

Gay History

Lesbian & gay people have for centuries struggled to be accepted as equal and treated humanely, fairly and with dignity. They have been oppressed, persecuted and killed due to prejudice, intolerance and indifference. The table below, written on the colours of the Gay Pride Flag, gives a brief reflection of that struggle, highlighting some of the significant steps in a long and often brutal history.

1290 First mention in English common law of a punishment for homosexuality.	1300 The 'Britton' treatise prescribed that sodomites be burned alive in England.	1376 King Edward III was unsuccessfully petitioned to banish foreigners who were accused of 'the too horrible vice which is not to be named'.	1533 The Buggery Act was passed which made buggery punishable by hanging.	1861 The Offences Against the Person Act abolished the death penalty for buggery in England & Wales.	1869 First published use of the word 'homosexuality' by a German-Hungarian campaigner.	1870 World's first attempt at publishing a gay periodical was made in Germany.	1885 In England the "Labouchere Amendment" was passed which made homosexual acts illegal (even in private) and it became known as the "blackmailer's charter".	1895 Oscar Wilde sentenced to two years imprisonment with hard labour.	1897 Scientific-Humanitarian Committee founded in Germany, the world's first organisation dedicated to the aim of ending the legal and social intolerance of homosexuals.	1928 First undisguised openly Lesbian novel <i>The Well of Loneliness</i> was published.
1933 The Nazis dissolved the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee founded in 1897 and destroyed its library.	1935 German anti-homosexual law strengthened by Nazis. A homosexual was known as a 175er after paragraph 175 of German law under which homosexuality had been a criminal offence since 1871.	1938 Nazis sent thousands of homosexuals to the concentration camps and were worked to death. In the camps prisoners were made to wear coloured cloth triangles to denote their crime or origin. Homosexuals had to wear pink triangles.	1948 Alfred Kinsey published <i>Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male</i> . It quoted figures that 4% of men identified themselves as exclusively homosexual and 37% had enjoyed homosexual activities at least once.	1953 Alfred Kinsey published <i>Sexual Behaviour in the Human female</i> . It quoted figures that 2% of women identified themselves as exclusively homosexual and 13% had enjoyed homosexual activities at least once.	1954 Appointment of the <i>Wolfenden Committee</i> to consider the law in Britain relating to homosexual offences.	1956 The Sexual Offences Act became Law which led to a rise in police activity against homosexuals for the rest of the century despite the amendments introduced in the Sexual Offences Act 1967.	1957 The Wolfenden Report was published which made recommendations about legalisation of homosexuality for consenting adults over 21 in private. The publication produced a storm of debate in the press.			
1958 The British Homosexual Law Reform Society was founded which campaigned to introduce the recommendations of the Wolfenden Report.	1961 Illinois was the first state in the US to decriminalise homosexuality. Release of the film <i>Victim</i> starring Dirk Bogarde. The first British film with a Gay theme looking at blackmail.	1963 The first gay rights demonstration took place in the USA in New York. Protesting against discrimination in the military.	1967 The Sexual Offences Act 1967 became law which decriminalised homosexual acts in private for consenting adults over 21 or over.	1969 The <i>Stonewall Rebellion</i> started in New York. It was a spontaneous reaction against police harassment after a Gay bar was raided by police. The Committee for Homosexual Equality was formed in Britain.	1970 The first Lesbian & Gay Pride march took place in New York to commemorate the <i>Stonewall Rebellion</i> . The London Gay Liberation Front was founded.	1971 First Gay march in London protesting against the unequal age of consent for gay men (21) took place.	1972 The first UK gay newspaper, <i>Gay News</i> , was founded. The first Gay Pride march and carnival took place in London.	1973 First UK gay helpline. First national gay rights conference held in UK. USA saw first openly gay candidate elected to city council.		
1974 London Gay (later Lesbian & Gay) Switchboard launched. The first International Gay Rights Conference held in Edinburgh.	1976 The lesbian Gay Christian Movement was founded. Tom Robinson, singer, wrote <i>Glad to be Gay</i> .	1977 Bill to reduce gay age of consent to 18 was defeated in House of Lords. <i>Gay News</i> prosecuted by Mary Whitehouse for 'Blasphemy'.	1980 Male homosexuality was decriminalised in Scotland. <i>Heaven</i> the first all-week mega-club opened. The first black lesbian & gay groups were founded.	1982 Male homosexuality was decriminalised in Northern Ireland. The Terrance Higgins Trust was launched, named after the first man thought to have died with AIDS in UK.	1983 The BBC's Panarama broadcast first TV documentary on AIDS. The first national lesbian & gay TV series, <i>One in Five</i> , shown on channel 5.	1984 Chris Smith, was the first MP to come out as gay while in office. The Terrance Higgins Trust held first national AIDS conference.	1986 AIDS debated in House of Commons, and a major national campaign was launched.	1988 <i>Section 28</i> , preventing the 'promotion' of homosexuality by local authorities came into force.		
1989 The Stonewall Group was set up in response to Section 28. Denmark first country in the world to give legal recognition to same-sex partnerships.	1990 The direct action group OutRage! was set up by Peter Tatchell after a west London queerbashing murder of Actor Michael Boothe.	1991 LAGPA: Lesbian And Gay Police Association was formed. Stonewall given EU grant to survey gay rights across the European Community.	1992 Isle of Man decriminalises homosexuality. London hosted first Europride.	1994 House of Commons voted to reduce the gay male age of consent to 18. OutRage! 'outed' eight bishops and provoked debate within Church of England.	1995 <i>Gaytime TV</i> was launched and one million tuned in every week. <i>Rank Outsiders</i> and <i>Stonewall</i> launched major campaign on gays in the military.	1996 BBC Radio 4's, <i>The Archers</i> , the world longest running soap, introduces first openly-gay character, Sean Myerson. Robert Runcie, ex-Archbishop of Canterbury, admitted having ordained known gay clergy.	1997 British General Election saw two out-gay men elected as MPs, Ben Bradshaw & Stephen Twigg. GCHQ relaxed its regulations relating to the employment of gays and lesbians. Angela Eagle first British MP to come out voluntarily as a lesbian.			
1998 House of Commons vote to set age of consent for gay men at 16. House of Lords defeated the clause to lower the age of consent for gay men at 16.	1999 German government honoured lesbian and gay Nazi victims. Bomb exploded in the Admiral Duncan, a London gay pub. Three people died.	2000 British government lifts ban on gays in the military. The Sexual Offences (amendment) Act lowers the age of consent to 16, in line with the heterosexual age. Government have to use Parliament Act to force through legislation after Lords reject the Bill.	2002 Equal rights are granted to lesbian and gay couples applying for adoption. Alan Duncan became first serving Conservative MP to voluntarily come out as gay.	2003 Repeal of Section 28. Discrimination at work on the grounds of sexual orientation made illegal by the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003.	2004 Sexual Offence Act 2004 sweeps away the Victorian Laws that were discriminatory towards gay men. Recognition of homophobic assault as a 'hate crime'. Gender Recognition Act.	2005 Civil Partnership Act 2004 likely to be implemented during this year. Allowing same-sex partners to register their partnership. Giving equal rights and legal status for same-sex partners for benefits, housing, inheritance, immigration, pensions etc.				

Gay Pride Flag is an Internationally recognised symbol for gay unity.

The colours represent:

-  Life
-  Healing
-  Sun
-  Nature
-  Art
-  Spirit



Including Jobcentres and social security offices

The Knitting Circle Timetable of Lesbian & Gay History site has more detailed information.
www.sbu.ac.uk/~stafflag/timetable.html