

The Albany Trust and Hall-Carpenter Archives in *Archives of Sexuality & Gender, Part I: LGBTQ History and Culture Since 1940*

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Various source media, *Archives of Sexuality & Gender, Part I: LGBTQ History and Culture Since 1940*



Introduction to the Hall-Carpenter Archives: a national lesbian and gay archive for the United Kingdom.

The Hall-Carpenter Archives (HCA) are named after the authors Marguerite Radclyffe Hall (1880-1943) and Edward Carpenter (1844-1929).

In 1978 the Gay Research Group of the British Sociological Association discussed the development of gay archives, but it was the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) which identified the need for a media monitoring service to collect evidence of discrimination and police arrests from all parts of the United Kingdom. So in 1980 CHE established the Gay Monitoring and Archive Project (GMAP) as part of its Discrimination Commission. It received agency press cuttings and collected other newspaper clippings sent in by its members. It had also inherited the correspondence and files of various earlier gay rights organisations.

GMAP later became separate from CHE and one of its founders, Julian Meldrum, moved all the papers into his flat in London. Its first funding was a grant made to the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL) from the Manpower Services Commission, and this allowed Julian to be employed for 12 months to work on the archive. He actively researched how a professional archive is run, and began to buy Public Record Office boxes, brass paper clips and the like. In 1982, with others, he set up a limited company called the Hall-Carpenter Memorial Archives Ltd. This rather obscure name and some carefully worded Objects of the Company were chosen to allow it to write to the Charity Commission to obtain charitable status for the new organisation.

The HCA's first few company directors were gay librarians or information scientists, journalists working for gay publications or gay rights campaigners with a strong interest in maintaining a "storehouse of our past". In 1983 the company obtained charitable status. Around this time an early homosexual rights group, the Albany Trust, donated

its extensive archives and press cuttings, and the NCCL provided essential meeting and working space in Southwark, London with financial assistance from a charitable trust, the Lyndhurst Settlement. The HCA also received personal donations from members of the lesbian and gay community. However the Albany Trust donation, plus a growing number of filing cabinets and a rented photocopier, meant there soon became too little room for Julian Meldrum to put down his folding mattress, so in 1984 the HCA moved to its first rented office accommodation in Mount Pleasant, London. Various other gay organisations had offices in the same building.

In 1984 a major funding bid resulted in a grant of £32,000 from the Greater London Council (GLC). Part of this was used to set up a Media Project to monitor television and radio broadcasts, and Lorraine Trenchard and Mark Finch were employed to run this. The HCA also moved to the newly opened London Lesbian and Gay Centre (LLGC) in Cowcross Street, Farringdon. This centre was, in its time, the largest lesbian and gay centre in Europe, and comprised a cafe, gym, bars, offices and meeting/drama spaces. From the office there the HCA ran weekly volunteer work sessions to index and sort press cuttings, write publications, collect archives, journals and ephemera, and run projects. Early publications from this time included *The Gay News Index* (1982); 'Declaring an Interest' — a projected catalogue of gay images on television in Britain, (1982-83); and *A.I.D.S. through the Media* (1984), all now out-of-print. With a newly-purchased computer, work started on indexing the 'News Library' of press cuttings and the records of gay organisations using *DBase II*, and a 'Pink Thesaurus' was created by volunteers.

From 1985 to 1988 the HCA employed Margot Farnham to coordinate a group of six women and four men (volunteers) for an Oral History project. Thirty-five interviews were carried out using new sound recording/transcribing equipment.

[The tapes and transcriptions are now in the National Sound Archive, part of the British Library, London. An accession list is available].

The Oral History project culminated in two books, published both in hardback and paperback:

Inventing Ourselves: Lesbian Life Stories
(London: Routledge, 1989) ISBN 0415 02957 7
(pbk)

Walking After Midnight: Gay Men's Life Stories
(London: Routledge, 1989) ISBN 0415 02957
(pbk) HCA is the author.

Both are now out-of-print, but many academic and public libraries have copies.

Around this time Kenneth Barrow established the National Lesbian & Gay Survey within the HCA. This was a Mass Observation-style survey engaging the opinions of 'ordinary' lesbians and gay men on various vital or controversial contemporary issues, anthologies from which were later published by Routledge.

The HCA's GLC funding terminated in 1986 and again the Lyndhurst Settlement helped the HCA with financial support. In 1987-88 a fundraiser was employed who wrote to around 30 charitable trusts — but none replied favourably. At this time it looked unlikely that the LLGC would receive future funding and its closure was imminent, so the Directors made a deliberate choice to try and house the HCA in a university, preferably in London.

In 1988 the HCA's core collections, i.e. the organisation records and periodicals, were moved to the Archives Division of the British Library of Political and Economic Science, at the London School of Economics (LSE) with the active support of the Archivist, Angela Raspin. These collections included those of the CHE, the Albany Trust/Homosexual Law Reform Society (HLRS), the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement, the Gay Liberation Front and a number of other now-defunct community-based national and local groups. The papers of the Gay Rights Working Parties of the GLC and NCCL are also represented. Scotland and Ireland are covered in the papers of the Scottish Minorities

Group, Scottish Homosexual Rights Group, the National Gay Federation and the Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association. A number of prominent gay activists, such as Peter Tatchell and John Chesterman, also donated personal campaign collections. In addition complete runs of most British and Irish gay serial publications, many newsletters from lesbian and gay groups throughout the UK, overseas lesbian and gay publications and ephemera (posters, newsletters and notices from small or short-lived organisations in the UK and overseas along with programmes, posters and tickets for a wide range of social and arts events) were transferred. This was a fitting home for the HCA as the first meeting in Britain of the Gay Liberation Front was held in the LSE. This part of the Archives was loaned under a ten- year agreement with the LSE Library. Since 1988 the HCA at the LSE have continued to grow with new accessions every year, and have been extensively sorted and indexed by Sue Donnelly and other professional archivists in her team.

The Hall-Carpenter Archives Management Committee was in abeyance between 1989-91, all directors having resigned. In 1991 Oliver Merrington, one of the original Directors, took over as Honorary Secretary/Treasurer and began arranging meetings, dissolving the Limited Company, issuing occasional newsletters and drawing up formal agreements with the repositories which held its materials. He also arranged a regular donation of press cuttings from the monthly Gay Times, which used to subscribe to a cuttings agency for their Mediawatch column.

The Press Cuttings Collection proved much more difficult to house, as the LSE archive had a policy of not taking newspaper cuttings for conservation reasons (they are printed on acid paper which rapidly deteriorates). Initially the collection remained in the LLGC building in Cowcross Street, although the early cuttings relating to the start of the AIDS epidemic were moved to the Terence Higgins Trust. The cuttings then moved to the offices of SIGMA (an organisation conducting sexual research in relation to HIV) in Brixton, London. During this time a professional archivist, Mark Collins, joined the volunteer team and started a re-sort of the cuttings

collection which had not been touched for some ten years. He also arranged their eventual transfer in the late 1990s to the Greenwich Lesbian and Gay Centre, a converted warehouse in southeast London.

A concerted effort to find a new university home for the Press Cuttings Collection resulted in a positive response from several universities. Simon Bradford, the librarian of the Cat Hill campus of Middlesex University, was at this time creating a new Collections Room for a number of historical archives, and offered space to the HCA. In February 1997 the transfer was arranged and a formal ten-year loan agreement signed. Oliver Merrington was appointed Honorary Research Archivist by the University, and holds weekly volunteer sessions there to organise the cuttings. On 2 June 1998 the collection was formally opened by a Member of Parliament, Evan Harris (standing in for Stephen Twigg MP). The photograph collection from Gay News is also at Cat Hill, as well as a growing collection of lapel badges, T-shirts, printed carrier bags and banners from marches and demonstrations. In 2001 the collection on this site was renamed The Lesbian and Gay Newsmedia Archive.

The HCA is also in regular contact with the Lesbian Archive and Information Centre, which is run by a collective and housed in Glasgow Women's Library, Scotland. Access is available to women only.

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Chair, Hall-Carpenter Archives September 2001
<http://hallcarpenter.tripod.com>

Introduction to the Albany Trust Archive.

My first encounters with the Albany Trust (AT) were between the years 1967 and 1971, during what might be seen as almost a middle phase of its work. I approached it as a young graduate who was both a little worried about his emerging sexuality at the same time as pondering the idea of doing a Ph.D. on how the legal changes of the 1967 Sexual Offences Act might impact the gay community. I met Antony Grey, the Director, along with Doreen Cordell (the counsellor) and Joy Blanchard (the office guru), who welcomed me into their small group of supporters and volunteers.

For several years I was a frequent visitor at the slightly ramshackle offices in Shaftesbury Avenue, London, where a rickety old lift would take you slowly to 'their floor', often accompanied by seemingly strange looks from porters. As a volunteer, my main task was to work on the massive press cuttings files which they had been collecting since their inception and which lay somewhat disorganised. My other main involvement concerned various conferences and researches. Occasionally I would glimpse important people in the corridor: the Canadian Professor of Politics at the London School of Economics, Bob McKenzie or the eminent Cambridge criminologist, Donald West, whose book *Homosexuality* was my bible at that time. And as I went to various meetings and conferences I was thrust into what I can only say now was a genteel world of closeted gayness: bishops, priests, social workers, professors, and politicians. All wanting change but none wanting to rock the boat too much. Caution was the byword of the time. And as a working class lad, I learned to sip wine and play croquet.

The AT was one of a number of international movements of that period which were pushing for change. It was nowhere near as developed as comparable groups in the USA (such as the Mattachine Society and the Society for Individual Rights) or in the Netherlands. But it nevertheless played a crucial role in changing the climate and environment and gaining itself a firm place in history as the key early group involved in legal, educational and social campaigning around homosexuality.

Indeed, in many ways, the AT may be taken as emblematic of the many major reform and pressure groups of post war Britain.¹ Formed in 1958, initially it was the Homosexual Law Reform Society (HLRS) which was the dominant wing of the organisation. This was not a grass roots movement, but one spearheaded by worthies who campaigned to implement the proposals of the Wolfenden Report as best they could. Their work culminated in the Sexual Offences Act of 1967 and the history of that Act has been well documented elsewhere.² After that time, the AT came into its own for a short while. Indeed, its prime roles — counselling services, public education and research — became extremely important. Much of the work of the AT and its allied organisations is documented in these papers.

The formation of the HLRS was a brave moment and an exhilarating time. I was too young to witness that (my time came with the excitement of the Gay Liberation Front), but it appears that at an early meeting at Caxton Hall near Westminster, London over 1000 people turned up as the Society went public. The frisson of excitement is caught by someone who was there:

“I went with a friend of mine... and we went early, feeling very self conscious. It was packed out. By going to a place like that, you were proclaiming in a blaze of lights that you were one of these hundreds of homosexual men... they were mostly men — meeting, not in the usual situation, cruising the place, but going there to talk about law reform... On the platform was a man called Antony Grey... I was very excited by the meeting, so I went up to him and told him that he had given a marvellous speech and I was very interested... He gave me his address and I joined the society...”³

The AT stood at a critical juncture in the history of lesbian and gay relations in the UK. Before its birth in 1958, homosexual relations had stood on the shadows of sickness and crime. A messy sordid affair; a blackmailer’s charter; a horror. The 1963 film *Victim* with Dirk Bogarde and Sylvia Syms captured these tragic days well. But shortly after the passage of the 1967 Act, a vibrant gay world developed that

symbolically and seismically was transformed with the arrival of the new Gay Liberation Front (GLF) movements in November 1970 at the LSE. As has been well documented, a change in language, politics, but most of all a change in mood came about. Nobody in the AT had ‘come out’ but in the GLF it was a sine qua non. The language of the AT was shaped largely by religious leaders and educators, whereas those in the GLF were flamboyant politicians — and proud of it. I do not wish to sound unfair, but it was a very radical shift. The AT symbolized the old, elite pressure group and welfare model with its traditionalism, its deep liberal conservatism, its religiosity and pastoral leaders, its doctors and genteel men (and overwhelmingly they were gentlemen). The GLF signalled the new social movement in the making: radical, fiery, anarchistic, colourful. The one held conferences at the Southwark Diocesan Conference Centre — where I recall learning to play croquet for the first time; the other held public drag balls at Kensington Town Hall, London and took to the streets to proclaim its outness. That AT’s work was held in disdain by the latter movement is revealed in a highly polemical pamphlet which was published in 1973 called *The Joke’s Over*. It is an almost unintelligible anarchist document, and it aims to both publish the AT’s social needs survey and at the same time critique it. ‘Fuck you, Albany Trust’, it proclaims.

All of which is a pity, because the AT was composed of brave individuals in its day who were busy making serious legal challenges in a time of smothering hostility and shame. This was the early ‘queer world’ and one far removed from its late twentieth-century counterpart. This collection of papers is a highly valuable one from a period of significant change, which will be of use to researchers, archivists and activists for many years to come.

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¹ The Abortion Lobby was the comparable movement of the time, and all this is discussed in Bridget Pym, *Pressure Groups and the Permissive Society* (David and Charles, 1974). More critical is the approach in National Deviancy Conference (eds), *Permissiveness and Control* (London: Macmillan, 1980).

² See especially Antony Grey’s own accounts in Antony Grey, *Quest for Justice* (London: Sinclair- Stevenson, 1992) and Antony Grey, *Speaking Out: Writings on Sex,*

Law, Politics and Society 1954-1995 (London: Continuum International, 1997). See also: Stephen Jeffery Poulter, *Peers, Queers and Commons: the Struggle for Gay Law Reform from 1950 to the present* (London: Routledge, 1991).

³ Bernard Dobson quoted in *Walking after Midnight: Gay Men’s Life Stories* (London: Routledge, 1989). This was an oral history produced by the HCA.

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