Lipski.

On the political front, the Premier, Rupert Hamer, responded to the *Russell Report* which had recommended that a more general religious education be progressively introduced to schools, to be taught by trained teachers and accredited volunteers. RI was to be phased out. However, teachers' unions had banned their members from teaching it. The battle to have it banned is still being fought but, with time, RI has become firmly entrenched, ACCESS Ministries, an evangelical organisation, putting hundreds of volunteers into schools.

(d) The nadir: things could only get better!

In 1980, the membership was still falling but that year saw Halina Strnad join. She proved to be a great addition. She joined the committee as treasurer and, over the next 20 years, she was to present more than 200 submissions to the government and other bodies on behalf of the Society. She is still submissions convener.

Interesting was Dr Beadnell's attitude to China, which she saw as espousing Humanist ideals. Her quote from Mao was, 'Once the correct ideas characteristic of the advanced class, [ie Humanists,!!! Her addition?] are grasped by the masses, these ideas turn into a material force which changes society and the world'. (This is nowadays seen as a rather naïve position.) James Gerrand, the incoming president also saw the USSR as being Humanist. He was quite quick to question Harry and Lottie Bench's criticisms of life in East Germany after a visit they made there. But, there was, indeed, a lot of curiosity about the secular Communist world.

In 1981, James Gerrand became president and editor of the *VH*. Mark Plummer, a very active member and spokesman, became secretary and Halina Strnad became treasurer.

There were now only 116 members. The lectures were once more moved to the city, in the hope of boosting attendance at public meetings, which were still being advertised in *The Age*.

The Society was now looking for a charitable cause and Helen Meggs put forward the idea of a 'self help' farm at Kinglake, for unemployed youth. It was fully costed and she had wanted the Building Fund monies to go to it. A committee was set up to look into the matter. The next year, it was named Outlook Farm.

In 1982, Les Allan became secretary. The remainder of the executive stayed the same.

(4) CONTROVERSIES

(4a) Controversies

Under the new editorship, the nature of the *VH* changed and nothing of the workings of the Society can be gleaned from it. It now took the form of reports of the public meeting and long philosophical debates between James and, in particular, and the Sydney-sider, Keith Rex. James also wrote long, informed articles. The debates, at times, descended into acrimony between speakers and contributors, not a good look for Humanists as a whole. Discussion nights sometimes drew as few as six participants. James was seen as too controlling by many members but he was doing an excellent job as a representative of the Society.

It was at this point that the Society began its support for the in vitro fertilisation (IVF) program and wrote submissions on the same. It was the focus of lively ethical debate, many but not all of these issues, being resolved.

On a lighter note, Mark Plummer, ex HSV vice-president and lawyer, defended David McKay who wore a sandwich board proclaiming, 'Jesus is coming and boy is he pissed off'. He had him cleared of all charges.

In this year, the Humanist library was established and membership rose to 163.

James Gerrand remained president in 1983, Halina Strnad, treasurer and John White, secretary. James spoke on the radio 3CR's Yarra Bank Show again and to Bert Newton on 3UZ. He and others continued to visit schools some of which were religious.

The executive of CAHS for 1983-84 was supplied by HSV, with Mark Plummer, president, James Gerrand, secretary and Halina Strnad as treasurer.

The US was seen as a very belligerent party in world politics, and the pages of the *VH* had moved further to the Left under James's editorship. The cause of disarmament was adopted and was very much an anti-US stance.

The debate about state aid to private schools had been lost, and Parliament and local councils still opened their meetings with prayer. Witnesses still had to take an oath and God remained within the Constitution of Australia. These were all recurring Humanist issues.

The *VH* was becoming a forum for a few individuals. Keith Rex continued to invite controversy with some of his outrageous statements about Humanism but some of his points were stimulating. The *VH* became a battleground for particularly sensitive political issues. James, meanwhile, was

writing some excellent editorials but was induced to say that the opinions expressed did not necessarily represent the views of the Society.

IVF and a minimum living wage were still subjects of Humanist debate. In the mean time, Scientology had been recognised as a religion so there were again queries among Humanists as to whether they should try for recognition as such. It became a hot and divisive issue.

Membership had risen to 185. Public meetings were attended by 70, at the most, while the Society was trying for a Council of Adult Education (CAE) course in 1984.

In 1984, the executive didn't change. In July, however, John White stepped down as secretary and Ron Simpson assumed that office.

(4b) Social agenda wins out but the controversy remains

Debate continued in the pages of the *VH* with James vigorously espousing social issues. However, an anti-religious tone existed which was name-calling rather than being constructive. James considered Bertrand Russell and BF Skinner his greatest inspirations. He held both men up as being ultimate examples of applying scientific thought to life but even scientific 'truths' can be superseded.

There were great fears, at this time, that computers would lead to mass unemployment and debate about decriminalising illicit drugs. James's letters to the press were a voice in the wilderness and out of step with the rest of society.

1985 saw a changing of the guard in the executive. Colin Duncan became president for the second time, Halina Strnad, secretary and Norm Bligh, treasurer.

In a further move to the Left, Marx the *VH* quoted Marx as saying "...communism as the transcendence of private property, equals humanism" a statement seen as alienating the more conservative in the Society. Brian Lowe, in his letters, took discussion even further to the Left as did the Wakemans. Harry Bench, however, came out against the Soviet system.

(4c) Change

It is interesting that, at this time, AIDS was becoming a public health issue and the term 'gay' was becoming current. Gene therapy along with IVF was being discussed. Humanists made a submission on decriminalizing prostitution, partly so it could be regulated and the nexus with organised crime broken.

The Society supported the Australian Commission for the Future, which equated progress with greater development of science and technology. James certainly had a lot of letters published and provoked discussion. He was in favour of Humanism being recognised as a religion, partly so it could receive government funding, but this drew heated opposition.

However, there were rumblings in the Society against James as editor of the *VH*, and Colin Duncan proposed that a committee be formed to screen what went into it. At the AGM, James had the numbers and the move was defeated. This defeat did not last long, however. 1986 proved a turbulent year for James. He made a statement that he wanted complaints about his editorial policy addressed directly to him rather than hearing them second-hand and it appears an editorial subcommittee had been formed. He said that some views expressed in the *VH* appeared too controversial for the subcommittee and that contributions should be accepted on their merits.

The first Editorial Sub-committee appears to have consisted of Mary Bergin, Jack Dunn and Donald Thomson. In September 1986, another sub-committee was appointed consisting of Mary Bergin, Carrie Salters, John Prior and Mervyn Corner.

It published guidelines in February 1987.

These were that, there should be (a) official material requested by the subcommittee,

(b) news of social activities and coming events, (c) discussion and views on social, political and economic matters, (d) material relating the Society to other organisations with a view to furthering its aims, and e) nothing libelous will be published.

Another ruling was that contributions may be edited but must be cleared with the contributor.

The 1986 executive was Colin Duncan, Halina Strnad, and Norm Blyth. The first meeting of the Outer Eastern Humanist Group, replaced the defunct Upwey group.

James remained a valuable spokesman for the Society, appearing on Muriel Cooper's show on radio 3AW to discuss capital punishment. He also spoke at St Joseph's College, North Melbourne, and the Monash Atheist Students Society. In the *VH*, he remained very idealistic regarding the USSR and Libya, to which he had travelled. This provoked the query as to whether 'travelogues' were relevant to Humanism.

The Rationalists, Skeptics, Existentialists and Humanist had many members in common, and it was felt they should move closer. The Humanists put forward the view that knowledge is based on science while the view was expressed that philosophy could shed light on issues for which science has no answers such as we find in the humanities. This was in reply to the comment that the *VH* was too philosophical. Halina Strnad wrote an excellent letter in reply to those who expressed the opinion that no common ground could be found within Humanism.

(4d) Oh dear!

There was some conflict in the pages of the newsletter regarding the prolific contributor, Keith Rex, who claimed to be a Humanist but seemed to try to demolish everything Humanism stood for. Miffy, James and Halina refuted his claims very expertly. Concern was expressed by other contributors, that Humanism was so amorphous that anyone could claim to be a Humanist. Miffy and James were also in conflict, he describing her as a political conservative while James was very much of the Left. Donald Thomson was of the opinion that, if the Society had to be political, it should be non-partisan. Brian Lowe said that the *VH* should not be an organ of the Socialist Left and that the editor should be more moderate in his replies to letters. This issue spilled over to 1987.

The Society, under its own banner, continued to take part in peace marches on Palm Sundays. It lobbied CAHS on bioethics, education and legal reform.

Late in 1986, Jack Dunn, always an active member, died, and Halina wrote a fine obituary in the *VH*. He was a Rationalist, Humanist and engineer. He had been very active in defense of public Education and in societies allied to the Humanists. He had been a founding member of the Society and president in 1969 and 1980. And, as has already been observed, he was one of the first civil celebrants to be appointed in 1973.

Membership numbers were not improving and the committee still consisted of 12 members with the powers to co-opt three.

The new executive for 1987 consisted of Mary Bergin, president, James Gerrand, secretary and Norm Blyth, treasurer.

(4e) Reason, first, last and always?

James argued that pure reason was the way to solve problems and that they should never be solved by rule of thumb as one contributor suggested. He went on to say that if an argument was internally valid then there should be no argument as to the conclusions it reached. The author suggests that he was wrong on two counts. First, the premise of an internally consistent argument can be quite erroneous and, second, the more variables, the less able we are to make a valid choice. He obtained media exposure on radio 3LO's Encounter, in the *Sunday Observer* and had many letters published. In these, he was mostly a fine representative of the Society.

Meanwhile, the nature of the *VH* had changed. The debate wasn't quite as lively, the lectures with question and answers were printed, as were abstracts of relevant journals and newspaper items.

There was no comment on social activities nor on active members.

Glad Folie and Lorna Noble were responsible for social activities and were very able organisers.

This was the time of Perestroika, the Chernobyl explosion and the USSR incursion into Afghanistan.

Voluntary euthanasia remained a Society cause, especially after a survey found that 86% of the population thought passive euthanasia acceptable.

In response to a Liberal Party leaflet being circulated in schools, it was planned for the Humanists to circulate their own. In addition, the Society participated in a seminar called 'The Crisis in the Media'.

James rebutted Nigel Sinnott's claim that the name Humanism was a liability since membership had peaked in the late '60s and early '70s. Clearly, it was not now attracting the numbers. Keith Rex, a prolific contributor in the past, declared that Darwinism was dead and that sociobiology was a pseudoscience that Humanists espoused.

In 1988, Glad Folie became acting president while the rest of the executive remained the same.

There were a lot of new faces on the committee while Halina continued to lead the discussion groups at her home. She and Colin Duncan were still responsible for submissions. Five sub-committees were set up, to publish with the Humanist Society of New South Wales (HSNSW), the Australian *Humanist Dipper*, to get Humanist books in public libraries and to cover media, membership and publishing.

The HSV appears to have supplied the CAHS executive from 1988-95, with Nick Renton as president, James Gerrand as secretary and various treasurers.

The Society committee had on its agenda armed neutrality, gun control, IVF (which was debated at Mannix College), informed medical consent and a move to have a Humanist inclusion in the syllabus of years 11 and 12, 'Society of Man'.

(4f) A stalwart dies

On 16 January 1988, that stalwart of the society, L M M "Miffy" Beadnell died. For almost 20 years she had been secretary of the HSV and editor of the *VH*, had given CAE courses, written innumerable letters to and made appearances on the media. In 1949, she had been made a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and had written papers for the Royal Victorian Astronomical Society. She was a great example of using science to further our knowledge and inform our choices – a foundation tenet of Humanism. She believed that certain things were unknowable and that male and female were equal. As a younger woman, she had ridden a motorbike and, at the age of 70, did a gliding course. As an activist General Practitioner, she had espoused the causes of family planning, was pro-choice, pro-IVF for reproduction as well as a cure for genetic diseases and wrote and spoke on many health issues, particularly family health. Once she retired as editor of the *VH*, she wrote abstracts of overseas journals for it and engaged James in lively debate. James Gerrand and Kate Oldaker, her long time friend, were among those that spoke at her funeral.

The HSV gave its support to the Australian Association for Armed Neutrality, while James controversially obtained the Society's condemnation of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza or more controversially – as he called them – 'Palestinian lands'. His view was supported by the Israel Secular Humanist Association.

The Committee had started to lobby for a secular representative on the National Committee for Bioethics. Peter Singer was proposed. The main issue was IVF, and the Society had made a

submission on that subject. The Society had also joined the Coalition for Gun Control after the Hoddle Street massacre and planned to join the Clifton Hill Gun Control Group. It was further decided to withdraw the HSV's advertisements in *The Age* and use other means of publicity. Another issue was to change the census form regarding the religion question.

James appeared on the Doug Aiton show on the ABC's 3LO and spoke on experimentation with fetuses up to 22 hours old that were being discarded as a result of IVF. The Catholic bishop was staunchly opposed to any such use. Meanwhile, members of the Society were getting many letters published in the press, and James debated with John Smith, Co-pastor of the Uniting Church in a debate at Latrobe University. Colin Duncan appeared on the ABC's Sunday Conference, talking on voluntary euthanasia.

Nigel Sinnott and James embarked on a heated debate in the pages of the *VH* regarding the treatment of Aborigines, land rights and whether Western education was appropriate. James supported the latter because he said it gave them choices and the hunter/gatherer lifestyle was no longer available to them in most cases.

5. WHITHER THE SOCIETY IN 1988?

(5a) Whither the Society in 1988?

The Society appears to still have lost its way as the committee drew up a development plan, but this was not adhered to. It also sought to encourage special interest and regional groups as a means of promotion. Despite low membership numbers, members continued to speak on radio and at universities and schools. As 1988 drew to a close, the issue of whether Humanism should become a religion was again hotly debated. David Martin thought the anti-religious stance was emphasised too much, while James stressed that the Society was more about social issues.

The 1989 executive was Andrew Rawlings, James Gerrard and Robert Bender. Colin Duncan, a former president and active member, died in April. James debated with sociology lecturer John Carroll on the topic, 'Has Humanism Destroyed Western Culture?' on radio, 3RRR FM. Bioethics remained very much on the agenda of the Society, which linked it to concern over population growth. Only Rosslyn Ives seemed to link equality of women and raised living standards as a means of reducing fertility. The issue, as well as the optimum population for Australia, was further debated in the pages of the *VH*.

In this year, the HSV was to be listed in the Yellow Pages telephone directory, and Robert Bender arranged for the Society to be incorporated. In 1990, the Building Fund was resurrected though, it appears, without success. Mary Bergin replaced James as Secretary. James was also replaced as editor of the *VH*, by Rosslyn Ives, although he remained as publisher. He continued to edit the *AH*, which was now the main discussion forum. Revised editorial guidelines for the *VH* were set up.

The religious debate seemed to be settled when Andrew Rawlings said that the Society should leave quarreling with religion to the atheists while the Humanists would promote Humanism. In 1992, Bill Keir proposed to wind up the HSV and transfer its assets to the Victorian Secular Society, which he had recently formed, but the move failed to win support. He was motivated by what he saw as members' apathy. He resigned shortly after.

The Fabians were among the organizations advertised in the *VH*, while James inveighed against US and Israeli policy and the influence of the Jewish lobby in Washington. He did, however, say that the totalitarian character of the USSR was not in keeping with Humanist values – a definite softening of his previous stance.

Robert Bender spoke on Humanism on radio 3LO and 3INR, maintaining a public profile for the Society in the process.

At the November 1991 AGM, owing to low attendance at Committee meetings, it was moved to reduce the quorum to four but the motion was lost. However, the resolution to amend the Constitution so that the Committee would be reduced to nine was carried. In 2010, the ability to co-opt was reintroduced.

At this point, James Gerrand and Brett Paatsch agreed that a discussion on the 'tattered' name of Humanism was well overdue, although there had been general rumblings before this time. The idea was applauded by Harry Bench. It partly hinged on the decision of the 1991 Committee to concern itself only with housekeeping. It was therefore decided to devote the Sunday discussion group to Humanism. Meanwhile, letters on the issue had largely drifted to the *AH*.

HSV infrastructure and the publication of policy statements had been last laid down in 1980 dealt with euthanasia, education, population and birth control, environmental protection, mankind, attitude to religion, Humanist ethics, personal liberty and care of disadvantaged. There were now moves for these to be up-dated.

James wrote a letter to Corporate Affairs Victoria, complaining of its ageism, which prevented anyone over the age of 72 from being the Public Officer for an incorporated organization. This directly affected the Society with its ageing membership.

Meanwhile, HSV had received a bequest from "Miffy" Beadnell's estate of \$2,000, directed towards an essay competition on Humanism for secondary school students.

Part way through the year, Andrew Rawlings resigned from the presidency and issues got even more messy when one of the committee moved to have the committee meetings taped although the motion appears to have been lost. The membership, however, remained in the doldrums at 156. Halina Strnad became acting president.

The premise that you had to be both scientifically literate and intelligent to be a Humanist seemed to confirm the idea that the Society was elitist. It assumed that the disadvantaged should look up to it despite the fact that they were the least likely to be members and that it was unlikely that they had heard of Humanism. It indicated optimistic assumptions as to how broadly the message spread.

The HSV's main preoccupation seemed to be population control while public meetings dealt with new issues such as racial and religious vilification, deinstitutionalisation of the mentally ill, privatisation of public property, the coming census, sex education in schools and, of course, state aid.

(5b) On the move.

An occasion of note was when a panel of Humanists debated at Monash University, debated with the Christadelphians on the topic, 'It is impossible to build a just and moral society without the acceptance of the Biblical God?'. Further to this topic, Sean Dooley wrote a pamphlet, *A Scientific Basis of Ethics*, and this is how the question is still being addressed in 2010.

In 1994, the president was Ray Dahlitz, Mary Bergin, secretary and Chris Jones, treasurer. At this time, Nick Renton of HSV was CAHS president.

Chris had appeared on the Jon Faine 3LO spot on 11 February, as a Humanist spokesperson, while Robert Bender had an article published about him in *The Age*,

17 February. Ray Dahlitz's book, *Secular Who's Who*, a large undertaking, had also been published with a section solely devoted to Humanists. In May, a plan was issued for a Humanist funeral service and Halina Strnad compiled the *Humanist Education Kit* for years 11 and 12 but it never appears to have been issued in final form to schools.

Ray remarked that without government subsidies such as religions have and Humanist organisations in Norway and the Netherlands get, Humanist societies in Australia would languish

as small, marginal bodies, as in the US. This was one argument for Humanism to be recognised as a religion.

(5c) Women

Even in an enlightened society such as the HSV, it was not always easy to get women recognised as equal to men, although Rosslyn Ives, editor of the *VH*, remained a great spokesperson for them, making the points that 50% of pregnancies were unwanted and that most women would limit their fertility, given a choice. Some men had the simplistic view that women's fertility and willingness to breed were the main problems when, actually, the more equality women enjoyed, the lower the birth rate.

At this point, the HSV donated \$500 to the Worawa Aboriginal Humanist Scholarship Fund.

Dally Messenger, HSV member and civil celebrant, became president of the Australian Federation of Civil Celebrants, and there are now numerous celebrants who are Humanists. At the same time, under the slogan, 'Revitalisation, Relevance and Recruitment' the specific aims of the Society were to extend the speaker panel, to realise the potential of the CAHS Conference and maximize the secular response in the 1996 census. Advocating use of the abortion pill RU486 and the ethics involved in IVF were still of major concern.

A public meeting was held involving Humanists and representatives of various religions on 'Religion and Morality in a Secular Society', involving Humanists and representatives of various religions, while Ray Dahlitz convened an open meeting on the future of Humanism.

The membership languished at 163.

The executive of 1995 remained the same, except that Colin Watson replaced Chris Jones as treasurer. James Gerrand, maintained, rather optimistically, that scientists would ensure that logging of forests was sustainable, somewhat overestimating their influence and enthusiasm. It was noted that 50% of scientists were employed militarily, so we should not assume altruistic motives.

In this year, the HSV hosted the CAHS Convention..

On the 6 March 1995, Olive Zakarov, Senator and active member of the Society, died some days after a car accident. She had helped with Humanist submissions and pioneered human relations and sex education in schools, fertility control and support for the disadvantaged. She was Australian Humanist of the Year in 1984 and a proclaimed atheist.

6. PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES

(6a) Humanism and religion

Ray Dahlitz spoke at the Jewish Secular Humanist Society. Dally Messenger, in a speech, quoted Edmond Barton, the first prime minister, saying "The biggest challenge facing a national society...was to find a feasible, structured cultural substitute for organized religion", an aim seemingly unachievable, given the government support for it, its ubiquity and growing fundamentalism. At the same time, there was a need for government support of Humanist palliative care, now provided by volunteers. In 2010, this is no longer the case and professionals are employed, although much of the work is still voluntary. Ray sought funding for the preservation of secular material for the Australian Secular Freethought Movement; this would have included material generated by the Humanists.

It should be noted, at this point, that members of the HSV were contributing hugely to the production of *AH*. Those helping with the mail-out included Betty Gerrand, Harry and Lottie Bench, Len Bergin, Norm Blyth, Laurie Coles, Merv Corner, Glad Folie and Ron Simpson. 1995 also saw the McPhates join. They soon became members of the committee and active generally.

Rosslyn Ives wrote, regarding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is strongly supported by Humanists, that we should not assume blanket acceptance of it, because it was oriented towards American and Western values generally and smacked of colonialism in the eyes of some peoples. It has now been virtually negated by concessions to Moslem countries.

Education, never far from Humanist hearts, was seen as a promoter of equality and tolerance, and yet the funding of independent schools led to separateness and intolerance. Therefore, Humanists continued to campaign against this funding.

The executive for 1996 was Ray Dahlitz, Mary Bergin and Colin Watson, with Ben Leeman as editor of the *VH*. This publication started the year with definitions of Humanism and articles on other freethought societies. Reg Taylor, founding member and sometime committeeman died.

An interesting HSV motion to CAHS that year was against the Holy See sitting at the UN since it isn't a nation although Australia acknowledges it as one by having an ambassador there.

Population control, consumption and sustainability were still on the agenda and 'global warming' came into common parlance. The Society openly opposed both the State and Federal governments, maintaining that support for the disadvantaged, homeless and addicted should be done by government and not delegated to church bodies. These are now supported in these endeavours by taxation so the separation of church and state is becoming more blurred.

(6b) Relativism and a universal ethic

James Gerrand again raised the issue of Humanist ethics being situational. This is a difficult concept for most people and the religious see it as smacking of relativism which has become somewhat discredited. The conflation of cultural practice and necessity with ethics raised the question of universal ethical values. James asked whether the taking of illicit drugs was ethical when most Humanists would see it as a question of legality and of breaking the nexus between drugs and organised crime. Alcohol, though legal, did more harm and, together with cigarettes, cost the state more, than illicit drug. Nevertheless, as usual, James provokes some interesting debate.

Long-time Humanists, author David Martin, was honoured but died the next year, while *Daily Messenger* was made a life member of the Australian Federation of Civil Celebrants.

The *VH* published a page-long list of celebrants to mark the occasion.

Unemployment was prominent in the pages of the *VH*, partly because it was an ongoing Humanist issue and partly because the editor of the *VH*, Ben Leeman, was a social worker. The Society, optimistically, wanted to see unemployment fall below 2%, to see the widening gap between rich and poor narrowed and abhorred the growth of part-time jobs and job insecurity from downsizing. Since the definition of 'unemployed' changed much later than when this 2% was arrived at and since that 2% undoubtedly did not include women, it was unrealistic in every sense.

Halina Strnad deplored the proposed withdrawal of government funding for family planning clinics because population growth and a woman's control over her own fertility remained vital issues. Women, given the choice, will generally reduce the number of children they have and are more attuned to the population problem than most men where sex, not unwanted pregnancy, is primary.

Halina had become president and the membership remained low at 180.

In the next year, 1997, Rosslyn Ives became president and Maureen McPhate became secretary. Colin Watson remained as treasurer until he resigned later in the year owing to ill health. Robert Bender was a temporary replacement until John Drake was elected.

A letter was sent to Senators by the HSV asking them to vote against the nullification of the Northern Territory's *The Rights of the Terminally Ill Act*, which made voluntary euthanasia legal. Despite overwhelming public support for it, governments have strongly resisted moves to have

such legislation reintroduced, although, in 2010, Greens Senator, Bob Brown, has attempted it once more.

The Society's proposed CAE course, 'Introduction to Humanism' was accepted. Session 1 was to be run by Ben Leeman while Ray Dahlitz was to tutor Sessions 2-7. However, the course did not attract enough enrolments to proceed.

An essay competition, funded by the bequest from 'Miffy' Beadnell was run for secondary school students on the topic of Humanism. A donation of \$233 raised at the annual dinner, went to the Fred Hollows Foundation.

The librarian of three years, Valerie Sands, resigned and, as a result, the library went into storage until new shelving was obtained for use in 2000. Mary Bergin and Halina Strnad had formerly been very active in keeping it going while Halina has a formidable library of her own on Humanist topics which she used for research when making submissions for the Society.

Harry Bench, among others, with his great knowledge of history, had been a valuable donor to the HSV library. He died on 15 May 1997 and had been a member since the early '60s. He had been treasurer, committee member and had organised speakers and debates. He saw religions as destructive and was a friend of Australian Humanist of the Year 1987, the broadcaster, Phillip Adams.

(6c) Things began looking up

Two sets of lectures raised the Humanist profile in 1997. John Ralston Saul, Canadian Humanist of the Year, gave the Massey Lectures and Eva Cox, the Australian Humanist of the Year, gave the Boyer Lectures. This resulted in increased interest and membership in the HSV.

Motions to CAHS reflected the times while some are still on the Society's agenda. They concerned the Tobin Tax to be levied on all international financial transactions and distributed to developing countries, optimum population and biodiversity, apology to the 'stolen generation', and reconciliation with the Aboriginal population and an Australian republic.

On the economic front, new conditions for unemployment benefits were opposed on the grounds that the rich could always escape their obligations. Unemployment was not seen as laziness but of shortcomings in the capitalist system.

Senator Harradine's influence re RU486 and other issues was seen as pernicious. Cuts to the funding of the ABC were another concern.

James Gerrand, meanwhile, maintained that science was all and philosophy useless in solving the problems of mankind. The geologist, Professor Ian Plimer, Australian Humanist of the Year 1995, was currently applauded for his willingness to risk bankruptcy in taking legal action against Creationists. His latter work, *Heaven and Earth*, (2009), has been harshly criticised by his peers, showing that scientists are not infallible.

From 1998 to 2000, inclusive, the HSV supplied the executive for CAHS. It consisted of Ray Dahlitz, president, Rosslyn Ives, secretary and Robert Bender, treasurer.

In 1998, the executive consisted of Rosslyn Ives, president, Maureen McPhate, secretary, and John Drake, treasurer. Ben Leeman remained editor of the *VH*. There were few at the AGM where Philip Nitschke, head of Exit International, was guest speaker. The HSV supported him in his bid for the seat of Menzies. Membership had risen to 220, and the HSV had now been on the World Wide Web for two years.

The HSV was lobbying for social justice, personal autonomy, public education, world peace and environmental protection, which, it was hoped, would be facilitated by closer ties with the IHEU. It also supported moves for a republic.

The Society remained actively opposed to religious instruction in state schools

(RI) – later to be designated Special Religious Instruction (SRI), a battle not yet won. It supported the moves for a republic and the teaching of comparative religion, which had been taught in some NSW primary and high schools, at least, since World War 11.

(6e) Raising our profile

The Second's Club was devised by Ray Dahlitz in order to get more members involved in organising and publicity for Australis2000 but, as a project, it largely failed.

Close ties had been reinstated with the United Nations Association of Australia (Victoria) and Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS).

James Gerrand succeeded in getting published his views in the *Herald-Sun's* 'Head to Head' column (2 February), 'Should Christianity be taught in State Schools at all?'

The 1967 Referendum had not only recognized Aborigines as citizens, it entitled them to welfare, seen by Aboriginal elders such as Noel Pearson as a double-edged sword. Meanwhile, the question of Aboriginal land rights was hotly debated in the pages of the *VH*, and the Society finally gave its support to the Victorian Branch of Australians for Native Title. The One Nation party had now formed and was very vocal against indigenous entitlements and what it saw as preferential treatment.

A new Humanist leaflet had been issued, and the Society donated to Freedom From Hunger, Community Aid Abroad, the Blind Citizens Centre and the Fred Hollows Foundation.

In 1999, Alan McPhate assumed the presidency; the rest of the executive remained the same.

Ray Dahlitz organised the Oscar Mendelsohn lecture at Monash University at which Peter Singer spoke, arousing a lot of interest in freethought groups generally. Peter Singer and Alastair Davidson, both Humanists and both of Monash, gained positions at Princeton University in the United States.

The CAHS Convention was held in Melbourne, raising the profile of Humanism, specifically. A meeting on youth homelessness was held at St Mark's Church hall, Camberwell. An HSV submission on the subject in 1998, by Halina Strnad, drew approbation from several government departments.

Lorna Noble again donated a painting for a raffle.

The January/February edition of the *VH* contained an autobiography of James Gerrand, ever a prominent member. He relinquished his long-time editorship of the *AH* to Rosslyn Ives in 1998 because the CAHS Executive objected to his maintaining personal control of the content. The issue precipitating this action was his attitude to what he called 'the Aboriginal problem'. The move was endorsed by the CAHS Convention. Rosslyn became editor largely by default as no one but James was willing to take on the editorship. In 2011, she still edits both journals although with some help from Dan Kerr regarding the *VH*.

(7) REAFFIRMATION OF HUMANISM IN 1999

(7a) Reaffirmation of Humanism in 1999

The Society again made a statement of policy and principles. Generally, it was non-theistic where humans shape their own lives in a humane and ethical society. As there was one life only, the ideal was to live it in freedom and dignity where one's potential can be developed. Science was acknowledged as a basis along with the arts. Of interest to the Society were human rights, ethics, liberty, tolerance, education, biodiversity, the environment, bioethics and the cancellation of Third World debt. The UK forgave the debt but the US did not, and there was still concern over the conditions imposed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Members submitted letters to *The Age* and *Herald-Sun* on the republic, 'God' in the Australian Constitution, the election of an Australian president and US foreign policy. As usual, not all were

published. CAHS sent leaflets to politicians drawing their attention to the fact that 40% of the population had no religious affiliation. This coincided with Federal parliament endorsing the form of the 2001 Census and the position of the 'No religion' question remained the same for the 2011 Census.

The success of the Melbourne Euthanasia Advisory Clinic was hailed in the *VH*. Not only did the Australian Medical Association object, but legislation was brought in to make all such enterprises illegal.

It was noted that the breakdown of funding for the School Chaplaincy Program run by the Council for Christian Education in Schools was as follows: 10% supplied by that organisation, 20% by government and 70% by school committees. The Society also noted with regret, the proposed change of the name of the Equal Opportunity Commission to the Equal Opportunity and Equal Responsibility Commission. It now appears to be named the Australian Human Rights Commission.

The passing of Colin Watson, member since the 1960s, public officer, library donor, past treasurer and committee member, was acknowledged in the pages of the *VH*.

In 2000, on the resignation of Ben Leeman from the committee and the *VH*, Ray Dahlitz took over as acting editor for that year only. The executive remained the same.

In preparation for the new millennium, Ray Dahlitz had gathered a list of prominent supporters and funds in preparation for Australis2000, which the IHEU had agreed to be a global, international Congress. However, at the General Assembly in Mumbai, January 1999, it was decided to downsize the Australian Congress to a regional event, running back-to-back with the global Skeptics' Congress in Sydney in November 2000. It was eventually organised by HSNSW. HSV sent \$2000 in support, to the Steering Committee. An additional \$3,000 was transferred from Melbourne to Sydney for the Asian-Pacific Rim Regional Humanist Conference, a congress of the IHEU and CAHS on the theme, 'Ethics and values for the new century'.

Halina Strnad was still holding the monthly discussion session at her home and preparing submissions.

The Happy Human emblem was stored at *The Age* for use in Society advertising death notices. This saved the time and expense of submitting it each time.

Dr Peter Lynn, member for 39 years, past president and author of *Ethics Without Religion*, (1976), died. He was self-educated, a social worker who rose to the position of Director of Prison Administration in Victoria. He gave many excellent talks on offenders and the prison system to the Society and was much involved in prison reform.

Over 35% of parliamentarians now affirmed instead of swearing the oath.

The Society demonstrated against the policies of the World Economic Forum on the occasion of the Forum's Asia-Pacific Summit, which mostly included CEOs of multinationals, politicians and academics. The interests of developing nations were not seen to be served.

Another ongoing issue was drug use, noting that the drug trade was second only to the arms trade and that there was no reasonable hope of stamping it out. HSV policy was for liberalisation of existing laws and harm minimisation.

The Society issued a 'Plan Ahead' kit, to assist people in the case of illness, ageing and injury for when individuals were no longer able to look after their affairs. 2000 was also the year of a new *Humanist Manifesto*.

The executive for 2001 was Alan and Maureen McPhate with Stephen Stuart, treasurer. Ray Dahlitz, one of the most active members, left the committee but still participated in the general publication of the *VH*.

There were plans to set up the Humanist Education Trust to enable the HSV to allocate funds for educational purposes. It was an attempt to get tax deductibility for those who donated to HSV. This never eventuated, even for large bequests.

The Society's concerns were bioethics, Aboriginal reconciliation, detention of asylum seekers, mandatory sentencing, global warming, privatisation of essential services, voluntary euthanasia, and the independence of the ABC and that Government had refused to sign the UN Optional Protocol on the Convention of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

(7b) Homeplus Living, Inc.

Meanwhile, Howard and Marie Hodgens and Halina Strnad were active in setting up Homeplus Living, Inc., a not-for-profit organisation for homeless students in years 11 and 12. This was to provide stable housing and living skills so that they could continue their education. Counselling and mentoring were offered. Two houses, one in Ashwood for girls and one for boys in Mitcham, were secured. The aim was to approach students through School Welfare Officers. A welcome grant from the Ross Foundation was received.

Noted with regret, was the death of Bill Keir, who joined the Society in 1982, was a committee member and vice-president, 1988-9, minutes secretary 1992-4, and founder, in 1992, of the Victorian Secular Society.

The HSV was concerned that universities were being corporatised and becoming more dependent on full fee paying students, both domestic and foreign, while academic standards were falling. On the same note, James Gerrard bemoaned the lack of scientific literacy in students from primary to tertiary levels.

While Rosslyn Ives was abroad, James edited the May and June editions of the *VH* and, as usual, attracted controversy, particularly over a very non-Humanist attitude to the Stolen Generation for which he was a denier.

Among the motions to go to CAHS were scientific literacy, the lack of science programs on the ABC, particularly the axing of 'Quantum', the census, climate change and the Bush administration's condition on foreign aid excluding contraception and contraceptive advice except abstinence. The needs for more funding for research and development and a forward-looking water policy were also mentioned.

Rosslyn Ives entered the controversy of whether science was the answer to all humanity's problems and whether Humanism could be considered a religion, arguing for the negative. This continues as a live issue to this day.

The University of the Third Age (U3A) placed requests for the Humanists to participate in courses on comparative religions, while speakers for the Society continued to deliver talks on radio and directly to the public.

The Society's Statement of Purposes was modified at the 2001 annual general meeting. The first purpose was 'To help create a civil society in which people can lead satisfying and fulfilling lives, relying on human compassion, creativity, ingenuity and reason, free from supernatural beliefs. This human centred, philosophical and scientific approach is called Humanism.'

The president for 2002 was Rosslyn Ives, while the other posts were the same as last year. Rosslyn was also Editor of the *VH* and *AH*.

Halina Strnad was named Outstanding Humanist Achiever of the Year at the Gold Coast CAHS Convention, for her long service, providing her home for socials and leading discussion groups there, her continuing and meticulous work with submissions, service on the HSV Committee, cataloguing the library and her pivotal role in Homeplus Living Inc.

By this time, the *AH* enlarged, it seemed, at the expense of the *VH*. It was altogether, much more ambitious, providing a major forum for Humanist ideas and debate, book reviews, news of activities of the other states, CAHS, IHEU and other overseas news.

(8a) FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND POLITICS IN GENERAL

(8a) Foreign affairs and politics in general

The HSV motions to CAHS, indicated a stance very critical of the government, particularly on foreign policy. They included opposition to the unconditional support for US foreign policies, wanting the UN to have adequate military and economic power to carry out its charter for peace; a change in balance from the majority religious representation on the advisory committee on stem cell research and cloning; a softer, more humane stance on refugees, and an education system that encouraged people to think for themselves and to empower them socially and politically. At the same time, there was some unease within the Society that 'small-l' liberals might be deterred from joining it and remaining members because of its critical attitude toward the government. It was observed that the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organization were all more or less under US control and imposed invidious conditions on the Third World countries that had dealings with them. Contrary to this advice, since the Global Financial Crisis, the US has not yet adopted the austerity measures recommended for these other countries.

The Society was having trouble again, finding a venue for its public meetings. Its older demographic meant a suburban location to which members could go in cars and park, was becoming more important.

Valerie Yule introduced her 'Social Inventing Corner' to the *VH* where she decried the 'dumbing down' of issues by the media and government. Her aim was to 'improve quality of life or help solve social problems' through discussion about her articles on such varied topics as the individual within society, social dancing, insurance, democratic elections, population and land mines.

The VESV was set up 30 years ago by some members of HSV, including Helga Kuhse. It aimed at educating and lobbying for legislative change. Philip Nitschke's broke with VESV and set up EXIT Australia, in order to promote the development of a suicide pill. The HSV supported both strategies and wrote a letter supporting Nitschke, who had been Australian Humanist of the Year for 1998.

This was the lead-up to the Iraq War to which the HSV was very much opposed, joining the Victorian Peace Network. Australia temporarily sent troops there in 2003. This withdrawal was followed by a 2005 recommitment.

The Society was very condemnatory of the draconian new anti-terror laws, which were a consequence of the attacks by terrorists on US targets on 11 September 2001. It also opposed the increased powers of the Australian Security & Intelligence Organization (ASIO).

The executive for 2003 was Rosslyn Ives, president, Maureen McPhate, secretary, and Stephen Stuart, treasurer. Steve had taken over from Ray Dahlitz in co-ordinating the public lecture program. The HSV also hosted the CAHS Convention and was to supply the executive for the next two years.

(8b) Passings

2003 saw the deaths of several dedicated Humanists. Joyce Clayton, 97, died on 6 February. She had been on the founding Committee of the HSV, while continuing her primary involvement with the Unitarian Church with which she had been involved for over 50 years. She had been active in the peace movement.

Mervyn Corner, member for 23 years, died in March. He had been very active in the mail-outs of the *VH* and *AH* and was the partner of Lorna Noble, who remains a member.

John Drake, active member for about 10 years and treasurer from 1998 – 2000, died in August. Another member of 20 years, Helen Gertsman, also died and left a very substantial and welcome bequest to the Society. She was a Jewish immigrant, teacher of languages, a former principal of Mordialloc High School, lover of sport, of music and a U3A teacher.

Her bequest assured the continuance of the Society and allowed financial flexibility relating to causes it espoused. It was decided by the committee that no personal benefit would flow from it, that no real estate would be purchased and that the fund deriving from bequests, named the Project Fund, would be administered by a Finance Committee on the advice of the treasurer.

Continuing and arising issues this year were the leading nature of the question on religion in the Census, the fact that health insurance was becoming a two-tier system with the privately insured obtaining a one-third rebate, hospital privatisation, the corporatisation of medicine, the lack of General Practitioner training places, funding for pure research, the lack of science education in schools and the hoarding of research results, particularly the patenting of genetic material. Of further concern was the growing gap between rich and poor, justified by a new type of Social Darwinism.

(8c) Can we compete?

The persistence of religion was noted, and Dr A.G. Robertson observed that no intellectual proposition could compete with the theatre of the churches and the fear they instilled of heaven and hell. This begged the question as to whether atheism was a purely intellectual stance, devoid of emotional content. It was noted that the European Union Constitution made no mention of 'God', unlike the Australian one.

A cloud over the year was a rift between the Rationalist Society and the Humanists. Instead of drawing closer, the Rationalists believed that the Humanists were trying to take them over by nominating for the former's committee. The road to true love never did run smooth between freethinkers! In 2010, there is fond rapprochement.

In 2004, there was no change in the executive.

(8d) Involvement

Helen Gertsman's bequest and another from Robert Turner allowed the HSV to jointly fund a scholarship at the University of Melbourne Centre For Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics. The thesis topic was sweated labour.

Biodiversity and medical ethics, science and the establishment were selected for in-depth discussion, while HSV members spoke to U3A groups, youth and funeral and bereavement groups and carers of the terminally ill. Members also participated in a panel to discuss the theme of the play, *If I Should Die Before I Wake*, backed by the Disability Employment Action Centre. A substantial number of HSV member's letters were being published in the print media. This extensive involvement in media and public relations continued in 2005.

Phillip Adams, public broadcaster and erstwhile Australian Humanist of the Year, was approached in the cause of promoting Humanism. Along with this, concern was expressed at the undermining of the judiciary, independence of the ABC and universities, ACOSS, the public service, the fact that the health system was now skewed towards the rich, indigenous issues, the failure of both major political parties to deal with poverty and the dangers of globalisation of the media. Climate change, environmental degradation and depletion of natural resources were now, well and truly, on the agenda.

The executive remained the same in 2005, but James Gerrand, long-time committee member, past president and editor of the *AH* and *VH*, retired from the elected committee and was co-opted for another year.

Publicity in the *Border Mail* of the HSV's *Plan Ahead* kit, designed to get people to put their affairs in order, prompted a significant number of orders for it from Albury-Wodonga, while the Society's website resulted in more membership applications.

(8e) Are we a religion?

The Census question 'What is your religion?' created more dissent in the ranks, between those who were prepared to try to obtain recognition of Humanism as a religion and allow people to answer 'Humanism' in the Census and those who were definite that Humanism was not a religion. This was still an ongoing debate in 2010, as was the possible relationship of Humanism to spirituality.

Among the motions to CAHS was to accept a donation from HSV of \$1,000 for full membership of IHEU and the promotion of a ban on 'terminator' genes in food crops.

Several members of the Society, in order to support homeless indigenous students, became friends of the Worawa Aboriginal College in Healesville, which compensated for the loss of the Homeplus Living project, which had run its course. Meanwhile, Marie and Howard Hodgens, HSV Committee members, received an award from Friends of Wattle Park. Such involvement showed Humanists making a direct contribution to the community. In this vein, a prize of \$250 was awarded for a Humanist essay competition for secondary students on the topic, 'Creating a Better Australia'.

While Humanists treated scientific knowledge as 'provisional', there was concern that Catholic Archbishop George Pell, had come out in support of Intelligent Design and that this, and Creationism, would be taught alongside science in Catholic and independent schools – as, indeed, astrology could. There was further alarm at medical schools appearing in religious institutions where an anti-contraception message could be promoted, along with a restrictive stance on medical ethics regarding abortion, and such issues as reproductive technology and stem-cell research.

A summit called 'Building Bridges: National Harmony and Security' was seen as a way of familiarisation with Moslems but, at the same time, the Society was debating the religious vilification laws, and their implications for genuine philosophical research, critiques of the various faiths, and whether it would inhibit free speech. There were also implications for the Humanist ideal of the teaching of comparative religions in state schools.

(8f) The religious instruction and chaplaincy debate

It was obvious that religion in state schools was getting more support from politicians, and the separation of church and state was becoming blurred. Premier Jeff Kennett had, in a money saving exercise, dismantled the welfare service in state schools and chaplaincy was seen as a cheap way of filling the gap, since the churches would pay for it and not the schools. (The chaplaincy program now receives generous tax-payer support. It was to provide a 'Christian presence'). Harry Gardner wrote a letter of protest. This government action was in the face of figures showing that, 59.6% of marriages were performed by a civil celebrant and 15% were performed in a registry office indicating falling support for religion within the community.

Rossllyn Ives continues to produce excellent *VH* editorials and letters to the media.

In 2006, Rossllyn, Mary Bergin and Stephen Stuart took office but Rossllyn resigned as president and briefly assumed the role of treasurer while Steve moved to the presidency in exchange. Membership was 259 with seven associate members. Alex Yap who had been managing the website said other commitments had forced him to resign so a replacement was being sought.

James Gerrand resigned from the committee after long service. He had joined the HSV in 1979, became a committee member in 1980, president 1981-84, and editor of the *VH*, 1981-90.

The HSV had representation at a Dying With Dignity workshop. Dying With Dignity Victoria, had recently changed its name from the Voluntary Euthanasia Society of Victoria. The HSV also took part in the conference at the University of Melbourne, 'Separating Church and State: Keeping God out of Government'. It was sponsored by CAHS in conjunction with the Australia National Secular Association and Rationalist Society of Australia, with Stephen Stuart on the organising committee. Included in those receiving donations from the HSV were the Victorian Peace Network, Liberty Victoria and further support for its PhD student.

The Society was gratified to learn that St Bede's school, Mentone, had referred to the HSV web site as a resource for its Victorian Certificate of Education course on religion.

It was with regret that the Society noted the death of Ron Simpson, civil engineer and surveyor, Committee member from 1969-81, and treasurer from 1972-73 and 1976-77.

(8g) Issues

The Society's interest in developing the Victorian *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities* was reflected in a new blog. Discussion on cultural relativism and its relationship to human rights resulted after the annual dinner speaker, Chris Schacht, spoke on the topic and made the point that the separation of church and state was the best guarantee of religious freedom. Terrorism and the impact of the Danish cartoon satirising Mohammed were also considered relevant in light of the religious vilification laws.

Other issues that concerned the Society were the supervised use of RU486 and lobbying on bioethics generally, massive cuts to the ABC budget, global warming, dismay at the policies of the Bush administration, support for organ donation, opposition to the Minister for Health and Ageing, Tony Abbott, who ruled that safe petrol to reduce sniffing should only be available on request. The Society supported the release of Australian David Hicks from Guantanamo Bay prison. In 2007, it sent letters regarding this and the atrocities in Darfur to the appropriate ministers, asking that refugees be accepted from there.

Dennis Altman, Professor of Politics at La Trobe University, put forward the argument that all children should go to state primary schools, in a bid to foster tolerance, understanding and social cohesion. This idea has been retained by the HSV and is still currently held. In a bid to further these aims, a legal challenge was mounted against the Education Department, in 2010 on grounds of discrimination against children who opt out of SRI with no alternative activities offered. The Humanists were seeking to teach ethics to these children in this time slot.

David Fotheringham became treasurer in 2008, Stephen Stuart, president, and Mary Bergin, secretary. Mary had, for many years, been the HSV's main contact with CAHS and the IHEU. Rosslyn Ives remained an ordinary Committee member and remained editor of the *VH* and *AH*.

The appointment of Peter Hollingworth, Bishop of Brisbane, as Governor-General in 2001, the ongoing government support for Catholic and independent schools, the teaching of SRI in state schools and the chaplaincy issue, showed that the lines between church and state had, indeed, become blurred. This close association was discussed in a seminar by the combined forces of the HSV, Institute of International Affairs and the Australian Council of International Development, on 'Religion and Ethics in Foreign Policy', toward which the HSV gave a substantial donation. Both the HSV and the churches supported more foreign aid.

Meanwhile, the Society made a pro-choice submission regarding the *Crimes (Decriminalisation of Abortion) Bill 2007* before the Victorian Parliament.

At this point, it should be noted that Harry Gardner's column in the *VH*, 'Humanist Ethical Education' was still running and provided a guide as to the lessons that, hopefully, would one day be taught in state schools. He also gave a presentation to a seminar on school chaplaincy.

A brief history of Humanism in Australia also appeared in the *VH*. Meanwhile, members were finding great difficulty in getting letters to the press published.

(8h) Where do young Humanists come from?

A breakdown of the allegiances of the Australian population was given in a lecture to the HSV based on research on Generation Y. Almost half did not identify with a religion, 17% did believe in 'God' and there was a very low level of interest in religion or spirituality: 19% believed there was little truth in religion, while 23% did not believe in an afterlife. This might seem to provide fertile ground for Humanism, but 46% identified themselves as nominally Christian and a high 17%, were 'New Agers'. Unlike Humanists, they were not into individual responsibility or commitment.

Together with the Uniting Church Social Justice Committee and the Medical Association for the Prevention of War, the HSV lobbied the federal government to ban the use of cluster bombs, which, it seems, was successful. Nevertheless, the government allows third parties to locate them on Australian soil.

Roslyn Ives was awarded the 2008 Outstanding Humanist Achiever of the Year. She also took part in a mixed panel with Melbourne City Mission Palliative Care, once again demonstrating her willingness to participate in the community on behalf of the HSV.

Among HSV donations were those to the Liberian Refugee Scholarship Fund, a grant of \$2,500 to Max Wallace toward publication of his book on church finance, *The Purple Economy*, and a huge \$10,000 was given to The Justice Project for interrogating politicians on human rights policy.

HSV finances were riding uncomfortably high so that professional auditing was called for. HSV was advised to be careful to engage only in activities that would not breach its tax status as a charitable entity. However, 2008 saw a steep decline in the value of the Society's investments as the Global Financial Crisis intensified.

The office holders for 2009 remained the same as the previous year, with nine committee positions. The HSV committee met at the William Tresise Community Centre, Hawthorn East, instead of at a committee member's home. Membership was now over 300.

Dan Kerr had become the new webmaster. It was not until 2010 that the website started to take on a more polished shape. In 2009, he also joined Roslyn Ives in the preparation and layout of the *VH*, which members with internet facility could to receive by e-mail.

Stephen Stuart, the president, maintained communication with La Trobe University's Centre for Dialogue, Darebin Interfaith Council, Parliament of the World's Religions, U3As and the Interfaith movement of the City of Dandenong. Harry Gardner represented HSV on the Centre of Melbourne Multifaith and Others Network (COMMON) for several years, participating in the annual event with Children's entertainment.

9. ETHICS VERSUS 'GOD' IN SCHOOLS

(9a) Ethics versus 'God' in schools

Dr Harry Gardner, in preparing the manual, *Ethical Education—Humanism for Schools*, hoped to submit it to the Victorian Education Department under the umbrella of SRI.

It was noted that teachers were not allowed to teach the ethics lessons and that the HSV would be reliant on volunteers, who were in markedly short supply, the work having, so far, fallen to Harry. There were contradictions in the Victorian *Education and Training Reform Act, 2006*, regarding the conduct of SRI in state schools.

In 2009, Harry's manual of 189 lessons, *Ethical Education—Humanism for Schools*, was commended, although amendments were suggested by Professor Desmond Cahill, Chair of the World Conference of Religions for Peace, the accrediting body. Although he suggested amendments, Cahill acknowledged that Humanism deserved to be treated 'on a par with religion'. Nevertheless, the minister vetoed it on the ground that Humanism was not a recognised religion. As a means of informing the membership on the nature of the course, Harry continued publishing lessons in the *VH*.

In attendance at the Darebin Interfaith Council the general opinion became apparent that belief in 'God' is natural to children whereas atheism was acquired. It seemed clear that describing Humanism as a 'life stance' would not get it into schools. If it was deemed a philosophy, access might be easier. If it was deemed a world-view with similar status to a religion, acceptance by the government might be easier.

In this year, abortion was decriminalised, but the *Medical Treatment (Physician Assisted Dying) Bill 2008*, failed. In 2010, the Humanists were still attempting to reverse the federal government's powers to quash Territory legislation and annul the *Rights of the Terminally Ill Act (NT)*. To this end, they demonstrated with the members of Dying With Dignity, Victoria, outside Parliament House. But letters against voluntary euthanasia were published in the press, while those expressing the Humanist view were not.

HSV members maintained some involvement with Worawa Aboriginal College, established as a boarding school for young Aborigines.

(9b) The Census

The Society kept trying to have the Census form amended, either so that 'No religion' alternative appeared immediately after the question, 'What is the person's religion?' or that the question be split in two, to read 'Does the person have a religion?' If 'yes', what?

HSV was to supply the Executive for CAHS for the next two years.

The usual question of bioethics related to voluntary euthanasia, reproductive technology or patenting of natural materials like genes, but a new question arose of healthy people taking cognitively enhancing drugs and the ethical minefield engendered by IVF.

Major changes took place regarding the committee in 2009. Stephen Stuart and Mary Bergin stayed but David Fotheringham wished to retire from the position, and was replaced as treasurer in February, by Dr Tom Mole. Long-standing and active committee members, Halina Strnad and Maureen and Alan McPhate also retired from the committee but remained active. Halina remained submissions convener and was joined by Geoff Allshorn, consulting other members, depending on their expertise. Nigel Sinnott produced a digital archive of HSV submissions, 1985-2008; over 200 have been directed to various public bodies and are listed in *Appendix 11*.

Maureen and Alan were made Outstanding Humanist Achiever of the Year at the CAHS Conference, for their contribution to Humanism, their work on the committee and unstinting help at public meetings.

(9c) The UN and human rights: what does it stand for?

The HSV joined other NGOs in protesting against the UN Human Rights Council's Resolution protecting religion from defamation. This stifled debate and complaints about human rights abuses in religious practices and traditions. The Council is now dominated by Moslem members and, in 2010, another Resolution was passed allowing the death penalty for homosexuals in member states. Although these resolutions were non-binding, the Council's role in protecting human rights was called into serious question.

Young member, Jason Ball, was invited to speak at the World Congress of the Center for Enquiry, Bethesda, Maryland, 9-12 April. He recalled being amazed, at the school he had once attended, that he was the only person who accepted evolution.

Halina Strnad did an excellent job in collecting over 5,000 books for bushfire survivors from Marysville, Kinglake and Murrindindi. Not all were suitable and were otherwise placed but the final donation, in the name of the Humanists, was over 3,500.

Money was sent as well.

Issues that were engaging the Society were the independence of the ABC and SBS and their funding, especially since the latter now screened commercials, and the matter of censorship for both.

The divisive nature on society of ethno-religious schools was also an ongoing matter for concern. It was further felt that state schools should be protected from corporate sponsorship.

Population control, as always, was on the agenda with a trend in opinion toward zero population growth. The current rate of growth was considered unsustainable, both environmentally and with regard to infrastructure, which has been seriously neglected.

(9d) What do we stand for?

Despite the emergence of vigorous atheism as a reaction to the perceived threat of religiously inspired terrorism, it was felt that the society was in no danger of becoming a single-issue, anti-religious body. It was noted, however, that religious bodies were permitted to discriminate on the grounds of marital status, gender, sexual orientation or belief, in breach of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It was suggested that atheist slogans be placed on trams or buses but this had been blocked in Tasmania and, seemingly, in Victoria.

It was stressed that the Society's public actions were of the utmost importance. Interest in it and publicity were furthered by public meetings, submissions, talks to outside bodies and appearance on the electronic media and in the press, where it was not easy to get published.

There were no changes of office bearers in 2010.

Humanists were well in view at the highly successful Atheist Convention, HSV manning a table with Queensland, South Australia and Max Wallace, author of *The Purple Economy*, which sold out. Although HSV was not invited to the platform, four Australian Humanists of the Year spoke: Phillip Adams (1987), former Senator, Lyn Allison (2008), Peter Singer (2004) and Robyn Williams (1993). The Convention attracted many enquiries and applications for membership of the Society. The government stimulus package was seen as a great opportunity for a submission on affordable housing, which was duly lodged.

Members registered alarm at the some racist attacks on Indians in Melbourne, and a motion to CAHS on the subject was duly put. Another opposed the federal government's summary intervention in aboriginal communities. A Tobin Tax was again supported.

Member, Sophie Aitken, appeared on the SBS 'Insight' program featuring religious instruction in state schools. Good publicity, indeed! Nevertheless, it was lamented that the Society had been unable, for years, to fill the post of publicity officer to promote Humanism, its aims and activities. This would be achieved by improving the HSV website, with recourse to social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

The Census revealed that only 1.6% of the population attended religious services once a month, and only 47% believed in 'God'. If this is the case, the author wonders, why so few Humanists? The message is, 'Join the HSV'.

(9e) Chaplaincy – again

The Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, was a disappointment. After proclaiming herself an atheist, she allocated \$222 million to swell the ranks of school chaplains by a further thousand. She considered all children should have a grounding in Christianity as it informs them of their cultural heritage. The government also tightened the policy on asylum seekers instead of allowing them more humane treatment.

The churches had tax-free status and received around \$10 billion from the government, so making and tax-free status so making them practically unassailable by small secular organisations. \$20 million was devoted to counselling on unplanned pregnancies, a role that most definitely requires trained social workers without religious bias – as does any counselling. Chaplains needed only one year of tertiary education, which is considered by the Society, as highly inadequate.

The debate on the chaplaincy program raised the question of teaching philosophy in schools, of which the Society was broadly in favour. Contact was made with the body promoting this, the Victorian Association for Philosophy in Schools.

Rosslyn Ives was an invited contributor to *The Australian Book of Atheism*, a major collection of essays edited by Warren Bonett. She wrote 'Life, dying, and death: reflections of a Humanist'.

There was some exhilaration among members when the NSW government ruled that ethics could be taught as an alternative to SRI. (The default position in Victoria is for children to attend SRI.) The down side is that the St James Centre, which provided it was not a secular Humanist organisation. Nevertheless, it was agreed that Humanists should work with religious organisations where aims were shared, such as humane refugee policy and commitment to social welfare.

A special general meeting amended the Rules of the Society, so as to incorporate provision for resolving disputes, to empower the committee to co-opt members and to determine subscription rates by ordinary resolution of the annual general meeting.

Nick Renton, AM, a prominent member of the HSV, died in 2010. He was Humanist, author and consulting actuary, director of several financial institutions and a sought-after speaker. He joined the Society in 1962 and was president, 1965-68. He was also active in writing submissions. In 1987, he became president of CAHS, persuaded the ABC to include Humanism in its religious programming and participated in debates on such topics as 'Does Man Need God?' and 'Is Marriage Really Necessary?'

The Project Fund sub-committee, was restructured, by appointing trustees responsible for investments under a Memorandum of Understanding.

10. JOINING FORCES AND A BRIGHT FUTURE

In order to link with like-minded groups of freethinkers, Stephen Stuart joined the Australian Atheist Network, which was preparing to form 'Reason Australia'. It was hoped this would improve lobbying potential. It was noted that the Victorian *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities*, was up for review and was weighted heavily towards religion despite the falling numbers of believers. This suggests action by the HSV and allied groups to have it amended. A subscription to Liberty Victoria was approved, as its material on human rights was very useful.

Jean Brown indexed back copies of the *VH* and began writing this history. Rosslyn Ives continued to produce the excellent *AH* but would like to divest herself of the *VH*. Jennie Stuart summarised our public lectures in fine style, for the benefit of readers unable to attend. Without our small army of helpers, none of this would be possible.

With 348 members and growing, a healthy investment portfolio and a willing committee, the Society is as healthy as it has ever been. We have not won the chaplaincy battle, which the Queensland Humanists are taking to the High Court nor the issue of SRI in state schools about which we are mounting a legal challenge after obtaining the services of Holding Redlich, solicitors,

in August 2010. We will never have grand cathedrals nor the pageantry of religions, but we can make a difference by involvement in the community on a personal level, by our public meetings and publicity for our causes through conferences and the media.

11. THE END