

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Queer Tour of Bloomsbury.

You will visit seven different stops and spend between five and ten minutes at each location. If you are taking the audio tour, you will meet a different tour guide at each stop. Overall, the tour lasts around 90 minutes, and you can use the Map and Directions document, or the online map to help you navigate the tour.

The original creator of this tour, back in 2018, was Professor Bob Mills. At that time, Bob was director of qUCL, a network of staff and students across UCL with research interests in gender and sexuality. You'll meet Bob when you get to The Slade.

This latest version of the tour has been adapted (with generous support from Bob) by Lo Marshall from B. Queer, The Bartlett Faculty's LGBTQIA+ network for staff and students. We've been funded to put this tour together by UCL's LGBTQ+ Equality Implementation Group and are very grateful for their support.

Before we start the tour, here are some things you might find it useful to consider as you go round the stops of the tour. Queer history is an evolving conversation. The tour will always be incomplete, always open to interpretation and future adaptation.

Bloomsbury is a district that publicly celebrates its history. This history is most visible on statues and the blue plaques that are approved and placed by specific organisations. These plaques, like much of British history, tend to celebrate people who were wealthy and white.

The lives of the people named on these plaques were moulded by ideas about gender and sexuality that usually goes unacknowledged – although you'll find a couple of exceptions on this tour. The presence – or absence – of this information tells its own story, and raises many questions about the politics of visibility. Questions like:

Whose lives should we commemorate?

Is the sex life of famous figures always relevant?

How do personal and professional lives overlap?

If we ignore gender and sexuality, do we risk erasing queerness from celebrated public history?

Where do you and I fit into these politics of public history, life and space?

Because this is a queer tour, we've drawn on ideas from queer theory – ideas you might not have encountered before, or even agree with.

One example is the idea that all the categories used to order social life are in some way constructed.

These constructed categories change according to where you live or the times you live in – so the boundaries separating them are often far blurrier and messier than they first appear.

The individuals celebrated in this tour may not have understood themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or queer. They might not have felt like part of an LGBTQ+ community. A lot of these words hadn't been coined during the lifetimes of some of these figures. Even older words like queer might have been used differently, or had different meanings.

We've framed these stories as queer histories. However, we could equally interpret them as gay, lesbian, bi or trans histories – as well as Black and Asian histories, class histories, and colonial histories.

A queer approach asks us to pay attention to these complexities, intersections and power relations. This helps us to understand how social orders, hierarchies and spaces are contested, complicated and sustained.

A queer approach also asks us to be aware of the politics of knowledge, highlighting ways that queerness has been – and continues to be – policed, legislated against, and socially stigmatised.

For example, engaging with queer histories often requires reading between the lines. The records we have access to are often newspapers, police records and court reports. We can't always rely on diaries and other documents created by the individuals themselves. Where these materials are available, factors of racial and class privilege have dictated whose voices have been heard, preserved and valued.

In other words, this tour isn't only about gender and sexuality. It's also a tour about how issues of race, class and colonialism intersect, profoundly shaping Bloomsbury's queer past and present.

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Copy editing by All things Words, 2024.