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LGBTQ+ Rights in Britain

What have been the changing impacts and causes of LGBTQ+-related laws in Britain?

Key Stages 4-5 | Time periods covered:

Early modern 1485-1750

Empire and Industry 1750-1850

Victorians 1850-1901

Interwar 1918-1939

Postwar 1945-present

Lesson pack



Introduction

People have always existed who engaged in same sex relationships, defied conventional gender norms, or lived as a different gender to the one they were assigned as at birth. The social climate these individuals lived in, and the language they had available to them, has changed significantly over the last 1,000 years – the span of The National Archives’ collections. The history of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people in the UK is a complex mixture of moments of pain, resistance, and progress.

‘LGBTQ+’ is used as an umbrella term to describe people historically who were either not cisgender or heterosexual. These individuals would have used a variety of different language to describe themselves in their own lifetimes. We recognise our records contain words that are at times offensive, however some of the original language and legal terms are preserved here to accurately represent our records and help us fully understand the past. Please note that some of these sources contain non-explicit references to sex and sexuality.

Use this lesson to find out more about LGBTQ+ rights and lives from the 1700s to the present day. The documents are listed chronologically.

This lesson has been developed in collaboration with the Bishopsgate Institute.



Suitable for:

KS 4 - 5

Time period:

Early modern 1485-1750,
Empire and Industry
1750-1850, Interwar
1918-1939, Postwar
1945-present, Victorians
1850-1901

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Teacher's notes

This lesson provides a chronological overview of the shifting laws and attitudes that have applied to the LGBTQ+ community in Britain and the former British Empire since 1701, and how they have affected the community. Owing to the number of sources, teachers may wish to break this lesson down into two parts or assign small groups to work on different sources and report back.

We recognise our records contain words that are at times offensive, however some of the original language and legal terms are preserved here to accurately represent our records and help us fully understand the past. Please note that some of these sources contain non-explicit references to sex and sexuality.

Discussion questions

- What is the significance of the lesson banner image?
- Why are archives important in researching LGBTQ+ histories?
- What are the limitations of using government archives when researching LGBTQ+ history?
- Does looking back through history change your assumptions or understandings about the LGBTQ+ community today? Why or why not?

Source 1 is a trial record from 1701 concerning a man named Charles Worrell who was convicted for sodomy. It consists of notes from Jenkin Williams, who worked on the same ship as Worrell and was witness to a tryst between Worrell and another man. His notes recount how, after going to the captain with this information, the captain instead entered into a blackmail scheme with Worrell, who provided him with gifts and money in exchange for his silence. The source shows how fluid 18th-century social practices could be even in the face of restrictive attitudes and laws.

Source 2 is a letter from 1835 about James Pratt and John Smith, the last two Englishmen ever hanged for sodomy. The letter is from Hensleigh Wedgwood, magistrate at the Police Office Union Hall. He argues that death is too harsh a punishment for the two men, on the basis that no one was harmed. He also points out that the only reason for the death sentence is that no lawyer wanted to defend such a shameful crime. Finally, he points out the class inequality in sodomy convictions, noting that richer men can more easily get away with the crime. This source helps students explore the nuance in attitudes towards homosexuality in the 19th century, as well as how issues of class may intersect with issues of sexuality.

Source 3 is Ann Lister's will from 1841. Ann Lister is famously known as the 'first modern lesbian', as her diaries document her relationships with women and marriage to Anne Walker. In her will, Lister leaves her estate to her 'friend' Anne Walker – with the stipulation that Walker never marries. The source can be analysed to show how official documents may reveal evidence of LGBTQ+ histories, but in ways that had to be coded and hidden to avoid persecution.

Source 4 is Section 377 of the 1871 penal code in the Straits Settlements (a collection of British colonies that today consist mainly of Malaysia and Singapore). It comes from Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. The Indian Penal Code, created in 1860 for Britain's Indian colonies, was applied to other colonies in the British Empire. This code was inspired by the 1533 buggery act, intended

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to transfer British values to their Indian colonies. This act was not only spread throughout the British Empire, but also spread to Britain as well, inspiring the legislation against sodomy in the 1861 Offences Against the Persons Act, which dropped the death penalty and replaced it with life imprisonment. When studying this source, students should be encouraged to get an understanding of how this law affects countries that were formerly British colonies today – for example by looking at how recently it was repealed in India and how many countries still have it in their laws.

Source 5 is the calling card left by Marquis of Queensbury calling Oscar Wilde a 'posing sodomite'. Students can be encouraged to explore why it would have been dangerous to be accused of something like this. This source could also be paired with an exploration of the story of Fanny and Stella¹, who were on trial for sodomy in 1870. They were deemed not guilty as the act of sodomy couldn't be proven. This indirectly led to the 'Labouchere Amendment' of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885, which made it illegal for any man to commit an act of 'gross indecency' with another man. Sexual acts no longer had to be proven. This was the act Oscar Wilde was convicted under in 1895.

Source 6 shows the attempted introduction in 1921 of a clause intended to criminalise sexual and romantic relationships between women. However, it was rejected by the House of Lords. Students can question why it was rejected, why relations between women were never criminalised, and what the attempted introduction of the clause says about attitudes towards lesbianism in the 1920s.

Source 7a is a police log of people coming in and out of the Shim Sham club, a London club frequented both by Black and LGBTQ+ communities. Students can interrogate why police were watching this club, and why this log was written in the way that it was. This source is paired with Source 7b, a photograph of presumably gay men having a fun day at the beach around 1928-31. These sources together can be used to encourage explorations of what life was like in the 1930s for LGBTQ+ people, showing joyful community gatherings but also police surveillance.

Source 8 is a portrait of Patrick Nelson by Duncan Grant in 1960-63. Patrick Nelson is a rare historical example of a Black gay man whose life is well documented, both through military records and ship logs contained in our collection, and through the love letters sent between him and Duncan Grant contained in the Tate archives. This painting is also a rare example of a depiction of an LGBTQ+ man by another LGBTQ+ man. This source can be used as a start point for students to further explore the life of Patrick Nelson, as well as the Bloomsbury Group, and to also find examples of other LGBTQ+ people of colour in British history. Students should be encouraged to recognise how rare historical depictions of Black LGBTQ+ people are, and to question why that might be.

Source 9a is a discussion from 1954 from the committee putting together the Wolfenden report, which was published in 1957. This report famously laid out the recommendations that homosexual acts between men over 21 in private should be made legal. The recommendations weren't implemented until ten years later in the Sexual Offences Act 1967. This source reveals for students

¹ <https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/fanny-and-stella-piecing-together-lgbtq-histories-and-telling-the-stories/>

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the debates that went on behind the scenes, highlighting the negative attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people in the late 1950s. However, it also reveals the arguments that led to the recommendations being made.

Source 9b is a table showing the number of offences of 'indecent' between males in England and Wales 1946-76. It covers the period directly before and after the Sexual Offences Act 1967, in which homosexual acts were legalised. It shows how, contrary to what we might think, arrests actually went up after this act. This is because, while homosexual acts were now legal, it was under very strict circumstances – only in private and only between men over the age of 21. Both the public and the police were now better informed about these strict conditions and more primed to be on the lookout for anyone breaching them. Homosexual acts would not be on the same legal standing as heterosexual acts until 2004.

Source 10 is an article by April Ashley, a model who was outed as being transgender in 1961. The article is a rare example in our records of a transgender person's own perspective, rather than that of government officials. It shows her describing her emotions when meeting her mother for the first time since transitioning, and her excitement about her upcoming wedding to Arthur Corbett. Their divorce would eventually lead to a ruling that their marriage was never legal due to Ashley's assigned sex at birth. This source highlights the personal and emotional side of her story, not just the important legal precedent that it set, which tied transgender people's legal status to their biological sex rather than their gender identities. This did not change until the 2004 Gender Recognition Act.

Source 11a-d are photos from a 1976 Drag Ball at Porchester Hall in West London. These photos show an example of British ballroom culture. Taken together with Source 12, they can provide a more nuanced view of what life for LGBTQ+ people was like in the 1970s. These photos can also be paired with Source 7a to show the evolution of LGBTQ+ spaces in London.

Source 12 is a letter from the late 1970s from the Campaign for Homosexual Equality. It was written because of a review of obscenity laws taking place, arguing for better representation of LGBTQ+ people in these laws. It reveals the limits of the Sexual Offences Act 1967, how negative attitudes remained prevalent, and lets students hear directly from activists writing at the time.

Source 13a is related to a government-run public health campaign about HIV/AIDS in 1986. At the time, AIDS had infected over 20,000 people in the UK, mostly men having sex with other men. The government wished to stop the disease from spreading and ease the pressure this was putting on hospitals with a public health campaign to inform the public about how to protect themselves from AIDS. Students can examine the language used in this letter, as well as Thatcher's handwritten notes on the page, to explore government attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community and AIDS at this time. This is paired with Source 13b, a photograph of a 'die-in' protest by activists, reflecting the community response to government policies around AIDS.

Source 14 is a protest leaflet against Clause 28 from an organisation of LGBTQ+ British people residing in the United States. This source shows the argument from the LGBTQ+ community against

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Clause or Section 28, introduced by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government in 1988. This leaflet shows the large protest movement that was happening against the clause, both in Britain and overseas. It's also important to point out that this piece of legislation came after many years of the AIDS crisis during which homosexuality was increasingly stigmatised and associated with disease. The clause was not repealed until 2003 – teachers may want to explore with students how LGBTQ+ issues are talked about in school nowadays, and how different it may have been only a few decades ago.

Finally, Source 15 is a page from a 1989 newsletter from the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre. It showcases the range of community activities that were present at this time and gives a different view of what life was like for LGBTQ+ people during the AIDS crisis and Section 28.

Background

The National Archives perspective

The National Archives has a unique view of LGBTQ+ history; our records reflect the state perspective, relating to UK government departments and major courts of law. Our archives give a valuable insight into how government interacted with and viewed LGBTQ+ communities in the past, through police, criminal, policy and legislation records. For most of our collections there has been significant criminal or social risk in LGBTQ+ people recording their lives, our collection therefore offers a rare material evidence into lives in this period before decriminalisation. Other archive collections are more likely to reflect personal documents relating to LGBTQ+ lives, such as the photographic and campaigning collections held at the Bishopsgate Archives.

The challenges of being an LGBTQ+ person are and historically have been significant, but even more so when intersected with other factors, such as race, disability and class. These intersectional experiences are underrepresented in the history that is told and in the surviving records. At The National Archives we actively work to find these voices and redress this balance.

Historical overview

Until recent decades, people who challenged sexual or gender norms were seen as a 'threat' to the 'natural order' of society. It has never been illegal, as such, to be gay, but the associated sex acts between men have been punishable at various times throughout history. Changing the gender you presented as has not been regarded a criminal act, but the law and society could make it very difficult.

In the Early Modern and Medieval period, the church and ecclesiastical courts determined the approach to homosexuality, seeing it as at odds with Christian values of heterosexual marriage and procreation. In 1533 the Buggery Act was introduced under Henry the VIII. For the first time in England sex between men was formally criminalised, with a potential penalty of the death sentence. The last two Englishmen to be hung for sodomy were James Pratt and John Smith at Newgate prison in 1835.

Domestic legislation also had an impact beyond the UK. The British colonial government introduced Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which outlawed 'carnal intercourse against the order of nature' in 1860. This was loosely modelled on the 1533 Buggery Act. Similar legislation spread to other parts of the British Empire. When countries gained independence, they inherited colonial legislation, and in some Commonwealth countries these laws continue to exist.

In 1885 the Criminal Amendment Act, including the controversial Labouchere Amendment, became law. This amendment actually extended the acts that were criminalised between men. The law was thought to have been influenced by the case of Fanny and Stella in 1870. Theatrical performers, the duo presented as women both on stage and off, and records held at The National Archives reveal that they used he/she pronouns and their masculine/feminine names interchangeably among family and friends. They were accused of the 'abominable crime of buggery', but the physical act

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of sodomy could not be proved. Such cases influenced the broadening of the law, to criminalise a wider range of acts relating to homosexuality.

Homosexuality was increasingly visible in society and the press; there was a moral panic. Cleveland Street scandal had seen a male brothel hit the headlines, as lots of high-profile individuals were rumoured to be involved. Oscar Wilde decided to fight public accusations of his homosexuality in the courts. He was made an example of receiving the harshest sentence of two-years hard labour for gross indecency. The Wilde trials influenced public attitudes for many years.

Despite the role of the law in policing gay and bisexual men's lives, there was an everyday homelife that was possible for some LGBTQ+ people. From 1841 to 1921 census records reveal the same sex units people were living in. Gender non-conforming artists Gluck and E M Craig were listed as living together at 30 Tite Street, Chelsea in 1921, while author and free love advocates Edward Carpenter and George Merrill can be seen living together across many decades of census forms in their home Milthorpe, near Sheffield. Author Radclyffe Hall and sculptor Una Troubridge are listed as 'joint head of household' in their 1921 census record.

Sex between women was never criminalised, but was socially unacceptable. In 1921 a Parliamentary Bill to criminalise 'gross indecency between females' failed to become law. It was feared that it would lead to a greater visibility of lesbians. Women who loved women are present in our collections, but the law's focus on policing same sex acts between men means that their lives can be harder to trace. These come to us through wills, census records, divorce files and censorship cases. Not long after this bill went to parliament was the headline grabbing trial of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, which was controversial for its depiction of lesbian relationships. Censorship of LGBTQ+ literature and arts was a reoccurring way of attempting to control and restrict the public image of same sex relationships between women.

In spite of the law, LGBTQ+ people have always found ways to gather, meet and create their own spaces. The 1920s and 1930s particularly saw a network of underground clubs develop that cultivated a queer clientele. The National Archives has a rich collection relating to some of these spaces, from the Harlem inspired Shim Sham club to 'London's greatest bohemian rendezvous' the Caravan Club. These spaces were a haven for, particularly working class, men to meet other men, but they were also vulnerable to police raids. Public spaces were also policed.

Men would meet in parks and cottages (public toilets). Police used controversial methods of undercover policing to catch men engaging in homosexual acts.

The twentieth century increasingly saw a shift from a criminal view of homosexuality to a medicalised one, seeing it as an illness. In 1952 Alan Turing, famed codebreaker and computer scientist, was arrested under the Labouchere Amendment and later prosecuted. He was given oestrogen injections, rather than a prison sentence, in attempt to 'cure' his sexuality. Turing committed suicide not long afterwards. The prevalence of such cases, and several high-profile incidents in the press, led to a desire for legal reform. The result was the 1957 Wolfenden Report, which recommended the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality.

Background

There have always been individuals living as a different gender from the one they were assigned at birth or expressing a non-normative gender. By the 1950s gender affirming surgery was increasingly available. In 1961 April Ashley's assigned sex at birth was revealed by the press as she went through a divorce case, known as *Corbett v Corbett*. An annulment was granted on the grounds that Ashley was considered legally male. *Corbett v Corbett* set a legal precedent, preventing trans people from changing their gender on legal documents for several decades.

The 1967 Sexual Offences Act finally acted on Wolfenden's recommendations a decade later and decriminalised sex acts between men. However, it did not grant homosexual men a parity with heterosexual couples. There was a higher age of consent, the Armed Forces and Merchant Navy were exempted, and acts were only decriminalised 'in private'. Arrests actually increased – the police and public were more aware of the parameters of the law. It only applied in England and Wales. Equivalent law changes did not happen in Scotland until 1980, and Northern Ireland until 1982. But, while only partial, the 1967 Act was a huge step forward and galvanised LGBTQ+ campaigns for greater equality. The 1970s saw a shift in political consciousness towards pride and equal rights; in the UK it was the decade of the first Gay Pride parade, the opening of Gay's the Word bookshop, and the launch of Switchboard, one of the first LGBTQ+ helplines. Campaign groups such as the Campaign for Homosexual Equality and the Gay Liberation Front were increasingly active.

LGBTQ+ individuals were greatly impacted during the 1980s by the rising number HIV infections and the subsequent AIDS crisis. It was a traumatic time, marked by ignorance and misinformation. The government instigated TV and cinema adverts to reinforce awareness about preventing the spread of AIDS, and took the unprecedented step of sending educational leaflets to every household in the country. In 1988, Section 28 was introduced, under the Local Government Act, prohibiting the 'promotion of homosexuality'. It was feared this would hamper the gains made around LGBTQ+ rights and stop AIDS education reaching the population. This attempt to suppress LGBTQ+ lives fuelled a fight back, including the founding of the campaigning organisation Stonewall.

The 2000s saw the age of consent lowered to the same age for homosexual and heterosexual acts, the UK Government lifted the ban on lesbians, gay and bisexual people serving in the Armed Forces and Section 28 was repealed. This was followed by a raft of progressive legislation, including the Civil Partnership Act 2004 and Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Act 2013. The Gender Recognition Act also came into force in 2005, enabling trans people to change their legal gender. April Ashley was finally able to have legal documentation that matched her gender identity.

The shift in LGBTQ+ rights over the last few centuries is significant. Where our records about the UK government were once dominated by criminalisation and ostracization, they now reflect equality legislation, Civil Service LGBTQ+ staff networks and presence at Pride parades. However this history also shows that progress is not always linear, and it is important to recognise that these changes were hard fought for. Whether it was through collective campaigns or individual acts of resistance LGBTQ+ people have repeatedly strived for, and continue to fight for, change and acceptance.

Tasks

Source 1

1701: Papers related to trial of Charles Worrell for sodomy. Catalogue ref: ADM 1/5262/169

Charles Worrell was a crew member on ship. He was spotted by another crew member, Jenkin Williams, having sexual relations with another man. This document shows how he survived through blackmailing his captain.

Note: A sodomy law is a law that defines certain sexual acts as crimes.

- Why is Charles Worrell on trial? What evidence has been used against him, and according to what law?
- How did Worrell initially manage to avoid punishment?
- How can you show the precariousness of Worrell's situation?
- How is homosexuality portrayed by the witness, Jenkin Williams?

Source 2

1835: Letter from police magistrate Hensleigh Wedgwood to the Home Secretary Lord John Russell about two prisoners condemned to be executed for having had sexual relations with each other. Catalogue ref: HO 17/120/60

The prisoners were called James Pratt, aged 30, and John Smith, aged 40. They were the last two Englishmen to ever be executed for sodomy. A sodomy law is a law that defines certain sexual acts as crimes.

- How is homosexuality portrayed in this letter?
- Look at the LGBTQ+ laws timeline. How long after this case was the death penalty for sodomy abolished?
- Does this letter give any suggestions as to why these two might have been the last two men ever executed for sodomy?
- Wedgwood suggests that these men were arrested not just because of the act itself, but because of their class and lack of wealth. Why is this?
- Look at this and other cases in this lesson. How does class play a role in how LGBTQ+ people have been able to navigate the law?

Source 3

1841: Anne Lister's will, in which she leaves her estate, Shibden Hall, to her wife Ann Walker. Catalogue ref: PROB 10/6000

Anne Lister is famously known as 'the first modern lesbian', due to the extensive diaries she left behind detailing her relationships with women. She married Ann Walker in 1834. However, this

Tasks

wasn't an 'official' marriage in the eyes of the law. This wouldn't be possible for same-sex couples until 2013. Both women inherited estates from wealthy families, allowing them some freedom in living their lives.

- What clues do you get about the reality of Anne Lister and Ann Walker's relationship in this will?
- Why does Lister need to use language that is vague or coded in this document?
- Why do you think Lister included a stipulation about Walker marrying?
- What does this document tell you about Lister's class background?

Source 4

1871: Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which criminalises homosexual intercourse [it was considered an 'unnatural offence']. The Indian Penal Code, created in 1860 for Britain's Indian colonies, was applied to other colonies in the British Empire. Here, it is applied to the Straits settlements (today's Malaysia and Singapore). Catalogue ref: CO 274/2

Section 377 still exists today in several countries that were formerly British colonies, including Malaysia.

- Why do you think this law has been applied to the Straits Settlements (a group of British colonies that today form part of Malaysia and Singapore)?
- How does this law reflect British attitudes and laws towards homosexuality at the time?
- This law, called Section 377 still exists in several countries that were formerly British colonies. Find out if Section 377 still exists/has been repealed in the following countries?
 - India
 - Singapore
 - Malaysia
 - Bangladesh
 - Pakistan
 - Myanmar
- What can you find out about colonial laws on homosexuality in Africa under British colonial rule? What did those laws look like in Uganda or Nigeria?

NB Some of these countries do not have the same names now as they did in the period under British colonial administration.

Source 5

1895: This is the calling card left by Marquis of Queensbury calling Oscar Wilde a 'posing sodomite' (presumably intending to spell 'sodomite'). Catalogue reference CRIM 1/41/6

The 'Labouchere Amendment' of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885 made it illegal for any man to commit an act of 'gross indecency' with another man. Sexual acts no longer had to be proven. Oscar Wilde was convicted under this act in 1895.

Tasks

On 18 February 1895 the Marquis of Queensbury – also known as Sir John Sholto Douglas – left his calling card at the Albemarle Club, labelled ‘For Oscar Wilde posing Sodomite’ (misspelt as ‘sodomite’). He took issue with Wilde’s ongoing relationship with his son Alfred. Wilde accused Lord Queensbury of libel. However, during the ensuing trial, evidence was brought up that eventually got Wilde convicted for ‘gross indecency’. Witness statements from male sex workers, for example, were forwarded to the crown prosecution and resulted in his trial for gross indecency.

- Why do you think these objects are labelled ‘A’ and ‘B’?
- Why do you think these items were used as evidence in the trial of Oscar Wilde?
- The Marquis of Queensbury called Oscar Wilde a ‘sodomite’ on his calling card. Why was this word offensive to Wilde?
- Look at the timeline of laws. Why might it have been dangerous for Wilde to be called a sodomite at this time?

Source 6

1921: This text shows the discussion around a clause that was proposed to be added to the Criminal Law Bill in 1921. Catalogue ref: LCO 2/469

The clause would criminalise female same-sex relationships, similar to how male same-sex relationships were criminalised. This source shows how it was ultimately rejected by the House of Lords.

- Why do you think this clause was proposed around this time?
- Why do you think this clause was rejected by the House of Lords?
- This source shows how the clause was rejected because it “may lead to unlooked for and evil results”. What do you think are the results they are referring to?
- How does this source show the difference in legal treatment of female same-sex couples and male same-sex couples? Can you think of any reasons for why this difference might have existed?

Sources 7 a & b

1935: Police observations on the Shim Sham Club. Catalogue: MEPO 2/4494

The Shim Sham Club was an unlicensed club on Wardour Street in London. It was heavily associated with African-American culture, described as ‘London’s miniature Harlem’. It was also frequented by the LGBTQ+ community. All of this caused the police to keep the club under surveillance. This document shows a surveillance report from an undercover police officer.

The Shim Sham Club was one of a small number of underground clubs where LGBTQ+ people in 1930s Britain could gather.

Tasks

- What descriptors is the policeman using that stick out to you? What does the language used in this police report infer?
- What does this report tell you about the type of people that the police might view as cause for concern?
- What does this report reveal about the people who went to the Shim Sham Club?

1928-31: A group of likely gay men having a beach day. Emmanuel Cooper Archive, Bishopsgate Institute.

This photo, taken between 1928 and 1931, is from a series of photos of a group of men having day out on the beach somewhere in the UK. It was collected by potter, art historian and LGBTQ+ activist Emmanuel Cooper when he was writing his book 'Photographing the Male Nude'. Unfortunately, there is no further information on who the men were or where the photos were taken.

- Looking at the description of this photo, why might we assume that this is a photograph of gay or queer men? What are the limitations of this assumption?
- This photograph was taken close to the same time as the police observations on Shim Sham Club (Source 7a). How do they compare in terms of the story they tell about LGBTQ+ communities?
- What might this source and Source 7a tell you about LGBTQ+ lives in 1930s Britain?
- Which members of the LGBTQ+ community are not present in either of these sources? Why do you think some members of the community might be more present in archival materials?
- What other sources might you look for to get a clearer picture?

Source 8

1930s-'60s: Portrait of Patrick Nelson by Duncan Grant, 1960-63. Photo © Christie's Images / Bridgeman Images

Patrick Nelson was born in Jamaica and came to the UK in 1938, where he – potentially at a venue like Shim Sham – met painter Duncan Grant, a member of the Bloomsbury Group. The two started a romantic relationship.

After fighting for the British military during the Second World War, Nelson returned to Jamaica in 1945. He once more came to London in the early 1960s, where he died in 1963. This portrait of Nelson near the end of his life was painted by Grant.

- Look at this painting and note what you can see. What can it tell you about Patrick Nelson?
- How do you think Duncan Grant, the artist, felt about Nelson based on this portrait?
- Do you look at the painting differently after learning more about their relationship?
- Find out more about Patrick Nelson's life. What can it tell you about the lives of LGBTQ+ Black people in early 20th century Britain?
 - What kind of spaces did Nelson exist in?
 - Why do you think he worked as an artist's model?
 - How open do you think he was about his relationship with Grant? Why?

Tasks

Sources 9 a & b

1954: Discussions around The Wolfenden Report. Catalogue ref: LCO 2/5762

The Wolfenden Report was released in 1957, based on an inquiry into the state of laws against homosexuality. It recommended that homosexual acts in private between men over the age of 21 should be made legal. It took ten years for these recommendations to be implemented in the 1967 Sexual Offences Act.

These papers from 1954 shed light on some of the debates happening within the Committee putting together the Wolfenden report. The section asking the general public for their opinions comes from a Gallup poll in 1957, after the report was published.

- Why do you think a Committee was tasked with reviewing laws against homosexuality in the 1950s?
- What are the reasonings behind making homosexual acts legal, according to the Committee? What are the reasonings against?
- After reading this source, why do you think it took so long (ten years) for the Wolfenden recommendations to be implemented?

1976: Table showing the number of offences of 'indecentcy' between males in England and Wales 1946-76. Catalogue ref: HO 522/7

The table covers the period directly before and after the Sexual Offences Act 1967, in which homosexual acts in private between men over age 21 were legalised.

- Identify the year 1967 on the chart. What was happening to the number of offences around this time?
- What happens to the number of offences after 1967?
- Can you think of any reasons why offences might rise after the 1967 Sexual Offences Act?
- What does this tell you about how well the Sexual Offences Act addressed the needs of the LGBTQ+ community?

Source 10

1962: Article: 'My Strange Life' by April Ashley in *The News of the World*, 6 May 1962. Catalogue ref: J 77/4532-J 77/4537

April Ashley was a model and one of the first people in Britain known to have had sex reassignment surgery. On 19 November 1961, *The Sunday People* ran an article under the headline 'Her' Secret is Out, outing Ashley as transgender. Her name was dropped from her recent film credit and her modelling work vanished. She retaliated by telling her own story in this article in the tabloid *The News of the World*.

Tasks

In 1963, she married Hon. Arthur Corbett. However, the pair separated soon after. Corbett sought an annulment of the marriage based on the fact that Ashley was assigned male at birth, and same-sex marriage was not yet legal. The annulment was granted.

This decision by the court set a precedent that transgender people would be defined by their assigned sex at birth, rather than their gender. This made it harder for transgender people to gain rights and change their legal gender. It wasn't until the Gender Recognition Act in 2004 that this process changed.

- How does April Ashley's family react to her coming out as transgender?
- What kind of emotions are described in this article?
- How does Ashley teach her mother about her identity?
- How does Ashley present herself in this article?
- How would the ruling against Ashley in her divorce case eight years later come to affect both her and other transgender people?

Sources 11 a-d

1976: Photos from a Drag Ball at Porchester Hall in West London. Robert Workman Archive, Bishopsgate Institute.

Modern Ballroom culture developed in late 20th century New York as a Black and Latino underground LGBTQ+ subculture in which participants dress up and walk according to different categories, getting points based on their look and performance. In London, the Porchester Hall Drag Balls¹ were originally run by drag entertainer and musician Jean Fredericks.

- What do these photos tell you about the culture at these Drag Balls?
- Return to these photos after reading Source 12. Taken together, what do these sources tell you about life for LGBTQ+ people in 1970s Britain?
- Which members of the LGBTQ+ community are not present in either of these sources? Why do you think that may be?
- Learn more about Ballroom culture in the 1960s and 1970s. What has been its impact on today's LGBTQ+ community?

Source 12

1977-79: Letter to the Home Office Committee on Obscene, Indecent and Violent Publications from The Colchester Group of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality. Catalogue ref: HO 265/3

The Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship was a Home Office Committee in the 1970s who were tasked with reviewing laws around obscenity, indecency, and violence in published media.

Tasks

This letter was written to the committee from the organisation The Campaign for Homosexual Equality, which aims to promote legal and social equality for LGBTQ+ people.

- According to this letter, what are some of the barriers that faced LGBTQ+ people, specifically gay and bisexual+ men, in 1970s Britain?
- What is the letter-writer trying to achieve by sending this letter?
- How does this letter portray the 1967 Sexual Offences Act?
- After reading this letter, how do you think obscenity laws have been used to target LGBTQ+ people?

Source 13 a & b

1986: Letter to Margaret Thatcher, then-Prime Minister, about the AIDS government health campaign, 24 February. From David Willetts of the Policy Unit. Catalogue ref: PREM 19/1863

This letter was written during the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Britain during the 1980s. HIV/AIDS is a disease mainly spread through unprotected sexual contact. When the disease was first reported on in the 1980s, little was known about how to treat it and it was extremely dangerous for the people who caught it. A lack of sexual education for LGBTQ+ people contributed to AIDS mainly affecting men who had sex with other men.

By the mid-1980s in the UK, the AIDS epidemic had grown so severe that the government launched campaigns that aimed to educate the public about the disease, many of which are still widely remembered.

- Why was the government preparing a major AIDS awareness campaign in 1986? Suggest at least three reasons.
- Why do you think one of the handwritten notes uses the word 'unpleasant' in reference to the campaign?
- What does then-Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's response tell you about the concerns that the government had about a campaign like this?

1993: Die-in, UK AIDS Coalition March from Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square, 28 August 1993. Gordon Rainsford Archive, Bishopsgate Institute.

- Looking at this photo, what do you think a 'die-in' is? What is it meant to draw attention to?
- Look at the banners and the actions of the protesters. What do you think they are protesting against? What are their aims?
- Look again at Source 13a. What do you think are the differences between the concerns of the government and the concerns of the LGBTQ+ community when it comes to HIV/AIDS?
- Why is it important to seek out sources from LGBTQ+ perspectives when learning more about the AIDS crisis?

Tasks

Source 14

1988: Clause 28 protest leaflet. Catalogue ref: FCO 82/1979

Clause 28, or Section 28 of the Local Government Act, was a law introduced by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Government in 1988. It followed controversies about sex education and objections, mainly from Conservative MPs, about the championing of gay causes by Labour-led councils. LGBTQ+ people were becoming more confident and visible in the worlds of pop music, television and film, but there was still a great deal of prejudice present in the national discourse.

This law banned local authorities from 'promoting homosexuality'. This meant for example that state schools and local councils could not teach about or discuss LGBTQ+-related topics.

Clause 28 was in place until 2003.

- Why has this leaflet been created?
- According to this leaflet, what are some of the effects that Clause 28 may have had?
- What tactics are they using to try and stop the law?
- Why do you think the government introduced this law? What might they have been hoping to achieve?
- Look at the date of this document in the top left corner. Why do you think the leaflet is connected to an AIDS activist group?

Source 15

1989: Page from the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre newsletter showing community activities. LGBTQ+ Archives, Bishopsgate Institute

The Black Lesbian and Gay Centre opened in 1985 to address issues facing LGBTQ+ people of colour. It provided a telephone helpline, advice and counselling, a library, a social space, and other community resources. It also produced the magazine *Blackout* along with newsletters such as the one shown here. The Centre was active into the 1990s.

Find more examples of BLGC newsletters online at the [Bishopsgate Institute](https://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/collections/black-lesbian-and-gay-centre)¹.

- Why was this the newsletter produced for the Black lesbian and gay community?
- What does it reveal about this community?
- What different types of community activities can you see?
- What was the significance of the *Blackout*² magazine published alongside the newsletters?

¹ <https://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/collections/black-lesbian-and-gay-centre>

² <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsehistory/2016/10/31/theblacklesbianandgaycentre/>

Connections to curriculum

History:

Key stage 4

- GCSE History EDEXCEL: Crime and punishment in 1700 to present day: nature and changing definitions of criminal activity.
- GCSE History AQA: Power and the people: Equality and rights
- GCSE History OCR: Crime and punishment, c.1250 to present

Key stage 5

- Edexcel A level History: Britain in the later 20th Century: 1945- 90: Consensus and Conflict
- OCR A level History: Britain under Margaret Thatcher 1979–90
- AQA A level History: The Making of Modern Britain, 1951–2007

Sociology:

AQA AS-level Sociology:

- 2.2.2 Families and Households

AQA A-level Sociology:

- 2.1 Culture and Identity
- 2.2 Families and Households
- 3.1 Crime and Deviance

OCR AS and A-level Sociology:

- Introducing socialisation, culture and identity
- Families and relationships
- Media

PSHE:

The lesson could be used to support a school PSHE programme of study for Key stage 4.¹

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/personal-social-health-and-economic-education-pshe/personal-social-health-and-economic-pshe-education>

External links

[LGBTQIA+ Archives | Bishopsgate Institute](https://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/collections/lgbtqia-archives)¹

One of the most extensive collections on LGBTQIA+ history in the UK covering the late nineteenth century onward.

[A Short History of LGBT Rights in the UK | The British Library](https://www.bl.uk/lgbtq-histories/articles/a-short-history-of-lgbt-rights-in-the-uk)²

From the British Library, a timeline of the LGBTQ+ community from 1533 to today.

[Gay Black Group](https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-gay-black-group-1983-online)³

Video from BFI about the formation of the Gay Black Group in 1980s London.

[Aids – Iceberg advert](https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-aids-iceberg-1987-online)⁴

Video from BFI showing the famous 1987 ‘iceberg’ public information film informing the British public about AIDS.

[Key dates for lesbian, gay, bi and trans equality](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/key-dates-lesbian-gay-bi-and-trans-equality)⁵

From Stonewall UK, a timeline of LGBTQ+ history from the 1950s onwards.

[Your Story, Our History: LGBTQ+ legislation](https://learning.parliament.uk/en/resources/your-story-our-history-lgbt-legislation/)⁶

Education videos and resource pack from the UK Parliament about LGBTQ+ rights and legislation.

[LGBTQ+ History | English Heritage](https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/learn/histories/lgbtq-history/)⁷

Learn about LGBTQ+ stories uncovered at English Heritage sites.

[Pride of Place: England’s LGBTQ Heritage](https://www.historicengland.org.uk/research/inclusive-heritage/lgbtq-heritage-project/)⁸

From Historic England, learn about LGBTQ+ history and heritage across England.

[Queer Britain](https://www.queerbritain.org.uk/)⁹

Queer Britain is the UK’s first national museum about the LGBTQ+ community.

¹ <https://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/collections/lgbtqia-archives>

² <https://www.bl.uk/lgbtq-histories/articles/a-short-history-of-lgbt-rights-in-the-uk>

³ <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-gay-black-group-1983-online>

⁴ <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-aids-iceberg-1987-online>

⁵ <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/key-dates-lesbian-gay-bi-and-trans-equality>

⁶ <https://learning.parliament.uk/en/resources/your-story-our-history-lgbt-legislation/>

⁷ <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/learn/histories/lgbtq-history/>

⁸ <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/inclusive-heritage/lgbtq-heritage-project/>

⁹ <https://queerbritain.org.uk/>

External links

[LGBTQ+ Archives – The National Archives blog](#)¹

Blogs from The National Archives about LGBTQ+ history.

[The National Archives LGBTQ+ history research guide](#)²

Research guide for finding LGBTQ+ history within The National Archives.

¹ <https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/tag/lgbtq/>

² <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/gay-lesbian-history/>

Transcript: Source 1

What I have to say in reference to Mr Worrell is that upon the nineteenth of August last 1701 I out of my cabin heard Mr Worrell aforesaid use very kind expressions to Mr Sandys being then both in Mr Price's hammock as: my dear, my life and my soul. Upon which I softly opened the door and saw Mr Worrell making the usual motions a man does when in carnal copulation and heard Mr Sandys say, fye upon you, you beast, I can endure it no longer, upon which Worrell desisted and turned on his back. This happened about half an hour before it was dark, the day about written.

Dated December 2nd 1701.

Jenkin Williams

On August the 23rd last past 1701 I showed Captain Laton a letter I had written in order to acquaint Captain Vinient of what I had seen and heard on the 19th of the month aforesaid between Charles Worrell and Thomas Sandys ... Charles Worrell earnestly entreated me to desire the Captain Laton would be pleased to let him the said Worrell speak with him in my cabin that evening before Captain Vinient should see the letter, which Capt. Laton condescended to, and after his arrival in the cabin read the letter upon which the said Charles Worrell very much ??? Capt Laton not to expose the letter to Capt Vinient and after much entreaty the aforesaid Capt Laton yielded to ??? the letter, and immediately tore it all to pieces, for which the said Worrell gave Capt Laton a thousand thanks, and told him ??? he did believe his ??? was not as good as he should wish, and that if he had occasion for any money, what he could conveniently spare – should be at his service, and desired the said Capt Laton to make use of those three guineys which he there delivered Capt Laton upon which Capt Laton thanked him and told him that if at any for the future Capt Vinient should be informed of anything to his prejudice, he would use his interest to have it suppressed and to this effect, and after a little more discourse upon that subject parted.

...

But in the interim by the investigation of some ill persons Capt Laton was mightily incensed against me, and for his revenge alleged I had unjustly detained his stuffs – and moreover told Charles Worrell I had forced a letter against him, upon which the said Worrell threatened me with a court martiall by calling me rogue and villain and that he would have my ears off which occasioned me in vindication of my own reputation, to give Capt Vinient my Commander the same relation I here lay down before your honours humbly desiring that the honours would be pleased to take it into your serious consideration.

Source 2: Letter from police magistrate Hensleigh Wedgwood to the Home Secretary Lord John Russell, 1835. Catalogue Ref: HO 17/120/60

inequality in the law in its operation upon the rich and poor. It is the only crime where there is no injury done to any individual & in consequence it requires a very small expense to commit it in so private a manner & to take such precautions as shall render conviction impossible. It is also the only capital crime that is committed by rich men but owing to the circumstances I have mentioned they are never convicted. The detection of these degraded creatures was owing entirely to their poverty, they were unable to pay for privacy, & the room was so poor that what was going on inside was easily visible from without.

I feel so strongly that death is not the punishment for their offence, & the dreadful situation they are in shocks me so much, that I cannot neglect a chance of saving them their offence I allow is a very heavy one against God, & shows a most degraded nature, but pray, Mylord, it is not a crime against society of such a description as to call for the spilling

of blood; that punishment should be reserved for terrifying crimes, for those offering violence to the lives or persons of others: and I am convinced that the only reason why the punishment of death has been retained in this case, is the difficulty of finding any one hardy enough to undertake, what might be represented as, the defence of such a crime. A disgraceful punishment would, I am sure, be more agreeable to the feelings of mankind, as well as more effectual in checking the offence. So discordant indeed does the punishment appear to me to the offence that, in a case when it had unquestionably been committed with a beast, I thought myself doing public moral good service in discharging the prisoner sooner than commit him for trial, nor should I be afraid of being condemned by any reasonable man who had witnessed my conduct. But besides this, there is a shocking

Transcript: Source 2

This offence I allow is a very heavy one against God, and shows a most degraded nature, but surely, Mylord, is it not a crime against society of such a description as to call for the spilling of blood, that punishment should be reserved for terrifying crimes, for those offering violence to the lives or persons of others: and I am convinced that the only reason why the punishment of death has been retained in this case, is the difficulty of finding any one hardy enough to undertake what might be represented as the defence of such a crime. A disgraceful punishment would, I am sure, be more agreeable to the feelings of mankind, as well as more effectual in checking the offence. ...

But besides this, there is a shocking inequality in this law in its operation upon the rich and poor. It is the only crime where there is no injury done to any individual and in consequence it requires a very small expense to commit it in so private a manner and to take such precautions as shall render conviction impossible. It is also the only capital crime that is committed by rich men but owing to the circumstances I have mentioned they are never convicted. The detection of these degraded creatures was owing entirely to their poverty, they were unable to pay for privacy, and the room was so poor that what was going on inside was easily visible from without.

Source 3: Anne Lister's will, 1841.

Catalogue Ref: PROB 10/6000

This is the last will and testament of me Anne Lister Sister of Sir John Galt in the township of Southowram in the parish of St. Giles in the county of York. I write these the ~~ninth~~ day of May in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and thirty six. I give and devise all my estate called Shibden Hall and all and singular the messuages farms lands tenements and real estate whatsoever and wheresoever which I own in anywise seized of or entitled to or have power to dispose of unto my friend Miss Ann Walker who is now living with me at Shibden Hall

Provided lastly and I do hereby declare that in case of the marriage of the said Ann Walker all and singular the trust estates monies and premises and all the trusts powers and authorities whatsoever herebefore given to or reposed in her shall thenceforth cease and determine in the same manner to all intents constructions and purposes as if the said Ann Walker should have then departed this life

A Lister



Transcript: Source 3

This is the last will and testament of me Anne Lister of Shibden Hall in the township of Southowram in the parish of Halifax in the county of York, spinster, made the ninth day of May in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and thirty six. I give and devise all my estate called Shibden Hall and all and singular the messuages farms lands tenements and real estate whatsoever and wheresoever which I am in anywise seized of or entitled to or have power to dispose of unto my friend Miss Ann Walker who is now living with me at Shibden Hall. ...

Provided lastly and I do hereby declare that in case of the marriage of the said Ann Walker all and singular the trust estates monies and premises and all the trusts proven and authorities whatsoever hereinbefore given to as or reposed in her shall thenceforth cease and determine in the same manner to all intents constrictions and purposes as if the said Ann Walker should have then departed this life. ...

A Lister

Source 4: Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code published for the Straits Settlements, 1871. Catalogue Ref: CO 274/2

THE PENAL CODE,

ORDINANCE No. IV. OF 1871.

PASSED ON THE 9TH DAY OF AUGUST, 1871.



PUBLISHED FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF THE STRAITS' SETTLEMENTS,
By WYMAN & Co., CALCUTTA.

1871.

OF UNNATURAL OFFENCES.

377. Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman, or animal, shall be punished with penal servitude for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine and to whipping.

Unnatural offences.

Explanation. Penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary to the offence described in this Section.

Transcript: Source 4

THE PENAL CODE

ORDINANCE No. IV of 1871

PASSED ON THE 9TH DAY OF AUGUST, 1871.

PUBLISHED FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF THE STRAITS SETTLEMENTS,

By WYMAN & CO, CALCUTTA.

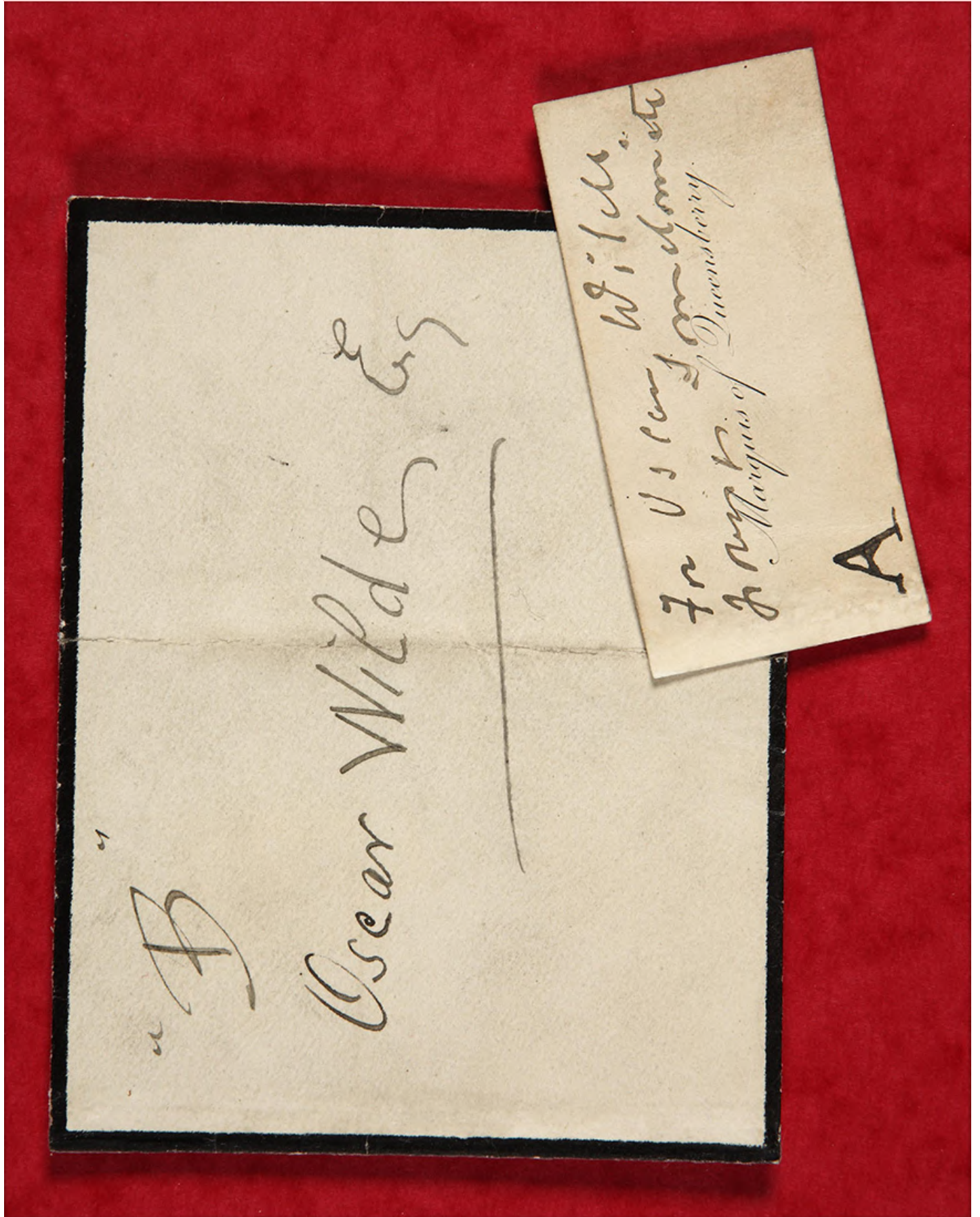
1871.

OF UNNATURAL OFFENCES.

Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman, or animal, shall be punished with penal servitude for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine and to whipping.

Explanation. Penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary to the offence described in this Section.

Source 5: Calling card left by Marquis of Queensbury calling Oscar Wilde a 'posing somdomite'. Catalogue Ref: CRIM 1/41/6



Transcript: Source 5

[Envelope:]

“B”

Oscar Wilde

[Calling card:]

For Oscar Wilde posing Somdomite

Marquis of Queensberry

A

Source 6: Discussion around a clause that was proposed to be added to the Criminal Law Bill in 1921. Catalogue Ref: LCO 2/469

After clause 3 insert as a new clause :

. Any act of gross indecency between female persons shall be a misdemeanour, and punishable in the same manner as any such act committed by male persons under section eleven of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885. Acts of indecency by females.

The Earl of Malmesbury to move that the Lords do disagree with this amendment.

The Lords disagree with the Amendment made by the Commons to insert clause A after clause 3, for the following Reason :

Because the Amendment introduces a new offence which may lead to unlooked for and evil results, and which should not be introduced without the fullest consideration.

Transcript: Source 6

After clause 3 insert a new clause:

Any act of gross indecency between female persons shall be a misdemeanour, and punishable in the same manner as any such act committed by male persons under section eleven of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885.

...

LORDS REASONS for disagreeing with certain of the AMENDMENTS made by the COMMONS.

The Lords disagree with the Amendment made by the Commons to insert clause A after clause 3, for the following Reason:

Because the Amendment introduces a new offence which may lead to unlooked for and evil results, and which should not be introduced without the fullest consideration.

Source 7a: Police observations on the Shim Sham Club, 1935.

Catalogue Ref: MEPO 2/4494

At 2-16.A.M. two women both of the Lesbian type left and walked to Shaftesbury Avenue where they entered a cab. As they passed me, one said to the other:- "That was a dear dance for ten bob".

At 2-17.A.M. the boy on the cycle left.

At 2-19.A.M. a man of colour entered.

At 2-23.A.M. a man under the influence of drink left. He was wearing a fancy hat and blowing a squeaker.

At 2-30.A.M. three men left and entered a cab.

At 2-34.A.M. one man and two women in evening dress arrived in a cab and entered.

At 2-37.A.M. a man entered, followed by a boy carrying a bottle, who arrived on a cycle.

At 2-42.A.M. three women left.

At 2-44.A.M. a boy, and the cycle left.

At 3-1.A.M. five men left, all very rowdy, they walked towards Coventry Street.

At 3-8.A.M. three men of colour left.

At 3-20.A.M. two prostitutes entered.

At 3-38.A.M. four women left.

At 3-50.A.M. two women left.

Transcript: Source 7a

At 2:16 AM, two women both of the Lesbian type left and walked to Shaftesbury Avenue where they entered a cab. As they passed me, one said to the other: "That was a dear dance for ten bob".

At 2:17 AM the boy on the cycle left.

At 2:19 AM a man of colour entered.

At 2:23 AM a man under the influence of drink left. He was wearing a fancy hat and blowing a squeaker.

At 2:30 AM three men left and entered a cab.

At 2:34 AM one man and two women in evening dress arrived in a cab and entered.

At 2:37 AM a man entered, following by a boy carrying a bottle, who arrived on a cycle.

At 2:42 AM three women left.

At 2:44 AM a boy, and the cycle left.

At 3:1 AM five men left, all very rowdy, they walked towards Coventry Street.

At 3:8 AM three men of colour left.

At 3:20 AM two prostitutes entered.

At 3:38 AM four women left.

At 3:50 AM two women left.

Source 7b: A group of most likely gay men having a beach day 1928-31. Emmanuel Cooper Archive, Bishopsgate Institute.



Source 8: Portrait of Patrick Nelson by Duncan Grant, 1960-63..

Photo © Christie's Images / Bridgeman Images



Source 9a: Discussions around The Wolfenden Report, 1954.

Catalogue Ref: LCO 2/5762

Surely the point of view of the Committee comes to this: that if a man (and the same is true of a woman) is doing wrong the law must not intervene to stop him unless he is harming someone else; and if two or more men are doing wrong together, neither coercing the other nor taking advantage of his weakness, they must not be interfered with by the law unless their behaviour is harmful to a third party or parties. I think that is the simplest possible exposition of the juristic philosophy behind the Report.

Again, I ask: can we accept this doctrine? By and large, though it is for each Member of the House to decide

for himself, I believe that we can.

Or must we consent to the very powerful reservation attached by Mr. Adair to the Wolfenden Report? I do not think that anybody ought to make up his mind on this question until he has read the Report—that goes without saying—and also the reservation by Mr. Adair. I hope that I am interpreting Mr. Adair correctly if I say that in his view homosexuality between consenting adults cannot be regarded as their affair alone; they are not just corrupting each other, but are liable to spread the infection far and wide.

He says:

“The presence in a district of, for example, adult male lovers living openly and notoriously under the approval of the law is bound to have a regrettable and pernicious effect on the young people of the community. . . . The more serious phases of such conduct have been recognised by our law as criminal for a continuous period of not less than 400 years, and a very heavy onus therefore rests on the advocates of the change now proposed to demonstrate by cogent evidence that the withdrawal of hitherto criminous conduct from the realm of criminal law is clearly justified.”

Most of us who have been at boarding schools or had adult experience of living for long periods in purely masculine

society, must know that if we do that, we are saying something of some whom we have known and liked at the various stages of our lives. We must be aware, if we live in the present century, that there are men, some of them genuinely idealistic, who pass a life of agony in trying to resist these sinful impulses, and that some of these unfortunate people are denied by nature the normal fulfilment of marriage. Some of them, at least, I do not want to rest too much on this argument, but to me it is a substantial one and may prove more substantial as the years pass—might be prepared to seek medical or spiritual assistance, if the criminal taint were withdrawn, whereas at present they feel unable to lay bare their secret.

PEOPLE were told of the Wolfenden recommendations and asked if they agreed or disagreed. Their answers are in percentages:

“Homosexual behaviour between men aged 21 and over should NOT be a criminal act provided that it is carried out in private.”

	All	Men	Women
Agree	38	41	34
Disagree	47	49	47
Don't know	15	10	19

Transcript: Source 9a

Surely the point of view of the Committee comes to this: that if a man ... is doing wrong the law must not intervene to stop him unless he is harming someone else; and that if two or more men are doing wrong together, neither coercing the other nor taking advantage of his weakness, they must not be interfered with by the law unless their behaviour is harmful to a third party or parties. ... Again, I ask: can we accept this doctrine? By and large, though it is for each Member of the House to decide for himself, I believe we can.

...

Or must we consent to the very powerful reservation attached by Mr. Adair to the Wolfenden Report?

He says: "The presence in a district of, for example, adult male lovers living openly and notoriously under the approval of the law is bound to have a regrettable and pernicious effect on the young people of the community. ... The more serious phases of such conduct have been recognised by our law as criminal for a continuous period of not less than 400 years, and a very heavy onus therefore rests on the advocates of the change now proposed to demonstrate by cogent evidence that the withdrawal of hitherto criminal conduct from the realm of criminal law is clearly justified."

...

Most of us who have been at boarding schools or had adult experience of living for long period in purely masculine society, must know that if we do that, we are saying something of some whom we have known and liked at various stages of our lives. We must be aware, if we live in the present century, that there are men, some of them genuinely idealistic, who pass a life of agony in trying to resist these sinful impulses, and that some of these unfortunate people are denied by nature the normal fulfilment or marriage. Some of them, at least ... might be prepared to seek medical or spiritual assistance, if the criminal taint were withdrawn, whereas at present they feel unable to lay bare their secret.

...

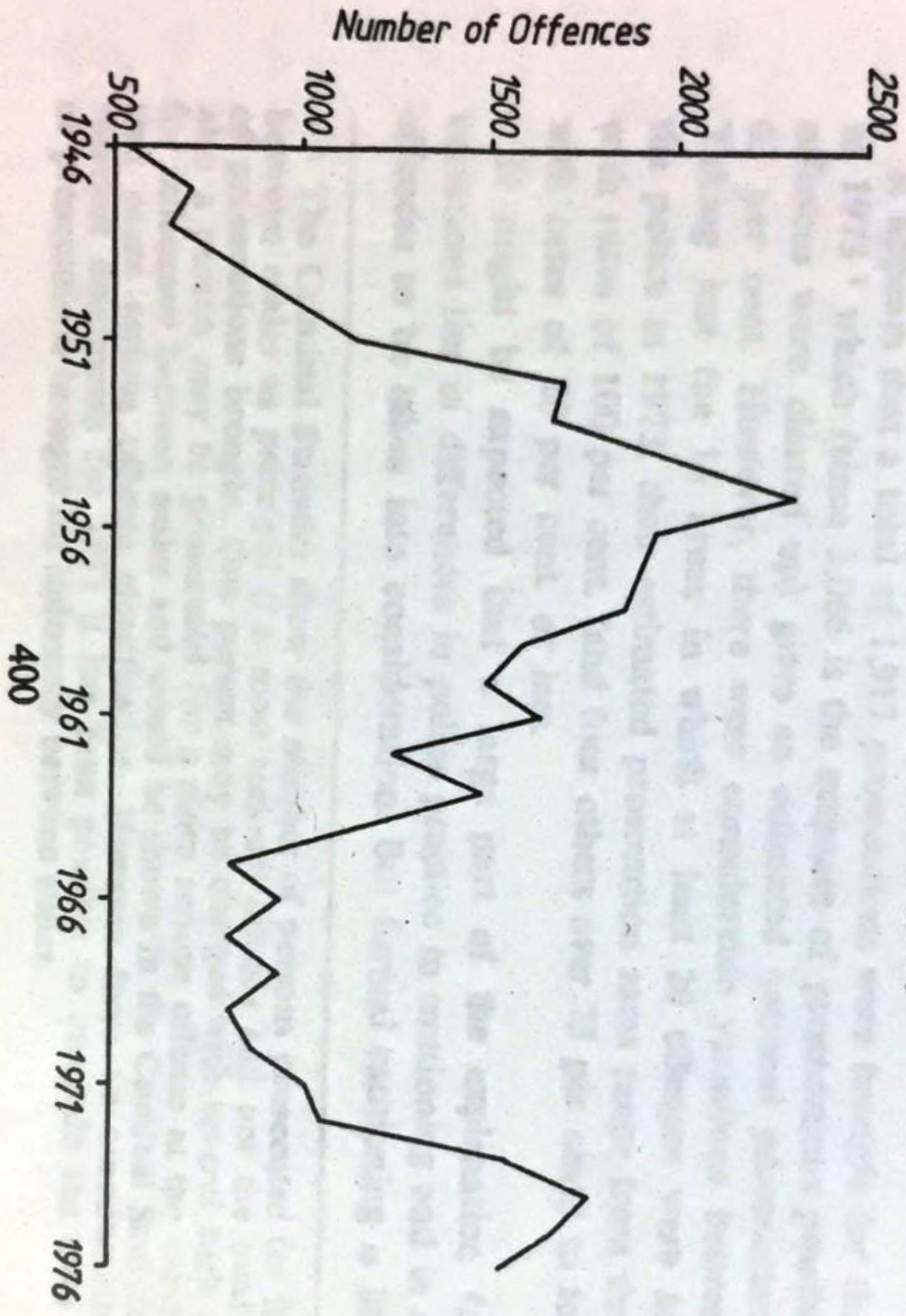
People were told of the Wolfenden recommendations and asked if they agreed or disagreed. Their answers are in percentages:

"Homosexual behaviour between men ages 21 and over should NOT be a criminal act provided that it is carried out in private."

	All	Men	Women
Agree	38	41	34
Disagree	47	49	47
Don't know	15	10	19

Source 9b: Table showing the number of offences of 'indecent' between males in England and Wales 1946-76. Catalogue Ref: HO 522/7

Figure 1
Number of offences of Indecency between Males recorded as known to the police, England and Wales 1946-76



Transcript: Source 9b

Figure 1

Number of offences of Indecency between Males recorded as known to the police, England and Wales 1946-76

[Vertical axis:]

Number of offences

500 – 1000 – 1500 – 2000 – 2500

[Horizontal axis:]

1946 – 1951 – 1956 – 1961 – 1966 – 1971 – 1976

Visual description

The line starts from 500 at year 1946, then climbs steadily to almost 2500 by year 1956. It then starts going down relatively steadily until hitting a low of around 700 around 1966. Around the year 1970 the line then starts climbing again until it hits around 1700 right before year 1976.

Source 10: Article: 'My Strange Life' by April Ashley in The News of the World, 6 May 1962. Catalogue Ref: J 77/4532-J 77/4537



A lovely girl adds a touch of lipstick—April Ashley in London yesterday

THIS, surely, was the most agonising yet joyous, the most harrowing yet soothing moment of my whole strange, mad, whirlwind life. The moment a few hours ago when, for the first time in more than eight stormy years, I was reunited with my mother.

The mother who last saw me when I was George Jamieson, deck hand in a British cargo ship. The mother, so dearly beloved, from whom I had deliberately kept apart all this time to spare her the agony of my gradual transformation from manhood into womanhood. The mother to whom now, at long last, I was ready—even proud—to present myself anew as a daughter.

Hesitated

I had hesitated about this reunion right up to the time the papers broke the news of my forthcoming engagement to the Hon. Arthur Corbett, son and heir of Lord Rowallan, present Governor-General of Tasmania and a former Chief Scout.

Even then I dithered for a day or two. But finally I plucked up courage and sent a telegram to her at her home in Cheetham, Manchester.

It said: "Dear Mother. Very urgent you phone me as soon as you get this. Love."

And so, not many hours later, my mother arrived at my flat in Kensington.

All morning I had been watching for her from the first-floor window. But somehow, when the taxi drew up, I didn't see it.

The first I knew was the familiar voice behind me in the room saying: "George!" I turned and flew into her arms. Tears streamed down our cheeks as we hugged one another. And for a while not another word was spoken.

But then she drew back a little and, holding me at arm's length, gazed at my long hair, my pearl ear-rings, the jewels about my neck and on my fingers, my new lemon-coloured suit and stiletto-heeled shoes.

"Why, George," she said.

"I can't believe it. I simply can't believe it. How you've changed. You look so young, so beautiful. Just like a film star."

Gently then, right at the beginning, I had to remind her: "Not 'George' now, mother, but April. Try to remember always—April."

We drank champagne and talked of all the members of our large family. I had not seen any of them, except one sister, Marjorie, since I was a young man of 19, just over eight years ago.

All my three brothers and two sisters are married now, I discovered. And all have children—the one great blessing which I am forever denied.

It was long past midnight when at last we decided it was time to go to bed. But even then I said: "Come along, mother. Come and sit with me and talk to me while I have a bath."

And all the time she kept saying: "I can't believe it. You are so beautiful. So very beautiful."

I tried to be completely frank with her. I explained everything about my transformation and the wonderful magical operation in the minutest detail, but very, very gently.

We have hardly stopped talking since that first meeting.

Choosing ring

We have been out on several exciting shopping expeditions, choosing wonderful clothes and lingerie and cosmetics together. And talking all the time.

And now I have asked her to come with me to help me choose an engagement ring.

I've explained to her that I've had a letter from Arthur, from the night club he runs in Marbella, on the Spanish coast near Malaga, telling me to go along to Aspreys, in Bond-street, and choose a fine ruby surrounded by diamonds.

Arthur is a connoisseur of rubies.

My sister Marjorie is coming to join us tomorrow. I would like them to be with me when I open in cabaret at the Astor, in the West End, probably next week. But I

doubt whether they will be able to stay that long.

Before they leave me, though, I hope I shall be able to tell them everything about my fascinating, exciting but often frightening life in the years I have been away from them.

Just as I shall be telling you in the News of the World in the next few weeks.

They know already, of course, about the early days in the back streets of Liverpool, when I was an ugly, thin, but quite hearty little boy.

Even though I did like playing with dolls and preferred the company of little girls, I literally forced myself

Transcript: Source 10

A lovely girl adds a touch of lipstick – April Ashley in London yesterday

THIS, surely, was the most agonising yet joyous, the most harrowing yet soothing moment of my whole strange, mad, whirlwind life. The moment a few hours ago when, for the first time in more than eight stormy years, I was reunited with my mother.

The mother who last saw me when I was George Jamieson, deck hand in a British cargo ship.

The mother, so dearly beloved, from whom I had deliberately kept apart all this time to spare her the agony of my gradual transformation from manhood into womanhood.

The mother to whom now, at long last, I was ready – even proud – to present myself anew as a daughter.

Hesitated

I had hesitated about this reunion right up to the time the papers broke the news of my forthcoming engagement to the Hon. Arthur Corbett, son and heir of Lord Rowallan, present Governor-General of Tasmania and a former Chief Scout.

Even then I dithered for a day or two. But finally I plucked up courage and sent a telegram to her at her home in Cheetham, Manchester.

It said, "Dear Mother. Very urgent you phone me as soon as you get this. Love."

And so, not many hours later, my mother arrived at my flat in Kensington.

All morning I had been watching for her from the first-floor window. But somehow, when the taxi drew up, I didn't see it.

The first I knew was the familiar voice behind me in the room saying: "George!"

I turned and flew into her arms. Tears streamed down our cheeks as we hugged one another. And for a while not another word was spoken.

But then she drew back a little and, holding me at arm's length, gazed at my long hair, my pearl earrings, the jewels about my neck and on my fingers, my new lemon-coloured suit and stiletto-heeled shoes.

"Why, George," she said. "I can't believe it. I simply can't believe it.

"How you've changed. You look so young, so beautiful. Just like a film star."

Gently then, right at the beginning, I had to remind her: "Not 'George' now, mother, but April. Try to

Transcript (cont.): Source 10

remember always – April.”

We drank champagne and talked of all the members of our large family. I had not seen any of them, except one sister, Marjorie, since I was a young man of 19, just over eight years ago.

All my three brothers and two sisters are married now, I discovered. And all have children – the one great blessing which I am forever denied.

It was long past midnight when at last we decided it was time to go to bed. But even then I said: “Come along, mother. Come and sit with me and talk to me while I have a bath.”

And all the time she kept saying: “I can’t believe it. You are so beautiful. So very beautiful.”

I tried to be completely frank with her. I explained everything about my transformation and the wonderful magical operation in the minutest detail, but very, very gently.

We have hardly stopped talking since that first meeting.

Choosing ring

We have been out on several exciting shopping expeditions, choosing wonderful clothes and lingerie and cosmetics together. And talking all the time.

And now I have asked her to come with me to help me choose an engagement ring.

I’ve explained to her that I’ve had a letter from Arthur, from the night club he runs in Marbella, on the Spanish coast near Malaga, telling me to go along to Aspreys, in Bond-street, and choose a fine ruby surrounded by diamonds.

Arthur is a connoisseur of rubies.

My sister Marjorie is coming to join us tomorrow. I would like them to be with me when I open in cabaret at the Astor, in the West End, probably next week. But I doubt whether they will be able to stay that long.

Before they leave me, though, I hope I shall be able to tell them everything about my fascinating, exciting, but often frightening life in the years I have been away from them.

Just as I shall be telling you in the News of the World in the next few weeks.

They know already, of course, about the early days in the back streets of Liverpool, when I was an ugly, thin, but quite hearty little boy.

Even though I did like playing with dolls and preferred the company of little girls, I literally forced myself ...

Source 11a: Photo from a Drag Ball at Porchester Hall in West London. Robert Workman Archive, Bishopsgate Institute



Source 11b: Photo from a Drag Ball at Porchester Hall in West London. Robert Workman Archive, Bishopsgate Institute



Source 11c: Photo from a Drag Ball at Porchester Hall in West London. Robert Workman Archive, Bishopsgate Institute



Source 11d: Photo from a Drag Ball at Porchester Hall in West London. Robert Workman Archive, Bishopsgate Institute



Source 12: Letter to the Home Office from The Colchester Group of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality, 1977-79. Catalogue Ref: HO 265/3

S U B M I S S I O N

to: The Home Office Committee on Obscene, Indecent and Violent Publications

from: The Colchester Group of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality

In brief, we hold that homosexuality is a legitimate and ordinary variant of human behaviour, and that homosexuals have a valid claim to equality under the law; but this position is still so far from general acceptance that it is necessary for us to keep a close watch on all laws relating to sexual matters and do what we can to modify them in a civilised direction.

- 5 At the same time, we are well aware that reform of these particular laws will not, of itself, bring about a complete transformation of the homosexual predicament, any more than the 1967 Act did. Insofar as they affect homosexuals, the obscenity laws are simply a part of a much larger pattern of harassment. The root cause of homosexual unhappiness is the enormous pressure to conform to heterosexuality and its patterns that characterise contemporary British society. Plainly, a reformed obscenity law could not do much about that, even if it encouraged freer discussion and expression of homosexuality, which might improve the self respect of gays and the attitude of society towards them.

Male homosexuals cannot, without some legal risk to themselves, at present kiss, hold hands, cuddle or dance together in public. Certainly, this law too should be reformed in the direction of equality; but we are not sure if it comes within the Committee's terms of reference, unless under the head of obscene displays.

- 14 The Committee will no doubt receive many representations as to the importance of protecting children and adolescents from obscene or indecent material. In our opinion, as we have already stated (paragraph 6), this concern can be and often is overstated and hypocritical. It is at least as important to try to lift the fog of guilt, shame and ignorance from the subject of sex. This may be done if responsible public discussion of sex, including homosexuality, is as free and honest as possible. The laws ought not to impede such discussion. We hope the Committee will make recommendations in this spirit.

Transcript: Source 12

To: The Home Office Committee on Obscene, Indecent and Violent Publications

From: The Colchester Group of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality

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Source 13a: Letter to Margaret Thatcher about the AIDS government health campaign, 1986. Catalogue Ref: PREM 19/1863

Prime Minister ⁽²⁾
 For information. Unpleasant, but I am sure

PRIME MINISTER 24 February 1986

AIDS *Do we have to do the action on Risky sex? I should have thought it could do more harm if long letters* *DHSS are right to propose a press campaign like this. It meet on Tuesday to discuss. MHA 24/2*

Norman Fowler is proposing to place explicit and distasteful advertisements about AIDS in all the Sunday papers. The AIDS problem is now so serious that we must do as he proposes, though his advert could open with more facts about the spread of AIDS. *needs read in mb*

We have so far had 275 cases of clinical AIDS in this country. But approximately 20,000 people are known to be carrying the virus. The Chief Medical Officer estimates that perhaps 25% of these people go on to develop clinical AIDS. But he may be optimistic - it is possible that they will all develop AIDS over the coming years.

The cost of treating someone with clinical AIDS is very cautiously estimated at £10,000-£20,000. That represents a bill between £50m and £100m just for the people currently with the virus who can be expected to catch the disease. The number of people with the virus is doubling every year.

The virus is mainly transmitted between homosexuals and between drug addicts who share contaminated needles. In Edinburgh 50% of drug addicts have the virus (as against 10% of addicts elsewhere) because pharmacists clamped down on providing needles for addicts. The challenge is to achieve proper public health supervision of addicts without encouraging drug-taking. AIDS isn't just transmitted between drug-takers and homosexuals. It can also be transmitted by normal intercourse. The following causal chain is perfectly possible: a drug-taker who finances her addiction by prostitution transmits the virus to a male client who passes it on to his wife who gives birth to a baby with the virus. These are the sorts of mechanism whereby AIDS can spread out to the population at large.

David Willetts
 DAVID WILLETTS

Transcript: Source 13a

[Handwriting of a Private Secretary]:

Prime Minister

For information. Unpleasant, but I am sure DHSS are right to propose a press campaign like this. H meet on Tuesday to discuss. MEA 24/2

[DHSS = Department of Health and Social Security, H = Home Affairs Cabinet Committee]

[Thatcher's handwriting]:

Do we have to do the section on risky sex? I should have thought it could do immense harm if young teenagers were to read it.

[Printed]:

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DAVID WILLETTS

Source 13b: Die-in, UK AIDS Coalition March from Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square, 1993. Gordon Rainsford Archive, Bishopsgate Institute.



Transcript: Source 14

NEVER GOING UNDERGROUND

LESBIANS & GAY MEN

OUT AND PROUD

Stop Clause 28, Supporting Gays and Lesbians in Britain

Today, thirty thousand lesbians and gays will be marching on London to protest new legislation – known as Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill – which bans all government funding of programs that “promote homosexuality” and forbids teaching “acceptance of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.” (“Promotion” is likely to be defined as anything that does not define homosexuality as unnatural or unacceptable).

We are here outside the home of the British Consul General to show international support for lesbians and gays in Britain who are under attack by the Conservative government. The Thatcher Government is aggressively pursuing a “traditionalist” view of family, society, and morality which explicitly destroys the civil rights and freedoms of lesbians and gays. The intent of the law is to utterly ban any treatment of homosexuality that validates lesbian and gay lifestyles. The result will be a severe curtailment of free speech in virtually all areas of education and culture.

We demand that Clause 28 be repealed!!!

The implications of Clause 28 are far reaching. Gay rights advocates say the Clause could invalidate employment and housing rights for lesbians and gay men, ban library books by gay authors, threaten hostels for homeless lesbian and gay youths, remove liquor licenses from lesbian and gay establishments, disrupt counselling services, and curtail artistic freedoms. Lesbian and gay groups will lose access to resources and meeting places. AIDS activists are concerned that the measure will foster a homophobic climate that could hinder efforts to halt the AIDS epidemic. There has been a massive campaign against the Clause all over the world, and the biggest gay demonstrations ever mobilized have been taken place in cities throughout Britain. Many celebrities have come out of the closet to support the campaign against Clause 28.

This demonstration is part of the National Spring Week of Actions 1988, sponsored by the national AIDS activist group ACT NOW...

Source 15: Page from the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre newsletter, 1989. LGBTQ+ Archives, Bishopsgate Institute

Saturday 11th February 1989

BLACK LESBIANS AND GAY PEOPLE OF FAITH 11th Feb 2-4.30pm
Black lesbians and gays of any religion welcome. Details
HONG on 01-485 6756.

Sunday 12th February 1989

SHAKTI (SOUTH ASIAN LESBIAN AND GAY NETWORK) MEETING (3-6pm)
For lesbians, gays and bisexuals of Indian / Pakistani
/Bangladeshi /Nepalese /Sri Lankan descent, London Friend,
86 Caledonian Road, N1. Access and other details 01-837
3337; or write to Shakti, c/o BLGC, BM Box 4390, London WC1N
3XX.

Thursday 16th February

Live recording of Lesbian and Gay Asian TV programme,
Studio audience wanted! Asian parent and relatives willing
to appear in the programme still being sought. More
information contact BLGC.



Friday 17th February 1989

9pm - 3am BHANGRA /Asian Disco at London Lesbian and Gay
Centre, 67 - 69 Cowcross St, EC1. Organised by Shakti;
South Asian lesbians and gays and their friends welcome.
Access details 01-608 1471; other information 01-837 3337.
Charge into centre 30p - Cons 15p. £2.00 disco. Late Bar!

LESBIAN AND GAY BLACK GROUP This and every THIRD FRIDAY in
the month is WOMEN ONLY. LGBG meetings held at Marchmont St
Community Centre, 62 Marchmont St, London WC1. Tel: BLGC
for more details (01-885 3543).

**NATIONAL
BLACK
GAY & LESBIAN
CONFERENCE
FEBRUARY 17 - 20, 1989**

Sponsored by Black Gay and Lesbian
Leadership Forum

in USA

USA *** LOVING OURSELVES HEALING OURSELVES - PREPARING FOR
THE 21st CENTURY is the headline call for participation in
the Second Annual National Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership
Forum's Conference and AIDS Institute. Date: February 17-
20, 1989; Venue: The University Hilton Hotel, Los Angeles,
California. Nearly 1000 people expected to register for this
year's conference. "The conference will present a series of
workshops designed to inform, empower and inspire Black
Lesbians and gay men. Our ambition is high; to provide the
present and future Black leaders of the Lesbian /Gay world
with the means to efficiently develop and effectively
implement their own personal objectives, professional game
plans and political agendas. These are to be workshops for
victors, not victims." Headlines to suggested workshop
topics include: "AIDS! What Does It Mean to Black Gays and
Lesbians?"; "Creating and Strengthening Black Gay & Lesbian
Institutions"; Building a Stronger Political Voice"; "The
Quality of Our Lives & Relationships"; "The Quality of Our
Lives and Relationships"; "Black Gay and Lesbian Enterprises
& Financial Stability"; "Creating Coalitions & Networks?"
Conference suggested sub-headings (of note to me, Ed):
Living with AIDS /Caring for PWA's; Eroticizing and
Affirming Safer Sex for Black Gay Men and /or Lesbians;
Alternative Therapies for HIV+, PVARC's, PWA's; Knowing When
and How to Move On; Out of the Closet & On With Your
Career!; Disciplined & Organised? Me? Yes You!; Taking
Ownership and Leadership in Traditional Black Institutions;
Sexism and Homophobia; What's the connection? London's BLGC
holds copies of the registration forms for this important
international event which we will despatch on request.

Saturday 18th February 1989

Self Defence for lesbians with disabilities

All-London Lesbian Mothers Group Social 18th February 7-
10pm at Camden Lesbian Centre (see Access details 31st Jan).

Self-Defence for Lesbians with Disabilities Camden Lesbian
Centre (see Access details 31st Jan) 18th February 10am -
4pm. Call Sharon on 383 5405.

Sunday 19th February 1989

Lesbian Incest Survivors Group meeting (19th February: 2-
5pm) for lesbians who were sexually abused, in any way in
childhood by relatives /adults in positions of authority and
trust. Central London venue, wheelchair accessible. For
further information ring 837 1600 or write to BOX LISG,
Sisterwrite, Upper St, London N1.

Tuesday 21st February 1989

LESBIANS WITH DISABILITIES GROUP 21st Feb 7-10pm, with sign
language interpreter - Camden Lesbian Centre (see Access
details 31st Jan).

Wednesday 22nd February 1989

PACE NEEDS VOLUNTEER COUNSELLORS: The project for Advice,
Counselling and Education (PACE), based at the London
Lesbian and Gay Centre is keen to invite Black lesbians and
Black gay men to join their team of volunteer counsellors.
In extending their counselling services they are focusing on
the counselling needs of Black lesbians and Black gay men
and how the project might be accessible to them. Their
counsellors work with a range of counselling perspectives on
both a short and a long-term basis and offer one to three
one-hour sessions per week. PACE offers regular supervision
and support to all their counsellors as well as some

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[Poster:]

NATIONAL

BLACK

GAY & LESBIAN CONFERENCE

FEBRUARY 17-20, 1989

Sponsored by Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum in USA

[/end poster]

USA *** LOVING OURSELVES HEALING OURSELVES – PREPARING FOR THE 21st CENTURY is the headline call for participation in the Second Annual National Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum's Conference and AIDS Institute. Date: February 17-20, 1989; Venue: The University Hilton Hotel, Los Angeles, California. Nearly 1000 people expected to register for this year's conference. "The conference will present a series of workshops designed to inform, empower and inspire Black Lesbians and gay men. Our ambition is high; to provide the present and future Black leaders of the Lesbian/Gay world with the means to efficiently develop and effectively implement their own

Transcript (cont.): Source 15

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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.

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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.

Find out more:

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