Humanist Heritage

MANCHESTER TOUR

Manchester has a rich tradition of radicalism, freethinking, and humanism - historically home to leading suffragists, pioneering cooperators, and influential social reformers. Many of these were united in challenging orthodox religious ideas, and living by values we call 'humanist' today.

1 HOLYOAKE HOUSE

Now home to the National Co-operative Archive, Holyoake House was named for George Jacob Holyoake (1817–1906): a leading proponent and historian of cooperation (where enterprises are owned and run jointly by their members), and coiner of the term 'secularism' in 1851. Although it's come to refer to the separation of church and state, Holyoake's secularism was a worldview rooted in reason and human need which is interchangeable with that of humanism today.

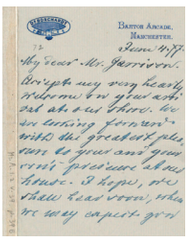
2 ROBERT OWEN

Robert Owen (1771-1858) was a utopian socialist, philanthropist, and reformer, whose own religious scepticism fostered his desire for a secular society, and his pursuit of a 'rational religion' - rooted in the needs of humankind, rather than the worship of any god. As a mill owner, he introduced pioneering changes to education, community, and labour, and influenced a number of experimental communities in Britain and abroad. The movement, which became known as Owenism, emphasised cooperation, reason, and the human capacity to improve the world.

3 MAHATMA GANDHI

The international significance and reputation of Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948) is well-known, but his involvement with the burgeoning humanist movement during the early 20th century is far less so. Drawn by its unifying focus on moral action, Gandhi became a correspondent and close friend of the Secretary of the Union of Ethical Societies (now Humanists UK) Florence Winterbottom, and in 1907 published a Gujarati translation of US ethical society leader William Salter's book *Ethical Religion*.

4 BARTON ARCADE



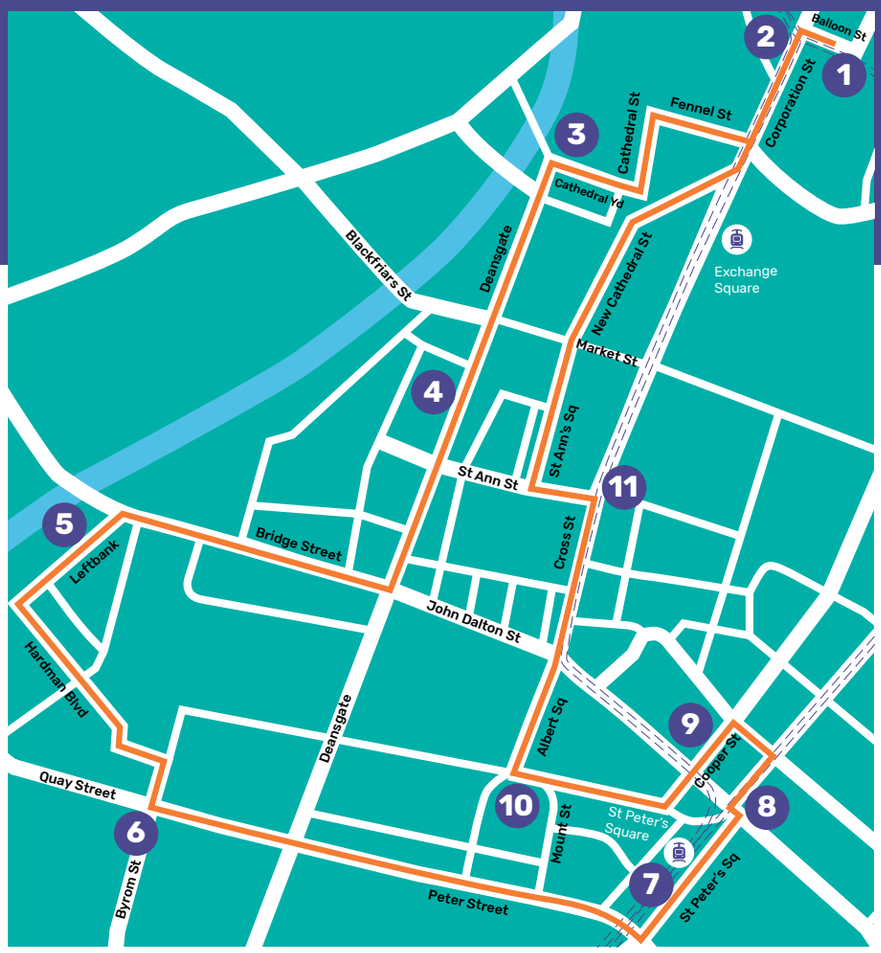
Dr Louis Borchardt (1816/7-1883) was a paediatrician, political liberal, abolitionist, and active supporter of women's equal standing in the medical profession. His offices were in Barton Arcade. On his death, an obituary in the *Women's Suffrage Journal* described him as 'the foster-father of the women's suffrage movement in Manchester'. It was at Borchardt's home in January 1867 that the Manchester Society for Women's Suffrage had been formed. Born of Jewish parents, Borchardt was a liberal thinker in matters of religion as well as politics. His daughters, Malvina and Helene, both became longtime members of the West London Ethical Society (a founding group of the Union which became Humanists UK), and started a girls' school in London.

5 PEOPLE'S HISTORY MUSEUM

The People's History Museum is the UK's 'national museum of democracy', and its collections commemorate many remarkable humanists and freethinkers, from revolutionary writer Thomas Paine, and influential secularist Annie Besant, to NHS founder Nye Bevan.

6 COBDEN HOUSE CHAMBERS

Cobden House, the former home of Richard Cobden and of Owens College, provides a fascinating insight into various efforts for secular education during the 19th century - a cause many humanists advocated, and continue to work for today. Cobden was a prominent voice in the call for a national system of secular education, while Owens College was founded for the education of young men along non-sectarian lines. An early pupil was Richard Pankhurst (1834–1898) - an active champion of secularism in state and schooling.



7 EMMELINE PANKHURST

This depiction of leading suffragette and founder of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) Emmeline Pankhurst was only the second statue of a woman in Manchester City Centre, after that of Queen Victoria. Also considered for commemoration was Mancunian MP Ellen Wilkinson, who in 1945 chaired a meeting in London which ultimately led to the formation of UNESCO: an organisation established on explicitly humanist principles.

8 MANCHESTER ART GALLERY

The Manchester Art Gallery includes two historic buildings designed for the pursuit of knowledge and the enjoyment of culture. It also contains works by prominent humanist artists, including Ford Madox Brown. One of the gallery buildings originally housed the Royal Manchester Institution 'for the Promotion of Literature, Science and the Arts'. The other, the Athenaeum, housed a society for the 'advancement and diffusion of knowledge'. The Royal Manchester Institution was the location of the inaugural meeting of the Manchester Ladies' Literary Society, with freethinker Lydia Becker (1827–1890) as President.

9 COOPER STREET

Becker was born on Cooper Street, and established the Ladies' Literary Society to provide intellectual opportunities for women, who were largely excluded from Manchester's other learned societies. In spite of the 'literary' in its title, Becker's society was mostly scientific in focus. Like much of Becker's work, the Ladies' Literary Society provided a direct challenge to the prescribed 'spheres' of activity for Victorian men and women, forming part of a long campaign to prove women's worthiness for intellectual pursuits.

10 TOWN HALL

The Town Hall was where the first meeting of the Women's Trades Union Council took place in February 1895. Established to encourage trade unionism among women workers, its office was nearby at 9 Albert Square. The Council's Honorary Secretary was Elizabeth Schwann (1855-1914), who the following year chaired the inaugural annual congress of the Union of Ethical Societies (now Humanists UK). Both she and her husband, MP Charles Schwann, were active members of the early humanist movement. Inside the Town Hall are a series of twelve paintings depicting the history of Manchester by Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), known as The Manchester Murals. Artist, suffragist, and ethical society member Ernestine Mills (1871–1959) described Ford Madox Brown as 'a cheerful and reverent Agnostic, whose whole life was one of unselfishness and devotion to lofty aims'.

11 CROSS STREET CHAPEL

Cross Street Chapel began life as a dissenting congregation, and the original chapel was built in 1694. In common with London's South Place Ethical Society (now Conway Hall), what began as an assembly of nonconformists grew over the years, and through a succession of ministers, into an ever more liberal outlook. While South Place moved from a Unitarian body to a humanist Ethical society, Cross Street became and remains a Unitarian chapel. The Unitarian emphasis on individual conscience and the rejection of dogma bears much similarity to the Ethical movement's ideal of 'deed not creed'.