

GROWING UP NEEDING THE PAST

An Activist's Reflection on the History of LGBT+ History Month in the UK

Sue Sanders

ABSTRACT

In her essay lesbian activist Sue Sanders from the United Kingdom recalls her personal journey from the 1950s to the present. The essay covers her times as a curious but clueless child, a budding lesbian activist longing to learn more about lesbian past, and becoming one of the founders of LGBT+ History Month in 2005. She pays attention to the political and societal changes that preceded its initiation, and gives a vivid description of the diverse activities celebrating the Month. Moreover, she draws our attention to its many outgrowths that benefit schools, memory and cultural institutions, and inspire new scholarship.

ABSTRAKTI

Esseessään brittiläinen lesboaktivisti Sue Sanders kertoo kasvutarinansa 1950-luvulta tähän päivään. Se kattaa hänen elämänsä uteliaasta mutta tietämättömästä lapsesta aloittelevaan lesboaktivistiin, joka haluaa oppia enemmän lesbohistoriasta, ja edelleen hänen päätyemisestään yhdeksi sateenkaarihistoriakuukauden perustajista vuonna 2005. Sanders kuvaa sekä kuukauden perustamista edeltänyttä poliittista ja yhteiskunnallista tilannetta että niitä monia tapoja, joilla kuukautta on sittemmin vietetty. Lisäksi hän esittelee sen monia liitännäisaktiviteetteja, jotka hyödyttävät kouluja, muisti- ja kulttuuri-instituutioita ja inspiroivat tutkimusta.

Thinking back, when growing up in London in the 1950s, I knew nothing about gay and lesbian people, and even less about LGBT history. When I was a kid, there were two gay men who lived next door; one worked at Decca, the then record company. I would sing in the garden in the hope of being discovered; needless to say, it did not happen. My parents were tolerant of them, nothing else. My mother had some close female friends who I learnt later were probably lesbians in a threesome, but it was never discussed.

There was a very sweet gentle local gay man I met when I was a teenager. He was very brave walking around in pink trousers in the early Sixties. We chatted a bit, but I don't think I ever came out to him as I was not out to myself then, just knew I was different. I was having quite a few relations with boys, much more so than my best friend who was secure in her heterosexuality.

Although our Sunday ritual included a roast dinner and listening to the radio programme Round the Horne (www.bbc.co.uk) which had two very camp gays, Julian and Sandy doing a sketch every week. My parents loved it, yet whether they were aware they were laughing at gay humour I don't know. It was very risqué, full of double entendre, and used Polari, the gay

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language. So, the irony was that gay life was there, but hidden in plain sight and certainly out of mine.

I do remember – and I would have been 10 at this time – being very excited about the Wolfenden Report, buying a paper, one of the tabloids, to find out about it. So clearly some part of me knew it was important to me. The report was looking into whether prostitutes and homosexuals should be decriminalised, and the report recommended that homosexuality should be. Yet that was enacted only partially ten years later in 1967.

Unfortunately, I stumbled upon and read Radclyffe Hall's *Well of Loneliness* quite early, maybe in my late teens. I found it very unsettling to say the least. In an attempt to meet lesbians, I rang the Gateways, a lesbian club, now closed, featured in the film *The Killing of Sister George*. I stammered "I think I might be a lesbian", and a very butch voice came down the phone: "Do come down, I will look after you!". I did not go near the place for years. I did, though, direct *No Exit* by Jean Paul Sartre in my third year at drama college. It was, I guess, my final fling at the heterosexism of the college. I cast the lesbian against type, which intrigued all, and it worked. I was the only out 'gay' in a drama college in London in the so-called swinging sixties!

It was in the seventies and eighties that I began to look for lesbian historical material. It was a time of much activity. I ran the Oval House, a well-known fringe theatre in London, for a year. It supported women's and left-wing theatre and attempted to get theatre that was exploring all the pertinent and current issues.

I was directing in the theatre and working with a lesbian company, Siren, and living with Caeia March, who was working on her first Lesbian novel. I was at the same time working with Nancy Diuguid. She had been an instrumental force with the Gay Sweatshop company, ([www.](http://www.unfinishedhistories.com)

[unfinishedhistories.com](http://www.unfinishedhistories.com)) a ground-breaking theatre company that toured plays exploring and celebrating what we would call now LGBT+ issues. Julia Parker and Mavis Seaman were running the Drill Hall, a theatre on the fringe, off Tottenham Court Road, London, that supported feminist and gay theatre. It was a heady time of experimental theatre exploring the issues of the day known as agit prop – witty, powerful, sometimes surreal drama and very much exploring themes and people hitherto unknown. Nancy, together with a group of women – predominantly lesbian – directed a play written by Barbara Burford (www.theguardian.com), *Patterns*, which attempted to illustrate the sisterhood down the ages. While many books and art pieces were reclaiming women's history, the lesbians were often left out. Whereas Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (www.brooklynmuseum.org) is one prominent example of art work which included lesbians, Dale Spender's *Women of Ideas: And what men have done to them* (1982) was a detailed exploration of women that history had forgotten, but did not explicitly identify lesbians. In response, I wrote an essay for a women's studies conference titled "*Where are the Lesbians in Women's Studies?*" which was well received by the lesbians and frostily by the heterosexual women. In 1984 they were keen to hide us, as they were afraid lesbians would put off heterosexual women exploring and embracing feminism.

Homophobia continued to be a prominent feature of life into the 1980s. For example, Greenham common, the American nuclear base in Berkshire, was being campaigned against by a group of women activists. The publicity surrounding the campaign was predominantly very lesbophobic. Most papers vilified us as man hating, hairy, ugly lesbians, and presented us as aggressive – an irony given we were peacefully challenging the most vicious aggressor threatening annihilation on a mass scale. Also, the reaction to AIDS was appalling. The press and the government were vile; AIDS was known as the gay plague and the stigma of it was horrific.

In an attempt to find my history, I took myself off to the British Library armed with a list of possible lesbians I had gleaned from the works of Chicago and Dale. By then I had discovered that the writer, who had so inspired me while studying her work at A level –Virginia Woolf – was bisexual. She had used the British Library extensively, so I might be sitting at a desk she had used! Had anyone told me about her bisexuality when I was studying at school, my life would have been completely different. I would have been confident in my choices knowing that I was not alone in them and that someone of such talent and profound reputation had feelings like mine. The lying by omission done by my teachers cost me years of angst and led to self-denial that may well have contributed to my inability to perform academically to the standard expected of me, failing as I did both my eleven plus and my A levels, despite being seen as a leading student.

Despite my enthusiasm and wonder, my quest to find historical lesbians in the library was at the time not well received or understood by the staff at the British Library. I was not adept in the Dewey system and needed a lot of help. I think embarrassment and disdain describes their reaction. I do still have my stack of index cards of historical lesbians and hope one day to pass it on to someone who can bring them back to life.

Much of my research yielded discoveries of lesbians of the early 20th century who had gravitated to Paris. Finding out about them was a revelation. Many were writers and artists living a life imbued by their art and their women lovers. Their lack of politics did dismay me, although Gertrude Stein driving ambulances in the first world war was an epiphany. Knowledge of the existence of these lesbians and their romantic, exciting and artistic lives was inspiring and empowering, but the fact that they had been hidden from me meant that I felt a strange combination of thrill and anger. Reading about lesbian lives and discovering lesbians who had led full, rich, useful lives succeeding in their chosen fields and finding ways

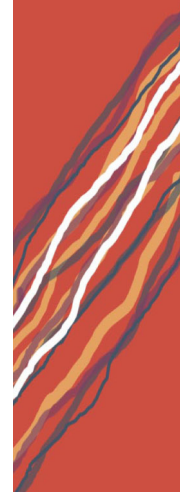
to make their mark gave me hope. It encouraged me to think that I might be able to do something useful and gave me a sense of a potential future that hitherto had been denied me.

As my career developed, I gradually started to make connections between my work and LGBT history. As a drama teacher and an out lesbian in schools I would often call myself a walking visual aid. As a kid, I had had no role models of political lesbians, although there were strong women in my life. My mother and my aunt had both forged their lives in the heat of the second world war in London. My aunt never married and had a career in the BBC. She bitterly complained about the men that she trained, and who then climbed the ladder and left her behind, but she did not make the connection to feminism and socialism.

I discovered Schools OUT, a small group of LGBT+ teachers who were working together to challenge homophobia. It was a vibrant group with people from all over the country, who were also union activists. It had been formed in 1974, known then as the Gay Teachers group. Initially it was founded as a social group, but quickly became political when one of their members was sacked when he was outed. I joined the group and met Paul Patrick, a fellow drama teacher. We eventually became the co-chairs and wrote resources for schools and delivered training together.

In addition to my work in schools I started to develop and run equality training workshops for a variety of voluntary organisations and local authorities. As part of this work, I wanted to offer to my students and my training participants solid examples of people who, at different historical moments, had bucked the norm and pioneered sexual and social revolution (www.schools-out.org.uk/?page_id=59; Devlin 2015).

It seemed to me that as humans we need both theory and concrete examples to inspire and inform our lives. Given that much of the training



I was delivering took place after the Stephen Lawrence report (www.theguardian.com) came out in 1999, it seemed vital to give examples of how people gained confidence and developed strategies to make the world a safer and more equal place for all.

The Stephen Lawrence report, or the MacPherson report as it also was called, was conducted to look into the mishandling of the investigation of the murder of Stephen, a black teenager in a suburb of London. It exposed the racism and corruption that had been at the root of the practice of the police at the time. Police had not arrested anyone for his murder, though there was a group of white boys who were well-known for their racism and violence. The report was the first thing that the first Home Secretary of the new Labour government Jack Straw set up. It proposed wide sweeping changes not only in the criminal justice system, but in all government departments including education. McPherson report defined institutional racism as

The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people (Home Office 1999).

What flowed from this report was landscape-changing. We had a new government that was keen to challenge the status quo that had supported the police in their practice of bullying and interfering with demonstrations and civil rights. Examples would be the brutal policing of the miners' strike, Greenham common and many marches for women's and 'gay' rights. There had also been several so-called riots in predominantly black areas of the country due to racist incidents of the police and the authorities.

Some of us were already working with the police to change their homophobic culture. We sought to get both the police and local authorities to take seriously the task of tackling homophobia. This was at a time when Section 28 was in place. Though we had vehemently fought against it, it was enacted in 1988, and was not repealed till 2003. It stated that a local authority "shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality" or "promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship" (Section 28, en.wikipedia.org).

The fight against Section 28 was widespread and brought many members of the LGBT+ community together to challenge the virulent homophobia of the press, media, and parliament. I was involved in both the arts and education forums that worked hard to educate the politicians and the press about the dangers of such a discriminatory law.

Having such a law in place, though there were never any court cases, encouraged homophobic attitudes that of course spilled into discrimination and sometimes violence in schools, workplaces and on the streets. Many members of the community practised self-censorship and kept themselves firmly in the closet. Those of us who were already working with the authorities attempting to mitigate the damage of 28 and the attitudes it engendered welcomed the Stephen Lawrence report. One of the report's 70 recommendations was that every member of the criminal justice system should receive training on equality and diversity to challenge the racist culture that the report had exposed. I helped to design and deliver some of that training. I felt that to be effective the training needed to enable the participants to see that all stereotypes and prejudices based on class and/or about women, LGBT, older and disabled people, needed to be challenged. There was no way we could improve the service and meet the needs of the public if any one group that was a subject of prejudice was not included.

During the early 2000's I was delivering a variety of training in the diversity and equality field, often through the lens of antihomophobic training. For me, knowing that other lesbians had existed, and fought to forge a reality that acknowledged lesbian lives, was crucial. However, I found that it was hard to find the diversity of lesbian experience. We were all hidden but some, like working class and black lesbians and lesbians with disabilities, were even more hidden. Black feminist writers like Barbara Burford and Jackie Kay, who were friends and colleagues of mine in the UK, and Maya Angelou in the USA, were ensuring that we were discovering and celebrating historical black feminist and lesbian experience.

Black History Month was a very powerful influence on my work. It was a crucial resource for schools, local authorities, and libraries. Linda Bellos, a well-known black Jewish lesbian mother, was one of the founders of Black History Month in the UK. We knew each other, since she was working in Lambeth Council, a local authority in London, where she became its leader. We worked on campaigns like Women Against Violence Against Women and we were the founders of the LGBT Independent Advisory group to the Metropolitan police.

The month October was used, but not always effectively, to raise awareness of black history. Unfortunately, all too often in schools, the history was of the American civil rights movement, rather than of the struggles of the British black leaders, or, say, the Windrush generation, the name given to the first generation of African Caribbean people who come over to the UK after the second world war in a boat of that name. Saying that, it nevertheless did bring to the fore the potential to discuss black people's contributions to British society and gave space to discuss and raise awareness of racism and the ways to counter it.

The fact we had a month in the UK to explore and celebrate black experience was a crucial precedent for LGBT+ History Month. With Paul

Patrick, my then co-chair at Schools OUT (www.schools-out.org.uk), we wanted to explore how we might set up such a month for LGBT+ people. We felt that if libraries and museums used the month, then teachers might feel emboldened to use it in schools. So we chose February, as it was at that time a quiet month for schools, and it had a half term. In the UK we became the mirror image of America, with our Black History Month in October and our LGBT+ History Month in February, and theirs vice versa.

After the Stephen Lawrence inquiry, an emphasis on anti-violence, equalities and diversity became more prominent in both the public and private sectors. With the abolition of Section 28 in 2003 (www.theguardian.com) and the plans of the Labour government to bring in a single equality act, it seemed to us that the time was perfect to launch the idea. The public sector equality duty expanded public protections for a range of people, including LGBT people. It ordered that:

In summary, those subject to the equality duty must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not (www.equalityhumanrights.com).

It was very exciting anti-discrimination law, saying not only *thou shalt not* but also *thou shalt!* Although we set up LGBT+ History Month in 2004 and celebrated it for the first time in 2005, the public duty did not come into being until 2012, by which time LGBT+ History Month was pretty well embedded in museums, libraries, local authorities and union calendars. Schools however were much slower and their reaction to this day is very patchy!



The month was launched in November 2004 at the Tate Modern Art Gallery in London. We had 13 people on the panel: 3 trans people, several people of colour, disabled people and a straight ally, as well as a bisexual, gay men and lesbians. As evident, I was determined to send the message out that we were wanting to celebrate the full diversity of our community.

Since then we have launched LGBT+ History Month in some spectacular venues. From the Royal Courts of Justice to a school in Hackney, from Bletchley Park where Alan Turing among so many others worked on counterintelligence, to the famous Oval Cricket ground, and even in the Speaker's Chambers in the Houses of Parliament. We launch our theme in November, to give people time to learn about it and prepare their events for February. We are also careful to ensure a wider geographic coverage. Apart from London, among the cities where we have held launches are Liverpool, Cambridge, Oxford, and Birmingham.

Over the years the month has developed organically. The website www.lgbthistorymonth.org.uk has been refreshed several times as we add more and more resources, all free to use. The month could not exist without the internet. It enables fast and effective ways of reaching people who want to be active on the issue or just want to know more about LGBT+ issues. The initial funding that we prized out of the Department of Education enabled us to set up the first website of which the most important component was the interactive calendar. This meant we needed a volunteer who could design the website for people to put up events. I was thinking that in the first year we might have ten events round the country. In fact, we had over a hundred!

The work is done by the unpaid members of the Schools OUT UK committee which is quite a fluid group. Many people have been part of it for a time and gone on to do amazing things for the community. Tony Fenwick, our CEO, and Steve Boyce, the chair of trustees, have been the



Fig. 1. The launch of LGBT History Month at Bletchley Park, where Alan Turing worked during the Second World War. Photo © Zfrog.

longest members of the committee apart from me. Paul Patrick alas died in 2008. We are all unpaid and work from home. We have no core funding but get support from a variety of sources. We have over the years had small pockets of money from trade unions, the criminal justice system, and LGBT+ networks of commercial firms. LGBT+ History Month also developed a couple of offshoots, such as The Classroom and OUTing the Past.

The Classroom was developed to give resources to teachers to celebrate and make visible the diversity of LGBT+ people all the year round, so that we were not just stuck in February. We were able to get some specific funding to set up the website and now one of our partners, The Proud Trust, an LGBT Youth Group Organisation that supports a variety of projects for young LGBT+ people, has undertaken a refresh of the resources. The website has over 80 lesson plans that usualise LGBT+ issue across the

curriculum for all ages. OUTing the Past is an annual festival of LGBT+ history for both the general public and academics. This year a television firm, Free at Last, sponsored the festival.

We have for some time now produced and sold a pin badge for each year. When we started to have a theme for the year, we made the badge to represent the theme. It is designed by students of a design course in a university, as part of their curriculum. Thus, we enable the students to learn about LGBT+ issues which they may not otherwise encounter. The badges have proved to be a good source of funding, along with rainbow lanyards we launched in 2020.

We also choose 4 members of the LGBT+ community to represent the theme, and we produce posters and info about them. Both the themes and people representing the theme are linked to the school's curriculum. The Proud Trust annually produces a massively popular workbook for youth groups and schools based on the theme. In this way we make it easier for schools to use the month and embed it into the school's fabric. At the same time, we can ensure it does not become a one-off event, unconnected to the ethos of the school.

Our Voices and Visibility poster, which shows the laws and people that have helped us get our human rights, will soon have its own interactive website as it has been a very popular resource.

Once we set up the month, other organisations and groups began to explore the rich territory of LGBT+ visibility and history. We have partnered with some of these organisations and attempt to signpost people to their useful resources by linking them to our website. So, people can celebrate the month and learn about the diversity of LGBT+ people and our history. Organising the website becomes an increasing challenge as we add more and more resources and links.



Fig. 2. Annual pin badges for LGBT+ History Month. Photo: © Zfrog.

On our website there is a general resource space with some indexing, and then specific resources under each year, some of which we have produced that are pertinent to the theme.

The website is accessed across the world, as is our Facebook and Twitter pages. This means that we are spreading the knowledge and increasing the visibility of the diversity LGBT+ people. Since we updated the website

in mid-January of 2020, we have had 55,000 visits to it. LGBT+ History Month @LGBTHM has 69.3k followers and our *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans History Month UK* Facebook page at has almost 98,000 likes.

I am amazed at the creativity of people in finding ways to celebrate LGBT+ histories, when I look through the calendar on the website and the reports people send in of what they did. The ingenuity is as outstanding as is the energy; so many hours of work, mostly unpaid, by so many people, to ensure the visibility of the community is my dream come true.

The number of events that occur in February have steadily grown, in 2019 we had over 1500 of them. In 2020 there were less reported events, but looking on the LGBT+ History Month Facebook, twitter and Instagram pages it is clear that now many people hold events and don't even tell us. The number of places that fly the rainbow flag during the month has steadily increased. Universities, town halls, places of work, libraries etc. The bureaucracy that must be navigated to make that happen is mind boggling, yet the effect powerful, showing as it does, public support and visibility of the LGBT+ community. This year we had a few zebra crossings turn into rainbows. There is a clear mixture of volunteer led activities, some in local clubs and pubs run by local LGBT+ groups. Often, they are low key events like quizzes, drag nights, fancy dress parties etc. Others that are organised with a little support by LGBT networks in workplaces can be more elaborate affairs. One firm uses our posters every year as the screen saver for the month as a simple and effective way of getting the message out.

Often February is chosen to launch a LGBT+ initiative or to hold a big conference. This year I attended several, three of which were linked to the Criminal Justice System.

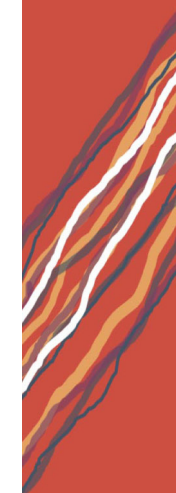
Any local authority worth its salt will not let February go by without organising something or working with a local LGBT+ group to enable a

few events. Camden & Islington, two adjacent London local authorities support the local LGBT+ forum. It has for many years produced a full programme of events, meaning they have an event for every day of the month! In year 2020 with our theme being Poetry Prose and Plays the programme was jammed packed with poetry reading, plays, under-fives story readings, art exhibitions, LGBT+ film day, and guided walks round the borough discovering LGBT+ history.

Many local forums up and down the country link up with commercial places like bookstores, cinemas and theatres, encouraging them to utilise the month. Such work is not just done in the big cities, but we see it happening in rural places such as Shropshire and Norfolk. In such places there is a wonderful synergy of dedicated and talented LGBT+ people using their creativity to produce events to celebrate our community. It is particularly exciting when this work is intergenerational, bringing together both younger and older people who learn from each other and forge links that are often hard to make otherwise in rural spaces.

It is particularly gratifying to see that libraries, national trust houses and museums are now positively working to find and celebrate their queer connections. We held our launch in the British Museum in 2014, which was a great success given that they have so many artefacts of a queer nature. Two years later, the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1967, due to the Wolfenden report, we saw many museums and art galleries stage exhibitions celebrating their connections to predominately white homosexual men. There was great media interest, so we are now working through our websites and connections to museums to ensure that in the future they present a more inclusive picture of our community.

I wish I could be more positive about schools. The response from them is incredibly patchy. Some schools, colleges and universities have grabbed



the potential of both the month and our offshoot, *The Classroom*. They involve the whole school in celebrating the month, utilising our resources and making and sharing their own. In other schools it is perhaps one teacher who attempts to introduce the month to their students and in some schools, there is no involvement with the month at all. It is a problem that, due to the focus on academic achievement in the recent years, many crucial areas like music, drama and citizenship have become less important. It is also true that Section 28 has a long shadow. Even though it was repealed in 2003, many teachers know more about Section 28 than they do about the Equality Act and the Public Sector Equality Duty.

It will be interesting to see what the implications of the new Relationships and Sex Education curriculum will be from September 2020 onwards. Without the complications of the COVID-19 pandemic it might have been used to give schools more confidence to use the month. Now, given that much of the training for teachers was due to take place this summer, which is likely to be cancelled, we will await with interest, how and if the new curriculum will be delivered.

To my mind, if we are to tackle bullying and negative stereotypes, it is vitally important for young people to have access to LGBT+ history. Young people have to be taught to be prejudiced, so we need to educate out prejudice by informing our students about the diversity of the population. If the books we use to learn to read are reflective and mirror all humanity, then there is less chance for ignorance to take root and give rise to prejudice and abuse.

Schools sometimes offer classes on 'gays' or on disability in an attempt to challenge the prejudice by saying we are normal. I find that highly problematic, as I feel the word normal has highly problematic connotations. I prefer the approach I call usualising. On *The Classroom* website we offer over 80 free lessons that give students the chance to be introduced to the full diversity of the population in maths, history, English and so on, starting

with the very first reception class. Since the success of LGBT History Month we have produced *The Classroom* website so we enable teachers to educate about LGBT themes everyday in every lesson so we are not just a one month wonder (the-classroom.org.uk). Obviously, the lessons are not all focused on history – most merely demonstrate ways in which LGBT+ themes and people can be dropped into a lesson to make us *usual*. This website enables schools to do the crucial work of challenging stereotypes and celebrating diverse LGBT+ people and issues throughout the year.

One of my incentives for starting the month had been to find our history, as well as celebrating and making us visible as a diverse community. The latter was certainly happening; however, the history part was less obvious. The lack of inclusive recorded LGBT+ history was becoming a more evident problem. Although museums and libraries, including the British Library, were holding events in February for LGBT+ History Month, it was obvious that such institutions needed help in finding the LGBT+ information they held. So, we began to consider how we could help and influence that work.

Dr. Jeff Evans, a long-standing member of the committee, proposed a solution. In 2015 we held the first national LGBT+ history festival and academic conference in Manchester called *OUTing the Past* (www.outingthepast.org.uk). We put out a call for popular historical presentations and academic presentations. We set up an academic panel to vet the submissions and were able to choose and present over 30 popular presentations and 20 academic ones. The following year we had 5 hubs, but we did not stop there.

In 2020 we were offered over 100 presentations and had 22 hubs, 14 in England, 6 on the island of Ireland and 2 in the USA. Unfortunately, our Dublin, New York and Boston events had to be cancelled due to COVID-19 pandemic. Many are held in very prestigious venues such as the British Museum, The Victoria and Albert Museum, the People's History Museum

Manchester, The National Archives Kew, The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, The Museum of Free Derry, and The Liverpool Museum. The timing of Jeff's work in Ireland was completely fortuitous, coming as it did when Westminster passed the same sex marriage bill for Northern Ireland.

OUTing the Past has most years another strand to it, which can be followed on the *OUTing the Past* website. We have commissioned theatre that explores hidden historical events. So, we can offer an immediate and exciting link to our past, bringing to life forgotten LGBT+ people that have played a crucial part in our journey to visibility. Steve Hornby is our national playwright in residence and has given us gems from the *Very Victorian Scandal* in the first year, which was a story of the Hulme Drag Ball raid of 1880 Manchester, to *A Queer Celli at the Marty Forsythe*, which explored the events of the first National Union of Students Lesbian and Gay Conference at Queens University Belfast in 1983. The programme has been expanded with plays about Walt Whitman, a lesbian bus driver being sacked for wearing a lesbian badge, a crucial first meeting of the Campaign for Homosexuality and the Gay Liberation Front held in a small northern town Burnley, and a story about a Victorian trans man, which was pieced together from local Manchester papers.

Much work has flowed from both LGBT+ History Month and OUTing the Past and we can see museums, archives and libraries working to find their links with the LGBT+ community, setting up LGBT+ tours, training their staff and working with enthusiastic volunteers to make their institutions more welcome and inclusive. Jeff worked in Northern Ireland with his many long-standing connections to facilitate the first exhibition of Northern Ireland LGBT+ History. It was launched at the Museum of Free Derry in 2020 and will, once the virus issues have subsided, tour in Northern Ireland, England and USA.

All these years later, I am continually surprised and humbled by how the LGBT+ History Month has grown. It has become a thing! Sometimes there is no thought that there is an organisation making it happen or that it had to be invented! That is both a joy and a problem. When people hold events and don't tell us, as they as often do, their ideas can't get shared on our website thereby depriving others of their ideas.

Not knowing the history of a people or a country is to make that place or people invisible, and worthless. It lays the foundation for discrimination and lack of respect. Watching how colonial countries organise education and lack of respect. Watching how colonial countries organise education in the countries they control demonstrates clearly how this works. The oppressed country is taught next to nothing about their own culture, their very language is degraded, and the oppressor's is taught. We live in a white able-bodied, Christian, heterosexual cis patriarchal culture. Given that, the need to educate in schools about the other characteristics is crucial. It gives members living with those characteristics confidence in themselves and promotes respect for those characteristics among people who do not personally exhibit such characteristics.

In the UK since the referendum on the membership of the EU in 2016, we have seen a frightening rise of reported misogyny and xenophobia; homophobic attacks have risen by 147% (www.theguardian.com). It is crucial therefore that we step up the work and use all the methods possible to challenge the ignorance, and educate out the prejudice. Teaching the history and placing the prejudiced groups in the forefront of our education is crucial. In doing so we need to take care not to set up a hierarchy of oppression. Much of the Brexiteers and Trumpists are demonstrating their frustration as white working-class folk who feel they have been left behind and ignored, and are now venting their anger against the elite who did the ignoring, and the women, gays and black people who they feel have been given undue attention.

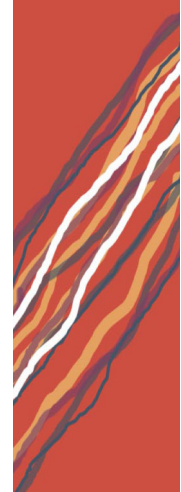




Fig. 3. OUTing the Past event with Stuart Milk and Sue Sanders at the Peoples History Museum Manchester, 2015. Photo © Zfrog.

Looking back on all of this work we have done since launching the first LGBT+ History Month, I am delighted at our achievements – although at the same time it raises a variety of feelings, because you have to think about why there was the need for such a thing in the first place. Yet today, LGBT+ History Month seems just as important as ever, given the backlash we are facing. I am so proud of our community grabbing the opportunity that LGBT+ History Month offered. It is a joy to see the massive creativity every February. I am also proud that the month has helped to inspire the UK Women’s History month and the UK Disability History Month.

At Schools OUT UK we have always been dedicated to celebrating the diversity of our community and would labour to do so both linguistically and with our content. Language has caught up with us, so we now have the word intersectionality to describe our work. Language is on the move and

we have seen ‘usualise’, a word I coined, become more common. Young people are hungry for knowledge, and they love to hear about how people have overcome problems and made their mark. It has been a privilege to be part of the movement that makes resources available to ensure that everyone can recognise and celebrate the contributions made by LGBT+ people to our society.

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