



# A record of UK gay activism

The archive and journal collections of the Hall-Carpenter Archives (HCA) have been housed at LSE since 1988. HCA was founded in 1982 to document the development of gay activism in the UK since the publication of the Wolfenden Report in 1958. Now these archives are more fully available online. Archivist **Sue Donnelly** explains the background.

On 13 October 1970 the first meeting of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) in the UK took place in a basement classroom of LSE. Its instigators were Aubrey Walter, who had completed a sociology degree at LSE, and Bob Mellors (BSc Sociology 1972), a 20-year-old LSE student. Walter and Mellors had met in the USA where they had attended GLF meetings and been drawn to a new wave of gay activism focused on ideas of gay pride and liberation. Eighteen men and one woman attended the first meeting where Walter and Mellors talked about their experiences in the USA. It was agreed to publicise the meetings more widely, and gradually more people attended. The first public demonstration took place on 27 November 1970 with a march from Highbury and Islington station to Highbury Fields, which had been a site of police arrests of gay men.

Since that time the School has become a repository for the movement's history. The Hall-Carpenter Archives are the largest source for the study of gay activism in Britain. The Archives have their origins in a gay monitoring and archive project established by the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) in 1980. This aimed to monitor reports of discrimination and police action against the gay community but soon found itself gathering a wide range of historical material. In 1982 the monitoring project separated from CHE, gaining charitable status in 1983 under the name Hall-Carpenter Archives. These Archives moved to the newly established London Lesbian and Gay Centre in 1985 and, supported by a £32,000 grant from the Greater London Council (GLC), set about gathering publications and running an ambitious volunteer programme, with a successful oral history project also set up at this time.

Unfortunately the withdrawal of GLC funding in 1986 led HCA's directors to seek other ways of maintaining the archives and in 1987 they

approached the School's archivist Angela Rospin to move them to the LSE Library. So, in 1988, the archives of gay organisations and activists and the gay press material all arrived at LSE – over 500 journal titles and 100 linear metres of archives.

2005 marked another milestone: this year saw the launch of the online Archives Catalogue, making the contents of the Hall-Carpenter Archives more accessible to researchers. The Archives Catalogue holds descriptions of all the HCA collections and a full listing of the archived holdings from the gay press. More detailed catalogues will be added throughout the year.

So what's in the records? The papers of the Albany Trust and the Homosexual Law Reform Society record the attempts to decriminalise male homosexuality throughout the 1960s, following the recommendations of the Wolfenden Report, including correspondence with the then home secretary, Roy Jenkins, and Lord Arran and MP Leo Abse, who steered bills through the House of Lords and the House of Commons. The arrival of the GLF in 1970 marked a new phase in gay activism, with a radical commitment to promoting gay liberation and a vivid use of street theatre. The GLF rejected the traditional organisational structures of committees, minutes and membership lists but has left a trail of leaflets, photographs and manifestos recording demonstrations and the infiltration of the *Nationwide Festival of Light* in 1972.

Complete runs of *Gay News* and *Capital Gay* follow the story of Mary Whitehouse's prosecution of *Gay News* for printing James Kirkup's poem *The Love that Dares to Speak its Name*, the ensuing court case, the withdrawal of *Gay News* from WH Smith's and the picketing of the shops. Relations between the churches and the gay community are traced in the archives of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement. In recent years the archive has collected material relating to AIDS and

the gay community, debates and demonstrations about Clause 28 of the Local Government Act, and the campaigns of Peter Tatchell and Outrage! including those against Robert Mugabe and against homophobia in the music industry.

The HCA are popular with researchers across the UK, both inside and outside the gay community. Research topics range from decriminalisation and law reform, to musical tastes in the gay community and the legal and social position of transgendered people. In February 2005 the Library marked Lesbian and Gay History Month with a seminar, to a capacity audience, on the history of HCA. And the collection continues to grow. ■



**Sue Donnelly**  
is the School's archivist.

## The Library archives

January 2005 saw the launch of the Archives Catalogue online, providing users with direct access to the wide-ranging contents of the Library's archived holdings for the first time. The Library has been collecting archives since 1898, with the arrival of the Webb Trade Union archives. The collection now stands at over 1,400 collections ranging in size from one file to hundreds of boxes. Highlights are:

- Passfield Papers: archives of Sidney Webb (1859-1947) and Beatrice Webb (1858-1943)
- Liberal Party, Independent Labour Party and Fabian Society archives
- Bronislaw Malinowski, anthropologist (1884-1942)
- Peter Shore, Labour politician, (1924-2001)

See [www.lse.ac.uk/library/archive](http://www.lse.ac.uk/library/archive)