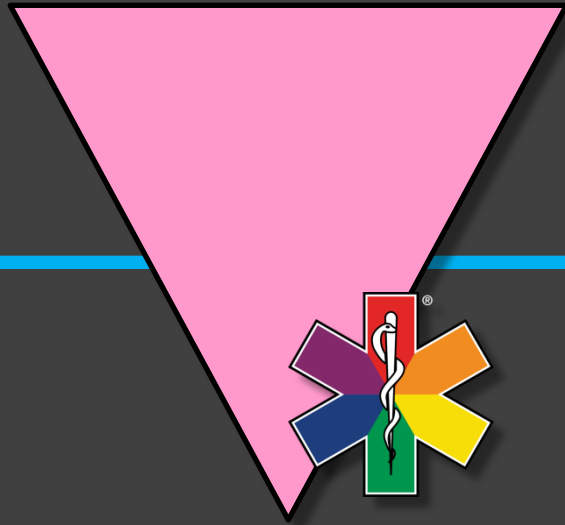


National Ambulance
LGBT Network



Supporting Lesbian, Gay,
Bisexual, Trans staff,
patients and communities

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Recognising Holocaust Memorial Day

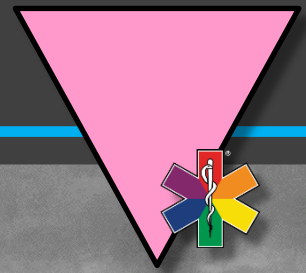


Remembering the 100,000 gay men murdered in the Holocaust

Alistair Gunn
15 January 2020



Remembering the past...



... might help our futures

Each year, the **27 January** is designated as Holocaust Memorial Day. As well as marking the liberation of the concentration camp at Auschwitz, this date allows us to reflect on the horrific things that happened to people between 1939 and 1945. In addition to the six million Jews that were killed, it is estimated that another million people, including many gay men, were held captive, or killed, at the hands of the Nazi regime. ▼

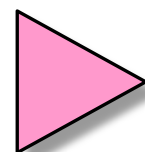
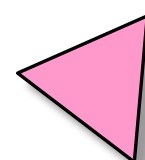
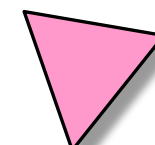
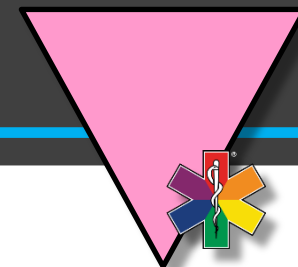
Find out what it's like to visit Auschwitz

Find out the origins and meaning of the pink triangle symbol

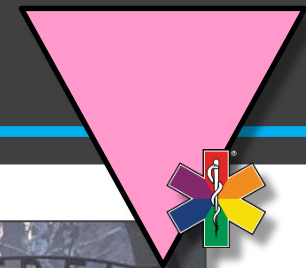


Read the story of one of the men that wore the pink triangle

Learn how you can find out more information



A Visit to Remember [1]



Before I visited Auschwitz back in 1997 I remember people telling me things about the place. Someone mentioned that birds won't fly over the site and another that flowers don't grow there. Nothing could have been further from the truth on the day I went. As this was part of an Inter-rail trip around Europe and it was quite symbolic that we travelled by train to the town of Oświęcim (the Polish name for Auschwitz) on a baking hot August day. Any thoughts of complaining about the heat rapidly disappear when you consider how thousands, if not millions, of people were packed into cattle wagons for the journey to death camps.

Birds were merrily chirping away and flowers were in full bloom when we got there but you soon lose all sense of this when you come face to face with the famous gates, surrounded by electric fencing and the words 'Arbeit macht frei' (German for 'work sets you free') across the top.

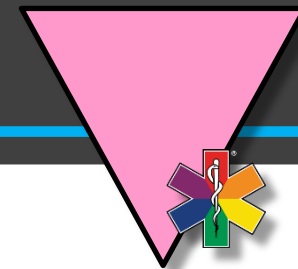


The famous gates at the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland

In the years since then I have compared visits with many friends and colleagues who have also been to Auschwitz. I am always fascinated to know what thing really impacted on people. I have heard people talk about the room full of human hair in which you can see little pig tails that must have come from a child. Some mention the suitcases on which chalk marks state the name of the owner.



A Visit to Remember [2]



The cruel reality is people would never see their belongings again and it all reminds you of the perverse illusion the Nazi's put in place so people would not challenge their journey to oblivion.

The thing that broke me was the lines of photographs, three deep, that run the length of the central halls in each of the huts. As I entered the third hut I paid a little more attention to the photos which are identically framed. Under each photo, in tiny black print, are three dates. You soon realise these are their date of birth, arrival at Auschwitz and the date of their death.

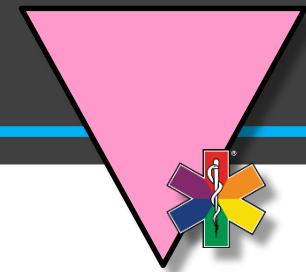
One photo showed a guy feigning a smile. On another a young guy stares back at you looking clearly scared. A further one shows a woman whose eyes are welling up with tears. At that point the sheer scale of the Holocaust started to sweep over me and I couldn't stop tears from flowing down my own face.

Interestingly, you learn a lot about yourself from a trip like this. You can't help but notice the people around you on the visit and what affects them. Maybe pig tails in a mass of hair made people think of their own children. Maybe seeing chalk marks on cases bring home the calculated regime of pure evil orchestrated by the Nazis. Maybe seeing endless lines of people scared and suffering goes so far against my own core values that I couldn't handle it.

People often apologise when they talk about wanting to visit a place like Auschwitz. 'Is it wrong that I'm fascinated about going?' My opinion is absolutely not. It's learning from history, it's paying respect to those who lost lives for no good reason and it is also understanding ourselves and our place in the world. Whoever we are, we have a part to play in making sure we challenge evil regimes and ensure events like the Holocaust never, never happen again. ▼



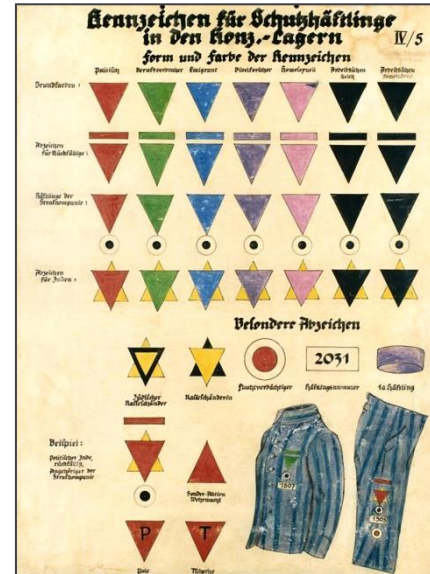
The Pink Triangle



The pink triangle symbol has its origins in the coding system used for prisoners at concentrations camps between 1939 and 1945. Most people know the yellow Star of David symbol that was used to identify Jewish prisoners, but there were many others used.

The pink triangle was the symbol used by the Nazi's to represent gay men in concentration camps. Many of these men had already fallen outside the German law as Paragraph 175 of the Nazi revised criminal code, outlawed homosexuality. Some men were even moved from prison to concentration camps.

Usually, these men were subjected to the most harsh and degrading treatments going. Those that weren't killed by Nazi bullets often perished through hypothermia, starvation or simple exhaustion from the barbaric daily tasks they were made to perform.



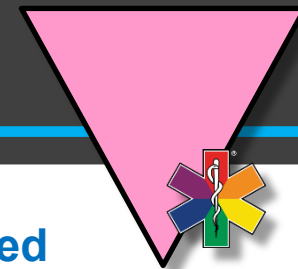
The complex coding system used for prisoners in concentration camps.

There was some variation between camps but generally the coloured symbols were universal.

During the 1960s the pink triangle symbol was reclaimed by the gay community as a symbol of gay identity. It remained the most recognisable symbol until the creation of the rainbow freedom flag in the 1980s. Today, you still see people, often older members of the LGBT community, wearing the pink triangle. ▼



The Men with the Pink Triangle [1]



There are few accounts of the lives of people who were made to wear the pink triangle symbols. Rather like in England, homosexual acts fell outside the law and therefore many people chose not to record their experiences for fear of further persecution.

Robert Odeman was a professional actor and musician, playing the piano in concerts throughout Europe. This came to an end when he injured a hand. In 1935 Robert opened a cabaret in Hamburg. One year later the Nazis shut it down, charging that it was politically subversive. Robert then moved to Berlin where he developed a close relationship with a male friend who was pressured to denounce Robert to the Gestapo. In November 1937 Robert was arrested under Paragraph 175 of the Nazi revised criminal code and sentenced to 27 months in prison.

Paragraph 175 of the German Penal Code stated:

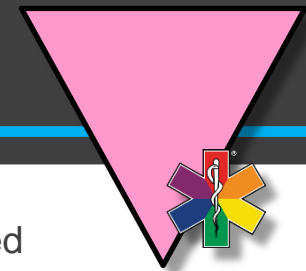
‘An unnatural act committed between persons of male sex or by animals is punishable by imprisonment; the loss of civil rights may also be imposed.’

On his release in 1940 he remained under police surveillance. They monitored his correspondence with a half-Jewish friend in Munich and with friends abroad. In 1942 Robert was arrested again under Paragraph 175 and deported to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. There he was assigned an office job. On a forced march from the camp towards the Baltic in April 1945, 40-year-old Robert escaped with two other ‘175ers’.

After the war, Robert returned to Berlin, where he worked as a writer and composer. He died in 1985. He was one of the survivors. Many thousands of homosexual men were killed by the Nazis.



The Men with the Pink Triangle [2]



The brutal reality of life for men with the pink triangle is captured in a biography by Heinz Heger. He not only describes the disgusting conditions all prisoners were subjected to, but the way gay men were singled out by guards and other prisoners for abuse.

In one chapter he describes the beating of one prisoner for the minor offence. The injuries he sustained, and the filthy conditions, meant he was never going to recover. Soon after infection took hold and it was a matter of days before he died.

The book is not for the faint hearted but is one of the few accounts available.

The play Bent debuted in 1979 and was later turned into a film. It outlines the fate of two pink triangle prisoners in Dachau who fall in love during their imprisonment.

The legal status of homosexuality prevented the proper recognition of the men persecuted. It wasn't until 1987 that the first monument was erected in Amsterdam. The 'Homomonument' is a large pink marble plinth that juts out into one of the canals (see photograph below). A further memorial sits quietly in the gay district of Berlin. On the walls of the Nollendorfplatz

U-bahn station is a pink triangle plaque. You could easily walk past it without noticing, but it is there for those who choose to remember. ▼



What about Lesbians?

The Lesbian and Gay Foundation wrote the following article in 2005.

Nazi persecution was also aimed at lesbians, although little specific information is available. There are few resources dealing with the fate of gay women under the Nazis.

This is largely due to the fact that they were classed generally with 'anti-socials' to remove the fact of their actual existence – which effectively obliterates them from history. Love between women was so intolerable to the Nazis that the existence of lesbianism was totally denied.

The most effective way to render lesbians powerless was to sever their connection to other women. With the rise of Nazism, lesbian meeting places and private homes were raided and their visibility was concealed. Lesbians were among those women imprisoned as 'asocials' and



Lesbian women wore the black triangle.

considered a threat to German society before 1939.

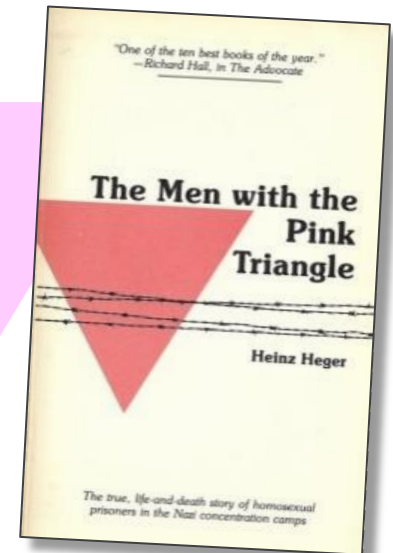
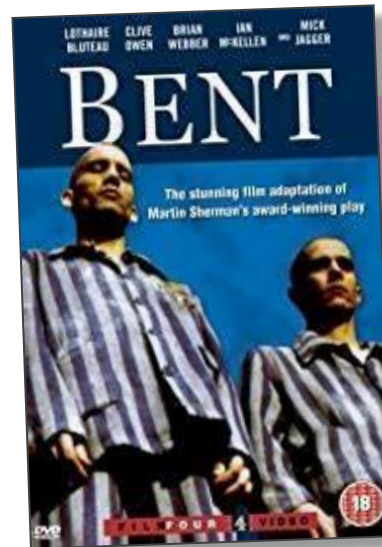
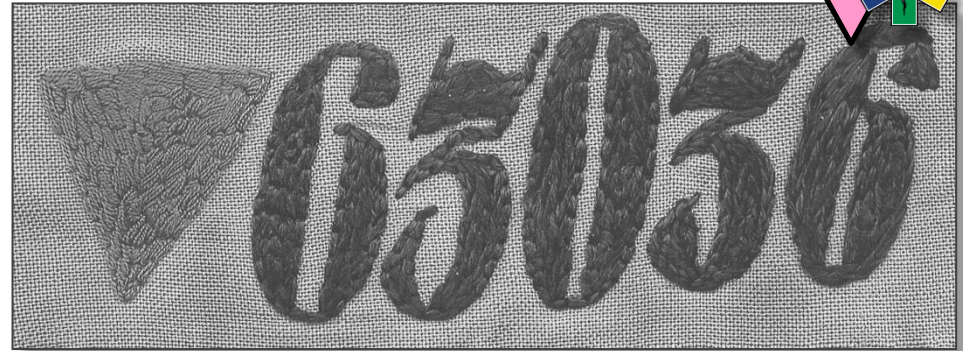
All 'asocials' were identified through black down-turned triangles. These detainees were considered stupid, unable to communicate and lacking courage. The SS despised them because the colour of the triangles was an insult to their own black uniforms. It is politically significant that the asocial category was not exclusively lesbian; it was a diverse grouping that included prostitutes, vagrants, murderers, thieves and those who violated laws prohibiting sexual intercourse between Aryans and Jews. ▼

Learn More

There isn't a massive number of resources available that are readily available, but two we would recommend are:

The film **Bent**. This was originally released in 1997 by FilmFour. The story follows the lives of Max and Horst who meet on their journey to Dachau concentration camp. They help each other to overcome the torment of the meaningless tasks set by the Nazis and in doing so form a close bond. It's not easy watching but certainly leaves you in no doubt about the harsh realities of the concentration camps.

The Men with the Pink Triangle is similarly not easy reading. If you are interested to know what life was really like for gay men under Nazi persecution, this is the book to get hold of. ▼



LGBT History Month

February is LGBT History Month and the perfect time to learn about our history. The National Ambulance LGBT Network has produced a number of resources to assist people holding events. If you have enjoyed reading this pack, why not explore some others and arrange an event for your colleagues.

All resources can be found at:

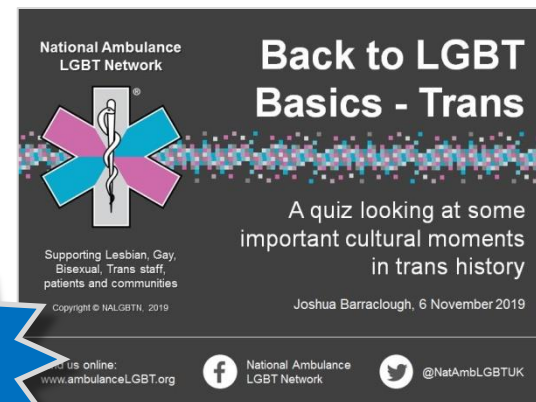
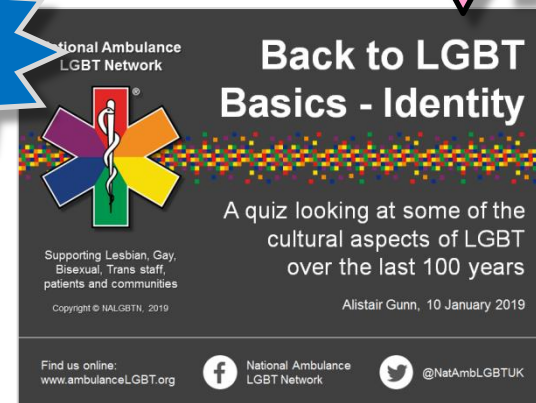
www.ambulancelgbt.org/resources/lgbt-history-month/

This year we have added a resource specifically about trans history. This resource is a set out as a quiz, with an incorrect fact appearing on every slide. Will you be able to spot them all? This is the perfect complement to the 'Identity' pack released last year, and we suggest you combine the two to make the perfect LGBT history event. ▼

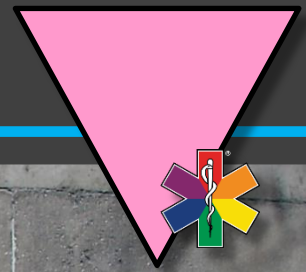
From
2019



New!



Picture View



A pink triangle memorial is placed inconspicuously on the wall of Nollendorfplatz U-bahn station in Berlin.

