

## Research Note



### Special Issue: Atheism, Secularity, and Science

# A Profile of the Members of the British Humanist Association

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**Abstract** | In 1967 Campbell published the first detailed survey of the members of the British Humanist Association. His survey of 931 members represented the most comprehensive study of the members of the organisation then published. The current research builds on Campbell's work and offers a detailed profile of the membership of the British Humanist Association at the start of the 21st century. The results of a survey conducted in 2014 of 1,097 humanists are presented and compared with Campbell's original 1967 data and against data derived from the 2011 United Kingdom Census. Particular attention is given to the topics of sex, age, residence, employment, and education background of the members.

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**Guest Editors** | John R. Shook PhD, Ralph W. Hood Jr. PhD, and Thomas J. Coleman III

## Introduction

The social changes that swept through Britain in the 1960s affected not only traditional institutions like the Church of England but also the institutions that represented the secular community. The three main secularist institutions were the National Secular Society (NSS; founded in 1866), the Rationalist Press Association, now the Rationalist Association (RPA; founded in 1885), and the Union of Ethical Societies, later the Ethical Union (EU; founded in 1896). Whilst all three organisations operated in distinctive ways they had broadly similar aims: to promote a secular worldview; to seek the end of religious privilege; and to bring an end to discrimination against the non-religious.

In 1963 the EU sought to merge with the RPA in order to better promote their common aim of developing humanism within Britain, the organisation that was formed was known as the British Humanist Association. This British Humanist Association was an umbrella organisation that represented both the EU and RPA. However, in 1965 the EU lost its charitable

status and the RPA were forced to withdraw from the merger. In 1967 the EU decided to change its name to the British Humanist Association, inheriting the name of the umbrella organisation and the membership of the EU. Today the BHA is the largest, and most well-known secular organisation operating in England and Wales (humanists in Scotland are represented by the Humanist Society Scotland).

Whilst the BHA recognises that there are many understandings of humanism they adopted in 2003 a definition that states that humanism is:

... the belief that we can live good lives without religious or superstitious beliefs. Humanists make sense of life using reason, experience and shared human values. We need to make the best of the one life (we know) we have by creating meaning and purpose for ourselves. We take responsibility for our own actions and work with others for the common good. ([Executive Committee of the BHA 20 September 2003](#))

The question of whether humanism represents a

worldview, a belief structure, a life stance, an ideology, or a philosophy is one which the BHA has frequently addressed, however it is sufficient in this context to simply affirm that their agreed definition states that ‘Humanism is the belief that we can live good lives without religious or superstitious beliefs’. Today the BHA has around 12,000 members ([Engelke, 2014](#)) and a further 30,000 supporters including many prominent individuals such as Professor Jim Al-Khalili, the BHA President, Professor Richard Dawkins, and Professor A.C. Grayling. In addition there are around 70 affiliated groups which include many local humanist associations as well as groups representing humanists within the LGBT community, political parties, and the military. The BHA also trains and authorises a network of around 300 celebrants who provide, naming, marriage, and funeral ceremonies. In 2012 BHA celebrants conducted 7,565 ceremonies in England and Wales; 6,563 funerals, 499 weddings, and 412 namings ([BHA Annual Report 2012](#)).

In 2011 the United Kingdom Census, for the first time, provided the opportunity for people to self-identify as humanist, and 15,067 people from England and Wales took the opportunity to do this, this is in the context of 14,097,229 individuals who self-identified as having no religion, including 32,382 agnostics and 29,267 atheists. The geographical distribution of humanists is recorded in [Table 1](#).

**Table 1: Distribution of humanists in 2011 Census (England and Wales)**

	N	% of regional population
North East	612	0.02
North West	1,427	0.02
Yorkshire & Humber	1,188	0.02
East Midlands	990	0.02
West Midlands	1,221	0.02
East of England	1,661	0.03
London	2,235	0.03
South East	2,964	0.03
South West	1,934	0.04
Wales	815	0.03
Total	15,067	0.023

### The 1964 survey

In 1962 Campbell began a PhD study at the University of London, the thesis was entitled *Humanism and the Culture of the Professions: A study of the rise of the British Humanist Movement, 1954-63* ([Campbell 1967](#)). The thesis, which was accepted in 1967, was

the first detailed synthesis of the membership of the humanist community, composing the memberships of the BHA, the EU, the RPA, the University Humanist Federation, and the Humanist Group. A key research question that Campbell set out to answer was ‘who are the members of these organisations?’. Campbell recognised that what statistical information existed about the memberships was often obtained indirectly and was of little use for comparative purposes.<sup>1</sup> In early 1964 Campbell mailed questionnaires to the members of the organisations, he also arranged for copies to be inserted into newsletters which were distributed to the memberships. The total membership of the 5 organisations was 5,837, although some individuals were members of more than one organisation. By May 1964 he had received 2,390 completed questionnaires. The membership of the BHA (N=1,236) returned 931 (75.3%) of the total responses. This paper considers only the responses from the BHA membership.

Campbell’s 1964 questionnaire was entitled *Who are the Humanists?* and explored a number of issues including, age, sex, marital status, family composition, education, and occupation, from the occupation information he was able to assign a social class code to respondents.<sup>2</sup> Information was also gathered about how long respondents had been members and the extent of their membership, e.g. whether they attended conferences or held positions within their local association.

Among the key findings made by Campbell about the membership of the BHA were that the members were more often male (73%), were predominantly aged between 20 and 50 (62%), married (60%) and had one or more children (81%). The majority had full or part-time employment (69%), and were employed in the professional or technical fields (58%), with teachers representing the largest occupational group (20%). The members were well educated, with more than half having a degree or a professional qualification, which was unusual in the era before wider access to higher education. Campbell also found that most members were within social classes I or II (77%).<sup>3</sup> This profile is mirrored in the findings of a review of membership for an internal BHA strategy document *New Directions: A strategy for the BHA* ([Horwood, 1987](#)) in which the typical member is described as a middle-aged male from the south-east who is well-educated and from social groups A-C1.<sup>4</sup>

Campbell’s analysis provided a valuable profile of the

BHA membership. In the intervening 50 years both the BHA and Britain have changed dramatically. The BHA has transformed from being an institution with a small membership and a low profile into a well-established and vocal proponent of secularism, whilst Britain has transformed into a multi-cultural society within which for many the role and significance of religion has changed.

The question that therefore arises is the extent to which the profile of the membership that Campbell produced has remained accurate, or whether it has transformed like the society of which the BHA is a part. The current research addresses the question ‘who are the members of the BHA in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?’.

## Method

In March 2014 2,000 members of the BHA membership were invited to complete an on-line questionnaire exploring their attitudes, beliefs, and worldviews. The survey was also advertised on the BHA Facebook page and the BHA Twitter feed, a small number of respondents requested paper copies of the questionnaire which, when returned, were hand coded. In total 1,097 completed responses were returned by May 2014. This figure represents approximately 10% of the total membership of the BHA.

The survey explored a wide range of topics through 205 items including demographics, personal history of humanism, attitude toward key life events, the role of religion in public life, political orientation, as well as personality and well-being scales. The following analysis is based on the data returned relating to demographics. In addition to two closed questions relating to age and sex; respondents were asked about their prior education by asking for information about the highest qualification they had achieved and a supplemental open ended question which invited respondents to identify in which field this qualification was achieved. Employment was assessed though a closed question asking whether the respondent was employed full-time, employed part-time, retired, unemployed, or in education or training; a supplemental open ended question asked for their job title. Respondents were also asked to describe whether they lived in an urban, suburban, or rural setting and whether they lived in their own home, rented property or some other arrangement. Data was also gathered from the 2011 Census to provide a background to understand the

survey data. Data was analysed using SPSS22.

## Results

**Table 2** presents the sex profile of the BHA membership in 1964 and in 2014. The data demonstrates that 73% of the sample was male in 1964 compared with 65% in 2014. This represents a slight decrease in the number of males in the membership.

**Table 2:** Sex profile of BHA members in 1964 and 2014 by percentage

	1964	2014	% change
Male	73	65	-8
Female	27	35	+8

1964 N= 927; 2014 N= 1,097

**Table 3** presents the age profile of the BHA membership in 1964 and in 2014. The data demonstrates that whilst the majority of the membership in 1964 was aged between 20 and 50 years (59%) in 2014 the majority of the membership was aged between 50 and 80 years (60%).

**Table 3:** Age profile of BHA members in 1964 and 2014 by percentage

	1964	2014	% change
Under 19	3	-	-3
20-29	18	5	-13
30-39	20	13	-7
40-49	21	17	-4
50-59	16	19	+3
60-69	11	26	+15
70-79	7	15	+8
Over 80	4	5	+1

1964 N= 927; 2014 N= 1,097

**Table 4:** Age profile of BHA members in 1964 and 2014 compared with population norms

	1964	UK	% change	2014	UK	% change
Under 19	3	8	-5	-	-	-
20-29	18	18	-	5	18	-13
30-39	20	19	+1	13	14	-1
40-49	21	19	+2	17	19	-2
50-59	16	15	+1	19	16	+3
60-69	11	12	-1	26	17	+9
70-79	7	7	-	15	9	+6
Over 80	4	2	+2	5	6	-1

1964 N= 927; 2014 N= 1,097; Population norms derived for 1964 from Campbell (1965) and for 2014 from the 2011 Census

**Table 4** presents the difference between the age profile of the BHA members in 1964 and 2014 with the contemporary national population norms. In 1964 the age profile of the BHA membership closely matched (notwithstanding the under 19 group) the national profile. In 2014 the situation has substantially changed, now the BHA members are more likely to be older, most noticeably in the age 60 – 80 age group than the UK population as a whole.

**Table 5** presents evidence of the location of where Humanists live in relation to urban, sub-urban and rural areas. The data are based upon potentially different understandings of urban, sub-urban and rural as Campbell based his assessment on individual addresses and whether this was classed as an urban district, a county borough or a country parish, whereas the 2014 survey is based on a forced choice question about how an individual would describe the area they lived. The data nonetheless demonstrate that BHA members are less likely to live in sub-urban areas than they were in 1964.

**Table 5: Place of residence of BHA members in 1964 and 2014 by percentage**

	1964	2014	% change
Urban	25	35	+10
Sub-urban	59	41	-18
Rural	16	24	+8

1964 N= 927; 2014 N= 1,097

**Table 6** presents the employment profile of members of the BHA in 1964 and in 2014. The data demonstrates a substantial drop in the numbers in employment in 2014. There is a parallel substantial rise in the numbers who are retired in 2014. The employed category in 2014 is made up of 38% full-time, 10% part-time, and 8% self-employed.

**Table 6: Employment profile of BHA members in 1964 and 2014**

	1964	2014	% change
Employed	69	56	-13
Retired	14	37	+23
Students	8	4	-4
Other	8	3	-5

1964 N= 927; 2014 N= 1,097

**Table 7** presents the top ten categories of employment of BHA members in 2014. The data demonstrates that the three main employment areas are informa-

tion technology, teaching in the primary and secondary sector, and teaching in the tertiary sector.

**Table 7: Distribution of 2014 BHA members by employment type**

	N	%
Information Technology	83	15
Initial and Secondary Teacher	64	12
Higher Education Teaching	55	10
Administration	39	7
Manager – Private Sector	35	6
Medical Doctor	34	6
Senior Financial Officer	31	6
Arts and Media	30	6
Celebrant	30	6
Research Scientist	26	5
Non-medical health related	19	4

N= 446

**Table 8** presents the data on highest educational achievement. The data demonstrate that the 2014 sample were more likely (82%) to have studied at university than their 1964 counterparts (34%). This is not unexpected given the expansion of tertiary education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, the 2014 sample are also nearly 4 more likely to have obtained an undergraduate or higher qualification at university than the population at large as indicated by Census data (22%).

**Table 8: Highest education qualification of BHA members in 1964 and 2014 and UK Census norms in 2011**

	1964	2014	Census 2011
Still in education	8	-	-
No higher education award	38	19	52
Degree	34**	42	22**
Professional qualification	21	*	*
Postgraduate degree	*	30	*
Doctorate	*	10	*

1964 N= 927; 2014 N= 1,097; \* No data available; \*\* Includes all university qualifications at or above undergraduate degree level

**Table 9** presents the data on the academic field within which the 2014 members achieved their highest academic qualification. The main academic fields reflect the professions identified in **Table 7**, namely education (9%), medicine (7%), and computing (6%). Many BHA members also studied Psychology (7%), and English (7%). Science as a whole represented the academic field for many members (15%: when physics, chemistry, biology, and ‘science’ are considered as

single academic field).

**Table 9: Academic field of highest qualification of BHA members 2014**

	N	%
Education	86	9
Medicine	68	7
Psychology	66	7
English	61	7
Computing	58	6
Business	57	6
Physics	44	5
Mathematics	41	4
Engineering	41	4
History	37	4
Music and the Dramatic Arts	35	4
Law	33	4
Modern Languages	33	4
Chemistry	34	4
Biology	32	3
Science	32	3

N= 758

## Discussion

Campbell's (1965; 1967) pioneering work offered the first detailed insight into the composition of the BHA's membership, although later work by Royle (1974) and Budd (1977) usefully extended the knowledge base about the organisations and the history of secularism in Britain. Campbell's interest in the organisation and the secular community was however much broader than the demographics of the membership. Whilst his PhD sought to situate modern humanism within the socio-cultural context of the professions he also explored the theoretical and methodological basis for the study of irreligion in the book *Toward a Sociology of Irreligion* (1971/2013). In this work he advocated that irreligion be approached as a concept that required study both in terms of its negative relationship to religion but also positively in regard to its own nature. In her introduction to Campbell's republished *Toward a Sociology of Irreligion* Lee (2013) describes the need to recognise that whilst irreligion is etymologically relative to, it is ontologically autonomous from religion. Humanism, which is one manifestation of irreligion, can only be properly understood by seeing it both within a historical and a contemporary social context (Campbell, 1971/2013).

In the 50 years since Campbell's work was undertaken the study of irreligion has seen periods of growth and periods of stagnation, there is currently a period where something like a tradition of the study is forming (Lee, 2013). The 2014 survey data, by examining similar issues to those considered by Campbell in his original survey offers a longitudinal perspective to be drawn at a time when there is a renewed interest in organised non-religion.

Prior to Campbell's research little was known about the people who joined such organisations, even though some organisations, like the National Secular Society had been in existence for a hundred years. What little was known primarily revolved around the individual 'personalities' of the community, people like Julian Huxley, Bertrand Russell, and Charles Bradlaugh (the first openly atheist Member of Parliament). The title of Campbell's questionnaire '*Who are the Humanists?*' is tellingly indicative of the paucity of knowledge about the ordinary members of the secular and humanist community in the 1960s.

## Sex

In 1964 the BHA had a predominantly male membership, 73% male to 27% female. Campbell considered this finding surprising (1967, 246), and he wondered whether this might in part be a product of what he referred to as 'the hidden women membership'. The 'hidden women membership' occurs when a married couple has a single household membership which is registered in the name of the male householder and although the women might also consider herself a humanist there would be no record of her in the membership statistics. However, the data from the 2014 survey show that males still constitute the majority (65%) of the respondents with females only constituting a third (35%) of the respondents, these percentages are very close to Campbell's 1964 findings. Data provided from the BHA (A. West, personal communication, 4 March, 2015) confirms that the 2014 survey is an accurate reflection of the gender balance of the organisation today and not a methodological product. The BHA also confirm that male membership, in recent years at least, typically fluctuates between 65% and 70% of total membership. Additional data obtained from archived BHA papers suggest that this sex ratio is indeed a longer term feature of the organisation. A survey in 1967 linked to the *The Humanist* magazine (N=160) revealed 70% males and 30% female readers. A more balanced sex membership

is indicated in the minutes of the Executive Committee in March 2001 where of the 3,803 members 55% were male, 39% were female, and 6% were recorded as 'other' (Membership Facts and Figures 10 March 2001). The gender imbalance is marked and is one of the most distinctive characteristics of the demographics of the organisation.

It is difficult to imagine that Campbell's 'hidden women membership' issue could still apply today, not least because individual members of a 'household membership' are now recognised as members in their own right. Instead research has consistently demonstrated that women are more religious than men, and that this applies in most places and times however religiosity is measured, even when congregations are in decline (Trzebiatowsa and Bruce 2012; Furseth 2010; Miller and Stark 2002; Walter and Davie 1998). The reason underpinning this association between women and religiosity is contested and biological, sociological, and in some cases quasi-ethnic reasons have all been proposed (Trzebiatowsa and Bruce 2012; Francis and Richter 2007; Voas and McAndrew 2012). Men meanwhile have been traditionally seen as being at the forefront of secularisation (Voas and McAndrew 2012), the BHA membership, being predominantly male, reflects this wider trend.

The 2011 Census data for England and Wales gave the opportunity to respondents to self-identify as non-religious and some 14,097,229 took the opportunity to do this. The Census revealed that there were more males (54.96%) than females (45.04%) who identified as non-religious. A similar picture emerges from recent longitudinal data provided by the 1970 British Cohort Study of 5,938 respondents born in 1970 which revealed that 54% of the men and 34% of the women would describe themselves as either atheists or agnostics (Voas 2015). These data show that whilst BHA membership does not closely reflect the national picture of those who identified as non-religious in the Census, it does reflect the picture presented in the literature of men having a greater commitment to and involvement with secular organisations (Trzebiatowsa and Bruce 2012).

### Age

In 1964 the BHA was an organisation that primarily attracted younger adults and those in their early middle age, i.e. those aged between 20 and 50 years of age (59%), today there are fewer members in all age groups below the age of 50, whereas in the age group

60 to 69 there are now 15% more members. In 1964 the age profile of the membership matched closely the age profile of the population at large. In 2014 however the situation is very different, now the membership is best characterised as being dominated by members in their later middle age and old age (50–80 years), some 60% of the members fit this profile. Furthermore, the age profile of the membership is now very different from that of the British population. Younger people are substantially underrepresented in the BHA, whilst older people, especially those aged 60–69 are (+15%) overrepresented. This finding is also somewhat unexpected given the data collection method employed, specifically an on-line survey that was advertised through email, Facebook and Twitter. It might be imagined that such a methodology would be far more likely to attract the younger members of the BHA than the older members, but this is not the case. It is apparent that the age profile is not a methodological issue as archival research has demonstrated that the ageing nature of the membership has been noted for some time; the Minutes of the Executive Committee from September 1985 recorded that more than 50% of the membership were aged over 60 ([Minutes of the Executive Committee September 1985](#)), a finding that was described in the minutes as being 'profound' for the future of the organisation. A survey of members in 2007 (Membership Statistics 2007) presented to the membership Committee in January 2008 revealed that the average age of the members was 66. The 2014 survey revealed a somewhat younger average age of 56.

This raises the question, why is it that the age profile of the BHA has changed so that it is now so skewed to the older end of the age spectrum? Engelke (2014) proposes that the reason often given is that older people, especially those who are retired or semi-retired, have more free time available, especially in the evenings to join local groups and become involved with the organisation. Whilst this seems reasonable in itself it does not explain the substantial change in the age profile of the membership in the last 50 years.

An analysis of the age at which people decide that they are humanists and the age at which they join the BHA adds complexity to this question. Most of the respondents said that they decided that they were humanists in their early adulthood, the average age is 33, but that they decided to join the BHA at an average age of 48. Engelke (2014) in his ethnograph-

ic study of members of the BHA has observed that people often do not recognise that the values and beliefs they hold and the perspectives they have adopted could be described as those of a humanist. In retrospect they recognise that they were a humanist at an earlier age, it is usually after they have been exposed to organised humanism through social contacts or through campaigns that they seek to engage with the humanist community. Ultimately these people reach a point where their understanding of humanism is better formed and contextualised and when they have reached this conceptual point they feel it is timely to join the BHA. Recent research ([Le Drew 2013](#); [Silver, Coleman, Hood, and Holcombe 2014](#)) demonstrates that individuals develop distinctive trajectories before they reach the point at which they join organisations like the BHA, for some that journey will have begun by being raised within humanist households followed by an early self-identification as a humanist, for others it is likely that there will have been prolonged periods when they were affiliated with religious organisations before turning to humanism. The 2014 survey has shown that for many respondents this process took a considerable time, on average there is a period of more than 15 years between the first awareness that people might be humanists and the time that they joined the BHA.

## Residence

Tables 1 and 5 show that in 2014 humanists lived mainly in the south of England, especially in London and the South East. Campbell in 1964 found a similar pattern with the humanists in his study. He found that humanists were far more likely to live in the larger (>500,000 population) conurbations, with those living in London and the South East representing 40% of his sample. The 2014 survey demonstrated that more humanists are living in rural areas and urban areas, with fewer living in areas they would describe as sub-urban. The 2011 Census shows that 35% of those who self-identified as humanists lived in London and the South East. In addition a survey of membership presented to the March 2001 Executive Committee of the BHA suggested around 32% of the membership lived in London and the South East. These data clearly show that there has been little change in the geographical distribution from 1964 to 2014, the BHA was and remains firmly located within the urban South East of Britain, although there are more humanists living in rural areas than there were 50 years ago. In the 2011 Census the percentage of households

owning their own home was 64%, and there were 36% living in rented accommodation. The high levels of home ownership demonstrated by the members of the BHA (83%) are explained by the older age profile of the members as people aged over 60 are more likely to own their own home, and also by the high levels of professional occupations which is also associated with higher levels of home ownership.

[Voas and McAndrew \(2012\)](#) explored the variation in where the non-religious lived as revealed by data contained within the 2001 Census. They concluded that the main reason for the prevalence of the non-religious in the south and east of England is that these are the areas that are the most socio-economically developed. Conversely the north-west and the north-east represent a British 'bible belt' ([Voas and McAndrew 2012](#), 45) where there is less economic development and a larger proportion of non-Christian theists. The basic premise of [Voas and McAndrew's \(2012\)](#) work is that there is a link between secularisation and economic growth, in the places where socio-economic growth is strong there is likely to be a large population of highly skilled, well educated workers who are the most likely to be non-religious. The BHA membership fits well this observed pattern of residence being primarily a reflection of wider socio-economic conditions.

## Employment

In 1964 Campbell noted that the members of the BHA were more likely than the population at large to be employed full-time or part-time, 69% compared with the national average of 60%. The number of retired members also exceeded the national average, 14% compared with 5%. There were also more members of the BHA who were students than the national average, 8% compared with 2%. The remaining 8% of the BHA membership was largely composed of stay-at-home parents, whereas the national average for the non-working, or those who did not state their employment was 34%, clearly the BHA members were distinct from the population at large in terms of their employment activity. The 2014 survey reveals that this situation has changed considerably. The survey demonstrated that now only 56% of the BHA membership were employed, whereas Census data suggests that 62% of the adult population are employed either full-time or part-time. The 2014 survey also demonstrated that 37% of the BHA membership are retired, whereas only 9% of the total adult population are retired. The 2014 BHA membership is clearly differ-

ent from the 1964 membership. The 2014 members are far more likely to be retired both in relation to their 1964 counterparts but also to the population at large. This significant shift in the employment profile of the membership is clearly a reflection of their age profile. The 2011 Census revealed that those who had answered that they had 'no religion' had the highest proportion of the economically active. The members of the BHA are more likely to be economically inactive and are therefore distinct from the majority of those answering 'no religion' in the Census.

In 1964 the members of the BHA were more likely to be employed in a relatively small number of occupations, the most common being non-university teachers (20%), clerks, cashiers and office machine operators (7%), chemical, psychical and biological scientists (6%), and medical doctors (5%). A further thirteen occupations represented between 1% and 3% of the remaining respondents, including lecturers, financial officers, legal professionals, authors, and civil servants.

In 2014 the BHA membership retain some similarities with their 1964 counterparts, but the principal difference is that the large number of non-university teachers, whilst still important (12%) do not represent the clear majority that they did in 1964. In 2014 there is much more variety of employment, but broadly speaking the same types of occupations are present, the most frequent occupations are related to information technology (15%), non-university teachers (12%), university lecturers (10%), administrators (7%), managers in the private sector (6%), medical doctors (6%), financial officers (6%) and scientist (5%). One obvious difference is the inclusion in the 2014 responses of the occupation of celebrant (6%). In order to be authorised as a 'humanist celebrant' it is necessary to be a member of the BHA. In 1964 Campbell found that the most common occupational grouping was the professional, technical and artistic workers, whilst some of the occupations within this grouping have changed as technology has developed, the grouping remains the most frequently represented amongst the BHA members.

## Education

In 1964 more than half of the BHA members (54%) had been awarded either an undergraduate degree or an equivalent professional award, usually a teacher-training qualification. In 2014 the BHA membership reported that most (82%) had achieved at least

an undergraduate degree. In both 1964 and in 2014 the BHA membership had many more people in possession of university degrees than was common in the population at large. In 1964 less than 7% of the nineteen year old population experienced any form of higher education (Campbell 1967, 271). In 2014 around 22% of the adult population have an undergraduate or other higher education qualification. The BHA members are now nearly four times more likely than the national average to possess a higher education qualification.

Whilst Campbell's survey does not identify the subjects studied by his respondents it is clear that there must have been an association between their employment and the subjects studied as many possessed professional qualification. In the light of this we might imagine that many of the respondents, studied either education, medicine, accountancy or science related subjects given the large number of teachers, doctors, accountants, and research scientists identified. The data for 2014 confirms this association between employment and education, but it also reveals that the BHA members studied a wide range of other academic subjects. The subject area most likely to have been studied by humanists is education (9%), and there is clear connection here with the most popular area of employment of the respondents namely teaching. Other subjects are also linked with the employment choices of the humanists are medicine (7%), business/management (6%), and law (4%). There is also a strong connection between those who studied computing (6%) and the large numbers who work in the I.T. industry.

Substantial numbers of humanists also studied subjects which might not traditionally have been associated with the members of an organisation whose philosophy is so closely linked in the public eye with science and analytical thinking (Gervais and Norenzayan 2012). The non-sciences are represented by English (7%), modern languages (4%), music and the dramatic arts (4%), and history (4%).

Science subjects were the choice of a large number of respondents, physics (5%), chemistry (4%), biology (3%), plus the catch-all 'science' (3%) together represent 15% of all respondents. Whilst this is a substantial number it is not as clear a preference for the sciences as might be expected, although if medicine is included then the figure rises to 22% of all respondents.

Studies have consistently found that people with higher levels of educational achievement are less likely to believe in God (Voas and McAndrew 2012), the BHA members reflect this finding. Other research has demonstrated however that there is also a positive association between religious participation and higher educational achievement (Norris and Inglehart 2004). Voas and McAndrew (2012) argue that this latter association is primarily because religious participation is often seen as a form of community activity, an activity that the well-educated middle classes generally support (Li, Pickles, and Savage 2005). The well-educated middle classes, although they are relatively small in number, make up a large percentage of those who are actively participating in religious practices. The BHA respondents fit closely with Voas and McAndrew's characterisation as a 'middle class intelligentsia', who are more educated than then population at large and have had the opportunity, and found the supportive environment, to 'ask the big questions' (2012, 37) about life.

## Conclusion

In 1964 Campbell presented the first profile of the members of the secular and humanist organisations of the United Kingdom. The 21<sup>st</sup> century humanist shares some similarities with their 20<sup>th</sup> century counterparts, like them they are usually male, well educated, tend to work in the professions, and live in urban areas, particularly in London and the South East. Unlike their 20<sup>th</sup> century counterparts however they are typically much older and consequently are far more likely to be retired, in these regards they are also distinct from the rest of the population of England and Wales.

The work of Voas and McAndrew (2012) reveals the complexities of trying to stereotype non-believers, but BHA members can be seen to fit well their description as a 'middle class intelligentsia'. Their research, supported by the findings of the survey, has also demonstrated a strong connection between non-belief and a privileged socio-economic position.

The 2014 survey has provided an insight into the membership of the BHA in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the main conclusion is that, with the exception of age, the 21<sup>st</sup> century humanist is very much like their 20<sup>th</sup> century counterpart. The research has enabled a longitudinal perspective to be taken on Campbell's original find-

ings and makes a contribution to our understanding of the demographics of the BHA at a time of renewed interest in organised non-religion.

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## Endnotes

[1] Prior to the 2001 Census questions about religious affiliation were not included and consequently very little reliable information was available about humanists and others who joined secular organisations and how they may or may not have differed from the population as a whole.

[2] Social class coding is a system of demographic classification based upon occupation, the system used by Campbell is no longer in widespread use. The system extended from Class 1 'Professional Occupations' to Class V 'Unskilled Occupations'.

[3] Social Class I 'Professional Occupations' would include doctors, lawyers, or architects. Class II 'Intermediary Occupations' would include most teachers.

[4] Social Classes A-C1 are used to describe people according to the social grade and occupation for the purposes of statistical research. Social Class A is typically described as 'upper middle class' and individuals so described would fulfil higher managerial or professional roles. Social Class C1 is typically described as 'lower middle class' and individuals so described would fulfil supervisory or clerical roles. The complete range of Social Classes is from A-E.