

# Ethical Record

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## *YouTubers – How YouTube Shook up TV and Created a New Generation of Stars*

*by Chris Stokel-Walker p4*



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To the Members of the Society: Please note that the date of the next AGM will be 4 February 2020.

The views expressed in this journal are not necessarily those of the Society. Photo by Christian Wiediger on Unsplash. 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

# Laying the Foundations for the Next 100 Years at Conway Hall

**Jeff Davy**

In 2018 the Trustees created a new full-time role, now titled Fundraising & Marketing Manager, with the idea of (re)introducing the idea of fundraising by the Ethical Society to contribute to the promotion of our charitable object through events and partnerships, and the upkeep, renovation and modernisation of the building.

With an eye on the centenary of Conway Hall in 2029, we are laying the foundations for a further National Lottery Heritage Fund application - to provide Resilience funding for the support and identification of our strategic requirements whilst continuing the day-to-day operation of the Society and building - and for an Appeal Fund, which will seek donations from members and the wider public. As far as we are aware, not since 1929 will the Society have asked for a formal public subscription such as this.

We are now in a position to do this because of the ongoing professionalisation of the Society's administration, including its Trustees, full and part-time staff and volunteers, with new strategies, systems, technologies and training being vital to this transformation. For example, the Society's clear visual identity, outward-looking marketing and use of a professional voice across different platforms, the Ethical Record, our website and social media.

A key contributor to our approach to this has been an Arts Council-funded training project run by the Arts Marketing Association, which we applied for and were accepted on to. Its title, Shared Ambition, refers to the

combination of Marketing and Fundraising approaches within an organisation, usually across departments but, in our case, in one role (with, of course, much support from other colleagues).

Over several months, including training sessions, mentoring and also sharing ideas and problems with other Arts/Charity organisations, the programme challenged our assumptions and tested our thinking, helping to identify the strengths and weaknesses of our organisation from a fundraising perspective.

What we learned from this has informed, for example, our work to define the Society's Vision & Mission and the decision to hold a public consultation of our members and wider audience, to which we had over 500 responses, including that Conway Hall was "The 'Cathedral' of secular culture and thought".

One of the most obvious, physical manifestations of this, should you visit Conway Hall, is the kiosk in our foyer, which has Marketing and Fundraising in the same unit. Combining an event/room information screen, forthcoming event information and contactless payment system, enabling us to take tracked, Individual donations, it has led to a realisation and understanding from everyone that sees it that we're a charity, requiring support and donations from members and the wider public alike.

Another, less visible, achievement has been a membership increase of 25% since the end of 2018 which, as with the preparations for the Appeal Fund and Centenary, puts us in a much better condition to continue in Conway Hall for another 100 years.



**Jeff Davy** is the Fundraising and Marketing Manager at Conway Hall, bringing with him many years of events and marketing experience. He has run his own events business and worked in a wide range of venues, here and abroad and is also a former professional photographer — but, nowadays, has swapped taking pictures of musicians for authors, philosophers and artists at Conway Hall instead.



# YouTubers — How YouTube Shook up TV and Created a New Generation of Stars

Chris Stokel-Walker

Please note: this article contains strong language.

**The world was very different 15 years ago. If you found yourself bored on an evening, you could turn on the television and select from a small number of channels that were showing programmes they'd picked at a time of their choosing. If you wanted to watch it later, you'd have to set a timer to record the programme on a VHS, and play it back at a later date.**

Today, if you're bored – on the bus, toilet or in your bedroom – you can log onto one website and have the world's biggest cinema screen at your fingertips, simultaneously playing almost the entirety of human history at just a few taps. The site is YouTube, and it has shaken up our world, obliterated TV and Hollywood, and created a new generation of stars.

More than 500 hours of footage are uploaded to YouTube every single minute of every single day. Some of it is slickly-produced, repackaged versions of those same TV shows you'd be watching 15 years ago, or new programmes produced by traditional broadcasters exclusively for the website (TV executives are nothing if not a pragmatic bunch: they know when the tide has turned against them). Some are by amateurs, or one-man bands who have been given extraordinary fortunes thanks to a stroke of luck, a lot of hard graft, and the power of an all-encompassing platform.

Because that is what YouTube is. Two billion of us log onto the site every month – in a world where half the global population doesn't have an internet connection, and a billion and a half more live in China, where YouTube is technically banned. (The country has its own, vibrant network of online video platforms, many of which look incredibly similar to YouTube. Its ecosystem of small screen celebrities is equally vast.)

It is a modern media phenomenon. And it has shaken up the entirety of society.

It all started with a home video recorded at the elephant enclosure of a zoo. There, YouTube's co-founders recorded a video staring at the pachyderms. The footage is uninspiring, and wouldn't cut through the morass of content to be seen by the five billion sets of eyeballs the top 5,000 YouTube channels receive every single day on the site. But it kickstarted something much bigger. In 2005, YouTube.com launched, and it slowly built up a cult following of curious people

looking to express themselves creatively.

These were the weirdos, the oddballs – the people who'd sit at the back of classrooms, or who would perform skits for their own entertainment after work. Except now they could reach an audience of likeminded individuals. And soon, they could reach an audience of even more people.

The site was already massive by 2011, and grew 500% more in the next five years. Today, YouTube is as likely to be home to Hollywood celebrities like Will Smith and Jack Black as it is the homegrown heroes that made the site so popular.

The reason for that is recognition. Many people – particularly the young – don't see the point in appointment viewing on television. They're tired of seeing the things that a middle-aged channel controller (invariably a white man in a suit) wants them to see. They don't want the same personalities presenting programmes that they've always seen. YouTube manages, even as it reaches maturity and is minting millionaires – the biggest of whom is a seven-year-old called Ryan who opens toys on camera – to keep some of its scrappy, backyard spirit.

But things are changing. 2019 was the year in which YouTube's heretofore biggest name, a Swede called PewDiePie to his friends, was usurped by a Bollywood music and movie studio called T-Series for the mantle of YouTube's most popular channel. Other YouTube content producers are selling up shop for millions, having made their money. One Spanish language comedy channel was sold for nearly \$10 million earlier this year to another YouTube company that has turned the property into a cross-cultural monolith: their first movie comes out this autumn. And Will Smith is the publicly acceptable face of the website, wheeled out for advertisers to keep them sweet and to assure them this radical website isn't all that different from the system they already know.



Photo by Zoe Holling on Unsplash

*“Today, if you're bored... you can log onto one website and have the world's biggest cinema screen at your fingertips, simultaneously playing almost the entirety of human history at just a few taps.”*

In part this is simply evolution: the young upstart is becoming older. But it's also to preserve YouTube's own future.

YouTube is where harassed, stressed, tired parents turn to when they need a break from childminding. It's eminently easy to place your child down in front of the television, tablet or a mobile phone screen and load up a cartoon for them to watch while you quickly do the dishes, check that important business email or grab a speedy shower.

But sometimes the content that children come across isn't wholesome. It's frequently inappropriate. But only four in 10 parents of children aged 4-12 bother to check what their child is watching, and one in 20 of us never do.

We should. In 2019, researchers analysed thousands of videos aimed at toddlers aged between 1 and 5. Many of the videos starred children's favourite TV characters like Peppa Pig. They then mimicked the way children click around YouTube, and the way the algorithm recommends content to users. In doing so, they found that there's a 3.5% chance your child encounters inappropriate footage within 10 clicks of viewing a child-friendly video.

To its credit, YouTube is improving things – slowly. When I interviewed the researchers behind the study earlier this year, that proportion was higher, and the risk of coming across age-inappropriate content greater. (The researchers are now tracking YouTube's algorithmic



# Done Good

## Kerry Hudson

Please note: this article contains strong language.

**Kerry Hudson spoke at the Thinking on Sunday event ‘Lowborn – Growing Up, Getting Away and Returning to Britain’s Poorest Towns’ on 16th June 2019, where she discussed her book *Lowborn* with James Bloodworth, author of *Hired: Six Months Undercover in Low-Wage Britain and The Myth of Meritocracy*. Her essay below addresses social mobility in the arts.**

**“That moment of understanding about how caged I was by location, economy, class, by where and to whom I’d been born, and that it was a captivity I was not even meant to know about.”**

The art of my childhood was stories: listening as a story was passed around my family, observing as it was expanded, embellished, pulled apart and stitched together over full decades. My art was the exoticism of Coronation Street, EastEnders and Brookside — where people had struggles I recognised — money, heartache and illness — on streets I did not. It was dancing for hours to the tape of ‘War of the Worlds’ imagining my body, wrapped in a second hand pink dressing gown smelling of pre-pubescent sweat, was telling the story too. It was the eight books I’d loan from the library each week, their heft piled up my chest, books chosen for their covers and titles: anything from Toni Morrison to Mary Higgins Clarke. My art was the recited Shakespeare of a homeless man who smelled of the garlic bulbs he ate whole and who said, alongside the bard’s sonnets, and no less profound or comedic, ‘This is no’ a melon,’ while tapping his slick yellowish-grey hair. It was seeing the musical *Blood Brothers* in the West End on a school trip. It was watching the *The Singing Detective* when I was eight from the top bunk in a homeless hostel and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* lying on a sour, scratchy carpet in a Coatbridge council flat aged twelve. My art was sitting through *Boys from the Blackstuff* week after week in silent, still, horrified recognition.

I took it all, and everything else less recognised as art in the world around me, in. It sometimes felt that I stored it within my body itself — in a huge deep ball in my belly, within the slats of my ribs, in the bitten quick of my dirty fingernails. How else could those growing-pains, that teenage feeling of invasion, be explained? That sensation of being the host for something I had not invited and which would do strange things to me? A little knowledge

is a dangerous thing and, like having one drink when you’d wanted the whole bottle, my scant access to creativity left me desperate, gasping. That moment of understanding about how caged I was by location, economy, class, by where and to whom I’d been born, and that it was a captivity I was not even meant to know about. The invisible unspoken captivity which tells you from the earliest time — you do this, but not that. My own cage was fortified by my first eighteen years of violence, both at home and on the streets, the fear of hunger and where we would sleep, of sexual threat, assault and violence. Of maternal and paternal rejection and mental illness: theirs and my own. Of never fitting in and having nowhere else to go even if I’d had a way of getting there, which I never did.

Still, ignoring the fact I only had two GCSEs (taken at college after leaving school at fifteen), I decided I would get to university in London and, somehow, would conspire to live a different sort of life from the one that had been meant for me. It might sound meagre, it does to me typing this, except that back then it was like saying I was going to fashion myself some wings and fly to the sun.

The only course I could get onto was a BTEC in Performing Arts in a town an hour and a half away by bus. I got accepted because the course was run by Ian Gordon, the Liverpoolian spit of Kirk Douglas, and a teacher of many decades who recognised my potential despite my lack of qualifications and took a leap for me. I believe in the power of radicalisation because that is what he taught me and the others who learnt with me. He approached every day with us — kids who were out of options and not considered academic enough for anything other than the simplest, example-based, education — with the fervour of a true believer. And he did believe. He believed art was for everyone. That in every kid, no matter how monosyllabic, damaged or angry, there was the spark of creativity that might become explosive with the right kindling.

In the previous eighteen months I had experienced two sexual assaults, I had been raped and had carried two pregnancies to eight weeks — mentally and physically gruelling experiences — and then had them scraped out of my womb. I cried all the time, I was often terrified for no reason, cold fear climbing over my skin. I was angry and raw and hurting. But still I wanted more for myself.

I travelled from home at 6.30am to get to the theatre where we studied, would wander for a few hours around the unfamiliar grey town centre and then return to the

changes more closely to see how action taken is improving or worsening the YouTube experience.) But the question should be why does this inappropriate content exist in the first place? And how does it end up on children’s screens?

Part of it comes back to that problem of age. Technically, YouTube is not designed to be used by children. But such is the way of life that it has become more popular with children than almost any other age group. And therefore a platform designed for adults has to bend to the demands of an increasingly large child audience. Protections that wouldn’t need to be in place were the rules around YouTube’s age limit enforced need to shelter those who sneak onto the site in their masses without adhering to the rules.

A British app developer, Matthew Reynolds, has coded a program that parses the content of the most popular videos on YouTube in the UK each month and checked the language used in them to see whether it’s appropriate for children. To the surprise of no-one, it isn’t. A quarter of the most popular videos on YouTube in June contained the word “fuck”, a fifth “shit” and around one in 20 “cunt” or the n-word. All are inappropriate for young children, and yet they stand a chance of encountering it on YouTube.

It’s an issue prevalent on other platforms, too. One parent I spoke to recently expressed concern about TikTok, the shortform video sharing app that has become popular with children even younger than those on YouTube. TikTok ticks based on easily-replicable memes that travel around the app. One day, at a nine-year-old’s birthday party where phones were meant to be banned, one child flouted the rules and sneaked in their phone. They opened up TikTok, and began showing the other kids. Soon, the game the children were playing was one based on a TikTok video they’d seen, tricking their more gullible peers into saying the n-word. The parent was horrified.

One of the major subjects I’ve been reporting on for the last few weeks is why this gap between social media platforms like YouTube and traditional television exists. Why is there a gulf in the standard of content allowed on one and not the other?

It turns out that there are various reasons, not least the way in which YouTube has flattened the hierarchy that used to exist around the creative industries.

There was a time when, to get a television show commissioned and broadcast, you would need to go

through several hoops. Countless executives would have to approve it, and it’s likely the program makers would implement a check through standards and practices — ensuring there is no inappropriate content in the show. For YouTube, all you need is a video camera or the ability to animate, and an internet connection.

It’s for this reason that we saw the rise of “ElsaGate”, where beloved cartoon characters were being placed in inappropriate videos targeted at children. A former YouTube executive told me he was horrified when he sat down to watch a cartoon with his eight-year-old daughter and saw a princess rescued from a horde of angry dwarves by a handsome prince — who then proceeded to rape her.

And it’s a problem that still persists today. American YouTuber Jarvis Johnson posted a video this week highlighting the issue with channels that claim to animate real life stories submitted by their followers. This can include stories of how illegal immigrants decided to get pregnant at the age of 12 in order to stay in the United States, or tasteless videos claiming that their grandmother was in fact a man who chopped off their own leg in an accident.

The issue is that people will watch these videos after they’re recommended by YouTube’s algorithm. And when these videos are watched, they make money for their creators — who are often based in eastern Europe and produce their content on a shoestring budget, making videos that are designed to shock and appal. The creators of the videos aren’t thinking about the consequences, or the children sat down in front of the screen at the other end of the process. They’re just thinking about how to make money.

Some of the recent proposals, not least by the US Federal Trade Commission, suggest fining YouTube for its child issues. That won’t do much for a company that is backed by Google, one of the richest companies in the world. And YouTube is not incentivised to do much anyway.

For my book, *YouTubers*, I surveyed 3,000 British parents about who they thought was responsible for the content uploaded to YouTube. Most said the platform themselves, then others said the creators who upload the content. A significant proportion said both were equally liable.

None said they were responsible. Perhaps they should. Pay more attention to what your children watch on YouTube — because no one else is.

**Chris Stokel-Walker is one of the world’s most respected and best connected journalists in the world of YouTube. He has been reporting on YouTube for more than five years, breaking news of multi-million-dollar business deals and writing agenda leading stories on the site’s latest trends and controversies. He has spent more than two years meticulously researching and writing his book *YouTubers: How YouTube shook up TV* and created a new generation of stars.**







theatre for evening rehearsals. I took part in every play I could and got home each night at midnight.

This was the time of New Deal benefits and in order for me to qualify for my sixty pounds a week I had to pretend I was on a technical lighting course. I was still only able to continue studying thanks to the kind collusion of someone at the Job Centre who quietly pushed my documentation through that loophole in the system. I have never been as poor or hungry as I was then. In my second year, unable to keep up the travel or the emotional demands of home, I moved into a bedsit near the theatre where each morning I woke to the frantic cawing of seagulls.

I never had enough money to feed the extortionate gas meter and so heat the flat or use the cooker — besides I had no pans, pots, plates, cutlery. I lived on McDonald's chips or tightly-clingfilmed cheese and onion rolls from the local shop. For a brief period after I moved in someone would knock at my door at 3 or 4 or 5am. They would bang and bang at the flimsy wood until I crept out of bed. There were no mobile phones then, there was no landline, no one who would come if I screamed in that block of transient bedsits. I stood on the other side, sure I could hear their breathing. I'd make my voice as tough, as furious, as 'I will kill you if you try to come in here' as I could.

'What?'

'Is that Mark?'

'Who? No.'

'Is he there?'

'No. Now fuck off. I'm warning you. Fuck off.'

And they would, only to try the next night and the next. After the first time one of my classmates offered me a baseball bat to have by the door. As though I would know how to swing it at an intruder's head. Don't worry, I told him, I'll sleep with a knife by me. Then I went to learn about Laban Movement technique or to study my lines for a Pinter play.

Maybe a month after I moved into the bedsit I came home to find two police officers outside my door.

The female officer turned to me, her yellow jacket luminous in that dingy hallway. 'Did you know the lad upstairs?' What I remember is how flat, how matter-of-fact, her face was. She might have been asking me if I wanted the last biscuit or where I had got my top from. 'He hanged himself.'

'No. Oh God. That's awful.'

She was quiet then, and I let myself into my freezing

bedsit clutching my cheese and onion roll for dinner. I was still starving.

While all this was going on Ian did everything in his power to keep us on the course: plays, film, music, TV, dance, books he loaned knowing he'd never have them back. His belief in us was extraordinary. At the core of everything he did there was politics and authentic anger. He knew we were at war with ourselves, the world around us and with the place we'd been born into. He made us good soldiers.

I believed for a long time that the greatest aim in life was to be genteel, soft, delicate. To me it seemed that if you'd reached a point where you could move through life without violence, then that was an art form in itself. But only in the last few years have I realised that my own art, my writing, comes from the fight. A vulgarity I nurture: fury, brutality, terror, deep dark places. That each time I sit down to work it is those things I put on the page, so that I might live my life without those things gnawing their way out from inside.

I graduated from my BTEC with a distinction and an unconditional place at a university in London, along with the bank overdraft and student loan — both of which I'm still paying off — that would permit me to take it up.

I met Ian again a few years ago. He'd had a liver transplant and showed me the scar, splitting his torso into three clean pieces. 'I feel like fucking Frankenstein's monster. I don't recognise myself,' he'd said, with tears in his eyes. I wanted to tell him I understood. We were all still fighting, wearing the scars that life had given us. Instead I told him: Thank You. I told him his courage, kindness and vision had changed my life.

In case you are wondering, you do not magically get the key to that cage even after you've done all the work to prove your worth. To leave that cage you must rage, kick, bite and scream your way out. The trouble with the romanisation of the 'poor girl done good' or of the 'starving artist' is that it conveniently overlooks the teeth marks, the blood and puss and piss we are covered in when we finally emerge. Polite society is exactly that — it smiles and shakes hands while pretending that it cannot smell the reek of someone who has been trapped for decades. Someone who has now arrived in their neighbourhood with hunger in their eyes looking for plenty of what many will consider is not theirs to have. But I, and many others with me, are still starving, and we're going to take it anyway.



**Kerry Hudson** was born in Aberdeen. Her first novel, *Tony Hogan Bought Me an Ice-cream Float Before He Stole My Ma*, won the Scottish Mortgage Investment Trust First Book Award and was shortlisted for an array of prizes including the *Guardian* First Book Award and the Sky Arts Awards. *Thirst*, her second novel, won the prestigious Prix Femina Etranger. *Lowborn* is her first work of non-fiction.



# Moncure Conway, Freethought, and Race in the Nineteenth Century

Nathan G. Alexander

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

**The following article is based on the lecture Nathan Alexander gave at Conway Hall on 6th August titled ‘Race in a Godless World: Atheism, Race, and Civilization, 1850–1914’, which is the title of his forthcoming book.**

Historians have often pondered the question of whether secularization – the falling away of Christianity – helped to open the way for racism. Christianity had offered a universalist message which said that all humans were created in God’s image and were descended from Adam and Eve, meaning all humans were equal. As the influence of Christianity declined in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, some thought, this allowed for racism to take hold.

Whether there is truth to this story is a question I take up in my recent book, *Race in a Godless World: Atheism, Race, and Civilization, 1850-1914* (Manchester University Press and NYU Press, 2019). There I chart the racial views of atheists and other freethinkers in the second half of the nineteenth century, with a focus on Britain and the United States. In this article, I use the life of Moncure Conway, a leading freethinker of the time and namesake of the Conway Hall Ethical Society, to bring out a number of themes from the book.

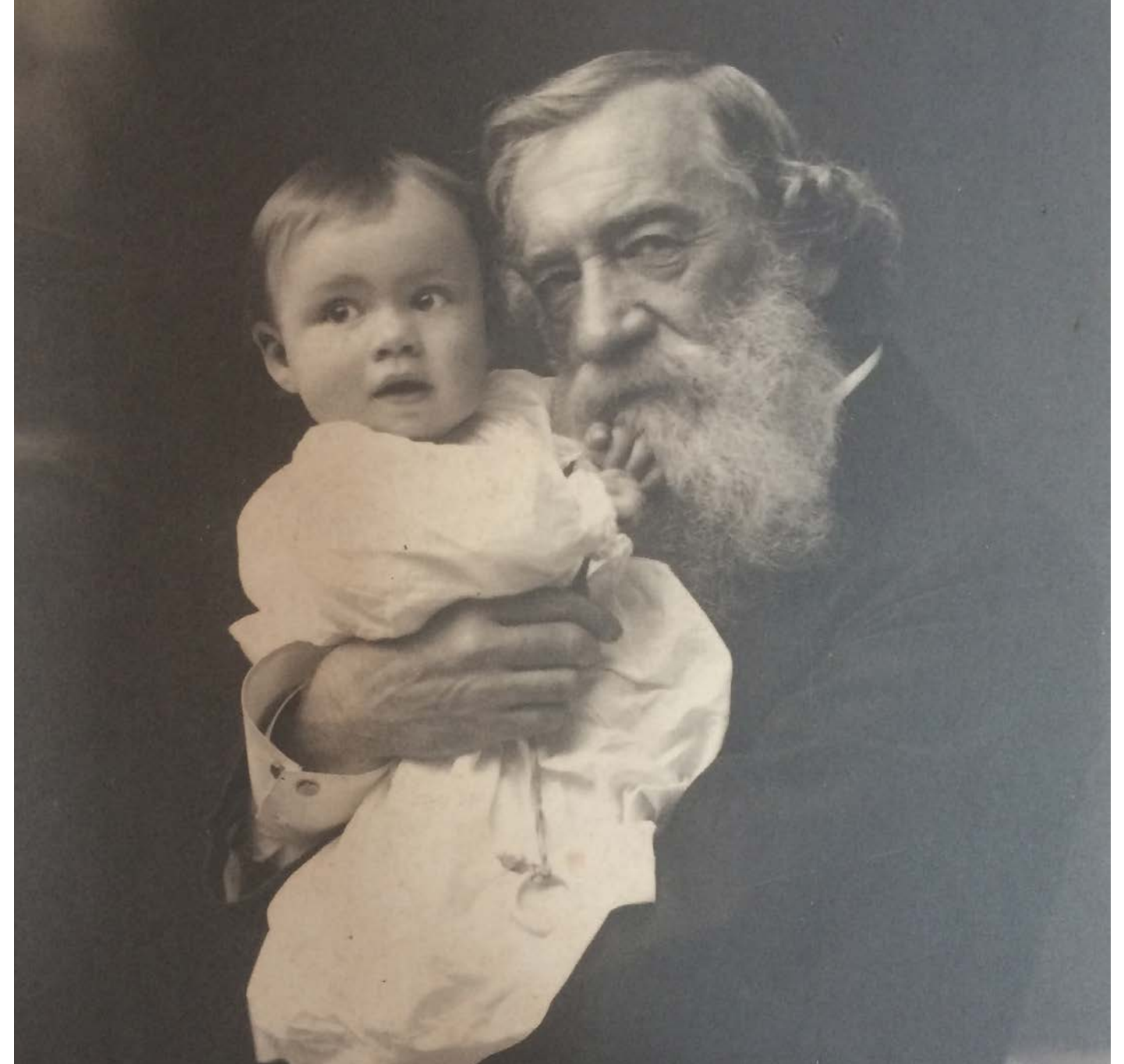
Conway’s life roughly covers the timespan of my book, as he was born in 1832 and died in 1907. He was born to a wealthy, slave-owning family in Virginia in the United States, but would become an opponent of slavery and racism. In the 1860s, he moved to Britain and then spent most of the remainder of his life there, serving as the leader of the South Place Chapel, which today is the Conway Hall Ethical Society. Conway’s life shows that the simple argument of secularization leading to racism is not tenable, and in fact, in his case, the opposite seems to be true.

As he wrote in his autobiography, over the course of his life, he had made “[a] pilgrimage from proslavery to antislavery enthusiasm, from Methodism to Freethought [...]” (M. D. Conway, vol. 1, 1905, p. iv) As a young man, Conway became a traveling Methodist minister, yet in the 1850s, his religion was falling away and he was becoming increasingly opposed to slavery. He would

leave the Methodist church in 1853 and moved to Massachusetts, where he continued his education at Harvard. At Harvard, Conway’s religion was further eroded while at the same time he became more strongly opposed to slavery as he mingled with anti-slavery leaders. After Harvard, Conway became a Unitarian preacher. Unitarianism was a more liberal form of Christianity that rejected many orthodox Christian ideas, including the idea of a trinity of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit being one, with radical Unitarians even asserting that Jesus was not divine and that the Bible was man-made. At this time, Conway was on the radical wing and he considered himself a rationalist and freethinker.

His views about slavery and religion caused a rift with his family and his community back in Virginia. In late 1854, his father wrote him a letter saying he should not return home if his views on slavery did not change: “[...] it is my sincere advice to you not to come here until there is reason to believe your opinions have undergone material changes on the subject of slavery. [...] Those opinions give me more uneasiness just now than your horrible views on the subject of religion, bad as these last are.” (M. D. Conway, vol. 1, 1905, p. 188) Conway did return briefly the following year, but soon left because of the tensions created in the community by his presence.

In the United States, the growing divisions between the North and South came to a head in 1860, with the election of Abraham Lincoln as president and the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. Conway was a pacifist and hated the war, especially since, early on, Lincoln’s declared goal was not to end slavery but only to preserve the unity of the country. In the early months of the war, Conway urged Lincoln to declare all the slaves free as a tactic in the war, with the idea that this would destabilize the South and bring the war to an immediate end. He authored a number of pamphlets making this case, and in early 1862, Conway, along with another abolitionist, even met with Lincoln to put this argument to him directly. Initially rejecting the idea, Lincoln would indeed later adopt this tactic in 1863 with the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed slaves in Confederate territory. (It should, however, be clear that



Moncure Conway holding a baby

many others also suggested this course of action, not just Conway.) During the war, as fighting moved closer to Conway’s family home in Virginia, his family members fled. About 30 of Conway’s father’s slaves escaped into nearby Washington, DC. Learning this, Conway helped them travel safely through the state of Maryland (which then still allowed slavery) and settle in the free state of Ohio.

In early 1863, Conway traveled to London on behalf of the abolitionists to attempt to discourage the British government from supporting the southern side in the war. At this time in Britain, there was debate about whether the war was pursued primarily to end slavery or to crush the South’s independence. Conway wanted to convince the British it was the former. While in London, Conway contacted the envoy of the southern Confederacy there and proposed a deal that if the South abolished slavery, all of the anti-slavery advocates in the North would call for the end of the war and the

recognition of the South’s independence. This proposal was rejected, however, and when news of the offer became public, Conway suffered some public embarrassment since he did not really have authority to speak on behalf of all abolitionists. After this incident, he decided he could not move back to the US. He no longer belonged in the South given his anti-slavery stance, he thought, and his staunch opposition to the war had set him apart even from his anti-slavery comrades in the North.

While in London, he became the leader of the South Place Chapel, which had moved from a Unitarian to an increasingly rationalistic creed, in 1864. He would continue to lead the congregation until 1885, and then from 1893 to 1897. In London, Conway moved in many important literary, religious, and scientific circles. One of these was the Anthropological Society of London, begun by James Hunt in 1863. This society actually advocated scientific racism. Hunt, for example, wrote a

# London Housing — Corruption and Crisis

George Turner

**The cost of housing has been a long-term problem. The proportion of income spent on housing has increased for each generation since the Victorian era. By the early 2000s the amount young people spent on housing hit 20% of income on average, with many spending much more.**

By this time, there was already a widespread recognition that we had a problem in our housing market. For the last 15 years around 3 in 4 people have consistently told pollsters that they believe that the UK is in the middle of a housing crisis.

Over the last twenty years things have continued to get worse.

Home ownership rates amongst the young have collapsed. In 1991, 67% of people aged 25-34 owned their own home. This declined to 59% in 2001, and collapsed to 36% by 2014.

The average deposit has skyrocketed, with the mean deposit in London now at around £100,000. In the social sector, 300,000 households are living in overcrowded conditions.

## The Politics of Planning

This problem has not gone unnoticed by politicians of all political backgrounds, who frequently cite the housing crisis as being a top priority for government at all levels. Almost all politicians appear to believe that the crisis can be solved by a simple prescription: build more housing. However, rather than build some itself, government relies on others to do it for them: property developers.

The pressure to do something, combined with the reluctance of government to launch major house building programmes, gives the development industry a huge political influence over policy making. The relationship between the development industry and government has become so deep, that the DCLG even allowed lobbyists from the development industry into the department to write government policy.

A target of the development community has been the planning system. The argument put forward by property developers and their advocates is that the planning system, with all its rules and regulations about what should be built and where, places an unnecessary and unreasonable fetter on developers who just want to get out there and build.

A restriction on developers' freedom, it is argued, is a

restriction on development itself. Planning is preventing developers from addressing the housing crisis.

The facts demonstrate that this argument is entirely false. Ever since 2010, the number of new homes granted planning permission has increased substantially every year, but the amount of new homes completed has not kept pace. Many planning permissions are simply never built, and today the number of unbuilt homes with planning permission stands at over 400,000.

The real issue of importance for the development industry is not any restriction on the amount of housing they can build, but the amount of profit they can make on each unit of housing.

## Planning and Profit

Planning rules are about driving good quality housing that serves the needs of a community whilst protecting the environment, both historic and natural.

In practice this means building homes to a high quality and environmental standards, ensuring affordable housing is provided to provide for lower income people, making sure historic buildings are protected in terms of their integrity and setting. It also means the protection of existing communities, making sure that a new development doesn't block out the daylight of a neighbouring building or that building new homes won't lead to overcrowding at the local school or GP surgery.

To deal with these issues, planning authorities can place obligations on the developers of new buildings to provide new community facilities, fund transport improvements, build low-cost housing, restrict the height of their buildings and so on.

It should be obvious that if developers can get out of these obligations, they can increase their opportunities to profit.

## The dismantling of the planning system

In the world of planning there are few hard and fast rules. Although local authorities set out policies which mandate what developers should build and where, each new development is considered on a case-by-case basis, and councillors sitting on planning committees have a great deal of freedom to disregard policy if they see a compelling case to do so.

Frequently, the need to build more homes is seen as compelling enough, and this encourages planning committees to grant their seal of approval to

work called *The Negro's Place in Nature* (1863), which used supposedly scientific measures to demonstrate the inferiority of black people.

Conway was an early member of this society. As he explained in his autobiography, he was sought out for his knowledge of slavery in the United States, yet he did not remain a member for long, as he quickly "found that it was led by a few ingenious gentlemen whose chief interest was to foster contempt of the negro." Conway hoped to promote his own anti-slavery viewpoint in the society, but without success. As he explained, the famed evolutionary scientist and supporter of Darwin, Thomas Henry "Huxley pointed out to me privately the fallacies of Hunt, and I made speeches in the Anthropological Society, but it became plain to me that anti-slavery sentiment in England was by no means so deep as I had supposed." (M. D. Conway, vol. 2, 1905, p. 1) Conway therefore quickly left the society due to its racism.

Conway, along with many other atheists and freethinkers in the nineteenth century, was also interested in non-western cultures, and even sometimes found them to be superior to those of the West – quite a rare perspective at this time. This is seen in Conway's *My Pilgrimage to the Wise Men of the East* (1906), which recounted his journey to India in 1883-84. Conway contrasted Indian civilization favourably with that of the West. For example, Conway reported on his first arrival in Ceylon, present-day Sri Lanka: "It was a new world I was entering. I had studied the Sinhalese Buddha and Buddhists, and knew I was leaving behind Anglo-Saxonism, – cruel, ambitious, canting, aggressive, – to mingle with people who knew 'the blessedness of being little.'" (M. D. Conway, 1906, pp. 108-109) Conway also added, "[i]t is certain that in any great city of Christendom there is more crime in one day than Ceylon knows in a year." (M. D. Conway, 1906, p. 119)

Conway also continued to pay attention to racial issues in the United States. While Conway lived most of his life in London after having moved there in the 1860s, he still visited the United States occasionally and kept up with news in the country. One controversy at the start of the twentieth century, in 1901, was when Booker T. Washington, one of the most prominent African American leaders of the era, was invited to dine at the White House with President Theodore Roosevelt. This invitation, coming at a time when segregation was practiced by law or custom in much of the country,

provoked a furious reaction among white racists.

Debate about the invitation played out in the American freethought newspaper the *Truth Seeker*, as readers on both sides submitted letters defending their position. One writer from the southern state of Alabama, who identified himself as R. Randolph, argued in the most hyperbolic terms about the horror of Roosevelt dining with a black man in the White House, which, as Randolph said, was "a national mansion hitherto held as negro-proof." The sight of a black man in the White House, Randolph believed, would make blacks "become so insolent and intolerable as to greatly increase the hatred already existing, and possibly lead them to perpetrate more of those fiendish acts which are almost invariably followed by lynchings." (Randolph, 1901, p. 714)

Randolph attracted a few letters of support, but on the whole, most freethinkers denounced Randolph and his views in the strongest terms, including Conway. By this point, Conway was one of the most respected freethinkers on either side of the Atlantic and something of an elder statesman. In his letter, Conway insulted Randolph, describing his letters as "psychological curiosities." Conway argued that "a Freethinker animated by race hatred" was "phenomenal" and he even explained that "I have entertained Mr. Booker Washington at dinner (in Paris), and as an old Virginian felt it an honor to sit at table with such a perfect gentleman and to converse with the most distinguished resident of the South now living, white or black." (M. D. Conway, 1901, p. 803)

The example of Conway's life shows that a simple narrative of secularization leading to racism cannot be maintained. Indeed, in Conway's case, this seems to be the opposite, as he moved from being a Christian who supported slavery to a freethinker who opposed racism. This is not to say that atheists or freethinkers could not be racist; that would be equally simplistic and equally wrong. Still, the case of Conway shows us that one does not need to rely on Christian universalist ideas to make the case against racism; the tools of science, reason, and skepticism can be equally effective, if not more so, in the fight against racism.

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inappropriate and damaging development.

The first and most obvious place where this rears its ugly head is with the disregard for our built and historic environment. UNESCO has recently threatened to downgrade the status of two world heritage sites in London and Liverpool because of the impact that new towers of luxury housing will have on the settings of Westminster and the Maritime Mercantile City.

Under planning rules, the garish towers that adorn the Thames and the Mersey should never have been granted permission. However, a crisis demands drastic action, and developers can make obscene amounts of cash from building 180m tall towers; selling the flats off to a market of offshore investors looking for a place to park their money.

Another more well-known and controversial impact of the ebbing away of planning rules is the reduction in the affordable housing obligation.

In the UK, there has always been a percentage of the population who have not been able to afford to pay for housing on the open market given their circumstances. For hundreds of years, society has made an attempt to provide some sort of low-cost housing to support the poor.

Today, government policy mandates property developers to provide housing for lower income people

on new developments, through an obligation to provide affordable housing (the definition of which has changed in recent years).

There is a common myth that affordable housing is some sort of forced charitable enterprise, and that housing developers provide that housing at a loss. However, developers are paid for the affordable housing they provide by housing associations who buy the stock off them. The amount they are paid is less than what they can get on the open market, but it should be enough for them to turn a small profit.

Local authorities set affordable housing targets based on need, and developers should deliver that target on their new developments. But the government, in order to encourage development, allowed developers to get out of their obligations if they can demonstrate that their building would be financially unviable if it were to include affordable housing. Financial viability means in very basic terms that the development must hit a minimum profit target to make it attractive to investors and land owners.

This financial viability test has produced an industry of surveyors who are willing (for a fee) to provide an economic assessment of your development that will ‘prove’ that you cannot build affordable housing.

The result of this has been a total failure to meet

affordable housing targets, and a serious deficit in the amount of affordable housing delivered.

### Slumlords

The darkest and most serious impact of the dismantling of the planning system has been the re-introduction of slum housing into the UK. In seeking to encourage development and the building of new housing, the government got rid of planning rules around the conversion of homes to houses in multiple occupation (HMOs): homes where a group of unrelated people rent out individual rooms. The other form of development now permitted without a planning application is the conversion of office buildings to housing.

This has allowed developers to create new housing with almost no planning control or standards. One racket developed by landlords in London which directly came out of the change in rules is to buy a small family home, and divide it into six units, claiming that the new building is an HMO and therefore does not need planning permission.

Each unit is then marketed as an individual flat, because that allows potential renters to claim a higher rate of housing benefit, all of which is passed straight onto the landlord.

You can't get many flats into a two-bed family home. The so-called 'studio flats' are 10-15 meters squared; little more than two full-sized snooker tables.

The population of people who qualify for full housing benefit for a single-person flat generally have high levels of drug and alcohol dependencies and mental health difficulties. This can create a dangerous environment when they are crammed into these tiny spaces with no support around them. In one home I visited, a woman with a ten-month-old baby was living in a house with a crack addict and a man who was eventually removed after he attempted murder on a prostitute.

### Profiting from failure

All of these schemes – the towers taking over our cities, the viability wheezes dreamed up by surveyors and the reintroduction of slum developments – lead directly to increased profits for developers: the one group that is certainly not suffering from any housing crisis.

At the same time as major developers have been claiming that practically every new building they propose is financially unviable, their profits have sky-rocketed. At

the top nine housebuilders in the UK, profit rose from £1.4bn in 2007 to £4.8bn in 2018. Much of this excess profit has flowed directly into the pockets of senior management, rather than being reinvested into building more homes.

Slum housing can also be extremely profitable. Splitting up a small family home into six so-called flats can generate rents of £6,000 a month, all paid for from housing benefit. In one case I looked at, one landlord, Simon Low, had 100 properties in the UK (each containing multiple micro-flats). His son, Abraham Low, ran a business that managed 150 properties containing 750 units.

### Planning as the solution, not the problem

In an open and free market, the occupiers of new housing would demand high standards. Few people, given a choice, would choose to live in a poorly connected, poorly insulated, poorly constructed home far away from shops and services. Many people want to live in cities with great historic monuments and vibrant cultural centres.

But the nature of the housing market makes this kind of choice impossible for most people. Most people do not have the money to live wherever they choose. To protect people from exploitation and for the public benefit, we have a planning system which is designed to balance the demands of developers to maximise their profit against the public good of having well-designed cities.

As expressed in the words of Justice Haddon – *Cave in R v Mole Valley District Council*,

“Whichever level or type of development one is dealing with, a clear distinction is always drawn between public “need” (i.e. what is in the public planning interest), and private “demand” (i.e. what is in the developers’ interest by having this particular type of development)....Pure private “demand” is antithetical to public “need”, particularly very exclusive private demand.”

For at least the last ten years, the government has given into the demands of property developers, with little effect in terms of solving the housing crisis. Instead, the dismantling of the planning system has allowed vast fortunes made at the expense of the public good.

It is possible to build enough high-quality homes to meet the needs of our society, but to get there the sacrifice we need to make is not the planning system, but the greed of many in the development community.



**George Turner** is an investigative journalist and has spent a number of years following the planning and housing industries. In 2014 he took Shell, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and Canary Wharf Group to court over their plans to redevelop Shell Centre. Before becoming a journalist he ran the Westminster Office of Sir Simon Hughes, who was then the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrats.



# Denial, Denialism and Post-Denialism: Why is Speaking Truth so Difficult?

Keith Kahn-Harris

**Perhaps I have an over-large ego, but for me, one of the pleasures of publishing a book is going out to speak about it and hear people's reactions to my arguments. Since the publication of my book *Denial: The Unspeakable Truth* in September 2018, I've discussed it in interviews, at book festivals and at lectures in a variety of locations (including at Conway Hall). And there's one question that always get asked:**

**"How does Brexit fit into your argument?"**

The answer to that is not quite what most people expect. Let's back up a bit...

Despite the title, much of the book's focus is on denialism rather than denial. I see denial as a fundamental human practice; one that is sometimes necessary and even 'healthy' and sometimes dangerous and harmful. As attested to by authors such as Stanley Cohen (2001), denial is a strange phenomenon: a simultaneous knowing and unknowing; a desire to not acknowledge a truth that may be threatening or inconvenient. None of us can bear too much reality; we deny, at least some of the time, our darker selves and the inevitability of our mortality. It's when denial means not addressing something harmful that it becomes a problem. Whether it's an alcoholic who cannot face up to his/her alcoholism, or a society that cannot acknowledge the threat of climate change, denial is a kind of void, a silence facing something that screams out for attention.

In contrast, denialism is anything but silent. An outgrowth of denial, it responds to the vulnerability that simply denying something always contains – that something or someone will come along and force you to face the truth. Denialism goes further, it fills the silence with noise, with counter-claims, arguments and alternatives to the established facts. Whereas denial can be social or individual, denialism is almost always a public and collective project.

I say 'project' because denialism is a tremendous labour. It faces Herculean challenges. Too often dismissed as stupidity or fraud, denialism involves, rather, a serious and sophisticated form of discourse and argument – which is precisely what makes it dangerous.

Denialism has developed in multiple areas of life: Those who say that anthropogenic climate change is not occurring, that the Holocaust and other genocides never happened, that the MMR vaccine causes autism, that HIV does not exist, that evolution is a lie, and so on. Of course, few people sign up to every single form of denialism; indeed, some denialists are incredibly insulted to be grouped into this wider category (the Flat Earth Society once indignantly criticised me in a tweet because of the association with Holocaust denial).

Like it or not though, these disparate forms of denialism do have essential features in common. They all attempt to fill the void of denial with institutions, organisations, conferences and journals. They all draw on scientific language and try to associate themselves with the prestige of scholarship. And they all draw on a similar set of techniques: conspiratorial thinking, focusing on tiny details rather than the big picture, demanding absurdly high levels of proof, and many more.

While others have described how denialism works before me (eg. Specter, 2010), I wanted to dig deeper into why denialism happens in the first place. I did this by asking what 'alternatives' denialists had to denialism. When you consider the issue in this way, the puzzle becomes easier to solve. In the enlightened modern world, certain desires became 'unspeakable' – impossible to publicly advocate and legitimate – while the desires themselves did not abate. Genocide is not a publicly speakable option, causing misery to billions by committing to the long-term use of fossil fuels is not a publicly speakable option, preferring that infants die rather than having their bodily integrity despoiled by vaccination is not a speakable option. So what choice is there but to deny that that is what you want? Better to use denialism to surreptitiously make the argument by covert means.

Yet as I researched my book, it seemed to me that something was shifting, not away from denialism towards honest acknowledgement and capitulation, but towards something even darker. This is what I call 'post-denialism'. Post-denialism is lazy denialism, a form that barely even bothers to do the hard work of developing





denialist scholarship and that is just one short step away from publicly embracing the hitherto unspeakable. Donald Trump is the post-denialist par excellence, with other world leaders such as Bolsonaro of Brazil and Duterte of the Philippines fellow pioneers. Their insouciant denials that they seek personal gain, that they advocate the suffering of others, that they have no wish to restrain their darkest desires, are merely a hairs-breadth away from ushering in a new moral order of speakability. We may well need to prepare ourselves for a world in which genocide, rape and venality are openly rejoiced in, rather than denied.

**“In the enlightened modern world, certain desires became ‘unspeakable’ — impossible to publicly advocate and legitimate — while the desires themselves did not abate.”**

So where does this leave Brexit? I presume that when audiences ask me for my thoughts, they are alluding to extravagant claims on the side of buses, Michael Gove having had enough of experts, fake news about immigration and the manipulation of Facebook news feeds. And yes, these kinds of practices are familiar from other denialist milieux. And yes, there are significant figures in the Leave camp who also embrace denialist causes such as climate change denial.

But it's too simplistic to reduce the causes of Brexit to the manipulations of denialists. For one thing, the pro-Leave campaign in 2016 was fairly heterogeneous, including sober-minded policy wonks who had clearly articulated criticisms of the EU that did not rely on denialism (whether the answer to those criticisms was for the UK to leave the EU is another matter). To leave the EU is a policy choice, one that may be wise or unwise depending on your point of view, but a speakable choice that does not require denialism to advocate for it.

In fact, even if denialism was part of the coalition of forces that succeeded in the 2016 referendum, I would argue that Leave advocates today have become less rather than more susceptible to denialism. In the final months of 2018 and the early months of 2019, as leaving without a deal became the dominant goal of pro-Brexit campaigners, something unexpected happened. The claims made for the benefits of leaving the EU made before and after the 2016 referendum are made less

frequently. Instead, the dominant discourse has become one that accepts, and even welcomes, negative material consequences of Brexit. Leaving the EU and ‘restoring sovereignty’ has become worth more than economic prosperity, worth more even than the preservation of the constitution and the integrity of the UK. No-dealers do not necessarily want the suffering that no-deal is likely to cause, but most are prepared, in principle at least, to accept that suffering in the short to medium term. Talk of surviving the Second World War and the Blitz is commonplace.

There are many arguments one could make against this position, but what you can't say is that it is denialist. It is the reverse: it is open about what it wants and what it prizes above all else and open about the price it will pay to achieve it. This may well be a sign that the process of moving beyond denialism, that I suggested was beginning to happen in my book, is accelerating much more rapidly than I or anyone else had expected.

**“This may well be a sign that the process of moving beyond denialism... is accelerating much more rapidly than I or anyone else had expected.”**

As someone who fears the personal and social consequences of a no-deal or any kind of hard Brexit, I can't hand on heart say that I welcome this process. It's difficult to know how to respond to a movement, sections of which openly advocate for human suffering in the service of a nebulous ideal. We have become so used to desires like this being unspeakable that we do not know how to react when they are presented to us unvarnished. Denialism protected us from such disquieting encounters with moral diversity.

We can at least say this: the debate about Brexit has become a debate about clear, fundamental principles. It is no longer wrapped in the fog of claim and counter-claim about what the EU is or isn't and what the material benefits of leaving may or may not be. This is human difference displayed in its most naked form and, as such, this is precisely the antithesis of denialism. And we may have to get used to navigating these differences and placing them at the heart of politics.

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# Richard and Jane Carlile

## Robert Forder

**On 24 May 1813 Richard Carlile, was born in Ashburton, Devon. On 8 December 1790, he married Jane Cousins of Alverstoke, near Gosport, Hampshire. Jane was a couple of years older than Richard and she was pregnant. Both were from relatively humble backgrounds, Richard was the son of a shoemaker who had served an apprenticeship as a tinsmith and Jane was the daughter of a “poor cottager”. So began the union of an extraordinary, unorthodox, outlandish and brave couple.**

It is unclear what brought Richard to Gosport but we know that Richard attended David Bogue's academy in Gosport (located close to the site of the current Town Hall) where he trained as a missionary and at one time considered entering the Church. David Bogue was a Congregationalist and is usually credited with being a founder of the London Missionary Society. Richard's interest in religion was not to last.

## Some background

To understand the Carliles I need to say a little about England two hundred years ago.

1. The country was rapidly urbanising and industrialising and while this brought great wealth to some for others it meant insecurity, grinding poverty and squalor. In 1819 things were made worse by economic recession.
2. The King, George III was mad and the Prince Regent, who effectively reigned in his place, had a reputation for gluttony, debauchery, luxurious living and being aloof from the population.
3. There was no pretence that Parliament and Government represented the population at large. Few were entitled to vote and those who did were generally landowners. Emerging cities like Manchester were unrepresented.
4. The hated Corn Laws placed tariffs on cheap imports of grain, inflating the bread price which was the staple food of most.
5. In the background was the traditional enemy France and the recent memory of bloody revolution which had purged not only the French monarchy but the French aristocratic classes.

If in the eyes of those who governed the country, this discontent was associated with one particular bogeyman, Thomas Paine. Paine had been involved in not one, but



Richard Carlile about 35.

two revolutions in America and France, writing polemics such as *The Rights of Man* and *Common Sense* opposing monarchy and aristocratic government. Worse, he had authored *The Age of Reason*, an uncompromising attack on Christianity which he held responsible for underpinning unjust, hereditary government.

## The Carliles move to London

Soon after their marriage the Carliles moved to London where Richard continued to seek employment as a tinsmith; a parlous and declining trade. This did not last long and to make a living, he sold the writings of reformers on the streets, particularly Thomas Paine along with weekly newspapers like the banned *Black Dwarf*.

Richard then moved on to publishing and sold his own journal *Sherwin's Political Register*. In particular he republished all Paine's works, thus keeping his ideas alive. This was dangerous work inviting prosecution for sedition, treason and blasphemy.

## Peterloo

On 16 August 1819 the events now known as Peterloo occurred in Manchester. Richard had been invited, attended and travelled with the main speaker, Henry Hunt, to St Peter's Field in his carriage. He was on the platform when the yeomanry intervened killing fifteen and wounding many others.





Peterloo – Carlile’s engraving

In Mike Leigh’s recent film, Richard is shown walking around St Peter’s Field after the event vowing to ensure the public were made aware of what had occurred. He avoided arrest (largely because he was unknown in Manchester) and caught the mail coach to London where he wrote his account. The placards proclaimed “Horrid Massacres at Manchester”. *Sherwin’s Political Register* was banned so Richard simply changed its name to “*The Republican*” and carried on.

He also published his iconic print depicting the events which he dedicated to Henry Hunt and the female reformers of Manchester. There are some points to note.

Richard was greatly impressed by the role of women who had turned out in their thousands, many dressed in white. In the illustration, Richard (extreme left of the platform) is shown next to Mary Fildes, Chairwoman of the Manchester Female Reform Society. Just to their left, a woman is shown being attacked with a sabre. The central banner carries the legend “universal suffrage”, not “universal manhood suffrage” which was what most reformers asked for. Richard wanted women to have the vote a century before this was actually achieved.

Dorchester Gaol

This was all too much for the authorities so Richard was prosecuted. He referred to his trial as a ‘mock trial’ because he refused to accept that the law could suppress free discussion and because the judge refused to allow him to call the Archbishop of Canterbury and Chief Rabbi as witnesses.

He was found guilty and sentenced to three years in Dorchester Gaol with a fine of £1,500. In fact he served seven years because he refused to pay the fine and his premises were raided and stock confiscated.

When he first arrived at Dorchester he was put in solitary confinement for fear he would contaminate

other inmates and was supposed to be taken from his cell for half an hour each day for exercise. However, he would then have been paraded in front of other prisoners. Richard objected and therefore didn’t leave his cell for nearly three years.

On the other hand his cell was light and airy, he had his own sofa, sink, water-closet and bath. There was also a writing desk from which he continued to edit *The Republican*, now published by Jane. *The Republican* sold well as news of Richard’s notoriety spread; he produced twelve volumes while in prison. It was during this period that he pronounced himself an atheist, the first person in England to do so in print during his own lifetime.

In 1820 it was Jane’s turn to be tried for seditious libel. She stood in the dock with her baby, Thomas Paine Carlile, in her arms. She was eventually sentenced to two years and shared her husband’s cell. When in prison Jane gave birth to a daughter named Hypatia after the pagan philosopher torn to pieces and burnt by a Christian mob.

Jane’s place, in Fleet Street, was taken by Richard’s sister, Mary, who in turn received a six months’ sentence for the same offence and joined Richard and Jane in Dorchester. Eight shop workers suffered the same fate and more than 150 men and women were sent to Newgate for selling *The Republican*.

Despite all, Fleet Street book sales continued. To make the authorities task more difficult books were sold from behind a screen. On the customer’s side was a clock-face bearing the names of the books, with a hand that could be pointed at the relevant title whereupon a hidden shop assistant pushed the book through a hole in the screen thus avoiding identification. Carlile called this “selling books by clockwork”.

By 1825 it was beginning to dawn on the authorities that

their actions were merely creating a bigger demand for the Carliles’ publications. He was suddenly and unconditionally released. On his release he was greeted by Julian Hibbert (a wealthy Caribbean sugar plantation owner) who helped fund many enterprises. Richard also received many contributions from members of the public.

His first action was to take on the lease of a larger shop at 62 Fleet Street and expand his publishing business.

Every Woman’s Book

In 1826 Richard was to offend respectable opinion once again when he published *Every Woman’s Book* which he had written himself. It was the first book to advocate birth control, provide contraceptive advice and free love in England.

*Every Woman’s Book* had been preceded by an article *What is Love?* published in *The Republican*. For Richard, contraception served two purposes; it helped prevent conception and facilitated pleasure.

“See what an evil arises from bastard children, from deserted children, from half-starved and diseased children, and even where the parents are most industrious and most virtuous, from a half-starved, naked, and badly housed family, from families crowded into one room... All these matters are a tax upon love.”

Richard was appalled by the practices of abortion and infanticide, common at the time. He suggested that no married couple need have more children than they wanted and maintained that no unhealthy woman need endanger her life through childbirth; that there need be no illegitimate children and; that sexual intercourse could be independent of the dread of conception.

Richard’s feminist views had developed though his experiences at Peterloo, then through the sacrifices of his female shop workers, particularly Jane and sister Mary. Now he went a step further by claiming Christian sexual morality was a constraint on female emancipation reducing women to subservience. He accused Christian marriage of causing men to treat their wives “with as much vulgarity as he treats any other chamber utensil” and for placing women under a form of “legalised slavery”.

Richard hammered points home by including a frontispiece illustration to his book showing Adam and Eve without the usual fig leaves. He knew he would be accused of obscenity and he was making the point that in his opinion aspects of the Bible were obscene.

Richard saw love-making as physically and mentally healthy and challenged still more taboos by claiming women found it as pleasurable and satisfying as men.

Richard’s favoured contraceptive method was the sponge although he also mentions “the glove” (or condom) and withdrawal. A problem with condoms was that rubber was yet to be vulcanised, that they were generally sewn from fine animal gut and were expensive.



Richard’s portrayal of the premises at 62 Fleet Street. The building is still there, the ground floor being occupied by a Vietnamese takeaway

Withdrawal was less favoured as it depended on the cooperation of the male.

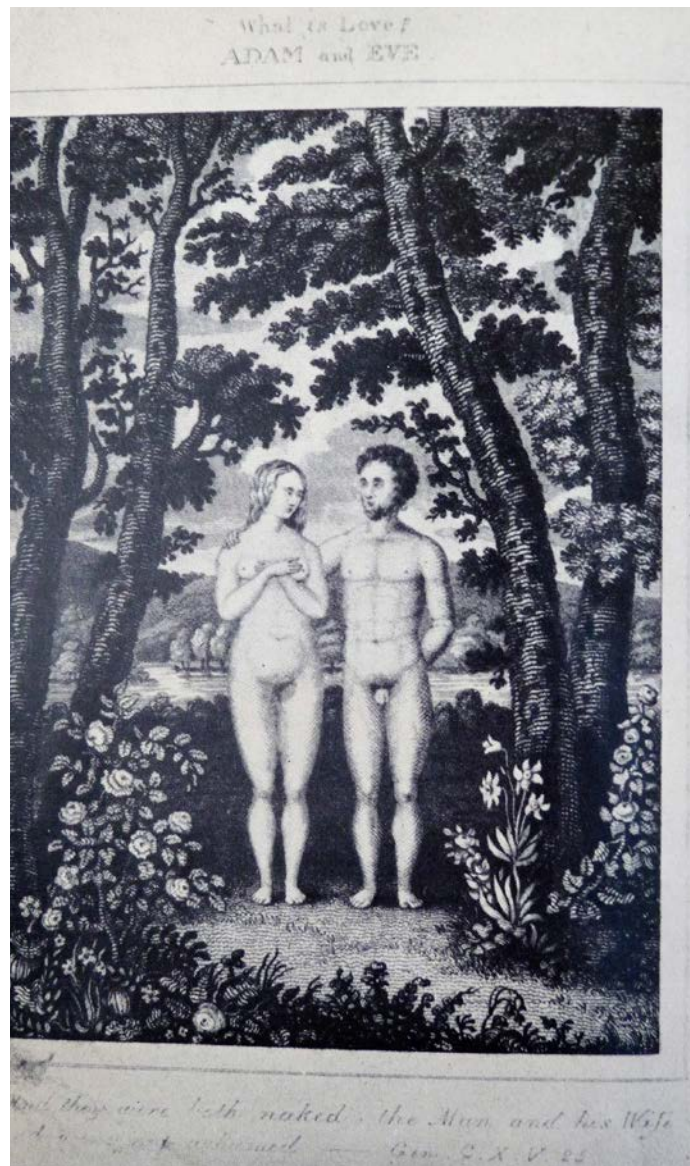
Richard must have been disappointed by the reaction to his book. Many of his female followers turned against him, including Mary Fildes. William Cobbett branded him “the grand pornographer and pimp” who planned to lure into prostitution the maidenhood of England. Nevertheless it sold well and provided similar advice on contraception to that provided by Marie Stopes some 100 years later.

Provincial lecture tours

On her release from prison in 1823 Jane departed for a speaking tour taking her four children with her. They were Hypatia (not yet twelve months), Alfred, Richard and Thomas Paine. Predictably the first stop was in Manchester where she was admired by the female reformers. She also travelled to Leeds, Huddersfield, Liverpool, Bolton and Salford. During this tour the difficulties and hardships she suffered were increased when the children contracted measles.

When Richard was released from gaol he went on four lecturing expeditions, two in 1827 (totalling eight months), one in 1828 (six months) and another in 1829 (six months). Although these tours had mixed success they did establish a national network of reformers. He was always well-received in Portsmouth and Manchester,





What is Love frontispiece

although he had substantial support in many other industrial towns. He was not a particularly forceful speaker and his most successful tour was in 1829 when he teamed up with the self-styled “Devil’s Chaplain”, Robert Taylor, and launched an “infidel mission”. Taylor was a Cambridge educated former Anglican Minister who had served a prison sentence for blasphemy. His oratorical skills greatly exceeded Richard’s.

### Eliza Sharples

Sadly, the Carliles were now falling out of love. In 1827 Richard first met Eliza Sharples when he visited Bolton.

**Bob Forder** is a member of the Council of the National Secular Society and acts as their historian. He has spent a career as a history and politics teacher and as a senior manager in comprehensive schools. He says that it is his ‘mission’ to ensure that brave radicals and freethinkers are not forgotten.



In 1831 Eliza moved to London and went on to supplant Jane as Richard’s “moral wife”.

Eliza emerged as a formidable character and campaigner in her own right, an effective platform speaker who edited her own feminist journal *Isis*. Years later, after Richard’s death, a young Charles Bradlaugh was to briefly find a home with Eliza when his relationship with his father broke down.

### The Rotunda

In 1830 Carlile opened the Blackfriars Rotunda, near Blackfriars Bridge. This was a substantial building with two lecture theatres, one of which could accommodate up to 1500. The Rotunda became the centre of reformers’ activities in London at a time of mounting discontent.

### Gaoled again

In 1831 Richard was incarcerated again, this time in London, for an article defending agricultural workers and the rural sabotage movement known as the “Swing Riots” after their mythical leader “Captain Swing”. Now it was Eliza who visited Richard in prison where she conceived a child, the first of four. While he was in gaol Eliza took over management of the Rotunda.

### Final years

Richard’s moment had passed. He had lost much support through his abandonment of Jane despite granting her an annuity of £50 per year. He also made himself unpopular with many former supporters by adopting the title Reverend. His atheism was unwavering, but he thought Christianity provided a sound moral code.

Jane and her sons opened a bookshop and publishing business on Bride Lane from which they scraped a living during her final years.

Richard’s end was probably hastened by his belief (shared by others) that swallowing a small amount of mercury each day improved health. He died on 10 February 1843 and his body was taken to St Thomas’s Hospital where, in accordance with his wishes, his brain was dissected for research. Jane outlived him by a few months. Both were buried in Kensal Green Cemetery.

Joel H. Wiener. *Radicalism and Freethought in Nineteenth-Century Britain. The Life of Richard Carlile*. Greenwood Press, 1983.

Michael L. Bush. *The Friends and Following of Richard Carlile. A Study of Infidel Republicanism in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Twopenny Press, 2016.

Michael L. Bush. *What is Love? Richard Carlile’s Philosophy of Sex*. Verso, 1998.

# Dr Harry Stopes-Roe (1924–2014)

## Olwen Terris

**Harry Stopes-Roe, philosopher and humanist, bequeathed his personal library to Conway Hall Library and Archives. In 2014, the year of his death, we took receipt of some 60 boxes of books and bound issues of journals. Now in 2019 over 600 book titles, published roughly between 1950 and 2000, have been fully documented and added to the online catalogue.**

Handling each volume of a personal library gives a unique perspective on the owner – and when, like Stopes-Roe, the majority of the titles are annotated in his own hand, that sense of getting to know a person is pleasurably accentuated and the documenting of that collection becomes a privilege.

Stopes-Roe gained an MSc in physics from Imperial College, London followed by a PhD in philosophy from the University of Cambridge, later becoming senior lecturer in science studies at the University of Birmingham. The rigours of science and philosophy (the relationship between the two disciplines proving a lifelong exploration) ultimately led him to reject god and seek an alternative basis for morality.



Harry Stopes-Roe; Marie Stopes by Bassano Ltd  
© National Portrait Gallery, London

Stopes-Roe was one of the last two appointed lecturers at South Place Ethical Society, his lectures there including ‘Why Be Good?’ (1980), ‘The Value of South Place’ (1981) and ‘Humanism and Science’ (1987). He served as Chair of the British Humanist Association (now Humanists UK) for nine years and was appointed Vice-President in 1994 becoming greatly involved with the formulation of their policy on religious and moral education. He played a vigorous role in the Values Education Council UK and the Religious Education Council of England. As an influential member of the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus Conference Harry was determined to overcome the exclusion of humanism from religious education in schools and, in the 1970s, produced the first syllabus to include a multi-faith model of religious education, and to require a systematic study of non-religious belief. This radical proposal was rejected by the Church of England’s National Society who submitted a legal objection which had the result of the new syllabus being rejected for something far more traditional. Later he was to write to the then Prime Minister David Cameron strongly disputing Cameron’s assertion that Britain was ‘a Christian country’.

Not all the books found their way to the shelves, some falling outside the acquisitions policy: these included titles which supported Stopes-Roe’s academic career covering advanced physics and linguistics, and subjects which personally interested him such as palaeontology and Chinese history. The books we were happy to retain greatly enrich our already strong holdings of works on moral philosophy, humanism, Darwinism and evolutionary ethics more generally.

Stopes-Roe annotated the majority of works he owned, the neat writing in pencil throughout the entire text, including prefaces, showing that the books had been read, thought about and questioned. The annotations are not what one so often finds – heavy underlinings, triplicate exclamation marks, and comments not far short of abuse in the margins. These annotations are essentially questioning – expressing thoughtful comment, doubts, often agreement. Interestingly he would often amend and add to the book’s index –



indexing, finding your way around a complex text was clearly important to him. All titles falling within the acquisition policy which carried these annotations have been retained and catalogued even when it was a duplicate copy as Stopes-Roe's observations are felt to be of great value to scholars and researchers.

In many instances Harry would cut out an obituary or reviews (carefully referenced and dated) from national newspapers or journal and insert them loose in the appropriate volume – again this provides researchers with added value – a brief biography of the author and summary of achievements or a critical appraisal of the text's arguments. Our catalogue entry indicates where this is the case. Often a book was studded with impromptu bookmarks – bus tickets, medical prescriptions, British Library Lending Division reservation slips, internal university memos, Safeway receipts and airline baggage labels had all been coerced into practical use.

Harry travelled to India and brought back with him booklets and pamphlets from the country's burgeoning humanist and rationalist movement. There are publications from the Atheist Centre at Vijayawada, works by the radical activist and thinker M.N. (Manabendra Nath) Roy, and several pamphlets from the Perivar Self-Respect Propaganda Institution. His involvement with humanism on an international scale continued with his work for many years for the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU, now Humanists International). The Library has benefited from some bound volumes of IHEU congress proceedings which were part of his collection.

The large majority of readers will know that Harry was the only son of women's rights and birth control pioneer, Marie Stopes. One book has an inscription from her to Harry, a gift of a philosophical treatise on aesthetics presented to him at the age of nine.

In May 1962, early days to engage with television in live debate, Harry took part in a BBC programme entitled *Perspective on Eccentricity*. Among the panellists debating eccentrics and their role in an age of conformity were Sir John Betjeman, Margaret Rutherford and W.A. Foyle, founder of Foyle's bookshop. Sadly it is unlikely that a recording has survived.

The papers of Harry Stopes-Roe were donated by his widow, Mary Stopes-Roe, to the Bishopsgate Institute in 2014. These 44 boxes include correspondence, minutes, papers and reports from the many committees on which



Harry Stopes-Roe

he served including the Birmingham Humanist Group, the Social Morality Council and the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE). The scope of this bequest can be found at: <https://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/LibraryCatalogue.aspx>.

When Harry died his life was commemorated in BBC Radio 4's obituary series *Last Word* broadcast 25 May 2014. Mary Stopes-Roe was asked what Harry considered to be his greatest achievement: she answered "I think probably the moral philosophy. He was extremely proud of his children, obviously, but for himself his magnum opus would have been his moral philosophy." When asked what shaped her husband's humanist philosophy she answered 'his habit of questioning, always'.

**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.



# BECOME A MEMBER



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.

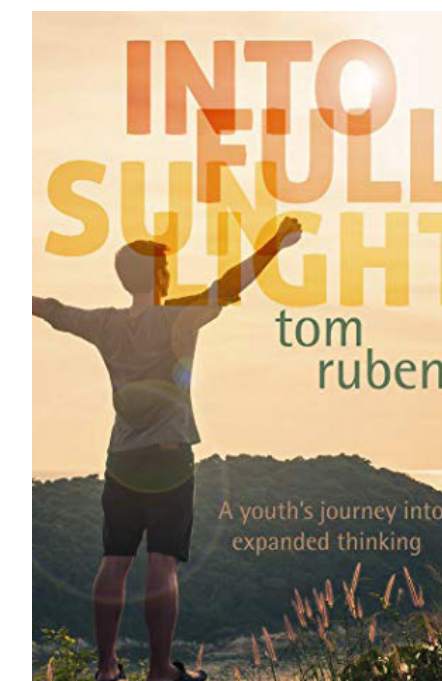
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## BOOK REVIEW by Norman Bacrac

### Into Full Sunlight — a novel by Tom Rubens



On the 18th July last at Conway Hall, English teacher Tom Rubens launched *Into Full Sunlight*, Book One of his trilogy (sub-titled "A Youth's Journey into Expanded Thinking"). The book is in memory of William Somerset Maugham, whose novel *Of Human Bondage* (1915) was in Tom's mind while he was writing it. Tom began the discussion by reading several passages from the work, giving the flavour of it.

This is a re-issue of Tom's complete work, *The Illumination Trilogy*, published by Austin Macauley, entitled *Mixed Picture*, [see *Ethical Record* Nov 2015 p 23 Vol. 120 No.11] by a new publisher, Happy London Press, which decided to re-publish the work in three volumes [Book One is priced at £8.50].

Readers will find this book absorbing, closely detailing the thoughts and experiences of a rather sensitive boy as he goes through secondary school and then university, including his early encounters with the opposite sex.

Those acquainted with any of Tom's previously published eight non-fiction books [for these google: Tom Rubens author], will be aware of his concerns with political and philosophical matters. Readers of Book One will look forward to the issue of subsequent volumes [Book Two: *Wide Illumination* and Book Three: *Harvesting the Light*] which also promise reflection on some of Richard Dawkins' themes from Tom's naturalist and humanist viewpoint.





25 Red Lion Square • London • WC1R 4RL

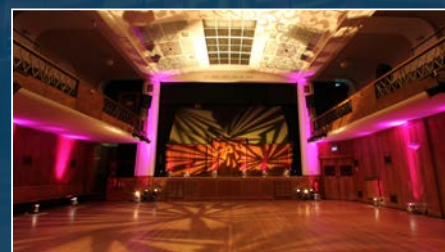


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## FORTHCOMING EVENTS AT CONWAY HALL

### EXHIBITIONS

- 31 January **Victorian Blogging: The Pamphleteers Who Dared To Dream Of A Better World**
- 31 October **Monument for Chelsea: A Sculpture of Chelsea Manning • John Reardon**
- From September **Not just a Refugee • Adiam Yemane**
- From October **Reveals • Barbara Marks**

### THINKING ON SUNDAY

- 13 Oct 15.00–16.30 **In Praise of Walking: The New Science of How We Walk and Why It's Good For Us • Shane O'Mara**

### THINKING ON MONDAY

- 21 Oct 19.30–21.00 **Behind Closed Doors: Sex Education Transformed • Natalie Fiennes**
- 18 Nov 19.30–21.00 **Among the Women of Isis • Azadeh Moaveni**

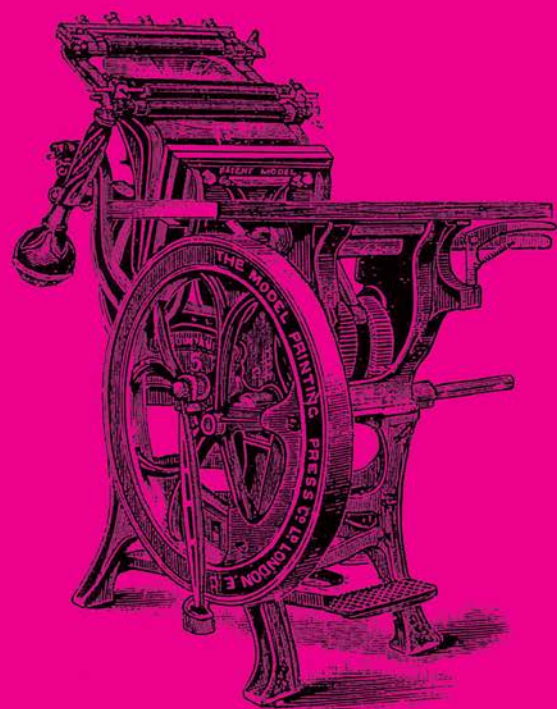
### PARTNERSHIPS

- 6 October **Conway Hall and Holborn Community Association: Fun Palace**
- 19 October **National Park City**
- 17–20 October **Bloomsbury Festival 2019: Small Steps and Big Ideas, Conway Hall Hub**

### TALKS

- 23 Oct 19.30–21.00 **London Fortean Society: Cursed Britain – A History of Witchcraft and Black Magic in Modern Times**

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## VICTORIAN BLOGGING

The Pamphleteers  
who Dared to Dream  
of a Better World

6 September 2019 – 31 January 2020

Exhibition information:  
[conwayhall.org.uk/victorianblogging](http://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](mailto:Librarian@conwayhall.org.uk)



## 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**