

# Ethical Record

April-May-June 2019

Vol 124 • No 2



## *The Ethical Stripper*

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**CONWAY HALL ETHICAL SOCIETY**  
Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL

[www.conwayhall.org.uk](http://www.conwayhall.org.uk)

**Trustees' Chair:** Liz Lutgendorff **Honorary Treasurer:** Carl Harrison

Please email texts and viewpoints to the Editor: [editor@ethicalsoc.org.uk](mailto:editor@ethicalsoc.org.uk)

#### Staff

**Chief Executive Officer**  
Jim Walsh  
[ceo@conwayhall.org.uk](mailto:ceo@conwayhall.org.uk)

**Arts & Partnerships Co-ordinator**  
Martha Lee  
[martha@conwayhall.org.uk](mailto:martha@conwayhall.org.uk)

**Finance Officer**  
Linda Lamnica  
[finance@conwayhall.org.uk](mailto:finance@conwayhall.org.uk)

**Library & Learning Manager**  
Sophie Hawkey-Edwards  
[sophie@conwayhall.org.uk](mailto:sophie@conwayhall.org.uk)

**Visitor & Events Manager**  
Maggie Nightingale  
[maggie@conwayhall.org.uk](mailto:maggie@conwayhall.org.uk)

**Systems Analyst**  
Sid Rodrigues  
[sid@conwayhall.org.uk](mailto:sid@conwayhall.org.uk)

**Marketing & Evaluation /  
Production Editor, Ethical Record**  
Deborah Mohanan  
[deborah@conwayhall.org.uk](mailto:deborah@conwayhall.org.uk)

**Marketing & Fundraising Co-ordinator**  
Jeff Davy  
[jeff@conwayhall.org.uk](mailto:jeff@conwayhall.org.uk)

**Digitisation Co-ordinator**  
Alicia Chilcott  
[alicia@conwayhall.org.uk](mailto:alicia@conwayhall.org.uk)

**Venue Hire**  
Carina Dvorak, Brian Biagioni  
[venuehire@conwayhall.org.uk](mailto:venuehire@conwayhall.org.uk)

**Caretakers**  
Eva Aubrechtova (i/c)  
with: Brian Biagioni, Tony Fraser,  
Rogerio Retuerma  
[eva@conwayhall.org.uk](mailto:eva@conwayhall.org.uk)

**Maintenance**  
Chris Bird  
[chris@conwayhall.org.uk](mailto:chris@conwayhall.org.uk)

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Please see the *Ethical Record* section of [conwayhall.org.uk](http://conwayhall.org.uk) for regularly updated content, additional articles and also take a look at the online archive, where every issue published since 1895 is available in digital form.

The views expressed in this journal are not necessarily those of the Society.  
Front cover image photo by Sin Bozkurt.

Registered Charity No. 1156033 Founded in 1793, the Society is a progressive movement whose Charitable Objects are: the advancement of study, research and education in humanist ethical principles.

#### EDITORIAL

## Volunteering at Conway Hall

**Becca Price**

**I discovered Conway Hall in 2014 in my first year of university and of living in London. I was interested in ideas around humanism and freethinking and was looking for somewhere I could nurture and further my understanding of these topics. Conway Hall, 'the home of humanism', seemed like the ideal home for me! I instantly fell in love with Conway Hall as soon as I stepped through its doors, and throughout the years it has shaped the way I think about various subjects and been instrumental in growing my knowledge and opinions around humanism, science, arts, religion and so much more.**

It wasn't long before I was volunteering for Conway Hall's 'London Thinks' events. Volunteering and sitting in on these events was instrumental for me in expanding my knowledge on a broad range of topics, and I worked on events with speakers I personally admire such as Nate Phelps, Laura Bates and Peter Singer. Conway Hall's staff are really invested in their volunteers and keen to help them feel comfortable and grow within the society. I was soon managing a team of volunteers for the events, which helped me gain invaluable skills and was an unforgettable experience.

After this I moved to a volunteering role within the library and archive. Here I worked on the 'Architecture and Place' project, helping to digitise items from the archives which tell the story of the buildings and spaces occupied by Conway Hall Ethical Society since the Society's birth in 1888. Learning more about the building through books, architectural blueprints, art and general ephemera was fascinating and I feel lucky to have had the opportunity to handle and interact with such beautiful and delicate objects of cultural and historical importance. I urge anyone to have a look at the digital collection from this project on [Conway Hall's website](http://Conway Hall's website), as it provides a fascinating overview of the Society's and building's history.

Most recently I have been volunteering with Conway Hall's events marketing team, where I have been trained in various areas of events marketing and gained experience, skills and insights of the inner workings of the venue. Moving from working on events to behind the scenes has been an interesting transition. Working with Deborah and Jeff has provided me with invaluable skills to both boost my CV and expand my knowledge.

I would highly recommend Conway Hall to other potential volunteers as the team has been extremely supportive in helping me over the past five years. It has not only been beneficial to me as an individual, but has also helped me a lot throughout the years in finding outside work, due to the transferrable skills I have gained along the way. But most of all I value the people I have met and the experiences I have had here, and the unwavering support afforded to me throughout. This has been the most important factor for me, feeling welcomed, at home, supported and cared for by the team. It has really helped me gain confidence, and while sadly I am leaving at the end of March, my face will surely be seen here again...



**Becca Price** has been volunteering at Conway Hall on and off for the past five years in the Library and Archives, Events and Marketing departments. She graduated from the University of the Arts London in 2015 with a fine arts degree and has been a keen painter and musician ever since.



# BECOME A MEMBER



CONWAY  
HALL *Ethical Society*

THINKING ON SUNDAY LECTURE, 28 October 2018

## The Ethical Stripper

Stacey Clare

I'm often asked why I chose the title "ethical stripper". My main priority as an activist and public speaker has always been to shift the discourse away from the traditional moralising about sex work and towards a more pragmatic conversation about how working conditions in the sex industry could be improved. It's long been my experience that not enough people actually understand the inner workings of the sex industry, despite it meaning lots of things to lots of people. I would even argue that what most people think they know about strippers is gleaned from second hand information. With such a lack of primary sources available, it's no wonder then that the wider discourse is often hijacked by hysteria and stereotyping. Introducing the concept of ethics into the dialogue directs it towards a more nuanced perspective. Reminding people that even strippers are affected by things like policy and licensing legislation helps us refocus the topic – rather than getting hung up on the image of strippers as victims of circumstance, we can look more closely at what exactly those circumstances are, how they come about, and who gets to make the decisions and design the policies.

Ever since I first started dancing in strip clubs at the age of 22 I could see that although the job had the potential to be empowering for those who choose it, because of the poor working conditions and lack of employment rights, invariably it wasn't. Straight away I could see how the feminist discourse applied to the industry, due to the gender inequality among workers, customers and club owners. But I also identified that the problems I could see within my workplace also deserved to be framed as a labour rights issue, which it never was. I saw a great deal of public dialogue, dominated by mainstream media narratives and fuelled by frenzied feminist campaigns, but very little honest, practical discussion about the way clubs operate, the business model of stripping and sex work, or any decent solutions being proposed.

In 2008 several major women's rights organisations collaborated on a carefully planned and executed attack on strip clubs. Their aim was to halt the "spread" of an industry that in their opinion represented a serious threat to the rights and freedoms of women everywhere. While their intentions may have been well founded, and their observations and criticisms of the industry accurate, the aims of the campaign were misguided. Strip club licensing was debated in Parliament, and the end result was a massive curtailing of the strip club industry, with unreasonable restrictions and conditions placed on venues.

The empty promise of the new legislation for strip clubs was that it would improve the situation and help the women working in them. In reality, the opposite has happened. The Policing and Crime Act 2009 has had an incredibly detrimental effect on strippers, by virtue of the fact it has done nothing whatsoever to protect our employment rights and safeguard us from being exploited and extorted by venue operators. By limiting the spread of an exploitative industry, while failing to prevent the cause of the exploitation in the first place, the women's rights campaigners have handed a monopoly to the remaining clubs. Exploitation has therefore intensified. Since the law was passed a decade ago, working conditions have deteriorated year by year. Club closures and ill-thought-out licensing conditions have lead to toxic, competitive and highly coercive conditions for dancers.

The greatest problem all along has been the lack of dancers' voices within the public arena. Stigma holds back many workers from coming forth, and even when we do we are often viewed as victims, under the control of our abusers and/or acting out of false consciousness. The stigmatising and whorephobic language used within the discourse only ever harms us further. We have a long way to go to reverse the negative effects of the last decade, and we need to start by understanding the language we use to talk about sex workers.

Conway Hall hosts a wide variety of talks, concerts, exhibitions, courses, performances, community and social events. For nearly a hundred years, Conway Hall has been home to Britain's bravest thinkers and boldest social movements.

It is owned and operated by Conway Hall Ethical Society, which is an educational charity (no. 1156033) whose object is the advancement of study, research and education in humanist ethical principles. The Society itself programmes up to 150 events per year including *Thinking on Sunday*, *Sunday Concerts*, Learning courses, art exhibitions, poetry and literature events as well as collaborations with like-minded charities and community groups.

We are an independent charity and receive no funding from the government. That means that everything we do is dependent upon our commercial activity and the generosity of members and supporters like you.

Support our work by joining the *Ethical Society* and enjoy a range of membership benefits:

- Free entry to our *Thinking on Sunday* talks series
- Discounted/Free entry to selected events at Conway Hall, including the *Sunday Concerts*
- Discounted fees for our own courses and those from *London School of Philosophy*
- Access to our archives and Library for book loans
- Quarterly digital edition of the *Ethical Record*
- Access to digital copies of *Ethical Records* dating back to 1895
- Voting privileges at the Annual General Meeting and participation in Membership consultations

Membership fees: Standard: £35 per year • Concessions: £25 per year

To join, go to: [conwayhall.org.uk/membership](http://conwayhall.org.uk/membership)





***“The greatest problem all along has been the lack of dancers’ voices within the public arena.”***

Photo: Sin Bozkurt.

## Is Stripping Sex Work?

There are members of my community who are split on this question. Many strippers see themselves as artists, entertainers, performers, and since they do not perform hands-on, full-service work, therefore they don’t identify as sex workers. I don’t decry anyone’s rights to self-identify; however for the purposes of moving towards a positive outcome we need to settle on a definition. On closer inspection, it’s hard to argue that stripping is not sex work. We perform a hyper-sexualised version of femininity (or masculinity in the case of male strippers), we dress in sexually suggestive outfits, we provide sexually stimulating dance routines.

Of course, there are many other components to our work as well; we provide company, we do emotional labour. A huge ratio of our time at work is spent simply talking to customers, never mind anything sexual. But full service sex work is not so different. All sex workers perform emotional labour, providing time and space for companionship and intimacy in all its various forms. The main differences between what strippers and full service

sex workers do, has to do with the amount of physical contact between ourselves and clients. And the ways in which our work is regulated differently.

In my estimation, stripping is a form of sex work. It is a job within the sex industry. Many workers move between jobs and there are crossovers. Some strippers also do full service sex work or webcamming in their own time. Escorts occasionally retire and become strippers. There are many different jobs in the sex industry, and on the whole we need to be able to talk about the various types of work under the same umbrella.

In 1980 Carol Leigh first coined the term “sex work” in an effort to establish a sense of agency and consent within the language used to talk about us: “The usage of the term ‘sex work’ marks the beginning of a movement... it acknowledges the work we do rather than defines us by our status.”<sup>1</sup> It therefore seems right to me to include stripping under the umbrella term.

<sup>1</sup> Leigh, C. (1997) “Inventing Sex Work” *Whores and Other Feminists*, Ed. Nagle, J.Taylor & Francis

## Cycle of Stigma

It can’t be underestimated how harmful stigma is to people working in the sex industry. Stigma creates silence. When people use stigmatising language to talk about the industry, sex workers hush up and hide what they do; they don’t talk openly about their work for fear of rejection or persecution. Imagine trying to navigate a doctor’s appointment, parent’s evening, meeting with an accountant or solicitor, or even reporting a crime to the police, if you couldn’t talk openly about your job.

Silence is soon followed by isolation, which leads to vulnerability, resulting in harm. Sex workers are more likely to be victims of violent crime, not because the work is inherently dangerous, but because perpetrators understand their chosen victim’s profile. By the time the public hears anything about sex work it is normally at the harm stage - think of all the news articles, documentaries and dramatisations about the tragedy of sex work. But this in turn fuels the cycle, creating further stigma and continuing the pattern.

## Whorephobia and Whorearchy

Another term for slut-shaming is whorephobia. Female sexual agency has been stigmatised for thousands of years and the trend is alive and well, finding new manifestations in the modern era. Whorephobia creates shame, stigma, exclusion and marginalisation. One recent example involved members of the pole fitness community, striving to have the sport “taken seriously”, distancing themselves from strip club culture by using the hashtag #notastripper.<sup>2</sup>

Whorearchy is another problem. There are many different types of work in the sex industry, with varying degrees of privilege. We are all united by stigma, but when one type of worker tries to cast off stigma by passing it on to someone doing a different job, this creates whorearchy. For example a stripper might say

<sup>2</sup> This starts to grate when there are also people in the pole dance community borrowing elements of stripper culture, such as wearing stripper style shoes (recognisable by their plastic platforms and exaggerated high heels) or throwing fake money around during classes, very much in line with the actual definition of cultural appropriation; borrowing or stealing culture from a marginalised group without giving anything back.

# The Perils of Perception

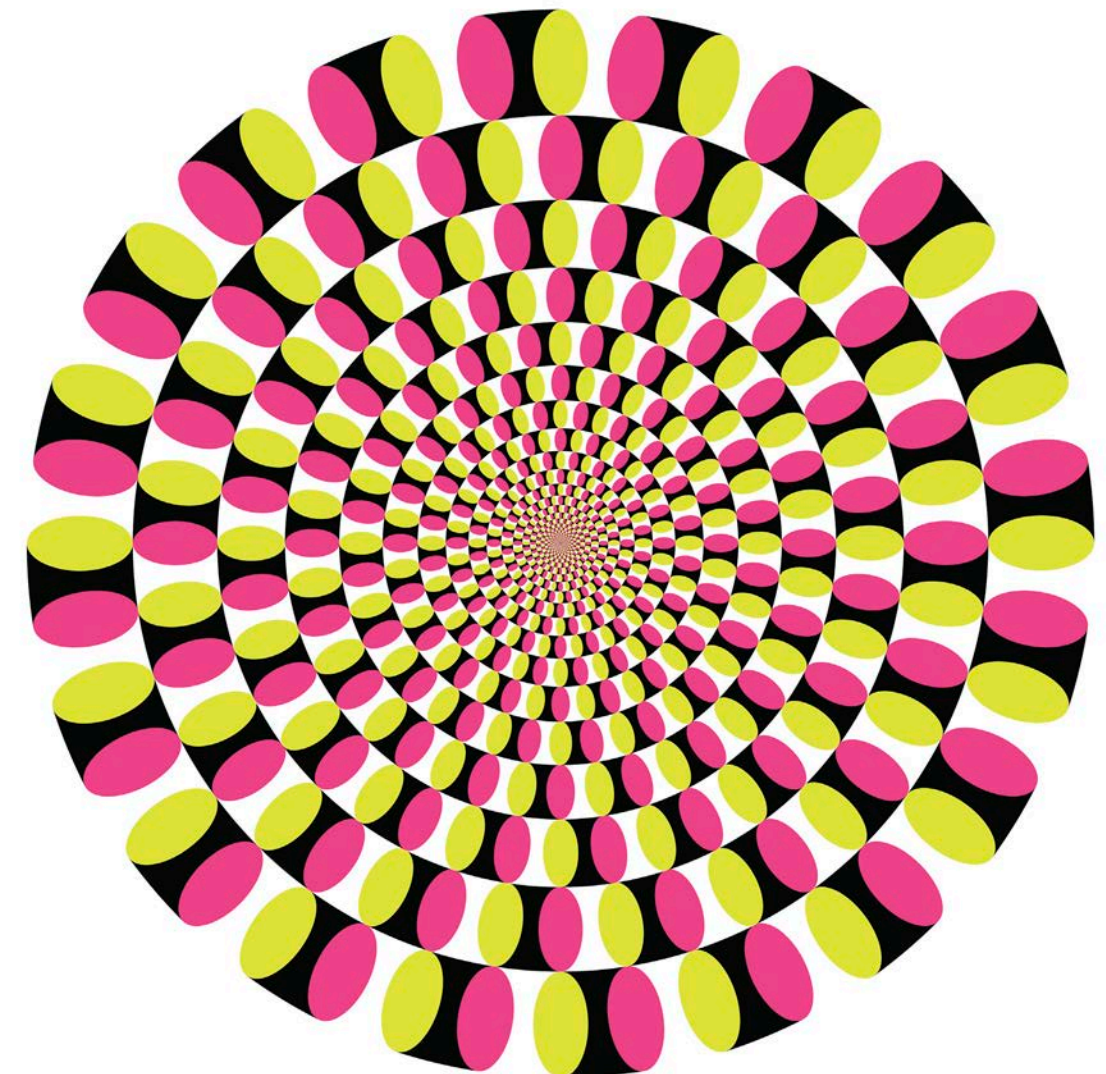
Professor Bobby Duffy

**The huge gaps between our perceptions and reality is becoming one of the most pressing social challenges of our time. This is not just driven by “fake news”, or the dodgy campaign messages and “alternative facts” that Brexit and President Trump have brought to the fore. In just about every country around the world there has been an increase in deeply tribal and polarised claims that have little connection to reality, on everything from immigration levels, trends in murder rates, vaccine safety and the role of the EU.**

These gaps are the subject of my book on *The Perils of Perception*, which is based on over 100,000 interviews in up to 40 countries – and outlines what we get wrong, why and what we can do about it.

Our errors are often extraordinary. People in Britain think that one in five teenage girls get pregnant each year – when it’s only 1.4%. Italians think that 26% of their population are immigrants, when the reality is around 10%. The French think 30% of their population are Muslim, when it’s around 8%. Across 30 countries, only 15% of people think their national murder rate is down since 2000, when it is actually down substantially in the vast majority.

And these misperceptions infect some of our most pressing issues, which in the UK currently centres around Brexit. Two-thirds of the public have heard the claim that the UK sends £350m a week to the EU, and 42% of these still believe it is true, despite it being labelled a ‘misuse of statistics’ by the UK Statistics Authority.



“oh, but at least I don’t have to actually sleep with my clients like escorts”. An escort might say “oh, but at least I don’t have to work the streets”. A domme might say “oh, but at least I don’t even have to touch my clients if I don’t want to”. When sex workers stigmatise other forms of sex work, we never solve the problem of stigma.

Stigmatising sex workers is, in my mind, highly unfeminist. The language used by groups such as Not Buying It, Object Now, The Fawcett Society and Times Up to discuss strip clubs is at best unhelpful, and at worst degrading. We are almost always spoken about as victims, and rarely consulted by any of the groups who are taking action. It is fair to say that in five years of being out in the public as a stripper and activist, campaigning for improved working conditions for strippers, I have not once been approached by any women’s rights organisations to discuss how we may pool our resources.

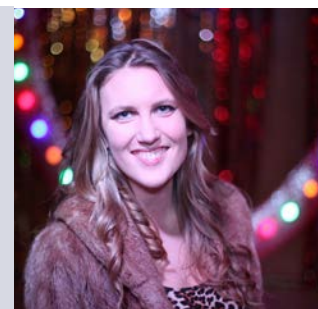
## East London Strippers Collective

The case of feminist campaigners working to get strip clubs shut down in an effort to rid the world of patriarchal power, is a perfect example of feminism in crisis. It is a strange sort of victory that results in women having their choices removed. I identify as a feminist, based on the principle that it’s a woman’s right to choose what happens to her own body. ‘My Body My Choice’ may seem like an obvious paradigm, but it can’t be underestimated how important it is to the gender equality movement. The right to bodily autonomy gave women access to legal abortion and birth control, which are fundamental cornerstones of feminism.

Under UK law, there is a distinction drawn between strippers and full service sex workers, in the sense that stripping is legalised and therefore licensable, but sex work is criminalised in various ways. When I entered the activist arena in 2014 I saw that there was a need to be able to discuss the specific problems within the strip club industry, and so in order to make room for that I helped co-found a group called the East London Strippers Collective (ELSC). We are a resistance movement, and we reject the following forms of oppression:

1. Exploitation in clubs
2. Poor policy
3. Poor media representations
4. Radical Feminist/abolitionist campaigns

**Stacey Clare** is a stripper, writer, performance artist, activist and co-founding member of the East London Strippers Collective. She has become an advocate for sex workers rights and speaks regularly about the problems of stigma and stereotyping. She is the author of the upcoming book *The Ethical Stripper* which discusses the harmful effects that the campaign to abolish the sex industry has on workers.



At present our main aims within the collective are to challenge the cultural norms of abuse and exploitation within our clubs, and transform them into a culture built on respect and collaboration. We do this by organising our own events and creating our own working conditions. For the last five years we have run a [life drawing class](#), with strippers performing pole and modelling for an audience of artists who draw us, and consume our labour very differently from the way

**“Sex workers are the best placed individuals to lead the movement. We are taking matters into our own hands and challenging the stigma and stereotypes that have dogged us for centuries.”**

customers do in clubs.

We’re also focusing intensively on mobilising strippers to unionise. We work with [United Voices of the World \(UVW\)](#) who specialise in representing people working in the gig economy. The more strippers can stand up for their rights and challenge the structure of exploitation within the strip club industry, and the more we can reframe the conversation as a labour rights issue, the greater chance we have to transform our industry from within.

Sex work is work, and the sex industry needs reform. Sex workers are the best placed individuals to lead the movement. We are taking matters into our own hands and challenging the stigma and stereotypes that have dogged us for centuries.

You can help by supporting Stacey Clare’s upcoming book *The Ethical Stripper*. Please donate to her crowdfunder at [unbound.com/the-ethical-stripper](https://unbound.com/the-ethical-stripper)





psychologists call 'rosy retrospection': we literally edit out bad things from our past, on everything from our poor exam results to our less-than-perfect holidays. Again, this is not a dumb fault in our brains, it's good for our mental health not to dwell on past failings or challenges. But it has the unfortunate side-effect of making us think the present and future are worse than our memories of the past.

We also suffer from what social psychologists call "emotional innumeracy" when estimating realities: this means we are sending a message about what's worrying us as much as trying to get the right answers when answering questions about realities. Cause and effect run both ways, with our concern leading to our misperceptions as much as our misperceptions creating our concern.

This has the critical implication that myth-busting, correcting misperceptions solely with facts, will always have limited impact — because it misdiagnoses part of the reason for our error. As Daniel Kahneman (the godfather of behavioural science, which lies behind our growing understanding of these patterns) said before the Brexit vote: "The major impression one gets... is that the reasons for exit are clearly emotional. The arguments look odd: they look short-term and based on irritation and anger. These seem to be powerful enough that they may lead to Brexit".

***"...we're naturally drawn to negative information. There is an evolutionary element to this. Negative information tends to be more urgent, even life-threatening: we needed to take note when we were warned by our fellow cavepeople about a lurking sabre-toothed tiger"***

These various biases in our thinking about realities doesn't mean the media play no role in twisting our perceptions — just that to some extent we get the media our brains demand.

But it's also true that we are living in particularly dangerous times for a reality-based view of the world.

The way we consume information has changed beyond recognition. We are able to filter and tailor what we see in a way never before known — and unseen algorithms do it on our behalf too. This plays on another of our most fundamental psychological quirks: confirmation bias. We want 'facts' that confirm our already held views, and actively avoid or discredit information that questions those views. It's correct that surveillance is the business model behind our apparently free internet — but that makes our confirmation bias its currency.

### So what can we do?

The first point is to hold on to the importance and power of a shared understanding of facts, with all the energy we can. Eye-catching studies suggest that giving people

the correct information can backfire and reinforce their misperceptions. But just as many studies show that most people are willing to listen, and shift their views, particularly when we can get in first, and not just correct after the (fake) fact. We are not all automatons, slaves to our tribal beliefs.

***"We need to ensure our evidence helps counter the sense that all is already lost, because some sense of hope and efficacy is important to encourage further action — and a vital defence against extremists who say things are so bad we need to rip it all up."***

As researchers, we're very focused on faithfully outlining clear facts — but we need to focus on telling the story too. We are storytelling animals, where the emotional connection created by a narrative about an individual affects us deeply. Simple myth-busting with facts will therefore have limited impact because it misdiagnoses a large part of the issue: our misperceptions are often emotional. But facts and stories are not opposites: both can affect individuals, and we

don't need to abandon the truth to have impact, if we tell the story too.

At a more personal level, our starting point should be to think that things are better than our initial instincts suggest. Hans Rosling and the Gapminder Foundation have made this point brilliantly on global issues like extreme poverty — but the same applies to myriad domestic concerns.

There is criticism of this more positive perspective, questioning whether we should really be so content about what has been achieved. But as our misperception studies show time and again, the real danger is the opposite. We need to ensure our evidence helps counter the sense that all is already lost, because some sense of hope and efficacy is important to encourage further action — and a vital defence against extremists who say things are so bad we need to rip it all up.

This is not the same as saying that everything is perfect, or we couldn't have done more. But we need to get good news stories out as well as bad — and we should be deeply suspicious of those playing on our biases to try to convince us everything has gone wrong.

*The Perils of Perception: Why We're Wrong About Nearly Everything* is published by Atlantic Books.



**Professor Bobby Duffy** is Managing Director of the Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute and Global Director of Ipsos Social Research Institute. He leads a team of around 200 researchers across the World. He has been previously seconded to the British Prime Minister's Strategy Unit and to the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) at the LSE. He is Visiting Senior Research Fellow at King's College London.

# The Death of the Gods: The New Global Power Grab

Carl Miller

**Take a moment. Pause. Stock prices plummet with a tweet. Newspapers collapse. Giant corporations disappear overnight. Political parties that have stood for centuries struggle for survival. Protests spill out of social media and onto the streets. Facebook has grown bigger than any country. Memes have managers, hackers advise governments. 'Mines' produce crypto-currencies worth millions. New refineries enrich data. Cities are smart, intelligence artificial, data big and realities virtual.**

Two years ago, I began to write a book. I was convinced that we are living through a moment of great flux and change. Across the world, again and again, I could see old familiarities tumbling down and new social orders, new hierarchies, new winners emerging that all, in one way or another, traced back to digital technology. The book was about a single idea; one that I knew writers had often turned to, in order to interpret their own moments of social change. Machiavelli used it, as did, in their different ways, Hobbes, Marx, Foucault, and countless

others. They have asked how it is created, who has it, and why. They've tried to make sense of its shape, of its effects and its consequences. The idea is power. The capacity to reach into peoples' lives, to mould their choices and preferences, to shape destinies.

The book was also - in a literal sense - a journey. In freezing courtyards in Berlin I met techno-activists, hackers and cyber-pranksters. In South Korea I visited the most digital city on earth; a city full of screaming e-sports fans and invisible hikikomori - 'the departed' - who never leave their room and who exist almost entirely online. In freezing courtyards in Berlin I met techno-activists, hackers and cyber-pranksters. I went on a cyber-crime raid with the police, and became involved in a struggle for control of an online market selling murder. I peered into the mechanics of algorithms that have been kept secret; I built a 'bot' to keep the peace on Twitter. I crafted viral messages to infect online conversations. I hung out with citizen investigators in a struggle to expose truths and lies. I joined with journalists to investigate a shadowy new protocol that despots might be using to control the internet.

***"I hung out with citizen investigators in a struggle to expose truths and lies. I joined with journalists to investigate a shadowy new protocol that despots might be using to control the internet."***

I had decided to meet people who could show how power was changing. They included former presidents and digital ministers, spies, soldiers, criminals and police officers, investigative journalists, guerrilla viral artists, hackers, labour organisers, academics, algorithmists, entrepreneurs and activists. Some were newly powerful. Others newly powerless. Some were seeking to expose power, and others still were influenced by power in ways I thought important.

The first, most obvious realisation of my journey was that traditional institutions and centres of authority have been badly undermined. I'd found the political mainstream besieged. The monopolies mainstream parties are long used to holding - of mass messaging, the mobilisation of enormous numbers of people - things that used to be difficult and expensive, had come tumbling down. Protests were becoming known by hashtags, and digital-first political parties were jumping in to contend mainstream elections across the world. And more quietly, I found a new breed of politician levying an even deeper challenge. Democracy, they were beginning to say, didn't need to be about Parliaments any more. Both inside and outside Government, they were beginning to build new digital ways of making political decisions unthinkable just a generation ago.

I had found the police facing perhaps the worst crisis of law enforcement in their history. It had become unbelievably easy to do cyber-crime, and almost half of crime now happened through the Internet. Online fraud had become the most common crime in the country. You were twenty times more likely to be robbed at your computer than mugged in the street. Your social media accounts were as likely to be burgled as your house. You were more likely to be targeted by a computer virus than all forms of violent crime put together. Yet thanks to the Internet, crime could pass unbelievably easy across borders. Again and again, investigations foundered as the police struggled to locate the victims, perpetrators and evidence scattered all across the world, separated by borders that they often couldn't reach across.

Media was faring little better. The famous global titles rumbled onwards, but underneath there was a bloodbath. Hundreds of local papers had shut, and as thousands of journalists lost their jobs, 2016 became the first year that they were outnumbered by those in public relations. It was the mediators of content - Google and Facebook - not the creators of it that were now in the driving seat, and papers around the world had seen their business models squeezed tighter and tighter. Professional journalists told me they had become content factories, churning out newswires and borrowed stories to harvest the clicks they needed to keep things going. It was now often citizen journalists doing the tedious, gritty, investigative work because they had exactly the one thing that the professionals often lacked: time.

***"The digital world didn't create new markets, it created single take-all winners, and the century-old laws that existed to protect the lifeblood of capitalism - open competition - simply didn't recognise the new economic logics unleashed by the digital age."***

Capitalism itself was under strain by the new economies driven by data and platforms. The largest hotelier in the world is a software company. So too is the largest taxi company, telecoms provider, payments and recruiting and advertising firms. But as software eat industry after industry, it created in each monopolies, duopolies, oligopolies, vast concentrations of wealth and power packed into the sprawling, primary-colour campuses that dotted Silicon Valley. The digital world didn't create new markets, it created single take-all winners, and the century-old laws that existed to protect the lifeblood of capitalism - open competition - simply didn't recognise the new economic logics unleashed by the digital age.

At the same time that the once-powerful incumbents



were being undermined, technology was also clearly offering new routes to power. Everywhere I looked, there were people who had taken on, or simply ignored, the rules, structures and organisations that were much bigger, richer and conventionally more powerful than they were. I'd met the makers of algorithms who could accidentally influence millions by changing a single digit in their unbelievably complicated creations. I'd sat next to the creators of 'bots' who could build activists far louder and more tireless than any human could be in real life. I'd seen how a citizen journalist launched world-changing investigations from their living room of his house in Leicester, with little more than some intelligent research and a well-connected network. At his fingertips were new ways of finding the truth and challenging lies. How a Taiwanese high-school drop-out became one of the most important government ministers in a country of 23 million people, motivated by a belief that technology can make democracy better. And how a semi-retired music teacher from rural Germany had forced the vice chancellor to amend a key policy with an online petition. I'd seen hackers explain in dull monotone how they could cause wind farms to burst into flames, who could control laptops with just a flashing

***“We know less about what influences our lives today than we did in the past. The gap between the power others have over our lives through the use of technology, and our ability to understand and recognise that power, is ever-widening.”***

light. One, who could reset every mini-bar bill in a huge hotel just with a television remote.

When power operates through technology, I found, it often became more hidden. Sometimes it is buried in the technical arcana of an algorithm. Sometimes within proprietary technology. Sometimes the code is open and

visible, but only a tiny number of people can actually interpret and understand it. We know less about what influences our lives today than we did in the past. The gap between the power others have over our lives through the use of technology, and our ability to understand and recognise that power, is ever-widening. Power had become more available and more fluid than it once was, spilling out from the old rigidities that used to contain it. But it had also become more hidden and mysterious.

Whether used for good or bad, power had gone wild. We have always tried to cage power, to civilise it; control the ways that I can reach into your life and you can reach into mine. Professional standards, norms, moral codes, ethical frameworks and public scrutiny are all the bars of these cages, but as power took on new configurations, it was leaking through these bars. There were no professional standards for technology makers. Huge tech giants were making platforms that were fundamental to our economic and political lives with barely any regulation at all. Crime was decisively moving into the digital world, leaving law enforcement struggling. Power was being used in ways that were largely unfettered by the network of rules and laws that were written for a different age.

The end of my journey, I knew, was really only the beginning. We are stepping into a world where power is, I think, more accessible to each of us. We are all a little more able to shape everyone else's lives; and they are more able to shape ours. Yet power has also broken out of its cage. It is often accessible, hidden, and less rules-bound than it was in the past, and we are only beginning to contemplate the world that it is being used to make.

**Carl Miller is the author of *The Death of the Gods: The New Global Power Grab*. Published by William Heinemann in 2018, it won the 2019 Transmission Prize. @carljackmiller**

**You can find more of his work at [www.carlmiller.co](http://www.carlmiller.co)**

**Carl Miller co-founded the Centre for the Analysis of Social Media at Demos in 2012 and has been its Research Director ever since. He has researched and written widely on how technology is changing society, including for *Wired*, *New Scientist*, the *Sunday Times*, the *Telegraph* and the *Guardian*. His first book *The Death of the Gods: The New Global Power Grab* is available from Newham Bookshop.**



## VICTORIAN BLOGGING

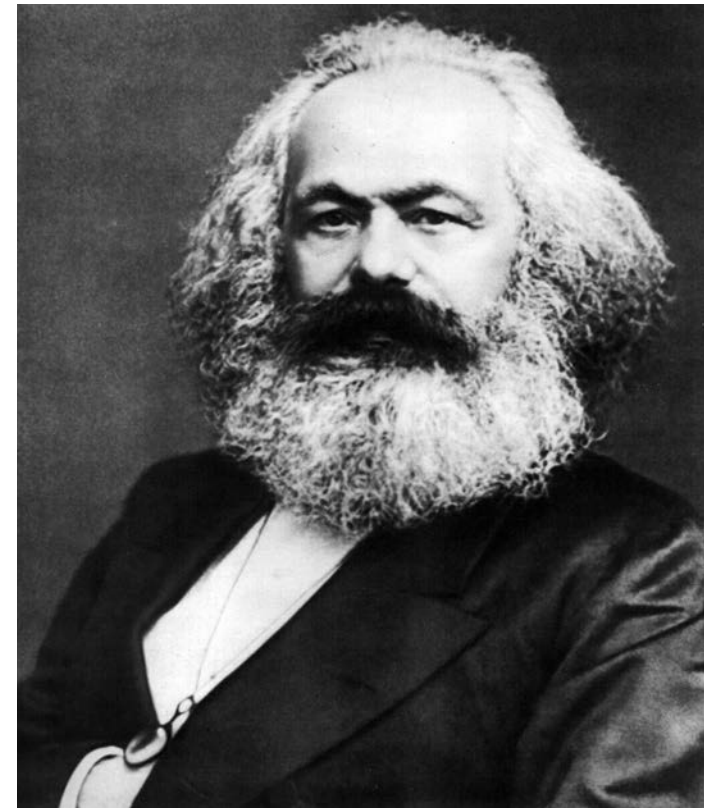
# Marx, Morris, and Utopia

**Professor Gregory Claeys**

**Students of the history of socialism are familiar with the names of Karl Marx and William Morris. The latter we can comfortably identify with the concept of utopia. The former, however, notably derided as “utopian socialists” most of his socialist predecessors and contemporaries, especially Robert Owen, Charles Fourier, and Henri de Saint-Simon, and instead proclaimed his own “scientific socialism” as a development growing imminently out of history and in no need of fantastic dreams, unreal speculations and “duodecimo editions of the New Jerusalem” detailing the future to come. Respecting the Paris Commune, for instance, Marx repeated that the workers had “no ready-made utopias to introduce *par décret du people*... They have no ideals to realize, but to set free elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant”. Morris, however, used the device of a “utopian romance” in *News from Nowhere* (1890) to describe the actual workings of the future society. Yet Morris is often labelled a “Marxist”, not least because he thought a violent revolution by the working classes would most likely bring about the change required.**

This article argues that we can provide another contrast between the two. Both can be understood as utopians in the sense that they posit ideal societies in which human relations are vastly improved. If we presume that utopianism comprises three aspects, namely ideology, literature, and intentional communities aspiring to the good life for a given group, “ideal societies” evidently are demarcated by their focus on variations on friendship and solidarity. In Utopia people treat each other better than they normally do: it is that simple. Their sociability is “enhanced” beyond the norm. This is, often, because they share property together, and are bonded by a collectivist and often egalitarian ethos, and a sense of promoting mutual well-being.

Marx's utopian aims focused, moreover, on an “all-round” development of character, an idea of many-sidedness which was shared by German Enlightenment writers such as Schiller and Lessing. In Marx it was the antidote to the oppressively narrow division of labour which is the target of the “Paris Manuscripts” of 1844, and of which Hegel had complained as early as 1802 in reference to Adam Ferguson in particular. All-roundedness served as Marx's ideal both before and after



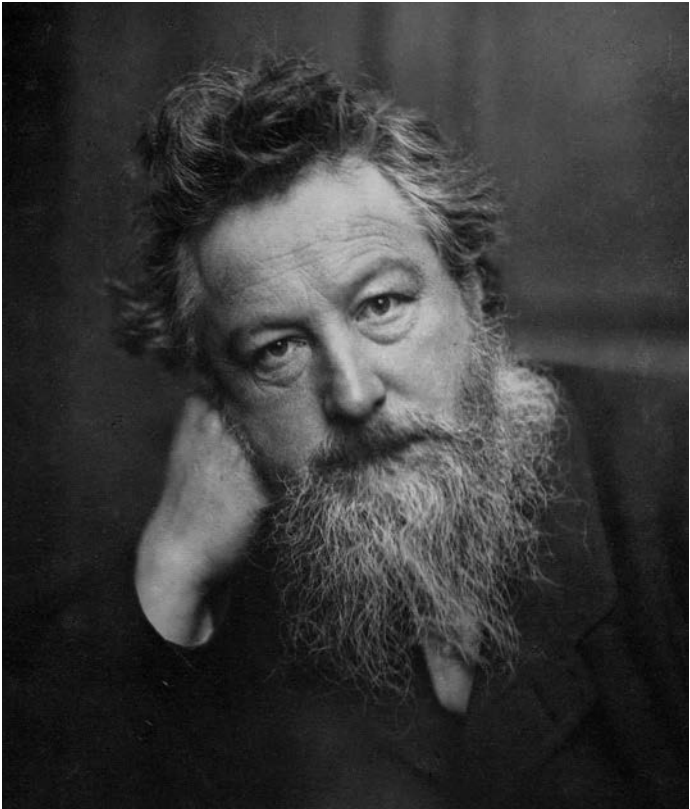
Karl Marx

***“Marx's utopian aims focused, moreover, on an “all-round” development of character, an idea of many-sidedness which was shared by German Enlightenment writers such as Schiller and Lessing.”***

1845. But it does not provide a theory of sociability as such. This Marx offered in defending what he termed “solidarity”, later more precisely described as “co-operation”. In communist society, Marx tells us in 1845, “the genuine and free development of individuals” would be “determined precisely by the connection of individuals, a connection which consists partly in the economic prerequisites and partly in the necessary solidarity [*Solidarität*] of the free development of all, and finally in the universal character of the activity of individuals on the basis of the existing productive forces”.

Both before and after 1845, then, Marx's ideal consisted of two components, all-roundedness and solidarity. Both





William Morris

however were not merely ideals, but actually existed and were growing out of emerging productive relations. Marx in 1844-5 clearly viewed relationships between people, or sociability, as a key measure of all humanity's progress. There is little doubt of his antagonism towards greed and selfishness. The aim, he wrote in 1845, was to "free [man] from the filth of gain" and from being "the slave of labour for gain and of his own as well as other men's *selfish* need". This would be accomplished by ensuring that "each man must be given social scope for the vital manifestation of his being. If man is shaped by environment, his environment must be made human", which was Owen's key point. And a crucial part of making this environment human was to free workers from the effects of narrow specialisation, in order to allow their capacities to flourish to the greatest possible extent.

But it is very clear that Marx did not think through the problem of how to supersede the division of labour. The *German Ideology* famously proclaimed that in the future communist society "nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic". Yet this extremely vivid image, so evidently unsuited to the modern urban, industrial vision of communism implied in the *Communist*

*Manifesto*, has puzzled many commentators. Engels would reiterate in 1847, however, that "the division of labour making one man a peasant, another a shoemaker, a third a factory worker, a fourth a stockjobber" would "completely disappear". In the future "Education will enable young people quickly to go through the whole system of production ... to pass from one branch of industry to another according to the needs of society or their own inclinations. It will therefore free them from that one-sidedness which the present division of labour stamps on each one of them. Thus the communist organisation of society will give its members the chance of an all-round exercise of abilities that have received all-round development".

This definitive description of "all-roundedness" evidently united Fourier's and Owen's schemes. A crucial question, however, is how far Marx in later life maintained this perspective. *The Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875) describes communism as ending "the enslaving subordination of individuals under division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour". Engels reiterated in 1872 the need for "abolishing the antithesis between town and country", noting that in Fourier and Owen's plans it no longer existed, and that this involved eliminating "modern big cities". By and large, however, both writers came increasingly to presume that freeing the working classes entailed giving them more free time, rather than dramatically transforming the process of work as such. Notwithstanding the occasional use of Fourier's phrase, "attractive labour", both seemed to assume in their later years that factory discipline would remain much the same under socialism, at least (prior to the eventual stage of communism), as under capitalism: the difference would be that the workers would be much better paid, and have much more free time.

Let us now turn to William Morris. As a disciple of John Ruskin, for whom the creation of objects of beauty was an essential element of the good life, and as a handicraftsman of great talent himself, as a furniture-maker, tapestry-designer and much else, Morris was characteristically a very different man from Marx, a model critic, perhaps, but by self-admission not much good at anything else. Morris's future ideal precisely entailed a revolution in the process of work itself, rather than an increase of free time and higher wages for the workers. This was elegantly expressed in his great novel, *News from Nowhere*.

The great advantage of the utopian romance format was that it permitted lived experience to be expressed through fiction with a vividness which political and historical narrative can virtually never realise. Thus in the second chapter of *News from Nowhere* the narrator takes a morning ferry journey down the Thames. The ferryman wears an elaborate fourteenth century

costume, works in gold and silver, and has made his own belt. A friend does weaving and mathematics. We learn subsequently that while "immensely improve machinery" still operates to do "all work which would be irksome to do by hand", factories are no longer concentrated in specific districts, and are no longer a sole form of employment for workers. Morris has instead taken "all-round development" much more practically and literally than Marx. Hunting, fishing and tending cattle have been supplanted by making beautiful things, by working with our hands, by surrounding ourselves with the produce of our aesthetic creativity. The motif is less pastoral than artisanal, less passive and contemplative than active and arduous. The residual problem revealed by Ruskin as problematic in *The Stones of Venice* - that in Gothic architecture it might be possible for individual artisans and builders to express their individuality, but that universalising this premise seemed impossible, is now solved. All can make beautiful things, and adorn themselves with them to boot. And this solved another residual problem left by Mill's *On Liberty* (1859), which Morris had read with care: the tendency of modern society to render individuals conformist and homogeneous, producing "the obliteration of national variety". In the future, thus, Morris was careful to stress, "You will find plenty of variety: the landscape, the building, the diet, the amusements, all various. The men and women varying in looks as well as in habits of thought; the costume far more various than in the commercial period."

Engels would later view Morris as essentially an impractical "sentimental socialist" and a "sentimental dreamer pure and simple", who had been unduly swayed by anarchism. In some respects, however, leaving aside the question of personal creativity, Morris's vision is somewhat closer to Marx and Engels. The "difference between town and country grew less and less", *News from Nowhere* tells us, and from "a country of huge and foul workshops, and fouler gambling-dens, surrounded by an ill-kept, poverty-stricken farm, pillaged by the masters of the workshops", England had become "a garden, where nothing is wasted and nothing is spoilt, with the necessary dwellings, sheds, and workshops scattered up and down the country, all trim and neat and pretty."

But the crucial point of this comparison is that the imagined future for Morris involves an intensive focus on a transformed vision of work which is simply lacking in

Marx and Engels. These two perspectives thus represent very different resolutions of the Smithian problem which became the starting-point for Owen as well as Marx: the dehumanising results of narrow specialisation. We have no reason to presume that Marx ever abandoned his hostility to the effects of the narrow division of labour. But it is equally clear that he lacked the artistic bent and talent, as well as an intense desire to render the world more beautiful, which signally define Morris's socialism. And beyond this contrast there lie the further implications of both visions. As an anti-Malthusian, Marx sets no limit on population growth, or apparently on production and consumption as such. Morris portrays the population as not having grown, but remaining "pretty much the same as it was at the end of the nineteenth century; we have spread it, that is all". It is likely that here, as in his political theory, Morris was indebted to John Stuart Mill, a neo-Malthusian, to some degree, and that his scheme hints at population control in a manner not proposed by Marx. Here, then, Morris points more than Marx directly to our own pressing environmental concerns, and remains a figure of great relevance to the immediate present.

**Dr Gregory Claeys's article is based on the talk he gave on 14th November 2018 for the *Writing Wrongs* series, curated by Deborah Lavin as part of the *Heritage Lottery* funded project *Victorian Blogging*.**

1. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. *Collected Works* (Lawrence & Wishart, 1986), vol. 22, p. 335.
2. This builds on my argument in *Marx and Marxism* (Penguin Books, 2018), from which I draw here.
3. Marx-Engels. *Collected Works*, vol. 5, p. 439. Later Marx and Engels associated the phrase "free development of all capacities" with Saint-Simon, and "attractive labour" with Fourier (5:481).
4. Marx-Engels. *Collected Works*, vol. 4, pp. 113, 130-1.
5. Marx-Engels. *Collected Works*, vol. 5, p. 47.
6. Marx-Engels. *Collected Works*, vol. 6, pp. 348, 353.
7. Marx-Engels. *Collected Works*, vol. 24, p. 87; vol. 23, pp. 347-8; vol. 25, p. 279.
8. William Morris. *News from Nowhere* (Longmans, Green & Co., 1899), p. 12.
9. William Morris. *News from Nowhere*, p. 108.
10. William Morris. *News from Nowhere*, p. 95.
11. Engels to F.A. Sorge, 29 April 1886, Marx-Engels *Collected Works*, vol. 47, p. 443; Engels to August Bebel, 18 August 1886, *ibid.*, p. 471.
12. William Morris. *News from Nowhere*, pp. 79-80.
13. William Morris. *News from Nowhere*, p. 81.
14. For Mill's scheme see my *Mill and Paternalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), esp. pp. 195-99. On Morris and Mill, see Seamus Flaherty. "Reappraising *News from Nowhere*:" William Morris, J.S. Mill and Fabian Essays", *Modern Intellectual History* (2018), 1-30.



**Gregory Claeys** has been Professor of History at Royal Holloway, University of London since 1992. He is the author of nine books, most recently *Marx and Marxism* (Penguin Books, 2018), and has edited *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), (with Gareth Stedman Jones) *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth Century Political Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), and some fifty volumes of primary sources and edited essays.



# Drawbridge Britain: Where Did the Hostile Environment Against Immigrants Come From?

Russell Hargrave

**In March 2018, the *Guardian* published a story about a man whom they called Albert Thompson. No one knew it at the time but, amid the grind of news about Brexit and the impact of austerity, the paper was about to expose one of the greatest failures in public policy of modern times. They were about to break the Windrush scandal.**

Thompson's story was tragic and baffling.

Here was a British citizen, born in Jamaica, who had arrived in London in the 1970s to join his mum, who was already working here as a nurse. He lived in a council house, worked in Britain for decades, paid his taxes, and then retired.

But one day in 2017, Thompson was asked for a British passport to prove he was entitled to stay in his house. He didn't have a passport because he had never applied for one. So he was evicted, and ended up homeless, sleeping in doorways.

Then he found he had cancer – and was told that in the absence of a passport he would also be charged for his NHS treatment: £54,000.

"I don't have 54 pence," Thompson told the paper, "let alone £54,000."

This was the first in a flood of stories about British citizens from that generation and their families who, having come here from former colonies in the West Indies, were suddenly being punished by draconian new rules.

The government, in a bid to get tough on illegal immigration, had passed laws demanding that people produce more and more documents before they could access homes and healthcare and jobs.

The rationale was that this would make it easier to identify people who shouldn't be in Britain. In reality, it meant that Thompson's decision not to get himself a British passport resulted in him being cast out on the streets.

Hundreds of other Caribbean-born Brits lost their jobs and their homes, too, trapped by officials as they trawled people's paperwork for any discrepancies. At least sixty people were locked up in detention centres. Some were

kicked out of the country they had lived in all their lives, others were trapped overseas unable to come back into Britain.

Ministers called the policies the 'hostile environment.' It left shattered lives in its wake.

But as shocking as these ideas were, they weren't new. Hostile policy towards immigrants, cooked up in Whitehall to discomfort and demonise newcomers to these shores, has its own long, shameful history.

***"The government, in a bid to get tough on illegal immigration, had passed laws demanding that people produce more and more documents before they could access homes and healthcare and jobs."***

No sooner had HMS Windrush arrived in Tilbury docks in 1948, heralding the start of large-scale migration from the Caribbean to modern Britain, than government hostility to migrants followed.

It mattered little, apparently, that the government, faced with crippling labour shortages, had actively invited in British citizens from the former colonies. Or that a parliamentary act in 1948 explicitly restated Britain's commitment to free movement across the whole empire.

Nervously eyeing public scepticism about immigration, just four years after the Windrush docked Prime Minister Winston Churchill tried to block-off that route. He summoned officials across Whitehall and demanded evidence of problems caused by Caribbean immigrants, so that he had justification for policies which barred them from travelling. The racist undertones here were hard to miss: migration from the so-called 'white dominions' – white-majority countries like New Zealand and Australia – attracted no such panic.

Churchill's plans hit a snag, though. The officials sent away to uncover proof of all the problems caused by Caribbean migrants reported back that no evidence could be found.





Future governments had fewer qualms, though. The drawbridge into Britain, down when the country needed economic help after a world war, was slowly cranked up again. New laws were passed to restrict the numbers of British citizens who could travel here: to bar entry unless for family members or someone with a voucher for a job (1962); to block Asian British citizens trying to flee upheaval in Kenya (1968); to allow in only citizens whose grandparents had been born in Britain (1971).

This last law was especially blatant about race. The door was left open to families which had been born in Britain and then left for the colonies (the overwhelming majority of whom would be white), but was closed firmly in the faces of black British citizens born overseas.

“Of course they are more likely to be white,” said Home Secretary Reginald Maudling when asked who would benefit from the new law. And that was that.

Zip forward to the end of the decade, and Margaret Thatcher stood on the brink of power.

The Labour government under James Callaghan was exhausted. It was 1978: Britain was a year out from a general election. Thatcher, the first woman to lead her party, was within touching distance of becoming the first woman to lead the whole country.

**“The drawbridge into Britain, down when the country needed economic help after a world war, was slowly cranked up again. New laws were passed to restrict the numbers of British citizens who could travel here”**

But she needed to get over the line. It was time for some hard-nosed politics.

In this spirit, Thatcher agreed to an interview on ITV’s flagship current affairs programme *World in Action*. This allowed her to speak directly with 23 million viewers (a staggering reach: by comparison today, around two million people tune into Andrew Marr on a Sunday morning). Social media was decades away: if a politician wanted to make their case before a mass audience, this was how to do it.

And so she sat down to talk about the economy, the ailing state of our high streets – and to mislead everyone about immigration.

The interview became famous for the language Thatcher chose, as she warned that newcomers were “swamping” some parts of Britain. (This sort of language has always proved irresistible to some political leaders: David Cameron would come under fire thirty-five years later for describing a “swarm” of migrants at the British border). But in many ways it is more notable for something else she said.

Immigration was too high, Thatcher contended, ignoring the fact that for several years more people had been leaving Britain than arriving here. In front of her audience of millions, she proposed her solution:

“Either you go on taking in forty or fifty thousand [immigrants] a year, which is far too many,” Thatcher said, “or you say we must hold out the prospect of a clear end to immigration, and that is the view we have taken.”

It couldn’t be much clearer. There were “far too many” migrants arriving each year, Thatcher said, and she wanted to reduce the number to zero.

Within a year, she was in Number 10. And what happened? Immigration didn’t drop to zero. Commonwealth migration to Britain continued at about forty thousand people a year, exactly the rate Thatcher had warned about. She had whipped up a storm around immigration for political purposes, but nothing then changed.

Voters may have felt like they’d been taken for a ride, but the real victims were immigrants themselves. The new Prime Minister had publicly declared that newcomers were “swamping” the country and that their numbers should be controlled. It was hostile rhetoric which wasn’t then matched by policy.

The effect was to stoke public fear of migrants an extra notch, whose lives were made that little bit more miserable as a result.

Immigration policy chugged along for another decade with few changes. By the 1990s, it was the Conservative government’s turn to look exhausted. John Major may have upset the odds and hung on at the 1992 General Election, but in 1997 he was swiped to one side by a landslide New Labour victory.

It was a big enough win for Labour to set about changing the country radically and quickly. Immigration was one such area.

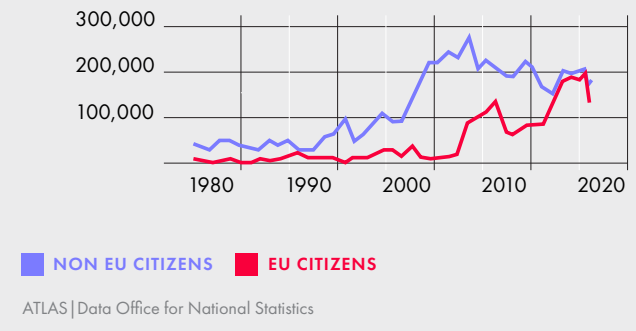
Plenty has been written about Labour policy in the last years of the ‘90s and the first of the millennium, but through a combination of opening European borders and relaxing visa rules outside Europe, the government added an estimated 2.5 million foreign-born workers to the British population in a little over a decade. The change was substantial.

But even here, ministers hurried to cook-up hostile policies, nearly all focused on asylum seekers, who fast became the scapegoats for all manner of social ills.

There were a lot of asylum claims in the early 2000s (more than 100,000 people and their families applied to be refugees here in 2004 alone, a staggering number which almost crippled the Home Office bureaucracy).

But the New Labour government, in keeping with administrations which had gone before, responded not by fixing that bureaucracy but with a flurry of hostile legislation.

NET MIGRATION TO THE UK 1975–2015



Across four separate immigration acts – in 1999, 2002, 2004 and 2006 – Labour introduced tighter and tighter rules against asylum seekers.

They were stripped of mainstream benefits and banned from working to support themselves, and instead given vouchers which were only accepted in certain supermarkets (“a humiliating procedure which more or less branded the recipients as imposters,” wrote the historian Robert Winder). Asylum seekers were dispatched all over the country with no right over where they ended up living; families with friends and family in Bristol could be shipped off to Glasgow at a moment’s notice.

Then a list of safe countries was drawn up, to which asylum seekers could be returned more readily. Bafflingly, and horrifyingly, this included Albania, the centre of European trafficking networks, so that victims of modern slavery faced being sent right back to their abusers. By 2004, the government threatened to withhold even basic financial support for people who had been refused asylum. Ministers said they should just return home, but many asylum seekers wouldn’t have been allowed back into countries ravaged by ongoing civil war, places like Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo. So people remained here instead, destitute and stuck.

All of this was rolled-out alongside an aggressive media strategy which saw repeated pledges to “clamp down” on asylum seekers, who were openly assumed by many officials and even ministers to be economic migrants in disguise. By the dying days of New Labour in 2010, its politicians had themselves started using the phrase

‘hostile environment,’ even if this mindset wasn’t yet at the strategic heart of government immigration policy. Soon enough, it was.

We have already seen that ministers in a panic about immigration rush to legislate. Theresa May was no different. First as Home Secretary in 2014, and then as a Prime Minister unshackled from coalition partners in 2016, she introduced her own bills to make the hostile environment into reality.

This is what trapped Albert Thompson and so many of his peers. The new laws moved immigration control away from the borders and into private life. Now landlords were required to scrutinise identity documents before letting out homes; employers had to run more background checks, as did banks; immigration officers got more powers equivalent to those given to the police; and the government started a huge data sharing exercise so that the Home Office could see information about who needed NHS care and where kids went to school.

A lot of this work took place below the radar of public attention, but the now famous Go Home vans – trucks driven around the most multi-cultural parts of London in 2015, carrying hoardings showing the number of people arrested locally for immigration offences – were its public face.

Thompson, a man who was British by birth and had lived and worked here for four decades, was undone by policies which swept across the private lives of citizens. By the time his case was uncovered, those policies had caused chaos to thousands of lives.

Thompson’s case got proper scrutiny, eventually, and only after *the Guardian* had blown the lid off the Windrush scandal. He got the cancer treatment he needed. Other victims are in a queue for compensation for the damage done to their lives.

They are the latest list of people on the receiving end of Britain’s historic hostility towards immigrants. But it is a long list, going back almost as far as modern immigration itself.

And they are unlikely to be the last. Very unlikely indeed.



**Russell Hargrave** is a freelance journalist and a policy advisor working with the Liberal Democrats. His writing has appeared in *the Guardian*, *Reuters*, *Public Finance*, *politics.co.uk*, *Church Times* and elsewhere, and he is the co-author of two think tank reports into refugees, charities and the media. His book *Drawbridge Britain, a History of Modern British Immigration Policy*, was published in 2018.



# Human Rights: From Victorian Reformers to the Universal Declaration

Alicia Chilcott

**The 10<sup>th</sup> December 2018 marked 70 years since the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Paris in 1948. Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person in the world, regardless of where you are from, what you believe or how you live your life. The declaration consists of 30 articles, affirming our human rights such as the right to safety, the right to marry and the right to education. The Declaration was a landmark international agreement on the principles of human rights and has a truly worldwide influence: it has led to over 80 international conventions and treaties and can be read in more than 500 languages!**

This formed the basis of the human rights protections that we have in the UK today, upheld through the Human Rights Act (1998), but also built on the efforts of many determined campaigners who came before. Many of the rights enshrined in the Declaration mirror those discussed and fought for in our nineteenth-century pamphlet collection.

Article 2 of the Declaration states that everyone is entitled to human rights regardless of race, sex, language, religion, political opinion, national or social origin, property or birth. This reflects the call for equality central to the work of many Victorian campaigners and reformers who promoted their ideals through pamphleteering. One such figure is Ernestine Rose, who dedicated her life to promoting equality for women and acceptance of atheism. Her pamphlet *A Lecture on Woman's Rights* discusses the growing women's rights movement of the mid-1800s and calling for women's equality in legislation, suffrage, marriage and education. Rose presents this movement as a global phenomenon, linked to wider movements towards greater freedom and liberty for all oppressed peoples.

**Alicia Chilcott** is Digitisation Co-ordinator at Conway Hall Library and Archive, working on an HLF funded project to digitise our collection of around 1,300 Victorian pamphlets. These pamphlets were written by London's radical thinkers to disseminate ideas about freethought, humanism and social and political movements such as the early women's rights movement, freedom of the press and anti-blasphemy. Alicia qualified as an archivist in 2017 and has a background in social and economic history.



The right not to be enslaved is enshrined in Article 4. Our namesake Moncure Conway, whose personal library forms a significant part of our pamphlet collection, was a noted abolitionist campaigner. Born into a Virginian slave-owning family, Conway freed his father's slaves during the American Civil War. He was well-known for his public speaking on the topic of anti-slavery and many of his lectures and sermons were reproduced as pamphlets. When Conway first came into contact with our Ethical Society (then a non-conformist Unitarian congregation), he was on a speaking tour of Britain, aiming to persuade the British people of the Union cause.

***“Article 2 of the Declaration states that everyone is entitled to human rights regardless of race, sex, language, religion, political opinion, national or social origin, property or birth.”***

The Peterloo Massacre has recently been widely discussed, following the release of the film *Peterloo* and the upcoming 100 year anniversary of the event. At a peaceful meeting calling for parliamentary reform, 18 were killed and an estimated 700 injured by cavalry. This moment raised public awareness of attempts to violently suppress protest and the sharing of radical political ideas, largely thanks to Richard Carlile's publication of his eyewitness account in his journal *Sherwin's Political Register*. Carlile was one of the most notable agitators of his day, fighting for freedom of the press, gender equality, secular education and many more important causes.

See the UN's Stand UP 4 Human Rights website<sup>1</sup> to see how you can take action to defend human rights and take the human rights pledge yourself.

*Ernestine L. Rose*



# Barbara Smoker's Remarkable Life Should Inspire Us All

Helen Nicholls

On 27 May 1989 thousands of hard line Muslims marched through London to protest the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. This was just a few months after Ayatollah Khomeini had issued the notorious fatwa encouraging Muslims to murder Rushdie. Standing alongside the route of the march was a counter-protestor holding a banner that simply said "Free Speech". She was threatened by marchers, who shouted "Kill, kill, kill!", and only escaped injury due to the intervention of a man she believes was a plain clothes police officer. This was Barbara Smoker, then president of the National Secular Society.

Barbara Smoker was born in 1923 to religious Catholic parents. She was educated at a convent school, where she was known to her classmates as "the saint", as she was so devout. She dreamed of becoming a contemplative nun and would have done so after leaving school had it not been for her mother's insistence that she wait until she was older and World War Two changing her life's course.

Reading Smoker's account of her childhood brings home the fact that (to one born 60 years later) she grew up in a very different era. When she was six years old she contracted scarlet fever and spent several months in hospital quarantine along with two of her sisters. The children in the ward were often treated cruelly. Her three year old sister was told by a nurse that she would be thrown into the hospital sluice if she cried at night. Barbara Smoker relates that one Christmas Eve, she was suddenly moved to the bed nearest the door. She discovered much later that this was the procedure for patients expected to die as it allowed staff to remove the body discreetly. The severity of her illness earned her the best present from the Christmas tree (much to her sister's envy) but she fortunately pulled through.

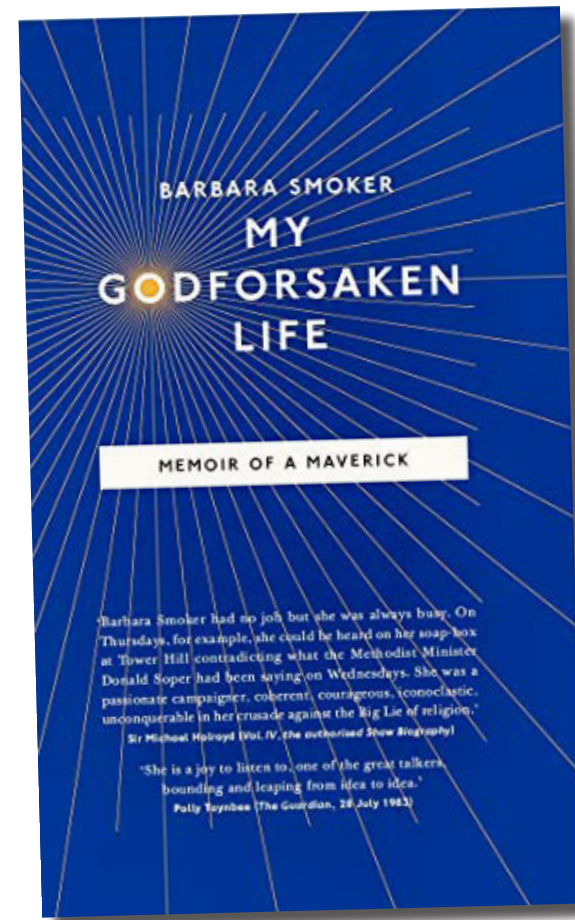
In 1942 Smoker joined the Women's Royal Naval Service, known as the "Wrens". Not one to do things by halves, she then volunteered for overseas service and was stationed in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). It is at this point that her strong anti-authoritarian streak seems to have emerged. Smoker describes going on unauthorised sightseeing trips with a friend, using a range of ruses to avoid



Barbara handing in a "scary letter" to Broadcasting House (2018)

detection and also mentions that she formed an illicit friendship with a "native" officer, despite that being considered the "ultimate sin" for a Wren. She was also motivated strongly by conscience, taking the initiative to inform British ships that Japan had surrendered as soon as they heard the news to prevent further bloodshed. The experience taught her that an individual can make a difference.

Exposure to other world views during her time abroad weakened Smoker's religious conviction. Eventually, her faith waned until she concluded that she was no longer a Catholic. However, she never lost her zeal and over the years was involved with a wide range of organisations such as the Ethical Union (now Humanists UK), the Shaw Society, the Voluntary Euthanasia Society (now Dignity in



Dying), the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Committee of 100, an anti-war group founded by Bertrand Russell for activists willing to commit peaceful acts of civil disobedience. She later discovered that she was monitored by the security services during that period.

Barbara Smoker was NSS president from 1971-1996. She describes this as a "life-changing" experience. During her time as president she produced a booklet entitled Eggs are Not People, which was sent to members of parliament in response to an attempt by Enoch Powell to ban embryonic research. She appeared regularly in the media and also spoke at a number of college Islamic society debates where she was alarmed by the views expressed by students. She notes that when she publicly raised concerns about the position of women and girls in fundamentalist Jewish and Muslim communities, Ken Livingstone accused her of racism and anti-semitism.

The memoir includes a poem by Smoker entitled "Living Relay", which is about links across time. She writes "Not one alive was living when Dickens held a restless pen – yet as a child I met a man who'd known him. Such a living span takes only two." She finishes with "Yes each has been and each has gone; yet each a torch has handed on."

*"She was also motivated strongly by conscience, taking the initiative to inform British ships that Japan had surrendered as soon as they heard the news to prevent further bloodshed. The experience taught her that an individual can make a difference."*

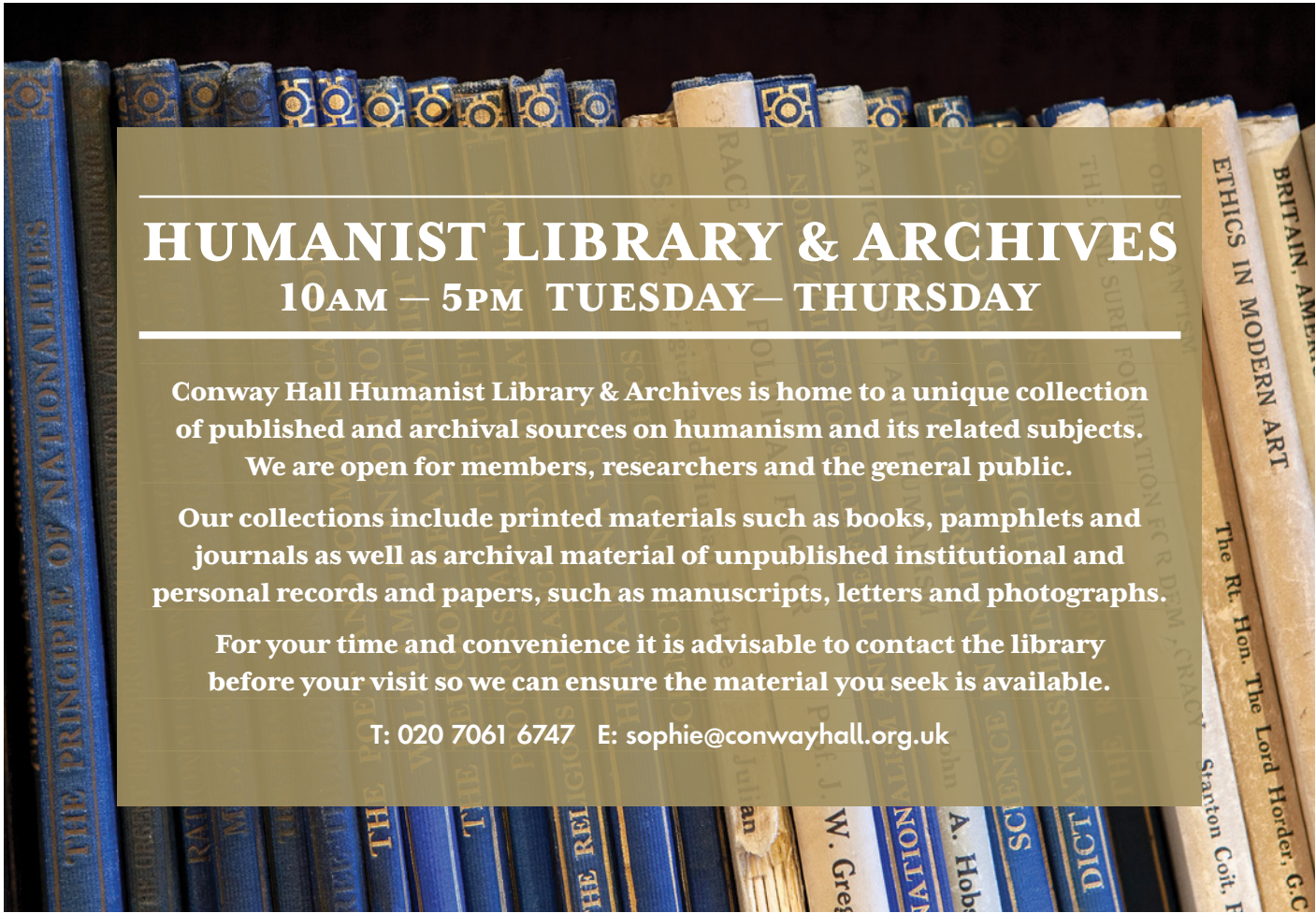
Smoker is frank about the fact she is coming to the end of her life. However, she has handed over the torches of the causes she represented. She pays tribute to her NSS successors as well as her predecessors. Her memoir teaches us about those who went before us in the secularist movement as well as telling the story of an incredible life spanning nearly a century. She is our link to the secularists of the past.

The memoir shines a light on aspects of Barbara Smoker's life previously unknown to those who know her primarily as a former NSS president. She is the child who almost died on the scarlet fever ward, the devout Catholic teenager and the errant Wren. More importantly, she is the seasoned activist who believed that she could make a difference in the world and went out and did it. Today's challenges are different from yesterday's but what we learn from Barbara Smoker's memoir is that the activists of the past were ordinary men and women who worked together to bring about change. We cannot all be heroes but we can do our bit to further the causes we believe in.

**Barbara Smoker's *My Godforsaken Life: Memoir of a Maverick* is published by Thornwick Press (RRP £11.99).**

**Helen Nicholls is the NSS's Membership and Finance Officer. The views expressed in this article are those of the author and may not represent the views of the NSS. This review was first published on the NSS's website.**





# HUMANIST LIBRARY & ARCHIVES

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# WINDRUSH

BRENT'S PIONEERING GENERATION

Photographic portraits by Nadia Nervo

12 March — 30 April 2019 • [conwayhall.org.uk/Windrush70](http://conwayhall.org.uk/Windrush70)

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS AT CONWAY HALL

### EXHIBITIONS

–30 April		<b>Feminism in Camden in the 1970s and 80s</b> • Susan Croft for opening times see <a href="http://conwayhall.org.uk">conwayhall.org.uk</a>
12 March – 30 April	9.00–21.00	<b>Windrush, Brent's Pioneering Generation: Photographic Portraits</b> • Nadia Nervo
3–31 May	9.00–21.00	<b>Moving On</b> , an exhibition of artworks in fabric • Emma Shankland
7 June – 31 August	9.00–21.00	<b>Victorian Blogging: The Pamphleteers Who Dared to Dream of a Better World</b>

### PARTNERSHIPS

24 April	19.00–21.30	<b>Conway Hall &amp; Humanists International: Fundamentalism Rising: Humanism Under threat in India &amp; Bangladesh</b> • Salil Tripathi, Bonya Ahmed and Andrew Copson
26 April	19.30	<b>Conway Hall &amp; Unfinished Histories &amp; The Feminist Library: Feminist Film of the 1970s and 80s</b> , including a screening of <i>A Woman's Place</i>
27 April	19.30	<b>Conway Hall &amp; Unfinished Histories &amp; The Feminist Library: A Celebration of Women's Theatre</b>
21 May	18.00–20.00	<b>Conway Hall &amp; the Slovenian Embassy: International Bee Day Celebration</b> , with embassies from 35 countries participating
29 June	9.00–17.00	<b>Conway Hall &amp; the London National Park City Fair</b>

### THINKING ON SUNDAY

7 April	15.00–16.30	<b>Denial, Denialism and Post-Denialism: Why is Speaking Truth So Difficult?</b> • Keith Kahn-Harris
28 April	15.00–16.30	<b>London Housing: Corruption and Crisis</b> • George Turner
12 May	15.00–16.30	<b>Examining Intelligence: Novelists on Education and Mental Ability</b> • Dr Michael Collins, Dr Sara Lyons and Dr Natasha Periyar
19 May	15.00–16.30	<b>Women of Westminster: The MPs Who Changed Politics</b> • Rachel Reeves
2 June	15.00–16.30	<b>Who Owns England?</b> • Guy Shrubsole
16 June	15.00–16.30	<b>Lowborn: Growing Up, Getting Away and Returning to Britain's Poorest Towns</b> • Kerry Hudson and James Bloodworth

### THINKING ON MONDAY

15 April	19.30–21.00	<b>Vagina: A Re-Education</b> • Lynn Enright
20 May	19.30–21.00	<b>Youtubers: How YouTube Shook up TV and Created a New Generation of Stars</b> • Chris Stokel-Walker

### COURSES

25 April–30 May	18.30–20.30	<b>Incendiary Words and Rebellious Campaigns: 1840–1890 &amp; 1940–1990</b> • David Rosenberg
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# CONWAY HALL *Sunday Concerts*

## April

- 7th 6.30 PM **Dante Quartet & Alexander Boyd**  
BEETHOVEN • DVOŘÁK
- 14th 5.30 PM **Robert Hugill - FREE PRE-CONCERT TALK**  
6.30 PM **Simon Callaghan & Clodna Shanahan - FUNDRAISER**  
MOZART • RAVEL • SCHUBERT • CHAMINADE
- Our concerts are presented by Conway Hall Ethical Society, an independent charity, with a low admission price and an ethos of "affordable classical music for all". Funds raised will support the continuation of the concert series, providing a platform for established chamber groups as well as giving a springboard to the next generation of young artists to make their mark on the classical music stage. The charity receives no government funding for its educational work and the 150 events a year that it puts on, including Sunday Concerts, learning courses, art exhibitions, party and literature events, and collaborations with like-minded organisations.
- 28th 6.30 PM **Hiro Takenouchi - MOZART SERIES FINALE**  
MOZART

## May

- 5th 5.30 PM **FREE PRE-CONCERT TALK + POST-CONCERT Q&A**  
6.30 PM **Robert Hugill in Focus**  
BUTTERWORTH • BRIDGE • BOWEN • HUGILL
- 12th 6.30 PM **Piatti Quartet**  
HAYDN • ELGAR • MENDELSSOHN
- 19th 6.30 PM **Sergio Patria & Elena Ballario**  
MENDELSSOHN • BOELLMAN • LISZT • CHOPIN • PIAZZOLLA
- 26th 5.30 PM **FREE PRE-CONCERT TALK + POST-CONCERT Q&A**  
6.30 PM **Morgan Szymanski & Beryounes Quartet**  
VIVALDI • PAGANINI • PUCCINI • BOCCHERINI • TURINA  
ESCHAUICH • PIAZZOLLA

## June

- 2nd 6.30 PM **Simon Callaghan & Friends - SEASON FINALE**  
MOZART • MENDELSSOHN • BRAHMS

