

"Cambridge never fails to provide an outlet whatever the bent may be."

— EAR Ennion in his book *Cambridgeshire* (Robert Hale, 1951)

"We're all snobs here. If you tell people that you come from Cambridge, you're already several points ahead in their eyes because they automatically assume that you are connected with the university and that you talk with an upper-class accent!"

— Richard Osborne, Manuscript book restorer/ male impersonator (31)

aspire to Cambridge class veneer

and punting on the Cam and toasting crumpets in front of the fire, but for most non-university people, life in Cambridge is not particularly attractive. The houses aren't very attractive, rents are high because of the demand for student accommodation, public transport's awful and there are hardly any clubs or places to dance—for straights or gays. I'm resigned to it now because I feel at home here."

— David Taylor, Post-graduate research worker (28)

Upon arrival

Although it's a small city (population 100,000) with a lot of rather scruffy areas, Cambridge must be one of the most photographed, tourist-trodden and sighed over cities in Great Britain with an educational influence which is legendary and spreads across the world. People come to Cambridge to study, to work, to play and to live.



It Takes Time To Grow

50 years of queer history across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

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

Introduction

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

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

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

COMING OUT GAY

THE SHADOWS WE HIDE IN.

Remember - you are not alone. There are hundreds of thousands of gay women and men around us - all ages, shapes, sizes and nationalities.

Some of us like to meet each other and make friends in pubs, clubs and discos. A city like London has dozens of such places and many other towns have a few. A number are pleasant, others less so; some positively welcome us, others merely tolerate us.

Then there are those of us who prefer to meet in quieter groups to discuss things. There are plenty of these too.

All of this is what people mean when they refer to "the gay scene". It can be interesting

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

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

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

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

Proud Parents

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

*"Telling Your Parents" and "What is Homosexuality"
Pamphlets, 1970s/1980s*

WHAT IS HOMOSEXUALITY?

Many books have been written about homosexuality. Some have been advanced as fact emerges: no one is born homosexual.

The weight of evidence is, that just as of the family pattern in the world. However, this is faced with the new

To explain homosexuality. Basically, it is a beginning, which effect on the relationships of us, gay people, returned. They except sexually the rest of the have very little

The question answer is the human being. not perceive

TELLING YOUR PARENTS

There is no single, surefire way of telling your parents that you are gay. Just as no two families are exactly the same, so the method, even the words, will vary from one family to the next. But many reactions are common to all families and knowing these it is often possible to work out the best method for your family.

Very few parents imagine their children could possibly be gay. Even those who may have had suspicions still feel shocked when confronted with the fact. Try to understand this. You have had perhaps several years to gradually come to terms with the fact that you are gay. Your parents, when you tell them, will have had no time at all. Although teenagers sometimes find it difficult to accept that no-one knows them as well as they do, parents, there is no denying that they have watched you develop from birth to the present moment. So they will find it hard to accept that there is a side to you they never knew about.

In this feeling of shock there are certain things that parents say. These include, "How can you be gay?" "You haven't tried hard enough with the school." "You can't know at your age." "These are the things you should be doing if you feel at all unsure."



Celebrating Relationships

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

Collection of Engagement and Civil Partnership Cards, 2013

HIV/AIDS in Cambridgeshire

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

Flyers and Pamphlets, 1990s



Gender Expression



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

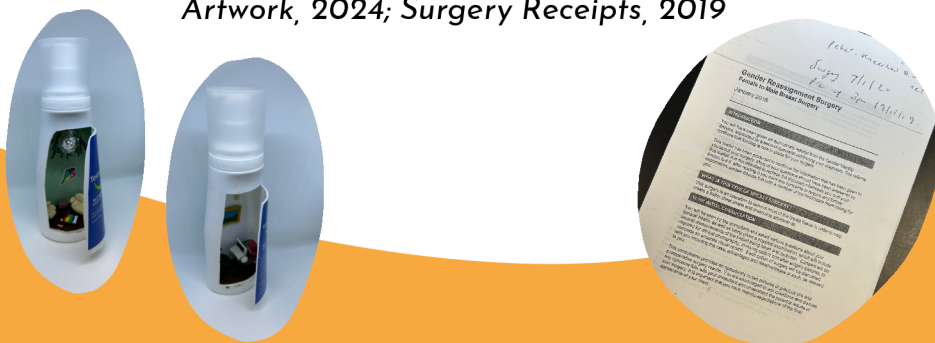
Gender Affirming T-Shirt, 2003

Life-Saving Transition

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

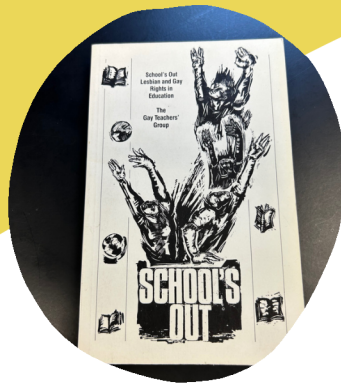
Whilst the NHS does cover some of these medical treatments, the capacity of the service has not expanded with demand and the wait to be seen can now be 3 years or more. For comparison, those who transitioned over 10 years ago were typically seen in a matter of weeks. This has meant that transgender people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

Artwork, 2024; Surgery Receipts, 2019



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





Learning About Our History

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

The Gay Teachers Association Book, 1987

From the early 2000s until 2023, Encompass Network co-ordinated the promotion of events to mark LGBTQ+ History Month. Encompass Network was an organization that aimed to support, link and represent LGBTQ+ voluntary and community organisations across Cambridgeshire.

History Month Programmes, 2010-2014, Donated by Encompass Network



Recognising Progress

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

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

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

Stonewall Award, 2011, Loaned by Bethan Rees;

Poster and Mannequin Arm signed by Sir Ian McKellen, 2009



Naturally Queer

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

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





Enjoying The Outdoors

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

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

*Copy of Cambridge News article, 1981, Bishopgate Institute;
Sister Act Newsletter, 2015*



A Sporting Community

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

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

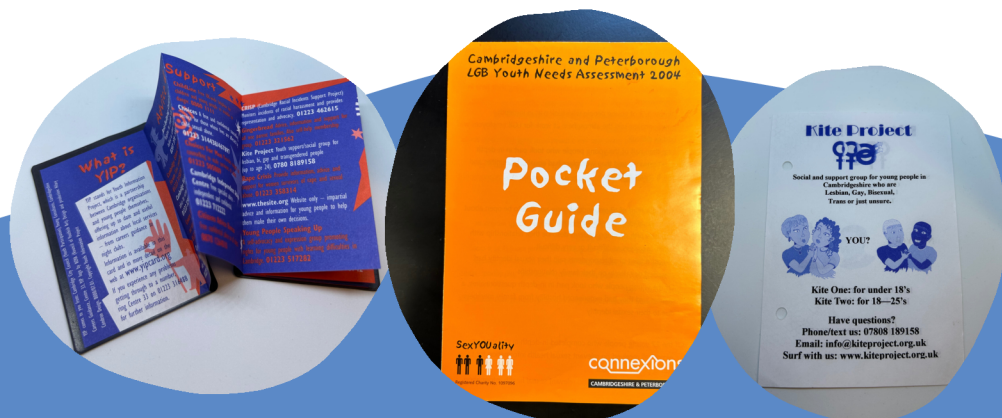
Helmet, programme and badges, 2022-2024, Loaned by Cambridge Rollerbillies

Supporting Young People

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

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

The Kite Group Flyer, 1990s; LGBTQ+ Youth Needs Assessment, 2004; The Kite Project Development Plan, 2003; Youth Information Project Flyer, Approx 2000



Local Prides

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

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



Cambridge Pride

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

Flyers, T-shirts and Cups from Pink Festival/Cambridge Pride, 2003-2024

Ely Pride

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

Pride in Ely T-shirt and Wristband, 2018-2024



Pride in St Neots

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

Peterborough Pride

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

Peterborough Pride Pin Badge, 2022-2024



Fenland Pride

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

Fenland Pride Flag, Posters and Stickers, 2024



Cambridge Alternative Pride

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

Cambridge Alternative Pride Poster, 2024

Pride Flags

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

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

Gilbert Baker Eight Stripe Flag, 1978, Reproduction



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

Six Stripe Pride Flag, 1979-Present, Donated by Encompass Network



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

Philadelphia Pride Flag, 2017 - Present, Reproduction



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

**Progress Pride Flag, 2018 - Present,
Donated by Cambridgeshire County Council**



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

**Intersex Inclusive Pride Flag, 2021 - Present,
Loaned From The Kite Trust**

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

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

The Kite Trust - thekitetrust.org.uk

Gay Outdoor Club - goc.org.uk

Cambridge Pride - cambridgepride.co.uk

Cambridge LGBT+ Mature - find on facebook

Cambridge LGBT Meet-Up - meetup.com/cambridge-gay-group

Cambridge SU LGBT+ Campaign -
cambridgesu.co.uk/lgbt-campaign

Dhiverse - dhiverse.org.uk

Diamonds - diamondstgc.org.uk

QWIC - find on facebook

Trans Liberation Cambridge - find on instagram

Peterborough Pride - peterboroughpride.co.uk

Queer Socials Peterborough - queersocialspeterborough.uk

Trans Support Peterborough - find on facebook and instagram

Pride in Ely - prideinely.co.uk

Ely Queer Community Wardrobe - find on instagram

Pride in St Neots - prideinstneots.org

Key Words:

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

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

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

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

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

The Kite Trust is a registered charity in England & Wales (1189936)
Registered office: 70 Market Street, Ely, Cambridgeshire, CB7 4LS

“It takes time to grow, and you probably won’t realise it but you are not the same person that walked into this room.”

LGBTQ+ Young Person from The Kite Trust

