

THE

NATIONAL

ARCHIVES

Resource pack



Discovering LGBTQ+ history in the archives

How much can police records reveal about LGBTQ+ history?

Key Stage 3-5

Interwar 1918-1939

Resource at a Glance

Suitable for:

KS 3-5

Time Period:

Interwar 1918-1939

How much can police records reveal about the lives of LGBTQ+ people in the past?

This resource pack accompanies our [LGBTQ+ History video](#), which you can find online. In the video, Hannah Carter and Victoria Iglkowski-Broad introduce the file CRIM 1/387 and what it can tell us about LGBTQ+ history in 1920s London. Stefan Dickers from the Bishopsgate Institute also showcases some of their extraordinary collection relating to LGBTQ+ British history.

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This resource is designed for use in assemblies, form time and History, Citizenship or PSHE lessons.

This is a printable resource pack of our online resource, which is available online here:

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/discovering-lgbtq-history-in-the-archives/>

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Teacher's Notes

This [film and set of resources](#) is suitable for an assembly, form time or a lesson on LGBTQ+ history. The film is around 12 minutes in length.

There is an accompanying PowerPoint presentation with questions to facilitate pupil discussion and teacher notes.

When discussing key developments in the 20th century for LGBTQ+ people, teachers may want to use these recommended timelines:

- [Stonewall - Key dates for Lesbian, Gay Bi and Trans Equality](#)
- [British Library - A timeline of LGBTQ communities in the UK](#)

Bobby Britt, whose story is explored in the film, lived from 1900 to 2000 and therefore would have witnessed huge changes. Teachers could ask students to identify different types of changes, e.g legal or social. Or pupils could judge which change/s would have had the biggest impact on LGBTQ+ people's lives.

Teachers may want to use the documents included in this pack. Students could analyse the document in more depth considering questions like:

- What type of document is it?
- Who produced it?
- Who was the audience?
- Why was it made?
- How much does it reveal about life for LGBTQ+ people in the past?

Questions to consider for class discussion (included on PPT):

- What can The National Archives documents reveal about the lives of LGBTQ+ people in the 1920s?
- What did you find shocking or surprising?
- Why is it important to go to other archives/museums to learn about LGBTQ+ history?

You could explore with students why stories about LGBTQ+ women and transgender people are harder to find within The National Archives. For instance, this resource explores documents that exist due to the targeting of gay men by police, while love between women was less criminalised. There are resources that can extend students' learning about the history the broader LGBTQ+ spectrum included in the 'Useful links' section of the resource.

Background

The film explores what documents at The National Archives can reveal about LGBTQ+ history. It focuses on the story of a basement flat at 25 Fitzroy Square, the home of Bobby Britt, a dancer on the West End stage. He would hold parties for a small group of his working-class friends. One of these parties was raided by the police in 1927 under accusations of being a disorderly house.

We know about these gatherings due to extensive undercover police surveillance and documents that the police recovered from the flat. The flat was being observed because, at these gatherings, men would have relationships with other men. This was an era when sexual acts between men were both criminalised and socially unacceptable in wider society.

While it was never illegal to be gay, many of the associated practices were criminalised. This included sexual behaviour, being in certain spaces, and physical appearance - for instance, men wearing makeup. For example, The National Archives' collection contains pieces of blotting paper used to forcibly lift makeup off the faces of men who were arrested. In just going about their daily lives, men who had relationships with other men could be arrested, prosecuted and imprisoned. It was not until the 1967 Sexual Offences Act that real legal change meant that LGBTQ+ people's lives were less criminalised.

The CRIM 1/387 document file includes a range of different types of primary sources, including annotated photographs, a list of exhibits, police surveillance notes and even seized love letters between men. Despite being gathered by police, these documents can give a valuable insight into the lively atmosphere of Fitzroy Square and even provide rare voices of LGBTQ+ people in the 1920s.

However, the film and resources also explore how important it is to use other collections to learn about LGBTQ+ history. Documents from the Bishopsgate Institute are included within this pack. These include diary entries written by William Mahoney, documenting his life with his partner Doug in the 1940s. The Bishopsgate Institute's collection can provide a more personal insight into the experiences of LGBTQ+ people in the past. For instance, they hold the log books for Switchboard, detailing conversations with people who rang this LGBTQ+ helpline.

Note that we are using the term LGBTQ+ here as an umbrella term, but many of the people discussed would not have had this language available to them at the time, and would have used contemporary language to describe their sexuality.

Photograph of Bobby Britt and others (CRIM 1/387)



List of exhibits (CRIM 1/387)

CRIMINAL APPEAL ACT, 1907.

R.
v

Robert Britt, Constance Carre, Alexander Berg Charles Smith, James Anderson, Harold Weir, William Gross, Leonard M Miller, Lester Jones, Edwin Brown, Harold Brewer, and Bert Lummes.

LIST OF EXHIBITS.

Number or other identifying mark on Exhibit.	Short description of Exhibit.	Produced by Prosecution or Defence.	Directions of the Judge of the Court of Trial, with name and address of person retaining Exhibit.
✓ 1	Black transparent skirt.	Prosecution	
✓ 2	Red Sash	do	
✓ 3	Pair lady's shoes	do	
✓ 4	Material	do	
✓ 5	Bathing costume.	do	
✓ 6	A pair of slippers.	do	
✓ 7	Suit of Pyjamas.	do	
✓ 8	Set of Photographs	do	Police.
✓ 9	Plan	do	
✓ 10	6 Letters addressed to Britt	do	
✓ 11	4 Letters " " Lummes.	do	

*Received Exhibits 1 to 15 and 15
H. J. Insp.
D. B. Insp.
D. B. Insp.*

*Received Exhibits 1 to 4 inclusive.
H. J. Insp.
Feb. 2. February 1924.*

Signed _____
Clerk,
Harborouqh Street. Police Court.

SCH. II.—No. 30.
LIST OF EXHIBITS.
M.P.-25-5899/M B

List of exhibits (CRIM 1/387)

Transcript

CRIMINAL APPEAL ACT, 1907.

R.

Robert Britt, Constance Carre, Alexander Berg, Charles Smith, James Anderson, Harold Weir, William Gross, Leonard M Miller, Lester Jones, Edwin Brown, Harold Brewer and Bert Lummes

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6	A pair of slippers	Do	
7	Suit of Pyjamas	Do	
8	Set of Photographs	Do	Police
9	Plan	Do	
10	6 Letters addressed to Britt	Do	
11	4 Letters addressed to Lummes	Do	

List of exhibits (CRIM 1/387)

Received Exhibits
1 to 7 and 15

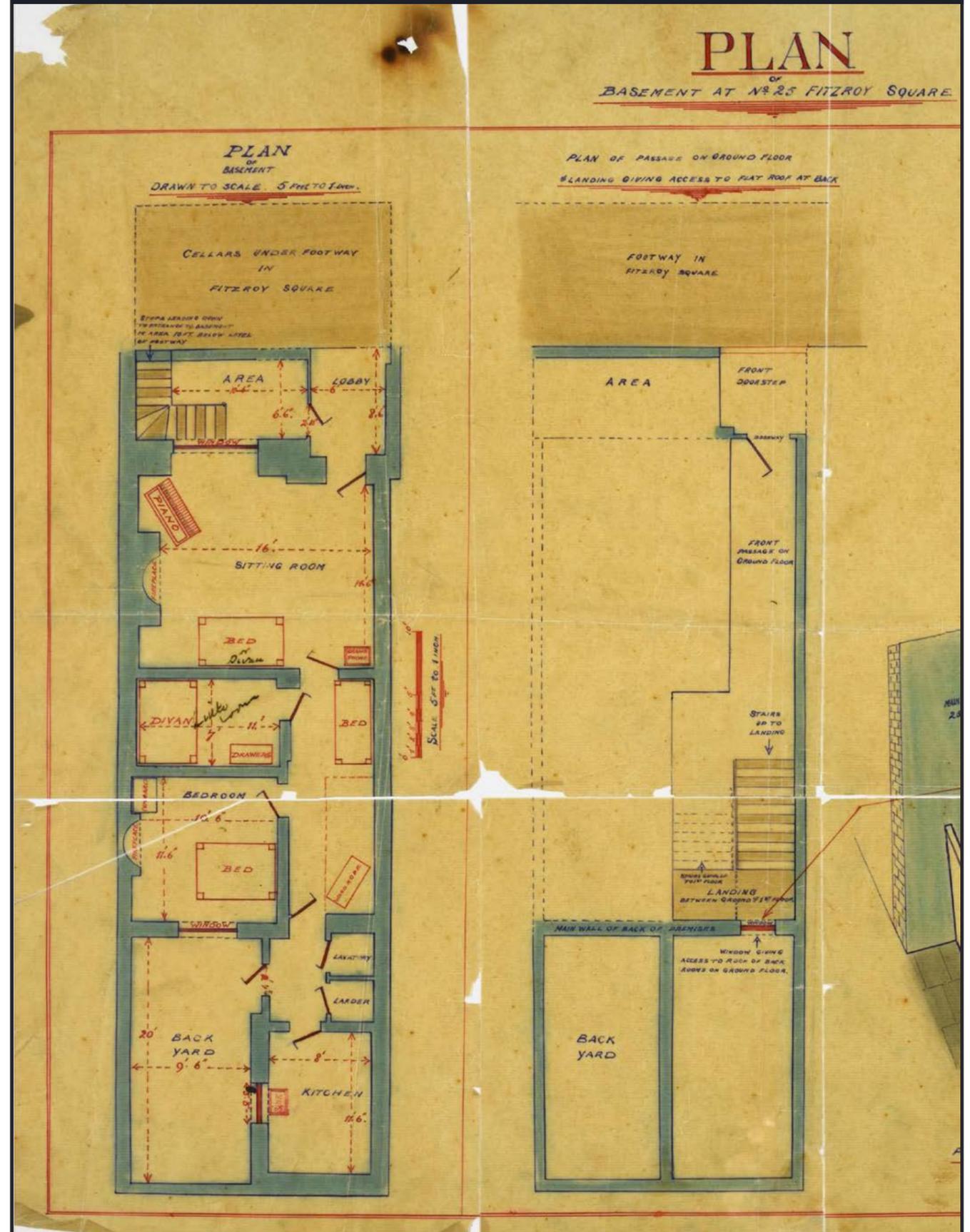
Received Exhibits 1 to 7 inclusive
2nd February 1927

Signed

Clerk,

Marlborough Street Police Court

Basement plan (detail) (CRIM 1/387)



Basement plan (detail) (CRIM 1/387)

Transcript

PLAN
OF
BASEMENT AT NO. 25 FITZROY SQUARE

PLAN OF BASEMENT
DRAWN TO SCALE. 5 FEET TO 1 INCH

CELLARS UNDER FOOTWAY IN FITZROY SQUARE
STEPS LEADING DOWN TO ENTRANCE TO BASEMENT IN AREA 10 FT. BELOW
LEVEL OF FOOTWAY

LOBBY

AREA

WINDOW

PIANO

SITTING ROOM

FIREPLACE

BED or divan

GRAMOPHONE

DIVAN

DRAWERS

BED

WARDROBE

BEDROOM

CUPBOARD

FIREPLACE

Basement plan (detail) (CRIM 1/387)

WINDOW

LAVATORY

LARDER

SINK

BACKYARD

PLAN OF PASSAGE ON GROUND FLOOR
& LANDING GIVING ACCESS TO FLAT ROOF AT BACK

FOOTWAY IN FITZROY SQUARE

FRONT DOORSTEP

DOORWAY

AREA

FRONT PASSAGE ON GROUND FLOOR

STAIRS UP TO LANDING

LANDING BETWEEN GROUND & 1st FLOOR

STAIRS GOING UP TO 1st FLOOR

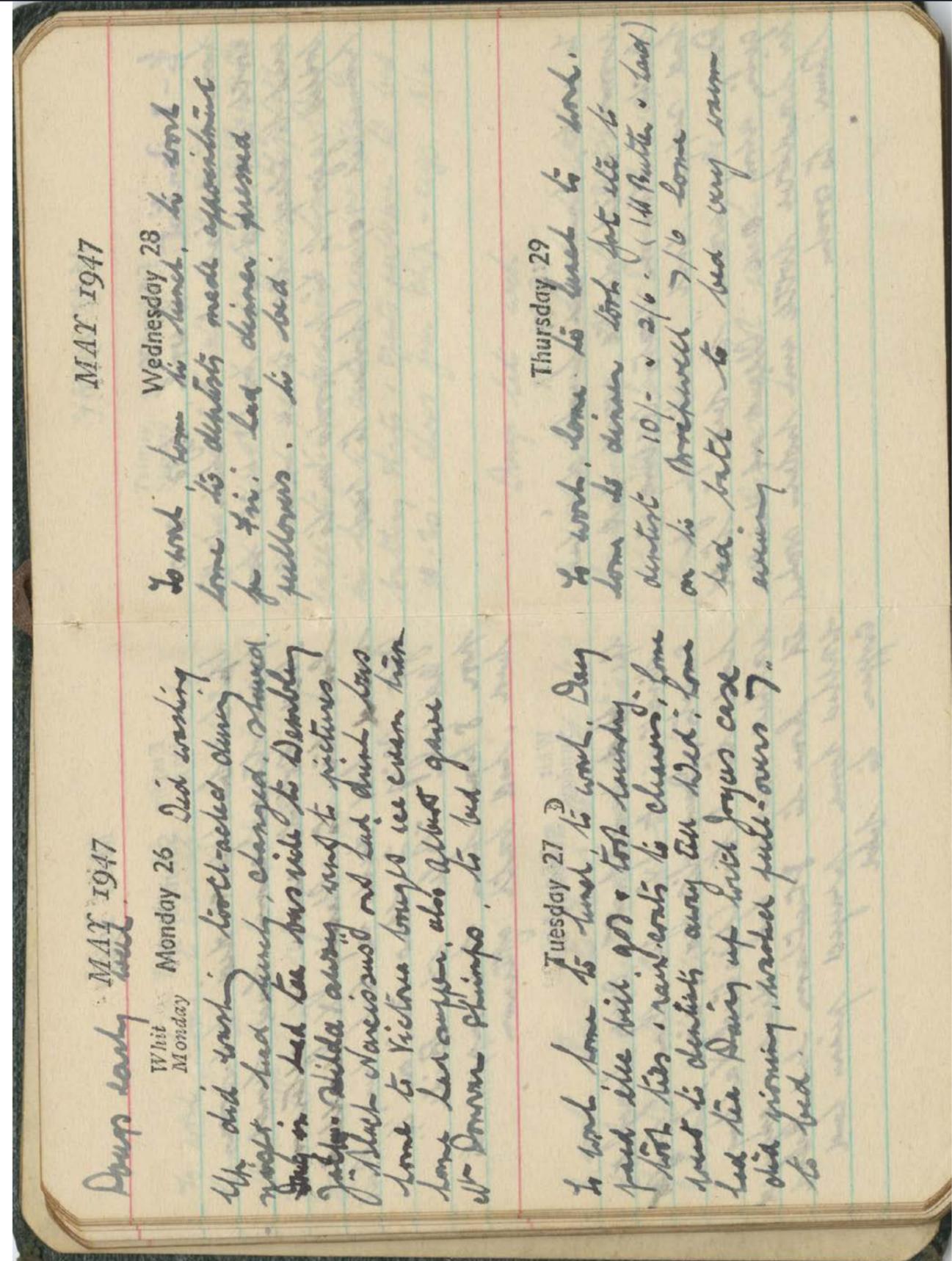
MAIN WALL OF BACK OF PREMISES

WINDOW

WINDOW GIVING ACCESS TO ROOF OF BACK ROOMS ON GROUND FLOOR

BACKYARD

Bishopsgate: William Mahoney's diary from 1947



Bishopsgate: William Mahoney's diary from 1947

Transcript

MAY 1947

Whit Monday Monday 26

Did washing up. Tooth cracked during night. Had lunch, changed. Shaved. Doug in. Had tea. Bus ride to Wembley. Jack & Hilda away. Went to pictures "Black Narcissus" and had drinks. Home to Victoria bought ice cream [illegible] home. Had supper. Also Albert gave us Donovan Shrimps. To bed

Tuesday 27

To work, home to lunch, to work. Doug paid electricity bill. Gas. Took laundry ties main coats to clean. Home. Went to dentist's away till Wed; home. Had tea. Doug up with Joyus case. Did ironing, washed pull-overs 7. To bed

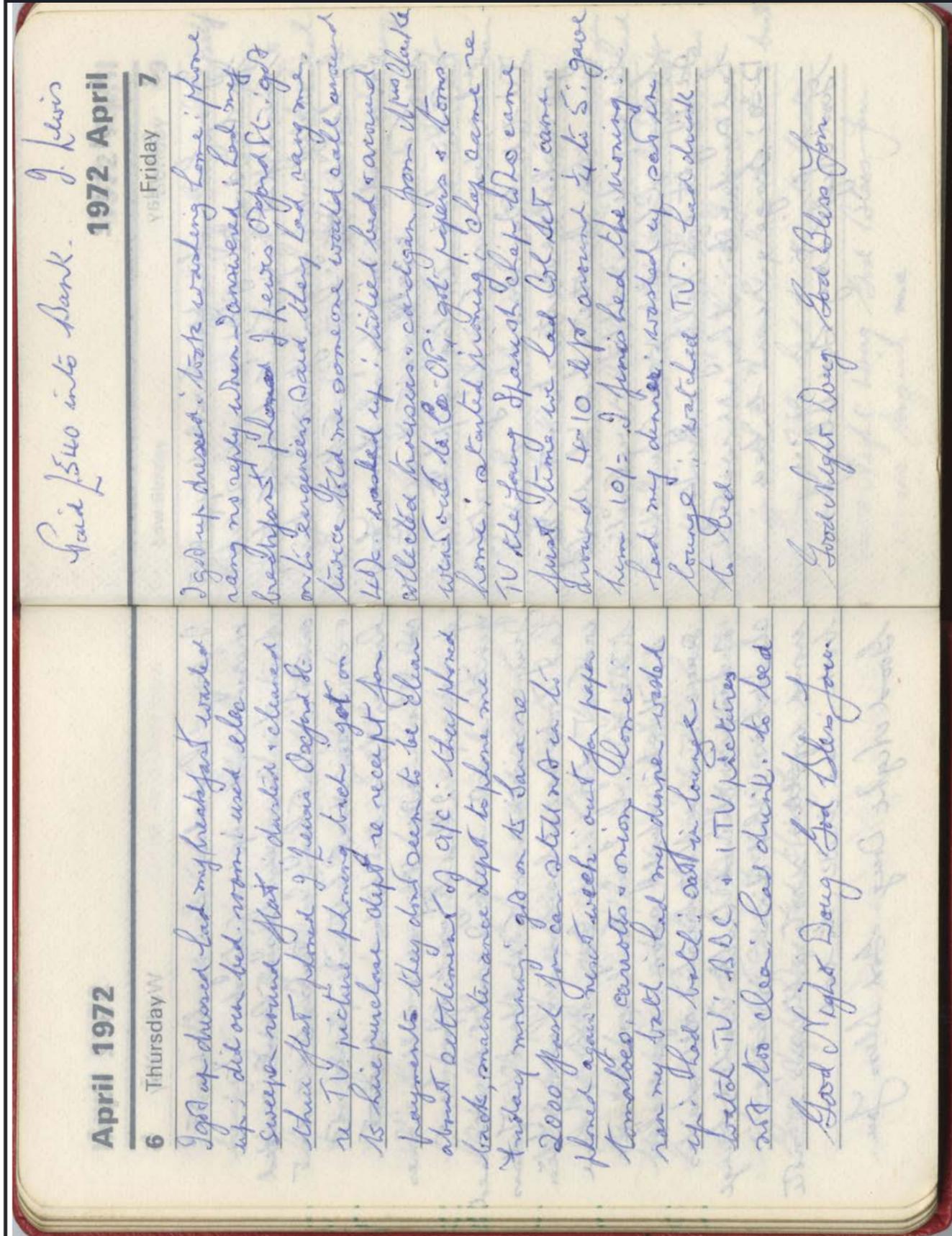
Wednesday 28

To work, home to lunch, to work. Home to dentist's made appointment for Fri. Had dinner pressed pull-overs. To bed

Thursday 29

To work, home to lunch, to work. Home to dinner took fat etc. to dentist. 10/- & 2/6. (1lb butter & lard) On to Brockwell 7/6. Home. Had bath. To bed. Very warm evening

Bishopsgate: William Mahoney's diary from 1972



Bishopsgate: William Mahoney's diary from 1972

Transcript

April 1972
6 Thursday

I got up dressed had my breakfast washed up. Did our bedroom. Used elec sweeper round flat. Dusted & cleaned through flat. Phoned J Lewis Oxford St re: TV. picture. Phoning back got on ls line purchase dept re: receipt from payment. They don't seem to be about settlement of a/c: they phoned back, maintenance dept to phone me Friday morning. Gld on ls Sara re: 2000 ??? still not in to phone again next week. Out for pepper, tomatoes, carrots & onions. Home. Ran my bath. Had my dinner. Washed up. Had bath. Sat in lounge. Watched TV: BBC & ITV. Pictures not too clear. Had drink. To bed.

Good Night Doug God Bless You.

Friday 7

Got up dressed. Took washing home. Phone rang no reply when I answered. Had my breakfast. Phoned J Lewis Oxford St. Got onto engineers. Said they had rang me twice told me someone would call around 4 o'clock. Washed up. Tidied bed & around. Collected trousers & cardigan from Mrs. Clarke. Went out to Co-OP, got peppers & toms. Home. Started ironing. Chap came re: TV. The young Spanish chap who came first time we had Col. Set. Came around 4:10 left around 1/4 to 5. Gave him 10/. I finished the ironing. Had my dinner. Washed up. Sat in lounge. Watched TV. Had drink. To bed.

Good Night Doug God Bless You.

Bishopsgate: Pride pins



Useful links

The National Archives:

- Education workshop: [‘Hidden Love’: LGBTQ+ lives in the archives](#)

Blogs:

- [‘Corrupting Public Morals?’ Fitzroy Square and Queer Desire](#) by Vicky Iglkowski-Broad
- [‘Kisses and kind thoughts’: Queer networks and letters between men](#) by Vicky Iglkowski-Broad
- [‘Bohemian, broad-minded, unconventional.’ What was it like to be queer in the 1920s?](#) by Vicky Iglkowski-Broad
- [HIV/AIDS and the LGBTQ+ community: Education, care and support](#) by Mollie Clark
- [Dr James Barry: The importance of archival discoveries](#) by Mollie Clark

Other links

Timelines:

- [Stonewall - Key dates for Lesbian, Gay Bi and Trans Equality](#)
- [British Library - A timeline of LGBTQ communities in the UK](#)

Useful websites:

- [Bishopsgate Institute](#)
- [Historic England - Pride of Place: England’s LGBTQ Heritage](#)
- [Stonewall Education Resources](#)
- [Switchboard](#)
- [London Metropolitan Archives](#)
- [Queer Britain](#)
- [LGBT collections \(the Hall-Carpenter Archives\) at the LSE](#)

THE

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Did you know?

The National Archives Education Service also offers free taught sessions onsite in Kew and online.

Too far to Kew? Join us for a live [online workshop](#) and we'll come to you! Our sessions are free, fun and interactive. Students can explore high quality digital images of original documents with the guidance of an Education Officer. They will make their own interpretations about the past and answer a historical enquiry based on this evidence.

We carry out our online taught sessions using Zoom or Blackboard Collaborate. This technology enables students to chat and exchange ideas with the Education Officer using the mic or chat-box; to work in groups using break-out rooms; and to annotate and share their ideas using the whiteboard area.

Our [Onsite Workshops](#) are available for free here at The National Archives and allow students to experience genuine original documents reflecting over 1000 years of history. From Elizabeth I's signature to the telegrams of the sinking Titanic, students love the wow-factor of being able to see real history on the desk in front of them.

Find out more:

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