

Walking with communists in Hampstead

HAMPSTEAD HEATH

6 FINISH

**Start Primrose Hill
Finish Hampstead Heath**
Duration 2+ hours

Frederich Engels left Manchester in disgust after the 1868 elections – the first in which the proletariat were entitled to vote – because they'd all voted Tory as they hated the Irish. 'The proletariat have made an awful fool of themselves,' he said. He moved to **122 Regent's Park Road (1)** in Primrose Hill, which is where this walk begins. The door was always open on a Sunday and all the communists and socialists of note would come over.

The editors of the *Social Democrat* newspaper in Tufnell Park would come across the railway tracks and there were proper parties, lots of beer and loud debate. On German election nights it was riotous.

It really was the mecca of international socialism. There would have been spies in the pub opposite, **The Queens (2)**, seeing who went in and out.

When Karl Marx died in 1883, Engels went through his papers and edited the second and third volumes of 'Das Kapital'. He also wrote 'The Origin of the Family' here. He received sacks of mail from communists all over the world and made it a point of honour to reply, not just in the correct tongue, but in the correct provincial dialect.

In Manchester, Engels had exploited the working class to fund his lifestyle, and here he played the stock market. He died with a portfolio worth a couple of million pounds and some of his investments were in imperial concerns. Engels would never admit to a contradiction as a mill

owner or a stock market man. He saw these as minor quibbles in the grander scheme of the revolution to come – he would not be deviated by petty bourgeois concerns. He got tetchy about it, but the defence was that if he didn't do what he did, Marx couldn't have done what he did.

From here, walk along Regent's Park Road to Chalk Farm. This is the daily walk Engels would have enjoyed. He would have left his house on Regent's Park Road, walked over the railways past the **Roundhouse (3)** – which was built in 1846 – and then through Chalk Farm, which had a reputation for violence and drunkenness, to go and meet Marx in Kentish Town.

Marx came back to London from the Continent in 1850, after the failed revolutions of 1848. At first he lived in Soho, then the family moved north to areas that were being laid out as Victorian suburbia. Walk up Haverstock Hill and then up Maitland Park Road. Marx

moved to **No 41 (4)**, which no longer exists, in 1875. Before that, from 1856, he lived at **No 9 (now No 46) Grafton Terrace (5)**, which is just round the corner. He always stayed close to Engels.

Marx lived a fairly nice middle-class lifestyle thanks to Engels. Engels was in Manchester from 1850 to 1870 and over that time

gave the Marx family the equivalent of £300,000-£400,000. The only way Marx could do his writing was if Engels subsidised it. So Engels was up in Manchester working in the cotton industry while Marx was in the British Museum. Engels wrote to Marx and asked him how much he needed; they agreed on about £350 a year (about £35,000 in today's money). To put it in perspective, Anthony Trollope was earning £140 a year at the Post Office and was thought well paid. The £350 was just the base – Marx earned more from journalism and royalties.

The other thing about the Marx family is that they would get bequests, go on a splurge and then become bankrupt again. And they'd blame it all on the 'bourgeois trap' that sucked them in. Marx got £600 from the death of his mother; it allowed them to move to Grafton Terrace. Then Wilhelm Wolff, a communist in Manchester, died and left Marx £800; Marx dedicated 'The Communist Manifesto' to him, and used the cash to move to Maitland Park Villas. This would have been quite plush and grander all round.

After Engels picked up Marx in Kentish Town, they would walk up to Hampstead and go round the Heath. It was quite a walk – up Southampton Road and Roderick Road and on to **Hampstead Heath (6)**. Sometimes they'd just pace around in Marx's house, but they liked, in that Teutonic way, taking these long constitutional walks to discuss ideas. I love the idea of them stroking their beards, deep in discussion as they stomped round the Heath. *Tristram Hunt (interviewed by Peter Watts) 'The Frock-Coated Communist' by Tristram Hunt is published by Penguin at £25.*

