

Ep 24: The history of the NSS- Interview with Bob Forder

Video available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V_gyBTgBhbA&feature=youtu.be

0:00:05.789,0:00:11.440

(Emma Park, EP) How did the secularist movement begin in Britain? When and why was the National

0:00:11.440,0:00:16.330

Secular Society founded? And why should modern supporters of secularism care

0:00:16.330,0:00:20.770

about its history? You're listening to the National Secular society podcast

0:00:20.770,0:00:25.660

hosted by Emma Park. In this episode, I will be speaking to Bob Forder about the

0:00:25.660,0:00:30.850

history of secularism and why it matters today. Bob Forder is a member of the NSS

0:00:30.850,0:00:35.590

Council. He has done extensive research into the early history of secularism and

0:00:35.590,0:00:40.239

is currently producing a series of short videos on the origins of secularism and

0:00:40.239,0:00:45.160

the NSS. A former history teacher, Bob has also written about secularism and

0:00:45.160,0:00:55.780

social reform for The Free Thinker and other publications. Bob first of all, how

0:00:55.780,0:01:01.600

would you define secularism and where did the idea first start becoming used

0:01:01.600,0:01:11.590

in modern history? (Bob Forder, BF) Well that's, that's er,

that's one heck of a question, Emma but I

0:01:11.590,0:01:19.000

decided to start my series of video talks with Thomas Paine because Paine

0:01:19.000,0:01:28.630

was the first person in modern times to expound essentially secularist radical

0:01:28.630,0:01:33.630

ideas to ordinary people.

I don't think Paine was very original

0:01:33.630,0:01:39.280

because he was influenced by people like John Locke and other philosophers but he

0:01:39.280,0:01:47.470

popularized his ideas and molded them into a coherent whole in the way that

0:01:47.470,0:01:56.259

ordinary people could understand. In particular, his 'Age of Reason', which was

0:01:56.259,0:02:03.009

first published in 1794, was an eviscerating attack on established

0:02:03.009,0:02:11.559

religion and influenced many who were to follow him. You know, the NSS used to

0:02:11.559,0:02:17.640

celebrate his birthday -

a sort of secularist Christmas, I think.

0:02:17.640,0:02:24.250

It was in the introduction to his book the Age of Reason that he worked, wrote

0:02:24.250,0:02:33.360

those words 'my own mind is my own church'
which I suppose is a sort of secularist

0:02:33.360,0:02:38.950
foundation stone. (EP) And what were his
other main ideas relating to secularism

0:02:38.950,0:02:44.140
would you say? (BF) Well I think the thing
that he taught more than anything else

0:02:44.140,0:02:54.760
was that individuals were citizens - they
weren't subjects. So that challenged of

0:02:54.760,0:03:02.230
course all sorts of other things like
aristocracy and monarchy but I think

0:03:02.230,0:03:07.570
that is a sort of fundamental,
fundamentally different way of looking

0:03:07.570,0:03:14.860
at things which was born in Europe in
the French Revolution, into the United

0:03:14.860,0:03:20.110
States in their revolution, but I think I
must mention George Jacob Holyoake as

0:03:20.110,0:03:26.740
well because it was he who coined the
term in about 1850, he was the man who

0:03:26.740,0:03:32.980
came up with the term 'secularism' when he
was looking for a more positive and

0:03:32.980,0:03:39.670
acceptable word than atheism. (EP) And how
did
he fasten on secularism in terms of

0:03:39.670,0:03:46.930
the etymology of secularism? (BF) Ah - I can't
be sure about that actually. It derived

0:03:46.930,0:03:53.320
from the French, in some way but I
can't remember the logic that he

0:03:53.320,0:04:00.300
followed but the important point was he
was looking for a word that didn't

0:04:00.300,0:04:07.540
involve people having preconceptions.
(EP) Okay and so, so how, what was his

0:04:07.540,0:04:12.010
conception of what secularism, what
secularism should involve and is there

0:04:12.010,0:04:18.250
something more positive than just
atheism? (BF) It was, well it was, it was a way

0:04:18.250,0:04:25.120
of approaching life and public affairs
that was based on science, that was based

0:04:25.120,0:04:30.940
on reason and
was based on compassion as well. (EP) And
you

0:04:30.940,0:04:37.690
also have mentioned before in
previous talks that secularism has meant

0:04:37.690,0:04:43.120
different things to different people but
how would you say that it has done

0:04:43.120,0:04:48.430
this? (BF) Well, you see, if we go to the first
three presidents of the National Secular

0:04:48.430,0:04:55.800
society - Bradlaugh, G W Foote, Chapman
Cohen -
for them, the word secularism and atheism

0:04:55.800,0:05:02.200
were virtually synonyms - they really drew
little distinction between it, but as the

0:05:02.200,0:05:07.510
word has developed into the 20th century
it means something rather different - I

0:05:07.510,0:05:15.520

think it means working towards a free and fair society in which the religious

0:05:15.520,0:05:21.160

are not accorded particular privileges, so there's a distinction if you like

0:05:21.160,0:05:28.300

between the public sphere and religion hence that NSS strapline 'challenging

0:05:28.300,0:05:35.020

religious privilege'. (EP) Do you have to be an atheist in order to be a secularist? (BF) No, I

0:05:35.020,0:05:41.440

don't think you do, you have to just accept that distinction. I have to say I

0:05:41.440,0:05:48.070

think it's more difficult for some - it depends on the denomination or the

0:05:48.070,0:05:53.919

particular church - but if, going back to Paine's idea 'my own mind is my own church'

0:05:53.919,0:06:01.169

if you accept the authority of a priesthood over your thoughts, it's more

0:06:01.169,0:06:06.700

difficult to be a secularist. (EP) And you mentioned Charles Bradlaugh, the founder

0:06:06.700,0:06:11.440

of the National Secular society, now the story of secularism in Britain is very

0:06:11.440,0:06:15.910

much bound up with the early history of the NSS and with Charles Bradlaugh's own

0:06:15.910,0:06:24.760

career, could you tell us how? (BF) Bradlaugh, yes, the great Charles Bradlaugh. Well he

0:06:24.760,0:06:28.510

was one of the leading radicals of the 19th century and for a period I think he

0:06:28.510,0:06:35.260

was THE leading radical. By the third quarter of the century there was a need

0:06:35.260,0:06:40.889

for a national organization to coordinate and support the work

0:06:40.889,0:06:48.210

of many, the many, local societies that had grown up in virtually, virtually

0:06:48.210,0:06:55.919

every urban centre. Bradlaugh himself was an extraordinary orator, he

0:06:55.919,0:07:01.680

had great organizational skills and it was he who announced the foundation of

0:07:01.680,0:07:08.999

the National Secular society on the 9th of September 1866 with himself as acting

0:07:08.999,0:07:13.590

president. This was confirmed at a conference at

0:07:13.590,0:07:18.990

Bradford the following year. (EP) And you said the National Secular

0:07:18.990,0:07:23.849

society was designed to support the work of the local societies - were there lots

0:07:23.849,0:07:28.740

of local secular societies at that point? (BF) Yes, all over the place. All over the

0:07:28.740,0:07:33.389

place.

Secularism and radicalism and campaigns

0:07:33.389,0:07:39.930

for change were very closely linked. I'm not saying that all radicals were

0:07:39.930,0:07:44.819

necessarily secularists or atheists

because that wouldn't be, that wouldn't

0:07:44.819,0:07:54.349

be true but certainly secularism was one of the driving forces behind radicalism.

0:07:54.349,0:08:01.430

(EP) Okay and um, given that Britain in the 19th century was a sort of rapidly

0:08:01.430,0:08:08.819

industrializing country, how did that, did that help or hinder the formation of a

0:08:08.819,0:08:14.539

national secular society?

(BF) Well in the most obvious way,

0:08:14.539,0:08:23.279

Britain had a railway network by 1850 so secularist speakers began to travel the

0:08:23.279,0:08:29.969

country. Also, the pamphlets and the newspapers they published could be

0:08:29.969,0:08:36.329

got around the country more easily than the case was before and ideas

0:08:36.329,0:08:43.199

spread and so we find the emergence of the National Secular society and a

0:08:43.199,0:08:49.140

secular movement occurring with those developments. (EP) Would you say that it, the

0:08:49.140,0:08:53.740

ideas in particular spread, were able to spread, more easily to say the

0:08:53.740,0:08:58.870

working classes, if you like, because I suppose in the past they could

0:08:58.870,0:09:03.160

have always spread among, among the elites but perhaps it was easier in the

0:09:03.160,0:09:08.620

19th century for them to spread to a wider audience. (BF) The NSS was

0:09:08.620,0:09:14.800

essentially a working class organization. The people who joined the NSS were

0:09:14.800,0:09:23.920

almost entirely working-class. There are some reasons behind that - the secularists

0:09:23.920,0:09:31.930

of this time, they were optimists and they were individualists and I think this

0:09:31.930,0:09:37.149

is one of the inspiring things about them. They thought that if you could make

0:09:37.149,0:09:43.779

people free they would improve themselves. Now, some of the impediments

0:09:43.779,0:09:51.399

to this freedom were large families so that's one of the reasons that Bradlaugh

0:09:51.399,0:09:57.040

was a Malthusian from the outset - that was one of the impediments - the

0:09:57.040,0:10:03.930

other impediment, to their mind, was organized religion and the Churches

0:10:03.930,0:10:09.790

because they thought of the Churches, and particularly the Church of England, they

0:10:09.790,0:10:16.899

thought of it as the thought-control police of the era. (EP) But were people from

0:10:16.899,0:10:21.520

different classes from, from the elites, ever involved with the secular society

0:10:21.520,0:10:23.410

or did that have to wait until a much later date or has

0:10:23.410,0:10:31.570
it never really happened? (BF) It did happen
much later - there were always tensions

0:10:31.570,0:10:36.970
there, I mean, the UK or Britain, or
Britain or England, or whichever you

0:10:36.970,0:10:43.329
prefer, we all know it, say, we all know
the importance of social class in our

0:10:43.329,0:10:48.779
society and it was even more important
in the 19th century than it is now and

0:10:48.779,0:10:57.750
it was true that respectable atheists
didn't really want to mix with

0:10:57.750,0:11:04.029
organisations - the rabble that
constituted the NSS in many, many ways - so

0:11:04.029,0:11:07.570
from time to time
Bradlaugh made overtures

0:11:07.570,0:11:13.420
to Charles Darwin for example to support
him over his parliamentary struggle but

0:11:13.420,0:11:19.000
he didn't get very far with it. (EP) Were
there any other societies for, that people

0:11:19.000,0:11:26.290
like Darwin joined, or...? (BF) Well we had by
the
last quarter of the 19th century, we had

0:11:26.290,0:11:30.000
the growth of the ethical societies in
London

0:11:30.000,0:11:36.070
and then, then these different,
the different classes tried to use

0:11:36.070,0:11:42.840
different language really so we had T.H.

Huxley coming up with the word 'agnostic'

0:11:42.840,0:11:51.960
which he thought sounded a bit less
challenging than atheist for example and

0:11:51.960,0:11:59.050
it was, I don't want to get into a
long philosophical discussion, but if we

0:11:59.050,0:12:02.380
did I'd be making out the case that I
can't really see what the distinction

0:12:02.380,0:12:08.800
between atheist and an agnostic is. What GW
Foote said was that an agnostic was an

0:12:08.800,0:12:14.200
atheist with a top hat. (EP) And what's
Charles Bradlaugh's own background?, just

0:12:14.200,0:12:19.060
very briefly and maybe you could just
just tell us, how did he come to

0:12:19.060,0:12:22.690
found the National Secular society, what
was his own class background, if you like?

0:12:22.690,0:12:27.250
What was his driving motivation? (BF) It
was quite,

0:12:27.250,0:12:34.810
it was quite humble - sort of
working-class London background.

0:12:34.810,0:12:41.320
His father was a solicitor's clerk I
think so they managed some sort of

0:12:41.320,0:12:50.200
respectability but you could hardly call
them well-heeled. Um, Bradlaugh - what,
what

0:12:50.200,0:12:53.490
affected the way Bradlaugh thought? I
don't know really.

0:12:53.490,0:13:00.340

He was obviously highly intelligent, largely self-educated, read all sorts of

0:13:00.340,0:13:07.990

things - built on, built on those things - got himself in an argument with a, with a

0:13:07.990,0:13:12.490

clergyman called the Reverend Packer. Packer had liked Bradlaugh to begin with as a

0:13:12.490,0:13:19.540

young man and appointed him as a Sunday school

teacher but then to his horror, to

0:13:19.540,0:13:23.979

Packer's horror, Bradlaugh started asking awkward questions like

0:13:23.979,0:13:29.919

why were there differences in the account of, in the accounts of Christ in

0:13:29.919,0:13:35.679

the Gospels and this led to all sorts of ructions and eventually Bradlaugh

0:13:35.679,0:13:41.259

leaving home. And at this point he went to live with a lady called Eliza

0:13:41.259,0:13:51.009

Sharples who was actually the mistress of Richard Carlile - the first man to

0:13:51.009,0:13:58.679

publish a birth control book in this country, who had died some years earlier.

0:13:58.679,0:14:04.269

(EP) So and then Charles Bradlaugh ultimately became an MP didn't he? (BF) Yes he did. after

0:14:04.269,0:14:10.539

After a struggle.

After several struggles. (EP) And in addition

0:14:10.539,0:14:14.679

to Charles Bradlaugh, your own ancestor another Bob Forder or Robert Forder

0:14:14.679,0:14:19.659

was the first paid secretary of the National Secular society in the same

0:14:19.659,0:14:23.649

team as Charles Bradlaugh and he, mentioning on the subject of birth

0:14:23.649,0:14:28.419

control, he was also involved in the promotion of this birth control

0:14:28.419,0:14:31.839

literature. Could you tell us a bit more about this campaign because it

0:14:31.839,0:14:36.489

seems to be one of the, one of the most important early social reforms in this

0:14:36.489,0:14:42.909

period? (BF) Yeah, you know Barbara Smoker, one of our longest serving presidents - I

0:14:42.909,0:14:51.639

think she served 24 years - died just very recently - in her inaugural speech as NSS

0:14:51.639,0:14:57.609

president

she said... (EP) When was that? (BF) 1972 (EP) Okay, so say

0:14:57.609,0:15:03.489

fifty, fifty years ago. (BF) Yep, yep. She said that the promotion of the

0:15:03.489,0:15:10.539

control of human fertility was perhaps the NSS's greatest single achievement

0:15:10.539,0:15:20.349

and most significantly it goes back to 1877 when Charles Bradlaugh and Annie

0:15:20.349,0:15:26.339

Besant republished a small birth control

tract entitled 'Fruits of Philosophy'

0:15:26.339,0:15:32.529

which had been, for which a Bristol bookseller had been prosecuted and was

0:15:32.529,0:15:36.129

serving a prison sentence... (EP)

Who had first published this 'Fruits of

0:15:36.129,0:15:39.699

Philosophy book? (BF) Oh, it had been published originally in the United

0:15:39.699,0:15:44.860

States and it had been published ever since the 1830s actually by various

0:15:44.860,0:15:49.649

free-thinking publishers, all of them, all of them were free thinkers - they were all

0:15:49.649,0:15:57.790

secularists and it had sold sort of penny numbers over the years but in 1877

0:15:57.790,0:16:02.050

this big case came along when Bradlaugh and Besant, because this bookseller had

0:16:02.050,0:16:06.339

been prosecuted for selling it, Bradlaugh and Besant decided to open

0:16:06.339,0:16:12.990

their own shop, sell it, deliver copies to the local police station and say "come on,

0:16:12.990,0:16:19.480

prosecute us", which they did. They defended themselves in court, they won

0:16:19.480,0:16:24.850

their case and this 'Fruits of Philosophy', which by this time was well out-of-date,

0:16:24.850,0:16:29.589

began to sell in its hundreds of thousands. (EP) And what does the 'Fruits of Philosophy'

0:16:29.589,0:16:34.809

actually say? (BF) Well, it told you how to avoid conception. It gave you

0:16:34.809,0:16:37.809

advice on contraceptive technique and Knowlton,

0:16:37.809,0:16:49.809

who is the author, he was a great advocate of chemical douching. (EP) Right, so that was the latest technology of the time? (BF) Well, yeah

0:16:49.809,0:16:54.999

there were other techniques but actually, actually, there was a feminist side to

0:16:54.999,0:16:58.929

this as well, you know, he, one of the reasons he favoured douching was it left

0:16:58.929,0:17:03.879

control to the woman. (EP) Interesting and and what happened? - after the Fruits of

0:17:03.879,0:17:07.689

Philosophy, what were the next hand books to follow that? (BF) Well you see

0:17:07.689,0:17:12.360

it was out of date in 1877. Bradlaugh and Besant did rather hesitate over

0:17:12.360,0:17:16.000

publishing it because they thought well actually, this isn't the latest best

0:17:16.000,0:17:23.409

advice and so immediately afterwards Annie Besant wrote her book or pamphlet

0:17:23.409,0:17:27.370

- they all cost sixpence, they got sold for sixpence which ordinary people could

0:17:27.370,0:17:34.809

afford and that was called the 'Law of Population'. She withdrew that in 1891

0:17:34.809,0:17:39.640

when she let, rather let the side
down by joining the Theosophists and

0:17:39.640,0:17:44.139
then the most popular of all books
appeared, and I've been reading a

0:17:44.139,0:17:47.580
lot about this recently, a sort of
hero

0:17:47.580,0:17:53.450
of the birth control movement and under-
appreciated was Dr. Henry Arthur Albert,

0:17:53.450,0:18:01.670
whose wife's handbook sold more than any
other and stayed in print till the

0:18:01.670,0:18:07.800
1920s and sold over half a million
copies... (EP) ..and was Henry Albert
connected to the National

0:18:07.800,0:18:11.850
Secular society? (BF) Yes, yes. He was a
member of the National Secular society,

0:18:11.850,0:18:18.720
he also was an important figure in the
Malthusian League which Bradlaugh and

0:18:18.720,0:18:26.640
Besant founded after the 1877 trial and
the Malthusian League went on for

0:18:26.640,0:18:33.450
many years afterwards promoting the idea
of what they called neo-Malthusianism

0:18:33.450,0:18:39.030
actually - we call it birth control - and
they promoted that for many, many years

0:18:39.030,0:18:44.880
and in a way evolved into the Family
Planning Association. (EP) The earlier members

0:18:44.880,0:18:48.660
of the NSS were involved in other social
reforms as well as the birth control

0:18:48.660,0:18:51.780
movement. Could you tell us about some of
the most important ones and the people

0:18:51.780,0:18:54.840
behind them? (BF) Well, I can't resist
mentioning another

0:18:54.840,0:19:02.160
former NSS president now who in the
1960s wrote a book about the NSS called

0:19:02.160,0:19:06.000
'a Hundred Years of Free Thought' to,
that was to celebrate its centenary in

0:19:06.000,0:19:11.700
part, but he made the point, you know, that
there's barely a social reform that the

0:19:11.700,0:19:17.130
society hasn't championed and usually
champions ahead of anybody else and made

0:19:17.130,0:19:21.210
themselves very unpopular in doing so,
but having said that, I'd like to pick on

0:19:21.210,0:19:26.760
a couple that are very closely related,
that run like golden threads, how's that?,

0:19:26.760,0:19:35.820
golden threads, through the history of
the, of secularism. At the beginning of

0:19:35.820,0:19:42.650
the 19th century fear of a revolution in
this country was rife. The government

0:19:42.650,0:19:48.320
responded by attempting to clamp down on
the circulation of nasty, dangerous,

0:19:48.320,0:19:55.050
radical ideas - particularly those of the
type espoused by Paine who was in their

0:19:55.050,0:20:01.389
minds the bogeyman par excellence, okay.

One of their main techniques

0:20:01.389,0:20:06.009
was the imposition of stamp duties on newspapers making them too expensive for

0:20:06.009,0:20:14.679
working people. These stamp duties were furiously resisted by the likes of

0:20:14.679,0:20:20.079
Richard Carlile who I mentioned earlier, who republished all Paine's works in the

0:20:20.079,0:20:24.700
1920s and 30s and got seven years in Dorchester jail for his trouble

0:20:24.700,0:20:32.919
and by Holyoake and many others. (EP) And did, were those, were those works sold in

0:20:32.919,0:20:36.639
such a way that they were available to working people? (BF) Yes, yes - they were -

0:20:36.639,0:20:46.359
nobody ever made money out of free thought as far as I know and that goes for my

0:20:46.359,0:20:52.389
own ancestor. It wasn't a profitable business because they were selling very

0:20:52.389,0:20:56.589
cheap pamphlets to working-class people and trying to sell them as cheaply as

0:20:56.589,0:21:02.409
possible because they wanted to maximize the circulation. The pamphlets

0:21:02.409,0:21:11.950
they published were the blogs of their age - its the way they communicated. (EP) Fantastic and any other major issues?

0:21:11.950,0:21:14.859
you mentioned there were two, so one of them was stamp duties, what's the other?

0:21:14.859,0:21:22.119
(BF) Well the, freedom, freedom of the press was one, the second - closely related - was

0:21:22.119,0:21:29.079
the campaign against the blasphemy laws which I don't think I really need to explain why that

0:21:29.079,0:21:34.149
was so fundamental to secularists - they thought you should be able to speak

0:21:34.149,0:21:38.729
about religion as you could speak about any other matter and there shouldn't be

0:21:38.729,0:21:44.109
prohibitions on things that were regarded as disrespectful or rude when

0:21:44.109,0:21:50.109
you spoke about, about the religious and here G W Foote needs a special mention

0:21:50.109,0:21:56.940
because it was he who at the height of the Bradlaugh problems of the 1880s

0:21:56.940,0:22:02.799
decided to take the battle to the, what he regarded as the bigots, by publishing

0:22:02.799,0:22:11.289
his extraordinarily irreverent, outrageous and satirical newspaper the,

0:22:11.289,0:22:19.290
the Free Thinker. Now one of the devices he used in particular, shades of Charlie

0:22:19.290,0:22:26.730
Hebdo here, but one of the devices he used in particular were cartoons, Bible

0:22:26.730,0:22:32.190
cartoons as he called them that were very very disrespectful and he was

0:22:32.190,0:22:40.380

inviting prosecution. He spent a year in jail and as a result of, as a result of

0:22:40.380,0:22:47.090

this but what he did do was that he highlighted the absurdity of the

0:22:47.090,0:22:54.120

situation that he thought confronted him.

(EP) And how does this, do you think, compare

0:22:54.120,0:22:58.620

with the situation today? The blasphemy laws in the UK were abolished not that

0:22:58.620,0:23:03.420

long ago. Have we made a lot of progress or is there still much to do on blasphemy

0:23:03.420,0:23:13.110

in the UK? (BF) Well, well you know, if that film 'Life of Brian' had appeared in the 1880s

0:23:13.110,0:23:17.280

well it wouldn't have appeared because it's a film, but obviously we must have made some

0:23:17.280,0:23:24.570

progress in that respect. Um.... (EP) Is there more to do? (BF) Of course there's more to do, there's

0:23:24.570,0:23:34.260

a lot more to do. I mean, today we are faced with a situation where we see the

0:23:34.260,0:23:45.870

growth, or potential growth, of populism, authoritarianism. To me, secularists, one

0:23:45.870,0:23:51.000

aspect of secularism - that golden thread I mentioned earlier - has always been

0:23:51.000,0:23:58.700

about freedom of, freedom of speech, freedom of expression. Secularists are

0:23:58.700,0:24:07.170

liberals if they're nothing else.

(EP) Liberals and individualists, yes... (BF) Liberals and

0:24:07.170,0:24:12.390

individualists. (EP) Absolutely, yes and freedom of speech has always been

0:24:12.390,0:24:18.690

one of the National Secular society's biggest campaign issues as, as what

0:24:18.690,0:24:23.730

you've said illustrates. (BF) A golden thread, Emma. A golden thread (EP) A golden thread. Absolutely, yes.

0:24:23.730,0:24:28.060

And why do you think Bob, why is it important for NSS

0:24:28.060,0:24:31.240

members today to know about the Society's history in the 19th century?

0:24:31.240,0:24:35.710

Why does it still matter? (BF) Oh thank you so much for that question Emma because

0:24:35.710,0:24:41.080

this sounds like a sort of, this is a personal campaign I'm on here... Let me

0:24:41.080,0:24:47.440

suggest some reasons why the history of this wonderful Society is so

0:24:47.440,0:24:51.250

important:

First, most obviously, there are lessons to be

0:24:51.250,0:24:56.290

drawn from the past.

Second, there's some cracking stories and I

0:24:56.290,0:24:59.650

hope I've given you a little, a little flavor and there's more in my series of

0:24:59.650,0:25:04.900

videos - there's some crackers, cracking

stories about extraordinarily brave

0:25:04.900,0:25:14.980

people who deserve to be remembered. Third, because history, organizations with

0:25:14.980,0:25:21.040

a history gain a sort of legitimacy from their history - if you've got a past

0:25:21.040,0:25:27.120

particularly a heroic past, you can only add to your credibility and gravitas and

0:25:27.120,0:25:32.830

Fourth, because it provides us with an identity which helps bind us together

0:25:32.830,0:25:38.860

and provides for a sense of purpose and direction. Now sometimes, when I've said all

0:25:38.860,0:25:40.780

that sometimes people still look a bit

0:25:40.780,0:25:44.170

quizzical and so I say one other thing to them

0:25:44.170,0:25:53.350

as well - I ask them to ask themselves why if the history counts for so little, why

0:25:53.350,0:25:59.020

do the Churches make such a fuss about theirs. (EP) Absolutely, well history is, is

0:25:59.020,0:26:03.760

certainly central to identity and I'm sure you as a history teacher know all

0:26:03.760,0:26:08.440

about that but, but on this topic, certainly when I was studying history at

0:26:08.440,0:26:12.730

school, I don't remember learning anything about secularism or its place

0:26:12.730,0:26:17.830

in British society. Do you think that secularism should be taught in schools

0:26:17.830,0:26:21.820

and should it be on the curriculum and if so, how would you teach it? Would you

0:26:21.820,0:26:28.900

teach it as part of history or politics or religious studies or what? (BF) Well to

0:26:28.900,0:26:33.370

give you the directest answer, should it be taught? Of course. Yes it should be

0:26:33.370,0:26:39.370

but it's a, it's a very difficult issue actually. Certainly I would suggest that

0:26:39.370,0:26:45.149

the work and careers of secularist heroes like Paine, Carlyle, Holyoake,

0:26:45.149,0:26:51.450

Bradlaugh, Besant deserve a higher profile, in fact, to be honest, any profile would

0:26:51.450,0:26:58.470

help but the other difficulty is that secularism is essentially a political

0:26:58.470,0:27:04.679

rather than a religious concept and I regret to say that politics or civics

0:27:04.679,0:27:12.659

education is not a long suit for British education. Some years ago, David Blunkett

0:27:12.659,0:27:16.769

when he was Secretary of State for Education endeavored to promote

0:27:16.769,0:27:23.970

citizenship education as a compulsory part of the curriculum. He never really

0:27:23.970,0:27:29.490

developed, it never really happened for a variety of reasons despite the efforts

0:27:29.490,0:27:37.710
of well, I had a go, but you know, it was
stony ground. I think that this whole

0:27:37.710,0:27:42.480
issue needs revisiting and it does
highlight the fact that the work of the

0:27:42.480,0:27:49.350
NSS is far from complete. (EP) Yeah,
absolutely.
So you, you would put secularism in

0:27:49.350,0:27:53.519
civics education and you would advocate
for a greater role of civics education

0:27:53.519,0:27:58.379
in the school curriculum. (BF) Most
certainly, most certainly but there are

0:27:58.379,0:28:04.649
real challenges to achieve that. (EP) Bob
Forder thank you so much for highlighting the

0:28:04.649,0:28:08.549
importance of the work of the National
Secular society and for talking to me

0:28:08.549,0:28:14.950
today. (BF) Thank You, Emma. Thank you very
much.

0:28:18.029,0:28:22.960
(EP) That was episode 24 of the National
Secular society podcast hosted by Emma

0:28:22.960,0:28:26.470
Park. If you would like to help us
challenge unfair religious privilege

0:28:26.470,0:28:30.249
and support freedom of and from religion
in Britain today, why not become a

0:28:30.249,0:28:40.269
member of the NSS. Full details are on
our website at secularism.org.uk/podcast. If
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0:28:40.269,0:28:45.210
about this episode on the website. Thanks
for listening.

0:28:48.200,0:28:48.700