

# Exploring London's LGBTQ+ Lives

LONDON MUSEUM

London Museum's collections reveal historical evidence that people with LGBTQ+ identities have lived in London since the city's origins, although they are unlikely to have identified with the terms 'LGBTQ+'.

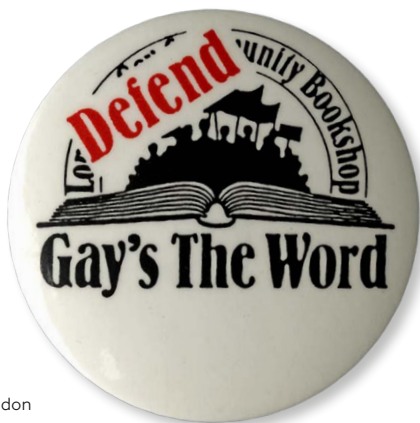
Listed below are frequently asked questions about our LGBTQ+ schools resources. If you have a question that isn't answered, email the London Museum schools team via [learning@londonmuseum.org.uk](mailto:learning@londonmuseum.org.uk)

## Have the words 'lesbian', 'gay', 'bisexual' and 'trans' always been used?

No. Language has changed over time. Before the 20th century, these and other terms, were hardly ever or never in use. Today we may view historic Londoners as part of the LGBTQ+ community, but in the past, they may not have identified with this terminology.

## Why does the London Museum use the word 'queer'?

In academia, 'queer' is used as a catch-all phrase to mean the LGBTQ+ community. As an academic organisation, London Museum uses the word 'queer' in some resources in this academic sense. In the broadest sense, 'queer' encapsulates those who feel that they don't neatly fit into any of the LGBTQ+ letters. However, each queer person has their own view of the word's meaning and not everyone feels comfortable with the term, as historically it has been used homophobically.



Lapel badge promoting the London bookshop Gay's the Word, 1984



Pointed poulaine shoe, late 14th century



Bronze head of Emperor Hadrian, 2nd century

## Why is LGBTQ+ history difficult to uncover?

The stigma surrounding these identities throughout history meant people often lived in secrecy and fear. This is largely because, in English law, it was once illegal for men to be gay. Lesbianism has never been illegal, but has been marginalised and remained hidden, as have other LGBTQ+ identities.

## Why aren't there more objects which tell the stories of LGBTQ+ people from Black, Asian and ethnically diverse backgrounds?

People from Black, Asian and ethnically diverse backgrounds are often missing from conversations around LGBTQ+ people in British history. This is not due to a lack of stories and experiences to tell, but because of issues with how records have been made and kept. Most LGBTQ+ people who recorded their experiences came from privileged, wealthy, and white backgrounds. Historically, people from Black, Asian and ethnically diverse backgrounds in Britain weren't often in privileged enough positions to record their stories in a lasting way, and so many of them have been lost.

## Which time periods and subjects feature in our LGBTQ+ resources?

Our LGBTQ+ resources focus on five key objects, covering:

- Roman London
- Medieval fashion and religion
- Victorian literature and performance
- The Suffragettes
- Music

We have chosen not to include objects and stories from the mid-late 20th century as many individuals are still alive.

## How can I start a conversation in my classroom?

On the following pages we have provided two lesson starters. You could:

- Read each description aloud and ask students to note down which word fits the definition
- Print the chronology resource for your students to complete by matching the events and dates.

These lesson starters can be used as starting points to discuss the following learning points:

- LGBTQ+ history stretches back to the Roman period
- Enormous change has occurred during the 20th century
- Today's terminology has only been used very recently
- Individuals have the right to self-identify and everyone will have a different relationship with the words that they choose to identify themselves with.



Badge created for the 1978 Gay Pride march in London



Portrait photograph of Ethel Smyth, 1913



Late 14th – early 15th century pilgrim badge depicting Christ



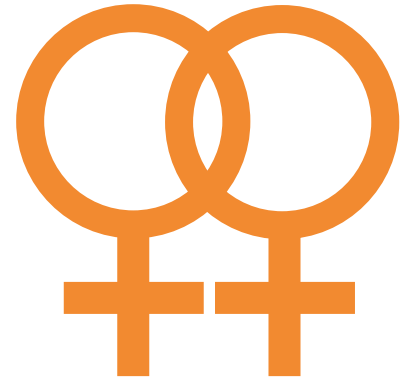
# Lesson starter

## Terminology

Below are some key definitions related to LGBTQ+ lives\*.

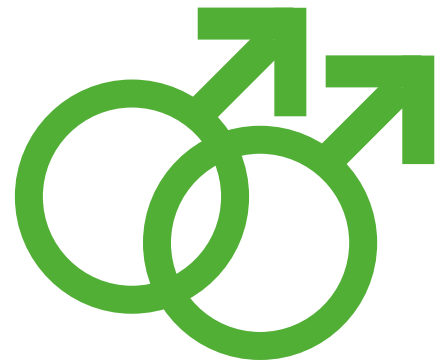
### LESBIAN

A woman who has a romantic and/or sexual attraction towards women. Some non-binary people may also identify with this term.



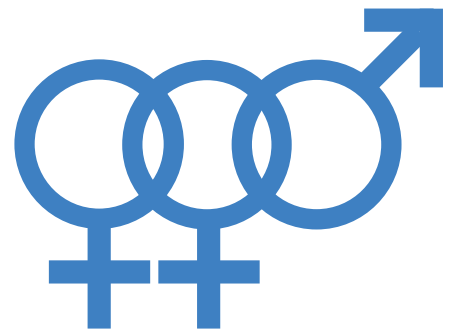
### GAY

A man who experiences romantic and/or sexual attraction to other men. Sometimes also used by women who are attracted to women in place of the term lesbian. Some non-binary people may also identify with this term.



### BISEXUAL

Used to describe a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards more than one gender.



### TRANS

An umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth.



### QUEER

A term used by those wanting to reject specific labels of romantic orientation, sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

It can also be a way of rejecting the perceived norms of the LGBTQ+ community (racism, sizeism, ableism etc). Although some LGBTQ+ people view the word as a slur, it was reclaimed in the late 80s by the queer community who have embraced it.

\*A full glossary of terms, including the above, can be found on the Stonewall website.

# Lesson starter

## Chronology

Match the dates and events below together to put them in the right order.

DATE	EVENT
122 CE	London's Gay Liberation Front is founded.
14th century	Croydon-born Roberta Cowell becomes the first (known) British trans woman to undergo reassignment surgery.
1533	Gay's the Word, opened in 1979 as London's first bookshop specialising in gay and lesbian literature, is raided by Customs and Excise.
18th century	Emperor Hadrian visits Roman London where male relationships are common. Later, he meets Antinous, his young, male Greek lover.
1835	Offences Against the Person Act replaces the death penalty with a prison term for sexual acts between men.
1861	Section 28 of the Local Government Act prohibits local authorities from teaching or publishing about homosexuality.
1885	Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Act comes into effect, allowing same-sex couples the opportunity to get married in England and Wales.
1895	Section 28 is repealed in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
1951	The Buggery Act makes having any type of sex which is seen as against the 'will of God' punishable by death. Although not specified, this would have included sex between two men.
1967	The London Pride parade attracts around 25,000 people and is continuing to grow.
1970	The last men to be sentenced to death for homosexual acts are hanged in front of Newgate Prison.
1972	Molly houses – taverns where men could have sexual liaisons with other men – spring up across London.
1981	London's first Pride march.
1984	The legend of Wilgefortis – a bearded female Christian saint – reaches London.
1988	Oscar Wilde is sentenced to two years hard labour for gross indecency.
2003	The Sexual Offences Act decriminalises sex between two men over 21 and 'in private'.
2014	Section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885, commonly known as the Labouchere Amendment, makes severe punishments for same-sex desire and love more widely enforceable.