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## INTRODUCTION

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### Abstract

This Special Section presents a conceptual walking tour of law's places and spaces in Central London, created by members of the Law and the Humanities Hub (LHub) at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies. By mapping diverse sites—from bookshops and cab shelters to courthouses and administrative offices—this map explores how law and place are mutually constitutive, shaping and reshaping one another. Combining legal geography with historical and cultural analysis, it invites readers to see law beyond formal institutions, tracing its often-hidden spatial inscriptions across the city. The result is both a guide and a provocation to rethink law's spatial—and temporal—dimensions.

**Keywords:** law; space; place; legal geography; Central London; lawscapes.

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Where does law happen? Where does it take place—and also shape space? This deceptively simple question underpins the entries presented in this Special Section, a conceptual walking tour of law's places and spaces in Central London. It asks us not only to think about the *where* of law—its physical sites and spatial arrangements—but also to confront the ways in which place and law make and remake each other. As Timothy Hyde (2020) has written, “law and space are mutually constituting; law has a spatial aspect and space has a legal aspect” (236). Together, they weave “a complex fabric of dependencies and reciprocities between the practices of spatial organization ... and those of law” (Hyde 2020: 236). Law always happens somewhere: it is not some ethereal abstraction, floating above the material world, but is instead a powerful agent that shapes space itself—by drawing boundaries, producing jurisdictions, designating uses, and inscribing meanings. The spatial,

social, cultural, and historical contexts in which law unfolds shape how it is made, interpreted, enforced, and resisted.

In December 2024, members of the Law and the Humanities Hub (LHub) at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies (at the School of Advanced Study, University of London) began exploring these connections through a deceptively simple exercise: by mapping a spider's web of law's places and spaces. Each member of the LHub team selected a site within roughly a mile of IALS—located in Bloomsbury across from Russell Square—and drafted a short entry, which we have collected here and which will also be published online as an [annotated digital map](#).

The resulting collection is as diverse as it is revealing: from the establishment of the Cabmen's Shelters in the late nineteenth century to the partially mummified remains of philosopher and legal reformer Jeremy Bentham on display at University College London today; from the 1984 police raid on Gay's the Word bookshop for conspiracy to import “indecent or obscene” materials, to the establishment of the General Register Office at Somerset House in 1836, which oversaw the documentation of births, deaths, and marriages and which marks the birthplace of modern bureaucracy in Britain. Moreover, these entries are not simply legal trivia pinned to the urban landscape. Instead, we might view our walking tour as an embodied form of legal geography—a real-world experiment, in and through these spaces, in tracing the “co-constitutive relationship of people, place, and law” (Braverman & Ors 2014: 1). Scholars working at the intersections of law and geography have devised various terms to conceptualize those connections—think of Nicholas Blomley's (1994) “splice”, Nicole Graham's (2010) “lawscapes”, or David Delaney's (2010) “nomosphere” (see also Bennett & Layard 2015)—but all offer both a theoretical and even practical vantage point for our tour wayfarers, who might witness these sites not as mere backdrops for distant legal events, but as active participants in those events: places and spaces that shaped and have continued to shape various legal legacies.

Such a perspective also entails a shift in focus for those moving through Central London. Instead of seeing law only in its formal expressions—through parliamentary statutes, court judgments, administrative rules—we begin to witness how law itself is quietly hidden in plain sight, sometimes invisibly spatialized and materialized, not only in the courthouse, the prison, and the police station, but also in various offices, bookshops, and park squares. One of our aims is to make this co-constitution visible. By walking the tour—which takes approximately 1.5 to 2 hours in total—wanderers will not only encounter sites of legal significance but will also

see how these sites have been shaped by various legal instruments and how, in turn, these spaces and places have shaped the law. Each entry also includes plenty of recommended detours for the *flâneur*, including other relevant things to see and do near each site, encouraging users to situate these legal spaces and places within the broader life of twenty-first-century London: the pubs where lawyers met to plot strategies, the streets where protests erupted, the cafés where legal aid volunteers worked late into the night.

The resulting map is also therefore an exercise in thinking about law beyond the courtroom. Many of our selected sites remind us that law happens in places we might not initially recognize as “legal”. The bookshop Gay’s the Word was, in 1984, the target of a police raid that reflected broader legal anxieties about obscenity, sexuality, and morality. Its location, clientele, and stock all played a role in the raid, as did the broader geography of queer life in London at the time. In this sense, the legal significance of the site cannot be disentangled from its spatial and social contexts. By situating law in place, we can open up questions about inequality and exclusion. The co-constitution of law and space is rarely neutral. Laws can be used to create exclusions—think of vagrancy laws that enable the removal of unhoused people from public areas or planning regulations that limit the construction of affordable housing. Conversely, spaces can resist or reshape law, as in the case of occupations, protest camps, or community gardens established in defiance of zoning rules. Our map necessarily includes sites of both oppression *and* resistance, reminding us that the spatial dimension of law is always contested.

In making visible these connections, this walking tour contributes to a body of scholarship that insists on the inseparability of law and space (Braverman & Ors 2014). At the same time, rather than reifying notions of the pure spatiality of law, we might follow Mariana Valverde (2020), who has reminded us that the spatial dimensions of law are themselves inextricably bound up with law’s temporality, constituting a kind of “spacetime” of law. For each of the contributors to this Special Section, shifting spatial arrangements intersect with particular and overlapping moments across time. In urban contexts like London, this spacetime dynamic is intensified by not only the city’s long history but also its diversity and density. The city is a kind of palimpsest of legal accretion: every street corner carries traces of these legal layers if we know how to read them. Think only of Lincoln Inn’s Fields, a perhaps unexpected epicentre for linking the long history of the abolition movement to more recent battles for suffrage and women’s rights. Our mapping project is

thus in part a lesson in reading spatialized history. It trains us to notice the plaques, the architectural features, the street names, and the less visible spatial arrangements—CCTV coverage, restricted access points, protest exclusion zones—that reveal law’s inscription in space.

The entries in this walking tour cover a wide range of sites. From the 1870 trial of the cross-dressers “Fanny and Stella”, which exposed Victorian anxieties around gender and sexuality (Laurie Bashford, “Traces of Gender Transgression in the West End”), to Jeremy Bentham’s publicly preserved remains, where utilitarian philosophy meets the material body (Andrew Benjamin Bricker, “What Should You Do With a Dead Body?”), London’s legal spaces reveal how law shapes—and is shaped by—society. At Somerset House, the birth of civil registration in 1836 redefined identity through state documentation (Jess Connolly-Smith, “From Birth to Death: Archiving the Nation”), while the monumental Senate House embodies law’s claim to permanence and even Orwell’s dystopian vision (Ogulcan Ekiz, “Outside the Senate House: Reflections on Timelessness and Law”). More modest structures, like the late-nineteenth-century Cabmen’s Shelters, combined regulation, philanthropy, and everyday labour (James Campbell, “Shelter from the Storm: The Story of London’s Cabmen’s Shelters”), just as London’s squares have evolved from aristocratic preserves into contested public arenas of democracy (Jonah Miller, “Fighting for London’s Green Spaces”). In Lincoln’s Inn Fields, the legacies of William Blackstone, Chief Justice Mansfield, and Margaret MacDonald connect various histories of common law, abolition, and women’s rights (Jake Subryan Richards, “A Transformative Square”), while the libel case of *Hunter v Sharpe* shows how courts have sought to police the porous boundaries of medical knowledge (Anat Rosenberg, “What Is the Difference between Medicine and Quackery?”). The story of Congress House traces the shifting fortunes of the trade union movement (Parashar Kulkarni, “The Rise and Fall of the Congress House and the Trade Union Movement”), while the Government’s raid on the bookstore Gay’s the Word underscores the selective weaponization of obscenity law against queer communities (Shekinah Vera-Cruz, “The Shadow of the Tiger: Law and the Literary”). Finally, the 1934 founding of the Progressive Writers’ Association in Bloomsbury demonstrates how London also became a crucible for anti-colonial literary movements, tying its streets to struggles for global emancipation (Raghavi Viswanath, “Writing Against Empire: A Bloomsbury Manifesto”).

Taken altogether, these entries and this map will, we hope, serve not only as a guide for walking Central London but as an invitation to see these places and spaces differently: to notice where law has happened, to

ask how those places shaped and were shaped by the law, and to imagine what those spaces might become in the not-so-distant future.

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