

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) Community Archives at London Metropolitan Archives

London Metropolitan Archives Information Leaflet 25



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This guide explores collections relevant to the research of LGBT history from 17th century to the present day.

Introduction

London has always been the capital of the LGBT community in England and Wales; for many lesbian and gay people, London's size and diversity have offered them a place of refuge with the opportunities to live their lives with relative tolerance, and explore their own sexualities.

Before 1967, gay sex between men was illegal. Religious intolerance and discrimination meant that Lesbian and gay communities were until late 20th century effectively 'hidden' within wider society. Relationships took place behind closed doors, and certain areas were known for male prostitution. Common places where cross dressing and gay sex took place in 18th century were 'Molly Houses' (or brothels). In 1890s, London saw the high profile scandal with the trial of Oscar Wilde, the writer over his relationship with Alfred Douglas, the son of the Marquis of Queensberry. He was held for a time at Wandsworth Prison.

The introduction of The Sexual Offences Act in 1967 decriminalised consensual sex between two men in private. There has never been a law specifically against sex between women, so the Act only applied to men. Since the 1960s a growing number of related social, political and cultural organisations have been established. Groups formed in response to direct attacks on individuals, such as Admiral Duncan nail bombing in 2000 and wider society's problem with homosexuality by campaigning for the removal of legal and social discrimination. In 1971, the first openly gay social event was organised by the Gay Liberation Front at Kensington Town Hall.

By the late 20th century, London's gay quarter had become centred in Soho, Westminster. However a number of areas in London have developed strong lesbian and gay communities including Vauxhall, Clapham, Earl's Court, Hackney and Stoke Newington.

Speak Out London Project!

Speak Out London - Diversity City, a new LGBTQ project running from September 2014 to August 2016 will establish a community LGBTQ oral-history/memorabilia archive at LMA. It will record histories from 1945-present. This new and significant contemporary archive will provide a powerful community collection to compliment and challenge more

formal historical records. The archive will be made available through a website and on site at LMA via the Mediatheque facility. Discover more at the Speak Out London site <http://speakoutlondon.wordpress.com>.

Collections at LMA

The 'invisibility' of the LGBT community within wider society prior to mid 20th century mean records tend to be mainly found in official sources. Evidence of the LGBT community can be found in the archives of courts, hospitals, local authorities and other organisations' collections. Rich information can be found, although individual cases are 'buried' within record series and in the main are not described in detail in the LMA's catalogues.

Court records

Judicial and diocesan religious courts dealt with sex crimes. Relevant records can be found from 17th to 19th centuries.

Middlesex Sessions of the Peace: session papers (MJ/SP) are the administrative records relating to the business happening in the court. They include summons, examinations of witnesses and bail records. Further series in the collection can be used to track developments in these cases. Individual descriptions of the cases can be searched in the catalogue until 1844 when depositions and examinations were kept as a separate series (MJ/SP/E) which is not catalogued in detail. For example a Henry Dundass was charged with committing 'sodomy' on the prosecution of Samuel Powell in 1773 (MJ/SP/1773/10/038).

London-wide Local authority records

The archives of the London County Council (LCC), Greater London Council (GLC), Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) and later London Residuary Body (LRB) contain committee minutes, correspondence, and grant files relating to the establishment of and assistance given to groups. These include LCC's Public Health Department's correspondence on homosexuality, 1947-1961 (LCC/PH/GEN/03/028/019); GLC Grants Branch files for Lesbian Feminist Writers Conference Planning Group Lesbian and Gay Video Project Collective, 1983-1985 (GLC/RA/GR/02/089-090). There is also a subject

file on 'Changing the world: a London charter for lesbian and gay rights', 1985 (GLC/DG/PRB/08/3534).

The ILEA collection includes 'Telling Friends: A different story', a 26 minute video produced and directed by Sandy Andrews (ILEA/VID/05/03/013), 1987. This feature was intended to be used in personal and social education classes with upper secondary pupils to encourage discussions about homosexuality to take place. The programme features young people who have identified themselves as lesbian or gay who consider prejudice they encounter and experiences of being gay at school.

The London Strategic Planning Unit archives include correspondence, memoranda and minutes relating to the Lesbian and Gay Cross Group Project, 1987 (LSPU/DIR/03/050).

Hospital records

Homosexuality was considered by the medical profession and wider society as a mental health condition. Individuals were admitted to psychiatric hospitals for treatment. LMA holds many archives of asylums and hospitals specialising in mental health collections.

For example patient records of Saint Luke's Hospital (Woodside Hospital), Muswell Hill, include individual case notes (1936-1966). These records contain physician's notes made on examination, and detailed typewritten notes giving the patient's personal and family history, and history of illness, with physical assessment. Access to this series of records is restricted under current data protection legislation as cases may relate to living individuals, although where proof is provided that patients are deceased, access may be given.

For example, case notes (H64/B/08/01/003, case number 0835) include the following account written and signed by the Psychotherapist, relating to a retired army officer, admitted from home in May 1936 and discharged in June 1936. Result: 'improved'. Diagnosis: 'Psychopathic personality'.

'Recently the patient has been resorting to undesirable night clubs of late where all forms of perversion are practised and catered for...'

'...he has long been addicted to various sexual perversions, transvestism has been the most prominent, but it is possible that he has also at times indulged in homosexual practice'.

'...he served a term of 9 months imprisonment for an unamiable piece of eccentricity - boot-blackening a girl in Maidenhead. For the past year his life has been continually punctuated by long visits, sometimes for a week on end, to a West End Flat kept for the entertainment of perverts, he will remain there in a state of drunken bliss arrayed in feminine clothes and adornments...'

'...his eyebrows show signs of recent plucking and there is evidence of the wearing of earrings'.

For further information on LMA's hospital collections see 'Hospital Records' (Leaflet no.34) and 'Records of Patients in London Hospitals' (Leaflet No.35).

Records of interested associations and religious bodies

Relevant records can be found in archives of Jewish organisations relating to homosexuality. These include correspondence concerning Section 28 of the Local Government Bill 1988 which banned promotion of homosexuality within local authority schools, together with discussion of an article in **The Independent** concerning the spread of AIDS, 1987-1988 (ACC/2805/07/18/007). Also a subject file, 1971-1987, on homosexuality including an article by Chief Rabbi Sir Immanuel Jakobovits (ACC/3400/02/02/148).

The records of the Public Morality Council (A/PMC), a body which was formed in 1899 to combat vice and indecency in London include a subject file on homosexuality, 1955-1959 (A/PMC/080).

The records of the Association of Greater London Older Women (AGLOW) include papers of Lesbian Workers Group from 1985 and Older Lesbian Project reports (LMA/4613).

LGBT Community records

Since 2003, LGBT History and Archives Conferences have been held at LMA on an annual basis. The following collections have been deposited by members of LGBT community, dating from 1970s to present day.

Allen, Clarence (B16/088): Correspondence, printed material, photographs and four videos - relating to Black Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender community (BLGBTQ) including sexual health, clubs and events and the arts.

Clarence Allen worked at the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre Project (BLGCP), Tottenham, which became the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre (BLGC), Arch 196, 230 Bellenden Road, Peckham; also a founder of Big Up, the first UK-based sexual health organisations for BMWHSWM (Black Men Who Have Sex With Men); records of each are included}, 1991-2008

Campaign for Homosexual Equality: Southwark/Lambeth Group (LMA/4539) including minutes, constitution and correspondence highlighting local campaign events and activities, 1976-1989.

Campaign for Homosexual Equality: London Section (B13/127): Minutes, correspondence, newspaper cuttings and speeches of Paul Olliver, Chair 1979 - 1981

Central London Arts Limited, The Drill Hall (B13/144): production files on gay theatre and other activities, with queer performers, including Gay Sweatshop, 1970s-2000s.

Kenric (B16/071). Kenric is the longest-established national organisation offering a social network to lesbians throughout the UK established in 1965, it was formed from the old Surrey and South-West London section of the Minorities Research Group, the name being an abbreviation of Kensington and Richmond.

The records were formerly held at London School of Economics (LSE) and include Chair's papers, constitution & procedures, committee minutes, correspondence, accounts, promotional material and photographs.

Kremenstein, Gerald (LMA/4678). Flyers, tickets, badges and membership cards for clubs, events and groups; papers on a visit to America, and papers of Harrow and Brent Lesbian and Gay Group, Jewish Gay and Lesbian Group and Saint Katherine's Group, 1971-2008.

Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender Advisory Group, an independent voluntary group of LGBT advisors to the Metropolitan Police Service (accession B06/161): minutes and policy papers; annual reports; newsletter; Sue Sanders' subject files including family liaison, conferences and training with related external reports and publications, 1999-2004.

Lesbian London (LMA/4540): minutes, policy, correspondence including comments and responses to articles, published 'Lesbian London'

magazine issues, finance, advertising and photographs. Includes the collective's 'The Lesbian London Survey' initiative with returned questionnaires and statistics (LMA/4540/03/007), 1991-1995.

Liberal Judaism (B16/076): Rainbow Jews Oral History Project. Launched in October 2012, Rainbow Jews is a pioneering project that records and showcases Jewish lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) history from the 1950s to today. It captures the voices and experiences of Jewish LGBT people in the UK through oral histories and archive creation. The Rainbow Jews project is supported by Liberal Judaism.

North West London Gay Group (B13/128): Unity Newsletter 1974 - 1986; Fortieth Anniversary booklet 2011, minutes 1978 – 1980

Older Lesbian Network (B15/148): OLN Newsletter 1996 – 2008.

Pink Singers (B16/065): oral history for their 30th anniversary. Europe's longest running LGBT choir established in 1983 and based in London. The Pink Singers are essentially a community choir, made up of over 80 lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people from a diverse range of backgrounds united by a passion for singing choral music. In 2013 the Pink Singers received a Heritage Lottery Fund Grant to engage in a project to collect and exhibit oral history and community heritage relating to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) experience over the three decades since the choir was formed in 1983.

Rivers Cultures Festival (LMA/4534/01/01/003) includes 'Walking Proud in East London' oral project recordings and publications (2011). (Access by appointment only)

'rukus! Federation Limited (LMA/4571) 'rukus! Black, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (BLGBT) cultural archive': collected diaries, letters, minutes and related papers, magazines, pamphlets, flyers, posters, journals, books and monographs, photographs and prints, audio-visual material, memorabilia and ephemera. Collected from individuals, activists, DJs, Club promoters, community organisations, writers, artists and magazine publishers. Includes records of rukus! Federation Limited (2000-2010), Ajamu (1975-2009) and Topher Campbell (1994-2010), 1975-2010

Spraggs, Gillian (LMA/4616): publicity leaflets and brochures for various London LGBT organisations including Galop, Kenric and Stonewall, 1980 – 1999.

Tatchell, Peter, Gay rights activist and campaigner (LMA/4466): campaigning articles, reports, printed material and banners, including his work with the campaign organisation Outrage!, 1971-2004. This collection cover a wide range of topics including AIDS/HIV research, vivisection and animal rights, homophobic violence and policing, the age of consent, media portrayal of homosexuality, negative comments on sexuality by 'personalities', homophobic lyrics and the music industry, international politics, green socialism, Labour and politics, Members of Parliament and 'outing', the Bermondsey By-election, the Greater London Assembly, Christian, Jewish and Islamic leaders' stances on homosexuality, the law and sexuality, the prosecution of homosexual acts, and the employment of homosexuals in the armed forces.

Westways Greetings (LMA/4666): greeting cards produced by Lip Productions Limited of Chicago, United States of America, which were distributed by Westways Greetings, 1970s.

Access

Some recently deposited collections are uncatalogued and require prior appointment. Some access restrictions apply to records relating to living individuals. The records of Peter Tatchell are available for public inspection, although files of an adult nature may not be produced for enquirers under the age of eighteen.

Collections held elsewhere in the United Kingdom

The following repositories hold extensive LGBT collections:

Glasgow Women's Library: The Lesbian Archive

Established in 1984 as the Lesbian Archives Collective in London, the Lesbian Archive was transferred to Glasgow Women's Library in 1995. It comprises printed materials ranging from books, reports, pamphlets and theses to biographical cuttings, personal papers and photographs of individual women, social events and demonstrations.

Contact: Glasgow Women's Library, 23 Landressy Street, Glasgow G40 1BP

Tel: 0141 550 2267

Email: info@womenslibrary.org.uk

Web: [web: www.womenslibrary.org.uk/explore-the-library-and-archive/about-the-collection/](http://www.womenslibrary.org.uk/explore-the-library-and-archive/about-the-collection/)

London University: London School of Economics Library, Archives Division

Holds the records of gay rights organisations and LGBT activists which form part of the Hall-Carpenter Archives. These date from the homosexual law reform movement of the 1950s and include the papers of the Albany Trust, Campaign for Homosexual Equality, Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement and many other groups and activists. Also held are further records of Peter Tatchell.

Contact: Lionel Robbins Building

10 Portugal Street, London, WC2A 2HD

Tel: 020 7955 7223

Fax: 020 7955 7454

Email: document@lse.ac.uk

Web: www.lse.ac.uk/library/archive/

Bishopsgate Institute

Holds the records of The Lesbian and Gay Newsmedia Archive (LAGNA) which contains over 200,000 cuttings taken from non-gay press on all LGBT matters since the late Nineteenth Century, badges, T-shirts and a reference library.

Contact: 230 Bishopsgate, London, EC2M 4QH

Tel: 020 7392 9270

Fax: 020 7392 9275

Email: library@bishopsgate.org.uk

Web: www.bishopsgate.org.uk/

Other sources

Unfinished Histories has been recording the history of Alternative Theatre in the 1960s, 70s and 80s through interviews and the collecting of archive material.

Further information is available on Unfinished Histories website

[Web: www.unfinishedhistories.com/](http://www.unfinishedhistories.com/)

'Out There' is a partnership project between LMA and The National Archives, providing an online search portal to help researchers identify archive resources for the study of LGBT history.

Further information is available on The National Archives website

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.

Further reading

Norton, Rictor. - ***Mother Clap's molly house : the gay subculture in England 1700-1830***, 2nd rev. ed. – Stroud: Chalford, 2006 [LMA: 40.451/NOR]

Parker, Graham, 1964-. - ***Gay London***, photographs by Andi Davidson. London : Metro, 1997 [LMA: Store 67.0/(1997)]

Kaiser, Charles. - ***The gay metropolis, 1940-1996***. - London : Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998 [Barbican Library]

Summerskill, Clare: ***Gateway to Heaven: Fifty Years of Lesbian and Gay Oral History***. – London: 2012

What next?

Help us document the history of the LGBT Community. LMA is actively collecting archives relating to the LGBT community in London. Please contact us if you would like to potentially deposit records.

About this leaflet

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