RADIATEARTS

UNSHUTTERED



LGBTQ+ LIVES HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

Made possible with Heritage Fund

Un-Shuttered is a creative heritage project exploring LGBTQ+ histories, memories and experiences in Chester through photography and storytelling.

Across six photography sessions, we explored Chester through our own eyes, photographing the city, green spaces and places that hold personal meaning, including locations connected to LGBTQ+ histories and our experiences of being LGBTQ+ in the city.

Cheshire Archives visited us to explore how LGBTQ+ people have been represented in local historical collections, thinking about what has been recorded and what might be missing. A historical tour took us to places including the Bear and Billet, where some of the first CHE (Campaign for Homosexual Equality) meetings in Chester took place, and Chester Crown Court car park, the current location of Chester Pride.







Through reflective writing and design sessions, we shared stories and memories, considered where we are now, and talked about how things could change in the future.

This zine brings together photographs, stories and memories shared during the project, and reflections on taking part.

Alongside these, a map brings together historical places connected to Chester's LGBTQ+ community.

Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

With thanks to Chester Pride for hosting our meetings during the photography sessions.

Visit our website to find out more about Unshuttered by scanning the QR code or visiting www.radiatearts.co.uk/uhips





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THE LADY DIANA SHOWBOAT



I was born here in Chester and have lived here all my life.

One of my favourite photographs was taken some time in the late 1970s. I can't remember the exact date, but I remember the night very clearly. We were on the Lady Diana Showboat, travelling along the river on a specially organised trip. There are about half a dozen of us in the photograph.

I recognise some of the faces: one of the barmen from Oliver's, and Michael, who was well known to many of us.

Michael had worked at the Countess of Chester for most of his life and later at the Liverpool Arms. He died only recently, and it was lovely to see him remembered by having the stage at Pride named after him.

There were others in the photograph I didn't really know. We were friendly enough, though. We had spent the evening together, and that was how things were.

The boat would have been full. There was a huge, thriving gay community in Chester at the time. The bars and pubs were busy, and there were parties, dances, discos and all sorts of social events. People knew each other. You could go somewhere with a friend and end up talking to everyone.

That's what I remember most about the photograph: people were friendly.

We might not all have been best friends, but we were friends. You spoke to people. You got to know them. There was no great effort involved. You just talked, spent time together and made connections.

Fifty years on, I sometimes wonder what happened to that community. I'm still here, but I don't see many of the people I knew back then.

Things have changed.

We have phones, computers and tablets now. I have them myself, and I love them, but they haven't taken over my life. I'm still very much in charge of them.

I don't know how you can really socialise through electricity. I don't know where that connection comes from.
For much of the last twenty or thirty years, my life wasn't particularly gay. I spent most of my time with straight people and lived their lives alongside them. It's only more recently that I've found a small gay community again.

Now I'm usually the oldest person in the room instead of the youngest.
And I love it. It keeps me young.

Perhaps that is what I would want someone looking at this photograph fifty years from now to understand. We were together. We talked. We made friends. We were part of something.

People came out, met each other and spent time together. There was no great effort. It just happened naturally.

I still believe it can happen that way.

But you have to get out there.
You have to talk to people.

Because if you're not doing anything at all, I'm not sure how you make friends or how you get closer to anyone.

You might as well be talking through a prison grill.

-Stan




Travelodge
POPCORN


SALE
KINGKABS









-Sanji









-Tim

SAHARA

WHEN ONE DOOR CLOSES, ANOTHER ONE OPENS...

I stumbled upon Radiate Arts doorstep for the first time last month, when I was in desperate need of a creative, LGBTQ+ inclusive space after moving to Chester.

When I waved goodbye to Manchester's gay village, the rainbow-painted walls and queer friends with familiar Northern accents, I felt like I left a little piece of myself, and my pride, back in my tiny student flat in Salford.

Transphobia, loneliness, facebook posts about Chester's inclusive queer spaces, like Rainbow Tearooms, struggling to stay open - these were some of the issues I witnessed when moving.

My sense of identity and confidence were slowly deteriorating, and my pride became painted over with dread.

On one particularly lonely night in August, a google search about photography workshops led me to 'Radiate Arts', an organisation that was providing the services I was looking for all along.

A chance to connect with LGBTQ+ individuals, a chance to speak about topics I'm passionate about, to feel less crazy, less alone, a chance to get creative and learn new skills, a chance to learn about Chester's history and queer scene, a chance to create memorable projects like this zine, and a chance to create hope.

I've decided to honour Radiate Arts' services by focusing my photo collection on themes such as community, opening new doors, and regaining my pride. Enjoy :-)

-**Jayden**




WLCOM
210


You are Enough!
BE HAPPY
Just Breathe



















It's been fascinating to learn about the history, places, and buildings of significance tied to Chester's LGBTQ+ history, and a wonderful opportunity to meet people in the local community and make meaningful connections, while exploring creativity and self-expression through photography.

-Susanne





As we move through life, different parts of ourselves emerge.

The people we connect with can unlock parts of us that were waiting to be expressed.

Through these connections, more of us is revealed.

Sometimes we sense that something lies beyond the life we know.

We cannot see what is waiting for us, only the possibility of what might be.

It is in taking the first step through the threshold that the unknown begins to become our own.

Sometimes we have to leave the familiar to discover what is possible. Beyond the boundaries of the life we know, another part of ourselves can unfold.

For me, my world began to change when I started going beyond Chester, travelling further, experiencing different places and discovering possibilities I couldn't see from where I stood.

And suddenly, there was room to become more of who I was.





Some friendships are forged deeply and represent some of the best summers of our lives.

People enter our lives and affect us profoundly, then they quietly exit, but we will always remember them fondly.

When we find a place where we can truly be ourselves, something opens.

Colour, creativity, friendship and love give parts of us permission to unfold.

We discover not only where we belong, but the freedom to express who we are.
We can become confined by the worlds we inhabit and the expectations placed upon us.
Yet beneath each layer, other parts of ourselves remain.

Through the families we are born into and those we find, we discover new ways of belonging.







Sometimes life takes us on a long journey, leading us back to where we started. But who we are has shifted with the time between leaving and returning.

The connections we make and the different environments we experience become part of who we are, bringing us back to the same place with a new understanding of ourselves.

-A.R.T







-Alex



PLACES REMEMBERED

Places that have shaped LGBTQ+ life in Chester, remembered through personal experiences.

THE BEAR & BILLET

The first Campaign for Homosexual Equality meetings took place here in the 1970s

Lower Bridge Street

BLOSSOMS

Where Red Door is now. Once the hotel found out it was used as a gay bar they closed it down. The space dated from before world war 2 and was active until the 70s.

St John Street

ROYAL OAK

After Blossoms Buttery Bar closed, the Royal Oak became a gay-friendly space. It was on Foregate Street, in the building that later became Dixon's, opposite Boots.

Foregate Street

OLIVER'S

Remembered as one of Chester's first gay clubs, started by the DJ from Melanie's

Forest Street

MELANIE'S

On Sunday nights, Melanie's became a place to dance and socialise. The disco was located on Frodsham Street, adjacent to the Kale Yards car park, above where the kitchen shop is now.

Frodsham Street

CINDERELLAS

In the 1980s, Cinderella's became a place for parties and queer socialising. Including themed costume parties.

Foregate Street

CHE OFFICES

At the top of Bridge Street, on the top floor, the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) had offices and a community space.

From the mid-1970s into the 1980s, the space also operated a switchboard, helping people connect with information and support.

Bridge Street

RAINBOW TEAROOMS

Chester Pride's Cafe and social space. Offering a safe space for our community to meet and connect today.

Bridge Street

CATHEDRAL GARDENS

A space used to relax and connect with friends

St Werburgh Street

THE L.A

The Liverpool Arms is an important social space for the LGBTQ+ community, hosting drag shows, live music and other entertainment.

Northgate Street

ST MARYS CREATIVE SPACE

A former church now used as a community arts and cultural venue.

St Marys Hill

BOOKS ON THE WALLS

An independent bookshop and social space on Chester's city walls

City Walls

THE LIVEROOMS

The lLive Rooms hosts the Upside Down Cabaret, Chester's monthly premiere LGBTQ+ variety show. A lovely welcoming space to experience queer creativity in the city.

Station Road

COUNTESS COUNTRY PARK

The park was created from a former landfill site and opened in 2014. It is now an important community space for walking, nature and wellbeing.

Valley Drive

"It has been a great experience which has helped me to expand the way I look at Chester, past & present & consider my future journey."

"It has reminded me of many of the wonderful experiences I have had here & people I have met."

"It's helped me to see the difference that meeting people who are kind and interesting have on your life."



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