



## BIROn - Birkbeck Institutional Research Online

Cook, Matt (2020) Local matters: queer scenes in 1960s Manc Hester, Plymouth and Brighton. *Journal of British Studies* 59 (1), pp. 1-25. ISSN 0021-9371. (In Press)

Downloaded from: <http://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/30017/>

*Usage Guidelines:*

Please refer to usage guidelines at <http://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/policies.html> or alternatively contact [lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk).

Journal of British Studies

Volume 59, no. 1 (January 2020)

Cook

Major Article

<AT>Local Matters: Queer Scenes in 1960s Manchester, Plymouth, and Brighton</AT>

<AU>Matthew David Cook</AU>

Journal of British Studies 59:1 (January 2020): ●●●-●●●

© 2020 by The North American Conference on British Studies

All Rights Reserved

<AB>This article compares queer social scenes in the 1960s in three English towns and cities: Brighton and Plymouth on the south coast and Manchester in the northwest. It considers how queer experience in these places was affected by local identities, demographics, geographies, and socio-economic circumstances, and so demonstrates how and why the local matters to queer scenes and lives, even in the midst of wider burgeoning mass and connective cultures. London has dominated analysis of both the “Swinging Sixties” and queer lives, yet this article shows how different queer experience outside that city could be. Despite multiple resonances and connections, London’s queer story cannot stand in for that of other places in England.</AB>

This article compares queer social scenes in three English cities during “the long 1960s,” from around the time of the recommendations of the Wolfenden Committee for the partial decriminalization of sex between men in 1957 to the passing of those recommendations into law in 1967 and the emergence of gay liberation in the UK three years later. It considers how queer experience was affected in these years by local identities, demographics, geographies, and socioeconomic circumstances in Brighton, a seaside resort sixty miles south of London, in Plymouth, a naval city on the border of Devon and Cornwall, and in Manchester, the center of a much larger industrial and metropolitan area in the northwest. Looking closely and comparatively at these places demonstrates how and why the local matters to queer scenes and lives, even in the midst of wider, rapidly expanding mass and connective cultures.<sup>1</sup>

---

<AF>Matt Cook is professor of modern history at Birkbeck, University of London. He is very grateful to Justin Bengry, Alison Oram, Jeffrey Weeks, and the *JBS* readers for their comments on earlier drafts of this piece, and to the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council for funding.</AF>

The decision to explore places outside the capital is deliberate. London has tended to compel our historical and nostalgic gaze at both the “Swinging Sixties” and queer lives; there has been virtually no sustained social and cultural historical analysis of queer experience outside the city for this period.<sup>2</sup> This is not to rob London of its significance; its iconic queer status was enhanced during this time, and it is an important reference point in many of the interviews that underpin this piece. However, what was happening there was also distinct and was not necessarily replicated in other parts of the country; London’s queer story cannot stand in for that of other places and was in any case itself multifaceted.<sup>3</sup> Local circumstances

---

<sup>1</sup> On these shifts, see Mark Donnelly, *Sixties Britain: Culture, Society and Politics* (London, 2005); Jeffrey Weeks, *The World We Have Won: The Remaking of Erotic and Intimate Life* (London, 2007); Marcus Collins, ed., *The Permissive Society and Its Enemies: Sixties British Culture* (London, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Brighton Ourstory, *Daring Hearts: Lesbian and Gay Lives in 50s and 60s Brighton* (Brighton [1992], 2015), provides a rich descriptive (rather than analytical) account. The focus of other work has been on adjacent periods or has dealt with the 1960s only fleetingly. See Robert Howes, *Gay West: Civil Society, Community and LGBT History in Bristol and Bath, 1970 to 2010* (Bristol, 2011); Jeffrey Meek, *Queer Voices in Post-War Scotland: Male Homosexuality, Religion and Society* (Basingstoke, 2015); Helen Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire in Industrial England, 1895–1957* (Basingstoke, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> See Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Pleasures and Perils in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918–1957* (Chicago, 2006); Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (New Haven, 2010); Matt Cook, *Queer Domesticities: Homosexuality and Home Life in Twentieth Century London* (Basingstoke, 2014).

in Manchester, Plymouth, and Brighton partially determined how close London felt in its imagined and actual queer (and 1960s) dimensions.

Occupationally, Plymouth and Manchester were predominantly working-class cities.<sup>4</sup> Associated cultures were quite different between the two, however.<sup>5</sup> In Plymouth, a relatively remote and also conservative (small and large “c”) city, families were closely connected through the docks and navy.<sup>6</sup> In Manchester, meanwhile, big manufacturers across the city and region were key to the economy. It had a strident labor, union, and radical tradition, and from 1964 seven out of the city’s nine constituencies were Labour.<sup>7</sup> Brighton was different again, with large numbers of sole-trader small businesses, often catering to day-trippers and

---

<sup>4</sup> For occupational breakdowns, see GB Historical GIS/University of Portsmouth and others, *A Vision of Britain through Time*, <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/>. Specifically for Brighton, see [http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10056410/rate/IND\\_MAN](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10056410/rate/IND_MAN); for Manchester, see [http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10056925/rate/IND\\_MAN](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10056925/rate/IND_MAN); for Plymouth, see [http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10168259/IND\\_MAN](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10168259/IND_MAN).

<sup>5</sup> See especially Becky Taylor and Ben Rogali, *Making Histories of Class and Community: Identity, Place and Belonging* (Basingstoke, 2008); and Mike Savage, “Working-Class Identities in the 1960s: Revisiting the Affluent Worker Study,” *Sociology* 39, no. 5 (2005): 929–46.

<sup>6</sup> Plymouth Devonport had a Conservative MP throughout the 1960s; Plymouth Sutton switched to Labour in 1966.

<sup>7</sup> See Steven Fielding and Duncan Tanner, “The ‘Rise of the Left’ Revisited: Labour Party Culture in Post-War Manchester and Salford,” *Labour History Review* 71, no. 3 (2006): 211–33.

weekenders from London and beyond.<sup>8</sup> Growing numbers of Brightonians were also commuting daily to the capital (one in twenty by 1971).<sup>9</sup> Though Brighton had plenty of people who were working class, there was less union and workplace collectivity.<sup>10</sup> The town was marked instead by individualism, expressed divergently in a political party leaning toward the Conservatives and an increasingly visible bohemianism and counterculture.<sup>11</sup>

These briefly sketched dimensions, together with other contexts and circumstances, significantly affected the ways that queer possibilities were conceived and taken up or resisted. I deliver some sense of this through an examination of the press in these years and more substantially through oral histories gathered by community history projects in each place and by the recent (the recent Queer Beyond London project (more formally known as Sexualities and Localities, 1965–2013) for which I was principal investigator.<sup>12</sup> These various projects were conducted in different ways, with varying aims, methodologies, and imperatives. Brighton Ourstory, a lesbian and gay community oral history project, began work in 1988, a year charged with outrage at the passing of Clause 28—a central government measure prohibiting local authorities from “promoting’ homosexuality”—and with grief at the mounting death toll to AIDS-related illnesses in the town. There was a felt

---

<sup>8</sup> See Fred Gray, “Three Views of Brighton as Port and Resort,” in *Resorts and Ports: European Seaside Towns since 1700*, ed. Peter Borsay and John K. Walton (Bristol, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> See Matthew Williams and Tony Wilson, “IES [Institute of Employment Studies] at 50,” <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/news/ies-50-half-century-brighton-hove-our-local-labour-market>.

<sup>10</sup> See *Backyard-Backstreet Brighton* (Brighton, 2018).

<sup>11</sup> The party held both parliamentary seats until 1964 and again from 1970; Labour took one of them in between.

<sup>12</sup> For more on this project see: [www.queerbeyondlondon.com](http://www.queerbeyondlondon.com).

urgency in capturing voices that the government wished to silence and that might soon be lost. Interviewees in Plymouth for the Pride in Our Past project of 2011 and 2012 had a different vantage point.<sup>13</sup> Legislation permitting gays and lesbians to serve in the military was by then eleven years old, easing the need for discretion in the city. Section 28 (formerly Clause 28)<sup>14</sup> was no longer in force—it was repealed in 2004—and the government’s social inclusion agenda by then positively encouraged funding and support for an LGBT community project on the part of the local council and the Heritage Lottery Fund.<sup>15</sup> As the project name suggests, it was an endeavor to marshal a sense of pride in the present by recouping a queer past hidden from view.<sup>16</sup> For Manchester I drew on interviews from a series of smaller projects, including *The Modern Lesbian* (2012) and *Queer Noise* (2016). These were underpinned by different imperatives again—to redress partially the dominance of gay men in community histories and to understand better the significance of Manchester’s long-standing and cutting-edge music and dance scenes on overlapping youth and queer

---

<sup>13</sup> Pride in Our Past collection at Plymouth and West Devon Record Office (henceforth PiOP).

<sup>14</sup> In English law, “sections” of an act are called “clauses” until passed, so when Clause 28 was enacted, it became Section 28.

<sup>15</sup> On the impact of these measures, see Alison Oram, “Making Place and Community: LGBT and Queer Oral History Projects in Brighton and Leeds,” *Oral History Review* (forthcoming, 2020).

<sup>16</sup> See Alan Butler, “Performing LGBT Pride in Plymouth, 1950–2012” (PhD diss. University of Plymouth, 2015).

cultures.<sup>17</sup> Our more recent work for *Queer Beyond London* involved interviews circling our interest in locality as well as witness seminars at which participants shared memories with and in response to each other. These seminars were an attempt to leaven the inevitable individualism of much testimonial work and to think through collectively ideas of community.<sup>18</sup>

The sense we gained of queer life in Manchester, Plymouth, and Brighton from this material was shaped by the different preoccupations and approaches of these different projects and of course by the people who elected to take part in them—almost invariably people now identifying as L, G, B, or T (though overwhelmingly as one of the first two categories) and often as active politically and/or as community organizers or volunteers. Participants tended to deploy terms and frames of reference that had currency at the time they were interviewed, reminding us that their testimonies were filtered through ideas about identity and community that came to the fore after the 1960s. My use of the term “queer” is an attempt alongside to signal same-sex sexual and emotional relationships and associated identifications, places, and subcultures that were not being named and understood in those ways then (or only unevenly so). The term also signals eccentricity rather than binary opposition to prevailing norms and allows us equivocally to address anachronism. That said, because queer theory foregrounds subjective fluidity, and because it is often deployed in strident defiance of hetero- and homo-normativity, “queer” can, without some caution, obscure people’s everyday investments in prevailing norms and the constraint some felt

---

<sup>17</sup> *The Modern Lesbian*, 2012 (henceforth ML), <https://soundcloud.com/themodernlesbian/>; *Queer Noise*, 2016 (henceforth QN), is part of the Manchester Digital Music Archive at [www.mdmarchive.co.uk/exhibition/id/77/QUEER\\_NOISE.html](http://www.mdmarchive.co.uk/exhibition/id/77/QUEER_NOISE.html).

<sup>18</sup> See especially Anna Green, “Individual Remembering and ‘Collective Memory’: Theoretical and Contemporary Debates,” *Oral History* 32, no. 2 (2004): 35–44.



within different (queer) roles and identities in the past. “Queer” also has and does hurt. It has long been wielded in homophobic attack, and it is important to remember that despite the reclamation of the term from the late 1980s, it is for many associated with a literal punch. In short, we blunt the term’s utility if we lose sight of its multiple meanings and the ways it has been used then, now, and in the time in between.<sup>19</sup>

These observations about terminology touch the dance between past and present and between the vicissitudes of memory and the analytics of history at stake in oral history work. Though the “evidence of experience” seems to give us intimate access to the “truth” of a person, place, and time, its reach and significance is much less direct, as Joan Scott argues.<sup>20</sup> Oral histories can be recuperative and reparative; they are sometimes all we have to draw on in thinking about marginalized people and communities past.<sup>21</sup> But that recuperation is necessarily mediated by what happened between then and now, by the contexts in which the interviews were gathered (as I’ve suggested), and by the ineffable workings of memory and the unconscious. In addition, as Penny Summerfield’s work vividly demonstrates, accounts

---

<sup>19</sup> See Robyn Weigman and Elizabeth Wilson, “Antinormativities Queer Conventions,” *Differences* 26, no. 1 (2015): 1–25.

<sup>20</sup> Joan Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 773–97. See also Penny Summerfield, “Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews,” *Cultural and Social History* 1, no. 1 (2004): 65–93.

<sup>21</sup> See especially Horacio N. Roque Ramírez and Nan Alamilla Boyd, “Introduction: Close Encounters: The Body and Knowledge in Queer Oral History,” in *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*, ed. Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramirez (Oxford, 2012), 1–20.

are shaped by prevailing cultural narratives and mythologies.<sup>22</sup> In play in the testimonies I use here, for example, are trenchant—if relatively recent—ideas about sexual identity, about “coming out” as a key moment in a life story, and about the central significance of queer scenes to queer lives.<sup>23</sup> Also important are the popular renditions of particular places and times—of Brighton being “a gay mecca” or of the 1960s as “swinging,” for example. These various mediating factors inform my discussion as I shuttle between these testimonies and newspaper coverage from the time to build a sense of local queer scenes and dynamics in Manchester, Plymouth, and Brighton.<sup>24</sup> I look at these places in turn in my three substantive sections; first, though, some further social and cultural context.

## <H1>Sixties Contexts</H1>

Underpinning many of the social and cultural changes were the high employment rates enduring from the 1950s and increased levels of disposable income. An enlarged group of fifteen- to twenty-four-year-olds (a million more than there had been a decade earlier) were tending to spend this income on records, cosmetics, clothes, and going out—to the cinema, to

---

<sup>22</sup> Summerfield, “Culture”; Penny Summerfield, “Dad’s Army, the Home Guard, and the Memory of the British War Effort,” in *The Lasting War: Society and Identity in Britain, France and Germany after 1945*, ed. Monica Riera and Gavin Schaffer (Basingstoke, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> See Kenneth Plummer, *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds* (London, 1995), 3–17.

<sup>24</sup> I made particular use of the Lesbian and Gay Newsmedia Archive (LAGNA) newsmedia collection at Bishopsgate Institute. On the queer historical use of such material, see Charles Upchurch, “Politics and the Reporting of Sex between Men in the 1820s,” in *British Queer History: New Perspectives and Approaches*, ed. Brian Lewis (Manchester, 2013).

new coffee shops, and to music and dance venues.<sup>25</sup> Youth cultures were increasingly visible. Beatniks were spotted in the early 1960s in El Sombrero Café in Plymouth and sleeping rough on the beach in Brighton.<sup>26</sup> Working-class mods with their sharp suits and scooters and rockers with their leather jackets and motorbikes came to national attention in the running battles on Brighton seafront and in other south-coast towns in 1964.<sup>27</sup> Middle-class dope smoking hippies were remembered in and around universities later in the decade—in the long-established Victoria University in Manchester and the new University of Sussex (from 1961) on the edge of Brighton.<sup>28</sup> In line with the national trend, the number of full-time students (aged sixteen plus) in Manchester more than doubled across the decade, from 11,530 in 1961 to 23,770 in 1971; in Brighton, they trebled, from 2,990 to 11,340.<sup>29</sup> Away from the

---

<sup>25</sup> See Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800*, 4th ed. (London, 2018), 276; Dominic Sandbrook, *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties* (London, 2007), 11. See also Donnelly, *Sixties*, chap. 1; Weeks, *The World We Have Won*, chap. 2; Kenneth O’Morgan, *Britain since 1945: The People’s Peace* (Oxford, 1991), part 1.

<sup>26</sup> Michael, interviewed by Justin Bengry, August 2017, for Queer Beyond London (henceforth QBL). The project is more formally known as ‘Sexualites and Localities, 1965 – 2013’; interviews and transcripts are currently held by the project team). See also “The Beachniks Who Sleep on Brighton Front,” *Times* (London), 29 August 1962.

<sup>27</sup> Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London, 1979), 46–62; Jonathan Green, *All Dressed Up: The Sixties and the Counterculture* (London, 1999), 5–13.

<sup>28</sup> Angela, interviewed by Sarah Feinstein 28 September 2016, for QN; Jim, cited in Maria Jastrzebska and Anthony Luvera, eds., *Queer in Brighton* (Brighton, 2015), 188.

<sup>29</sup> Registrar General for England and Wales, 1961 and 1971 Census aggregate data, UK Data Service, 2002.

family home, many of these students found more scope to look and behave differently. Though disparate, these various “tribes” of young people were linked by the value they placed on self-determination, visible difference, and the questioning of convention.<sup>30</sup> This phenomenon was part of what Jeffrey Weeks has described as a growing democratization and new informality in “styles of [everyday] life” as the decade progressed.

Alongside and related to this trend was greater mobility.<sup>31</sup> More people wanted to travel and had the disposable income to do so. Motorway infrastructure developed rapidly from the late 1950s, and car ownership grew exponentially.<sup>32</sup> Foreign travel came within reach of more than just the elite, especially as holiday pay became more common and Spain (the most popular overseas 1960s destination) actively courted tourists.<sup>33</sup> Gatwick Airport, twenty-seven miles north of Brighton, was by now catering to the charter-flight market to Europe.

This new capacity for travel was accompanied and fostered by a growth in connective media and mass culture. The national press already had huge readerships,<sup>34</sup> but the 1960s saw the expansion of the magazine market, the diversification of radio, and the wider reach of television. By 1969, 91 percent of UK households had a television, rising from 58 percent in

---

<sup>30</sup> Colin Campbell, “Beatniks, Moral Crusaders, Delinquent Teenagers and Hippies: Accounting for the Counterculture,” in *The Permissive Society and Its Enemies: Sixties British Culture*, ed. Marcus Collins (London, 2007), 97–111, at 97; Weeks, *Sex*, 279.

<sup>31</sup> Weeks, *Sex*, 274; Collins, introduction to *The Permissive Society and Its Enemies: Sixties British Culture*, ed. Marcus Collins (London, 2007), 7, 9.

<sup>32</sup> Green, *All Dressed Up*, 2.

<sup>33</sup> Sandbrook, *White Heat*, 193–94.

<sup>34</sup> See Colin Seymour-Ure, *The British Press and Broadcasting since 1945* (Oxford, 1996), 28–31.

1959.<sup>35</sup> Television provided shared reference points through music, light entertainment, and current affairs programming – the latter including documentaries and debate about the reform of the law on capital punishment (1965), abortion (1967), and homosexuality (1967).

Regionalism and localism remained strong; the local press, which I draw on extensively, continued to have high circulations;<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, people now knew more about broader social and cultural trends. Apparent changes in sexual attitudes and behavior thus took on national proportions in debate, even if they were experienced unevenly at a local level.<sup>37</sup>

Greater disposable income, consumerism and mass culture, the beginning of a decline in manufacturing (evident especially in Manchester), and a rise in the number of people with academic degrees (in Brighton, for example) were, in short, re-inflecting local interwoven cultures of class, youth, and sexuality.<sup>38</sup> Jeff Weeks argues convincingly that “the pattern of autonomy and isolation” that marked working-class life and associated “distinctive sexual cultures ... [was] beginning to dissolve” by the end of this decade.<sup>39</sup> Change was not even or wholesale, however. A *Times* journalist observed substantially more people in cardigans than miniskirts on the London Underground in 1966, and many more people elsewhere in the country were remote from places where they could buy miniskirts, let alone visit coffee shops

---

<sup>35</sup> Broadcasting Audience Research Board, <https://www.barb.co.uk/resources/tv-ownership/>.

<sup>36</sup> Seymour-Ure, *British Press*, 46–47, 50–51.

<sup>37</sup> Weeks, *Sex*, chap. 13.

<sup>38</sup> GB Historical GIS/University of Portsmouth and others, “Greater Manchester,” *A Vision of Britain through Time*, [http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10056925/rate/IND\\_MAN](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10056925/rate/IND_MAN);  
“Brighton and Hove UA,”  
[http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10056410/cube/EDUC\\_LEVEL\\_GRAD\\_GEN](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10056410/cube/EDUC_LEVEL_GRAD_GEN).

<sup>39</sup> Weeks, *Sex*, 274.

or clubs.<sup>40</sup> Changing fashions and pastimes could mask underlying conservatism and stubborn resistance to change, something we can identify especially in Plymouth. The decade saw vicious racism—relating mainly to Afro-Caribbean immigration—distressingly evident in Manchester’s inner suburb of Moss Side, for example. Surveys of attitudes on race and a range of social and moral issues showed much less distance between young and old than is often assumed.<sup>41</sup> There was still a trenchant commitment to marriage and to sexual fidelity within it, and if people were less censorious about pre-marital sex, most had not had sex when they married or had sexual experience only with their future spouse.<sup>42</sup>

Homosexuality continued to disgust, and even those who were in favor of reform tended toward sympathy for a blighted minority rather than thoroughgoing acceptance of difference; 93 percent of people surveyed in 1963 thought homosexuals needed treatment.<sup>43</sup> Much argument for legal change still hinged on the class-bound distinction between the dissolute queer and the respectable homosexual.<sup>44</sup> The legal reform of 1967 reflected this. The key to legal sex with another man was access to private space, something available to far fewer then than now. And still most people disapproved: the National Opinion Poll (NOP) found that 50 percent in the higher ABC1 social groups (defined occupationally) approved of the change in the law; in the lower C2DE, the figure dropped to 34 percent. The same survey found that 30 percent of ABC1 and 26 percent of C2DE interviewees disapproved of “unisex

---

<sup>40</sup> Cited in Sandbrook, *White Heat*, 248.

<sup>41</sup> Collins, Introduction” to *Permissive Society*, 22–25.

<sup>42</sup> Weeks, *Sex*, 237–38.

<sup>43</sup> Sandbrook, *White Heat*, 495, 496.

<sup>44</sup> See Matt Houlbrook, “Queer Cultural Politics, 1920–1967,” in Collins, *Permissive Society*, 55.

clothing.”<sup>45</sup> Jose was spat at on a Manchester bus when she didn’t conform; Aileen was called a cow for wearing trousers in Glasgow.<sup>46</sup>

There was nevertheless some assurance for queer people in this decade. Possibilities were more apparent in the increasingly visible youth and countercultural scenes. For all its limitations, the 1967 act did make a symbolic and practical difference to many. Once the law was passed, Rex Batten and his partner felt able, after fifteen years together, to buy their first double bed.<sup>47</sup> More cultural representation—and so more queer reference points—on radio, in TV, in cinema, and on the stage contributed to teenager Michael’s politicization in Plymouth, as we will see.<sup>48</sup> The deliberately staid Homosexual Law Reform Society (from 1958) was joined by differently oriented, more grassroots groups in the 1960s: the lesbian Minorities Research Group (MRG) formed in 1963, and a year later the North Western Homosexual Law Reform Committee (NWLRS; in 1969 renamed the Committee for Homosexual Equality, in 1971 the Campaign for Homosexual Equality—in both cases, CHE). Though there was as yet “no overarching discourse of sexual rights,”<sup>49</sup> both organizations were avowedly lesbian and homosexual in their membership and looked to building networks of local social and campaigning groups in areas including those I’m exploring here.

---

<sup>45</sup> Collins, introduction to *Permissive Society*, 19.

<sup>46</sup> Jose, interviewed by Rachel Adams, 2012, for ML, <https://soundcloud.com/themodernlesbian/josie-pickering-part-1-early>; Aileen, cited in Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 248.

<sup>47</sup> Matt Cook, “Warm Homes in a Cold Climate,” in *Queer 1950s: Rethinking Sexuality in the Post War Years*, ed. Matt Cook and Heike Bauer (London, 2012), 125.

<sup>48</sup> See essays in *The Queer Sixties*, ed. Patricia Juliana Smith (London, 1999).

<sup>49</sup> Weeks, *Sex*, 291.

With representations of queer lives in the 1960s almost invariably focusing on London, it is hardly surprising that the city remained a crucial reference point and draw; the two men I discuss most in relation to Plymouth (Michael and Ted) each moved to the capital for a while. The MRG and the lesbian social group Kenric emerged there in 1963 and 1965 respectively. The Gateways on London's Kings Road was doubtless the best-known lesbian club in Britain, especially after it featured in the 1968 film *The Killing of Sister George*.<sup>50</sup> In a newspaper exposé of a northern queer pub in the same year, London was used to underline the journalist's apparent dismay: the pub was not "in sinful Soho or permissive Paddington" but in "the homely Yorkshire town of Leeds."<sup>51</sup> The capital served as a cipher here and more broadly for queer depravity, a reputation built up and generalized over the previous century and more. Matt Houlbrook accounts for and nuances this reputation in his study of the first half of the twentieth century, crucially demonstrating the significance of class in the orientation of queer identity, community, and modes of life and resistance in London.<sup>52</sup> My work on late Victorian and postwar London similarly suggests how experiences of the capital could differ hugely, depending on where in the city individuals lived and socialized, and on their class status and the extent of their disposable income.<sup>53</sup> Houlbrook and I both make a case for seeing queer London not as a totemic whole but as a series of differently scaled

---

<sup>50</sup> Jill Gardiner, *From the Closet to the Screen: Women and the Gateways Club, 1945–1985* (London, 2003).

<sup>51</sup> "Even in These Permissive Times, Do We Want Pubs Like This?," *The People*, 24 March 1968.

<sup>52</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*.

<sup>53</sup> Matt Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885 – 1914* (Cambridge, 2003); Cook, *Queer Domesticities: Homosexuality and Home Life in Twentieth Century London* (Basingstoke, 2014).



localities where queer experience was modulated as much by immediate local imperatives as by wider circulating ideas, discourses, and styles. Disaggregating the capital gestures toward a similar local particularity and distinctiveness elsewhere—as Helen Smith shows in her analysis of cases in London, Yorkshire, and the West Midlands in the 1940s and ’50s.<sup>54</sup> In Birmingham, for example, Smith found a subculture and exclusive identity associated with sex between working-class men, while in Rotherham there was plenty of (homo) sex but little sense of the men involved “being” homosexual. Smith demonstrates that regional and local circumstance, identities, and cultures mattered deeply in that period. I argue in the following sections that they still did in the 1960s.

## <H1>Manchester</H1>

Aside from the wealth of oral history material relating to Manchester, I selected this city because of its scale; I wanted to consider what this metropolis beyond London, without the trappings of a capital city, was like for queer people in the 1960s and how the scene there differed from that in the other two much smaller provincial centers. In 1961, 661,000 people lived in the City of Manchester itself, but the wider urban area (subsequently known as Greater Manchester) encompassed about 2.7 million. At this point, 47 percent of men worked in the manufacturing sector, 12 percent more than the national average (though the figures were in decline, as was the population of the city).<sup>55</sup> Stereotypes of local working-class

---

<sup>54</sup> Helen Smith, “Working Class Ideas and Experiences of Sexuality in Twentieth Century Britain: Regionalism as a Category of Analysis,” *Twentieth Century British History* 29, no. 1 (2018): 58–78.

<sup>55</sup> GB Historical GIS/University of Portsmouth and others, “Manchester,” *Vision of Britain*, [http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10056925/rate/IND\\_MAN](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10056925/rate/IND_MAN).

stoicism, grit, and straightforwardness were tenacious here and related to an industrial and radical past and present.<sup>56</sup>

Manchester was unevenly modernizing in the 1960s. Council blocks replaced dilapidated terraces in some of the inner suburbs; a multistory car park went up behind Canal Street, conveniently adjacent to the queer Union and Rembrandt pubs. A new motorway encircling Manchester from 1960, linking it more directly to satellite towns and cities, plus five city center stations (two of which later closed), meant that Manchester was a well-connected place. This was significant to the youth and music scene in the city; people came from across the region for Northern Soul nights at the Twisted Wheel, for example. Some worried about what this might portend. The *Bolton Evening News* complained about Manchester coffee shops being nighttime magnets for dissolute youth: “Such moral decadence [in] the city tonight, happens in the small towns tomorrow”—a warning in tune with wider concern about such places and the supposedly more sexualized youth who frequented them.<sup>57</sup>

In 1959 a new chief constable of Manchester, John McKay, initiated a crackdown on “anti-social” people and the places they frequented. New Afro-Caribbean immigrants and shebeens in Moss Side were increasingly targeted, and so too were queer men. According to the new commissioner, a deliberate and misguided policy of non-engagement in the four years prior to his appointment had resulted in just three prosecutions for male-male importuning in Manchester. In the four years following his appointment, the total reached

---

<sup>56</sup> On Mancunian “character,” see Ian Taylor, Karen Evans, and Penny Fraser, *A Tale of Two Cities: Global Change, Local Feeling and Everyday Life in the North of England* (London, 1996), chap.1.

<sup>57</sup> “Teenage Clubs,” *Bolton Evening News*, 31 October 1964.

506.<sup>58</sup> Police now routinely put queer venues under surveillance and brought charges for lewd dancing or other licensing infringements. They would “turn up to try and sort out who was gay and who wasn’t” at the Trafford Bar of the “lush” 1930s Gaumont Cinema on Oxford Road—a place where “half the blokes were wearing make-up” and some used polari, a cant slang used especially between queer men.<sup>59</sup> Double doors led from the Trafford Bar into the cinema’s Long Bar, popular with American servicemen stationed at Burtonwood (twenty miles to the west of the city) until the early 1960s; there was almost certainly, as in Plymouth, some social and sexual mixing between the groups.<sup>60</sup> The two landlords who began running the Rembrandt Hotel as a queer venue on nearby Canal Street from 1962 were fined three years later for running a disorderly house. The landlord of the neighboring Union Hotel was jailed the same year for allowing his pub “to become a canker at the heart of this great city.” The court heard that he had “exploit[ed] abnormality for personal gain” and allowed “men dressed as women” to “writhe in a sexy way” on stage and tell “filthy jokes.”<sup>61</sup> Drag shows in this long-standing queer venue were in fact already notorious—apparently popular in the 1940s with those American servicemen who might stumble in from the Gaumont Cinema bars.<sup>62</sup> McKay stepped down in 1966, but his policies endured. In 1968, Club Rouge on Brazenose Street (near the Twisted Wheel) had its license trimmed and the

---

<sup>58</sup> “Vice between Men – and a City’s Police,” *Manchester Evening News* (hereafter *MEN*), 30 August 1963.

<sup>59</sup> Jenny Anne Bishop, witness seminar, QBL, Manchester, 18 March 2017; “Our Manchester,” <http://manchesterhistory.net/manchester/gone/gaumont.html>.

<sup>60</sup> “Pubs of Manchester,” accessed 4 March 2019, <http://pubs-of-manchester.blogspot.com/2010/02/long-bar-trafford-bar-oxford-street.html>.

<sup>61</sup> “Hotel Outraged Public Decency,” *MEN*, 15 October 1965, 5.

<sup>62</sup> Jenny Anne Bishop, witness seminar, QBL.

manager was fired and fined after plain-clothes policemen observed—and partook in—same-sex dancing at the venue.<sup>63</sup>

Luchia, who moved to Manchester from Ireland as a teenager in the early 1960s, remembers that “the police and the gay bashers were always hanging around and you had to run the gauntlet” between the Union, Club Rouge, and New York (another queer venue). Though she described the fun to be had in these venues, the broader climate, she said, was “vicious and a disgrace and it took its toll: every six months or so we’d hear of someone else who had died and who took their lives. And we couldn’t even go to the funeral.”<sup>64</sup> Luchia didn’t mention the Moors murders in her interview, but she was certainly on the Manchester scene when Ian Brady visited the Rembrandt and Union to watch “the maggots ... running their hands through their hair, posing, waiting, giving the smile.”<sup>65</sup> In 1965 Brady picked up seventeen-year-old Edward Evans at Manchester’s Central Station (fifteen minutes walk from the Union and a cruising spot before its closure in 1969). He took him by car to Myra Hindley’s grandmother’s house about half an hour away in Hyde, just east of Manchester, where he abused and murdered him. There was less sympathy in the press for Evans than for Brady and Hindley’s other victims. As one Fleet Street journalist had it in his 1966 account of the murder, Evans was “a queer” who “drifted from one haunt of homosexuals to another.”<sup>66</sup> It was in this derisory context that a working-class “community” of dykes, drag queens, and prostitutes tightened.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> “Why a Policeman Had to Dance,” *MEN*, 9 September 1968.

<sup>64</sup> Luchia, interviewed by Sarah Feinstein, 28 September 2016, for QN.

<sup>65</sup> David Smith and Carol Ann Lee, *Witness* (Edinburgh, 2011), 54. Smith here parrots the language he claimed Brady used.

<sup>66</sup> John Potter, *The Monster of the Moors* (London, 1966), 117.

<sup>67</sup> Luchia, QN.

Luchia blushed when someone at the factory where she first got work explained to her what a lesbian was and told her also that they—and “pansies”—gathered at the Union. She decided to visit the pub: “I stood on Canal Street looking at all these people going in and out ... I saw men dressed up as women and vice versa ... I’d never seen anything like it in my life.” Once she plucked up courage to go in, the landlord, his wife, and others at the pub became “like family.”<sup>68</sup> They found her bar work at the “classier” Club Rouge, where actors from the early TV soap *Coronation Street* sometimes drank, and also a place to live nearby with others “like her.” Her fellow punters meanwhile advised her against the treatment her doctor was pressing on her and gave her the confidence to resist. That doctor would almost certainly have been aware of Manchester’s Crumpsall Hospital, a prominent center for aversion therapy.<sup>69</sup>

The reputation of the pub drew people from some distance. Luchia had initially traveled seventeen miles to get there, and in a case in 1962, it transpired that the two men police spotted “kissing and cuddling” in a car in a quiet lane in Middleton just off the new motorway had met in the pub earlier that evening.<sup>70</sup> This wider notoriety and hinterland allowed the community based at the Union to grow and consolidate. Luchia describes it using familiar Mancunian tropes of resilience and mutual support. “As [our numbers] got bigger,

---

<sup>68</sup> Luchia, QN.

<sup>69</sup> “£6,000 Gift for Research into Homosexuality,” *Guardian* (UK), 25 November 1964; see also Tommy Dickinson, *Curing Queer: Mental Nurses and Their Patients, 1935–1974* (Manchester, 2015).

<sup>70</sup> “Two Men Sent for Trial,” *MEN*, 23 March 1960.

we got bolder,” she said. “We would step out together onto Canal Street with our drinks [and] had queans at each end guarding us.”<sup>71</sup>

The felt need for such “guards” and the repressive police climate fired the campaigning work of Alan Horsfall, a National Coal Board clerk, former Labour councilor, peace campaigner, and (as one paper coyly put it) “bachelor.”<sup>72</sup> He was writing letters to the press from early in the decade; one of his first came in response to the prosecution of a group of men in Bolton who had met through work at the hospital there and through a pen-pals club.<sup>73</sup> Dozens more letters followed, signaling to homosexual and “normal” readers alike that there was plentiful queer activity in the region (and not only in its dissolute center), that the police were active in response, and that there were some, like Horsfall, who were prepared to speak out. In 1965 he co-convened the first meeting of the NWHLRS, which by the end of that year had distributed ten thousand leaflets arguing the case for reform to Greater Manchester’s councilors, social workers, magistrates, trade unions, newspapers, and other groups and individuals.<sup>74</sup> Horsfall laid plans for a network of Esquire social clubs (on the model of working-men’s clubs), although a 1969 application for one in Swinton (just within the motorway ring road) was turned down by the council. “I don’t want these people

---

<sup>71</sup> Luchia, QN. In the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, “quean” was used to signal effeminate men and female impersonators. It slid into the more contemporary “queen,” but Lucia seems to be using the older association.

<sup>72</sup> “Homosexuality and the Law,” *Leigh Reporter*, 4 February 1965.

<sup>73</sup> “Men on Sex Charges Are Sent to Trial,” *Bolton Evening News*, 26 June 1963; “Tempter Is Jailed for 18 Months,” *Bolton Evening News*, 25 June 1963; “The Witchunt is Horrifying,” *Bolton Evening News*, 12 July 1963.

<sup>74</sup> “Homosexuality and the Law,” *Leigh Reporter*, 4 February 1965.

here,” said one councilor bluntly.<sup>75</sup> More successful were the CHE groups, which were holding meetings and social events in working men’s clubs and church halls across the region from the early 1970s. The push for reform in and around Manchester in these ways came from the bottom up, in line with a local tradition of grassroots radical and Labour politics in which Horsfall had been closely involved.

We get a differently articulated sense of this upstart right “to be [in a] terrible, filthy pub” amidst the “dark Victorian maze of streets”<sup>76</sup> off Shudehill on the other side of the city center from the Union. This was the meeting place of the New Group of lesbians, affiliated to the MRG. Social worker Judith remembers the New Group having about fifty members: “Basically it was professional women. It was more butch or middling than femme ... I used to enjoy it because I had pretty dresses, had a whale of a time ... and all scrupulously moral.”<sup>77</sup> There was clearly an appetite amongst middle-class lesbians for this affirmative space and network. Judith said that the Union was “too rough a do” in the 1960s for her MRG girlfriends to take her there.<sup>78</sup>

In the Union, Horsfall’s campaigning, and the New Group there was a shared onus on community formation, but class clearly mattered to feelings of comfort and belonging in these contexts. So while the Union, the Picador (“a firetrap of a place ... full of butches” on Shudehill),<sup>79</sup> and the Bus Stop café (an all-night haunt of young queers and prostitutes near the Gaumont Cinema) were popular with working-class queer people, the New Group was “professional,” and the Rembrandt was described as “a country pub in the city” where the

---

<sup>75</sup> “Homosexual Club Is Rejected,” *Guardian* (UK), 10 September 1969.

<sup>76</sup> Liz Naylor cited in John Robb, *Manchester Music City, 1976–1996* (London, 2009), 157.

<sup>77</sup> Judith, interviewer not specified, ca. 2008, ML.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Liz Naylor, cited in Robb, *Manchester Music City*, 157.

men were outwardly respectable and “very well-dressed.”<sup>80</sup> However, in the eyes of the police and censorious onlookers, these subcultural distinctions blurred: they were all dissolute.

In the second half of the 1960s, ten minutes to the south of Canal Street, homosexuals gathered at the university as part of the Homophile Society. Around 1971 it morphed into a CHE group which Angela went to when she arrived in the city to study. She found it rather staid and male dominated—though she did learn there about the new Gay Liberation Front (GLF) group and through that found a more strident politics. Inspired by the GLF’s critique of the “exploitative” gay scene, Angela and a friend went to the Picador “to see if we could convert and talk to some of these gays.”<sup>81</sup> Luchia was there that night and remembers overhearing some “posh” women discussing politics. She asked to join their conversation and invited Angela to come to one of the meetings she had been organizing above the Union. There, Luchia said, “we started to break down barriers—we were all equal [and] ... we started to educate each other.”<sup>82</sup> Angela remembers that this was where she first met “a proper lesbian”: at the university “it was cool to be bi”; it fitted with being “a student and a hippie [in a place] where people were talking about liberation.”<sup>83</sup> At the Union, meanwhile, community was forged in the face of ongoing police harassment and street-level abuse and on the back of an embedded sense of (Mancunian?) mutuality.<sup>84</sup> “We were all outcasts,” Luchia said: “A lot of the women were escorts, on the game,” and there were petty criminals and

---

<sup>80</sup> Comment on a 1962 image of the Rembrandt posted by Manchester Archives, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/manchesterarchiveplus/5335375310>.

<sup>81</sup> Luchia, QN.

<sup>82</sup> Luchia, QN.

<sup>83</sup> Angela, QN.

<sup>84</sup> Taylor, Evans, and Fraser, *Tale of Two Cities*, chap. 1.



drugs—used “to get blocked” rather than to “open minds” (as university students described their drug-taking). In “com[ing] together” in that upstairs room, there was an attempt to find solidarity between these different networks in a broader 1970s context of “less isolated” class cultures.<sup>85</sup>

Manchester’s size and accessible hinterland, class makeup, growing student body, and particular “character” shaped the ways queer lives were lived there in the 1960s. Jigsawing together scraps of testimonial and other evidence suggests some piecemeal self-assertion and readiness to form supportive connections in the decade before the liberationist call to “come out” and “come together.” This supportive impulse might pivot on wider traditions of class solidarity in the city but was also a response to the palpable dangers of queer life—in the bashings from “normal” men, the raw hatred directed at them by Brady and others, and the ramped-up police activity. The connections formed in the 1960s underpinned a particularly strong sense of collectivity that became especially tangible in lesbian and gay responses to further challenges in the city in the years that followed. These challenges included Chief Constable James Anderton’s notorious continuation of his predecessors’ homophobic policing (1976–91), the introduction of Section 28 in 1988 (a particular anathema in a city that, from 1984, had a council solidly, radically, supportive of its lesbian and gay citizens), and the large-scale AIDS crisis in the city that demanded community cultures of caregiving resonant with Luchia’s evocation of “family” at the Union.

<H1>Plymouth</H1>

---

<sup>85</sup> Weeks, *Sex*, 274.

By the 1960s, Plymouth had been substantially rebuilt following the air bombardment of 1941.<sup>86</sup> Its center was depopulated and the city zoned for supposedly more convivial family living. One was less likely here than in Brighton to find a central bedsit a couple of doors down from a queer bar. Though it was growing— from 204,409 people in 1961 to 239,452 in 1971—it could be hard to be anonymous in Plymouth; the city was remote, families were tight, and people were often connected through shared work and social spaces.<sup>87</sup> Ted recalls that a woman who saw him coming out of the queer back bar at the Lockyer Hotel threatened to tell his mother.<sup>88</sup>

That bar was near the city-center end of Union Street, the thoroughfare that ran to the docks to the west. Most people drinking or dancing in the pubs and clubs on this street would have had some connection to the docks or navy. In the 1960s, 25,000 people were employed directly in one or the other, and roughly the same number again were in associated trades.<sup>89</sup> More people here than nationally were skilled and semi-skilled, with fewer in the middle-class and unskilled social categories.<sup>90</sup> We get an oblique queer sense of this in the list of thirteen men appearing on charges of gross indecency before the quarter session at the end of 1959. Of the thirteen, three were or had been in the navy in the lower ranks, one was a

---

<sup>86</sup> See Stephen Essex and Mark Brayshay, “Boldness Diminished? The Post-War Battle to Replan a Bomb-Damaged Provincial City,” *Urban History* 35, no. 3 (2008): 437–61; Jeremy Gould, *Plymouth: Vision of a Modern City* (Swindon, 2010).

<sup>87</sup> Registrar General for England and Wales, 1961 and 1971 Census aggregate data, UK Data Service, 2002.

<sup>88</sup> Ted, PiOP.

<sup>89</sup> Gould, *Plymouth*.

<sup>90</sup> GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth and others, “Plymouth,” *Vision of Britain*, <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10168259>.

military policeman, and the others were three clerks, a mechanic, a demolition foreman, two laborers, and a salesman.<sup>91</sup> All but the salesman likely were or had been employed in the docks. Such men were always more liable to arrest than those in the middle or upper-middle classes, but the range and type of occupations nevertheless reflects that of Plymouth more broadly.

Michael was thirteen when this news story hit the local press, signaling to him both the dangers and the possibilities of queer sex in the city. Around the same time, his father, a musician, described a visiting singer to the Palace Theatre as “an old nancy boy” and later forbade his son to go to the Lockyer Tavern (on account of its “nancy” clientele) and then to Union Street. As a result, these places were firmly in Michael’s sights when, at fourteen, he was “right out on the town. I was down at the Lockyer, I was down in the Palace, I was down Union Street, I was cottaging and sort of hooking up with anybody and everybody.”<sup>92</sup> The back bar at the Lockyer was a well-known, “cramped and nicotine-stained” queer hangout by the 1960s.<sup>93</sup> It was mainly men who drank here, though there were also some lesbians and “normal” customers who would come through from the front bar—sometimes, said one woman, to “[stir] up trouble” or “take the mickey out of the girls or as they called them butch women.”<sup>94</sup> Ted, who was twenty-three in 1960, described the landlord and “elegant” landlady who—like the licensees at the Union in Manchester—“were very nice to us [queers]”; they would sometimes have lock-ins and drinks in their upstairs flat. Ted talked of a camaraderie among the regulars and a playful competitiveness when visitors came from out of town: “I remember a chap coming down from Brighton, and he was an ex-Plymouth boy ... he turned

---

<sup>91</sup> “Sorry to See So Many of These Cases,” *Western Gazette*, 14 October 1959.

<sup>92</sup> Michael, QBL.

<sup>93</sup> Keith Howes, “Plymouth,” *Gay News*, no. 104, 1976.

<sup>94</sup> Jeannie, interviewed by Helen Philips, 29 February 2012, PiOP.

up in this big, flash American-styled car, beautiful car, and we were all looking at him in the bar and saying ‘I bet I can get off with him’ ... And anyway I did and we went out in the car [to the countryside].” He told another story about having sex with a visiting Londoner (a model “photographed by Cecil Beaton”) in his car on Dartmoor;<sup>95</sup> increased car ownership and the rural surroundings offered multiple possibilities. Ted suggested a local interest in queer men from elsewhere, and especially from places with a certain queer sheen like Brighton or London.

Other venues that Michael and Ted mentioned were not as specifically “homosexual” as the Lockyer but offered plentiful queer opportunities. In the mid-1960s, Michael picked up men at a “modern” coffee shop at Drake Circus on the other side of the city center from the Lockyer—El Sombrero, popular with beatniks (whom his mother warned him against). On Union Street there was the “elegant” Long Bar at the Palace Theatre, which drew a mix of service personnel and queer locals. It became Diamond Lil’s in the later 1960s, a venue remembered affectionately as a drinking haunt well into the 1980s.<sup>96</sup> It was “a sort of sailors’ place with these drag queens,” said one regular.<sup>97</sup> For after-hours drinking and dancing, there was the nearby Paramount Club: “Squeezed between these two pubs was this doorway ... And you got all the services, you got the prostitutes, you got the queer boys, basically the dregs of society ended up there ... And guys would dance with each other, and sometimes you’d get a drunken sailor ... saying: ‘Come ’ere, darlin’, I wanna dance with you!’”<sup>98</sup>

Ted remembered that “nobody took any notice if two men or two matelots [sailors] got up and danced together [at the Paramount]. It was okay.” He was nevertheless “very

---

<sup>95</sup> Ted, interviewed by Alan Butler, 2011, PiOP

<sup>96</sup> <https://www.navy-net.co.uk/community/threads/the-real-diamond-lils.31298/>.

<sup>97</sup> Kevin, interviewed by Alan Butler, 29 February 2012, PiOP.

<sup>98</sup> Michael, QBL.

wary” of the advances of a group of five sailors there on one particular night: “They started to say, you know, ‘Come back with us,’ and I said, ‘Where are you?’ and they said, “We’re off the frigate. You can come back on board with us.’ And I said ‘No,’ and they said, ‘No, we’re all right,’ and they all started kissing each other to prove they were OK.”<sup>99</sup> In his refusal—“You know, five! You can cope with one. Or maybe two”—Ted perhaps had in mind the frequent queer bashings in Plymouth that often involved members of the forces. In general, though, he describes the ease of homoerotic interaction at the Paramount and also at Mambos, another queerish venue. He looked forward to “blank week” at the latter, the days when sailors had already spent all their money “on the girls” and so “would come into the Mambo and ... you’d probably buy them a coffee and get off with [one].”<sup>100</sup>

This lively sex scene involving both queer and normal men extended to nearby cottages and cruising areas. Michael would regularly pick up sailors and married men: “I reckon a good 50 percent of my hook-ups were one-night stands with guys who identified as straight.” Among the other half were his first boyfriends, including one of two queer ex-sailors living together just off the Hoe, and after that, the “first love of [his] life,” Richard.<sup>101</sup> He was a former dockyard apprentice who had subsequently been bitten by the travel bug spreading through the 1960s; after two years backpacking around Europe and North Africa, he had returned to Plymouth, got a job as a security guard at the new Westwood TV studios, and picked up Michael in Hoe Park on the seafront. Richard’s story, like Michael’s, speaks both to local possibilities and imperatives and to wider social and cultural change. The evening and nighttime casual sex circuit clearly offered more than just fleeting pleasure; for Michael and Richard, it was an important way of forging friendships and of finding longer-

---

<sup>99</sup> Ted, PiOP.

<sup>100</sup> Ted, PiOP.

<sup>101</sup> Michael, QBL.

term lovers. Ted, meanwhile, enjoyed the scope for homosocial relaxation, especially at Lion's Den Cove on the eastern edge of the Hoe. It was a place protected from view by a dirty glass screen and a "men only" sign in the 1960s; "People would go up there and spend the day there."<sup>102</sup>

Such behavior might be tolerated in Plymouth as long as it fell below the radar. Michael remembers his mum and dad being angry about a spate of cottaging arrests in the city: "Damn ridiculous, just let them get on with it," they had said. Despite their disapproval of theatrical "nancy boys," the beatniks at El Sombrero, and Michael's colorful shirts, they were also permissive in this sense and supportive of Michael when he introduced Richard to them as his boyfriend. They came to "adore" Richard, and he in turn was astonished by their familial embrace: "He was horrified when he came home ... to my parents, and Christmas morning we all piled into my mum and dad's bed. My sister, her husband, me. He was standing there. "Come on!" [we said]."<sup>103</sup> This was one of the ways the local family-focused culture might be expressed.

Richard's own Plymouthian family behaved very differently. He "was not even allowed in his parents' bedroom," and Michael certainly wasn't; he was kept apart. A more disturbing story involved a father who beat up his son badly when he discovered he was homosexual, even though he himself had had casual sex with men.<sup>104</sup> Evident effeminacy or queerness—in an errant queer son, "nancy" performers, or colorful shirts—might be derided even if sex between men was common and tolerable in particular contexts. In this military city, the dividing lines between homosociality, homosex, and homosexuality were especially

---

<sup>102</sup> Ted, PiOP. See also Butler, "Performing," para. 342.

<sup>103</sup> Michael, QBL.

<sup>104</sup> This story was shared with the author by a project participant after the QBL witness seminar held in Plymouth.

thin.

Police efforts in addressing the queer menace in the 1960s were not as concerted as those of the Manchester force, and there was some equivocal accommodation. Ted remembered, “Various policemen would be up there [at Lion’s Den Cove]—sunbathing. Nude, as well.” In his prolific cottaging adventures, Michael noted multiple blind eyes being turned and once picked up a policeman outside an empty public toilet and had sex with him in the cop car. He also recalled a local “Quentin Crisp character” called Rita who would put on makeup and go to the Lockyer and the cottage opposite, notoriously “good for military” who might check in at the end of their night out on Union Street. (The Lockyer itself was likely out of bounds to servicemen.)<sup>105</sup> “Everybody knew Rita,” Michael said, “which is why very often she wouldn’t get caught. Police would just say: ‘For Christ sake Rita, go home! Put it away!’”

The apparent permissiveness with which this “character” was treated is equivocal, however. Michael also recalls how Rita was repeatedly arrested and served time in Exeter prison. Michael’s “first fling” was also prosecuted and compelled to have electric-shock therapy in lieu of a prison sentence. “It ruined his life,” Michael said.<sup>106</sup> Similar stories emerge from Brighton and Manchester, but in Plymouth there was an additional layer of regulation in the form of the military police. Some venues were placed off limits to service personnel, and “there’d be paddy wagons, the military police” ready outside others to pick up the drunk or otherwise transgressive.<sup>107</sup> Jeannie, a member of the Women’s Royal Army Corps, didn’t go to queer venues in Plymouth until after she left the forces in 1964 at the age of twenty-six. “You more or less had to pretend to be straight,” she said. The military police

---

<sup>105</sup> Michael, QBL.

<sup>106</sup> Michael, QBL.

<sup>107</sup> Michael, QBL.

“were always going through all your [things]; [you had to] scurry to hide everything under the lino ... all the letters and what have you.”<sup>108</sup> Discovery could lead to punishment, dishonorable discharge from the forces, and exposure to family and friends.

These circumstances lent a particularity to Plymouth’s queer scene. It seems to have been even more male dominated than Manchester and Brighton in this period; a vibrant lesbian scene didn’t develop until the mid to late 1970s. Moreover, even if many men were sexually transgressive, there was a desire and perceived need to negotiate carefully established local, military, and familial traditions, protocols, and expectations. This dynamic is much less visible in Manchester, a much larger city, or Brighton, a more notoriously queer one.

This local narrative is replayed by most interviewees, though some striking examples of self-assertion slip through. Rita for one seemed not to have been cowed, and Michael was confident on the sex and social scene. He was buoyed perhaps by his youth, attractiveness, and supportive family. He was also finding some anchor points for his identity and politics in his family’s socialism and in queer-themed books and films. He saw *Victim* when it first came out in 1962 at the vast—but for this film, virtually empty—3,254-seat Odeon Cinema on Frankfort Street in the city center. (It was one film during which he didn’t stray to the projection booth for sex with the projectionist.) Later he borrowed Peter Wildeblood’s *Against the Law* (1955) from Plymouth’s library: “I read that and thought ‘Wow, if anybody got caught with me, I’d just tell the truth and say I belong to this as well.’” He added, in imagined contravention of a trenchant local culture, “To hell with what anybody thought.”<sup>109</sup>

Both the film and book Michael mentioned substantially centered on London, and it is perhaps no surprise that he and Richard ended up there, joining a CHE group and marching

---

<sup>108</sup> Jeannie Crook, PiOP.

<sup>109</sup> Michael, QBL.



in the first gay pride parade in 1972. Returning to Plymouth soon after, Michael found he no longer fit in with the local group. “I kind of breezed in a bit. And said: ‘I worked in CHE in London, in Harrow,’ and they were so unwelcoming.... I was invading their space.”<sup>110</sup> The members perhaps resented being implicitly measured against a metropolitan yardstick.

Ted describes a similar feeling of disjunction when he moved back to Plymouth: “I had moved on and Plymouth hadn’t. I went into the Lockyer and they did not even know the word ‘camp’ or ‘gay’ ... They were laughing and said ‘What do you mean “camp?”’ And so we had long discussions about ‘camp’ and ‘gay.’ ‘Oh, that’s London,’ they said.”<sup>111</sup> Ted and Michael saw themselves as differently queer after their experiences in the capital; on their return, both saw Plymouth as “stuck.” Another Ted, by contrast, was nostalgic for the regularity and familiarity of queer “family” life there in the 1960s: “It was better when it was against the law. We were like a big family; we all knew who we were and where we could go. You’d go out and visit people on a Sunday for tea and things like that. We always used to go for drinks on a Saturday night at the Lockyer Hotel. It was only a little place, but we were used to it and the staff knew us all.”<sup>112</sup>

In Manchester and Brighton, youth and counterculture, partial decriminalization in 1967, and especially women’s and gay liberation a few years later allowed some to feel more confident in being visibly queer, political, and irregular. In Plymouth, the ban on homosexuals in the military and the surrounding culture of discretion acted as a brake. Though beatniks hung out at El Sombrero, counterculture didn’t take hold in the city in the late 1960s and early ‘70s. There was little place in this military city for the peace movement,

---

<sup>110</sup> Michael, QBL.

<sup>111</sup> Ted, PiOP.

<sup>112</sup> “55 Years on and Ted and Paul Are as Happy as the First Day They Met,” *Plymouth Evening Herald*, 16 September 2015.

which was elsewhere woven together with anti-racist, women's, and early homosexual activism (as it was for Alan Horsfall, for example). Plymouth Polytechnic wasn't formed until 1970, and even then did not have the radical pulse of higher education institutions in Manchester and Brighton. Although there was a CHE group, and several of its members were prepared to be photographed for *Gay News* (further evidence of a piecemeal willingness to be visible), the secretary told the paper that "what the world does today, Plymouth does ten years later ... The best thing for gay people here would be if they all suddenly woke up with green noses. But then they'd probably start using makeup." *Gay News* saw this reticence aligned with regional identity and a "strong vein of West Country conservatism."<sup>113</sup>

My interview with a former submariner about his memories of Plymouth in the later 1970s and '80s yielded an account markedly similar to those offered by Ted and Michael about the 1960s.<sup>114</sup> And when in 1989 Colin and Peter from Manchester moved to the city to open a gay pub (The Swallow), they quickly identified an enduring onus on passing and discretion. "We picked [this pub] because ... people could get there easily but wouldn't be seen going in ... That was the prevailing attitude, that and the Navy attitude," said Colin. The military police continued to sniff around for errant sailors there well into the 1990s.<sup>115</sup> At a time when gay bars with plate-glass windows were opening in Manchester and Brighton, in Plymouth the queer scene was less visible and less mixed. The "queer sixties" endured longer here.

## <H1>Brighton</H1>

---

<sup>113</sup> Howes, "Plymouth."

<sup>114</sup> Dennis, interviewed by Matt Cook, 19 November 2017, for QBL.

<sup>115</sup> Colin, Plymouth witness seminar, 12 June 2017, QBL.

Unlike Plymouth and Manchester, Brighton in the 1960s was already well known for its queer scene, in part because of its broader reputation for pleasure seeking. London was nearer and more tangibly part of the town's queer dynamics than it was for the other two cities. In 1949, a "little Kinsey" ethnographer accompanied a group of homosexuals to Brighton from the capital as part of his research; it was apparently the obvious place to go.<sup>116</sup>

In 1961, 163,159 people lived in Brighton, a high point after a century and a half of growth (from 7,339 in 1801). The population dipped slightly thereafter (to 161,351 in 1971), though Brighton had the ongoing demographic ballast of adjoining Hove, with its 73,000 people, to the west. Together the two towns roughly matched Plymouth in population. Unsurprisingly for a seaside resort, the economy was service-sector based, with few big employers. Only 21 percent of the population worked in manufacturing in 1960, 15 percent lower than the national average and 26 percent lower than that in Manchester. Meanwhile, the proportion who were self-employed was around 4 percent higher than the national average, rising slightly across the period from 12 percent to 14 percent. More people were in professional, managerial, and skilled roles than in the other two cities, or indeed more broadly, and fewer were semi-skilled, unskilled, or unemployed.<sup>117</sup> Some commuted to jobs in London, often the office-based jobs that expanded postwar and opened out possibilities especially for women to have "lifestyles independent of family."<sup>118</sup> Though poverty was

---

<sup>116</sup> "Homosexual Groups," in Liz Stanley, *Sex Surveyed, 1949 – 1994: From Mass-Observation's "Little Kinsey" to the National Survey and the Hite Reports* (London, 2014), appendix 2: 199–205.

<sup>117</sup> GB Historical GIS/University of Portsmouth and others, "Brighton and Hove UA," *Vision of Britain*, [http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10056410/rate/IND\\_MAN](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10056410/rate/IND_MAN).

<sup>118</sup> Alison Oram, "Arena 3 and Lesbian Politics in the 1960s" in Collins, *Permissive Society*, 62–79, at 63.

endemic in Brighton, it did not have the poor or working-class image of Manchester. The launch of the university in 1961 prompted a “studenty” reorientation of the town, and its reputation for the arts also developed in this decade, especially after the inauguration of the Brighton Festival in 1967. Students, young artists, beats, mods, rockers, and hippies were all associated with the town—though this youthful reputation in fact belied residential demographics; throughout the 1960s and until 1981, an above-average proportion of over-sixty-fives lived here.<sup>119</sup> Residents elected mainly Conservatives to the council and to Parliament. This was, remember, a town of small businesses, without the kind of strong working-class community and history that energized the left in Manchester.

By the 1960s, Brighton had a central cluster of queer pubs. The Spotted Dog, the Greyhound, the “terribly small” and “tatty”<sup>120</sup> Pigot’s bar at the St. James Hotel, and the Regency Club were all popular with working-class men and, to a lesser extent, women. Pigot’s was remembered as a queer venue from the interwar years and, like the others, had a piano for regular sing-alongs. The Regency clientele, according to Brighton-born James, was “a third lesbian, a third gay men, a third straight.” It was, he said, “one of the friendliest clubs I’d ever known, certainly not an exploiting club.”<sup>121</sup> On the seafront, the Lorelei and “sleazy” Wanderin coffee shops (open all hours) were rougher, as were the Belvedere and Fortune of War pubs (the latter known for its butch lesbian crowd).<sup>122</sup> Chatfields was too—and popular with a crossover crowd of prostitutes, rent boys, queer men, and sailors who would travel from Portsmouth for a weekend of fun out of view of the military police. Grant, originally from Kent, remembers that “anybody who had a flat or a house with a floor space would

---

<sup>119</sup> GB Historical GIS /University of Portsmouth and others, “Brighton and Hove UA.”

<sup>120</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 1364.

<sup>121</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 1639.

<sup>122</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 2323.

probably go down to Chatfields and chat up a sailor and take him home for the weekend.”<sup>123</sup> These places were cheek by jowl with “classier” queer venues: the cocktail bar at the “very very select” Argyle Hotel<sup>124</sup> and the “lovely, old” St. Albans Club, also known locally as “the wrinkle room” on account of the age of its well-heeled actorly clientele.<sup>125</sup> At the Golden Fleece, the two bars developed distinct atmospheres, in part because of the presiding barmen: Bert was “the soul of discretion” in one; Dennis, in the other, was “one of those flamboyant queans.” His bar “was hilarious and riotous,” but he could be “indiscreet” and might “compromise you in public,” James said.<sup>126</sup>

In such a compact town, sandwiched between sea and the South Downs countryside, these places were close to each other and to people’s homes. As a result, there was more domestic socializing here than in the other two cities. More people here than had their own room or place (even if only a bedsit), so it was easier to take people back;<sup>127</sup> some with money had large central flats and houses that were good for entertaining. Phil and Ken (aka Rose and Esme Filk’n) held tea-parties on Sunday afternoons in their “beautiful flat” in Hove, replete with chandeliers and long velvet drapes.<sup>128</sup> Bob, from Worthing, a little further along the coast, remembers that “Aunt Rose used to sit at a high chair and pour tea out of

---

<sup>123</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 1434.

<sup>124</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 1512.

<sup>125</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 1630.

<sup>126</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 1446.

<sup>127</sup> GB Historical GIS/University of Portsmouth and others, “Brighton and Hove UA: Housing Density,” *Vision of Britain*, [http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10056410/rate/HOUS\\_DENSITY\\_GEN](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10056410/rate/HOUS_DENSITY_GEN).

<sup>128</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 1127.

silver pots.”<sup>129</sup> Harry, who moved to Brighton from Cheshire in 1958, recalls that “there’d sometimes be as many as forty people. You knew everybody. It was rather like a masons’ lot.”<sup>130</sup> Brighton was home—or a weekend home—to some well-known queer actors and playwrights; Dublin-born Patrick identified a theatrical “gay mafia” in the town: “expensive queans ... throwing cocktail parties with art dealers and old actresses ... there was an awful lot that went on behind heavily brocaded curtains.”<sup>131</sup> There was also an early “leather clique, the motorbike crowd,” who held parties in their homes too.<sup>132</sup> If many such gatherings were exclusive affairs, post-closing-time parties could be less so: “You’d be at a club, and someone would say ‘party at so and so,’ and you didn’t need to know who the people were, you’d simply grab a bottle and gatecrash,” said Hove-born Janice.<sup>133</sup> George, another Dubliner, remembers one party in Hove where there were lesbians and queer men, drag queens, and “sailors dancing with men.”<sup>134</sup>

Homes could be less compromising places than the bars and clubs. Barbara initially travelled to London for monthly MRG meetings in pubs there, the easy link to the capital giving access to such additional social/political resources. An offshoot developed fairly quickly in Brighton, and Barbara, originally from Blackburn in Lancashire, remembers small MRG gatherings in each others’ homes—for fun and to provide support for women who felt isolated: “We would do the rounds, but our house seemed to be where they could always come at any time.... We used to periodically put on these dos, oh, they were lovely.” Her

---

<sup>129</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 2440.

<sup>130</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 2440.

<sup>131</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 1216.

<sup>132</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 2544.

<sup>133</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 2566.

<sup>134</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 2530.

neighbors would offer to help: “The wife [next door...], she’d say, ‘Oh flow in to me for coffee, you can’t cope with all that lot’ ... She was always there, she knew. And never never openly discussed. But it was so obvious.” What Barbara describes was an unspoken acceptance on the part of her neighbor—an attitude that other queer Brightonians mention too.<sup>135</sup> Sandie, originally from Birmingham, lived in a bedsit in a house on Grand Parade owned by a “gay man” who “tried to [rent to] queer people if he could,” though she lived amiably there alongside a “straight girl and an old lady.”<sup>136</sup> George remembers a neighbor telling him that she “heard [his] little squabbles [with his boyfriend] from time to time,” signaling to him that she knew and didn’t mind.<sup>137</sup> These were reassuring gestures, especially before the change in the law in 1967.

Brighton’s queer commercial and domestic network in the 1960s was substantial enough to have its own class-based, occupational, and age-related cliques and networks (though also with notably more mixed-gender socializing than in Plymouth).<sup>138</sup> Grant remembers that “lots of queers would say, ‘Oh, I wouldn’t go into that place, it’s frightfully rough and tumble. Oh they’re awfully common in there.’” His queer set might go out during the week to avoid the “rougher” “queer blokes” from midland and northern cities who came at the weekends.<sup>139</sup> Others went out of their way to encounter these and other visitors. The last train to Portsmouth left at 1.30 a.m. on Sunday morning, and before that “the cottage at

---

<sup>135</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 1922.

<sup>136</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 590.

<sup>137</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 1073.

<sup>138</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 1354.

<sup>139</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 1541.

the station used to be infamous”: “The queans in drag used to descend like a plague of locusts ... so pissed they were falling arse over tit to find a sailor.”<sup>140</sup>

If, for most, discretion remained crucial, Dennis’s behavior at the Golden Fleece and the purported antics of the Saturday-night queans at the station testified to a particular “out there” camp self-confidence in the town. Phil and Ken announced their coupledness with a camp/crude surname combining their first names. Michael found the quick-witted Brighton queens “very alarming,”<sup>141</sup> and Grant remembered that “color-wise [in Brighton] it was a bit grotesque ... pink velvet trousers with a green shirt ... terribly Hawaiian shirts with all sorts of tulle at the neck.”<sup>142</sup> Filk’n Casuals—the gentlemen’s outfitters in Bond Street run by and named after Phil and Ken—fed this distinctive style, stocking those bright shirts and their own innovations in tailored underwear (including in leather). There were echoes here of the new fashions emerging from Kings Road and Carnaby Street in London, but also of the earlier Sussex Arts Balls in the late 1940s and ’50s, which were notoriously sequin strewn and flamboyant.<sup>143</sup>

Public nonconformity seems to have felt more plausible and less dangerous here than in Plymouth and Manchester. A barber in St. James’s Street catered openly to butch women; Laurie would commute to her office in London in “a collar, tie, everything masculine on top, with a skirt.”<sup>144</sup> Aileen, who moved to Brighton from Glasgow, “could not believe the freedom women had ... you could go out on a Sunday in a pair of slacks, really enjoy it.

---

<sup>140</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 2257.

<sup>141</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 2403.

<sup>142</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 1091.

<sup>143</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 1202.

<sup>144</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 622.



Nobody turned around calling you a cow.”<sup>145</sup> In summer, both homosexuals and heterosexuals could be seen on the beach openly “gazing into each others’ eyes.”<sup>146</sup> The men’s beach at Hove was especially popular with queer men: “There was nothing in the rest of the country to compare ... Lots of very famous and infamous people could have been photographed [there], I can assure you,” said Grant.<sup>147</sup> Vera meanwhile remembered going with a picnic to “sit up on the South Downs” with her girlfriend, or “to the hill past St. Dunstan’s” by Roedean Girls school on Brighton’s eastern edge. The school was the scene of “pashes” between girls and was a queer reference point in other ways too: “We used to say Nancy Spain [the butch journalist and TV personality of the 1950s and early ’60s] went to Roedean. You felt a connection, you see, because you knew she was gay.”<sup>148</sup> Margaret described traveling from London with other Kenric members and setting up camp on the Downs before going out in Brighton in the evening.

This outdoor “scene” in Brighton offered scope for relaxation and sex, but it was also tinged with danger. Vicky didn’t feel safe walking on the streets “dressed like we used to dress.” Despite the sense of comfort others expressed, for her and her friends, “If you couldn’t get in a car or get a taxi, then you didn’t go.”<sup>149</sup> “Queer rolling”—in which queer men would be attacked and robbed on the assumption they were less likely to complain—was common on the seafront.<sup>150</sup> As elsewhere, men risked arrest when they had sex or picked up

---

<sup>145</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 248.

<sup>146</sup> Geoff Roberts, “Last Exit to Brighton,” [*Brighton Gazette*, ca.1968 – source and date not included], East Sussex folder, LAGNA.

<sup>147</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 2212.

<sup>148</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 1311.

<sup>149</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 801.

<sup>150</sup> “Court Hears of Queer Rolling,” *Brighton Gazette*, 23 September 1966.

in public places—as in a 1964 case of a sales rep who met two working-class brothers on a central Brighton street and took them back to his Regency Square flat, where they “whipped [him] at his own request” and committed “acts of gross indecency” together.<sup>151</sup> The public toilet in Black Lion Street (amid the central cluster of queer bars) was closed a year later because of the number of arrests there, many involving tourists.<sup>152</sup> Unicorn Books, run by the American beatnik poet Bill Butler in Gloucester Road, was raided by police soon after it opened in 1967. Butler was prosecuted for selling “obscene publications,” including the hippie *International Times*, which celebrated a “new attitude” of permissiveness and carried queer contact ads. Fellow poets Alan Ginsburg, Thom Gunn, and others were swift in providing Butler with financial support, signaling again the importance of new and wider queer and countercultural networks in the 1960s. Unicorn endured for a further five years partly as a result.

A year after Unicorn opened, the *International Males Advertiser* launched from Preston Street near the seafront. After six issues, it became the *International Spartacus Guide*, a magazine of listings, contacts, and features “for homosexual, about homosexuals, by homosexuals.” The offices became an informal resource for queer men in or traveling to Brighton. “We had, I guess, what was effectively the predecessor of Gay Switchboard . . . . People came to our office, just arriving on the doorstep with their problems. It was quite dramatic.”<sup>153</sup> The window got progressively more suggestive: Eric remembered walking past and seeing “leather jock straps and things like that which I hadn’t seen on display before.”<sup>154</sup> The office and its output spoke of an unapologetic presence that was attuned to a wider

---

<sup>151</sup> “Four Fined in Whipping Case,” *Brighton Gazette*, 24 July 1964.

<sup>152</sup> “Hotbed Lavatory to Close,” *Brighton Gazette*, 23 April 1965.

<sup>153</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 2137.

<sup>154</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 2129.

countercultural shift and homosexual (soon to be gay) politics, and also to Brighton's particular reputation as a permissive cosmopolitan place receptive to both. Queer commerce was more evident earlier here than in Manchester or Plymouth.

These were some of the ways in which Brighton "started to liven up by the end of the sixties," said Dennis. "Everything else ... loosened up" as "things had got gay and we had got flower power" (tellingly combining gay and wider counterculture).<sup>155</sup> By 1968, Brighton was "gayer" than Hampstead, according to one woman who moved to the town from London apparently partly for this reason. In contrast to the situation in Plymouth, queer incomers were plentiful.<sup>156</sup> Journalist Geoff Roberts claimed that in "no other European city is homosexuality so open and apparently so tolerated."<sup>157</sup> Interviewees certainly touched on feelings of isolation and fear, and queer bashers and the police were certainly active. But in Brighton more than in Manchester and Plymouth, there was a sense of possibility and excitement born of the scale of the scene, the visibility of queer people, and a wider notoriety. In all three places, we see examples of queer people behaving "as if" their behavior was accepted and acceptable,<sup>158</sup> but here such examples are legion. This tendency underpinned some early organizing and protest. The MRG was active locally (as in Manchester in the form of the New Group), and there were some piecemeal outspoken moves by students at the university. In 1965 one wrote to the *Brighton Gazette* to protest the "reactionary" opinion voiced in the *Brighton Gazette* about the Black Lion Street toilets; he called for "a militant campaign to change the law regarding homosexuals."<sup>159</sup> A year later, a group of Sussex

---

<sup>155</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 1563.

<sup>156</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 248.

<sup>157</sup> Roberts, "Last Exit."

<sup>158</sup> On this, see Weeks, *World We Have Won*.

<sup>159</sup> "Driven Underground," *Brighton Gazette*, 12 March 1965.

students joined others from Oxford University to lobby MPs in support of the Sexual Offences Act.<sup>160</sup> A Gay Liberation Front group with around fifty members formed at the university in the 1971 and quickly organized what the *Brighton Evening Argus* described as a mixed “pop music discotheque with psychedelic lighting” at the Co-Op Hall in London Road, away from the seafront and the established commercial queer scene there. With 250 young revelers, including a local lorry driver and Coventry trade unionist, it was touted by the *Evening Argus* as something new: “The overall feeling was one of relaxed enjoyment, natural pleasure in dancing, and lots of laughter”—very different to what organizer Simon Watney described as “the extremely sordid atmosphere gay people usually have to put up with.”<sup>161</sup>

Despite this early flourish, Brighton’s GLF seems to have been less radically engaged than Manchester’s, possibly because of the greater and earlier queer visibility and comfort here. “I think Sussex [University] was possibly one of the easiest places [in the country] to come to terms with an alternative from mainstream identity,” said Jim, a key player in the university’s subsequent Gaysoc.<sup>162</sup> The activist jolt and mobilization in Brighton came later. In this town of historic queer ease, the sting of homophobic backlash around Clause 28 and in the 1980s locally and nationally was especially sharp.

## <H1>Conclusions</H1>

Wider social and cultural changes in the 1960s weave through these accounts of Manchester, Plymouth, and Brighton. We see it in fashion and style and in youth cultures and student life, in the money some were able to spend on going out, in the scope to travel and move around more easily. These shifts modulated queer life, scenes, experiences, and also expectations and

---

<sup>160</sup> “Sussex Undergrads Lobby MPs,” *Hastings Evening Post*, 10 February 1966.

<sup>161</sup> “And a Gay Time Was Had by All,” *Brighton Evening Argus*, 1 June 1971.

<sup>162</sup> Jim Stanford, cited in Jastrzebska and Luvera, *Queer in Brighton*, 189.

aspirations—apparent in the nascent radicalism felt individually by Michael in Plymouth or more collectively by the women of the MRG in Brighton and the New Group in Manchester. In each city, there were those who owned and articulated a queer identity (with varying degrees of flamboyance and self-confidence) and at least one pub serving a mix of queers, queens, lesbians, and people who were gender-crossing. Camaraderie at the Union in Manchester, the Lockyer in Plymouth, and the Regency in Brighton was often forged in relation to class and in the face of varying degrees of local opprobrium. Queer and Swinging London was a shared reference point, though it meant something different for Brightonians within easy (even daily) reach than it did for the more distant Plymouthians. Undoubtedly, iconic places and national and international trends, ideas, and (for example, legal) imperatives had their place in local queer lives and imaginaries; I have nevertheless shown that these shared reference points were part of localized queer cultures that were also substantially different from each other. Casual sex between “normal” and queer men was not unique to Plymouth, but this crossover was especially pronounced there because of the presence of a large number of young servicemen who might be open to sex but not much more in terms of identity or community. Many here felt a need to separate and negotiate carefully queer and normal lives in what was a small, family-oriented and traditional city. The size of Manchester, meanwhile, provided a queer critical mass and facilitated what could be for some an enveloping subculture. Luchia initially shuttled between her factory work and the Union but quickly found jobs in queer bars and lodging with women “like her.” Her strong sense of community was forged partly in relation to the particular policing regime and probably also to a solidarity and straightforwardness associated with Mancunian identity. Brighton was exceptional in different ways again. As in Manchester, the scene was substantial enough for distinctive styles and reputations to attach to different venues that developed distinct reputations, but here there were more middle-class and artistic cliques as

well as more of a domestic circuit. Queer life was already embedded in the culture of this permissive seaside resort, in ways that had earned it a wide notoriety and plentiful visitors. (Many of them stayed: Ourstory interviewees were from Lancashire, Yorkshire, Cheshire, Kent, and London, as well as some other Sussex towns.) Having accommodated a stream of weekendening friends from London, John turned his home into one of the town's first clearly queer guest houses, Le Chateau Gay, in the later 1960s.<sup>163</sup> The value of the pink pound was more evident to him and others in Brighton at this point than it was in Manchester or Plymouth. In Brighton there was also a clearer folding together of queer, youth, and hippie subcultures, partly because of the proximity to London (the epicenter of that "sixties swing"), and partly because Brightonians were used to—or were often themselves—incomers who might live at some distance from family and associated expectations.<sup>164</sup>

While there are certainly queer resonances between Manchester, Plymouth, and Brighton, we also witness different identifications, ways of being, and understandings of community and politics. We can trace these tendencies into later decades. I have suggested a continuity of some of Plymouth's queer dynamics of the 1960s into the years that followed. In the seemingly unabashed queer visibility in Brighton in the 1960s, meanwhile, we see some of the imperatives that soon attached to gay liberation. There and perhaps more substantially in Manchester, we can also detect a nascent politics that partially underpinned later activism.<sup>165</sup> Local "sixties scenes" in these ways etched out some of the "imaginative space for the sexual revolution of the 1970s" (in the words of Raphael Samuel) but also help

---

<sup>163</sup> Ourstory, *Daring*, loc. 2137.

<sup>164</sup> On familial negotiation and rupture, see Peter Keogh, Catherine Dodds, and Laurie Henderson, *Ethnic Minority Gay Men: Redefining Community, Restoring Identity: Research Report* (London, 2004).

<sup>165</sup> See Oram, "Arena Three."

us to understand why the call to “come out” and “come together” was taken up unevenly.<sup>166</sup> It was easier to heed that call in Brighton or among students at Manchester University than it was in Plymouth.

Growing student populations, changing work and work patterns, urban renewal and gentrification, and civic and police accommodation of or resistance to queer people subsequently reshaped LGBTQ lives and scenes in distinctive ways in our three cities. These distinctions partly explain why the national and international AIDS crisis or legal change away from and then in the direction of equality were experienced differently in each place—despite the sense some interviewees had of a loss of local particularity in the 2000s, and a hankering after earlier and supposedly more “authentic” times and scenes. Some interviewees contrasted distinctive local (and often also “rough” and “working-class”) places with more recent “generic” and “sterile” bars and clubs.<sup>167</sup> Gilad Padva and Elsbeth Probyn see this brand of nostalgia as somewhat queer, oriented not around childhood, family, and a society braced by idealized versions of these things but rather around the “move ... made to belong to ... another kind of family” and to “a glorified past and its mythic playgrounds, role models and halls of fame.”<sup>168</sup> We can feel something of this in accounts of carnivalesque Union Street in Plymouth, of the back bar at the Gaumont Cinema in Manchester, and of the drag

---

<sup>166</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (London, 1994), 114.

<sup>167</sup> See, for example, Dennis, QBL; and Greg, interviewed by Matt Cook, 12 July 2017, for QBL.

<sup>168</sup> Elsbeth Probyn, “Suspended Beginnings: Of Childhood and Nostalgia,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 2, no. 4 (1995): 439–86, at 442; Gilad Padva, *Queer Nostalgia in Cinema and Popular Culture* (London, 2014), 8. See also Ben Jones, “The Uses of Nostalgia: Autobiography, Community Publishing and Working Class Neighborhood in Postwar England,” *Cultural and Social History* 7, no. 3 (2010): 355–74.

queens in pursuit of sailors at Brighton station. James's, Luchia's, and Ted's respective descriptions of the Regency, the Union, and the Lockyer are laced with a wistful sense that these "non-exploiting" and queerly familial places do not exist in the same way anymore (or at least not for them as older lesbians and gays). While nostalgia should not lead us to flatten out and generalize queer experience in more recent times, it underscores the significance of the local and particular to the ways that queer lives were lived then and have been remembered since.