

One of the many Black Brighton pioneers

If you have ever idly asked yourself, 'I wonder who opened the first sauna in Brighton?' or 'When was massage with aromatherapeutic oils first practised in the town?' then wonder no more. The answers are here.

Sake Dean Mahomed was born into a Muslim family in Patna, India, in 1759. He joined the East India Company's Bengal Army as an 11-year-old camp follower and rose quickly through the ranks under the care of 'his best friend', an older Irish officer, Godfrey Baker. Two years after joining Baker in Ireland in 1784, Mahomed met and married his much younger white Irish wife, the equally remarkable Jane Daly, and in 1794 published *The Travels of Dean Mahomet*, thought to be the first book by an Indian in English.

Hookah pipes

Jane and Mahomed moved to London, where they raised a family and opened the Hindoostanee Coffee House in the West End, offering authentic Indian food and 'chilm tobacco' in Hookah pipes, an early example of a fashionable dope café. In 1814 they opened Mahomed's Baths in Brighton, on the seafront at the end of King's Road, where the Queen's Hotel now stands.

Mahomed's innovative combination of Indian massage with essential oils, Turkish vapour bathing, and the 'hot cold douch and shower' (which had probably been used in England for some time), led to many cures in patients whose diseases had been considered beyond all hope of recovery. Royal patronage soon followed.

Admired and loved

The good works of Mahomed, and his multi-talented family, made him a well-loved and admired figure around the town for another four decades. Sadly he did not long

survive the death of his wife Jane at the age of 70, dying two months later on the 24th February 1851 at the grand old age of 91. They are buried together, with two of their young children, at St Nicholas Church where their headstone has been reverently preserved.

Mahomed and Jane's descendants are still in Brighton and many mementoes and memories of his and his family's contribution to the town are everywhere treasured and retold. Despite the best efforts of the silence merchants, the burners and the demolition men, Sake Dean Mahomed's name today is living proof that a legacy of loving industrious care can never entirely be destroyed.

Thanks go to Rozina Visram, Bert Williams of Brighton and Hove Black History, Fathom, the British Library, Paul Jordan and Donna Steele at the Brighton History Centre, Richard Le Saux at Brighton Museum and, most especially, Vernal Scott in the making of this tribute. Hats off to you all.

New in the archive

We are grateful to Graeme for donating a copy of the first (April 1993) *Cruising Monthly*, a 'documentary video for the lesbian and gay community' and fundraiser for London Pride.

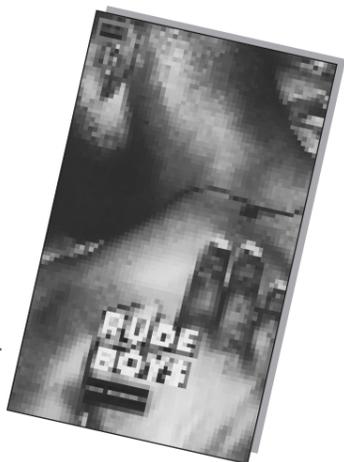
The sad death of **Barbara Bell** has brought into the archive two pipes she smoked as one of a group of butch policewomen during World War II and also a dish from her many holidays



This portrait of Sake Dean Mahomed (1759-1851) in his full glory can currently be seen in the local history section on the ground floor of Brighton Museum. Many details of Mahomed's life suggest he might respectfully be considered as an early and important builder of Black gay community in Britain

with dear friends in Italy. We thank her sister, Midge, for these gifts.

Chris, former owner of OUT! bookshop in Brighton (and Ourstory trustee) has donated five volumes of the American journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies *GLQ*, orphans from the shop's unsold stock. And thanks too to David for donating a copy of Jay Russell's *Rude Boys* (right).



BRIGHTON OURSTORY PROJECT

newsletter

Roll up, roll up for Pride 2005!

Brighton Ourstory has been going through some big changes recently, what with us becoming a charity and moving premises. So we thought we should reflect this in a bigger and better presence at this summer's Pride in Preston Park.

This year we've managed to break free of our market stall and we will have a whole tent for you to mooch around and linger in. Under a Barnum-esque canvas you'll be able to see our new exhibition, a powerful portrait gallery of the queer folk who've populated and copulated in this fair city in the Regency, Victorian, and Edwardian eras, and through the mad, bad Twenties and Thirties. Gathered together for the first time ever, you can now Meet Our (very own) Ancestors. Wafting out of our tent and over the park will be music the more recent of these might have canoodled to, courtesy of Val's wind-up gramophone and a pile of 78s. Pop by on Saturday 6th August and say hi, we'd love to see you.

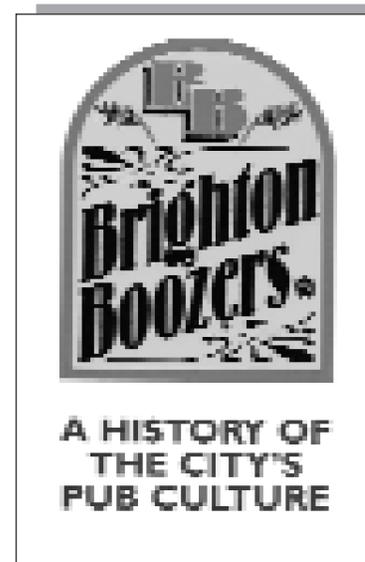
Moving home

One of our biggest recent changes is that we've moved from our previous cramped and quite inaccessible offices in Grand Parade to some slightly more spacious rooms in a lovely Art Deco building right in the centre of Brighton. Volunteers have been busy over June and July painting and moving into our new home and leaving our last ship-shape. Now we're more accessible, why not pay us a visit? Give us a call on our new number, Brighton 206655, and we'll get out the best tea set. Grateful thanks go to the Scarman Trust and Pride in Brighton & Hove for funding the move and the refurbishment, and for enabling us to buy archive equipment and pay the rent for another year! Thanks also to Pride, Brighton & Hove Council and the National Lottery Awards For All for giving

us the money to hire our Pride tent and provide the shimmering display within.

Drunk again, Mother?

Ourstory has been caught boozing on the job! However, it's not what it seems, honest; we've been helping Brighton Museum with an exhibition entitled Brighton Boozers - celebrating the history and many faces of Brighton's pubs. Queer bars - from the Chequers to Charles Street via the Oriental - are a fascinating aspect of a city renowned for enjoying its beer. Ourstory has been instrumental in research for a part of the exhibition dedicated to these less-than-straight watering holes. Brighton Boozers is at the Brighton History Centre, within Brighton Museum (entrance in the Pavilion Gardens), until 11 February 2006.



Above and top: Author Rose Collis and the cover of her beautiful book 'Brighton Boozers' which develops the intriguing histories of the town's pubs documented in the exhibition of the same name now available at Brighton Library, History Centre or Museum Shop at £4.99

Professional training

Thanks to a Global Grant (European money administered by the council), a number of Ourstorians have embarked on a programme of training, specially devised in conjunction with the London Metropolitan Archive, the Lesbian & Gay Newsmedia Archive at Middlesex University and other archives. Tutored by professional archivists and conservation specialists, we will be building on our existing knowledge and developing best practice tailored to Ourstory's specific needs - taking us a step closer to the time when our centre of lavender history will be up and running.

Ben and Linda

Finding the lesbians: How straight is your family?

'All the young men were killed in the First War,' my mother said, 'that's why Auntie Annie never married.' 'And is that why Auntie Elsie never married either?' I asked. I must have been six-years old and we were off to see my two favourite relations. They lived in a bungalow, stuffed full of Victorian treasures, a place frozen in time and the two old ladies treated me like a grandson.

As the years went by I learned that these two aunts were nothing of the sort. Annie was my grandfather's eldest sister and Elsie her 'friend'. But to my childish imagining they seemed like an old married couple. Annie did the garden, Elsie the cooking, they argued all the time, but had a deep commitment that went beyond friendship.

Then when I was still a child, Annie died and Elsie was left bereft; they had been together for 63 years. Elsie and I became close and exchanged many secrets until her death in 2000 just a little before her 103rd birthday.

Auntie Annie, it seems, was taken in by Elsie's mother Martha after becoming pregnant and being kicked out by her parents. Elsie's parents had split up just before the First World War, when her German-born father was determined to return to the Kaiser's growing military might, but Martha was determined to remain in Britain with her two

children. An unusual thing in itself, Elsie's life was never conventional.

Despite Annie and Elsie being



Annie and Elsie: Lifelong companions

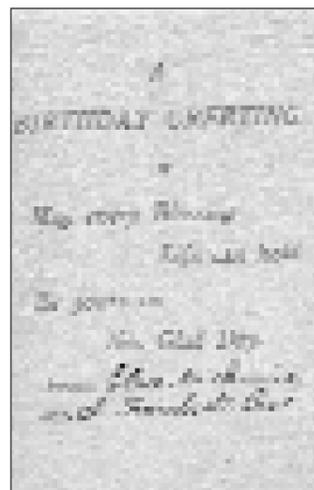
separated by more than a decade in age, they formed an attachment and found employment together, working as lady's companions cum servants, going from employer to employer, but always as a couple. Under this cover they remained in employment together for years, before eventually buying the bungalow in Sussex and retiring.

So what has made me suspect that these great aunts were in fact lesbians? Well, there was certainly the romantic affection with which Elsie held Annie after her death and then there were the references to how I must be 'careful' and how it was easier for the girls to 'get away with it than the boys'. These veiled references were always difficult to deconstruct - was Elsie really saying what I thought? Had she seen my homosexuality? Did she know we came from the same minority? We never discussed sex, or sexuality; Elsie met all my partners, loving them at the time and condemning them when my affair was over. We didn't need to discuss things, we just knew.

When Elsie lay dying in a nursing home, having spent months in a state of confusion, not really making sense to the outside world, she had a moment of

clarity. Elsie came from a Quaker background and had an unshakable belief in the afterlife. She knew her time was here and took me by the hand. 'At last,' she said, 'I will see Annie again.' She lost consciousness and died a few hours later. To the family they may have been the eccentrics who lived together because of the loss of men in WWI, but we shared the truth. I'm not religious, but if Elsie was right, I hope they are together now, still arguing.

Dr Chris Farrah-Mills



Birthday greeting 'from Elsie to Annie with fondest love'

'The campest queens are the toughest'

Rev Dr Gordon G P Hunt (1929-1997)

Gordon Hunt, a long-time Hove resident, wasn't a quiet sort of man. At six foot four this larger than life character cut a swathe through queer culture for more than four decades.

Gordon was born in London and brought up in wartime Cambridge, where there was still a distinction between 'town and gown'. Here he would mix with well-healed undergraduates, once claiming that he had affairs with three viscounts by the time he was twenty.

Montagu Scandal

After the war Gordon frequented the American Bar at the Ritz, a well-known gathering place for gay men, but dark clouds were looming in the shape of the Montagu scandal. Lord Montagu and others were pursued by the police in what was effectively an anti-gay witch-hunt. As more men were questioned, houses raided and diaries and address books seized, the circle widened. Gordon decided that the only way out was to flee the country and he went to work for Unilever, firstly in West Africa, then in Singapore. The sea journey out was so full of well-educated escaping young English queens that the ship was nicknamed the SS Lollipop.

Swinging London

After various affairs overseas (including one with the Prime Minister's brother in the newly independent Singapore), Gordon came back to the UK in the early Sixties, and became part of Swinging London, where he worked first for Harrods, and later John Lewis. It was at this stage that he discovered Brighton where he was to make his home from the mid-Seventies.

Gordon maintained a deep sense of

injustice over the treatment of gay men and how successive generations had been hounded by the establishment, persecuted by the police and vilified by the press. The Wolfenden Committee had already published a report in September 1957 recommending the partial decriminalisation of homosexual acts and the Homosexual Law Reform Society was in full swing. Gordon often described the great push forward to partial decriminalisation in 1967 and going on the first march for gay rights, which he said was more of an escorted mince.

Going down to Brighton

In Brighton Gordon worked for HM Customs and Excise as a VAT inspector and became involved both in the town's gay scene and in political campaigning. Gordon also had a lifelong interest in the occult and after becoming ordained in the States would conduct gay Pagan weddings (called 'handfastings').

Baroness Young

His letterwriting campaigns (always backed by thinly-veiled threats) were an inspiration for many. He frequently wrote to



Above: Calm before the storm, 1946

Below: Everything stops for tea - Gordon running the Colonies in 1959

homophobic members of the House of Lords, the House of Commons and local and county councillors expressing his disgust and always seemed to be able to engage the least likely people in lengthy dialogues. He followed Joe Orton's example of setting up controversial correspondences in many papers, himself being the author of all letters under different names. His point was always to give publicity to an anti-gay injustice. One of his funniest exchanges took place with Baroness Young, a vehement homophobe and campaigner against equalising the age of consent. Frustrated at the 'family' campaigner's blinkered and bigoted stance, he chose to criticise her dress sense, and wrote condemning her for a 'wine-stained' abomination she wore in the Lords and asking 'when will we see your other polyester one again?' The noble Baroness replied in hand-written green ink that where she came from it was considered most rude to comment on a person's dress. Gordon's missive back enquired as to the place of origin that she referred to and ventured to suggest it might be Mars, since no-one on this planet could consider homosexuality the 'unhygienic risk

to children' which she alleged and that no-one in a post-holocaust era could be quite so outrageously bigoted.

In later life, Gordon reserved his greatest wrath for the Church. He would monitor religious programmes on the radio and was a frequent contributor to live debates. Famously, one Sunday, after a nasty anti-gay outburst by a fundamentalist bigot given airtime on local radio, Gordon managed to speak to the producer. The producer thought that if you gave both sides of the debate a say, there was somehow a fair balance. Enraged by this skewed logic, and cross at having the Religious Right deny our freedom to exist, Gordon simply said 'That's how radio stations burn!' Shock at an arson threat from the Rev Dr himself, and even more shock when he refused to retract it, brought a surprising new attitude among the producers. As Gordon always said, 'the campest queens are the toughest'. And dear old Gordon was certainly tough.

Award success for Ourstorians

Two volunteers of Brighton Ourstory have received a prestigious award from the University of Sussex for their work in the LGBT community.

Benedict Brook and Sally Hill, both trustees of Brighton Ourstory, were given their Chancellor's Award from Lord Attenborough in front of a packed crowd of hundreds of graduating students and their families, on 22 July at the Brighton Dome. The award is designed to recognise the work of exceptional members of staff at the University. Benedict is

currently Communications Officer of the University while Sally is Coordinator of UNISEX, the campus sexual health, drugs and alcohol project.

The award not only recognises their contributions to the campus student and staff LGBT communities, it also specifically highlights their work with Ourstory. It was through 2001's *Queer About Campus* exhibition, a joint project between ourselves and Sussex's student LGBT group, that Sally and Benedict first began their relationship with Ourstory.

The pair said they were 'thrilled at winning the Chancellor's Award.' They added, however, that they were equally 'pleased that the good work of Ourstory had been recognised, and has been highlighted in front of hundreds of new graduates. If these graduates



go out into the world,' said Benedict, 'with a positive endorsement of homosexuality ringing in their ears then that has to be a good thing.'