

brighton ourstory..

ANTONY GREY

Antony Grey, perhaps the greatest campaigner for gay rights this country has ever seen, died on 30th April this year, aged 82. His work for the Homosexual Law Reform Society and the Albany Trust are well-known and well-documented. Ourstorian, Linda interviewed Antony in his West London home in 2007 and was pleased to discover, first of all, that this charming, intelligent man with a keen sense of justice was a fellow-Librarian. The purpose of the interview was to garner Antony's memories of his visits to Brighton. He recalled his first trip here at Easter 1950, not very long after the war when Brighton was still a bit shabby but being painted up.



Antony Grey in the 1940s

He'd been attracted to Brighton because it was the only town in the country with a reputation for being a good place to go if you were gay – "Brighton and Amsterdam were the two places that attracted one for holidays." He stayed at the Old Ship Hotel and discovered: "the bitches beach, where I got my fingers burnt in a sense because I was naïve and idealistic in those days and I didn't realise how bitchy some of these people could be – and were. It was a good education." He remembered with great affection a bisexual woman dubbed by a magistrate 'the most dangerous woman in Brighton' because she gave support and accommodation to homeless drug addicts. He enjoyed going to the 42 Club, where owner Tony Stewart was "a strong supporter of the Homosexual Law Reform Society and raised money for it by doing entertainment evenings. None of the London clubs did anything of the sort."

Asked if the arrival of the Gay Liberation Front had come as a surprise, he replied: "It came as a complete surprise – not to me but to people like Lord Arran and Leo Abse, who fondly believed that once they'd decriminalised homosexuality they could put the lid on it and it would all go back quietly underground and people would not make an exhibition of themselves. It got me into terribly bad odour with the gay movement because they thought I was an agent of a very paternalistic attitude."

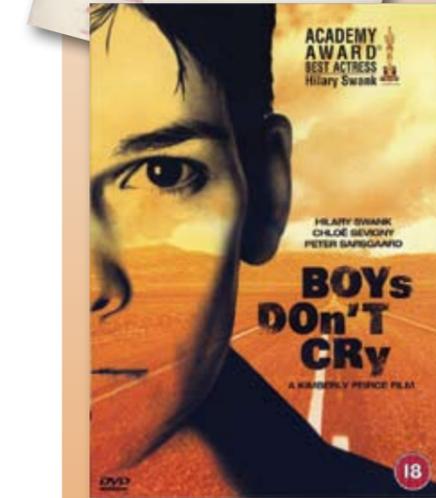
When he was asked if he had ever been nominated for an honour, he said he hadn't but that the only honour he'd really value was a peerage because "it gives you a platform." Campaigning to the last, Antony created his own platform by writing a Blog. We all in this country – and the Commonwealth - owe a debt of gratitude to Antony for his pioneering work and achievements.

People would not make an exhibition of themselves...

A FEAST OF TALENTS...

What a brilliant night we had with our LGBT History Month event on 26th February. Taking over the whole of Jubilee Library with a 400-strong audience, we performed Ourstory's hit show, *The Lavender Lounge Bar* – memories and songs from a 1960s gay club. This was

followed by some of today's young lesbian singers – and a veteran or two. Special thanks and appreciation go to Nicky Mitchell for co-ordinating the event, to Eric Page for the décor and Brighton & Hove City Council for providing the funds.



NEW IN THE ARCHIVE...

Of late, the archive has welcomed in for safe-keeping: lots of lesbian feminist books from Nina; a copy of the DVD *Boys Don't Cry* from Tony and from the Diocese of Chichester a framed photograph and obituary of the much-loved Father Marcus Riggs, who founded the Open Door centre for people living with HIV and AIDS.



PREDATORY LESBIAN..?

What a joy it was to attend Helena Whitbread's talk about nineteenth century lesbian diarist, Anne Lister, at Hove Library recently. Helena has spent about 25 years working on the diaries and translating the secret code in which intimate details of Anne's life are written. She has published two books of extracts from Anne's diaries: *I Know My Own Heart* and *No Priest But Love* and is now working on a biography. Warm-hearted and appreciative of both Anne's activities and her personality, Helena's talk provided an antidote to the, at times, poisonous documentary, *Revealing Anne Lister*, screened on BBC2 last month. Fronted by gay comedian, Sue Perkins, this peculiar programme was unlike any other television history I've ever seen. Using the brand of chirpy sneering that currently counts as comedy, Sue spent the first half of the programme painting Anne as 'predatory' and ignoring the testimony of scholars with a much deeper understanding of the customs of the day, who used words like 'wooing', 'courtship' and 'seduction'. What came through loud and clear from Helena's talk

was that Anne's so-called 'prey' enjoyed the attentions they received so much they willingly entered into marriage-type relationships with her!

As far as I can see, having read the diaries myself, the only way Anne can be seen as predatory is if you regard being a lesbian as inately predatory – otherwise, she's simply making the first move. There is no doubt that she has to think carefully about how she's going to do this – in the absence of any lesbian community,

Her gaydar was in good working order...

her potential lovers are following social convention (and economic necessity) and playing heterosexual. As she received very few brush-offs,

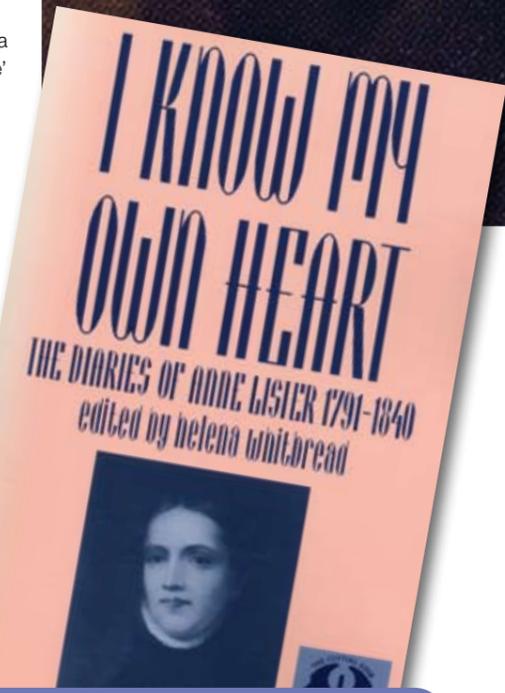
it seems she was adept at reading signals – her Gaydar was in good working order. In thinking about Anne's behaviour, I am constantly reminded of stories in Ourstory's two books: *Daring Hearts* about Brighton in the 1950s and '60s and Barbara Bell's life story. Looking for love, sex and 'marriage' in those unsympathetic days required both strategy and intuition – and on occasion a little emotional blackmail. Anne's life was no different.

Anne makes it easy for us to find fault with her personality by laying bare her innermost thoughts and feelings (how many of us could come out of such scrutiny smelling of roses?) When Helena Whitbread published her first book in 1988, she turned the world of lesbian history on its head – here for the first time was incontrovertible evidence that nineteenth century women had sex with each other and weren't just romantic friends. Somehow, though, it seems we can't quite cope with that – we can't just celebrate this fact and feel a deep connection to our lesbian past. We have to demonise Anne Lister – where does that come from?

Linda Pointing



Anne Lister



LOVELY LOLLY

We'd like to say a great big thank-you to everyone who shows their support for Ourstory by sending money or enabling funds to come our way – every penny counts and none is wasted. As well as contributions from individuals, we have welcomed this year the support of Brighton & Hove City Council from their Small Grants and Equalities & Inclusion budgets, of the Sussex Community Foundation, who have made grants from the Grassroots and Sports Relief funds and from the Co-operative Bank to enable work on our website and in particular to allow online donations and sales. Along with everyone else we'll be looking for ways to beat the austerity measures – all bright ideas welcome!

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Jane and Tash in rehearsal for *Pulp*

Programme for *Curfew* – a nightmare scenario of the future where a lesbian underground resists enforced control by men, assisted by heroines from the past.

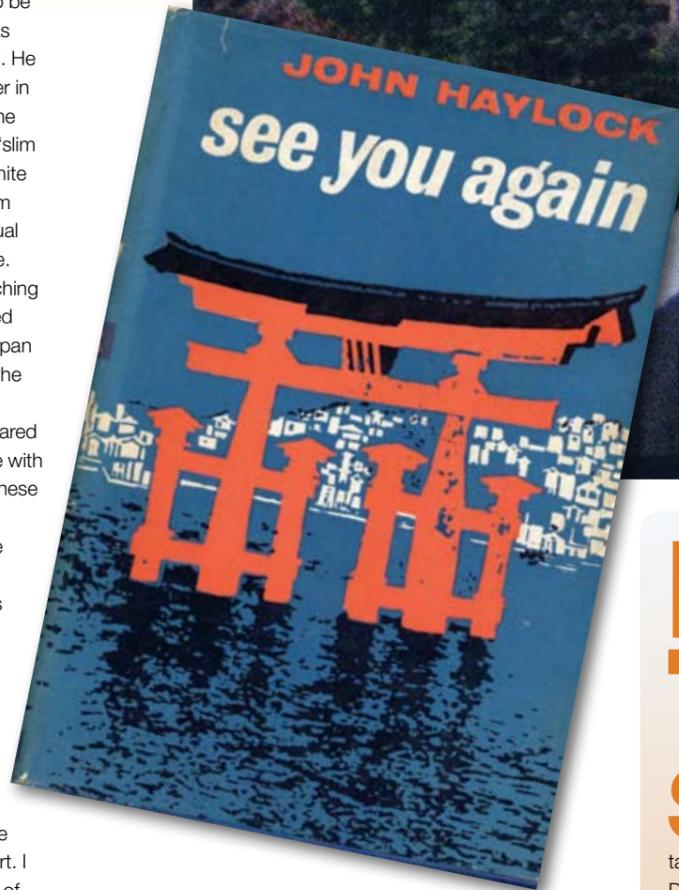
Jude as Wonder Woman in *Curfew*

JOHN HAYLOCK

John Haylock considered Brighton to be his home in the short periods he was not away in places far from England. He spent his early adult life as a wartime soldier in the Middle East and Greece. While still in the army and at age of 28, his seduction by a “slim Egyptian lad with dark burning eyes in a white skullcap and galabea” finally persuaded him he was gay. He realised life for a homosexual in Britain in 1946 would not be an easy one. Soon after demobilisation, he left for a teaching job in Iraq. Over the ensuing years he visited and taught in many other countries, but Japan was where he stayed longest and formed the greatest attachment.

When I knew him around 1969, John shared 5, Powis Grove, an elegant Brighton house with Tom Skeffington-Lodge and a young Japanese friend. A sixtyish upper-crust Labour MP in the Tom Driberg mould, Skeffington-Lodge also adopted Driberg’s reckless approach to casual sex, offering hitchhikers lifts in his vintage Rolls. Skeffington-Lodge was loud and, in small doses, could be outrageous fun. John, by contrast, was understated. He proved to be better company and wryly amusing. John’s laughter was infectious, his face creasing like an engaging Cheshire Cat. He was inquisitive and keenly observant. He had considerable taste, with wide interests in literature and art. I met John through David Atkin, companion of author Francis King. John had known Francis since 1950, when he and Desmond Stewart stayed with Francis in Florence. One evening, David took us on an expedition to Hastings old town. Over a candlelit dinner enhanced by agreeable waiters, Francis and John unveiled the secrets of discreet drinking holes along the Sussex coast, proof that gay life did – and still does – exist outside the mecca of Brighton.

John was an author and journalist. His entertaining autobiography about his life abroad, ‘*Eastern Exchange*’, was published in 1997. It was only moderately revealing, at least about his inner self or about his partner of 20 years, Hiro Asami. Of his sexual self we learn a little. During a 1962 trip to Luang Prabang in Laos, he notes that the only hotel “had a Vietnamese cook, a handsome young man, who was competent not only in the kitchen.” John wrote a number of novels and these probably tell us more about the person he was. They are set in Japan, exploring



John Haylock

SIREN THEATRE COMPANY

Thirty years ago, at the height of the fervent, fizzing, feminist movement, three young women decided to set up a lesbian theatre company. They called it Siren. Sitting on the wonky roof terrace of the illustrious women’s household at 95a, St James’s Street, Tash Fairbanks, Jane Boston and Jude Winter began the intensely creative process of producing their first play, *Mama’s Gone A-Hunting*. They called for inspiration on the latest feminist texts – books that split open conventional thinking with a double-headed axe and laid bare the lies that

be shed on it.” The play toured extensively to small towns all round the country and in Holland, hosted by local women’s liberation groups. Tash remembers that people found it quite shocking: “...even people with the same kind of radical ideas as us were saying they hadn’t seen anything like this before...women would come up and say, ‘I’ve never told anyone, but actually I’m a lesbian.’”

Tash and Jane were lovers when Siren started and Jude was on the brink of becoming a lesbian – she began an enduring relationship with

Jude was on the brink of becoming a lesbian...

Debs Threthewey, who came on board as Siren’s technician for their second play, *Curfew*. There was plenty for Debs to do, not just with the sound and

light systems but designing and building sets: “The set for *Now Wash Your Hands, Please*, a giant toilet seat, was a work of art in a way. It measured about fourteen feet by nine feet and all had to come apart and fit into a transit van.”

In all, Siren produced eight plays with strong lesbian themes but the pinnacle of their success came in 1985 with the thriller, *Pulp*, which featured a very popular kiss. Jude recalls: “there was a romance between the characters and that was the first time we’d done that. We played to packed houses at the Drill Hall in London for four weeks and were voted *Time Out*’s Best Performance of the Season. There was a feature in *The Face*, which was a huge coup at the time. For the first time we were in a venue that had a publicity machine. We were on a fee as well...”

Beset by demons creative, emotional and political Siren sadly dissolved in 1990.

Women decide to leave planet Earth and Men try to stop them on the grounds that they would be taking away their life-support. An intergalactic judge is called upon to hear evidence on both sides. Siren’s plays were hard-hitting but funny, too and music played an important part. Tash played saxophone, Jude, synthesiser and Jane guitar and they composed music and lyrics to move the action along.

Mama’s Gone A-Hunting opened at the Marlborough Theatre in Brighton – amid some confusion, as the creative process had been so exciting no-one had stopped to write a script. There came a point at which none of them could remember what came next. Jane recalls: “nobody knew what the next line was because nobody had written it down! I think it was Jude went scrabbling round the back for a scrap of paper to see if there was any light to

DEREK AND THE DUKE

Snogging in the back seats of a cinema, most of us have done it at one time or another. But this isn’t a tale about snogging, but about a cinema, The Duke of York’s to be precise, which opened its doors 100 years ago this September.

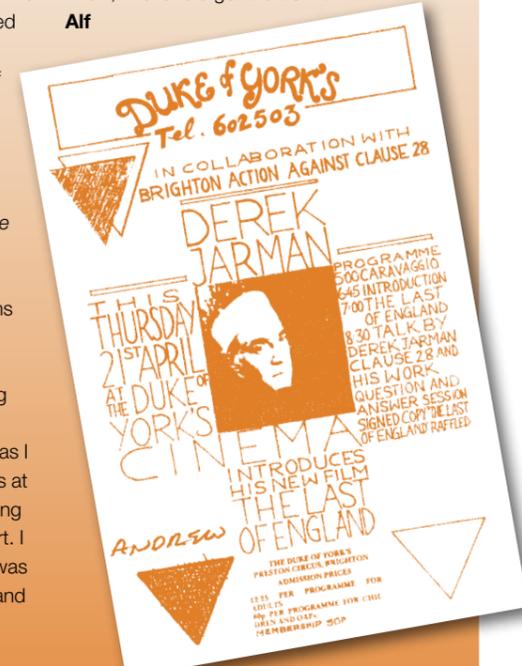
To celebrate its centenary, memories of the cinema are currently being collected and Ourstory were delighted to be able to share something from our archive.

On 21 April 1988 Derek Jarman came to The Duke of York’s with his new film *The Last of England*, organised in conjunction with Brighton Action Against Clause 28. The evening featured one of his earlier films *Caravaggio*, followed by Derek Jarman decrying Clause 28 and the Conservative government’s attempt to make ‘promoting homosexuality’ illegal.

I have a personal memory of that night as I was there with my then boyfriend, upstairs at the back... Anyhow, there was a fundraising raffle and I managed to win a signed t-shirt. I had a bad cold and knew Derek Jarman was HIV positive so my boyfriend went down and collected it off Derek.

The end of that evening is a bit of a blur. I have a feeling Derek and everyone went on to the Zap club but I’m not sure. One thing I do know, I never did get the t-shirt...

AJF



the impact of the East on visiting westerners and the impact of the West on Japanese men befriended by them. As Peter Burton remarked in his obituary in ‘*The Independent*’ after John’s death in Brighton in 2006, “His novels may have had something serious to say, but whatever point he had to make Haylock made it with such

A candlelit dinner enhanced by agreeable waiters...

a lightness of touch that his readers often found themselves laughing out loud.”

John moved to live in a converted police station in Cyprus not long after I got to know him. There he had the 85 year-old Duncan Grant come to stay and, for several months, a friend of mine recovering from illness. He was as kind in life as he was generous in spirit.

Mark Rowlands

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