

Social and Cultural Attitudes towards LGBTQ+ in Britain from the 1950s

Information sheet 3: LGBTQ+ Life in the UK (1950s–2020s)

The experiences of gay men in Britain... In the 1950s...

Peter Wildeblood (1956) In *Against the Law*, Wildeblood described his trial and the injustice he faced: *"I had committed no crime, harmed no one, and yet I was treated as a danger to society. The court did not care that my relationships were based on love and trust, only that they violated an outdated law. I was made to feel like a criminal, not because I had done anything wrong, but because of who I was."* His book helped shift public opinion.

Douglas Plummer (1963) Writing under a pseudonym in *Queer People*, declared: *"I am a homosexual, a so-called 'queer' or 'pansy', and I admit it without shame. But shame is precisely what society demands of me. I am expected to hide, to pretend, to live a life of secrecy and fear. And yet, I refuse. I refuse to be ashamed of who I am, even if the law insists that I should be."* This was a rare public statement of defiance in a time of criminalisation.

Alan Turing (1952) In his police statement, Turing acknowledged his sexuality: *"I suppose I am a homosexual. I take no steps to hide it. I do not believe that my private life should concern the law, nor do I think that my affections make me any less capable of contributing to society. But it seems that society does not agree."*

... and in the 2000s...

Olly Alexander: *"I want to be a voice for people who feel like they don't have one. I want to show that it's okay to be different and to be proud of who you are."*

Sandi Toksvig: *"I think it's important to be visible. The more we are seen, the more we can help others feel less alone."*

These quotes highlight the importance of self-acceptance, visibility, and the celebration of identity within the LGBTQ+ community in contemporary Britain.

Positive attitudes towards homosexuality

Wolfenden Report (1957): *"Homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private should no longer be a criminal offence."* This was a turning point in legal discussions, though change did not come until 1967.

Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Geoffrey Fisher (1957) Supporting the Wolfenden Report, he argued: *"There is a sacred realm of privacy... into which the law should not intrude."* His stance was unusual for a religious leader at the time.

Yvette Cooper, Shadow Minister for Women and Equalities (2013) *"Call us hopeless romantics, call it the triumph of hope over experience - most of us think when people love each other and want to make that long-term commitment, that is a wonderful thing. So why would we stop a loving couple getting married just because they are gay?"*

Stephen Gilbert (2013) *"We have come a long way in a short space of time but it is absolutely right we take the next step and deliver full legal equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people in our country."*

Negative attitudes towards homosexuality in the 1950s

Home Secretary Sir David Maxwell Fyfe (1953) *"I am determined that the law shall not be slackened in dealing with male vice. Homosexuals are a danger to society and must be dealt with accordingly. The police will continue to pursue cases with vigour, and those found guilty will face the full force of the law. There can be no tolerance for such behaviour, which undermines the moral fabric of our nation."*

Daily Mail Editorial (1950s): *"The spread of homosexuality threatens the moral fabric of our nation. It is a disease that must be contained before it corrupts the youth and weakens the strength of British society. The government must act decisively to ensure that such unnatural behaviour is not allowed to flourish."*

Judge at Peter Wildeblood's Trial (1954): *"Such behaviour is unnatural and must be punished to protect the moral order. The law exists to safeguard society from corruption, and those who engage in such acts must face the consequences. It is our duty to uphold decency and ensure that such immoral conduct does not spread."*

British Medical Association (1950s):

"Homosexuality is a condition that may be treated through psychiatric intervention. Those afflicted by this disorder require medical attention to correct their unnatural inclinations. With proper treatment, they may be rehabilitated and reintegrated into society as normal individuals."