

THE QUEENS' JUBILEE!

To mark the 50th anniversary of the first pride march in the UK by the Gay Liberation Front, Queercircle is proud to present *The Queens' Jubilee!*

Co-curated with Stuart Feather, *The Queens' Jubilee!* showcases the fun, jubilant and anarchic approach the radical queens adopted for their demonstrations, performances and way of living.

Through rare, documentary photography and original editions of *Come Together* - the Gay Liberation Front newspaper - *The Queens' Jubilee!* charts the introduction of drag into radical politics and its evolution from street theatre demos to communal living.

“Radical drag can be defined as women’s clothes worn by gay men, without falsies; or pretence, or parodying women. It displays upon his body a fully determined political and social provocation that confuses sex and gender rules as laid down by compulsory heterosexuality. Heels are good not just for gait and fashion sense, but for the feelings of restriction and vulnerability. Wearing a badge as a first step in coming out was okay in drawing the attention of close passers-by – drag viscerally proclaims its message to the entire street – there is no mistaking its content.”

-Stuart Feather



Stuart Feather is an artist and gay campaigner, active in the Gay Liberation Front in the 1970s. With Bette Bourne, he helped in founding the Bloopips gay theatre group.

He is the author of *Blowing the Lid; Gay Liberation, Sexual Revolution and Radical Queens* published in 2015.

**Come Together* was the newspaper published by the GLF Media Workshop established by Aubrey Walter, co-founder of the movement and David Fernbach, and like all the function groups, open to all GLF activists. The first issue was published on 30th November 1970.

KEY:

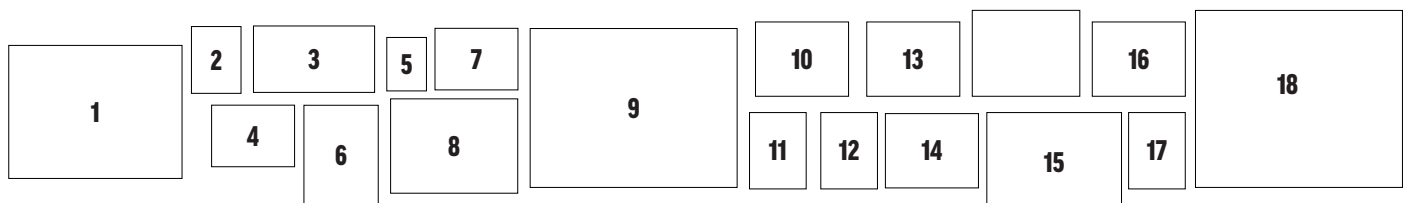


IMAGE 1:

The first openly public demonstration by lesbians and gay men in the UK Proposed by Eric Thompson, Gay Liberation Front protest in response to the arrest of Louis Eakes by “pretty policemen” who used sexual overtures to ensnare gay men.

Friday 27th November 1970. Highbury Fields, London.

Credit: Sunday Times

“It was so heart-warming to see my new sisters and brothers outside the station, under the streetlights, next to the pub - The Cock Inn - ... animated by seeing so many others turning up, everyone bright with excitement. Soon, we moved off to find the cottage shouting ‘Give us a G. Give us an A. Give us a Y. What does that spell? GAY. What’s GAY? GOOD!’

Altogether I think there were about 80 of us who took part, though Come Together, the GLF newspaper states 150, but however many of us there were, by the time we entered The Cock Inn, we had all changed. From the dark of the Fields to the light of the pub, we saw each other anew. We had shared our beliefs and convictions in public and acted them out in the world. We had made the first ever openly public demonstration in this country by homosexuals. Call it radicalisation if you like, but to me it felt more like arriving at the Ball.”

-Stuart Feather, Blowing The Lid. p60.

Left: Warren Hague, reading out the GLF Demands and Principles. Centre: Tarsus Sutton holding a taper. Right: Mick Belsten

Mary McIntosh was writing up her research into homosexuality in 1967 when she realised that her findings completely undermined the work of Antony Gray of the Homosexual Reform Society. who had after a nine year slog finally met Leo Abse MP who had agreed to present his Bill for the decriminalisation of homosexuality to Parliament, which was mainly based on the medical argument.

McIntosh therefore decided to wait for the law change before publishing her work “The Homosexual Role,” 1968, in an obscure American sociology journal. In 600 words she changed the entire view of homosexuality.

Mary became the senior feminist in the country. In 1994 she had a place on the Parliamentary Advisory Committee to the Criminal Law Revision Committee looking at The Age of Consent for homosexuals fixed then at 21-years-of-age. The Tories came to the meeting minded not to change the law. Mary however, had succeeded in creating a caucus of five members to agree to demand a reduction to 16 and to have this agreement attached to the committees’ decision.

When asked why 16 she explained it was purely tactical. When it came time to vote, the Tories on learning a minority report would be attached, immediately agreed a reduction to 18.

Mary McIntosh’s psychological insight and political acuity was typical of her actions to enhance the position of the LGBT+ community.

IMAGE 2:

Come Together Issue 4: February 1971 - The Gay Liberation Front Newspaper

Right: Page 8. A poem by Tarsus Sutton on the first action by GLF Street Theatre. The performance on 26th January 71 lacked political content and was more a fashion show as Tarsus’ poem indicates.

IMAGE 3:

**“Miss Trial Competition” - Street Theatre Demo
4th February, 1971 - Bow Street Magistrates Court**

Fulfilling Angela Mason’s request to show solidarity with Women’s Liberation, GLF performed their Miss Trial Competition on the pavement outside Bow Street Magistrates Court; with characters called Miss Taken, Miss Judged, Miss Conception etc., giving their opinions to a compère. GLF completed one performance, but the second was stopped by Covent Garden porters throwing rotten tomatoes. The BBC filmed GLF but that was the day Rolls-Royce collapsed, there was huge trouble in Northern Ireland and England didn’t win the Ashes.

Left to Right; Tarsus Sutton, Jane Winter, Barbara Klecki, Marshal Weekes, Paul Theobald, Stuart Feather and Angela Mason with her WL Placard which was the title of a WL Pamphlet giving their reason for attacking the Miss World Contest and the general struggles they faced.

IMAGE 4:

“Miss Trial Competition” - Street Theatre Demo 4th February, 1971 - Bow Street Magistrates Court

Left to Right; Paul Theobald, The Compere whose name is lost, Marshal Weekes, Edsel, Tarsus Sutton and Barbara Klecki, GLF’s youngest activists at 15-years-old.

IMAGE 5:

Come Together - “Beauty and the Pig”. Issue 4: February 1971

Angela Mason of Women’s Liberation (WL) invited GLF Street Theatre to come and perform something that would show solidarity between WL and GLF. The occasion was the first appearance at Bow Street Magistrates Court on 4th Feb 1971, of four women arrested at the Albert Hall for interrupting on live TV the cattle market that was called the Miss World Contest, run by Mecca. WL rushed the stage with football rattles that brought proceedings to a halt and the comedian Bob Hope fled into the wings. The winner that year was Miss Grenada. Mecca at that time was negotiating a deal with the government of Grenada to build a beach resort hotel there.

“Everyone’s ideas for this performance were discussed, and out of them developed The Miss Trial Competition, with contestants named Miss Judged, Miss Used, Miss Taken, Miss Behaved, Miss Conception and Miss Understood who were interviewed by a compère and told the story from the protesters point of view.

I wish I could remember the speeches but the tension was so great it was difficult to know whether my shaking body was due to nerves at being in drag for the first time, or dressed in a body stocking and tights in February”

-Stuart Feather, Blowing The Lid. p84-85

IMAGE 6:

Come Together - Doris Aversham Column Issue 4: February 1971

“After the General Meeting a few of us in the Street Theatre Group usually ended up at Mitch Blunden and Angus Shield’s bed-sit in West Kensington for a smoke. It was the first hippy home I visited, with mattresses on the floor covered in tie-dye silks and Turkish carpets on the wall. Propped up by cushions, the fire blazing, shillings ready for the gas metre; we were reading the first edition of Come Together. What was missing, someone decided was an Agony Aunt column, somebody who could answer questions on sexual politics. We gave her the name Doris Aversham.”

- Stuart Feather, Blowing The Lid. p90

IMAGE 7:

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament - Street Theatre Performance Alexandra Palace, Easter Sunday, 11th April 1971

The CND promoted GLF at their Festival of Life at Alexandra Palace so Street Theatre went on a recruitment drive to attract more lesbians and gays to join the movement.

Centre; Tarsus Sutton

IMAGE 8 & 9:

Festival of Light - GLF Demo Trafalgar Square and Hyde Park, September 1971

A missionary and his wife returned from India shocked at the depravity and decadence Britain had fallen into. Backed by the professional moralists Mary Whitehouse, Lord Longford, Malcolm Muggeridge and Cliff Richard they united all the fundamentalist evangelical Christian sects into one organisation they named the Festival of Light (FoL) whose aim was to recriminalise homosexuality and abortion.

The male left in GLF ignored the threat, but not Street Theatre who co-opted the Action Group to join them. The FoL inaugural meeting in Methodist Central Hall on 9th Sep 1971 was interrupted time and time again by GLF and WL groups. Mice were released. Same sex couples stood up and kissed each other. Nuns, some of whom were men, danced the Can-Can down the aisles. Speakers were interrupted; one queen screamed out she'd seen the face of God and was saved. Finally, half the hall lights went out. The Guardian headline the next day was "Darkness in our Light."

On 25th September the FoL held a rally in Trafalgar Square before a march to the FoL in Hyde Park. But GLF and WL using the FoL address list changed the starting time and the parking spaces for the buses bringing the faithful from all over the country to London and had them parking in the outer suburbs. 70,000 were expected, only half that number arrived. A month later the FoL organisation collapsed.

IMAGE 8:

On the steps of St Martin's-in-the-Fields L-R; Stuart Feather as the Alternative Mary Whitehouse conducting the choir, Peter Reed, violinist, choristers Mary McIntosh, Claudia the first Trans to join GLF, Jenny, and Frankie Green. Above Left: Tim Bolingbroke the nun blesses Bette Bourne.

Moving off the group was blocked by police who divided them in two, driving one group into the Strand where arrests were made and the other half forced into the crux of the lion plinth where the only escape was up. Police had to haul themselves onto the plinth to make more arrests while those who escaped reached the Mall and went on to join the main body of GLF in Hyde Park.

IMAGE 9:

The arrest of Stuart Feather as Mary Whitehouse and Nicholas Bramble as the Spirit of Porn; Paul Theobald, as a riot policeman, and Chris Blaby and Tim Bolingbroke as nuns. All four were searching for the main group of GLF when they were arrested from behind as they were walking through Hyde Park.

In Bramble's case, when he felt the officer's hands on his wrist he instinctively, with his Royal Ballet training, locked his arms. The policeman panicked trying to get a grip and cut his little finger on Nicholas' diamante bracelet. He was charged with assault on a police officer which carries an automatic six-month prison sentence upon conviction. At his first hearing his arresting officer was on duty elsewhere. At the second hearing the court learnt that the papers for the trial had been lost. That was months of living hell for Nicholas.

COMMUNE

"OUR LIVING TOGETHER WAS AN EXPERIMENT FOR ALL OF US BASED ON A SOLIDARITY THAT WE DEFINED AS LOVE."

-Stuart Feather, Blowing The Lid. p458

Repairing the broken water main at No 42 was beyond us, so we all fanned out in the neighbourhood to look for another empty house to squat. Squatting an empty building wasn't illegal; the criminal offence was breaking and entering, so it was necessary for us to find some other way of getting in, like finding an open window, which made it a civil offence under the Forcible Entry Act of 1381.

- Stuart Feather, Blowing The Lid. p456

Friday nights the commune was closed to visitors and everyone ate dinner together and discussed any problems that inevitably arose from living and working so closely. Saturday night was also closed to visitors as the queens dressed up and dropped acid.

"I mean there were times in that commune when we reached a kind of bliss. I think it gave us the energy to carry on and it was a bliss that we hadn't encountered before. It wasn't drug induced, it was that kind of communal action."

- **Bette Bourne, *Blowing The Lid*. p494**

IMAGE 10:

Steven Crowther

Steven Crowther in the make-up room, was studying art at the London College of Printing. He was always up early on Friday and Saturday mornings hunting for pretty things that the stall holders brought out in the Golborne Road market where one could find quality frocks from the 1920s to the 1950s for 50p and art deco objects for the same price. If the frocks were really good, they were kept, otherwise they were taken to the stall on Portobello to sell.

IMAGE 11:

Tim Bolingbroke in the 7A Colville Houses Commune

For his birthday Tim told the commune he would invite his mother and sister to dinner. They duly came but it turned into a rather formal affair. After dinner it wasn't long before they made their excuses and left. Later it was learnt that they didn't feel very well on their journey home, which was no surprise to the queens as the cake was stuffed with some very good Afghan hash. Tim relieved everyone of any guilt feelings by saying they chose to eat it. of his studies that "Androgyny is not an easy binding of this or that aspect of masculine or feminine behaviour. It is a definite contradiction of counterposing drives. An escape from androgyny is what we, as a species, are aiming for. That is what our sexual deviations are all about." Findings that foretell the Trans and non-binary positions of today's community.

IMAGE 12:

Radical Queens Stall

Bob Mellors L; and Stuart Feather R; on the radical drag queens stall, Portobello Road, Winter of 72/73.

Rex Lay had a stall on the Portobello Road under the Westway flyover on Fridays, which he wasn't using so Bette arranged for us to take his pitch...We found frocks of all kinds from the twenties to the fifties that could be pulled out of the black plastic bags on Golborne Road for 50p each, which we sold further down Portobello, if we didn't want to keep them, for £2.50 or more.

Bob Mellors, the other co-founder of GLF was drawn to the Trans activists in the Front and published two pamphlets "Jeff Bridges loves Clint Eastwood – True!" and "We are all androgynous Yellow." He wrote of his studies that "Androgyny is not an easy binding of this or that aspect of masculine or feminine behaviour. It is a definite contradiction of counterposing drives. An escape from androgyny is what we, as a species, are aiming for. That is what our sexual deviations are all about." Findings that foretell the Trans and non-binary positions of today's community.

IMAGE 13:

The front cover of the radical femmes issue of *Come Together* 15.

Clockwise; Evening Star, Lewis Rabkin, Stephen Crowther, Bette Bourne, Nigel Kemp, Stuart Feather, Mick Belsten, Tim Bolingbroke, Michael James and John Church.

The Colville Commune also put together *Come Together* 15, the last but one issue, in early 1973. It is a microcosm of all that the commune stood for and includes photographs of most of them. The whole of Valerie Solanis' SCUM manifesto, which advocated violent revolution by women against men, was included, along with pieces on communal living, on sexism, on masculinity and queendom.

IMAGE 14:

Lewis Rabkin and Bette Bourne.

Lewis Rabkin (*left*) like many gay South Africans fled to Britain to avoid the draft and crushing homophobia that went with the racist regime.

Bette Bourne (*right*) was a successful young actor, then appearing under his birth name, when he dropped out and became an activist with the Gay Liberation Front in 1971. He and John Church were the first professional actors to publicly identify as gay in the wake of the nascent GLF movement. He was told this was career suicide by one of his tutors at the Central School of Speech and Drama where he had trained and former friends began crossing the street to avoid him - such was the repressive atmosphere of the times. He began using the name Bette professionally and personally - so that there could be no confusion - and it was as Bette Bourne that he was billed years later when performing for the *Royal Shakespeare Company* as Dogberry in *As You Like It* and as the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* at *The Globe*.

In the Interim he started his own theatre group, *Bloodlips*, which toured internationally, and performed in work written for him by Neil Bartlett and Mark Ravenhill. He was recently made a Fellow of the Central School of Speech and Drama.

His latest appearance is as the Queen in the Alternative Royal Command Performance presented by Duckie at the South Bank for the Platinum Jubilee.

IMAGE 15:

Pages 2 and 18 of the Radical Femmes issue of *Come Together* 15.

The introduction was written by Ramsey Blackwood, one of the few black GLF people. In the commune's history, 'Happy Families', there is an invitation to visit them. "Come up and see us sometime. We are squatting in a discussed film studio with no bath but plenty of bubbles."

Lisa Power - No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles - 229.

IMAGE 16:

27th June 1972 (4th Day of the first Gay Pride week).

The first celebration of Gay Pride in the UK began in London Friday 23 June 1972 with a dance at Fulham Town Hall and culminated in International Gay Pride Day, Saturday 1 July. The week's activities were organised by the GLF Youth and Education Group.

It was the turn of the Boilermakers Union to form the picket at the American Embassy protesting the Vietnam War. The radical queens decided to join them in solidarity. But the boilermakers were nowhere to be seen when GLF arrived. There was however dance music coming from an American college band in Grosvenor Square. The queens joined them, started dancing, and then invited the office girls on lunch break to join in. In obvious disgust the band packed up so the queens decided to walk to Piccadilly and see how the Dilly boys were getting on.

The group finally arrived at Trafalgar Square for a photo opportunity. When police enquired as to what they were doing and learnt they were making a demonstration the police called up a few more officers, and accompanied the queens up Charing Cross Road, and along Oxford Street to Marble Arch; four days before the first Gay Pride March covered the same route.

Pictured L-R: Mike Rhodes, John Church, Cloud Downey, Michael James, and Alaric Sumner of GLF's Youth Group, organisers of the first Gay Pride march.

IMAGE 17:

Michael James in the make-up room of 7A

"I made sure I did my make-up before dropping acid."

Michael came to London in 1958 when he was just 17. He found a bed-sit in Camden Town full of drag queens, two of whom were mad for horses, served their national service in the dragoon guards and one of them, when in drag, rode side-saddle. Soho was their playground and the Porchester Hall in Bayswater which held serious Drag Balls on a monthly basis, run by Jean Fredericks, a well-known Canadian trombonist, and drag performer.

Michael joined GLF in the early summer of 1971 when GLF meetings were held at a building site in Covent Garden that had been the home of The Middle Earth club. He came the following week with a large tea urn and dispensed tea during the break.

IMAGE 18:

Grande Salon of the Radical Drag Queens' Film Studio squat at 7A, Colville Houses, Notting Hill, W.11. November 1972.

Behind the folding screens far R; lived Joyce Maving and Cliff, a street couple who came with the queens from their previous squat in Colville Terrace. They preferred to live on the streets than be separated into same-sex council accommodation. The A frame ladder on the left was used in the wardrobe behind to climb up to the racks of drag on one side and men's clothing on the other. The door to the kitchen on the opposite side is lost in shadow, as are the stairs leading up to the balcony in the top right corner, off which was the office, and the lavatory and make-up room.

Clockwise from one; A visitor who called himself Evening Star. Michael James, John Church, Stuart Feather, Tim Bolingbroke, Steven Crowther, Nigel Kemp, Lewis Rabkin, Bette Bourne and Mick Belsten. Bottom L; Julian Hows who wasn't available for photography that day. Top L; Lorrian, infant son of Jane Bentley. Top R; Richard Lydell 3-year-old son of Mary sitting in the shadows.