

New in the archive

As ever some wonderful treasures have been given to the Ourstory Archive for safe keeping over the last few months. Bob Young brought us



Window sign from the Pink Elephant Club, 131, King's Road

original draft documents of

five Brighton Gay Community Organisation newsletters from 1984/5, full of hand-written notes and gentle affection. Alec, has lodged with us two bright pink perspex window signs for the Pink Elephant Club and the Minute Books for that and the Variety Club when it was in Middle Street. Alec should be given a Golden Handbag Award for services to lesbians in the 1960s and early '70s for running practically all the gay clubs friendly to women at that time.

Books and vids

We thank Lawrence Latham and the former GLAM (Gay Lesbian Arts and Media) management committee for donating synopses of video interviews recorded for their *Before Stonewall* project. The tapes themselves have been lodged at the South-East Film and Video Archive, where, in due course, they can be viewed by researchers or groups by appointment. The sound recordings should be available through Brighton History Centre and at the National Sound Archive. We are grateful to Stuart, Colin and Basil for a copy of Neil McKenna's *The Secret Life of Oscar Wilde* and to Val for Antony Grey's *Quest for Justice - Towards Homosexual Emancipation*,



in which he remembers the campaigns and causes he was involved in, including his prominent role in the Homosexual Law Reform Society and the Albany Trust. Also from Val, *Gaia's Guide* 1991/2, the *Gay to Z Directory* of 1994 and two cartoon books: the first issue of *Dyke's Delight*, 1993 and *The Complete Hothead Paisan - Homicidal Lesbian Terrorist* by Diane Di Massa, 1999.

Press cuttings

Graeme and Elaine have donated recent press cuttings, safer sex information and venue guides, while Hove Library continues to put their old *DIVAs* our way. Our grateful thanks go to them all and to Nina and Karen for continuing their trawls of current newspapers. A recent thinning out of the *Gay Times* photograph collection has yielded a splendid crop of shots from inside local bars and clubs, direct action campaigns and Pride celebrations from the mid '80s to the beginning of this century. Very many thanks to Richard Smith for passing those on to us.



Above and below: Clubbers at Heaven & Hell in Ship Street 1989 Photo: Bill Short

Rooting around

Ourstory has also been rooting around in the archive collections of mainstream organisations. Brighton & Hove City Council Planning Department have generously given us access to their photographs of listed buildings and conservation areas, producing a good stock of bars, clubs and gay landmarks, mainly from the 1970s & '80s. Also from that era, Brighton History Centre has allowed us to copy extracts from the radical alternative newspaper, *Brighton Voice*, which carried many listings and articles about lesbian, gay and feminist groups in those heady, Liberation days.

Gay Liberation Front

Speaking of which, very many thanks are due to Malcolm Everett for loaning his personal collection of Sussex Gay Liberation Front papers to us to copy. Although the originals will go back to him to keep, he has agreed to amend his will so that one day Ourstory will become their permanent custodian. We hope that others will take a lead from Malcolm in this respect - no-one wants to part with things that bring back precious memories, while they're in a position to care for them but it's important to make provision for their future safety. Too much of our history has disappeared at the hands of executors who don't recognise its significance.

BRIGHTON OURSTORY PROJECT

newsletter

Sweet sixteen and out on the razz

Hi folks, Ourstory got a nice surprise last Autumn when we heard we'd finally become an official charity. Although it was a long, hard haul to get there, the Charity Commission were obviously on our side in the end because they registered us on International Coming Out Day! Now we join a select list of LGBT charities in Brighton that consists of us, Pride and Switchboard. Our Charity Number is 1106242 and we will soon have the bank account for it up and running. This is great cause for celebration as we turn our sixteenth birthday and look forward to the day when we can open our lesbian and gay history centre. In the meantime, anyone who can help keep the Greedy Rent Wolf from the door by putting a few quid our way will save us a deal of anxiety and make sure more of our energy goes on fabulous projects.

Barely Legal

Towards the end of last year, we premiered Barely Legal a short video compilation of photographs and memories spanning the time when male homosexuality was still illegal and the start of the Liberation movements.

We had hoped to have it ready for Brighton Pride 2004 but the time commitments of our hardworking volunteers meant it wasn't to be. However, the LGBT History Conference at the London Metropolitan Archive in December provided a great opportunity for others to hear all about Brighton in the Sixties and Seventies. *Barely Legal* includes a lively band of ladies from the Minorities Research Group, camping on the Downs; memories of the Variety Club; 42 Club shows; the Unicorn Bookshop; a truly extraordinary Women's Sexuality conference at the University of Sussex and much more besides - as we loosened our clothes and the Law struggled to tighten its grip. Our grateful thanks go to all of you who gave us your memories and who gave or lent additional visual material for the show and particularly to Kim, who burnt a lot of midnight oil putting it all together for us. It went down a treat in London and we hope to screen a fuller version at the Spectrum conference in Rottingdean this April.

LGBT History Month

Inspired by the success of Black History Month as a tool for teaching about racism, a pioneering group of activists in London designated February 2005 the first ever LGBT

Partnership Register last year. The posters reflect fifty years of protest, determination, liberation and backlash. We liked it and hope you did too if you saw it in any of the council buildings and secondary schools to which the Council Forum sent it.

Please take a look at our fabulous website, www.brightonourstory.co.uk - as well as back numbers of this newsletter, you'll find a wealth of information about us, some of the queer comings and goings in Brighton during the last two hundred years and news about our latest projects.

Please keep in touch!

Benedict & Linda
Trustees, Brighton Ourstory
(A registered Charity!)



Nick and Roy of Brighton & Hove City Council's LGBT Workers Forum with the poster display at Brighton Town Hall

Forever on our minds

If, in some all too imaginable catastrophe, Brighton & Hove was ruined and abandoned, what proof would there be to the archaeologists of the future that the city had ever been a centre of lesbian and gay life?

Paper records in a rainy climate will decay and, given time, electronic records are too corrupt to read. The raddled frontage of Revenge on Old Steine and a few fragments of the Royal Pavilion's minarets might advertise a settlement dedicated to the pursuit of eccentric pleasures - but what else would survive in concrete and stone?

Scratched

The permanent marks of our occupation are pitifully few. Scratched in the cement outside 41

Grand Parade is the inscription 'EBO + PETE 1991', a fading reminder of the loveliness that was Ebenezer Holland, a much-loved gay man about town. A plaque on the wall of Café Rouge on Market Street commemorates the DJ Andy Crock, another bright star of Brighton's dance scene. And in the gardens behind the Brighthelm Centre a plaque which has seen better days

reads: 'The memories of you all are still with us and the pain in our hearts although eased in time is forever on our minds World Aids Day 1996'

Some might argue that we are lucky to have escaped the kitsch horror of, say, Manchester's Aids memorial on Canal Street

but, all in all, Brighton has very little to show for the decades of queer life and passion that have animated the town. Memorials are not

impossibly difficult to erect. Thanks to the efforts of Adrian Cooper, tribute has at last been paid to Lord Alfred Douglas, with a blue plaque on the wall of his flat in Nizells Avenue, Hove. Total cost: £250. Gay men have been known to spend more in the course of a single wanked-out weekend.



Should we be bothered - that we have come so far and have so little? Perhaps, in the distant future, sexual identity will come to seem a quaintly unimportant marker of a forgotten tribal allegiance. But in the here and now our failure to imagine a place for ourselves in posterity looks more like the proof of a belief that our lives do not deserve commemoration, that we do not think of ourselves as possessing the dignity which an everlasting memorial confers

Adored and Accepted

Two interesting fragments of lesbian history have recently floated our way on a slightly musty tide of esoteric research. Rose Allatini (1890-1980) is chiefly remembered today as the author of *Despised and Rejected*, a novel about conscientious objectors and homosexuality that was

suppressed by the government after publication during the First World War for fear it would encourage pacifism amongst the troops.

Despised and Rejected was reprinted by Gay Men's Press in 1988, with an introduction by the gay antiquarian Jonathan Cutbill making brief reference to Allatini's connection with Rye in Sussex. Articles published by the American journal *Theosophical History* paint a fuller picture of both Allatini's local roots and those of her friend Melanie Mills, whose house at Beckley near Rye she shared during the Second World War.



Rose Allatini, the Vienna-born Jewish author of a stream of popular novels tinged with mysticism and lesbian references. Eunice Buckley was one of many pen names.

Holiday bungalow

Allatini's career as the author, under various pen-names, of 38 novels, much concerned with reincarnation, is explored in a long

piece by the scholar Jean Overton Fuller, while family reminiscences are offered in a shorter piece by Allatini's son.

Melanie Mills, a five-time novelist herself, also emerges as an eminent candidate for lesbian reappraisal. Her 1935 memoir *The Wheel of Rebirth* (published under the name of HK Challoner), concerns the strange goings-on in a holiday bungalow on the Sussex seashore, and is still in circulation today, a classic of British mystical writing. A study of Mills's career and writings ought to shed some



much-needed light on lesbian involvement in theosophy and its related branches.

The life and times of Dougie Byng

The name Dougie Byng is synonymous with pantomime dames, music-hall - and Brighton. A familiar, dapper figure in Kemp Town, where he lived in his later years, Byng is unique in having enjoyed one of the longest and most prolific careers of any performer: 76 years, during which he explored musical comedy, variety, cabaret and pantomime.

Born in Nottingham in 1893, his had a comfortable upbringing, in an extended family which included 10 half-siblings from his father's first marriage. His grandfather had been a music hall entertainer, who trod the boards in London for 40 years, writing and performing his own songs. Dougie was just eight when he first expressed a desire to go on the stage, but received little or no encouragement from his mother. At a village concert she had to remove him after he

dissolved into a helpless giggling fit at the sight of a large lady with prominent teeth and pince-nez, belting out a sentimental ballad.

Lack of family support did nothing to dampen the young Dougie's enthusiasm, or his determination to carve out a successful career in show business. He worked his way across the various genres, starting off as a dresser with a theatrical costumiers in Soho, his first job. From there he turned to acting, and in 1914 joined his first

What makes the man such a fascinating and compelling subject is that, in many ways, he was ahead of his time: a pioneer and key exponent of what we would now regard as 'camp', and he proved to be a major influence on subsequent comics and drag artistes. Beneath this flamboyant exterior, however,



Love longer, as always Dougie



concert party at the Palacette Theatre in Hastings, a big break which led on to lengthy tours in musical comedy and operetta, and prestigious cabaret stints in London, Paris and New York.

"Too blue"

While touring with ENSA during World War Two, his act was considered "too blue for the Troops". Byng also turned to radio (in 1920 he'd received the dubious accolade of being banned by the BBC for being too risqué), and became the first-ever female impersonator to appear on television, with his own show. A brilliant raconteur, he wrote his own material, including many songs, which were packed with innuendo and double entendres. Only six months before he died (in 1988) he gave a sell-out performance at the National Theatre.

existed a very private, introspective man. Byng's personal life was open to widespread speculation, but among his immediate circle of friends his homosexuality was common knowledge. He was rumoured to have had relationships with the playwright Terence Rattigan and actor Robert Newton, among others.



Have you got a story about Dougie?

Veronica has spent several months researching into Dougie Byng's life, with a view to turning it into a biography, and has interviewed several celebrities who knew and/or worked with Byng, including George Melly, Ned Sherrin and Brighton's own Dora Bryan. But more contributions would be most welcome.

Please e-mail any stories or reminiscences - however tenuous - about Dougie Byng, to Veronica at von.gemini@virgin.net.