HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES

TOWER OF LONDON

LGBTQIA+ RESOURCE GUIDE



SPACE TO STIR AND BE STIRRED

TOWER OF LONDON · HAMPTON COURT PALACE · BANQUETING HOUSE
KENSINGTON PALACE · KEW PALACE · HILLSBOROUGH CASTLE AND GARDENS

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INTRODUCTION

LGBTQIA+ histories can be found in the stories of all our palaces. However, same sex love and desire and non-binary gender identities have been understood in different ways throughout history.

Our modern understanding of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans identities is very recent, dating from the late 19th Century and continuing to develop up to the present day. When we try to look for these identities in the past we struggle, but if we look for love, desire, and the way people presented themselves, we find a rich history everywhere.

This resource guide will explore LGBTQIA+ stories at the Tower of London. These histories are neither new nor an addition to Historic Royal Palaces. However, LGBTQIA+ history is at risk of being forgotten or misrepresented. The search for 'evidence' of LGBTQIA+ lives is often challenging – meaning it can be coded, obscured, or deliberately protected for their security. But History is not locked in the past. History continually evolves as it responds to people with lived experience, new research and society's shifting perspectives.

Historic Royal Palaces is committed to telling and sharing LGBTQIA+ histories, making history come to life as we work closely with our communities to broaden perspectives and make meaningful and relevant connections with our palaces and their stories.

Thank you to members of the London LGBT+ Forum's Network, London Frontrunners, East London LGBT Seniors, River House Trust, Middlesex Pride and members of Historic Royal Palaces' staff for their invaluable support, reflections and insights with the creation of this resource.

USING THIS RESOURCE

This resource aims to support individuals and groups to better connect with lesser-known histories of the Tower of London. We selected stories that have a physical presence at the Tower, but this does not mean these are the only LGBTQIA+ stories here, but it is a starting point. We have included the following to help you explore these stories and help set the wider context for these stories:

- Glossary of terms
- A timeline of LGBTQIA+ history and the Tower of London
- Maps of where you can find these physical spaces in the Tower of London
- Recordings of reflections from members of the local community
- Conversation starters for group discussions
- References to help you find out more

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

IDENTITY TERMS

LGBTQIA+ means lesbian, gay, bi, trans and any other gender identity or sexual orientation that isn't on the list. + The plus sign recognises a spectrum of additional sexual orientations and gender identities

Lesbian – a woman sexually and/or romantically attracted to other women

Gay – someone sexually and/or romantically attracted to people of the same sex

Bisexual – someone sexually and/or romantically attracted to people of two or more gender

Trans – an umbrella term to include trans men and women, non-binary, gender fluid and gender non-conforming people

Gender Identity – is whether you are a man, woman or neither. It might be different from the gender you were given when you were born.

Queer – is a term used by those wanting to reject specific labels of romantic orientation, sexual orientation and/or gender identity. It is an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities.

> The word "queer" entered English to mean odd or strange and by the late 19th and early 20th centuries was commonly used as a derogatory label for same-sex attracted people. The word Queer functioned as a slur for decades.
>
> In the 1980s and the 1990s LGBTQIA+ communities began reclaiming the word through activist-led reappropriation, cultural reuse, and academic theorizing and the queer theory movement that framed "queer" as an empowering umbrella term.
>
> That process remains contested: many embrace the reclaimed term, while other community members and some critics reject them as traumatic remnants of hate speech.

Intersex – A term used to describe a person who has biological attributes of both male and female sexes or whose biological attributes do not fit with societal or medical assumptions about what constitutes male or female.

Intersex people may identify as male, female, non-binary or otherwise.

Asexual – Someone who experiences little or no sexual attraction to others. Asexual people may still experience romantic attraction, form relationships, or use additional terms to describe their identity.

Cisgender – A term for non-transgender people which describes someone as having a sense of gender identity that matches their biological sex.

Gender – A person's sense of being male, female, or – for those who describe themselves as genderqueer – this may also mean a sense of being neither, both, or fluid.

Heteronormativity – The assumption that people can be categorised within gender binaries that include sexual and/or romantic attraction to those of the 'opposite' sex.

Homophobia/Transphobia/Biphobia – The irrational fear, hatred, abuse etc. of gay, transgender and/or bisexual people.

Non-binary – An umbrella term for people who do not identify within binary gender ideologies.

Pronouns – Gender pronouns that people may use to describe themselves: he, him, his, she, her, they, them, their (gender neutral).

Sex – Assigned at birth in relation to someone's hormones and external and internal sex organs.

HISTORICAL TERMS

Medieval – The medieval time period, also called the Middle Ages, refers to the span of European history between the fall of the Western Roman Empire in the 400 CE and the beginning of the Renaissance in the late 1400s.

Tudors – The Tudors were a royal dynasty that ruled England from 1485–1603. They began when Henry VII won the Battle of Bosworth, ending the Wars of the Roses. They ended with the death of Elizabeth I.

Stuart – The Stuarts were the dynasty that followed the Tudors, beginning when James VI of Scotland became James I of England, uniting the crowns.

Renaissance – The Renaissance is the period in European history from the 1300s to 1600s marked by a powerful revival of learning, art, science, and culture. It revived interest in classical Greek and Roman knowledge, encouraged new artistic techniques, and transformed science, politics, and society.

Protocol – The official procedure or system of rules governing affairs of state or diplomatic occasions

Favourite – A favourite royal refers to an intimate companion or close associate of a monarch, often holding significant influence and power.

Chronicle – An account of important or historical events in the order of their occurrence.

Restoration England – Restoration England refers to the period in English history from 1660 to 1688, marked by the return of the monarchy after the English Civil War and the Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell.

Salon – A salon is a gathering of people, often hosted in a private setting, where intellectual, artistic, and social discussions take place, with roots tracing back to the 1500s in Italy and flourishing in the 1600s in France.

Deserter – A deserter in military history refers to a service member who abandons military duty without permission and intends to not return.

TIMELINE

LGBTQIA+ rights in Britain

1533 The Buggery Act outlawed all homosexual relations in Britain (later across the Empire). Punishable by death.

1861 Offences Against the Person Act abolished the death penalty for homosexual acts; minimum 10-year prison sentence introduced.

1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act criminalised all homosexual acts, public or private; no witnesses required for prosecution.

1889 Albert von Schrenck-Notzing falsely claimed to "cure" homosexuality; harmful treatments like electric shock therapy used.

1951 Roberta Cowell is the first known British trans woman to undergo reassignment surgery and have her birth certificate changed.

1952 Alan Turing prosecuted under the 1885 Act and forced into chemical castration; died by suicide two years later.

1957 Wolfenden Report argued homosexuality was not a disease and recommended that private life should not be policed.

1967 Sexual Offences Act partially decriminalised male homosexuality for consenting adults over 21, strictly in private.

1970 Gay Liberation Front founded following the 1969 Stonewall Riots.

1972 First UK Gay Pride rally held in London.

1974 London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard, a London-based information and support helpline, is established.

Maureen Colquhoun came out as the first lesbian Labour MP.

1975 The Liberal Party (now the Liberal Democrats) became the first UK political party to support LGBT rights, passing a motion at conference to support 'full equality for homosexuals', including equalising the age of consent.

1981 Male homosexuality was decriminalised for consenting adults over 21, in Scotland.

1982 First HIV/AIDS case reported in the UK; epidemic grew rapidly.

1984 Chris Smith, Labour MP for Islington South and Finsbury, speaks openly about his sexual orientation and becomes the first openly gay MP, 10 years after Maureen Colquhoun came out as the first lesbian MP.

1988 Section 28 enacted, banning "promotion of homosexuality" in schools and public materials.

1996 HAART introduced, restoring immune function and reducing AIDS deaths by ~80% between 1995–2000.

2000 The UK Government lifts the ban on lesbians, gay men and bi people serving in the armed forces.

The age of consent was equalised for homosexual and heterosexual people. Previously, it had been higher for homosexual people than for heterosexual people.

2003 Section 28 was repealed.

2004 Civil Partnership Act introduced; Gender Recognition Act allowed transgender people legal recognition and new birth certificates.

2010 Equality Act protected LGBT people from discrimination in employment and officially adds gender reassignment as a protected characteristic.

2013 Same-sex marriage legalised in England and Wales.

2014 Scotland legalised same-sex marriage.

2018 UK Government committed to banning conversion therapy as part of its LGBT equality plan.

2020 Same-sex marriage legalised in Northern Ireland.

2022 UK government reversed plans for a full conversion therapy ban and excluded trans people; no legal ban currently in place.

2025 A UK Supreme Court ruling defines "sex" for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010 as biological sex assigned at birth, causing deep worry for trans people.

TIMELINE
Tower of London

1066–1087	*William I (the Conqueror)*
1066	William the Conqueror establishes a Norman fortification after the conquest.
*c.*1078–1100	Construction of the **White Tower** begins and is completed.
1080	**Chapel of St John** completed inside the White Tower.
1100	First recorded prisoner, Ranulf Flambard, escapes.
1140	Tower first used as a royal residence.
1221	**Wakefield Tower** built.
1264	Royal Menagerie established.
1300	**Beauchamp Tower** constructed.
1307–1327	*Edward II*
1322	**Ceremony of the Keys** begins (still performed nightly).
1381	Tower stormed during the Peasants' Revolt.
1483	Disappearance of the **Princes in the Tower.**
1536	Execution of Anne Boleyn.
1542	Execution of Catherine Howard.
1554	Execution of Lady Jane Grey.
1592/1603–1616	Imprisonment of Sir Walter Raleigh.
1603–1625	*James I (and VI of Scotland)*
1671	Colonel Thomas Blood attempts to steal the Crown Jewels.
1660–1685	*Charles II*

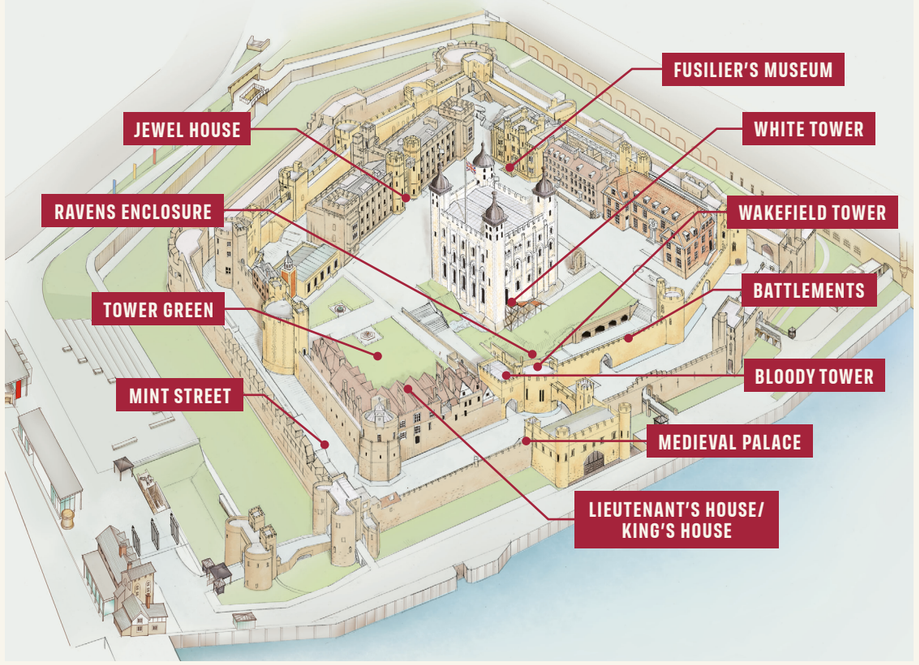
1696	Isaac Newton becomes Warden of the Mint at the Tower.
1804	Menagerie opened to the public.
1834–35	Menagerie moved to London Zoo; Lion Tower demolished.
1843	Moat drained and filled.
1842–1862	Waterloo Barracks constructed.
1914–1916	Eleven German spies executed during WWI.
1939–1945	Tower damaged by bombing during WWII.
1942	Rudolf Hess briefly imprisoned.
1952	Kray twins held - among the last prisoners.
1994	Modern Crown Jewels exhibition opens.
2000s–Present	Tower becomes major heritage site with over 3 million visitors annually.

ROUTE PLANS AND MAP

These stories are shared in chronological order. Use theses maps to find the physical traces of these histories in The Tower of London.

Click on the names on these pages to jump to their stories

History	Place
Edward II (1284)	Medieval Palace
James I (1566) (with Duke of Buckingham: 1592)	Outside of the White Tower
Robert Carr/Thomas Overbury (1613)	The Bloody Tower
Hortense Mancini (1646)	Battlements looking towards Greenwich
Roger Casement (1864)	Mint Street
Kathleen Woodhouse/Fredrick Lee (20th century)	Outside of the Fusilier's Museum
Ronnie Kray (1933)	Outside of Jewel House



ROUTE PLAN [INCLUDING MANDATORY STEPS]

History	Route
Roger Casement (1864)	Down Mint Street
Edward II (1284)	Wakefield Tower, Medieval Palace [Mandatory step area]
Hortense Mancini (1646)	Battlements looking towards Greenwich [Mandatory step area]
Kathleen Woodhouse/Fredrick Lee (20th century)	Outside of the Fusilier's Museum
Ronnie Kray (1933)	Outside of Jewel House
James I (1566) (with Duke of Buckingham: 1592)	The Lieutenant's House/King's House – look over Tower Green towards it
Robert Carr/Thomas Overbury (1613)	The Bloody Tower [Mandatory step area]

ROUTE PLAN [STEP FREE]

History	Route
Roger Casement (1864)	Down Mint Street
Edward II (1284)	Outside of the Medieval Palace
Hortense Mancini (1646)	Outside of the Ravens Enclosure
Kathleen Woodhouse/Fredrick Lee (20th century)	Outside of the Fusilier's Museum
Ronnie Kray (1933)	Outside of Jewel House
James I (1566) (with Duke of Buckingham: 1592)	The Lieutenant's House/King's House – look over Tower Green towards it
Robert Carr/Thomas Overbury (1613)	Outside of the Bloody Tower

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EDWARD II

Edward II was born in 1284 and was king of England from 1307 – 1327.

As King, Edward II used the Medieval Palace at the Tower of London, as a royal residence.

During his lifetime he was criticised for flouting royal protocol and being unduly influenced by his royal favourites, such as Piers Gaveston.

After Edward's deposition and mysterious death, rumours began to circulate that he had had sexual and emotional relationships with men.

The truth will never be known, as medieval chroniclers didn't record what happened between the two men behind closed doors. But they did comment on the exceptional closeness of the relationship, recording the strength of Edward's love for Gaveston when they first met in in about 1297.

This was described in the Chronicle of the Civil Wars of Edward II: **'When the king's son gazed upon him, he straightaway felt so much love for him that he entered into a covenant of brotherhood with him and chose and firmly resolved to bind himself to him, before all mortals, in an unbreakable bond of love.'**

Their love is often described at the time in fraternal terms, and they may have entered into a bond as **'wed brothers'** or a **'Bond of Brotherhood'.**

Edward never had a mistress, and even at his wedding banquet the King is said to have given more attention to Gaveston than to his new Queen.

The power and titles Edward gave to Gaveston meant that the royal favourite was deeply unpopular, and as a result he was executed by a group of nobles on 19 June 1312.

Scan or click to hear reflections on Edward II story from MA student, studying Heritage Management at Historic Royal Palaces

Christopher Marlowe's 1592 play *Edward II* suggests that Edward II could be pleased by a 'lovelie boye', and queer filmmaker Derek Jarman adapted the play to comment on the lives of gay men in 1980s Britain.

In 1969, two years after male homosexuality was decriminalised in England and Wales, but 11 years before the same advance was made in Scotland, Ian McKellen portrayed Edward II in a Prospect Theatre Company production.

Gaveston was played by James Laurenson, and their on-stage kiss caused some controversy when the production arrived in Edinburgh. "The late councillor John Kidd took offence to this show of male affection, particularly as it took place on a stage erected within the assembly hall of the Church of Scotland," McKellen recalls.



JAMES I AND VI

James I of England (also known as VI of Scotland) stayed at the Tower after he arrived in England in 1603, to take up the English throne.

He was the last monarch to stay at the fortress. He stayed in The Lieutenant's House/ King's House.

Located on Tower Green, this timber framed Tudor building was traditionally used to house high status prisoners and royal guests. It is one of the few surviving domestic buildings inside the Tower complex.

James loved men throughout his life. He bestowed power and aristocratic titles on his favourites, and powerful families would send their sons to court to gain favour with the King.

Court factions competed for the Kings favour by pushing a man of their choice to become close to the king. It was widely known that James specifically favoured handsome men with good breath

George Villiers, often described by contemporaries as the handsomest man in Europe was one of James' favourites. Along with his beauty he was also known for his intelligence.

The two met in 1614. Villiers was knighted and then two years later he was given a dukedom. Villiers was from quite humble origins, so his rapid rise to power upset many nobles at court

James referred to Villiers as his spouse and the pair wrote very intimate letters to each other, some of which survive. Neither were ashamed of their love for each other.

James defended his relationship with Villiers at a Privy Council meeting in 1617, saying that he did not wish for his love to be deemed a "defect."

Accounts of the two men's lives reveal a tender, affectionate relationship. James openly doted on Villiers and in 1617, he toasted him before the court, explaining that **'I love the Duke of Buckingham more than any other man'.** The King justified this through his faith, stating that **'Christ had his John and I have my George'.**

Villiers nursed James while he was on his deathbed but was eventually assassinated during the reign of Charles I due to his unpopularity.

Scan or click to hear reflections on the story of James I and VI from a member of staff at the Tower of London

The Pet Shop Boys, often recognised by the LGBTQIA+ community, as gay icons, headlined a concert in the moat of the Tower of London on 28 July 2006 for the Tower of London Music Festival.

The event was described as the "perfect match of pop theatricality and historic grandeur."



ROBERT CARR AND THOMAS OVERBURY

Robert Carr, a Scottish nobleman, became a favourite of King James VI/I after the king visited him following a serious jousting accident in which Carr broke his leg. The two developed a close and affectionate relationship, and Carr quickly rose in influence at court through James's patronage.

They exchanged gifts and wore miniature portraits of each other, reflecting the strength of their bond. While historians debate whether their relationship was purely political, deeply personal, or romantic, Carr was undoubtedly one of the king's closest companions.

During his late teens, Carr met Thomas Overbury, a brilliant and handsome young Englishman. Several contemporary sources hinted heavily that Carr and Overbury had a love affair.

Overbury came back into Carr's life around 1612, to fill a power vacuum that was left by the death of the King's chief minister, Robert Cecil.

Overbury publicly opposed Carr's marriage to Frances Howard and refused the King's orders to complete an assignment for him abroad. As a result, he was imprisoned in the Bloody Tower. Overbury died under suspicious circumstances at the Tower of London.

It later came to light that he had been poisoned to death on Carr's wife Frances' orders.

When her plot was discovered, Frances was placed on trial with her husband. At the trial, Carr was flanked by two men who were prepared to muffle him with their cloaks should he begin to divulge anything that would embarrass the King about their relationship.

Carr and his wife were both sentenced to death, but James never signed their death warrants. They were instead imprisoned for seven years, in the Bloody Tower, the very site where Overbury had been murdered.

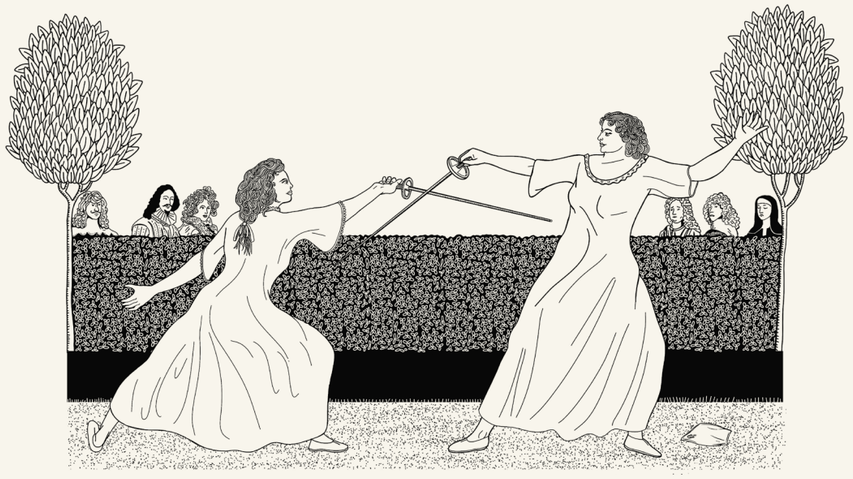
In a final gesture of love James pardoned them 9 years later as he lay on his deathbed. This left Carr free to spend the last 20 years of his life back where he had started – on the fringes of relevance – dying in 1645, in his 60s.

Scan or click to hear reflections on the story of Robert Carr and Thomas Overbury from a member of staff at the Tower of London

Historic Royal Palaces has been taking part in Pride in London since 2016, marching under the banner: "1,000 years of kings, queens and in-betweens."

Pride provides an opportunity for colleagues to come together in a vibrant and joyful celebration of love, identity and solidarity. Historic Royal Palaces is proud to stand alongside the LGBTQIA+ community and support the values of inclusion, visibility and belonging.

The Tower of London also hosts its own onsite Pride celebration at the Keys Pub. Featuring karaoke, quizzes and dancing, the event offers a fun and welcoming space for staff to celebrate and show their support for the LGBTQIA+ community.



HORTENSE MANCINI

Hortense Mancini was an Italian-born aristocrat, born in Rome in 1646, who played a pivotal role in shaping elite culture in Restoration England through the introduction of the French salon model.

In 1659, aged 29, Charles II, proposed to Hortense, who was then aged only 12. Her uncle rejected the offer, as Charles was living in exile at the time, due to the English Civil War. However, later in her adult life Hortense became mistress to King Charles II.

Charles restored the monarchy in 1660, returning the Tower to royal control. He rebuilt and reorganised parts of the Tower complex and re-established the Crown Jewels in the Tower after the Civil War. Hortense Mancini lived at court during a period when the Tower was still used for royal ceremony; including the storage of regalia used in Charles II's coronation.

In Italy, Hortense was married off to one of the richest men in Europe, Armand-Charles de La Porte de La Meilleraye. He was cruel and controlling, forbidding Hortense from interacting with any men, isolating her in the countryside and forcing her to spend a quarter of her day in prayer. In her memoirs, Hortense called herself **"the richest heiress and the unhappiest woman in Christendom."**

After almost seven years trapped in her marriage, she left behind her four young children and fled to Rome. Under the protection of the French king Louis XIV and the Duke of Savoy, Hortense wrote her experiences down and had them published, becoming one of the first women to publish an autobiography.

One courtier commented on the marriage that **"no cuckold has ever been so deserving of the title as the Duke Mazarin [Armand], and every day of his life gives me more admiration for his wife, who prefers to take to the road rather than suffer his presence any longer."**

At the death of her protector, the Duke of Savoy, Hortense fled to London. She arrived dressed in men's clothing and is reported to have worn men's clothing at moments throughout her life. Contemporary accounts describe her as having relationships with both men and women; she had lovers of **"each sex."**

In London, Hortense, became the mistress of Charles II. 17 years after his proposal of marriage to her was rejected. As the King's mistress, Hortense met his illegitimate daughter: Anne Lennard. Anne was unhappily married at the time, and the two developed a well-documented "romantic friendship".

The rumours surrounding their relationship reached a peak in December 1676, when Anne and Hortense, staged a very public, though good-natured, fencing display in St James's Park, dressed only in their nightgowns.

Anne's husband reacted by separating the couple and sending her to a convent. Anne grieved the relationship, refusing to leave her bed, kissing a miniature of Hortense at all hours. While Anne mourned the loss of her love, Hortense seemed less affected and continued her affair with Anne's father, King Charles II, and took on an additional lover, Louis I de Grimaldi, Prince of Monaco.

Hotense went onto found a salon of intellectuals, attended by both men and women, including her formal rival, the King's mistress Louise de Kerouaille, and Charles' most famous mistress, Nell Gwyn. The salon was walking distance from the Tower of London, located in her London residence on St James's Square.

It quickly became one of the most celebrated salons in Europe – exerting influence on continental culture in England and demonstrating the level of power that an exiled woman was able to wield.

Hortense Mancini defied the patriarchal norms of seventeenth-century woman, and her life was epitomised by movement, mobility, and independence. At her death, in 1699, the diarist, John Evelyn, said of her: '**She has written her own story and adventures.'**

Scan or click to hear reflections on the story of Hortense Mancini from a member of staff at the Tower of London



ROGER CASEMENT

Roger Casement was an Irish-born civil servant and human rights activist.

His Civil Service work led him to investigate human rights abuses committed by King Leopold's regime in Congo. His reports exposed widespread atrocities and prompted international pressure that forced Belgium to end the abuses. In recognition of this, he received the Order of St Michael and St George in 1905.

Casement was deeply affected by his experiences of imperialism abroad and as a result wanted his native Ireland to gain its independence from the United Kingdom. Of this decision he said, **"Surely it is a braver, a saner, and a truer thing to be a rebel in act and deed against such circumstances as this than tamely to accept it as the natural lot of men."**

During the First World War, he sought German support for Irish independence and travelled to Germany to recruit Irish Prisoners of War to form an Irish brigade and help raise a rebellion in April 1916, now known as the Easter Rising.

To support this in April 1916, the Germans dispatched a ship, the Aud, with a cargo of arms to be landed in Kerry. Casement followed in a submarine. The Aud was captured and blown up. Casement was arrested on 20 April 1916.

Six years after being awarded his knighthood, he was imprisoned in the Tower, either in St Thomas' Tower - part of the Battlements - or on Mint Street.

He stood on trial at the Royal Courts of Justice, and was found guilty of treason, and sentenced to be hanged. His English friends and allies, remembering his humanitarian record, petitioned for a reprieve.

However, as this happened, copies of diaries, alleged to be Casement's, known as 'The Black Diaries', were circulated. The diaries recorded his homosexual activity; often paying for sex and favouring young men. The diaries were supposedly released by British government to undermine the reprieve campaign.

During the trial excerpts from his diaries were shared and the Daily Express's ran a headline calling them "The diaries of a degenerate." Buckingham Palace announced his knighthood was erased, and opinion turned against him and the clemency campaign withered.

When the prison announced his execution, the crowd gathered outside Pentonville cheered. It was said **"He was guilty of treason, but he was killed by homophobia."**

The "Black Diaries" were widely believed, particularly in Ireland, to be forgeries but a forensic study conducted in 2002, found them to be genuine.

There is now greater willingness to recognise Casement as a gay national figure, and the authenticity of the diaries is widely accepted, making Casement both a nationalist and LGBTQIA+ symbol. However, Irish authorities remain reluctant to seek a pardon because the diaries describe his attraction to younger partners.

Scan or click to hear reflections on the story of Roger Casement, from the secretary of the London Frontrunners, an inclusive running and triathlon club for the LGBTQIA+ Community

Montgomery Hyde (14 August 1907 – 10 August 1989), was an Irish politician. He was deselected and lost his seat in the House of Commons, after arguing in favour of the decriminalisation of homosexuality.

Hyde authored Roger Casement (1957), a landmark biography on Roger Casement

He was the first to argue that homophobia shaped Casement's execution and is a key figure in establishing Casement's modern reputation as both a nationalist and LGBTQIA+ icon.



KATHLEEN WOODHOUSE/ FREDRICK LEE

Kathleen Wright is linked to the Tower of London, as they were an army recruit in the Royal Fusiliers regiment, which has its headquarters at the Tower.

Kathleen was born Fredrick Wright but wished at points in their life to be known as Kathleen Woodhouse. While they wanted to live as a woman, Frederick Wright was seen by society as a man, working in a male role as a valet.

In March 1916 they attempted to die by suicide. This was illegal at the time. To avoid punishment the court gave them the option to instead join the army, and a detective took them to enlist right away, despite them not wanting to.

During this time Kathleen lodged with a Belgian lady in Percy Road, North Finchley. It seems they gave their name to their landlady as Kathleen Woodhouse, suggesting that they wished to live as a woman at this time. They chose the name Woodhouse from Woodhouse Road, which is just a couple of streets away.

They also filled in an Aliens Registration Form, at this time, under the name Kathleen Woodhouse. This suggests, either, that they were an immigrant, or perhaps they were attempting to officially establish their identity as female by filling in an official document.

At this time, they were arrested again for acting in a disorderly fashion. It is unclear what prompted the report, but speculation has been made that it is because their landlady realised that they were choosing to live as a woman and reported them.

A detective attended the scene, and according to his account Kathleen attempted to negotiate themselves out of the situation.

Kathleen explained to the detective that their reason for adopting female attire was to evade military service. They explained that they **'disliked soldiering and soldiers, and anything at all manly'.** They added **'I wish I had been a woman, as I love wearing beautiful clothes, and all my tastes are feminine. I intend to live as a woman till after the war is over and then go back to be a valet.'**

Kathleen's personal effects were found in their room, which included makeup, women's clothing, and "something to make his bust appear like that of a woman" as quoted in contemporary newspapers. Kathleen also had a picture of a cross-dressing performers on display, in their room.

They appeared in court, giving their name as Frederick Wright, however, they were still wearing feminine clothes. The newspaper reports on the case showed a fascination with Kathleen dressing as a woman and focus on them as a deserter from the army, which at a time of war carried a huge stigma.

Kathleen was sent back to the army and after this their story disappears from the historical record. However, Kathleen's story reveals the courage it took to imagine and live a life that reflected their true identity, despite the many obstacles stacked against them.

Scan or click to hear reflections on the story of Kathleen Woodhouse, from a member of Middlesex Pride, a community-led organization that celebrates the diverse LGBTQIA+ people of Middlesex



RONNIE KRAY

Ronnie and Reggie Kray were English gangsters who became the foremost perpetrators of organised crime in the East end of London during the 1950s and 1960s.

Together with their gang 'The Firm' the twins went on to commit armed robberies, assaults and murders. Despite being much feared, their cult status brought with it an element of celebrity.

In March 1952 the Kray twins received letters calling them to begin their national service at the Tower of London with the Royal Fusiliers.

Upon their arrival at the Tower, they were given a lecture on smart turnout by the Corporal. Unsurprisingly, the twins did not take kindly to being told what to do, and the Krays started to walk away. When the Corporal tried to stop them, Ronnie hit him.

They were arrested and held in the Tower of London for a few days before being transferred to Shepton Mallet military prison to await court martial. The next two years of their national service were characterised by successive incidents which resulted in the Krays being incarcerated in military jails and prisons, before being dishonourably discharged.

In 1964, rumours began to swirl around Ronnie's sexuality when The Sunday Mirror published a story claiming that Ronnie and Conservative MP Robert Boothby were under investigation by the Met for being in a homosexual relationship, which was deemed a crime until 1967.

Later in life, Ronnie opened up about his sexuality. He spoke in interviews in the 1980s and in his 1993 autobiography 'My Story' about being bisexual.

In his autobiography Ronnie says: **"I was bisexual. I made no secret of it."** (Ronnie Kray, My Story, 1993) and: **"I enjoyed the company of men as much as women."** (Ronnie Kray, My Story, 1993)

He also talks about having a long-term partner while in prison: "I had a close relationship with a young man inside. He was good to me." (Ronnie Kray, My Story, 1993).

Ronnie's tone in his autobiography was unusual for the time, especially given the stigma surrounding homosexuality in mid 20th century Britain. He is open and unapologetic, presenting his bisexuality as one aspect of his wider personality.

While The Kray twins, and their gang, are known for their violent and brutal actions, Ronnie's openness and frankness about his sexuality can be seen as a defiant act against homophobia during the 1950s and 1960s.

Scan or click to hear reflections on the story of Ronnie Kray, from a member of East London LGBT Seniors, a grassroots support group that caters to the LGBTQ+ community of older adults, including those in retirement.

Queer Lives, at the Tower of London was an after hours, immersive theatrical tour held in February 2023, exploring 700 years of LGBTQIA+ history connected to the Tower, hosted by a "drag raven" inspired by the Tower of London's legendary guardians.

The raven was performed by Mzz Kimberley aka Kim Tatum, making her the first trans woman to lead a theatrical performance at the Tower of London.

PROMPTS FOR GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Click on the names on these pages to jump to their stories

In this section you can find suggestions and ideas for starting conversations within your group.

Edward II (1284)

Chroniclers described Edward and Gaveston's relationship in terms of brotherhood and unbreakable love.

What words would you use today to describe a bond like theirs?

Edward II was a king, so every friendship, every affection and moment of closeness became a political tool or weapon. Gaveston's rise in Edward's affection was directly translated into titles, lands, and influence.

Can a king ever have an intimate relationship that isn't also an act of power?

James VI and I (1566)

Historians previously used the term 'favourite' to describe men King James was intimately with or expressed feelings and desire for.

What word would you use to describe these men?

King James was head of both the church and state. Is that why he could explore what we would understand to be a Queer life when it was illegal to do so? How do you feel about that contradiction?

Robert Carr/Thomas Overbury (1613)

Several contemporaries hinted that Carr and Overbury were lovers.

How do you feel about same-sex relationships being preserved in history mainly through rumour rather than open acknowledgement?

Carr and the King wore miniatures of each other – a deeply personal gesture.

What gestures, and or gifts, do you use to show and share affection with loved ones in your own life?

Hortense Mancini (1646)

Hortense described herself as "the richest heiress and the unhappiest woman in Christendom."

How do you feel about the contrast between wealth and total lack of freedom in her early life?

Hortense arrived in London dressed in men's clothing and wore men's attire at various points in her life.

How do you interpret her gender expression in a world that strictly policed women's behaviour?

Her relationship with Anne Lennard was described as a "romantic friendship," yet Anne's grief and devotion suggest something deeper.

How do you feel about queer relationships being softened or disguised by historical language?

Roger Casement (1864)

The "Black Diaries" were circulated during Casement's trial to undermine public sympathy.

What does it say about society when someone's sexuality is used as a political weapon?

Casement exposed atrocities in the Congo and forced change.

What is a time that you have seen injustice or discrimination in your life, and what action did you take?

Kathleen Woodhouse/Fredrick Lee (20th century)

Kathleen lived at a time when expressing a gender different to your biological sex was criminalised, yet they still tried to shape a life that felt true to them.

What does this tell us about how society treated people who didn't fit expected gender roles?

Kathleen's story shows someone trying to live authentically despite immense pressure.

How does recognising queer resilience in history affect how you see the past?

Ronnie Kray (1933)

The Krays were feared criminals yet also treated as celebrities.

How do you feel about the way society can glamorise people who commit harm?

Ronnie wrote openly about his relationships with men and women, saying, "I made no secret of it."

How does that self-acceptance challenge the narratives imposed on queer people in the 1950s and 60s?

LOCAL GROUPS/RESOURCES

LGBTQIA Community Groups Local to the Tower of London

Tower Hamlets LGBTQ+ Community Forum

London Frontrunners

East London LGBT Seniors

River House Trust

London Friend

Click on the group names to find out more

Further resources

You can explore further links and resources on LGBTQIA+ stories and histories within our spaces and beyond.

Website

LGBT+ Royal Histories | Tower of London | Historic Royal Palaces (hrp.org.uk)

Palace Pride | Historic Royal Palaces (hrp.org.uk)

Podcasts

LGBTQ+ Histories at Our Palaces

https://open.spotify.com/episode/1ceE6uF3nrZOMJUD9t1Nae?si=XNerqOlDQ5WV_PoOdj7BHQ

LGBTQ+ History – Queer Possibilities at Our Palaces

How we used to talk about LGBTQ+

Blogs

The rise and fall of Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset

Celebrating marriage between women in the early modern period

Queer Lives at the Tower: The LGBT+ Stories that were almost on the tours

Frederick Wright Or Kathleen Woodhouse: A First World War Soldier Who Wished To Live As A Woman

Watch

Exploring queer history with Rowan Ellis and Matthew Storey – YouTube

CONTACT INFORMATION

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