It Takes Time to Grow

50 Years of queer history across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

From the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1967, through to the expansion of local Pride events across the county in the 2020s, join us to explore the growth of the local LGBTQ+ community over the last half century.

*At the top of the page, an old newspaper titled Cambridge talking about gay life in Great Britain*

# Introduction

Following extensive campaigning across the country, homosexuality was decriminalised in England and Wales in 1967 – however this was only for those aged 21 and over, and required any sexual relations to take place ‘in private’ (in this case meaning behind a locked door).

The change in the law lead to an increase in the persecution of LGBTQ+ people (especially gay men) locally in the following decades, but in turn that acted as a catalyst to bring the LGBTQ+ community together through a wide variety of different groups, events, support services and political activities.

Local LGBTQ+ community organising in the 1970s, 80s and 90s was strongly connected with wider social justice struggles – such as groups who campaigned to protect the Kite Ward in central Cambridge from extensive redevelopment.

*At the bottom of the page, an old document titled ‘Coming out Gay’ which how queer people were able to meet*

The 2000s brought significant changes in policy for LGBTQ+ people including the equalisation of the age of consent to 16 in 2000, the Gender Recognition Act in 2004, the start of civil partnerships in 2005, and protection from discrimination through the Equality Act in 2010. This period also saw the repeal of ‘Section 28’ – a piece of legislation that was in effect from 1988 to 2003 in England and which deterred schools, councils and other publicly funded organisations from actively supporting the LGBTQ+ community.

These changes mean that LGBTQ+ people have been able to live more openly in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. It has also enabled the LGBTQ+ community to access more funding and other resources to scale up projects, events and activities and more public figures have been open about their sexuality and gender. In 2007, Jenny Bailey became mayor of Cambridge City Council and was recognised as the first transgender person in the UK to take on such a position.

However, over the last 10 years, LGBTQ+ people have faced many challenges with increased hate crime and discrimination, fuelled by toxic debates in the media about our lives. Locally, this has driven a new wave of community solidarity and organising in response. Pride events now take place across the county, a whole variety of LGBTQ+ groups provide year-round support, and more and more companies, schools and services seek to demonstrate their support for the LGBTQ+ community.

Our exhibition is touring venues across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough during 2025.

# Proud Presents

Over the last 50 years attitudes have changed and increasingly parents have wanted to understand and support their LGBTQ\_ children. Parents Enquiry was a national helpline and support group for parents of lesbian and gay children funded in 1968 by Rose Robertson who ran it from her home in London for the next 30 years. These pamphlets were originally written by Rose, and reproduced by the Campaign for Homosexual Equality, and likely distributed by the Cambridge-based Proud Parents group.

*At the bottom of the page are pamphlets from the 1970s/1980s entitled ‘Telling your Parents’ and ‘What is Homosexuality’ in a monospace font.*

# Celebrating Relationships

*At the top of the page is an image of multiple different engagement and wedding cards. Collection of Engagement and Civil Partnership cards created 2013.*

From 2005 to 2014, a civil partnership was the only form of legal recognition for a same-sex relationship, prior to the introduction of equal marriage laws. These cards from a civil partnership ceremony in 2013 illustrate well-wishers attempts to find cards suitable for the occasion when only a few manufactures catered of LGBTQ+ life events.

# HID/AIDS in Cambridgeshire

Cambridge Aids Action (Now known as Dhiverse) was set up as a local response to the rapid spread of HIV amongst gay men in the 1980s. Their offices at Dales Brewery (off Mill Road in Cambridge) were often used by a variety of other LGBTQ+ groups, including The Kite Trust, Encompass Network and SisterAct.

*In the middle of the page to the right are various Flyers and Pamphlets from the 1990s.*

# Gender Expression

*At the top shows a dark t-shirt with white splashes across the front. Gender Affirming T-Shirt 2003*

“This T-shirt represents the start of becoming at home in my body and presentation. It was 2003 and I was 14 years old, old enough to start hanging out with friends in town and buying the occasional item of clothing. I went into Burton menswear, free from shame, standing excitedly and proud to find something that felt like me. This was it. Something that didn’t draw too much attention not me, but also something that was me. The splashes felt like a representation of the internal processes I was experiencing. Back then we didn’t have the language we do today or the resources to understand about gender and queerness. It was a lonely and confusing time, but that T-shirt gave me hope. I loved that T-shirt. I wore it A LOT. It reminds me of the start of my social transition in becoming Nathan. 21 years later and I still haven’t been able to part with it” – Gender Affirming T-Shirt, 2003.

# Life-Saving Transition

For many transgender people, access to medical treatments is essential to relieve the distress of gender dysphoria – an intense discomfort with the disconnect between one’s gendered body and internal gender identity. For adults this can include hormone replacement therapy and different forms of surgery depending on the individual and how they want their body to be.

Whilst the NHS does cover some of these medical treatments, the capacity of the service has not expanded with demand and the wait to be seen can now be 3 years or more. For comparison, those who transitioned over 10 years ago were typically seen in a matter of weeks. This has meant that transgender people are increasingly having to raise thousands of pounds to access these treatments privately.

*At the bottom of the page are receipts for gender affirming surgery in 2019, as well as some artwork spray bottles from 2024.*

The process of transition is different from induvial to individual and many trans people use art and creative methods to document and to represent their experiences. Scan this QR code to watch a short film A Tight Warm Hug’ and listen to a piece of music ‘Sing! Little Floret’.

# Learning About Our History

*At the top of a page is a book entitled Schools Out in black and white with people on front. ‘The Gay Teachers Association Book created 1987’.*

The Gay Teachers Association was founded in 1974 after a teacher list his job because of his sexuality. The organisation campaigned for LGNTQ+ inclusion in education. They became Schools OUT UK, and in 2005 set up LGBT+ History Month to take place in February each year.

From the early 200s until 2023, Encompass Network coordinated the promotion of events to mark LGBT+ History Month, Encompass Network was an organization that aimed to support, link and represent LGBTQ+ voluntary and community organisations across Cambridgeshire.

*At the bottom of the page are some History Month Programmes, 2010-2014 which were donated by the Encompass Network. The programmes are colourful and have the diary of events for each day*

# Recognising Progress

Sir Ian McKellen, one of the founders of LGBT rights charity – Stonewall, was a student in Cambridge during the 1950s:

‘I didn’t identify one other gay man at St Catharine’s… we all came out after Cambridge. There were no places you could go… no clubs, societies, no debates about it’.

Sixty years later a lot had changed and Sir Ian McKellan visited several schools in Cambridge throughout his work with Stonewall and met with young people accessing SexYOUality groups (now The Kite Trust\_. The progress towards inclusive education was further recognised in 2011 when Cambridgeshire County Council won this prestigious award.

*At the bottom of the page is a glass stonewall award from 2011 going to Cambridgeshire City Council, there is a picture of Sir Ian McKellen with various people, holding a rainbow drawing of an eye in 2009, and a poster entitled ‘2byou’ signed by Sir Ian McKellen in 2009.*

# Naturally Queer

Across the last 50 years, one of the arguments against LGBTQ+ rights had been the suggestion that homosexuality is unnatural. However, there is extensive research to show that this is not the case and that there is a wide diversity of sexual behaviours and sex characteristics throughout the animal Kingdom.

Scan this QR code to watch a video tour from the University of Cambridge’s Museum of Zoology.

# Enjoying The Outdoors

*At the top of the page is an old newspaper image entitled ‘Gays heading for Everest’, showing 4 men standing over a map. This is a copy of the Cambridge News article in 1981, Bishopgate Institute. Beside this picture there is leaflet showing various gardening projects and an allotment. Sister Act Newsletter 2015*

A Cambridge branch of the Gay Outdoor Cluw as founded in around 1978. In 1981, the national chairman was Cambridge-based Philip Judson, and he was involved in coordinating a 4-week expedition to climb Mount Everest as a part of a team of LGBTQ+ men. The Gay Outdoor Club is still operating with a Cambridgeshire branch and proudly calls itself ‘Britain’s biggest and longest lasting national club for LGBTQ outdoor activities’.

SisterAct, a Cambridge based group founded in 1993 for ‘women who like women’ also regularly advertised outdoor activities as part of their programmes. Their newsletter from 2015 highlights a joint walk with London Hiking Dykes and a weekly Footy Friday in Cottenham.

# A Sporting Community

*At the top of the page is an image showing a helmet from Romsey Town Rollerbillies, two badges with a rainbow star background with a white Cambridge Rollerbillies logo and then a leaflet for a Pride Celebration game for the Cambridge Rollerbillies vs Nottingham at Saturday 9th July 2022.*

The Cambridge Rollerbillies formed in February 2008, as the Romsey Town Rollerbillies, inspired by London Roller Derby who first brought the sport to the UK. The league has been teaching people to skate and play roller derby in Cambridgeshire for over 15 years.

As a sport, roller derby prides itself on being a kind and inclusive community, historically known as a safe space for women, members of the LGBTQ+ community and for people of all body shapes and sizes. Their most significant accomplishment has been winning the international Roller Derby Cup twice in 2011 and 2014.

# Supporting Young People

The first lesbian and gay youth group in Cambridge was set up with the help of Youth Action Cambridge in the late 1980s. The group relocated to the Centre 33 building in Claredon Street and in 1993 renamed themselves at the Kite Club. The organisation behind the group became a registered charity in 2003 known as SexYOUality and received funding to undertake a needs assessment for LGBTQ+ youth across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

SexYOUality continued to run groups in Cambridge, and started others in sever towns across Cambridgeshire over the next 14 years. In 2017, the organisation renamed itself The Kite Trust and now runs weekly groups in Cambridge, Ely, Huntingdon, March, Peterborough, St Neots and Wisbech as well as offering individual support, residentials and family events.

*At the bottom of the page is a flyer from The Kite Group 1990’s in blue and red theming, a Youth Needs Assessment from 2004, the Kite Project development plan from 2003 in a dull orange colour and the Youth Information Project Flyer approximately 2000 using blue coloured font.*

# Local Prides

Prides are usually annual events where the LGBTQ\_+ community and allies gather, celebrate and protest for their rights and inclusion in society. Some of the most famous, like those in London and New York started in the early 1970s.

However, it is much more recently that local Pride events started happening in Cambridgeshire.

*Below is an image showing all the leaflets for the local prides in Cambridgeshire*

## Cambridgeshire Pride

The Pink Festival was an open-air event at Cherry Hinton Hall in Cambridge with a number of marquees offering varied entertainment including live music, cabaret and comedy. The events ran from 2003 to 2010, with the last event attracting around 10,000 attendees. The Pink Festival team then went on to establish Cambridge Pride in 2019 featuring a punt parade along the river. The COVID-19 pandemic meant that in-person events were put on hold for the next two years, but Cambridge Pride has returned as an annual event on Jesus Green since 2022. Cambridge Pride 2025 will take place on Saturday 14th June.

## Ely Pride

Pride in Ely took place for the first time in 2018 and now runs annually with stalls and entertainment in Jubilee Gardens and The Maltings on Ely’s riverside. Pride in Ely 2025 will take place on Saturday 9th August.

*Below is an image of a black t-shirt with the words “Pride Ely Cambridgeshire” on in rainbow lettering, and a wristband with a rainbow colour with the words “Pride in Ely” on it.*

## Pride in St Neots

Pride in St Neots is a volunteer run charity, founded in 2020, and they offer a range of activities throughout the year rather than as a single event. These include regular coffee meet ups and a youth group. In July 2024 they walked as a group in the parade at St Neots Music Festival.

## Peterborough Pride

Peterborough Pride also took place for the first time in 2018, and has grown over the last six years with nearly 5,000 people joining last year’s event at the Green Backyard on Oundle Road. The event now opens with a march each year open to anybody who would like to walk through the city centre to show support for the LGBTQ+ community. Peterborough Pride 2025 will take place on Saturday 19th July.

*Below is an image of a Peterborough Pride trans pin in the shape of the letter P and a flag. The Peterborough Pride lettering is rainbow.*

## Fenland Pride

Fenland Pride took place for the first time in July 2024 at the Queen Mary Centre in Wisbech. The event was organised by The Kite Trust and included a swimming session, an art exhibition, film screenings, board game evenings, and a main event with performances and stalls. The artwork for the event was created by Alex Diviney.

*Below is an image of the Fenland Pride poster, with the tiger in a rainbow colour holding a progress pride flag.*

## Cambridge Alternative Pride

*Above is a purple poster with Cambridge Alternative Pride written on it in black lettering.*

Cambridge Alternative Pride took place in August 2024 in response to the growth of cooperate sponsorship and involvement in Pride. Organised by Trans Liberation Cambridge, the pride also took place on Jesus Green and at The Lockon with community members providing workshops, knowledge sharing and creative activities for each other.

# Pride Flags

These flags demonstrate the evolution of the LGBTQ+ Pride flag over the last 50 years.

The original flag was designed by Gilbert Baker for a pride parade in San Francisco in 1978. The flag had eight stripes including hot pink and turquoise. The flag displayed here is a reproduction.

*Below is an image of the Gilbert Baker Stripe Flag from 1978 (reproduction). It features the colours from top to bottom: Pink, Deep red, Orange, Yellow, Black, Light Blue, Dark Blue, Brown. Beside it is the Six Stripe Pride Flag, with the colours from top to bottom: Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Purple.*

Due to the lack of readily available fabric in some of the colours, it was adapted to the six stripe flag from 1979 with stripes of red, orange, yellow, green, blue and violet. This flag was the most widely used for around 40 years, and the flag displayed here was used by Encompass Network locally in the 2010s.

In June 2017, the city of Philadelphia in the US adopted a revised version of the flag that added a black and brown stripes to the flag to draw attention to the needs of people of colour within the LGBTQ+ community. The flag displayed here is a reproduction.

*Above this is the Philadelphia Pride Flag from 2017, with dark blue, brown, red, orange, yellow, green, blue and deep blue-purple.*

In 2018, designed Daniel Quasar introduced the ‘Progress Pride Flag’ which incorporates a chevron shape with black, brown, light blue, pink and white stripes. These additional elements indicate particular communities where progress is needed to ensure their rights and needs are met: people of colour, trans people, and those living with HIV/AIDS and those who have died. The flag on display here was flown by Cambridgeshire County Council from 2021 to 2023.

*Above this is the Progress Pride flag, with a chevron containing (inside to outside): White, pink, light blue, brown, black. The main flag features (from top to bottom): Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Purple.*

In 2021, Valentino Vecchietti of Intersex Equality Rights UK redesigned the progress pride flat to incorporate the intersex flag – a purple circle on a yellow background. The flag on display in our exhibition has been used by The Kite Trust at their events for LGBTQ+ young people across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

*Above this, is the Intersex Inclusive Pride Flag. It features a chevron with colours (inside to outside): Yellow with a purple circle inside, White, Pink, Light Blue, Brown and Black. The main flag features (Top to bottom): Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue and Purple.*

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough has a rich and vibrant LGBTQ+ community that has grown significantly over the last 50 years. At the 2021 census, 25,000 people aged 16 and over identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or another sexual orientation, and 4,500 reported a gender identity different to their sex assigned at birth.

If this exhibition inspires you to connect with or show your support for the LGBTQ+ community, there are many groups and events across our county.

The Kite Trust – thekitetrust.org.uk
Gay Outdoor Club – goc.org.uk
Cambridge Pride – cambridgepride.co.uk
Cambridge LGBTQ+ Mature – find on Facebook
Cambridge LGBT Meet-Up meetup.com/Cambridge-gay-group
Cambridge SU LGBT+ Campaign – cambridgesu.co.uk/lgbt-campaign
Dhiverse – dhiverse.org.uk
Diamonds – diamondstgc.org.uk
QWIC – find on Facebook
Trans Liberation Cambridge – find on Instagram
Peterborough Pride – peterboroughpride.co.uk
Queer Socials Peterborough – queersocialspeterborough.uk
Trans Support Peterborough – [www.transpeterborough.co.uk](http://www.transpeterborough.co.uk)
Pride in Ely – prideinely.co.uk
Ely Queer Community Wardrobe – find on Instagram
Pride in St Neots – prideinstneots.org

# Key Words

LGBTQ+: Stands for: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and any other minority sexuality or gender.

Sexuality: The attraction someone feels to another person. Lesbian, gay and bisexual are three examples of sexualities under the LGBTQ+ umbrella. Minority sexualities include everyone other than people who are heterosexual.

Gender: The identity someone feels inside themselves – this might be as a man, woman, or another identity under the umbrella term of non-binary.

Sex assigned at birth: The identity recorded on a birth certificate by a doctor based on a baby’s visible sex characteristics. The UK only currently gives options for this to be male and female.

Transgender: A person whose gender is different from their sex assigned at birth.

“It takes time to grow, and you probably won’t realise it but you are not the same person that walked into this room.” – LGBTQ+ Young Person from The Kite Trust.