



Mark Ashton

(19th May 1960 – 11th February 1987)

was born into a working-class family in Oldham, Lancashire. His father renovated and installed redundant textile machinery in developing countries which meant family relocation in search of work.



When Mark was an infant they moved to Portrush, Northern Ireland. The nearest sizeable town was Derry / Londonderry which was a crucible of the armed conflicts between the nationalists (mainly catholic) and unionists (mainly protestant), most notably 'Bloody Sunday' in 1972 when British soldiers shot 26 unarmed civilians protesting against internment. Throughout his youth there were armed British soldiers and armoured vehicles on the streets. Everywhere there were political slogans and murals on walls and pavements. Despite the tensions and tragedies of the conflict an 'alternative' youth culture was emerging and amongst Mark's friends were young musicians who formed the (now legendary) group 'The Undertones' whose biggest hit was 'Teenage Kicks'. He met his best friend Monty at catering college in 1976. The two of them soon discovered they were gay. By 1981 they had both moved to London loving the hustle, bustle, music, fashion, dancing and clubs. Mark would spend three hours getting his outfits together and make-up!

In 1982 he holidayed with his family now living in Bangladesh. There for three months, the experience of witnessing sick, homeless kids begging from him changed how he looked at life. He started taking a more serious look at what was going on around him. Returning to London he volunteered for Gay Switchboard (a 24/7 support service for LGBT+ people). He also joined the Young Communist League. He threw himself into activism, learning, reading and going to meetings. It was around this time that Mark and Monty met Jimmy Somerville. Jimmy had been working on the 'Framed Youth' video project and he interviewed Mark for the documentary. As Mark's energies poured into his work with the Communist Party, Jimmy's went into forming the band 'Bronski Beat' but all that hard work needed a release and they would often go out for a night on the town.

Around this time alarming stories were coming over from New York and San Francisco about a new illness which we heard about from within the gay scene months before it became acknowledged by the media. In 1983 I met Mark when he interviewed me to volunteer on Switchboard. We became close friends especially with our mutual bonds of commitment to gay liberation and socialism (and hedonism). Twelve months later Thatcher provoked the Miners' Strike which in turn lead him to form LGSM - Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners - depicted in Stephen Beresford's award-winning movie 'Pride' (Pathé 2014).

Within three years we lost 'our' Mark to HIV/ AIDS. It was very sudden. He was diagnosed in Guy's Hospital with PCP and died just days later. There were hundreds at his funeral, mainly people in their twenties and mining families came from South Wales.

Mark was Mind, Body, Spirit rolled into one. He changed the world and Jimmy wrote 'For A Friend'.

Mike Jackson, Secretary - LGSM (May 2020)

Body, Mind, Spirit

Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans +
History Month

2021: PSHNE

Schools OUT UK
The LGBT Education Charity
Charitable Incorporated Organisation No. 1156352