

# PREJUDICE

LGBTQ heritage and its  
contemporary implications

# AND

Edited by Richard Sandell,  
Rachael Lennon and Matt Smith

# PRIDE

May 2018

ISBN: 978-1-898489-50-4

Design: Anna Lincoln

Published by the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG),  
School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester.

# Contents

<b>Foreword</b> Richard Sandell, Rachael Lennon and Matt Smith	<b>4</b>
<b>Prejudice and Pride: Motivations and Consequences</b> Tom Freshwater and John Orna-Ornstein	<b>6</b>
<b>FOREVER, FOR EVERYONE?</b> Rachael Lennon	<b>10</b>
<b>The Museum of Transology: Protesting the Erasure of Transcestry</b> E-J Scott	<b>18</b>
<b>1000 Years of Kings, Queens and In-betweens</b> Matthew Storey	<b>22</b>
<b>Queer City: London's Club Culture 1918-1967</b> Rowena Hillel and Vicki Iglkowski	<b>26</b>
<b>Everyone's History Deserves to be Told</b> Annie Reilly	<b>30</b>
<b>Queer Talk at The Red House, Aldeburgh</b> Lucy Walker	<b>34</b>
<b>BRINGING QUEER HOME</b> Matt Smith and Richard Sandell	<b>38</b>
<b>The Politics of Recognizing an Invisible Man</b> Aaron Bryant	<b>50</b>
<b>Rooms of Their Own: Enriching Our Understanding of Built Heritage</b> Nino Strachey	<b>55</b>
<b>Pride of Place: Valuing, Mapping and Curating Queer Heritage</b> Alison Oram	<b>58</b>
<b>Queering Heritage Sites: a Manifesto</b> Chris Cleeve and Sean Curran	<b>64</b>
<b>You Can't Tell LGBTQ Stories Where They Don't Exist. Or Can You?</b> Sian Goodman	<b>71</b>
<b>WHOSE VOICE DO WE HEAR?</b> Jocelyn Dodd and Sarah Plumb	<b>76</b>
<b>People, Passion, Place: Volunteering in an Evolving National Trust</b> Annabel Smith	<b>83</b>
<b>LGBTQ Heritage and its Contemporary Relevance</b> Tom Butler, Julie Howell and Richard Sandell	<b>88</b>
<b>Discussing Diversity: Portraits Untold at Beningbrough Hall</b> Sue Jordan	<b>93</b>
<b>Contemporary Art and Difficult Histories</b> Grace Davies, Simona Piantieri and Michele D'Acosta	<b>96</b>

# Foreword

Over the past decade or so, stories of same-sex love and desire and gender diversity have been slowly gaining increased (if, still, uneven and partial) visibility in heritage sites, museums and galleries in many parts of the world. In England and Wales, the fiftieth anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in 2017 provided the impetus for an unprecedented number of cultural organisations to explore and publicly present queer histories. At the same time, it would be inaccurate to assume from this increased cultural activity, an onward progression of ever-greater openness or a neat and uninterrupted trajectory of growing inclusion, equality and respect. Indeed, many have noted that LGBTQ-themed narratives are often temporary and tentative, sometimes controversial and often privilege some lives and identities over others. *Prejudice and Pride: LGBTQ heritage and its contemporary implications* reflects on this context and addresses three interlinked research questions;

1. How can heritage organisations uncover, understand and interpret the lives of people closely linked to their sites who challenged conventions of sexuality and gender diversity?
2. How can we understand the contemporary significance of queer/ LGBTQ public heritage for visitors, LGBTQ communities and society more broadly?
3. How might these narratives be used to engage diverse audiences in contemporary debates surrounding LGBTQ history, culture and equality?

*Prejudice and Pride: LGBTQ heritage and its contemporary implications* emerges from the collaboration between the National Trust and the University of Leicester's Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) that shaped an ambitious and large scale research-led public programme. Looking forward as well as back, the contributors collectively aim to stimulate and enrich new thinking and practice in a field that – despite significant advances in recent years – has nevertheless proved to be challenging and sometimes highly controversial. Whilst some of these challenges are undoubtedly specific to the field of queer heritage, many also resonate with attempts to reveal other hidden or marginalised histories, efforts to use these histories to speak to contemporary social concerns, and initiatives that seek to engage audiences in a more critical approach to the way we understand the past.

*Richard Sandell, Rachael Lennon and Matt Smith*

# PREJUDICE AND PRIDE: MOTIVATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

**Tom Freshwater** (National Public Programmes Manager, National Trust)  
and **John Orna-Ornstein** (Director of Curation and Experience)

The National Trust has an international reputation as a custodian of natural and cultural heritage in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, including coast, landscapes, buildings, gardens, interiors and collections of all kinds. Yet, arguably, it has underplayed its role in marking national moments of commemoration and celebration. In 2014, like many organisations, we developed a programme to mark the centenary of the beginning of the First World War and how it connected to our places. We demonstrated that connecting to wider anniversaries and commemorations allowed a richer conversation with our

audiences, both established and new. One legacy of 2014 was an ambition to continue having this richer dialogue at a national scale leading to the development, for the first time in the organisation, of a series of ongoing nationally curated programmes. The first of these new programmes was *Prejudice and Pride*, inspired by the 50th anniversary of the passing of the Sexual Offences Act 1967, that took place through 2017. Early conversations with Historic England and Leeds Beckett University about their Pride of Place initiative helped frame our thinking. In choosing to explore LGBTQ heritage it was clear that we needed to find a way

to work with sensitive histories in terms of historical research, partnerships and public programming. Numerous places in the Trust's care have a known link to LGBTQ heritage, including internationally known figures such as Virginia Woolf and Lawrence of Arabia – but we knew that only a few had site interpretation, research and volunteer teams that actively engaged with this heritage. Our initial research suggested that some of our audiences would doubt the authenticity of our stories, and that others would also feel this subject matter went beyond the appropriate remit of the organisation. We also knew these opinions would be reflected in our 11,000 staff, over 65,000 volunteers and our 5.2 million members. Was it worth the risk to choose to run a national programme inspired by this heritage?

This prompted a discussion at senior governance, advisory and executive levels of the Trust as to what this risk constituted, and how it could be managed and mitigated. In 2007, the Trust experienced a number of member resignations and challenging press coverage when same-sex civil partnership ceremonies were welcomed at its places. There were concerns that we would, again, be accused of campaigning on a civil rights matter rather than sticking with our core mission – conservation – especially at a time when we were experiencing an extended period of unfavourable coverage from some sections of the media.

We balanced these concerns against our core mission: to look after special places,

*for ever, for everyone*, that last phrase being key. If we began to limit the people we are 'for' then we fail to discharge our charitable purpose. The wider context of our heritage peers and national and local museums – Historic England, Tate, National Museums Liverpool, the British Museum and many others – gave us confidence that we were not alone. We talked to these organisations and learnt from their practice. We sought a research partnership with the University of Leicester, home to a leading research centre in heritage and museums (RCMG), to underpin and help to shape our work. We found voices and collaborators to work with at our places and in our publications and podcasts who understood what we were trying to do. We joined Stonewall's *Diversity Champions* scheme to ensure our practice as an employer was also appropriate.

As expected, we did experience challenges. The most notable came when we hit the national headlines in August over our activity at Felbrigg Hall, Norfolk. The controversy centred on a short film exploring the LGBTQ connections at Felbrigg along with our approach to making all visitors feel welcome. A group of volunteers at the Hall voiced their dismay over both aspects of the programme, leading to major news coverage – including a *Daily Mail* front page splash. Not surprisingly, this caused high levels of concern within the organisation: were we damaging our wider cause through our commitment to this programme? Ultimately, strong decisive leadership helped guide the

organisation through this time and ensured that we stayed on course, maintaining our commitment to share our LGBTQ histories, and stay true to our values. The programme continued to develop with an ambitious mix of events, exhibitions and immersive experiences that engaged, delighted and challenged our audiences.

This one programme is not the end of the Trust's engagement with LGBTQ heritage, rather it's a beginning. Our newly formed research strategy gives a framework for new activity to be undertaken; the relisting of three of our places for their LGBTQ heritage by Historic England attests to the authenticity of the stories; we've committed to attend Pride festivals across the UK again this year and in future years. We now have a cohort of staff, volunteers and managers at all levels of the organisation who have engaged with this work and seen the benefits as well as the challenges. What is there to be afraid of?





# For ever, for everyone?

**Rachael Lennon** (National Public Programmes Curator  
and Curator of *Prejudice and Pride*, National Trust)

**‘The best moments in reading are when you come across something - a thought, a feeling, a way of looking at things - that you’d thought special, particular to you. And here it is, set down by someone else, a person you’ve never met, maybe even someone long dead. And it’s as if a hand has come out, and taken yours.’<sup>1</sup>**

We all look to history and heritage to find something of ourselves in it. Not always successfully. The stories we encounter on a visit to any heritage site inevitably represent a tiny fraction of the lives connected to that place and the narratives that have been chosen to dominate these encounters today still draw heavily from decisions made in the twentieth century. We can often see the values of past centuries reflected in, what Laurajane Smith sees as, these ‘collective acts of remembering and forgetting’ (2014: 49). Consequently, the historic characters we meet on our day out still disproportionately reflect male, white, elite, straight, cisgender, non-disabled lives. This minority continues to dominate the understanding and presentation of all of our shared history.

The lives of people who expressed gender diversity and same-sex desire have almost always fallen outside of these dominant narratives. LGBTQ+ experiences have been actively marginalised both within the lifetimes of individuals and

collectively through recorded and shared history. These stories have not simply fallen through the cracks of history; they have been pushed, purposefully erased or hidden away.

The exclusion of LGBTQ+ narratives from public history, from the mainstream of the cultural heritage sector, not only displaces the lives that have been omitted or misrepresented, it dislocates LGBTQ+ people from their shared past. The introduction and more truthful representation of these lives is a statement of welcome to audiences today.

## **Tackling prejudice and celebrating with pride**

In December 2016, the National Trust launched *Prejudice and Pride*, a yearlong celebration of LGBTQ+ heritage. The Trust, one of the biggest conservation charities in Europe, joined museums, galleries and media organisations across Britain in marking the 50 year anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in England and Wales. 2017 provided an unprecedented profile of LGBTQ+ past lives in the mainstream of the cultural heritage sector.

For the National Trust, *Prejudice and Pride* marked the first

Figure 1. Henry Cyril Paget, 5th Marquess of Anglesey (1875-1905) in a theatrical costume with a winged headdress. © National Trust/Simon Harris.



year of a new *Challenging Histories* programme, an annual series of exhibitions, events and publications created to look again at our histories, to reveal and counter the biases that can pervade heritage presentation. Before it had even commenced, the Trust's celebration of LGBTQ+ histories was challenged by a small minority of the press as inappropriate, unnecessary and a politicisation of the purpose of this conservation charity. In the *Daily Mail*, James Delingpole stated that "The National Trust wasn't broken" and asked "Why on earth are you trying to fix it?" (Delingpole 2016).

### **Resisting nostalgia**

The past exclusion and misrepresentation of LGBTQ+ lives is a reality inherited by today's historians and curators, as well as audiences. Efforts to reclaim these histories create particular challenges in the presentation of built heritage. In the historic house, there remains an emphasis in the collective imagination on the experiences of 'the family' (Smith 2014: 49) often resulting in a narrative that privileges heterosexual lives. The lives of elites are similarly privileged. It is not difficult to imagine why some visitors might choose to walk in the footsteps of the elite owners than in the, often brutal, steps of the disenfranchised workforce. The seductive nostalgia of these experiences has allowed a heteronormative emphasis to continue to centre on 'who married whom, how

many children they had and how the inheritance passed down through the generations' (Oram 2012: 537).

As the visions of previous owners are preserved, many spaces are presented to reflect a moment in time and this choice has led to some places perpetuating historic attitudes and values that can sit uncomfortably in the present day. In the 'transition' from home to historic monument, Alison Oram observes that 'slices of time and space are transformed into "history"' (Oram 2012: 537) and the narratives that result are by no means neutral. Within these inherited, constructed and partial narratives, same-sex desire and gender diversity have generally been given little space.

### **Learning to share**

Over recent decades, the inclusion of difficult, challenging, or previously 'othered', histories in our museum and heritage experiences has become increasingly familiar and the collective efforts of cultural institutions to mark the fiftieth anniversary of partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in 2017 marked a significant further step forward. This increased concern for diverse histories has important implications. As Jenny Kidd has argued, understanding and encountering different perspectives opens up space for a wider challenging of history itself: hearing new voices exposes the process of history making as partial and 'inherently

**Many of the histories celebrated by museums, galleries and heritage sites throughout 2017 were not openly presented previously. Some had been covertly referenced in interpretation through uncomfortable, ambiguous or coded language; perhaps there if one knew where to look, but rarely out and proud.**

biased' (Kidd 2014: 1).

Though this is a familiar concept for many of those working with interpretations of history, the effort to reveal more inclusive and diverse histories through a focus on LGBTQ heritage in 2017 exposed an uneasiness amongst some audiences with these new narratives. The familiar stories we encounter in our schools, in media, museums and heritage sites inevitably feel like the 'neutral' versions of history. Experiences that fall outside of that norm can be uncomfortable and it is challenging for anyone to question realities which had previously felt like immutable truths. Most significantly, experiences that fall outside of these norms are easily portrayed as deviations: political in their very telling.

Accusations of politicisation and 'political correctness' ran throughout criticism of LGBTQ+ history celebrations in 2017. Crucially, much of the criticism focused, not on the way past LGBTQ+ lives were presented, but on the very fact of their being openly, unapologetically, presented at all. For Harry Mount in the *Daily Mail*, the prominent inclusion of LGBTQ+ lives in National Trust places represented nothing less than 'rampant politicisation and intolerance of opposing views' (2017). Discomfort at the potential of encountering LGBTQ+ lives on a National Trust day out was articulated by some high-profile critics. As the cultural heritage sector marked the anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality, we saw, in some responses in press and public debate, open expressions of a privileged position which refused to acknowledge that different lives, experiences and perspectives also deserve to be publicly presented and explored.

Over recent years many National Trust places have increasingly made efforts to reveal the colourful diversity of their spaces: particularly celebrating the varied lives of individuals that lived together under the shared roofs of its homes. The Trust has sought to increase the inclusivity and accessibility of its places and increasingly committed to reflecting the diversity hidden within the nation's heritage sites. It is the responsibility of all those working to interpret histories to continue to question whose stories get told and how they might resonate and have implications today. For centuries, historians have fastidiously tracked their attempts to add value, to better understand the versions of history that they inherit, generation after generation. A diversity of lived experiences, beyond the intersectional privilege embodied in the male, white, elite, straight, cisgender, non-disabled, stories we are disproportionately taught in school, is the reality of our shared history.

In *Prejudice and Pride*, the National Trust expressed its commitment to continuing open-minded and curious research to get closer to understanding the lives that shaped its places. It diversified the types of narratives that it would share, of the histories already present in its sites and collections. It made a particularly conscious choice as to what was remembered and commemorated, actively and publically

seeking to undo some of the 'forgetting' (Smith 2014: 49) inherited from previous centuries.

### **Recognising our own history**

The consequences of excluding entire communities from public history are only recently beginning to be explored and understood, but it is clear that they reverberate strongly in the present (Sandell 2017). We look to the past in the making of our contemporary identities and draw confidence from our roots, finding role models to inspire our future. 2017 provided an opportunity to better understand the implications of the omission and misrepresentation of past LGBTQ+ lives today and to unpick the importance of visibility for cultural heritage organisations and their audiences.

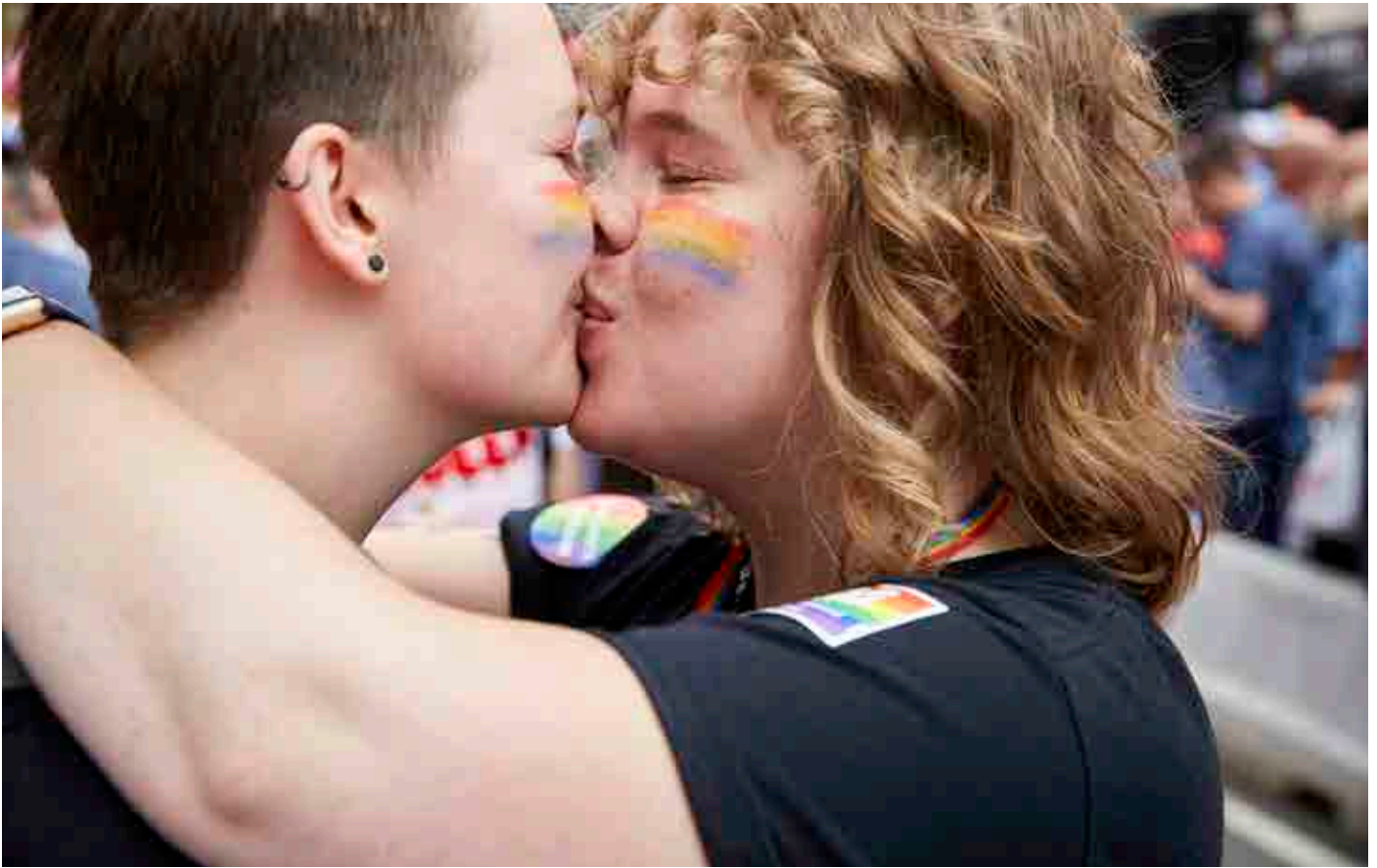
Many of the histories celebrated by museums, galleries and heritage sites throughout 2017 were not openly presented previously. Some had been covertly referenced in interpretation through uncomfortable, ambiguous or coded language; perhaps there if one knew where to look, but rarely out and proud. Some were discovered by cultural institutions for the first time, by a new scale of research into histories of gender diversity and same-sex desire. Some organisations made efforts to uncover and present the particularly hidden experiences of LGBTQ+ people of colour and working class histories, though these lives remained underrepresented across anniversary activity.

For the National Trust, the same-sex relationships of elite, famous figures like Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf were well known, but historically not openly and clearly reflected in the visitor experience of their homes, Sissinghurst and Monk's House, which had previously tended to focus on the relationships of the women with the husbands who shared and shaped these places with them. These inevitable prioritisations have continued to be made over time. Sarah Waters (2017) remembered visiting Sissinghurst with her first girlfriend in 1989: 'We went there not for the glorious garden itself, nor for the wonderful setting, but because we knew that its one-time owner, Vita Sackville-West, had had many affairs with women. As we wandered about, I remember that we weren't quite daring enough to hold hands. But I still recall the thrill we felt at discovering this semi-secret bit of 'our' history.'

The *Prejudice and Pride* programme more fully drew out the same-sex relationships half-hidden in National Trust places. Sissinghurst hosted a National Portrait Gallery exhibition, *Speak its Name*, and Woolf's novel *Orlando*, in which the eponymous character was heavily inspired by Sackville-West and changes sex half way through, was nationally celebrated and explored through the programme. Most significantly, Sissinghurst has now been relisted by Historic England to reflect its importance to LGBTQ+ history. Future decisions in the conservation of the castle and gardens must now consider how best to safeguard and to share this significant, now protected, element of its history. Sissinghurst, like the other National Trust places that created *Prejudice and Pride*



MUSIC IS LIFE



Birmingham Pride. © National Trust Images/Arnhel de Serra.

activity, demonstrated that there is plenty of space for historic houses to embrace very different areas of their history, and showed that the richness of historic sites is only enhanced by embracing multiple perspectives.

*Prejudice and Pride* also provided an opportunity for the National Trust to make it clear to all visitors, 29 years after Sarah Waters' visit to Sissinghurst with her first girlfriend, that everyone is welcome to hold hands. Whatever the curatorial motivations, the omission or masking of LGBTQ+ stories encourages LGBTQ+ visitors, volunteers and staff to mask their own stories and relationships. Stonewall's Hate Crime and Discrimination report suggests that 36%, more than a third, of LGBT people and 58% of gay men, say that they still don't feel comfortable walking down the street holding their partner's hand (Bachmann and Gooch 2017). Visibility of past LGBTQ+ lives, like visibility of LGBTQ+ lives today, can help to provide an antidote to this environment and our cultural heritage spaces should be understood to be safe spaces for all.

The National Trust, like many large cultural heritage organisations, has worked over recent decades to ensure that it provides a particularly safe space for families, and caters for family needs. Representing difference in the families

whose lives are publicly presented is an important element in welcoming LGBTQ+ children and children of LGBTQ+ parents. As one visitor wrote, 'As a gay dad and National Trust member can I say thank you for telling hidden stories and making all families, including mine, welcome'. Places like Smallhythe in Kent, or Bucks Mills Cabin in Devon show models of family living outside of the norms of their times and beyond the, sometimes narrow, narratives of persecution and prosecution associated with LGBTQ+ past. They are homes that provided the women who lived in them space for happiness, sometimes heartbreak and, most consistently, love and creativity.

The richness of these places cannot be fully understood or appreciated by anyone whilst the same-sex relationships that animated them are censored out of history. Though it is clear that visibility of past LGBTQ+ lives can have a particular resonance for LGBTQ+ people today, the inclusion of these narratives is simply a fuller version of our shared history, to be enjoyed by anyone. In January 2017, the National Trust received the following correspondence from one of its members:

'As a long-term supporter, who is a straight, married, white, middle-aged, middle-class, Christian, church elder, I should

like you to know that I look forward to seeing your celebration of the contribution made by our forefathers and sisters who were LGBT.'

LGBTQ hate crimes were reported to rise 147% in July to September 2016, the three months after Brexit (Townsend 2016) and Stonewall's 2017 report on hate crimes and discrimination confirmed a significant increase since their benchmark research in 2013 (Bachmann and Gooch 2017). In the face of divisive public debate, the presentation of our histories, together, uncensored by the values of previous centuries, has social implications. As a long-standing member of the National Trust wrote;

'I think that this work is so important in this country at the moment. Providing information and giving the opportunity to discuss our country's LGBTQ heritage will, I hope, help further promote tolerance and acceptance of the similarities and differences that make our communities.'

This awareness of our context is important to an organisation with a social purpose: we are not seeking to campaign for civil rights, but we contribute to the cultural life of the nation and take an evidence-based view on national issues to which we can help contribute, such as social cohesion.

In Dorset, teams at Kingston Lacy created an exhibition remembering the exile of William John Bankes, who fled England in 1841 to avoid the risk of prosecution for 'indecent acts'. An installation of 51 knotted ropes commemorated 51 men – aged 17 to 71 – who were hanged for same-sex relationships within the lifetime of William John, reminding visitors of the ways in which same-sex love has been viewed and treated throughout history. In another room in the house, an installation gave voice to individuals who have been forced to flee their homes because of their sexuality today; reminding us that Bankes' experience of exile has not yet been consigned to history.

The presentation of a broader diversity of past lives disrupts the kind of dangerous nostalgia that involves an active forgetting that 157 years ago, men could be executed for expressing same-sex desire; that 50 years ago same-sex relationships remained illegal; 15 years ago support of LGBTQ+ children through 'the teaching of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship' was forbidden and prosecuted in England and Wales by Section 28, and that, just 5 years ago, we couldn't marry our partners.

### Leaving a legacy

Nina Simon defines relevance in cultural heritage as 'a process, not a momentary door flinging open' (Simon 2016: 55). The 2017 anniversary saw a critical mass of LGBTQ+ heritage activity across our nations. Though there are clear risks of aligning any marginalised history to a finite time period, the sheer volume of activity in 2017 presents an

## It will change the way history is written and thought about from this point onwards.

opportunity for a legacy to shift the centre ground, and to ensure that the door stays open to those to whom it was previously closed.

The National Trust was just one of the many organisations who chose 2017 to look again at its queer histories, to research them with open minds, and to provide them with profile for the first time. Across the year, over 350,000 people visited LGBTQ+ exhibitions and events at National Trust sites. All 5 million National Trust members received LGBTQ+ histories in the member magazine, headlined by the enigmatic Marquess of Anglesey (figure 1). A podcast, spotlighting over 2000 years of queer heritage was downloaded 17,000 times. Through Heritage Open Days, 32 volunteer-led LGBTQ+ events were hosted at non-National-Trust sites across England; 29 more than in the last five years combined. Over 300 National Trust staff and volunteers of all ages attended 17 Pride festivals in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, distributing tens of thousands of rainbow oak leaf stickers and badges. These badges, subject to considerable controversy across the media, have now been accessioned by the British Museum and People's History Museum. The long-overdue National Trust LGBTQ+ staff and volunteer group will take on this legacy. The Trust is now a Stonewall Diversity Champion, actively working to ensure that it can truly be an inclusive place to visit, to volunteer and to work.

In the *Prejudice and Pride* podcast, Clare Balding reflected: 'this is a real shift, this is a change of mood music, this is a new chapter... and it will therefore have a legacy. It will change the way history is written and thought about from this point onwards' (Balding 2017).

It is the responsibility of any conservation charity to continue to look again, to research, to better understand the lives lived in connection to its places and objects, and to pass that knowledge on to the next generation. It is our responsibility to remember that all of history is a construction, to resist nostalgia and to keep asking ourselves who constructed the histories we inherited and why? To ask who is remembered and who forgotten and to understand the power behind those choices. Perhaps Oscar Wilde captured it best when he observed: 'the one duty we owe to history is to re-write it'.<sup>2</sup>



David McAlmont researching *girl.boy.child*, a collaboration with RCMG, University of Leicester. © Richard Sandell.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>From Alan Bennett's classic play, *The History Boys*, originally published in 2004

<sup>2</sup>Oscar Wilde in *The Critic and Artist*, originally published in 1881.

## References

Bachmann, C.L. and Gooch, B. (2017), *LGBT in Britain: Hate Crime and Discrimination*, London: Stonewall.

Balding, C. (2017) *Prejudice and Pride*. Available at: <https://soundcloud.com/nationaltrustpodcasts/sets/prejudice-and-pride> (Accessed 6 February 2018).

Delingpole, J. (2016) 'Preserve us from a National Trust that is so achingly right on', *Daily Mail*, 22 December. Online. Available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-4057118/Preserve-National-Trust-so-achingly-right-says-James-Delingpole.html> (Accessed 1 February 2018).

Kidd, J. (2014) 'Introduction: Challenging Histories in the Museum', in J. Kidd, S. Cairns, A. Drago, A. Ryall and M. Stearn (eds) *Challenging History in the Museum: International Perspectives*, Surrey: Ashgate: 1-22.

Mount, H. (2017) 'Intolerance that's lost the faith of the nation: The National Trust has sacrificed its original aims on the altar of political correctness and as a result we are all losers', *Daily Mail*, 7 August. Online. Available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4766586/Harry-Mount-National-Trust.html> (Accessed 1 February 2018).

Oram, A. (2012) 'Sexuality in Heterotopia: time, space and love between women in the historic house', *Women's History Review*, 21(4): 533-51.

Sandell, R. (2017) *Museums, Moralities and Human Rights*, London: Routledge.

Simon, N. (2016). *The Art of Relevance*. California: Museum 2.0.

Smith, L. (2014) 'Domestic bliss or the great divide? Country houses and the perpetuation of social inequality', *Unravelling Uppark*, Unravelling Arts Limited: 48-55.

Townsend, M. (2016) 'Homophobic attacks in UK rose 147% in three months after Brexit vote', *The Guardian*, 8 October. Online. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/oct/08/homophobic-attacks-double-after-brexit-vote> (Accessed 2 February 2018).

Waters, S. (2017) 'Prejudice and Pride', *National Trust Magazine* (Spring).

# THE MUSEUM OF TRANSOLOGY: PROTESTING THE ERASURE OF TRANSCESTRY

**E-J Scott** (dress historian and curator, *The Museum of Transology*)

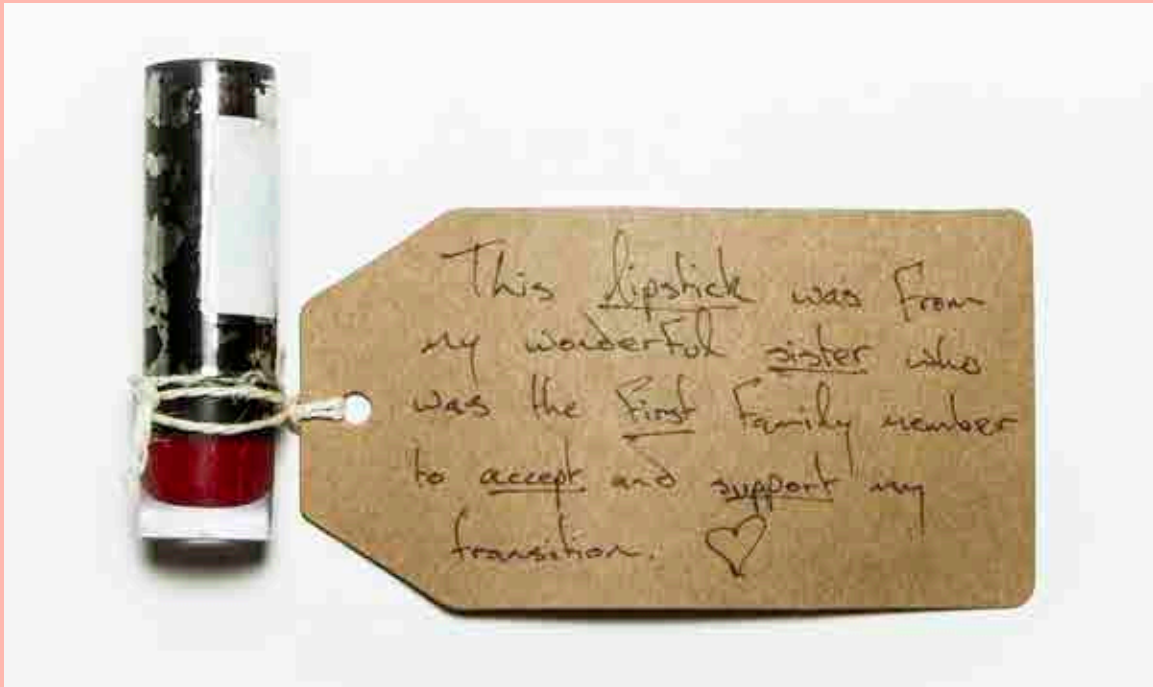


Figure 1. The Museum of Transology. Photography by Katy Davies, © Fashion Space Gallery.

The UK's gender politics have progressed enormously over the last decade. From genderless public toilets, to non-gender-specific changing rooms in flagship department stores, to schools providing support for trans children, few people's daily lives have remained untouched by the 'trans tipping point'. The increased confidence and visibility of trans people across the nation has sparked a gender revolution that is fostering widespread social change.

Little wonder then, that *the Museum of Transology* – the first major exhibition in the UK (if not the world) to explore trans lives using the material culture surrounding them – has attracted such interest and evoked such powerful responses. The project began by gathering everyday objects and stories from the local trans community in Brighton, and developed into a collection of over 250 objects chosen by 108 trans people to represent their gender journeys. In the exhibition, each object comes with a luggage tag attached to it displaying a handwritten explanation of its significance in the donor's gender journey – making ordinary objects extraordinary (figures 1 and 2). Heartfelt, brave and intimate, the deeply moving stories share themes of hope, despair, ambition, confidence and desire through objects of social history, dress, medicine, beauty products and personal ephemera, artists' installations and portraiture. Brought together, these individual experiences provide a revelatory account of how gender politics has evolved in the UK, reflecting the increasing shift in

social consciousness towards mainstream acceptance and legislative equality for the trans population. In the words of one visitor, *the Museum of Transology* is 'an informative, moving and thought provoking exhibition on an important subject that affects us all, however we feel about our gender. This kind of display is exactly what museums should be doing'. Not only does the exhibition serve the community, it serves society at large.

76% of visitors to the exhibition at the Brighton Museum & Art Gallery say it was the main or motivating reason for their visit. It doubled the numbers of the previously most popular exhibition at the London College of Fashion. It has attracted significant international media attention, including film makers from Brazil, Canada's CBC Radio 6, Colombia's Museo Q, Paris' Loud & Proud festival, and a BBC World Service feature. The exhibition space itself has been used by local trans groups, as well as schools, universities and health organisations. It has therefore made a difference to individuals, communities and to wider society. Visitor comments include, 'The subject is so often overlooked and misunderstood; it needs public awareness and understanding which comes through education such as this' and 'It has given me more compassion about the complexity of issues faced by trans folk'. Ultimately, *the Museum of Transology's* popularity reflects a thirst amongst audiences for museums to engage with modern debates surrounding gender and identity. Rather than isolating non-trans audiences, visitor comments have

related deep levels of reflection on their own gender identities. It has also made a previously invisible audience visible, directly combatting social exclusion. ‘Came from Worthing today’, comments one visitor to the exhibition, and to intentionally add emphasis to their point, they write in underlined italics: ‘never been to a museum before’.

Museums have the power to normalise subjects they deal with simply by including them on their walls, highlighting the way in which they abnormalise subjects when they are missing from their displays. Museums create meaning. To not be included on the walls of a museum is to be rendered historically homeless. It is to be told that your existence is meaningless, that you are the unspeakable, that you are destined to be forgotten. Combatting this isolation and otherness, the direct relatability of this exhibition rests entirely on the familiarity of the everyday objects. In combination with the strikingly honest testimonials, the exhibition-making serves to de-spectacularise trans lives that are so often grossly misrepresented by the mainstream media (Sandell 2017). In turn, this contributes to combatting the profound levels of violence and discrimination faced by this marginalised community. This reflects an interplay between social inequality and cultural authority (Sandell 2007) and demonstrates that museums can use their social agency to foster greater social cohesion by helping to demystify oppressed groups.

This collection halts the erasure of trans people from history; it is collecting and curating as a form of direct action and non-violent resistance. Furthermore, *the Museum of Transology* forces museums to acknowledge not only the prevalence of trans erasure, but the continuation of it: without *the Museum of Transology*, even this spectacular moment in Western gender history threatened to slip through the archival gap and into the historical abyss. But marking the trans here and now is only the first incarnation of *the Museum of Transology*. There are three more steps required to complete its full trajectory: to tour the exhibition and collecting workshops in order that museums everywhere can replicate its model and establish their own community’s Museum of Transology; to engage this collection with existing collections, creating rich associations between the countless objects and artworks in collections that showcase gender performativity and diversity throughout history; and to find this collection a permanent home to ensure it is protected for future generations, providing the indisputable proof that ‘We’re here! We’re trans! And we’re in the museum!’

*The Museum of Transology* opened at the Fashion Space Gallery, London College of Fashion Jan – April 2017 and moved to the Brighton Museum & Art Gallery, June 2017 – December 2018.

The collection continues to grow as unsolicited objects and stories continue to arrive from trans people around the world.

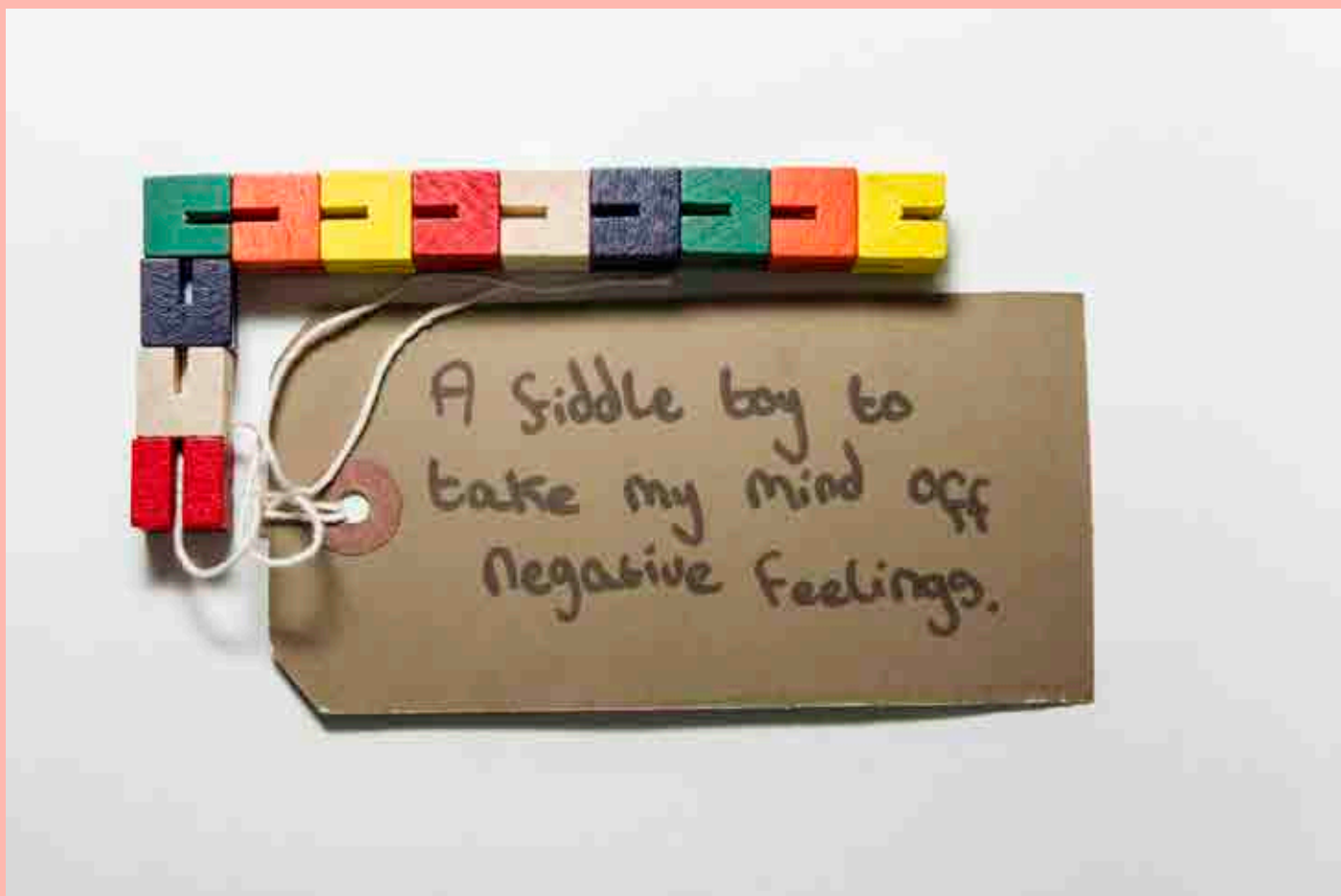


Figure 2. The Museum of Transology. Photography by Katy Davies, © Fashion Space Gallery.

### References

Sandell, R. (2007) *Museums, Prejudice and the Reframing of Difference*, London: Routledge.

Sandell, R. (2017) 'Museums and the Transgender Tipping Point' in R. Sandell, *Museums, Moralities and Human Rights*, London: Routledge.

# 1000 YEARS OF KINGS, QUEENS AND IN-BETWEENS

**Matthew Storey** (Curator, Historic Royal Palaces)

Historic Royal Palaces looks after 6 palaces and 1000 years of history. Given that same-sex love and desire and gender diversity have existed in every era of history, we obviously have many stories to tell. Our approach to LGBT+ interpretation, programming and research is collaborative, historically informed by the sites we look after, and aims to be emotionally engaging.

All new staff at Historic Royal Palaces begin by learning our cause: 'We help everyone explore the story of how monarchs and people have shaped society in some of the greatest palaces

ever built'. This informs everything we do and, it follows therefore, that inclusivity – the 'everyone' in our cause – should be central to the organisation. Recent years have seen greater emphasis on more representative interpretation that reflects the make-up of contemporary society, and the societies of the past. 2015 saw the creation of an internal resource – *Diversity at the Palaces: A Story Bank* – which identified key stories at each of our sites around the themes of migration (forced and voluntary), women's history, sexuality and disability. An awareness that many of our potential audiences felt that the stories we told, of monarchs

and courtiers, were far from their own reality, combined with the substantial public interest and commercial potential of telling these stories, inspired this work. Ultimately, we recognised that diverse stories are important because they are an integral part of the story of our society.

We marked the fiftieth anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in 2017 with our Palace Pride programme, highlighting and celebrating the LGBT+ stories in our palaces' histories. The programming drew talent from across the organisation. While you might expect staff from curatorial, interpretation and learning departments to be involved, the participation of our press and social media teams and, above all, front of house warding teams, gave a vital creative energy. Content for new tours, Pride, Power and Politics at the Tower of London and Pride at the Palace at Hampton Court Palace, was developed collaboratively with the warders who would be presenting it. The overwhelmingly positive visitor feedback (85% of Tower tour attendees rated the event 5 out of 5 for enjoyment), was a direct result of this creative process.

A sense of energy and fun drove the programme, and motivated the staff involved. Our banner in London's Pride parade in 2016 and 2017 proclaimed our celebration of '1000 years of kings, queens and in-betweens'. Marching the route I saw the faces of the crowd concentrating to read the banner, then break into smiles as they took in the subversive, witty and inclusive message.

Our CEO, John Barnes, marched with us and he, like the rest of the staff marching, was inspired by the huge energy and enthusiasm of the crowd. The participation of staff from all levels of the organisation showed the collaborative support for our participation.

Historic Royal Palaces has the advantage – when researching, presenting and interpreting the histories relevant to our sites – that Britain's monarchs have been at the heart of society and legislation. A vast historiography exists for them, and we can relate nationally important histories to our palaces. The Tower of London supported histories of legislation, including Henry VIII's 1534 act of legislation bringing sodomy into civil law, and punishment, as well as the experience of LGBT+ people in the army. Hampton Court Palace, a vast royal residence and home of art from the antiquity onwards, allowed stories of rulers from Hadrian to Queen Anne. It was important that all the stories told felt distinctive and appropriate to Historic Royal Palaces' own sites. The relationships of James I and VI with his male favourites were perfectly suited to the Long Live Queen James event (figure 1) at the Banqueting House, Whitehall, a building created by James with ceiling paintings by Rubens that glorify the King's legacy.

Long Live Queen James, was historically informed, directly inspired by the histories of the site, collaborative, hugely fun and emotionally engaging. The evening's highlight was a 'Jacobean drag-show in Polari', developed by Mark Ravenhill and



Figure 1. Ginger Johnson in *Long Live Queen James*, a Jacobean drag-show in Polari, at the Banqueting House, Whitehall, February 2017.  
© Historic Royal Palaces/Richard Lea-Hair.

performance artist, Scottee, and played by four leading contemporary queer performers. The show told the story of James I and VI and his favourites (a history contemporary with the building), in Polari (a language used by gay men at the time of the partial decriminalisation the event celebrated) performed by queer artists (a representation of contemporary LGBT+ culture). The event was a sophisticated combination of three separate historical periods, informed directly by the histories but relevant to the experience of a modern audience. I gave curatorial input half way through the development of the show. At this point the creators had already been able to develop their knowledge and response to the history on their own terms, without the potential deadening effect of an early meeting with an expert. When I did meet the creative team I was able to answer their questions, respond to their ideas, and give them further information and inspiration for the development of the show.

There is a risk when reporting on LGBT+ programming to emphasise the positive outcomes, but negative responses are a persistent feature experienced by many organisations working with LGBT+ histories across the sector, particularly on social media. While our engagement and reach on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram were impressive, comments from incomprehension to blatant homophobia were made. While, reassuringly, the rest of our online community countered these comments, the Digital Media team also had to manage offensive content. While most staff have a positive experience from

organising LGBT+ interpretation, those who do not, need supporting.

Where next for LGBT+ interpretation at Historic Royal Palaces? Building on the success of 2017, the Executive Board has given support to continue our cross-departmental collaborative approach to champion and co-ordinate LGBT+ programming, interpretation and content across the organisation. Staff at all levels will be encouraged and supported. Quality programming and interpretation is underpinned and informed by original, collaborative, academic research.

Ultimately, we hope to continue to inspire and emotionally engage everyone with stories that are fascinating, relevant and representative.

# QUEER CITY: LONDON'S CLUB CULTURE 1918-1967

**Rowena Hillel** (Education and Outreach Officer, The National Archives)  
and **Victoria Iglkowski** (Diverse Records Specialist, The National Archives)

'I have only been queer since I came to London... before then I knew nothing about it.'

This surprisingly open expression of a queer identity and its link to London is found in a letter written in 1934, housed at The National Archives. The author of the letter, Cyril Coeur de Leon, would have to wait a further 33 years before the passing of the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, which decriminalised homosexual acts between men in private in England and Wales. 2017 marked the 50th anniversary of the passing of the Act, and the 60th anniversary of the Wolfenden Report,

which recommended decriminalisation.

In March 2017, The National Archives and the National Trust joined forces for the first time to recreate London's 'most bohemian rendezvous' and queer-friendly club, The Caravan. Raided and closed by police in 1934, The Caravan was described as 'the most unconventional spot in town' and was one of a number of commercial underground clubs in London's West End where men could freely meet, socialise and undertake relationships with other men.

To mark the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality,

brought about by the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, Queer City: London's Club Culture 1918-1967 sought to tell the important story of many similar clandestine LGBTQ+ places that were raided and closed by the police and to revive the spirit of the Caravan at almost the exact location of the original club.

Sadly, we know so much about The Caravan because of the very fact it was raided and closed and its owners were criminally prosecuted and sentenced to hard labour. Documents held at The National Archives – including Metropolitan Police witness statements, court proceedings and photographs taken following the raid 83 years ago – give us a sense of what frequenting The Caravan may have been like (figures 1, 2 and 3). Love letters between men who attended the club, found stashed in hiding places after the raid, are a poignant reminder of the hidden lives these men were forced to live.

It was these rich original documents that were used as the inspiration and starting point for Harry Ross, Helen O'Neil and their team to create a powerful immersive experience based on what we know about the club and its members from the material that survives. Almost 83 years later, the Caravan was once again open for business.

At the door we were invited to step back into 1930s Queer London and become members of the secret 'Caravan Society' by signing a replica member's book. As we entered the smoky packed club we were

introduced to our host: actor, singer and director Ralph Bogard, suitably dressed in 1930s attire. 'Welcome to the Caravan', he declared, 'where anything can happen ...' What followed was a rare treat of some of the finest queer cabaret, vintage DJs, music hall artists and contemporary poets London had to offer, all set against the backdrop of undercover police investigations and raids on queer venues.

In the daytime a dedicated team of National Trust volunteers led visitors on a journey through queer London exploring some of the spaces where a thriving queer community lived, worked and partied in and around Soho, Covent Garden and Fitzrovia in the early part of the 20th century: the legendary 'Billie's' club around the corner on Little Denmark Street, and the hub of queer black London, 'The Shim Sham', which stood on Wardour Street.

Like many underground clubs of its era, the Caravan only remained open for a short while before a letter signed by 'some rate payers of Endell street' alerted the police to 'the sexual perverts, lesbians and sodomites' that frequented it. But despite being under constant threat of police raids and arrests, queer venues like the Caravan remained important hubs for men and women to express their sexuality and love freely.

In the anniversary year, Queer City celebrated the stories of these clandestine spaces offering a valuable window into queer club culture and the everyday prejudices faced by the LGBTQ+

community in the early 20th Century. The significance and spirit of the project was captured by one visitor after an evening at the club; 'For those few nights, a comet

blazed across Soho, and all of us had a place where we could be glorious together and set the world on fire. We had the Caravan Society, and I can only hope that its light shines on into the rest of this year.'

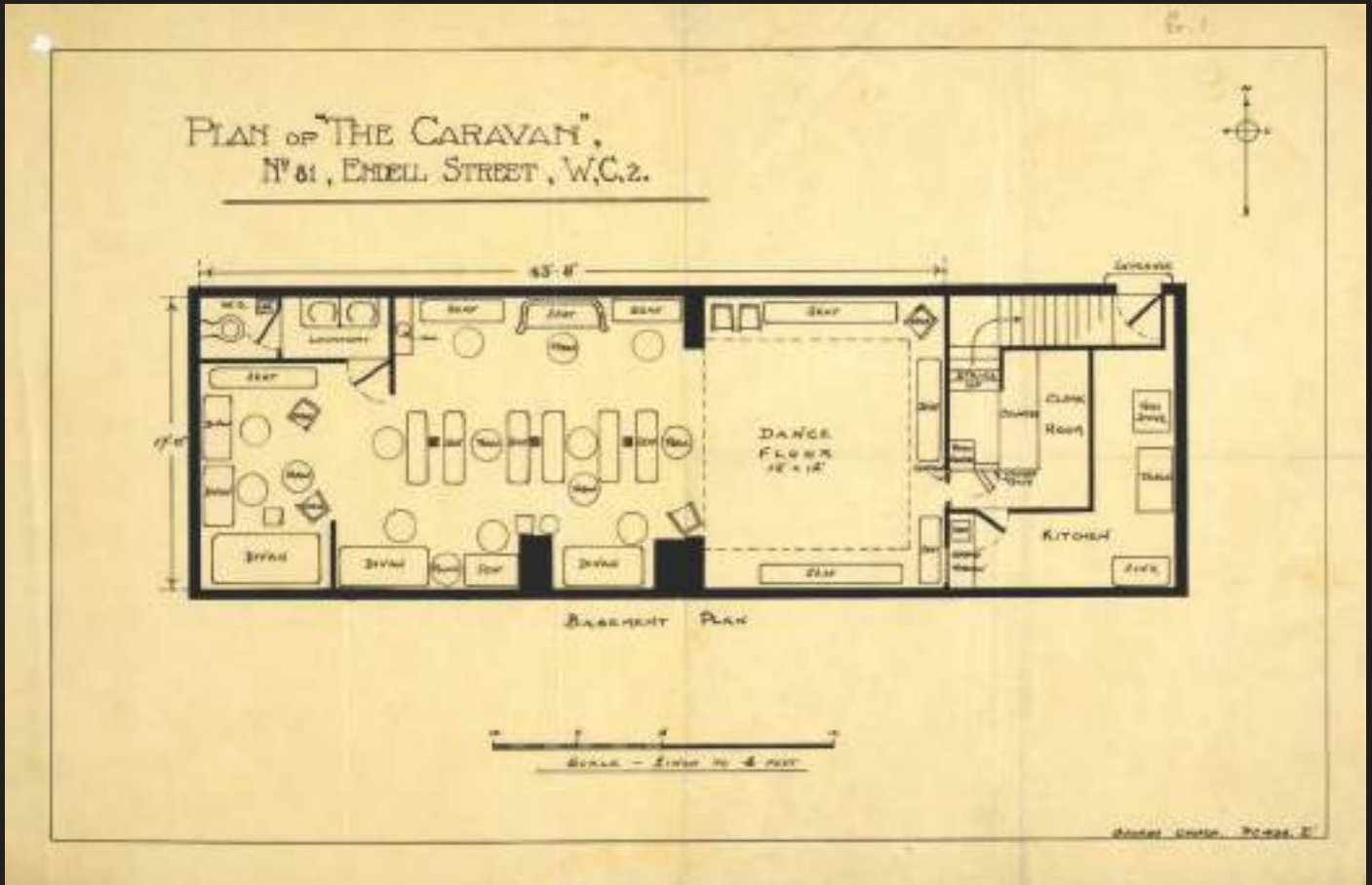


Figure 1

Figure 1. Police sketch plan of *The Caravan Club* in Endell Street, London 1934. This plan of the Caravan Club was used for police purposes, outlining the different areas of the club. At one point 102 men and 45 women are described as being in the small basement club. The National Archives: MEPO 3/758.

Figure 2. Police photograph of the interior of *The Caravan Club*, Endell Street, London 1934, taken after a raid on the club. Police witness statements describe the club interiors as 'oriental' and 'smoky'. The National Archives: MEPO 3/758.

Figure 3. Fitzroy Square was home to the basement flat of Bobby B (Robert Britt) where he would hold parties for a small group of his working class friends. The police raided the venue after suggestions of same sex relationships in the flat. This photograph was taken as police evidence, and is a rare example of a surviving photograph of men and women present in a raid on a queer venue. The National Archives: CRIM 1/387.



Figure 2



Figure 3

# EVERYONE'S HISTORY DESERVES TO BE TOLD

**Annie Reilly** (Heritage Open Days Manager, National Trust)

For the past 23 years, people across England have been using Heritage Open Days to tell their stories, shape their places and chip away at canonical ideas of 'heritage'. A grassroots, community-driven network of walks, talks, openings, re-creations and revelations, Heritage Open Days may not immediately suggest a forum for radical histories, but scratch beneath the bunting and we are a movement built on activism and inversion of power.

When I joined Heritage Open Days in early 2017, I saw the festival as a haven for stories excluded from history textbooks

and major museums, and a natural forum for surfacing, commemorating and sharing histories that have previously sat outside the mainstream, like those linked to LGBTQ lives.

The Unsung Stories commissioning programme, supported by generous funding from players of the People's Postcode Lottery, was conceived to create new, impactful work that would shine a different light on familiar places and stories, engage new audiences and offer powerful experiences. This chimed perfectly with my previous experience working in theatre. I know that artists

and their work can stretch and enrich our understanding of history and of each other. And I know that artistic work rooted in history and community can have uniquely powerful effects on artists, participants and audiences.

With the anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in England and Wales, I believed we had a unique opportunity to amplify Heritage Open Days' ability to engage with under-explored stories and to reflect, support and be supported by the National Trust's emerging Challenging Histories programme. We therefore commissioned four flagship artistic interventions that centralised queer voices and perspectives and connected communities to under-appreciated and marginalised aspects of their history.

I had high hopes that we would create some powerful, high-quality work and encourage more diverse programming

**I know that artists and their work can stretch and enrich our understanding of history and of each other.**

at a local level. But I wasn't sure what to expect. Yes, our festival is a haven for niche and 'beyond the canon' histories but it can also feel like our world is increasingly socially conservative. Our image is not that of an ambitious arts-commissioner. However, I believed foregrounding diverse histories was an important opportunity for Heritage Open Days to boldly state our belief that everyone's story – everyone's history – deserves to be told.

What happened exceeded my highest hopes. Over fifty-five applications from interested artists produced a strong field from which we could have happily funded many projects. More than forty five organisers suggested local stories and places of significance and a willingness to work with and host an artist.

Our chosen artists created diverse pieces unique in form and approach, but all equally impactful. Each of them was made all the more moving and evocative by being sited where the stories originally took place. Re-Dock and SHIFT produced VR monologues and a community play about Alan Turing and (crucially) his co-defendant in the courtroom where he was tried. Scottee worked with three queer performers voicing rumour, gossip and memory of Richard Chopping and Denis Wirth-Miller in the places they frequented in Wivenhoe. From Julie-Rose Bower, we commissioned a multi-media trail and community performance that explored the life, work and violent death of record producer Joe Meek outside his home on Holloway Road. Olivia Winteringham

## Everyone's history deserves to be told

and Kiln Ensemble led an international gathering of letters which were offered to a memorial flame whose ashes are being transformed into a diamond for the Oswestry Town Museum.

Our evaluation yielded many inspiring statistics and anecdotes: 64% of attendees for the piece in Wivenhoe stated it changed their perception of the county; the majority of the audience for the Holloway Road piece said they saw previously hidden LGBTQ aspects of Joe

Meek's life and work. An audience member for the Turing play commented 'I will be aware of attitudes to people's sexuality and try to challenge prejudice. I am glad my kids came to hear this. It has made us talk about Turing's story.' A local council officer said of the Kiln work, 'the feedback has been tremendous, heart-breaking but most importantly real and from the deepest parts of our community's lives.' These works and the effect they had on the audience and the community were quietly profound, opening up dialogues



Artists Nando Messias, La John Joseph and Mem Morrison, *From Wivenhoe, With Love: The life and times of Richard Chopping + Denis Wirth-Miller*. © Rahil Ahmad and Heritage Open Days.

and partnerships and engaging with elements of our shared past that had previously been hidden or disregarded.

Most exciting and inspiring was the ripple effect of these works and the central adoption of LGBTQ heritage as a theme. We commissioned four events but our organisers across the country hosted over twenty five others, taking the anniversary as a chance to tell new stories about their places. Adding a compelling level to the local picture, these people said 'yes, these stories deserve to be told'.

It was important to me that, although we highlighted queer history this year to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Sexual Offences Act, (as we mark various historic anniversaries), we do not separate these events and histories from the overall festival. I wanted queer stories to appear on the same platform and be highlighted alongside bell ringing events, historical re-enactments and tours of factories. This was about widening the canvas, not painting on a separate one.

It was gratifying to see the power of centralising queer voices and perspectives explored as part of the larger story of our heritage. I was also moved and proud of the moments where it was evident that people who had likely not engaged with diverse histories were drawn to the power of these stories, which underlined the humanity of us all. The specificity of these situations, these stories artfully told, shone as something unique but entirely relatable. I saw people who – perhaps for

the first time – engaged with the impacts and reality of queer persecution in our country, considered queer histories and heard queer voices. How many echoes there are of the exclusion, hurt, love, humour and pain we all feel to varying degrees.

I underestimated the ability and the appetite of people across the country to look beyond their own experience, their own understanding, to engage with stories and perspectives that challenge linear, simple and monolithic understandings of histories. Through these events – both centrally commissioned and locally conceived – communities across England quietly but strongly stood up against hegemonic history and sanitised heritage, embracing new narratives, new partners, new voices and challenged narrow or simple understandings of our past. I find this activism and this openness admirable and deeply encouraging. Heritage Open Days and its committed local organisers proved that our festival is about ALL our stories. We widened the canvas and our communities painted with gusto.

# QUEER TALK AT THE RED HOUSE, ALDEBURGH

**Lucy Walker** (Director of Public Programming and Learning  
at the Britten-Pears Foundation)

Queer Talk (Feb-Oct 2017) was held in a gallery at the former home of the composer Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) and his lifetime partner, Peter Pears (1910-1986) (figure 1). One of its main aims was to locate Britten and Pears firmly in their period, explaining the need for their relationship to be secret, and discussing the challenging times in which they lived. They were, to some degree, protected by their social status and discretion but, during the 1953 'purge' by the home secretary, it appears that Britten was interviewed by Scotland Yard.

A major feature of the exhibition was a 7-metre long timeline of LGBT history covering slightly more than 100 years, starting with the trial of Oscar Wilde and ending in 2016 with Prince William adorning the front cover of *Attitude*. Underneath, there was another timeline of Britten and Pears' relationship, and significant works composed by Britten that managed to speak of homoerotic love even within the confines of the time, such as the all-male opera *Billy Budd* and the romantic love song, *Canticle I*, subtitled

Figure 1. Britten and Pears in Djakarta, January 1956 (photographer unknown). Image courtesy of the Britten-Pears Foundation.



My Beloved is Mine and I am His.

The exhibition gave some prominence to Lord Wolfenden: footage of his stance on the supposed ‘immorality’ of homosexuality (even though he proposed that private acts were not a matter for the law), and newspaper reportage of the outcomes of his 1957 Report when it was published. We showed a clip of the campaigning film, *Victim*, which exposed how vulnerable homosexual men were to blackmail. Other exhibits included a display of letters between Britten and Pears, and a look at ‘Other Lives’, such as the horrific treatment of Alan Turing in the 1950s.

We found visitors particularly engaged with the timeline. We saw people standing in front of the year they were born, and realising how attitudes towards the LGBT community had developed in their lifetimes – sometimes showing astonishment that there had been attempts as recently as the 1980s to row back progress (Section 28, for example, the law that prohibited local authorities in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland from activities that were deemed to ‘promote homosexuality’). Younger visitors were struck by how quickly the laws had moved in their lifetimes, compared to the snail-like pace of progress in previous decades. This interaction between current values and attitudes and historical repression and prejudice was especially powerful. I received personal correspondence from several visitors who expressed gratitude that we were telling this story, and often

related the timeline to their own stories and struggles.

The timeline also featured ‘decriminalisation bunting’: flags representing countries alongside the dates at which male homosexuality was decriminalised—with some countries such as France and Belgium decriminalising in the 18th century (even though the law in France subsequently reverted for a period). The timeline ended with a list of countries in which homosexuality remains illegal – emphasising that there is still some way to go towards true, global equality.

Alongside the exhibition we held a series of related events. These included Queer Talks and Queer Recitals - plus a more adventurous event: a public reading of the Wolfenden Report (entitled *We Are Concerned...*) which took place during the Aldeburgh Festival. Members of the public, Britten-Pears staff and volunteers, and visiting Festival artists, took turns to read roughly 10-15 minutes each from the Report until it concluded: it took around 6 and a half hours! It was remarkable to experience the Report in such an immersive way: to understand its heartfelt aims to be objective, yet witness its built-in prejudices against the very people it was attempting to be objective about.

Although the Wolfenden event sold out, as did a wrap-up session when the exhibition closed, the turnout for some events was a little disappointing. There is no strongly visible gay scene in Aldeburgh or nearby, and the setting is rural/coastal rather than urban/metropolitan. It’s also possible

that there was some discomfort with the thematic focus of Queer Talk. While the fact of Britten and Pears' relationship has never been concealed to visitors who come to the Red House, making it the subject of an exhibition and a year-long process of exploration was thought by some – including some volunteers and board members – to be a betrayal of their hard-won privacy. However, the Britten-Pears Foundation as a whole (the organisation which looks after Britten's legacy) strongly backed our contribution to the anniversary celebrations, which we had planned as far back as 2013. To those who questioned why we were taking part, we would sometimes remark: what do you think it would mean if we weren't?

Despite these challenges, the exhibition brought in many new visitors and we received barely any negative feedback from the public. In terms of legacy, this year's exhibition, Britten in America, features the period when Britten and Pears first began their romantic relationship, and we continue to mark LGBT history month which we have done since 2014. We have been asked for advice by other organisations on how we approached the topic, and how to reach audiences, and recently an LGBTQ youth organisation in Ipswich has made contact on the back of our visibility relating to this issue. Several colleagues, armed with a pack of Queer Talk badges, spoke to the group at a recent open evening and we are planning to engage them in further visits and dialogue. We are very proud to have been involved in this important anniversary – and will continue to tell the story.

# Bringing Queer Home

**Matt Smith** (artist and curator, Professor of Craft, Konstfack University of the Arts, Stockholm) and **Richard Sandell** (Professor of Museum Studies, RCMG, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester)

Researching and revealing queer lives can be riven with complexity and challenges. At the same time, ignoring or suppressing those histories – as has often happened in historic houses and heritage sites, as well as museums and galleries – is, we argue here, not only unethical but increasingly untenable in the twenty-first century. Choosing to remain silent on the numerous queer connections that can be found in historic sites – including those that appear (to some at least) to be glaringly obvious as well as those that lie hidden or that offer only hints and suggestions of queerness – risks complicity with efforts to undermine LGBTQ equality and raises important questions about the roles and responsibilities of cultural institutions in relation to contemporary social and political issues.

In the spring of 2016, we were approached by the National Trust to explore the possibility of a collaboration that would help to shape their inaugural Challenging Histories national public programme through a focus on LGBTQ heritage. Despite the numerous challenges which, at that time, were only beginning to come into view, the opportunity to work with the Trust on a national scale – to uncover, reveal and

publicly present queer histories that, until now, had been largely overlooked, silenced or suppressed – was too good to miss. We had both worked in this field for a number of years. Matt, as an artist and curator, had been experimenting with contemporary arts practice to look differently at heritage sites, unpicking the dominance of upper class male privilege and rebalancing narratives with stories of the women, the working classes, the people of colour, and the queer people associated with the houses. Richard, as a practitioner/ researcher, had been exploring how narratives of gender variation and same-sex love and desire in museums, galleries and heritage settings are intertwined with broader struggles for LGBTQ equality and human rights. A collaboration with the largest heritage body in the UK proved tempting for a number of reasons, not least the opportunities the scale of the organisation offered to stimulate public debate around contemporary LGBTQ equality on a national scale. That many Trust sites are located away from the metropolitan centres that have tended to host experimental queer cultural programming combined with the opportunity to work with and engage rural communities, that have had relatively little

exposure to LGBTQ equality initiatives, offered an additional incentive to take up the invitation to work together.

This essay draws on the collaborative research we carried out with the Trust over a two year period, and a broader body of literature and international practice that helped form our thinking, to explore the challenges bound up in queer public heritage practices and to make a case for an approach that takes account of the contemporary social significance of greater openness around LGBTQ lives.

### Queer possibilities

The past fifty years have seen enormous changes in how queer people are perceived and treated in Britain. After centuries of oppression, same-sex marriage only came into effect three years ago in England, Scotland and Wales<sup>1</sup> and social stigma still affects the lives of many (Bachmann and Gooch 2017). Given both the scale and pace of attitudinal change it is therefore unsurprising that interpretation within historic houses is often out of step with contemporary thinking and that there still exists considerable uncertainty around how to interpret LGBTQ histories. A key ambition for the national public programme that eventually took the name *Prejudice and Pride* was to address these uncertainties; to achieve a closer alignment between approaches to interpretation within historic houses and contemporary (relatively more progressive) attitudes to LGBTQ lives embodied in UK and international human rights laws and policies. We wanted to both significantly increase the visibility of queer narratives and also address the awkward silences and omissions, the opaque and euphemistic references that are commonly found in historic house interpretation, which reproduce a sense that same-sex love and desire or gender diversity are something shameful, deviant or unwelcome.

Early discussions naturally centred on language. We drew on a rich body of theory and debate around the relative value and appropriateness of different terms to refer to historic and contemporary experiences, desires and identities. We adopted the familiar and convenient acronym LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer) to denote our concern for the widest possible range of experiences whilst acknowledging that there is no single overarching history and that people's experiences will vary greatly. Throughout the collaboration, we used both 'queer' and 'LGBTQ' in a variety of ways to encompass same-sex love and desire (commonly referred to today by the terms lesbian, gay and bisexual), gender diversity or variation (commonly referred to today as trans or transgender) and people whose intimate relationships or gender portrayals fell outside the norms society expected.

'Queer' has become a term increasingly used in academic and cultural settings to cover a broad spectrum of sexualities and genders and to purposefully trouble the strict binaries of straight/gay, male/female and masculine/feminine (Jagose 1996: 1).

LGBT identities are not historically stable and the representation of historical queer lives is not straightforward. Terminology is both geographically and historically specific (Sullivan 2003: 1). As Nikki Sullivan states: "Terms such as invert, queer, sodomite, sapphist, dyke, and so on, are cultural artefacts that are tied to ways of understanding and of being that are specific to a particular cultural milieu" (ibid: 2). How we consider sexuality (gay, straight, bisexual, asexual) and gender (male, female, transgender, intersex) and how these line up with ideas about masculinity and femininity is shaped by both our upbringing and social norms and expectations.

There are long histories of people loving members of their own sex and of people disrupting the binary between male and female. However, the terms we currently use (lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans) do not neatly fit onto many past lives. The idea that someone's choice of partner forms their identity (gay/lesbian) and that this influences their life choices is a relatively recent (in historic terms) idea. 'Queer' is therefore useful when discussing lives that predate the emergence of the terms 'lesbian', 'gay', 'bisexual' or 'transgender'.

It is argued that, historically, in Western Europe, homosexuality was an act that someone engaged in rather than an essential part of their character or make-up. Bray argues that modern homosexual identity originated 'at the close of the 17th century, with the emergence of an urban homosexual subculture that sprang up around [molly houses] north of the Thames' (Bray 1982: 84 quoted in Jagose 1996: 11–12). Foucault, by contrast, argued that it was around 1870 when, 'in various medical discourses, the notion of the homosexual as an identifiable type of person begins to emerge' (ibid: 11–12):

The nineteenth century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history ... Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality ... The sodomite had been a temporary aberration, the homosexual was now a species (Foucault 1978: 43).

Of course gender variation is just as nuanced; language, identity and lived experiences of diverse gender expression are culturally, geographically and historically situated, creating challenges in the use of contemporary terms, identity markers and perspectives to describe the lives of people living in different times and contexts.

The change from act to identity complicates the retrospective use of contemporary LGBT identity terms to describe historical figures. Even today, identity terms can be problematic, with many people who do not identify – be it publicly or personally – as LGBT, engaging in same-sex relationships or expressing their gender in ways that challenge conventional binaries. Sometimes it can be more appropriate to resist labels altogether when describing the lives of historical figures.

The term 'queer', by contrast, opens up a mesh of possibilities (Gorman-Murray et al. 2010). Although not uncontested (Browne and Nash 2010), queer can be a

## Bringing Queer Home

very useful overarching term (sometimes also used as a verb) to overcome some of the limitations of the familiar contemporary identity markers – L, G, B and T. Queer is therefore a helpful way to include all people whose lives challenge gender and sexual norms (Sullivan 2003) as well as people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Of course, 'queer' is not unproblematic. Historically it has been a pejorative term, and there are many people who continue to be uncomfortable with its contemporary usage. However, like many other theorists and practitioners, we have chosen to use the term extensively in our own work because of the distinct advantages it offers for bypassing at least some of the obstacles posed by other terms such as lesbian, bisexual or gay.

Queer allows us to sidestep the 'smoking gun' of evidence that is sometimes demanded to categorically prove that someone experienced same-sex desires. Rather than placing fixed and static labels on people, 'queer' can speak of all difference related to sexuality, gender and sex. When working historically, this is very useful since it can include anyone whose sexual intimacies or gender performances fell outside the strictly controlled 'heterosexual' norm (Cook 2014) – including feminine men and masculine women, people who had emotional intimacies with others of the same sex, people whose sexualities were fluid as well as people who might now define themselves as L, G, B, T or Q. 'Queer' also allows us to view these historic lives as distinct from any stereotypical lifestyle which we might now associate with gay men or women since, as Matt Cook has argued, there was, in the past, 'by no means a uniform and coherent understanding of what men having sex and relationships with other men amounted to' (ibid: 11). Therefore, it is useful to think of these historic lives not as archetypes but individuals, individuals who help map out some of the many ways queer people have been able to live their lives.

Stuart Hall suggests that we think of identity not as an unproblematic fact, but 'as a "production", which is never complete, always in process' (Hall 1990: 222). His argument suggests that one is only aware of identity when inhabiting a position where your identity is unaligned with those of the people around you. By opening up processes of curation at historic sites to include queer histories, it allows people who identify as LGBTQ to be part of the mainstream, to no longer be 'other' or excluded. It also invites visitors who are not LGBTQ to recognise and acknowledge sexual and gender differences in the past and the present day.

### Queer and the Historic House

Discrimination, criminalisation and medicalisation have made life difficult for queer people. The transition that has been unfolding in Britain – from the repression of queer histories and LGBTQ narratives under Clause 28, a law that prohibited local authorities in England, Wales, Scotland

and Northern Ireland from activities that were deemed to 'promote homosexuality'<sup>2</sup>, to the recent introduction of same-sex marriage – reflects a tremendous shift in the rights and visibility of sexual minorities. Only with the introduction of same sex marriage in England, Wales and Scotland in 2014 did the law stop discriminating against gay men and women, while same sex marriage is still not available to people in Northern Ireland.

Queer histories, therefore, need to be considered in the context of a society which promoted secrecy and covert behaviour amongst many of those people whose sexuality and gender fell outside of society's norms. Owing to this, the number of queer histories we have knowledge of is relatively small. With some notable exceptions, textual information about historical queer lives is unusual and, before the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1967, was often confined to criminal or medical records.

In recent years, the presence of queer lives has started to become more visible in museums in the UK and internationally. Gay Icons at the National Portrait Gallery (2009), Queering the Museum at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (2010–2011), April Ashley: portrait of a lady at the Museum of Liverpool (2013–15), Coming Out at the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool (2017) and Queer British Art at Tate Britain, London (2017) are just some of the exhibitions which have used different ways of mapping queer lives through material and visual culture.

There are relatively few intrinsically 'queer objects'. Most objects rely on their associations with queer individuals – the door from Oscar Wilde's cell, April Ashley's wardrobe – for their queer relevance. Museums often strip the personal associations from objects and reframe them within the museum's own taxonomies. This can make queer curation in museums difficult, and has encouraged critical and creative ways of reviewing and revisiting collections.

In contrast, historic houses often place people at the heart of their interpretation. These sites are a result of their owners shaping the environment and its contents in a way that very often reflects their identity, experience and desires. As Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson (1998: 13) have pointed out, 'how we decorate our homes, the consumer choices we make, or do not make, or would wish to make, give off signs, articulate aspects of our personality with all its complexities of dreams and aspirations, as well as status and position, wealth and class'. The owners of historic houses had the wealth and influence to live outside the constraints imposed on most people in society. While their queerness may have been criticised, their money also very often allowed them to insulate themselves. This privilege allowed queer lives to be lived and recorded and is one of our richest sources of queer histories. Historic houses are therefore infused with personal stories which might lead us to wonder why queer histories have so seldom been visible within them.

For Alison Oram, historic house interpretation in Britain

'generally reflects dominant ideas about the national past, and mobilises family narratives about aristocracy, class, lineage and family in order to forge a sense of stability and national identity' (2012: 533). This presentation is undertaken by house curators and custodians who choose what is – and is not – suitable for public consumption. With a few notable exceptions, such as Charleston in East Sussex, the former home of artists Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant<sup>3</sup>, the queer histories of historic houses have generally been excluded or marginalised through this process.

Queer histories have traditionally not been taught at school and unlike other marginalised groups whose histories are often shared between parents and children, queer people are seldom the children of LGBTQ parents. Therefore, historic houses have an important, indeed unique, part to play in bringing to life these histories as part of all our history, and specifically to give contemporary queer lives an anchor in the past.

The home also has a very poignant and current role in queer lives. The experience of having to leave home because of your sexuality or gender identity may not be universally shared by all LGBTQ people but it is a recurring part of many queer histories as well as contemporary lives. Criminalisation around the world underpins the forced displacement of LGBTQ asylum seekers migrating to Britain and elsewhere (Taylor and Townsend 2014) and, within the UK, present day prejudice and persecution forces the movement of numerous

LGBTQ people from one part of the country to another. According to research by the Albert Kennedy Trust (2015), 24 percent of homeless young people identify as LGBT and, of these, 77 percent believe that coming out to their parents was the main factor in their becoming homeless.

*Prejudice and Pride* therefore represents a significant shift, not only in the thinking and practice of the UK's largest heritage body but, more broadly, in the ways in which we can begin to think about the role of historic houses and heritage sites in addressing previously hidden histories and engaging audiences in exploring their contemporary social and political significance. The programme's explicit focus acknowledges that the silencing of queer people in the interpretation encountered at National Trust properties has had the potential to be both hurtful and alienating as well as potentially damaging to contemporary LGBTQ equality.

Grass roots historians have been identifying sites of LGBTQ interest for a number of years. In 2016, Historic England launched a mapping website – *Pride of Place* – which enabled members of the public to record and pin their LGBTQ memories, linking them to specific buildings and locations (Historic England). The National Trust saw an exciting opportunity to not only add to this burgeoning field, but to set out to make a difference, enriching the ways in which visitors, and society more broadly, view and discuss queer lives. However, arguably the most compelling reason for including queer lives in the curation and interpretation

**By opening up processes of curation at historic sites to include queer histories, it allows people who identify as LGBTQ to be part of the mainstream, to no longer be 'other' or excluded. It also invites visitors who are not LGBTQ to recognise and acknowledge sexual and gender differences in the past and the present day.**

of these buildings is that they are very often integral to understanding the history of the house itself. The inclusion of queer histories should, therefore, be understood as a core part of the curatorial remit and not something that can arbitrarily be excluded based on the preferences, concerns and fears of individual staff.

### Erasing and reinscribing queer lives

To explore this argument further, it is useful to consider the family tree, which is central to the interpretation of most historic houses. It can be argued that family trees are primarily a means of mapping the historic distribution of wealth and assets – illustrating how the ownership of a house or title moved through the generations. They also provide a useful starting point for exploring historic sexualities.

The family tree – with its reliance on marriages, divorces and offspring – typically presents an artificially fixed, neat and clean history; a highly edited and sometimes sanitised history of heterosexual intimacies that frequently omits same-sex relationships. Some houses – such as Charleston in East Sussex – have listed extra marital relationships in their family trees and recognise the need to do this in order to present a rich and accurate account of the site's history. For many others, however, the family tree has provided an easy excuse to sideline relationships which fall outside of heterosexual norms.

The joining of male/female couples through marriage on these trees – whilst not an absolute guarantee of heterosexual coupling – places male/female pairings at the heart of the home and also functions to highlight those people who did not get married. At the same time, however, this omission of same-sex relationships – rather than silencing queer lives – can sometimes lead to people being marked out by virtue of their single status – 'spinster aunts' and 'bachelor uncles' – full of queer possibilities and ripe for investigation.

This difference between omitting and silencing is important. At Nymans House and Gardens, one of the most famous residents was Oliver Messel (figure 1). A celebrated theatre designer, Messel has been the focus of numerous exhibitions and displays at the house. When Matt Smith started working with Nymans in 2011, the 2007 guidebook, *The Nymans Story*, and house map contained a family tree which showed Oliver as a 'bachelor uncle' while at the same time recording the first and second marriages of both his brother and sister. Matt had first seen a photograph of Oliver Messel at an exhibition at Nymans a few years before. The pose in the photography, his unmarried status and his choice of career all flagged up to him that Oliver might have been queer.

It was therefore unsurprising to later find out that Oliver had had a very public relationship with another man, Vagn Riis-Hansen, who was also his business partner, for nearly 30 years. While curatorial omission (via the family tree) had not

wholly erased Oliver and Vagn's relationship, since attuned visitors were able to read that something queer was going on, it nevertheless signified a problematic mistreatment of queer lives. If queer histories are not being discussed by the institution in the same way that heterosexual lives so frequently are, it suggests to visitors that queer lives (and possibly queer visitors) are unwelcome, or at least that they should be silent or discreet. To their credit, staff at Nymans House subsequently amended the house maps to include Oliver and Vagn's relationship.

There is something particularly cruel about silencing queer histories in historic houses. Queer histories are relatively scarce. When being a gay man was a criminal offence, or being a lesbian resulted in forced medical interventions, it made sense for people to be silent about their lives. The home provided a space – albeit only a semi-private one in the case of large houses – within which queer people could make their own spaces and live the lives they wanted. Silencing these fragile histories, therefore, has profound consequences. For Anna Conlan, silence and omission '... does not simply mean marginalization; it formally classifies certain lives, histories, and practices as insignificant, renders them invisible, marks them as unintelligible, and, thereby casts them in the realm of the unreal' (2010: 257).

In settings where queer lives have been discussed, historic houses have often relied on clumsy euphemisms. Queer histories are seldom clean cut and unambiguous and it is all too easy to see why these interpretations have happened. However, this does not mean that these muddled interpretations are acceptable, or that they do not cause hurt.

In the guidebook at another Trust house, *The Vyne*, its owner John Chute (figure 2) is described as:

... the youngest of Edward Chute's ten children and, as he was unlikely to inherit the family estates, spent many years travelling in Italy ... He was never to marry, but surrounded himself with younger men, including his handsome, wealthy and deaf cousin, Francis Whithead ... In Italy the two inseparable cousins were called the 'Chutheads' (Howard 2010: 53).

It is hard to know what to make of this paragraph which seems laden with innuendo but offers readers nothing more than tantalising suggestions. This ambiguity leads to uncertainty in the visitor. Whether or not John and Francis had a sexual relationship, there is more than enough evidence of John living outside a heteronormative framework – including allocating rooms at *The Vyne* for his close friend Horace Walpole – to place him comfortably in queer history work. Indeed, contemporary society was not shy of discussing – and at times condemning – their perceived sexualities and performances of gender. George Hardinge referred to Walpole's 'effeminacy of manner' (quoted in Bentman 1997: 277) and added 'some of his [Walpole's] friends were as effeminate in appearance and in manner as himself and were as witty. Of these I remember two, Mr. Chute and Mr. George



Montagu. But others had effeminacy alone to recommend them' (ibid). That this effeminacy was not socially acceptable becomes clear in William Guthrie's attack on Walpole in 1764<sup>4</sup>:

This abuse it would be more unpardonable to reply to, or retort, since there is a weakness and an effeminacy in it ... The feeble tone of the expression, and the passionate fondness with which the personal qualities of the officer in question are continually dwelt on would almost tempt one to imagine, that his arrow came forth from a female quiver, but as it wants both the true delivery and lively imagination which characterized a lady's pen, the attack must have been from a neutral quarter, from a being between both, neither totally male or female ... by nature maleish, by disposition female ... that it would very much puzzle a common observer to assign to him to his true sex ... (William Guthrie quoted in Bentman 1997: 282)

The open speculation that surrounded Chute and Walpole in their day begs the question – why did we get so wary

about discussing queer lives in contemporary curation? The intimacy between Chute and Walpole led to their forming, along with Richard Bentley, the 'Committee of Taste', which supervised the enlargement and decoration of Walpole's villa, Strawberry Hill. During their 36-year friendship/relationship, Walpole and Chute continually sought to influence and adapt their own and each other's properties and the contents of those properties. The relationship between these two men is therefore not some salacious footnote, but a core part of the narrative of the house, and the property we see today is a result of their relationship and discussions. Whilst visitors to Strawberry Hill find no explicit mention of Horace Walpole's queerness in the villa's interpretation and guidebook, this omission has not prevented a wider discussion in the media and amongst researchers and visitors (Foyle 2016)<sup>5</sup>.

Figure 1. Oliver Messel, Venice 1950s. Photograph by Antony Armstrong Jones. © Armstrong Jones. Courtesy of the Snowdon Archive.



Figure 2. John Chute Esq. (1701-1776) by Johann Heinrich Muntz (1727-1798) at The Vyne, Basingstoke, Hampshire. © National Trust Images/John Hammond.

Figure 3. Sunrise over Felbrigg Hall, Norfolk. © National Trust Images/John Millar.

### So why aren't we all queering historic houses?

That interpretation of queer lives in historic houses has been so sparse will sometimes be the result of a lack of curatorial interest, uncomfortable feelings or professional uncertainty. Certainly, engaging with queer histories raises some unique challenges and may require curatorial staff to open themselves to new processes and ways of working.

One of the main issues is locating the 'evidence' of queer lives. Unlike heterosexual relationships which could be legally recognised through marriage, queer lives and intimacies were traditionally only recognised through the state in criminal or medical records. Personal papers were often destroyed or hidden by the individual or their family (Oram and Cook 2017). Moreover, we have all grown up in a society which assumes heterosexuality as the normal way to be. This is the basis for heteronormativity, defined as 'the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality not only coherent – that is, organised

as a sexuality – but also privileged' (Berlant and Warner 1998: 548). The ubiquity of heteronormativity which ensures 'heterosexuality as an institution is so embedded in our culture, that it has become almost invisible' (Sullivan 2003: 121) means that we usually assume that someone was heterosexual unless we are told otherwise. Compounding this, the level of evidence that curators and researchers have demanded to assert that someone was queer has often been far higher than that needed to assume heterosexuality.

More often than not, it will be appropriate to acknowledge that there are gaps in evidence, leading to uncertainties. Leighton House in London provides a useful case study in dealing with uncertainty while at the same time not closing down possibilities. As Richard Sandell (2017), explains, for many years the House avoided reference to Leighton's sexuality in the absence of evidence pointing to relationships with either men or women, despite considerable academic debate on the subject.

In more recent years, however, the museum has begun to



shift its position. In 2010, when the House reopened to the public after extensive restoration and refurbishment, Alan Kirwan, then Education Officer at Leighton House, argued successfully for explicit acknowledgement in the museum's interpretation of the debate regarding Leighton's homosexuality. Today, the brochure that all visitors receive on arrival at the museum's front desk, states;

'Leighton remains an enigmatic figure. His private life was closely guarded. He lived alone and travelled alone; some found it hard to penetrate his polished social manner and wondered if they ever really knew him. Leighton never married and rumours of him having a child with one of his models, in addition to the supposition that Leighton may have been homosexual, continue to be debated today' (Sandell 2017: 77).

A further challenge to queering historic houses lies in the shifting ways in which queerness might be expressed or discerned. Intersections between identity politics, taste and culture are nuanced and have altered over time. Fashions for men and women change over time, as do the accepted ways of performing gender roles. Similarly, the ways in which queer people have chosen to decorate their houses has also changed.

For example, the sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935) suggested that a person's sexual orientation could be determined by studying the objects in his or her home and suggested statuettes by Constantin Meunier and works by Michelangelo, Gainsborough and Rodin had particular associations for men who loved men (Steorn 2010: 130–1). Similarly, statues of Saint Sebastian, which were originally aimed at religious audiences, began to be adopted in the 18th century by men who loved men (ibid: 124). Links between objects, places and LGBTQ lives and associations are often fragile and easily lost or overlooked. We will not always be able to pick up on the historical LGBTQ readings of places and objects and, similarly, some non-LGBTQ places and objects might resonate with contemporary LGBTQ associations. Ceramic figurines from the 18th century, for example, which were unlikely to have carried queer resonances when manufactured, closely mirror the mannerisms adopted by Larry Grayson in the 1970s which were associated with effeminacy amongst gay men.

The numerous challenges and uncertainties that surround the public presentation of queer histories, help to account for their relative scarcity. Although recent years – and 2017 in particular – have seen a growing openness amongst cultural institutions to discussing same-sex love and gender diversity, there are, of course, still numerous historic properties that remain silent about their queer histories, even in the face of repeated questions by visitors who read something in the house, its décor or in the sometimes glaring gaps in the story they are presented with. This coyness has many explanations but, very often, curators cite a lack of evidence or a degree of uncertainty surrounding the individuals' lives as a reason for

maintaining a silence and sidestepping visitors' questions. As Richard Sandell has argued:

... an insistence on irrefutable proof of same-sex activity (which, of course, would never be expected to prove someone's heterosexuality) can sometimes point to genuine concerns for historical accuracy but also, in many cases, to deeply embedded, conscious or unconscious, prejudice (Sandell 2017: 75–76).

Addressing uncertainties head on can be challenging. As part of *Prejudice and Pride*, with colleagues in the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries<sup>6</sup> we researched and created a short film about Robert Wyndham Ketton-Cremer, the last squire of Felbrigg (figure 3), a magnificent hall in north Norfolk which was donated to the National Trust in 1969. Research revealed both first-hand accounts and written sources already in the public realm that supported what many local people assumed – that Robert Wyndham Ketton-Cremer was homosexual. In the film – *The Unfinished Portrait* – that was launched in July 2017 and made available online and to visitors to Felbrigg – we chose to be open about the squire's sexuality but to dwell, instead, on other lesser known aspects of his life including his extraordinary poetry, biographies of queer subjects and the circumstances surrounding his decision to leave the hall to the Trust. Despite the careful research behind the film, its launch created a fierce media storm that ran for several weeks. The first wave of controversy questioned the basis of our claims regarding his sexuality and, when these were subsequently addressed, debate switched to whether someone's sexuality, that was kept secret in their own times, should be the subject of public acknowledgement in the present day<sup>7</sup>.

The controversy that erupted around Felbrigg is familiar to many involved in the field of LGBTQ heritage. Lisa Yun Lee, former director of the Jane Addams Hull House in Chicago, broke new ground in engaging audiences in debate around the most appropriate way to describe Jane Addams' relationship with her long-time companion, Mary Rozet Smith. Reflecting on her experiences, she stated:

The hushed debates that erupt into public uproars now and again about whether Jane Addams 'was or wasn't' reflect legitimate intellectual interest in the cultural evolution of language and the history of sexuality, but more often than not are a manifestation of homophobia expressed as a pathological anxiety about our most important historical icons and what is appropriate and acceptable at any particular historic moment.

This uneasiness manifests itself in the all too common symptom of selective historical amnesia (Lee 2011: 179). We would argue that, as these examples show, when uncertainty around a historic person's life is addressed head on, in a clear and open manner, the subject can be discussed by visitors who are given the space and information to make up their own minds. In contrast, when an ambiguous sexuality is asserted as heterosexual, or ignored in the interpretation,

this can reflect (as well as strengthen) negative attitudes towards same sex love and desire. By addressing uncertainty and ambiguity head on, we avoid a situation of 'curatorial limbo' where visitors may read coyness or silence about a historic person's sexuality as a criticism of contemporary queer lives.

Silence is not the only issue facing queer curation at historic houses. Sometimes, interpretation can be highly misleading, as Alison Oram (2012) points out in her analysis of Shibden Hall, the former home of Anne Lister in West Yorkshire. Some years ago, in the car park where visitors enter the site, information boards proclaimed: 'Welcome to Shibden – a family home from 1420 to 1933 and still a place for the whole family to enjoy today'. The double use of the word 'family' links hereditary property inheritance (family home) with notions of intergenerational family groups (the whole family) and, by implication, reinforces heterosexual reproduction and traditional kinship groupings.

The reality of the Lister family who owned the property was that they rarely married and had few children. In fact, as Alison Oram points out, 'taking the two hundred year period until 1933 when the last John Lister died and the property passed into public ownership... (there were) a mere thirty-two years out of two hundred... when children under the age of eighteen lived in the house' (ibid: 540). Oram goes on to argue that what 'family' meant to the Listers was 'sibling-based households rather than marital partnerships, celibacy and same-sex relationships rather than heterosexuality and a dearth of children rather than a secure succession' (ibid: 541).

Rather than discussing the changing role of family and relationships over time, the (false) impression given by the information boards was of stable, nuclear, heterosexual families. Today, Shibden talks about Anne Lister's lesbianism and her refusal to comply with expected gender codes. However, even here, Oram argues that '[s]he is cast as an interesting (and now acceptable) anomaly, rather than as a critique of the meanings of family and sexuality in public history' (ibid: 542).

### **For Ever, For Everyone?**

In a pilot study of LGBTQ visitors to cultural institutions in North America, researchers Joe Heimlich and Judy Koke (2008) explored what factors positively influenced their experiences. Three main factors emerged: the ability to be demonstrative of their relationship, feeling represented within the institution's content, and feeling accepted (ibid: 98). Interviewees told Heimlich and Koke that, to experience a sense of truly belonging in cultural venues, they would like to see inclusion of queer lives within the imagery and narrative associated with exhibits.

What this study begins to reveal is not only the importance of greater openness of queer histories but also the possibilities that might be opened up by more imaginative,

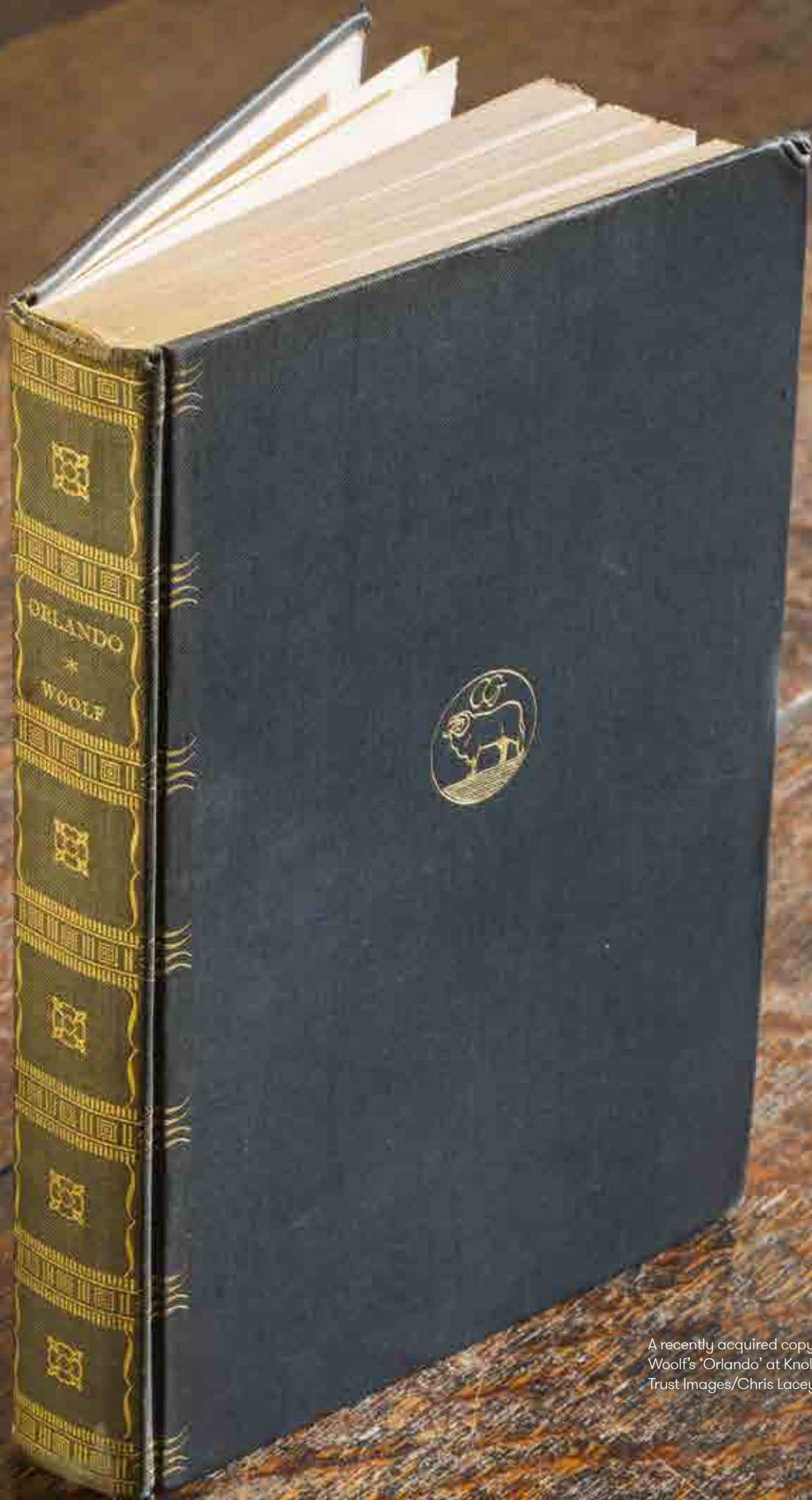
inclusive and creative approaches to engaging and welcoming diverse visitors. In addition to providing comprehensive, honest and nuanced accounts of the past, an important part of the *Prejudice and Pride* programme was the work that properties undertook to let queer people know that they were welcome at the National Trust. Indeed, some of the most creative work undertaken during 2017 happened at properties which had relatively few queer historical links.

At Hanbury Hall, for example, the androgyny of Achilles in the wall paintings by Thornhill was a catalyst for commissioning a queer performance piece by Tom Marshman. At Sutton House, a property in Hackney with a long history of programming queer interventions, the designation of the Trust's first gender-neutral toilet powerfully conveyed to visitors that trans people are both welcome and catered for.

Moreover, one of the criticisms levelled at historic houses – the elite nature of their owners – here benefits one minority – the queer visitor. Historic examples of queer life have often had their 'origins in the elite or the creative upper-middle class' (Oram 2011: 193), in part because economic independence allowed for lives to be lived outside the bounds of social norms. The historic house – which provides us with collections of objects and environments developed by individuals in order to reflect their interests and desires – has the potential to provide us with rich seams of knowledge about queer pasts.

Historic houses allow visitors 'the recognition of the house as an emotional framework, a space in which to "live"' (Behagg 2012: 67). Personal narratives are embedded in these houses in a way that they seldom are within museums and galleries and allow for a more intimate and personal response to the environment. This ready-charged atmosphere provides the potential for historic houses to connect with queer lives in a unique and potent way.

For the many and complicated reasons we have explored here, queer histories have often been omitted or treated differently from heterosexual ones in historic houses and heritage sites. We would argue that *Prejudice and Pride*, as part of broader developments and experiments in queer heritage that are taking place in the UK and internationally, marks a sea change in the thinking of the National Trust, one that has begun to act upon public perceptions and stimulated public debate around contemporary LGBTQ equality. At the same time, this should be viewed as a starting point for further change rather than a high profile, but time-bound, one-off celebration. As our collective experiences of revealing and engaging audiences around queer histories has demonstrated, changes in the way we look at the past rarely unfold without challenge and controversy and there is certainly much work to do, and many more stories to uncover.



A recently acquired copy of Virginia Woolf's 'Orlando' at Knoke. [c] National Trust Images/Chris Lacey.

## Bringing Queer Home

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Same-sex marriage is still not available in Northern Ireland.
- <sup>2</sup> Clause 28/Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 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'. It was repealed in Scotland in 2000 and in the rest of the United Kingdom in 2003.
- <sup>3</sup> See, for example, Adair (2010), Ferentinos (2015), and Lee (2011).
- <sup>4</sup> Although in the writing, Guthrie pretends to not know the recipient of the attack, Bentman asserts that he did.
- <sup>5</sup> See also, Historic England 'LGBTQ Architecture', <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/inclusive-heritage/lgbtq-heritage-project/lgbtq-architecture/>
- <sup>6</sup> Further details can be found on the RCMG website, <https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/rcmg/projects/prejudice-and-pride-1/the-unfinished-portrait-at-felbrigg>
- <sup>7</sup> For a fuller discussion of this controversy, see Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (2017).

### References

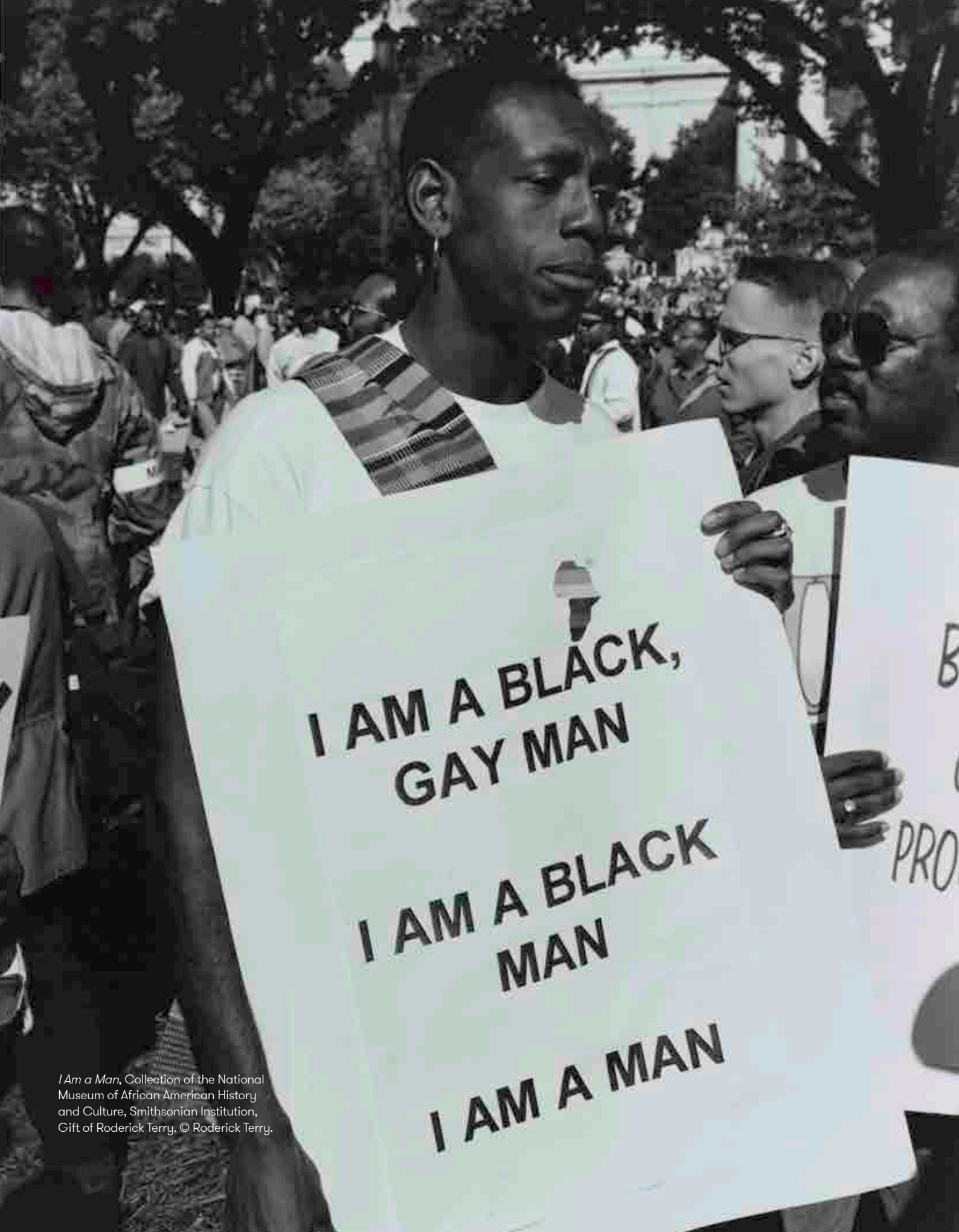
- Adair, J.G. (2010) 'House Museum or Walk-In Closet? The (Non)Representation of Gay Men in the House Museums They Called Home', in A. K. Levin (ed.) *Gender, Sexuality and Museums: A Routledge Reader*, London: Routledge: 264-78.
- Albert Kennedy Trust (2015) *LGBT Youth Homelessness: A UK National Scoping of Cause, Prevalence, Response, and Outcome*, London: The Albert Kennedy Trust.
- Bachmann, C.L. and Gooch, B. (2017) *LGBT in Britain, Hate Crime and Discrimination*, London: Stonewall.
- Behagg, M. (2012) 'Museums of the Self: House Museums, Emotional Space and Personal Narratives', *engage*, 31: 59-71.
- Bentman, R. (1997) 'Horace Walpole's Forbidden Passion', in M. Duberman (ed.) *Queer Representations: Reading Lives, Reading Cultures*, New York: New York University Press: 276-89.
- Berlant, L. and Warner, M. (1998) 'Sex in Public', *Critical Inquiry*, 24(2): 547-66.
- Bray, A. (1982) *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, London: Gay Men's Press.
- Browne, K. and Nash, C.J. (2010) *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research*, Farnham: Ashgate.
- Chamberlain, M. and Thompson, P. (eds) (1998) *Narrative and Genre: Contexts and Types of Communication*, London: Routledge.
- Conlan, A. (2010) 'Representing Possibility: Mourning, Memorial and Queer Museology', in A. K. Levin (ed.) *Gender, Sexuality and Museums: A Routledge Reader*, London: Routledge: 253-63.
- Cook, M. (2014) *Queer Domesticities: Homosexuality and Home Life in Twentieth-Century London*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Ferentinos, S. (2015) *Interpreting LGBT History at Museums and Historic Sites*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Foucault, M. (1978) *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction*, New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foyle, J. (2016) *Did Horace Walpole build Strawberry Hill to express his sexuality?*, Financial Times, 3 June 2016.
- Gorman-Murray, A., Johnston, L. and Waitt, G. (2010) 'Queer(ing) Communication in Research Relationships: A Conversation about Subjectivities, Methodologies and Ethics', in K. Browne and C. J. Nash (eds) *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research*, Farnham: Ashgate: 97-112.
- Hall, S. (1990) 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in J. Rutherford (ed.) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, London: Lawrence & Wishart: 222-37.
- Heimlich, J. and Koke, J. (2008) 'Gay and Lesbian Visitors and Cultural Institutions: Do They Come? Do They Care? A Pilot Study', *Museums & Social Issues*, 3(1): 93-104.
- Historic England (2017) 'Pride of Place: England's LGBTQ Heritage', Online. Available at <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/inclusive-heritage/lgbtq-heritage-project/> (accessed 29 November 2017).
- Howard, M. (2010) *The Vyne*, Swindon: The National Trust.
- Jagose, A. (1996) *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, New York: New York University Press.
- Lee, L. Y. (2011) 'Peering into the bedroom: Restorative justice at the Jane Addams Hull House Museum', in J. Marstine (ed), *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics: Redefining Ethics for the Twenty-First Century Museum*, Routledge: London; New York: 174-87.
- Oram, A. (2012) 'Sexuality in Heterotopia: time, space and love between women in the historic house', *Women's History Review*, 21(4): 533-51.
- Oram, A. (2011) 'Going on an outing: the historic house and queer public history', *Rethinking History*, 15(2): 189-207.
- Oram, A. and Cook, M. (2017) *Prejudice and Pride: Celebrating LGBTQ heritage*, Swindon: National Trust.
- Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (ed.) 2017. The Unfinished Portrait: *Researching and Presenting the Life of Robert Wyndham Ketton-Cremer, Felbrigg Hall*. University of Leicester: Leicester. Online. Available at <https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/rcmg/projects/prejudice-and-pride-1/THEUNFINISHEDPORTRAITresearchreportfinal.pdf> (accessed 3 February 2018).
- Sandell, R. (2017) *Museums, Moralities and Human Rights*, London: Routledge.
- Steorn, P. (2010) 'Queer in the Museum: Methodological Reflections on Doing Queer in Museum Collections', *Lambda Nordica*, 15(3-4): 119-43.
- Sullivan, N. (2003) *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, New York: New York University Press.
- Taylor, D. and Townsend, M. (2014) 'Gay asylum seekers face 'humiliation'', *The Guardian*, 8 February 2014.

# THE POLITICS OF RECOGNIZING AN INVISIBLE MAN

**Aaron Bryant** (Curator, Photography and Visual Culture,  
National Museum of African American History & Culture,  
Smithsonian Institution)

In 2011, I served as co-chair and curator for the Black Male Identity project in Baltimore, Maryland. As stipulated in our vision, the project would ‘use the power of art to uncover and explore authentic, positive images of black male identity and to challenge conventional artistic and societal assumptions’ about what it meant to be an African American male. The community arts organization, Art on Purpose, administered the project and helped organize a series of programs across Baltimore City to address issues of ‘Black Male Identity’ through exhibitions, public discussions, performances, and other community events. As co-chair

and curator, my objectives focused on shifting cultural paradigms to reflect a range of black male experiences and humanities. We hoped to elevate the discourse on African American males as socially constructed identities. I began thinking more critically, particularly as a curator, about LGBTQ representations in public spaces during this project and there were two ideas that influenced my work then, as they do now. The first is Charles Taylor’s political science thesis on multiculturalism and ‘the politics of recognition’ and the second influence is Ralph Ellison’s seminal text, *Invisible Man*. Both theses inform my work in LGBTQ



*I Am a Man*, Collection of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Roderick Terry. © Roderick Terry.

representations in public history as I consider the politics of recognition and invisibility.

In his essay, 'The Politics of Recognition', Charles Taylor – a professor of Philosophy and Political Science at McGill University – echoes many of the themes addressed in Ralph Ellison's novel, *Invisible Man*. Taylor argues that, 'our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves' (1994: 25). 'Nonrecognition or misrecognition', Taylor continues, 'can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being' (ibid).

As he attempts to define himself under the externally imposed values and expectations of others, Ellison's narrator finds that the socially prescribed roles imposed on him limit his complexity as an individual and marginalize his humanity. If we assume that our identities are expressions of our humanity, then we can understand that our emotions, tastes, preferences, perspectives, history, and culture shape how we see ourselves and distinguish ourselves as humans. As Taylor maintains, one's identity is 'something like a person's understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being' (1994: 25). This suggests that, in ignoring an individual's identity, we not

only ignore their humanity, we objectify the individual and disregard them as human.

Much of Ellison's story is told from a retrospective first-person perspective. Ellison uses a chronological narrative, to create a temporal space between the narrator as the storyteller who is looking back at a course of events, and the narrator as the character who is experiencing those events for the first time. The prologue begins with the narrator telling his readers, 'I am an invisible man... I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind' (1990: 3). The 'am' in this passage signifies the present. It creates an authoritative tone and defining moment in which the narrator has come to a revelation. He recognizes his invisibility not as the result of how he perceives himself but rather as the consequence of being subjected to the narrow perceptions of others. The narrator describes his invisibility as a social condition in which he suffers from society's blindness and refusal to see or recognize his individual humanity as he would recognize it himself.

'I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me', the narrator says in the prologue's first paragraph. 'Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass' (Ellison 1990: 3). In the novel's first paragraph, we note the similarities in the language used by both Taylor and Ellison. Ellison's use of the

## Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need

word 'invisible' aligns itself with Taylor's use of the words 'nonrecognition' and 'misrecognition'. Through their language, each writer refers to the condition of not being recognized, seen, or acknowledged. Ellison emphasizes this point in his frequent references to blindness throughout the story.

We also see a similarity in language as Ellison's narrator portrays himself as having 'been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass'. This description reveals a perspective that is comparable to Taylor's belief that a group or individual can suffer 'real distortion' if people or society 'mirror back to them a ... demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves'. Here, both writers are commenting on the effects of invisibility and the psychological harm done by not having one's identity acknowledged.

As Ellison and Taylor would argue, however, by conceding to the distorted images projected onto them, 'the invisible' are sometimes complicit in their own misrecognition. This concession inevitably exacerbates their invisibility, as 'the invisible' begin to absorb social projections of subordinacy. They see and define themselves through society's purview, and 'have internalized a picture of their

own inferiority', as Taylor maintains, 'so that even when some of the objective obstacles to their advancement fall away, they may be incapable of taking advantage of the new opportunities'. 'Their own self-depreciation, on this view', he continues, 'becomes one of the most potent instruments of their own oppression' (Taylor 1994: 26). This suggests that the invisible contribute to their own marginalization through passive complicity.

In the first paragraph of chapter one, the Invisible Man supports Taylor's thesis by confessing that he has contributed to his own invisibility through yielding to society's expectations. He admits; I accepted their answers too, though they were often in contradiction and even self-contradictory. I was naïve, I was looking for myself and asking everyone except myself questions which I, and only I, could answer (Ellison 1990: 15).

We have the impression that Ellison's protagonist looked to others not only for his identity but for validation as well. His poignant comments underscore this need for approval.

With simple metaphors, Ellison raises issues that Taylor discusses at the very beginning of his essay. To begin the paper, Taylor points out that the need for recognition is at the center of political debates surrounding cultural nationalism. This need evolves into a demand, and the demand builds momentum as more voices enter the dialogue to form a political movement. As Taylor states;

## The Politics of Recognizing an Invisible Man

'A number of strands in contemporary politics turn on the need, sometimes the demand for recognition. The need, one might argue, is one of the driving forces behind nationalist movements in politics. And the demand comes to the fore in a number of ways in today's politics, on behalf of minority or 'subaltern' groups...' (1994: 25).

In the beginning of Ellison's novel, the narrator seems to embrace his invisibility as a way of rejecting the dehumanizing images society imposes on him. In the end, however, this approach proves to be a passively futile way of addressing the social constructs of racism. In an attempt to escape dehumanization, the narrator dehumanizes himself. As he states at the beginning of the novel, he no longer exists and is now invisible. He is not human, but is a phantom without an image or identity.

By the end of the novel, however, Ellison's protagonist awakens from his hibernation and state of terminal unconsciousness to rise from the underground, which for so many years has symbolized his grave. 'I must come out, I must emerge', he tells the reader as he vows to leave the basement that embodies his status as subhuman and 'subaltern', to force others to recognize and accept his presence (1990: 581).

Both Taylor's and Ellison's profound writings help us to understand the power and significance of authentic and respectful recognition of LGBTQ people in the contemporary public realm and

point to the role museums, galleries and heritage organizations must play in this visibility work. As Taylor states in his essay, 'Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need' (1994: 26). Ultimately, this is the point Ellison makes with his novel, *Invisible Man*. We must come out. We must emerge, and we must demand recognition, because recognition is not just a courtesy. It is a human right and a human need.

### References

Ellison, R. (1990) *Invisible Man*, New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Taylor, C. (1994) 'The Politics of Recognition', in A. Gutmann (ed), *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press: 25-74.

# ROOMS OF THEIR OWN: ENRICHING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF BUILT HERITAGE

**Nino Strachey** (Head of Research and Specialist Advice, National Trust)

Virginia Woolf famously concluded that ‘A woman must have money and a room of her own to write fiction’. In 2016 I began research for a book – *Rooms of their Own* – which explores the homes of Virginia Woolf, her lover Vita Sackville-West, and Vita’s first cousin Eddy – the man who stood between Vita and Knole, the house she loved but could not inherit. Linked by an intimate web of relationships, Eddy, Virginia and Vita created homes in Kent and East Sussex which challenged contemporary conventions. While Virginia Woolf and Eddy Sackville-West favoured the bright colours and bold patterns of Bloomsbury, Vita Sackville-West looked to

the Elizabethan age, filling her rooms with the romantic relics of past lovers. Our assessment of the built heritage at Knole, Monk’s House and Sissinghurst would be profoundly diminished without an understanding of same-sex love. In each house, personality is expressed powerfully through possessions, creating the layers described by Vita’s grandson Adam Nicolson as ‘an assembled world.... a form of self-portrait’. Using first-hand accounts, my research shows how domestic interiors can help us to understand shifting social and moral attitudes towards sexuality and gender in the 1920s and ’30s. Bringing together stories of love, desire and

intimacy, of evolving relationships and erotic encounters, and descriptions of the settings in which they took place, the book offers fresh insight into the lives of three writers linked to the Bloomsbury Group.

Living in an England where homosexuality was illegal until 1967, Eddy Sackville-West's design choices at Knole were boldly counter-cultural. Lytton Strachey left a wry account of his 'ladylike apartments', where the walls were painted in Marie Laurencin pink, and decked with Duncan Grant male nudes. Vita Sackville-West found him 'mincing in black velvet' amidst an array of rapiers, crucifixes and coloured lights: mauve for the bedroom, green, red and yellow for each turret. As she reported to Harold Nicolson – 'I don't object to homosexuality, but I do hate decadence'. Virginia Woolf wrote Orlando in honour of Vita, but elements of her hero are purely Eddy: 'He had eyes like drenched violets, so large that the water seemed to have brimmed in them and widened them; and a brow like the swelling of a marble dome pressed between the two blank medallions which were his temples; sights disturbed him...sights exalted him – the birds and the trees; and made him in love with death'.

Virginia Woolf may have disapproved of Eddy's androgynous friends, and his love of make-up and jewellery, but she was equally committed to the Bloomsbury philosophy of sexual equality and freedom. She believed that every person had the right to live and love in the way that they chose, and her own rooms at Monk's House are filled with works of art produced by the queer cross-gender collaboration of

Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell. Their distinctive combination of bright colours, bold patterns and eclectic objects creates an atmosphere of comfort and informality. There is a sense that anything could happen in these Bloomsbury-inspired rooms. Eroticism and humour are never far from the surface.

Vita's interiors at Sissinghurst were more subtly subversive, carefully arranged to enable a patchwork household, accommodating different partners at different times. Her husband Harold worked in London during the week, sharing his life with a series of younger men. Meanwhile, Vita's lovers stayed while Harold was away, tactfully returning to London on Saturday mornings. She filled her Writing Room in the Tower with romantic relics, every object carrying an associative memory: crystal rabbits from Violet Trefusis, paintings by Mary Campbell, furniture sourced by Virginia Woolf, illuminated manuscripts produced by Chris St John, embroideries worked by Gwen St Aubyn. Vita's happy marriage to Harold Nicolson sustained not only a love affair with his sister, but a lifetime of same sex relationships on both sides. As she wrote in 1920:

'I hold the conviction that as the centuries go on, and the sexes become more nearly merged on account of their increasing resemblances ..... such connections will to a very large extent cease to be regarded as merely unnatural, and will be understood far better'.

*Eddy Sackville-West's E.M.G. Gramophone, painted blue and silver by John Banting, 1927. © National Trust Images/John Hammond.*



# PRIDE OF PLACE: VALUING, MAPPING AND CURATING QUEER HERITAGE

**Alison Oram** (Professor of Social and Cultural History  
at Leeds Beckett University)

Pride of Place: England's LGBTQ Heritage was a research and public engagement project commissioned by Historic England, which ran during 2015-16. What was so important about Pride of Place was the recognition by Historic England, as the government agency responsible for the historic environment, that 'LGBT history is fundamental to our understanding of our national heritage'.

The major achievements of Pride of Place included: new listings and amended list descriptions (i.e. national heritage designation for LGBTQ-related sites); a

crowd-sourced interactive online map which identifies buildings and places across England that are significant to LGBTQ heritage; an online exhibition on LGBTQ history and heritage; teachers' resources for secondary schools and a DIY guide for the public on how to research and obtain protection for queer places. (<https://historicengland.org.uk/research/inclusive-heritage/lgbtq-heritage-project/>) With a limited time frame of 18 months, the project team used a range of processes and technologies to bring together academic expertise and community understandings of LGBTQ heritage.

Historic England has statutory powers and obligations to recommend buildings, gardens and other sites for national listing on the basis of their having ‘special architectural or historic interest’, signalling their heritage value to the nation and giving them important protections. It also has a mission to engage the public in understanding, enjoying and valuing the historic environment. In recent years Historic England has increasingly recognised

that the histories and heritage of ‘minority’ communities, groups and identities need a stronger voice and better representation of their places and pasts within the national heritage canon.

### **Listing Queer Heritage**

One of the most challenging elements of the project was achieving new national listings of LGBTQ places. Interestingly we found dozens of places already listed on



Figure 1. The Artist's Cabin on the beach slipway at Bucks Mills, North Devon. © National Trust Images/Chris Lacey.

the National Heritage List for England (NHLE) due to their architectural value that also had strong queer histories. These might include country houses where earlier (usually upper-class) inhabitants were known to have had same-sex relationships, such as Shibden Hall, Halifax, whose early 19th century owner Anne Lister had many relationships with other women, as her decoded diaries show.

Pride of Place amended a number of existing listing descriptions on the NHLE to explicitly demonstrate their LGBTQ history, including Shibden Hall, the Red House at Aldeburgh, home of Benjamin Britten, Sissinghurst Castle, and the grave of Dr James Barry. But the project resulted in only two or three completely new listings: in practice, places had to have both architectural value and hard evidence of queer social history to be considered. The Cabin at Bucks Mills, Devon (figure 1), managed by the National Trust, was one of the few queer sites to be newly listed. The summer painting home (between 1924 and 1971) of artists and partners Judith Ackland and Mary Stella Edwards, it was also an example of a relatively unmodified vernacular building, in this case a fisherman's store dating from the mid-19th century.

But Millthorpe, Edward Carpenter's house in Derbyshire, a prime example of a queer place of national significance, failed to achieve listing. Carpenter was an early advocate of sexual and gender equality and bravely shared his own life and home with his lover, George Merrill, in a period – the 1890s – when homosexual acts were

illegal and Oscar Wilde was prosecuted. Unfortunately Millthorpe was not acceptable for national heritage listing because the house had been significantly altered since Carpenter's time, with little of its historic fabric and character remaining intact.

The highest level of national recognition and protection is very difficult to achieve for everyday queer places and buildings. Local protection of different kinds may offer more potential: specific buildings may be included in a local authority plan as having significance, they may be part of a designated conservation area, or they may be accepted as being an 'asset of community value'.

## Mapping Queer Heritage

Pride of Place was very successful in mobilising grassroots queer heritage through the interactive map, which continues to be live on HistoryPin (<https://www.historypin.org/en/prideofplace/>). In order to publicise the map and encourage the pinning of queer places, Pride of Place built a database of partners including LGBTQ community groups and individuals, created a vibrant Twitter and Facebook following and hosted 'pinning parties'.

Many different kinds of places have been pinned on the map as sites of queer heritage, including LGBTQ bars and clubs, cruising grounds, buildings with LGBTQ political and social significance, and homes where 'ordinary' queer couples have lived. The map is an opportunity for intangible heritage to find expression:

that is, places that recall people's lived experiences; places that have queer meanings. These places may or may not still exist materially as buildings. Indeed we ensured that older layers of queer heritage – London's molly houses, early church memorials to same-sex couples and so on – were among the over 2000 places pinned to date.

The co-creation of the map gathered a huge amount of new and dispersed knowledge of queer heritage through mass participation that, in terms of volume and scope, could not have been assembled in any other way. It captured and queered traditional high culture buildings (such as historic palaces) and, even more significantly in terms of the lack of other records, everyday spaces of past and contemporary LGBTQ life and cultures.

### **Curating Queer Heritage**

The Pride of Place online exhibition of 35 web pages is dense with images and tells stories of the queer past through place and location – whether a lesbian bar of the 1970s or a prison that held queer men in the early modern period. One of our justifications for deploying the term 'queer' was its usefulness as an umbrella term to signal the range of people and identities whose heritage the project hoped to represent.

The exhibition aimed to take account of concerns about the erasure of trans and bi narratives in queer public history and the lack of histories of the queer black

past. We commissioned specific sections from specialist historians, including pages on queer black London between the wars, and on black lesbian and gay centres of the 1980s. The lack of trans history was also challenging, and here we included very different kinds of gender-crossing in the past plus the recent history of medical transsexuality. We avoided labelling these diverse historical practices as analogous to contemporary trans, gender-fluid or non-binary identities but recognise their resonance for people today. One such example is also our oldest: Cataractonium, a Romano-British site in present-day Catterick in North Yorkshire, where archaeologists uncovered the grave of a fourth century AD 'gallus', a gender-crossing priest of the goddess Cybele.

### **The influence of Pride of Place**

The reception of Pride of Place by the national (and international) media on its launch in September 2016 was overwhelmingly positive. Journalists and commentators, even from the sometimes hostile tabloids, were curious about and engaged with the project, especially the amended listing descriptions. This illustrates that there is widespread interest in, and acceptance of, the idea of LGBTQ heritage, in the wake of the increased social tolerance of queer sexuality following the introduction of civil partnership and other equalities legislation in the 2000s.

Because of its powerful position as the government agency responsible for heritage, the actions of Historic England

## Pride of Place: valuing, mapping and curating queer heritage

in endorsing queer heritage have had a tangible influence on other organisations in the heritage sector, including the local authorities and voluntary sector bodies that actually manage historic sites. The National Trust, the most significant heritage provider in the country in terms of its property ownership and size of membership, was encouraged by the reception of Pride of Place to develop its Prejudice and Pride programme in 2017.

The Pride of Place project demonstrates the importance of mobilising conventional heritage processes and pushing at their boundaries. It also shows that it is essential to co-produce queer heritage jointly between LGBTQ communities, historians and heritage professionals and, not least, to understand the necessity of recognising diversity within queer heritage and the ways it intersects with other kinds of under-represented heritage.



Edith Ailsa Craig (1869-1947) by Clare 'Tony' Atwood. © National Trust Images.



View through a doorway into the Book Room, Nymans, West Sussex.  
© National Trust Images/Andreas von Einsiedel.

# QUEERING HERITAGE SITES: A MANIFESTO

**Chris Cleeve** (House and Gardens Manager, Sutton House, National Trust)  
and **Sean Curran** (Community Learning Manager, Sutton House,  
National Trust)

During 2017, Sutton House and Breaker's Yard in Hackney, East London, proudly hosted a year-long programme exploring LGBTQ identities. Sutton House has been actively engaging with LGBTQ audiences for many years and our ambitious programme – Sutton House Queered – was a result of our sustained commitment to challenging what kind of space a historic house can be. Based on our experience of enhancing relevance for, and engaging with, LGBTQ communities, we offer here a manifesto for making your institution one that is welcoming to, and inclusive of LGBTQ people. We hope this manifesto will be of particular use to those museums, historic houses and other special places that, much like Sutton House, do not have any obvious links to LGBTQ history.

Our objectives for Sutton House Queered, was that Sutton House would:

- Be a safe and welcoming place for LGBTQ people
- Challenge the notion that you need direct links to a community and their history to engage with them
- Utilise a compelling, changing and relevant programme to attract more visitors
- Remain faithful to its ethos as a community-focused space

## **Manifesto**

- Use your 'Spirit of Place' as a catalyst to enhance, not restrict, decisions

## Queering heritage sites: a manifesto

The National Trust understands that every property in its care offers a unique appeal to visitors and potential visitors. A property's 'Spirit of Place' recognises this, and each property and the decisions made there is guided by this. Sutton House's 'Spirit of Place' is 'quirky and unexpected' and 'a place of belonging'. These were taken from quotes from our visitors and community members, and reflects Sutton House's unique position as a Tudor house in

an urban area, and its ethos as a welcoming community space. Our 'Spirit of Place' actively encourages us to take risks, to try new approaches, and to open ourselves up to a diverse range of people which is reflective of Hackney's diversity.

- Understand the place and its history as an uncharted territory to map out all possible themes and stories. Think laterally, challenge elite and



Artwork by Kev Clarke at *Sutton House Queered* launch event, February 2017. Photograph by Eli Beristain, courtesy of Sutton House.



Visitors admiring *Henry VIII* by Kev Clarke at *Sutton House Queered* launch event, February 2017. Photograph by Eli Beristain, courtesy of Sutton House.



monolithic approaches to history-making. Look obliquely at spaces and askance at the histories they might tell.

Five hundred year old Sutton House is not purely a Tudor House. In truth, some of its most compelling and powerful stories lie within its relatively recent history, after its acquisition by the National Trust. In the 1980s political activist, Anarcho-Punk squatters founded a community-focused centre in the 'Blue House'. In the 1990s the house was threatened by development into luxury apartments and so the Save Sutton House campaign led by local people convinced the National Trust to open the house for community and educational purposes.

- Research local, regional, national and global issues that are happening now for the LGBTQ community

We anticipated that many National Trust properties with clear historical connections to LGBTQ stories would represent gay, privileged, white men and, to a lesser extent, lesbians and bisexuals. We used our unique position to address more intersectional LGBTQ identities, by focusing on those who are doubly marginalised people within the community. Thanks to our own historic links to radical politics and grassroots campaigning, we worked predominantly with queer and trans people of colour, and with working class LGBTQ artists. We commissioned photographer Sarah Moore to take a series of portraits of black trans activist, model and DJ, Munroe Bergdorf,

in and around Sutton House, which we displayed in our Victorian Study for the first half of the year.

We also researched the challenges faced by the LGBTQ community in London today, and particularly the rapid closure of many LGBTQ community spaces, bars and clubs. Using the Save Sutton House campaign as inspiration, throughout October we held a season called Never Gonna Dance Again which included an exhibition curated by artist Kat Hudson about LGBTQ nightlife, and an academic symposium about the changing landscape of London's LGBTQ bars and clubs, including a keynote speech from Night Czar, Amy Lamé.

At the beginning of Sutton House Queered we installed new signage for our toilet facilities. This was a way of responding to recent debates in the media that were hostile to trans people, fuelled by the discriminatory proposed 'bathroom bills' in the US, and we endeavoured to make sure that our facilities were as welcoming as possible to people of all gender identities. We avoided using reductive images of stick figures, and instead used images of urinals or toilets. We also repurposed the accessible toilet sign to include a symbol representing trans identities. Introducing an explicitly named gender neutral toilet sign is a simple and cheap thing to do, but based on visitor feedback, has been one of the most widely embraced aspects of our programme.

- Work with LGBTQ creatives, community leaders, organisations

and academics to create a changing programme for all visitors

As with many marginalised groups, LGBTQ people are more likely to face poverty than straight and cisgender people. The best people to share the stories of LGBTQ people are the community themselves. We therefore committed to providing paid opportunities for LGBTQ artists, curators and educators throughout the year.

Having a dialogue with the community itself will ensure you are aware of some of the barriers they face. During our summer season, School of Anarchy, which we themed around LGBTQ activism, we hosted the Weirdo Zine Fest – a DIY cultures fair for marginalised people, run by cultural organiser and archivist Kirsty Fife. With her advice, we came up with a staggered pricing system to the house that day, to ensure people who wanted to attend the zine fair would be able to do so for free.

While there are financial benefits to engaging new audiences, it's important to recognise that an ethical approach is essential for meaningful engagement. The Sutton House team led the National Trust's first ever presence in London Pride, and made sure that our being there was to represent the organisation's support for the LGBTQ community. As such, we made it quite clear that we should not be using the opportunity to sell membership.

- Make sure your deepest engagement is with local groups and individuals.

During the opening exhibition of Sutton House Queered, we featured artworks around the house by our existing community members. One of our own volunteers, Kev Clarke, is a queer artist, who playfully appropriates historic paintings with camp iconography, inspired by the collages of Joe Orton and Kenneth Halliwell. We also exhibited artworks by a member of our over 55s community group (the Recycled Teenagers), Victor Zagon, an elderly gay man who moved to East London from Hungary in 1957 and who visits Sutton House every week to sketch and take part in activities such as dancing, singing and crafting.

We reached out to Project Indigo, a support group for LGBTQI people aged 11-25, who are based just around the corner from us. We held a few workshops with them, exploring the activism of Sutton House and of the LGBTQ community, and gave them the gallery space over the summer to exhibit work they had created.

While the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in England and Wales, and the Trust's Prejudice and Pride programme, created a great platform and opportunity to explore LGBTQ histories and to engage with new audiences, to end our work because the year has finished would undermine the relationships we have established with LGBTQ communities, and be easily dismissed as tokenism. Legacy must always be a consideration when working on short term programmes and the relationships built should be nurtured and deepened. In November, we were approached by the curator of the queer

## Queering heritage sites: a manifesto

film festival Fringe, who wanted to hold a film screening and Q&A featuring rapper, performance artist and activist Myki Blanco. They approached us based on the reputation we have built for being a space

that actively welcomes marginalised communities, and this was testament to Sutton House Queered that its final event was a community-organised and led one.



*School of Anarchy, Sutton House Queered. © National Trust Images/ Arnhel de Serra.*

# YOU CAN'T TELL LGBTQ STORIES WHERE THEY DON'T EXIST. OR CAN YOU?

**Sian Goodman** (Visitor Experience Manager, Hanbury Hall, National Trust)

The opportunity for an under-resourced and perhaps lesser-known property like Hanbury Hall to be part of a national public programme like Prejudice and Pride presented us with what felt like a 'Stars in their Eyes' opportunity to behave (if only temporarily) like a heavyweight, flagship estate. Tonight Matthew, we're going to be Chatsworth! We faced just one problem – Hanbury didn't have an immediately obvious LGBTQ story to tell so we decided to approach the theme from a slightly different angle. I feel strongly that those of us who work in heritage and arts have a responsibility to disrupt the biased narratives of the past

and include more diverse stories which more people can connect with. History has been very kind to the straight, white male, and he's done pretty well off the back of it! But by repeating his account, we're never going to grasp the opportunity we have to be a part of broader cultural, political and social change.

The possibilities for disrupting our long-established narrative at Hanbury began to emerge in 2015 when we uncovered a new satirical sub-story present in our wall and ceiling paintings by Sir James Thornhill (figure 1). We've never known how to talk about these amazing

You can't tell LGBTQ stories where they don't exist. Or can you?

works; the story is complicated and understanding it relies on a classical education and the medium is intimidating for many. On top of this there's something that was just plain confusing – Thornhill's Achilles, at the centre of the scene in the Great Hall, didn't look like Achilles. Our Achilles is not the beefy warrior described by Homer and Ovid; hiding in a woman's clothing, beneath he is clearly female, and womanly and powerful.

Following colossal amounts of research into the paintings, one of our volunteers, Peter Edwards, discovered that the face

of Achilles bears great similarity to that of Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough, and that across from her stands a lady looking rather a lot like Queen Anne and, next to her, the usurping Abigail Masham. The satire fits perfectly – it's the moment where Sarah reveals her true identity as a pro-war Whig idol and, in response, Queen Anne replaces her in her affections with Abigail. Thornhill is not known to have produced satirical content in any of his other commissions but perhaps Hanbury's quiet, non-aristocratic family provided just the right opportunity for a big old political statement.



Figure 1. The Painted Staircase in the Hall at Hanbury Hall, Worcestershire. The Staircase was painted by Sir James Thornhill (1675-1734), c.1710. © National Trust Images/Dennis Gilbert.

Through training and sharing the research we encouraged our volunteer team to begin referencing Sarah and Anne's relationship in their interactions with visitors, disrupting the (up until then) exclusively straight narratives of Hanbury. Many were uncertain. Some felt that we were over-emphasising the story and that the detail of the relationship was irrelevant. In many ways they are quite right; for many, this isn't the main attraction of Hanbury Hall, but by explaining why it was so important to share stories of same-sex relationships wherever they exist, more and more volunteers came around to find their own ways to talk about it.

When the Trust announced its intention to launch *Prejudice and Pride*, we took the opportunity to go further and we commissioned Tom Marshman to produce performance work for Hanbury. Tom often works to queer narratives, sometimes by imagining stories and creating gossip but very often informed through a process of detailed research. Tom teased out not only the Sarah Churchill story but also those of the Greek Gods in Thornhill's paintings, and gave them wonderful contemporary and human relevance (figure 2). His use of modern language to surprise and stir audiences and his capacity to normalise queer identities, gave a space for everyone who watched it to laugh and reflect on Tom's unique take on history. The performance came with all of the rumbustiousness of the eighteenth century. 'The Bawdy Song' for example, (originally penned at the time when Hanbury Hall was built) on the topic

of Queen Anne, Sarah and Abigail, was sung by Tom to the tune of Lady Gaga's, *Bad Romance*. This seemingly simple act dismantled the audience's preciousness over historical narratives and deeply connected us to the original audiences. Sharing cheer and laughter with those who sang this 300 years before beautifully illustrated how LGBTQ histories are not as difficult to talk about as many might think.

Beyond Tom's performance and the story on the staircase, we also looked to diversify who's history we introduce throughout our storytelling. Around the dining table we had seated well known men and women from the times in which Hanbury's first owner, Thomas Vernon, lived. Visitors are given named invitations and later meet their character, hopefully with interest and an enhanced connection. We made simple changes to the diners by adding in more representative characters such as Lord John Hervey, the first and only openly gay MP for 200 years. This is the smallest and simplest addition to the story we tell, but it gave prominence and acceptance where perhaps it may have not existed in the past.

I'll admit to feeling like an imposter in early meetings when *Prejudice and Pride* was being planned and discussed. Unlike some of the other participating sites, Hanbury Hall doesn't have a grand narrative linked to a queer former owner who overcame adversity or challenged societal norms. So when I found myself in a room of people talking of Vita Sackville-





West, Virginia Woolf and William John Bankes, I was pretty sure I was out of my depth and that I should rescind my interest in the programme. I am so pleased that I did not.

The last year for the team at Hanbury has been at times challenging; providing a safe space for people to unpack and potentially rethink our prejudices is difficult and exhausting. Some still feed back to me that our participation in Prejudice and Pride was tenuous. I agree every time. But LGBTQ lives are not a new phenomenon – same-sex desire and gender variation have existed in all places and times so perhaps we should all take up opportunities to acknowledge that and, in doing so, move closer towards a fair and equal society.

# Whose voice do we hear?

**Jocelyn Dodd** (Director, RCMG, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester) and **Sarah Plumb** (Research Associate, RCMG)

What happens when heritage organisations seek to purposefully facilitate and enrich contemporary debate about history, identity and the world today? More particularly, when heritage sites open up opportunities for such dialogue, debate and discussion, whose voices get heard and whose do we listen to?

Here we address these questions by drawing on an in-depth study carried out by the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) of the ways in which audiences engaged with and responded to *Prejudice and Pride*. We set out to listen to, and carefully consider, the fullest range of visitor voices in order to develop a nuanced understanding of their thinking and their feelings towards the programme that set out – through exhibitions, events, installations and new interpretation – to reveal and celebrate the lives of people who challenged conventional notions of gender and sexuality. In particular, we were interested in understanding the impact of the programme on visitors' thoughts, feelings and actions. The responses to the programme that we captured in the study include the most stridently expressed opinions, the quieter voices, and those that fall somewhere in-between. Through carefully listening to visitors we can start to explore the potential of heritage sites to stimulate reflection, encourage visitors to negotiate difficult, sometimes contested, ideas, and to generate new understandings.

## **Those who speak loudest**

As is often the case when cultural institutions explore new ways of presenting long-established narratives, the loudest voices tend to be those expressing negative viewpoints. A number of critical press pieces about *Prejudice and Pride* sparked controversy and, inevitably, powerfully shaped some visitors' responses. For example, an article published in the *Daily Mail* (Levy 2017) in response to activities at Kingston Lacy and Felbrigg Hall described the National Trust as becoming 'obsessed with "trendy PC thinking"' and the programme as 'totally inappropriate'.

The language and tone in these press stories were echoed in many of the most critical responses from visitors, pointing towards the significant influence of mainstream media in legitimising and reinforcing particular perspectives, as well as seemingly swaying public opinion. A number of visitors viewed *Prejudice and Pride* as 'going beyond the remit of the National Trust', whilst others described it as 'political correctness gone mad'. That being said, the expressed opposition to *Prejudice and Pride* was diverse and complex. Some visitors believed sexuality to be 'a private matter', something that 'should be kept behind closed doors'. Other criticisms could be understood as a manifestation of broader anxieties around social and political change and a sense that the inclusion of more diverse histories potentially

undermined the experiences and value of those whose lives have traditionally been privileged in heritage presentations. For example, one visitor to Kingston Lacy commented:

*I just worry that minority views are being pushed upon us. My view is that minorities should be allowed to enjoy their lives, without it almost turning around so that the majority feel guilty if they have a different view.*

A small minority of visitors expressed their opposition through explicit homophobia. One visitor to Sissinghurst Castle, for example, commented:

*Promiscuity and gay behaviour is wrong. We should set good examples to our children, not promote abnormal as good.*

The intensity with which opposition was sometimes expressed (by both visitors and the media) and the volume of negative comments that some parts of the programme seemed to generate might be taken to imply widespread public opposition towards Prejudice and Pride. Within this context, RCMG set out to capture the fullest range of responses to the programme and to listen to and understand all views and opinions, including those that were potentially eclipsed by the polarised character of the media controversy.

### Listening to visitors

Without paying attention to the fullest range of voices we lack an in-depth and nuanced understanding of visitors' feelings, perceptions and experiences which brings with it the risk of jumping to simplistic conclusions.

The complex ways in which diverse visitors engage with, and respond to, cultural experiences can be challenging to capture and make sense of. Over the past 15 years, RCMG has developed specialist expertise in this area, bringing academic rigour and innovation in research methods to bear on the challenge of understanding how museums, galleries and heritage sites effect change – in some form or another – in their audiences. Our mixed-methods research design – combining a quantitative analysis of responses across the breadth of participating properties with an in-depth qualitative analysis of visitor engagement at a smaller number of sites – considered:

- How are visitors prompted to think differently by the Prejudice and Pride programme?
- How does the programme impact visitors' (and members') perceptions of the Trust's relevance to contemporary lives?
- How does the programme enrich understanding and stimulate debate about contemporary issues?

## As is often the case when cultural institutions explore new ways of presenting long-established narratives, the loudest voices tend to be those expressing negative viewpoints.

Self-completion comments cards were carefully designed, piloted and subsequently used across Trust sites that actively programmed for Prejudice and Pride and a small number of Pride events. In addition, in-depth semi structured interviews were conducted at five sites to explore people's responses to and experiences of events, exhibitions and installations that were part of the national programme. Of 1522 completed and returned comments cards collected across nine participating properties and four Pride events, 72% of visitors were in support of the National Trust exploring and presenting LGBTQ history and culture. Only 12% of visitors responded negatively to the programme, whilst the remaining 16% offered ambiguous or obscure comments that proved difficult to categorise as either supportive or critical. We found that 100% of visitors to Pride events were supportive of the programme, but with a relatively low number of people completing comments cards – 68 people – this equated to only 4% of the total respondents. Felbrigg Hall in north Norfolk – the site that had been subject to the most critical and controversial press coverage during Prejudice and Pride – not surprisingly received the largest proportion of explicitly negative responses (37%) across the participating properties. Nevertheless 51% of Felbrigg visitors were supportive of the aims of Prejudice and Pride, and the remaining 13% responded ambiguously.

This analysis begins to complicate the impression that might otherwise be gleaned from press coverage and social media analysis where vehemently expressed criticism appeared to dominate. Interestingly, this finding resonates with a previous research project conducted by RCMG for Glasgow's Gallery of Modern Art in 2009/10. Here, programming that sought to celebrate LGBTQ lives similarly attracted national and international controversy – dominated by a group that called for senior managers to be sacked and funding to be withdrawn – although in-depth analysis of visitor experiences revealed a more complicated picture

## Whose voice do we hear?

with a majority supporting the gallery's intentions (Sandell, Dodd and Jones 2010, Sandell 2017). These findings point to the ways in which mainstream media often operates to amplify criticism, fuel controversy and, in doing so, to eclipse the richness and diversity of ways in which audiences have responded.

Undertaking further in-depth visitor research at five participating properties, and through drawing on the well-established research methodology of interviewing used in social sciences, more diverse points of view were revealed. 86 interviews were conducted with 161 different visitors. The interviews were semi-structured, conversational and approached in an open manner, allowing visitors to share their thoughts and perceptions in their own way. Importantly, the process of interviewing created opportunities for visitors to reflect on their experiences and begin to work through their emerging thoughts and ideas, eliciting rich, nuanced, and considered responses.

### The quiet majority

Through both comments cards and interviews, RCMG aimed to create opportunities for visitors to express their views openly without censure or judgment. Care was taken to avoid leading questions, enabling a wide array of perspectives, opinions and viewpoints to emerge. Although positive comments were in the majority, with most visitors supportive of the Trust's decision to present LGBTQ-themed stories, the ways in which this support was expressed (and the reasons underpinning it) were wide ranging, complex and varied.

Many visitors spontaneously made connections between, on the one hand, the histories and narratives they encountered on-property and, on the other, the contemporary political climate, referencing the present-day relevance of the programme and the importance of supporting the LGBTQ community. For example, one visitor to Felbrigg Hall stated that Prejudice and Pride is, 'Very important always but especially so in the Trump and ISIS era'.

Two separate couples visiting Smallhythe Place – which featured a small exhibition about the lives of Edy Craig, Tony Atwood and Christopher St John – were prompted to voice their concerns about a story emerging in the news that week which highlighted the potential undermining of the rights of women and LGBTQ people posed by closer ties between the government and the Democratic Unionist Party. One of the visitors reflected on why programmes like Prejudice and Pride matter today, stating:

*It strikes a chord because I didn't really know who the DUP were and we were discussing yesterday what their policies were and we were quite horrified by their very old fashioned policies and not accepting, and that for me is very concerning in current times. So these sorts of exhibitions are great for raising awareness, trying to reduce prejudice and educating people.*

Several visitors discussed the need for LGBTQ visibility and a more inclusive and honest approach to presenting histories. One visitor to Sutton House commented:

*Think it is important for the 'National' Trust to represent the whole nation in all its differences.*

Another visitor attending an event at Smallhythe Place shared how his perceptions of the Trust had changed as a result of Prejudice and Pride:

*LGBT people contributed so much to our history and to our national identity and obviously our big homes. As a mainstream organisation I'm pleased that it's looking at minority populations and their contribution to national life. So what it's done for me, it's made me engage with the National Trust, which I probably wouldn't have done before that. In a word I feel welcome here now. This is the first time we've visited a National Trust for years and we're now considering joining as a family member.*

The value of seeing lesser known histories celebrated at National Trust properties was also raised by many visitors as a way of acknowledging that LGBTQ people have always existed and are just as much a part of history as any other group. Other visitors reflected on the legitimising power of the National Trust as a 'mainstream institution' and the significant role heritage organisations can play in supporting LGBTQ rights and equality. One visitor to the installation, Exile, at Kingston Lacy in Dorset commented:

*I think this is a fantastic exhibition and a great setting for it. I think it is a shame that some people seem to deem it inappropriate for the National Trust to be involved in an exhibition of this subject matter – I think it is absolutely appropriate as LGBT rights and history are inextricably linked to owners, occupiers and workers of the houses and historic locations the Trust preserves. The exhibition has opened my eyes to how much progress has been made in LGBT rights in the last 50 years but I am also very aware of how much discrimination still exists. I hope in my lifetime I will see this eradicated.*

The analysis of visitors' responses offers a compelling picture of majority support for Prejudice and Pride. At the same time, regardless of whether visitors were critical of the programme or positive about it, many responses were characterised by thoughtful and deep levels of engagement, evidenced by rich and full responses to comments cards and a considerable number of very lengthy interviews. This depth of engagement points to the success of the programme in stimulating and enriching contemporary debate. But did the programme provoke people to think differently about history, identity and the world today? Did Prejudice and Pride impact the ways in which visitors thought about LGBTQ lives and equality?

## Whose voice do we hear?

Outright Rejection	Stimulated Reflection	Shifted Attitudes	Inspired Action	Unequivocal Support
Sick of hearing about LGBTQ. I'll be cancelling my National Trust membership.	The project had a profound effect on us, bringing us to tears. That such a display should have proved so controversial must indicate the residual strength of homophobia in this country. I say this as a 76 year old heterosexual male who regrettably in the past had significant difficulties in understanding homosexual feelings.	As a child of the 1950s, I am on a continuing journey to lose the prejudices of my youth. Thank you National Trust for helping myself and others on that journey.	I guess I always thought that your sexual orientation was a matter for private consideration and that the whole campaigning 'out there' thing was a bit over the top, but <i>Prejudice and Pride</i> made me realise that our society is not as liberal as we believe and there are people with strongly homophobic views still. I will speak out about my sexuality and make sure I stand up for my rights.	Our heritage is for us all, whether lesbian, gay, straight, trans, bisexual. It's fantastic the National Trust has created this programme to help us all take pride and share in this heritage.

Figure 1. Spectrum of audience engagement and response.

### Did *Prejudice and Pride* change hearts and minds?

Although responses were often lengthy, complex and sometimes even contradictory, it is nevertheless possible to discern patterns in the ways visitors were prompted to think. Five main categories of response can be seen in figure 1.

At one extreme, some visitors outrightly rejected *Prejudice and Pride* with even a small minority expressing their intention to cancel their National Trust membership. At the other end were a similarly small number of visitors who were unequivocal in their support for all aspects of *Prejudice and Pride*, sometimes already active in championing LGBTQ rights and fighting for LGBTQ equality.

The majority of responses, however, fall somewhere in-between these two extremes; visitors whose responses evidence some form of reflection or shift in thinking, whether subtle and incremental or, in a few cases, more profound and even transformative. In debates related to contentious topics that are dominated by polarised viewpoints – such as LGBTQ equality – it is often these voices that are overlooked, even unheard. When we do listen carefully to all visitors' reflections, what experiences of change do we find?

#### *Stimulated reflection*

Many of the events and activities associated with *Prejudice and Pride* stimulated a process of reflection. One visitor to Beningbrough Hall, who participated in a live-portraiture event, noted that the experience created an opportunity for contemplation, stating:

*Everyone's life matters. We are all part of the picture of life in the past, present & future. We need to know and understand in order to move forward in the future. Taking time to listen to and, watch the 'life portrait' was very relaxing - also a good opportunity to reflect.*

Similarly, activities at Hanbury Hall provoked a profound reflection from a child visitor, who asked us to 'Imagine if love was illegal?' Several visitors reported having their 'eyes opened', and credited *Prejudice and Pride* with expanding their knowledge and understanding of LGBTQ issues, with one visitor to Sutton House commenting that:

*... as an informed person I am ashamed to say that I know very little about the LGBTQIA community. Exhibitions like this change that; we need them to harvest understanding and inclusivity.*

A visitor to Kingston Lacy also tells of an increase in his awareness of past events and treatment of LGBTQ people, alongside a desire to see a more tolerant and inclusive society:

*As a gay man it is important to me to learn more about LGBT history and stories of our ancestors, so thank you for helping to tell more about our history. Until learning about William Bankes' story I had no idea that gay men were executed for who they loved from the 1500s to 1800s. I am so lucky to live at the current time. May tolerance & acceptance continue to grow.*

#### *Shifted attitudes*

In many cases this enhanced understanding around prejudice faced by LGBTQ people, both historically and today, moved people, shifted attitudes and aroused more empathetic views, helping visitors to reflect on their own positions. In some cases, this led people to declare that they had become more tolerant, as we see with one visitor to the exhibition at Smallhythe Place, who reflects on the nature of intolerance as well as her own prejudices, stating:

*I think Edy and her friends were definitely brave, they were pioneers and they set the ball rolling. It's going to make me think more before I make an opinion and, as I say, it's going to make me more tolerant. I think it's human nature that you are prejudiced,*

## Whose voice do we hear?

*but you've got to curb it and you've got to have more love in your life, you've got to have more love for everyone.*

### *Inspired action*

We also found that the programme inspired visitors, albeit a small number, to declare their intention to take some form of action. One visitor to Kingston Lacy reflected on her shift in attitude, stating that:

*I guess I always thought your sexual orientation was a matter for private consideration and that the whole kind of campaigning, 'out there', thing was a bit over the top, but Prejudice and Pride and the experience of going to Bournemouth Pride has changed my view of that because it's made me realise that our society is not as liberal as we believe and there are people with strongly homophobic views still. So for that reason from here on in I will certainly speak out about my sexuality and make sure I stand up for my rights.*

Other visitors described how what they saw and experienced as part of the programme moved them to want to go away and find out more, as well as be more compassionate and support people facing persecution. One volunteer at Kingston Lacy was prompted by their own experience of the Exile installation to do their own additional research on the men who were executed for same sex acts and to share this with visitors.

### **Deeper connections with history**

We also found that visitors' personal experiences of difference and diversity impacted the way they engaged with the programme. Visitors used the comments cards and interviews as an opportunity to describe their responses to Prejudice and Pride, including emotional engagement or accounts that shared personal relevance or meaning. One young visitor to a performance at Knole Park stressed that:

*To say it was emotional is too small a word. It brought up things I've wanted to voice to my parents but haven't been able to ... It mattered today because it's one step closer to showing the world that I matter.*

A large proportion of visitors who did not themselves identify as part of the LGBTQ community but declared personal connections with LGBTQ people appeared to find it easier to engage with themes raised by the programme and responded empathetically to those facing prejudice. Many visitors spoke about their distress seeing family members or friends experiencing prejudice because of their sexual or gender difference and one visitor to Sutton House also shared her experience as a manager tackling workplace discrimination against a gay colleague, stating 'there is no place for prejudice

in society today [and] nobody should be judged on their sexuality'.

Visitors who had little prior connections with LGBTQ people sometimes found it difficult to relate and were less likely to empathise with the stories told. A visitor interviewed at Kingston Lacy remarked that they felt the programme 'wasn't important at all', and later asked: 'why would I think about it?' Some visitors felt uncertain, even uncomfortable, with LGBTQ issues, and a large number of individuals reflected on the fact that they 'had never thought about it before' when asked whether a programme like Prejudice and Pride mattered to them. Sometimes visitors presented contradictory views, for example, being very supportive of the programme and advocating the need for a tolerant and inclusive society in one part of the interview and, in another part, describing gay men's behaviour as 'predatory'.

In spite of this, many visitors relished the opportunity to reflect on the concerns raised by the programme and appreciated the chance to discuss their thoughts and feelings.

A number of visitors also struggled with language and terminology, unsure of what words to use. One visitor who attended a talk at Wightwick Manor, expressed her anxiety about her understanding of transgender issues.

*I have to say though I'm confused by the whole transgender thing, and I consider myself quite a liberal person. But all these different words! I'm supposed to call myself a 'cis' woman, so I've been born a woman and I identify as a woman. So all this new nomenclature I'm confused by and I suppose it's quite a fresh debate at the moment. We've got some feminists coming out and going 'if you're born as a woman and you live as a woman you will have had a different experience, a cumulative experience or affect, but if you're born as a man and you transition to becoming a woman you will not have the same life experiences'. I agree with them, but I kind of have this slight liberal thing where I go 'ooh am I allowed to admit that? Am I not politically correct? ... I mean I don't care, if you want to become a man or a woman that's cool, but why does that mean I have to change what I call myself, how I identify myself, so I'm not resisting it I'm just a bit confused about it.*

She recognised that at no other time had she had the chance to talk about her thoughts, later reflecting that she greatly valued the opportunity to discuss this within the interview.

*I'm a bit worried that I'm being left behind actually, I feel like I missed those opportunities to have those sorts of conversations in a safe environment because, when you're at school, you can kind of explore these things and have conversations and have younger friends and you're all experimenting with your personalities. I feel like you've got the space to have those conversations. I feel as you get older and you're more formed as a person, and arguably your peer group is more formed and fixed, I think you have less and less opportunity to just discuss these things in an open and safe way. So I'm sitting here going to you, I feel a bit embarrassed, that*

## Whose voice do we hear?

*I feel a bit uncomfortable with all this transgender stuff because I don't know what to do with it and I don't know what I'm supposed to say and how I'm supposed to behave, but I don't want to offend anybody. But I don't feel I have the opportunity to have that conversation in a more public space. I'm not sure whether it would be appropriate, isn't that sad?*

In considering these two long extracts, we see a visitor not only provoked to reflect on contemporary issues but someone who welcomes the opportunity to be challenged to think differently. Visitor comments may not always reflect the kinds of views that exhibition makers and event organisers hope to inspire but they nevertheless point to the largely untapped value of heritage sites as sites of reflection, debate and dialogue on contemporary issues.

### Visitor journeys

Our research points to the huge potential heritage sites hold to provide a space for reflection on the contemporary world as well as the past and to provoke different ways of seeing, thinking and feeling. Giving people the opportunity to reflect and, importantly, to share their views acts as an important part of this process. Through the visitor study we witnessed people negotiate ideas, generate new understandings and, in some cases, move towards greater understanding and empathy towards difference. One visitor described themselves as on a 'continuing journey to lose the prejudices of my youth', explicitly thanking the National Trust for helping them and others on that journey.

With this in mind, it is important to ask, what public spaces exist where adults in particular can think about, discuss and debate contested issues? Heritage organisations, along with museums and galleries, can provide a stimulating environment for this to take place. They can provide a space for evolving ideas, developing language and exploring values. At the same time, creating these opportunities for reflection and debate – especially in relation to issues that hold the potential to polarise viewpoints – can be fraught with difficulty. Where these difficulties were anticipated and carefully considered, fewer people felt threatened, and fewer people retreated into prejudiced views and attitudes. Where visitors felt confident, comfortable, and able to express themselves without judgement they were more likely to move forward in their thinking. As one 85 year old woman visiting Knole Park commented;

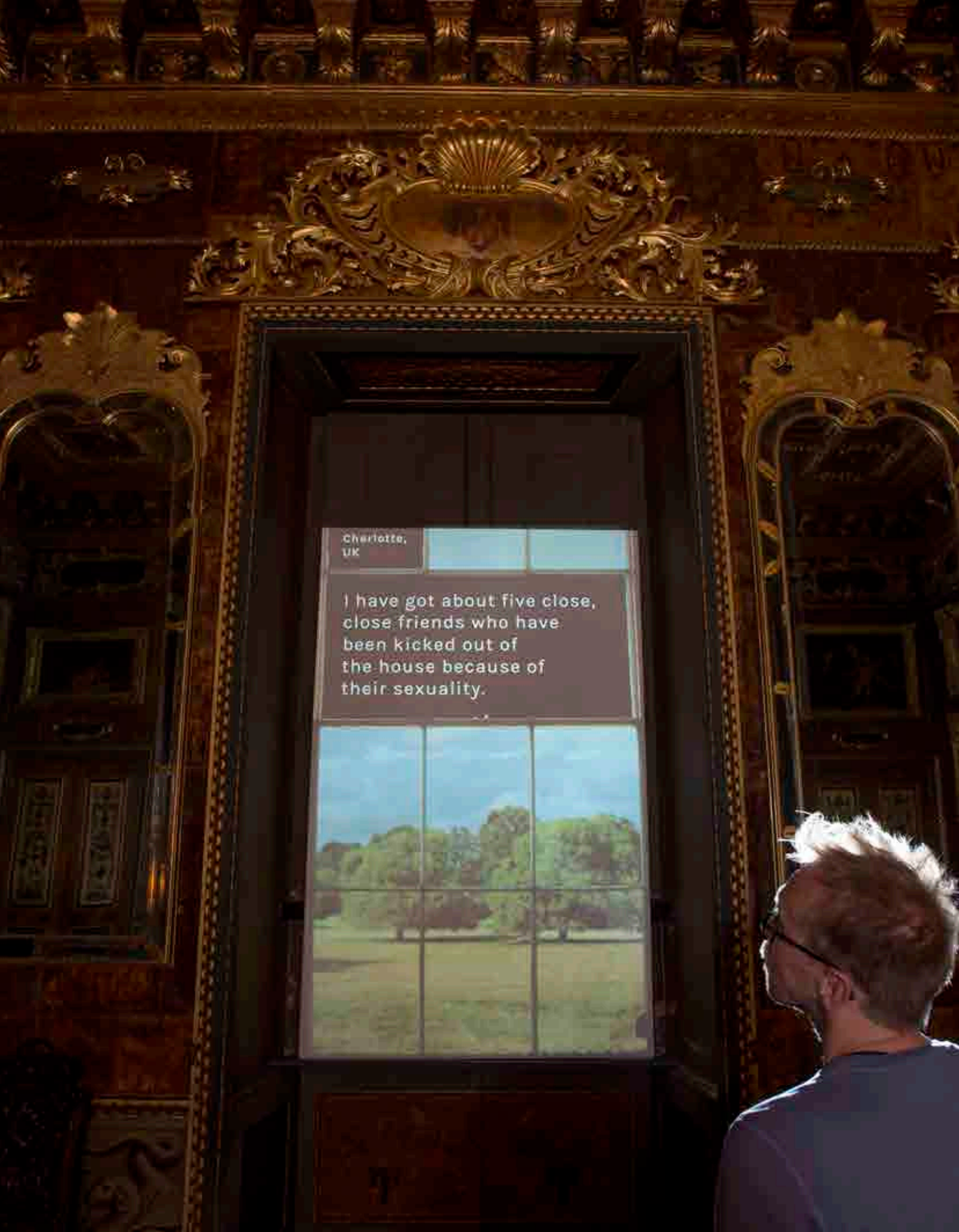
*... when I married at 25 I had never heard of homosexuality. Now I want to explore shades of grey, not binary. Two nurses I worked with were lesbians and only in retrospect I realise this. I want to understand the modern world. I do not want a closed mind.*

Although the fifty years since homosexuality was partially decriminalised in England and Wales have been witness to

huge advances in LGBTQ equality, attitudes towards LGBTQ people today are still highly uneven and, for many, in a process of flux. As Prejudice and Pride has undoubtedly shown, efforts to publicly celebrate same sex love and gender diversity – despite advances in the law – continue to divide public opinion. At the same time, when we attend closely to the full range of responses to a more inclusive approach to understanding the past, we find both an openness to new ways of seeing and a thirst for opportunities to explore and reflect on the relevance of these histories to the present day.

### References

- Levy, A. (2017) 'National Trust's latest PC stunt: New exhibition at historic property features 51 ropes to commemorate men who were hanged for being gay', *Daily Mail*, 19 September 2017. Online. Available at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4900892/PC-National-Trust-s-exhibition-men-hanged-gay.html> (accessed 20 February 2018).
- Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) (2017) *The Unfinished Portrait: Researching & presenting the life of Robert Wyndham Ketton-Cremer, Felbrigg Hall*, Leicester: RCMG.
- Sandell, R. (2012) 'Museums and the Human Rights Frame' in R. Sandell, and E. Nightingale (eds) *Museums, Equality and Social Justice*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Sandell, R. (2017) *Museums, Moralities and Human Rights*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Sandell, R., Dodd, J. & Jones, C. (2010) *sh[OUT]: An evaluation of the Social Justice Programme of the Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow (GoMA) 2009-2010*, Culture and Sport Glasgow/RCMG 2010.



Charlotte,  
UK

I have got about five close,  
close friends who have  
been kicked out of  
the house because of  
their sexuality.

# PEOPLE, PASSION, PLACE: VOLUNTEERING IN AN EVOLVING NATIONAL TRUST

**Annabel Smith** (Head of Volunteering & Participation Development,  
National Trust)

The summer of 2017, halfway through our Prejudice and Pride programme, proved to be a challenging time. Media headlines were grim – National Trust volunteers forced to adhere to a ‘politically correct’ agenda. We heard about volunteers disturbed and alienated by the direction the Trust was taking: some left the organisation as a result. Conversely, some sections of the press were more positive and our cultural sector peers publicly expressed their support for our work. Some volunteers expressed a greater connection with the Trust as a result of Prejudice and Pride, whilst others now felt comfortable enough to be open

about their sexuality in the workplace. We gained new volunteers, attracted by a more relevant National Trust.

Within this polarised debate, key questions arose. What is the role of volunteers in the Trust’s ambition to engage visitors in challenging histories? And how do we best work with volunteers so that they feel able to support our organisational commitment to be ‘For Ever, for Everyone’?

## The role of volunteers

Without the support of our volunteers we would never be able to deliver our ambitious plans to transform the experience of visitors to the National Trust. The main touchpoint for visitors at our places, each one of our thousands of volunteers have countless interactions with existing and potential supporters, beyond the boundaries of the place where they volunteer. Working together with volunteers as partners in the process of change is vital. For this to happen successfully, we must continue to invest in our volunteer managers. Failing to do this can have significant negative impact, both in terms of the quality of volunteer and visitor experience. However, investment is not only about mitigating possible negative impact. There are huge opportunities for a more fulfilling experience for volunteers, realising the potential of this invaluable support. For example, many volunteers at Kingston Lacy became involved in the creation of the Exile installation, taking part in sessions to record a powerful soundscape that helped to convey the property's commitment to the aims of the programme. This participation resulted in a deeper emotional connection to place, as experienced by this volunteer:

'What I didn't plan was the way I ended up feeling. It felt very emotional to see and speak the names and ages of these individuals. All of a sudden the story came alive – these were people – real people, just like us, who were being hanged for their love. I'm not embarrassed to say

tears fell down my face and I felt honoured to be part of the journey telling the story to the visitors.'

## Volunteer management capabilities for a future-proofed National Trust

It is crucial that we continually invest in the skills of volunteer managers, to enable effective practices which make the best of voluntary contributions. However, to realise a future where the Trust is positioned as a cultural institution that can engage visitors around multiple and diverse histories and convey their contemporary relevance – facilitated by volunteers – we need an augmented skill set. We are starting to establish what these skills are; answers lie with existing managers and also in areas identified in an ongoing research project exploring the differences between managing staff and managing volunteers, initiated in 2013 and led by Professor Anne-Marie Greene and Dr Jenna Ward. The research found several differences, two of which are particularly applicable to our ambition to explore challenging histories.

### Affective commitment

Affective commitment, in this context, is the powerful emotional attachment volunteers have to place. This has huge value to the Trust – it's what helps raise money, upholds standards and provides visitors with a warm welcome. High levels of affective commitment, however, may also lead to resistance to change and be perceived as an obstacle to progress. The research suggests that affective commitment might lie behind some of the difficulties managers

can face when implementing change. By ignoring this aspect of the volunteer experience, we can be perceived to be trampling over volunteers' emotional attachment. The positive news, however, is that managers can also demonstrate affective commitment, encouraging and supporting volunteers to express their own attachment and, in doing so, seek to build support for change.

### **Emotional labour**

Another key skill in the volunteer manager of the future's toolkit is the ability to manage their own emotions and the emotions of volunteers. Known as emotional labour, this was found in the research to be a striking difference between the demands of managing staff and managing volunteers. Volunteer managers employ emotional labour more frequently and intensely because, without the regulation of a legally binding employment contract, volunteers are often more able than staff to express their strongly-felt emotions. This can make the role of the volunteer manager harder, especially when layered with the emotional demands of challenging content such as proved to be the case with Prejudice and Pride. An emotionally intelligent volunteer manager who can effectively respond to the feelings displayed in their volunteer teams, and channel these into mutually beneficial outcomes, will reap the benefits.

### **Engaging and supporting volunteers in diversity and inclusion**

The National Trust has a robust equality and diversity policy, applicable to all staff and volunteers, and a set of values and behaviours underpinning everything we do. As Prejudice and Pride progressed, however, it became apparent that these were not consistently operationalised and therefore difficult to employ as drivers for change. Trying to use our values and behaviours as a justification of the programme uncovered the extent to which some volunteers, and staff, did not fully support our organisational mission, 'For Ever, for Everyone', as applied in a 21st century context. In addition to objections to the specific programme, some complaints were grounded in the belief that the Trust is purely about conservation, and initiatives such as Prejudice and Pride constituted mission drift. Our new For Everyone programme aims to engage volunteers and staff with our ambitions to enable everyone – staff, volunteers, visitors and communities – to feel they belong at the National Trust.

### **Conclusions**

Despite the press stories, independent analysis has shown that volunteer experience was not significantly negatively affected by involvement in Prejudice and Pride. Furthermore, there was evidence of positive impact, with volunteers at participating places more likely than those in other places to agree that equality and diversity is a core purpose of the National Trust. It is crucial that we recognise and build on the partnership of countless volunteers who were, and are, in support of this work.

To continue to rely on this support, and to encourage others to join us on this evolving journey, we need to invest in the volunteering relationship, and continue to build the capabilities required to successfully work with volunteers in the process of change. Finally, it's important to help staff and volunteers to connect with our organisational mission, laying firm foundations for a future where all volunteers are in support of a National Trust that is truly for everyone.





# LGBTQ HERITAGE AND ITS CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

**Tom Butler** (writer, researcher and creative producer),  
**Julie Howell** (socially engaged artist and experience designer)  
and **Richard Sandell** (Professor of Museum Studies, RCMG)

In late September 2017, John Orna-Ornstein, Director of Curation and Experience at the National Trust, received a letter from a couple who had recently visited Kingston Lacy in Dorset. Prompted to write by their experience of visiting Exile – an installation that we had conceived, researched and designed with colleagues (Anna Lincoln, Lea Nagano and James Jones), Trust staff and volunteers to explore the property’s significant LGBTQ heritage – they reflected on both the controversy that Exile had generated in

the media and the impact it had had on them:

‘...the Exile project at the house, in particular the rope memorial, had a profound effect on us. We would not have predicted that it would have had such an effect, bringing us to tears. That such a display should have proved so controversial must indicate the residual strength of homophobia in this country. I say this as a 76-year-old heterosexual male who regrettably in the past had

significant difficulties in understanding homosexual feelings. Things are changing and in our view will be greatly helped by such strong displays as that at Kingston Lacy.’

Between September and November 2017, *Exile* at Kingston Lacy drew attention to the story of William John Bankes. William John – a Member of Parliament, collector and talented draughtsman – inherited Kingston Lacy in 1834 and set about making dramatic changes to his home. Just seven years later he was caught with a soldier in ‘an indecent act’. It was the second such incident. At a time when intimate relationships between men could be punishable by death, William John felt he had no choice but to leave the home he loved for exile in France and, later, Italy.

William John’s experiences are an integral part of Kingston Lacy: knowing his story offers visitors a richer and fuller understanding of the house. Indeed, it is impossible to fully convey to contemporary visitors why the house looks the way it does without knowing of William John’s same-sex desires and their consequences. Our ambition in developing *Exile* was to not only share this story and place it at the heart of the visit but, importantly, to use it to shine a light on contemporary and on-going LGBTQ issues.

Early on in shaping the project, we recognised the potential for William John’s story to evoke in visitors, strong emotional responses. Our approach to telling this story in a new way began

with a process of emotional mapping, understanding the potential feelings and responses of visitors as they moved through the house. Our eventual design response spanned the entire house, with three distinct installations linked by a series of new interpretive panels. The experience was conceived to foster in visitors, different emotions and responses at each stage; to unsettle, move, inform and empower visitors. Our process was also shaped to welcome involvement from everyone that works in the house today, knowing that the subject matter is still controversial to some and deeply personal to others.

We know that at the beginning of any story expectations are high. As such, the Entrance Hall was our chance to unsettle visitors, disrupting any preconceived ideas of what a visit to a National Trust house might be. The first installation, *In Memoriam*, featured 51 knotted ropes suspended from a wooden frame (figure 1). This striking installation represented the 51 men who were hanged in the UK under laws that criminalised same-sex acts during William John’s lifetime. It aimed to communicate the brutality of the times and the context of William John’s actions.

*In Memoriam* was a fully-immersive and sensory experience with as much to feel as to understand. Many visitors experienced unexpectedly strong emotions within the forest of ropes, moved by their smell, rough texture and proximity to the reality of hanging that they suggested. Within the layout of the ropes was further implicit detail: the height of the remembrance knots corresponded to the ages of the

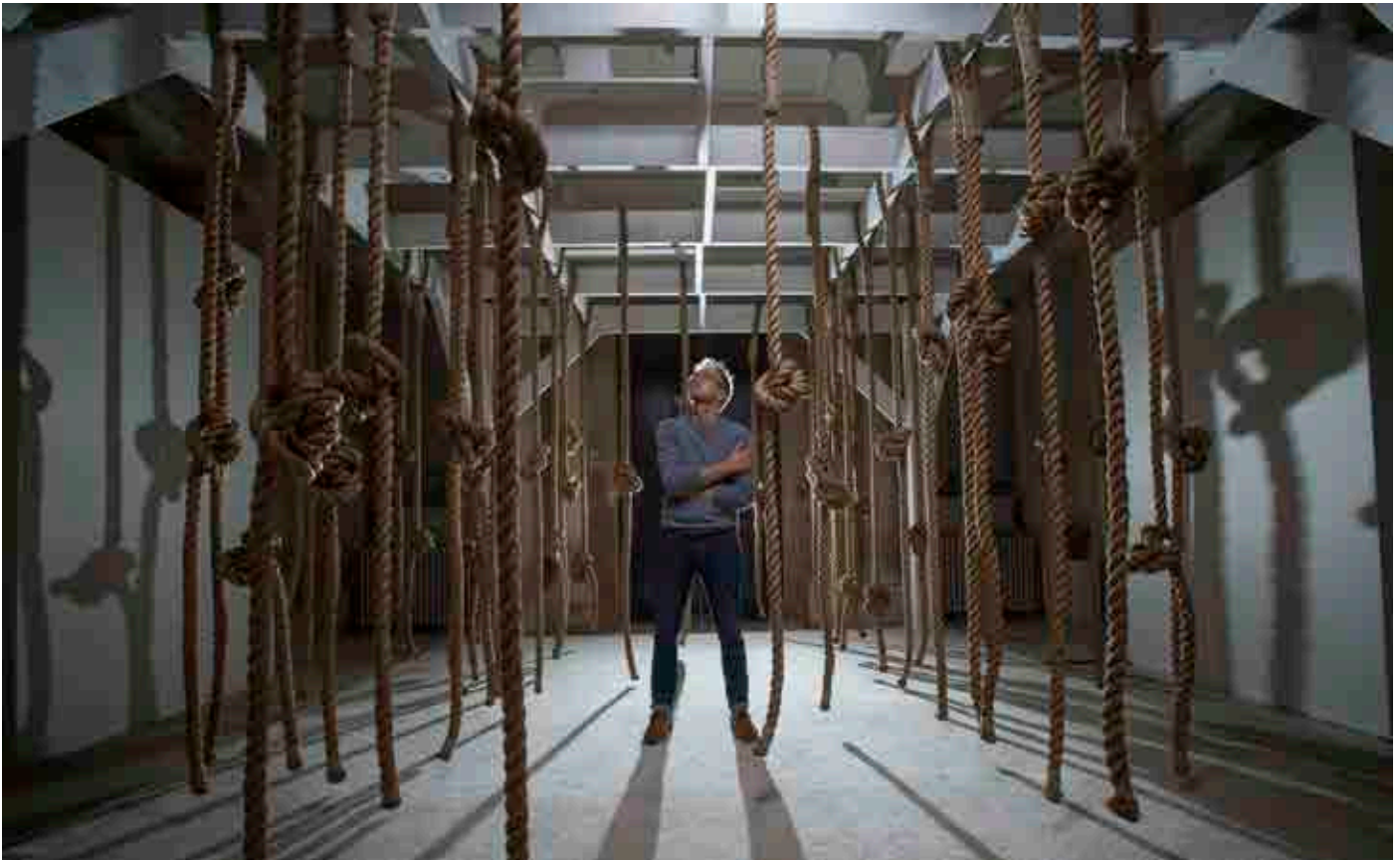


Figure 1. *In Memoriam*, part of *Exile* at Kingston Lacy, developed by RCMG, University of Leicester. © National Trust images/Steven Haywood.

men, spanning from 17 to 71 years. Their position in the room also had meaning: the ropes that represented men that died together were placed together. Added to this was a soundscape comprising original music by James Jones and recordings of Kingston Lacy volunteers and staff reading the names of the 51 men. The voices – women and men of all ages – made the stories human and personal: the ropes represented brothers, sons and fathers. We carried out extensive research to discover more about these men, compiling a list that included – where possible – their ages, jobs, where they lived and where they were killed.

This new research provided great interest and a foundation for deeper investigation by volunteers and, in some cases, the visitors themselves.

In the elaborately furnished Spanish Room we used film projection and sound to draw connections between William John's story and ongoing prejudice and intolerance today. Our intention was to disrupt any sense of a neatly packaged history that began with intolerance and persecution and ended with equality and respect for all. Displaced drew on the diverse experiences of LGBTQ people forced to leave their homes in the UK and abroad.

The Spanish Room – where visitors encounter William John’s creative vision for Kingston Lacy in its most arresting and complete form – provided an ideal backdrop and contrast to the narrative we inserted here. We projected our film onto closed window shutters, creating an optical illusion of the outside world. An image of Kingston Lacy’s grounds gradually shifted to contemporary scenes: a London street; a market in Uganda; a house in Chechnya. This helped visitors to make connections between legally and socially sanctioned forms of prejudices that affected William John in the 1840s with those that shape LGBTQ lives today. It was a deliberate choice to include UK as well as international experiences, showing that – despite the advances in the law that *Prejudice and Pride* celebrated – intolerance and stigma still force people to leave their homes today. The design was pared back to contrast with the opulence of the room, and a subtle soundscape of ordinary life – a key in a lock, a kettle boiling – reinforced the global, everyday experience of same-sex love and desire.

Finally, towards the end of the visitor route, *Prejudice, Persecution, Pride* set William John’s story within a global history, examining how the law has shaped and continues to shape LGBTQ lives. Copies of Acts from the Parliamentary Archives and a timeline revealed familiar and surprising stories of persecution and intolerance, liberation and equality.

This was our chance to empower visitors,

helping them to reflect on their visit and inspire them to think differently and share their views and opinions. The materiality of the Acts communicated the path from persecution to protection: a scrap of sixteenth century vellum instigating the death penalty juxtaposed with a 12cm-thick legal volume enshrining LGBTQ rights in the UK today. Our 6-metre long timeline (figure 2) gave us the opportunity to include stories that represented the diversity of experiences of the law within LGBTQ communities. Indeed, we researched and featured examples of how the law has impacted trans and women’s lives in a purposeful attempt to develop an inclusive narrative that also helped to place William John’s story within a broader queer history. These included, Roberta Cowell, a former Spitfire pilot (1918-2011) who legally changed her gender from male to female in 1951 and the ban in 1928 on Radclyffe Hall’s ‘lesbian novel’, *The Well of Loneliness*, under the Obscene Publications Act.

Alongside stories linked to well-known figures such as Sir John Gielgud and George Michael we featured lesser-known stories related to, for example, Maureen Colquhoun (the UK’s first openly gay MP, referencing William John’s own career as an MP) as well as the re-imprisonment of gay men in Germany soon after their liberation from the concentration camps in 1945.

We created a gentle, calm and intimate room with domestic lighting levels and space to sit, reflect and provide feedback – positive or negative. A video

## LGBTQ heritage and its contemporary relevance

interview with Ruth Hunt, Chief Executive of Stonewall UK, presented a powerful call to action to continue awareness of inequality and how to support younger LGBTQ people today.

Over 19,000 people visited Exile, all with

their own connections and responses to the story of William John and his contemporary relevance. We hoped that visitors would leave not only feeling more emotionally connected to Kingston Lacy, but with a new understanding of LGBTQ experience today.



Figure 2. *Prejudice, Persecution, Pride: LGBTQ lives and the law*, part of *Exile* at Kingston Lacy, developed by RCMG, University of Leicester. ©National Trust images/Steven Haywood.

# DISCUSSING DIVERSITY: PORTRAITS UNTOLD AT BENINGBROUGH HALL

**Sue Jordan** (Programming, Learning & Engagement Officer,  
Beningbrough Hall, Gallery & Gardens, National Trust)

Beningbrough has always been passionate about diversity and inclusion and, in 2016, when we were approached about an exciting and innovative arts project, rooted in diversity and making the arts accessible, we took the opportunity. Prior to 2016, we approached a variety of community support groups, in an attempt to access training and resources to support our staff and volunteer teams to equip them with the tools they needed, to give our visitors the best possible experience when visiting our properties. During the search, we were often presented with the costs of a training facilitator which, at the time, we just could

not afford. It always seemed a shame that, as a national organisation, we didn't seem to have the internal resource to support such ambition. So when we had the opportunity to take part in a, new, nationally-funded project, we took it.

The project – Portraits Untold funded by Arts Council England – took place at 4 different venues, with 4 different sitters and set out to explore our common humanity and what diversity meant to them. As part of the project we developed a partnership with the York LGBT forum, through which we were able to access training and insight from their core team

of volunteer speakers. Lisa Kelly, Co-Chair of the forum and Transgender Sub Group Co-ordinator, spent two days with me planning and preparing for her talk, which focused on what we, as a property team, wanted our staff and volunteers to gain from the training, as well as what Lisa and the forum wanted to bring to it. This partnership was the beginning of a great relationship and an important stepping stone towards advancing our inclusive culture at Beningbrough. The following year, Prejudice and Pride provided an opportunity to continue this work and to further strengthen, and communicate to visitors, Beninbrough's commitment to equality and inclusion.

We welcomed back award-winning artist, Tanya Raabe-Webber to join us for a four-day residency to further explore what diversity really looks like within the National Trust and within our local communities. Tanya painted Lisa's portrait in the Saloon in front of a live and online audience, engaging her in conversation and inviting her to share her story. The event grew in ambition and scale and we invited applications from the general public for people who could share and discuss their own stories with a live audience.

Inclusion and diversity is something I've been passionate about for a long time. Having attended a relatively diverse secondary school, I've grown up with people from all walks of life, with various challenges and barriers and from a number of different countries. My social group for most of my teenage years

included a friend with limited mobility, a Sikh and a Hindu, both with strong family and religious values, and a friend who identified as gay from the age of 14. Having experienced verbal abuse and intimidation with several of them on different occasions and in very different situations, I caught only a glimmer of what some people receive on a daily basis. My friends would often brush it off and yet I was always left feeling uncomfortable and defensive of them. I'm a firm believer in equality and diversity and am invested in developing our volunteering offer to better meet the needs of our current volunteers, of our visitors and of volunteers of the future.

If we can create an experience for visitors, staff and volunteers that genuinely welcomes and embraces diversity and if we can attract volunteers from more diverse backgrounds, our connection to the public will be greater and what we offer will be more relevant and accommodating to the needs of society today.



# CONTEMPORARY ART AND DIFFICULT HISTORIES

**Grace Davies**, (Contemporary Arts Programme Manager, National Trust)  
with **Simona Piantieri** and  
**Michele D'Acosta** (Prejudice and Pride artists-in-residence)

In the first of her 2017 BBC Reith Lectures, Hilary Mantel asserted that 'history can tell us whether we live in good times or otherwise, and help us put our small lives into context, but if we want to meet the dead looking alive, we turn to art'. Across many centuries, artists have played a key role in bringing stories to life, from religious scenes, to battles and portraiture. Artists have shone a spotlight on the world in which we live and, in doing so, often challenged conventional thinking around aspects that might otherwise have been overlooked.

Over the last 30 years or so, a growing number of cultural institutions have chosen to work with contemporary artists to help facilitate a dialogue with the

public about the multi-layered, sometimes challenging, aspects of their collections and histories. Through artworks and interventions, artists have enabled custodians of collections to unpack their interpretive choices to the public around the presentation of objects and ideas from history.

In 1992, African-American artist Fred Wilson was granted access to the collection at Maryland Historical Society. Wilson's now iconic project sought to highlight the absence of the black history of Maryland and, in particular, the history of slavery through his interventions. One example famously included the juxtaposition of slave shackles with ornate silverware in museum display cabinets

whilst, in another, he labelled empty plinths with the names of remarkable contributors to Maryland's history – their absence in the permanent collection notable by their colour. Wilson said of his installation, 'What they put on view says a lot about a museum, but what they don't put on view says even more'.

Fred Wilson's intervention was - in 1992 - a bold decision for a museum to invite this kind of scrutiny. Yet, due to its popularity, the exhibition extended its course, and with over 55,000 visitors, it was the most popular in the organisation's history. Its success inspired other cultural institutions to place their own interpretations of history under further interrogation.

The National Trust has been working with artists for many years through Trust New Art, a programme of contemporary arts inspired by National Trust places. Artists have been instrumental in opening up debate across a wide range of issues from representation of LGBTQ histories, to workers' rights and legacies of colonialism and empire. The creativity of artists to challenge and interrogate convention has been a useful tool in unlocking narratives that may not have been otherwise told.

In 2017, Simona Piantieri and Michele D'Acosta were selected as Artists-in-Residence for the National Trust's Prejudice and Pride national public programme. They made extensive site visits, gained access to archival material and talked with many property staff to create three remarkable short films that explored the lives of a number of LGBTQ people from history who lived marginalised lives amidst prejudice.

Many of the past lives they explored were talented artists who used their creativity to explore their sexuality and the meaning of same-sex love; many of these are still under-recognised or invisible to the wider public. Although their art has been celebrated, their personal lives remain hidden, or conveniently overlooked. Michele and Simona felt the collection of Pre-Raphaelites at Wightwick Manor and Gardens was one of the richest for telling stories of gay men, gay women and bisexual artists, many of whom suffered a great deal and were severely punished for their sexuality. Their film, which sensitively and poetically captures the lives found within the Wightwick collection, was displayed at the property through the latter half of 2017, and can still be viewed online (<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/prejudice-and-pride-our-lgbtq-artists-in-residence>).

A further two films were produced, one creatively capturing the National Trust's presence at Pride Festivals across the country and the second, a reconstruction of 'The Caravan Club' - a queer-friendly members club of 1934 and known as 'London's most bohemian rendezvous'. Simona and Michele's involvement with the programme was of personal significance to the artists, as Simona explains:

*"I ran away from home in southern Italy when I was 19 years old. My parents had found out that I was gay and, for them, it was a curse. Growing up in a Catholic country and studying in a Catholic school, I can't stress enough how important it is to talk about and to study queer artists and*

*public figures. Their lives must be made public and they must become role models to this generation and to generations to come. I had no such frame of reference when I was a teenager, and this was a very painful and stressful experience, not only for me, but for my family and friends. This is the case for lesbians even more than for gay men.*

*It is important to acknowledge the huge contributions that LGBTQ artists have made throughout history and the impact they have had on people's lives. As an artist myself, I cannot separate my private life from my work because my sexuality is part of who I am; and this will necessarily reflect in my art. So how can one study someone's artistic contribution without knowing where he/she comes from? We shouldn't wait to hear about LGBTQ artists' misfortunes and their 'outing' to learn about their sexuality. We should work more and more for acceptance of any gender and for giving LGBTQ people the same respect that heterosexuals have.*

*It is good to celebrate queer lives and to move away from the ignorance and prejudice of the past. Learning the stories of a range of LGBTQ identities from history can empower and inspire current and future generations to create a more accepting world. The colours of the Rainbow Flag remind us of the mixed LGBT community, they are also symbolic: life (red), healing (orange), sunlight (yellow), nature (green), harmony/peace (blue), and spirit (purple/violet). They encapsulate the notions that our LGBTQ ancestors still have the power to inspire in contemporary society.”*

Artists' interpretations and interventions have been catalytic in enabling cultural institutions to challenge their interpretations of the past, and – as makers, storytellers, provocateurs and idea generators – artists are able to create new meanings and re-imagine histories, helping us make sense of the past so that we can create a better future.

*In Memoriam*, part of *Exile* at Kingston Lacy, developed by RCMG, University of Leicester. *Exile* at Kingston Lacy (detail). Photograph courtesy of Hayley Evans.



