



Manchester

by Linda Rapp

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Home to one of England's largest and liveliest glbtq communities, Manchester was chosen to host EuroPride in 2003 and the Pride Games in 2005. Its popular Lesbian and Gay Heritage Trail pays tribute to glbtq Mancunians.

During their conquest of Britain (78-86 B.C.E.), the Romans built a fort in the area of present-day Manchester. They called it Mamucium ("the place of the breast-shaped hill"), the source of the name of the city, but did not establish a permanent settlement there.

The town was chartered in the late thirteenth century. The textile industry--first dealing in wool and later in cotton--brought growth and wealth to Manchester. Eventually canals and railways were built to facilitate the export of its products.

Nineteenth-century Manchester was a prosperous city and a cultural center, but in the twentieth century the market for its textiles diminished, and the city went into decline. In the 1960s, urban renewal projects were begun to replace substandard housing and antiquated or disused commercial buildings.

In 1996 an IRA bomb injured more than 200 people and caused considerable devastation to property. The city responded with determination, repairing damaged buildings, erecting new ones, and developing attractive public spaces. Over 200 new businesses opened in Manchester, bringing many jobs and revitalizing the central business district.

Redevelopment continued in the neighborhoods, including the Gay Village, which was used as the setting for the popular television series *Queer as Folk*. The Marketing Manchester group pointed out the importance of the glbtq community in Manchester's revival, saying, "A major factor in the city's sense of style is the excitement generated by the gay lifestyle."

Formerly a rundown area, the Gay Village is now a lively neighborhood with a variety of restaurants and clubs. There are also service organizations providing support to glbtq men, women, and youth, as well as people with HIV/AIDS. A congregation of the Metropolitan Community Church welcomes glbtq Christians, and the Gay Business Association assists gay and lesbian entrepreneurs.

In 2003, organizers of the festival EuroPride earned a 39,500-pound grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund to establish guided tours on the Lesbian and Gay Heritage Trail. The award drew protests from the Monte Cassino Veterans Association, which had applied for funds to attend a sixtieth-anniversary commemoration of the World War II battle in Italy, and incensed Tory M.P. Gerald Howarth, the chairman of the Lords and Commons Family and Child Protection Group, who called the decision by the directors of the fund "simply monstrous."

"Basically, the Heritage Trail is a celebration of what until recently was a criminal offense and is an abuse of lottery money," he fumed.

The Heritage Trail opened on the first day of EuroPride 2003, which attracted some 300,000 visitors to Manchester and added millions of "pink pounds" to the local economy.

The Heritage Trail tour educates people about Manchester's glbtq history over the past two centuries. It includes stops at the former site of a prison where a man named James Massey hanged himself in 1807 while facing prosecution for "an unnatural crime"; at the home of Henry Stoakes, a bricklayer and volunteer police officer, who had been married for 29 years when it was discovered in 1839 that "he" was a woman; at Temperance Hall, where 22 men were arrested for dressing in drag at a costume ball in 1880; and at the AIDS Memorial. Also featured on the tour are the site of the publication of Edward Carpenter's *Homogenic Love and Its Place in a Free Society*; a sculpture of computer pioneer Alan Turing, who cracked the Enigma code during World War II; and a memorial mosaic of writer and actor Quentin Crisp.

The Heritage Trail served as the basis for Graham Clayton-Chance's short documentary film *Out of the Past* (2003), which was chosen for screening at the United Kingdom's prestigious Commonwealth Film Festival in 2004.

The ten-day Manchester Pride Festival has become a highlight of the year in the city. The 2005 Festival included the Pride Games, a three-day event that attracted glbtq athletes from all over the world to compete in a variety of sports.

An estimated quarter of a million people came to Manchester to participate in entertainment and cultural events and to attend the always festive pride parade. A wide range of groups marched, played in bands, and rode on floats along the three-mile parade route to the delight of rainbow flag-waving spectators. The Royal Air Force took part for the second consecutive year, and a team from the Army made its first appearance, marching behind a float on which muscular men wearing tight pink shorts danced to pop music.

On a more serious note, British armed forces and police departments used the festival as an opportunity to recruit potential members.

The Festival also held its traditional candlelit vigil to remember people with HIV/AIDS. It also featured "The Celebration," a blessing of same-sex couples by a minister from the Metropolitan Community Church. Participants in the ceremony signed a "pink book" to pre-register their unions in anticipation of the implementation of the Civil Partnership Rights Bill in December 2005.

The vibrant glbtq community plays an important role in Manchester--preserving its history, fostering its culture, providing social services, contributing to the economy, and invigorating the city with its indomitable spirit.

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