SOUNDS FROM THE PARK

An Oral History of Speakers' Corner

Cover photo

William MacGuinness speaking at Speakers' Corner, 1964.

© Moyra and Rodger Peralta

Opposite

Jacobus Van Dyn speaking at Speakers' Corner, 1959.

© Peter Turner

Published by On the Record, London, 2013.

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Text by Rosa Vilbr and Philip Wolmuth
Edited by Claire Garner and Laura Mitchison

ISBN 978-0-9927393-0-0

Photographs by Chris Kennett, Moyra and Rodger Peralta, Peter Turner, Nick White, Philip Wolmuth and Mark York

Design by Edd Baldry

Interviews with Tony Allen, Martin Besserman, Ishmahil Blagrove, Adam Buick, Michael Carolan, Ruth Eastwood, Jonathan Fitter, Abdurraheem Green, Anthony Gomm, Leslie Griffiths, Richard Headicar, Kathleen Humphreys, Tim Kendall, Chris Kennett, Heiko Khoo, Edna Mathieson, Patrick Mc Evoy, Sharley McLean, Julian Meek, John Palmer, Bob Rogers, Jean Saunders, Roy Sawh, Tom Tickell, Clifford Slapper, Marko Stepanov, Reinhard Wentz, Edmund Wheatley and Myk Zeitlin

Interviews conducted by David Abbott, Chloe Alexander, Lynda Finn, Annette Fry, Hilary McGraw, Laura Mitchison, Elizabeth Pillar, Liz Schmitz, Clifford Slapper and Rosa Vilbr

Research by Tahmina Ahmad, Luke Malcher, Pauline Roenisch, Isaac Schling and Red Strivens

The Sounds from the Park project was managed by On the Record in partnership with Bishopsgate Institute. It was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Barry Amiel and Norman Melburn Trust.

SOUNDS FROM THE PARK

An Oral History of Speakers' Corner

A booklet by:

Supported by:

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In memory of all the speakers and hecklers no longer with us, especially Paul Hunt and Sharley McLean who have passed away since this project began.

Introduction

Philip Wolmuth

When I first visited Speakers' Corner in 1977, the northeastern corner of London's Hyde Park seemed just as George Orwell had described it in 1945: the resort of preachers, eccentrics and "a large variety of plain lunatics."[1] On this world famous patch of concrete and grass, a large number of speakers were standing on bespoke platforms, ladders, or upturned milk crates, shouting across each other to attract the attention of a large and motley crowd of onlookers. Hecklers shouted back. Others walked about clutching placards proclaiming the end of the world, or calling down the wrath of God on unrepentant sinners. The cacophony was bewildering.

But I soon came to see that something was happening here that was very special: genuine, unmediated, face to face public debate. At the edges of the crowd, small knots of people engaged in intense discussions, oblivious to the mayhem around them. Even within some of the larger meetings, it was possible to hear serious exchanges of ideas, albeit often interspersed with a lot of foolishness. In an age in which the

1. George Orwell, "The Freedom of the Park", *Tribune* (7.12.1945).

mass media set the parameters of public discussion, such encounters are rare, and offer a very different perspective on "public opinion."

The subjects under discussion are almost entirely unrelated to day to day news headlines. At least half the speakers are preachers; issues of race, religion and nationality are discussed obsessively. Regular visitors agree that the place has changed over the years. The Sunday afternoon crowds are now smaller; there are fewer platforms and a narrower range of speakers. The demographics of both speakers and crowd have also shifted; there is still a predominance of preachers, although now at least as many are Muslim as Christian. But it still has the unique buzz generated by the intensity and eccentricity of face to face argument.

Perhaps the essential feature of such argument was best described by Donald Soper as the "fellowship of controversy." Soper was a Methodist minister, socialist and pacifist, who spoke regularly at Speakers' Corner

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Peter Bhalla speaking with red flag, Speakers' Corner, 1994.

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Above

A crowd at Speakers' Corner, 1968.

© Chris Kennett

from 1926 until his death in 1998. He explained the value of person to person debate:

"It is one of the most important of all the avocations of any religious faith or any political party. You can be compelled to say what you mean, and cannot get away with the fact that it sounds important. The great difference is: you can't answer back to the television!"[2]

There was a time when such exchanges were not confined to Hyde Park. Speakers' Corner is all that remains of a long tradition of public meetings in parks and on street corners at which "ordinary" people could listen to orators, political campaigners and preachers, and participate in discussions on all manner of subjects – political, religious, and otherwise topical.

The origin of these outdoor gatherings dates back at least as far as the Methodist and other dissenting field-preachers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They were commonplace in cities and towns across the country until the early twentieth century. Between 1885 and 1939 there were around 100 open-air meetings every week in London alone. After the Second World War they gradually disappeared, in parallel with the rise of radio and television, leaving Speakers' Corner as the sole survivor.

Perhaps its longevity has something to do with the park's central location and its history as a focal point for popular protest. In 1866 police, 12,000 special constables, and military reinforcements attacked a banned Reform League meeting. Finding the park locked, demonstrators tore up hundreds of yards of railings to gain access, and the rioting which followed lasted three days. The following year, when a crowd of 150,000 defied another government ban, police

> “But I soon came to see that something was happening here that was very special: genuine, unmediated, face to face public debate.”

and troops did not dare intervene. Spencer Walpole, the Home Secretary, resigned the next day. Finally, the 1872 Parks Regulation Act established the right to meet and speak freely in Hyde Park.

So the park has a special place in the history of the struggle for democracy in Britain. It is easy to forget that, despite well-worn platitudes regarding our long democratic tradition, for the majority of the common people the right to free assembly, free speech, and even the right to vote, are relatively recent acquisitions. When Soper stood up to speak at his first Hyde Park meeting, women under 30 did not yet have the vote. Many of the democratic rights we take for granted, including the right to engage in the “fellowship of controversy”[3], were won only after long battles, some of the most significant of which took place in Hyde Park itself.

The cacophony that greets the present-day visitor to Speakers’ Corner thus has illustrious forebears. On closer inspection, the apparent mayhem can be seen to be a remarkable example of self-regulating, anarchic, collective expression. It is no longer a significant forum for direct political action but, whether they are aware of it or not, the speakers, hecklers and audiences that congregate there each week are the vibrant descendants of those who fought for and won the right to freedom of expression, and who established the park’s worldwide reputation as the home of free speech.

2. Donald Soper, interviewed by Philip Wolmuth, 1991.

3. Ibid.

Speakers

"It doesn't matter what the subject is, if you have a style of speaking or a patter that's engaging, and to some degree connects with the times. You can't just come with a script and assume it's gonna work, 'cause it won't. That script has to be played against the audience at Speakers' Corner. But if you're prepared to work it, and play the audience, you can create a speech about anything, could be aliens, philosophy, politics, history, sexism, racism, you name it. Anything you want to talk about, you can talk about."

Heiko Khoo

"There was something about these people. I mean, what makes somebody want to come down week after week and behave in that way? Were they mad?" wondered Chris Kennett as a teenage visitor to Hyde Park in the 1960s.

Watching the speakers, many other visitors have thought the same thing. From up on their stepladders they declaim to crowds of hundreds, or talk intently on the ground with a small group. They are mostly, but not only, men. They speak about religion, politics or something less serious. Some use street theatre, or bizarre routines, like the Hyde Park Question Corner lady who gave out sweets as quiz prizes in the 1960s.

When asked why he has spoken on black issues and international politics since the 1980s, Ishmahil Blagrove explained: "I began speaking at Speakers' Corner for the first time because I felt my voice wasn't heard. I needed a podium, I needed somewhere to express my frustration." Similarly, Roy Sawh, who started speaking on racism and immigration in 1959, 30 years before Ishmahil, said his motivation for speaking was "the injustice that I encountered when I came [to Britain from British Guiana]. I came from a sugar estate where, when you see white people, you take your hat off to say, 'Yes, sir. No sir.' ... You either change it or you accept it. I was not prepared to accept it. I can't stand injustice."

Other speakers were not motivated by a single cause but were interested in dialogue. Julian Meek, who ran the Open Platform where anyone could get up and

speak, says that he wanted to create "a community of those who were there. And whether it was a word, or whether it was a smile, or whether it was something that made somebody laugh and they engaged with somebody else, the relationships rather than perhaps the content, it's a process."

Sharley McLean thought the "social work" that happened on the edges of the Hyde Park Gays and Sapphics meeting she spoke at was important: "I can remember one guy in particular he was an orthodox Jew and he was gay. Usually right next to us was the Jewish platform and he'd sneak over and sort of talk to me when I wasn't on the platform and that poor bloke. I mean, honestly. Years later he came and said I did help him, he did gain confidence and he went to Israel and found a good gay group there."

Martin Besserman started reading poetry aloud at Speakers' Corner as a teenager: "I often felt that I wasn't really getting enough attention and I needed some acknowledgment. I think when I came to Speakers' Corner there was the potential to get acknowledgment but also I was attracted by the eccentricity, I felt I could fit in with it."

Most speakers put in hard years of training at Speakers'

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Geoffrey, Gypsy speaker at Speakers' Corner, 1978.

© Philip Wolmuth

Above

Joshua, hippy speaker at Speakers' Corner, 1979.

© Philip Wolmuth

"Fight or flight response. But forget the fight, it was like, 'I wanna run.'"

Abdurraheem Green

Corner to develop their speaking ability through a mixture of watching others and trying it out for themselves. As John Palmer learnt when he spoke in the late 1950s "to get anywhere, to survive you have to develop a capacity to attract and hold an audience and hold your nerve."

Most budding orators test the waters by heckling, as Tony Allen, anarchist speaker and comedian did in the early 1970s: "I think everybody does; it's a way of hearing your own voice in that situation and scaring yourself when you do it, you sort of look round, 'Did that go down?' It's the first step. So I always say that to anybody who heckles a lot, I say, 'You're a frustrated speaker,' I can recognise it in somebody. If I like what they're saying I'll let them have my stand for a while, and nurture them to get up and do it."

Patrick Mc Evoy first spoke at the Corner in 2011 and was extremely nervous before he began. He remembers sitting rewriting his speech, delaying the inevitable moment when he would have to get up and speak: "This guy he came up to me and I was just sitting there shaking like a leaf … and he said, 'I hope you don't mind me cursing like this. Are you writing your effing memoirs before you make your speech?' And I've got to say that helped immensely because it made me laugh and I realised, don't take this too seriously."

No matter how polished or confident speakers may seem, some never lose that nervous edge. Abdurraheem Green, Muslim speaker in the 1990s, describes the feeling he had going to Speakers' Corner and "seeing the chaos … that's when it's like, 'Oh!' My

stomach's starting to get butterflies, exactly like they call it. Flight or fight response. But forget the fight, it was like, 'I wanna run.' Yeah. And I mean I don't get nervous speaking now except if I went down to Speakers' Corner I would still be nervous. I mean, even as I'm saying it I'm feeling scared."

Controversy is key to the Speakers' Corner style and especially useful when you need to gather a crowd. Some speakers even write provocative signs and stick them to their stand, saying things like "feminists just need a good hard spanking", for instance.

Once you've collected an audience, if you want to keep them around it helps to be funny, as Roy Sawh explains: "Because nobody will stand there for three hours and listen to anybody, you know, not even me … I mean, I'll never forget one day somebody said to me, 'Oh, why don't you go home?' You know, 'You came on the banana boat, why don't you go back on the banana boat?' And I said to him, 'Look, my brother, I didn't come on the banana boat, I come by BOAC. To me, it meant British Overseas Asian Carriers. I saw it and so I came.'"

For Tony Allen, Speakers' Corner is the ultimate performance space. Unlike acting: "You're not in a

Above

An Iraqi speaker at Speakers' Corner, 1993.

© Philip Wolmuth

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Heiko Khoo, Marxist speaker at Speakers' Corner, 2001.

© Philip Wolmuth

> “You’re not in a character, you’re inevitably in a version of yourself and you’re talking directly to the audience.”
>
> **Tony Allen**

character, you’re inevitably in a version of yourself and you’re talking directly to the audience.” Some of the speakers describe themselves adopting an alter ego at the Corner. Ishmahil Blagrove smokes cigarettes on the stand because “it’s almost like a prop.” Abdurraheem Green played with his identity as a white Muslim convert by wearing white robes reminiscent of Jesus. He says: “Being in Speakers’ Corner forces you to concentrate yourself. In a sense, some essence of what you are has to come out because if it doesn’t how are you gonna engage with people?”

Over time the experience of speaking, and engaging in dialogue with their audience, affects the speakers. Julian Meek developed the ability to talk later than most children because of a condition called dysphasia. Because of this, becoming an orator at Speakers’ Corner was an especially meaningful experience for him: “I suppose it’s like so many dyslexics go on the stage or in films, it’s a platform to actually be yourself, it was my way out. And it’s given me a tremendous sense of purpose, which I will always be grateful for.”

Roy Sawh found speaking educational; every time someone asked a question he didn’t know the answer to he would look it up to be ready for the next week. Patrick Mc Evoy says that on a personal level speaking has “improved me as a human being. In trying to understand other human beings, the position we’re in and my place in the world.”

Hecklers

"The culture of Speakers' Corner is to heckle. There's no other forum like it, where you've got an audience that are browsing really, that can just move away at any time, because there's another speaker within yards. And that audience is hosting snipers, who will make a few remarks and then they'll move on. So they are completely unaccountable."

Tony Allen

Heckling is part of what makes Speakers' Corner a conversation, not a monologue. Essential to the dynamic of Speakers' Corner, hecklers are described as "snipers", "quality control", "discussants", "destabilisers" and "enquirers". They might gently ask a question, let rip a cutting one-liner or hackneyed "mother-in-law" joke, or wreck the meeting by shouting disruptively until the speaker gives up.

Tom Tickell has heckled in the park since the late 1950s. He considers that part of the reason he enjoys heckling so much is that it allows him to rail against the religion he was taught as a child, "It's a form of anger management. It gets rid of my own spleen. It … allows me to attack people and, a) get an audience, b) be funny, and c) get rid of that anger that I feel."

Tony Allen, who once received a grant from the Arts Council to be an "advocate heckler", uses heckling to tell people that "I could see their psychosis. If it was obvious to me then it must be obvious to other people, so I thought I'd better tell them about it."

Another longstanding heckler, Ruth Eastwood, who has visited since she was "a toddler" in the 1940s, says heckling is about testing the strength of a speaker's argument. "I pull everything apart to see if it's true, rather like the British Kitemark. You test a seat belt and it doesn't get the mark until it has passed certain tests. But you are pulling apart and testing it with pressure because you want to see its strength, not because you want to destroy it." Ruth traces her heckling back to her Orthodox Jewish background: "I was taught to search for the truth and it doesn't matter who's saying it or what it is, you must listen for what is right."

Some hecklers target their energies on political lines; Tory hecklers target left-wing speakers, and left-wingers in turn enjoyed heckling the Hyde Park Tories. Nonbelievers have long heckled religious meetings. Reverend Kendall who spoke for the Public Morality Council platform from 1926 to 1956 complained, "I always wore my clerical collar and to some this seemed like a red rag to a bull."

How a speaker responds to their hecklers makes or breaks their meeting. The speaker must make quick retorts, as Richard Headicar, a speaker from the late 1950s on nuclear disarmament, among other issues, learnt, "I had this one [heckler] who was so incredibly irritating and I couldn't deal with him. And then I was talking [about] the danger of war by accident or mistake. And he said, 'There you go again.' I said, 'What do you mean?' 'Bamboozling everybody.' I said, 'Well how am I doing that?' 'Well you always use several words when one will do.' I said, 'Give me an example.' He said, 'Well all day you've been talking about accident or mistake.' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'Well they're the same.' I said, 'They're not.' He said, 'They are.' And to this day I don't know where it came from but I said, 'Sir, you may or may not have been an accident but you were certainly a very big mistake!'"

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Crowd at Speakers' Corner, 1979.

© Philip Wolmuth

Above

A heckler challenges a speaker, 1978.

© Philip Wolmuth

Hecklers

> “I tended to like hecklers because I was always a bit dubious of people standing there speaking, telling us what to think ...”
>
> **Myk Zeitlin**

Some speakers plotted to attract hecklers, knowing that a spirited exchange was the best way to draw a crowd. Group platforms with several speakers, like the Socialist Party of Great Britain, even staged questions from their members if they hadn’t managed to attract a helpful heckler. Tom Tickell explains that it’s possible for speakers and hecklers to share a mutual respect: “There’s a socialist speaker [Heiko Khoo] with whom I disagree on almost everything but he’s one of the cleverest people who argues extremely intelligently, I think we respect each other. The other day he said, ‘I tell you what, what I’d like is for you to start shouting at me and we’ll get a crowd together’, and I was happy to do it.”

Left

A heckler interrupts at Speakers’ Corner, 1964.

© Moyra and Rodger Peralta

If some in the audience were intently listening to the speaker then interruptions from a heckler could be annoying. Myk Zeitlin felt differently: “I guess I tended to like hecklers because I was always a bit dubious about people standing there speaking, telling us what they think from a position slightly above us and so if someone’s responding it actually can be empowering to everyone else. You know, it can make them think, ‘Oh actually, yes, I can say something as well. I can disagree.’”

For many onlookers, like Chris Kennett in the 1960s, hecklers were welcomed for the drama they created rather than their contributions to serious debate,

“Face to face, you’re not going to be so insulting as if you’re just behind a keyboard.”

Adam Buick

“There was one in particular I remember whose name was Mary and she was a very small woman, but she was really vicious. She came on crutches and she’d barge her way through the crowd and she’d stand right at the front and she’d jeer at the speaker, didn’t matter what colour or creed, didn’t make any difference and she’d always find a way of antagonising them. And she’d get the crowd going.

“Some of the speakers detested her and they’d try and drive her away. If they did she’d just go and find another target but sometimes she’d take the crowd with her because there were people who enjoyed listening to the hecklers as much as listening to the speaker. And I was one of them. I’d follow the hecklers, for me that was great entertainment.”

Ishmahil Blagrove, who began to speak in the 1980s considers that the great hecklers were “quality control”. One he remembers was “Lord Barker”, whose racist heckles in black meetings were “destabilising”. Barker would turn up at Speakers’ Corner “in character” as an aristocrat but sold newspapers as his day job. Ishmahil remembers: “I didn’t really engage with many white people and so seeing him with a bowler hat and pin stripe suit and with a name, Lord Barker, I assumed he

Above

Argument at Speakers' Corner, 1993.

© Philip Wolmuth

was a real lord … He'd greet you with 'Hello nig nog how are you? Hello nig nog' and in fact you know the funny thing was I was never offended by him because he said it with a smile on his face … Barker was that acceptable representation of what racism was within society, within the context of Speakers' Corner."

Jonathan Fitter, who speaks on Israel and Palestine, notices that in recent years the boundaries between speaker and heckler have blurred: "A lot of the speakers, particularly those who talk about Islamic issues, will sometimes get down off their ladder and come and sort of debate with me … Another thing I have noticed, something I am not particularly keen on, whereas in the past someone [would] just get up and say their thing, now I sometimes see people getting up on their ladders near to someone else and having a debate."

Adam Buick from the Socialist Party of Great Britain who spoke from the early 1960s says that although people can be rude or even aggressive at Speakers' Corner, compared to what people are like on the internet, "it's nothing, which is an interesting thing isn't it? Face to face, you're not going to be so insulting as if you're just behind a keyboard."

The Crowd

"Little by little Speakers' Corner, the ambience of Speakers' Corner, impressed itself on me. You realised that there were people who were there each time you went. And, you began to see how they fitted in, the pattern of talking and many people seemed to know each other, so that although you might be quite shocked at some of things people said to each other you realised that it was said amongst people who knew each other and who later, as you found out, would have a drink together in the pub."

Bob Rogers

"It may be a cathartic experience, that I get some emotional benefit from it. It must be. And listening to conversations, joining them, starting conversations with complete strangers is fascinating" says Reinhard Wentz, reflecting on the 50 years he has spent at Speakers' Corner.

Less obvious than the speakers, quieter than the hecklers but just as important are Speakers' Corner's faithful regulars who mix with the tourists to make up the crowds. Small groups gather to discuss and debate, gossip and tell jokes. Through their memories the mythology of Speakers' Corner is kept alive. Some have been coming for 50 or even 70 years.

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Ruth Eastwood, lifelong discussant at Speakers' Corner, 2004.

© Mark York

For many who first visited in the 1950s or 1960s, the unusual atmosphere of Speakers' Corner was particularly compelling. Michael Carolan remembers being surprised to see grown-ups "being quite naughty" when he visited as a young child with his father in the 1950s: "People have to remember back to that period, we were very conformist. People in the '50s behaved in a way that was expected of them [and] didn't do anything that was unexpected, in fashion, in speech, in behaviour they were not inclined to be individualistic."

Right

Jacobus Van Dyn collecting money and showing off his tattoos at Speakers' Corner, 1959.

© Peter Turner

Speakers' Corner allows individualism to flourish and for some this is a much needed release. Sharley McLean first visited Speakers' Corner in 1939 after she arrived in London at the age of sixteen as a refugee from Nazi Germany. She would continue to attend for over half a century to listen, heckle and eventually speak. The social aspect of Speakers' Corner was always important to her, firstly as a place to meet the German refugees who gathered behind the famous Methodist speaker, Donald Soper's stand, although later she made "Speakers' Corner friends".

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Above

Sharley McLean being "sainted" for her contribution to the gay community by the "Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence" street performance and protest group, Speakers' Corner.

© Sharley McLean

She says: "I think in a way Speakers' Corner saved my life, it gave me different points of view. Working class Britain isn't very exciting especially at my time of life. It was to me intellectually dead. Marx is okay with a pinch of salt and being sort of comrades has its attraction, is a form of religion, but Speakers' Corner in a way was utopia because you had real nutcases. Even as a spectator a) you got to know a lot of other people and b) it released something which was … crushing [for me]."

For many the greatest attraction of Speakers' Corner is the discussion held on the edges of meetings. John Palmer remembers that in the 1950s "after the speakers had left you'd get a crowd of 50, 60, 80 people, debating political issues … I was fascinated with that process." Similarly Tom Tickell says he prefers the debates amongst the crowd which are "infinitely more intelligent than with the speakers".

Friendships made at Speakers' Corner can be life changing. Myk Zeitlin remembers that in the 1970s, "I was just starting off a lifetime career of sitting in an office and [Tony Allen] was there with his critique of work as being pretty pointless and I kind of liked it. He wasn't just talking about how crap capitalism was he was actually talking about how he and others were trying to do

> “I think in a way Speakers’ Corner saved my life, it gave me different points of view.”
>
> **Sharley McLean**

things differently. Trying to live a different life and it was very different from the abstract theories which I’d been dealing with until then because I think when I started work I’d had this idea, my model was actually Franz Kafka [who] worked in an insurance office in the day and then at night he did something a lot more interesting and he was a bit radical, so I thought that was going to be my life. Meeting Tony Allen made me realise that it just wasn’t on. That I had to do something different.”

It wasn’t only the speakers that were influential, Myk remembers meeting “people who spoke but not from the stage”. One of these was Alfred Reynolds who was a Hungarian exile, philosopher and poet who had been imprisoned for speaking out against Stalin and later involved in denazification. For Richard Headicar, speaker on nuclear disarmament and socialism from the late 1950s, meeting Alfred Reynolds represented a “sea change.” It was the beginning of an important friendship that fundamentally altered his political perspective. Among other things, Alfred Reynolds’ influence led Richard to make speeches on the rationality of love, “which was quite an unusual talk in the political sphere. For me love came to mean something that the more I thought about, the more I applied my mind to it … I’d learn how to practise it better and about the little things in life.

And it's those little things that I saw in the end after all my dramatic appearances on the public stage that really mattered. The little bits of caring, the tiniest perceptions about what a friend may need. And the little ordinary, everyday pleasantries and niceties of life, these can be far better and sometimes far beyond words."

Opposite

Norman Schlund, just finished speaking at Speakers' Corner.

© Nick White

The relationships forged at Speakers' Corner can end up stretching far beyond the bounds of Hyde Park. Kathleen Humphreys faithfully attended the park with her sister to listen to Donald Soper speak from the 1940s until the 1990s. They even took turns with other "fans" to collect his stand and wheel it over to the park for him. Soper was a great influence on her: "I had never been a pacifist. I worked in Woolwich Arsenal for ten years and waved the flag and was very patriotic but listening to old Soper he could be very convincing and persuasive … my sister and I did become pacifists."

Later, Kathleen Humphreys would become Soper's carer, looking after him up to the last days of his life. After he died "Sunday afternoons were blank … when he wasn't anymore we were at a loss ... We were fans, just like the pop stars."

Bob Rogers was inspired by his friendship with Norman Schlund who spoke in the park for many years. Norman was a performer who, in Bob's words "was talking about nothing" and would use his whole body to create a comic performance that "was a form of street theatre."

"Norman was almost like a divine figure at Speakers' Corner… I became fixated, almost, as I was regularly in his audience but I never spoke to him for many, many years because I was so much in awe of the man and so many other people wanted to talk to him. And, as he talked and I listened to the private conversations afterwards, you realised that Norman's lifestyle was not like that of other people. Norman was essentially a homeless person, which you could never have guessed from his appearance or his manner." Indeed Bob says one of Norman's "regular sayings, was: 'Appearances

Above

A crowd at Speakers' Corner, 1964.

© Moyra and Rodger Peralta

up, must be kept.'" Norman used to sleep on the night buses, which in those days were far less frequent, and on occasion Bob would join him. Norman would plan their itinerary meticulously. They would end their nights breakfasting in a greasy spoon at Smithfield Meat Market and later in the day got to Selfridges for tea.

Like many of the people Bob encountered at Speakers' Corner, Norman had served in the army during the Second World War. Bob explains that "many people went to Speakers' Corner because it was a place of refuge for them. They could submerge themselves in a group of people who had similar backgrounds … It did facilitate people whose lives perhaps had been disturbed and disorientated by the war."

People still attend Speakers' Corner to take part in "the fellowship of controversy."[4] Its continued existence every Sunday is reason enough to go; "use it or lose it" as Bob Rogers says. For others, Speakers' Corner is important for one period of their lives. There they think ideas through, develop skills, gain experience of the world and move on. Whatever brings you to Speakers' Corner, it gives you the opportunity of crossing paths with people you would otherwise never meet.

4. Donald Soper, interviewed by Philip Wolmuth, 1991.

About the project

Sounds from the Park was a one-year project to record the history of Speakers' Corner from its origins in the late nineteenth century, right up to the present day. Almost 30 orators, hecklers and crowd members were interviewed. A Speakers' Corner archive of oral history, documents and sound recordings was gathered. The archive is open to the public from January 2014 at Bishopsgate Library.

Sounds from the Park was managed by On the Record Community Interest Company in partnership with Bishopsgate Institute and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Barry Amiel and Norman Melburn Trust.

On the Record would like to thank all of the people who were interviewed, the steering group members, volunteers, archive donors, Stefan Dickers, Michelle Johansen, Liz Pinel and all the other staff at Bishopsgate Institute, Martin Spafford and the students at George Mitchell School, The Adventurers History Club, Wish and everyone else who contributed to Sounds from the Park for the generous gift of their time, memories and talents.

Visit **soundsfromthepark.org.uk** to see and hear more from the archive and download the project's radio documentary.

ISBN 978-0-9927393-0-0

Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park, London has been famous for open air speaking since the late nineteenth century.

The project **Sounds from the Park** gathered an archive of oral history, images and documents at Bishopsgate Institute to record this important history. This booklet explores the motivations and experiences of Hyde Park's speakers, hecklers and crowd members, using this unique archive of memories and images.

www.soundsfromthepark.org.uk

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