



# Speakers' Corner: Fellowship of Controversy

A Multimedia Presentation of

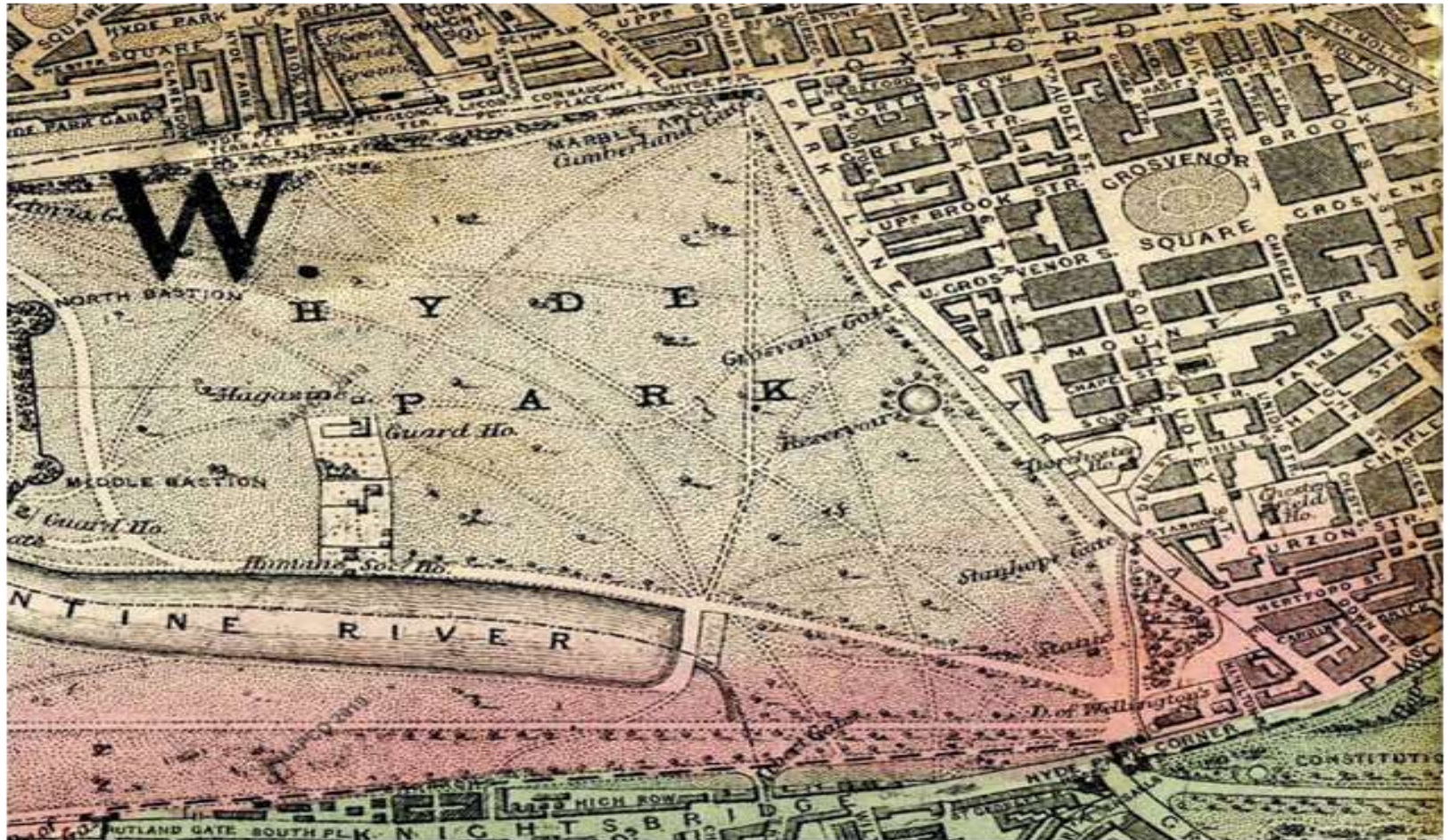
SOUNDS FROM THE PARK



© Philip Wolmuth



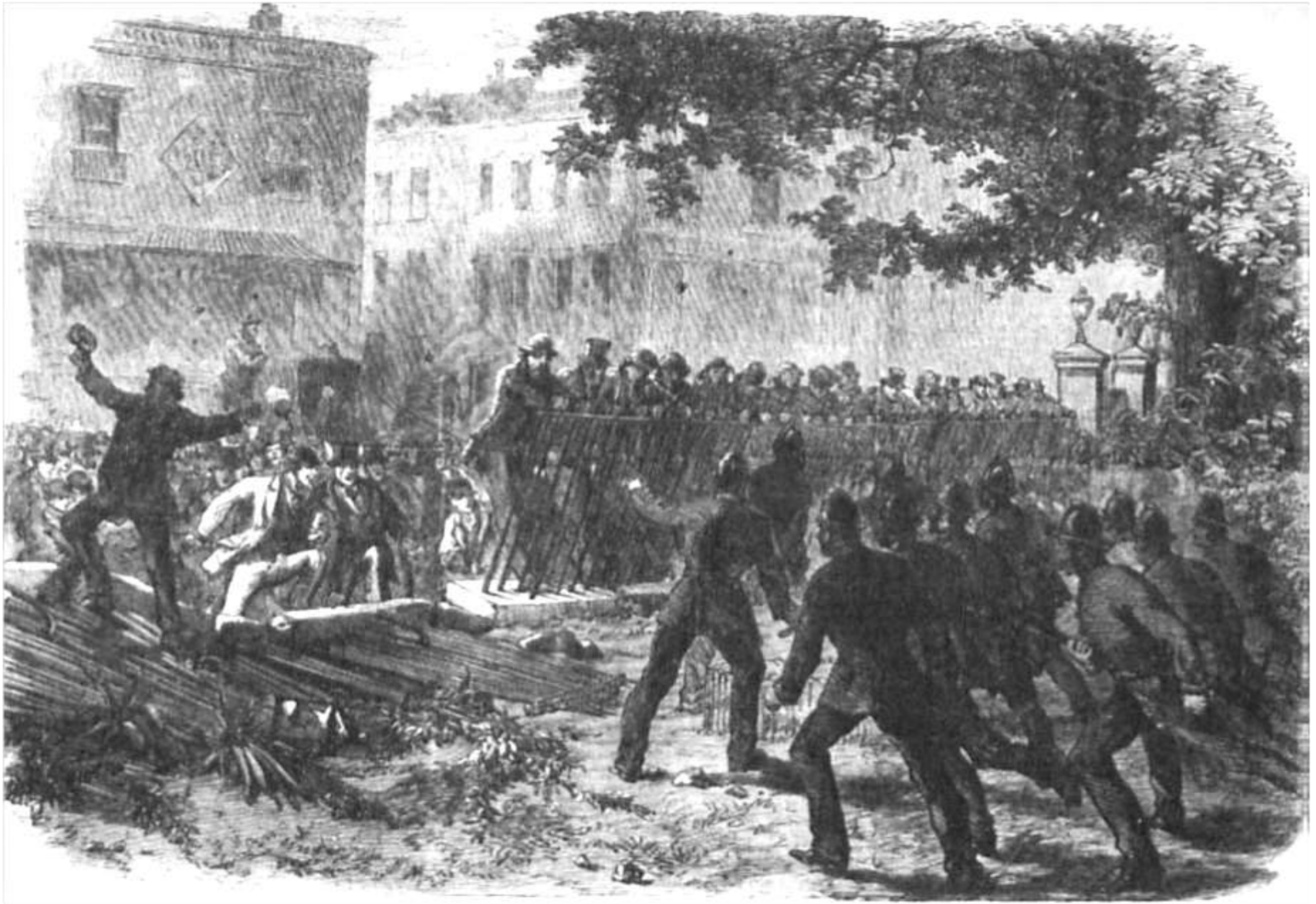
# Story of the Project



Hyde Park: last great open air oratory site in the UK.

**“I have often listened to these speakers, and have sometimes wondered where they came from, how they lived, and where they would go when they had said or screamed their say, and the gates of the park were closing.”**

Sean O' Casey, playwright, 1920s.



The Reform League tear down the gates of Hyde Park, 1866



# Mythology of Speakers' Corner



Public hangings at Tyburn, William Hogarth, 1747



**Tony Allen arrested for swearing in his “anarcha feminist” speech about sexual liberation © Philip Wolmuth**

# Habit Memory

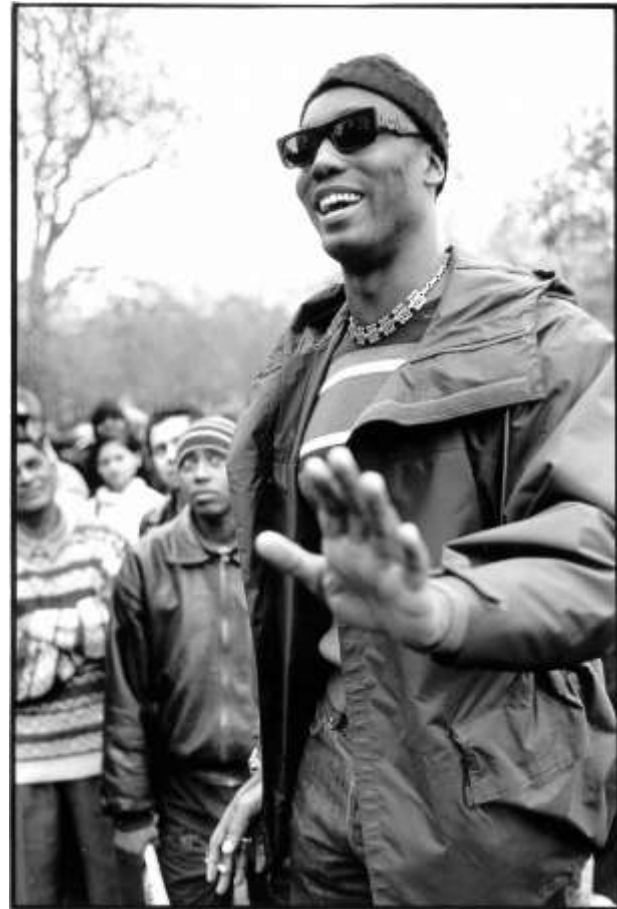
**“Often it is only by the fact of the performance that we are able to recognise and demonstrate to others that we do in fact remember.”**

Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 1989.





Roy Sawh, 2013 © Sophie Polyviou



Ishmahil Blagrove, 2001 © Philip Wolmuth

# Micro “mnemonic communities”



Bob Rogers at Speakers' Corner, 2001  
© Philip Wolmuth



Bob Rogers at Speakers' Corner, 2013  
© Sophie Polyviou

# Fellowship of Controversy and Other Meanings



"an open air lunatic asylum"  
"a zoo"  
"an old time variety show"  
"a training ground"

"a bare knuckle fight"  
"an intensely political forum"  
"a utopia"  
"an ever changing argument"  
"a refuge"





***"An ever  
changing  
argument"***

**Tony Allen**



**Tony field recording:** "...Because, we're breaking the whole idea of passive listening to one person who is in control!"

**Tony interview:** "Speakers' Corner is an argument and it's an ever changing argument. And sometimes I'll quite happily let it wind right down and just have a discussion with somebody who's actually teaching me something."

# **"A utopia" Sharley McLean (visitor and speaker, 1940s to 2000s)**

"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 brothers and sisters or comrades has its attraction - it's a form of religion then. But Speakers' Corner in a way was utopia because you had real nutcases. [Axel Hoch's platform was] "I'm a free thinker" and there were others who talked about banning the bomb and any political issue... So they had this need to express something and for me, even as a spectator a) you got to know a lot of other people and b) it released something which was... crushing."



© Philip Wolmuth



Being 'sainted' for her work for the gay community by the gay street performance and protest group the 'Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence'

# "An old time variety show" Bob Rogers on Norman Schlund

"He had an enormous mouth and he had enormous hands. He had an enormous mouth and he had enormous hands. And he used his mouth and his hands and his whole body to speak and it was a form of mime show. And essentially, Norman was talking about nothing. [pause] Now, to talk about nothing for an entire Sunday afternoon, or even with interludes, is not something which is lightly undertaken and I, I was in awe of the man."



"I mean I may make it sound easy, I may be accused of oversimplifying a very difficult issue, but they never ever accuse me of burning the cakes."





**"A refuge for people whose lives had been disturbed by war"  
Bob Rogers**



of

*Suggested Itinerary*

0005 hrs Bus from Park Lane to Victoria  
 0042 hrs Bus from Victoria to Waltham Cross  
 0155 hrs Walk from Waltham Cross to Chingford  
 0422 hrs Buses (2) from Chingford to Spitalfield  
0500 Waltham Cross St. 0510 Waltham Cross St. 0510 Waltham Cross St. 0510 Waltham Cross St.  
 0530 hrs Tea - toast - sandwiches at Market  
 0630 hrs Bus to Lunden Bridge Station  
 0645 hrs Wash & brush up in LFB station  
 0700 hrs Bus to Sudbury  
 0815 hrs Sojourn in a walk around BARHAM PARK  
~~0915~~ <sup>10.15</sup> hrs Tea (plus) at cafe in Sudbury  
~~11.00~~ <sup>11.00</sup> hrs Foot path canal walk SUDBURY ALBERTON  
 1300 hrs TO SELFRAIDERS for POT TEA ?  
 1700 hrs TO Morley College or Union Jacks for dinner.

23/24  
09/82.

Norman Schlund's schedule for sleeping on night buses. Donated to the Speakers' Corner archive by Bob Rogers.

**'Time was when Hyde Park was free to all who cared to speak, sing, dance, juggle, conjure, recite, sell pills, give racing tips, solve world problems, or build Utopias while you waited. Collections could be taken without let or hindrance. Up to 1872 the place must have been a speakers' paradise. Those days are gone. Gone, too, are the great oratorical figures who affrighted the air of Marble Arch.'**

Bonar Thompson, 1934

# Meeting “the armchair activists”



School students on a trip to Speakers' Corner as part of Sounds from the Park, 2013.





At the project's final event © Sophie Polyviou

# How to remember a living practice?



Left: Speakers' Corner speaker Tony Allen at the press conference.

Right: Culture Minister Sajid Javid at the press conference

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