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BECOME A MEMBER



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HALL *Ethical Society*



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CONWAY HALL ETHICAL SOCIETY

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Upcoming at Conway Hall

Please see the *Ethical Record* section of 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.

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

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.



The Pamphleteers Who Dared to Dream of a Better World

Dr Jim Walsh

In 2017, on a dull grey Friday in early Spring, my colleague Sophie Hawkey-Edwards and I were locked in battle to find a suitable name for our project. We wanted to digitise an extraordinary resource of over 1,300 nineteenth-century pamphlets in our collection but couldn't find an agreeable unifying theme. We laid out a few choice gems in front of us and threw around ideas such as 'Skepticism, Social Change and Skulls' (one of the pamphlets had a skull on the front cover!). However, none of the possibilities we were coming up with seemed to work beyond an individual pamphlet or theme in the collection. We took the proverbial step back and considered the pamphlets as products of thought dissemination by those championing a cause. Then it hit. The pamphlets were the nineteenth century equivalent of today's blogs. From there, the title wrote itself and became conceptualized as: *Victorian Blogging – The Pamphleteers Who Dared to Dream of a Better World*.

Since that eureka moment and with the wonderful support of the National Lottery Heritage Fund we have travelled far. Alicia Chilcott and Olwen Terris joined Sophie to catalogue, prepare for digitisation and conservation (by writing a wheelbarrow load of reports!), and deliver a tremendous audience engagement programme with citizen journalism and Wikimedia events alongside fact-packed talks and guest lectures.

Over 1,300 pamphlets have been conserved and digitised. Nearly 400 people have attended learning events, such as workshops and talks. Nearly 1,000 hours of volunteer time has been clocked up and, so far, people from over 40 countries have visited the online resource, which hasn't even had its official launch as yet!

As well as being the Chief Executive Officer of Conway Hall, Dr Jim Walsh has written a blog, *Compassionate Strangers: What Happened to Wisdom?*, on what it is to be human and have humanity. In particular, Jim focuses on how compassion, ethics and wisdom act as guiding aspirations across three essential principles: self-awareness, other-awareness and self-development. To contact him, email ceo@conwayhall.org.uk



“Over 1,300 pamphlets have been conserved and digitised. Nearly 400 people have attended learning events, such as workshops and talks. Nearly 1,000 hours of volunteer time has been clocked up”

Perhaps the greatest joy, for me, however is in the realisation of a known parallel. To explain. The content of the pamphlets contains themes of women's rights, civil rights and free speech. These issues, written over a century ago, have not been resolved and disappeared. They are still with us today. They might well be in different countries or in different forms, but they are still here. Consequently, my joy is that the arguments and thoughts given over a century ago are re-surfacing and hopefully supporting 21st century campaigns in their fights against injustice. For example, one 1884 pamphlet by William Alexander Hunter, *Blasphemy Laws; Should They Be Abolished?*, argues for free speech not as a 'social luxury' but as the pre-condition for intellectual, scientific and cultural progress. Could there be a closer parallel to the *Freedom of Thought Report* published by Humanists International in 2018? (The report is a worldwide survey of discrimination and persecution against humanists, atheists and the non-religious, with huge contributions made by international bloggers from every country).

Separated by over 100 years, the ideas and passion of our Victorian bloggers still resonate and reverberate with the issues of our day. Heritage in its best form is always contemporary.

Free Enquiry and Free Expression

Olwen Terris

The remarkable holdings of nineteenth-century pamphlets held in Conway Hall Library and Archives constitute three important collections.

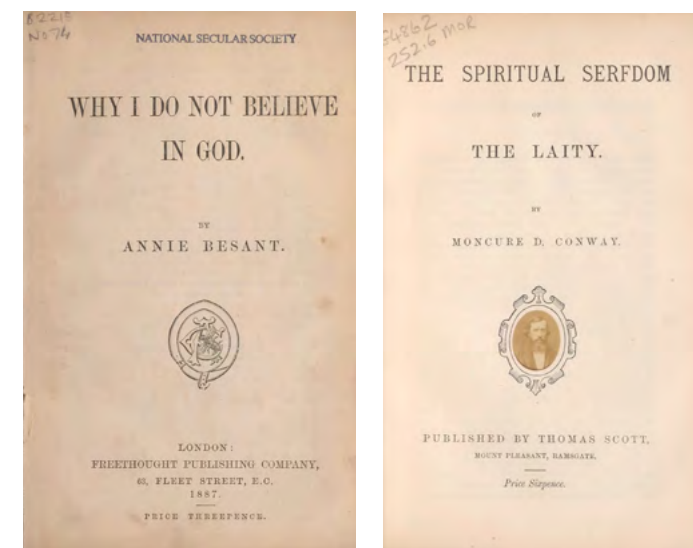
Please note this article refers to a pamphlet that uses racist language

The Morris Tracts comprise 80 pamphlets in six bound volumes donated by a Miss Morris in 1904. We believe that the collection was put together by Henry Grave Morris, a long-standing member of the Society who gave much of his time to library matters. Henry died in 1904 and it is likely that a close relation, Miss Morris, donated the volumes to the Society. The majority of titles (published between 1870-1890) focus on religious debate, many transcriptions of the Sunday Lecture Society at St George's Hall, Langham Place and the discourses held at South Place Chapel (Conway Hall's former home), several of the latter delivered by our namesake Moncure Conway. A further category is material published by Thomas Scott (1808-1878). Scott was brought up as a Roman Catholic who later rejected religion and spent his time and fortune in publishing pamphlets in support of 'free enquiry and free expression'.

The National Secular Society (NSS) collection comprises approximately 700 pamphlets. As with the Morris Tracts, the majority are public lectures dealing with matters of religion and state alongside debates on social issues including vaccination, flogging in the military, birth control, and poverty. They were donated to Conway Hall where they were housed in archive boxes and fully catalogued.

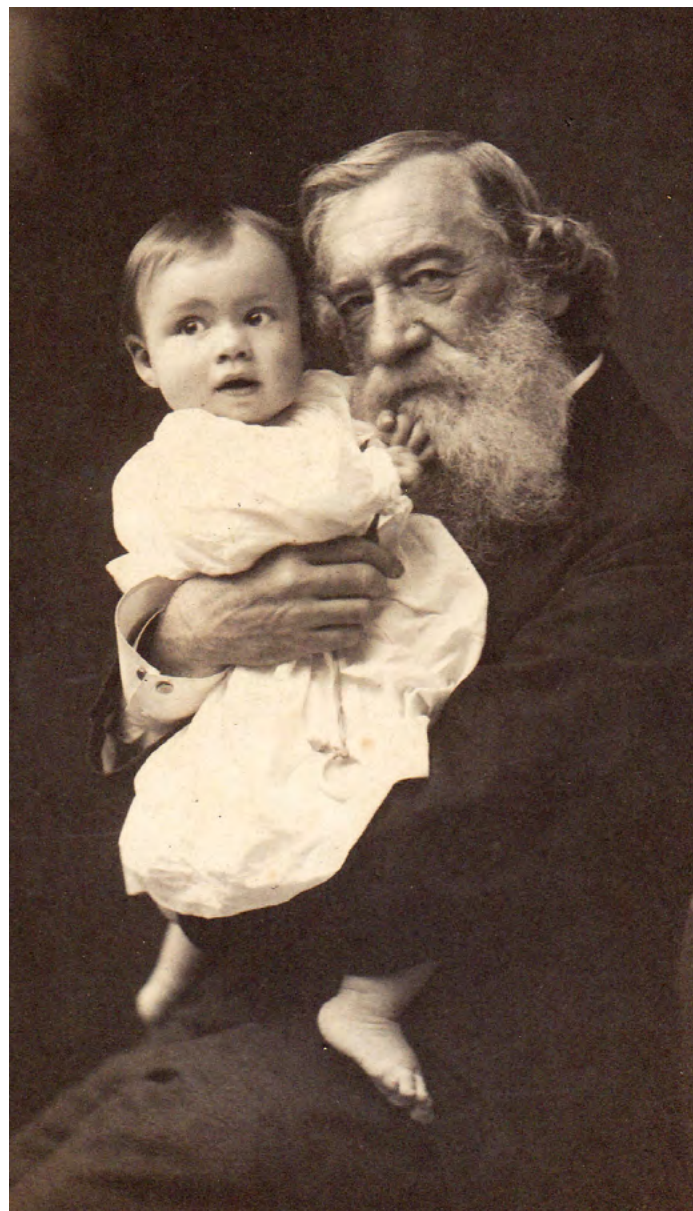
The Conway Tracts were donated to the Society in 1908, shortly after Moncure Conway's death. They comprise 33 volumes of bound papers including political and religious tracts, single issues of journals, pamphlets, letters and ephemera from Conway's personal library; in 1923 another volume was added to the original gift by Eustace Conway, Conway's one surviving son. The wide-ranging nature of the content supports an appreciation and understanding of Conway and his circle.

To the pamphleteers, religion (or non-religion) mattered. The majority of tracts are public lectures, debates, open letters, rebuttals and rejoinders which



were transcribed and published and are best read less as works of literature (although many do employ literary devices – satire, irony, sarcasm) but as impassioned and rhetorical pleas for their cause. Many take the form of questions: *Is Suicide a Sin?*, *What is Agnosticism?*, *Were Adam and Eve Our First Parents?* While others feel compelled to express and explain the thinking which led to their individual beliefs: *Why I became a Unitarian*, *Why I became a Theosophist*, *Why I do not Believe in God* – the reasoning is all. The personal pronoun is common, few of these pamphlets are published anonymously; encouragement of freedom of expression is to be found in the letter or spirit of the majority of writers but alongside a fierce advocacy for the rightness of their way of thinking. Titles are frequently provocative: *The Death of Christ*, *Against Hero-Making in Religion*, *The Spiritual Serfdom of the Laity*. There is a strong element of propaganda and hectoring, subtleties of shades of grey, the balanced view, are not pre-eminent.

It has become almost a truism to say that the concerns



Moncure Conway

growth fuelled by the theories of Thomas Malthus outlined in his work *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), and high levels of infant mortality, all of which were of deep concern to the Victorians. The efficacy of mass vaccination is still being debated but the arguments have different emphasis. Today those who oppose vaccination are largely concerned with alleged side effects but to the pamphleteers the objections were closely related to working-class politics and the vested interests of the medical profession.

From its origins in resistance to the 1853 Compulsory Vaccination Act, the Victorian anti-vaccination movement challenged the public health policies of an increasingly interventionist state. Anti-vaccinationists were largely from a politically active working class that regarded compulsory vaccination as an extreme example of class legislation; its policy and administration implicitly targeting working-class children and inflicting financial penalties on their parents who were unable to pay the fines for non-compliance or who considered themselves conscientious objectors.

“It has become almost a truism to say that the concerns of the pamphleteers – freedom of the press, women’s suffrage, public health etc. – are as relevant today as they were in late nineteenth-century Britain.”

Not all the ideologies expounded in the pamphlets reflect what contemporary society would regard as progressive views, although most do. But James Hunt, President of the Anthropological Society, and author of the pamphlet *The Negro’s Place in Nature* delivered to the British Association in 1863 occasioned great controversy because of its defence of slavery in the Confederate States of America and belief in the plurality of the human species.

These three collections form the bulk of the Victorian pamphlets, all of which have been digitised in the NLHF-funded Victorian Blogging project. The originals are now stored in archive boxes in temperature-monitored conditions and may be consulted by appointment. The digitised copies are available for all to research freely in pursuit of a better understanding of the social, political, religious and ethical issues for which these radical thinkers campaigned.

of the pamphleteers – freedom of the press, women’s suffrage, public health etc. – are as relevant today as they were in late nineteenth-century Britain. Certainly these issues remain of concern to contemporary society but it can be misleading always to impute the same motive. For example, tracts on birth control are less concerned with the right of women to have control over their own fertility and more searching for a practical solution to the problems of urban overcrowding, fear of population

Olwen Terris worked at the British Film Institute, National Film and Television Archive in the role of Chief Cataloguer for thirteen years before moving to the Imperial War Museum, Department of Collections Management as Data Standards Officer. She has been at Conway Hall since 2012 where she started as a volunteer cataloguer and has catalogued the Library’s nineteenth-century pamphlet collection.



CONSERVATION

From Printing Press to PDF: Conserving and Digitising the Pamphlet Collection

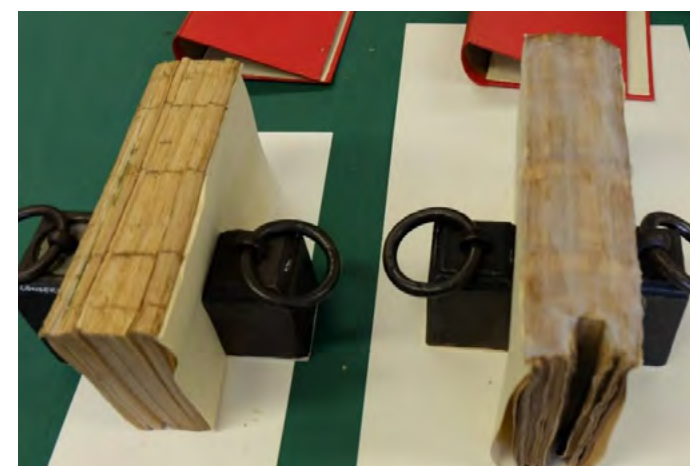
Alicia Chilcott

Central to the Victorian Blogging project has been the conservation and digitisation of our nineteenth-century pamphlet collection, completed by conservators and digitisation experts based at the Postal Museum. This process has made it possible for us to share this important collection outside the confines of our building, by placing digital copies of each pamphlet online where they are freely accessible to anybody with an Internet connection.

The technical process behind digitisation often goes unseen by those who make use of the end product. Long before digital imaging begins, significant planning and preparation of the collection must take place. Having planned out the timescale and workflow of the project and secured generous funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, we began preparing the collection to be digitised. Librarian Olwen Terris ensured that each individual pamphlet was thoroughly catalogued. Working with volunteers, we then created a condition report – a record of the physical condition of each pamphlet – noting problems such as tears, surface dirt and paper acidification, which leaves pages brittle and yellow. This helped identify the extent of conservation work required.

Following years of heavy use and imperfect storage, our pamphlets were a little worse for wear: pages had become acidified; tears had developed through over a hundred years of handling; and dust and dirt had accumulated on page surfaces. This was exacerbated by the nature and date of the collection – paper mass-produced in the late nineteenth century tends to be of poor quality and is especially susceptible to degradation. Conservation treatment was required in order for the pamphlets to be robust enough to withstand the digitisation process and for their text to be clearly readable in the digitised versions.

The collection was then handed over to conservators at the Postal Museum to work their magic. Some of the pamphlets had been bound together into volumes. Wherever these bindings were badly damaged, too tight to allow for digitisation or risked damaging the pamphlets within them, they were carefully removed and



the disbound pamphlets gathered together using Japanese paper. The collection was also rehoused in acid-free archival packaging.

All of the pamphlets, bindings and any retained storage boxes were cleaned to remove surface dirt that might reduce the readability of the pamphlets and add to their deterioration in the long term. Some volumes were also treated for red rot – the degradation of leather that results in a red powdery deposit. Any tears running across the text would reduce its legibility when digitised and handling throughout the digital imaging process may worsen them, so these were repaired using Japanese tissues and wheat starch paste. Any especially brittle pages, suffering from paper acidification, were



deacidified using magnesium bicarbonate to stabilise the chemical balance of the paper.

Thanks to these treatments, the collection was ready to withstand the extensive handling required for digitisation and was in a more easily readable condition, allowing for good, clear digital copies. The treatments have improved the robustness of the pamphlets and this, paired with improved storage conditions and reduced handling due to the availability of digital copies, will help to ensure their long-term preservation.

The painstaking process of photographing every individual page of each of the 1,300-plus pamphlets could then begin at the Postal Museum's digitisation studio. These images have been combined into a single PDF file for each pamphlet, with Optical Character Recognition (OCR) applied, which makes the pdfs text-searchable. These pdfs can be viewed on our online digital collections platform:

<https://conwayhallcollections.omeka.net>

The process does not end here. We must take the same level of care to ensure the long-term preservation of these digital copies as we do for the original paper pamphlets and indeed all of our collections. In the field of archives, this is called digital preservation. There are lots of technical tasks involved in digital preservation, ranging from selecting digital file formats that are most likely to stand the test of time, storing the files carefully and retaining back-ups, to recording metadata about each digitised pamphlet (this is all of the information about the digital file that helps us to identify and preserve it, the sort of information you find in a library catalogue). This will ensure that the digitised pamphlets continue to be available in the future.

Images © The Postal Museum.

Alicia Chilcott is Digitisation Co-ordinator at Conway Hall Library and Archive, working on the NLHF-funded project to digitise our collection of over 1,300 Victorian pamphlets. These pamphlets were written by radical Victorian thinkers to disseminate ideas about freethought, humanism and social and political movements such as the 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.



VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering on the Victorian Blogging Project

Jennifer Scott & Selina Packard

Thirteen volunteers have altogether dedicated almost 1000 hours of their time towards the Victorian Blogging project. They have generously assisted with a diverse array of tasks, including cataloguing, assessing the condition of the pamphlet collection, uploading digitised pamphlets online, helping to promote the project through blogs, social media and at events, and working with us to create exhibitions. We have provided training and supervision, helping to build each of our volunteers' skills and confidence. Here we hear from some of these volunteers about their involvement with the project and how they have benefitted from it.

Jennifer Scott

As a volunteer on the Victorian Blogging project I have been checking the quality of the digitised pamphlets, editing and adding to metadata (information about each pamphlet that you would see in a catalogue) and uploading them onto the digital collections website. It has been rewarding to contribute to a project that provides anyone interested with free access to this important resource on Victorian political and cultural life. Participating in the project has been a particularly useful experience as it has allowed me to apply my theoretical understanding of metadata in a practical setting, something which I now feel confident doing.

I also helped to represent the project at London History Day 2019 at the London Metropolitan Archives. This was a great opportunity to introduce Victorian Blogging to people who otherwise might not have encountered it and engage them with the story of nineteenth-century pamphleteering.

Jennifer Scott is a Conway Hall Library & Archives volunteer and recent graduate of the Archives and Records Management programme at UCL, having previously completed a BA in History at the University of Sheffield, where she developed an interest in nineteenth-century British social and cultural history.

Selina Packard is a Conway Hall Library & Archives volunteer working on Victorian Blogging, a National Lottery Heritage Funded project to digitise the Library's collection of nineteenth-century pamphlets. Selina volunteers at a few London-based archives and is working towards a career in archiving.

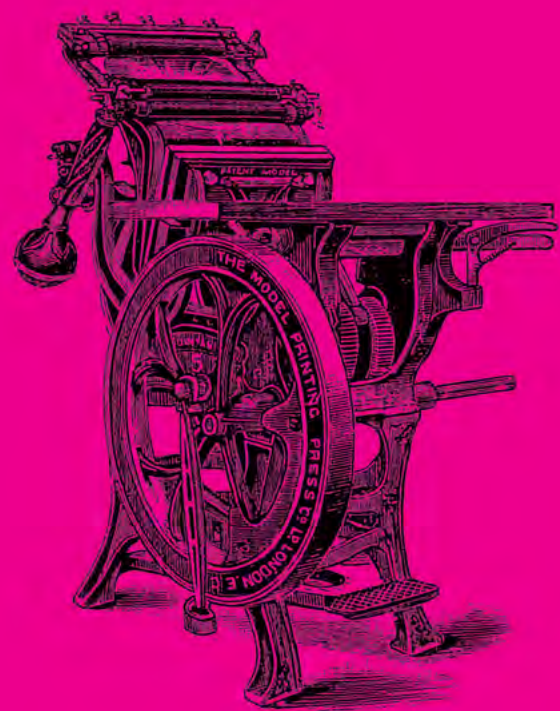
A pamphlet which I found particularly thought-provoking was the *Statement of Mrs. Lydia B. Denny, Wife of Reuben S. Denny, of Boston, in Regard to her Alleged Insanity*. In this pamphlet, the author writes of her treatment when trying to obtain a divorce from her husband on the grounds of domestic violence and adultery, and in doing so provides a unique insight into women's rights in the Victorian era.

Selina Packard

I have engaged in two distinct activities for this project: uploading pamphlets to the digital collections website, Omeka, and writing a blog on atheism in the nineteenth century. I learned how to use Omeka and also gained an understanding of the digitisation process and this stage of it. For the blog, I enjoyed the research and discovering more about the pamphleteers – many of whom were prominent or well-known in their day but not so famous today – and about Conway Hall itself.

I was fascinated to read Ernestine Rose's pamphlet, *A Defence of Atheism*, partly because of its lively, satirical style, but also because I discovered that Rose was as prominent in the American women's movement in the nineteenth century as Susan B Anthony or Elizabeth Cady Stanton but is almost unheard of today.

As I wrote the blog I thought carefully about how to link attitudes to atheism in the twenty-first century to how very differently it was viewed 150 years ago. I developed skills in writing engagingly for a public forum. It also gave me an insight into the nature of archival outreach work and the necessity for raising awareness of archival work.



VICTORIAN BLOGGING

The Pamphleteers
who Dared to Dream
of a Better World

6 September 2019 — 31 January 2020



Exhibition information:
conwayhall.org.uk/victorianblogging

HUMANIST LIBRARY & ARCHIVES

10AM — 5PM TUESDAY— THURSDAY

Conway Hall Humanist Library & Archives is home to a unique collection of published and archival sources on humanism and its related subjects.

We are open for members, researchers and the general public.

Our collections include printed materials such as books, pamphlets and journals as well as archival material of unpublished institutional and personal records and papers, such as manuscripts, letters and photographs.

For your time and convenience it is advisable to contact the library before your visit so we can ensure the material you seek is available.

T: 020 7061 6747 E: Librarian@conwayhall.org.uk

DISSENT

Writing Wrongs

Deborah Lavin

Dissent, political, religious, social and sexual, did not enter the world with printing, but printing certainly accelerated the spread of new and maverick ideas. But the new printing technology developed in Europe in the fifteenth century required capital. The equipment was large, heavy and noisy.

While, at the top end, the skilled workforce had to be literate and know some Latin, the need for such educated workers made the wages bill high and the first master printers were rich and well-connected men with little interest in challenging the existing social relations. And if, by chance, they did want to put forward unorthodox ideas, they soon found the state and religious authorities very willing to censor, ban and confiscate books, while the printer-publishers could be fined, pilloried or imprisoned. In some jurisdictions, scientific writers might be burned at the stake for heresy.

All this made the publication of the independent and subversive a reckless and unattractive proposition, at least in book form, as books are heavy and difficult to transport and conceal. Yet this very difficulty presented opportunities to the skilled and literate printing workforce who, with their 'out of hours' access to a printing press, could produce cheaper, more portable, more easily hidden and hence more difficult to censor... pamphlets!

The birth of pamphleteering came so quickly after the birth of printing, they could be taken for twins. And for some three hundred years the pamphlet was the media of choice of every dissident, rebel, utopian and revolutionary. Where openly on sale books and newsheets could be censored, or prohibitively taxed out of existence, and public lecturers and street orators could easily be rounded up and imprisoned, the small and easy-to-hide pamphlet could be exchanged for a farthing and passed on surreptitiously from hand to hand. By choice and necessity most of the early subversive would-be changers of the world gravitated to employment in the printing trade, and from that vantage point they were among the first to make the abiding radical demands for free speech and an end to censorship.

First, the right to reject the state religion in favour of alternatives and later, with the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason, the right to reject all religion. It was a long fight, with many heroes and heroines, before the crime of blasphemy was finally abolished in 2008.

The following four talks changed tack and considered individual single issue causes that feature strongly in Conway Hall's nineteenth-century pamphlet collection. Other issues could have been chosen, as the collection is extensive, but a choice had to be made and we decided on four that seriously mattered in the nineteenth century and have relevance today: slavery, blasphemy, Utopias and birth control.

Moncure Conway, who gave his name to Conway Hall, made the abolition of slavery in his United States homeland one of his life's central fights. In 2015, Conway Hall mounted a series of talks (which I curated) on the *British Business of Slavery*, which looked at the issues from the beginnings of British involvement in African slavery up to its abolition in the British Empire in 1834. Slavery, of course, continued not only in the United States of America, but throughout the globe and Dr Joseph Kelly's talk on November 7th, *The Elimination of Slavery from the Whole World: Problems of Anti-Slavery in Victorian Britain*, took up the post-1834 battle against slavery. Concentrating on the later nineteenth century and a little beyond, Dr Kelly's talk offered an insight into the battle now being fought against the resurgence of slavery in our contemporary world.

Next was Professor Gregory Claeys talk on *Marx, Morris and Utopia*. Creating a better, even perfect, world is at the core of both the ethical debate and Conway Hall's pamphlet collection. Prof Claeys made some new and provocative connections, not least about the ethical basis of Marx's materialism.

Professor David Nash's November 21st talk, *Blasphemy, the Individual and the State: From Historical Flashpoint to Contemporary Grievance*, dealt with one of the central maverick pamphleteer campaigns. First, the right to reject the state religion, in favour of alternatives and later, with the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason, the right to reject all religion. It was a long fight with many



© Wellcome images

heroes and heroines before the crime of blasphemy was finally abolished in 2008.

I gave the last of the four “single issue” talks on November 28th on *Annie Besant and the Liberal, Radical, Socialist and Feminist Opposition to Birth Control in the Nineteenth Century*. As the title suggests, the talk explored the opposition to birth control from such important figures as Charles Darwin, Millicent Fawcett and Karl Marx, among others. But it also focused on what is often omitted when discussing the trial under the obscenity law of Annie Besant (and Bradlaugh) for publishing the *Fruits of Philosophy* birth control pamphlet – namely how, instead of relying simply on the current enthusiasm for Malthusian economics or the feminist argument for women’s bodily autonomy, Besant and Bradlaugh sought to make the longstanding radical argument for free speech and no censorship.

In the early twenty-first century, the new technology of the Internet creating blogging, just as the new technology of printing had produced pamphleteering, but where

each is fundamentally democratic or populist, blogging has given a strength and a reach to dissident voices unimaginable to the early pamphleteers. Equally, blogging has presented a much quicker and more immediate threat to the prevailing elites and their related orthodoxies.

At first merely amazed but now seriously worried, governments are seeking to put the genie back in the bottle by regulation and outright censorship with (in the West) punishments ranging from job-loss to fines and imprisonment. Elsewhere in the world, independent bloggers have met with more violent fates. Yet far from there being any great demand for free speech rising to confront the new elite push to silence, there has been prevarication and even collusion from liberal and left groups opposed to some of the new blogging voices. How this has come about is one question, what should be done about it is another. Viv Regan concluded the talks series by vividly addressing both these concerns and more.

Deborah Lavin has worked as an actress and stand up poet and has written several plays. She gives talks on various radical and socialist figures in the nineteenth century, and also on Victorian medical issues, especially the controversies surrounding syphilis, contraception, vivisection and lady doctors. Deborah has curated several series of talks at Conway Hall, including *Writing Wrongs* and *Prostitution, Pimping and Trafficking*.



EDUCATION

Victorian Blogging School Project

Alicia Chilcott

Conway Hall Library & Archives partnered with the Centre for Investigative Journalism (CiJ) to deliver a series of six learning sessions for Year 12 Politics students at Regent High School, Camden. The sessions focused on the history of pamphleteering and nineteenth-century political and social campaigns, how social media is used today to support similar campaigns, and citizenship and human rights issues in the nineteenth century and today. The sessions were led by Conway Hall Library & Archives staff, Tom Sanderson of the CiJ, and educators David Rosenberg and Adam Ramejkis. We also produced a learning pack, to support teaching about the history of pamphleteering and its present day relevance, drawing on material from our own collections.

This project was a wonderful opportunity for Conway Hall to engage with young people in our local community and to hear about the issues that matter to them. We provided a meaningful learning experience for the students outside of the classroom, with sessions taking place at Conway Hall, Goldsmiths College, and even including a walking tour of sites relating to nineteenth-century campaigns for rights and social justice around Holborn and Bloomsbury. This allowed the students to walk in the shoes of people who lived and worked in their local area and challenged the status quo, ultimately striving to make their city – and the world – a fairer and more equal place.

Here we share some of the students’ excellent work from across the six sessions

In the first session, the students visited Conway Hall and were asked to summarise their initial impression of what Conway Hall represents using hashtags. Based on a brief perusal of our library shelves and the room itself, the students made some surprisingly accurate guesses as to what sort of organisation we are!

Throughout the sessions, we looked at a number of issues that were of concern to both Victorian

pamphleteers and young Londoners today. One of the most pressing of these was, of course, housing. In the nineteenth century, a significant increase in the city’s population alongside other factors resulted in many living in unhygienic and overcrowded slum housing. We have Victorian reformers to thank for the clean running water and bathrooms that we have in our homes today – and the lack of open sewers!

But people living in London today find themselves in the midst of another housing crisis. According to a recent Mayor of London report, the average monthly rent in the city is nearing £1500 and the average house price is almost half a million pounds – sums far out of the reach of many. With the power very much sitting with letting agents and private landlords, renters are subject to unstable housing arrangements and unfair extra charges.

One Victorian pamphlet that we looked at denounced this inequality between property owners and renters, declaring the state of slum housing in London to be ‘MURDER!’ This pamphlet, written by Charles Mowbray, encouraged readers to join a rent strike movement against landlords and the ‘rotten dens’ in which they were forced to live. We discussed the way that Mowbray used provocative language to capture the attention of readers and clear arguments and statistics to support his case. The students then listed some of the housing problems that they would draw attention to today if they were creating a pamphlet or blog about the housing crisis and considered the eye-catching and emotive language they could use to get their message across.

‘Too small, expensive and overcrowded’

‘Not enough social housing’

‘Housing first! Give all necessary requirements to the homeless so they can contribute to society!’

‘Too many vacant affluent houses and luxury apartments’

‘Housing should be more accessible for young people’

The history of politics

Conway hall
of Fame

Politics

Religion

Global History

Science

Lucious Library

Global Philosophy & Ethics

The history of politics

Fight For Equality

Conway hall
of Fame

Gallery of knowledge

Science

Religion

Global Philosophy & Ethics

Global History

Fight For Equality

Politics

Library of special books

MURDER !

- WORKMEN, why allow yourselves, your wives, and children, to be daily murdered by the foulness of the dens in which you are forced to live ? The average age of the working classes is some 29 years, and the average age of the rich 55 years.

It is time the slow murder of the poor, who are poisoned by thousands in the foul, unhealthy slums, from which robber landlords exact monstrous rents, was stopped.

You have paid in rent the value over and over again of the rotten dens in which you are forced to dwell. Government has failed to help you. The time has come to help yourselves.

PAY NO RENT

to land-thieves and house-farmers, who flourish and grow fat on your misery, starvation, and degradation.

A MASS MEETING

WILL BE HELD IN

VICTORIA PARK

(NEAR THE BAND STAND)

On Sunday, July 26th, at 3 p.m.,

When the following Speakers will address the meeting in support of a No Rent Campaign :—

D. J. Nicoll, W. B. Parker, S. Mainwaring, C. W. Mowbray, J. Turner, R. Jane, and E. Hall.

Hurrah ! for the kettle, the club, and the poker, Good medicine always, for landlord and broker ; Surely 'tis best to find yourselves clobber, Before paying rent to a rascally robber.

The Development of the Law of Obscenity

- 1708 Read is indicted for printing *The Fifteen Plagues of a Maidenhead*, allegedly pornographic. The judge dismissed the case, saying "It is stuff not fit to be mentioned publicly . . . There is no law to punish it. I wish there were but we cannot make law". (Hitherto, it was within the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical courts).
- 1727 Curll is convicted of obscene libel for publishing *Venus in the Cloister* or *the Nun in her snock*, the court overruling Read's case. The decision was based on Sir Charles Stidley's case: "He was fined 2,000 mark, committed without bail for a week and bound to his good behaviour for a year, on his confession of information against him for showing himself naked in a balcony and throwing down bottles (pist in) et et amix among the people in Covent Garden, contra pacem and to the scandal of the Government".
- 1857 The Obscene Publications Act ("Lord Campbell's Act") is the first statute on the subject, empowering magistrates to issue search warrants for obscene material, which would then be destroyed.
- 1868 Obscenity is defined for the first time. Lord Chief Justice Cockburn provides the "deprave and corrupt" test in the famous *Hicklin* decision, a test which was to be accepted for almost a century, and even then has never been entirely rejected.
- 1909 The Cinematograph Act unwittingly leads to local authority censorship of the cinema, extended by the Cinematograph Act 1952.
- 1953 Mr. Justice Stoble delivered his celebrated summing-up to the jury in *The Philanderer* case at the Old Bailey: "Remember the charge is a charge that the tendency of the book is to deprave and corrupt. The charge is not that the tendency of the book is either to shock or to disgust. That is not a criminal offence. Then you say: 'Well, corrupt or deprave whom?' . . . What exactly does that mean? Are we to take our literary standards as being the level of something that is suitable for a 14-year-old school-girl? . . . The answer to that is: of course not."
- 1955 The Children and Young Persons (Harmful Publications) Act is passed to deal with "horror comics", and makes it a criminal offence to sell or import them. No prosecution has ever been brought under the Act.
- 1959 The basis of the present law, the Obscene Publications Act, is passed, following reports first from the committee of the Society of Authors (chaired by A.P. Herbert) and then from the House of Commons Select Committee.

In other sessions we considered the issues of censorship, freedom of the press, and the role of social media in present day political and activist discourse. The Victorian British government heavily censored the press through blasphemy, obscenity and libel legislation and limited their reach by keeping the cost of publications high through taxes and stamp duties. Pamphlets produced by small independent publishers provided a way to disseminate radical ideas that would not be covered by the mainstream press, for fear of recrimination.

We looked at the work of figures such as Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant, who were taken to trial for publishing the 'obscene' birth control pamphlet *The Fruits of Philosophy*, and Richard Carlile, who was imprisoned for seditious libel after publishing the revolutionary works of Thomas Paine in the form of pamphlets. Carlile is most significantly remembered for publishing his eye-witness account of the Peterloo Massacre, which heavily criticised the government, in his radical newspaper *Sherwin's Political Register* (later *The Republican*).

Today, the UK stands fortieth out of 180 countries in the 2018 World Press Freedom Index, a decline of eighteen places since 2002, when the index began, making us one of the worst countries in Europe for press freedom. We discussed the ways in which pamphlets and social media have similarly been adopted as a means to cheaply and widely spread information and gather support for causes not discussed in mainstream media. We considered the role of hashtags like #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter in helping to organise movements, gather support and disseminate information such as sharing video footage of police violence or exposing personal experiences of sexual harassment and assault. This draws direct parallels with Carlile's exposé of the violent attacks on peaceful protesters at Peterloo 200 years ago.

Having learnt about the historical and present-day context surrounding censorship and the communication of dissenting ideas, the students engaged in lively debate prompted by some key questions. It was brilliant to witness them critically assessing these complex issues and formulating and expressing their own opinions. Following the debate, we asked each student to summarise their stance in a short paragraph.

Can 'no-platforming' ever be justified, or is it an attack on our freedom of speech?

'I personally disagree with no-platforming because I believe that everyone has the right to freedom of speech and no one should be told what they can or can't say. Although I am willing to make an exception. The only time no-platforming should be used is when whatever is being said has the potential to physically harm any living being.'

'No-platforming is never justified as it inflicts upon people's right to freedom of speech.'

'No platforming should not be allowed as it is not right to not allow people to have their beliefs. On this basis, we should allow people to have their views and learn from them and progress as a society. We can't progress through being ignorant towards people and their ideas.'

'Freedom of speech is sacrosanct and fundamental to a functioning democratic body and should be upheld. But with limitations, of course, such as not when speech advertently calls to violent action. This, therefore, is the only time where no platforming is justified. Furthermore, extreme and radical ideas should be permitted as it allows for the development and the exploration of opinion.'

Overall, is social media a force for good or bad in society and political debate?

'In my opinion, social media is neither a force for good or bad. This is due to the fact that social media allows people to share their views, so it depends how the individual is using it.'

'In some cases it could be good because it brings awareness to those who would like to find out more information about specific situations. However, it can also be seen as bad because many people take information out of context and people could be brainwashed or groomed. Overall, I believe that social media is neither good or bad as it depends on how people are using it.'

'Social media is more bad than good because people can be misled on a large scale, there needs to be education on how people are influenced.'

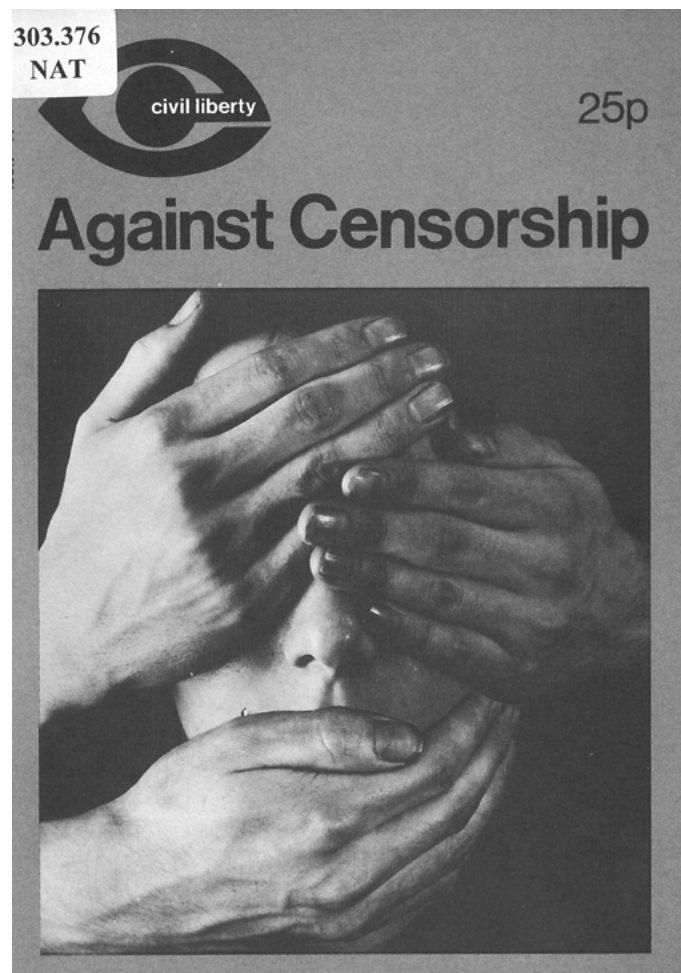
Can violent political protest ever be justified?

'I think that it depends on the situation. If the protest is something which affects a lot of people and is a serious matter, violence should be allowed.'

'Some people might say that it is justified because the issue could be affecting the whole country or the government could be committing violence towards people. On the other hand, it may be seen as unjustified because violence should not be used in any situation.'

'Protests should only be violent if individuals are fighting for an issue that affects a large proportion of the population.'

Alicia Chilcott is Digitisation Co-ordinator at Conway Hall Library and Archive, working on the NLHF-funded project to digitise our collection of over 1,300 Victorian pamphlets. These pamphlets were written by radical Victorian thinkers to disseminate ideas about freethought, humanism and social and political movements such as the 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.



However, it could be argued that these violent protests could harm innocent people.'

This project was a fantastic opportunity to bring young people into our Library to engage with our collections and for us to work with a school in our local community. Over the series of sessions with the students, they gained confidence in speaking out about issues that affected nineteenth-century pamphleteers as well as those campaigning online in the present day. The students developed their awareness of political and campaigning history, as well as critical thinking and persuasive writing skills. Most of all, it was wonderful to see them inspired by the work of Victorian pamphleteers and draw connections to the issues that affect them today.

Images: Pamphlet, reference number 303.376 NAT. National Council for Civil Liberties, Against Censorship (1972).

EDUCATION

Fighting Inequality, Interrupting the Canon, Questioning the Status Quo

Adam Ramejkis

Please note this article refers to a pamphlet that uses racist language

In February 2019, over two consecutive Mondays, first-year BA Graphic Design students from Camberwell College of Arts visited Conway Hall Library to take part in the Victorian Blogging zine-making workshops.

This was part of a pilot unit called *Whose history?* – a unit that challenges students to interrogate and interrupt the canon of graphic design history, which is described as 'read[ing] like most other histories: a single narrative account that charts the lives and works of white middle-class European and American men. And, like most other histories, this single narrative solidifies itself... to become not just the 'truth' but often 'the only way' to think about a subject'.

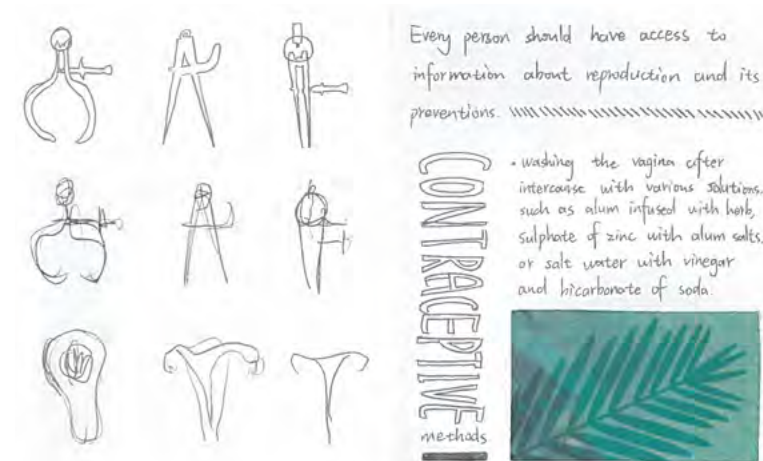
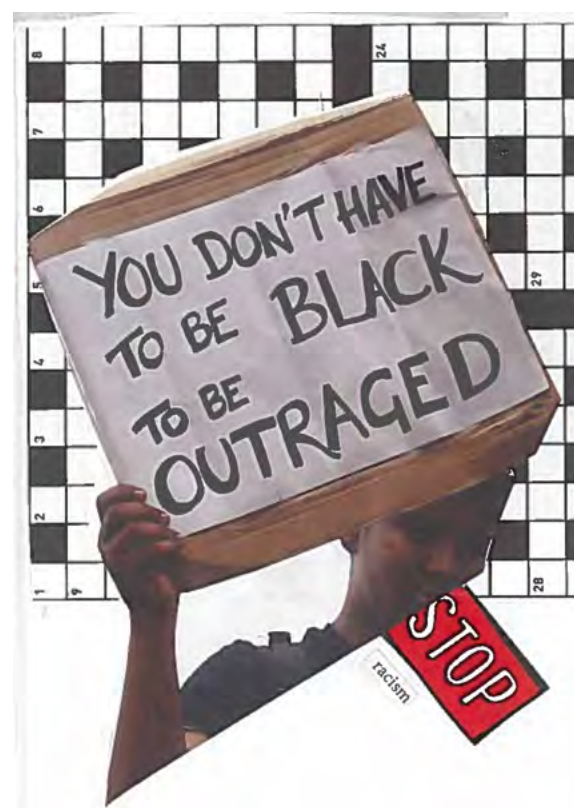
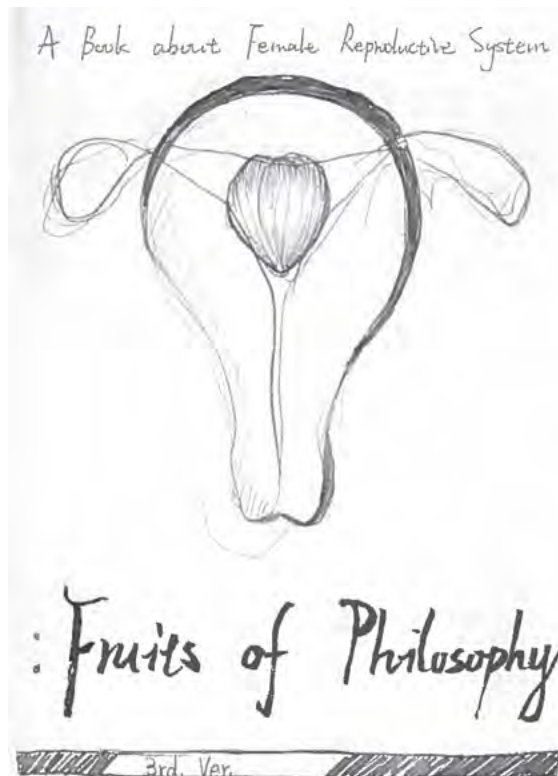
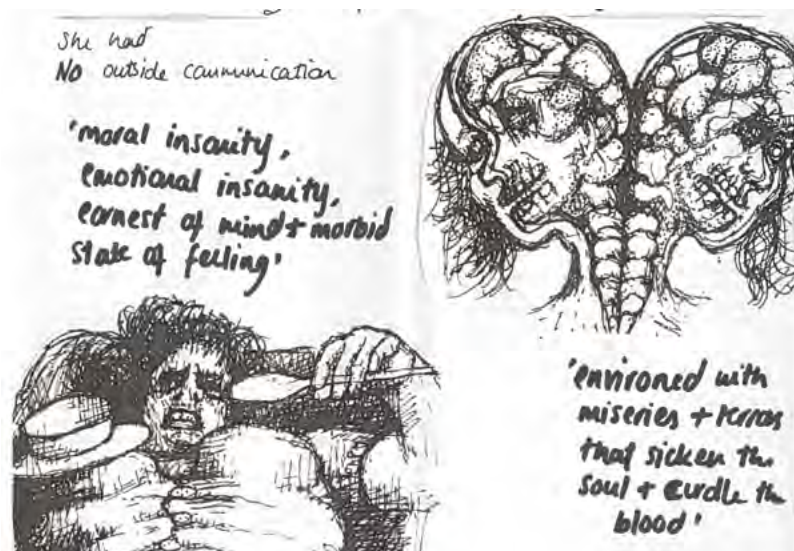
Conway Hall has a long history of championing the fight to call out injustices and redress balances, and of being a place for 'those who dare to dream of a better world'. As such, I saw this as an opportunity to introduce the students to Conway Hall Library's amazing collection of Victorian pamphlets, many of which questioned the dominant narratives of the time and offered up different ways to think about life and society.

After a short introduction to Conway Hall and its pamphlet collection, and an overview of the Victorian Blogging project, the students were given paper, pens, scissors, glue and collage materials – and the task of creating zines in response to one or more of the pamphlets. When making their zines, a number of students commented on how the issues the nineteenth-century pamphleteers were fighting for are still relevant today.

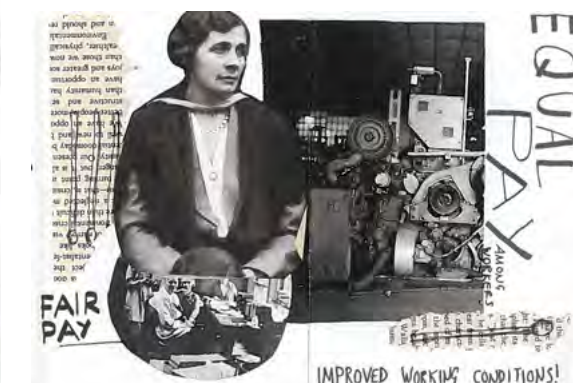
The zines shown here were created in response to the following pamphlets from the collection:

- Lydia B. Denny, *Statement of Mrs. Lydia B. Denny, Wife of Reuben S. Denny, of Boston, in Regard to Her Alleged Insanity* (1863)
- Charles Knowlton, *Fruits of Philosophy: an Essay on the Population Question* (1878)
- Annie Besant, *The Political Status of Women* (1880s)
- James Hunt, *On the Negro's Place in Nature* (1863).





Adam Ramejkis works at University of the Arts London, running workshops, seminars and projects for staff and students on criticality, creativity, communication and collaboration. He also runs a workshop series in Conway Hall Library, *Thinking and Language*, exploring the links between thinking and language. Adam has worked on the Victorian Blogging project, co-facilitating workshops for students and has volunteered to help catalogue and upload the digitised pamphlets online.



Incendiary Words and Rebellious Campaigns 100 Years Apart

David Rosenberg

I was excited to be asked to devise a course as part of the Victorian Blogging project. I knew from research for my book, *Rebel Footprints*, that there were many rebellious campaigns in London during the Victorian period using incendiary words, but to make it more interesting for the students and to challenge myself I decided to bring it closer to the present by looking also at how those campaigns and the slogans that accompanied them played out 100 years later. So I focused on London 1840-1890 and 1940-1990 – mixing both periods within each session.

The six sessions included a visit to May Day Rooms, where students had access to a range of archive materials of struggles since the 1960s. For the earlier period we used Conway Hall’s own collection.

Our first session focused on housing through the campaigning work of Charles Mowbray. He formed a No Rent League in the 1880s which he publicised at free speech pitches in East London, and also looked at rent strikes that women organised in 1889 to support their husbands during the dock strike. Banners hung outside their homes saying ‘As we are on strike, landlords need not call’.

We examined the rent strikes organised by the Stepney Tenants’ Defence League, with considerable Communist Party input, as a prelude to the CP’s organised squatting campaign with homeless people in London just after World War Two and the 1970s actions of the Bengali Housing Action group in response to their housing crisis fuelled by discrimination.

Session two focused on minorities finding a voice through the struggles of Jewish and Irish immigrants in the Victorian period, comparing their experiences with Caribbean communities of the 1940s and 50s, and the political origins of the Notting Hill carnival.

The ways in which sexual minorities found a voice through the Gay Liberation Front in the 1970s carried through to session three, which focused mainly on women’s liberation struggles from early proponents of equality in the 1860s and 70s.

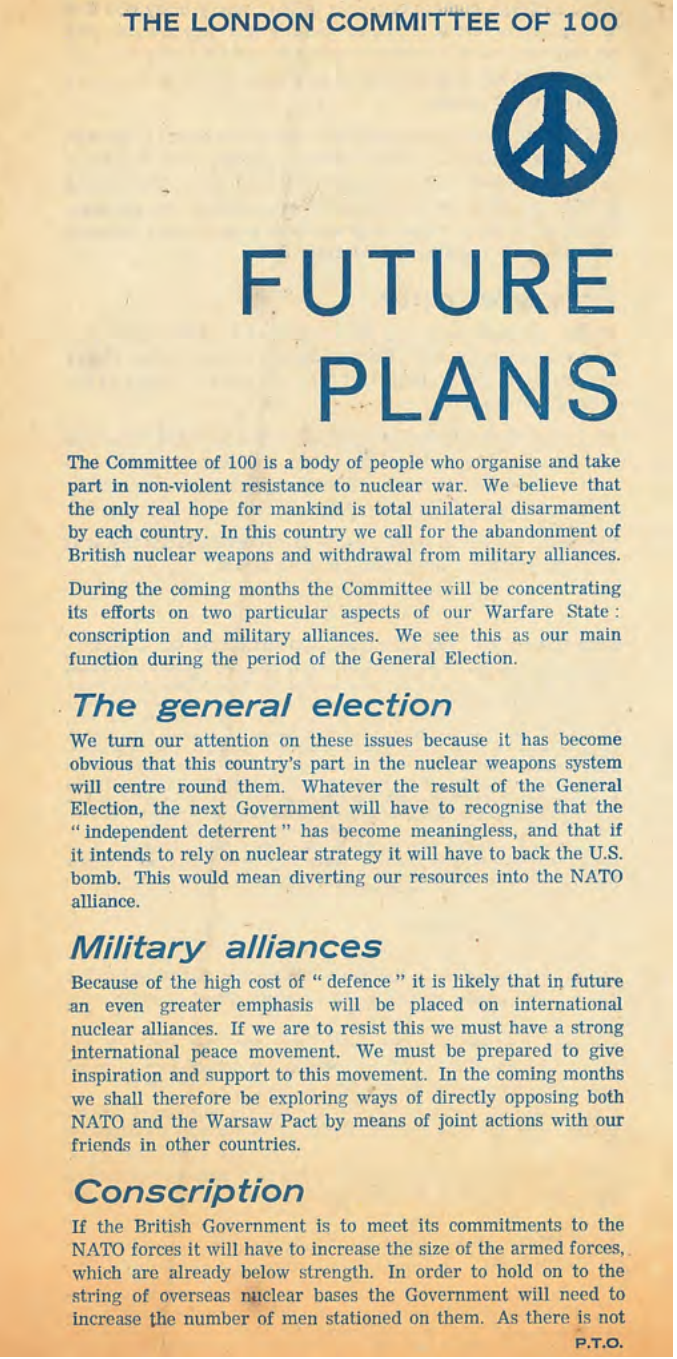
We saved the later period of women’s liberation



campaigns for session four, when we visited May Day Rooms. They have posters, pamphlets and leaflets illustrating second wave feminism. We also explored materials there that related to our earlier sessions plus some rare copies of innovative children’s rights campaigns.

The fight for women’s equality also happened in the workplace. Session five looked at women’s trade union struggles in London from the matchwomen (1888) to the Dagenham women (1968), and women cleaners in government buildings (1972).

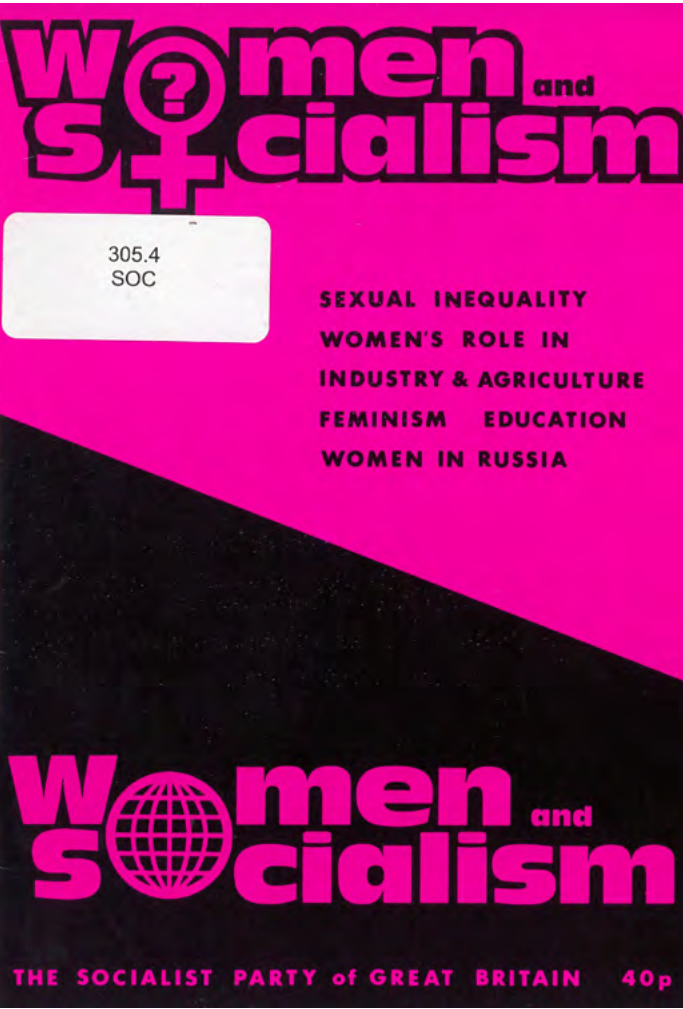
Our final session focused on words and actions relating



to war and peace, from the London Peace Society in the 1840s formed by Christian dissenters, the Stop the War League of the 1850s organising during the Crimean War, and the Workmen’s Peace Association of the 1870s, who understood that militarism was heavily influenced by class interests. In the later period we focused on CND, the Committee of 100 (who used tactics similar to Extinction



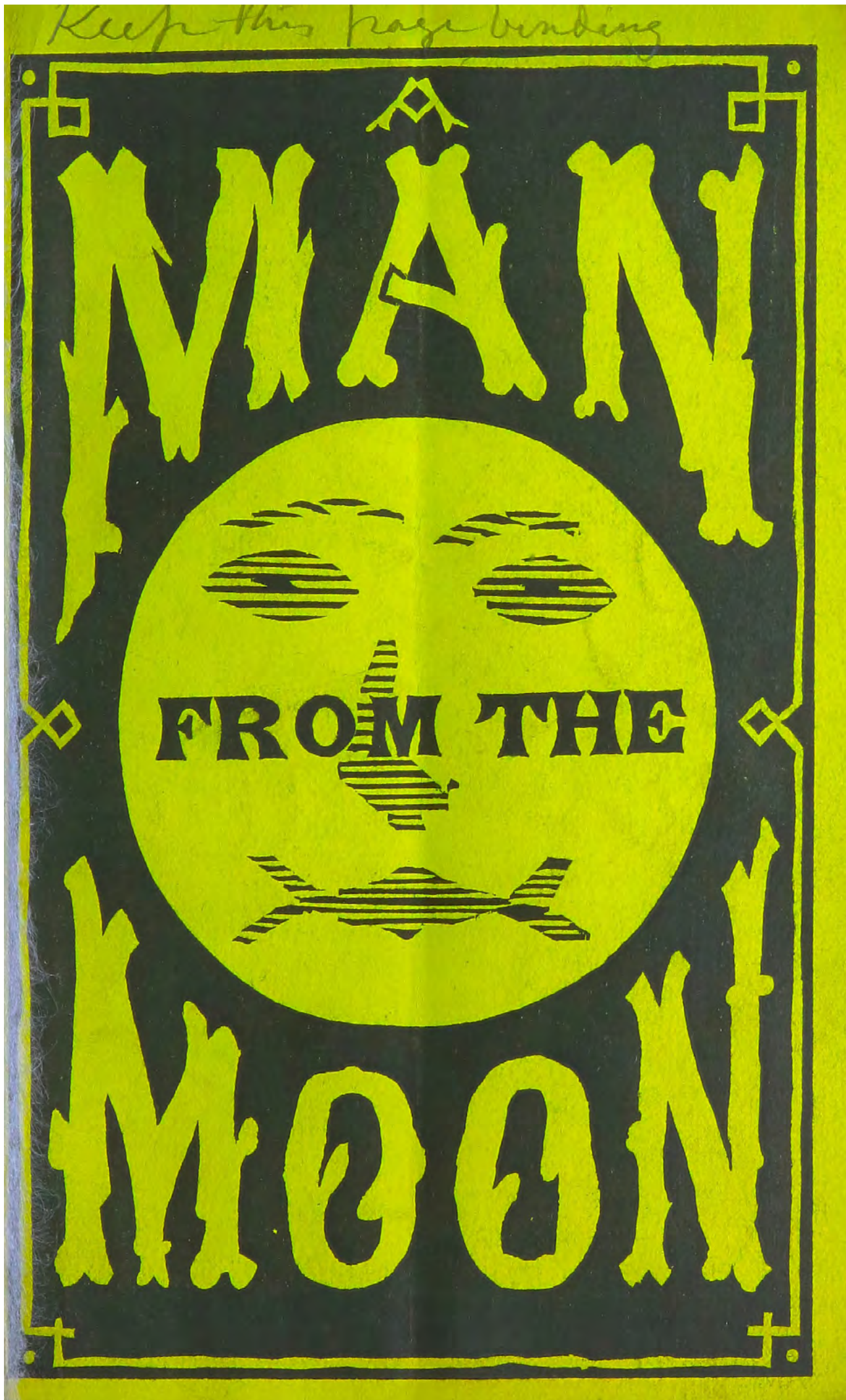
David Rosenberg is an educator, writer and tour guide specialising in London’s radical history. He is the author of *Battle for the East End* (Five leaves Publications, 2011), and *Rebel Footprints* (Pluto, 2015, 2019).



From Left: 1. Article promoting the matchwomen’s strike written by Annie Besant in *The Link* (1888). Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons. 2. Archive reference number SPES/1/13/1. A handbill produced by the Committee of 100; 3. Pamphlet, reference number 305.4 SOC. *The Socialist Party of Great Britain*, Women and Socialism (1986).’

Rebellion today) and the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign – all products of the 1950s and 1960s.

We covered so much ground but throughout we highlighted the ways and means that radical ideas were created and conveyed, through pamphlets, petitions, placards and banners through to slogans on badges t-shirts, shoulder bags, wristbands and coffee mugs!



Pamphlet, reference number G5229. Anon., A Man from the Moon (c1870).

VICTORIAN BLOGGING

Expanding the Reach of the Collection Through Wikimedia

John Lubbock

In addition to Conway Hall's main digital collections platform, the digitised pamphlets are also being uploaded to Wikimedia Commons and the Internet Archive. This will increase the reach of the collection online, as well as providing further assurance that the digitised pamphlets will continue to be accessible online into the future. In May 2019, John Lubbock and Stuart Prior of Wikimedia UK facilitated a Wikipedia editathon event at Conway Hall, helping participants to add information from our pamphlet collection onto Wikipedia.

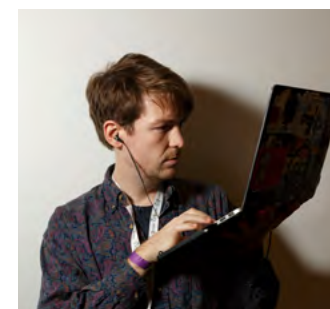
Almost 300 of the nineteenth-century pamphlets have so far been uploaded to Wikimedia Commons, the file sharing sister site of Wikipedia. You can see the [Category:Conway Hall digital collections](#) where they are all collected. Now that they have been added to Commons, there is still the work to do of adding the pamphlets to relevant pages on Wikipedia, so that, for example, someone who wants to read Charles Bradlaugh's writings on atheism can access them directly from a file embedded in his Wikipedia page. I have, in fact, just added Bradlaugh's 'A Defence of Atheism' to [his Wikipedia page](#), where you should be able to read it unless an officious Wikipedia editor decides to remove it for some technical reason or other.

There are lots of interesting pamphlets to be found in the collection, which will probably take some time to go through and add to relevant Wikipedia pages. There is another Wikipedia editathon event in the pipeline where we hope to tackle this work and ensure that Conway Hall's pamphlets are accessed and read by as wide an audience as possible through Wikipedia. A short sci-fi story from around 1870 about [an alien from the moon](#) could surely be added to the Wikipedia page '[History of](#)

[science fiction](#)'. Some of [Thomas Huxley's writing](#) should be added to his [Wikipedia page](#). There are interesting pamphlets on [rail nationalisation](#), [vegetarianism](#), [Italian unification](#), [sex work](#), and, above all, on late nineteenth century attitudes to religion.

Wikipedia provides a great platform to share these works because Google's search algorithm privileges Wikipedia links, and so when people are researching nineteenth century attitudes to religion and science, they are likely to come across Wikipedia links. We are using these examples from Conway Hall's pamphlet collection to help improve Wikipedia, and provide further avenues for research when people wish to access primary documents, as well as the summaries of secondary sources which make up most of the content on Wikipedia. The original pamphlets are all in the public domain by virtue of their authors having been deceased for more than 70 years. We hope that by linking the files back to the Conway Hall digital collection, it will make Conway Hall's collection more visible online.

Archives all over the world have huge stores of materials that only reach a limited audience. It's not possible for the British Museum to have their entire collection on display, but with Wikimedia projects, it is possible to catalogue and make copies of everything available online. We believe that this should be done especially with collections funded by the public purse. If our taxes help to support cultural collections, outputs like digitised copies should be available for the public to access at any time. It's fantastic that Conway Hall has taken the forward thinking step of making their digitised collections compatible with the Open Licensed nature of content on Wikipedia, and we are looking forward to working with Conway Hall to make further use of and extend the reach of their collections.



John Lubbock is the Communications Coordinator for Wikimedia UK, the UK chapter of the Wikimedia movement. He also works as a freelance journalist and filmmaker.

Bridging the News Gap — Community Investigative Journalism

Tom Sanderson

The digital age has had major impacts on the ability of people to both publish and access information. There are similarities in this with the changes brought about by the advent of cheap printing that precipitated the rise of Victorian pamphleteers, providing many more opportunities for people to disseminate radical ideas and opinions.

However, this more recent change has also had a much more significant impact on the traditional publishing industry than we've ever seen before. Advertising, a revenue stream that has for decades covered the costs of researching, producing and distributing information, is now almost unrecognisable.

Before the recent availability of virtually free online publication, a newspaper had an asset which could be sold – the dissemination of information – but with the digital age has come a growing perception that news will be available for free. The option to generate income through advertising – either commercial or personal – in newspapers has also been impacted by the rise of personal listings websites such as Gumtree and Facebook Marketplace and cheaper commercial advertising offered by social media platforms, Google and apps.

In this climate of financial decline, investigative journalism tends to be seen by editors as a costly luxury and the biggest impact of this has been within local news; since 2005, there have been nearly 400 closures of local papers and staffing cuts have been so severe that over half of parliamentary constituencies are no longer covered by a daily paper. This removal of space for public scrutiny of official decisions and public spending is having an overall negative effect on accountability across society.

One clear example can be taken from the 2017 Grenfell Tower fire. Community groups had repeatedly raised the danger represented by disregard for fire safety regulations. Nearly six months before the disaster, the Grenfell Action Group published a blog post entitled 'Playing With Fire', drawing attention to the Council's neglect, stating:

'It is a truly terrifying thought, but [we] believe that

only a catastrophic event will expose the ineptitude and incompetence of our landlord, the KCTMO [Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation, the authority in charge of Grenfell Tower].'

"In this climate of financial decline, investigative journalism tends to be seen by editors as a costly luxury and the biggest impact of this has been within local news; since 2005 there have been nearly 400 closures of local papers"

They were eventually proven right and local and national press took notice of their warnings, albeit half a year – and 72 needless deaths – too late. Soon after, *The Press Gazette* interviewed Grant Feller, a former local journalist from the area. Asked whether he thought residents' concerns would have been picked up by the Kensington and Chelsea News when he worked there, Feller said: 'One hundred percent, yes.'

In 1990, Feller's former employer had ten journalists covering west London; by the time of the Grenfell fire there was just one. A little over a month later, the paper closed down entirely. So despite increased access to the means of online publication for community campaigners like the Grenfell Action Group, accountability for those making decisions and spending money on behalf of communities has seriously declined.

While it seems like there's never been a worse time for public-interest investigative journalism, we have also seen many reasons for hope emerge from these new circumstances.

There are many examples of people who are making local news work for communities, pursuing alternative models of journalism. Outlets like the *Bristol Cable* and the *Ferret* are not reliant on advertising revenue or rich owners who are interested only in profits. They have cooperative structures in which anyone who donates a small monthly amount becomes a member and is given a say on the focus of investigations, as well as how the organisations are run.

Both the *Cable* and the *Ferret* are now working towards becoming financially sustainable entirely through contributions from members. This introduces the tantalising prospect of a new model which is free from the influence of large profit-focused corporations, the companies that provide advertising revenue, or rich individual owners with their own agendas. For far too long, people have been getting used to accessing information without cost and the argument that good, thoroughly-researched investigative journalism is a public good which needs to be independently funded cannot be made too strongly or too often.

These new community journalism outlets are actually part of the communities they report on as used to be the case when local newspapers were able to employ teams of journalists who live day to day in the areas they covered.

Alongside this are dual trends making research into the actions and decisions of those in power easier and

quicker. Thanks to the 'open data movement', Freedom of Information law and a drive towards greater financial transparency that has resulted in free access to company registration documents, information about government both local and national has never been easier to find. There are also many online tools and pieces of software which are making it much easier to access and analyse this information.

The challenge now is not only to prove the long-term sustainability of local investigative journalism, but to replicate them for other regions and different communities across the UK.

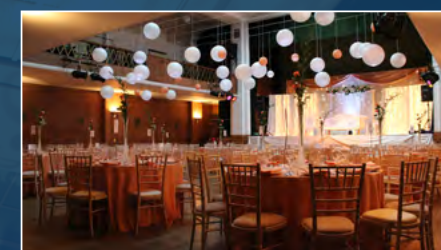
This is a challenge the Centre for Investigative Journalism has risen to, in partnership with Conway Hall, through offering free training workshops for those who want to put these tools and techniques to good use in the public interest.



Tom Sanderson is Project Manager at the Centre for Investigative Journalism, an educational charity that specialises in providing training to journalists, researchers, producers and students in the practice and methodology of investigative journalism. For the past two years, Tom has been running projects across the UK aimed at increasing the capacity of community-led news outlets to conduct public-interest investigations.



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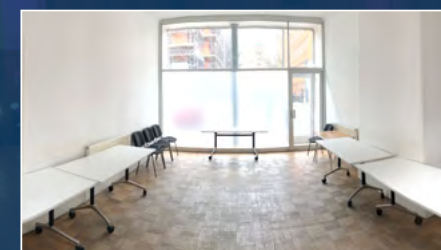
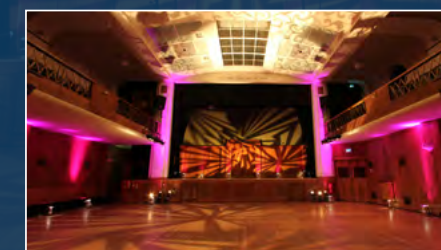


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Creative Writing Workshops

Michelle Crowther

In the summer of 2018, I was invited to run a series of three creative writing workshops as part of the NLHF-funded Victorian Blogging project. I had for many years been fascinated with the Victorian period, so I was very excited to be working on the project. I was asked to work with the pamphlets and encourage participants to write their own creative responses to them. These pamphlets covered a range of themes, such as women's rights, contraception, suffrage, religion and freedom of the press but were all relevant to today. They were quite lengthy and some of the language slightly inaccessible, so I had to think about how the participants would read, absorb and create something new from them in a thoughtful and engaging way.

I began by pulling out interesting quotations from the pamphlets and scattering them on the desks for participants to pick up and read. I then asked them to sit at the desk they felt most drawn to and revealed the author and pamphlet they would be working with. I spoke about each author for five minutes to set the scene and gave the participants a pack of material, which included images, biographies, poetry and writing prompts. I gave them time to read and think about the material and share their ideas, then it was down to some serious writing.

Thomas Paine, Common Sense

Beginning with Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, written in 1776, participants explored Paine's early life and sought to make connections between his childhood and the man he became. A short story was created during the workshop entitled *Accusative*, which drew on Paine's childhood poem *Here lies the body of John Crow* and imagined Paine as a school boy cornered by three bullies. The story ends with the young Tom Paine taking out his frustrations with the bullies on a noisy crow in the tree overhead, speculating whether his revolutionary ideas were born as a result of his school day experiences. It was inspired by the quotation attributed to Aristotle: 'Give me a child until he is 7 and I will show you the man.'

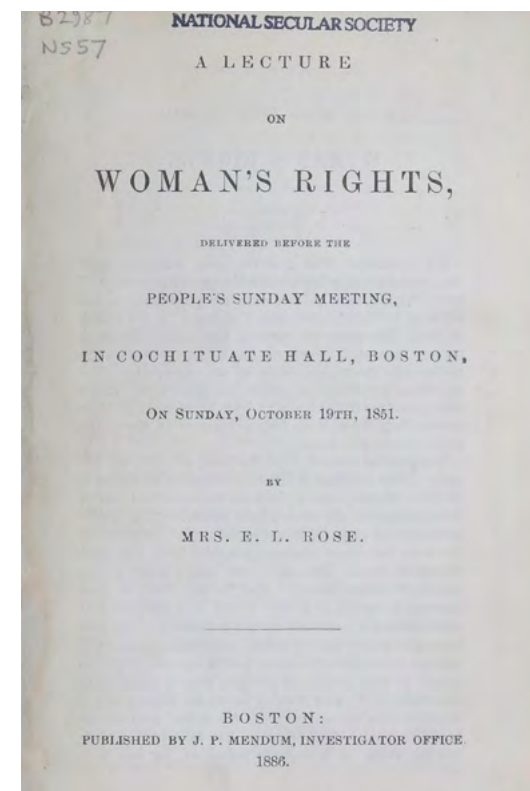


Thomas Paine

Ernestine Rose, A Lecture on Woman's Rights

The next pamphlet was Ernestine Rose's *A Lecture on Woman's Rights* written in 1851 and addressing topics of suffrage, property ownership, self-governance and financial freedom. Rose's childhood in Poland and her independent spirit provided much inspiration. With a spray of rose water to provide a sensory stimulus, the following poem was written by Elizabeth Uter about Ernestine's career manufacturing room deodorizers.

*When I drop rose petals into water
I am simmering and distilling them,
they will not flush or even turn to pink.
I make up this delicate decoction
only to hide from you the husband smell,
the fusty rule of men, lording over
all and in the very place where you dwell.
Not many know the myriads uses,
the applications of miracle balms,
the calming tonics to make the mind bloom
in cobwebbed corners of the spousal tomb.
Soon, ladies, if you wish for potency
and agency within your marriage vow,
come, taste the touch of freedom on your skin.
Let me list the ways rose petal water
will lift you from your groggy, wedded haze:
it will revive you in your daily life,
make you the true ruler in your house
from morn 'til noon and night, the trousered wife,
spritz or spray his flagrant, manly foulness,
give your twitching nose a new found prowess.*



Pamphlet, reference number N557. Ernestine Rose, *A lecture on woman's rights* (1886).

Charles Knowlton, Fruits of Philosophy

Fruits of Philosophy, a treatise on contraception, written by American doctor Charles Knowlton in 1830 and published in England by Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh in 1877, was our third pamphlet. The pamphlet is rich with detail about the female anatomy and advocates birth control for social and economic reasons. Combining this with biographical information about Knowlton and his wife, the writers were inspired to create dialogues, poems and stories about man's ownership of the female body during the Victorian era. The below poem by Michelle Crowther is inspired by Carol Ann Duffy's poetry anthology *The World's Wife* and imagines what Tabitha Knowlton thought of her husband's treatise. It is entitled *A Fruitful Connection*, Knowlton's term for the moment of conception.

*According to my husband, my Fallopian tubes could admit a hog's bristle –
a flexible and resilient fibre, used in the manufacture of artist's brushes.
These bristles have an excellent capacity for holding paint, particularly oil,
which requires a stiffness unavailable in softer, sable brushes.
Using these fibres,
paint is vigorously applied upon the canvas, reproducing the artist's impressions
of all he sees.
My husband was never an artist, but a skilled anatomist, or at least I thought he was
from the number of bodies he brought home and dissected. I should have wondered
at his methods – the decomposing body in the suitcase, the number of chopped up
pudenda lying on the kitchen table, but I trusted that this was normal behaviour for a
medical student, even when they imprisoned him. As for me I scrubbed and bleached
the table with my cleaning brushes, washing away the stains left by my sex.
Charles got three month's hard labour for writing his book. It was a relief not
to syringe away his secretions. I had endured a variety of concoctions – alum, pearl-ash,
white oak bark, nut galls and sulphate of zinc. And at last I could reclaim the salt cellar
for my cooking. He argued that contraception cost nearly nothing; was safe
and required no sacrifice. In short, all responsibility was mine and pleasure his.
There was no delicate sponge, moistened with water for me.
My pear with the long neck was the inspiration for the fruits of his philosophy,
yet I am only remembered as the mother of his five children.*

As a result of reading Knowlton’s treatise, Elizabeth Uter was interested in the words used for female body parts and how often these have been named after men. Here is an extract from her poem.

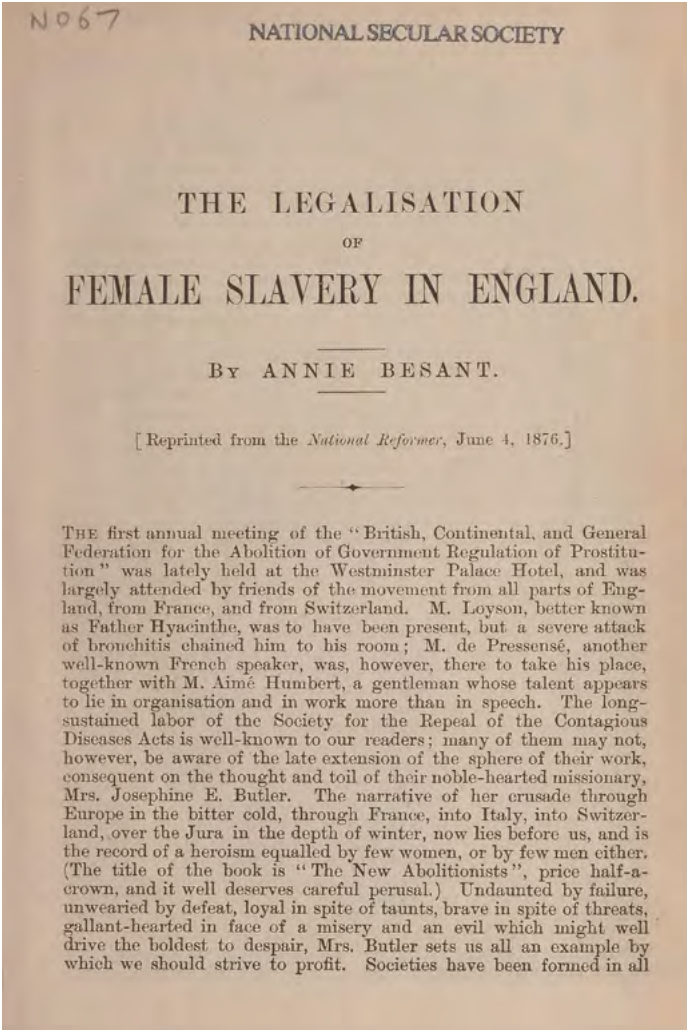
*A woman’s body is packed to bursting with men,
there’s an awful lot of them knocking together,
a meeting of the male mind and thought
to form a quorum particularly in the ladies’ inner sanctum,
Have you heard these words? A veritable roll call of old school
boys
– getting under my skin, causing pressure sores:
Alcock, Bartholin, de Graaf, Douglas, Fallopian,
Grafenberg, Langer,
Montgomery and Skene and there’s many more.
These science men have the female anatomy mapped, inside
and out,
in their name alone, maybe for ego’s sake? But boy, do they
have clout.
They’ve climbed the Everest of Reproduction, for the first time
it seems
and then again and again until forever, amen.
Their script is like an inked tattoo within our flesh and bone,
a little kinky, no? What perks? What kicks?
And I’ll tell you this, yes, these fellas above, have us stitched up,
love.
But seriously, why should we care?*

Annie Besant, The Legalisation of Female Slavery in England

Sex work and the Contagious Diseases Acts were the theme of our next pamphlet, written by Annie Besant in 1876. Inspired by the struggles that Annie faced as a wife and mother, Lesley Strachan wrote a poem about Annie’s decision to leave her husband and son behind in 1873 as a result of her loss of faith in God. A photograph of a view from the top of a staircase provided the visual stimulus for the poem. One can imagine Annie justifying her decision as she takes each step down the stairs.

*As his wife, I have a role, a duty to fulfil.
As God, with no provocation, threatened my child.
As her mother, my trust and faith has died.
As an ecclesiast, he ordered me to put my own beliefs aside.
As a fanatic, I cannot be a hypocrite.
As a husband, he hurled it as an insult.
I caught it at the door and wear it with pride.*

Michelle Crowther is the Learning and Research Librarian for Humanities and Languages at Canterbury Christ Church University. She is a creative writing practitioner who has run several workshops on writing about the past using objects, old newspapers and documents as inspiration. She is currently studying for a PhD in the literary culture of Canterbury in the 1870s.



Pamphlet, reference number N067. Annie Besant, The legalisation of female slavery in England (1885).

‘An emancipated slave’, The Curse of My Early Life

The Curse of my Early Life by an emancipated slave, published in 1876, is a passionately-written first person account of the effects of being subjected to orthodox Christian beliefs from a young age. Ying drew on her own religious upbringing as a Roman Catholic in the Philippines and wrote down ten words that represented faith, creating a sentence for each word, which she crafted into a poem.

Conway Hall Humanist Library and Archives was an oasis of calm and a perfect place to write. For me, the workshops were a highlight of my summer. I have been inspired by the freethinkers and their pamphlets and I hope that I inspired others to feel the same.

This project has been made possible by £88,000 funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

This generous funding has enabled us to digitise our fascinating collection of nineteenth-century pamphlets and make them freely available online and to engage hundreds of people in free workshops, courses and talks to bring the collection to life. To access the digitised pamphlets online, go to **conwayhallcollections.omeka.net** and view the Victorian Blogging collection.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS AT CONWAY HALL			
EXHIBITIONS			
6 Sep–31 Jan		Victorian Blogging: The Pamphleteers Who Dared To Dream Of A Better World	
On temporary loan in the Library		Monument for Chelsea: A Sculpture of Chelsea Manning <ul style="list-style-type: none">• John Reardon	
THINKING ON SUNDAY			
1 Sep	15.00—16.30	Stop Being Reasonable: Stories of How We Really Change Our Minds <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eleanor Gordon-Smith and Neil Denny	
15 Sep	15.00—16.30	Brexit Without the Bull <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gavin Esler	
29 Sep	15.00—16.30	Mask Off: Masculinity Redefined <ul style="list-style-type: none">• JJ Bola	
13 Oct	15.00—16.30	In Praise of Walking: The New Science of How We Walk and Why It's Good For Us <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shane O'Mara	
THINKING ON MONDAY			
16 Sep	19.30–21.00	Lawless: A Lawyer's Fight For Justice in a War Zone <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kimberley Motley	

September 2019

- 8th 6.30PM **Maggini Quartet** BEETHOVEN • BERKELEY • TCHAIKOVSKY
- 15th 5.30PM **Robert Hugill • FREE PRE-CONCERT TALK**
6.30PM **I Musicanti** BEETHOVEN
- 22nd 6.30PM **Tippett Quartet & Peter Cigleris** BENJAMIN • DURRANT • BRAHMS
- 29th 6.30PM **Delta Piano Trio** HAYDN • VASKS • CORIGLIANO • BRAHMS

October

- 6th 6.30PM **Piatti Quartet & Simon Callaghan**
TURINA • BRAHMS • SHOSTAKOVICH
- 13th 6.30PM **Trio Concertante** BEETHOVEN • SHOSTAKOVICH • BRAHMS
- 20th 5.30PM **Peter Quantrill • FREE PRE-CONCERT TALK**
6.30PM **Chamber Philharmonic Europe** MOZART • JANÁČEK • BRAHMS
- 27th 5.30PM **Royal College of Music musicians • FREE PRE-CONCERT RECITAL**
6.30PM **Timothy Ridout & Jâms Coleman** GLINKA • SHOSTAKOVICH • FRANCK

November

- 3rd 6.30PM **Camerata Alma Viva** MOZART • HANDEL • KABALEVSKY • MONTI
- 10th 5.30PM **Robert Hugill • FREE PRE-CONCERT TALK**
6.30PM **Rosetti Ensemble** MOZART • BRIDGE • DEBUSSY • SCHUMANN
- 17th 5.30PM **Royal College of Music musicians • FREE PRE-CONCERT RECITAL**
6.30PM **Carducci Quartet** MOERAN • BORODIN • DVOŘÁK
- 24th 6.30PM **Linos Piano Trio** BEETHOVEN • MENDELSSOHN • RAVEL

December

- 1st 6.30PM **Fizwilliam Quartet & Simon Callaghan**
HAYDN • BEETHOVEN • ELGAR
- 8th 5.30PM **Robert Hugill • FREE PRE-CONCERT TALK**
6.30PM **Arcis Saxophone Quartet**
REICH • DVOŘÁK • BERNSTEIN • BARBER • GERSHWIN
- 15th 5.30PM **Royal College of Music musicians • FREE PRE-CONCERT RECITAL**
6.30PM **Piatti Quartet** SUK • SHOSTAKOVICH • SCHUBERT • **SEASON FINALE**