

Deborah Colville: 'From Aerodiphros to Painless Dentistry: Bloomsbury's Notable Inventors'

I'm going to talk in particular

present summer on which Mr Phillips promised, by public advertisement, to make an 'actual transit or flight', but (unfortunately) failed to perform his promise".

So who was Phillips? He hadn't been in Bloomsbury Square very long by 1844. He was previously at 80 High Holborn, from where, in 1840, he was advertising as a "pneumatician" (The Times, 16 March and 19 May 1840). This splendid-sounding job title is explained in more detail in the advertisements, which begin "Smoky Chimnies Cured at Once". He then moved to Bloomsbury Square, as a further advertisement shows: "Smoky Chimneys perfectly Cured, by one simple operation, at a moderate charge...W. H. Phillips and Co beg to announce that their time is entirely devoted to the correction of chimneys smoking into rooms...from any cause whatever. The charge to effect this permanent cure is from £1 to £2, including all expenses...No charge for inspection within five miles of London" (The Times, 27 January 1844)

By 1853, he seems to have been on a downward spiral: The Times reports that he caused a disturbance in the offices of the Fire Annihilator company in Leadenhall Street. He had taken out the patent for the Fire Annihilator and had been connected with the company, but he apparently now wished not to be associated with it any more, and had turned up at the company's offices and started tearing up their prospectuses. He was bound over to keep the peace for six months. (The Times, 24 August 1853) His name was continuing to appear in advertisements for the company in September 1853 (The Times, 17 September 1853).

This was not the end of his career as an inventor, though. In 1854 he applied for a patent on "improvements in rotatory steam engines" (Mechanics' Magazine, 1855; application made 4 October 1854) and this was in connection with his continuing work on the Aerodiphros. In fact, his name is quite well known to historians of aviation, because in 1868, it appears that he finally managed to demonstrate his flying machine. This was at the Royal Aeronautical Society's exhibition, Crystal Palace, June 1868, the world's first aeronautical exhibition, and one which included trials of various aerial machines (The Times, 23 and 24 June 1868). According to Phillips's own notes, this was one of several successful flights his model had made: "The steam was up in a few seconds, when the whole apparatus spun around like a top and mounted into the air faster than any bird; to what height it ascended I had no means of ascertaining. The distance travelled was across two fields where, after a long search, I found the machine minus the wings, which had been torn off from contact with the ground". (quoted in [www.aviastar.org/history/index.html](http://www.aviastar.org/history/index.html))

It was based on a system of jet propulsion – steam squirted out of openings in the arm of the rotor, spinning them around and thus lifting the machine into the sky. This was the first time that a model helicopter powered by an actual engine, rather than a stored energy device such as coiled springs, had successfully been flown.

circulated among scientific groups, it was considered nothing short of sensational. Some engineers became overly enthusiastic about Phillips' flying machine, and soon there was talk of building large passenger-carrying helicopters. These bold ideas quickly faded when it was realized that a much more suitable power unit other than the bulky steam engine would be needed before their dreams could become a reality" ([www.aviastar.org/history/index.html](http://www.aviastar.org/history/index.html))

G. H. Jones

From steam-powered helicopters to painless dentistry – and Mr George Horatio Jones, of Great Russell Street. He was born in Cork, Ireland, around 1844, but had moved to England by the time he was 18, when the 1861 census shows him in Devon, pupil of Alfred Huston, surgeon dentist. By April 1871 (the time of the 1871 census) he was living with his wife Annie at 57 Great Russell Street, and this was to remain both his home and his professional address for several decades. His advertisements are very prominent in *The Times* during the 1870s and 1880s, usually headed by the promise "Painless Dentistry". This kind of advertisement was of course very common in the late nineteenth century, but something relatively unusual about Jones's promises of painless dentistry was that he wasn't just talking about the use of nitrous oxide in his practice. (As we know, the first use of ether as an anaesthetic in Britain had been carried out in Bloomsbury, in Gower Street in 1846 by a dentist, James Robinson.)

G. H. Jones was interested in extending the painlessness of dentistry to his main area of interest, false teeth. It was in this connection that he took out a patent on 30

which had by that stage been accumulated. Some of the models ended up in the Smithsonian but the rest, including Phillips's lathe, were sold at auction at 1925 – to Henry Wellcome!<sup>3</sup>

This was not Jones's only connection with America.

Bahamas! He married the eldest daughter of the Rt Hon. Lord Inverforth, and became quite a prominent public figure, but again his obituary (The Times, 10 January 1967) does not say anything of his origins. And the only daughter of G. H. Jones, Dora Mary Jones (b. 1889) seems to have been devoted to this naval brother and followed him to the Bahamas – she also changed her name to Dora Langton-Jones. We can trace these children back to the father of painless dentistry, G. H. Jones, and perhaps we might be able to track down some surviving descendants by appealing on the blog<sup>4</sup>. There does not seem to have been any obvious discreditable reason for the changes of name.

Bloomsbury). But his most enduring and famous location was the purpose-built British College of Health of 1828, in Hamilton Place, New Road (ie the part of Euston Road opposite St Pancras station). The name was significant. Morison had become convinced by this time



Archer, of 105 Great Russell Street, invented a collodion process which became the dominant form of photography worldwide from the 1850s to the 1880s and which he thought of calling the “Archerotype”. But he was too unassuming to patent the process and died in poverty in 1857. His children were granted a £50 civil list pension because his discovery was reckoned to have saved about £30,000 in the production of Ordnance Survey maps alone! (Encyclopaedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography, ed. John Hannay, 2008)

Bloomsbury was a natural home for inventors of all kinds in the nineteenth century, some of whom are more famous than others. But even those who have been well-documented, or who are at least well-known to historians working in a particular field like aviation history or photography, have not generally been seen in their Bloomsbury context. We are in the privileged position of being able to see them in their geographical as well as their historical context. Bloomsbury’s preponderance of institutions gave them everything from scientific support and intellectual credibility to a ready market and protective camouflage. And they certainly made the most of it!