

Shropshire Telford & Wrekin LGBT+ History Festival

2020

a report back



A bit about ...

In 2015, four individuals came together to deliver a presentation at the very first National Festival of LGBT History which took place in Manchester.

Geoff, Peter, Sue and Sal were so inspired after that weekend that they applied for Shrewsbury to be a localised 'Hub' of the National Festival in 2016.

Collectively they called themselves Salopian Rainbows (this was intended to be vague enough to be useful for any future 'rainbow' initiatives, rather than having lots (more) very specific email addresses!

'Shrewsbury LGBT History' was born as an entity - Shrewsbury specific, only because of the 'hub' element, the rest all being large cities!

The first Shrewsbury LGBT History Festival took place over a jam-packed February weekend in 2016 and again in 2017, with a variety of inspiring speakers, lots of volunteers helping out and masses of goodwill.

In 2018 the core group of 4 took the decision to move away from the labour-intensive weekend model to spread events over the month of February and, in 2019 had a first go at emulating the old Shropshire 'Summer Programme' by encouraging others to organise events and offering to promote these centrally on our website and in a brochure.

For the 2020 Festival, Shrewsbury LGBT History (which has its own constitution and bank account) received some funding from the National Lottery Community Fund to host its own events and do more to reach out to other parts of the County. This led to 2 pre-events (Sept and Nov 2019) to share resources and discuss themes. The ensuing programme and this report provides details of what actually happened in February/March 2020.



GEOFF HARDY



PETER ROSCOE



SUE GORBING



SAL HAMPSON

SINGING WORKSHOP

LGBT+ Anthems

Sunday 26th January 2020 at The Hive, Shrewsbury

Hosted by History Month

Introduced by Sue Gorbing and Roxane Smith, (*Harmony Junky*)

We started the festival celebrations with 46 fabulous people taking part in this workshop, where Jamie Dawes-Hughes (Natural Voice Network) talked about the experiences of some LGBT people over the years and the stories represented in songs like Tom Robinson's *Glad to be Gay*. He had constructed a new version of this song for us to learn, as well as a 4-anthem mash up of: *Freedom, I Will Survive, Give a Little Respect* and *I'm Coming Out* - his favourite LGBT anthems! What a joyous afternoon!



OFFICIAL FESTIVAL LAUNCH



Sunday 1st February 2020 at The Hive, Shrewsbury
Hosted by History Month

Introduced by Sal Hampson and Sue Gorbing

Exhibition opening - Jonathan Cutbill's Bird & Wildlife Photographs.



The Launch was really well attended by over 50 people. The Town Mayor, Cllr. Phil Gillam came along, as well as the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Dave Myers and the fire service LGBT Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer. The atmosphere was enthusiastic and the exhibition of Jonathan Cutbill's photographs had many admirers. The tasty cakes went down well too!

LAUNCH: JONATHAN CUTBILL MEMORIAL PRESENTATIONS

Saturday 1st February 2020,
following the exhibition opening.

40 people stayed for the **Jonathan Cutbill Memorial Lectures**, which were introduced by the Mayor and also attended by the Fire Service Officers. After a talk by video, given by **Justin Bengry** (Senior Tutor, MA Queer Studies, Goldsmiths University), **Andrew Lumsden**, Gay Liberation Front veteran activist and friend of Jonathan gave a fascinating, personal account of Jonathan's life, his involvement with the creation of Gays the Word bookshop, and the building of Jonathan's LGBTQ+ book collection at his home in Shrewsbury. **Maria Castrillo**, Head of Special Collections at Senate House, London, spoke of the national importance of this LGBT historical library, its value and legacy for future researchers of our histories.

34 stayed for the second half - a fascinating account by **Graham McKerrow**, 'Saving Gays the Word', of the raid of the bookshop by Customs and Excise - set in the context of the 1980's, and the ultimate triumph of the Defend Gay's The Word campaign!

Feedback from the audience was very positive and many reflected just how much they had learned about the struggles that led to where we are today.



COMMENTS



Words from Maria Castrillo

"I wanted to thank you for inviting me to the opening event of Shropshire LGBTQ+ Festival. I thoroughly enjoyed it and I felt really privileged to be part of the celebration of Shropshire's LGBTQ+ heritage".

One of the audience, later, wrote:

"I just wanted to say how much I enjoyed Saturday's event at The Hive. Andrew Lumsden was great, Graham McKerrow, who spoke about Gay's the Word was fascinating, with his illustrated slides of the front pages of the time. Justin Bengry, Lecturer in Queer History at Goldsmiths, University of London by video was also fascinating. Maria Castrillo, Head of Special Collections at Senate House University of London in particular brought to life where the books would be going, and their importance. I must admit I had not really grasped their true import, and the reverence in which they are held until that day. A collection of World importance I believe Justin suggested.

I left the day feeling that Jonathan Cutbill's life, work and legacy had been illuminated for me.

A huge amount of work, and I am sure Jonathan would have been very proud. It's great that his legacy is shortly going to be going to London as a permanent memorial".

FILM SCREENING: ARE YOU PROUD?

Sunday 1st February 2020 at The Hive,
Shrewsbury

Hosted by History Month

Q & A Chaired by Sue Gorbings with
Director, Ashley Joiner, and Andrew
Lumsden (who'd featured in the film)

Sponsored by Shropshire Rainbow Film
Festival

An intense and gripping film, Are You Proud? was 5 years in the making after Ashley Joiner found himself challenged by a comment that he had 'no idea' of the struggles that many LGBTQ+ people had gone through over the past 50 years (and before). Ashley took up

the challenge and attended many events, prides, discussions, exhibitions, talking to a whole variety of people who identify as LGBTQ+ about their lives, experiences, challenges, fears and hopes, coming up with an impressive and honest documentation of LGBTQ+ experiences – warts and all!

The general consensus from the 35 attendees was that the film was one of the most comprehensive many of us had seen, raising lots of thoughts and questions about how we can best work and stand together to continue making the changes needed for LGBTQ+ people to continue to be out and Proud!

LUDLOW EXHIBITION LAUNCH

Monday 3rd February 2020

Hosted by Shropshire Library Service and Ludlow Pride - 2 month-long exhibitions to celebrate art, culture and community with local artists: Ludlow Library: 'HIM, The Role of Magazines and icons in the Gay Community and the Gay Liberation Movement 1970s & 1980s'. Chang Thai Bar: 'Queer Women's Exhibition of Art and Poetry'

The Mayor of Ludlow Town Council, Cllr.T. Gill, attended the opening of the HIM exhibition with a gathering of about 25 people. Teas/coffees were served with a rainbow iced cake. The exhibition was created and curated by Roger Kean, editor of HIM magazine (founded in 1975) and Oliver Frey, responsible for much of the magazine's artwork. They came to live in Ludlow in 1982 when HIM and other gay male magazines were forced into liquidation as a result of police raids under the then prevailing 'obscenity laws'

The Exhibition launch was followed by Pride Ludlow at the Chang Thai restaurant, which hosted a month long exhibition of gay women's art plus performance poetry by Lucy Aphramor, with complimentary Prosecco!!



BOOK READING: RAINBOW REVOLUTION WITH JAMIE LAWSON



Friday 7th February at Button & Bear (independent bookshop),
Shrewsbury
Hosted by Button & Bear

This lovely venue welcomed some 27 people for a talk by the author of 'Rainbow Revolutions', Jamie Lawson, Professor of Anthropology at Bristol University. Prosecco served on arrival.

Aimed at 12 to 16 year olds, Jamie's accounts of Stonewall, the emergence of the rainbow flag and the significance of the pink triangle motif were well received by the, mostly, younger audience, one of whom was later inspired to write a piece for the webazine at Mary Webb school.



"Lovely evening with a full house for Jamie Lawson talking about his book for children/young people 'Rainbow Revolutions'. Thank you 'Button & Bear' for organising such an interesting and welcoming event"

PRESENTATION - GROWING UP GAY: COMING OUT AND FINDING GAY LIBERATION

Thursday 13th February at Wellington Library, Telford
Hosted by Telford LGBT

This was the first of two Presentations hosted by Telford LGBT– this one with Geoff Hardy sharing an intimate story of growing up gay in the rural South-East of England, with an audience of 10 people. A gentle discovery of awakening sexuality with a supportive family, reinforced by the lucky discovery of Gay Liberation Front in its early days, fuelled a long and continuing life of political rights-based activism. Geoff used a series of personal photographs from family albums to illustrate his personal journey



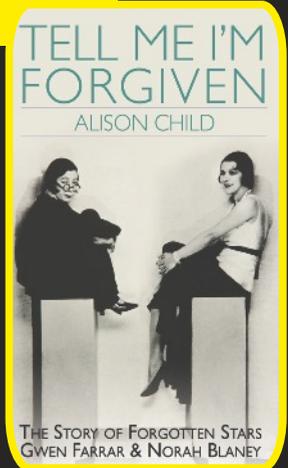
TELL ME I'M FORGIVEN - AND SOME QUEER TALES FROM WALES

With Alison Child, Rosie Wakley, Helen Sandler & Jane Hoy
Saturday 15th February at Stop Café, Shrewsbury
Hosted by History Month

Sponsored by Border Women, introduced by Sue Corbing and Rosemary Dartnell (Border Women)

The evening was a delight from start to finish: while covering very different narratives, both acts - playing to an audience of 33 - threw light on the notable and erstwhile more-or-less hidden stories of four women who lived their lives in enduring lesbian relationships. There was playfulness, love and humour in spades, as well as a clear narrative showing, in very human terms, the 'normality' of the lives lived by these remarkable women. It was a privilege to attend the performance and to witness the intergenerational fondness between performers and their chosen subjects.

And, great to sing along in the convivial surroundings of the STOP cafe!!



SHORT FILM PROGRAMME: MANY LIVES, MANY STORIES



Sunday 16th February at The Hive, Shrewsbury
Hosted by History Month
Sponsored by Shropshire Rainbow Film Festival and SAND

35 people attended this great short film selection, chosen by Director of 'Time and Again' Rachel Dax, telling stories from across the globe, highlighting the very real and human experiences of older and old LGBTQ+ people. The afternoon definitely flagged up

some of the issues that SAND (lgbsand.com) is working to address – people's fears about ageing and potentially being more vulnerable if in need of 'care'. As well as those issues though, we were uplifted by films that illustrate that just because we get old, doesn't mean that we can't have fun, engage in sexual relationships and dance!

"Thank you for those two fantastic events at the weekend. Amazing throughout."

CLOWNING AND COMEDY WORKSHOP (13 - 18)

Hosted by History Month

This event was cancelled as too few young people booked to take part. History Month recognise that 13 -18 year olds are a crucial, but difficult, audience to attract and we intend to focus on this for any future events!

LESFLICKS: TWO FILM SCREENINGS

Saturday 22nd Feb 2020 (morning & afternoon) at Shrewsbury Library
Hosted by Shropshire Library Service.
4 films explored issues around relationships, societal norms and clothing, coming out and a particularly heart wrenching look at love, loss and life. The films prompted sharing of personal experiences and discussion of the generational differences in

language and technology, what gender neutral clothing means, and the challenges of coming out. A great outcome was the discussion of how a couple of the films with their focus on teenage life could be used within schools to explore these themes and issues. 4 people attended the afternoon screenings, enjoying the opportunity to share.

PERFORMANCE: YOURS SINCERELY



Saturday 22nd Feb 2020 at The Hive, Shrewsbury
Introduced by Geoff Hardy and Cerin Mills from Arts Alive

A great afternoon hosted by The Hive and Arts Alive. 41 people in the audience, including a great representation of young people as Will Jackson of Quick Duck theatre

Company took us on a wild and wonderful journey of letters in his one-man coming of age queer story. Humour, lyp-sync cheesy gay songs, interesting use of lamp-light and just general loveable-ness made for a very entertaining matinee – just the job for a wet and dreary afternoon!

IN CONVERSATION: SILENCE WAS THE ANSWER

Mike Fry with excerpts from his book of memoirs and musings

Hosted by History Month

Tuesday 25th February at the Hive, Shrewsbury

Unfortunately – due to flooding and environment agency warnings not to go into the town centre we had to postpone this event which we plan to reschedule.



PRESENTATION - THE LOVE THAT DARES TO SPEAK ITS NAME: MARY WHITEHOUSE AND HER SHROPSHIRE GIRLS



Thursday 27th February at Wellington Library

Hosted by Telford LGBT+

Peter Roscoe treated his audience of 23 to a fascinating insight into Mary Whitehouse – someone who had a real impact on us as LGBT+ people with her campaigning against her particular interpretation of immorality. Peter's research, which stretched to reading excerpts of Mary's 6-volume self-penned autobiography and

memories from former students on Telford Memories Facebook Page, prompted a lively Q & A. A fascinating insight into a woman obsessed!

The evening concluded with some very appreciative remarks from the Mayor of Wellington Town Council, Cllr Anthony Lowe

LECTURE: THEN ALL THE WORLD

Friday 28th February hosted by and at Shrewsbury Regimental Museum

Another victim of the floods - this event, which draws on the love letters of WW2 soldiers, Gilbert and Gordon, will now be at a later date.

PRESENTATION: MEET YOUR OLD TESTAMENT TRANCESTORS

Friday 28th February at Shrewsbury United Reformed Church
Hosted by Shrewsbury URC, attracted 30 people.

Chris Dowd, a URC Minister and a gay man, was introduced by Carole Marsden (URC Minister)

In his introduction, Chris said that he had a lot of support, but had experienced more difficulties within the Church than in wider society, in regard to sexuality issues.

The presentation, based on his book: 'Transfaith', shed a light on Trans and Queer/Gender-challenging characters and stories that reflect LGBTQ and Non-Binary lives and experiences in the Bible, such as Esau, Jacob, Joseph, Adam and Deborah. '[S]cripture needs to be explored and taken seriously, but not literally...we may see different things..based on our context and life experience'.

'Queer Theology...claims a space that should have always been there.'

Accompanied by well-chosen video clips, the presentation was educational, entertaining, fascinating and the audience was engaged throughout.



SPOKEN WORD: RAISE THE ROOF

Friday 28th February at Church Stretton Library. Hosted by Lucy Aphramor

This show, written and performed by Lucy Aphramor, had fabulous support from staff and volunteers at Church Stretton library. Our audience of around 15 people included local residents, and folk who had travelled that bit further specifically to attend and support an LGBT history month event. The performance was really well received - "stunning" "moving" "it really spoke to me" were some of the comments.

It was followed by a question and dialogue session led by Rosie Carnall, using a method called Philosophy for

Communities. Admittedly it was a challenge getting everyone back to their seats once we'd started chatting over tea, biscuits and homemade banoffee muffins, but it paid off. We explored some of the big ideas we'd just heard and considered what these meant for us individually, and as a society. There were lots of themes to choose from as the narrative weaves together trauma, fat stigma, body respect, flawed public health messages, queer identity, Grenfell Towers and the Black Lives Matter movement.

"LGBT history month created the perfect opportunity to bring these conversations to Church Stretton".

LGBT YOUTH/SCHOOL EVENT: 'KNOW OUR HISTORY, MAKE OUR FUTURE'

Saturday 29th February at The Hive,
Hosted by History Month
*Introduced and facilitated by Alice
Crutwell, Sylvian, XYZ and Shropshire
Youth Association*

The 2020 Youth/School event developed the 'Take Part, Take Action' theme of 2019. The afternoon, co-facilitated by Sylvian, a young trans man and Alice Crutwell, Public Health Curriculum Advisor for Shropshire Council, was well attended by over 60 people – including, for the first time, 15 young people from Bishop's Castle Community College!



The programme was designed to inspire and celebrate LGBTQ+ good and emerging practice in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin. There were inspiring accounts by young people, individual histories, journeys and stories expressed by speakers- via spoken word, song, presentations and testimonials.

Sylvian ran an LGBT History Quiz, which, in a light hearted way, communicated some of our past, brought people together and created a focus. There were inspiring accounts of progress towards a whole school approach to LGBTQ+ inclusion, from Meole Brace School, Shrewsbury Academy and Mary Webb School (the latter being the first school in Shropshire to host an LGBTQ page on their website).

Of course, as in previous years, there was an ample supply of cup-cakes and the celebratory LGBTQ+ rainbow cake made by a member of the XYZ Youth Group.

Feedback sheets for each table allowed people to suggest ways forward and expressions of the world we would like to see. These were well-used and will be collated and fed back to schools, as they are largely produced by young people themselves. As always, the event was one that left all present positive and hopeful for the future!

A big thank you to XYZ and Alice for making this event such an inspiring, successful and useful occasion.

AN EVENING OF CELEBRATION AND COMEDY WITH CLARE SUMMERSKILL

Saturday 29th February
at The Hive, Shrewsbury
Hosted by History Month
What a night – a sell out with
60 people in the audience and
a roller coaster barrel of laughs
with Clare Summerskill picking
out the details of middle-aged
lesbian life that only lesbians
would know, but which
entertained a diverse audience.
Her kind, observational
humour and mix of stand up
and comedic songs was a
perfect blend to finish a
fantastic run of events in
Shrewsbury.

“Great night, laughed so much it hurt”

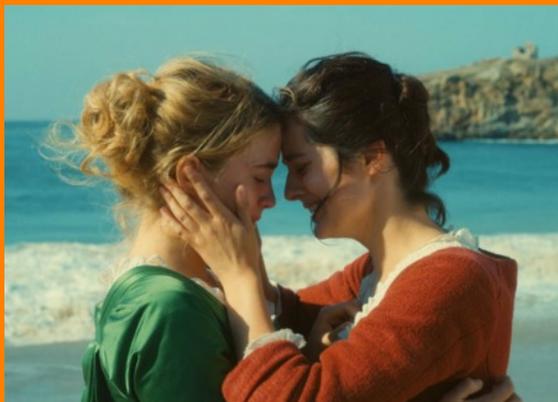
*“It was a great evening, Clare's
observations of us, our lives and
experiences was so spot-on and had us
laughing all evening.”*

FILM SCREENING: PORTRAIT OF A LADY ON FIRE

Wednesday 4th March, hosted by
Oswestry Film Society at
Kinokulture, Oswestry

Some 30 people enjoyed the
ambience of Kinokulture and this
Gothic love story, with its high
camp and nod to Hitchcock.

*“The best lesbian period costume
drama I have ever seen”*



ONE FINAL COMMENT FROM YOU

“I wanted.. to drop you a quick line to say how much I enjoyed the events I attended in the History Festival. I really appreciate all the inspiration, work, time and commitment that it must have taken to put on so many events, covering such a varied, interesting and entertaining programme. Congratulations and a huge thank you to you all. What a wonderful team you make and, we’re lucky to be flying the flag in our county!”



ONE FINAL COMMENT FROM US

Thank you!

www.shrewsburylgbthistory.org.uk