



NOTTINGHAM & NOTTS LESBIAN & GAY SWITCHBOARD

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The History of a Lesbian and Gay Telephone Helpline

set in the context of local developments since the
1967 Sexual Offences Act

David Edgley

First printed August 2000
(Updated and reprinted September 2006)

CONTENTS	PAGES
1. Introduction	2
2. Before 1967	3 - 7
3. The 1967 Sexual Offences Act	8 - 9
4. CHE and GLF	10 - 15
5. The development of a community	16 - 20
6. Switchboard 1975 - 1981	21 - 38
7. Switchboard 1982 - 1990	39 - 59
8. Switchboard 1991 - 2000	60 - 76
9. The future	77 - 79
10. The Switchboard Pyramid	80
11. Postscript 2006	81 - 88

This booklet was originally produced through the Nottinghamshire Living History Archive Millennium Award Scheme funded by the National Lottery. This updated reprint was made possible by Boots Charitable Trust.

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INTRODUCTION

The history of lesbians and gay men in 20th century U.K was a shadowy story for most of that period. In the 1970s information and documentation began to appear and more recently most aspects of lesbian and gay life have had books devoted to them. There has, however, been little which has centred on particular geographical areas.

This history is specialised in the sense that it focuses on one city - Nottingham - and one organisation within that city - Nottingham Lesbian and Gay Switchboard.

The background for this history has been gathered in two ways: -

1. From the recorded reminiscences of people aged between 25 and 85 who were involved in Switchboard itself, in the precursors of Switchboard and in groups and organisations which developed in parallel with Switchboard.
2. From the written records of Chimaera, the newsletter of Nottingham CHE, from the minutes of Switchboard meetings and from local gay free sheets. Between them, they cover the period from 1971 to 2006.

The history itself is set out chronologically with occasional inserts which are either direct quotations from the audio recordings and written records (a different type face is used for these) or are comments which develop various aspects of the main text.

BEFORE 1967

Sex between men was criminalized at the end of the 19th Century. The Law considered sex between women as something which did not happen. Queen Victoria's comment on the draft of a law to make lesbianism illegal was "Women do not do that sort of thing". That story may be apocryphal, but for much of the 20th Century the "homo" in homosexuality might well have been derived from the Latin "homo" - meaning "man", rather than the correct Greek "homo" - meaning "the same".

Making criminals of gay men led to an "underground" culture which allowed myths and stereotypes to flourish unchallenged. The associations of gay men with effeminacy, transvestism and child molesting are still held by many people today.

You never told anyone. You couldn't defend yourself. The police, the law, the church, society, everybody was against you. It was the blackmailer's charter. I was blackmailed and I know a fellow who was blackmailed by two policemen.

The fear of exposure in some cases produced a sort of camaraderie, but more often made people live double lives in which it was difficult sustain relationships.

Once your name was in the paper, your job had gone, everything had gone. The only way out if you got caught ... well a lot committed suicide. The Canon told me that a man came to talk to him at the cathedral and said he was gay and his family was against him. The next night he picked up the Evening Post and read that the man had hanged himself.

In some cities there were gay bars, usually well hidden. There were also private parties; both were liable to be raided.

The News of the World was the worst. They used to have witch hunts. A fellow I met was in a party which was raided. They were all taken to prison. It was headlines in the News of the World. When he came out of prison, the Governor said "Watch what you're doing, you don't want to be back in here", to which he replied "I've had more in here than I do outside".

For many gay men the only way of meeting others was by picking people up in public lavatories - a process colloquially known as "cottaging". Occasionally other venues became known as meeting places.

There was a cinema on Market Street called the Scala. I found it out quite by accident. It was like musical chairs, people were moving around all the time. For one and ninepence you could have a *wonderful* night out.

There was another set who lived in the country houses or in The Park. You went to dinner parties, you were introduced to people and then you were invited back.

It was unusual for men to live together, but the ignorance about lesbianism meant that two women living together was generally seen as a highly respectable state of affairs.

Very few men dared or had the moral courage to set up home together. Mostly they lived with their parents or got married, though I do know two men who did and they have lived together now for fifty years.

Of course, there were lighter moments.

I went to the Algarve. We went into the dining room and there were two waiters and they sort of looked at us. They must have put two and two together. On the table was a small vase of flowers. One of the waiters came up to me and he took the flowers away and came back with the most enormous vase of flowers I've ever seen and plonked those on the table. There was uproar in the dining room because the women could not stand it to think that we were getting attention and they were being ignored.

I went to Iraq. There were no European women, except nurses - and they were reserved for officers! So the troops had no outlets. I found out then that most young men would have sex with another man rather than not have sex at all. There were 2000 men. I had the time of my life.

I stayed at a club for Officers in Sloane Square and got mixed up with the gay crowd in London; chiefly ballet dancers from Covent Garden. I had short hair and was always properly dressed and I stood out like a sore thumb. We would meet someone, and they would look at me and say "Is he so?" or "Is he musical?" We used Polari to have talks in restaurants where other people couldn't understand what we were talking about.

Pubs in Chelsea and that area sort of alternated. You would go there one week and the following week you would find it was deserted, because rumour had got round that there was going to be a raid. Unless you were in close touch, you'd never know where to go because you didn't know where the crowd had dispersed to. The White Bear in Piccadilly was quite good for a long time. One occasion I went there with two ballet dancers, one on each arm, the manager came out and said "Sorry boys, not tonight". He'd been tipped off there was going to be a raid. He turned to me and said "All right for YOU, sir."

During the Second World War, people often had more important things on their mind than the sexuality of their friends and colleagues.

This talk about homosexuals in the armed forces - my experience in the RAF was that as long as you did your job properly nobody took any notice of it at all. My first love affair was with a young man in the Armoured Cars Unit and he got killed. I was then working with the Assistant Provo Marshall for the RAF. I went into work on the morning that my boyfriend had died and my boss said to me "I understand that you know about Edbrook's death" and I said "Yes, sir" and he said "I understand he was a very special friend of yours, would you like to take some time off?" That was the attitude.

The thought that by tomorrow you might be dead had a liberating effect on many people's attitude to sex.

During the war it was blackout in Nottingham. Bombs were dropping. They dropped incendiaries on my house. You weren't allowed to show a light. I remember meeting a Canadian Commander in the pub. We walked out in pitch black on the corner of King Street and Queen Street and had ten minutes of love there with everybody walking about in the blackout. You knew you were going to die tomorrow, there was a bomb with your name on it so everybody enjoyed themselves.

In the 1960s a few films began to focus on homosexuality, though seldom in anything other than tragic or melodramatic ways. On the radio, however, the exploits of Julian and Sandy in the popular "Round the Horne" comedy show introduced people to "Polari", the gay secret language which was until then the province mainly of the London theatrical set. The script frequently contained outrageous double-entendres which went over the heads of most of their audience.

Newspapers had their own agenda. They still do. It was seldom truthful or positive.

In the early 1960's a tabloid newspaper ran an article called "How to spot a Homo". Characteristic features included wearing sports jackets, smoking a pipe, wearing suede shoes and leaning backwards at an angle of 95' to the ground when walking.

In the 1950's the Wolfenden Committee had been set up to prepare the ground for a possible change in the law. Though they concluded that one's sexuality was established at an early age, they were convinced that parliament and the public would not be happy with an age of consent for gay men which was below the age at which you could vote, which at that time was 21.

In 1967, the Sexual Offences Act passed through parliament. There was a Labour Government in office and the Home Secretary was Roy Jenkins, but one of the MPs particularly involved with introducing the new law was the Conservative, Humphrey Berkeley.

In the 1970 election there was a big swing away from Labour and the Conservatives were returned to office, but in Humphrey Berkeley's constituency the swing went into reverse and he was not re-elected.

Some homosexuals didn't like it. They said we would be better off leaving things as they were. I was so relieved it came as a glorious relief

THE 1967 SEXUAL OFFENCES ACT

“Well, you’re all legal now”, they said.

Unfortunately, things were not that simple. The law views heterosexuality and homosexuality in diametrically opposing ways.

Heterosexuality is considered to be broadly legal except if certain boundaries are crossed. Homosexuality between men is considered to be illegal unless it takes place within carefully defined circumstances. The 1967 Act did not make gay sex legal - it became “no longer unlawful”. It introduced the phrase “consenting male adults in private”.

The definition of “private” is not the normal one. It is well known that this peculiar definition has repercussions in institutionalised accommodation such as prisons. Few people have considered that it will also apply to old people’s homes when the current generation of gay couples who are “out” and happy about their sexuality may need to go into residential homes in their old age.

The unequal age of consent criminalized many men in their late teens who would otherwise be considered fit to vote, fit to marry and fit to die for their country in war time.

In pubs and clubs heterosexuals can “chat each other up”. For gay men, this was considered to be “soliciting for immoral purposes in a public place”. They may be consenting and adult, but the process which eventually leads to sex could still be illegal.



CONSENTING MALE ADULTS IN PRIVATE

The 1967 Sexual Offences Act contained several anomalies, some of which are still unaltered.

In 1967, the age of consent for gay men was 21 and was only reduced to 18 in the mid 1990s. The Labour Government has promised to equalise the age of consent as soon as problems with the House of Lords can be overcome.

In 1967, the Act only applied to England and Wales. Scotland came into line in 1980 and Northern Ireland in 1982. The Isle of Man was still an exception for many years after that.

The definition of privacy used in the Act is bizarre and means that technically none of the following are private for gay men: -

- ◆ a locked hotel bedroom
- ◆ a locked car in isolated, secluded woodland
- ◆ Being with your own partner in your own bedroom in your own house, when another man is present in another part of your house.

CHE AND GLF

The change in the law produced little in the way of immediate gains. The new law was so flawed that prosecutions continued on a large scale and the law did little to counter society's attitudes and the numerous areas of discrimination which still remained. Though the 1967 Act did not involve lesbians, discrimination and negative attitudes certainly did.

Two organisations which attempted to improve the lot of lesbians and gay men emerged in the early 1970s. They were the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE).

“Organisation” is perhaps the wrong word to describe GLF. It thrived on spontaneity. It favoured events which could achieve as much public notice as possible, but it seemed to have little time for structure and long term planning.

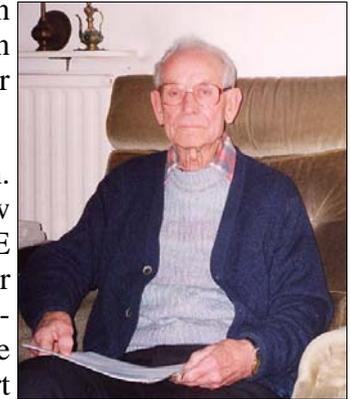
I became involved with GLF. I started going along to “zaps”, zapping people like Larry Grayson at the London Palladium, streaming on to the stage and stopping the show. At Christmas we went to Ardleigh, where Mary Whitehouse lives and sang Christmas Carols outside her house.

In Nottingham GLF **was** Kris Kirk. Kris was a student at Nottingham University, who later went on to work in television and as a writer. He died about six years ago. When he was in Nottingham, GLF flourished. When he left, it faded rapidly.

CHE started in Manchester towards the end of the 1960s. It went through various name changes (the Campaign for Homosexual Equality was its third and final name) and eventually managed to gain some publicity, which resulted in people from other parts of the country writing off to the Manchester group.

The second CHE group started in London, but the CHE group in Nottingham was either the third or fourth.

The local contact was Ike Cowen. At that time Ike was a Law Lecturer. He later wrote the CHE Constitution, framed drafts for alterations in the law (which received praise, but not acceptance from Parliament) and helped start the first local gay club.



Ike Cowen

During the period when Ike was waiting for the number of people contacting CHE to reach a viable level, those who were interested were offered the chance to go to a low-key social group called “Night Off”. This met about once a fortnight at a building off Mount Hooton Road in Nottingham and was organised by the Reverend Barry Hodges. “Night Off” continued as a “non-scene” social group until 1974.

I remember someone at Night Off telling us how he had seen a friend sitting 2 rows in front of them in the theatre. To attract his friend's attention, this man hooked his umbrella handle around his friend's neck and tugged only to find that the person who turned round was not his friend (and all related to the accompaniment of the adagio from Balakirev's first symphony).

When sufficient people had contacted CHE to make a local group viable, Ike organised the first meeting on November 16th 1971. In March 1972, a small committee was set up to keep the group running and a series of meetings began. The meetings attempted to address one of the many issues which CHE tried to deal with - a lack of social facilities.

One might expect that people contacting the *Campaign for Homosexual Equality* would be interested in campaigning. In fact, the vast majority of contacts were from people who needed to socialise and who latched on to CHE as a possible means to that end.

In 2000, Nottingham has one gay club, 6 or 7 bars for gay men and lesbians, once-a-month discos, various social groups, support groups, special interest groups and helplines. In early 1971, there were a couple of bars made known by word of mouth and nothing more.

Nottingham, however, was relatively well provided for compared with most areas of the country. The total lack of facilities over great swaths of the UK was demonstrated when people travelled to Nottingham CHE group meetings from Derby, Mansfield, Loughborough, Leicester, Leeds, Sheffield, Northampton, Lincoln and Scunthorpe.

People often became aware of CHE by accident and then kept the information for a long time before using it.

I was walking with my dog and saw an old Derby Evening Telegraph flying around. I picked it up to put in the bin and, lo and behold, I saw an advert to join CHE. I took the wet paper home, dried it out, kept looking at it for a week or two and then rang the number.

It became clear that many of the people contacting CHE had problems. Some were very isolated, some were finding it hard to come to terms with their sexuality and some were being victimised and harassed because of their sexuality. Others made contact to gain information about homosexuality in general or what CHE could do. Enquiries of this type came from the Samaritans, Women's Groups, Universities and Colleges, the Probation Service etc.

The result of this was that the local CHE felt obliged to function on four levels: campaigning; providing social facilities; providing education and information; counselling. The "counselling" was initially very ad hoc and would better be described as "sympathetic listening".

At this time, Nottingham CHE's committee included Heather Cook, Roger Hollier, David Edgley, Hilary Stafford, Ian Corfield, Derek Johnson and Bruce Wainwright. The committee tried to keep its members informed by publishing a newsletter called Chimaera, edited first by Heather Cook and then by David Edgley. It eventually established a reputation as one of the best of its genre. It printed several articles which were later transferred to Gay News - including "The Adventures of Super Puff" by Bruce Wainwright.

Miss Clutch's suspicions about Nick were growing by the second. "Was it YOU that left the vibrator plugged in all day during the power strike? Downright unpatriotic, that's what I call it. I bet Mr Heath didn't leave his plugged in!"

In a survey by the Times Literary Supplement of voluntary groups' magazines and newsletters, Chimaera was the only gay-linked newsletter which was mentioned.

Some of the early campaigning was significant and also successful. Meetings and discussions took place with Derby and Nottingham Samaritans, groups of probation officers and social workers, students at Derby Technical College, Matlock College and at Bishop Lonsdale College where we took part in a large scale "teach in".

At Bishop Lonsdale College we were informed that if a student was known to be gay at school, then they would not be accepted for the college.

People participated in radio programmes, spoke to a Jewish Youth Group and Ike Cowen talked to a large assembly of Sheffield Police officers.....

I have been a practicing homosexual for over 30 years and after all that practice I'm now rather good at it.

Nottingham CHE had Howard Hyman, who started NALGAY, a support organisation for workers in NALGO which is now UNISON. It became a very successful group. It has been important in changing attitudes within the union and getting some anti-discrimination legislation and then other unions following suit.

One of the most enjoyable areas of campaigning and information giving was with the National Housewives Register. This organisation had recently started as a less starchy alternative to the W.I. Someone put us on their list of speakers. After one group invited us, word got round that we gave good value and further invitations rolled in from about 25 other National Housewives Register groups over a period of 8 years.



ON SPEAKING TO THE NHR

Not W.I. nor Women's Liberation;
This buttress of the Guardian's circulation,
These shareholders of Marks and Mothercare,
We thank them for this chance to show our flair.
This new experience sent to test us -
Addressing National Housewives Registers.
We sally forth with rapier wits to sting 'em
In Derby, East Leake, Yoxall, Grantham, Bingham.
We puncture with our sharpened repartees
Their follies, except when issues eccles-
-iastical are raised, against us like a rod.
("God's good," some say, but we're no good on God.)
Genesis, Deuteronomy, then St. Paul
Are quoted as we quietly climb the wall.
So hone your minds in case your brains grow flabby,
For next it's Mansfield, Burton, Darley Abbey.
The moral lunacies of Leviticus
Are used to flail us. What a pity! Cos'
It's not just gays and lezzies he can't take,
It's those who dine on lobsters, pork or steak.
We made our points and backed them with statistics,
While scoffing home-made cake and oatmeal biscuits.
And multitudes of invitations kept on
Arriving from Uttoxeter and Repton.
With solidarity and with strategies well-planned,
We'll overwhelm this Chablis-and-Cortina land.
So here we come! To challenge and disturb ya'
Amid your weeping-willow fringed suburbia.
Where next will our campaigning forays be,
We ask ourselves? But suddenly we see
A messenger, who reads from a cartouche
And summons us to Ashby de la Zouch.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COMMUNITY

The isolation felt by so many lesbians and gay men until the early 1970s began to be broken down by three agents of change.

- ◆ Gay and lesbian publications
- ◆ Expanding social facilities
- ◆ A network of telephone helplines

In the late 1960s a few magazines appeared which were mainly aimed at gay men. They were short lived, amateurish, had small circulations and were difficult to get hold of except on subscription.

In 1972 Gay News appeared. It was a real newspaper and although W. H. Smith's would not stock it, many newsagents did, as did many bars and clubs. It had a gay guide where groups, bars, clubs and helplines got free listings. Anyone picking up a copy of GN could find out what there was in any part of the UK. In some places the gay guide confirmed that there was little or nothing, but if you lived in one of those places, you could always use the pages of contact ads to meet other people or even start your own group and publicise it through the gay guide.

Gay News reported on what had happened and also on what was going to happen. By keeping people informed about future events it helped people to organise action over instances of discrimination or attempts to stifle the new found freedoms which could not be taken for granted.

Before the 1970s there had been a few gay bars in Nottingham, usually one bar in a pub or hotel which had several bars. The Foresters dates back to the 1950s as a lesbian bar and for men there was the George, the Black Boy and the Flying Horse. At that time, there was little mixing between the sexes.

The scene now in Nottingham is mixed men and women. In Reading I went into a pub a couple of times. The pub was divided into two bars, one side for men and one side for women and there were two doors. We went in one and it was the men's side. It was like this scene from a western where the piano stopped and everybody turned to look at us.

In the 1970s, The Foresters continued and was joined by The Old Dog and Partridge (back bar), the Hearty Goodfellow (downstairs bar) and the Roebuck (since demolished). The novelty of the 1970s was gay club culture.

The first club in this area was The Pavilion Club half way between Nottingham and Derby in Shardlow. It developed out of a pub night called the "Bona Ome" club which was tried out in several pubs in places like Langley Mill, Sneinton and Shardlow. Eventually some of the people involved decided to buy an old sports pavilion and convert it into a genuine members club - owned by the members and run by the members. It opened in 1971 and was christened the "Handbag Club" by local residents.

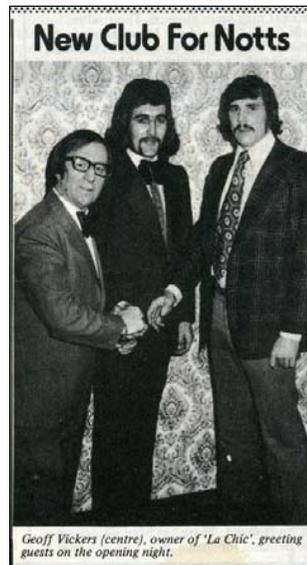
The idea of a club owned and run by its members was the model for the Nightingale Club in Birmingham, which continues successfully to this day.

I have very fond memories of the Pavilion Club. Basically it was large wooden hut with some land attached to it. The price of the booze wasn't rip off prices. It was staffed by the members for free - who did a lot of the structural work, the painting and decorating and up-dating of it with some nice flock wallpaper. Everybody was sort of "family".

We had the patio outside. People sponsored a slab or a rose tree. I remember Stella, who was planting this memorial tree and she was that pissed on gin that she fell into the hole herself and the rose tree followed in after her.

The first gay club in Nottingham was Mario's, on Stanford Street near what is now the Broadmarsh Centre. It converted from a teeny-boppers club to a gay club in 1972. Though often a bit tatty around the edges, it had a good and friendly atmosphere and continued successfully for over 10 years, changing its name to Shades and then to Whispers.

1973 saw the opening of La Chic in what is now Albion House on Canal Street. La Chic was ground breaking in being the first club in the UK to have a licence which stated that it was specifically for use by gay men and lesbians - a situation which made headlines in the Nottingham Evening Post.



Geoff Vickers (centre), owner of 'La Chic', greeting guests on the opening night.

Having two major gay clubs confirmed Nottingham as the gay centre of the East Midlands and made it the weekend destination of many from neighbouring counties.



The Flying Horse on Cheapside off the Market Square was the main gay bar in the 1960s. It was known as the "Pansy's Parlour"



The Old Dog and Partridge Lower Parliament St

The back bar was a popular gay bar from the mid 1970s to the early 1980s



Stanford House Stanford Street was the home of Mario's Club (later "Shades", later still "Whispers") from 1972 to the early 1980s

London Gay Switchboard (as it was then called) began operations on March 4th 1974. 1974 was a significant year for developments in Nottingham which would lead to a local telephone helpline. The first milestone was the opening of the People's Centre on March 23rd 1974.

The People's Centre was a sort of alternative citizen's advice bureau. It was based at 33 Mansfield Road, adjacent to the Nottingham Council for Voluntary Service (NCVS) offices. In June, Howard Hyman, of Nottingham CHE, approached the People's Centre and got the go ahead to hold face-to-face advice and information sessions for gay men and lesbians. In essence, this was the start of Nottingham Lesbian and Gay Switchboard and several people who later became involved with Switchboard helped on the one night per week which was set aside for us.

The major problem standing in the way of success for these sessions was the lack of publicity. The principle method of publicising things locally - the Nottingham Evening Post - refused to take any advert which carried the words "homosexual," "gay" or "lesbian". The existence of the sessions was therefore spread by either word of mouth or by those people who saw the relevant notice in the People's Centre window.

As advice sessions of a different nature were held each night, people sometimes got muddled.

I'm having trouble with my bunions (it's my orthopaedic shoes) can you help me?

SWITCHBOARD 1975 - 1982

After a few months of the face-to-face sessions, we obtained agreement from the People's Centre to advertise and use their telephone line for incoming calls from those seeking lesbian and gay related information. At this stage, and for several more years, the helpline was a branch of CHE and its publicity referred to CHE, but the telephone service which became Nottingham Lesbian and Gay Switchboard started here.

Though the Evening Post refused our advertisements, a few small papers accepted them, but journals such as the Hyson Green Guardian unlocked no floodgates of callers.

At this time CHE and GLF cooperated to produce a group called Nottingham Gay Alliance. Their most noteworthy achievement was Gay Street Theatre which gave birth to two "plays". The first of these was called "Robina Hood and her Gay Folk".

We did the Alternative Robin Hood and got chased out of Slab Square. A Russian delegation was there and they thought it was the real Robin Hood Society. Richard was the gay King Richard, Howard was Will Scarlet, Kris Kirk was Maid Marian I was the Major Oak and a dog peed up my leg.

The second play was "Green Noses" and was based on the premise that if you were gay or lesbian, your nose would turn green and therefore you could not stay "in the closet". The play was performed several times, most notably at the 1975 CHE Annual Conference in Sheffield.

NOTTINGHAM
GAY ALLIANCE
(CHE + GLF)

perform the play
“Green Noses”
outside Sheffield City
Hall in 1975



At the time the annual CHE Conferences were so controversial that several cities refused to host them. The 1975 Conference in Sheffield even received a write-up in the Johannesburg Star (September 6th, 1975).

The occasional smacking sound of a kiss of greeting between men accompanied the gathering of the delegates to the conference of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality. A uniformed attendant at City Hall observed the scene with unraised eyebrows: “You see just as much kissing on the football field”.

This controversial conference impinged little on the sensibilities of Sheffield Citizens despite the forebodings of the Ratepayers’ Association and the wrath of the National Front whose fly-posters display a crudity which the conference delegates would find hard to equal.

Lesbian delegates insisted on a collection for the waitresses as it was found that they were being paid only 60% of what the male waiters were receiving.

In 1976 Radio Nottingham gave Nottingham CHE group the chance to record its own 15 minute radio programme. CHE members had already featured in several discussion and phone-in programmes locally, but this programme was more planned and structured.

A section called “The Heterosexual News” attempted to attack the association between paedophilia and gay men by reading bits from the Evening Post which reported sexual assaults by heterosexuals on under-age girls. There was also “Frank Pough, with the Queerspotting Results”.

The only gay in the village! Another bit had a country yokel being visited by his Fairy Godmother - arriving to the sound of thunder and clucking chickens. When the yokel bemoaned that fact that he was gay, Fairy Godmother encouraged him by stating that “One in ten are gay” only to receive the news that in his village there were only ten people.

By this time, the telephone helpline started calling itself Gay Switchboard, a point reinforced by attendance at a Gay Switchboards’ Conference in Manchester in June 1976. As well as Nottingham and Manchester, the other groups represented were from London, Glasgow, Bristol, West Midlands and Brighton.

Our regular attempts to place advertisements in the Evening Post were inexplicably met with success. The number of calls which came in more than doubled. Like other similar helplines, exposure to a new audience initially brought its share of cranks.

We had this letter from someone who wrote “You are all damned and within 21 days the Lord will descend on you and you will be cast into the fiery pit”. Green ink of course.

1976 also saw a growth in our association with Nottingham Council for Voluntary Service. We had developed links with counsellors at NCVS in the early 1970s, first with Felicity Harding (daughter of Chad Varah) and later with Mary Riddell. Richard Webster, the then convenor of Nottingham CHE, worked with Mary to organise a large scale day long Forum.

The Forum “Homosexuals as People” was held at La Chic on Saturday November 6th, 1976. It was directed towards people in “the caring professions”. 125 people took part and the audience was made up of people from Social Services, Probation, Marriage Guidance, Samaritans, Student Organisations, NCVS and the Clergy.

The links with NCVS were further cemented when Switchboard moved from the People’s Centre to the NCVS building next door at 31a. A restaurant was sited underneath 31a and there was a chippie two doors further along.

Sometimes the smell of fish and chips was overpowering when you came out of the alley way to 31a Mansfield Road. Some people said that CVS stood for Chips, Vinegar and Salt.

Nottingham CVS allowed us to use their phone number and address in advertising and to receive incoming calls without contributing to the rental charge. Their support has been continuous and, at times courageous.

One letter came from someone who said he would like to support Switchboard by being sponsored to have a nail hammered through his tongue. We politely declined the offer.

In the first 3 months of operating under the name Switchboard there were 98 enquiries: 61 phone, 20 letter and 17 visitors. One area where there was no local support group was for transvestites. 5 transvestites phoned during this period; most of them were not gay. All we could say was “keep in contact and we will let you know if anything develops”.

One call was from a man who said “I am Avon of Blake’s Seven, and I am coming to destroy you”.

The sudden surge in calls took us by surprise and made us realise that we were not as prepared for some of the calls as we ought to be. There was no formal training for those staffing the phone line. One volunteer described it as “Learning by Nelly”, i.e. you sat next to Nelly, observed what she did and then you did the same.

Back up information consisted of a few pages of typed notes and the Gay News Gay Guide. Calls were written up in a log, but the manner of the write up was entirely in the hands of the person on duty.

The idea that those people who answered the phone needed to have training began to crystallize in some people’s minds, but it took a year of debate and discussion before the idea was put into practice.

We occasionally got hoax calls, but sometimes the caller had been hoaxed by someone else ... This is PC Jones from Central Station. I’m phoning about the bicycle which was reported missing by Mr. McQueen ... or ...Can you give me details of the hang glider which you have for sale?

At the 1976 NALGO AGM, Richard Webster proposed that in their dealings with Notts County Council, the Council should state that it would not discriminate against employees on the grounds of sexual orientation. Richard “came out” while proposing the motion, which was passed by an overwhelming majority.

1977 started off on a high note. Someone who had seen our ads in the Evening Post sent us an anonymous donation of £5. The following week, the donation was repeated. This continued over many months. We never found out who our benefactor was, so if you are reading this, “Thank you”.

At the same time, Switchboard received its first grant. £100 was awarded by Nottingham Students’ Karnival. Karnival has provided the one continuous thread of external financial support from that time to the £500 donated by them this year. Another “Thank you”.

The increase in calls and financial resources gave us the impetus to operate on two nights a week from March 1977.

Nationally the big news centred on Mary Whitehouse’s revival of the crime of “Blasphemous Libel” which she unearthed in order to prosecute Gay News for printing a poem about Jesus by Professor James Kirkup. La Chic club staged a benefit in order to raise money for the Gay News Support Fund. What nobody realised at the time was that the Grand Benefit Night was also the last night for La Chic. None of us found out what happened to the money which was raised; it certainly did not reach Gay News.

The closure of La Chic left a partial vacuum which others attempted to fill. On Alfreton Road a place called the Stork Club had one night as a gay club and then gave up. The Sandpiper on Broadway in the Lace Market lasted several months. It had considerable potential, but indifferent staff drove customers back to Shades.

In August 1977 the CHE Conference came to Nottingham and took over the Commodore for its meetings and what was then the Albany Hotel on Maid Marian Way for visiting delegates. The conference made headline news mainly because of the invitation of a Dutch professor who had made a study of paedophiles. Gay men may have been branded as paedophiles, but the newspapers did not appreciate them discussing the truth about that stereotyping.

The conference was entertained by a visit from Gay Sweatshop, which had recently been set up as a professional lesbian and gay travelling theatre group which performed plays written specially for it.

By now Nottingham CHE had had useful meetings with all the local MPs. To continue this approach, Howard Hyman invited the Conservative leader of the County Council to speak to the group.

Sir, I must say that I consider it an impertinence for you to send me a letter. I have always regarded homosexuality as one form of perversion and I very much regret the progress on permissive lines that have taken place during the last few years. I also take exception to the use of the word “gay”. From time to time I am gay, but at no time queer. I have reason to believe that public opinion is on my side. Yours faithfully, Peter Wright.

Shortly afterwards, Councillor Wright wrote a letter “inviting” Nottingham CVS to remove CHE and Switchboard from their premises. The letter was also signed by Councillor Michael Gallagher, the leader of the Labour group. It was suggested that not taking up the “invitation” would have potential implications for NCVS’s grant. Ron Collier, the then Director of Nottingham CVS, refused to cooperate and backed CHE and Switchboard.

The threats evaporated and it eventually became public that the two councillors did not have the backing of their parties, but were acting as individuals.

Early in 1978 the Evening Post decided that it would once again refuse to take ads for CHE or Switchboard. No explanation was given. Advertisements were started in Mansfield CHAD and several smaller local papers. On January 20th, Kenneth Clarke MP spoke to the CHE group.

Kenneth Clarke felt that the Switchboard service was worthy and essential. He could not understand the attitude of the Nottingham Evening Post.

On February 23rd, a full page article by Lucy Orgill in the Derby Evening Telegraph featured local CHE member Martin Fox and his partner.

“There was always a feeling at the back of my mind that something wasn’t quite right.” A feeling which took him, via his doctor, to a psychiatrist: “I was offered aversion therapy, which I didn’t take.” “At the end of six half-hour sessions, 95% of that time taken up with my talking, he told me: “Oh, you’re gay, accept it. Go off and enjoy yourself”.

The issue of training for telephone volunteers was resolved by some members of the group who had been in contact with National Friend. Friend groups were geared towards counselling and a local training programme was devised which emphasised listening skills and counselling techniques. It then became necessary for all volunteers to complete the training before they were accepted for work on the telephone line.

It was with some apprehension that I phoned Gay Switchboard. When the person on the other end of the phone told me that I could come along to a meeting, I was petrified! As I arrived at 31a, I had thoughts about turning back, but I went in. I’m glad I did. All my worries went as I realised that I wasn’t going to be questioned, just accepted.

Many people with a religious background found problems in reconciling their sexuality with their beliefs.

I was very involved in the Christian Union; it was very keen and very earnest and very evangelical, so being gay was the worst thing you could possibly be. That was just dreadful. I went along to quite a few “ex-gay” events thinking that this was a way of getting rid of it. If I prayed enough it would disappear and I would be able to get married like everyone else.

Homosexuality is completely taboo. I do know that there is another lad at my mosque who is gay, but he has gone to the other extreme. He is “out” and he has given up on religion. I, on the other hand will never give up religion, because that is a pillar that I can hold on to. It has given me immense strength and immense satisfaction; frustration at times as well because the answers haven’t been there as regards my religion and homosexuality.

Radio Trent gave a regular God slot to the Rev. Michael Hall, who clearly loved the publicity, but whose muddled thinking often provided an easy target and allowed us to get opportunities to reply “on air”.

Dear Rev. I. Takethebible-Literally

Leviticus 25:44 states that I may buy slaves from the nations that are around us. A friend of mine claims that this applies to the Irish, but not the Scots. Can you clarify?

I would like to sell my daughter into slavery as it suggests in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?

I have a neighbour who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states that he should be put to death. Who is morally obliged to kill him? Is it me, as he is my neighbour, or you, now that I have notified you of the situation?

Quest, an organisation for lesbian and gay Catholics, had been set up in the early 1970s. At the end of 1978 a local group was started by Tony Barker, who was a CHE and Switchboard member.

In 1978 the number of calls received totalled 862. The types of calls taken have always covered a huge range, but many of them result from the way in which lesbians and gay men are oppressed.

There are laws (which may not always work in practice) to support racial minorities, women and the disabled. In 1978 there were over 20 instances where the law clearly discriminated against gay men and lesbians. We had to wait until the new millennium to see any real change here.



AREAS OF DISCRIMINATION FOR GAY MEN & LESBIANS

Age of consent for men
Employment rights
Partner's rights in the law
Pensions & employment perks for partners
Security of housing tenure for partners
Obtaining insurance/mortgages
Stereotyping by media
Gay = paedophile
Gay = AIDS
Gay = Transvestite
The use of slanted language by the media
“Outing” by the media
Entrapment by police
Interpretation of “privacy”
Heterosexism
Funeral arrangements
Access to partners in medical emergencies
Incitement to hatred legal when directed at
lesbian & gays
Public displays of affection
Custody of children after divorce
Adoption/fostering
Targeted by religious extremists
Selective use of religious texts
Section 28 of the Local Government Act
Homophobia and homophobic crime
Immigration and same-sex partners

In the late 1970s Switchboard was still a part of CHE and was financed by CHE. CHE raised money by profits from the sale of Gay News and from discos held in the upstairs bar at the Hearty Good Fellow.

In those days I was very vain and often refused to wear my glasses. At one of the Hearty Good Fellow discos I remember asking Mike Raymond "who is that sitting by the window?" He said "It isn't anybody, it's just a pile of clothes".

The influence of National Friend had eventually led to the formation of a local Friend group in addition to Gay Switchboard. The Friend group operated on Tuesday nights.

Some friction between the two related organisations began to develop because the training for both was organised exclusively by Friend. Those volunteering for Friend made a commitment to involve themselves in on-going face-to-face counselling.

Several people in Switchboard were interested in staffing a telephone helpline, but were not prepared to undertake on-going counselling, yet found that their training focussed heavily on this.

Towards the end of 1979 it was agreed that Switchboard should develop its own training programme and that Friend and Switchboard would cooperate, but be separate organisations.

In 1979, the number of calls taken passed the 1000 mark for the first time and totalled 1130.

For those who are interested in the long term historical perspective, the May 1979 edition of Chimaera outlined a scheme for a Gay Centre to be established in Nottingham.

The lack of local facilities for transvestites was addressed by Friend and Switchboard member Mick Banbury. For sometime he had been telling callers that when sufficient people had shown interest, he would organise evening meetings for transvestites at Nottingham CVS. At the end of 1979 Mick managed to get these meetings underway. These were to take on a separate existence as the Chameleon Group in 1984.

This guy rang up from Basford. He was transvestite and was having problems with his make-up. Margaret used to give make-up lessons to quite a few transvestites, so I said "if you can get here by 9.30, we'll talk you through it". He turned up this six foot fellow with a beard and make-up on top and a dress and he'd pedalled from Basford. His problem was that people laughed at him. The poor guy hadn't a clue. He could have passed in the circus as a clown, it was that bad.

On May 15th 1980, Switchboard began operating 3 nights per week. Shortly afterwards it put into operation its own training programme. During 1980, 1355 calls were taken.

From 1980 onwards, Switchboard had a coordinator who was independent of CHE and Friend. The first Switchboard coordinator was John Clarkson. In the mid 1960s John was involved as a gay teenager in one of the last trials under pre-1967 legislation.

Broadcaster Ray Gosling was then a local journalist and on one occasion he visited CHE to relate how he had to report on the court case. Amongst other things, he told how bed sheets were held up for the court to inspect. John was imprisoned for his “offence”.

One of John’s first activities as Coordinator was to organise that year’s conference for the National Association of Gay Switchboards, which was being held in Nottingham.

For the first few years, several women helped to staff the phone line, but by 1980 Switchboard had become an all male organisation. Some explanation for this can be put down to two things: -

1. The local CHE group was originally Nottingham CHE, but eventually split into three separate groups: Mansfield, Derby and Nottingham. By coincidence most of the women involved lived in the Derby or Mansfield areas and the split, in addition to the problems of travelling to Nottingham, helped divorce them from what was going on in Nottingham.

2. Lesbian Line, a telephone line set up for women and staffed by women was established in the late 1970s and understandably many women gave this their first priority.

It must also be admitted that CHE was a male dominated organisation and sexist attitudes were often displayed by some of the men. To encourage women back into an all male organisation is a difficult process and took many years to accomplish.

By the early 1980s many of the organisations with which we had had liaison felt comfortable with referring some of their callers to us.

Some of the organisations that have referred callers to us include: The Samaritans; The Probation Service; Citizens’ Advice Bureau; the City Information Service; Nottingham Counselling Centre; Social Service Departments and Marjorie Proops.
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For many, the highlight of 1981 was the opening of Part II club. The name originates in the fact that it took over the building previously occupied by La Chic club. The new club was large, with three bars, dance floor, restaurant and “quiet” area and was fitted out to a high standard.

Unlike previous Nottingham clubs, Part II had a very visible front man in the entertaining form of Ross Smith. For its first two years a good argument could be made for saying that Part II was the best gay club in the UK.

Switchboard’s involvement with Part II was a two way process. They understood that the information that we gave out would inevitably lead many of our callers to visit the club. Mutual self interest was therefore served by them helping us to maintain our service, though this notion was not recognised by some other venues.

Much of Switchboard’s and CHE’s income came from the sale of Gay News. Part II agreed to take 150 copies of Gay News from us and give us all the profit from their sale. All we had to do was dump the papers on reception desk and let the club do the rest.

One of the continuing issues which prompt people to call us is that of “coming out”. This can mean coming out to yourself and acknowledging that you are lesbian or gay.

I remember saying to my parents “What’s homosexuality?” and they said “It’s that disease where you get red blotches on your face”, so I knew I was going to get nowhere there.

I don’t know whether it was getting married that triggered my beginning to come out ... I was aware that I was deeply attached to another woman. The marriage broke up. I had internalised a great deal of homophobia and stereotypes about what gay and lesbian people were like. I started to fall in love with another woman and I was able to act upon it for the first time. I felt this was absolutely something wonderful; I remember thinking “My God! This is what they write poetry about!”

I remember someone saying something about lesbians when I was in the Sixth Form and thinking “I think that’s me”.

It can also mean coming out to your friends, family and colleagues and dealing with the responses which follow.

I became aware of my sexuality quite late on. I suppose what spurred it on was being pig-sick of men! Thinking “Right, there’s got to be something better out there ... and there was.” Coming out, for me was just telling everybody how deeply in love I was. My parents, being the good middle class parents that they are, were terribly understanding, though my mother said “Oh, you won’t turn out like that Vanessa Redgrave, will you?”

Now I am totally out - shove it in everyone’s face ... you like it or lump it! And bloody hell, everybody’s nice about it, everybody understands, it’s awful! I want a really nasty bastard that I can talk to!

Not everyone’s experience of coming out was so easy or positive.

Until about four years ago I was quite closeted. I had three different lives; my life at work, my life at home with Roy and I had my parents. The three never met. My mother never met Roy and I think it was partly of my making. I couldn’t cope with her meeting.

My son took a lot of bullying, a lot of flak from other kids. Some of the children were very cruel in ways that they felt they could be cruel directly to my son rather than to me.

The police were shocked when they heard that we were being harassed by neighbours. They called in the young man next door and his girl friend and threatened them that if they didn’t modify their ways, they would be done for a breach of the peace.

Every now and then something will happen and I’ll think “It’s not actually as cosy as I think it is”. Some people I know in the States, they’d invited me over for Thanksgiving and I asked if Alison could come too. Their response was just so awful. They just didn’t know how to handle it and they made completely crass comments about “only if we behaved in an appropriate manner in front of the children”. I was amazed that these were educated people and they couldn’t handle it, so we didn’t go.

Eventually, for some people things settle into place

I got to the point of thinking “Well, I might be” to “Actually I am” to “What am I going to do about it?” I remember after saying to this woman “Yes, I am a lesbian” “It feels like I’ve put on a really comfortable jacket, it fits and it feels really comfy and feels like I’ve had it for years.” There’s that sense “Yes, that’s it, that’s who I am”.

In 1981, the incremental steps taken to improve the service included establishing monthly General Meetings. These combined business with on-going training.

The on-going training usually involved a speaker who would lead a discussion on a topic relating to one of the types of calls which we dealt with. For several years these meetings took place at the Salutation Inn. In 1981 the number of calls taken had risen to 1450.

People who have spoken to Switchboard at General Meetings include: Inspector Henstock (Policing and the L&G Community); David Hughes (CVS Director); Ross Smith - Peterhouse Trust; John Heppell MP; Childline; The Chameleon Group (TV/TS); The Macedon Trust; FAME (Family Mediation service); Second Base (Housing); Friend; Relate; Lesbian & Gay Christian Movement; Samaritans; Nottingham Law Centre; Sgt. Watterson (Police Community Affairs Dept.); Welfair; Greg Woods (reader in L&G studies at Trent University); Ben Benson - Equal Opportunities Unit; Women's Aid; Pink Chalk (L&G in Education); The Health Shop; Paul Head (Gender Dysphoria) Kenric; Base 51; The GAI Project; Shakti (Asian L&G Group); Mushroom Bookshop; The AIDS Information project; The Bisexual Group; GLYP (G&L Youth group); Bernard Rattigan (Health Authority Psychotherapist); The STD Clinic; Barry Ward - Solicitor; Quantum Job Club; Ike Cowen; Lesbian Line; Cruse; Inspector Dave Wakelin (Crime & Disorder Act/Victim Reparation); Gay Bikers; The Outhouse Project; Tres Roche (Nottingham Counselling Service); Trans-Action; Breakout; Hyking Dykes; Age Concern; Nottingham Register Office; Refugee Gay Men's Forum; Childline ... and many others.

CHE and GLF laid the foundations, the infrastructure of a gay movement. They were like little beacons that lit up a dark map.

SWITCHBOARD 1982 –1990

In 1982 Switchboard introduced free accommodation files. The files could be used by people to publicise a room, flat or house they wished to rent or by those seeking lesbian and gay friendly accommodation.

The major change which took place in 1982 was in the role of CHE and the implications this had for Switchboard.

CHE decided to become a campaigning only organisation. The decision weakened it locally and nationally. Most members immediately jumped ship and in Nottingham they headed for NOGSOG, an inelegant acronym which stood for Nottingham Gay Social Group. NOGSOG was set up to take over the social role of CHE and did so successfully for several years.

The effect on Switchboard was that it was now totally independent of CHE and had to become self-financing. A benefit at Part II and profits from sales of Gay News helped, but it soon became clear that if other sources of funding were not found, there would be a financial crisis within a year.

Towards the end of 1982 the Evening Post inexplicably allowed us to advertise once more. Though this brought our financial crisis a little nearer, we felt compelled to use the Post not only because it brought in more calls, but for “political” reasons. In 1982 we had 1405 calls - a slight fall compared to the previous year. In 1983 the calls rose to 1661.



The Hearty Goodfellow on Maid Marian Way

The basement bar was the main gay bar from the late 1970s to the early 1980s



Albion House Canal Street

home of La Chic club (1973-77) and Part II club (1981-85)



Ocean (formerly MGM and the Astoria)

Hosted popular disco on 1st Monday of month since 1984

The CHE Social Group had acted as a support group for many people who had come out through Switchboard. NOGSOG took over this role. As the group met in one of the CVS rooms, people who phoned Switchboard could be told that if they wanted to call in and talk to someone from Switchboard, they could afterwards drop in on the Social Group. NOGSOG would usually end up in a pub, so people new to the gay scene could be taken along in a small group, rather than having to brave the unknown alone.

Many people who phoned said "you're the first gay man I've ever spoken to". If they called in for a chat and you saw them two or three months later, you could often see how people's lives had been transformed by a single phone call.

Though Chimaera, the newsletter, had died with CHE's metamorphosis, NOGSOG produced its own newsletter, which lacked Chimaera's serious articles but retained its amusing side, particularly in terms of collecting silly jokes from a variety of sources.

From the Dyslexia Songbook, we have "I've got you under my sink", "Tainted Vole" and "Just a snog at Twilight".

From the Guardian Printer's Songbook, we have "Bless this Mouse", "People will say we're in Hove" and "Doris Godunov"

Late entries at the ball include: -

Mr and Mrs Styrene and their pregnant daughter Expanded Polly Mrs and Mrs It (from Australia) and their English Grandmother Pommie Gran.

The world's largest hernia weighs 180 lbs and is in the care of the National Truss.

A gay institution suffered literal burn-out in 1982 when a disgruntled punter set fire to the Pavilion Club. The club was insured, but those running the club decided not to rebuild. The insurance money was used instead to set up the Pavilion Trust.

The aims of the Pavilion Trust were to support gay individuals and organisations in Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Leicestershire. In later years Switchboard benefited from donations from the Trust on several occasions.

In 1983 we gained further independence by installing our own phone line rather than using the Nottingham CVS number. We also leapt into the forefront of high technology by buying an answerphone. The money for these came from a grant of £330 from Notts County Council - the first grant we had from them.

We were kept in the black by another grant from Karnival, a donation from NOGSOG and the introduction of FRONGS. FRONGS stands for Friends Of Nottingham Gay Switchboard. They are a small group of people who commit themselves to pay us a monthly donation by standing order. It has been difficult to find FRONGS and to keep them, but some of them have been donating for over 10 years.

The on-going saga later to emerge as the OutHouse Project was touched on in the Nottingham Evening Post.

As part of Nottingham's Equal Opportunities Programme, gays could soon have their own council-supported day centre.

By this time, the Hearty Good Fellow had fizzled out as the main gay pub. Its very successful replacement was Gatsby's, behind the Palais. For several years it was often so packed that movement was difficult, breathing was an effort and hearing someone near to you was impossible - so people loved it.

The Bradley family ran a good pub, but as far as Switchboard was concerned, the efforts we made to get them to support us were always turned down. No sales of Gay News here; no benefits; no notices on the wall detailing what Switchboard did. We were told that they had their heterosexual lunchtime customers to consider.

In 1984 a new phenomenon hit Nottingham. The big once-a-month one-nighter. The first Monday of every month was "The Astoria".

In the 1960s there was a relatively sedate dance hall called the Sherwood Rooms on Collin Street at the bottom of Maid Marian Way. In the 1980s this had become the Astoria (and was later to transmogrify into MGM and then Ocean). The Astoria was a very large heterosexual disco club and they had been prevailed upon to use one of their off nights for the poofers. It was a great success.

Part of the success was due to the music provided by Peter Martine, who later called his nights "Revolution". Peter is fondly known as the "Sleezemeister". Many years ago a TV programme featured "Clarence the cross-eyed lion". Peter Martine is also fondly known as Clarence.



The New Foresters,
St. Ann's Street. A lesbian
bar since the 1950s.



Admiral Duncan (now @D2)
Lower Parliament Street.
Gay bar since late 1980s



Central, formerly Gatsbys.
Huntingdon Street.
Gay bar since 1983.



The Lord Roberts,
Broad Street.
Mixed gay-friendly bar.



Fairy Towers
(The Victoria Centre Flats)

From time to time we get calls from people whose sexual-ity is causing them trouble at work. Unless your employer has an equal opportunities policy which includes sexuality, there is often not a lot that can be done.

I went to work for the Church of England in two different par-ishes and was thinking about going forward for ordination, so the lesbian question was tightly locked away, far too scary to look at and if I didn't do anything about it, it was going to disappear. I moved to Nottingham, spent two years in Nottingham suppos-edly training to be ordained, but once I got here I thought "this issue is not going to go away and you need to look at it and ad-dress it".

It (coming out) had huge consequences. I decided to talk to the vicar. I completely misread this man. He completely freaked when I told him, didn't handle it, told the Bishop, told my college. I was hauled up in front of the Bishop for the worst hour of my life. The Bishop would not ordain me and basically, in the end I had to leave and that was the end of my career in the Church.

A precedent was set in 1981 in the case of John Saunders. When his employer found out that he was gay, he was sacked. The case was taken to an Employment Appeals Tribunal.

The employer said that because he was gay, John Saunders was a danger to children. At the tribunal it was stated that this proposition was not necessarily scientifically sound, but because it was a commonly held view it was sufficient to allow them to uphold the dismissal.

Public prejudice was considered justification for sacking someone. This remained true until 2003.

The precarious nature of employment for many lesbians and gay men was emphasised in 1984 by a policy decision of the Tory led Rugby Council.

“In future any homosexuals will not be employed by the Council. They may be the best applicant, but they will not get the job”. In attempting to justify the move, a councillor said “We would not employ a known rapist in the typing pool”.

Another acronym emerged in 1984. GLYP stood for Gay and Lesbian Young People. It was a social group intended for those under the age of 26 and continued functioning until 1999. It was founded by Ben Clarke with some help from Switchboard.

1985 was a year of many changes. On an administrative level Switchboard started operating on Fridays, making it 4 nights per week. 1948 calls were taken. John Clarkson started work in Bristol and David Edgley took over as Co-ordinator.

We had become aware of AIDS in the early 1980s and in 1985 Switchboard was involved in helping Nottingham AIDS Information Project with its training programme. Ignorance and misinformation led many people to call us in fear. They thought that they must have AIDS because they had one of the many everyday symptoms linked with AIDS. Young people on the verge of coming out sometimes thought that AIDS spontaneously generated if you were gay. Hysterical newspapers implied if you were gay you had, or would get, AIDS and that others could catch it from being close to you. Information on AIDS and safer sex has been an important part of our work since that time.

The long-threatened financial crisis finally arrived. Gay News ceased publication, to be succeeded by Gay News. The Gay News title had been sold and the new version was an amateurish travesty which no one wanted to buy. We attempted to sell alternatives like “Him”, but to little effect. Overnight half our income had been wiped out.

In late Spring, Nottingham Switchboard hosted the National Association of Gay Switchboards’ Conference. It included a social get-together at Part II. The next day Part II Club closed down, which left a hole in the Nottingham social scene and added to our fundraising problems. We managed to stay solvent by sponsored walks, a sponsored “slim” and through a donation from the Pavilion Trust in addition to further donations from NOGSOG, Karnival and FRONGS.

Other venues half-heartedly tried to fill the Part II gap. The Casablanca was a tiny club on Greyhound Street and soon became known as the Khazi. A club in the Lace Market turned gay for a few months as did the Catacombs on Byard Lane, but both failed to catch on.

The outcome of this was that many Nottingham people realised that for the first time in their experience the gay scene was better in other cities. The traffic between Leicester and Nottingham and Birmingham and Nottingham started to go in the opposite direction.

After a year, the Bradley family stepped in by opening a club on St. James’ Street. It went through several name changes, getting marginally less tacky on each transformation. Club 69 L’Amour Nero’s.



HOW TO ENSURE THAT YOUR NEW LESBIAN/GAY VENUE IS A FAILURE

- ◆ don't publicise it - we are such *sensitive* people that ESP will suffice
- ◆ show by your pricing that lesbian and gay drinks are more expensive than straight drinks
- ◆ avoid the word lesbian and gay in your publicity, so your regular customers won't be put off
- ◆ use an off night at a 3rd rate straight venue
- ◆ hold it once a fortnight or on the third Wednesday of the month, so people lose track and turn up when you are closed
- ◆ continue to employ staff who are unfriendly
- ◆ deliberately hold your monthly event on an evening which clashes with another well established venue
- ◆ give nothing back to the Lesbian & Gay Community - or hold fundraising benefits and keep the money yourself (Switchboard knows who you are!)

The City Council elections in 1983 saw Richard McCance elected. Richard was formerly a member of CHE, GLF and Switchboard and was then involved with the Labour Campaign for Gay Rights. He did not hide his sexuality; his election stance was that of an "out" gay man.

The new Labour controlled Council had a majority of one, which gave Richard some leverage on issues about which he felt strongly.

In 1985 the Council set up lesbian and gay Equal Opportunities sub-committees equivalent to those for ethnic minorities. Two part-time workers, one lesbian (Jo Fraser) and one gay man (Ben Benson), were taken on at the Equal Opportunities unit. The Tories weighed in with comments about wasting rate-payers' money while failing to acknowledge that lesbians and gay men paid rates too.

The Evening Post printed many letters on the subject. On previous occasions we had found that writing a truly obnoxious anti-gay letter ourselves not only allowed us to make a reasoned reply, but also prompted others to do the same.

Sometimes we used made up names or anagrams, so that when we replied to our own letters we didn't give the game away. One Switchboard member, Tim Barnsley wrote using the name "Mary Bintles". Someone else wrote as "Martin B. Foaley", an anagram of T. Bailey Forman, the company which owned the Evening Post.

There was once again discussion about opening a lesbian and gay centre as soon as possible.

At the same time as becoming a Councillor, Richard also started a local lesbian and gay freesheet first called "Gay Nottingham", then "Metrogay" and finally "Outright". At first just a double-sided A4 sheet, it eventually expanded to 16 pages with a circulation of 5000.

I thought "Maybe I could sell some advertising". I went round to Mushroom Bookshop and I sold my first ad for £2. It was wonderful, it felt great.

After the move in Rugby to stop employing homosexuals, Richard was involved in a protest and was charged with wilful obstruction. His trial was halted when the prosecution heard microphone feedback and accused a woman in the court of attempting to make a tape recording of the proceedings. The woman was Richard's mother. The noise was from Richard's mother's hearing aid. Richard was found not guilty of the charges.

Several years later, Richard became Nottingham's only "living saint" when he was canonised by the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence as St. Richard of the Megabyte-Ram.

In December 1986 some members of GLYP joined others to protest outside the home of Staffordshire Tory Councillor Bill Brownhill. The Councillor had said that all gays should be gassed. 12 of the protestors were arrested and locked up over Christmas, but all charges were later dropped. Sometime later, one of the people arrested received compensation of £30,000 for the way she was treated by the police.

Switchboard had a second County Council grant in 1986 and a small grant from the City Council. The latter allowed us to start a resource library. Currently the library has nearly 200 books on areas such as counselling, history, law, lifestyle, religion, sociology, culture as well as some fiction and biographies.

1986's other innovation was the installing of a second phone line. This let us take long, complicated phone calls without worrying that other people might be prevented from getting through. It also helped increase calls to 2443 for the year.

At this time we were getting some money from selling Gay Times. Gay News was a fortnightly newspaper. Gay Times is a glossy monthly magazine, very professionally produced and often with excellent articles as well as a comprehensive Gay Guide section. We negotiated with Mushroom Bookshop to obtain our Gay Times supplies jointly so that the total number we bought between us took us into a higher discount rate and increased the profit from sales of the magazine.

Minutes of meetings in 1986 show that we received a letter from Rev. A. Beeby, who claimed he had cured someone of AIDS. The minutes also show another small step towards the elusive lesbian and gay centre. Switchboard had affiliated to what was called the Nottingham Lesbian and Gay People's Centre Cooperative Society, which later saved a lot of ink by changing its name to the OutHouse Project.

1987 was a two steps forward, one step backwards year. We started operating on Tuesday nights, bringing us to 5 nights per week. The Gay Bikers, a nationwide group, had a secretary who lived in Nottingham. The group asked to use us as their mailing address in exchange for a yearly donation.

On the other hand, we were involved in a lesbian and gay exhibition in the front window of Angel Row library. The exhibition was repeatedly vandalised, though volunteers regularly replaced damaged exhibits.

The local elections brought the Tories back into power. The lesbian and gay sub-committees were immediately closed down, the Equal Opportunities Unit was reorganised and the lesbian and gay workers had to work out their notice.

When the balance of power changed, virtually everything disappeared because there was no bedrock to hold it. We hadn't won the arguments in the streets. Contrast it with Leicester, where the three main parties had got together and won the arguments about gay rights with the electorate a lot more than we managed to do in Nottingham.

The Salutation Inn made it clear that we were no longer welcome there for our monthly General Meetings. This soon worked to our advantage when we moved to the Admiral Duncan, which was then tentatively moving towards being a gay bar. The Duncan eventually started to hold raffles and events for us - the first in 1988 and five huge benefits over the 1990s (unlike De Luxe, where a benefit was held but the money never reached us).



A Switchboard's lot IS a happy one!

(Some happy words from the Switchboard Fairy)

When The Switchboard's funds are growing ever weaker (ever weaker)
And the bailiffs start to bang upon the door,
(pon the door)
When the prospects start out bleak and then turn bleaker
(then turn bleaker)
'Tis the **Duncan** that we turn to yet once more.
(yet once more)

This Establishment is notably **Inn**-spiring,
(bly inspiring)
And its **Pub**-lic spirit seems to know no bounds.
(know no bounds)
So again it saves us from perhaps expiring
(haps expiring)
By collecting many pence and many pounds.
(many pounds)

When a local hard up helpline needs a backer
(needs a backer),
And from Gatsbys all we get is sweet F.A.
(sweet F.A.)
It's the **Admira(b)l(e) Duncan** that's the cracker,
(that's the cracker)
Though De Luxe will *take* your money, then not pay.
(then not pay)

Voluntary organisations are always in need of “the good idea”. Switchboard volunteer Dave Pitt had several “good ideas”. He was responsible for negotiating with Mushroom over Gay Times sales. He suggested leaving collection boxes in various venues; this has regularly brought us about £100 a year. He also picked up and followed through the idea of trying to get free “adverts” on ITV.

In 1987 we were given a week’s worth of Public Service Announcements on Central TV. We were told that the PSAs would go out sometime after 10 pm, but before midnight and we were required to have the phones staffed, rather than rely on answerphone messages.

There was no difficulty in raising volunteers for a post 10 pm shift, but everyone was surprised by the effect of the PSAs. Monday night was normal until 10 pm. Then calls stopped. The PSA was broadcast at 10.30 pm and immediately both phones started to ring. As soon as the phones were put down after a call was taken, they rang again. This continued for 90 minutes before there was a pause between calls. Calls carried on more slowly until 2 am.

This was repeated the following night, except that the hangover of calls from the previous night started as soon as we began operating at 7 pm.

The effect of the PSAs continued for over six months - well into the following year. People wrote down the number and kept it for a long time before actually calling. This led to 1987 and 1988 being the years in which we had the greatest number of callers: 3095 and 2763 respectively.

Winter 1987 saw three developments; two successes and one failure. While the general Lesbian and Gay Centre (first mooted in 1979) still looked a long way off, a Lesbian Centre was opened on October 16th within the Women’s Centre on Chaucer Street.

Even in 1987, the commercial gay scene was very youth orientated. If you didn’t like loud music or socialising based around the sale of alcoholic drinks in a smoky atmosphere then there wasn’t a lot for you. Some people tried to address this problem and answer the question “What happens to lesbians and gays when they reach their forties?”

Even at the age of 25 I can go to some of the places and feel very old!

After some publicity, the first meeting of a social group for the over 40s took place at Nottingham CVS on November 19th; about 14 people attended. Very few people turned up for the second meeting and the group closed. Clearly coffee and chat in the dowdy CVS Boardroom was not the answer. The issue still remained important and in the distant future Switchboard was to look at it again.

On November 12th the first issue of The Pink Paper appeared. This was the first national lesbian and gay freesheet. Since then, others such as Boyz, Axiom, APN, and Midland Zone have appeared. Yes, they are full of advertising, but unlike the free papers pushed through our letter boxes, the editorials, articles and letters often provide good reading before they reach the waste bin or the bottom of the budgie’s cage.

In the 1980s tabloid newspapers, particularly The Sun, had branded many Labour Councils as being “Loony Left”. In many cases the stories they carried were highly imaginative fiction.

One report mentioned that a London Labour Council had instructed its teachers to ban “Baa Baa Black Sheep” as being racist and to substitute “Baa Baa Green Sheep”. If you went into some of the schools in that borough, you might actually hear some of the infants reciting “Baa Baa Green Sheep”, but only AFTER it had been reported in the press. Unfortunately, some teachers read the tabloids and believe what they read, so they altered the nursery rhyme.

The Nottingham equivalent of this was “Gay Swimming on the Rates - Mothers Fear AIDS Risk”. There was no AIDS risk. Mothers did not fear it until newspapers told them to. A group of gay men had done what any group can do and gone to the Victoria Leisure Centre to book the small pool. They did this by paying for it, but to the tabloids this was “Gay Swimming on the Rates.”

The most vicious distortion was “Infants given Gay Pornography”. This story involved a most unpornographic book called “Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin”. Papers said that children as young as 5 and 6 were being encouraged into homosexual practices by reading the book. In fact **one** copy of the book was available in a Teachers’ Centre for use only by teachers. This fiction was used as an excuse to establish “Section 28” and has been repeated recently (in Nottingham Topper November 1999) now that there is the likelihood of Section 28 being repealed.

The possibility that Section 28 might pass into law led some people on Switchboard to campaign against it. Switchboard volunteer Richard Scholey wrote letters to many Peers to try to sway the vote. This precipitated a call to Switchboard from Lord Longford, who wanted clarification on some of the points in Richard’s letter.

The campaign failed and Section 28 became law in 1988. It is often described as the law which prevents promotion of homosexuality in schools. What Section 28 really says is: -

A) A Local Authority shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality.

B) A Local Authority shall not promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.

The bit which relates to schools is, in essence, saying to children who are lesbian or gay or whose parents are lesbian or gay “you are not in a real family, you are unacceptable, you are inferior”.

What it does in practice is make teachers fearful of counteracting homophobic bullying.

In 1989, Robert Nicholson was sacked by Birmingham Education Authority (citing Section 28) after discussing homosexuality in his lessons following the suicide of two former pupils who had problems with their sexuality. An Industrial Tribunal upheld his claim for unfair dismissal, but an Employment Appeals Tribunal reversed the decision on the basis that the Education Authority had acted reasonably.

Section 28 had both short and long term effects on Switchboard.

A fortnight after Section 28 became law, the Nottingham Trader banned our advertisements. Whether they believed the new law applied to them or whether they just wanted to show what an upright and moral free paper they were was never made clear.

A few years later this and other free papers devoted many columns to telephone sex lines of all shades and hues. They refused to re-instate our ads despite letters of support from Nottingham CVS, MIND, The Samaritans, Relate, Parents Anonymous, The Self Help Team, the Probation Service and Nottingham Counselling Centre.

In 1998 Switchboard advertised in several papers on a trial basis. In Newark we were told that we could advertise in the free paper, but its “sister” journal, for which you had to pay, refused our ads on the grounds that they were a “family newspaper”. Clearly “pretend” families don’t count.

Having a Tory Council immediately wiped out any Council grants - a situation which they have assured us would still happen if they were elected in the 21st Century.

Section 28 meant that when Labour were returned to power in Nottingham, it took many years for them to be confident that the work Switchboard does is not affected by Section 28.

I always class myself as a silent caller. I rang on a Tuesday night and put the phone down, I rang on a Wednesday night and put the phone down. I rang again on the Wednesday night and spoke. I came in and we sat and talked.

One of the highlights is speaking to someone who wants to volunteer to work on Switchboard whom you spoke to as a caller on the phone 5 or 6 years ago.

The rest of the 1980s were relatively free from major upheavals for Switchboard. Calls continued to come in at somewhere between 2000 and 2500 per year. In 1988 Peter Dufton took over as Coordinator. By 1989 the social group NOGSOG was in decline and could no longer offer us financial aid.

In 1990 Tony Barker became Coordinator. In the same year an article in Outright said

The OutHouse Project envisages setting up a Lesbian and Gay Centre in Nottingham in the very near future.



The Health Shop on Broad Street (and the Health Shop dustbins)

Provided safer sex advice and counselling for gay men from 1991

SWITCHBOARD 1991 - 2000

After 10 years without any women volunteers, 1991 was a breakthrough year when we were joined by Pat Parris and, soon after, by Liz Morrish - the following year Switchboard changed its name from "Gay" to "Lesbian and Gay".

Another important development in 1991 was the provision of counselling and safer sex advice for gay men at the Health Shop on Broad Street.

1992's big event was a second week of Community Service Announcements on Central TV. Again, they brought in hundreds of extra callers. Switchboard was one of very few lesbian and gay organisations to obtain two sets of these "free ads".

Minutes of meetings show that information about us was travelling far.

We have received a letter from Vladimir K from Tsentuki, Russia asking whether we could help him in his quest to loan some "gay core" videos. We wrote back saying that we couldn't help him, but enclosed a leaflet describing our service.

With the publication of international gay and lesbian guides (and later with the use of the internet), we have started to get occasional enquiries from all over the world. E-mails, letters and phone calls have been received from Amsterdam, the Czech Republic, Poland, USA, Canada, Germany, India, China and Australia.

1992 saw the folding of Nottingham Gay Social Group, but several Switchboard volunteers tried to initiate a new group for those in the process of coming out. This group was called "Icebreakers", but it too closed after about a year.

Though we are *Lesbian and Gay* Switchboard, we get calls from heterosexuals and these are often from concerned parents.

The phone rang and somebody hung up immediately. An hour later they rang up again and admitted that it was them who had called earlier. It turned out to be a father whose son had just attempted suicide and he felt he couldn't understand why. He had looked round his son's room and found our number and rang it. When he heard my voice saying "Nottingham Lesbian and Gay Switchboard" it all fell into place. We discussed the implications for a long time. What made me feel good was that I knew that if this lad had told his father, he wouldn't have got the response he expected ... his father was that understanding.

A mother phoned up and said that her daughter had just told her that she was a lesbian and she didn't know what to do. She thought she would phone Switchboard. My first thought was "Wow, you've phoned Switchboard I wish I had a mother like you!" She was a wonderful woman and we had a great chat and we were on the phone for ages. That young lesbian is really lucky to have a mother like that who is willing to go out of her way to learn about what it means and how she can help. She just loves her daughter so much.

Sometimes the callers are people who want to be parents.

A woman called who was wanting to have a baby and had gone through quite a lot of treatment, got pregnant and then miscarried. We had quite a lot to talk about because I'd gone through a similar experience.

Lesbian and gay fostering is controversial and the two “gay dads” who became fathers by surrogacy made headline news.

Now you can even be a gay daddy. Roy and I are thinking of having a couple of Koreans or a couple of Peruvians. We don't want Romanians, they're passé.

Sometimes lesbian and gay couples are considered to have “child substitutes”.

I go out to these monthly meetings with all these old women and they all talk about babies and grandchildren and they will turn to me and say “And how is Sammy your dog?”

The expectations of parents are not always in line with those of their children.

I was introduced to these girls, and their brothers were there. I was thinking “Oh, my God! The brother is gorgeous!” I never fancied the girls. I always had an excuse “Oh, no she's not educated enough,” “She doesn't have a British passport”, or “She will not look after my parents.”

The reactions of parents are not always what you would expect

My dad said “You know, I can't really blame you. Men have so little to offer women.”

..... or what you would hope for.

For my partner, it was a lot more difficult, a lot more messy and quite disturbing. Her mother would phone in the middle of the night and call us both child molesters. She became quite ill with the stress of it. She hasn't spoken to her brother for 8 years.

Switchboard decision making has always been a collective process with the final word being that of those attending the general meetings, though this may have to change when we achieve charitable status.

Throughout the 1980s the administrative work was picked up by the Management Group, which consisted of anyone who volunteered to join it. By the 1990s the amount of extra work was increasing and the Management Group felt overburdened.

In 1993 a new structure was put into effect. It involved the setting up of five Working Groups, one each for Administration, Fundraising, Training, Publicity and Information. In 1999 a Standards Working Group was added to the others. All Switchboard volunteers had to agree to join at least one Working Group. The Working Groups are often given freedom to develop ideas on their own within parameters laid down by the general meetings. A new constitution was drawn out which took account of the Working Groups.

Negative attitudes of certain politicians were given an airing in March 1993 when the OutHouse received an unsigned letter from a Councillor saying “You lot should be put down”.

This led to a march which passed through Hockley to the Council House carrying a black-draped coffin. On the coffin was the inscription

Here lay the remains of Nottingham City Council's Equal Opportunities Policy.

In the 1990s many people felt that attitudes towards gays and lesbians were changing for the better. One of the reasons for this was the number of people “coming out”.

This is a virtuous circle. The more people who come out, the more the general public sees through the myths and stereotypes, though much of the press do their best to maintain them. The more people come out, the more the average heterosexual has to deal with lesbians and gays in everyday life rather than as a theoretical “them”. The more people come out, the more positive role models there are for young lesbians and gays and this leads to more people coming out.

There is much more of a support system out there for people, if only because there are things now that you can read. Info in the library, info on the internet, gay pop stars, gay people in The Archers! 25 years ago W. H. Smith refused to stock Gay News, now there’s a whole line of glossy magazines with a gay theme, so things have changed.

It can be argued that Section 28 had the opposite effect to that intended. For several years gays and lesbians saw gradual progress in how they were treated and suddenly politicians seemed to want to turn back the clock.

AFTER Section 28, campaigning organisations such as Stonewall and Outrage took off. AFTER Section 28 there is far more talk about homosexuality than before. AFTER Section 28, there is a greater determination both to hang on to what has been achieved and to eliminate those inequalities which should form no part of a society which puts any store by fairness and the dignity of its citizens.



FILL A PAGE WITH POOFS AND DYKES

Alexander the Great, Richard the Lionheart, Edward II, James I, Frederick the Great, Queen Anne, Michaelangelo, Caravaggio, Leonardo da Vinci, Christopher Marlowe, Francis Bacon, Lord Kitchener, Florence Nightingale, Madame de Staehl, Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Oscar Wilde, Lawrence of Arabia, Dag Hammarsjold, Alan Turing, Proust, Colette, George Michael, Freddie Mercury, Elton John, Stephen Gateley, Tracey Chapman, K.D. Laing, Will Young, Janis Ian, Joan Armatrading, Neil Tennant, Little Richard, Holly Johnson, Peter Tchaikovsky, Benjamin Britten, Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland, Stephen Sondheim, Samuel Barber, Dame Ethel Smyth, Sviatoslav Richter, Peter Pears, Vladimir Horowitz, Dimitri Mitropoulos, Nigel Hawthorne, Dale Winton, Julie Goodyear, Pam St. Clements, Roy Barraclough, Richard Wilson, Matthew Kelly, Bessie Smith, Billy Strayhorn, Rudolf Nureyev, Serge Diaghilev, Vassily Nijinsky, Wayne Sleep, Lionel Bart, Lorenz Hart, Cole Porter, Noel Coward, Liberace, Ivor Novello, Nancy Spain, A.E. Housman, Lord Byron, Herman Melville, Tennessee Williams, Edward Carpenter, Gertrude Stein, Somerset Maugham, Christopher Isherwood, W.H.Auden, Daphne du Maurier, Iris Murdoch, Jean Cocteau, Lytton Strachey, Vita Sackville-West, Radclyffe Hall, Una Troubridge, E. M. Forster, J.M. Keynes, Virginia Woolf, Yukio Mishima, Ludwig Wittgenstein, James Baldwin, Janette Winterson, Patricia Cornwell, Kate Millett, Julie Burchill, Michael Carson, Joe Orton, Alan Hollinghurst, Rita-Mae Brown, Clive Barker, Armistead Maupin, Federico Garcia Lorca, Walt Whitman, Andy Warhol, David Hockney, Rainer Fassbinder, Derek Jarman, Pier-Paolo Pasolini, John Schlesinger, Ishmael Merchant, Luigi Visconti, Serge Eisenstein, Gianni Versace, Jean-Paul Gaultier, Yves St. Laurent, Coco Chanel, Rock Hudson, Tab Hunter, Montgomery Clift, Danny Kaye, Raymond Burr, J. Edgar Hoover, Charles Laughton, Laurence Olivier, Dirk Bogarde, John Gielgud, Michael Barrymore, Frankie Howerd, Kenneth Williams, Julian Clary, Graham Norton, Ian McKellan, Ellen de Generes, Stephen Fry, Sandi Toksvig, Miriam Margolyes, Simon Callow, Tallulah Bankhead, Matthew Parris, Justin Fashanu, Greg Louganis, John Curry, Maria Bueno, Billie-Jean King, Virginia Wade, Rosemarie Casals, Martina Navratilova, Conchita Martinez, Amelie Mauresmo, Jana Novotna, Rabbi Lionel Blue, Lord Montague, Lord Ali, Michael Cashman MEP, Chris Smith MP, Nick Brown MP, Angela Eagle MP, Simon Hughes MP, Stephen Twigg MP, Ben Bradshaw MP, Alan Duncan MP, Michael Portillo MP.

In 1994 the value of the service we provide was recognised by grants from Nottingham Health Authority and Notts County Council. We have had grants from the Health Authority every year since then and grants from both the City and County Councils in most subsequent years. A representative of Nottingham Health Authority has said that we “provide amazing value for money” and “easily exceed all their criteria”.

1994 saw the launch, on July 11th, of the GAI Project at the Health Shop. This is a gay and bisexual men’s HIV prevention scheme. The GAI Project has assisted and worked with Switchboard on a regular basis. In 1994 Nero’s club closed, but in early 1995 its place was taken by Kitsch club - formerly known as the Casablanca.

For twenty years Switchboard shared a room, first with a variety of other voluntary groups on a Box and Cox basis and then with the CVS photocopiers. On November 1st 1995 we finally moved into our own room. This was a time saver, as previously we had to set out our equipment and files at the start of each evening and pack them away at the end. We could now also cover the walls with regularly used information and notices about imminent events.

Another development in 1995 was the writing of a Complaints Procedure which was incorporated into our Constitution.

At the very end of 1995 we were notified that a grant application to the Edward Carpenter Trust had been successful. The grant was for a computer and printer.

Up to 1995 our log sheets had spaces to monitor where callers had obtained our number as well as general details of the call taken and the category into which the call fits. In subsequent years our monitoring has become much more detailed. In 1996 we started monitoring where callers live and we now note calls which deal with homophobic crime, with mental health, with homelessness as well as the age, ethnic origin and marital status of callers.

2 old married men had found love. They rang up and asked me should they tell their wives, which is a question we can’t answer for them. A fortnight went past and then they rung me up and they’d told their wives and apparently their wives had been getting on even better than they had. They went on holidays, booked as married couples, but changed rooms when they got there.

To obtain grants we have to demonstrate that there is a need for our service and that we are effective in satisfying that need. Our annual report carries very detailed statistical analyses of calls which show that we deal with a very wide range of enquiries such as: -

Social facilities; “Coming out”; Accommodation; Safer Sex, HIV and AIDS; Transvestism; Trans-sexualism; Books and Publications; Homophobic crime; Religious issues; Legal matters and more.

Though we are NOTTINGHAM Lesbian and Gay Switchboard, we serve the City and the County (see page 83). Since Nottingham became a unitary authority, it has become more important to demonstrate that we get calls almost equally from the City and from the County.



QUEERS ARE HERE

Switchboard took calls from all these towns and districts in Nottinghamshire

Aspley, Basford, Bestwood, Bobbers Mill, Broxtowe, Bulwell, Carrington, Cinderhill, City Centre, Clifton, Dunkirk, Forest Fields, Hyson Green, Lenton, Mapperley Park, Nuthall, Radford, Silverdale, Sherwood, Sneinton, St. Anns, The Meadows, The Park, Top Valley, Wilford, Wollaton, Arnold, Beeston, Trowell, Carlton, Chilwell, Ruddington, Sandiacre, Stapleford, Watnall, West Bridgford, Bingham, Blidworth, Calverton, Cotgrave, Colston Basset, Eastwood, Edwinstowe, Hucknall, Huthwaite, Kirkby in Ashfield, Lambley, Lowdham, Mansfield, Mansfield Woodhouse, Newark, Netherfield, New Ollerton, Ollerton, Oxton, Papplewick, Rainworth, Ravenshead, Retford, Rufford, Rushcliffe, Southwell, Sutton in Ashfield, Worksop

..... and that was just in 2006

By the end of 1996 our printed files were now duplicated on a specially written computer database. The sceptical amongst us were soon convinced that the database generated information which was fuller and more accurate than that which could be quickly extracted from paper files.

One of our volunteers launched us on to the internet by constructing a Switchboard Website and the following year our statistics showed that some people were contacting us as a result of this.

On October 9th 1996, Switchboard joined with the GAI Project to start "Breakout", a weekly social group for gay and bisexual men over 26. This has run successfully from the Health Shop for the last 4 years.

Liaison with other groups and organisations as well as those bodies which give us grants has grown increasingly important. Liaison presents problems for an organisation which has no paid workers and whose volunteers work mainly in 9-to-5 jobs. Nevertheless, many people on Switchboard seem prepared to give up weekends, holiday time and yet more evenings to do this.

A very important example of this took place in 1997. Switchboard joined with the GAI Project and Lesbian Line for weekend sessions where they met with representatives of Nottinghamshire Police and discussed ways of tackling the acknowledged under reporting of homophobic crime. This was prior to the August launch of Operation Shield, which established a dedicated police phone line on which homophobic incidents could be reported.

Switchboard encourages callers to report incidents to the police, but acknowledges that some people will feel unable to do this. The main issue which prevents people from making a report is that the process will “out” them and for some people this is still a step too far.

In those cases, we can take anonymous reports of the crimes and send them on to the police. Though not ideal, anonymous reporting may help to build up a pattern of incidents and may sometimes provide the missing fragment of information which leads to an arrest.

Other examples of liaison include: -

- ◆ Providing training on LGB awareness and homophobic crime for Victim Support
- ◆ Providing training on discrimination and sexuality New College, Trent University and Portland College
- ◆ Providing training on changes in laws affecting LGB people
- ◆ Facilitating a module of Nottingham University’s Social Work MA course - for 8 years
- ◆ Taking part in the Notts Police LGBT Consultation Group
- ◆ Taking part in the Nottingham City LGBT Forum
- ◆ Taking part in the North Notts LGB Development Group
- ◆ Giving talks on the work of Switchboard to BASE 51, to Nottingham and Trent University LGBT Student groups, Breakout, Relate, Age Concern, Rushcliffe CVS,
- ◆ Providing displays/exhibitions at Central Library, Chase Community Centre (St. Anns), The Council House, Nottingham Voluntary Action Centre, Portland College, The Holocaust Centre and County Hall
- ◆ Assisting in the production of QB free sheet
- ◆ Participating with many others in Pink Lace and, later, Pride Nottingham’s LGBT Festivals

On Saturday September 13th 1997, Broad Street in Nottingham was closed to traffic so that it could serve as a venue for the first local lesbian and gay festival, Pink Lace.

Nottingham’s lesbian and gay groups and organisations had stalls at the Hockley end of Broad Street while singers and dancers performed on a stage set up in front of Broadway Cinema. The weather was often overcast, but the mood was sunny. Switchboard shared a stall with Lesbian Line.

We had anticipated that Pink Lace might be a target for an extreme right-wing group or the odd yob or two. It was a pleasure to be proved wrong. After the success of 1997, Pink Lace expanded in subsequent years and moved to the grounds of Nottingham Castle.



In 1998, the local magazine Outright closed down. People from the GAI Project and Switchboard joined together to produce QB, a folded A3 newsheet, which goes part of the way to fill the gap which was left.

Another incremental step towards providing a more professional service took place when, in 1998, Switchboard affiliated to National Friend. National Friend was the organisation which sets standards for lesbian and gay telephone lines and to become a member you must meet the criteria which they lay down. Unfortunately National Friend closed in 2001.

In 1998, the OutHouse Project was awarded £228,000 by the National Lottery and the long drawn out saga of a Nottingham Lesbian and Gay Community Centre took a huge leap towards becoming a reality. Jackie Frith was appointed as a worker to oversee the project. Prior to the award, they had looked at the TGWU building on Mansfield Road and then another in Hockley, both of which were unsuitable.

On gaining the grant, OutHouse found suitable premises on Chapel Bar, had plans for alterations drawn up and were in serious negotiations about buying, when the owners did an about-turn and withdrew.

It was eventually late 1999 before OutHouse exchanged contracts on a building on Cranbrook Street. The site is on the edge of Hockley, which has been the area favoured for the centre for several years. Hockley seems to have turned into Nottingham's gay village; in 2000 most of the gay bars are in or adjacent to Hockley and the area is home to other lesbian and gay friendly places, including a couple of cafes and Broadway Cinema. At the time the OutHouse Centre hoped to open in about 2001 (but see page 81).



The Grand and Inspiring LGB Community Centre Saga Hokey Cokey

First it's the TG WU
But is it right for you?
Yes! No! Yes! No! Will we ever know?
We find a place in Hockley and with joy we shout,
"That's what it's all about. Oi!"

Oh! The dear old Outhouse!
Oh! The dear old Outhouse!
Oh! The dear old Outhouse!
They'll get there in the end! Oi!

The place in Hockley's pants,
We're led a merry dance.
Oh, no! Oh, no! Where shall we all go!
The place is Chapel Bar - of that there is no doubt.
Let's spread the news about. Oi!

Oh! The dear old Outhouse! Etc, etc.

Inform the kin and kith
That we've got Jackie Frith.
Yahoo! Yahoo! Got the lott'ry too!
We've sent off our ideas to an architect,
That should earn some respect. Oi!

Oh! The dear old Outhouse! Etc, etc.

They tear our contract up.
We've all been sold a pup.
Scream! Gnash! Scream! Gnash! Everything's gone crash!
So we'll return to Hockley and have one more try.
We won't eat humble pie. Oi!

Oh! The dear old Outhouse! Etc, etc.

This building does impress.
We've got the Council's "Yes".
Hooray! Hooray! Let us all be gay!
We'll have our lovely centre and we'll have it soon.
We're all over the moon! Oi!

Oh! The dear old Outhouse!
Oh! The dear old Outhouse!
Oh! The dear old Outhouse!
They got there in the end! Oi!

(Unfortunately, they didn't)

Many years ago people at Nottingham CVS had said that they hoped to move to a more modern building. “It’ll never happen”, people said. At the end of December 1998, Switchboard’s belongings were packed in crates. The MOVE really was happening. On the 4th of January 1999, we started operating in the modernised building called the Nottingham Voluntary Action Centre at 7, Mansfield Road.

Someone described the old building at 31a, as

Like a once favourite uncle who’d gone a bit senile and smelly.

It was formed by joining together several adjacent buildings and was on many split levels, with dark, damp nooks where a mad axe murderer could (but fortunately didn’t) lurk.

The new building was clean, bright, warm and decorated in a colour scheme which would give any passing chameleon a nervous breakdown.



The local social scene was also undergoing a lot of change. Gatsby’s had closed and the new management had renamed it “Central”. Jacey’s opened as Nottingham’s largest gay bar; the Lord Roberts, though “mixed” became increasingly popular and both have been very supportive towards Switchboard.

A major success of 1999 came when we received a National Lottery grant of £4550 for new computers, a new printer and various “peripherals”. We approached the new millennium suitably buoyed up and optimistic, but were soon reminded that change can have its negative side.

In 2000, Nottingham’s first proper gay club for several years opened as NG1 next door to the Admiral Duncan, but soon afterwards Mushroom Bookshop closed down after 25 years. When hesitant callers asked where they could buy Gay Times or pick up the free papers, we confidently directed them towards Mushroom. We could be sure that nervous newcomers would be put at ease by the lesbian and gay friendly staff.

The loss of Mushroom was sad, but Switchboard volunteers were shocked by the sudden death of Mike Raymond who had been with CHE and Switchboard almost from the start. It was strange to see Mike’s name on the log sheet for Friday night and to realise that shortly after going home he was to die of a brain haemorrhage. His funeral made no acknowledgement of his sexuality or his work for the gay community. Mike was also a humanist, but was given a Christian funeral. This highlights the particular need for lesbians and gay men to make a will and make clear their funeral arrangements. Mike did not do so and we will never know the choices he might have made.



Building on Cranbrook St. Bought by OutHouse for an LGB centre. Never opened. Sold in 2004 due to lack of funds.



The Mill, Woolpack Lane a gay bar from the mid 1990s. Closed 2002.



Jacey's on Heathcote Street Nottingham's largest gay bar. Renamed "Ice". Melted 2002.



NG1, Lower Parliament Street. Gay Club opened in 2000.

SOME RECENT PROJECTS

A presence on the internet is vital for any organisations these days. Originally we allowed our website to be written by a voluntary organisation whose purpose was to organise websites for other voluntary organisations. After they repeatedly failed to respond to requests to update our site, we established our own website. It's cheap and cheerful, but is accurate and regularly updated. We have also set up a separate website to deal with our History Project. In recent years the number of telephone calls we get has fallen by about 30%, but this has almost entirely been matched by an increase in e-mails.

We believe that many in rural areas may be far less aware of our service than those in cities and larger towns. A Karnival grant allowed us to advertise ourselves in some of the smaller local towns. Further grants from the County Council and the Allen Lane Foundation continued this process.

Community Accounting Plus, who examine our accounts, have advised us to apply for charitable status and we hope to do so as soon as possible. We know we qualify for charitable status, but the problem is one of finding the time to go through all the necessary procedures.

When people are asked "how much does its cost to run the whole service: phonenumber (which reaches about 2000 people a year); training; QB; liaison and community involvement - including rent, advertising, phone, training, postage, equipment, catering, expenses ...?" they are usually surprised by the answer. About £6000 for our basic costs. The low cost reflects the fact that we rely on 25 well-qualified but unpaid volunteers. The time worked is far more than the 15 hours of the helpline; we have calculated that, if paid, staff costs would be between £50,000 and £60,000 per year.

Looking at the future in a more general sense, most lesbians and gay men, while aware of the huge amount of discrimination they still face, seem to feel that things are changing for the better.

I'll listen to the Today programme and hear someone spouting all this stuff when people talk about morality. I get so angry and upset. I think "how dare you say that I am not a moral person".

It'll get better when the next generation comes through, because they will be the ones who will have been out for all their sexually active lives. They won't want to be forced back into any closet. We're the ones that have probably got to put the legal position into place and they'll be the ones who actually make sure it works and is practised.

Generally things are improving, especially with the media talking more about lesbian and gay issues and more people telling their families and friends Then people start to realise they know someone who is lesbian or gay and it's a sort of domino effect.

Attitudes are changing though this is more apparent in the cities. I come from a rural part of Lincolnshire. It's a different story when you go back home - attitudes in some rural areas are 20 years behind that in the cities.

I was in Estonia in 1999 and they were having their first television discussion about homosexuality. There were no homosexual people in the debate, just psychologists, psychiatrists and it seemed very much the position we were in in the early 1970s. Yet in Tallin they had an upfront café bar on a busy side street. Countries that have had oppressive regimes and are starting with a clean sheet can make amazing progress in a short time because they've got all these other countries to learn from and they can take the good bits and add their own.

A wonderful series "Queer as Folk" which didn't hide anything, didn't make any compromises, it was very brave.

Politically it is very mixed. We have gay men in the cabinet; who could have imagined that 10 years ago. The law that you can't kick people off the military for being lesbian or gay has gone through relatively uncontroversially. We are getting rid of Section 28 slowly but surely, but there are still days when you feel kind of near to tears. The thing that had me dancing with rage recently was when those boys schools cancelled their trip to the Dome because the Gay Men's Choir was going to be singing. I thought "how can we be so revolting and repellent that we can't even sing in a massive great Dome where children might be within 50 yards of a gay person. Why is that such a big deal?"

The thing that made me happiest was the announcement in 1998 that, after going through a lot of hoops, a lesbian or gay relationship might be the basis for immigration. I thought, my God, that is the first time I have ever felt that my government was doing something for me, that suddenly I was included in what's normally referred to as "the general population" and I had human rights and entitlements. I remember just dissolving in tears on my own in the kitchen when I heard that, because I still do have a relationship with someone in the USA that's been going on for 10 years.

It is reassuring to note that the County Council's Grant Aid Newsletter (April 2000) states

Organisations need to be aware that discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation is now unacceptable in European Law as well as being contrary to the County Council's own Equal Opportunities policy.

In 2000, the County Council was in advance of those laws which have been enacted more recently.

POSTSCRIPT: 2006

Locally, as always, there have been ups and downs. To the disappointment and frustration of many, OutHouse's community centre never materialised. A Lottery grant of nearly £230,000 was found to be insufficient to complete the refurbishment of the building which had been bought on Cranbrook Street.

The building was sold, the money returned to the Lottery and the "profit" (from the rise in property values) was initially to be used to open a lesbian and gay coffee bar. Growing realisation that even this was unlikely, led to a decision to distribute the assets to "good LGB causes". OutHouse did, however, successfully revive the Nottingham Pride Festival in 2003 and organise a survey (called "I Count") on local LGBT experiences in areas such as homophobic crime, access to local services etc.

The closure of OutHouse also led to the folding of the short-lived publication "I'm Free", which combined QB with the OutHouse Newsletter. In 2005 Switchboard revived QB and, thanks to a grant from the Notts Community Foundation, its print run has doubled to 1000 and it is distributed to places like Broadway, several LGB social groups, the libraries as well as "the scene". It's also seen on the Switchboard's History Website

After over 20 years, the Pavilion Trust decided to wind up. Its remaining funds were equally divided between LGB services in Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire. Nottinghamshire's third was allocated to Switchboard.

Consultation with the LGB community by statutory organisations increased. This was welcomed, even if it may have been prompted by the need to abide by recent changes in the law. Switchboard has been involved with the Nottinghamshire LGBT Police Consultation group since 1999, but in 2003 it joined the City LGBT Consultation Group, though nothing yet from the County Council. The City was keen to foster civil ceremonies for same-sex partnerships; it also employed a lesbian and gay consultancy group to develop LGB issues.



SWITCHBOARD BY NUMBERS

We can summarise ourselves by the following number pyramid: -

0	number of paid workers
2	number of phone lines
5	nights a week
7	7 pm open
10	10 pm close
25	trained volunteers
31	years as a telephone helpline
200	number of contacts in first year
1800	number of contacts last year
7000	current cost/year of basic service in £
60,000	number of contacts since 1975
934 8485	our phone number



NOTTINGHAM



PRIDE

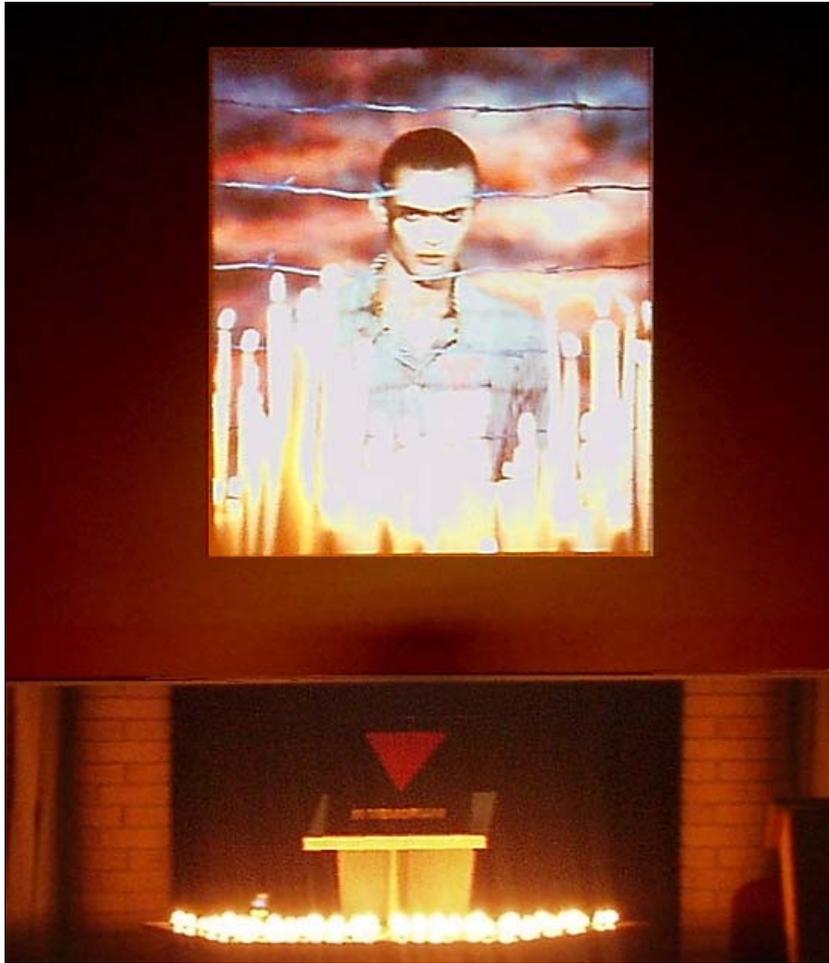


In 2003 Lesbian Line closed after providing information and support by and for lesbians for over 20 years. This left Switchboard as the only organisation of its type in Nottinghamshire. It's worth mentioning that there is no equivalent service in Lincolnshire and that similar services in Derbyshire and Leicestershire only operate 3 times and once a week respectively. This may explain why 25% of the people who contact us come from outside Nottinghamshire - 17% from adjacent counties and the rest from all over the UK.

The North Notts LGB Development Group grew out of a Home Office funded survey of LGB facilities in North Notts. The survey essentially concluded that there were no facilities and that "something must be done". The NNLGBDG was originally motivated by the CVSs in Bassetlaw, Newark, Mansfield and Ashfield and was soon joined by Switchboard and other interested organisations and individuals.

In recent times the group has: organised several training sessions on LGB issues; produced a Directory of LGB Services; helped set up several LGB youth groups; supported Gay Family Routes (which helps parents who have LGB children); provided a plaque (commemorating LGB victims) for the Holocaust Centre. It has also given tremendous support to Switchboard. In response, Switchboard has:

- ◆ Added "Nottinghamshire" to its name
- ◆ Acquired a "North Notts friendly" Mansfield phone no.
- ◆ Distributed large numbers of information packs across the area from Mansfield northwards
- ◆ Taken out regular paid advertising in North Notts, with major effects on the geographical profile of callers
- ◆ Help provide some of the training mentioned above
- ◆ Contributed the Nottinghamshire component of a local Directory of LGBT facilities and services



On September 22nd, a ceremony was held at the Holocaust Centre at Laxton. The purpose of the ceremony was to celebrate the donation of an LGB memorial plaque to the Holocaust centre and, at the same time, to remember the lesbians and gay men who died in the Holocaust. About 45 people assembled to hear readings from the book “The men with the pink triangle”, by Heinz Heger. The ceremony ended with candles being lit by everyone present while the names were read out of countries where homosexuality is still punished by imprisonment or the death penalty; it was a long list.

Switchboard’s involvement in training has increased in general. We have provided further training for the University of Nottingham and Victim Support. We have also responded to requests for training from Nottingham City Social Services, Nottingham Education Department, Rushcliffe CVS, Portland College and Nottingham CVS amongst others.

In 2005, Switchboard organised a two-part conference which looked at LGB issues within black and minority ethnic communities. This was the first event of its type to be held outside London. It was prompted by two things:

1. The many recent changes in the laws which affect LGB people.
2. The accumulation of statistics showing that over the past 7 years between 7 and 10% of people contacting us were from Black or Minority Ethnic communities.

Anyone wanting a copy of the Conference report can obtain one by e-mail if they contact Switchboard.

The History Project, of which this book is a part, is on-going and has made important local contributions to LGBT History Month - initiated in February 2005. The first LGBT History Month provided a spur to transfer much of the project to a website.

Switchboard’s History Website is at www.nlgshistory.ik.com

For 2006’s LGBT History Month, Switchboard organised an LGBT History Quiz at the Lord Roberts pub, a presentation on “Stereotyping in the Media”, a “Famous Faces Bingo Night” (again at the Lord Roberts), a presentation on Gay History in the 50s, 60s and 70s for Age Concern and displays for the City Council and Nottinghamshire Police.

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Over a short period there have been many changes in the law:

- ◆ The age of consent lowered to 16 in 2001
- ◆ Same-sex couples being allowed to adopt as a couple, rather than as an individual - in 2002
- ◆ Anti-Discrimination measures in employment enacted in December 2003
- ◆ Section 28 removed in November 2003
- ◆ The Criminal Injuries Compensation Board agreeing to provide compensation for LGB victims of hate crimes
- ◆ The offence of “gross indecency” removed in 2004
- ◆ The idea that “lovers’ lane sex” should be treated equally and sensibly for same-sex couples and opposite sex couples
- ◆ The legal recognition in 2005 of same-sex partnerships through the civil registration of partnerships process
- ◆ Legal precedents supporting the transfer of tenancy in rented accommodation when one partner in a same-sex relationship dies
- ◆ Support for “living wills” and the idea that a same-sex partner can be “next of kin”
- ◆ The recommendation that judges should view homophobia as an aggravating factor in offences such as assault and to adjust sentences accordingly

Not everyone has been pleased by such changes, but when opponents include Lord Tebbit and The Daily Mail, one is inclined to feel that things must be improving. The Moreton Christian Association claimed that the 2001 outbreak of foot and mouth disease was God’s direct response to the lowering of the age of consent. As evidence, they cited the fact that the last major outbreak coincided with the passage of the Sexual Offences Act in 1967. (But why did God take it out on cows? Should the RSPCA be alerted?)

One area where things have not improved is in schools. Much recent research has shown that homophobic bullying is rife in most schools and needs to be tackled. This is not helped by the attitude of some Head Teachers who don’t believe that this is an important issue for them, or who think that there are no lesbian or gay children at their schools. Not only are they burying their heads in the sand, but they also fail to understand that you don’t have to be gay or lesbian to be at the receiving end of homophobic bullying. Unfortunately, it is impossible to ask Damilola Taylor to recount his experiences of this.

Ofsted have given clear instructions that schools have a duty in this regard and “good practice” guidelines have been published, but most schools still seem in a state of denial. Expensive law suits may be the only way to rouse some schools into action.

The changes in the law are to be welcomed, but changes in the attitudes and opinions of large sections of the population will take longer to achieve. In the same way, anti-racist legislation has not removed racism, but, over 30 years, has suppressed much of the public expression of racism. It has made many people examine their own unconscious racism and feel guilty about expressing racist views.

Many newspapers still revel in homophobic stereotypes - essentially deciding not to let truth stand in the way of a good story. Will their attitudes have changed in 30 years time?

We would like to remember

- ◆ Wallace Edge, teacher poet and artist, who contributed many of the reminiscences relating to the 1930s-1960s period. Wallace died aged 87 in 2003
- ◆ Richard Webster, whose work for the local LGBT community is mentioned on pages 24 and 26 and who died in May 2006
- ◆ Peter Dufton, former Coordinator of Switchboard, who died in July 2006

And finally

After over 30 years as a helpline, Switchboard finally applied for charitable status. That status was granted on 18.5.2006. Switchboard is now Registered Charity number 1114273.