

Library of Birmingham Archives & Collections

The History of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Communities

Birmingham City Archives holds the following records which may be of interest to researchers:

MS 1836: Papers concerning the Gay Community Centre and Gay Switchboard and various newsletters, 1976-1984

MS 2266: Papers of W.R.P.M. (Women's Revolutions Per Minute).

This was a business established in 1977 by Nicolle Freni and Tierl Thompson as a non-commercial feminist music importing and distribution service. The aim was to make women's music available around the country, to promote the music of women from around the world which could not be found in standard music shops, and in this way to stimulate more women into making their own music. The organisation also aimed to provide positive images of women and to communicate how women were changing themselves and the world.

The business was taken on and developed by Caroline Hutton in 1979, who travelled widely, to concerts, festivals and women's events and also ran a mail-order business from Birmingham. When she decided to cease trading in 1999, the administrative records of W.R.P.M. were deposited in the City Archives, and any remaining music albums were deposited in the Music Library. The business was continued by Hilary Friend.

The collection includes promotional material on numerous women artists, some of whom are lesbian, and magazines on women's music.

THIS COLLECTION HAS NOW MOVED TO GOLDSMITH'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LONDON (2012)

MS 2324: 30 colour photographs taken by Ming de Nasty of Birmingham Pride Mass Camp Carnival, 2000 (the first gay carnival parade to progress through Birmingham city centre).

MS 2346: 14 colour photographs taken by Ravi Deepres of the 'Fierce' arts festival, 2000. (Various gay individuals and groups took part in this).

MS 2347: 10 colour photographs taken by Neil Forsyth of Birmingham Pride Mass Camp Carnival, 2000.

MS 2659: Records of the Lesbian and Gay Switchboard West Midlands, (minutes, papers, newsletters) 1970s-1990s.

MS 2788: Records of Gay Birmingham Remembered, 1961-2008.

Magazines, publicity material for various LGBT organisations, newscuttings, papers re the Nightingale Club and oral history interviews with members of the LGBT community

[N.B. THESE INTERVIEWS ARE NOT YET AVAILABLE TO CONSULT]

QS/B and PS/B Records of the Birmingham Quarter Sessions and Petty Sessions courts, 1839 —

These may show the arrest of individual men when homosexuality was illegal, but the language is not always clear.

MS 1844: Calendars of prisoners tried at the Assizes, Birmingham, 1884-1893.

Some examples:

4 August, 1885.

Alfred Oswin Holmes. 18, Hairdresser.

Received into custody: 24 April 1885.

Accused of unlawfully assaulting one Ida Ely on 2 April, 1885. No evidence.

Accused of carnally knowing one Ida Ely on 2 April, 1885 and then with her feloniously committing and perpetrating an abominable crime. Guilty. Penal Servitude for Natural Life.

Accused of unlawfully assaulting one Charles Henry Ely on 2 April, 1885 and then with him feloniously committing and perpetrating an abominable crime. No evidence.

Accused of unlawfully assaulting one Esther Ely on 23 April, 1885 and then with her feloniously committing and perpetrating an abominable crime. No evidence.

19 March, 1889.

Arthur Cornelius Ridding. 42, Clerk.

Received into custody: 4 March 1889.

Accused of unlawfully committing an act of gross indecency with another male person named William Butler on 1 March, 1889. Trial: 21 March 1889. Pleaded guilty. 2 calendar months hard labour. Birmingham Prison.

29 July, 1891.

Edward Verner. 51, Agent.

Received into custody: 13 April 1891.

Accused of unlawfully committing an act of gross indecency with another male person named Ambrose Alfred Bradbury on 12 April, 1891. Trial: 3 August 1891. Pleaded guilty. 12 calendar months hard labour. Birmingham Prison.

29 July, 1892.

Benjamin Smith. 26, Labourer.

Received into custody: 3 May 1892.

Accused of feloniously, wickedly and against the order of nature carnally knowing George Perry, and then with him feloniously committing and perpetrating an abominable crime on 19 and 20 April, 1892. Trial: 1 August 1892. Found guilty of an attempt to commit an abominable crime. 4 calendar months hard labour. Birmingham Prison.

Some of the records listed here may be closed under the Data Protection Act.
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'Gay & Lesbian Issues' cuttings from local newspapers, 1977-

Specific references to Birmingham in printed sources:

Birmingham's Sinister Side by Steve Jones.

p.75. 2 Photographs of male prisoners arrested for 'buggery'. Alfred Holmes, aged 18, 1885. Life sentence.

Harry Wood, soldier, aged 24. 5 years.

The Lesbian History Sourcebook by Alison Oram and Anne Marie Turnbull.

pp. 43-44. Daily Herald 10 May 1929 and 29 August 1932.

Newspaper story about a woman, Sarah Holton/m, who 'deceived' others as to her sex – she worked as a man (William Sidney Holton) on the canals in Birmingham and lived with another woman.

Cross Dressing:

Of course, a person who cross-dresses does not always identify with another sex, but may do, and may not be gay or lesbian, but may be.

Vesta Tilley (1864-1952) a celebrated and successful music-hall artist, born in Birmingham, retired in 1920. Most famous for her male impersonations. A big percentage of her fans were female.

Photographs: **MS 310/1465-1468**

Peter Farrer: *The life of Maurice Pollack, 1885-1918, a Birmingham Actor* (2000)

Article in *Aris's Gazette* newspaper about a woman in Stafford gaol, 5 Sept. 1791 (see Revolutionary Players website - www.revolutionaryplayers.org.uk)