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Sheffield and LGBTQ Public History**

TWELLS, Alison <<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2602-0029>>

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# **Iron Dukes and Naked Races: Edward Carpenter's Sheffield and LGBTQ Public History**

**Alison Twells**

## **ABSTRACT**

This article explores the development of a public history walk based on the life of Edward Carpenter (1844-1929), late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Sheffield-based writer, campaigner and sex reformer. It argues that understanding the world in which Carpenter and his comrades, friends and lovers lived, dreamed and loved, requires attention to both the alterity of sexual experiences in the past and historical continuity in terms of sexual identities and practices that are marginalised within different mainstream cultures. Public History brings a new perspective to this debate, drawing attention to the resonance of history in terms of present day identities. The article also addresses the heteronormativity of public history, the role of history in place-making and the ways in which public history, creative history and the practice of walking can challenge dominant versions of urban history and urge us to think critically about different ways of knowing the past.

## **KEYWORDS**

Public history, creative history, LGBTQ history, Queer Critical History, Edward Carpenter, walking, Sheffield, urban history, space and place.

The final quarter of the twentieth century saw renewed interest in the life and oeuvre of the writer and campaigner Edward Carpenter (1844-1929). Between his death in 1929 and the 1970s, Carpenter had all but disappeared from public view. George Orwell's dismissive characterisation of him as one of the “outer-suburban creeping Jesus” types, a representative of the “fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, pacifist and feminist” cranks who populated the wider socialist movement,<sup>1</sup> was reflected in his absence in the work of twentieth-century labour historians;<sup>2</sup> Henry Pelling believed Carpenter to be “too subtle, amorphous and intangible for the ordinary mind to grasp.”<sup>3</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, however,

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<sup>1</sup> George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967 [1937]), 152.

<sup>2</sup> Keith Nield, 'Edward Carpenter: The Uses of Utopia', in Tony Brown, *Edward Carpenter and late Victorian Radicalism* (London: Frank Cass, 1990), 17-32.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Pelling, quoted in Nield, 'Edward Carpenter: The Uses of Utopia', 19.

Carpenter's counter-cultural lifestyle and commitment to the Larger Socialism - causes which extended beyond workers' rights to include women's suffrage, sex reform, anarchism, vegetarianism, ethical living, craft and gardening, clothes reform, teetotalism, pacifism, better housing and the campaign for clean air, and which had seen him gain an almost prophetic stature in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth century - resonated in the new political climate. The same decades saw Carpenter's reclamation for the Gay Liberation Movement: his long partnership with his male lover, George Merrill; his insistence in his writing that love between men was a natural part of human sexuality; and the role he played in offering support and clarification to many men and women who grappled with same-sex desire, including writers Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon and E.M. Forster, were explored in the newly emerging field of Lesbian and Gay History.<sup>4</sup> An extensive scholarship has since emerged which explores Carpenter's socialism, internationalism and significance for the history of sexuality.<sup>5</sup> This article focuses on his appearance in LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer)<sup>6</sup> public and creative history, a neglected aspect of historical enquiry.

The 1970s and 1980s saw various creative representations of Carpenter's life and circle, including a bronze bust by sculptor Dorothea Clement, a performance at the Crucible Studio Theatre of BBC Sheffield radio journalist Rony Robinson's *Edward Carpenter Lives!* and Gay Sweatshop Theatre Company's production, *Dear Love of Comrades*, which toured the country in 1979.<sup>7</sup> After an end-of-century lull, the booming field of community history,

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<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London: Quartet Books, 1977). E. M. Forster acknowledged that *Maurice*, written in 1913-14 and finally published in 1971, was inspired by his 1912 visit to Millthorpe. E. M. Forster, Terminal Note, *Maurice* (London: Penguin, 1972), 217. See also: Siegfried Sassoon to Edward Carpenter, 27 July 1911, Edward Carpenter Collection, Sheffield City Archives (Carpenter Collection, hereafter), MSS 386/179, 386/181; Robert Graves to Edward Carpenter, 30 May 1914, Carpenter Collection 386/234.

<sup>5</sup> The major studies are: Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love* (London and New York, 2008); Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks, *Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis* (London: Pluto Press, 1977); Chushichi Tsuzuki, *Edward Carpenter 1844-1929: Prophet of Human Fellowship* (Cambridge, 1980); Brown (ed.), *Edward Carpenter and Late Victorian Radicalism*; Emile Delavenay, *D.H. Lawrence and Edward Carpenter: A Study in Edwardian Transition* (London: Heinemann, 1971).

<sup>6</sup> On naming, see Brian Lewis (ed.), *British Queer History: New Approaches and Perspectives* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), Introduction.

<sup>7</sup> Rony Robinson, *Edward Carpenter Lives!* (Crucible Studio Theatre, 1972).  
<http://www.unfinishedhistories.com/history/companies/gay-sweatshop/dear-love-of->

reoriented away from the local history society meeting to embrace wide-ranging groups and projects often shaped by identity and theme as much as by geography,<sup>8</sup> encouraged new activities, often in the context of the development (from 2005) of LGBT History Month.<sup>9</sup> This and the wider movement to extend the practice of public commemoration from “great men” towards lesser recognised groups and individuals, has seen Carpenter’s appearance in Sheffield’s revamped Weston Park Museum and a room named for him in the Central Library, as well as a number of public history events and commemorations. The most significant of these is English Heritage’s Pride of Place, which focuses on Millthorpe, Carpenter’s north-east Derbyshire home from 1892 to 1922,<sup>10</sup> a long-time unofficial site of pilgrimage, by socialists and queer men in Carpenter’s lifetime and, from the later twentieth century, by gay men.<sup>11</sup>

This article focuses on the development of a city walk based on Carpenter’s life in Sheffield, where he lived in the late 1870s while working for the University Extension Movement and where he kept accommodation after his move to Millthorpe, and where he attended political meetings and anti-war demonstrations, helped to run a café and hosted political speakers, socialised, pursued sexual and romantic relationships and sold home-grown vegetables. I am developing the walk for the community history group, Friends of Edward Carpenter, which was formed in 2011 with the twin aims of raising awareness of Carpenter’s historical significance and funds to develop a permanent memorial in his adopted

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comrades/ Thanks to Alison Oram for reminding me of the Gay Sweatshop production and Ray Batchelor for this: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xcs3iinZOx4&feature=youtu.be>.

<sup>8</sup> Alison Twells, ‘Community History’, *Making History: The Changing Face of the Profession in Britain*, (IHR, 2008), [http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/community\\_history.html](http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/community_history.html). See also Alison Twells, Penny Furness, Sadiq Bhanbhro and Maxine Gregory, “It’s About Giving Yourself a Sense of Belonging”: Community-Based History and Well-Being in South Yorkshire’, *People Places and Policy (People Place Policy)*, forthcoming, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> There have been 40-50 Heritage Lottery Fund-supported LGBT community history projects since the early 2000s. Alison Oram, personal correspondence, September 2017.

<sup>10</sup> See also for example ‘Free Love and Socialism: Visit to Edward Carpenter’s House’, Sheffield Friday Night Rides, <http://www.sfnr.org.uk/past-sheffield-fridaynightrides/20110624-free-love-and-socialism-visit-to-edward-carpenters-house/>; Helen Smith and Dead Earnest Theatre Company, ‘Sweet Comradeship’ (2013); Sally Goldsmith, ‘Boots, Fresh Air and Ginger Beer’, June 2015:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XyTOWZtHnN8>; Historic England, Pride of Place: <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/inclusive-heritage/lgbtq-heritage-project/>.

<sup>11</sup> See Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter*. 313-314, 330-332. For a more contemporary pilgrimage, see <http://rictornorton.co.uk/carpente.htm>.

city.<sup>12</sup> When I set the initial research as a student project for my final year module, Community History, on the BA History degree at Sheffield Hallam University, I had little idea how big a task it would be. My student's final submission - a short walk focusing on the sites of historical socialist haunts - showed that not only were the socialist sites now mainly buried under more recent developments or located in semi-derelict parts of the city centre, but that finding material sites that represented Carpenter's life as a gay man was a significant challenge. I have since developed and led the walk on a number of occasions throughout 2016-2017, including on the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia and as part of a series of events accompanying the Journey to Justice exhibition.<sup>13</sup>

The inclusion in the walk of sites representing Carpenter's life as a lover of men has required engagement with the body of work, largely from cultural geography, which has emphasised the social and political production of “space” and the ongoing and often contested nature of place-making activities.<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, this has seen exploration of the city as a heterosexual space in which non-heterosexuals have been compelled to disguise their presence or to enter via an underworld of secret bars, bath houses and public urinals.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, historians have shown that queer men and women have found freedom in specific parts of some cities and have used the city to explore “ideas of homosexual selfhood and community, and the place of both in society”.<sup>16</sup> As Chris Waters states in his review of Matt Cook's *London and the Culture of Homosexuality*, there was no single queer urban

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<sup>12</sup> Friends of Edward Carpenter, <http://www.friensofedwardcarpenter.co.uk/> As Alison Oram has pointed out, such public history walks have a genesis in the sexual politics of the 1980s. Alison Oram, 'Going on an outing: the historic house and queer public history', in *Rethinking History* 15:2 (June 2011), 189-207, 196.

<sup>13</sup> Journey to Justice, May 2016: <http://journeytojustice.org.uk/projects/voices-for-equality/>.

<sup>14</sup> Doreen Massey, 'Places and their Pasts', *History Workshop Journal* 39:1 (1995), 182–192, 185-87. See also Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005); Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perceptions, Attitudes and Values* (Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1974).

<sup>15</sup> Simon Gunn, 'The Spatial Turn: Changing Histories of Space and Place', in S. Gunn and R. J. Morris, *Identities in Space: Contested Terrains in the Western City since 1850* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 1-14.

<sup>16</sup> Matt Cook, "'A New City of Friends": London and Homosexuality in the 1890s', *History Workshop Journal* 56 (2003), 33-58, 46; Matt Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Matt Houlbrook, 'For Whose Convenience? Gay Guides, Cognitive Maps and the Construction of Homosexual London 1917-1967', in Gunn and Morris, *Identities in Space*, 165-186; Matt Cook and Jennifer V. Evans (eds), *Queer Cities, Queer Cultures: Europe since 1945* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

experience: there was “a grossly indecent city, an inverted city, a decadent city, a Hellenic city, each mapped along particular axes that often did not overlap with the others, each of which informed the lives of some men but not others”.<sup>17</sup> All, however, are submerged beneath what Laurajane Smith has termed the “authorised heritage discourse”, the dominant representation of the city.<sup>18</sup> As Doreen Massey has argued, “the identities of places are very much bound up with the histories that are told of them; how these histories are told, and what history turns out to be dominant”.<sup>19</sup> History, then, has a role in place-making.

Walking itself is the focus of a developing body of theory. From Walter Benjamin's notion of the (detached, male) flâneur, urban walking in particular has received considerable attention from scholars.<sup>20</sup> While Michel de Certeau's notion of walking as “a form of urban emancipation that opens up a range of democratic possibilities” has been critiqued for its romanticism - not least because some walkers have considerably more freedom and less risk than others<sup>21</sup> - scholars have drawn attention to the “multisensory” aspects of walking: its capacity to provide a distinct “mode of knowing and understanding”, through the foregrounding of “atmospheres, emotions, reflections and beliefs ... as well as intellects,

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<sup>17</sup> Chris Waters, 'Distance and Desire in the New British Queer History', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 14:1 (2007), 139-55, 147; Cook, *London*.

<sup>18</sup> Laurajane Smith, *The Uses of Heritage* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 4. See also: Phil Smith, 'Walking-Based Arts: A Resource for the Guided Tour?' *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism* 13:2 (2013), 103-114; Obrador Pau and Sean Carter, 'Art, Politics, Memory: Tactical Tourism and the Route of Anarchism in Barcelona', *Cultural Geographies* 17:4 (2010), 525-531.

<sup>19</sup> Doreen Massey, 'Places and their Pasts', *History Workshop Journal* 39:1 (1995), 182-192, 185-87. For 'space' and historians, see Roey Sweet, 'Urban History', *Making History: The Changing Face of the Profession in Britain*,

[http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/urban\\_history.html](http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/urban_history.html) (accessed 2 January 2018); Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (MIT Press, London, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> See for example: Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (New York: Viking, 2000); Francesco Careri, *Walkscapes: Walking as an Aesthetic Practice* (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 2002); the almost entirely male-focused Merlin Coverley, *The Art of Wandering: The Writer as Walker* (Harpending: Oldcastle Books, 2012); Lauren Elkin, *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice, and London* (London: Penguin, 2016). With regard to Carpenter, see Michael Hatt's discussion of his representation of Democracy (in *Towards Democracy*, 1883) as 'a combination of Walt Whitman and Jesus Christ with muscles' who 'comes "swinging" though space, his measured, easy, sexy gait an index of his sense of locatedness and orientation in the world.' Michael Hatt, 'Edward Carpenter and the Domestic Interior', *Oxford Art Journal* 36:3 (2013), 395-415, 411.

<sup>21</sup> See for example Brian Morris, 'What We Talk About When We Talk About "Walking in the City"', *Cultural Studies* 18:5 (2004), 675-697; Sharon M. Meagher, 'Philosophy in the Streets', *City* 11:1 (2007), 7-20.

rationales and ideologies.”<sup>22</sup> Phil Smith has written about the drift, or *dérive*, as “a way of gathering sensual information about the city, a resource for a subversive form of mapping.”<sup>23</sup> Walking has its temporal dimension too: participants travel in time as they move in space. In Ian Sinclair's words, walking is a way of contacting “the ghosts and levels of a city, the past and the future”.<sup>24</sup> David Pinder has employed the metaphor of “spectral traces” to draw attention to the historical layering of “cities that exist inside the city” and the “steps, paths, presences” of others, such that we can “seem to be inhabiting a realm of ghosts”.<sup>25</sup> Accessing the sedimented layers of history in the built environment can make explicit the constructed nature of the official version of a city or an area within it, thereby “unsettling dominant identities of place” and developing an “alternative narrative that subverts the official rhetoric”.<sup>26</sup>

Beyond issues of space and place, writing a LGBTQ history walk takes us to the heart of tenacious debates within the history of sexuality. These are broadly concerned with the question of whether we can define the sexualities of the historical men and women whose lives we seek to recover in terms of current categories of sexuality; in other words, whether there is continuity in experience between historical periods or whether such experience can only be understood in historical context.<sup>27</sup> A range of recent studies has demonstrated that rather than there always having been a minority of “homosexuals” in a predominantly “heterosexual” culture, concepts of sexuality and sexual practices have changed dramatically through time.<sup>28</sup> In Chris Waters' words, men and women in the past had “affective ties to

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<sup>22</sup> Sarah Pink, 'An Urban Tour: The Sensory Sociality of Ethnographic Place-Making', *Ethnography*, 9:2 (2008), <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1466138108089467> (accessed 21/12/2017); Jon Anderson, 'Talking Whilst Walking: A Geographical Archaeology of Knowledge', *Area* 36:3 (2004) 254-61. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.lcproxy.shu.ac.uk/doi/10.1111/j.0004-0894.2004.00222.x/full> (accessed 21 December 2017). There are no page numbers in this version.

<sup>23</sup> Smith, 'Walking-Based Arts', 106.

<sup>24</sup> Sinclair quoted in David Pinder, 'Ghostly Footsteps: Voices, Memories and Walks in the City', *Cultural Geographies* 8:1 (2001), 12.

<sup>25</sup> Pinder, 'Ghostly Footsteps', 8-9.

<sup>26</sup> Pau and Carter, 'Art, Politics, Memory', 526, 529.

<sup>27</sup> For discussions of these debates and their historical development, see David M. Halperin, *How To Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 121–30.

<sup>28</sup> Key studies include: Chiara Beccalossi, *Female Sexual Inversion: Same-Sex Desires in Italian and British Sexology, c. 1870-1920* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011); Sean Brady, *Masculinity and Homosexuality in Britain, 1861-1913* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005); H. G. Cocks, *Nameless Offences: Homosexual Desire in the Nineteenth Century* (London: IB

each other that could not in any sense be subsumed under categories of consciousness and identity that we would recognise today”.<sup>29</sup> Helen Smith's ground-breaking study, *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire in Industrial England, 1895-1957*, both contributes to this debate and is especially pertinent for Sheffield. In industrial South Yorkshire, Smith argues, male intimacy, which included physical and emotional affection and the sharing of beds and, no doubt for some, sex, was just one part of a wider sexual repertoire, “something they did alongside all the other romantic and sexual elements in their life”,<sup>30</sup> including heterosexual marriage. There was a fluidity of sexual expression, to the extent that the majority of working-class men in the north of England did not subscribe to a single, coherent sexual identity, even by the late 1950s.<sup>31</sup> Smith argues that “working men's identities and sense of selfhood were not dependent on their sexuality; they were tied to their work and workplace community, their sense of regionality and the group of mates who shared these key areas.”<sup>32</sup> Same-sex encounters were neither judged negatively: “Amongst northern working men, 'normality' and 'good character' were not necessarily disrupted by same-sex

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Tauris, 2003); Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality*; Laura Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism: the Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture* (New York, Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2001) and *Disturbing Practices: History, Sexuality and Women's Experience of Modern War* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005); Rebecca Jennings, *Tom-Boys and Bachelor Girls: A Lesbian History of Post-War Britain, 1945-1971* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008); Maurice Kaplan, *Sodom on the Thames: Sex, Love and Scandal in Wilde Times* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Lewis (ed.), *British Queer History*; Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Alison Oram, *Her Husband was a Woman! Gender-Crossing in Modern British Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2008); Helen Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire in Industrial England, 1895-1957* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Charles Upchurch, *Before Wilde: Sex between Men in Britain's Age of Reform* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> Waters, 'Distance and Desire', 140. See also Jeffrey Weeks' review of his earlier work. Jeffrey Weeks, 'Queer(y)ing the Modern Homosexual', *Journal of British Studies* 51:3 (2012), 523-539; Oram, 'Going on an outing'. See also Joseph Bristow, 'Remapping the sites of Modern Gay History: Legal Reform, Medico-Legal Thought, Homosexual Scandal, Erotic Geography', *Journal of British Studies* 46:1 (Jan. 2007), 116-42.

<sup>30</sup> Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire*, 71. See similar arguments from the Americas and New Zealand: John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Chris Brickell, *Mates and Lovers: A Gay History of New Zealand* (Auckland: Random House/Goodwit and London: Arnold, 2008); Ray Batchelor, 'Queer Tango's "Image Problem": Men, Intimacy and Pictures from the Past', unpublished conference paper, November 2016.

<sup>31</sup> Matt Houlbrook shows that this was the case in parts of the south too, although awareness of the category of queer men developed sooner. Houlbrook, *Queer London*.

<sup>32</sup> Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire*, 80.



desire. As long as a man was a good and reliable worker, many other potential transgressions could be forgiven or overlooked.”<sup>33</sup>

These issues are particularly pertinent in a public history context, where such debates are overlain with other considerations.<sup>34</sup> On the one hand is the argument, powerfully expressed by Robert Mills, that LGBTQ public history in the years after the millennium has seen the emergence of a grand narrative which emphasises progression from repressive Victorian sexual attitudes towards “outness”, visibility and liberation;<sup>35</sup> a narrative which draws on Foucault's “repressive hypothesis” and what Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick has termed the “epistemology of the closet”.<sup>36</sup> Within this paradigm, Mills argues, histories purport to uncover hitherto hidden antecedents of modern categories of sexual identity, thereby reflecting a belief in the existence of a homosexual essence that is unchanging through time. “Outside academic contexts,” Mills writes,

attempts to subject the notion of transhistorical, transcultural homosexual identity to critical examination still appear to have few takers. In the U.K. at least, queer-themed exhibitions continue to subscribe, for the most part, to the idea that “there have always been LGBT people,” that their lives have simply been “hidden from history,” and that the recuperation of their stories can be addressed through a process of “making the invisible visible.”<sup>37</sup>

While recent years have seen challenges to this model - see for example *Pride of Place* by English Heritage and the National Trust's *Prejudice and Pride* - a focus on “gay ancestors” remains evident in, for example, many LGBT History month events.

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<sup>33</sup> Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire*, 3. For an exploration of similar issues in relation to early twentieth-century lesbianism, see Doan, *Disturbing Practices*.

<sup>34</sup> For Public History in Britain see Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice* (London: Arnold, 2006 [2000]); Jill Liddington, 'What is Public History? Publics and Their Pasts, Meanings and Practices', *Oral History*, 30:1 (2002), 93-93.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Mills, 'Theorising the Queer Museum', *Museums and Social Issues* 3:1 (2008), 41-52, 48; Robert Mills, 'Queer is Here? Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Histories and Public Culture', *History Workshop Journal* 62:1 (2006), 253-63.

<sup>36</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, transl. Robert Hurley, (London, 1978); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, 1990), both cited in Mills, 'Queer is Here?', 255.

<sup>37</sup> Mills, 'Theorising the Queer Museum', 48. This can be the case even in progressive settings. See for example the absence of definition of “lesbian and gay material” for museum exhibitions in Angela Vanegas, 'Representing Lesbians and Gay Men in British Social History Museums', in Richard Sandell (ed.), *Museums, Society, Inequality* (London: Routledge, 2002), 98-109, 106, 105.

As David Halperin and others have argued, the failure to take on board critical analyses of the “consolidation of the modern gay subject” throughout the twentieth century has a political consequence, serving to support the contemporary “prominence of heterosexuality and homosexuality as central, organizing categories of thought, behaviour and erotic subjectivity” and thereby to obscure the fact that this was not the case in different historical periods.<sup>38</sup> In addition, this approach unwittingly excludes “other expressions of sexuality and gender nonconformity that resist categorization within the heterosexual-homosexual matrix” that is dominant in contemporary culture.<sup>39</sup> Trans sexualities are perhaps the most current example here,<sup>40</sup> but this also includes variety within same-sex desire itself: men who engaged in sex with men but who did not identify as gay, for example, a group who formed a significant part of Edward Carpenter's wider circle and who will be discussed below. Like many academics, Halperin, a scholar of Classical Greece and beyond, sees the focus on historical context as of political value: “to historicise homosexuality is to *denaturalise* heterosexuality”, he writes, and serves to reveal its rise to dominance as “relatively recent and culturally specific”, “to deprive it of its claims to be a ‘traditional value’, and ultimately ‘to destroy the self-evidence of the entire system on which the homophobic opposition between homosexuality and heterosexuality depended.’”<sup>41</sup>

Public history does raise other issues for consideration, however. Participants bring to public history events their desires for community and for the validation of their current identities.<sup>42</sup> They may also exhibit exasperation at seemingly arcane debate and obscure and elitist academic language - in this case, in relation to Foucauldian and Queer Theory. For such an audience, injunctions to pay greater attention to historical context or emphasis on discourse can not only seem to reduce the history of sexuality to a history of representation

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<sup>38</sup> Halperin, *How To Do*, 3.

<sup>39</sup> Mills, 'Queer Is Here?' 256; Waters, 'Distance and Desire', 140.

<sup>40</sup> Alan Sinfield has argued that this is part of an over focus on sexual orientation and marginalisation of gender dissidence in post-1970s identity politics. Alan Sinfield, 'The Challenge of Transgender, the Moment of Stonewall, and Neil Bartlett', *GLQ* 10: 2 (2004), 267–72.

<sup>41</sup> Halperin, *How To Do*, 3, 10.

<sup>42</sup> Mills, 'Queer is Here?', 255. See George Chauncey, Martin Bauml Duberman and Martha Vicinus (eds), *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Lesbian and Gay Past* (London: Penguin, 1991 [1989]), 11-13; Alison Oram, 'Telling Stories about the Ladies of Llangollen', in Ann-Marie Gallagher, Cathy Lubelska and Louise Ryan (eds), *Representing the Past: Women and History* (Essex: Pearson Education, 2001), 44-63, 45.

but can come across as high-handed, dismissive and counter-intuitive. There are issues of pride and well-being at stake; those “intangible elements of connection and emotion” which Ann-Marie Kramer has identified in relation to genealogy<sup>43</sup> and which closely relate to the benefits of public history more generally.<sup>44</sup> There are, moreover, alternatives to a polarised, binary approach. The argument that same-sex desire is differently expressed historically, in Halperin's words, does “not necessarily invalidate the importance of the broader queer project of identifying with and claiming non-heteronormative figures from the past.”<sup>45</sup> Such figures themselves form transhistorical continuities; as Valerie Traub has suggested, rather than focusing exclusively on the alterity of the past, we can see parallel structures of intimacy across historical contexts.<sup>46</sup> As Laura Doan has argued, we need a “queer critical history” which allows us to simultaneously excavate queerness in the past while resisting the desire to name and impose modern categories of identity on the “variations, deviations, and complications of actual lives of individuals who were unaccustomed to sexual self-reflectivity.”<sup>47</sup>

This article brings these debates within LGBTQ public history together with a focus on writing a public history walk to commemorate Edward Carpenter's connection with Sheffield. The first section focuses on Carpenter as a socialist and lover of men to explore issues involved in layering queer history over Sheffield's well-trodden radical urban historical terrain. Secondly, I explore the potential to address both the desire for gay antecedents and the fact of historical difference through a focus on Carpenter, a self-identified “uranian” who desired only men, and other men in his circle, such as his lover George Hukin, for whom sexual and romantic involvement with men was just one part of a more fluid sexuality that he seems not to have named. Throughout, I raise the question of what academic historians might learn from the focus in public and community history pedagogies on communication and collaboration, on the sensory experience of walking and the capacity for curated walks to provide a different knowledge of a place.

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<sup>43</sup> Ann-Marie Kramer, ‘Kinship, Affinity and Connectedness: Exploring the Role of Genealogy in Personal Lives’, *Sociology* 45:3 (2011), 379-95.

<sup>44</sup> Twells et al., “It's About Giving Yourself a Sense of Belonging”.

<sup>45</sup> Halperin, *How To Do*, 16.

<sup>46</sup> Valerie Traub, 'The Present Future of Lesbian Historiography' in George E. Hegarty and Molly McGarry, *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 124-45.

<sup>47</sup> Doan, *Disturbing Practices*, 162.

## 1. Sex and Socialism in the city walk

Having lived in Sheffield and worked as a historian here for nearly thirty years, I am aware that there is a common feeling that the city should make more of Edward Carpenter. At the same time, many people, while knowing a little bit about him, do not feel sufficiently knowledgeable to be able to properly contextualise Carpenter's life, activism and writings. How unusual was he as an “out” gay man living openly with his lover in the 1890s? Beyond his authorship of *England Arise!* what was his specific contribution to the socialist movement? A key aim of the Friends of Edward Carpenter in suggesting the walk, therefore, was to interpret Carpenter for this wider audience and thereby contribute to the development of a platform for his commemoration in Sheffield. In planning the walk, I decided to focus in the first instance on sex and socialism, the two themes that are the main focus both of the historiography and public interest in Carpenter, now and in his lifetime.<sup>48</sup> Trial runs of the city walk have confirmed that this is an appropriate focus, bringing together three broad and sometimes overlapping groups of walkers with interests in Sheffield history per se, the city's radical history more specifically and in LGBTQ history, locally and nationally. In this section, I will explain the choice of sites in the walk as part of a wider discussion of the difficulty of uncovering Carpenter's “queer city” in comparison to Sheffield's well-established radical past.

My starting point for thinking about Carpenter's city-based socialist politics was Millthorpe, his north-east Derbyshire home. The opening sentence of the entry for the house on Historic England's Pride of Place website states that “[r]arely has a single house been the site of such important political and cultural developments.” Carpenter's writing on the naturalness of same-sex love, his domestic life with George Merrill, one of the most celebrated gay partnerships of the period, and visits by figures of national and international renown such as Havelock Ellis, Olive Schreiner and E. M. Forster are discussed alongside his socialism, environmentalism, interest in craft and market-gardening, advocacy of the simplification of life, nudism, vegetarianism, and even his influence on architecture and

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<sup>48</sup> In the longer term, there is scope to add more material: on sites relating to Carpenter's pacifism in the First World War, for example, or - my particular interest - his global/cosmopolitan influences and connections to and relationships with people such as Olive Schreiner, Mahatma Gandhi and Charlotte Perkins Gillman.

the garden city movement.<sup>49</sup> Millthorpe, then, can be seen to embody the Larger Socialism for which Carpenter was a key spokesperson and which was key to his appeal at the turn of the twentieth century. As shown by historian Michael Hatt, Carpenter's commitment to the New Life can be seen even in his domestic arrangements - the piano in the combined kitchen/living room, the portrait of Walt Whitman on the wall, the “absence of ‘Things,’ and of their attendant fuss and care”<sup>50</sup> - scant references to which reveal his rejection of “the visual and material culture of capital” in his repudiation of domestic artefacts, servants and bourgeois formalities. Carpenter's statements in *My Days and Dreams* that he envisaged at Millthorpe “a *rendez-vous* for all classes and conditions of society”<sup>51</sup> and that “[p]lainness is necessary from foundation causes of humanity and democracy”,<sup>52</sup> and his decision to share his home with two labouring families, the Fearnhoughs and then the Adamses, prior to George Merrill's arrival in 1898, were similarly concerned, in Hatt's words, with the development of “relationships that are non-hierarchical, but also spaces that bear no trace of social stratification.”<sup>53</sup> Even his sandal-making, Hatt suggests, which was inspired by a pair sent from India by a friend in 1885-86 and taught by a Sheffield “bootmaker friend”, W. Lill,<sup>54</sup> can be seen as a disruption by “anti-Capitalist eastern values” to make “a vigorously anti-middle-class style statement”.<sup>55</sup>

Carpenter's status as a prophet of the New Life can be further evidenced in contemporary accounts. Katherine St John Conway (1867-1950), a Bristol-based founding member of the ILP, reported that Carpenter's *England's Ideal* (1887) led her to feel as if “a

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<sup>49</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/inclusive-heritage/lgbtq-heritage-project/homes-and-domestic-spaces/millthorpe-and-edward-carpenter/>.

<sup>50</sup> Raymond Unwin to Ethel Parker, May 1884, quoted in Mark Swenarton, *Artisans and Architects: The Ruskinian Tradition in Architectural Thought* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 132; and Janet Ashbee, quoted in Felicity Ashbee, *Janet Ashbee: Love, Marriage and the Arts & Crafts Movement* (New York: Syracuse 2002), 34, both cited by Hatt, 'Edward Carpenter and the Domestic Interior', 403-404; and Alan Crawford, *CR Ashbee: Architect, Designer & Romantic Socialist* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 16.

<sup>51</sup> Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1916), 164.

<sup>52</sup> Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, 166.

<sup>53</sup> Hatt, 'Edward Carpenter and the Domestic Interior', 404 and 408. See also Charlotte Wilson's description of “the beautiful homeliness of its life of genuine human equality in honest labour and well-earned rest for recreation.” *Women's Penny Paper*, 24 November 1888, cited in Tsuzuki, *Edward Carpenter*, 91.

<sup>54</sup> Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, 124.

<sup>55</sup> Hatt, 'Edward Carpenter and the Domestic Interior', 410-411. See also Ruth Livesey, *Socialism, Sex and the Culture of Aestheticism in Britain, 1880-1914* (Oxford and London: Oxford University Press and the British Academy, 2007).

great window had been flung wide open and the vision of the world had been shown me: of the earth reborn to beauty and joy”.<sup>56</sup> Conway and her partner, fellow ILP member John Bruce Glasier (1859-1920), chose Millthorpe as one venue for their honeymoon in 1893.<sup>57</sup> By the late 1890s and early 1900s, socialists were particularly in thrall to Carpenter's representation of the New Life in *Towards Democracy*, his Whitman-esque poem in four parts, the publication of the first collected edition of which in 1905 saw him achieve an almost celebrity-status.<sup>58</sup> The prediction of the 1897 Labour Annual that “before many years have elapsed, there will be few in the Labour Movement who will not count [*Towards Democracy*] as an indispensable companion”<sup>59</sup> is echoed in the memories of ILP member, Fabian and pacifist Fenner Brockway, who described the poem as “our Bible”; Carpenter, he wrote, was the “greatest spiritual influence of our lives.”<sup>60</sup> Rather than merely uncovering a list of “socialist” sites, therefore, we<sup>61</sup> wanted to find evidence of Carpenter's vision in his city-based political activities.

We assemble for the walk at a meeting point just down the road from the former Hall of Science on Rockingham Street, the site of Carpenter's early political involvement and our first port of call. Before walking to the Hall, I introduce Carpenter by means of a brief biography: his birth into an upper middle-class naval family in Brighton in 1844; his mathematics degree at Cambridge; his ordination in 1870 and curacy with Christian socialist leader Frederick Denison Maurice; his decision, after a period of depression and a spell of time travelling in Europe, to take work with the University Extension Movement, and his arrival in Leeds in 1874 and Sheffield in 1877. I want to establish the terms on which Carpenter arrived in the north and to suggest that he was unusual in two respects. Firstly, he

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<sup>56</sup> Stephen Yeo, ‘A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain, 1883-1896’, *History Workshop Journal* (1977), 5-56, 44.

<sup>57</sup> Tsuzuki, *Edward Carpenter*, 136.

<sup>58</sup> *Towards Democracy* was published between 1883 and 1902, with a collected edition published by Swann Sonnenschein in 1905. Cook, “A New City of Friends”, 44.

<sup>59</sup> Cited in Kirsten Harris, *Walt Whitman and British Socialism: The Love of Comrades* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2016), 60.

<sup>60</sup> Fenner Brockway, ‘A Memory of Edward Carpenter’, *New Leader*, 5 July 1929, quoted in Stanley Pierson, ‘Prophet of a Socialist Millennium’, *Victorian Studies* 13:3 (1970), 301-318, 301.

<sup>61</sup> The “we” in this piece is very hard to define: it is largely me, in discussion with various interested parties, including Kate Flannery of The Friends of Edward Carpenter, with whom I did the first trial walk one lunchtime in 2015, Sally Goldsmith, an expert on Carpenter's north Derbyshire life, and Donald McLean, who thrashed out with me what walkers/people interested in Carpenter want to take away from a public history event.

was no philanthropist. Although many University Extension lecturers were motivated by the desire to lead and reform,<sup>62</sup> the movement focused on educating the classes together rather than being directed at uplifting the poor in a more conventional philanthropic style. Nineteenth-century Sheffield was in any case notoriously resistant to philanthropic efforts. Middle-class reformers had battled for decades with a popular culture renowned for its wilful distance from polite society, believing this to be the result of the “little mester” system of production which saw men simultaneously working as employees and employers.<sup>63</sup> In a report for the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science in 1860, for example, the authors note the independence and irregular working hours of the grinders who made up the bulk of the working population, commenting that “authority on one side and subjection on the other ... scarcely exists in Sheffield.”<sup>64</sup> Secondly, Carpenter was attracted to Sheffield in large part because of this underdeveloped sense of social hierarchy and air of resistance to outside interference and authority. Indeed, it is likely that his lecturing job was a means for Carpenter's move rather than the focus of his ambition. Unusually, he believed he had things to learn from the northern working class. Carpenter experienced polite society as suffocating in its focus on status, materialism and “false shames and affectations”.<sup>65</sup> As he wrote to Walt Whitman in 1874, he expected to find something “vital” and tangible in the North; he hoped to discover a “desire to lay hold of something with a real grasp”.<sup>66</sup> His aim was to add substance to his own life while contributing to cross-class fellowship.

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<sup>62</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, 'Travellers in a Strange Country: Responses of Working Class Students to the University Extension Movement - 1873-1910', *History Workshop* No. 12 (Autumn, 1981), 62-95; Brian Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement 1870-1918*, London 1965, 86-92.

<sup>63</sup> Dennis Smith, *Conflict and Compromise: Class Formation in English Society, 1830-1914* (London: Routledge, 1982), 31, 52-53; Colin Holmes and Sidney Pollard, *Essays in the Economic and Social History of South Yorkshire* (Barnsley, 1976), 5-6; Alison Twells, *The Civilising Mission and the English Middle Class, 1792-1850: The "Heathen" at Home And Overseas* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), 58-60.

<sup>64</sup> F. Hill, 'An Account of some Trade Combinations in Sheffield', National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, *Trades Societies and Strikes* (London, 1860), 530, cited in R. D. Storch, 'The Problem of Working-Class Leisure: Some Roots of Middle-Class Moral Reform in the Industrial North, 1825-50', in A. P. Donajkowski (ed.), *Social Control in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 146.

<sup>65</sup> Carpenter to Whitman, 12 July 1874, in Horace Traubel (ed.), *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, Vol. 1 (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1961), 160.

<sup>66</sup> He was aware, he wrote, that mathematics and science might not be enough to give in return. Carpenter to Whitman, July 12 1874, in Traubel (ed.), *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, 161. Carpenter, who first encountered Whitman's poetry at Cambridge, met him in 1877 and 1884 and corresponded with him until the poet's death.

I open the walk with readings of what I consider to be some of the key quotations concerning Carpenter's philosophy and decision to move to Sheffield. This is the very personal Carpenter, the man E. M. Forster claimed “wasn't happy in the class in which he was born... and he did not revolt from a sense of duty, or in order to make a splash, but because he wanted to”; who “escaped from culture by the skin of his teeth.”<sup>67</sup> I suggest that Carpenter was suffering from depression in the early 1870s and carving a new life for himself was essential to his wellbeing. By the time he published *My Days and Dreams* (1916), he had developed a wider critique of the Victorian Age:

a period in which not only commercialism in public life, but cant in religion, pure materialism in science, futility in social conventions, the worship of stocks and shares, the starving of the human heart, the denial of the human body and its needs, the huddling concealment of the body in clothes, the “impure hush” on matters of sex, class-division, contempt of manual labour, and the cruel barring of women from every natural and useful expression of their lives, were carried to an extremity of folly difficult for us now to realise.<sup>68</sup>

But the very personal feelings of the young man who struggled to feel at home in his family of origin and who detested what he experienced as the “puppet dance of gentility”,<sup>69</sup> can be seen in his early writings in *Towards Democracy* (1883):

World of pigmy men and women, dressed like monkeys, that go by  
World of squalid wealth, of grinning galvanized society,  
World of dismal dinner-parties, footmen, intellectual talk, [...]  
World of everything and nothing - nothing that will fill the void;<sup>70</sup>

Walkers enjoy Carpenter's account of being “taken with” the Sheffield people “from the first”. Looking back on his arrival in 1877, he wrote:

Rough in the extreme, twenty or thirty years in date behind other towns, and very uneducated, there was yet a heartiness about them, not without shrewdness, which attracted me. I felt more inclined to take root here than in any of the Northern Towns where I had been.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> E. M. Forster, 'Edward Carpenter', *Two Cheers for Democracy* (London: Edward Arnold 1972 [1951]), 205-07, 205; E. M. Forster, 'Some Memories', in Gilbert Beith, *Edward Carpenter. An Appreciation* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1931), 74.

<sup>68</sup> Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, 321.

<sup>69</sup> Carpenter, *Towards Democracy*, 26.

<sup>70</sup> Carpenter, *Towards Democracy*, 147-148.

<sup>71</sup> Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, 92, 72.



This invariably sparks discussion as we walk to our next stop: is this how Sheffield people have always been? Or was Carpenter prone to romanticisation?

Rowbotham's biography makes for the easy identification of sites for the city walk relating to Carpenter's involvement in early socialist politics, both extant buildings and sites of former buildings. We chose the site of the former Hall of Science as our first port of call, partly because it works in terms of the route: this is the most westerly point and we walk in a north-easterly direction from here. It also gives an introduction to Sheffield in the 1870s, the decade of Carpenter's arrival in the city: using a historical map from *Local Studies*, we pick out nearby residential courts and industrial works. To convey the pollution and poverty in this part of the town, we use an extract of a letter to Whitman in 1874 in which Carpenter tells his friend that he would be surprised at “the squalor and raggedness” of the great manufacturing towns, the “pale-faced teeming population, and tall chimneys and ash heaps covered with squalid children picking them over, and dirty alleys, and courts and houses half roofless, and a river running black through the midst of them” describing it as a “strange and wonderful sight.”<sup>72</sup>

Starting at the Hall of Science works in terms of the chronology of Carpenter's life in Sheffield: it was here in the 1870s that he became acquainted with the burgeoning socialist movement and with older radical men and women and where he delivered his first political lecture on the topic of “Co-operative Production” in 1883.<sup>73</sup> Introducing themes that were to run through his life and writing, he argued that under the right conditions manual labour can be “a blessing and not a curse”, that workers are more important than commodities, that completing whole tasks rather than small repetitive operations gives dignity to labour, that men would be better off working for themselves in cooperative ventures than earning a pittance and lining someone else's pocket and that the “simplification of life”, especially in terms of consumption, was important for human happiness. This contributes to an overarching theme of the walk: in its origins in Owenism - the Hall of Science was opened in 1839 by Robert Owen himself and was dedicated to the campaigning, educational and

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<sup>72</sup> Carpenter wrote to Whitman Carpenter to Whitman, 19 December 1877, in Traubel (ed.), *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, 190.

<sup>73</sup> Edward Carpenter, ‘Co- operative Production: With Reference to the Experiment of Leclaire. A Lecture Given at the Hall of Science, Sheffield, 1883’ (Manchester: John Heywood, 1883), 13.

cultural activities of Sheffield's Owenites and Chartists<sup>74</sup> - the Hall represents a politics that involved creating the New Life in the here and now as well as campaigning for structural - parliamentary, economic - change. An extract that I read from Carpenter's lecture is one of the most requested quotations in follow-up correspondence. An eerily modern critique of "[b]uying today and throwing away tomorrow", of the practice whereby "we go on until our houses are choked with useless lumber and our towns are laid upon a foundation of old boots and salmon tins!" it is a critique of "the cost to the souls and bodies of men" of goods produced for a pittance in back-breaking conditions.<sup>75</sup> The Hall of Science also establishes the theme of looking beyond Sheffield. Carpenter had contact with prominent members of the new London-based socialist movement. He occasionally attended meetings of the newly-formed Social Democratic Federation (1881) and this resulted in William Morris speaking there in 1886, no doubt with the aim of establishing a branch of his breakaway Socialist League. Instead, the independent Sheffield Socialist Society was formed.

From the Hall of Science, we walk towards the city centre to the site of the Wentworth Temperance Hotel, Dining and Coffee Room on Holly Street, now under the City Hall, and a frequent venue for meetings of the Sheffield Socialist Society. Other "socialist" sites on our route include: Speakers' Corner at the top of Fargate, where Carpenter and other socialists would congregate to address the public on a Saturday morning; Paradise Square, a cobbled square of Georgian houses with a long history as a venue for religious and political meetings; and the Commonwealth Café, a "smart and tempting coffee tavern"<sup>76</sup> funded by Carpenter himself in 1886-1887, housed in a building which was formerly a debtor's gaol on the very peak of Scotland Street, in the area known as The Crofts. The Commonwealth Café in particular provides a rich entry point into late-nineteenth century socialist culture and working-class life. Readings from various contemporary sources give a vivid insight into a neighbourhood described in 1851 as consisting of "shops, warehouses and factories, and mean houses, zig-zagging up and down the slopes."<sup>77</sup> Missionary representations of The

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<sup>74</sup> John Salt, 'The Sheffield Hall of Science', *The Vocational Aspect of Education* 12:25 (1960), 133-138; Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Virago, 1983).

<sup>75</sup> Carpenter, 'Co-operative Production', 13.

<sup>76</sup> Charlotte Wilson, *Freedom*, April 1887, cited in Tsuzuki, *Edward Carpenter*, 91.

<sup>77</sup> S. Sidney, *Rides on Railways* (London 1851) cited in David Hey, *The Fiery Blades of Hallamshire: Sheffield and Its Neighbourhood, 1660-1740* (Leicester: Leicester Studies in English Local History, 1991), 45, quoted in Paul Belford, 'Work, Space and Power in an English Industrial Slum: "the Crofts", Sheffield, 1750-1850', in Alan Mayne and Tim Murray

Crofts as a classic slum segue into Carpenter's vivid evocation of the sights and sounds of the area from the attic at the café.<sup>78</sup> It was, he wrote:

almost high enough to escape the smells of the streets below, but exposed to showers of blacks which fell from the innumerable chimneys around. In the early morning at 5am there was the strident sound of the “hummers” and the clattering of innumerable clogs of men and girls going to their work, and on till late at night there were drunken cries and shouting. Far around stretched nothing but factory chimneys and foul courts inhabited by the wretched workers.<sup>79</sup>

It was here that Carpenter arranged and edited *Chants of Labour* (1888), collecting the “songs of hope and enthusiasm and composing such answering tunes and harmonies as I could, in the midst of these gloomy and discordant conditions.”<sup>80</sup> The Crofts also provided the context for Carpenter's call in *Love's Coming of Age* (1896) for better constructed houses, cleaner air, public bakeries and laundries, communal housework, and simple approaches to food and furniture.<sup>81</sup>

There is a disorienting effect as Carpenter's descriptions are layered onto the modern-day quietness and semi-derelict surroundings of Scotland Street and the wider area, which is in the early stages of re-development.<sup>82</sup> Standing on the hill overlooking the city, our backs to the New Connexion Chapel which in the 1790s housed Reverend Thomas Bryant's “Tom Paine Methodists”<sup>83</sup> and is now residential accommodation, we examine late C19th photographs of The Crofts. This is where we feel “the ghosts and levels of a city, the past and the future”.<sup>84</sup> During 1886-87, speakers at the Commonwealth Café included William Morris, Annie Besant, Havelock Ellis, Tom Maguire, and anarchists Peter Kropotkin and Charlotte

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(eds), *The Archaeology of Urban Landscapes: Explorations in Slumland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 106-117, 106-7, 15; David Hey, *A History of Sheffield* (Lancaster: Carnegie, 2010 [1998]), 66.

<sup>78</sup> For the missionary construction of the Crofts see Belford, 'Work, Space and Power', 107.

<sup>79</sup> Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, 135-36.

<sup>80</sup> Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, 136.

<sup>81</sup> Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, 61.

<sup>82</sup> Toby Butler, 'Memoryscape: How Audio Walks Can Deepen Our Sense of Place Through Integrating Art, Oral History and Cultural Geography', *Geography Compass* 1:3 (2007), 360–372.

<sup>83</sup> Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (London: Verso, 2000), 338-339.

<sup>84</sup> Sinclair quoted in David Pinder, 'Ghostly Footsteps: Voices, Memories and Walks in the City', *Cultural Geographies* 8:1 (2001), 12.

Wilson.<sup>85</sup> In the winter of 1887, meetings for the unemployed were held there, sometimes leading to demonstrations in West Bar below, or Paradise Square. Indicating the overlapping nature of radical generations, former Chartist Jonathan Taylor provided soup and bread on these occasions; the group also organised teas for poor children from the neighbourhood. While this format does not avoid replicating the episodic nature of many history walks,<sup>86</sup> the inclusion of readings, images and space for informal discussion works well. The former will find their way onto our planned phone app and may also provide scope for the possibility of other people developing the walk in terms of what Phil Smith calls the “ambulatory arts”, particularly *en route* performances. At the moment, however, my own short-comings come into play; I am not a performer but an academic historian keen to develop creative history and to make explicit the constructed nature of the route, but unsure how to comfortably adopt more creative techniques.<sup>87</sup>

Although there is more work to be done here, not least via the rich records of the St Vincent's Catholic Church and associated mission, these sources illustrate the relatively straightforward nature of uncovering material relating to sites concerned with working-class life and socialist politics. Carpenter's life as a man who loved men, however, is a different story. The most concrete reference in his papers concerns his relationship with George Hukin, a razor grinder and trade unionist whom he had met at the Socialist Society. Carpenter and Hukin conducted much of their romance at the Commonwealth Café: he “has turned out too good almost to be true”, Carpenter wrote to his friend Charles Oates in October 1886. “He generally stays the night with me on Saturdays, either at Millthorpe or at my quarters in Sheffield.”<sup>88</sup> Within the year, however, Carpenter was writing to Oates about his heartbreak: Hukin had announced his plans to marry Fannie, a young woman in the Socialist Society (see section two, below).<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter*, 112.

<sup>86</sup> See Phil Smith, 'The Volatile Virtues of the Guided Tour - Live Performance and the Journey to Counter-tourism', in Dineke Koerts and Phil Smith (eds), *Conference proceedings, 3<sup>rd</sup> International Research Forum on Guided Tours, 4-6 April 2013, The Netherlands* (Breda: Breda University, 2013), 27-38.

<sup>87</sup> Smith, 'The Volatile Virtues of the Guided Tour'.

<sup>88</sup> Carpenter to Oates, 28 October 1886, 20 December 1886, 10 April 1887, Carpenter Collection MSS 351/36, 351/37, 351/38.

<sup>89</sup> Carpenter to Oates, 27 August 1887, December 1887, 4 January 1881, Carpenter Collection MSS 351/42, 351/43, 351/44.

Carpenter's unpublished memoirs also reveal his attendance at what appears to have been a regular sporting event on Fargate which involved young men racing whilst wearing little more than a loin cloth. The event drew many onlookers, some of whom would bet on the race's outcome. Carpenter described the event, concluding that "a pair of light running shoes, and an almost invisible strip between the legs constituted the only covering – and many of the runners being men and youths of fine figure and development, the effect was proportionably interesting."<sup>90</sup> This quite singular source shows Carpenter revelling in the erotic potential of the city. A similar subversion of the heterosexual city can be identified in Carpenter's defence of naked bathing at Endcliffe Wood. It was undoubtedly true, as he argued, that for young men who worked in dirty trades and had no bathrooms, such bathing was essential.<sup>91</sup> However, we scarcely need the description by Carpenter's friend John Addington Symonds of a scene at Embankment Ponds to grasp the potential for eroticism. Symonds wrote that he watched a "young rough" transformed into "a Greek hero" as he stripped to swim in the lake. "His firm and vital flesh, white, rounded, radiant, shone up the sward ... I followed him with swift eyes, as a slave his master."<sup>92</sup> We include other sites which we know formed places of erotic rendezvous for men: the city centre Iron Duke urinals; and our final port of call, the site of a Turkish Baths, now underneath the city campus of Sheffield Hallam University.<sup>93</sup> Carpenter's long-term partner, George Merrill, was for a while an attendant at such a baths.<sup>94</sup>

## 2. Gay ancestors?

It is impossible to understand Carpenter without contextualising his life and writing in terms of late nineteenth century ideas about sexuality and in particular the emergence of sexological categories of identity. Some of this contextualisation draws on quite complex material, and I find it best delivered over a cup of tea and a piece of cake in Mugen Tea Rooms on Scotland Street, where the supportive and interested proprietors provide a space

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<sup>90</sup> Carpenter Collection MSS 253.

<sup>91</sup> This park is too far from the city centre to be included in the walk. Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter*, 127-128.

<sup>92</sup> Cook, 'A New City of Friends', 42-43.

<sup>93</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 93-108. See also Gavin Brown, 'Urban (Homo)Sexualities: Ordinary Cities, Ordinary Sexualities,' *Geography Compass* 2:4 (2008), 1215 – 1231.

<sup>94</sup> The Baslow Hydropathic Establishment in Chatsworth Park. Carpenter to Oates, 10 June 1896, MSS 351/69; Carpenter, 'George Merrill: A True History and a Study in Psychology', Carpenter Collection MSS 363/17.

for our walking groups to take a break and focus on readings. It took me a while to feel comfortable with the idea that intellectual challenge should be an intrinsic part of LGBTQ (or any other) public history.<sup>95</sup> But I find that my desire to grapple with Carpenter - was he unusual in his day? what ways of understanding sexuality did he propose? is he a “gay ancestor” or is something more complex going on? are other sexual identities obscured in his writings? etc. - is shared by walkers, who want to be able to better interpret the man whom we are celebrating and commemorating.

I provide a brief overview of the development of Carpenter's writings on sexuality, which began with a series of popular pamphlets aimed at inspiring a new public discussion about sexuality as a normal, natural part of life. Three of these focus on gender and heterosexuality: *Woman and her Place in a Free Society*, *Marriage in a Free Society*, and *Sex-Love and its Place in a Free Society*, all published by The Labour Press in 1894. A fourth pamphlet, *Homogenic Love* (1894), deals explicitly and polemically with love between men over the centuries and in different cultures. Here Carpenter foregrounds his belief in the inherent nature of same-sex desire, arguing that same-sex love was “instinctive and congenital, mentally and physically, and therefore twined in the very roots of individual life and practically ineradicable ... sufficiently so to constitute this [homosexuality] a *distinct variety of sexual passion*.”<sup>96</sup> Carpenter further argues that nervous difficulties in men were produced by the “strain of being forced to conceal their true nature”,<sup>97</sup> thereby introducing a key theme in his writing in the coming years.

Carpenter featured as a “case study” in the first volume of *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897) by British sexologist Havelock Ellis. It is important to note how in this interview Carpenter takes issue with the tendency in European sexual theory to view homosexuality as a psychological anomaly or even a neurosis. This idea had a long pedigree in, for example, Karl Westphal's argument in the late 1860s that same-sex love represented a

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<sup>95</sup> Raphael Samuel, 'Heritage-baiting', *Theatres of Memory Vol. 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994). Phil Smith has drawn attention to the tendency of tour guide walks to court and reproduce audience preoccupations, in many cases reproducing the authorised heritage discourse (Smith, 2006, 4). Smith, 'Walking-Based Arts', 106.

<sup>96</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Homogenic Love, and its Place in a Free Society* (Manchester: The Labour Press Society, 1894). My reading is of 'Homogenic Love: An Essay', manuscript, Carpenter Collection MSS 60, 34-36; 45-46.

<sup>97</sup> Carpenter, *Homogenic Love*, MSS 60, 38.

“contrary sexual feeling” and was the product of moral insanity resulting from “congenital reversal of sexual feeling”, and Karl Ulrichs emphasis on the anomalous development of the embryo, resulting in a female mind in a male body and vice versa.<sup>98</sup> Havelock Ellis, with whom Carpenter was well acquainted, saw homosexuality as both inherent and a relatively harmless biological anomaly brought about by hormone irregularities. Carpenter's assertion that “this kind of love is, notwithstanding the physical difficulties that attend it, [is] as deeply stirring and ennobling as the other kind...” counters the implicit assumption of deviancy in this emerging body of work.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, Carpenter's theorising of "homogenic love" derived from a variety of non-medical sources, including Whitman's poetry, classical scholarship and Hindu notions of friendship between men.<sup>100</sup>

This is, of course, the point at which Carpenter emerges as a hero. His insistence on the inherent nature and equivalence of same-sex desire and love strikes a chord with contemporary walkers, as does his honesty that he had himself been “on the brink of despair and madness with repressed passion and torment”.<sup>101</sup> People are moved by his bravery, writing in the context of the “new mood”<sup>102</sup> of the late nineteenth century, shaped in part by the Labouchere Amendment to the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act, which saw acts of “gross indecency” between men punishable by up to two years hard labour, the Oscar Wilde Trial of 1895 and the focus on importuning in the 1898 Vagrancy Act. Indeed, one fall-out from Wilde's trial was Carpenter's publisher's decision to leave *Homogenic Love* out of the first edition of *Loves Coming of Age* (1896).<sup>103</sup> The theme of suffering emerges again in *The Intermediate Sex* (1908), the book that saw him established as a member of a small and

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<sup>98</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800* (London and New York: Longman 1989 [1981]), 104-105.

<sup>99</sup> See discussion of Carpenter's correspondence with John Addington Symonds in Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter*, 187.

<sup>100</sup> Bristow, 'Remapping', 128.

<sup>101</sup> In Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Volume 1: Sexual Inversion* (1897), 58-59.

<sup>102</sup> Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, 103.

<sup>103</sup> Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, 196; Carpenter to Oates, 26 August 1895, Carpenter Collection MSS 351/64. As Rowbotham argues, “the first British statement by a homosexual man, linking emancipation to social transformation, was destined only for friends and acquaintances.” Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter*, 190. For the significance of *Love's Coming of Age* in popularising a new view of sex, see Irene Clephane, *Towards Sex Freedom* (London: John Lane, 1935), 183-84.

controversial group of sex reformers in the field of sexology.<sup>104</sup> Here he again pays homage to the “solitary and serious ... inner struggles” that were a consequence of secrecy and shame.<sup>105</sup> Carpenter's ideas find a generally more confident expression in this volume, particularly his argument that there existed “beneath the surface of society, a large class” of individuals whose characteristics were both masculine and feminine and who were at the cultural avant-garde of society.<sup>106</sup> *The Intermediate Sex* not only sold well but was important in affirming individual lives, as attested by letters from Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon, among others. Sassoon wrote to thank Carpenter for illuminating an aspect of his own life: “your words have shown me all that I was blind to before, & have opened up the new life for me, after a time of great perplexity & unhappiness”, he wrote. Prior to reading *The Intermediate Sex*, his ideas about homosexuality “were absolutely prejudiced, & I was in such a groove that I couldn't allow myself to be what I wished to be, & the intense attraction I felt for my own sex was almost a subconscious thing, & my antipathy for women a mystery to me ... I write to you as the leader & the prophet.”<sup>107</sup>

Carpenter's desire to challenge the secrecy and shame that loom(ed) large in queer lives, and ultimately the deviancy model of homosexuality, can also be seen in his unpublished writings, particularly his memoir of his long-term lover, George Merrill.<sup>108</sup> A rough diamond, Merrill grew up on Edward Street, just round the corner from the Commonwealth Café, and worked, variously, in an interesting mixture of classic queer jobs and manual trades: as an attendant at a baths, at a newspaper, as a waiter and later at Vickers' River Don Works. He was uneducated and uninterested in conventional morality. Indeed, Carpenter appears to have delighted in his remoteness from bourgeois standards of respectability, his absence of guilt about “the seamy side of life”, or awkwardness about his lack of education; Merrill, he wrote, was completely “at ease and quite himself in any society, aristocratic or vagabond”. An essential anecdote on our walk comes from Carpenter's

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<sup>104</sup> Edward Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1908).

<sup>105</sup> Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex*, 26; Cocks, *Nameless Offences*, 4-5. For shame and pride, see Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick, 'Shame, Theatricality, and Queer Performativity: Henry James' The Art of the Novel' in David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub (eds), *Gay Shame* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 49-62.

<sup>106</sup> Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex*, 21, 26. See Cocks, *Nameless Offences*, Chapter 5. See Brian Lewis's discussion in 'The Queer Life and Afterlife of Roger Casement', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14:4 (2005), 363-382, 374.

<sup>107</sup> Sassoon to Carpenter, 27 July 1911, CC MS 386/179.

<sup>108</sup> Cocks, *Nameless Offences*, 4-5.



unpublished reminiscences. “Not long ago”, he wrote, “when I happened to mention the Garden of Gethsemane, he asked me in all sincerity what that was; and when I said “the garden where Jesus spent his last night” he simply replied with ‘Who with?’”<sup>109</sup> This story, which raises the spectre of a very modern Jesus cruising in the equivalent of Sheffield's Botanical Gardens, provides another moment - indeed, laugh - of recognition for many walkers. For historians, it raises interesting questions about the place of story, and possibly entertainment, in the communication of public history.<sup>110</sup>

Merrill is recognisable from Carpenter's writings as a man very certain of his sexuality. There was no ambiguity when he cruised Carpenter on the train from Sheffield, exchanging “a look of recognition” before following him the four miles home from Totley Station.<sup>111</sup> George Hukin, however, leads us into the more complex issues involved in the representation of historical sexualities. On the one hand, readings from Carpenter's letters in which he discusses his feelings about this affair tend to underscore similarities between past and present sexual and romantic cultures, confirming him as a “gay ancestor”. His letters of heartbreak - reporting to Oates that he was “healing & hardening nicely & find I am beginning to think of other people, other possibilities”, while emphasising his need to “be away from the pair for the most part – for tho’ they are both very affectionate, it causes me most horrible spasms of jealousy to see them” - could evoke anybody's memory of a broken heart. Later in the same letter, his comments about the pain of loving a man whose primary relationship was with a woman - “the mockery of woman always thrust in the way” - and the fear of life-long isolation and unhappiness, of “a life-long struggle – with defeat certain”,<sup>112</sup> both connects with the stereotype of the queer man as an outsider and resonates with some walkers' experiences of isolation at different historical moments.

At the same time, understanding Hukin himself requires that we look beyond our contemporary understandings of sexuality. Of particular significance here is a revelatory letter thanking Carpenter for his generous and symbolic gift to Hukin and Fannie of a bed,

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<sup>109</sup> Carpenter, 'George Merrill'.

<sup>110</sup> See the prominence of this anecdote in Colm Tóibín's review of Rowbotham's biography, 'Urning', *London Review of Books*, 31; 2 (29 January 2009), 14-16: <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v31/n02/colm-toibin/urning>.

<sup>111</sup> Carpenter, unpublished reminiscences, Carpenter Collection MSS 253, 254; Carpenter, 'George Merrill'.

<sup>112</sup> Carpenter to Oates, 27 August 1887, December 1887, 4 January 1888, Carpenter Collection MSS 351/42, 351/43, 351/44.

some months after their wedding announcement: “It’s ever so much nicer than the one we had”, Hukin writes,

so much softer, and so wide we might easily lose each other in it, if it wasn’t for the way it sinks in the middle, which sometimes throws us together whether or no.... I do wish you could sleep with us sometimes Ted, but I don’t know whether Fannie would quite like it yet and I don’t feel that I could press it on her anyway. Still I often think how nice it would be if we three could only love each other so that we might sleep together sometimes without feeling that there was anything at all wrong in doing so.<sup>113</sup>

In our three runs of the guided city walk, I have read this extract to gasps of laughter and disbelief, whilst standing across the road from the site of the Commonwealth Café. Questions emerge: was Hukin bisexual? or just hopelessly naïve? But this extract is evidence of a sexual culture in industrial Sheffield which is now long gone.<sup>114</sup> A puzzle to many in the present day, it was also a mystery to Carpenter, as a self-identified lover of men. When he and Hukin walked and slept together in Baslow, Derbyshire, a few months later, Carpenter wrote to Oates that he was “just as affectionate and loving as ever”, concluding that “[i]t is a funny business but I think I am getting used to it.”<sup>115</sup>

Hukin in turn raises questions about the wider group of working men to whom Carpenter was introduced via Albert Fearnough, one of the pleasingly “spirited” University Extension students he encountered soon after his arrival in Sheffield.<sup>116</sup> Through Fearnough, a scythe-maker who invited him to his home on a Bradway farm, Carpenter became acquainted with rural living and manual labour. As he wrote on his friend's death in 1924, Fearnough “was the means by which I escaped from that dingy wilderness of the old Brighton drawing-rooms, and reached the simple and bedrock foundation of manual labour.”<sup>117</sup> Also through Fearnough, he became acquainted with working men. Carpenter was able to “knit up alliances”, he wrote, which were “more satisfactory to me than any I had before known.”

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<sup>113</sup> George Hukin to Edward Carpenter, 21 November 1887, Carpenter Collection MSS 362/16 (1).

<sup>114</sup> Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire*.

<sup>115</sup> Carpenter to Oates, 4 January 1888, Carpenter Collection MSS 351/44.

<sup>116</sup> Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, 79-80; Carpenter to Dalton, 27 April ND, cited in Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter*, 61.

<sup>117</sup> Carpenter Collection MSS 250/2.

Railway men, porters, clerks, signalmen, ironworkers, coach-builders, Sheffield cutlers, and others came within my ken, and from the first I got on excellently and felt fully at home with them – and I believe, in most cases, they with me. I felt I had come into, or at least in sight of, the world to which I belonged, and my natural *habitat*.<sup>118</sup>

While there is no specific extant evidence of sexual relationships between Carpenter and individual men such as Fearnough, Helen Smith's research raises the possibility - indeed, likelihood - that they too were participants in an earlier sexual culture in which same-sex erotic expression was a feature of male friendship.<sup>119</sup>

This then is a key point in understanding Carpenter: that his writings on sexuality tend to confirm emerging sexological categories rather than making visible men like George Hukin. To understand Hukin, and possibly Fearnough, we have to look beyond Carpenter, to the New Queer British History which has shifted the focus from the quest to rediscover hidden “gay” ancestors to exploring “the historical production of diverse modes of sexual difference and ‘normality’”;<sup>120</sup> to raise questions about the role of the “consolidation of the modern gay subject” in the twentieth century in the marginalisation of “other modes of queer identification”.<sup>121</sup> If we want to include Hukin and Carpenter's wider circle - as we should do - the public history we produce needs to be questioning, unsettling and defamiliarising as well as comforting and affirming.<sup>122</sup>

## Conclusion

David Hey (1938-2016) understood about pride and history. In his years at the University of Sheffield, he combined rigorous academic research with a deep commitment to communicating beyond the academy. His local histories and engagement with the newly burgeoning popular interest in genealogy - and his encouragement of family historians to branch out beyond a narrow focus on individual family trees and into the wider context of social history - connected with the deep passion for history in the culture at large. This sense

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<sup>118</sup> Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, 101-102.

<sup>119</sup> Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire*.

<sup>120</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 8.

<sup>121</sup> Waters, 'Distance and Desire', 140.

<sup>122</sup> Doan, *Disturbing Practices*.

of passion and pride is the thread that connects Hey's work with the exponential growth in community and public history that has emerged in the past two decades.

In developing this walk based on Edward Carpenter's life, we have been motivated by endeavours to extend public history and commemoration to previously marginalised social groups. In Sheffield, that has meant looking beyond narrowly-defined interpretations of the industrial working class to celebrate, for example, the “women of steel”. Edward Carpenter, who wrote about sexual liberation alongside workers' rights and other social reforms, and who was lauded within the early labour movement for his commitment to living the New Life, is similarly deserving of recognition. The process of developing a walk which facilitates understandings of the world in which Carpenter and his comrades, friends and lovers lived, dreamed and loved, has involved challenging both the heteronormativity of much public history and the simplistic application to other historical periods of the categories of modern sexual identities. In so doing, it contributes to the project defined by Laura Doan as *Queer Critical History*,<sup>123</sup> bringing together the rediscovery of some of the terms and sexual practices of a past society whilst remaining cognisant of continuities over time, particularly regarding sexual identities and practices that are marginalised within different mainstream cultures. The practice of Public History brings a new perspective to this, drawing attention to the resonance of history in terms of present day identities and the implications for wellbeing and rootedness of identification and connection with people both similar to and very different from ourselves. This extends to place. As Doreen Massey has argued, space is both shaped by history and is “always under construction”.<sup>124</sup> In conveying a sense of the histories that lie beneath the surface of the streets of the city, the Edward Carpenter history walk contributes to the process of place-making: routes through the city are claimed as part of LGBTQ pasts, thereby challenging dominant versions of Sheffield history. While shaped by academic interpretations, the walk, in its explicit selectivity and constructedness, the emphasis on sensory engagement, the rhythm of movement, on collaboration and communication with fellow walkers, on the sense of walking in the footsteps of others and experiencing the historical layers of a city, also challenges us to think critically about different ways of knowing the past.

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<sup>123</sup> Doan, *Disturbing Practices*.

<sup>124</sup> Massey, 'Places and their Pasts'; Massey, *For Space*, 9-10.

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#### **NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR**

Alison Twells is Reader in History at Sheffield Hallam University. She has published extensively on gender, class and nineteenth-century British missions. She is currently working in the field of creative history, a project which emerged following receipt of a suitcase of twentieth-century diaries and letters, which inspired her to complete an MA Creative Writing. She has a longstanding interest in both community-based history and in Edward Carpenter, his neglect in Sheffield and creative representations of his life and circle.