

## **‘SALFORD’S RADICAL ROOTS’ WORKSHOP**

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**Derek Antrobus** is a Councillor for Salford City Council but also a local historian and fascinated by social history.

William Cowherd was previously a curate of a Swedenborgian church in Manchester. He then moved to Salford and set up a Bible Christian Church. He believed that everyone was equal and that every living thing contained a spark of God, including animals. These beliefs in equality were quite disruptive in Salford at that time.

The church became a thought of radical action, where Cowherd preached his reforms, including the works of Tom Paine, from the pulpit.

***“We have it in our power to make the world over again” (Quote from Common Sense by Tom Paine)***

Cowherd also was a pacifist and didn’t believe you should bear arms. He considered that we should all be able to reach our potential as human beings. He turned the Church into a place where people could change their lives through education using the library

He believed in public health and that a vegetarian diet was healthy and played an important part. He was one of the philosophical forerunners of the Vegetarian Society. He promoted teetotalism as he felt that people shouldn’t drink.

He offered free burials for the poor and there is still a plot of land in Greengate which bears the remains of thousands of bodies from this period. This site is soon to be turned into a park. He provided medical services for the community and ran a soup kitchen.

After his death in 1816, Joseph Brotherton became the Minister and he, along with other members, were politically active until his death in 1857. His cousin William Harvey became Mayor and was also a member/deacon of the Church in Salford.

He helped establish the Salford Art Gallery and fought in parliament to get both the library and art gallery opened. He was keen for members of the community to have open spaces to enhance wellbeing, even promoting allotments on his own land.

These figures wanted to influence national and local values and believed that Salford should govern itself. They campaigned for a technical institution in Salford.

Brotherton was the first Member of Parliament to speak up against capital punishment.

**Chris Dabbs** wanted to look at a bit of the past and what it meant for the future.

In 19<sup>th</sup> Century, William Cowherd started a movement in radical religious thought and vegetarianism. In 1838 the Great Chartist Meeting of 1838, prompting the political theorist Friedrich Engels to dub it "the *Mons Sacer* of Manchester". It attracted over 30,000 people, creating a national convention for this movement.

Engles, who owned Victoria Mill in Weaste looked at the working conditions of the working class and collected evidence which contributed to the development of the theories of Karl Marx

Salford is the place of the first free public lending library. It is where the trade Union Congress started in a pub called the Three Crowns. In 1895 there was a Manchester and Salford Women's Trade Council. It is possible for Salford to come up with radical ideas because these people did in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They are part of the inspiration that we can draw on

Chris argued that 19<sup>th</sup> Century trends are not that different to those we experience today. Greater Manchester today is an hour glass economy suggesting there are lots of people on low wages jobs and there is little potential for our young people in the future.

#### **Trends then and now:**

- Social Demographic disruption – migration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and now
- Technological disruption – 19<sup>th</sup> century it was railways and today it is digital, especially for young people.
- Political disruption – rise of socialism then and Brexit and the far right now
- Environmental – in 19<sup>th</sup> century the city was designed deliberately so that the rich houses were built in the western part to avoid the smell of the city being blown their way.

If the trends are not that different then how do we learn from the past? The past is only useful if we use it.

Emily Pankhurst was instrumental in women coming together. This collective action is important – to not accept the way the world runs

Chris spoke about Extinction Rebellion and their tactics that the police did not know how to respond to it.

Recommended book called "Blueprint for Revolution" about the effective ways to change the world.

Chris spoke about how the internet was designed by white male Californians and that it has been biased in favour of that demographic. However, we don't have to accept the way it is being run and that it can be run in a social and collective way.

Although there are trends and we can look to the past, we need to do things in a 21<sup>st</sup> century way and not copy things that were done in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Ben Turner**, ran a theatreship around the country which ended up in Salford Quays. He examined things from another perspective and challenged how we can do things differently. Ben wanted to take art and theatre outside instead keeping art and culture inside a building. He felt like this was putting it inside a box.

Art and culture outside is free and therefore a political and radical act.

The Peel Park opening represents the healthy lungs of the city (the body) whereas the opening of the library and art gallery were there for the mind.

Brotherton's wife Martha, wrote the first vegetarian cookbook.

Thomas Paine's bones were brought to Salford and kept in Irlam overnight before being taken to Manchester. However, Cobbett was informed by the yeomanry that the bones were not allowed to be taken to Manchester on pain of death. It is important to put historical events into context and the reason the bones were not allowed into Manchester was because of Peterloo. The bones disappeared overnight and there is speculation that they were recycled and made into pin buttons.

Ben's key message is to keep things outside the box.

## **Q & A session**

There is a sense that people get fired up, then things will calm down and then get fired up again. It is the nature of society. Where do we see radicalism standing strong and remaining constant?

Things work in cycles. Some can last 200 years and some are shorter. However there is always some radicalism going on as people want to make a change. There are certain times when cycles hit at the same point and things start to happen. A number of cycles came together in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and there is a belief that cycles are beginning to align again today. This is an opportunity as something is shifting. There is a choice to be made to go down one route or another. We should come together collectively on not controlled by one person.

There are times when you can move with change and sometimes you have to wait.

How do we bridge the gap between people advocating a radical route when there is such apathy? What do we do about this as it's not just a generational thing – all ages are not engaging in radical change. How do we engage people from radical to actual change?

Don't know the answer. Don't remember a period when people weren't saying that there was a disconnect. We tend to look back and think that people were more engaged in the past or it was better in my day but this isn't necessarily the case.

Shouldn't be disturbed in thinking that this is something new.

The digital age gives us an opportunity if used in the right way. We need to use social media to see what is going on but not everyone uses it.

How can you make things the norm? The voluntary sector works in an engaging and visible way to change people's views. We no longer need to live in slums and there are different debates using different channels. Transforming what is the norm goes on each day.

Challenge the idea that there is huge amounts of apathy. Young people are not apathetic. They want change. They know if they change x then y happens. The number of people voting in the referendum on Brexit was huge. However there is a lack of knowledge about how people can come together to make things happen. Not necessarily about the normal everyday stuff like bins, the NHS and the police. They want a say in other issues. Some want to get involved and some don't.

We have lost the ability and knowledge to collectively organise. The 19<sup>th</sup> century was very co-operative and they knew how to organise. It was a movement where the ownership was shared.

Discussion on the difference between the terms radical and reform, referencing Peterloo. Radicalism is about challenging social structure. Peterloo was radical even though they knew it was a risk

Discussion on the need for political education and what is missing in the curriculum. People are not apathetic they are just not educated enough in this area.

Protests can be done in a non-violent way and fun way which is still a valid form of protest.

Need to better support activity groups, making them accessible to people who have disabilities or whose lives are 'precarious'. People might want to get involved in activism but in a way that fits with their busy lives.

Having political meetings during children's bedtime was an issue for one delegate and was a reason for then leaving the party despite being raised and ignored. How do you then get involved in activism politically?

*Rules for Radicals by Saul Alinsky* – recommended read.

More to be done with political education and acknowledging Salford's radicalism. Salford CVS can help support any group with the creation of their historical roots online.

Young people now are both powerful in spirit as well as in physical presence. This spiritual presence is online and we need to get them better engaged.

There was a lot of anger when we had riots a few years ago. Salford is changing and there is a growing black community. Anger is about fighting the lack of resources in poor areas. Activism is about joining communities together and young people are the key. How do we get the changing population together?

Agreed that it isn't apathy. There is anger but this is being played out in a different way. Young people are connected in a different way to what we are used to. It is US that need to change to connect in a different way.

When we talk about radical everyone's eyes roll so we are not doing it very well. We are not capturing living history in an engaging way. Need to look to our creative colleagues. We need to understand why / how people got angry so that it generated a movement. Need to find ways to keep it going. Needs to be both radical and reforming.

It needs to be available to young people with learning disabilities. We need to give them a voice using arts and creative medium. We are not giving them a fair chance.

We are also missing a massive opportunity with the refugees who have migrated to this country and are now been forgotten. We need to remember that there are different communities in this area and consider what they will need in 50 years' time.

2 practical actions taken away from the workshop.

- 1) Political education - how to campaign radically; looking at both the legal and the practical
- 2) Support organisations to develop their own history projects

