

## **LGBT History**

by Laura Critchley

February has been and gone, and you probably never even noticed some of the events taking place this month. Well, nothing special happens in February, right? Wrong! February is LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans) History Month. LGBT History Month is similar to Black History Month... it's just a celebration of the history of these people!

All over the North West people have been celebrating their heritage and their history! Groups such as LGYM (Lesbian Gay Youth Manchester... contact details are below) held a number of events to celebrate this month including: Queer Veggie Café and Les Bi Con.

So, what exactly is LGBT History? A lot of people are under the impression that homosexuality and bisexuality is a fairly new and modern thing, whereas, in reality, LGBT has had an influence on many aspects of history.

Some of you may have come across Oscar Wilde at some point. Oscar Wilde was a mixture of bisexual, homosexual and paederastic (an erotic relationship between a grown man and an adolescent boy). Many people believe he was bisexual because he had a wife, though, he may have married purely to fit into social standards... and Wilde didn't seem to be the type of person to willingly abide to social standards as is often shown in his writing. There is evidence of a paederastic relationship in "A Woman of No Importance" between Lord Illingworth and Gerald. In fact, there are homosexual and paederastic connotations in many of Wilde's works. This, and his outspoken opinions on homosexuality and his links with male prostitutes and homosexual brothels lead to his arrest for "gross indecency" and sentenced to 2 years in prison in 1895. But, LGBT references can be found even further back in history.

I'm going to guess that most of you have studied Shakespeare at some point in your education... well; did you know that Shakespeare was allegedly bisexual? Some of Shakespeare's Sonnets seem to be love poems to a man, his "fair youth". "Sonnet 18", "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" is now believed to have been written to a male.

But, LGBT goes back much further into history than Elizabethan times. In 11th Century Scandinavia, as in many other parts of the world, men that didn't inherit their father's land and therefore weren't allowed to marry went to join warrior societies, where there was an evident lack of women... who were only allowed to have sex once married. So, the men who could not marry and could not have sex with women resorted to homosexuality and it became an institutionalised way of life.

Even further back in history, to around 350 BC, Alexander the Great, King of Macedon, ruled his vast kingdom. It was rumoured that in these times it was common that the men of the armed forces were mostly homosexual or homoerotic and homosexuality was encouraged to raise morale. Homosexuality was also common within Greek mythology for example the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus in Homer's Iliad.

In Oliver Stone's 2004 film version of "Alexander" Alexander is obviously bisexual with his love for his friend, Hephaestion and his attraction to his Persian chamberlain, but also with his marriage to his wife and their sexual relations.

Many people, even in this country, where it is actually against the law to be homophobic and therefore homosexuality is becoming more socially acceptable, are still unaware of the laws surrounding homosexuality.

In the year 2000, the age of consent for homosexuality is equalised to the age of consent for heterosexuality... 16. Many people still think that it's either illegal still for homosexuals to have sex or that the age of consent is still 18. In the same year, the UK's armed forces also abolished the ban on homosexuals signing up. Section 28, the law brought in by Margaret Thatcher that "said" that schools and council members could not promote or teach homosexuality, was lifted in Scotland.

In 2003, Section 28 is repealed in England and Wales, meaning that schools can now openly teach about homosexuality, but, many teachers are unaware of this change and still seem to be scared to teach about homosexuality; meaning that approximately 1 in 10 people (approximately 1 in 10 people are LGBT) aren't receiving an adequate sex education.

In 2005 "gay marriage" is made legal in the UK... although, this actually comes under the term of "civil partnerships"... this means that a gay couple can get equal rights to a married heterosexual couple.

It is now also illegal to discriminate against someone because of their sexual orientation and their gender identity... this means that bullying someone because they're LGBT is now against the law.

LGBT people spend February, LGBT History Month, to celebrate all these changes... to celebrate all the positive things that have changed for LGBT people in the UK. But, it's also a time to remember the negative things that have happened to LGBT people throughout history and to hope that things such as homophobia and biphobia will eventually be wiped out so there will be no more Matthew Shepard's.

Matthew Shepard was murdered in 1998, simply because he was homosexual. He was severely beaten and left to die, tied to a fence, naked. The only part of his body that wasn't covered in blood was two streams beneath his eyes where he'd been crying. He was eventually found, but, died not long after... he was 21 years old. To add further insult to his death, an anti-homosexuality organisation, GodHatesFags,

picketed his funeral. Friends of Matthew responded to this by dressing up as angels with big wings to block out the protestors from the view of the family.

Homophobia is mainly based on ignorance. LGBT History Month is designed to bring more awareness to LGBT issues and to therefore hopefully reduce ignorance and homophobia. So, at least acknowledge that LGBT History Month exists, so, next February maybe something can be done within OSFC to help raise awareness of LGBT issues.

### **Relevant Contact Details**

[LGYM](http://www.lgym.org.uk/) (Lesbian Gay Youth Manchester): <http://www.lgym.org.uk/>

[LIK:T](http://www.likt.org.uk/) (Young Women's Health Project): <http://www.likt.org.uk/>

[Avert](http://www.avert.org/homosexu.htm) <http://www.avert.org/homosexu.htm>

[Kidscape](http://www.kidscape.org.uk) <http://www.kidscape.org.uk>