WELCOME TO WANDSWORTH
London Borough of Culture

Queer Wandsworth

A research project on the LGBTQ+ heritage of Wandsworth Borough

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Introduction

Queer people have always lived in Wandsworth. Whether as neighbours, activists, entertainers, friends, the community has always been present, even if it has historically been hidden or unrecorded. This exhibition explores the queer experiences that have shaped our borough, from theatres and parks to nighttime spaces, the streets we still walk today, and private homes.

By tracing stories of power, protest, love, and spaces, we celebrate how people have found belonging and community here. We invite you to discover the local histories that have been preserved and reflect on those too often overlooked.

Please note that we recognise that throughout history the word *"queer"* has complex and sometimes painful meaning. We have chosen to use this word as it has been reclaimed in recent years and is now often used by the LGBTQ+ community, including being the favoured term of many of the individuals and groups we have worked with on this project.

We do not seek to disregard the word's history, but rather reflect the community as it is today, using a phrase that highlights the diversity in the LGBTQ+ community.

For more information about our project and extended information about places and people in the borough please visit our exhibition at BAC (3–21 February 2026) and Wandsworth Town Library (4–28 February 2026). An online map with locations and more information can be found at:

Queer Representation in Collections and Archives

Uncovering LGBTQ+ history in archives can be challenging due to *"archival silences"*, where stories are often excluded, hidden, or destroyed.

To protect themselves in times of repressive attitudes and the criminalisation of same-sex relationships, the LGBTQ+ community frequently used coded language and secrecy. For researchers this can make LGBTQ+ history difficult to identify. However, by identifying surviving objects and reading between the lines of traditional records, we can begin to uncover and highlight these lost histories within Wandsworth.

To ensure that LGBTQ+ history is documented and celebrated in the future, we are also working to fill the gaps in the archive. By highlighting examples of LGBTQ+ history and recording what the community is like in Wandsworth today, future researchers will be able to see the legacy of the LGBTQ+ community in the borough. The current Wandsworth Heritage Collection contains the works of other artists and sitters such as Delmar Banner or Caroline Townshend and Joan Howson.

These artists lived within enforced heteronormative expectations, unable to openly express their true identities. The painter Delmar Banner, a homosexual man, was married to the sculptor Josefina de Vasconcellos, with whom he shared both a home and artistic practice, and who created his bust that we have in our collection. Stained Glass artists Caroline Townshend and Joan Howson lived and worked together for decades, including in a house in Putney, until Caroline's death in 1944. This exhibition offers a space for both their artworks and their identities to be shared, recognised, and uplifted by the community.

Queer Wandsworth Collections: William Hallé

During the 20th century, a local man documented the details of his everyday life, unaware until his late years that his writings would one day be preserved and read by future generations.

William Hallé (1912–1998) was an artist who lived, worked, and socialised in Wandsworth. In his personal diaries Hallé offer a rare insight into gay life in the borough before and after the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1967.

These diaries, which Hallé at one time wanted to publish, are now held by the Wandsworth Heritage Service at Battersea Library, accessible to be viewed. At times they are written in code, and some relationships are only alluded to.

However, they also document how gay men met, socialised, had relationships, and navigated public spaces all while avoiding public recognition or notoriety.

Now saved in the archive for future generations, Hallé's diaries provide a rare first-hand account of queer lives, relationships, and negotiations of safety, desire, and belonging.

They show how decisions as simple as where to go, who to trust, and what to write down, were shaped by the risks queer people faced.

Hallé was also a painter and left his works of art to the then museum.

His works, part of the Wandsworth Heritage Collection, can be found online at: welcometowandsworth.com/heritage-collections/

Queer Spaces in Wandsworth

LGBTQ+ history exists in all parts of Wandsworth borough, however there are some spaces that have been, and continue to be, intrinsically linked with the queer community. From small domestic homes to borough-wide areas queer culture shapes, and is shaped by, places in the borough.

Battersea Fields appears in early 18th-century slang and medical references linked to sex between men. *Mollies* – a term used at the time for men who had sex with men – used the word "Battersea'd" in connection with venereal disease. It echoes the molly saying "you must go to Battersea, to be cut for the simples", with *simples* meaning medicinal herbs grown locally and used in remedies. While the phrase suggested treatment or cure, it more often implied the visible symptoms of infection rather than successful medical intervention.

Other cruising grounds in the borough included Nine Elms Station, Clapham Common, Queensmere Pond and *"cottages"*– or public toilets, in the borough parks. These places were an open secret in the community where queer people could meet. Accounts and photos of these places are saved in the collections of different archives and museums.

Following the partial decriminalisation in 1967, gay spaces became more visible. Legendary drag duo The Trollettes – David Raven and Don Coull – recorded their Live at *The Cricketers* LP in 1983 in the borough. In the 90s and 2000s new venues emerged across Wandsworth, from popular spots like Reflex in Putney to the many club nights hosted at the Market Tavern.

My Beautiful Laundrette (1985) was filmed across Wandsworth, including Stewart's Road and areas of Battersea. It famously depicted a groundbreaking interracial queer relationship in South London, showing us the streets of Wandsworth though a queer lens and proving that LGBTQ+ people have always walked the streets we walk today.

Queer Performance Spaces: Past and Present

There is a rich history of performance spaces and venues in Wandsworth, places where public identity and gender could be reimagined.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, venues like the Duchess Theatre, Putney Hippodrome, Tooting Granada, and Clapham Grand hosted a vibrant music hall and variety circuit, bringing spectacle into everyday local life.

The Clapham Grand, founded on the 26 November 1900 with the support of famed performer and first modern pantomime dame Dan Leno, hosted stars of Music Hall and variety performance like the male impersonator Vesta Tilley.

As a major entertainment venue, The Clapham Grand built a legacy of gender-based performance. It hosted landmark events such as Andrew Logan's Alternative Miss World Fireball in 1995 and has become a key London stage for international drag stars, including many from RuPaul's Drag Race. During the Covid-19 lockdowns it hosted the Stream Queens series to keep the artists working and audiences connected when live events were cancelled.

Throughout history the community has used creative outlets for activism and raising awareness – the renowned theatre company Gay Sweatshop started from a flat in Balham in 1975. In recent years LGTBQ+ creatives have performed in venues and events in the borough such as Wandsworth Arts Fringe, LibertyFestival, Wandsworth Family Pride, or in our libraries, working on theatrical performances, cabaret, and artistic reflections on the queer experience. Community creative arts organisations such as Pride Punx combine art, performance, and activism to support LGBTQ+ initiatives.

Liberty Festival 2025, the Mayor of London's flagship disability arts festival, took place in various venues in Wandsworth. The festival, produced in collaboration with CRIPtic Arts, featured a large array of queer and disabled artists. Artistic and Executive Director of CRIPtic Arts, Jamie Hale said:

"As we produced Liberty Festival, CRIPtic reached for a line-up that spoke to the Wandsworth community, with work designed to reach and appeal to everybody across the programme. We wanted anyone passing through the festival to find a piece of work that gripped them. For myself, I loved the provocation of some of the queer work we brought, and the sensitivity and sensuality of other parts of it. But supporting queer and disabled artists cannot be achieved through a one-off event. It requires a constant, committed investment in reaching people whose work is sidelined and marginalised by venues, funders, and society. It also requires shifting taste and the idea of great art from the modes we are taught to believe are the ideal to something wider and more expansive."

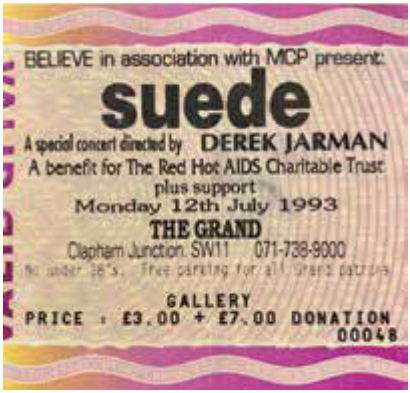
Protest and Pride

Wandsworth's LGBTQ+ history is interwoven with protest and campaigning. Organised activists, local groups, and support networks have operated in Wandsworth, working to challenge discriminatory laws and social condemnation.

Groups like the Wandsworth and Richmond branch of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) lobbied for legal rights, safer housing, and better educational opportunities for the LGBTQ+ community.

Key figures have ties with the borough. National campaigner Mark Ashton, who co-founded Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) in 1984, died from AIDS related illness in 1987 aged just 26 and is buried at the Lambeth Cemetery in Tooting.

Across Wandsworth, venues have long been vital hubs for LGBTQ+ organising and solidarity. From safe meeting spaces to centres of community action, places like the White Lion in Putney, Battersea Arts Centre, the Balham Food and Book Co-operative or St Andrew's United Reformed Church in Balham played key roles in supporting local resistance and connection.



In 1993, the Clapham Grand hosted a sell-out Red Hot AIDS Charitable Trust benefit, organised by filmmaker Derek Jarman, featuring Suede, Chrissie Hynde and Siouxsie Sioux, in what it was going to be one of Derek's last appearances before his death of AIDS related illness in 1994.

Local organisations have also been advocating for care, support, and wellbeing within the LGBTQ+ community for years, and continue to do so in present times. In 2005, Wandsworth LGBTQ+ Forum (later known as Queer Wandsworth) was established following the murder of Jody Dobrowski on Clapham Common. Wandsworth Oasis, founded in 1989 by Lieutenant Richard Crowe, of the Salvation Army's Wandsworth chapter and Patrick Lethaby, continues to support HIV-related health and community work.

Spaces for all ages can be found throughout the borough, offering support and celebrating the LGBTQ+ community. Groups like the Furzedown Project, Free2B, and The Baked Bean Charity all have initiatives to support LGBTQ+ people in the borough.

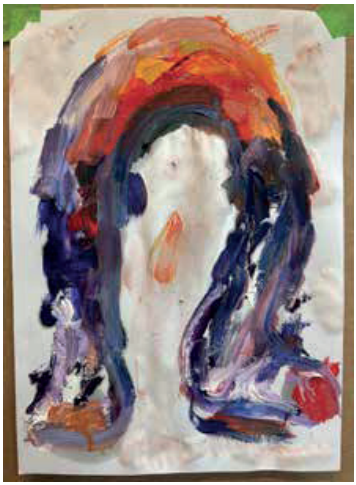
Queer Artists: Luca Bosani

For this project we worked with local artist Luca Bosani, recipient of an LBOC microgrant, to produce some works based on our research. Luca Bosani (b. 1990; they/he) is a multimedia artist whose practice combines sculpture, fashion, and performance to question and challenge traditional gender roles. Throughout 2024, they were the Victoria & Albert Museum x Adobe artist-in-residence, researching the history of heels and platform shoes. Their research culminated in a post-gender installation featuring nine sculptural shoes and a large-scale performance on view (Dec 2024 – Nov 2025) in the V&A South Kensington Museum. They have exhibited nationally and internationally.

In 2017, during their Contemporary Art Practice MA at the Royal College of Art, disappointed and constrained by existing gender and artistic categorisation, Bosani conceived the concept of 'UPOs': Unidentified Performing Objects. These are artworks that reject categorisation and sit in between definitions (shoes/sculptures – garments/paintings); ever-changing, fluid, and queer, they aim to transform both the wearer and the viewer. In this non-coded, non-binary, non-prescriptive space, Bosani's creativity grows and flourishes.

Collaboration and group performances are at the core of Bosani's practice, and their UPOs are practical and conceptual tools for gender non-conforming individuals, LGBTQI+ neurodivergent communities, and young people to feel seen, heard, included, and supported.

Luca chose to respond to William Hallé, Caroline Townshend and Joan Howson, and Andrew Logan. Here are Luca's reflections on his work:



UPO (William Hallé)
William Hallé (1912–1998)
Living and working in Wandsworth, London

For this piece, I have been deeply inspired by William's diaries and by his painting career and works.

The shape of the UPO (shoe-sculpture) refers to the myth of the ostrich *"burying its head in the sand to avoid danger"*, a visually evocative image rather than a science-based phenomenon.

While reading William's diaries, preserved in the Wandsworth Council archive, I noticed that at times he felt compelled to conceal his sexual identity and perceived himself as *"wrong"*, likely reflecting a discriminatory, homophobic environment (1940s–1960s Britain). *(...)* In the diaries, he recounts secretive visits to cruising sites in Nine Elms to meet other men, experiences that generally brought joy to his days.

William also wrote extensively about his artistic career as a painter and playwright, often returning to ideas of success and failure, and highlighting the economic and social challenges artists used to face and still face today. For these reasons, my artwork UPO (William Hallé) has an *"up and down"* form, with yellows and reds representing successes, and blues and purples representing failures. Despite low moments, William remained creative throughout his life. The red tip of the artwork represents his creative drive and his passion for love and life, in the face of the challenges he encountered both as an artist and as a queer person.

The artwork is painted in oil using a technique inspired by William's painting style and palette.

UPO (Caroline Townshend & Joan Howson)
Caroline Townshend (1878–1944) and Joan Howson (1885–1964)
Living and working in Wandsworth, London

For this piece, I chose a modern transparent boot with a shape recalling 1920s–1930s *"women's shoes"*, the eras in which Caroline and Joan lived and worked. The size is as close as possible to what the stained-glass artist duo might have worn. With the aid of AI, analysing historical portrait photographs, I was able to estimate that Caroline and Joan would have worn shoes sized between 4 and 5.5 UK.

The transparency of the artwork evokes glass, a material that Caroline and Joan worked with throughout their lives. The high platform heels and the decoration of the boot uppers reference their stained-glass artworks and designs. They are made using a technique that echoes stained-glass, with black raised outlines resembling their metalwork.

The patterns and symbols are drawn from and reimagined from their original artworks, mainly religious stained glass for churches and cathedrals, suggesting ideas of union, partnership, and mutual support. This reflects their long-standing professional collaboration and their shared life under the same roof, which may also have been romantic in nature.

UPO (Alternative Miss World Fireball)
Alternative Miss World (1972–ongoing), Fireball (1995), founded by Andrew Logan (1945–living) *Clapham Grand, Wandsworth, London*

Founded in 1972 by Andrew Logan, Alternative Miss World is a queer-led performance pageant that celebrates radical self-expression, gender fluidity, and the joyful subversion of beauty norms through art, costume, and performance.

For this piece, I was inspired by the outfit worn by the organiser and host/hostess of the 1995 Alternative Miss World Fireball, Andrew Logan. I chose to recreate the shoes Andrew wore that night with a personal interpretation, deliberately deciding not to search for images in which the original shoes were visible, allowing imagination and material experimentation to guide the process.

The right UPO shoe-sculpture begins with an original fire brigade shoe and represents Andrew's *"masculine"* side. It is painted in gold and embellished with red jewellery, brooches, and decorative inserts. The left UPO represents the *"feminine"* side: a flame-like heel inspired by fire imagery, painted and decorated with red glass flexible mosaic, glitter, gold, and small red rocks and sand. The heel has been extended and enlarged using wood.

The embellishments on both shoe-sculptures are inspired by Andrew Logan's sculptural art practice. The shoe sizes are the closest I could find to Andrew Logan's estimated size. The heels are vintage 1990s shoes, directly connecting to the time of the 1995 AMW Fireball, while the fire brigade shoes belonged to a real fireman. Both shoes were sourced from second-hand private sellers and purchased online.

Acknowledgments and Credits

We extend heartfelt thanks to the borough organisations who support queer lives.

Special thanks to all the organisations and individuals who supported us in this exhibition and have kindly loaned material: Andrew Logan Museum, Apples and Snakes, Battersea Arts Centre (BAC), Bishopsgate Institute, Brett Anderson, Clapham Grand, De Montfort University, Free2B, Furzedown Project, Mike Christie, Our LGBTQIA+ interviewees, The Derek Jarman Estate, University of Roehampton, Wandsworth Library Service, and all other organisations and individuals whose generosity and support, though not listed here, have been invaluable to this exhibition.

We also thank our artist Luca Bosani, who generously responded to our request to use Wandsworth's queer history as a reference for his work.

Wandsworth is the Mayor's London Borough of Culture 2025. Led by Wandsworth Council in partnership with local people and organisations, Welcome to Wandsworth is a year-long programme featuring hundreds of cultural events and creative initiatives, taking place from April 2025 – March 2026. With gratitude to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for their support.

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Photo Credits:

- Wandsworth Heritage Collection: Delmar Banner, Caroline Townshend and Joan Howson, William Hallé, Putney Hippodrome, Music Hall
- Andrew Logan Museum: Fireball, Alternative Miss World 1995
- Wandsworth Family Pride photo by Stefan Jakubowski
- Liberty photo by Ewan M Riley
- Red Hot AIDS charitable trust: Clapham Grand Archive
- Luca Bosani: The Artist

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