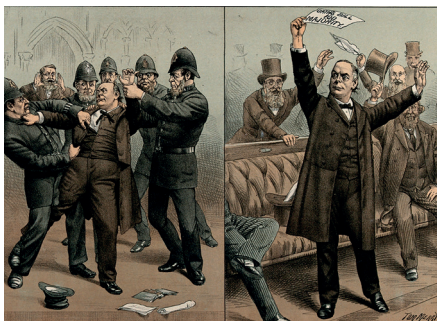


NORTHAMPTON TOUR

This walk explores Northampton's long tradition of secularism and free thought, including the legacy of its famous MP and radical reformer, Charles Bradlaugh. Discover connections to key humanist figures like artist William Morris and councillor Rodger Alder, who championed freedom of speech, LGBT rights, and the pursuit of human happiness.



1 CHARLES BRADLAUGH STATUE

Charles Bradlaugh (1833–1891) was a leading freethinker, secularist, and founder of the National Secular Society. His efforts to take his seat in Parliament as elected MP for Northampton in the 1880s led to a protracted campaign for solemn affirmation, rather than oath swearing, and his publication with Annie Besant of birth control literature made a stand against obscenity laws. A fierce defender of freedom of speech, and tireless champion of rationalism and reason, Bradlaugh took up many of the causes central to the efforts of Humanists UK today.

This statue by George Tinworth (1843–1913) was unveiled in 1894, three years after Bradlaugh's death. *Watts's Literary Guide* (now *New Humanist magazine*) reported that more than 100,000 people were present at the unveiling by Bradlaugh's daughter Hypatia, in a 'remarkable demonstration of gratitude and devotion on the part of the admirers of the deceased freethinker and democrat'.



2 GUILDHALL

Northampton Councillor Rodger Alder's self-planned humanist funeral was held in the Great Hall here in 1997. A lecturer in Industrial Archaeology at Nene College and active in local politics, Alder became deputy leader of Northampton Borough Council and chair of its planning committee. In this role, he helped secure the naming of Bradlaugh Fields, in honour of Charles Bradlaugh, and played a leading role in acquiring 78 Derngate (next stop) for the Council. Alder died at just 49 from cancer, leaving instructions that his funeral include 'big hats, meringues and orange squash'.

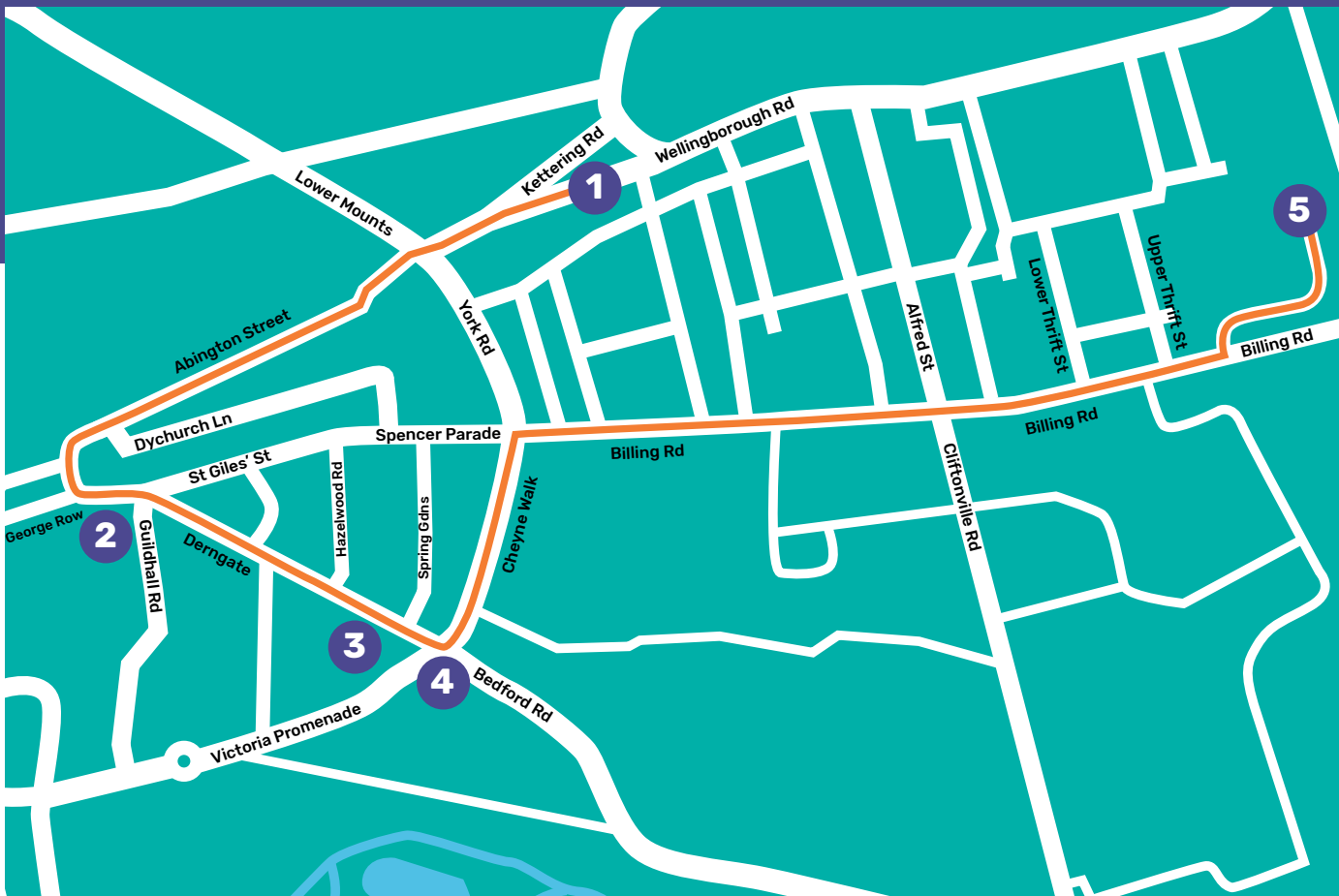
Alder was active in Northampton's gay community, and in the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Group (now LGBT+ Humanists), whose meetings, socials, and residential weekends he regularly attended. He was remembered in the *Gay and Lesbian Humanist* magazine as 'a man of great intelligence, wit, and good humour'.



3 78 DERNGATE

78 Derngate is a Grade II listed house and visitor attraction. Built in the early 19th century, it was later designed and remodelled by Scottish architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh for Northampton model engineer, W.J. Bassett-Lowke – Mackintosh's only domestic commission outside of Scotland. In the 1990s, Rodger Alder played a key role in acquiring the house for the Council.

Humanist playwright George Bernard Shaw stayed here on a number of occasions, hosted by Fabian businessman and socialist Bassett-Lowke. Put up in the vibrantly decorated 'stripy' guest room, in response to the hope that he would sleep well, given the room's brightness, Shaw was said to have responded that he always slept with his eyes shut.



4 BECKETS PARK

In July 1885, famed artist, designer, and humanist William Morris spoke here at Becketts Park (then Cow Meadow) on socialism, under the auspices of Northampton's Secular Society. He reportedly stated that 'the real business of man on earth was happiness', and 'if there was anything which interfered with happiness it was a duty to remove

it'. In the evening, Morris lectured at the Secular Hall on 'How we live and how we ought to live'.

In 1902, following a series of meetings at Cow Meadow held on Sunday afternoons during the summer, efforts were made to start a local ethical society 'to build up and comfort men and women, in those ways of thought and conduct which go to make a good life'.



5 BILLING ROAD CEMETERY

Billing Road Cemetery was opened in 1847, an example of a garden cemetery and the town's first secular burial site. Over the following years, a number of non-religious burials took place and were reported upon by the papers. These often used the secular burial service written by Austin Holyoake (1826–1874), emphasising the character and achievements of the individual, and – rather than an afterlife – the 'conviction that our memory will be cherished by those who come after us'. Such burials included those of

prominent local atheist William Watts in 1883, 'old Radical' Frank Perry in 1885, and Irish-born Patrick Shea of Victoria Road in 1895.

The cemetery suffered bomb damage in 1941, and in the years since has lost many of its monuments and original buildings. One notable monument is that on the grave of Mary and Robert Fossett, circus performers. Though neither had an explicitly secular funeral, the inscription for Robert Fossett chimes with a humanist idea of death: 'He has pulled in for his last rest and still remains with those who knew and those who loved him best'.