

It Started With A Kiss...

Thirty years ago, come 30th January, Southern Television (the 1970's equivalent of today's ITV Meridian) broadcast a half-hour documentary about gay people in Brighton. Sadly, the pleasure and triumph that must have been felt by activists featured in the programme turned sour the next day, when one of them got sacked from his job. Protesters from all over the country converged on British Home Stores' Oxford Street branch and local campaigners left the general public of Brighton and Worthing in no doubt as to their feelings. Tony Whitehead later became a founding father of the Terrence Higgins Trust.

FRIDAY
Helping the gays who aren't
 HOMOSEXUALITY, still considered a dodgy subject, receives its most direct and outspoken programme yet, from Southern Television. **Coming Out (10.30 ITV-South)** is a committedly sympathetic account of how local "gays" have organised themselves to encourage others, who may be afraid of the social stigma. Southern's programme goes much further than either *Whicker* or *Man Alive* in helpful support for homosexuals. Among people interviewed are the couple who run Brighton's "Lavender Lane," a 24-hour information and support phone service; and the film shows a close-up of the number (27878). Particularly interesting are interviews with the mother and father of the young man who is secretary to the Congress for Homosexual Equality: as nice and respectable a couple as you could wish to meet, they first asked themselves where they had "gone wrong" and then gradually came round. When they visited their son's shared flat, Dad was expected to fly off the handle, "but I thought it was marvellous."
 The effect will be to help remove the guilt that must still haunt many young men and women who find they are "different" and alone (a feeling that leads to an estimated 40 suicides a year).



Above: The protest outside the Brighton branch of BHS in 1976 by members of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality and University of Sussex Gay Soc.
 Right: How *Gay News* covered the story.
 Left: A review of the upcoming programme in the *Sunday Times*' TV pages.



BRITISH HOME STORES SCANDAL

TONY WHITEHEAD (22) has been forced to resign from his job as a trainee manager with British Home Stores in Worthing - because he is an open homosexual



Tony appeared in the Southern Television programme featuring Brighton gays on January 30, in which he was seen kissing his boyfriend.

The following (Saturday) morning, he went into work as usual and was summoned to the office of Branch Manager, Mr J O'Sullivan, who asked Tony if he was "a practising member of CHU."

Tony replied that he was, but as his workmates in the store knew all about his homosexuality, he could foresee no problem.

Mr O'Sullivan, however, could. And he suspended Tony from full pay to await a directive from the BHS headquarters in London.

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New in the archive

We're delighted that so many of you keep an eye out for things to give to the Ourstory archive. Over the last few months, **LAGNA** (Lesbian and Gay Newsmedia Archive) have sent us copies of their press cutting collection for East Sussex from the 1950s to the present. Two lots of books have come our way - **Francis** brought in ten gay men's books written in the 1950s and '60s, including *Song of the Loon* by Richard Amory,

A Youth of Fourteen by Aubrey Fowkes and *Finistere* by Fritz Peters. **Nina** has given us some more recent lesbian fiction, including Sarah Waters' *Tipping the Velvet* and Jackie Kay's *Trumpet*. These will all grace the shelves alongside our existing library of about 300 titles of interest to lesbian and gay browsers. **Graeme** persuaded a relative to make us a DVD of the television drama series, *Sugar Rush*

(Julie Burchill's story of young lesbian love, filmed in Brighton). **Nina, Sally, Ben** and **Graeme** have all donated contemporary press cuttings, posters, flyers and magazines, while **Veronica** has sent us a selection of lesbian and gay magazines from the 1970s-90s. **Jean's** photograph taken in Alciston churchyard has inspired a bit of delving and perhaps a piece for the next newsletter. *Thank-you all!*

BRIGHTON OURSTORY PROJECT

newsletter

Our Survey Said...

This year's Brighton Pride was, undoubtedly, one of the best ever for Ourstory. Set free from the confining shackles of the market area we were able to stretch our legs, and our new exhibition - *Meet Our Ancestors* - into a roomy tent, complete with working gramophone. Our larger space also meant many more people had the chance to browse our display, have a mooch and chat. As well as this, many of you took the time to fill in a special questionnaire designed to see if our long term plans - to have a permanent home for the archive - were what you wanted as well.

Happily, our survey revealed that this was an aim you agreed with. Of 93 respondents 92% thought it very important to have an LGB History Centre in Brighton and would visit it. Two thirds of respondents were local, with a third from outside Sussex, while 54 women took part, as compared to 37 men with one person m2f.

Xavier Mayne

In September, Tom - one of the group's founders - gave an entertaining talk to the Friends of Ourstory on one of the people highlighted in *Meet Our Ancestors* - Edward Prime Stevenson. This globetrotting American opera queen from the turn of the century (who also took the rather exotic name of Xavier Mayne) was author of many a groundbreaking gay book.

Archive catalogue training has been going apace and we've just completed the listing of the Brighton Campaign for Homosexual Equality/Brighton Gay Community Organisation collection. We have lots of files, newsletters, scripts for gay play readings and ongoing campaigns. Some correspondence needs to be kept confidential but otherwise the files are now available - if you'd like to come and take a look, either for research or general interest, give us a call on Brighton 206655.

If anyone out there has other official files for these organisations that they would like to pass on to us for safe keeping, we'd be glad to



Above: Val winds up the gramophone in the Ourstory tent at this year's Pride.

add them to the collection. Thanks go to the archivists and conservator who've been guiding us through the rigours of caring for our collections to a professional standard, to the Ourstory volunteers who've worked so hard during the training and to Global Grants for the money to do it. Many more collections to be catalogued during 2006.

Winter Pride

Winter Pride and LGBT History Month are turning into regular fixtures in the calendar - and with a more cultural feel than summer's hedonistic pleasures we feel we fit right in. This year we're putting on *Really Living*, an Ourstory production not seen for fifteen years. It's a moving performance with film and music that evokes the challenges and delights

experienced by three generations of lesbians and gay men in Brighton and Hove. Head down to the rather swish Joogleberry Playhouse (just off St James St on Sat 11th Feb at 4pm (with the bar open from 3.15pm). Tickets £5/3.50 available in advance.

We've also been delighted to help and advise Brighton & Hove Council's LGBT Workers' Forum with their Winter Pride event celebrating the Sussex Arts Balls, which took place in the years following World War II. In those days, prizes were awarded for the best fancy dress costume. Grant, an Ourstory contributor and regular at the balls, recalls "a certain number of queens used to spend the whole of the summer sitting on the Men's Beach, sewing sequins on the gowns".

Of course, we couldn't sign out without mentioning the sad loss of entertainer Phil Starr in October. We have fond memories of this kind and unpretentious man giving an exquisite benefit performance in our *Lavender Lounge Bar* show in 1999. Read more about Phil on page 3

Until 2006...

Death of a legend. We pay tribute on page 3.



Rookie to Raunchy

This is the story of how Bubbles (Iris) Ashdown joined the Army and started her fifty year love affair with the Brighton gay scene. Taken from an interview conducted a few months before her death in 1993.

"My date of birth was 25th June 1925 but according to the Army I was born 25th June 1923. I had to add two years to join the Army. I had my first affair with a girl at twelve. Her name was May - I met her at school, she was a bit older than me. My Grandfather put me to quite a nice private school but in 1941 I decided there was no future for me in Brighton because I was born illegitimate, which was very unfortunate, and everyone

started asking questions, you see. So I thought the only answer was that May and I would join the Army so we both went up and volunteered at Waterloo Place. Unfortunatley, May had been in the Territorials - she was ex-service and it was my first time in, so she never went to the same place as me. I went to Norton Barracks in Worcestershire and then to Donnington on the Welsh Borders.

of bread and marg and jam and put them in my steel helmet. And then one day a new officer came, a Miss Peach, she was a second lieutenant. In those days you weren't under military law so she was called 'Miss' and she was what was called PAD officer, which was

Passive Air Defence. And she rode this bloody bicycle and she called out, "Gas!", which meant we had to do the drill: swing your gas mask round, put your gas mask on - of course, I had a jam sandwich in it, didn't I? Up on a charge, 'Stealing Army Rations'. I lost two days' pay and I was confined to barracks. But to me it was all exciting, I was only sixteen, it was thrilling, you see.

Bill Lloyd

"I knew I liked women but it wasn't an important issue. I didn't analyse it, I didn't think, 'Oh dear, I'm a lesbian - Oh Dear God, help me' - you know. It was just one of those things. It was part of life. I was just a person. But in the Army I was illegal, so I kept my nose clean. About 1943 or '42, I did have a little affair with an assistant adjutant at a women's camp. If we'd been caught, it would have been very, very nasty.

"I had my first charge in the Army, then. We used to march two miles to work at the depot and we had no refreshments so I used to take myself a couple of big bits

"Soon after the war I got stationed in Brighton - Tower House on Preston Road, which was rather lovely, with a transport company.

Coming to Brighton was like a new world - Brighton was different. I remember the Marine Hotel, which not many do. It was on the seafront. Bill Lloyd - of course a woman - used to run the downstairs. I found it because I got friendly with a girl - I didn't know if she was queer but turned out afterwards she was. We went walking one night, saw this couple of butch types and we followed them and they went down this basement at this Marine Hotel. And it was fabulous - remember it's been wartime and everything's been rather austere - and there's this beautiful velvet and chandeliers. I couldn't believe it. It was full of lesbians - charming, well-dressed women, some in bow-ties and some feminine. And they fawned over me! I was very young, having joined the Army at fifteen and war ended in 1945. For me it was a new thing. It was fantastic!

continued on next page



Bubbles soon after she'd joined up in her ATS (Auxiliary Territorial Service) uniform, possibly on Ditchling Road, where she lived

Too obvious

"There weren't many clubs at that time, the Marine Hotel was the main scene. Pigott's was a pub in St James's Street. There'd be a woman called Dolly that used to play the piano and it was queer, it was a queer pub, so I felt right there.

You used to get soldiers coming in and they used to start a fight with the queer boys. I remember some of the soldiers would come in quite friendly, you know and of course there was always a good sing-song night there. There was a girl called Laurie and Laurie was a big butch lesbian. She would sing *Nature Boy*. She'd got a good voice. And the soldiers didn't mind her singing, although she was very butch, all collar and tie, you know, the works. And then there was this very camp queen, and he was so camp that one day a soldier took a poke at him - 'cause he was too obvious: 'Dahling' and all that. I used to intervene, very nicely, 'cause I was quite diplomatic in those days. I wasn't in uniform but I would talk the Army jargon. I got friendly with the queer boys because they were illegal and I was illegal. I was twenty-five years in the Army."

Marine Hotel on the corner of Marine Parade and Broad Street in 1947.



A Tribute to James Arthur Fuller (aka Phil Starr)

If you've been living in Brighton these last few months you can't have failed to notice the impact the death of Phil Starr has had on the community. A female impersonator from the old school, his career and life ended, not with a whimper, but while he was still going strong. He had just taken over Starr's Bar and Hotel on the New Steine, he was lined up as the lead in drag panto *Babes in the Bushes* and there was even talk of a BBC sitcom.



Above: Phil's final performance at Legends Bar on Brighton's seafront, just a few days before his death. Photos courtesy G Scene magazine.

What stirred most people, however, was that his death came just days after he brought the curtain down on Legends bar as it closed for an extended refurbishment. He had been the

fist drag act at Legends 14 years previously, and now he bowed out with a rendition of Vera Lynn's *We'll Meet Again*. Sadly, we were not to meet Phil again.

Born in Croydon in 1932 Phil began his career in the RAF, stationed in Singapore. Upon his return a life on the stage beckoned and he began performing in *Call Us Mister* - the last ever touring drag show. After the chorus line finished Phil kept performing - mostly in East End bars. He also managed the Two Brewers pub in Clapham, South London, turning it from unsuccessful straight pub to widely popular gay bar.

It wasn't long before he was a regular on the Brighton scene and five years ago, just short of



his seventies, he finally sold up and moved to the coast. But his diary remained full not only by the sea, up in London and even as far afield as Thailand.

Recently his Arsenic and Old Lace persona saw him team up with David Raven (aka Maisie Trollete), while Brain Ralfe and Lee Tracey persuaded him to take part in the infamous and popular drag pantos.

His funeral, attended by hundreds, was testament to his popularity in this town and beyond. Phil Starr was a one off and much loved Brighton figure. We wish him well on the next stage he steps across.

Hold Very Tight, Please

On cold windy nights when Hove-bound Ourstorians have to wait a very long time for a bus home, their hearts are now sometimes warmed by the arrival of Brighton's latest diesel dyke, Dr Helen Boyle, masquerading as a number 49 bus. A recent arrival at the depot, Dr Boyle spent fifty years of her life helping sick women and children in Brighton,



accompanied by a series of female companions. To find out more about this talented, determined and compassionate woman, visit www.womenofbrighton.co.uk and to find out *even* more, take a look at issue no 12 of this newsletter, available at www.brightonourstory.co.uk. Thanks go to Val Brown for nominating Dr Boyle to Brighton & Hove Bus Company.



War Stories Wanted

Researcher at the University of Lancaster, Emma Vickers, is looking for lesbians and gay men who were in the armed forces during World War Two. She's doing a PhD and would love to interview people about their experiences. She can be contacted at e.vickers@lancaster.ac.uk or at the History Department, University of Lancaster, Lancaster LA1 4YG. If you have already recorded your memories with us and would be happy for us to allow Emma access to those tape recordings, please give us a call on 01273 206655.