

National Ambulance  
LGBT Network



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

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# Our LGBT History Icons



We celebrate LGBT History  
Month with a look at our  
icons and landmark events

Adam Williams with the National Committee  
26 February 2020



# Introduction



Each February is LGBT History Month and the perfect time to reflect on the past and how far we have come. So this month we asked the National Ambulance LGBT Network committee to think of their icons and favourite events and write about them for this month's 15 Minute Read.

Even the people putting this document together found it interesting to consider the variety of people being written about. Alan Turing appeared twice and hardly surprising after his story has become increasingly understood. He topped the poll of the BBC Icons programme last year and will feature on the new £50 note when it is released. We're unlikely to hold one of those for a while!

Other names are from politics and those who have played a big part in changing the fortunes of LGBT people in Britain. Others from popular culture and sport have kept us well entertained. Read on and find out more.



This month's 15 Minute Read was inspired and produced by Adam Williams who is a paramedic at North West Ambulance Service. Adam is also the Chair of the North West Ambulance LGBT Network and committee member of the National Ambulance LGBT Network.

Articles are by Adam Williams unless stated. Other contributors this month are Emma Burrow, Alex Ewings, Tony Faraway, Alistair Gunn, Joanne Sugden, Gareth Thomas and Kirsten Willis.



# Alan Turing



Being a proud Mancunian there is no greater LGBT hero in my eyes than the legendary Alan Turing. Turing's life is one of remarkable achievement and great sorrow.

Often referred to as the father of modern computing Alan was a renowned mathematician and code breaker. One of his most notable achievements was his work to break the infamous Enigma Code during World War II which contributed to victory for the Allies in 1945. Many historians disagree as to the exact number but it is estimated that his work shortened the war by up to four years and saving millions of lives.

If we fast forward to today we can see the influence his work continues to have. Computers are a major part of modern life and the original 'Turing Machines' were his creation. He gave the world one of the greatest tools to maintain peace and prosperity; communication.

Whilst we celebrate his outstanding achievements we must also remember that great tragedy he endured. As a gay man of the time Alan had to constantly hide who he really was for fear of punishment from the state.

When he was found out he was punished by the state. Given the choice of prison or chemical castration he chose the latter so he could continue to work on his research. What courage he showed, enduring an archaic barbaric procedure in order to continue developing what we take for granted today.

It's a fitting tribute that 52 years after his conviction, and 54 years after his death, Turing was granted a posthumous pardon by The Queen. This act in itself paved the way for conversations and debate about archaic laws and the fact that LGBT people have just as much to contribute to society.



# Paul O'Grady



Paul O'Grady is quite simply a cross-generational icon. My first recollection of Paul was as the undoubtedly Lily Savage, a very straight talking and funny drag queen personality, one of the first mainstream drag queens to be embraced by the British public. Indeed many have stated that the character savage was pioneering for its time and paved the way for many more.

In 1995 Paul O'Grady announced the retirement of Savage and the British public soon embraced Paul to our hearts through his heart warming television shows defending animal rights and continually fighting for the rights of LGBT people. Over the years Paul has been a passionate advocate of equality, in particular marriage equality not only in the United Kingdom but across the world.

Paul's health problems over the years have been no secret, indeed he has been very public about his health troubles due to smoking and his admiration

for the NHS in not only providing him with life saving treatment but for helping him to turn his health around.

But rather than retire from public life Paul has used his second chance and high profile to highlight important causes, particularly regarding the NHS, LGBT rights and animal rights.

Examples being his involvement in the NHS heroes awards and his documentaries at Great Ormond St Hospital Little Heroes. His argument for the protection, preservation and development of the NHS is made all the more convincing by the fact that he in his own words has been the recipient of the best health care in the world.

Paul to me is a modern Icon, whatever age you are, he will always find a way to connect to you and to touch your life and inspire you to contribute to the community in your own special way.



# Ian McKellen



Sir Ian is quite simply one of the greatest acting talents this country has ever known. Over his career he has performed Shakespeare, in the West End and latterly on the big screen.

Aside from McKellens acting career, his sexuality has inadvertently been a big deal too. While McKellen's sexuality was known amongst his fellow actors McKellen did not publicly disclose this until 1988 when he came out to the public on a BBC radio programme. Ian's motivation to make his sexuality public was the controversial Section 28. He said at the time that although there could be negative effects on his career he could not sit back and allow this blatant violation of LGBT rights go unchallenged. In fact it was during a debate with a conservative journalist over Section 28 on said BBC radio programme that he declared he is gay.

As well as being patron of many LGBT focussed charities McKellen is a co-founder of Stonewall, an

LGBT rights lobby group in the United Kingdom, named after the Stonewall riots. Stonewall today continues to be a strong fighting force for LGBT rights around the world.

In 2015 Sir Ian Led the 25<sup>th</sup> Manchester Pride parade. As Grand Marshal Ian was at the head of the parade leading through Manchester's streets views by thousands of people.

I had the privilege of watching that parade and he certainly loved every minute of it. What was more poignant for myself was his reaction to the protestors present. In a true testament of his class he simply blew them kisses. Showing that there was no room for hate in the city of Manchester.

Sir Ian is simply a legend and at the youthful age of 80 he certainly shows no signs of slowing down and we wouldn't have it any other way!



# Why LGBT History Month?



‘One thing identified back in 2005 by the group Schools Out, was how little history has been recorded about LGBT people. Just over 50 years ago homosexual acts between men were illegal and at a similar time the Stonewall riots in New York were taking place.

Being illegal and on the wrong side of rioting did not lend itself to positive depictions of LGBT people. There is however a rich tapestry of history which has been denied until relatively recently.’



Two of the stars of Adam William's writing are Ian McKellan (above) and Paul O'Grady with his alter ego Lily Savage (below).



# Alan Turing



By Tony Faraway

Considered the father of theoretical computer science and artificial intelligence, Alan Turing was instrumental in codebreaking intercepted messages at Bletchley Park during World War II and undoubtedly shortened the length of the war.



Admitting he'd had sex with 19 year old Arnold Murray in 1952, he was charged with gross indecency and forced to choose between imprisonment or chemical castration. He chose the latter.

Turing was found dead aged 41 by his landlady. He had died from cyanide poisoning, a half-eaten apple beside him. His death was recorded as suicide. The apple, however, was never tested - one aspect that led to some doubting this verdict.

But Turing's legacy lives on throughout the world. As Time magazine put it: *'The fact remains that everyone who taps at a keyboard, opening a spreadsheet or a word-processing program, is working on an incarnation of a Turing machine.'*

We will never know what Alan Turing might have gone on to achieve had his life not ended so tragically early.



Symbolically, Turing is commemorated in Sackville Park, Manchester, sitting between the University on one side, and Canal Street, at the heart of the Gay Village, on the other. When there, I like to spend some time with him contemplating how life has changed, in terms of both technology and equality.





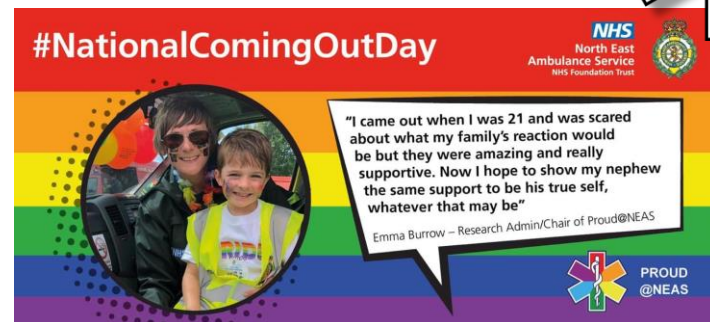
# National Coming Out Day



By Emma Burrow

I still remember the overwhelming feeling of anxiety and worry that I had before I came out at 21. I'd known for a long time that I was gay but didn't have the courage to tell anyone. I started seeing my first girlfriend and once we decided to move in together I thought then was the right time to come out. I was dreading the reaction from people but my family and friends were amazing, They were so supportive and continue to do so. However, I worked in elderly care for many years and it wasn't an environment that I felt I could be openly LGBT.

I started working at North East Ambulance Service (NEAS) in 2018 and quickly became involved in the LGBT staff network Proud@NEAS. I finally feel like I work in a truly inclusive workplace where I can be my 'real self'. Last year I attended Newcastle Pride and I was immensely proud that my five year old nephew Oliver was there and



marched with NEAS in the parade.

My sister Sarah, Oliver's mum, is passionate about Oliver growing up in a world where he can be whoever he wants to be, which is why she brought him to Pride. He knows his Auntie Emma has a girlfriend and that's normal to him.

For National Coming Out Day 2019 I shared a photo of Oliver and I attending Pride. Oliver now has this photo printed out and pinned to his wardrobe. Oliver knows that if he is LGBT or straight, either way he will have the same reaction, complete acceptance and support.



# Nicola Adams



By Alistair Gunn

Like myself, Nicola Adams was born and raised in Yorkshire. On the face of it that's where the similarity stops and you could say she's just about my polar opposite. She's black, identifies as bisexual and a successful sportswoman.

Her unblemished record in flyweight boxing is enviable. In competitions she has never lost a fight. She also became the first openly LGBT person to win an Olympic boxing Gold medal, after her win at the 2012 Summer Olympics.

As well as being a 'Yorkshire lass' one thing that really endears me to her is just how humble and lovely she seems to be. I have seen her interviews on a number of occasions and the gratitude she expresses to the people who have supported her is something to commend. What's more she has an infectious smile that appears to touch both ears!

Those who know me well enough know I'm a lover not a fighter and I can think of few less things I'd rather do than go boxing. My sporting prowess is limited to bashing out 60 lengths in a swimming pool. We can all admire those who's passion is something different to our own and contemplate what we would talk about if we ever really get to meet.



In 2012 Nicola was named the most influential LGBT person by The Independent. Now that's something I would definitely like to talk to her about over a cup of tea... Yorkshire tea of course!





## By Gareth Thomas

As one of the Welsh Ambulance Service representatives on the National Ambulance Service LGBT Network, I thought I'd make sure a Welsh icon from history is included here.

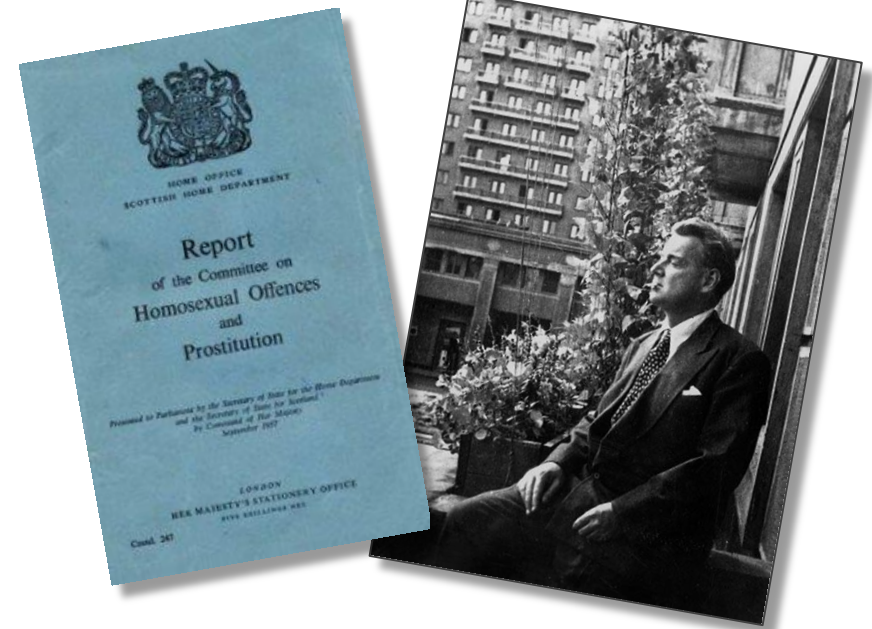
Goronwy Rees is a little known name, but the part he played in LGBT history is significant. Born in Aberystwyth Goronwy began his career as a journalist and went onto work for MI6 for a while and was closely involved with the 1950's spy scandals.

He eventually went on to become Principal of Aberystwyth University and was asked to join the Government's Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution in 1954.

The resulting (and highly controversial) Wolfenden Report laid the foundations for the later 1967 Sexual Offences Act. This partially decriminalised

male homosexuality for the first time in England and Wales.

Goronwy was described as '*by far the most lateral thinking and perceptive member of the committee.*' He argued successfully that they should take evidence directly from homosexual men.



# Fighting Section 28



By Joanne Sugden

My most significant event in history is the North West Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Equality's 'Never Going Underground Campaign' against Section 28 in 1988. Set against the backdrop of Thatcher's Britain this Local Government Act was designed to ban the promotion of homosexuality including its teaching in any school setting. Never Going Underground used the iconic London Underground logo as a symbol of defiance and solidarity amongst the lesbian and gay community. What is unique about this campaign is that it saw the coming together of 20,000 LGBT and supporters in one of the biggest ever marches and demonstrations ever to take place outside of London.

Manchester in the 1980s was not only evolving as a gay social scene but politically it had had its fair share of marches against pit closures, reclaim the

night demonstrations to name a couple. It also had a politically active and empathetic council which supported lesbian and gay equality. It's little wonder it became the centre point for this event to take place.

The campaign was supported by and attracted the attention of many famous people who were guest speakers as well as leaders of the demonstration on 20 February 1988. Celebrities included Michael Cashman of Eastenders and the legendary Sir Ian McKellen who would go on to become the patron of Manchester a Pride.

On the day of the march there was a great buzz around Manchester, meeting at All Saints near the Polytechnic. As people gathered you knew it was going to be something special. To see so many people united against the Act was amazing and to be part of it was incredible.

*Continued...*



# Fighting Section 28 (Continued)



The march culminated with everyone gathering in Albert Square listening to guest speakers vociferously speaking out and against the Act.

As the day went on crowds dispersed with many staying on and going out in the village. Friendships, memories and more were made that day. It certainly made people stand up and listen to a united voice and question why there was such an outdated Act being pushed through government. Section 28 was a real step backwards but it didn't thwart the LGBT community who were more determined than ever to be visible and stand against Conservative oppression.

The response was immense and was followed in March with a concert including featuring Jimmy Somerville and Andy Bell in support of the Never Going Underground campaign. It was an honour to be part of this campaign, a piece of LGBT history and whilst change was not effected and the Act not

repealed until 2003 it certainly made our voices heard in an unprecedented show of unity.



*Ian McKellen and Michael Cashman were the high-profile supporters of the Never Going Underground campaign.*



# RuPaul Charles



By Alex Ewings

RuPaul Charles was born on 17 November 1960 in San Diego. Now in 2020, this icon of modern LGBT history and pop culture is undisputedly the queen of drag.

RuPaul has brought the 'Drag Race' brand to the masses. It first starting in the US in 2009 where the first of 'America's Drag Superstars' were crowned.

Starting in the New York club scene in the late 1980s, RuPaul quickly gained a following and popularity. His 1993 album release *Supermodel of the World* was a surprise success, and that kick started RuPaul appearing in several films including *The Brady Bunch Movie* in 1995. This year also gave him another major break through, as he became the first drag queen to become majorly involved with a cosmetics company as a spokesmodel – MAC Cosmetics.

RuPaul continued to work in the entertainment industry which included more music releases as well as appearing in film and television. He hosted *The RuPaul Show* from 1997 to 1998 and was a frequent guest on other mainstream American talk shows.

Finally, after his career began to slow, *RuPaul's Drag Race* saw him win an Emmy Award in 2016 for 'Outstanding Host', with a batch of other wins and nominations for the show itself, since being nominated as far back as 2011.

This recognition of an LGBT icon in the mainstream media, as a drag queen, and who is also a person of colour, has been a big deal in modern LGBT history. All hail Queen RuPaul. As RuPaul says, '*If you can't love yourself, how in the hell are you gonna love someone else?*'





# Ruth Hunt



By Kirsten Willis BEM

Ruth Hunt was nominated a life peerage and Crossbench member of the House of Lords in the 2019's Prime Ministers Resignation Honours, making her Baroness Hunt of Bethnal Green. She was formerly the Chief Executive of Stonewall from 2014 to 2019.

Born and raised in Cardiff, Baroness Hunt was educated as a child in Wales, before reading English Language and Literature at St Hilda's College at the University of Oxford. Having held numerous posts within Stonewall, she was instrumental in the research into lesbian, gay and bisexual health needs and inequalities, religion and beliefs and its impact on sexual orientation equality and older peoples experiences in Britain.

I was lucky enough to see Baroness Hunt speak at The University of Reading, where she gave a keynote address at the Inaugural Wolfenden

Lecture in May 2017.

Her speech entitled 'LGBT Equality: Past, Present and Future', held on the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Report of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution (the Wolfenden Report) was one of the most animated, positive and engaging speeches I've heard.

She encouraged us to remain conscious and mindful of the challenges that we experience within the LGBT community and to learn from these, so that we can be influencers for change.



Such an incredible role model, Baroness Hunt continues to be one of my true LGBT inspirational leaders, whom I am sure will be a huge driver for change within Government with her work within the House of Lords.



# LGBT Conference 2020



A date for your diary is this years National Ambulance LGBT Network Conference. This will take place on Friday 10 July at the University of the West of England in Bristol. Returning to our previous formula, this conference will take place the day before Bristol Pride, enabling delegates to extend their stay and join ambulance colleagues in this social element.

This conference will see the continuing exploration of the subject of intersectionality; the issues and complications raised which LGBT is combined with other protected characteristics.

Registration for the 2020 conference is likely to begin shortly so keep an eye on our website for more information.

[www.ambulanceLGBT.org/conference](http://www.ambulanceLGBT.org/conference)



# Picture View



Committee members  
and guests at our  
Task and Finish event  
on 31 January.