

= Merseyside Skeptics Society =

The Merseyside Skeptics Society (MSS) is a nonprofit organisation that promotes scientific skepticism in Merseyside and the United Kingdom . Founded in 2009 , the society has campaigned against the use of homeopathy , challenged the claims of psychics , and hosts regular events in Liverpool , podcasts , and an annual conference in Manchester , QED : Question . Explore . Discover .

As part of their Liverpool Skeptics in the Pub events the society hosts guest speakers , who have included Simon Singh , David Nutt , and Robert Llewellyn . It also organises the awareness and protest against homeopathy campaign , 10 : 23 .

= = History = =

The Merseyside Skeptics Society was founded in February 2009 to develop and support the skeptical community in Merseyside . The Society held its first speaker 's meeting on 17 September 2009 at the Crown Hotel in Liverpool , England . Professor Chris French , editor of The Skeptic magazine gave a talk entitled " The Psychology of Anomalous Experiences " . Merseyside Skeptics Society Limited was registered in the United Kingdom as a private , limited by guarantee , no share capital company on 20 August 2010 .

According to co @-@ founder Michael Marshall , the group chose to use the American spelling of ' skeptic ' because " in the States , the word isn ' t as strongly linked to cynicism . It 's not seen as being as negative as it is over here . "

When climate change deniers began identifying as skeptics , vice president Michael Marshall made a clear distinction , stating : " In our view , climate change sceptics are not sceptics . A sceptic looks at the available evidence and makes a decision , and for homeopathy the evidence is that it doesn 't work . But the sceptical position on climate change is that it is happening . "

= = Activities = =

= = Meetings = = =

The Society holds several regular meetings in the Liverpool area , including the Liverpool Skeptics in the Pub , Skeptic Dinners , and Women 's Socials . Liverpool Skeptics in the Pub holds two meetings a month , one of which is a social event and the other of which features a guest speaker . Guest speakers have included Ariane Sherine , Simon Singh , David Aaronovitch , Evan Harris , Elizabeth Pisani , Brian Deer , Jon Ronson , Stephen Law , David Nutt , Mark Stevenson , Mark Lynas and Robert Llewellyn , among others . Topics covered vary widely and include health care , science , atheism , the paranormal and supernatural , psychics , politics and psychology .

= = Homeopathy = = =

In 2009 , the society wrote an open letter to pharmacy chain Boots in which they denounced the sales of homeopathic products in their store . In the letter they wrote that " We trust brands such as Boots to check the facts for us ... We don 't expect to find products on the shelf at our local pharmacy which do not work " , calling for them to remove the " bogus therapy " from their shelves .

The Society organised the 10 : 23 campaign to raise awareness of , and campaign against , homeopathy . This campaign included protests in 2010 against Boots for selling homeopathic preparations as equivalent to mainstream , scientifically @-@ based medicine and involved mass homeopathic overdoses outside Boots stores to mock what the protesters asserted to be the lack of efficacy in homeopathic products .

Following the overdose , Boots responded by saying " We know that many people believe in the benefits of complementary medicines and we aim to offer the products we know our customers want

. " These protests took place in 70 cities in 30 countries around the world , including Australia and New Zealand , and resulted in no ill effects to those taking the products .

In addition , the Society has complained about GPs who have advocated alternative medicine including homeopathy .

= = = Sports wristband test = = =

In 2012 , Merseyside Skeptics Society investigated claims that the Shuzi Qi sports wristbands ? bands supposed to improve athletic performance similar to Power Balance bands ? had any effect . These bands were promoted in marketing materials as containing a computer chip programmed to " resonate with blood cells ' natural frequencies " , improving circulation by causing them to " unclump " , and were claimed to " bring your whole being into a state of balance where ... your endurance levels are increased . " The study cited by Shuzi UK used a technique called live blood cell analysis which has been discredited , and Merseyside Skeptics Society characterized the claims as " nonsensical techno @-@ babble " .

After the society conducted tests with a rugby player , it was reported that the bands had made " no discernable difference " and that when subject to double blind trials , the product failed to have any effect on the rugby player 's performance . Following the test , a spokesman for Shuzi UK stated that the claims made on its UK website would be updated ; however , the director of the company claimed that the tests were biased and unfair .

= = = Challenging psychic claims = = =

In 2011 , celebrity psychic Sally Morgan was accused of having an off @-@ stage assistant at her shows who passed information to her via radio . Merseyside Skeptics Society subsequently challenged her to participate in a test of her supposed powers , designed by psychologist Chris French . Around the same time , Simon Singh received emails from Sally Morgan 's solicitor , stating that she had instructed the solicitor to " take libel proceedings , if necessary , in relation to allegations that she is a cheat " following the campaign encouraging her to take the test .

The Society turned the initial challenge into an annual event titled the " Halloween Challenge " ; a scientific test to investigate if professional mediums could demonstrate psychic abilities in a controlled setting . In 2012 , researchers at Goldsmiths , University of London conducted the challenge with two professional mediums , who both agreed beforehand that it was a fair test of their abilities , asking them to attempt to identify information about five volunteers they had not previously met and could not see . The experiment involved the mediums writing details about the volunteers , who then had to identify themselves from the descriptions . With a success rate of one in five , the results showed little evidence of the mediums ' claimed psychic ability . One of the mediums described the test as " designed to confirm the researchers ' preconceptions " , saying that she had to work face @-@ to @-@ face to make a connection .

Vice @-@ president Michael Marshall supported the ban of the sale of tarot readings and spells on eBay in 2012 , stating he thought it was " solid consumer protection " . He continued that " tarot , spells and curses are all highly unproven " , noting that although many tarot readers are sincere and believe they have psychic abilities , " that doesn 't make it any more real . "

When the owner of a missing cat in Lincolnshire enlisted the help of a psychic , who said that it had been adopted by another family and would be found in an area children play , the society said : " Both of these are incredibly obvious scenarios to suggest for a missing cat , and would likely be the suggestions you 'd get from someone without psychic powers ? and without the need for a fee , too . "

In June 2010 , Liverpoolian psychic Joe Power made allegations to the police that threats of violence had been directed towards him from members of the society on social media site Facebook . After police contacted the society in regards to the claims , a member was able to explain that the allegations were unfounded . In a statement on their website following the incident , they wrote " nobody involved with the Merseyside Skeptics Society ? or anyone that I even know of ? has ever

made threats to Joe or his family , and we absolutely never will . "

= = = Podcasts = = =

Merseyside Skeptics Society produces three podcasts titled Skeptics with a K , InKredulous and Be Reasonable .

= = = Skeptics with a K = = =

Skeptics with a K , " the podcast for science , reason and critical thinking " , is the official podcast of the Society . Its first episode was recorded on 28 July 2009 , at Mike Hall 's home . The podcast features hosts Mike Hall , Michael " Marsh " Marshall and Colin Harris ? in April 2014 replaced by Alice Howarth ? discussing recent events from a skeptical point of view . Co @-@ host Michael Marshall described it as , " a fairly @-@ shambolic , overly @-@ enthusiastic and snarky mix of science , skepticism and sarcasm . " A popular semi @-@ regular segment , until 14 July 2011 when it concluded with a special " Best of " edition , was a fact check on the children 's book The Giant Book of Fantastic Facts . On 1 April 2013 , an entire episode consisted of fictional stories including a parody of Ghost Busters , a story about the " Mersey Book of Monsters " and one about the " Paranormal Investigation Society Scotland (PISS) " . The hosts have appeared as guests on other popular podcasts including Cognitive Dissonance and the Token Skeptic .

= = = InKredulous = = =

InKredulous is a comedy panel quiz show , inspired by shows such as Mock the Week , Have I Got News for You , and The News Quiz , featuring a variety of guests from the skeptic community . In the pilot episode , host Andy Wilson described it as " the quiz show where we satirically examine news stories , websites , events and personalities who will tweak the spider sense of our sceptical listeners and delicious looking panelists . " The first episode was released on 8 February 2010 . Hosts of other podcasts are frequently guests , including Steven Novella of The Skeptics ' Guide to the Universe , Robin Ince of Infinite Monkey Cage , George Hrab of Geologic , Brian Dunning of Skeptoid , Kylie Sturgess of Token Skeptic , Ross Blocher and Carrie Poppy of Oh No , Ross and Carrie ! , and others . Other notable guests include David Aaronovitch , Paul Zenon , and Jon Ronson .

= = = Be Reasonable = = =

Be Reasonable is a monthly interview show that engages guests with ideas outside the mainstream scientific consensus , such as a member of the Flat Earth Society . In the first episode , on 28 January 2013 , hosts Hayley Stevens (until June 2014) and Michael Marshall described the show as an examination of their guests ' beliefs and their structure , and the evidence they believe supports these beliefs . Guests have discussed past life therapy , aura photography and the presence of aliens on Earth .

= = = QED : Question , Explore , Discover = = =

Starting in February 2011 the Merseyside Skeptics Society , in conjunction with the Greater Manchester Skeptics Society , began organising and presenting an annual two @-@ day skeptical science festival , QED : Question . Explore . Discover .

QED is organised by skeptics volunteers and any proceeds go back into the event or a charity . On the " Token Skeptic " podcast Michael Marshall said , " How we try to always pitch it and how we try and run it is - it 's all about the skeptical community . Because its being run by people who are just part of that community who are doing this because we really love it , the atmosphere , seems to be , of people coming together . It 's kind of a big party , a celebration of UK skepticism and also

international skepticism " .

===== QED 2011 =====

The master of ceremonies for the first QED was George Hrab . Notable speakers included Steven Novella and Eugenie Scott , and episodes of the podcasts InKredulous , The Pod Delusion , and Strange Quarks were recorded live during the event . In an article on the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry website about the first QED conference , Kylie Sturgess said , " The organisers of QEDCon didn 't need to proclaim the success of their convention from the stage ? it was evident from the beginning to the end . "

===== QED 2012 =====

The second QED convention in 2012 was sponsored by the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science and featured speakers such as Robin Ince and Maryam Namazie . The Skeptic magazine awarded the first annual " Ockhams ' Awards " at QED 2012 . The categories and winners were ; Editor 's Choice Award ? Mike Hutchinson from The Skeptic ; Best Skeptic Video ? Tim Minchin 's " Storm " ; Best Science Video ? Daniel Keogh and Luke Harris ; Best Skeptic Blog of 2011 ? Skepchick ; Best Podcast ? The Pod Delusion ; and Best Event / Campaign / Outreach ? Robin Ince .

===== QED 2013 =====

The third QED , sponsored by the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science and the British Humanist Association , featured speakers such as Richard Dawkins and Lawrence Krauss . The second annual Ockham 's Awards were presented to " Shut Up Infinity " (Best Video) ; Quackometer (Best Blog) ; Kylie Sturgess , Token Skeptic (Best Podcast) ; Skeptics on the Fringe , Edinburgh Skeptics Society (Best Event / Campaign) and The Pod Delusion (Editor 's Choice) .

===== QED 2014 =====

The fourth QED was hosted by magician Paul Zenon , who co @-@ wrote and appeared in the humorous opening film and was also a panelist . Notable speakers included Richard Wiseman , Elizabeth Pisani , Mark Crislip , Robert Llewellyn , Nathan Phelps , Susan Gerbic , Mark Edward and Deborah Hyde . The Ockham Awards for the year 2013 were hosted by Wiseman and included Skepticity (Best Podcast) , Leaving Fundamentalism by Jonny Scaramanga (Best Blog) , Nightingale Collaboration (Best Campaign) , Superstition ain 't the way : Kylie Sturgess at TEDxPerth (Best Video) and the QED organisers (Editor 's Choice) .

===== QED 2015 =====

The fifth QED took place in April 2015 and featured guest included Mitch Benn , A. C. Grayling , Harriet Hall , Lucie Green , Ryan Bell , Natalie Haynes , Jennifer Michael Hecht , Bruce Hood , Aron Ra , Kate Smurthwaite and Matt Dillahunty .

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