Locating Queer History
Matt Cook
23 April 2024

1. *Introduction: Queer folk in Manchester, Leeds, Brighton and Plymouth*

I want to start by introducing you to some queer folk and queer places from four regional English cities in the 1960s.

- *Manchester: Luchia*
  - Luchia moved from Ireland to Manchester as a teenager in the early 1960s.
  - In the factory where she found work, she heard about the 'pansies' who drank at the New Union on Canal Street and went along.
  - 'I stood on Canal Street looking at these people going in and out. I saw men dressed up as women and vice versa. I'd never seen anything like it in my life'.
  - It became like her 'family' and she was taken under the wing of the straight landlord and landlady who found her bar work nearby work and a place to live.
  - This sense of family mattered because of attacks by queer bashers and particularly intense police activity in the 60s and 70s.
  - 'We had to take care of ourselves', she said. 'As [our numbers] got bigger we got bolder and we would step out of the New Union onto Canal Street with our drinks. And we had queens at each end guarding us […] they were vicious against the homophobes'

- *Leeds: Jane*
  - In a 1969 'expose' of the Leeds queer pub The Hope and Anchor, readers of *The People* met Jane, who worked in a local mill, where she arrived and left early before everyone else because people would ridicule her so much.
  - At The Hope and Anchor, other punters told *the People*, that 'she gets most hurt if not referred to as 'her' and 'she', but found it generally to be a place where, as she said herself, she could 'enjoy herself without feeling out of place'. Like Luchia she found a sense of family here.
  - She was amongst the braver people locally: in interviews recalling this period, several men said they wouldn't go there. John remarked: 'everything would be straight back to work. Your job would be untenable'. He and others had too much to lose, while others had too little to gain: Ruth remarked on how male dominated this pub and the couple of others nearby were. She came from Wakefield to 'find like-minded people' one night but returned home disappointed.
  - Two weeks after *the People* report at The Hope and Anchor, the pub was ransacked by Leeds and Glasgow Rangers football fans and it closed, leaving Jane and others without their anchor point for a year before it reopened as the New Penny, or Bent Penny as it became known.

- *Brighton: Aileen and Ted*
    - Aileen moved to Brighton from Glasgow because of its queer notoriety by the 1960s; she relished being able to go out on a Sunday wearing a pair of slacks and 'nobody turned round calling me a cow'.
    - Ted, from Southampton, felt 'euphoric' when he moved here in the 1960s. 'I just dived in and never looked back', he said.
    - One of the several pubs Ted enjoyed was The Golden Fleece – which had two bar with distinct atmospheres: Bert, in one, was 'the soul of discretion'; Dennis, in the other, was 'one of those flamboyant queans'. His bar was 'hilarious and riotous', but Dennis could be indiscreet and might 'compromise you in public'. Discretion still clearly mattered.
    - Nearby Filk'n Casuals (the smutty combination of Phil and Ken – then who owned it) meanwhile fed a distinctive queer style here in the 60s and 70s: 'terribly Hawaiian shirts with all sorts of tulle at the neck', Grant remembered.

- *Plymouth – Ted and Michael*
    - Remembering 1960s Plymouth from the vantage point of the 2010s, local born Ted was nostalgic.
        i. 'It was better when it was against the law. We were like a big family; we all knew who we were and where we could go […] We always used to go for drinks on Saturday night at the Lockyer Hotel. It was only a little place, but we were used to it and the staff knew us.'
    - Another local, Michael, a teenager in the sixties, was forbidden by his parents from going down Union Street, notorious for the sailors who went out on the lash there. He went nevertheless and remembers the Paramount:
        i. 'You got up to this tall, really tacky room with a tacky bar where they played juke-box music. [...] And you got all the services, you got the prostitutes, you got the queer boys, basically the dregs of society ended up there [...]. And sometimes you'd get a drunken sailor [...] saying: 'Come 'ere darlin', I wanna dance with you!'
    - The imperative, though, was to keep below the proverbial radar. 'You have your joke, you muck about, but nothing else', one Lockyer punter told Gays News when they visited in the early 70s.

2. Connections

- There's much to connect these and places experiences. In each there was at least one tacitly queer pub (Brighton had many more), which had a mix of punters who found finding some sense of ease and possibility, lots of fun, and, for many, a sense of family.
- There was in the 50s and 60s, as the sexual binary (heterosexual/ homosexual) became more entrenched, a growing sense of separation between the two, and we can see this to different extents in each of the cities, in way a clip from a documentary in Leeds exemplifies: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-oRP461d2sg
- Notice we don't get to meet any homosexuals – this is about those people over there from the perspective of the norm.
- What the film also suggests is a sense of real and present danger for homosexuals - and again this is present in each city to varying degrees
- This is no surprise because:
    - Arrests and prosecutions actually went up after the 1967 Act.
    - Men and women continued to lose their jobs.
    - Women also lost their children in distressing custody battles.
    - Trans folk appear in the press infrequently but when they do in this period it is usually with reports of suicide and attack.

- *Differences*
- But in this lecture, I want to think a bit further about what marks these places and these folk out in these very different cities. And so make an argument that the particular dimensions of locality - the local geography, economy, politics, size, history and also distance from London - make a difference to the identity and community formed and was experienced in each of these.
- If we go back to our cast of characters, we might glimpse something of this:
    - Luchia and her friends defiance.
    - Ted's caution and also nostalgia in Plymouth.
    - A sense of embattlement in Leeds city centre.
    - A feeling of possibility and the scope for some visibility, flamboyant or otherwise, for Aileen, Ted and their circles in Brighton.
- Communities, scenes and identities had a different cadence in each of these places because of particular circumstances and inflections of local, regional, national, ethnic and other identifications. If the call to 'come out' was soon to be articulated loudly nationally and internationally in the early 1970s, it was thus taken up very unevenly in these cities.
- So, I'm asking why these differences – and how did they play out in the 1960s and in the years that followed?
- In answer, I'm going to take each city - two in the north, two on the south coast, but all within the English jurisdiction - to pull out those factors which have made for these differences.
- In doing so, I want to suggest the significance of thinking about sexuality in particular and local context and that we should be suspicious of sweeping accounts which often place London front and centre and assume its history can also count as a national history.

3. Manchester

- Large conurbation – but in decline as the manufacturing base shrank and a programme of slum clearance took place. 544,000 people lived in the city itself in 1971, a drop of 80,000 from 1961. The population fell by a further 90,000 by 1981 before gradually recovering to roughly the 1971 figure by 2021 under very different economic conditions. The wider Greater Manchester region meanwhile maintained a more consistent population of c.2.7 million, including some of those who left the central parts of the city.
- Others moved in, however. Afro-Caribbean immigrants settled in the inner south suburbs from the later 1950s and the number of students doubled from c.12,000 in 1961 to 24,000 a decade later (in line with the national trend).
- These incomers contributed to a burgeoning youth culture in the city centred on dance halls, shebeens and all-night cafes, which were, according the *Bolton Evening News*, 'hives' of 'moral decadence'.
- A somewhat associated queer scene developed alongside, brought to wider visibility during the sixties by particularly aggressive policing which came with the appointment of John McKay as the new chief police officer in 1959.
- Landlords and punters from the Rembrandt, 'a country pub in the city', and the more working-class New Union, both on Canal Street in the southern part of the city centre, found themselves in court on various indecency and licensing charges. These and other venues were mapped in local press coverage as a result, flagging the existence of a nascent queer scene as surely as the dangers associated with it.[i]
- The intense police activity and press interest in part explains the stridency of queer community here that we saw in Luchia's testimony about this.
- The formation of the North-Western Homosexual Law Reform Committee (later the CHE) here in the mid 1960s, and direct action lesbian and gay organising at the start of the 1970s - in a campaign of kiss-ins and slogan painting on city centre railways bridges, for example - has been

understood locally as an extension of this queer push back and also of the city's longer radical lineage 'of Peterloo […and] the Pankhursts.' So said Paul Fairweather, Manchester City Council's first gay officer (from 1984, and another radical local initiative).

- Paul suggested that this Mancunian history and tradition underpinned a particular sense of solidarity and an 'upstart' queer scene, 'large enough to have lots going on' but, unlike London, small enough to be socially and politically networked and 'completely manageable'
- So, a combination of factors:
    - A critical mass.
    - Particularly intense police activity – against queer and black people and the venues they used from 1959 and right through the 1980s.
    - A broader tradition of solidarity and radicalism (energized in response).
    - Also, a cross over scene,
- There were then central venues like Paddy's Goose, Tommy Ducks and Blooms Hotel which were nominally regular bars but popular with queer and trans people. 'If I went to The Goose [on a Wednesday], I'd be sure to find some other trans people to spend the evening with', said Jenny-Anne, who felt anchored in the city in the seventies and eighties as a result of these places and a trans support group running out of the university chaplaincy on Oxford Road (with the crucial car park allowing for crucial discreet safe arrival and departure).
- In the years to come, this continues: Manchester remained on a radical cutting edge politically (it hosted the largest anti-clause 28 demon in the country in 1988) and also in terms of the cross-over music and dance scenes.
- In a city in decline, it was cheap in the 70s and 80s to live and to put on parties in the industrial buildings and warehouses that were increasingly lying empty.
- Kate, a transwoman, told me in interview: 'the only people who seemed to live in town [in the late 1980s] were queer […] we didn't even have a supermarket […] there was something about not just moving to Manchester but living in the centre of it […] We just wanted to be right in it, be part of it'.
- The Labour-controlled city council was amongst the first in the country to appoint lesbian and gay officers and committees in the 1980s.
- It supported:
    - The new gay centre.
    - Helped gays and lesbians into housing (recognising the disproportionate difficulties many then faced).
    - Helped facilitate the formation of the UK's first gay village, in the deserted warehouses and buildings around canal street – the postindustrial landscape lending itself to this kind of renewal.
- In the early 1980s the area around Canal Street was still 'full of cotton workers by day and prostitutes by night', according to the former landlord of the Rembrandt. Thereafter 'the warehouses emptied and only the prostitutes were left'.
- In 1990, etched out of an old industrial building on Canal St, was plate glass fronted Manto on Canal Street. It was modelled on bars in Paris and Barcelona to 'introduc[e] a bit more sophistication' to the scene (though punters initially crowded upstairs to avoid being in full view; the risks of exposure were still very real for many).
- Soon the area became the hub for city centre warehouse apartment living, bar and club-based socialising, and AIDS-related community fundraising and support. The new potential of the pink pound was especially evident here (though the 1996 Phoenix lesbian and gay shopping mall foundered; it was the night-time economy that was flourishing). 'Queer as Folk', the landmark Channel Four series of 2001, cemented the village's place on a queer cutting edge for much wider audiences and the city tourist office was soon promoting it alongside 'curry mile' and other newly defined urban 'quarters.'

- Cerydwen, also from Leeds, found it 'liberating [...] exciting to have such a place' where there was at least a couple of lesbian venues and nights alongside the majority that were gay male. Jo contrasted the 'bright lights' of gay Manchester with 'parochial Plymouth'.
- The village has been criticized for being an exclusionary ghetto; for being too commercial, too young, too white, too straight, too gay; for not being queer enough.[ii] And, partly as a result, it provided a spur to an 'alternative' in the 2000s, associated especially with the Northern Quarter and harking back to earlier music, queer and drag scenes.
- This scene traded frequently on ideas of local working class, industrial and radical 'authenticity' rather than the Euro-American trends which were seen to dominate in village venues. It pushed boundaries in terms of music, performance, and what it meant to queer (the more frequently deployed term on this alternative circuit).
- The gay village nevertheless maintained its status as a place of socialising, community and remembrance. The bars and clubs, etched out of former industrial buildings, were still busy and a tourist draw.

4. Brighton

- If Manchester became, by the 1980s and 1990s, queerly notorious, Brighton was ahead of the game – already by the 1950s courting the pink tourist pound and described by one late 1960s journalist as the gayest place in Europe – and visibly so.
- In 1971, Brighton and Hove together had 230,000 residents. Compact – hemmed by south Downs and the sea, population density was high with flats and bedsits close to the centre and social scenes.
- Local economy was consistently reliant on sole traders rather than big employers; hotels, cafes and shops provided what Alan Berube described as 'classic low paid queer work' – militating against the kind of union and ethic of solidarity extending from the workplace we see in Manchester.
- Only 21% of Brighton and Hove's population worked in manufacturing in 1971 - 10% below the national average and 20% lower than Manchester - and this declined further over the period.
- More people here were self-employed and in professional, managerial and skilled roles, with a substantial proportion (one in 20 in 1971 and one in 12 by 2011) commuting the 60 miles to office-based jobs in London.
- Such work opened out possibilities for women in particular to have 'lifestyles independent of family' (Oram). Commuting separated work from home, sexual and social lives for many Brightonians, further underpinning the onus on pleasure and consumption here.
- Less workplace and union solidarity that in different ways shaped queer experience and currents of feeling in the other cities. Instead, the keynote was self-expression and individualism.
- This was enhanced by an art and students scene which had a disproportionate impact because of the size and geography of the city:
    - The University of Sussex (1961).
    - The new town centre buildings for the College of Arts and Craft (1966).
    - The inception of the Brighton Festival (1967), which rapidly become the biggest arts festival in England.
    - A queerish independent book shop (Unicorn) opened comparatively early here.
    - Also, avowedly gay hotels earlier than in other parts of the country.
- This was moreover, in the 1960s and until the early 1990s, a relatively cheap place to live. This made for made for a youthful and countercultural population.
- An associated queer life was tangibly woven into Brighton's cultural and commercial fabric and this was a draw to a steady stream of migrants from other parts of the country.
- Surveys in the mid 1990s showed very few members of the LGBTQ population were born in the city (rather different from Plymouth). There was a sense in this of a city enthusiastically chosen (and again by individuals and for themselves – you can see the theme here). And though Brighton

remained very white, the incomers furnished some sense of cosmopolitanism and brought different experiences and ideas to bear on the community and sense of a counterculture here.

- The queer scene was already substantial enough by the 1960s to be riven by cliques and snobbery. Grant recalled that 'lots of queers would say, "Oh, I wouldn't go into that place, it's frightfully rough and tumble.' His own queer set went out during the week to avoid the 'rougher' 'queer blokes' from midland and northern cities who visited at weekends.
- There was a distinctive style too as we've seen. Michael found 'the quick-witted Brighton queens [...] very alarming' when he arrived from Luton in 1960 as a twenty-two-year-old, and Grant remembered that 'colour-wise [in Brighton] it was a bit grotesque'.
- There was a fashion link to London, and much shuttling to and from the capital in ways that gave this small-ish seaside resort a metropolitan edge.
- By the seventies there were clear links between hippie, feminist, left-wing and queer people and causes, helping to make Brighton, to Jim, 'possibly one of the easiest places [in the country] to come to terms with an alternative from mainstream identity'.
- This was certainly political, but the sense of queer ease and possibility in Brighton in these years partly explains why it wasn't urgently so – certainly in comparison to Manchester and Leeds where gays and lesbians were facing especially heavy-handed policing on the one hand, and, on the other open violent hostility from the National Front.
- Strikingly, before 1967, queer folk were behaving as if what they were doing was legal, and in that sense the act made relatively little difference. Clause 28, when it came in 1988, was a different matter – especially in the context of the AIDS crisis which hit Brighton so especially hard, consolidating networks and a community of care.
- Clause 28 banned the promotion of homosexuality by local authorities and this was a particular affront in this town of historic queer ease and visibility.
- The particular fervent activist upsurge in Brighton springs from the late 1980s and gave community here a new texture. As opposed to Manchester, the council here was cautious and did celebrate and market the city's queer credentials until the late 1990s and 2000s. Activism and community was instead determinedly grassroots and often mobilized in opposition to the council.

5. Plymouth

- An interviewee in Plymouth described going to Brighton and realising 'you could be gay there', an identity he didn't closely associate with his home city.
- Devastated by the air bombardment of 1941, Plymouth was remodelled in the post war years as a self-consciously modern city (albeit with historic seafaring roots).
- Its centre was depopulated and reconstructed suburbs were zoned for supposedly more convivial family living. You were much less likely here than in Brighton to have a central bedsit a couple of doors down from a queer bar. This reconfiguration was apparently something of a draw. The population grew by 35,000 across the 1960s reaching 239,500 in 1971 – more or less akin to Brighton but less densely packed.
- The city's culture and reputation still revolved around the navy and docks. In the 1960s, a full 40% of men, 11% above the national average, worked in public service of one kind or another, largely on account of the military presence. In the 1970s, 25,000 people were employed directly in the dockyard or navy and roughly the same again in associated trades. This amounted to just under a quarter of the city's working population.
- More people here than nationally were skilled and semi-skilled, with fewer in the professional and managerial or unskilled social categories. As a result, many Plymouthians shared a class and occupational background and identity, often aligned with a strong sense of family tradition and culture. It was, like Brighton, also very white.

- Interviewees repeatedly emphasised the work and family networks of gossip, and their concern with what 'the neighbours might think'. There was a felt need to keep below the radar – and for very pressing reasons.
- Homosexuality was outlawed in the armed forces until 2000 for men and women, affecting not only those directly serving but their partners and families.
- If in Brighton the 1967 Act was an irrelevance because people were already living 'as if' what they were doing was legal, here it was an irrelevance because there was another national ordinance which had a particular impact on this military city.
- The military presence and its significance to the local economy meant there was only a negligible peace movement here; neither was there much of an antiracist or feminist movement in this overwhelmingly white and traditional city. The arts scene was small and the student population didn't expand until much later, in the 1990s.
- This matters because these are the factors that prompted and sustained the alternative scenes, politics and countercultures which feature in different ways of each of the other cities, especially from the late 1960s, and which aligned gay lesbian and trans identities closely to the left and to counterculture in this period.
- In Plymouth we see something very different: There was 'a big, big gay scene' for women in the early 1980s around the station. Sharon remembered that 'we used to [...] designate, god, loads of the little pubs around North Road – everyone would kind of gather on a Thursday night. [...] So [the landlord would] know we'd all descend on them on whatever night.'
- This scene was, however, fairly invisible unless you knew women who were part of it. When Prudence and Gay moved here from Manchester in 1982 to set up In Other Words Bookshop they also established a local Lesbian Line because of what they identified as a local 'ignorance of where to go for advice and for friendship with other lesbians'.
- The couple themselves brought a certain queer Mancunianism with them and because they ran their own business and didn't have local family to worry about, could afford to be more overt than many queer people in the city.
- In Other Words was remembered by several as a daringly prominent hub. 'It was almost like an alternative reality,' remembered Alan. 'I was living in Plymouth, and I was living in the traditional Plymouth, but there were these little pockets of places [like In Other Words] that I could access if I was brave enough'.
- Then, there was the Lockyer until 1977 (when the new landlord turfed out the gays), one or two other pubs or clubs, and more loosely queer venues like the Paramount which Michael described earlier.
- There was an equally vibrant outdoor sex scene in the city's many green spaces, involving men, including a sizable number of sailors, who often didn't identify as gay but enjoyed casual sex with other men.
- There seems to have been a tacit knowledge and toleration of this. There was a sense here in the 60s and really up until the 1980s that you could retain your normality and masculinity whilst also have some casual gay sex – as long as you didn't 'act gay'.
- At a workshop I ran in the city, a story surfaced of a father who badly beat up his son in the early eighties when he discovered he was gay despite the fact he himself had regular casual sex with men.
- In this military, 'male-dominated' city there was an especially thin dividing line between the sex men might have with each other and homosexual identities taken up by others which were deemed to be beyond the pale. Such lines were sometimes policed by the kind of violence this father meted out to his son.
- The imperative was to discretion, and this was facilitated by the separation of homes from places of social and sexual recreation. There was as result no real push back against Clause 28 here because there was little impetus to be visible in the first place.

- What's especially interesting about Plymouth is the nostalgia I mentioned earlier and which we see especially vividly in Dennis' testimony. Dennis came to Plymouth as a trainee submariner in the 1970s and came out as gay and left his marriage in the early 2000s.
- He told me:
  'When I was a junior rating [naval trainee] in the 1970s I shared a cabin with three guys [...] And so we had that community feeling of, you look after one another [...] It was normally a case of a group of us going [to Union Street]. You go out together, you enjoy together, you are entertained. And you take it from there. […] And I think that's lost now, because everyone is an individual. [...] They go back to their room and they shut the door. They just live on their own. [...] The places, the pubs, the bars. They were probably frequented by sailors, be they gay, be they straight, or what have you. It's gone.
- At The Swallow, the only remaining gay bar, 'where 95 per cent of the people were LGBTQ', Dennis said he 'didn't feel comfortable [amid people] doing their own thing, being flamboyant, being garish, being loud'.
- The greater visibility of LGBTQ people in the 2000s has not led to a greater feeling of community for Dennis. Like those serving in the navy in these later years, people at the Swallow were just 'doing their own thing'.
- By the time I interviewed Dennis, the culture here around sexual pleasure was anchored more firmly in identity, as it had been in Brighton since the sixties at least. With a single gay bar and a receding public sex scene, Plymouth had less to offer the casually interested or indeed those who identified as gay and lesbian. If there was a drive to re-invent a scene in Leeds and Manchester at this time, there was little of that here.
- There was not the critical mass and several interviewees referred to a local apathy and an enduring reluctance to 'put your head above the parapet.'
- Kevin described friends who went annually to Pride in Manchester 'to be gay': 'they have four or five days to be drunk, dance, they have World AIDS Day remembrance and then they come back to normal life down here'.

6. Leeds

- With a population of 750,000 people Leeds was three times the size of Brighton and Hove and Plymouth and was in addition well networked by road and rails with nearby Bradford, Wakefield, Huddersfield, Halifax, offering multiple opportunities for sex, socializing and activism.
- It had some of the same traditions of labour and working-class solidarity as Manchester; similar too in terms of students and associated youth and counter and actist culture. But queer culture and community was also quite distinct, marked by the later seventies by separatism and also a social scene oriented away from the centre.
- I signalled at the outset the edginess and male dominance of this part of Leeds in the 60s, 70s and 80s.
- Ajamu, from Huddersfield, meanwhile, described a particular discomfort here: '[In the 1980s] you had Rockshots. You had the New Penny. And then there was a pub not far away called The Whip. And The Whip was a National Front pub. […] And then also – because some of the gay bars were still also predominantly white, there's a sense of, you're new meat. [So] a lot of black folks would not go into town […] […In Chapeltown] even though you weren't out you were kind of safe.'
- Chapeltown was an inner north suburb known for Afro-Caribbean immigration and streets with large houses lending themselves to communal squatting and, often subsequently, management by housing co-ops.
- This is the area where Ajamu, who identified then as bisexual, socialized in shebeens and reggae clubs and also domestically. For a specifically gay scene, he would cross the Pennines to Manchester rather than going into town.

- The large houses also enabled lesbian feminist and separatist communities to form and also be sustained, with a social scene developing in rooms that were rented in local pubs (The Dock Green) and also an Afro-Caribean community centre in Bradford. There wasn't the appetite or resource to establish city centre bars at a moment when the scene there was in decline and widely seen as unwelcoming.
- There was some sense of solidarity between the black and lesbian communities because of the particularly active neo-fascist groups in the city.
- 'The [National Front] was something that brought a lot of people together [in opposition]', said Yvonne. 'Really the only people who supported our community were the Black community and the only people who supported them were us and so like a very close link developed in the seventies, *ad hoc*, not official', she said.
- When Gay Pride was switched from London to Huddersfield in 1981 (to protest against escalating police activity against gay men in what had previously been a fairly convivial queer hub), marchers travelled into nearby Leeds after the march to join the 20,000 people gathered in Harehills' Potternewton Park (just adjacent to Chapel Town) for the Northern Carnival Against Racism.
- The particular separatism politics in Leeds was partly to do with the early emergence of women's libation meetings right from 1969 and snowballing consciousness raising groups.
- But it was also fired and consolidated in anger at the horrific murders by Peter Sutcliffe (the so-called 'Yorkshire Ripper') between 1975 and 1981 and at the misogyny which laced the press and police response. Women Against Violence Against Women was especially active here - as was reclaim the night.
- By the late seventies there were all-women working collectives, arts, and theatre project - and also early self-insemination networks, aided by a local anti-sexist men's group. There was thus a strong sense in inner north Leeds of a distinct lesbian counterculture and community which was transformative for many, if alienating for others.
- What is also clear in Leeds is the way suburbs and satellite towns came to matter queerly in the 70s and 80s more than the centre.
- Things began to shift in the late 1980s when lesbian-initiated action against Clause 28 drew gay men to the kind of joint campaigning that had waned here in the early seventies.
- Cerydwen remembers 'walking with men for the first time […]. We were talking about joint efforts about being lesbian and gay, that was new and scary.' There was also more mixed socialising, including at the biannual Victor-Victoria costume balls, which were 'huge events [...] significant not just in their scale [...] but because they were with men,' Jude said.
- The area around the New Penny was meanwhile beginning to gentrify. City centre living was becoming generally fashionable again and new and converted warehouse apartments in this area near the station appealed especially to those who were travelling to and from London for work as Leeds developed from a centre of manufacture to a hub for legal and financial services.
- The new bars reflected a by-now-established LGBT identitarianism but sex and desire were still not only understood and experienced in these terms here.
- When the AIDS and sexual health charity MESMAC was established in this part of the city in 1990, it served 'men who had sex with men', an approach rejected in Brighton where campaigning was directed specifically at gay men. In ethnically and culturally diverse Leeds, it was more common than in Brighton for men to have sex with each other without claiming an associated distinctive or exclusive sexual identity. Messaging targeting gay men may have missed the mark.
- A sense of this expansiveness was fostered at nearby Wharf Street Chambers, an anti-capitalist workers' co-operative which began operating in 2012 in a disused hosiery factory (again, the post-industrial landscape offering some queer potential). Social and support groups met here and it gained a particular reputation as a welcoming space for trans and gender non-binary people who had previously often felt the need to travel or move from Leeds for community - notably to

Manchester where there were longer standing networks and a different if still uneven tradition of inclusivity.

- This central part of Leeds became a queer hub again and there is a sense of return in this, even though the shape and dimensions of community have shifted dramatically since the days of the Hope and Anchor in the 1960s.
- In the years inbetween, Leeds' queer life flourished mostly beyond this part of the city – in the suburbs and satellite towns and through social and political networks converging in community centres, the upstairs rooms of 'regular' venues, and people's homes. 'The scene was always underground in Leeds', said Ajamu, and as a result for people like Colin, from Plymouth, 'if you said a gay city, Leeds would not have come to mind at all'. This was to do with geography and demographics, with alternative social, sexual and political scenes, and with a local authority which was supportive but less proactively so than in Manchester. As a result, industrial decline played out differently on queer life here.

7. Conclusion

- In the seventies and eighties Pride was a London event. Now there is barely a weekend between June and September without a Pride event in one city or another across the UK – including Manchester, Leeds, Brighton, and Plymouth (which held its first Pride later than the other cities, in 2010 and out of public view in the city hall).
- This fanning out from the capital in the 1990s, but especially the 2000s, speaks to shared queer co-ordinates and trajectories. These relate to shifts in understandings and experiences of identity and community, to changing attitudes and patterns of socialising, to the internet and inception of smart phones, to legal change, and to processes of industrial decline and urban regeneration.
- We can point also to broad economic and occupational shifts towards the service sector which had an impact on queer scenes and flagged new potential in the pink pound. De-industrialisation meant that in some cities there were vacant building ripe for queer conversion. This was part of a process of gentrification which made city centre living and socialising fashionable once again, especially for those who were single or child-free.
- Some celebrated these shifts, while others saw a homogenising commodification, commercialisation, and loss of radical edge. There was much unevenness in these processes, though it was the result, I've suggested, of particular local circumstances.
- The tenor of local government, the scale and fervour of local LGBTQ and intersecting politics, the activities of the police and neo-fascist groups, and then the particularity of local geography, hinterland and demography modulated the way wider trends played out on local queer life. Hence, though pride as a feeling has been wrapped into queer identification since the 1970s, it has had a different cadence in different places.
- In Plymouth there was a longstanding 'pride in passing', in Manchester a twisting together of gay and civic pride, in Leeds a transformative feminist pride and politics, and in Brighton a pride in self-expression, camp visibility, and in being, as the council now proudly announces, 'never normal'.

© Matt Cook, 2024

Further reading

By the lecturer:

- Matt Cook, Alison Oram and Justin Bengry, *Locating Queer History: Traces and places across the UK* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022)
- Matt Cook and Alison Oram, *Queer Beyond London* (Manchester: MUP, 2022)
- Matt Cook, *Queer Domesticities: homosexuality and home life in twentieth century London* (London: Palgrave, 2014)
- Matt Cook, eds, *A Gay History of Britain* (London: Greenwood, 2007)
- Matt Cook, *London, and the Culture of Homosexuality*, 1885-1914 (Cambridge: CUP, 2003)

Other works:

- Brighton Ourstory, *Daring Hearts: lesbian and gay lives in 50s and 60s Brighton* (1992; Brighton: QueenSpark E-book edition 2015)

- Kath Browne and Leela Bakshi, *Ordinary in Brighton: LGBT Activisms and the City* (London: Routledge, 2016)
- Marian Duggan, *Queering Conflict: Examining Lesbian and Gay Experiences of Homophobia in Northern Ireland* (London: Routledge, 2016).
- Mike Homfray, *Provincial Queens: The Gay and Lesbian Community in the North-West of England* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007).
- Robert Howes, *Gay West: Civil Society, Community and LGBT History in Bristol and Bath 1970 to 2010* (Bristol: SilverWood, 2011)
- Maria Jastrzebska and Anthony Luvera, eds, *Queer in Brighton* (Brighton: New Writing South, 2015)
- Daryl Leeworthy, *A Little Gay History of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2019)
- Jeff Meek, *Queer Voices in Post-War Scotland: Male Homosexuality, Religion and Society* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)
- Pride of Place: https://historicengland.org.uk/research/inclusive-heritage/lgbtq-heritage-project/
- Queer Beyond London: http://queerbeyondlondon.com
- Queer Heritage South: https://www.queerheritagesouth.co.uk/s/queer-heritage-south/page/home
- Queer Noise: https://www.mdmarchive.co.uk/exhibition/id/77/QUEER_NOISE.html
- Sasha Roseneil, *Common Women, Uncommon Practices: the queer feminisms of Greenham* (London: Cassell, 2000)
- E-J Scott, ed., *Brighton Trans*formed* (Brighton: Queenspark, 2014)
- Helen Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire in Industrial England, 1895-1957* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)
- West Yorkshire Queer Stories: https://wyqs.co.uk

© Matt Cook, 2024

[i] See, for example: 'Hotel Outraged Public Decency', *MEN*, 15 October 1965; 'Why a Policeman Had to Dance', *MEN*, 9 September 1968.

[ii] Bev Skeggs and Jon Binnie, 'Cosmopolitan Knowledge and the Production and Consumption of Sexualized Space: Manchester's Gay Village', in *Sociological Review* 52, no. 1 (2004): 39–61; Taylor, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 190. See also: 'Straights to the Point', *Daily Express*, 30 August 1999; Philip Hensher, 'Please Keep Out of Gay Bars and Clubs', *Independent*, 5 June 2002.