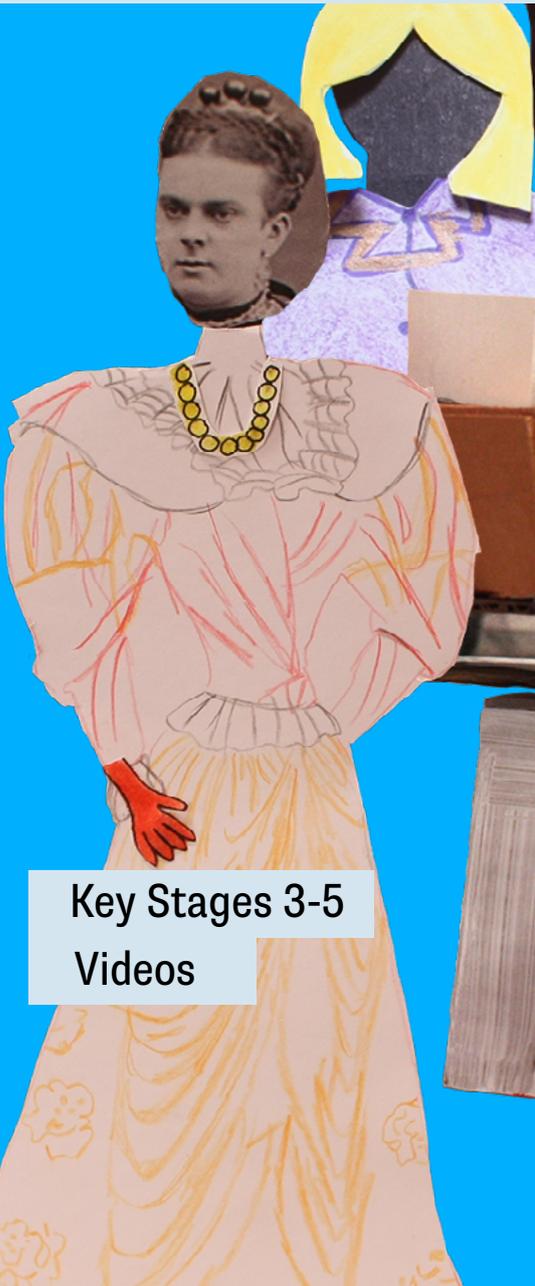


THE	
NATIONAL	
ARCHIVES	



# Uncovering LGBTQ+ lives in the archive

What types of sources might be useful to find out about the lives of LGBTQ+ people in the past?



Key Stages 3-5

Videos

# Introduction

'Uncovering LGBTQ+ lives in the archive' is a series of films combining puppetry, model-making, and animation created by a group of eight young people in July 2022. The project allowed the group to explore moments of LGBTQ+ history from the collection, some more well-known than others, and to interpret the documents from a 21st century perspective. They then used their reflections to inspire the narrative and artwork for their films.

This was the first young person's project to be run onsite since 2019. The group worked with a filmmaking team led by Nigel Kellaway, as well as staff from the Education and Outreach department and record specialists.

The young people explored stories relating to individuals and 'spaces' which allowed them to consider wider themes such as the use of language, criminalisation, and communication through the 18th to 20th centuries. Under the guidance of staff, the young people worked with original archive documents, in some cases seeing photographs of the people and places they were researching. The group demonstrated emotional intelligence and compassion for the people whose lives they have interpreted.

The series of films can now be used by teachers and students as brief overviews or introductions to the themes explored within the films.

The following questions can be asked of each film:

- What types of documents are shown in the films?
- What do the documents reveal about what life was like for LGBTQ+ people at the time?
- What themes can you identify within the films?
- How do we view these stories today, with a contemporary perspective?
- Can you find out how the laws affecting the lives of LGBTQ+ people have changed over time?  
Can you explain why?
- Why are these documents kept at The National Archives?

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## Dr James Barry

By Ellyse B



[Watch Dr James Barry](#)<sup>1</sup>

## Transcript: Dr James Barry

Dr James Barry was a British army doctor during the 1800s. Barry travelled around the world with the British Army to places including Jamaica, St Helena, Barbados, Corfu, Malta, Antigua, Trinidad, Crimea and Canada before finally returning to the UK after 50 years of service.

Barry's work saved countless lives in his army hospitals. He was a renowned surgeon and doctor. He improved hygiene, sanitation and diet at the bases he served, benefiting many people. Barry also is one of the first documented successes of a C-section surgery where both the mother and child survived. Barry was hugely respected and looked up to by soldiers and other doctors alike. His skills were well known and often praised.

It wasn't until his death in 1865 that his medical accomplishments were not the most spoken about thing regarding Dr James Barry. Barry was biologically female but identified as a man, something that today we may call transgender, although this term did not exist at the time. Upon his death, Barry had explicitly requested that his body be buried in the clothes he died in and that his body not be examined. However, a former servant of Barry's had seen Barry's dead body and realised it was a female body. She seemed to think that she had become acquainted with a great secret and

## Transcript (cont.): Dr James Barry

wished to be paid for keeping it. When she did not get the money she demanded, the servant went to the press and sold the story.

The story of James Barry dominated headlines, with them expressing disbelief and shock that someone could keep such a secret for so long. This document from The National Archives is a newspaper telling the story of James Barry published in 1910, almost 50 years after his death. The article highlights that nobody had any idea that Barry was biologically female.

Newspapers also took to using she/her pronouns to refer to Barry despite throughout his life using he/him pronouns. Similarly, the articles use words like feisty conspicuous, irritable, impatient and mischievous to describe Barry, all words commonly used to describe women and not men, often due to their negative connotations. This seemed to try and diminish Barry's character and identity. There was also relatively little covered about his accomplishments during his time in the Army and the improvements that he made, the revelation of his sex overshadowing his lifetime's achievements.

Thankfully, Barry still had his supporters and friends; people such as McKinnon, who wrote in a letter: 'It's none of my business whether Barry was a male or a female. I have never had any suspicion that Dr Barry was a female.' Similarly, Lieutenant Colonel Rooks, who was one of the few people who had found out about Barry's sex but had kept it secret, said in an interview for a newspaper: 'I have never, until now, mentioned the subject.' This shows that even though there were people who didn't care about the invasion of Barry's privacy in life, he still had people who kept his secret and did not care about his biological sex.

I think it's important to talk about James Barry's story because there are many parts that can still resonate today with transgender people. While Barry would not have called himself a trans man, that's what we might call him today because he identified himself as a man.

What Barry went through wasn't acceptable then and definitely isn't acceptable today even though similar things still happen. People are still forcibly outed and their work is still sometimes overshadowed by their sex or gender. But there has been progress. And even though it's terrible what happened to James Barry, we now have the chance to share his story and raise awareness of what he did and what he experienced and improve how we treat others in the future.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-ts51\\_aWP8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-ts51_aWP8)

## Being Other

By Finch F



[Watch Being Other<sup>1</sup>](#)

## Transcript: Being Other

Through all the progression leading towards equality for the LGBTQ+ community, there still remains a consistent feeling of otherness lingering from the centuries of isolation and hate.

While being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender was never technically against the law in England, there was legislation against practices related to same-sex activity. The 1534 Buggery Act was the first piece of legislation criminalising sexual acts between men and this was further condemned by using the death penalty to punish intimate acts between men only abolished in 1861.

In 1954, there was public pressure about the increased surveillance and prosecution of gay men after the Second World War, which challenged the norms and values at the time. The Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution was created, overlooked by John Wolfenden, who believed the law's role was to protect the public and not interfere with private lives. He wrote, 'There must remain a realm of private morality and immorality, which is, in brief and crude terms, not the law's business.'

The evidence summary used to illustrate the scrutiny faced by gay men included medical

## Transcript (cont.): Being Other

documentation labelling homosexuality as a mental illness or deficiency. The language used made sexuality seem medical and artificial, with treatment plans for various categories of homosexuals. Further examples of evidence included religious documents, such as the interim report looking at

the problem of homosexuality forwarded by the Bishop of St Albans with so-called godly views on the unnatural acts of homosexuality.

One of the documents held in The National Archives that demonstrates the scope of lost privacy for gay men is the 1954 map of Central London documenting all the arrests in urinals for indecent acts. The implications of surveilling public toilets not only shows the fear factor in society, blaming gay men for the infiltration of the Met police in what should be private places, but also demonstrates the lack of safe spaces for queer people.

Joe Orton, the gay poet renowned for taking library books and defacing them with depictions of nude men, made one of the most explicit depictions of 1960s gay sex in his published diary, where he describes North London at night as a frenzied homosexual Saturnalia.

The Wolfenden Report was published in 1957 with a list of recommendations that questions relating to consent and in private, but to be decided in the same criteria as heterosexual acts between adults and to decriminalise sexual acts between men in private over the age of 21 trying to bridge the gap of otherness.

It took over ten years for the recommendations to be voted into law in the Sexual Offences Act in 1967. This actually resulted in a spike of arrests that brought attention to same-sex relationships, showing the cause and effect dynamic of what should have been a step in the right direction.

Despite the considerable milestone in achieving homosexual law reform, it didn't help normalise much or dispel that sense of otherness. For example, the medicalised language was still used and the wrongfulness of homosexuality was still brought up in the report itself. It was only in 1994 when the age of consent was lowered to 18, and then finally in 2001, when the Sexual Offences Amendment Act finally reduced the age to 16, now on the same level as heterosexual relationships.

Today, as we stand, there have been several acts passed in the journey towards equality and inclusivity. The Gender Recognition Act was passed in 2004, showing the leaps and bounds made since raiding and arresting gay men in public toilets.

Yes, there is still progress to be made for the otherness to truly stay in the past. And yes, that path is one that is difficult. But being other doesn't mean being wrong or unnatural. It's being yourself.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yy4yNbmCna8>

## Fanny & Stella

By Hira I



[Watch Fanny & Stella<sup>1</sup>](#)

## Transcript: Fanny & Stella

The 1871 trial of Queen versus Boulton and Park entailed Miss Fanny Graham and Stella Boulton being charged with committing buggery – sex between men.

Even before their arrest, Fanny and Stella were placed under surveillance for openly challenging conventional assumptions about gender and sexuality in the street outside of their theatrical performances in the south of England.

The trial didn't just include Fanny and Stella. Charges were pressed against Louis Hurt and John Stafford Fiske. There was also Lord Arthur Clinton, who wrote love letters to Stella Bolton but unfortunately had died before trial.

While under arrest, Fanny and Stella were both forced to undress and be examined by a number of doctors against their will. During the trial, the prosecution focused on Boulton and Park's cross-dressing. A witness was called to the stand to testify on seeing Fanny and Stella enter a jewellery store despite never seeing them buy anything.

## Transcript (cont.): Fanny & Stella

Women's dresses and gloves were used as evidence in court. These items were displayed for inspection and often mocked by spectators. Throughout the trial, they were referred to by their birth names despite their families testifying with them identifying as females from a young age.

The defence argued Boulton and Park were engaged in acting female characters in order to portray their innocence. Wearing clothes made typically for women wasn't a crime, yet it was still used against them. The judge urged the jury to overcome their prejudices. The jury, after one hour's deliberation, found all four defendants not guilty.

But the successful ending for Fanny and Stella was believed to inspire the 1885 Labouchere Amendment, which convicted Oscar Wilde and Alan Turing. The amendment ensured that if sodomy couldn't be proven individuals could still be charged with gross indecency, meaning Fanny and Stella's clothes could meet their arrest again in the future.

You must remember how others like Fanny and Stella existed in Victorian queer culture who weren't as wealthy. Terms like transgender or anything even equivalent to that weren't used in the 19th century meaning it's important to understand that identities were more complex than men choosing to dress as women.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0vttq5Db8k>

## 25 Fitzroy Square

By Jacob R



[Watch 25 Fitzroy Square<sup>1</sup>](#)

## Transcript: 25 Fitzroy Square

January 1927, number 25, Fitzroy Square. Whilst an unsuspecting building on the outside, the basement flat of number 25 was home of Bobby Britt and Constance Berg, who have regular parties for their friends. Partying into the early hours of the morning, the flat became a safe space for queer individuals.

However, unbeknownst to the pair and their friends, the basement flat had been under observation for a while. After Spencer's account, a police sergeant involved in the observation of the flat details events from the 11th of December to the 15th of January, with minute details like the language guests used being recorded. Police constables would stand near windows or even on the landing inside the flat during these observations.

On the 16th of January, the flat was raided, with its occupants being charged with running a disorderly house. As being gay wasn't a crime in itself, and faced with the challenges of proving the guests had actually committed a crime, the police and courts would often use this charge to accuse the guests of behaviour which had either caused nuisance or outraged public indecency.

## Transcript (cont.): 25 Fitzroy Square

Bobby was charged with this and sentenced to 15 months hard labour. The most surprising detail of this story is the complete invasion of a private space. The charge used was often exclusively reserved to sentence those visiting queer clubs like the Caravan Club on Endell Street in the 1930s.

The file recording the trial of the individuals visiting Fitzroy Square includes a number of letters, one from a person named Eric to Bert. The letter includes the line, 'I believe there is nothing possible which could be greater than real, honest-to-God love,' his words reminding us that queer love is simply just love.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kW0XfIPTq3k>

## The Shim Sham Club

By Louisa R



[Watch The Shim Sham Club](#)<sup>1</sup>

## Transcript: The Shim Sham Club

In 1930s Britain, queer life had to take place in secret. Queer relationships were not accepted or even acknowledged and sex between men was criminalised. Clubs that welcomed queer clientele provided a place where LGBTQ+ people could be themselves openly. But these places often faced raids.

Two such clubs found a home in Soho, London: Billie's and the Shim Sham, described as a den of vice and iniquity by the Met police. Billie's was located on Little Denmark Street in the West End and had a formal set up with a dance floor and a grand piano.

Shim Sham was nearby. Located on Wardour Street, it was a jazz club attracting famous African-American jazz players and holding regular bottle parties, which were in danger of breaching alcohol licensing laws. The club was a safe haven for those shunned by society or by the law.

On the 5th of July 1935, the Shim Sham Club was raided on the grounds of liquor license evasion and was charged with operating as an unlicensed club. This is a clear example of how the policing of necessary spaces like the Shim Sham meant that they struggled to exist and were often very

## Transcript (cont.): The Shim Sham Club

temporary.

Stannard's description of life inside the Shim Sham was uncomfortable to read. His detailed surveillance of people simply existing in what was supposed to be a safe space was a stark reminder of the heavy policing of queerness in this period.

It wasn't just the police who were concerned by spaces like the Shim Sham. Letters from concerned residents demonstrate the generally hostile attitudes towards homosexuality. One citizen described the shop as a rendezvous for homosexual perverters, with another using the word repulsive to describe it. People were fearful of being associated with queerness in a society that so plainly condemned it.

21 of the 37 were found guilty. Billie Joyce, the owner, was charged with keeping a disorderly house. A statement from PC Murray described the effeminacy of the men in the club almost as though that in itself was a crime, and described them as powdered, wearing rouge with eyebrows made up or wearing pink nail polish.

A letter from the mother of one of those arrested sums up the hostility and fear surrounding queerness in this time period. She is desperate for her son not to be associated with the club describing him as a very good boy always, who has worked very hard, as though someone with good qualities like that could not possibly be queer.

Though queer spaces in Britain today are not under attack in the way they once were, many still fear dying out. LGBTQ+ people across the world still fear imprisonment when living and gathering openly. Queer people today, particularly young queer people feeling isolated or ashamed, need community just as much as they did in 1935. Queer spaces like the Shim Sham and Billie's must be protected and treasured.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-j8pUBAWTo>

## Radclyffe Hall

By Matilda B



[Watch Radclyffe Hall!](#)

## Transcript: Radclyffe Hall

Marguerite Antonia Radclyffe Hall, also known as simply Radclyffe Hall, sat in her study at her typewriter as she wrote a story called 'The Well of Loneliness', which concerned an English woman from an upper class family who discovers she is a lesbian during World War One, or what was commonly known at the time as 'invert', as in inverted sexuality.

Radclyffe was determined that in this novel she would shout to the gods and howl at the moon that being a lesbian was a natural God-given right to all women who felt different than their straight counterparts. Little did she know that she would be facing quite the stir.

The book was a sensation and it became a cult hit among the many unseen lesbians in England. The hatred for the book from close-minded men was never far away. A man by the name of James Douglas, editor of the Sunday Express made it his mission to write hateful things about the book and it became the subject of great scandal and gossip in the English newspapers of the time.

Many other institutions, such as the Metropolitan Police, also disapproved of its theme and subject matter, and managed to take it all the way to a London court. A splashy court case ensued over the

## Transcript (cont.): Radclyffe Hall

subsequent months and the book was eventually banned, with the judge citing that its content was obscene because it defends the unnatural practices between women.

The book was banned as existing copies shredded and the title all but disappeared from bookshops and libraries. It would not be published for another three decades until 1959.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qxZJN857ljo>

## The Link

By Tom D



[Watch The Link](#)<sup>1</sup>

## Transcript: The Link

The Link. The story of a 1920s romance with the flair of the 21st century. Created in 1915 by Alfred Walter Barrett, The Link was an anonymous monthly magazine, which was used for many forms of non-matrimonial matchmaking.

By 1920, the consequences of World War One were tugging at the people of Britain and the Commonwealth. The heart and soul of the nation had been under constant siege for four years, inflamed in the angst of warfare and the ultimate fear of receiving a red letter through the post.

With families losing numerous relatives and mothers losing their sons as well as their husbands, Britain became a nation of lonely individuals. The weather was bleak and British. Life was mundane and the economic squeeze of war was affecting individuals' livelihoods.

Any glimmer of hope seemed to crack and peel away as the relentless consequences of war kept constricting people more and more. It drove people to a breaking point, and the people of Britain were lonely and consequently looking for someone to requite their sadness.

## Transcript (cont.): The Link

The Link also highlighted, as it has always been, that LGBTQ+ couples have always existed. Personally I think the trauma of warfare and the sense of existentialism the war highlighted made individuals question their own lives and almost feel like they had nothing to lose in revealing themselves through The Link.

Ernie and Geoff were one such couple who incited conversation through letters thanks to one 25-word description that was posted in a 1920 issue of The Link. They sent and received letters to one another and they spoke of music, art, dancing and amusement.

Whilst letters were exchanged, it is never known whether Ernie and Geoff ever met. The letters are surprisingly enigmatic, whilst being exceptionally open given the criminalisation of homosexual acts at the time of writing.

'All my love is for my own sex.' Surely the ultimate acceptance of their love, which is sustained through their letters. This line is a powerful self-acceptance of love, which effectuates love for oneself as well as the same gender.

Given relationships like Ernie and Geoff's were frequent in the monthly issues of The Link, with blatant expressions of individuals looking for same-sex romance, The Link was investigated by Metropolitan Police. Alfred Walter Barrett was put on trial for allowing such relationships alongside his colleague Gladys McCarthy. Both defended the paper, saying they were unaware of what was going on and both were not charged.

However, public attitudes surrounding The Link differed to the judge. An issue of the Daily Telegraph from the 9th of June 1921 revealed public attitudes saw this case as revolting. The use of language in the paper expresses a clear attitude of disgust towards homosexual relationships with the newspaper's tone reflecting societal attitudes of ostracising and trying to suppress the LGBTQ+ community.

The Link was not just used by LGBTQ+ individuals. It was used by everyone in society, regardless of class, gender or profession. There was a place for everyone in The Link's monthly subscription. However, as a contemporary interpreter, one criticism of The Link might be its classification of people into women, ex-military or middle class men with no alternative categories. Whilst the magazine was used by a diverse range of people, they were all still classified, creating a barrier to the extent to which people could actually be themselves.

Hopefully today Ernie and Geoff would feel comfortable with who they are and they might have the chance to meet one another. However, still, like the 1920s, there are those who are oppressed into not allowing themselves to be who they are. In a post-COVID society, where the numbers of people feeling lonely have drastically increased more than ever, we should feel comfortable and pride in who we are, knowing that a society has been created where everyone can be who they are destined to be.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BgUOA8NpmlA>

## Cyril and the Caravan Club

By Zhitong L



[Watch Cyril and the Caravan Club](#)<sup>1</sup>

## Transcript: Cyril and the Caravan Club

In The National Archives, we can find an interesting piece of document in the Metropolitan Police records: a love letter from a man called Cyril. How does such a private letter end up here? Well, because it was written to another man.

Cyril moved to London in 1932 when he was 20. Having had a wife and a kid, in London, he for the first time realised and so embraced his queer identity. Dressed up in a feminine look, he started to frequent certain queer spaces under the name The Countess and the pronoun she.

One of the places he used to drop by is the Caravan Club in Soho, which by the time was advertised as London's 'greatest bohemian rendezvous', a rhetorical strategy to imply queerness as homosexual behaviour was at the time still illegal.

In the Caravan Club, he met his good friends, and more: Morris, the one he loved. He wrote, 'I love you, Morris, darling. Honestly, I do.'

There were, however, some people from the neighbourhood who obviously didn't want queerness

## Transcript (cont.): Cyril and the Caravan Club

to emerge in this area. Reports were received by the police. 'It's absolutely a sink of iniquity', 'frequented by sexual perverts, lesbians and sodomites'.

Surveillance began. Undercover cops flooded into the club. After about a month the club was finally raided, only six weeks after it opened. People in the club were arrested, including Cyril.

When this happened, he tore up the letter and hid it under the sofa. But the police searched it out and retyped it to serve as his criminal evidence, which now forms a part of the documents in The National Archives. That's why we get to know his story today.

The mutuality of pain and happiness, violence and resistance defined the life of being queer in London in the 1930s. And London as a city was, and still is, a hub where queer communities develop. In his book 'Queer London' when talking about queer lives in London in the early 20th century, Matt Houlbrook says: 'For just as London opened up certain opportunities for certain men, it closed down other possibilities and left other men marginalised or silenced.'

This is true throughout history and still applicable to London now, when homosexuality is no longer criminalised. But what's delighted for you and me to see is that London is evolving towards a brighter future. Over a million people marched for the 2022 London Pride Parade to support and celebrate diverse groups of queer people in terms of sexualities, ethnicities, ages, etc. London is progressing to a more inclusive city thanks to Cyril, the Caravan Club, and many others alike.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MKUSto0IGn8>



## Why do our hyperlinks come with footnotes?

Our resources are designed to be printed and used in classrooms, which means hyperlinks aren't always accessible digitally. We include the full link at the bottom of the page so that you can type in the address without distracting from the main text of the lesson materials.

## Did you know?

The National Archives Education Service also offers free workshops onsite in Kew and online in your classroom.

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.

Our [Online Workshops](#) allow our Education Officers to teach through your projector, leading discussions and guiding students through activities based around original documents. All you need is a computer with a projector, webcam and microphone. We'll arrange a test call before your session to check the tech is working.

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