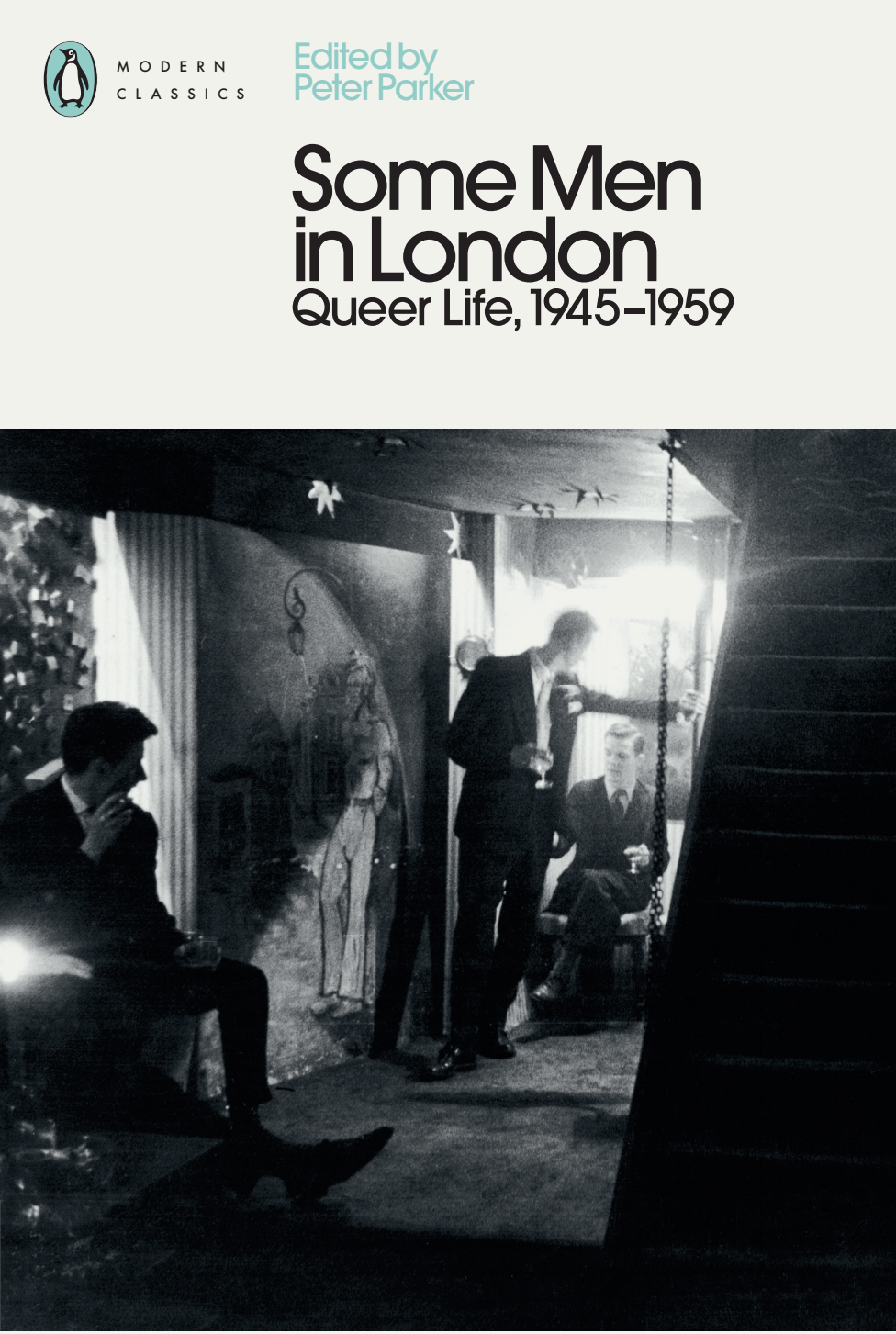


Edited by
Peter Parker

Some Men in London

Queer Life, 1945–1959

PENGUIN MODERN CLASSICS

Some Men in London

'The non-fiction event of the year must be Peter Parker's two-volume anthology, *Some Men in London* . . . The editing is masterful and mordant, with Parker's observations peppered throughout' Frances Wilson, *Spectator*, Books of the Year

'Captivating . . . *Some Men in London* has the democratic, unpolemical quality of a social realist novel. In its sheer range of viewpoints and incidents it shares something with the roving perspective and multitudinous voices of Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*. It is a testament to Peter Parker's skill as a compiler – his ear for the peculiar and the archetypal alike – that gay life in these years . . . comes to feel like its own epicentre, the beating heart of the city. At times it feels more urgent and vibrant by far than life in the present' James Cahill, *TLS*

'Riveting, startling, often horrifyingly comprehensive reading' Paul Flynn, *Evening Standard*

'As lively as a novel . . . a truly vital thing in a world where so many stories have been erased or criminalised' Damian Barr, *Scottish Field*

'Peter Parker has assembled a remarkable range of materials covering all aspects of this phenomenon, spanning VE Day and the passing of the Sexual Offences Act in 1967 . . . Parker adds drily witty commentary throughout' Rupert Christiansen, *Daily Telegraph*

'Parker is to be congratulated for producing such an indispensable pair of books at a time when all queer voices of the past need to be heard, heeded and held in mind' Richard Canning, *Literary Review*

'With its wide-ranging selection, generous biographical notes and provocative bibliography, *Some Men in London* is a serious and important contribution to our understanding of Britain up to today' Fiona Sampson, *The Tablet*

Copyrighted Material

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Peter Parker is the author of biographies of J. R. Ackerley and Christopher Isherwood, *The Old Lie*, *The Last Veteran*, *Housman Country* and *A Little Book of Latin for Gardeners*. He edited *A Reader's Guide to the Twentieth-Century Novel* and *Twentieth-Century Writers*, is an advisory editor of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, and contributed essays to *Britten's Century* and *Fifty Gay and Lesbian Books Everybody Must Read*. He has written about people, books, art, architecture and gardening for a wide variety of newspapers and magazines, and lives in London's East End.

Copyrighted Material

Some Men in London
Queer Life, 1945–1959

Edited by Peter Parker



PENGUIN BOOKS

Copyrighted Material

PENGUIN CLASSICS

UK | USA | Canada | Ireland | Australia
India | New Zealand | South Africa

Penguin Classics is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies whose addresses can be found at global.penguinrandomhouse.com

Penguin Random House UK
One Embassy Gardens, 8 Viaduct Gardens, London SW11 7BW

penguin.co.uk

Penguin
Random House
UK

First published in hardback in Penguin Classics 2024
Published in paperback in Penguin Classics 2026
001

Introduction, selection, commentary and biographical notes
copyright © Peter Parker, 2024

The moral right of the editor has been asserted

Penguin Random House values and supports copyright.
Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes freedom of expression and supports a vibrant culture. Thank you for purchasing an authorized edition of this book and for respecting intellectual property laws by not reproducing, scanning or distributing any part of it by any means without permission. You are supporting authors and enabling Penguin Random House to continue to publish books for everyone.
No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner for the purpose of training artificial intelligence technologies or systems. In accordance with Article 4(3) of the DSM Directive 2019/790, Penguin Random House expressly reserves this work from the text and data mining exception.

Typeset by Six Red Marbles UK, Thetford, Norfolk
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorized representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland, Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978–0–241–37061–2

Penguin Random House is committed to a sustainable future for our business, our readers and our planet. This book is made from Forest Stewardship Council® certified paper.

MIX
Paper | Supporting responsible forestry
FSC® C018179
www.fsc.org
FSC

yrighted Material

Contents

Introduction 1
Editor's Note 19
1945 21
1946 33
1947 41
1948 65
1949 75
1950 87
1951 113
1952 127
1953 157
1954 193
1955 223
1956 249
1957 269
1958 303
1959 347

Biographical Notes 379
Bibliography 433
Acknowledgments 449
Permissions 451

Copyrighted Material

Copyrighted Material

Introduction

> *What the public really loathes in homosexuality is not the thing itself but having to think about it. If it could be slipped into our midst unnoticed, legalized overnight by a decree in small print, there would be few protests. Unfortunately it can only be legalized by Parliament, and Members of Parliament are obliged to think or to appear to think. Consequently the Wolfenden recommendations will be indefinitely rejected, police prosecutions will continue . . .*
>
> *E. M. Forster, September 1960*

Born into the Victorian age, E. M. Forster lived to see the recommendation of the Wolfenden Report that 'homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private should no longer be a criminal offence' pass into law.[1] The Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution, under the chairmanship of the educationalist Sir John Wolfenden, was set up by the government in 1954 in response to what was considered an alarming rise in 'vice'. It would take a whole decade for its recommendations about homosexuality, delivered in 1957, to be implemented with the passing of the Sexual Offences Act of 1967. Given that homosexuality was only partially decriminalized by the Act – it applied only in England and Wales, only to men over the age of twenty-one, and excluded members of the armed forces and Merchant Navy – Forster's pessimism was not entirely unjustified. Indeed, convictions for those homosexual offences that remained on the statute books actually increased after 1967. In the 1950s and 1960s, while the Wolfenden Committee was discussing decriminalization and Parliament

Copyrighted Material

debating it, 'the twilight world of the homosexual' was forced upon the attention of the British public in innumerable books, newspaper and magazine articles, and radio and television current affairs programmes. Forster was right in suggesting that people did not much like having to think about something that was not usually discussed in public; but, without thinking about it, or even noticing, that same public had for decades been entertained and enlightened by homosexual writers, painters, actors, dancers, composers and musicians, radio and television personalities, comedians and other performers.

There sometimes appeared to be a compact between these people and their public. Kenneth Williams, for example, was one of the leading actors in the hugely popular *Carry On* films during the 1950s and 1960s (and beyond). Part of the joke was that he was often cast as a heterosexual whose smirking interest in the opposite sex was comically at odds with his outrageously camp mannerisms and vocal delivery. Frankie Howerd was another popular comedian whose heterosexual leering was about as convincing as his toupée, but who kept his private life strictly under wraps. Similarly, although some of his plays had a homosexual theme, Noël Coward refused to the end of his life to acknowledge his own sexuality publicly on the grounds that 'there are still a few old ladies in Worthing who don't know'.[2] Employed by a tabloid press that frequently condemned homosexuality, Beverley Nichols and Godfrey Winn were hugely popular journalists, 'confirmed bachelors' with a devoted female readership. Winn even wrote a long-running 'agony aunt' column and was called upon to judge the Miss World beauty contest. Such men were fearful that admission or exposure would bring their careers to an abrupt end, but this was not always the case. Despite his much-publicized arrest for 'persistent importuning' in 1953, the recently knighted Sir John Gielgud was greeted with a standing ovation when he first appeared on stage after his conviction, suggesting that public attitudes to homosexuality were not quite as hostile as the newspapers liked to suggest – at any rate not among theatregoers, who would indeed have had a pretty thin time of it if the stage had lost its homosexual actors, writers, producers, directors and designers.

A large number of such people gravitated towards London, because that was where much of the cultural life of the country was generated. In addition, however, many homosexual men without any connection to the arts also came to London because it was easier to blend in or

Copyrighted Material

find like-minded friends or potential partners in a populous capital city than in the smaller and more close-knit communities in the provinces where they had been born and brought up. In his 1960 sociological study *A Minority*, Gordon Westwood was told by some of those he interviewed that 'they found that homosexuality was regarded with greater toleration by Londoners than by others'. Westwood comments: 'This may be true, but it is suspected that a more important factor here is the anonymity provided by living in a large city. Two homosexuals living together in a village or even a small town would almost certainly be the subject of gossip, but two men living together are less noticeable among the millions in London.'[3]

Drawn together by a shared and illicit sexuality, queer men in London found the barriers of class more permeable than elsewhere. The idea that working-class men, unless corrupted by their social superiors, could be homosexual was not widely shared. In their 1940 study of the inter-war years Robert Graves and Alan Hodge flatly stated that: 'Homosexuality had been on the increase among the upper classes for a couple of generations, though almost unknown among working people.'[4] This was a fallacy particularly peddled, to their great discredit, by Labour politicians, who affected to believe that homosexuality was entirely confined to upper-class decadents. It was a view also widely promulgated in the popular press, with the notoriously unsympathetic columnist John Gordon assuring readers of the *Sunday Express* in 1954 that 'Perversion is very largely a practice of the too idle and the too rich. It does not flourish in lands where men work hard and brows sweat with honest labour.'[5] This fantasy is not borne out by metropolitan court records. For example, when the Wolfenden Report was published, a retired Methodist clergyman and hymnologist called Thomas Tiplady wrote letters to the Public Morality Council in which he claimed that in spite of serving for three years as a padre on the Western Front during the First World War and running the Lambeth Mission in Kennington for thirty-two years, he had never met a homosexual. Neither, he added, had the Rev. James Butterworth, who ran a popular and famous youth club in Walworth. This proved, he felt, that the vice was unknown among the working classes and was found only among those with a higher education and wealthier lifestyle. Tiplady, who even claimed that he had never heard of any homosexual living in his neighbourhood, must have been

Copyrighted Material

very innocent or imperceptive, since the headquarters of his Lambeth Mission was a short walk from Archbishop's Park, the public lavatory of which was one of the most notorious in London, 'producing some dozen or more prosecutions per week'.[6] Not much further afield were equally busy public urinals in Upper and Lower Marsh Street. The court registers for Lambeth Police Court show that the forty-two men charged with homosexual offences in September 1947, when Tiplady was active in his Mission, included several labourers, a leather-worker, a postman, a messenger, a rigger, a shopkeeper, a waiter, a fitter, a cellarman, a porter, a grocer's assistant, a machinist, a mosaic-worker, a barman, a cook, a boat-builder, a domestic servant, a housekeeper, a caretaker and several members of the unemployed – none of them belonging to the well-educated upper echelons of society to which Tiplady imagined homosexuality was restricted. Similarly, Peter Wildeblood's 1955 autobiography *Against the Law* provides a table detailing the occupations of 321 men brought to court for homosexual offences in the mid-1950s, in which schoolmasters, clergymen and those of 'independent means' are vastly outnumbered by men employed in factories or transport, as postal workers, clerks, shop assistants, hotel and domestic staff, and unskilled labourers.[7] As Douglas Plummer put it in his book *Queer People* (1963), 'For every Hugh Walpole there are many thousands or ordinary labourers or lorry drivers or salesmen who are also homosexual.'[8]

This anthology draws together witnesses from all walks of life and from the comparatively brief but crucial period beginning in 1945 with the end of the Second World War and ending in 1967 with the passing of the Sexual Offences Act. One of the anomalies of the period, and indeed of history, is that female homosexuality was never criminalized in Britain. That lesbian women were subjected to a similar degree of hostility from the press and the public to that endured by homosexual men is beyond dispute; they were not, however, at constant risk of arrest and prosecution by the police and the courts. While there was some overlap in the lives of lesbians and queer men in London during this period, the trajectory of this anthology is towards the partial decriminalization of male homosexuality, and because lesbians were not materially affected by this, they are largely absent here, perhaps awaiting their own anthology. This first volume covers the years 1945 to 1959, an era in which

Copyrighted Material

views on sexual difference now seem shockingly unenlightened. These views were not only expressed in populist newspapers but also by those who administered the law and formed medical opinion. Attitudes began to change a little during the period covered by the second volume, 1960 to 1967, but crass or simply hostile attitudes to homosexuality persisted. As long as homosexual acts remained illegal, you had 'right' on your side if you decried them, and if details of 'criminal' activity appear to occupy a substantial part of the book, it is because during the period covered all actively homosexual men were living outside the law. Even so, many of them managed to get on with and enjoy life, and the anthology also provides evidence of a thriving subculture that flourished in London, and of social and professional networks that enriched the national culture.

In order to avoid the pitfalls of hindsight, the book draws only on what was written and recorded at the time, creating a mosaic of experience and opinion. This means that there are no extracts from memoirs published after 1967 – not even from Quentin Crisp's seminal *The Naked Civil Servant*, which appeared in 1968. There is such an abundance of material written and published between 1945 and 1967 that the anthology could have been – and at one time was – at least twice the length it is; but in order to keep it within manageable bounds many other items have had to be omitted. In addition, a number of pieces of writing had to be dropped because publishers and copyright holders demanded impossibly large sums to reproduce them, and readers will no doubt be disappointed to find that some of their favourite stories and people are absent. The contents are nevertheless wide-ranging, taken from letters and diaries, medical and sociological books and magazines, newspaper reports and letters pages, fiction and autobiography, film and theatre, television and radio programmes, parliamentary debates and government and police documents. An equally wide range of opinion has been gathered, with the voices of hostile witnesses taking their place alongside those of people whose activities, or very existence, these witnesses deplored or even wished to eradicate. Among other things, it shows that attitudes towards homosexuality were always much more complex than newspapers, successive governments and the Metropolitan Police imagined. The word 'queer' is employed here not because it is now used polemically and more or less indiscriminately to embrace all kinds

Copyrighted Material

of sexual difference, but because it was the one most people used during this period to refer to homosexual men.

The aim of the book is to evoke what it was like for homosexual men to live in London from 1945 to 1967, whether they had famous faces or, more usually, led lives of quiet or occasionally rowdy anonymity. The start date has been chosen because homosexuality was seen to be 'increasing' during the 1940s, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, and this created a moral panic, largely fuelled by the sensationalist press. Peter Wildeblood, who was both a journalist and someone whose life was gloatingly picked over in the newspapers when he went on trial for homosexual offences in 1954, suggested that lurid newspaper stories were the fault of

> a cold-eyed bunch of businessmen who peddled tragedy, sensation and heartbreak as casually as though they were cartloads of cabbages or bags of cement. The false, over-coloured and sentimental view of life reflected in the newspapers was due to the cynical belief of these men that this was what the public wanted [. . .] The reporter always gets the blame, but the real culprits are the proprietors and editors who relentlessly pursue the trivial and sordid, while protesting that they are shocked by what they have to print.[9]

This anthology widens the lens provided by the tabloids to show the reality of where and how queer men really lived during this period and how they spent their time – in pubs and clubs, in more public places of assignation, or simply at home. The reader will discover what these men read in the newspapers or in books, heard on the radio, saw on the television and in theatres, art galleries and cinemas. The book will show how they accommodated themselves to, or in many instances fell foul of, laws that criminalized their sexuality, laws that in some cases led to men being imprisoned, blackmailed or driven to suicide. It will show how these laws were frequently debated in Parliament and the press and investigated by sociologists and members of the psychiatric and medical professions. Readers will see how individuals and organizations campaigned to have the law changed, while others fought a rearguard action to keep it on the statute books. They will also read about how ordinary heterosexual people viewed homosexuality – with loathing and contempt, with crude humour, with sympathy, and even with indifference.

Copyrighted Material

*

'The West End of London spells VICE in searing capital letters,' a Scotland Yard chief superintendent warned readers of the *News of the World* in April 1954. 'There's plenty of it to be found in other parts of the capital of course, and in other British cities, towns and even villages. But for the black rotten heart of the thing look to London's golden centre.'[10] This is indeed what politicians, civil servants and newspaper editors did, taking London as the principal reference point for any investigation of, or debate about, the nation's morals. The Wolfenden Committee may have based some of its findings on information gathered from other parts of the country, but overwhelmingly looked to the streets of the capital. For example, the most detailed account of how police dealt with homosexual offences was gathered from two London constables, one working in Mayfair and Soho, the other in Chelsea. Similarly, although provincial magistrates were consulted, the main witnesses were those who served in the metropolitan courts. This may have been partly because, although there were many examples in the provinces of individuals and groups of men being charged with homosexual offences, in the wake of the Second World War prosecutions were particularly prevalent in London, with 637 cases coming up before the Metropolitan Magistrates' Courts in 1947, a considerable rise from 211 in 1942.[11] As already mentioned, in the single month of September 1947 forty-two men appeared before the magistrates at the Lambeth Police Court charged with various homosexual acts. These included 'persistent importuning for immoral purposes', in which men were arrested for soliciting, either in the streets or in public lavatories (known among queer men as 'cottages'); 'gross indecency', for which the police had to catch men in the sexual act rather than merely soliciting it; and 'buggery', the legal term for sodomy.[12] Other magistrates' records told a similar story.

It says a good deal about attitudes to homosexuality that the law made no real distinction between men who were merely in search of sexual companionship and male prostitutes who were touting for business. Those brought before the magistrates were either fined, put on remand, imprisoned, bound over or very occasionally discharged. Fines, usually for a first offence, changed over the years to take account of the cost of living. In the 1940s they generally ranged between £5 and £15, but these had increased to a maximum of £25 by the 1950s. (According to the Bank of England inflation calculator, £5 in 1946 would be the

Copyrighted Material

equivalent of £168.91 in 2023, while £25 in 1950 would be the equivalent of £690.37.) Many men went to prison for a second conviction, the sentences handed out by magistrates ranging from anything between six weeks and six months. Persistent offenders were referred to the assizes or quarter sessions, where they would be tried before a jury, as were all those over seventeen charged with gross indecency; if convicted they were given prison sentences of between one year and the legal maximum of two years. The crimes of indecent assault or assault with the intent to commit buggery carried a maximum sentence of ten years' imprisonment. These assaults would cover homosexual rape or attempted rape, but might also include a sexual act by a man over twenty-one with someone between the ages of sixteen and twenty, even if (as was often the case) this was consensual. If deemed culpable, rather than unwilling victims, the junior partners in such activities could be sent to borstal or an approved school. Convictions for buggery were technically punishable by imprisonment for life, but more usually led to a sentence of between one and five years. A table published in the Wolfenden Report showed that of the 1,515 men who between 1951 and 1955 were found guilty of buggery only forty were given a sentence of over seven years. Until penal servitude was abolished in England and Wales in 1948, a prison sentence could carry the additional punishment of hard labour. Even after it had ended, inmates at Wormwood Scrubs spent six days a week working full time in prison workshops. A group of homosexual prisoners being inducted there in 1955 were told: 'You will have to work as hard as you have ever worked and if you do not learn this you will have to spend the rest of your days at Dartmoor' – that prison being considered much tougher.[13] Foreign nationals sometimes faced deportation when they had finished their sentences.

The commonly received notion that in the 1950s the Home Secretary, Sir David Maxwell Fyfe, in collaboration with the Director of Public Prosecutions, Sir Theobald Mathew, and the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Sir John Nott-Bower, had initiated a homosexual witch-hunt has been challenged by recent historians. It was, however, clearly stated in the press that in October 1953 Maxwell Fyfe had 'instructed the police to step up the drive against vice in London'.[14] The Home Secretary had all kinds of vice in his sights, including female prostitution, but there is little doubt that 'male vice' was considered a major and increasing

Copyrighted Material

problem in the capital. Indeed, during questions in Parliament on homosexual offences in December of that same year, Maxwell Fyfe stated that 'homosexuals in general are exhibitionists and proselytisers and are a danger to others, especially the young, and so long as I hold the office of Home Secretary I shall give no countenance to the view that they should not be prevented from being such a danger'.[15] It might also be noted that many people at the time certainly felt that a witch-hunt was under way. The Conservative MP Henry 'Chips' Channon, for example, noted in his diary on 26 October 1953 that 'There is, it seems, a witch-hunt against "perversion" etc. Certainly several people have behaved squalidly or stupidly recently but that is no real reason for a drive, or crusade, and in years to come people who lead it will look as foolish as do the witch-hunters of ancient days.'[16] Homosexual himself, Channon undoubtedly had particular cause to worry when he recorded the following day that 'the anti-vice wave gathers strength', but his sense that there was 'apprehension in the air, an uneasy feeling' echoes what many other homosexual men felt during this period.[17] For instance, another diarist, George Lucas, who worked for the Department of Trade and was reporting rather more from street level than Channon, recorded that what he called a 'new and vigorous attack on inverts' had been instigated at this period.[18]

Often working with the police and other professional bodies, a number of essentially amateur organizations took it upon themselves to monitor the morals of their fellow citizens. The Marylebone Vigilantes, formed in 1957, were an ad hoc coming-together of local residents principally concerned with female prostitution; but the public debate around homosexuality fomented by the Wolfenden Report (a report the Vigilantes vigorously 'denounced') encouraged them to widen their remit to curb 'male vice'.[19] 'The qualifications of the Vigilantes are common-sense, determination, clean-living and fair-mindedness,' wrote a correspondent in the *Marylebone Mercury*; they 'have proved their worth in our community and as British citizens in general'. Examples of 'common-sense' and 'fair-mindedness' may be found in their suggestion in February 1958 that they should join forces with other 'anti-vice groups throughout London' to create a London Vice Council that would demand, among other things, the 'Deportation of all aliens and Colonials who are convicted of vice or sexual offences' and the 'return of "flogging" for any man convicted of vice or sexual offences'.[20]

Copyrighted Material

It seems astonishing that this group of self-appointed busybodies were taken seriously enough to have meetings not only with their local MP but even with the Home Secretary R. A. Butler, to whom they sent regular reports. Happily, not every resident of Marylebone thought the Vigilantes were a power for good, and the correspondence pages of the *Marylebone Mercury* in the late 1950s became a battleground between social conservatives and those of a more liberal persuasion who supported the recommendations of the Wolfenden Report.

The Public Morality Council had been founded in 1899, again largely to combat female prostitution, but by the 1940s had widened its scope to monitor all aspects of 'immorality'. Its aim was a society governed by Christian ethics and values, and, with the Bishop of London as its chairman, it was officially recognized by the police and government. In 1954 it appointed a sub-committee 'to study the problem of homosexuality', and sent an 'interim report' on the subject to the Wolfenden Committee. The PMC conducted public campaigns, held a regular pitch at Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park, made formal complaints about plays, films and broadcasts it considerd unsuitable, and kept a beady eye on the general deportment of individual citizens. It employed patrolling officers, usually former policemen, to tour the West End and send in regular detailed reports on such perceived vices as gambling, prostitution and homosexuality. The officer would liaise with the police and obtain statistics for those convicted of these offences. One officer reported in September 1948 that things generally had improved in the West End once that year's Olympic Games were over and the many visiting foreigners had returned to their own countries. He nevertheless stated that male indecency was on the increase, and his report included a list naming thirty-two men charged with homosexual offences in the West End between 12 August and 17 September, their ages ranging from eighteen to fifty. Twelve were given prison sentences of between two and eighteen months, twelve were handed fines of between £5 and £15, while the remainder were bound over, held on remand or had their cases sent to the quarter sessions. Only one case was dismissed.

Members of the public could join the PMC by paying an annual subscription, and were encouraged to write to the Council about anything that had offended them, which resulted in correspondence on a wide range of subjects, from unchecked sexual activity in psychiatric units to

Copyrighted Material

naked mannequins in shop windows. While such letters were generally welcomed, in the summer of 1955 the PMC's vice-chairman (*sic*), Lady Cynthia Colville, started receiving what soon became a torrent of long and rambling letters from a thirty-year-old art teacher in Kensington called Murray Llewellyn-Jones, who had given shelter to a young man down on his luck called Tony. It soon became clear that Tony was not the decent young working-class lad Llewellyn-Jones had imagined. He was in fact both a convicted thief and a male prostitute, and after several altercations with his benefactor left Llewellyn-Jones's house to live in what appeared to be a brothel in Earls Court catering for both heterosexual and homosexual clients. Llewellyn-Jones started by asking for advice on how to deal with the young man, something that was not within the province of the PMC, though they did look into the alleged brothel and took successful action to have it raided, only to receive further letters about Tony's activities as a rent boy and complaints about the clubs and all-night coffee houses that were frequented by 'perverts'. Every time someone from the PMC replied, they received yet another long, obsessive and repetitive screed until it was decided that the only way to stop them was not to reply. This resulted in Llewellyn-Jones writing to say that he was dissatisfied by the PMC's response and had therefore changed his mind about making a donation to the organization, something Lady Cynthia considered a small price to pay if the letters ceased. Both she and the PMC's secretary, George Tomlinson, decided that Llewellyn-Jones had rather too intimate a knowledge of those queer haunts he claimed to deplore, and suspected his interest in the young tearaway was not as disinterested as he made out. This extraordinary series of letters is preserved in the PMC archives and provides a fascinating account not only of one man's somewhat compromised crusade to combat homosexual vice in the capital, but of the kind of world in which rent boys moved, the places queer men and male prostitutes congregated, and the overlap between the queer and straight sexual 'underworld'. Unfortunately I was refused permission to reproduce these letters, or those of the Rev. Tiplady, or the patrolling officer's reports, all of which are among the Public Morality Council's papers preserved in the London Metropolitan Archives.

The apparent rise in homosexual crime was often attributed to the large numbers of men from the provinces who were flocking to the capital

Copyrighted Material

in search of a less circumscribed, or simply more exciting, life. Not that a move to London always ended happily. For his 1965 book *Sociological Aspects of Homosexuality* Michael Schofield interviewed various categories of homosexual men, including fifty who had been convicted of homosexual offences and were serving their sentences in London prisons. Of these, thirty were living in London at the time of their arrest, but only eight of them, a mere 27 per cent of the sample, had been born in the capital. 'This', Schofield felt, 'is in accord with the strong tendency for homosexuals to migrate to London.'[21] It wasn't merely those born in small villages or rural areas who followed this path; the opportunity to find anonymity in the capital even attracted men from other large cities. 'Belfast is a big place,' said one, 'but by this time I was too well known all over the city and so I thought I'd better come to London.'[22] Others appear to have 'discovered' themselves almost by chance in the capital. 'I have only been queer since I came to London about two years ago,' one man wrote to someone he had apparently mistaken for being homosexual, 'before that I knew nothing about it, as I told you I am married and have a little girl two years of age.'[23]

Schofield further discovered that 40 per cent of his convicted sample had left home by the time they were seventeen. 'I felt I wasn't understood at home,' said one. 'I was always a bit effeminate, even then. So I went to the West End and started to run around with others like me. I found their company preferable.'[24] Some youngsters soon found themselves in trouble, and one of the things that may surprise and shock readers is the number of juveniles who were prosecuted and found guilty of homosexual offences. A table appended to the Wolfenden Report reveals that in England and Wales, in the years 1951–5, 729 youths between the ages of fourteen and seventeen, and 1,079 aged between seventeen and twenty-one, were found guilty of 'indictable homosexual offences'. Even more shockingly, 244 boys under the age of fourteen had been found guilty of the same offences, and these figures do not of course include those whose cases were dismissed by the courts, or those who had been involved with older men prosecuted for sexual offences against the underaged. George Lucas reported meeting a 'sophisticated, amoral' twenty-two-year-old guardsman at Marble Arch who had been on the game since he was fourteen; and in 1949, 'while his father sat sobbing at the back of the City Juvenile Court', a thirteen-year-old came before

Copyrighted Material

magistrates in Coventry 'for persistently importuning for immoral purposes'.[25] That these were not isolated cases may be judged from the cheerful accounts given to Richard Hauser in *The Homosexual Society* (1962, reproduced in Volume 2) by young men who had been on the game since they were twelve or thirteen, and indeed one who even claimed to have started at the age of eight. Most people would have agreed that any change in the law should ensure that minors were still protected, but there were clearly some minors who, whether or not they could be judged capable of making such decisions, found sexual relationships with adults both satisfactory and lucrative.

Although queer men of all classes and ages attracted the attention of the police and the courts, there was during this period something of a shift in attitudes, in which homosexuality began to be more widely regarded as a psychological problem rather than a criminal one. Books started to appear which 'explained' homosexuality to the general public, some sensible, some sensationalist, some merely crackpot, but most of them approaching the subject from a broadly sympathetic, if often misguided, viewpoint. Some of these were the work of professional sociologists such as Richard Hauser or Michael Schofield, much of their content based on interviews with homosexual men and so giving a fascinating insight into how queer men led their lives and what they thought about themselves. Others, such as D. J. West's *Homosexuality* (1955) and Clifford Allen's *Homosexuality: Its Nature, Causation and Treatment* (1958), were the work of practising psychiatrists. In addition there were books by eccentric amateurs, such as *Men and Cupid* (1965), written by a nonagenarian heterosexual called Harold Martin and issued by the Fortune Press, a publishing house more usually (though not exclusively) renowned for homosexual erotica. In his Introduction to *Society and the Homosexual* (1952), written by Schofield under the pseudonym of Gordon Westwood, the distinguished psychoanalyst and criminologist Dr Edward Glover wrote: 'Books purporting to inform the public on the psychology of sex fall naturally into two categories: those few which should find a conspicuous place on the family bookshelves, to be consulted when the occasion demands by old and young alike, and the great majority which should be consigned forthwith to the waste-paper basket.'[26] *Society and the Homosexual* clearly belonged to the former category, part of what the

Copyrighted Material

publisher called 'a campaign of public enlightenment' that also 'suggests various changes in the law'. Schofield was himself homosexual, but nevertheless regarded homosexuality as a 'problem' that society needed to approach with 'tolerance and understanding'.[27] In contrast, Allen and West suggest that some form of treatment would solve the problem, and preferably eradicate homosexuality altogether. 'Given a simple choice, no one in his right mind would chose to be homosexual,' writes West.[28] Like Westwood, he advocates 'toleration of sexual deviants', but concludes his book by insisting that this is 'not the same as encouragement. No doctor should advise a young person to rest content with a homosexual orientation without first giving a grave warning about the frustration and tragedy inherent in this mode of life.'[29] What is truly dispiriting about this is that West too was homosexual; what is cheering, however, is that he would himself go on to have a much happier life than this envoi to his book would suggest, because at around the time he was writing it, he had entered into a relationship with another man that would last more than forty-five years.

Regardless of these attempts to replace the prison cell with the psychiatrist's couch, the Metropolitan Police continued vigorously to patrol the kinds of places where they might arrest homosexual men. They produced maps of Central London for the Wolfenden Committee showing the 'location of urinals where arrests were effected during 1953'.[30] These are marked in red: a circle for importuning, a cross for gross indecency, and a cross within a circle for places where arrests had been made for both offences. These do not extend as far west as Shepherd's Bush Green, where the actor Wilfrid Brambell would be arrested, or as far north as the Holloway Road, where the playwright Joe Orton would often be found, but include Chelsea and Victoria. A large area of Hyde Park bounded by Park Lane, Bayswater Road and the Serpentine is outlined in red and annotated: '76 cases of gross indecency in this area in 1953'. Such was the level of activity here after dark that the Marlborough Street Magistrate, Paul Bennett, told the Wolfenden Committee: 'I would like to floodlight the place tonight.'[31] Some of the arrests in the Park were undoubtedly related to the fact that Knightsbridge Barracks, home to the Household Cavalry (made up of the Life Guards and the Blues and Royals), was on its southern edge. Although played down, or even flatly denied, by the authorities, there was a long-standing tradition of guardsmen combining

Copyrighted Material

ceremonial duties with casual homosexual prostitution, and their ranks were swelled between 1947 and 1963 by huge numbers of civilians aged between eighteen and thirty who were conscripted to do National Service. London was awash with young men, often far from home, short of money and with little to do in their spare time, and it is no coincidence that another open space where homosexual activity was rife was St James's Park, close to the Wellington Barracks in Birdcage Walk, which was home to the Coldstream, Grenadier, Irish, Scots and Welsh Guards.

A rather more detailed, and indeed more interesting, map than the ones provided by the Met could be drawn to show the complex geography of queer London. This would include not only parks and lavatories, but the pubs, clubs, cafés, baths and cinemas in which homosexual men met. It might even include queer brothels: one in Holborn frequented by the theatre critic James Agate, one in Kensington where the politician Lord Boothby was to be found, one supposedly run by the head of the airline BOAC, and others, perhaps less professionally run, in Mile End's Tredegar Square and Earls Court's Penywern Road. While these establishments were specialized, there were a number of clubs and pubs which, though they did not specifically cater to a homosexual clientele, were sufficiently bohemian for no one to care very much what one's sexual tastes were. The Gargoyle in Dean Street was popular with artists and writers, many of whom happened to be homosexual, and much the same went for the nearby Colony Room, run by the lesbian Muriel Belcher and her equally foul-mouthed queer barman, Ian Board. Similarly, the Fitzroy Tavern in Charlotte Street was not a queer pub as such but became notorious as somewhere servicemen could mingle, to their financial advantage, with the clientele. Before setting off into the night together, guardsmen and homosexuals convivially downed pints in pubs such as the Welsh Harp in Covent Garden, the Pakenham Arms in Knightsbridge and the Bag O'Nails in Buckingham Palace Road. The Wellington in Waterloo Road had rooms that could be rented by men who had picked up servicemen staying at the nearby Union Jack Club, a hostel for those on military leave that was itself a site of considerable homosexual activity during this period. Such pubs occasionally attracted the attention of the military police, leading to courts martial and dishonourable discharges from the army.

Other pubs gained reputations as places frequented by queer civilians,

Copyrighted Material

and these too were subject to surveillance and the occasional raid. Landlords were sometimes prosecuted for keeping a 'disorderly house', at which point they often claimed, unconvincingly, to be wholly unaware of the sexual orientation of their customers, even those who painted their faces. Cafés might seem by their nature rather more orderly than pubs, but Forte's in Leicester Square, for example, stayed open until midnight and was a well-known haunt of male prostitutes. Some of these places, such as the Ham Yard Café in Soho, became so notorious that they were closed by the police, but as Rodney Garland observed in the extract from *The Heart in Exile* (1953) included here, when a pub or café was closed by the authorities, the clientele often simply moved elsewhere. For example, the Bar-B-Q in Frith Street was closed in June 1955, but its customers – many of whom, though male, went by such names as Freda, Babs and Tangerine – relocated to the Little Hut round the corner in Greek Street, where they continued to talk openly and raucously about their trade as male tarts. That said, not all cafés were as 'disorderly' as these ones. According to J. R. Ackerley, who was often to be found there with E. M. Forster, the Mousehole in Swallow Street, despite being just off Piccadilly Circus, where rent boys clogged the pavements, was 'a perfectly respectable little place'. The police disagreed and, having noticed the number of men there who wore make-up and addressed each other as 'darling', raided it in 1957.[32] Ackerley and Forster transferred their custom to Bobbie's, an 'afternoon club' that occupied a dingy room off Dean Street and had a predominantly working-class clientele. Forster enjoyed this last aspect of the place but thought that security on the door was 'culpably slack'.[33] Membership clubs such as the Festival in Brydges Place, off St Martin's Lane, or the A&B (Arts and Battledress), which moved from Orange Street to Wardour Street in 1952, organized things better. Many of the meeting places that peers in their debates on homosexuality dubbed 'buggers' clubs' were very far from the dens of vice their Lordships imagined; they were merely places where queer men could mix socially without worrying that they were being observed by a hostile public. The grander ones were not in essence very different from the gentlemen's clubs in which Members of both Houses spent much of their time, and indeed the Rockingham Club in Archer Street was popularly known as 'the poufs' Athenaeum'.

Copyrighted Material

Other men haunted London's cinemas, such as the Biograph near

Victoria Station, where the film's soundtrack was often barely audible because of the clatter of seats being changed, or those in Piccadilly Circus or Leicester Square where a rolling programme of uninterrupted newsreels or cartoons made it possible for audience members to remain there the whole day. Public baths in such working-class areas as Bermondsey or West Ham were other busy sites of homosexual activity, as were the capital's Turkish baths, notably the one in Jermyn Street, the one beneath the Imperial Hotel in Russell Square, and the all-hours one in the Harrow Road, which remained open every week from 9 a.m. on Monday to 9 a.m. on Sunday. The YMCA swimming baths in Great Russell Street were also popular, not least because for a long time swimming costumes were banned there on the grounds that wearing them was 'unhygienic'.[34] Other men simply stayed at home or got on quietly with their lives.

This, then, is the world in which some men in London moved between 1945 and 1959, mostly treading carefully but occasionally behaving recklessly. Supposedly 'secret', this world was being opened up to a sometimes aghast public by both homosexual men themselves in articles and autobiographies, and those who wished to study them, 'expose' them, legislate against them, prosecute them, or treat their 'condition' in specialized clinics. Amid the darkness of the period, there are flashes of light, humour, defiance and common sense, as well as entertaining plays and novels that present a rather more sophisticated and less shrill account of this world than the tabloids did. Much of what is reproduced here will offend modern sensibilities, but this is as it should be and why history is important. In an era when homosexual men have legal rights and can even marry, we need to be reminded what people really thought, felt and said in the past – if only to ensure we never return there.

NOTES

Epigraph. 'Terminal note', dated September 1960, *Maurice*, pp. 221–2.

1. *Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution*, p. 115.
2. Hoare, p. 509.
3. p. 180.
4. *The Long Weekend*, p. 99.

Copyrighted Material

5. Quoted in Wildeblood, *Against the Law*, p. 128.
6. National Archives, HO 345/7: Memorandum submitted to the Wolfenden Committee by Geoffrey Rose, Metropolitan Magistrate for Lambeth, December 1954.
7. Wildeblood, *Against the Law*, p. 24.
8. p. 33.
9. *Against the Law*, p. 31.
10. 11 April 1954, quoted in Houlbrook, p. 237.
11. Ibid., p. 273.
12. London Metropolitan Archives, PS/LAM/A/01/138.
13. Kinsey, 'Notes on his European Trip of Late 1955', 12 December (8).
14. *Daily Herald*, 27 October 1953.
15. House of Commons debate on Sexual Offences, 3 December 1953 (Hansard, Volume 521).
16. Channon, *The Diaries: 1943–57*, p. 912.
17. Ibid., pp. 912, 917.
18. Lucas diary, 30 October 1953.
19. *Marylebone Mercury*, 5 December 1958.
20. Ibid., 7 February 1958.
21. p. 26.
22. Ibid., p. 25.
23. National Archives, MEPO 3/758, quoted in Houlbrook, p. 2.
24. p. 25.
25. Lucas diary, 2 February 1951; *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 9 December 1949.
26. p. 11.
27. Ibid., p. 172.
28. p. 154.
29. Ibid., p. 181.
30. National Archives, HO 345/12, C.H.P./10.
31. National Archives, CHP/TRASNS/10: Notes of a meeting held with Bennett at the Home Office, 5 January 1955.
32. Quoted in Parker, *Ackerley*, p. 337.
33. Ibid., p. 338.
34. Hall Carpenter Archives and Gay Men's Oral History Group, *Walking After Midnight*, p. 67.

Copyrighted Material

Editor's Note

Except where otherwise stated, the material in this anthology is reproduced in its original form, complete with idiosyncrasies of style and punctuation.

I have, however, made some excisions, but only to remove material that is either irrelevant or repetitive.

All cuts are indicated thus: [. . .]. Any other ellipses are reproduced from the original texts.

Copyrighted Material

Copyrighted Material

1945

After almost six long years, the Second World War ended in Europe on Tuesday, 8 May 1945, the day that Nazi Germany formally surrendered to Allied forces. This victory in Europe was celebrated by VE Day – although the war with Japan would continue for several more months. As news of the German surrender spread on 7 May, people began celebrating in the streets of London. Although there was a formal element to VE Day itself, with speeches to the nation from the King and the Prime Minister, the West End was packed with people marking the occasion in a grand saturnalia. Among the crowds was John S. Barrington, a British pioneer of physique photography, celebrating in his own way. He had met James Agate, the long-serving theatre critic of The Sunday Times, *during the war, and subsequently procured for him. The Lyons Corner House was a restaurant on Coventry Street with a long-standing reputation as a queer meeting place and consequently nicknamed 'the Lily Pond'.*

A rumour became a certainty. Gaiety began to invade the people at about 3 pm. Met Margot and took her to the film *Dorian Grey* [*sic*]. When we came out of the cinema V.E. Day was here at last. At 9 pm Leicester Square, Coventry Street and Piccadilly were crowded beyond imagination . . . Drink flowed. Many were already tight by mid-evening . . . We all loved everyone.

Margot and I had to move via back streets to the Café Royal and then needed to bribe our way in. Champagne with Jimmie Agate. Then at 11 pm back through the crush in Piccadilly Circus, kissing every soldier, sailor and airman I could meet. Watched the

Copyrighted Material

lights go on in Leicester Square for the first time since September 1939 . . . Impossible to get into Corner House, crowds too great, so pick up superb sailor, take him to office and fuck him 'silly', an exceptional activity for both of us. Give him a bottle of whisky and £5. Then take the bus home to Tufnell Park. It thunderstormed and rained tropically. Everyone asleep.

Tuesday: V.E. Day official. To office by 10 am. Worked till noon. Streets getting crowded again. Splendid view of crowds through office window. Open window and wave to people passing down Charing Cross Road. West End is like a huge fairground with pictures of Churchill, King and Queen, Monty, Eisenhower, etc. Coloured hats, streamers, men with movie cameras. Boys and sailors up trees and lamp posts, Americans at the Rainbow corner throwing French letters filled with water onto the crowds. Met Miki and Ricky (USAF) outside Café Royal 6 pm. Went to St James Park, struggled through crowds in Mall. Left Miki and Ricky who felt like bed and sex (and he didn't want me) . . . At 3 am tiredness crept over London. People just sat down and talked. A few made love. Young men in uniform and girls. And I also saw in dark doorways and in alleys and phone boxes sailors and kneeling men.

At 4.30 am to the Corner House. Crowded, noisy, much like it was in the Blitz. Hot chocolate and scrambled eggs. Nice lonely sailor, never learnt his name, at the same table. Big, tall, very masculine. Dark hair, blue eyes, olive skin, perfect teeth. Half an hour's chat. Established that he never had. Couldn't. Nothing a man could do would make him come, so what's the point. A real challenge. Took him – without much protest – to my office and persuaded him to show me his body. And then a rapid erection as he assumed poses. A little more persuasion and he lay on the divan, posing as a sleeping god. A jaw-aching, tongue-tiring hour resulted in his sheepish, grudging admission that everything is possible given the right time, place, incentive and partner. I'd like to have seen him again, but he wouldn't even join me for breakfast. Half a tumbler of whisky, a refusal to let me kiss his cheek, and he was gone into the now depleted crowds. Before he

Copyrighted Material

disappeared he raised his arm with a clenched fist, but he didn't look back.

John S. Barrington diary, 7–9 May 1945

Meanwhile, in his house at 5 Belgrave Square, the forty-eight-year-old Conservative MP Henry 'Chips' Channon was celebrating VE Day with the playwright Terence Rattigan, with whom he was having an affair while his partner, Peter Coats, was in India serving as Lord Wavell's aide-de-camp. Guests at his party included a number of people from the world of theatre and ballet, to whom Channon had been introduced by Rattigan.

[Yesterday evening] Terry arrived breathless, hot, beautiful, on foot just before nine and we dined *à deux i*n the black dining room as we listened to the King's broadcast. It was really too embarrassing: he ought to talk better by now: the contrast to Winston's eloquence and that of Dominion PMs is shocking. I have no patience with the present Sovereigns [*sic*], both are bores and dull . . . but do the job well enough, I suppose. We had scarcely finished our intimate little *repas* and looked about the house, which looked lovely and luxurious, when our guests began to arrive. It was barely ten o'clock when Juliet Duff accompanied by Desmond MacCarthy, then Sibyl Colefax and Harold Nicolson, the Londonderrys and others came . . . the theatre frittered in and we must have had nearly all a hundred guests. Everyone brought someone else: there were Noël Coward, Ivor Novello, Bobbie Helpmann, the dancer; Freddie Ashton the choreographer etc. etc. They drank gin cup, whisky, and ate . . . from time to time went out to take air and see the crowds. Terry tried to take me away but I felt my obligations as a host, but he went with [Channon's GP] Dr Bucky to Buck House and was lucky enough – with his fine sense of timing – to see the King and Queen come out on to the balcony. The Palace was illuminated and the enthusiasm extreme; but little rowdiness . . . in the distance were a few bonfires . . . guests came and went on foot, since there was no traffic. Noël Coward and Emerald Cunard had a bitter argument

Copyrighted Material

which was almost a quarrel [. . .] Finally before 4 a.m. they began to disperse and Terry and I came up to bed. We slept together in Napoleon's bed! He snored a little, moaned and smiled as he turned over.

Here endeth the first twenty-four hours of peace.

Chips Channon diary, 9 May 1945

Emerald Cunard (1872–1948) was a leading Society hostess. Tony Gandarillas (1885–1970) was a Chilean painter and diplomat, who had been the lover of the painter Christopher Wood (1901–30).

Emerald recounted her row with Noël Coward last night. He greeted her with, 'Emerald, darling!' She replied, 'Why do you call me "darling"? I don't know you.' Then she said, 'I have never liked you.' And again later, 'You are a very common man.' Tony Gandarillas practically had to separate them.

James Lees-Milne diary, 9 May 1945

~

Channon's diaries continued to record his sometimes rapturous but often fraught relationship with Rattigan.

Sunday 13th May

For some time I have been aware that my friendship with Terry is a fatal one; it is too intense, possibly too one-sided; certainly we are criticised. Are we marching to a doom, to a scandal?

Monday 14th May

A dreadful day in some ways. All premonitions were justified, for TR rang me up late last night and we talked for an hour; he had just had a visit from John Gielgud who, slightly tipsy, had played the candid friend and warned him that we are the talk of London – indeed our axis, our ardent association, is public property and, almost ahead, a scandal. I soothed him but was distressed.

Copyrighted Material

Wednesday 16th May

I woke in a swoon of happiness, gay, and like an ecstatic bridegroom. Terry telephoned early.

Tuesday 5th June

Terry is mine, as much as he will ever be; but he is incapable of going full out. I prefer Peter, who if less glamorous, is more unselfish and *au fond* far more fascinating.

Wednesday 6th June

A bad beginning to a dull day; discouraging post. A long letter from Peter, still in Simla, in which he quotes a letter written to him by Sybil Colefax which is a mixture of malice and *naïveté*: she underlines and makes much play of my friendship with T. and made mischief. P. now definitely talks of returning to join me in August.

Chips Channon diary, May–June 1945

While Channon and his circle were reasonably safe from exposure and prosecution, insulated by their social position, for the less exalted in shabby Pimlico matters were very different.

PIMLICO ARTIST & MAYFAIR WOMAN
Sordid Story of Immorality

AFTER HEARING A STORY OF WEST-END NIGHT LIFE AND OF THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN A PIMLICO FILM ARTIST AND A GOOD-LOOKING YOUNG MAYFAIR WOMAN, THE BOW STREET MAGISTRATE REMARKED, 'THE WHOLE ATMOSPHERE ABOUT THIS CASE STINKS. THE LESS I SAY ABOUT IT THE BETTER.'

The artist, Frank Jones, 28, of St. George's-square was accused of living wholly or in part on the earnings of prostitution. His defence was one of mistaken identity.

Mr. R. I. Graham, prosecuting, said Jones was constantly in association with a Mayfair woman known to the police. When they went

Copyrighted Material

to her flat to execute the warrant the woman looked out of a window and after some delay opened the front door. She then said she was alone but there were two cigarettes burning on an ashtray and it was obvious that someone had left the premises. Jones was not arrested until some days later, when he and the woman were being driven away from the flat in a taxi.

'TOOK MEN TO FLAT'

P.c.s Burton and Clarke gave evidence of keeping observation on Jones and the woman on five nights during June. They alleged that on the first night, June 5, Jones was watching her in Piccadilly while she was accosting men. At 10.15 p.m. she took an American officer to her flat in Netford-street and Jones hurried on ahead and got there first. Just before midnight and again at 1 a.m. the woman took other Americans to the flat. The observation ceased at 2 a.m. The same sort of thing went on for four successive nights.

In cross-examination by Mr. Rutledge, for the defence, P.c. Burton said he knew Jones as a convicted pervert. He had never seen money pass between the couple.

It was obvious that Jones lived at St. George's-drive. Men's clothing was found at the woman's flat but he did not know that she was associating with another man. Perverts called at the flat, but the officer thought the object of their visits was to see Jones and not the woman.

Mr. Rutledge: Is it your opinion that he is earning his living in a certain style – as pervert? – No.

'From first to last,' suggested Mr. Rutledge, 'Jones was never in this woman's company during your observation.'

P.c. Burton replied that he was with her the whole time. He added that he found three photographs of the woman at Jones's address in St. George's-square.

P.c Clarke, in an answer to Mr. Rutledge said he had not seen Jones 'plying his trade' on the streets. Another man was at the flat during the observation, but he was now sitting in court and could not be mistaken for Jones.

£5 A WEEK FROM 'GENTLEMAN FRIEND'

Sub-Div.-Inspector Muir said that after his arrest Jones said to him, 'This is an absurd charge. The man they are looking for is another dark-haired man who goes there. I go there, but I don't live there. I

Copyrighted Material

go home to Victoria every night; the landlady will tell you so. I do film work, but that is not my only source of a quarrel.' She had never given him any money. He was homo-sexual. A gentleman friend paid him £5 a week. It would be unfair to bring his name into court as he was a man of position. After the police had been to the flat he telephoned the woman and she told him about the trouble, and he called round to see her.

The magistrate (Mr. Sandbach): Not having seen her for some months the police happened to find you there the night you arrived? – Yes.

The woman concerned was called as a witness for the defence. She gave her name as Mrs. Kathleen Leadley, and said she first met Jones in 1938. She had never given him money nor board or shelter. She did not see him at all during the period covered by the police observation. Another man, whose description fitted Jones's, was living with her at the time, but she did not know his name. She knew Jones was a homo-sexual.

'LITTLE BIT OF SCANDAL'

Questioned about a party given at her flat Mrs. Leadley said, 'A few friends of the homo-sexual type came to my flat for a little bit of scandal.' She declared that the men's clothing found in her place was made for her by a tailor. [. . .]

Mr. Rutledge said the defence made no attack on the police, but submitted that there had been a mistake in identity. It required some courage for Jones to go into the witness box and tell the story he had, but he had discharged the burden placed upon him of establishing that he had means for supporting himself.

It was stated that Jones was twice found guilty of importuning in 1937. He was first bound over, and next time was sentenced to six months' imprisonment.

The magistrate held that the charge was proved and passed a sentence of six months' imprisonment.

West London Press, 13 July 1945

~

Artists such as Keith Vaughan, John Minton, Francis Bacon and 'the Two Roberts', Colquhoun and MacBryde, tended to congregate in the pubs of Soho and Fitzrovia, where they drank to excess

Copyrighted Material

and eyed up potential conquests. Vaughan's extensive diaries describe his trawling the pubs and streets in search of other men.

I thought first I would find Robert C [olquhoun]. & went to the usual pubs but he was not there. The square was set as usual. I walked the rounds but there was nothing striking. The youths with long hair & neat open-necked shirts flaunting their undeniably beautiful youth. A violinist had begun playing by the fountain. Someone came & stood in a little space on my left. After a while he swung on his heels and swept me a single, expressionless glance & walked away. I saw him sit on one of the seats. He sat on the corner & watched me approach him. Our eyes met steadily as I drew near & at the last moment, I think simultaneously we began to smile. The smile set my heart beating into my ears. I knew from that moment that I could sleep with him if I wanted to. I doubt if an observer could have told that the broad open smiles & his movement anticipating my sitting beside him was not the greeting of old acquaintances.

Keith Vaughan diary, 15 August 1945

~

I dined at the Ordinary and didn't enjoy it a bit, although several friends were present, including the Nicolson boys. Nigel was looking wonderfully healthy and handsome. He astonished me and embarrassed Ben by saying loudly, as we all sat on a sofa together, 'I do wish men would make up their faces.' I can think of several who might improve themselves in this way, although Nigel has no need to do it. He made a wry reference to James [Pope-Hennessy]'s behaviour as though he were surprised and pained by it.

James Lees-Milne diary, 15 August 1945

Lees-Milne had been the lover of the Nicolsons' father, Harold, and (intermittently for around a decade after they first met in 1936) of the charming but unreliable James-Pope-Hennessy, with whom both Harold and Nigel Nicolson had also been in love. Unlike his brother, Ben Nicolson remained homosexual.

Copyrighted Material

~

Plays required a licence from the Lord Chamberlain's Office to be performed in public. Scripts had to be submitted in advance of production and would be read by an Examiner of Plays, who would provide a synopsis and suggest whether or not a licence should be granted.

David and Peter share a flat, the same bedroom and there is every indication that they share the same bed. David is a writer, Peter a musician, and both are pansies.

Their friend, Ronnie, a Musical critic, introduces his sister Diana.

Diana falls in love with Peter and encourages him to compose. David is jealous.

Under the influence of Diana's sympathy and encouragement Peter writes an opus. He is playing it to Diana, when David enters! This brings David's jealousy to a head. There is a tense scene, which ends in Diana at last grasping the full implications of the situation. She leaves in distress, Peter rushes out into the night and David sits up nursing his misery. Next morning Ronnie implored David not to carry on like an elderly pervert, and David sentimentalises about the hopeless future for his type of unfortunate. Peter returns to announce that he is leaving David, and Diana comes to say that she is returning to the country. Peter implores her not to desert him, and even begs her to marry him, but Diana knows too much about pansies and goes. David makes a last attempt to persuade Peter to stay, and fails. The curtain descends as he telephones another pansy boy friend to come round with his friends and throw a party. I might add that incidentally we hear a good deal about the other perverts and their love affairs.

The play is comparable to Edward Bourdet's 'La Prisonniere' (frequently banned), and as far as possible, considering the theme, is emotional rather than sordid; but sentimentalising about perverts is a most insidious method of encouragement, and I have not the slightest hesitation in advising that the play is

Copyrighted Material

NOT RECOMMENDED FOR LICENCE.
H. C. Game

The author might raise the excuse that this play, far from glorifying the particular subject, makes it deplorable – rather in the line of The Green Hat.

However I [strongly] advise, too, that it should not be given a licence.

NG

Licence refused
C

Reader's report and notes by Norman Gwatkin, Assistant Comptroller, and Lord Clarendon, Lord Chamberlain, on Dail Ambler's play *Surface*, 28 August 1945.

Édouard Bourdet's La Prisonnière *(1926) was a pioneering play about a lesbian who attempts to leave her relationship with another woman to marry a man, but fails. Translated as* The Captive, *it caused a sensation when presented on Broadway and was closed down by the authorities. It seems likely that Gwatkin is confusing* The Green Hat, *the 1925 play by the popular author Michael Arlen, adapted from his own scandalous but heterosexual novel, with the British author Mordaunt Shairp's* The Green Bay Tree *(1933).*

~

Very little poetry that was overtly homosexual was published during this period, though these satirical verses by William Plomer were an exception.

Copyrighted Material

Aloft in Heavenly Mansions, Doubleyou One –
Just Mayfair flats, but certainly sublime –
You'll find the abode of D'Arcy Honeybunn,
A rose-red sissy half as old as time.

Peace cannot age him, and no war could kill
The genial tenant of those cosy rooms,
He's lived there always and he lives there still,
Perennial pansy, hardiest of blooms.

There you'll encounter aunts of either sex,
Their jokes equivocal or over-ripe,
Ambiguous couples wearing slacks and specs
And the stout Lesbian knocking out her pipe.

The rooms are crammed with flowers and objets d'art,
A Ganymede still hands the drinks – and plenty!
D'Arcy still keeps a rakish-looking car
And still behaves the way he did at twenty.

A ruby pin is fastened in his tie,
The scent he uses is *Adieu Sagesse*,
His shoes are suede, and as the years go by
His tailor's bill's not getting any less.

He cannot whistle, always rises late,
Is good at indoor sports and parlour tricks,
Mauve is his favourite colour, and his gait
Suggests a peahen walking on hot bricks.

He prances forward with his hands outspread
And folds all comers in a gay embrace,
A wavy toupée on his hairless head,
A fixed smile on his often-lifted face.

'My dear!' he lisps, to whom all men are dear,
'How perfectly enchanting of you!'; turns
Towards his guests and twitters, 'Look who's here!
Do come and help us fiddle while Rome burns!'

Copyrighted Material

'The kindest man alive,' so people say,
'Perpetual youth!' But have you seen his eyes?
The eyes of some old saurian in decay,
That asks no questions and is told no lies.

Under the fribble lurks a worn-out sage
Heavy with disillusion, and alone;
So never say to D'Arcy, 'Be your age!' –
He'd shrivel up at once or turn to stone.

William Plomer, 'The Playboy of the Demi-World: 1938', published in his collection *The Dorking Thigh*, December 1945

Copyrighted Material

1946

John Barrington spent much of his time searching London for men prepared to pose for his physique photographs. He frequently enjoyed sex with his models. Keith Vaughan haunted pubs but felt alienated by their conviviality.

Go with new commando friend Roy to boxing match at Seymour Hall [in Marylebone]. Also take Billy and Cliff, both semi-professional boxers. Both boys are good fun in studio after pub crawl. Hope to make long-term model friends of them. First new faces this year. Both relax and pose naked, warmed by whisky and my hands.

John S. Barrington diary, 15 January 1946

At the Wheatsheaf in Dean Street the usual crowd will be standing jammed against the counter and the walls, smoking, drinking, talking about nothing, passing slowly into a state of artificial vitality as the weak intoxication of the beer softens the scales of their bitterness, emptiness, disappointment.

Keith Vaughan diary, 12 February 1946

Bermuda Club, Wardour Street, cocktail party. Went 9ish. Lots of lovely black men half dressed in the heat. Take three to supper and to studio for semi-naked photos, a dozen roll-ups of weed, two bottles whisky. One leaves at 1 am, one passes out, George and I do some nude studies, he gets very randy. His first time. Amusing breakfast in Soho.

John S. Barrington diary, 23 February 1946

Copyrighted Material

James [Pope-Hennessy] telephoned to explain why he had not been in touch lately. For the past seven weeks he has been madly in love with a French 'cellist. His life has been a turmoil. I drove to lunch with Joan and Garrett [Moore] and there found both James and 'cellist. Both looked very alike, two little black-headed objects, dissipated, green and shagged. James has scratches over his face.

James Lees-Milne diary, 10 March 1946

~

Chips Channon's partner, Peter Coats, had returned from India to live with him and was not best pleased by Channon's relationship with Terence Rattigan, who had himself become involved with the actor Kenneth Morgan (1918–49). Channon himself was not above considering other men as potential lovers. One of these was 'that auburn Irish fascinator' John Perry, a former lover of John Gielgud who left the actor to become the partner of the theatrical impresario Hugh 'Binkie' Beaumont. Nicholas Lawford (1911–91) was a diplomat and Parliamentary Private Secretary, and the life partner of the fashion photographer Horst P. Horst (1906–99). The actor Peter Glenville (1913–96) and actor and writer Arthur Macrae (1908–62) were part of the queer theatrical world to which Channon had been introduced by Rattigan. Oliver Messel (1904–78) was a leading stage designer.

Thursday 28th February

Peter cried at breakfast and I was at once attentive; but I have no qualms of conscience as I have done everything possible to be sweet to him and to make him happy and comfortable. I fear he is tormented by jealousy of Terry, and his face, his fair very beautiful face, tightened when Terry telephoned to me before leaving for Brighton, where he is staying for a few days.

Tuesday 5th March

Called on Terry who came up from Oxford where *The Winslow Boy* is repeating its Brighton triumphs. He looked pasty, white, ill and quite awful – liver aggravated by whisky! Why will he drink so? . . . I was suddenly sickened and refused to lunch with him and

Copyrighted Material

his raffish old father and went off to the Commons. [. . .] Then home where joined by Nicholas Lawford we dined the five, in the big beautiful Blue Room. Much champagne and cosy conversation. Enjoyable, or half-enjoyable evening. I was angered with Terry for not coming too. (He is devoid of social sense.) Instead he went off to Brighton to see his catamite (a little horror named Kenneth Morgan whom he occasionally, but only occasionally, sees) act in some awful play there. I was disgusted.

Wednesday 6th March

Met Terry at Victoria: he looked fresh and pretty as usual; such is his power of recovery, and his very great Roman beauty. I whisked him home here, gave him drinks, and a gold wristwatch and then left him reluctantly to lunch here by himself. He was very sweet.

Thursday 28th March

A really horrid day. Worked to the point of exhaustion and then dressed elaborately and walked to the House of Commons, calling in on Arthur Macrae for a cocktail on the way. In all innocence he let something slip about Terry which blinded me with rage and ultimately spoiled my evening . . .

Monday 1st April

Came up to London [from Kelvedon, his country house], after a sunbath in the late afternoon; masses of work. Changed into a dinner jacket and fetched Terry at Albany (it was a long-standing 'date') and joined by Craig Williams, who is a remarkable Wisconsin lad, and John Gielgud we went to see *Lady Windermere's Fan* at the Haymarket. We were conspicuous, we four, as we were bejewelled, scented and wore deep red carnations – indeed we must have looked like popinjays! Much drinking at the Carlton Hotel bar during the intervals; and then we came home here to Belgrave Square to dine. Delicious dinner in the candlelit room, and Craig Williams was immensely impressed! Suddenly John Gielgud was telephoned for, and rushed away much to Craig's annoyance and wounded pride. I was in his happiest mood, looked beautiful,

Copyrighted Material

smelt seductive and was altogether unforgettably enchanting . . . and we had extravagant 'romps'.

Monday 27th May

Came up to London. Dined with Peter Glenville, his 'friend' Bill Smith, and T. We went first to *The Kingmaker* which T and I relished. Later returned to 16 Yeoman's Row where 'the Glenvilles' live – where we gossiped. On leaving someone suggested saying 'goodnight' to Oliver Messel, who lives below – we knocked, went through a studio crammed with masques and moulds, and came to his dark bedroom – he was *au lit* with a black man: and a dull middle-aged one at that! I was horrified – the squalor and decay of it all. And little Oliver who is so sweet and gentle and talented.

I put Terry to bed. His illness is rather more – *quand même*.

Chips Channon diary, February to May 1946

~

SENTENCES FOR BLACKMAIL

JOHN JAMES MCNEILL, 31, trader, was sentenced at the Central Criminal Court yesterday to five years penal servitude on being found *Guilty* of demanding with menaces £300 from an Army captain referred to as 'Captain X,' with intent to steal. On the same charge TERENCE DENIS FITZSIMMONS, 22, receptionist, who was found *Guilty*, was sentenced to three years' penal servitude. McNeill was stated to have 12 previous convictions, mostly for importuning.

The Times, 26 March 1946

~

Friday 5th July

I felt fatigue with Terry for the first time last evening, and am tiring of the set-up . . . is it enduring? Or was it only a love shadow that fell between us?

Monday 8th July

Woke nervous . . . Peter in high spirits. I disturbed because I know that weak T is deceiving me, or really worse, and more actually

Copyrighted Material

because people think he is [. . .] Oliver Messel came to see me: I am told that he is in trouble, blackmailed and when I say *black*-mailed I mean *black*mailed. [. . .] Terry telephoned gaily and didn't mention having had Kenneth Morgan for the weekend. Life is very complicated . . . Perhaps he didn't.

Friday 26th July

Terry is in a sweet mood. He has more charm than any mortal man. Sometimes I wonder whether he is a mortal or a Roman god. He is so very pagan: says that he worships only the Sun and Jupiter . . . he has no morals, or moral sense of right or wrong.

Saturday 27th July

T enchanting all days and frolics in the afternoon.

We slept in the Empire bed.

Chips Channon diary, July 1946

Channon gave up his diary a few days later and resumed it only in October 1947, when in a summary of the missing year he noted:

The winter was clouded by [illegible] with Terry whose vagaries caused me anguish; but the end of the Rattigan romance, which came on January 13th 1947 after a row at Kelvedon, brought relief. He was a regrettable incident in my life but I shall always remember his beauty and seductions. We remain fast friends but I fear that he is doomed; some unlucky star will guide him to perdition. Already he is seriously embarrassed for money; is selling Sonning (that cheerful semi-detached villa which was our love nest for so long); and his long-golden looks are fading.

~

Since 1943 John Minton had been sharing a house and studio at 77 Bedford Gardens in Kensington with Robert Colquhoun and Robert MacBryde, who had been in a relationship since they met at the Glasgow School of Art ten years earlier. The ménage became complicated when Minton developed an unrequited passion for

Copyrighted Material

Colquhoun. Things came to a head in the summer of 1946, resulting in a sympathetic MacBryde writing to Minton:

I am sorry about that night you arrived back from Cornwall – felt it better to wait for a while before going back to it. As to our conversation regarding the cause and the cure, I now feel that perhaps it was quite near the mark, and that you would find some release by being parted from us . . . Anyway we can work it out gradually together later. We couldn't be fonder of anyone than we are of you but I suppose you still meant it when you spoke of still loving Robert and sometimes feeling unhappy. If I have ever hurt you forgive me and believe me I never was conscious of hurting. There's many nice people would share a place with you if that is what you thought of, but I wish you could love someone else like you say you loved Robert. Anyway it will be so very nice to see you again and we always miss you when we go elsewhere. Try to be happy . . . Duncan [Macdonald] sends me a nice note and very funny with much flattery etc and a reference to a conversation he had on Scottish painting with 'Raymond' [Mortimer] as he puts it. I have done some repairs here and arranged some washing gadgets with a pipe to carry excess water away – well you know me old MACBRYDE.

Robert MacBryde, letter to John Minton, n.d.
(August or September 1946)

~

The most common offence for which homosexual men were arrested was 'importuning for an immoral purpose'. While many felt it easier to admit to the offence and pay a fine, some men successfully appealed against their convictions.

BARONET FINED

SIR GEORGE ROBERT MOWBRAY, 47, of Warrens Wood, Mortimer, Berks, chairman of the Berkshire County Council and vice-chairman of the Executive Council of the County Councils Association of England and Wales and president of Reading University

Copyrighted Material

Council, was at Bow Street yesterday fined £20 and ordered to pay £5 costs for importuning men for an immoral purpose at Piccadilly Circus Underground station. Notice of appeal was given.

Sir George Mowbray gave evidence denying the charge. He said that he had been happily married for 19 years and had three children. He had spent most of his time in local government and other voluntary work. During the evening he had four double gins and limes and two ports, and while driving his car to his club he was not really fit to be in charge of it. He spent nearly an hour in the Underground station to give himself the time to sober up and to wait for the rain to stop.

The Times, 28 August 1946

BARONET'S CONVICTION QUASHED

An appeal by SIR GEORGE ROBERT MOWBRAY, 47, chairman of Berkshire County Council, vice-chairman of the executive council of the County Councils' Association of England and Wales, and president of Reading University Council, against a conviction at Bow Street Court on August 27, when he was fined £20 and ordered to pay five guineas costs for importuning for an immoral purpose at Piccadilly Circus Underground Station, was allowed at London Sessions yesterday. The conviction was quashed. Sir George Mowbray, giving evidence, said that he was an abstemious liver, and at home drank barley water. On August 19, however, he went to London to attend industrial council meetings, and had four large gins and limes and two glasses of port. Leaving his car in Regent Street he went into Piccadilly Tube, and finding he was not as sober as he had thought decided to wait in the tube. Sir Patrick Hastings, K.C., for the appellant, submitted that a most unhappy mistake had been made. Nothing indecent was even suggested against him, but merely that he smiled, nodded, and looked.

The Times, 16 October 1946

~

The National Schoolboys Own Exhibition was an annual event held at various locations in London from the 1920s to the 1950s, attended by thousands of boys and youths between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one. John Gielgud used the event to tease

Copyrighted Material