

# LGBTQ HERITAGE WALK OF BLOOMSBURY

- This walk, starting at Holborn Underground Station and ending at St Pancras Underground Station should take about 60 minutes. It is being made available through the London Metropolitan Archive. It was devised and written by Andy Kirby.

Directions - leave Holborn tube station, cross the road, turn right into Southampton Row, cross over.

## Stop 1 - 7 Southampton Row Edward FitzGerald

Edward FitzGerald (1809-1883) lived in many parts of central London and was here in 1833. Born into a rich family after Cambridge he travelled the country and at 23 fell in love with 16 year old William Kenworthy Browne, a field sportsman, and they spent much time together until Browne's 1844 marriage. FitzGerald married the sister of a friend at his dying wish but they separated soon after. In 1857 he began his famous free translation of the Rubiyat of Omar Khayyam and two years later published it as Browne died in his presence. He moved to Lowestoft, telling Browne's widow he walked the beach nightly "longing for some fellow to accost me who might give me some promise". He found and was exploited by fisherman Joseph Fletcher who he said looked like one of the Elgin marbles in a fisherman's jersey. He continued to translate Greek plays and lived alone.



Directions - continue up Southampton Row and then turn into Vernon Place, hence Bloomsbury Square. Stand in the middle of it.

## **Stop 2 – Bloomsbury Square Edward Wilson and Charles Spencer**



In 1693 Charles Spencer Earl of Sunderland secured the good-looking Edward "Beau" Wilson and financed his wealthy lifestyle. To hide their affair they circulated stories Wilson was having an affair with Elizabeth Villiers, a mistress of William III. She employed spies including John Law who followed Wilson who took a sedan chair some evenings to a house near Hyde Park from which a woman then left to visit Sunderland returning at five in the morning. This proved to be Wilson who bribed the spies to keep quiet. Law took against Wilson, followed him from the Strand, accosted him in this square and ran him through with a sword. Law was tried for murder but fled to Scotland.

Directions – walk to the north side of the square and look for 20.

### **Stop 3 – 20 Bloomsbury Square Gertrude Stein 1902**



Gertrude Stein lived at number 20. She came to London with her brother Leo after the ending of a university love affair with two girls and studied at the British Library. She then went to France where she met Alice B Toklas, her lifelong companion and lived there until her death in 1946. She was famous for her experimental novels notably *The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas* and lectured extensively in the U.S, London and Oxford. They are buried together in Pere Lachaise cemetery in Paris, where Oscar Wilde is entombed.

Directions - Backtrack to Southampton Row, turn left into it and continue until Russell Square is on your left and Guilford Street on your right.

## Stop 4 - 38 Guilford Street Sir Edward Marsh



Birthplace of Sir Edward Marsh 1872-1953, central figure in modern poetry. private secretary to Winston Churchill for 23 years. Friend of Wilde's friend Robert Ross, and patron of Bloomsburyite Duncan Grant. His Georgian Poets series from 1911 popularised Walter de La Mare, Rupert Brooke (with whom he had a passionate relationship), Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves and D H Lawrence. He was also a patron of Ivor Novello whose flat he would visit every morning on the way to work at Whitehall. He was a well known theatregoer with his elegant clothes and monocle. Critic James Agate said "even when the theatre is half empty every actor feels he has a full house of Eddie is in front."

Directions – continue down Guilford Street until you reach Doughty Street on your left. Look for number 30.

## Stop 5 – Charlotte Mew 30 Doughty Street



Charlotte Mew (1869-1928) was a poet admired by Ezra Pound, Thomas Hardy and Virginia Woolf, Robert Bridges and Siegfried Sassoon. She was one of seven children born in Bloomsbury, two of whom were schizophrenic. Between nursing her mother and painter sister Anne she wrote stories and poems. She had unreciprocated passions for teacher Lucy Harrison (who later lived with her female successor at the Gower Street school), with her fellow Yellow Book contributor Ella D'Arcy, and novelist May Sinclair who said to her "you are simply wasting your perfectly good passion". She moved in with her sister to her studio in Charlotte Street and, devastated at Anne's death from cancer, died of drinking Lysol and they are buried together.

Directions - Go up Doughty Street into and anticlockwise round Mecklenburg Square, follow the passage that goes to Brunswick Square and look for corner facing the Brunswick (Curzon cinema)

## Stop 6 - 26 and 27 Brunswick Square (NW corner)



E M Forster and Bloomsbury Group members Keynes and Strachey were Apostles at Oxford. He is famous for six novels where Angels Feared to Tread (1905), The Longest Journey (1907), A Room with a View (1908), Howards End (1910), Maurice & A Passage to India (1914). He never published his gay novel Maurice, sharing it with Christopher Isherwood and D. H. Lawrence, who based Lady Chatterley's Lover on it. Forster lost his virginity to a wounded soldier on an Egyptian beach when he was 38 and later met Bob Buckingham, a married policeman, in 1930. They remained lovers until Forster's death. 38 is where Virginia and Adrian lived with Duncan Grant, Keynes and Woolf from 1911-12. (NE corner)

Directions - At Brunswick Square turn right into Hunter Street and look for Handel Street

## Stop 7 – 32 Bernard Street Handel Street WC1 (formerly 30 Henrietta Street)



Sophia Jex-Blake 1840-1912 was a pioneering doctor. Expelled from several high schools she studied mathematics and became tutor at Queens College. She wrote as a teenager "I believe I love women too much ever to love a man" and had a passionate friendship with Octavia Hill, who went on to found the National Trust, until her mother banned them from cohabiting. After medical studies in America she campaigned in Edinburgh where she studied for women's right to practice medicine. In London she founded the London School of Medicine for Women in Handel Street in the Pavilion, a "perfect, small two sided Georgian house" and she lived in Bernard Street 1874-7. She gained her MD in Berne and was supported by her friend and lover Ursula du Pre.

Directions - cross Hunter Street, follow the other end of Handel Street, take steps left to Brunswick Centre, turn right to Marchmont Street Continue up Marchmont Street

## Stop 8 - 66 Marchmont Street



Socialist Ernest Hole opened the UK's longest running gay bookshop in 1979, inspired by NY's Oscar Wilde Memorial bookstore, as a gay and feminist shop with a café. The back room piano held Novello's score from which the shop's title "Gay's the Word" comes. Groups meeting there included the Gay Disabled Group, Icebreakers, Gay Black Group, the Lesbian Discussion Group, and in 1984 the Gays & Lesbians Support the Miners campaign, immortalised in the movie *Pride* (2014). In 2017 a blue plaque to campaigner Mark Ashton was installed over the shop. In 1984 police seized books going there including Tennessee Williams and Gore Vidal who gave £3k to the defence fund. It's still subject to vandalism, most recent a smashed window in 2018. 57 Marchmont street Kenneth Williams's home 1935-56, and at 60 Emlyn Williams.

Directions - Turn right into Tavistock Place, left into Southampton Row and look for Coram Street.

## Stop 9 - 9 Coram Street Emily Faithful



Emily Faithful 1835-1895 was a pioneer of careers for women. She founded the commercially successful Victoria Press in Farringdon which employed only women except for heavy lifting. Queen Victoria gave the company a royal warrant and she published a magazine helping women find employment. She was involved in a notorious divorce case between Admiral Henry Codrington and his young wife Helen James, with whom Emily cohabited while he was in the Crimean war. She lectured widely, including her poetry in her lectures, touring the USA three times, promoted women's suffrage, training for servants, relief for distressed gentlewomen and in Manchester better conditions for women in factories.

Directions - Cross Southampton Row go through National Hotel into Bedford Way

## Stop 10 – 31 Upper Bedford Place (now Bedford Way)



The Rev Stuart Headlam was an early Christian socialist and advocate of dance who found half the £5,000 bail for Oscar Wilde. Wilde stayed in his house here on leaving prison on 18 May 1897. Wilde was transferred to Pentonville to foil any demonstration by Queensberry or his cronies, and very early the following morning Wilde was released. Two people met him: his loyal friend Robbie Ross, and Stewart Headlam. He was taken to Headlam's home and given his first cup of coffee for two years. That night, Ross and Reginald Turner, and Wilde, left for France. Headlam's own short-lived marriage in 1878 had been to a lesbian, Beatrice Pennington.

Directions - Go north up Bedford Way to Tavistock Square, turn left until you reach Gordon Square.

## Stop 11 - Gordon Square



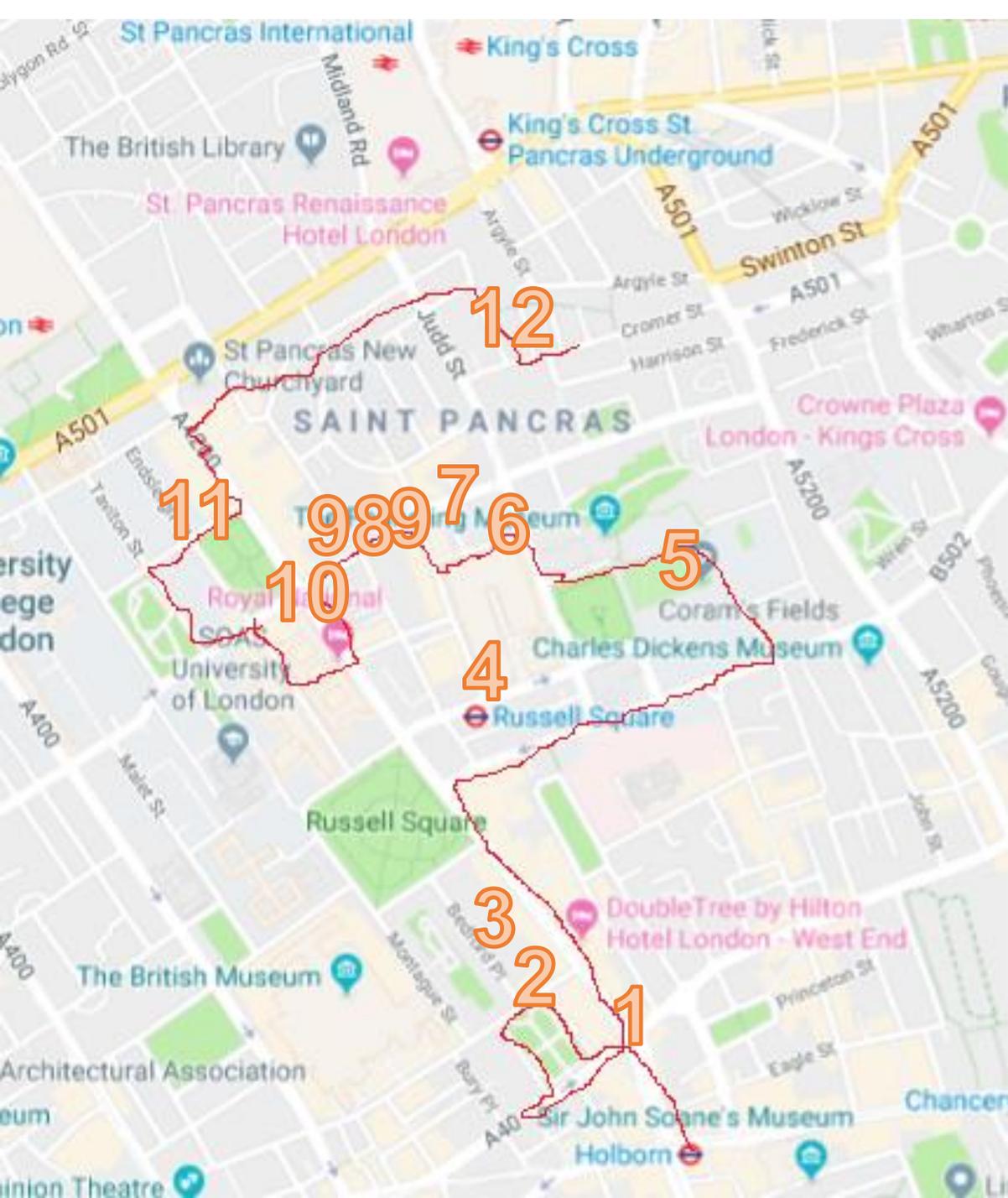
At 46 Gordon Square lived sisters Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf. The Bloomsbury Group began in 1905 and included Lytton Strachey, Vanessa's husband art critic Clive Bell, John Maynard Keynes, David Garnett, and artist Duncan Grant. Strachey described them as "loving in triangles, living in squares" and liaisons included Duncan Grant with Keynes and Adrian Stephen before marrying Vanessa Bell, Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West who both married men. Katherine Mansfield and Dora Carrington and Rupert Brooke were bisexual. Strachey lived at 51 1909-24, his brother James at 41, and Vanessa at 50 in 1920 and 37 from 1922-29, with Clive Bell moving into 50.

Directions - turn right at top of Gordon Square into Leigh Place, cross and walk up Woburn Place to Woburn Walk, down Flaxman Terrace and Bidborough Street, left into Judd Street until you reach Cromer Street

## Stop 12 – 14 Cromer House Kenneth Williams



Kenneth Williams 1926-88 was a star of TV, stage, radio, and "Carry On" films. He spent his childhood in this block, moving to 57 Marchmont Street over his father's hairdressers. He died of a mix of alcohol and barbiturates soon after his mother's death in 1988, aged 62, in his mansion flat in Osnaburgh Street and also lived in Queen Alexandra Mansions in Judd Street. He was a friend of playwright Joe Orton and each is mentioned in the other's diaries. Williams' posthumously published diaries reveal much of his suppressed gay longings. He writes after reading Orton's unpublished diaries "I must ask for certain cuts to be made because the indiscretions could result in appalling publicity."



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- 2 Bloomsbury Square  
Edward Wilson and Charles Spencer
- 3 Bloomsbury Square Gertrude Stein 1902
- 4 38 Guilford Street Sir Edward Marsh
- 5 Charlotte Mew 30 Doughty Street
- 6 Sophia Jex-Blake, Handel Street WC1
- 7 E M Forster 26 and 27 Brunswick Square
- 8 Gays the Word Mark Ashton
- 9 Emily Faithful 9 Coram Street
- 10 Stuart Headlam Bedford Way
- 11 Gordon Square, the Bloomsbury group
- 12 Kenneth Williams 14 Cromer House