



PréCiS

Spring 2021

Bringing Christian faith and science together

Issue no. 99

**Interview - Diana Briggs
(retiring CiS Gen Secretary)
2021 Northern Conference
New CiS General Secretary
required
Local Group News**



Interview with Dr Diana Briggs CiS General Secretary

What has your science-faith journey looked like?

Although my parents were not really church-goers, I had an innate inclination towards faith, going off to church by myself at quite a young age — first attending a local Sunday school and eventually, almost by accident ending up an Anglican. Fortunately, my faith journey was not blighted by the narrow rules or prohibitions which sometimes damage the faith of young Christians, so I entered the world of science not even aware that there could be issues from a faith perspective. I gravitated naturally towards biology and was fascinated by the vast array of living creatures which exist. The idea from “tree of life” pictures that they could all be interconnected was gripping and hours were spent poring over books on different life forms, past and present. It was much later that I learnt about Darwin and how evolutionary theory is borne out at a molecular level. I was a DPhil student at Oxford, thinking a lot about convergent evolution as part of my project when I first discovered that some Christians had a serious problem with things like evolution and the age of the earth. Although I reflected on it a bit, it all seemed a little bit odd and unconvincing - and then I discovered Christians in Science.

What sparked your interest in science?

Growing up in the real life “lab” of New Zealand

(NZ), with its geothermal activity, tectonic plates, glaciation, volcanoes, earthquakes and the occasional tsunami as part of everyday life, I was very drawn towards Geology for a while. But I couldn't quite see how I could use it in a career path (academia as a career never occurred to me). As an island nation, NZ is also a great place for unique wild-life — particularly marine organisms and birds. Although born a Brit, I grew up in a tiny fishing village and farming community on the Coromandel Peninsula in NZ. As children we used to swim amongst the fish off the local wharf. It was a big game fishing centre and (conservationists stop reading!), dripping wet from our after-school swims we would watch the “catches of the day” arrive — mako, hammerhead and all sorts of other sharks, marlins, swordfish etc. A day out in the school holidays would be to take a local launch out into the bay and come back with schnapper, john dory, kahawai, trevally. And that was before we got onto collecting seafood from the beaches and finding jelly fish and Portuguese man o'wars washed up in sea storms. And then there was the bush, the mountains, the birds, bare-back riding, sheep-shearing and the local rodeo. How not to be drawn in to all this?

How long have you been involved with CiS and how has this involvement progressed?

My first contact with CiS was through the late Brian Robbins whom I met at a book launch in the mid nineties and he asked me to write a review of the book under discussion (Susan Greenfield's Journeys to the Centre of the Mind).

I then got co-opted as a CiS book reviewer and finally joined CiS in about 1998 when Sir Colin Humphreys, then Chair of CiS, asked me if I would join the committee. With Ross McKenzie from Queensland, who was visiting Oxford at the time, I set up the Oxford CiS group in 2004. In 2007 I took over from Caroline Berry as CiS General Secretary.

You have been CiS General Secretary for 14 years, could you tell us a little about your role?

The role has changed a lot since I was appointed. Originally, we had no Executive Officer and there was a lot of routine administration to do. With the last Templeton Grant we were able to make provision for a full time Exec Officer which freed me up enormously and I now have much more of an oversight role. I now work about 1 ½ days a week, depending what’s happening. It gets busier over the winter months when there is a lot to do with conference planning, annual members meeting, both management and trustee meetings, annual reviews of our essential documentation to ensure it is still in keeping with latest legislation, submitting our annual reports to Companies House and the Charities Commission, and the Editorial Board of Science and Christian Belief. In a normal week I probably spend the equivalent of about half a day on routine matters – emails, keeping up with others in the team and with CiS members who may want information or advice, answering questions, finding speakers and commentators, putting people in contact with one another etc. The other two half days get split between other

tasks such as those mentioned previously, as well as keeping an eye on developments elsewhere that might be significant and in the last year, providing accurate information and fielding off conspiracy theories and other untruths about the pandemic and vaccines. There is also an opportunity to develop a few personal interests and through a range of contacts, I have been in a position where I have been able to visit groups with an interest in science and faith in both the UK and other parts of the world, taking part in their conferences, networking, sharing ideas and CiS resources.



Diana and her husband Prof Andrew Briggs

Where would you like to see CiS in five or ten years’ time?

There are a lot more organisations with an interest in science and faith than there were when I first joined CiS and we need to concentrate on niche areas where we can make a unique contribution. It is good that we can now move beyond conflict narratives to see science and faith as partners in a common purpose. Not only does this lead to a richer understanding of how science and theology work together, but also gives us the opportunity to see how can we better support

Cont. p5

Job Vacancy - CiS General Secretary

With our current General Secretary, Dr Diana Briggs retiring at the end of this year, Christians in Science is looking for a suitably qualified person to act as General Secretary. This is senior administrative role, working alongside the Chair of the CiS Executive Committee and the CiS Trustees to provide support and oversight of CiS activities.

This voluntary role is part-time, requiring approximately 1½ days per week. A background in science is essential and basic administrative, HR and networking skills are desirable. He or she will work closely with the committee and be involved in all aspects of the running of CiS, including HR and line management.

Together with the Executive Officer, the General Secretary will communicate with churches and other groups to find speakers for events, plan conferences and liaise with CiS members and the public.

The General Secretary also acts as Secretary to the Trustees, including maintaining essential HR and Charity documentation.

We would like to have a new appointee in place by Oct/Nov 2021 to overlap with the current incumbent and enable a smooth handover on 1 January 2022.

Please contact Dr Diana Briggs (secretary@cis.org.uk) for a job description or any questions about the post. Please send your application to Diana by 30th June 2021.

Registered Charity Number 1121422

both scientists, teachers and in their places of work. We are uniquely placed to equip and resource them, not just intellectually but in other areas too. I would also love it if we could strengthen our bonds with the international groups so we can be much more of a global network. A number of groups are now starting up in the global south and have both enormous energy for the work and unique issues to deal with that are very different from our own: we could both learn from them and support them.

What was the most interesting thing you discovered or worked on in your career?

When I was doing my doctorate, I loved looking at serine proteases for evidence for convergent or divergent evolution. The real wow moment for me was convergent evolution. It just seemed such an amazing concept, that organisms that were not closely related could independently evolve similar traits which were observable even at the molecular level.

What do you do for fun?

I'm very much into nature and wide open spaces. Last autumn I had the fun of exploring the dripping woodlands of Berkshire with my very small grandchildren – a delight as we daily came across an everchanging variety of fungi, lichens, creepy crawlies and all manner of amazing woodland flora and fauna. My other great love is music and theatre. Although I don't do as much as I once did (particularly since the lockdown!). I still sing with my church choir for special events, and have done a few crazy things

like fly to Milan on the spur of a moment to go to the opera at La Scala. I love visiting interesting places, and being married to a fellow academic who is also a private pilot, has provided ample opportunity for this. Our trips this way have taken us round much of Europe, the American South-West, NZ, Australia and parts of Africa. I also have a penchant for ancient history, prehistory and archaeology and make the most of opportunities to indulge in them.



Visiting the African plains

If you could chat with a scientist from the past, who would it be and why?

One of the first scientists I came across was Marie Curie. As a child I used to get a magazine that on the back page serialised the lives of famous women. Marie Curie was one of these – her life journey from Warsaw to Paris, her ground-breaking work on radioactivity, winning two Nobel prizes (in Physics and Chemistry), the application of her work in both cancer treatment and in radiography and her tragic death from over-exposure to radiation, little understood at the time. And on top of that

Cont. p7

CiS Northern Conference

DIGITAL THEOLOGY AND THE CHURCH

May 7th - 8th 2021

Speakers:-

- ◆ **Steve Furber - *Brains, Minds and AI***
- ◆ **Andrew Graystone - *Too Much Information?***
- ◆ **David Robertson - *What Would Jesus Post?***
- ◆ **Anna Pearson - *Quantum Mechanics, Faith and Unresolved Questions***
- ◆ **Peter Philips - *Digital Church in a post-COVID world***
- ◆ **Maggi Savin-Baden - *Post Digital After Life and the Spiritual Realm***

Join us for a series of talks and discussions going beyond clicks, likes and views to go deeper into what it means to a Christian believer in today's digital era.

For more information and to register at Eventbrite - [tinyurl.com/djdb93um](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/cis-northern-conference-digital-theology-and-the-church-tickets-151111111111)

there seemed to be a munificence about her, demonstrated in her family relations, her generosity to her research associates and insistence that her personal accolades be credited to the institutions who had supported her. Einstein apparently said that she was probably the only person who could not be corrupted by fame.

And your thoughts after retiring from CiS?

This is still in the planning stages. When I joined CiS I put a long-standing family history project on hold and I am looking forward to getting back to that. I'm currently a trustee of a literary charity and I'm also exploring ways I can perhaps continue to have a role in the science-faith world. A major renovation of a holiday home on the Norfolk coast is also on the cards.



We wish to thank Diana for all the hard work for so many years. We hope Diana and her husband Andrew, enjoy their retirement together at the end of this year.

Wish to watch a great Science/Faith talk??

Some of our local groups are putting together online events and everyone is welcome, no matter where you live.

Do check the Events listed on the CiS website or in the monthly CiS Update.

Why not host an online "gathering" of friends or colleagues to watch a talk then discuss together.

The talks from this year are available on the CiS YouTube channel - www.youtube.com/c/ChristiansinScience

LOCAL GROUP NEWS

BRISTOL

For more information please contact Andrew Halestrap - ahalestrap@hotmail.com

DUNDEE

For more details on Dundee events please contact christiansinsciencedundee@gmail.com

EDINBURGH

For more information please email cisedinburgh3@gmail.com

HARROW

For details of future events in Harrow please contact Revd Lyndon North - revlnorth@aol.com

HUDDERSFIELD –students

For details please contact Omololu Fagunwa on fagunwaomololu@yahoo.com.

IPSWICH

For more information about future events please contact Dr John Ling - jjling@btopenworld.com

IRELAND

For details please contact Dr Neville Cobbe - neville.cobbe@yahoo.co.uk for more information.

MANCHESTER

We will have a meeting at 7pm on the first Monday of every month. Please register via Eventbrite (details on the CiS website) or contact sec.cismanchester@yahoo.co.uk

April 12th - The Spiritual Interpretation of Scientific Imagery, Rev. Dr David Gregory (Croxley Green Baptist Church)

May 3rd - After the Monkey Trial, Dr Christopher M. Rios (Baylor)

June 7th - The Environment and Theology, Dr Hilary Marlow (Cambridge)

NORWICH

Please contact sfnorfolk1@gmail.com for more details.

OXFORD

For more information, please contact Diana Briggs at diana.briggs@wolfson.oxon.org

READING

Please email Dave Law to discuss restarting this group at dave@readingatwork.org

SHEFFIELD

For more information please email rhoda.hawkins@sheffield.ac.uk

SOUTH WEST

For more information on events please email cissouthwest@gmail.com

SOUTHAMPTON

For information about the group please email Peter

Details of all events are also available on the CiS App and at www.cis.org.uk/events.

If you wish to start a Local Group in your area, please get in touch with Stephanie, our Development Officer, at do@cis.org.uk



May (southampton@cis.org.uk)

ST ANDREWS

For information about the undergraduate group, please contact Dr Andrew Torrance (abt3@st-andrews.ac.uk).

For information about the postgraduate group, please contact Dr Rebecca Goss (rjmg@st-andrews.ac.uk).

SURREY

For information please contact Joy Perkins at joyeperkins@googlemail.com

SURREY HEATH

For more details please contact John Russell at chynoweth.jw@gmail.com

TYNESIDE & NORTHUMBERLAND

For information on Newcastle events, please contact Bill Clegg at bill.clegg@ncl.ac.uk

WEST MIDLANDS

For more information please contact Godfrey Armitage on g.n.armitage@warwick.ac.uk

WORCESTER

For more information please contact Jim Smith on jgsmith29@aol.com

YORK

For more information please email christiansinsciencenyork788@gmail.com