

## ON THE PULL

A new series of displays will open in Brighton Museum on Valentine's Day on the theme of love and courtship. Objects from their extensive holdings have been chosen by a team of amateur curators to offer fresh perspectives for a younger and more diverse audience. On the team was singer Al Start (pictured right) who also trawled the Ourstory archive and was inspired to write two songs, which will feature in her displays.



Angus McBean's neoclassical glamour in Devonshire Place



## NEW IN THE ARCHIVE...

• We've had a rich season of varied donations. Back in July we had an unexpected email from Wayne Murdoch at the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives who kindly attached a copy of a previously unknown photograph pictured below of the champion swimmer Harriet "Elphinstone Dick" Rowell (see "Exceedingly novel acquatic event" in newsletter 1) in Melbourne in the 1890s; and very handsome she was too. Walter and Gerry have given us several albums of very funny photos once belonging to Brighton club face Ray "Sadie" Jacobs and some show programmes. Vital magazines and newspapers have come from Val in Hastings, some *Square Pegs* from Rose at Mind Out, four boxes of books from the lovely Robert at the Lesbian and Gay Newsmedia Archive, and a bag of *Gay News* from Ted MacFadyen, who is celebrating his 80th birthday in January. From Canada Ian Young sent a copy of *Out in Paperback*, his engrossing visual history of gay pulps drawn from his own vast collection.

Other authors sending their work to sit happily on our shelves into the far-distant future were W J McIlroy (the illuminating *Without the Faith: Freethinkers and Freethought in Brighton*) and Patrick Newley (his vivid biography of *The Amazing Mrs Shuffewick*). Tina and Claire sent copies of Lesbian Link newsletters, and five novels arrived from Di, including *Strictly No Males*, the 1977 story of a "highly secret society where the only things that could never be bent were the rules!" Lastly, Arthur Law brought in a big bag of t-shirts and another of seven banners which appears to make Ourstory's collection of queer banners the largest in the country. Thank you very much to everyone and happy birthday, Ted!



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## RECENT BOOKS OF NOTE

In 1977 at the age of 24 Geraldine Bridgewater became the first woman trader on the floor of the London Metal Exchange, proving the rule that the first women to break into a male profession are generally strong-minded lesbians. *Ring of Truth* from Brighton-based publisher Pen Press is the enthralling account of her historic battles with the dinosaurs of the financial world.

Jane Stevenson's biography of the wonderful painter Edward Burra, the Sibyl of Rye, features many extracts from his breathlessly camp and grimly amusing letters, and has starring roles for two of his gay friends, the surrealist John Banting and the devastatingly beautiful dancer William Chappell, who settled in houses nearby.

Sussex must have been positively swarming with artistic queers in the middle of last century. Martin Wood's new biography of John Fowler shows the interior decorator with boyfriends at his place near Rolvenden on Romney Marsh in the Thirties, his

typically flouney style not entirely at home with the plain rustic lines of the weatherboarded cottage.

A rather more appealing interior was created by the photographer Angus McBean in his house at 12 Devonshire Place in Forties Brighton, as related in Adrian Woodhouse's recent heavily-detailed biography. Severely Empire pieces of furniture were dramatically backed by walls with classical murals by none other than Quentin Crisp, which might conceivably survive to this day under later layers of woodchip.

Finally, Douglas d'Enno's excellent encyclopedia *Brighton Crime and Vice 1800-2000* includes the interesting news that the antique dealer Arthur Noyce (see "Hove Flat Murder?" in newsletter 3) was eventually reprieved from the gallows after the death of his boyfriend in 1936, and sent to Broadmoor instead. We were not so pleased to see that the book's three-page section on homosexuality is almost entirely drawn from the Ourstory website but without any credit.

# brighton ourstory..

## BESET BY DEMONS...

It is a truth universally to be acknowledged that a successful LGBT history group in possession of an archive must be in need of a government policy to obstruct its progress. Now 'integration' has replaced 'diversity' as the

keystone of grant-giving, independent community groups are finding themselves forced into unequal alliances with mainstream institutions like universities just in order to survive. Brighton Ourstory has always stayed resolutely independent, knowing that colonisation by the mainstream would militate against our entire raison d'être – to celebrate the history of our own communities. These days, it seems, despite our remarkable achievements over the last nineteen years, we can only watch as potential funding evaporates before our eyes. Brighton & Hove Council have helped us out with half the rent on our archive for the last two years but have warned us that this level of funding is

unlikely to continue.

Are we downhearted? Well, yes a bit. After all, it's not as though we're sitting around doing nothing. Sadly the other government policy that affects us – the encouragement of charitable

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giving by individuals - hasn't taken off nearly so robustly. So, we'd like to say a great big thank-you to all those who do make a donation to our funds – you are our life-blood and make a very real contribution to keeping alive the spirit of our communities past and present through the preservation of their treasures.

### NASTY FALL

Although money for rent is difficult to find it's much easier to fund (touch wood) the shows

and exhibitions we produce from our archive collections. For the Summer Pride Festival this year, with help from Brighton Pride and the City Council, we were able to give another airing to a number of programmes from the *Out On Tuesday* TV series both at our tent at Preston Park (where Tom suffered a nasty fall putting up the banner and the telly gave up after three hours) and at Jubilee Library where we were delighted to welcome series editor, Mandy Merck. Mandy entertained us well with her many behind-the-scenes memories and reminded us that wherever you go, it's not what-you-know but who-you-know that counts.

### WRATHFUL EYE

More demons were at work recently at the Pre-Launch of LGBT History Month 2008 at the Royal Courts of Justice in London. Under the wrathful eye of eighteenth-century judge, Lord Blackstone, whose statue loomed above us, Linda suffered a comedy fall down some steps and all four of our display panels sprang from their stands in a spectacular collapse. Lord Blackstone wrote the standard commentary on the laws of buggery and we feel he may have had something to do with it!

## BANNERS OF THE BANNED

• Help us celebrate Winter Pride 2008 and LGBT History Month at a show recalling the fire and passion of Brighton's opposition to the infamous Section 28. Exactly twenty years on from the first historic campaign meeting, we evoke the powerful presence of protest that erupted onto Brighton's streets and surged into the very heart of local and national politics. A story told by the banners that led the way and those who made, carried and kept them. **8pm Wednesday 6th February 2008. Friends Meeting House, Ship Street, Brighton. £6 or £3 concessions. Signer provided by request**



Evil eye? Lord Blackstone Meets Our Ancestors



# SINGLED OUT

Those practised at reading between the lines will find Virginia Nicholson's book, *Singled Out*, full to the brim with lesbians. A thoroughgoing examination of the post-First World War phenomenon of the 'Surplus Woman', this book looks from every possible angle at the lives of women whose fiancés 'died in the war' or who were too slow to snap up the few marriageable men who survived.

Although the author devotes a small section to women she acknowledges to have been lesbians, she restricts herself mainly to high-profile, self-proclaimed, mainly literary inverters like Radclyffe Hall. Another small section is devoted to 1920s & '30s commentators on the prevalence of lesbianism (most agree there was a lot of it

**Full to the brim with lesbians**

about). Apparently oblivious of the necessity for lesbians of older generations to make up cover stories, Ms Nicholson takes at face value everything she has been told or read in the autobiographies of her subjects.

Those of us who live in the lesbian communities of today know well enough what huge numbers there are of women whose lives are indistinguishable from most of those discussed in this book – and many of us are still not happy to be out everywhere. How sad then, that even now these women are dead, we are discouraged from recognising them as lesbians, from owning in some part their achievements and, on emotionally frosty days, from being warmed by their love for each other.



Beatrice Gordon Holmes (above), the first woman stockbroker and a Punch cartoon of 1021 from *Singled Out*



Syd Lewis and Tony Stuart in *Pearl White and the Seven Oafs*



Rearrange these letters for a Jolly seasonal greeting



Photographs and programme design reproduced by kind permission of Syd Lewis

## BRIGHTON VERY, VERY GAY

At the end of July 1967 the Sexual Offences Act passed into law, making legal for the first time in British history sex between men in private. Lord Arran who had championed the legislation expressed the hope that homosexuals would not take this as a signal to flaunt their sexuality in public. Four months later Brighton's 42 Club was staging a show at the Co-op Hall on London Road called *Brighton Gay*, the first of many drag revues and pantomimes. The club's owner, Tony Stuart, was an actor as were his friends, Joyce Golding (the only woman in the shows) and Eddie Reid. Calling also on the amateur talents of club members, the shows became the high point of Brighton's gay calendar for a whole decade. Tony's partner, Syd Lewis, remembers:

"We had the same theme song for the revues, 'Tramp, tramp, tramp, the boys are off to camp.' The first time it was scouts, then it was Romans, then it was something else. But it was always the same opening number. We rehearsed for about three months on a Sunday. I designed and made all the costumes. Nothing was ever wasted, what was a medieval skirt one year was turned into a pop outfit the next. A friend of ours used to work at a brassiere factory and all the off-cuts from the brassieres, I used all that for finale costumes, for crinolines.

The very first show the audience was more or less all gay people - members and their guests. It proved so successful we made a bit

of money to pay to charity and also to put on the next show. And before we knew it, there were old age pensioners and straight people in the audience. It sold out like mad in the end. It was a job to get tickets. People said, "Can I help out," just to be able to make sure they'd go, selling programmes and all that sort of

**We still miss those shows like mad**

thing. There was never any filth in the show, it was all double meaning.

Once, at the Wagner Hall, which was the church hall, off West Street, when the curtain went up at dress rehearsal we were just shocked, we expected to see nobody and there was a load of bloody vicars and bishops. It was a gay vicar at the time and he'd brought his mates in from all over Sussex.

We still miss those shows like mad because it was the highlight of the year, all the rehearsals, the camp and the fun."

### MOLLY FLYNN

● A wrongly dated newspaper clipping in the scrapbooks of that astonishing old poove George Ives tells the tale of Molly Flynn, a Brighton woman of 21 who worked her passage back from San Francisco some time in the 1920s, dressed as a sailor. During the sea voyage, the muscular Miss Flynn rescued three men from drowning, knocked out the ship's bully and "had no difficulty passing myself off as a man as I have naturally a deep voice". The local papers appear not to have reported her remarkable "masquerade" but perhaps someone out there has fuller details? We'd love to hear more.

### BACK-A-BOX

● We worked out recently that it costs £5 to keep a shoebox full of memories safe for a year – and we have the equivalent volume of a thousand shoeboxes in our archive. Not that we've turfed a thousand pairs of K-Skips onto the street – only the best acid-free boxes are good enough for the photographs, letters, newsletters, clothes, banners, papers and magazines in our collections. This ensures that fragile documents don't deteriorate and healthy documents stay that way. If you don't already subscribe or donate, why not back-a-box or three this year!



Call Brighton Ourstory on **01273 206655** or contact us by email on **info@brightonourstory.co.uk**