Humanist Heritage

NOTTINGHAM TOUR

This walk explores Nottingham's history of radical thought and the fight for freedom of expression. Discover the stories of figures like Susannah Wright, who defied imprisonment to promote a free press, and Thomas Major Mosley, a miner who spent decades debating rationalism in the city's public square. The route highlights the sites where freethinkers, abolitionists, secularists, and humanists have advocated for reason and human rights across 200 years.

1 GOOSE GATE

Goose Gate was the site of a radical bookshop opened by Nottingham-born lace worker Susannah Wright in 1826. Wright had earlier been imprisoned in London for selling texts deemed to be blasphemous. During a self-penned defence conducted with a babe-in-arms, lasting nearly four hours, Wright argued for the fundamental right to bring religion 'to the touchstone of free discussion'.

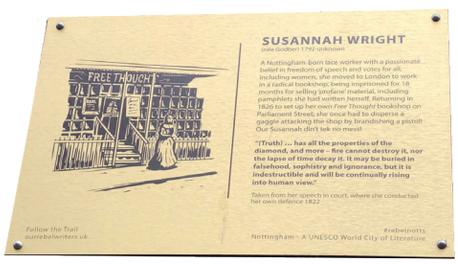
Her opening of a shop here in Nottingham was met with extreme backlash from the community, with Wright keeping a pistol under the counter for her protection, but she stood her ground. Her success was proven when she later moved to larger premises, also on Goose Gate.

3 DRURY HILL

Drury Hill was once home to the Secular Institute: a meeting place for Nottingham's secularists. Although today the word has come to mean the separation of Church and state, when 'secularist' was coined by activist and freethinker George Jacob Holyoake in 1851, he was seeking a positive alternative to words like 'atheist' and 'infidel', and describing a philosophy focused on promoting human happiness in *this* world - one synonymous with humanism today.

Nottingham had a secular society from the 1850s, which organised lectures, held debates, and provided an opportunity for its members to meet with likeminded people.

2 PLAQUE TO SUSANNAH WRIGHT, 7 BROAD STREET

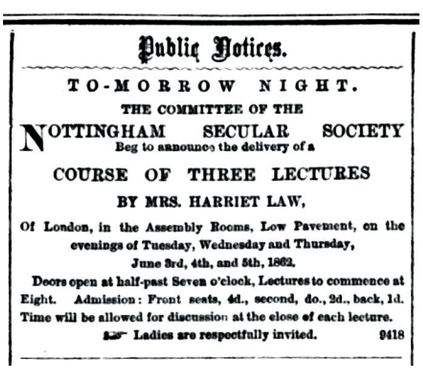


This plaque to Susannah Wright was placed as part of the Our Rebel Writers trail, an independent art project promoting Nottinghamshire's rebel writers. Susannah Wright's efforts to promote freedom of the press and freedom of belief form a key part of the story of humanism in the UK, placing her within a rich tradition of working for free discussion and the right to non-belief.

4 9 LOW PAVEMENT

This building was formerly the Assembly Rooms, and one of the venues used by Nottingham secularists during the 19th century. One series of lectures, organised by the Nottingham Secular Society, welcomed prominent speaker Harriet Law, who spoke here across three evenings in June

1862. *The Nottingham Journal* reported that her subjects were 'Difficulties of Christianity', 'The Doctrine of Providence... Opposed to Reason and Experience', and 'The Degradation of Women and Children', summarising her argument that 'reason, experience, and science are gradually dispelling the idea of the doctrine of providence'. Such topics, including the use of religious ideas to oppress women, and the importance of reason and evidence, were common among secularist lecturers of the time.



Public Notices.

TO-MORROW NIGHT.

THE COMMITTEE OF THE

NOTTINGHAM SECULAR SOCIETY

Beg to announce the delivery of a

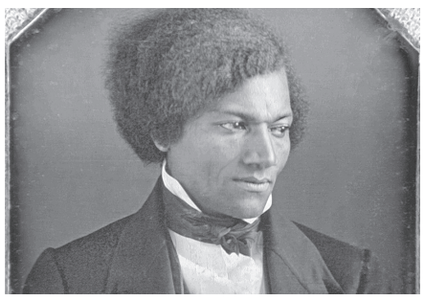
COURSE OF THREE LECTURES

BY MRS. HARRIET LAW,

Of London, in the Assembly Rooms, Low Pavement, on the evenings of Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, June 3rd, 4th, and 5th, 1862.

Doors open at half-past Seven o'clock, Lectures to commence at Eight. Admission: Front seats, 4d., second, do., 2d., back, 1d. Time will be allowed for discussion at the close of each lecture.

☞ Ladies are respectfully invited. 9418



5 NOTTINGHAM COUNCIL HOUSE

Nottingham Council House was built on the site of what was once Exchange Hall, where leading abolitionist and formerly enslaved man Frederick Douglass spoke in March 1847. As he often did, Douglass took the opportunity during his speech to castigate those back home in America who professed religion while holding slaves. In this, Douglass represents another aspect of the humanist tradition: those outside the organised movement who nonetheless expressed sceptical ideas and challenged what they saw as religious hypocrisy.

6 OLD MARKET SQUARE

If you'd come here on a Friday in the 1950s, you would have been likely to come across the indefatigable Thomas Major Mosley, a former miner and prominent debater. A decades-long member of the Cosmopolitan Debating Society (founded in 1898), Mosley took to the square on a weekly basis into his old age, typically taking 'rationalism' as his subject. Famed for his encyclopedic memory and ability to get along with those he completely disagreed with, Mosley continued Nottingham's legacy of championing free discussion. On his death in 1970, Mosley was given a humanist funeral conducted by J.W. Challand, secretary of the Nottingham Humanist Group.