

Make Life Beautiful!

If you have a spare moment before 11 January then it's well worth catching the exhibition of *The Dandy in Photography* at Brighton Museum and Art Gallery. All the expected faces are there - Noel Coward, Cecil Beaton, Stephen Tennant (in shiny coat) and Robert de Montesquiou (queening around in what looks like a pair of ocelot gloves) - but also some much rarer delights, including the gay writer Oswald Blakeston and the actor Glen Byam Shaw looking very lovely indeed. Giving the boys a run for their money is a natty Radclyffe Hall and a whole series of the wonderful Claude Cahun, surrealist and Jewish resistance fighter, whose enigmatically beautiful self-portraits have prompted the curators to display the word "lesbian" on the walls of the art gallery for the very first time in its long, venerable history. Go Claude!

Come into the archive, Maud

A group visit is planned to the British Newspaper Library at Colindale. Please contact the BOP office (tel: 692068) if you'd like to come and peep behind the scenes at the national collection of periodicals.

Lord Alfred Douglas

Shamefully few of Brighton & Hove's lesbian and gay residents have been honoured with a commemorative plaque, but, as reported in *The Argus*, plans are being made for a plaque to mark the former home of Lord Alfred Douglas, poet, Hoveite and "close friend" of Oscar Wilde. Those of you in a giving mood are encouraged to contribute to the appeal, which has the support of Bosie's great-nephew, Lord Gawain. Cheques payable to 'Bosie Blue Plaque Appeal' c/o Adrian Cooper, 31 Tyson Place, Grosvenor Street, Brighton BN2 0JQ



Claude Cahun, self portrait c 1928

Thank-you One and All

There's been a steady flow of donations to the archive in the last half of 2003 and we extend our grateful thanks to the following:

- **Val** for early twentieth century newscuttings found during her research on Drs Helen Boyle and Mabel Jones;
- **Nina** for a variety of feminist books, records and ephemera - and for continuing to make cuttings from *The Independent*;
- **Veronica** for a bundle of *Gay News*'s from the 1970s & '80s;
- **Elaine** for a copy of the first newsletter produced by the newly opened Lesbian Archive in London from 1986;
- **Doug** for his history of the Sussex Gay Liberation Front, some photos of a SGLF party at the 42 Club, three 42 Club show programmes from the early 1970s and a quarter-inch tape recording of the SGLF Religious Symposium from 1974. Held in the Wagner Hall in Regents Road (behind Churchill Square) this event gathered together Church leaders of various denominations to give their views on homosexuality - a good reason if ever there was one to get our old tape recorder mended.

Out of sight but not out of mind, we'd like to thank Karen for cutting up *The Argus* on our behalf every day and Alf for his dedicated work on our splendid website, which he continues to develop. All but two of our newsletters are now available as text and some as pdf versions, which can be downloaded in their original format. Check it out at www.brightonourstory.co.uk



BRIGHTON OURSTORY PROJECT

newsletter

Charity, Hilarity, Pride Events, Remembrance?

Hi folks, it's been a busy Summer at the Brighton Ourstory Project! As we go to press we are in the final negotiations with the Charity Commission. They have largely accepted our charitable aims and once registered we will be in a better position for funding and promotional work and to realise our ambition for a permanent home in which to place the archive, which is fully accessible to the lesbian and gay communities, and has permanent display and work space. I would like to pass on thanks to our management group members who have worked so hard to make this happen and especially to Linda, who slaves away tirelessly and works her magic!

We also pass on grateful thanks to Sally who is leaving us for a year in Australasia, she will be much missed but we expect to see her back full of bright ideas from the queers down under (and don't forget the lifeguard you promised to send me from Sydney, Sal!!).

What a great Summer! We had a stall at Brighton Pride, where we met lots of old and new friends and did three events the day after Pride.

All were a great success, the first was a walking tour of queer historical Hove, in temperatures approaching 100 degrees! The

tour started and finished at the Dudley Hotel which was then the venue for our second event, a 1930s musical tea. We were entertained to stunning renditions of songs which thrilled lesbian and gay theatre goers in the '30s and '40s after a very elegant tea in period surroundings. My spine's still tingling at Stewart Barlow's gorgeous rendition of *Love for Sale* and who's eye could fail to be dry when we all sang *I'll See You Again!* at the end. As ever with our events massive attention was paid to period detail. And I for one was delighted when a guest of very senior years

commented, "This really is what it was like!"

A quick change after the '30s event transformed the venue into a 1960s drinking club, for our Lavender Lounge Bar. With contemporary readings from the archive about people's real life experiences and wonderfully queered versions of songs from that era, this proved a great success.

From celebration to remembrance, a representative from Ourstory laid a pink triangle wreath at the war memorial in Brighton as part of the Remembrance



Stewart, Basil, Colin & Jacquie helped us to melt 'too charmingly' on the hottest day of the year

Day ceremony on Sunday Nov. 9th. Our inclusion in this ceremony, on behalf of the Lesbian and Gay Community marks the culmination of many years struggling to get the sacrifice of Lesbian and Gay Service people recognised and all the victims of the concentration camps remembered. The ceremony was dignified and rubbing shoulders with MPs and civic leaders, we felt included at last! And to our own queer fallen folk, darlings *We will never forget Youx*

So dear friends as we plan for another hard year of preserving the gay past we wish you the most sincere compliments of the season and hope to see you all again soon.

Chris



Chris at the Old Steine war memorial with our pink triangle wreath

From the Bookshelf

British gay history, eh? You wait for years for something decent to read and then five books arrive all at once. Graham Robb's *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century* is a popular assemblage of material from across Europe and America, much of which will be familiar to serious students of the field, who might find H. G. Cocks' *Nameless Offences: Homosexual Desire in the 19th Century* more rewarding in its focus on fresh British archival findings, particularly court proceedings and newspaper reports.

Like the Cocks book, Matt Cook's *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885-1914* is a profitably reworked Ph.D dissertation and many of his conclusions will also be true of gay life in Brighton, very much then as now London's sister metropolis. Mark W. Turner provides a lighter read with his history, *Backward Glances: Cruising the Queer Streets of New York and London*, also casting valuable light on Brighton's hallowed seafront haunts.

Halifax church
One of the great pioneers of

British gay history, Alan Bray's posthumous work, *The Friend*, is a subtly argued exploration of the religious meaning of same-sex friendships in medieval and early modern England, including the partnerships described by Anne Lister in her voluminous lesbian diaries. Bray also records the recent discovery of two fragments of Lister's tombstone in the parish church at Halifax, broken and hidden for many years under the late-Victorian flagstones. Fans of Lister will enjoy Jill Liddington's latest slice of the diaries, *Nature's Domain: Anne Lister and the Landscape of Desire*, which opens

with an account of a failed romance in Hastings in 1832 when she "cried & sobbed bitterly for an hour last night". How long can it be before an academic press bankrolls a complete edition of the Lister diaries? At four million words, they are nearly four times the length of the diary of Samuel Pepys but the benefit to our understanding of lesbian history would be immeasurable.

Lastly, Caroline Zilboorg's *The Masks of Mary Renault: A Literary Biography*, records a Sussex summer holiday of 1937 when Renault and her partner Julie Mullard rented a tiny cottage near Horsted Keynes, living together for the first time in what proved to be a 50-year relationship. The pair cycled around the countryside, took "our clothes off in the fields" and devoted domestic hours to



cooking and work on Renault's debut novel, *Purposes of Love*, the nearest she came to lesbian fiction in a body of work devoted largely to male homosexuality.

If you'd like to look at these books at the archive ring Ourstory on 01273 692068 or email info@brightonourstory.co.uk.

Tom

1973: Naughty Schoolboys and Cottaging Crackdown

The Sixties were well and truly over, and homosexuality had been legalised for seven years, but Britain was far from laissez-faire about us homos. We've scoured the pages of *Gay News* from Autumn 1973 to bring you the choicest cuts. From the merits of male secretaries, to a surprising snub by the CHE to Brighton, it all happened as the nights drew in.

On a drizzly Sunday in November this year, a Brighton Ourstory member was called forth by loudspeakers to lay a wreath at the Old Steine cenotaph commemorating those LGB people who died in the wars.

It was only last year that this level of civic acceptance was granted to our community. Trawling the archives of *Gay News* we find that thirty years ago, in 1973, members of the Sussex Gay Liberation Front held their own ceremony as the military bands paraded away. A member of The SGLF read aloud: "Gay sisters, gay brothers, we are gathered here to remember the dead of World War II. In doing this, we are conscious that there are those in this society who would prefer to forget that gay people also died." The gay anthem *United We Stand* was recited as a wreath of pink flowers arranged as a triangle, a reminder of the mark used by the Nazi's for gays, was laid. Ourstory proudly continue this tradition three decades on.

Dissappointing demo

The Sussex Gay Liberation Front was in full swing in late 1973. However, not always to great success. A demo in August attracted just 20 people. SGLF spokesperson Graham Phillips blamed the poor turnout on the fear of some LGB people being identified publicly. Graham, however, lashed out at Brighton Council, for refusing to let Sussex Gay Lib use civic property: "This is just the latest example of discrimination," he said. Interestingly, in November 2003, several councillors protested against the present day City

Council's refusal to fly the Rainbow Flag on Pride Day.

In the same year national group, the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) decided to not hold its conference in Brighton, despite even the Conservative MP's blessing. Instead the charming Cotswolds town of Malvern won the seemingly Olympian feat to host the homos. In true gay style only bitterness was heaped on the winners with John Montgomery saying: "I bet that Malvern, with its rather dreary waters, can't offer anything like the hospitality or understanding of our town." The CHE sensibly decided to hold their 1979 conference in Brighton.



Larking about in Lancing

John Montgomery also had a few things to remark about the antics of local public school boys. Asked by Evelyn Waugh, whom he was literary agent for, whether there was much buggery afoot at his



Above: Denied access to the civic ceremony, in November 1973, *Gay News* reported on the Sussex Gay Liberation Front's own remembrance service held afterwards. Contrast this to today where the Lesbian and Gay men of the wars are publically commemorated.

former school John said: "Yes - in all the boarding schools. A few years ago I saw half-a-dozen Lancing boys pick up a group of fellows in a Brighton pub during half term. The school was almost deserted. I was told they entertained their guests in one of the studies."

Cottagers were being regularly dragged before the courts in 1973. Hove television engineer Kevin Henry, 28, admitted the charge and was fined £250. This was considered a staggering amount as the usual fine for toilet shenanigans was rarely more than £100. However, poor Kevin was, as *Gay News* pointed out a 'three times loser'. SGLF were outraged and suggested a series of measures including "Disco profits should go towards helping people in financial difficulty to pay their fines."

A debate raged about homosexuality and employment. Many recruitment agencies found the idea of gay men attempting to be secretaries all rather distasteful. Not so, however, suggested a letter from Peter R Girling of Horsham in *Gay News*, a male secretary himself. He

canvassed twenty clients in Sussex, seven of which said they would prefer a man as a secretary.

Changing rooms

Norman Redman of Sussex wrote a letter to *Gay News* explaining how his role as a professional referee was in no way affected by his homosexuality. He said he neither 'hid' nor 'advertised' his gayness: "It seems that the gay person is more accepted in the sports world than any other. My only complaint is that it can be so bloody frustrating in the changing rooms!" Norman was sacked from the FA in 1988 for having HIV.

Christmas is on the way and in 1973 there were festive treats galore. Mark Fleming was in cabaret at the Longbranch Club on the 12th December, while on Christmas Eve the New Curtain Club had a late night extension for the 'Queen of Clubs'. Perhaps the highlight, however, was the annual panto from the Forty-Two club. In aid of the Foredown Hospital, *Aladdin is at it again. Boom! Boom!* ran for seven nights from Dec 2nd at the Wagner Hall, with all performances timed for the last London train.

Benedict

Zena remembered

Brighton Ourstory project volunteer, Elaine, has been cataloguing the Zena Dell collection. Zena spent her life on the stage, appearing, for example in the chorus of Cochran's 1936 Revue and later as principal boy in pantomime round the country. Elaine is pictured here with a 1951 photograph of Zena as Aladdin with co-star Gloria Day. Zena was married three times but found love in later life with Bubbles Ashdown. They lived together for 23 years at 24, Frederick Gardens, Brighton. Zena died in 1991 at the age of 75. If anyone has memories of Zena they'd like to share, please ring us on 01273 692068.



Above left: Zena Dell, 1930s publicity shot

Above Right: Volunteer Elaine with a fifties picture of Zena.

Right: Bubbles with Zena during the long illness which kept her bed-bound in her last years

