

Humanist Bloomsbury

SELHuG Guided Walk, 22 April 2023

Introduction

- This is a walk to see some of the locations associated with the Humanist movement - but what is Humanism?
- The word Humanism has changed its meaning over the years
- Today it means a focus on the individual, on a person's individual & social power & responsibility, rather than on some super-natural 'god'.
- Humanists do not believe in any kind of after life or alternative existence - we believe that we each have one life, here on earth, & our purpose in life is to live as happily as possible - largely by making other people happy & making the world a better place
- We believe that our species, homo sapiens, is a social animal & that our ethics & values are derived, by a process of natural selection over thousands of years, from our experience of living with others
- We exercise a rational approach to life, based partly on scientific evidence but also on empathy for other people & other sentient beings.
- Our slogan is 'Think for yourself & act for everyone'

History of Humanists UK

- Traces its origins back to 1787, as a nonconformist Unitarian congregation rebelling against the doctrine of eternal damnation
- Located at South Place, Finsbury, led by the American minister Elhanan Winchester
- This group widened its interests & became South Place Ethical Society, which is thought to be the oldest surviving freethinkers' organisation in the world
- Union of Ethical Societies, 1896, became Ethical Union in 1920
- 1950, Humanist Council formed to link Rationalist Press Association, the Ethical Union & South Place Ethical Society
- 1957 became Humanist Association, the British Humanist Association in 1963, Humanists UK in 2017
- Campaigning organisation, plus coordinator for Humanist Celebrants
- Weddings, funerals, pastoral care in hospitals & prisons

Conway Hall

- In 1824 the South Place Ethical Society built a chapel at South Place, Finsbury.
- Moved to Conway Hall in 1929
- Conway Hall was designed by Frederick Mansford. It is a Grade II listed building
- Conway Hall is named after an American, Moncure D. Conway, who led the South Place Ethical Society from 1864 to 1885 and from 1892 to 1897,
- Many events promoted by Humanists UK are held here, & the building houses the Humanist Library & Archives

Red Lion Square - past residents

- John Harrison, the world-renowned inventor of the marine chronometer, lived at number 12, where he died in 1776.
- Dante Gabriel Rossetti lived at number 17 in 1851.

Humanist Bloomsbury

SELHuG Guided Walk, 22 April 2023

- William Morris & Edward Burne-Jones also lived there from 1856 to 1859. With Rossetti, they were members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood of artists, poets & art critics.

Bertrand Russell (1872-1970)

- Russell was born into a prominent aristocratic family of radical Whigs
- John Stuart Mill, the writer, philosopher, and feminist was the boy's godfather.
- His parents died when he was a young child & he was brought up by his grandparents
- His grandfather, Lord John Russell, had been Prime Minister in the 1840s and 1860s.
- He was a very lonely little boy, but he developed a keen interest in mathematics and philosophy, going on to study at Trinity College, Cambridge
- Wrote Principia Mathematica (1910-1913), major work on mathematical logic
- Campaigned against WW1 & was imprisoned as a pacifist
- Accepted WW2 as the lesser of two evils
- 1950 awarded Nobel Prize for Literature
- Founding member of Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) in 1957
- Always strongly critical of religions, he provided a philosophical basis for humanism
- Closely associated with British Humanist Association (BHA)
- Married Alys Pearsall-Smith in 1894, separated 1901, divorced 1921 when he married Dora Black (1894-1986), feminist and socialist campaigner, divorced 1936 when Bertrand linked up with their children's governess Patricia Spence
- Dora & Bertrand had 2 children together & she had 2 more with journalist Griffin Barry while married to Bertrand
- He was something of a womaniser!
- Bust made by Marcelle Quinton & installed here in 1980

Fenner Brockway (1888-1988)

- politician, writer and activist, campaigned for world peace and an end to racial inequality
- Attended School for the Sons of Missionaries in Blackheath (now Eltham College), from 1897 to 1905,
- Labour MP for Eton and Slough 1950 - 1964
- Founding member of the Campaign For Nuclear Disarmament in 1957
- Life peerage 1964
- Served on the BHA advisory council.
- Entire life's work was inspired by his belief in equality, in the innate dignity of every man, woman, child and animal, and in his awareness and acceptance of both his and mankind's place in the universe.
- Bust made by Ian Walters, installed 1985

Kingsway Tramway Subway

- Grade 2 listed tunnel, opened in 1906, to enable trams, & subsequently trolley-buses, to cross under Strand & Aldwych & emerge here in Southampton Row.
- Included 2 underground stations at Aldwych & Holborn
- Closed in 1952

Humanist Bloomsbury

SELHuG Guided Walk, 22 April 2023

- In June 1958, the London County Council proposed making use of part of the subway for light traffic from Waterloo Bridge. It opened as the Strand Underpass on 21 January 1964.

Bloomsbury Square

- Originally laid down in 1660s, called Southampton Square, it was the front garden of Southampton House, seat of the Earl of Southampton
- Southampton House became Bedford House when daughter of Earl of Southampton married Duke of Bedford
- The Dukes of Bedford are the Russell family: Bertrand Russell is related to the Dukes of Bedford
- Bedfords were great town planners & liked town squares. The various squares of Bloomsbury were laid down in early 1800s & are named after members of the family - Russell, Bedford, Tavistock, Gordon, Woburn
- The name Bloomsbury is thought to be the English pronunciation of the French name of a Norman knight who possessed the area after the Norman Conquest

Corner Bury Place & Barter Street

- Former location of HQ of Women's Freedom League, founded 1907, slogan 'Dare to be Free'
- WFL envisioned emancipation for women beyond merely gaining the vote. It recognised the wide-reaching disadvantages of a patriarchal society, particularly for working class women, and sought sweeping societal reform
- Numerous ethical society members, male & female, actively campaigned for women's suffrage.

Bury Place - Bertrand Russell

- Blue plaque on wall of flat 34, home of Bertrand Russell 1911-1916

Bedford Square Gardens - Rammohun Roy (1772-1833)

- Indian social and religious reformer, sometimes referred to as the 'father of modern India':
- a progressive thinker, pioneering journalist, and the first Indian intellectual to sail to Europe.
- Roy influenced the thinking of a variety of individuals associated with the ethical movement & the development of organised humanism in the UK, including 'rational religionist' and philanthropist Robert Owen, South Place leader William Johnson Fox, Fox's successor Moncure Conway, and the freethinking writer Harriet Martineau.

Humanist Bloomsbury

SELHuG Guided Walk, 22 April 2023

Lady Ottoline Morrell (1873-1938)

- Blue plaque on wall of number 10 Gower Street
- English aristocrat and society hostess, she befriended writers including Aldous Huxley, Siegfried Sassoon, T. S. Eliot and D. H. Lawrence, and artists including Mark Gertler, Dora Carrington and Gilbert Spencer.
- Had open marriage with MP Phillip Morrell
- Ottoline had a long affair with Bertrand Russell,
- She reputedly had a fling with a young stone mason, who might have been the model for game-keeper Mellors in Lady Chatterly's Lover.

Gower Street notable residents

- Offices of British Humanist Society for 10 years at number 1
- Millicent Fawcett, a leading figure in the British women's suffrage movement & founder of the Fawcett Society, lived at No. 2 Gower Street
- First anaesthetic in England administered in Bonham Carter House, 52 Gower Street, in 1846
- Charles Darwin - 110 Gower St, moved in with new wife Emma Wedgwood in January 1839. House destroyed in WW2, since developed by UCL
- Charles Dickens (aged 11) lived at 147 Gower Street in 1823, when his mother opened a school there.
- Proceed north up Gower Street to Dillons book shop, then turn R

Gordon Square notable residents

- Bloomsbury Group - group of associated English writers, intellectuals, philosophers and artists in the first half of the 20th century,^[1] including Virginia Woolf, John Maynard Keynes, E. M. Forster and Lytton Strachey.
- Influenced literature, aesthetics, criticism, and economics as well as modern attitudes towards feminism, pacifism, and sexuality.
- Sir Leslie Stephen, early Humanist, lived at 46
- Subsequently daughters Vanessa, later Vanessa Bell, & Virginia, later Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) also lived at 46
- John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946), philosopher & father of Keynesian Economics, subsequently also lived at 46
- Lytton Strachey (1880-1832), writer, critic & author of Eminent Victorians, lived at 51
- The Bloomsbury Group 'Lived in squares, met in circles & loved in triangles' - Dorothy Parker
- Square now owned by University of London

Tavistock Square

- Associated with non-violence & pacifism
- A bust of the writer Virginia Woolf was unveiled in 2004 at the southwest corner of the square. Woolf lived at 52 Tavistock Square between 1924 and 1939.
- Statue of Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) in centre

Humanist Bloomsbury

SELHuG Guided Walk, 22 April 2023

- Cherry tree was planted in 1967 in memory of the victims of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.^[8]
- 1994, the Conscientious Objectors Commemorative Stone commemorating "men and women conscientious objectors all over the world and in every age"
- In September 2018, a memorial honouring the victims of the suicide bombing in September 2005, and the efforts of those who gave assistance, was unveiled

Woburn Walk

George Jacob Holyoak (1817-1906),

- a writer, lecturer, and promoter of the Cooperative movement
- Coined the term 'secularist' in 1851.
- In its focus on living well in this life, without hope of another, Holyoake's definition of a secularist is almost identical to that of a humanist today
- In 1842 arrested in Cheltenham for blasphemy. His trial resulted in six month imprisonment, the last trial for blasphemy in England.
- Laws against blasphemy and blasphemous libel were formally abolished in England and Wales in 2008 and Scotland in 2021. Equivalent laws remain in Northern Ireland.

Dorothy Richardson (1873-1957)

- British author and journalist. Author of Pilgrimage, a sequence of 13 semi-autobiographical novels published between 1915 and 1967
- One of the earliest modernist novelists to use stream of consciousness as a narrative technique.
- Richardson also emphasises the importance and distinct nature of female experiences.

Brunswick Square - notable residents

- John & Isabella Knightly, in Jane Austin's Emma, lived here
- In Thackeray's Vanity Fair Mr Osborne lived here
- John Ruskin was born at 54 Hunter Street, Brunswick Square in 1819.
- The writer E.M. Forster used 26 Brunswick Square as his London base from 1930 to 1939
- Virginia Woolf, Leonard Woolf & Duncan Grant lived at 38 on north side, 1911-1912
- J M Keynes lived at 38 from 1911-1912, before moving to Gordon Square

Humanist Bloomsbury

SELHuG Guided Walk, 22 April 2023

Foundling Hospital

- Established in 1739 by Thomas Coram (1668-1751), an English sea captain and philanthropist, to care for abandoned children
- In C18th became a very fashionable destination for its art gallery & music room
- Supported by William Hogarth (wonderful portrait of Thomas Coram) & G F Handel, whose will is in the exhibition & who donated the score of The Messiah to the Hospital
- 1926 Hospital moved to Redhill & subsequently to Berkhamstead
- Foundlings/orphans now no longer kept in hospitals but are generally fostered with families
- Foundling Hospital became the Coram Charity in 1971, a registered adoption agency, also education & care services for young people
- Memorial mitten on railings made by Tracy Emin, 2010
- Mothers used to fix a little token on their children's clothing as a means of identification. Emin's 'Baby Clothes: Mitten' memorialises this tradition

Coram's Fields

- Originally part of the Foundling Hospital grounds
- Now provides services for children and young people in the local community
- Owned by a trust that protects it from development
- Adults only allowed if accompanied by a child

Other sites

- Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital - the largest centre for research and postgraduate teaching in children's health in Europe.
- JM Barrie donated the royalties from his story Peter Pan to GOSH, now includes plays, books, films & even Disneyland rides. Condition - amounts provided must never be public.

Church of Humanity

- 20 Rugby Street
- Founded 1870 by philosopher Richard Congreve, a follower of French philosopher August Comte
- Positivism - 'Act from affection, think in order to act' - celebrate the achievements of humankind through secular ritual - 'Catholicism minus Christianity' - Thomas Huxley
- Closed 1932

Humanist Bloomsbury
SELHuG Guided Walk, 22 April 2023

Gateway to The Foundling Hospital, Paris
Painting by Henry Nelson O'Neill (1817-1880)

