

CHESHIRE ARCHIVES AND LOCAL STUDIES

Short guides to using records at Cheshire Record Office

LGBT+ RECORDS

Why use this guide?

- We have produced this guide in an attempt to open up our collections and support research into the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender history of Cheshire.
- Researching LGBT+ history can be a difficult and time consuming process, especially since many sources of information are not immediately obvious.
- This guide suggests potentially useful documents and collections to help you uncover the hidden LGBT histories within Cheshire, and gives examples of relevant documents that we have already identified within our collections.
- It also includes a brief timeline showing various key dates in LGBT+ history.

Please note that additional LGBT+ references may come to light in the future as we receive new collections and continue to explore our existing records.

Essential Information

- It is important to note that the words we use to describe the LGBT+ community have changed over time, with many of the terms used in historical records being considered offensive today. Some terms you might come across when consulting records are shown below:
 - Buggery
 - (Gross) indecency
 - Obscenity
 - Sexual offences
 - Sodomy
 - Unnatural offences
 - Unnatural act

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Timeline

The following timeline highlights some of the key dates in LGBT history. This may prove useful when searching newspapers and other records to see if local information is available.

1533	King Henry VIII passes the Buggery Act 1533 making all male-male sexual activity punishable by death.
1828	The Buggery Act 1533 was repealed and replaced by the Offences against the Person Act 1828. Buggery remained punishable by death.
1861	Death penalty for buggery was abolished.
1885	The British Parliament enacted section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885, known as the Labouchere Amendment, which made male same sex acts illegal.
1895	Oscar Wilde tried for gross indecency over a relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas, was sentenced to two years in prison with hard labour.
1908	'The Intermediate Sex' by Edward Carpenter was published.
1951	Roberta Cowell becomes the first Briton to undergo male-to-female confirmation surgery.
1954	Alan Turing committed suicide. He had been given a course of female hormones by doctors as an alternative to prison after being prosecuted by the police because of his homosexuality.
1957	The Report of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution (better known as the Wolfenden report) was published. It advised the British Government that homosexuality should not be illegal.
1967	The Sexual Offences Act decriminalised homosexuality for those over 21 years of age.
1969	Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) formed as the first British gay activist group.
1972	The first Gay Pride march took place in London.
1988	Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 banned local authorities from "promoting homosexuality".

1989	The campaign group Stonewall UK is set up to oppose Section 28 and other barriers to equality.
1992	Body Positive is established to provide support to people affected by HIV/AIDS in Cheshire and North Wales.
1994	The age of consent for same sex was lowered to 18.
2000	The age of consent for same sex was lowered to 16.
2002	Same-sex couples are granted equal rights to adopt.
2003	Section 28 was repealed.
2004	The Civil Partnership Act 2004 is passed, giving same-sex couples the same rights and responsibilities as married heterosexual couples in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.
2013	The first Chester Pride event took place.
2014	Same-sex marriage becomes legal in England and Wales under the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013.

☞ For help about ordering documents please see our 'Using the Searchroom' leaflet or speak to a member of staff.

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LGBT+ Collections Guide

☞ The past 'invisibility' of the LGBT community within wider society means that records tend to be mainly found in official sources. Evidence of the LGBT+ community can be found in the archives of courts, hospitals, local authorities and other organisations' collections.

Court Records

Male homosexuality was illegal in the UK until 1967, and as a result there are plenty of criminal records to use in researching this subject. Female homosexuality was not officially criminalised so records weren't created in the same way.

Court records can include:

- indictments that simply list a person's name and offence
- depositions of the evidence taken by the court
- transcripts of the trial proceedings

Quarter Sessions

Local courts for trying criminals were held four times a year and were known as 'quarter sessions'. Common offences tried at the quarter sessions included theft, assault and poaching, but could also include complaints and allegations of homosexual behaviour, frequently referred to in the court records as 'an unnatural crime'.

We hold the records of the Cheshire County Quarter Sessions ([reference Q](#)) and the Chester City Quarter Sessions ([reference ZQ](#)). Useful records from within these collections may include the Sessions Files, Sessions Books and Order Books.

Example: Alan Turing and Arnold Murray

Alan Turing and Arnold Murray appeared before the Cheshire court of Quarter Sessions sitting in Knutsford on 31 March 1952 charged with three counts of gross indecency. Both men pleaded guilty and were given probation orders - Turing was to undergo hormone treatment at the Manchester Royal Infirmary during a probation period of 12 months.

The official court records present the bare facts of this singular event that may or may not have contributed to Alan Turing's death two years later. Apology for the events of 1952 has been followed by pardon in 2013 and 'Turing's Law' in 2017. This documentary heritage has become a symbol of LGBT campaigning history over 60 years after its creation and a powerful reminder of social progress achieved in living memory.

We hold the following records of interest relating to Alan Turing:

- [QPP 4417/7 Register of the court of Summary Jurisdiction](#)
- [QJB 4/83 Quarter Sessions Book](#)
- [QJF 380/2 Quarter sessions file \(indictment\)](#)

Consistory Court

Consistory courts – or church courts – were organised by diocese and had jurisdiction over a wide range of subjects including sexual behaviour.

Useful items from within the Diocese of Chester consistory court records ([reference EDC](#)) may include the Court Books ([EDC 1](#)) and corresponding papers, Deposition Books (EDC 2) and Citation Books ([EDC 3](#)).

Assize Court

A higher court - the Assize Court - dealt with more serious offences such as homicide, larceny, robbery, burglary, treason, rape and sodomy. Records of the Chester assizes are held at The National Archives in London ([please see their online catalogue Discovery for more information](#)).

We do hold some calendars of prisoners for the Chester Assizes ([please see our catalogue for further information](#)). Calendars of prisoners for the Assizes will commonly refer to a defendant's earlier petty sessional trial, giving the date of that trial and the court in which it took place.

Example: The Altrincham Case

During the summer of 1936, 29 men were tried at Chester Assizes for committing homosexual offences in and around Altrincham and various nearby Cheshire and Lancashire towns. 72 charges were prosecuted at the trial, the majority of which were committed between 1930 and 1936, with a few going as far back as 1925.

The charges behind the case originated when a man named Norman Sparrow fell ill and had to take time off work in 1936. He was repeatedly quizzed by his employer, who eventually "dragged the truth out of him". From then the prosecution moved from one suspect to another, with man after man incriminating himself and others, resulting in one of the biggest trials for homosexual offences in English history.

Details of this case can be found within the Assize records at the National Archives, as well as in local newspapers.

Petty Sessions

We hold petty sessions (or Magistrates Court) records for the following Cheshire divisions: Broxton, Bucklow, Chester Castle, Chester City, Congleton, Crewe, Daresbury, Dukinfield, Eddisbury, Ellesmere Port and Neston, Halton, Hyde, Leftwich, Macclesfield, Middlewich, Nantwich, Northwich, Prestbury, Runcorn, Sandbach, South East Cheshire, Vale Royal, Warrington, Widnes, Winsford and Wirral. Useful records within these collections include the General Court registers, court orders and minutes of court proceedings.

Police and Prison Records

You can use calendars of prisoners to find the names, crimes and dates of arrest of prisoners held before trial. The annual reports of the police and Chief Constable can provide useful statistical data on the occurrence of sexual offences such as “buggery” or other “unnatural acts”. We hold the Chief Constable’s annual reports for numerous years starting from 1868 onwards.

Please note that between the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 and the Police Act of 1964 “watch committees” were the local government bodies which oversaw policing. We hold the records of Chester City Police Force and Watch Committee ([ZDPO](#)).

Newspapers

Like today, newspapers record details of crimes and prosecutions and can provide an excellent source of information. When used alongside archival records, the newspapers can build up a picture of individual’s lives and society’s reaction to events.

We have access to numerous local newspapers on microfilm in our searchroom; including the Chester Chronicle and the Cheshire Observer (see our local studies catalogue or ask a member of staff for a full list). We also have free access to the British Newspaper Archive website, which is a great resource for searching newspapers by date, location and keywords. When searching the Newspaper Archive, it is important to remember to use a range of different search terms as some words have had different meanings over time which can affect search results.

Example - Concealment of Sex in Macclesfield

One of the great things about using newspapers to research LGBT+ history is that they can reveal stories that may not be recorded in any other sources. For example, on Friday 13 October 1848 the Chester Chronicle published an article entitled “Singular Case of Concealment of Sex”. A medical officer from the Macclesfield Union was attending to a patient, John Smith from Macclesfield, when “on looking on the person and hearing his voice, he was struck with their peculiarity; the face, lips, general expression, and the voice, being those of a woman”. When the patient later died, the medical officer confirmed that John Smith was in fact a female previously called Sophia Locke. Sophia had been living with a female who described herself as her wife for 14 years, and had apparently assumed male attire at three years old. Sophia’s burial record can be found in the parish register of Christ Church, Macclesfield, although there is no mention of her alternative identity.

Legal Records

One of the more serious effects of social prejudice against homosexuals is that it makes them highly vulnerable to blackmail, particularly when the law itself supports such prejudice. Before the passing of the 1967 Sexual Offences Act many blackmail attempts involved a threat to expose a man as a homosexual, whether or not he were in fact gay.

We hold the records of various solicitors firms within our collection.

Example – Blackmail and Extortion

We have a selection of records from one of our collections of solicitor's records, including letters, photographs and other personal effects.

One of the letters, written in French and sent prior to the outbreak of the First World War, seems to be an attempt to blackmail the recipient into paying for medical treatment.

The author of the letter suggests "you know well what happened to me at your house" and demands a payment of 200 francs. He ends by threatening "if you don't do it, I shall have justice."

Parish Records & Wills

Parish records and wills can be a useful resource for researching LGBT history, particularly if you are interested in finding out biographical information about specific individuals or tracking down evidence of same-sex relationships.

We are the Diocesan record office for about 400 parishes in the Diocese of Chester (roughly the same area as pre-1974 Cheshire) and for those in the deaneries of Widnes and Warrington in the Diocese of Liverpool. The vast majority have deposited records and most registers can be seen on microfilm in our searchroom. Larger local libraries hold microfilms for their areas. Microfilmed register entries up to 1910 can now be searched and viewed online with the subscription site Find My Past.

The Record Office also holds over 70,000 original Cheshire wills and probate records proved in the Archdeaconry of Chester between 1487 and 1857, as well as 60,000 microfilm copies of wills proved at the Chester Probate Registry between 1858 and 1940. Indexes to all these wills can be found by searching our online Cheshire Wills Database or via Find My Past.

Example – Taxal Marriage

The parish register of Taxal Parish Church shows evidence of a marriage between Hannah Wright and Anne Gaskill in 1707. Moreover in 1750 Sarah Richardson, "commonly known as Peter", and Maria Sproston were married by publication at St Michael & All Angels, Middlewich. Unfortunately we can't know for sure the circumstances surrounding these marriages, but this does not make them any less captivating.

The parish registers can also be used to discover more about the lives of well-known LGBT+ figures. For example, Christopher Isherwood was a novelist, playwright, screen-writer, autobiographer and diarist. He was born in 1904 at Wyberslegh Hall, Stockport and was baptised at the church of Disley St Mary in Cheshire.

Diocesan Records

In addition to the consistory court records, the Diocese of Chester collection also contains the records of various organisations, committees and associations ([EDM](#)). These include Moral Welfare Associations, Education Associations and Adoption Services.

The minutes of these associations could provide evidence of any discussions regarding LGBT+ issues.

Community and Culture

Following the Sexual Offences Act, there were two primary developments: firstly, the growth of LGBT venues and secondly the growth of LGBT activism.

Campaign Groups and Charities

Body Positive Cheshire and North Wales was formally established in 1992 with the aim of providing support, information and advice to people living with or affected by HIV across Cheshire & North Wales. Around the same time Body Positive began managing the CASH (Cheshire Action for Sexual Health) service for gay and bisexual men living in the East Cheshire area. Over the years Body Positive has developed its services and now provides comprehensive services focusing on Sexual Health advice, education and STI prevention in Cheshire. Body Positive also provides a range of services to the LGBT+ community including Silver Rainbows and in 2017 was awarded Heritage Lottery Funding for this project. The BPCNW archive at Cheshire Archives includes over 200 copies of the Cheshire Cheese newsletter, as well as training materials, posters and pamphlets.

The Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) was a democratic voluntary organisation founded in 1964 with the aim achieving full legal and social equality for LGBT people in England and Wales.

At its peak, CHE was the largest LGBT organisation this country has ever seen, with 6,000 members and over 100 local groups around the country. At one time the Chester group has over 240 members and was the biggest in the country. Meetings were held at various venues across Chester, including the Blossoms Hotel and the Bear & Billet.

The records of Chester CHE are held at the London School of Economics Library. If you have any CHE records at home that you would like to donate to us then we would love to hear from you!

Gay Culture

Signs of the gay scene and gay culture in Cheshire can be found in the following resources:

- Local newspapers (especially events pages and advertisements)
- Local magazine listing guides (for example the Cheese Board section of Cheshire Cheese magazine provides a useful guide to local LGBT+ support groups and helplines, social groups and charities from 1995 onwards)
- Directories such as the Yellow Pages and Thomson Local Directories
- National and international newspapers and magazines e.g. “The Tartan Skirt: Magazine of the Scottish Transvestite/Transsexual Group” contains several references to Cheshire
- Cinema listings and theatrical productions
- University of Chester student magazines
- The Cheshire Image Bank website includes photographs of various ‘gay friendly’ venues in the region
- Court and police records can also provide insight into the development of LGBT nightlife, since both were charged with regulating pubs, clubs, and other venues licensed to sell alcohol and to play music. These can be usefully cross-referenced with building control plans and photographs to get a sense of what venues looked like.

Example - Gay Liberation in Chester

On the 21st November 1975 the Cheshire Observer published an article called “Gay Liberation – The Chester Scene”. The article gives an insight into Chester’s branch of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality, with subheadings entitled “Sympathy, Thriving, Lonely, Love, Ignorance and Temptation”. It includes interviews with members of the CHE group, providing a better understanding of what it was like to be LGBT+ in Chester in the 1970s.

Politics

Most political parties have, at one time or another, discussed LGBT issues, often in response to changing social and cultural circumstances, or a legislative programme.

We hold the records of the following local political parties: the Association of Liberal Councillors ([LOP 4](#)), Cheshire County Council Liberal Democrats ([D 7589/1](#)), Chester Liberal Association ([ZCR 159/6980](#)), East and Central Cheshire Area: Social Democratic Party ([LOP 5](#)) Knutsford and Holmes Chapel Labour Party ([DDX 589](#)), Altrincham and Sale Division Liberal Association (D 6567, [DDX 387](#) & [D 6177](#)), Macclesfield Divisional Labour Party ([D 8224](#)), Moulton Local Labour Party ([LOP 2/5](#)), Nantwich Conservative Club ([DDX 487](#)), Northwich and District Conservative and Unionist Association ([LOP 1](#)), Northwich Divisional Labour Party ([LOP 2/2](#)), Sandiway and Cuddington Labour Party ([LOP 2/6](#)), Warrington Branch of the British Communist Party ([LOP 3](#)) and Warrington Trades Council and Labour Party ([WMS 2805](#)).

These collections can include minutes, year books, campaign literature and various other published materials.

Local Government

Local Authority records can give a valuable insight into how the government interacted with and viewed LGBTQ+ communities in the past. The records can also reveal evidence of decisions affecting the LGBT community including adoption, education and Section 28 (see example below), civil partnership and marriage, health care, employment and equal opportunities, and advice and mentoring services.

Types of documents that may be useful include the council and committee minutes (usually found within the clerk's departmental records), legislative and policy documents, and annual reports.

We hold records for the following local authorities:

- **City Councils:** Chester City Council
- **County Councils:** Cheshire County Council
- **Borough Councils:** Altrincham, Chester, Congleton, Crewe, Ellesmere Port, Hyde, Macclesfield, Warrington and Widnes.
- **Urban District Councils:** Alderley Edge, Alsager, Bollington, Buglawton, Hale, Handforth, Knutsford, Lymm, Middlewich, Nantwich, Neston, Northwich, Runcorn, Sandbach, Tarporley, Wilmslow and Winsford.
- **Rural District Councils:** Bucklow, Chester, Congleton, Disley, Macclesfield, Malpas, Nantwich, Northwich, Runcorn, Tarvin, Warrington and Wirral.

Example – Section 28

In 1988 the Local Government Act contained a clause (known as Section 28) which stated that a local authority "shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality" or "promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship". There was great hostility to the clause and some local authorities opposed it.

Evidence of the implementation of this clause can be found within the Cheshire Education Committee's 1989 document "Sex Education: a Guide for Schools and Colleges" (reference LOD/1/2 Minutes).

Hospital and Asylum Records

Homosexuality was once considered by the medical profession and wider society as a mental health condition. Individuals were admitted to psychiatric hospitals for treatment.

Cheshire Archives holds many archives of asylums and hospitals specialising in mental health collections; for example Parkside Asylum ([NHM 8](#)), Winwick Asylum ([NHW 3](#)) and Upton Asylum ([ZHW](#)). Please note that hospital records of less than 100 years old will be closed under the Data Protection Act.

There may be some valuable information contained within admissions registers for the region's major hospitals, as well as in the hospital minutes and annual reports, relating to sexuality and sexual health. Although HIV/AIDS is not a disease that affects only the homosexual community, the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s brought issues of central concern to the gay movement onto the mainstream political and social agenda.

Cheshire Archives and Local Studies hold records for the following hospitals: Alderley Edge Cottage, Alvaston, Arclid, Barrowmore, Chester City, Chester Royal Infirmary, Congleton War Memorial, Congleton West Heath, Countess of Chester, Cranage Hall, Crewe Memorial, Crewe Linden Grange Maternity, Davenham Isolation, Dutton, Ellesmere Port, Macclesfield (West Park) General, Macclesfield Infirmary, Macclesfield Parkside, Manor Hospital, Great Sutton, Mary Dendy, Nantwich Cottage, Nantwich Barony, Northwich Victoria Infirmary, Oakmere Rehabilitation Centre, Ravensmoor, Tarporley War Memorial, Warrington General, Warrington Infirmary, Warrington Victoria Park Maternity, Weaverham The Grange, Winsford Albert Infirmary and Winwick.

Oral History Interviews

Oral history interviews are extremely significant in that they can reveal individual and group experiences that have not been recorded in any other medium and would otherwise be lost. As part of the From Prejudice to Pride project, Cheshire Archives and Local Studies have been working with Body Positive and the Silver Rainbows social group to interview older members of the LGBT community from the Cheshire region and help to preserve their stories and experiences for future generations.

Adding to our collections

If you have information relating to the LGBT community in Cheshire, or relevant material to add to the collections, we would be delighted to hear from you. Please telephone 01244 972574, email rebecca.farmer@cheshiresharedservices.gov.uk or ask a member of staff for more information.

Useful Links and Resources

- Cheshire Archives Catalogue <http://catalogue.cheshirearchives.org.uk>
- National Archive Discovery <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>
- Digital Transgender Archive <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/>
- Lesbian and Gay Newsmedia Archive (LAGNA) <http://www.lagna.org.uk/>
- Stonewall <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/>
- Body Positive Cheshire and North Wales <https://www.bpcnw.co.uk/>
- UNIQUE Transgender Network <http://www.uniquetg.org.uk/>
- Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) archive at the LSE Library <https://archives.lse.ac.uk/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=HCA%2fCHE>
- Find My Past (Cheshire Collection) <https://www.findmypast.co.uk/articles/world-records/search-all-uk-records/special-collections/the-cheshire-collection>
- British Newspaper Archive <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>