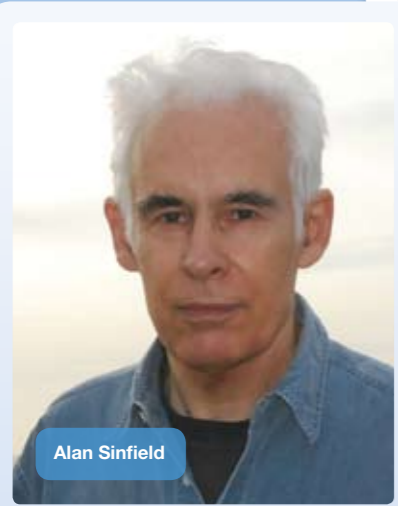


brighton ourstory..

WE'LL KEEP A WELCOME IN THE ARCHIVE...



Alan Sinfield

QUEERSTORIES FOR BRIGHTON

Last year I was invited by left-leaning academic/cultural journal *New Formations* to write about life writing. This offered an enticing prospect of writing about that famous local product, *Daring Hearts* by Brighton Ourstory, along with nine other lesbian and gay oral history books. In my article, I first clear some of the ground, theoretically: there is no innocent writing. The personal testimony is the favoured strategy, even though the discovery of community is demonstrably most effective in changing lives; roughly speaking, the more the

various editors disclaim any undue influence over the arrangement of memoirs and interviews, the more they may be seen to be illustrating a preconceived thesis.

I interviewed Tom and Linda of Ourstory.

Daring Hearts has its own thesis. Brighton, it is admitted, was designed for holidays. But things generally were not so bad in the old days. Intermittent police crackdowns were terrible and you had to be very careful at work. But otherwise survivors had quite a good time. This argument was and is heretical, Linda observes; 'not the Liberationist position at all' Tom adds.

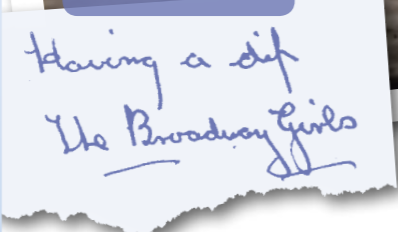
Meanwhile Linda and Tom, mainly, have kept the archive going since 1989; in my interview I have tried to fathom what has sustained them.

Alan Sinfield

To read Alan's article in full, give us a call or for more information about the journal it appears in, visit www.newformations.co.uk



From Vera's collection



From *New Day Dawning: The Early Years of Sydney's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras*



NEW IN THE ARCHIVE...

John Witte from Sydney's Pride History Group visited us in September and presented the archive with four new additions, all prettily wrapped in pink cellophane. These include two well-researched publications on Sydney's gay pubs and camp scene. In the mid '50s, Rex's Bottoms Up Bar was the place to be. Those unable to afford the prices would buy drink from the bottle shop and stand outside, waiting for news of the night's party. We also have a full-colour booklet on the history of the Mardi Gras, which began in 1978. Its organisers wanted to create a carnival atmosphere so that lesbians and gay men could be happy and visible and could claim Sydney's streets. The front cover of 'Out and About' shows the Clover Clubrooms, Sydney's first lesbian-only venue, formed in 1972 after four friends were refused entry to a gay nightclub. An early theme was 'Tramps Night - music, garlic bread and a prize for the best-dressed tramp'. Information on the group and its publications at www.pridehistorygroup.org.au.

Alan Sinfield, a long-time supporter of Brighton Ourstory, summarises elsewhere his thoughts about us. He has given us a copy

of the full article, in an edition on 'Reading Life Writing' in the journal *New Formations*. The article also looks at 10 books that rely on personal testimony and interviews. He demonstrates how different the books are and, however much the interviewer may strive to avoid it, the results cannot help but be influenced by the outlook of the interviewer and the structure of the interview. Someone being interviewed may focus on what they think the interviewer wants to hear. They may feel they should construct

In the mid '50s Rex's Bottoms Up Bar was the place to be...

a coherent account to make sense of their life. However, Alan does feel the effort is worthwhile. "I am overwhelmed with admiration", he says, "for the

skills and commitment in Brighton Ourstory and the other archives and editors". Thank you, Alan!

We are exceptionally grateful to Vera for donating to the archive her varied photograph collection covering the 1930s to the 1960s. Also to Mary for a decade's worth of DIVAs, some copies of radical feminist magazine *Trouble and Strife* from the 1980s & '90s and a sprinkling of *Everywoman's*.

Mark Rowlands

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David Sheppard with photos of Brighton Pride 1992

The last six months have been full of welcomings for Ourstory. During November, three new trustees joined our Management Group so lots of hugs and kisses to Alf, Melita and Mark, who bring a host of valuable skills and knowledge. Alf, of course, is already Ourstory's Web Manager and does a tremendous job keeping us in the digital age (there is a temptation to live in the past).

Earlier in the year Amy Murphy from Ourstory Scotland came to do some research in our archive and it was great to spend time talking with her about issues we share - there's not a day goes by in our line of enquiry that's free of an ethical dilemma or two: does a relationship between two happily consenting teenagers, where one is under sixteen, count as paedophilia? When is it OK to publish photographs of unidentified people? Should interviewees be asked to sign over copyright of their life story? Ourstory Scotland adopted this name after its founders made a fact-finding visit to our archive a few years back - we felt sincerely flattered.

At roughly the same time, John Witte of the soon-to-be-formed Sydney Pride History Group was visiting our website and taking inspiration from that. When he came to visit in September this year he told us he'd

modelled the Australian group on Brighton Ourstory. Again it was good to compare notes and realise that Sydney's gay scene in the 1950s and '60s had striking similarities to Brighton's.

Lately we've been thrilled to help David Sheppard with his plans to stage a theatrical production about the roots and growth of Brighton Pride. He visited the archive several times to look through Pride programmes and photographs and the papers of activists who started the whole thing off in 1991. Our collections have great potential for creative productions such as this and we wish David every success - all the more so as it might

reinvalidate the Marlborough and help bring it back into the fold.

This Autumn, as usual, we laid a wreath as an official part of the Remembrance Day ceremony at Brighton War Memorial. Holding our now-traditional wreath of fresh flowers in the shape of a pink triangle (thank-you to Florian the Florist for another lovely job), flanked by top military brass and shivering Brownies, I was pleased to note the Wreath Master remark, 'I'm glad you're here.' Possibly only a comment on my time-keeping but different from the somewhat embarrassed and frosty air of previous years - so perhaps a hint of welcome, too.

Linda

ON THE SHELVES

Lurleen's *Lexicon of Lavender Love* is a quirky and irreverent lexicon of all things lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, including the history of everyday words attached to the gay sub-culture, heroes and villains, sexual practices, useful web addresses, recommendations from the worlds of film, TV and literature, and many full colour photos of the lady herself! Written in Lurleen's unique, no-nonsense "trailer-trash" voice *The Lexicon* is available exclusively from Amazon.com, and is a must-have for anyone, whether they are living the lavender lifestyle or not! For more info please go to www.myspace.com/lurleenjohnson or the fan page on Facebook.



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Visit us online at www.brightonourstory.co.uk

LOVING PARTNERS



Margaret and Vera on holiday in the '60s



Margaret and I were together for 48 years. I was 42 and she was 40 when we met in a club in Portobello Road. In 48 years we were never apart - only one night. She was a wonderful person. There's givers and takers, she was a giver. We had our moments, of course - you don't live through life without bloody arguments. Being a redhead with green eyes, she had a terrible temper - the glasses used to fly sometimes, I used to have to duck. But nothing serious.

We came to Sussex 19 years ago, when I retired. I worked until I was 72. I loved driving. Saturdays we'd always go out. Portsmouth and Southsea - we took the little boat to Gosport, where you could see the liners going out. She loved Chichester - lovely charity shops. I hate shopping, so I used to buy the paper - park the car in Chichester Market and sit there quietly, read while she shopped for two hours. We'd come home about four o'clock, have our tea and then watch the television. Quite happy.

Margaret was a bookworm and she was a great puzzle-doer. She had magazines like Chat, and Take A Break. We didn't mix with a lot of people. Our neighbours didn't know we were gay, except for one. Margaret said, 'Don't let everybody know.' Me, I don't care - they can all know - but, 'I don't want to,' she said. 'I'd rather not.' If it was rotten weather, we'd be quite happy reading. And then suddenly, when she went, I can't concentrate on reading.

My job was the garden and the car and Margaret's job was indoors. She did all the cooking and the ironing. She always washed by hand, so every three weeks I'd take the big stuff down the launderette. She washed the rest herself, put them in the spin-dryer. I never knew how to use it when she'd gone. All that carpet

In 48 years we were never apart - only one night...

she used to do - clean and put stuff on it. All the toilet stuff. I didn't know what any of that cleaning stuff was for.

When Margaret was ill, somebody came about the Housing Benefit. He was a lovely bloke. When he said, 'Are you partners or do you go as a married couple?' I said, 'No. I don't bother with all that game. We are what we are.' He said, 'If you put yourself down as man and wife' I said, 'I can't do that sort of thing, we're loving partners and that's it.' 'I'm sorry you won't get quite as much.'

I go to a day centre now. Most of them know that I'm gay. They all like me. I told them about me not being well, they said, 'You'll be alright.' Two religious ones said, 'We'll pray to God you'll be alright.'

Every night I get in bed and I turn the covers down and I say, 'Oh, Margaret, what's going to happen to me? I've got nobody.' And that's how I feel all the time now. I say to God, 'Take me quietly and be done with it - I'll be with my darling anyway.' Well, I won't be with her, that's a load of nonsense. I say, 'Send me a guardian angel!' He hasn't done it yet.



Shame soon after it opened in June 1989



Brighton Ourstory, Gay Times photograph collection



PROPER BIG-NIGHT-OUT CLUBBING

Club nights come and go in Brighton but a few live on in the city's cultural history. Club Shame, which opened its doors for the first time 20 years ago in June 1989, was one such club. It was a Wednesday night at the Zap Club, two large converted arches on the Kings Road seafront area and ran until 1996.

Promoted by Paul Kemp (Wild Fruit) as 'exclusively for gay people and friends', nights were themed with saucy dancers and even saucier projections. Its visual spectacle and the up-for-it attitude soon attracted clubbers down from London and in 1990 Gay Times said "we put Club Shame forward as a blueprint of gay clubs for the '90s".

"The absolute change from the normal gay scene was a breath of fresh air, to have a mixed club where everyone mixed together, dressed up, and danced the night away was totally mind blowing. It felt like I'd come home, this was the club that started my clubbing life without restraints." Gavin Fett

"It was my first experience of proper big-night-out clubbing - thinking days in advance what clothes to wear, who you'd go with, and then

there was the complicated series of phone calls and arrangements to get some decent speed... Oh, I once met Boy George there and went with him to some private party he was having in a room behind the stage. My main memory of the evening was trying (vainly) to chat up some go-go boy who was one of Boy George's entourage. And, at the other end of the scale, I remember being punched in the face outside the club by two blokes. But yes, it was the best club in the world. Had the exact right mix of bigness and friendliness."

Michael Hootman
"Club Shame was a Brighton institution - I remember queuing outside the Zap in the depths of

winter to get into Shame with all my straight and gay mates - we didn't worry about the cold, just wanted to get inside and dance our little socks off to the fantastic music that made Shame what it was! I was working part-time in a hotel and a lot of my colleagues used to come and really let themselves go at Shame - we even got a very straight acting chef to come down with us and he ended up on a podium with his t-shirt off!" Nick Squires

AIF

We put Club Shame forward as a blueprint of gay clubs for the '90s...

JUSTIN CAMPAIGN

● This Autumn Brighton Ourstory, among others was invited to an event at Withdean Stadium organised by the Justin Campaign, which works to combat homophobia in football. Supported by members of the Kick It Out campaign (which works to combat racism in football), the evening was an inspiring one and clearly from what the speakers said there is not only a pressing need for this work but also real commitment on the part of our home team to make it a success. On display was an impressive archive of Justin Fashanu memorabilia. Justin committed suicide in 1998. He was Britain's only ever out gay professional footballer. He played for Brighton & Hove Albion from 1985-1987.



Justin Fashanu in Seagulls strip 1985

Getty Images

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