

The Guardian Web Article – Closure of LGBT Venues including The Black Cap Public House

<https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/apr/21/lgbt-london-venue-closures-capital-future-night-tsar>

LGBT London: what venue closures mean for the capital's future

London has lost many LGBT venues in recent years as rents skyrocket and property development accelerates. But with the mayor's 'night tsar' and new spaces emerging, there are signs of revival for the capital's queer nightlife

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Danny Harrop-Griffiths

Fri 21 Apr 2017 07.30 BST Last modified on Fri 11 May 2018 13.07 BST

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Drag show at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern, one of London's longest-running LGBT venues, in 1976.
Photograph: Alamy

It's a springtime Saturday night in Vauxhall, a London "gaybourhood" that's lost many LGBT spaces in the last few years: Barcode, Paris Gym, Area, and The Hoist. Meanwhile, the area's skyline has transformed almost beyond recognition, with tower upon tower of [luxury newbuild flats](#).

But this Saturday in Vauxhall is a time for celebration: it's the [opening of Bloc South](#), the first gay club in this part of town to open for years. Down the road is a packed out Royal Vauxhall Tavern, where the group [Lesbians and Gays Support the Migrants](#) gives a stirring speech. It feels like the good old days when Vauxhall wore London's gay crown.

"There's been a lot of press about the closing of LGBT venues all over London," explains Wayne Shires, the man behind Bloc South. "There's no conspiracy theory,

but I'd say most of these closures have been down to rent increases and development." Still, some call it part of a broader programme of the "[sweeping sterilisation of London nightlife](#)".

Last November, University College London published a report looking at [LGBTI nightlife in London since 1986](#), which highlighted an intensity of closures of long-standing venues in the capital. [According to one LGBT website](#), 151 gay bars and clubs in London shut between 2000 and 2016, and Attitude magazine editor Cliff Joannou told the Guardian he believes that a third of the capital's LGBT venues have closed since the recession.

[Between 2011 and 2016, London lost half its nightclubs](#)

This includes key venues such as Madame Jojo's, the Black Cap, The Joiner's Arms, Barcode Soho, Kazbar, the Queen's Head, Candy Bar, the Oak Bar and Green Carnation – many suffering the impact of rent hikes and rampant development.

Last month, much-loved Soho venue [Molly Moggs closed](#) without warning – and the reasons are still unclear. This old-school boozer was one of the first venues to offer an alternative to the clubbing scene as a place for the community to meet and socialise. These kind of spaces are now few and far between.

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Protesters outside the former Joiner's Arms in 2015 campaign against the closure of LGBT bars in London. Photograph: Frantzesco Kangaris for The Guardian

When popular venues The Joiner's Arms, Nelson's Head and George & Dragon all shut their doors within two years of each other between 2014 and 2016, [a whole swathe of LGBT spaces](#) were lost along the Hackney Road, with Shoreditch's gentrification reaching a saddening new high.

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In 2015, the Black Cap pub in Camden closed just a week after being awarded [asset of community value](#) status, with Camden council having stated that the venue "plays the role of a community centre for the local LGBT people in the absence of such a dedicated facility". The LGBT community is still fighting for the reopening of the Black Cap, with regular protests and dedicated campaigning work by the [Black Cap Foundation](#).

A similar response met the news in 2014 that renowned Soho cabaret venue Madame Jojo's would close. A [vigil-style march](#) (forming part of the wider [Save Soho](#)

[campaign](#)) asked for the venue to be saved, and a petition to stop the closure attracted thousands of signatures.

[Speaking to the Guardian at the time](#), Alexander Parsonage, the artistic director of a cabaret group that regularly performed at Madame Jojo's, lamented its loss. "Jojo's brought together gay culture and burlesque culture with mainstream music and club nights," he said. "[Its] closure plays to the weird gentrification that's happened in Soho over the past 10 years. For 400 years it's been the gloriously seedy underbelly of London, where some of the most interesting subculture has thrived, and yet in the last 10 years Westminster council seems hellbent to destroy that, to gut its character completely and turn everything into high end retail."

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First Out Cafe Bar near Tottenham Court Road closed in 2011. Photograph: Frank Baron for the Guardian

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Losing queer spaces in London is nothing new – although these days it no longer comes down to social oppression. The once-clandestine Caravan Club – a groundbreaking 1930s LGBT venue in Soho – was [recreated last month](#) for the National Trust and National Archives Queer City project exploring the history of queer life in London. This, along with many other events around the country this year, marks the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality through the 1967 Sexual Offences Act.

LGBT nightlife spaces are by no means alone in facing the mounting pressure of London's speculative property development. Between 2011 and 2016, the capital lost half its nightclubs and [more than 40% of its music venues](#), as luxury hotels and housing won out against cultural spaces in multiple cases.

But for the LGBT community, nightlife venues hold even greater significance due to the lack of dedicated daytime spaces – one of London's few spaces, First Out Cafe, [closed in 2011](#). The UCL report notes that LGBT venues accommodate "a range of important welfare, wellbeing and community functions".

LGBT places are an integral part of our plan to grow London's 24-hour culture Amy Lamé

It continues: “At a time of rising inequality and intense competition for space, closures of venues and other spaces present a challenge for already vulnerable minorities, for the neighbourhoods in which they form part of the social, cultural and economic fabric, and for social integration in the capital more widely.”

But the tide appears to be turning. London mayor Sadiq Khan’s awareness of venue closures led to the creation of the city’s new “night tsar” role, filled by performer and presenter Amy Lamé.

Despite the closures, Lamé – host of the Royal Vauxhall Tavern’s long-running avant garde club night Duckie and staunch supporter of London’s LGBT community – feels hopeful. “I was very worried when I heard The Hoist in Vauxhall was closing,” she says when we speak one morning in early March. “But when I talked to them, I realised they just wanted to retire.”

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London mayor Sadiq Khan, with new night tsar for the city, Amy Lamé. Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

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“We don’t want venues to close, but some venues will close quite naturally. It’s a different story if they’re under threat. Part of my job here at city hall is to make sure places aren’t closing owing to undue pressure, say around threats from developers or other challenges to businesses here.”

Resisting that threat is something Lamé knows much about, having been involved in the successful campaign to secure Grade II listing for the Royal Vauxhall Tavern (RVT) in 2015, following its purchase by a property developer the previous year. It was the first such listing of an LGBT venue in the UK.

Thanks to grassroots movement RVT Future, and a gay-friendly Lambeth council, things are looking up for one of Vauxhall’s oldest and most-loved venues. In February this year it was granted “sui generis” classification by the council, confirming and protecting the entire building’s use as a combination of pub, nightclub and performance space – thus protecting it against development into private accommodation.

There’s also a lot for support for the LGBT community from the mayor of London himself. “The mayor has put his weight behind the campaign to protect the RVT and to prevent any change by developers,” Lamé explains. “Sadiq [Khan] and I keep LGBT places close to our hearts and hold them in very high regard. And we’ve made

it really clear that it's an integral part of our plan to grow [London](#) culture, and especially London's 24-hour culture."

In December, Lamé announced [the mayor's intention to invest £10,000](#) in a research project to explore why LGBT venues are closing and what can be done to protect them.

Meanwhile, particular venue openings hold promise for the future of LGBT London. Just as Shires successfully opened South Bloc in Vauxhall, the ground-breaking performance artists Jonny Woo and John Sizzle opened the Glory in Haggerston, at the same time that Shoreditch saw the closure of multiple LGBT spaces.

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Following a campaign, the Royal Vauxhall Tavern secured Grade II listing in 2015.
Photograph: Rob Holley/PA

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Many see the Glory as a godsend for the LGBT community. It's viewed as a 21st-century community hub that aims to be thoroughly inclusive and supportive, a safe space for performers and patrons on every point of the LGBTQI+ spectrum.

But venues and nights like these are still outnumbered by spaces where gay men are the majority, with the UCL report noting that "gay men have the monopoly on [LGBT] venues". According to the report, those spaces catering to women and black, Asian and minority ethnic LGBT people have been disproportionately vulnerable to closure over the last few decades. While some stress the importance of men-only gay clubs – to serve as a safe space that has been vital in gay culture – others feel venues should be more inclusive.

"I've been to gay clubs in the past where I've been told to stop kissing my girlfriend by both staff and fellow clubbers," explains bisexual activist Lewis Oakley.

"I could never go into some bars in Soho and feel safe," adds Mzz Kimberley, one of the first black trans performers on the scene in London. "A lot of spaces don't feel safe for me. Not only because I'm black, but as a trans woman as well. A lot of gay men have a problem with lesbians and transgender women."

Mzz Kimberley and many others believe that this kind of prejudice is being left behind by an emerging 21st-century queer cultural scene that leaves traditional labels relating to sexuality and gender at the door. "The queer community for me is going to be the community of the future," she says.

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The Caravan Club – a groundbreaking 1930s LGBT venue in Soho – has been recreated for the National Trust and National Archives Queer City project. Photograph: The National Archives

We may be losing exclusively gay spaces, but the queering of traditionally straight venues is on the rise. “People like to discover new playgrounds. That’s one of the great things about having a queer party in a place that is usually oriented to straight events,” says [Daddy Issues](#) DJ and promoter Borja Peña. It’s a formula that’s working all over London – and that integration is a good way to educate wider social groups about diversity and equality.

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Still, the importance of exclusive, safe spaces persists: after the Brexit vote, hate crimes against LGBT people in the UK [rose by 147%](#). At a recent talk about the evolution of London’s nightlife, Nadine Artois and Tia Simon-Campbell, of [QTPoC](#) nights [Pussy Palace](#) and [BBZ](#), explained the genesis of their nights: “We needed a space we could be ourselves, away from the mainstream club environment. A safe haven for queer people of colour.” Artois added that gentrification and venue closures have made it difficult for them to find a space to host their nights. “There’s not really many places left to go.”

The 'gaytrification' effect: why gay neighbourhoods are being priced out

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The impact of technology on social life shouldn’t be overlooked either. London has become a virtual reality city with the potential to meet hundreds of thousands of people online, with close to 700,000 users of the Grindr app alone. The need to go to a specific venue to meet someone has become less important – which has led to [complaints that the community itself is to blame](#) for closures.

Co-chair of the RVT Future campaign Rob Holley disagrees with this idea, [telling Pink News that custom is still thriving](#): “The vast majority of London pubs (gay and straight) which close are commercially successful, but London’s crazy property market means converting the building into flats makes a bigger, quicker buck for their owners.”

LGBT venues are exceptionally diverse across London. It’s true that we’ve lost a lot recently, but it looks like we’re reinventing queer space for our constantly evolving

city – and many are hopeful that the trend of closure can be reversed. In November, TV personality Gok Wan [announced plans](#) to launch his own club night in response to London’s “diminishing” LGBT scene. “In the last six years I’ve managed to open three venues,” says Bloc South’s Shires, “so you can do it, if you try hard!”

Let’s hope, as the mayor’s motto suggests, that London is open – whatever your sexuality.

Additional reporting by Francesca Perry. Follow Guardian Cities on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) to join the discussion, and [explore our archive here](#)

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Reflections on The Black Cap



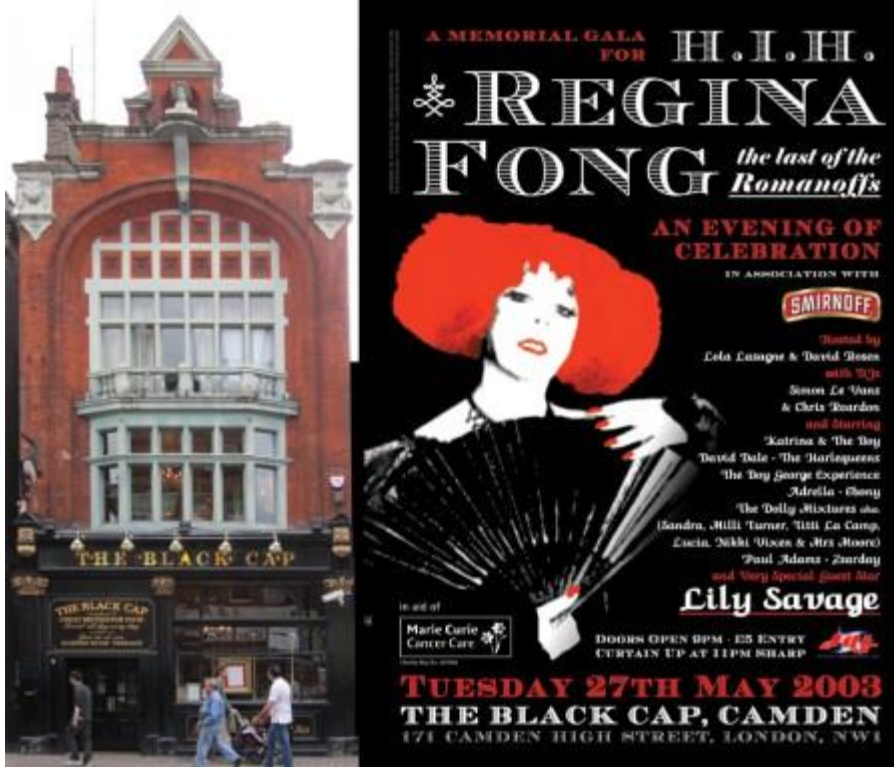
01 May 2012/Comments Off/in [Opinion](#)/by [Simon Watney](#)

It is frankly shocking news that a planning application has recently been lodged with Camden Council to construct new luxury flats above the Black Cap pub on Camden High Street, alongside other proposed changes which would transform the entire nature of the building, reducing the present two-floor pub facilities to the ground-floor only, and doubtless making it in turn vulnerable to 'redevelopment'. There are two big reasons why we should care about this. One has to do with the place itself, and the other concerns its wider significance.



In a very immediate sense The Black Cap matters because it is the only gay venue in this densely populated area, a situation aggravated by the recent 'de-gaying' of the William 1V in Hampstead. Sometimes dubbed 'The Palladium of Drag', since time out of mind it has been one of London's most popular gay venues. When I first visited it in the late '60s it was presided over by Mark Fleming, a big, heavily-built Jewish drag-queen who sang standards in a strong baritone voice and claimed an intimate friendship with the late Queen Mother. In those days there was a cosy bar facing the street with ancient leather sofas, and a narrow passage leading back into the then much smaller stage-bar. The great Mrs Shufflewick was a regular performer, along with countless others. Here the late, wonderful, Regina Fong reigned for seventeen glorious years, before her untimely death in 2003. Whilst Regina ruled London from her north London outpost, her great friend and rival Lily Savage also ruled from The Two Brewers in Clapham, south of the river. For over two decades they were the great twin presiding deities of the London gay scene, and Lily was herself a frequent performer at The Black Cap, where in the Seventies you could see Hinge and Bracket, and it was later practically a second home to Julian Clary, in his sublime incarnation as The Joan Collins Fanclub' complete with the ever-loyal 'Fanny The Wonder Dog'. It was and is

something of a spit-and-sawdust sort of place, utterly unpretentious, its recent upstairs bar and open Fong Terrace a great boon for Camden Town-ers and visitors alike.



People who ask why gay pubs matter in the age of Grindr remind me of people who ask why books matter in the age of the Kindle... Nobody gave us our pubs and clubs, and more than anyone gave us the rights we now enjoy. They were things we created for ourselves, against very considerable odds, and we take them for granted at our peril. As we now see, they can easily be taken away again, leaving us with what? The Black Cap has been a gay pub for at least 150 years, and it embodies something living and vital about the whole history of sexual outsiders in London, and our recent transformation into a recognised and mainly accepted modern social constituency.

But that's not all. The fate of The Black Cap also matters in wider terms, since its history goes back many centuries, like that of The Worlds End on the opposite side of the High Street, which since at least the seventeenth-century had been famous as The Old Mother Red Cap, its name only being changed most regrettably by new owners in the late 1980s. Throughout the nineteenth-century Camden High Street was famous for its popular entertainment, and only a couple of hundred yards south of The Black Cap stood the Old Bedford, the Queen of London's Music Halls, home to Marie Lloyd. Damaged in the Blitz but reopened after restoration in 1949 it struggled on as a flea-pit until it was finally tragically demolished by the Council in 1969, to be replaced by the present astonishingly joyless Jobcentre building.

If Camden Town means anything it means the history of a village where people lived for centuries to the north of the Regents Park, with its tiny ancient parish church dating back to Saxon times, evolving into its present incarnation with and its vast markets around the canal and its air of smart invigorating grunge – a gigantic pleasure-garden and spiritual home of Amy Winehouse. From the moment of its first great expansion we have today only Koko at the south end of the High Street, formerly known as The Camden Palace, which in turn stands on the site of much older Georgian pleasure-gardens at the end of Bayham Street, a stone's throw from where Charles Dickens lived as a boy, and The Black Cap at the north end. Together they represent traditions of popular culture which stem from the very roots of this city, places which give it its very identity.

Back in the '70s there was a popular lesbian and gay disco upstairs at what was then The Sols Arms, a pub just a little way up the Hampstead Road. A post-war building, the name preserved that of an ancient Inn on the site, all memory of which was lost when the site was completely developed into offices in 2007. Of course cities change, and London has always thrived through change, at least until now, when alas it seems that the entire atmosphere of places such as Soho and Camden Town are so vulnerable to ruthless speculative greed, utterly indifferent to such issues as the quality of local lives. In times of rapid change like these it is all the more important that certain landmarks remain, which in their way are quite as important as the great historic palaces and churches. If we lose The Black Cap we don't only lose a key amenity enjoyed by countless people here in Camden Town, but also a significant symbol of what London means, what London as a place is all about. Do we really want the future of London to be one vast blank grey Croydon? With so much lost, and so much at stake, surely some things have to be fought for?

Simon Watney has lived in Camden Town since 1979.

Objectors should contact Camden Council Case Officer Nicola Tulley. The planning application reference number is 2012/1444P

<http://www.hamhigh.co.uk/news/packed-programme-of-camden-events-to-celebrate-amy-winehouse-s-30th-birthday-1-2366391>

Packed programme of Camden events to celebrate Amy Winehouse's 30th birthday

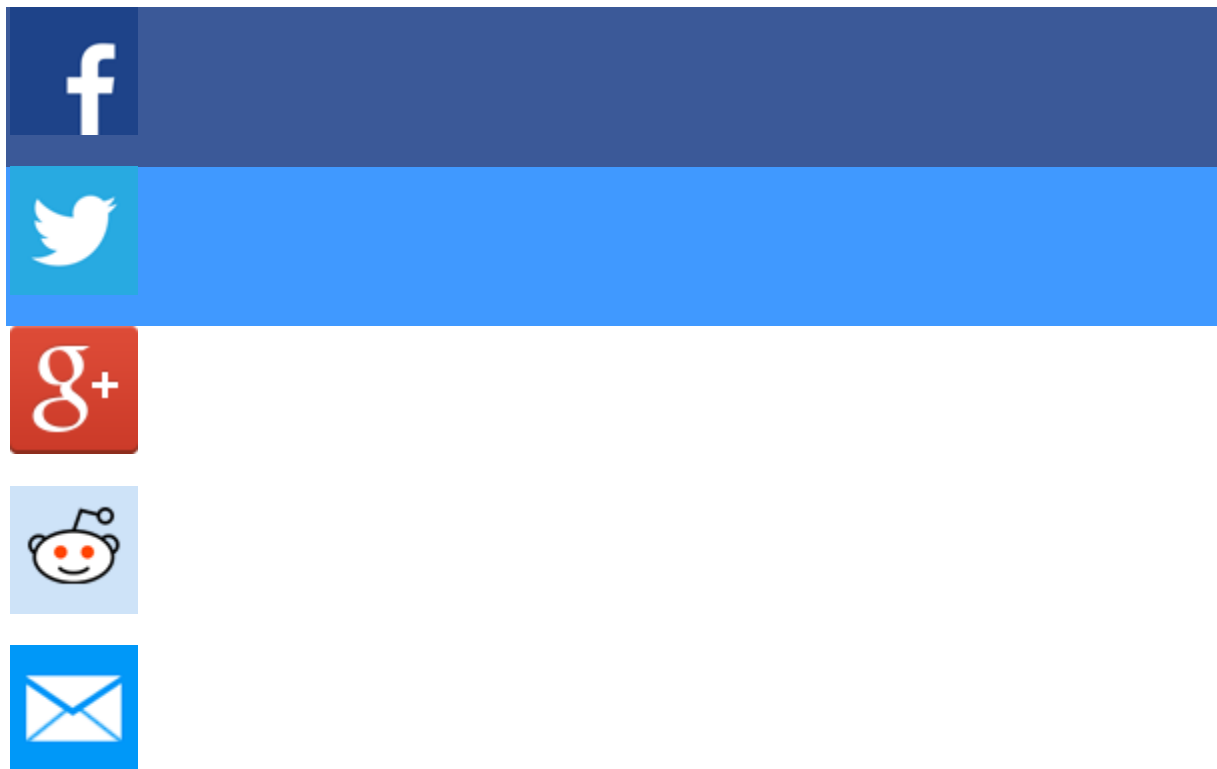
PUBLISHED: 11:00 07 September 2013

By [Amie Keeley](#)



*Amy Winehouse *** Local Caption *** 00320541*

A jam-packed programme of events from cabaret to parachute jumps is being held throughout September to celebrate what would have been Amy Winehouse's 30th birthday.



All the events will take place in Camden Town, the singer's hometown, and will help raise money for the Amy Winehouse Foundation – the charity set up by her family to prevent the effects of drug and alcohol misuse on young people.

Highlights include a birthday party sing-a-long of Amy Winehouse songs with *Channel 4 News* presenter Jon Snow and art and photography exhibitions at the Proud Gallery, Chalk Farm.

The Black Cap pub, in Camden High Street, will also host an evening of London's top cabaret and performance artists as part of a special comedy night.

Meanwhile, the Jewish Museum, Albert Street, Camden Town, will be running a vintage fair selling 1950s print and circle dresses, '60s wiggle dresses and '40s vamp style in homage to Amy's iconic look.

Ms Winehouse died at the age of 27 of accidental alcohol poisoning at her home in 2011. She would have turned 30 on September 14.

The foundation has been running drug and alcohol awareness programmes in Camden schools, including La Sante Union, Dartmouth Park; Acland Burghley, Tufnell Park and Hampstead School, Cricklewood.

Ms Winehouse's mother, Janis, who suffers from multiple sclerosis, is also set to jump out of a plane on September 29 alongside Mayor of Camden, Cllr Jonathan Simpson, and 30 others.

She said: "When I was asked about taking part in the parachute jump I just said, 'why not?' – that's my general outlook on life.

"Life is short, live it.

"This is important to me as it will not only raise funds and awareness for the foundation, but also will let people know that having multiple sclerosis doesn't need to stop you doing anything you want."

Cllr Simpson chose the foundation as his charity of the year when he was elected mayor and has been working with businesses across Camden to further support the foundation's work.

He said: "I hope lots of people join us at the parachute jump so we can raise lots of money for the vital work the foundation does supporting vulnerable young people."

Other events include a pop-up shop selling artwork and music in Camden High Street, various live music shows and walking tours exploring Camden's colourful music scene.

* For a full list of events, venues and times visit www.amywinehousefoundation.org/amys30

<http://archive.camdennewjournal.com/news/2013/oct/police-investigate-how-police-officer-and-musician-devoted-soulmates-fell-death-buildi>

(refers to Black Cap pub as part of the sequence of events of the incident that evening)

Police investigate how police officer and musician - devoted soulmates - fell to death at building site





Pictured from top:

Left: Stuart Meads, devoted to music; Right: Transport Police officer Gavin Brewer. Both fell 20ft at building site

Artist's impression of the finished development in Netley Street

Floral tributes left at the scene

Published: 24 October, 2013

by RICHARD OSLEY and PAVAN AMARA

AN off-duty police officer and his musician boyfriend – described as devoted “soulmates” – fell to their deaths at a building site after a night out in Camden Town.

Tributes were paid last night (Wednesday) to PC Gavin Brewer, 32, and Stuart Meads, 34, a member of the synth-pop band Trademark, who were found dead at the basement level of a new development in Netley Street in the early hours of Saturday.

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Mr Meads' father Stephen said: “I don't even know where to start. Stuart was the best son you could wish for.”

Police are investigating the theory that a hoarding collapsed when they both leaned on it at the same time.

Officers were called to the street to the sound of arguing, but CCTV footage is understood to rule out initial reports that the couple were fighting. They had been out together at the Black Cap pub in Camden Town earlier in the evening.

The footage, taken from a nearby building, is understood to show the men fall through the capsizing hoarding, plunging around 20 feet to the concrete floor at foundation level. Scotland Yard confirmed it was investigating the circumstances, as did the Health and Safety Executive.

Key lines of their inquiry will include an attempt to establish how sturdy the hoarding was and how much pressure needed to be applied to make it collapse.

The company working on the site made no press comment yesterday (Wednesday) as investigators continued to piece together what happened.

The corner site at Hampstead Road has been the scene of building work for more than a year and it is understood that workers were within a fortnight of removing the hoarding and completing the final fence. A document posted on the perimeter of the site said a hoarding licence is due to expire next month.

Builders have been working on a block of eight new flats, some of which are already thought to have been sold in advance of completion.

Colin Marsh, who manages the nearby Prince Regent Mews housing development, voiced concern at the accident happening on a street "where children come backwards and forwards to school every day".

"Police have to investigate the hoarding," he said.

Stephen Baker, one of Mr Meads' closest friends, said he went "numb" when he was told what had happened.

"I had this weird out-of-body reaction. Time just stopped," he said. "I haven't seen the CCTV but a police liaison officer at the family home on Sunday was saying it didn't look like Stuart and Gavin were leaning on the boards.

"She said it looked like the faintest touch. Then the hoardings collapsed. They weren't pushing it. It could have happened to anyone at any time."

Mr Baker added: "His friends want answers. Nobody will allow his death to be in vain, but his family are so distraught. Gavin and Stuart were soulmates.

"Stuart used to say that he hadn't said that about anybody before. He was madly in love."

A shrine of flowers is mounting in Netley Street, including a bouquet from pupils and staff at nearby Netley School and PC Brewer's colleagues from the Finsbury Park division of the British Transport Police.

One message said: "Race you in heaven." The couple had begun their relationship a year ago.

Camden Council inspectors have visited the scene since the tragedy to ensure all hoardings are safe.

The Town Hall is not required to visit sites for safety checks. A press official confirmed: "Our building control team only become involved if a) a report of an unsafe site is made or b) when an incident occurs."

Post mortems were taking place yesterday with coroner's inquests expected to open later this week.

A British Transport Police spokesman said: "PC Brewer had been with the force for nine years. BTP officers and staff are continuing to support family and friends through this very difficult time."

Grieving father: He was the best son you could have asked for

"I HAVEN'T been able to think since I heard," Stuart Meads' father Stephen told the *New Journal* yesterday.

"Stuart was so loved, he was so talented in many ways.

"Every part of his personality was unique and brilliant, everything was wonderful. There is no one thing I can single out because there was so much.

"It's going to be a really long time until we begin to deal with this. I don't even know where to start.

"He was loved beyond belief by so many. He was the best son you could wish for."

The musician's death was not just mourned by his closest family. Tributes revealed a fun-loving personality and devotion to music that had touched many lives.

Trademark, a band formed with his cousin, Oliver Horton, and Paul Soulsby, had a loyal following. Not just a jobbing backroom band, they released a couple of albums, gigged at festivals and supported The Human League on tour. There was a buzz about their music.

"The Sunday Times listed them [Trademark] as having the album of the week," the musician's friend Stephen Baker said.

"He loved that. He was part of the band for over 10 years and that made his family so proud.

"They didn't believe in covers. They did all the music composition themselves."

In his day job, Mr Meads, who grew up in Egham, Surrey, threw himself into a broadcasting career, working behind the scenes on television shows such as *The Weakest Link* and *Deal or No Deal* and then taking up a role at television studios in Kentish Town, where his brother also works. He had found happiness too in his relationship with PC Brewer, his friend recalled.

"He was madly in love, like a teenager. The sort of love you don't think adults have any more," said Mr Baker.

"They'd had previous heartaches – Gavin was the same – and they had given up on it when out of nowhere he fell crazily in love.

"They were convinced they were meant to be together. Gavin was a very charismatic man."

The police officer had been living in Waltham Forest.

His sister, Michelle Crook, wrote online: "There are no words to describe the tragic news.

"May your soul be rested and may you continue to shine down on us, just as you always shone."

<http://archive.islingtontribune.com/reviews/features/2013/jan/feature-savage-truth-how-paul-ogradys-drag-act-started-out-black-cap>

FEATURE: The Savage truth of how Paul O'Grady's drag act started out at the Black Cap



Paul O'Grady and, inset, his alter ego Lily Savage

Published: 3 January, 2013

by GERALD ISAAMAN

HE is a rogue elephant with an urgent native wit, the boy from Birkenhead who broke all the rules when he came to London to live a rough and ragged life in Camden Town and other parts.

His future seemed to be going nowhere working with dysfunctional families in dire need as a Camden Council peripatetic care officer.

Then his real talent broke through with the birth of his alter ego Lily Savage, the outrageous drag queen originally introduced at the Black Cap pub as Larry Sausage, whose urban honesty had audiences howling with delight.

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The rest, as they say, is history – remarkable social history of uncomfortable life as lived in the raw by Paul O’Grady. Now, at 57, he is hailed as the outspoken, utterly class-ridden gay rebel, who enjoys high status as TV chat-show host, cuddly comedian, brazen author and softie animal lover.

Much of his action-packed story is told in two earlier volumes of autobiography, revealing dodgy times amid dodgy people in clubs and pubs. Now comes the third volume, *The Savage Years*, which reveals what a difference success can make to someone whose big heart takes all the kicks and marches on regardless.

There are moments when you wonder – and worry – about his sanity, like the time he returned to his council task looking after Eric: “a big lad for 14, taller than me, twice as wide and blessed with a very loud voice and an extensive vocabulary of obscenities that would make a docker blush.”

It’s a world you can’t imagine as Paul reveals: “We were thrown out of a café on Tottenham Court Road and asked to leave the British Museum, and once on a tube a woman kicked me as she got up to leave, denouncing me as ‘evil’ for allowing my ‘younger brother’ to swear the way he did.

“What saddened me the most was that if people had bothered to look beyond the disorder, they would have found an intelligent and very endearing young man.”

That’s the key to Paul’s character: his ability to take on the world as the hero of the downtrodden who recognises what’s rotten, that there is an underclass that needs his charismatic ability to raise the real, potent issues.

Mind you, he is guilty of changing his opinions about people and places, the blurred photos in the book themselves evidence of distorted times. Possibly it’s all part of the contrary knockabout nature of his performances as a totally loose cannon that have so endeared him to admirers galore.

En route he has become more and more political. By the time you reach page 364 of Paul’s amazingly acrid adventures, he announces: “You won’t be surprised to hear that I’ve nothing but contempt for our current government, my suspicions growing when I learn that during the Leveson inquiry the phrase ‘I don’t remember’ and ‘I don’t recall’ were used by this prime minister we’ve found ourselves landed with 49 times in total.

“Maybe he needs to see someone about this loss of short-term memory, a complaint usually associated with long-term drug abusers. Not that I’m suggesting for one minute that Mr Cameron spliffs up in garden of Number 10, it’s just that his memory seems to be deteriorating rapidly.

“After all, he did leave the kid behind in the pub, didn’t he? A scarf, or a glove you can understand, but your daughter? Let’s hope the voters forget him just as quickly during the next election, leaving him free to tour holiday camps and care homes as a ‘memory act’ with his old pal the Dark Lord of News International, billed under the name Dandelion and Murdoch.”

Indeed, currently appearing as “Lilian Twanky” in Aladdin at the O2 Arena , he confesses: “You might think that to look at me, and see that I love doing panto, that I must love Christmas. But I can’t bloody stand it. It starts earlier each year, you’ve got Christmas songs and adverts in bloody September. It’s so expensive and commercial it makes people spend money they haven’t got. And people fret about it so much.”

Yet Paul loves his panto. “It’s a tradition that I don’t think is ever going to die out,” he declares. “People might think it’s a doddle, but it’s not, you know. I get loads of offers to do Lily, but I hadn’t done panto for a few years and thought it would be fun to play Widow Twanky, I thought it was perfect for Lily.

“And because I knew it wasn’t going to be forever, I could really enjoy it. But this is the last time, I’m finally putting the old bird to bed.”

He has said that before. More fascinating is the fact that Paul has signed up to do a TV documentary series on the working class. That truly will be an eye-opener from their uncrowned king.

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Review: The Meth Lab presents: Shangela

by [Candace Chan](#) | Sep 1, 2014 | [Drag, Reviews](#) | [0 comments](#)



Hallelloo! Whether you know her from *RuPaul's Drag Race* contestant from seasons 2 and 3, as pimp-ho Shangela Laquifa Wadley or as the "Nancy Drew of Drag", Shangela came to Meth Lab London and brought the party with her.

LIKE: As well as appearing in Seasons 2 and 3 of *RuPaul's Drag Race*, Shangela fronted a Facebook ad campaign.

If *Meth Lab Presents: Shangela* had to be reduced to three words, professional, genuine, and Beyoncé are as good as any.

Lovers of drag yet to become aware of who Shangela is are probably living under a rock. This Southern queen made her initial splash appearing on the second season of *RuPaul's Drag Race*. With only five months experience as a drag performer, the inexperienced artiste was the first to be eliminated. This is one queen, though, that never gives up: Shangela returned in the next season and made it to the final six. Since then she's had a successful career in entertainment with cameo roles in *Glee* and *Community*.

Shangela is clearly driven by a passion for her craft. The hard-[werkin' girl](#)'s performance begins with an impeccably arranged intro with pounding beats and intriguing vocals that draw the mind in. Wearing a black and gold shoulder-padded bodysuit with glitter on her lips and eyes, she takes over the stage with a medley of chart-topping hits, starting with the graceful *Young and Beautiful* through to *RuPaul's* twerk anthem *Peanut Butter*. Her second act is a smashing mashup of Beyoncé's biggest hits. With fierce dance moves and an explosive energy, she captivated the audience with her stage presence – not many queens (not many people, really) can dance like that. She may not be Beyoncé, but tonight this hair whipping, booty shaking queen has our undivided attention.

Shangela is one of my favourite queens from *RPDR* because she puts her heart into everything she does. When she finishes her first routine with a seeming effortlessness, I am actually

surprised to see her catching her breath. Even so, she still glows on stage, basking in the cheers and love from the audience.

As the stand-up challenge of *RPDR* Season 3 showed, Shangela is a talented comedian. Her comedic alter ego [Shangela Laquifa Wadley](#), a self-described “post-modern pimp-ho” who pimps herself because of recession doesn’t make an appearance but there’s enough in Shangela’s powerhouse performance.

Born on Halloween 2013, Meth Lab has earned some renown for bringing some of the finest *RPDR* competitors to London as well as giving up-and-coming queens a platform to showcase their talent. This show is supported by Trannyshack participants Jenna Scyde and Honey Foxx as well as the Familyyy Fierce’s very own Pretty Miss Cairo. Of all the supporting acts, the one that really piqued my interest is Jenna and her rendition of *Popular* from the musical *Wicked*. This take on the song – about a popular girl offering to give an underdog a makeover out of her generosity – is smartly spiced up with quotes from *Mean Girls* and *Clueless*, and Jenna looked her part in a sleek blonde wig and a white mini dress. Like a true mean girl, Jenna flashes out a photobook on which she writes bitchy remarks about the other queens. This was a great act for a crowd who loves a bit of musical fun and shade.

Host Meth keeps the audience entertained by lip-syncing to Queen B’s *If I Were a Boy*, a song which she called “very close” to her heart. Before you can take her too seriously, she whips out a can of beer which she shakes (and shakes) throughout the number. Just before the frothed-up beer sprays everywhere, she pulls a male audience member on stage, gets down on her knees, and the rest of the audience are spared a faceful of lager. A light hearted, if not raucous, ending to a genderbending mindfuck.

Shangela may not have been everyone’s *RPDR* queen but I’m very glad to see her perform in person. There are things you can never experience through the TV screen – I was able to see the passion in her eyes, and support her (literally) as she surfs through the crowd on her back, with arms spread open like an angel. Passionate, genuine and professional, Shangela is a true diva who deserves every success she has. She is the queen who keeps coming back on *RPDR*, and I certainly hope it won’t be long before I see her again.

The Meth Lab presents: Shangela, The Black Cap, 171 Camden High St, London NW1 7JY.
More details [here](#).

Further reading

[What did Candace Chan make of Sharon Needles?](#)

[Judge Not Lest Ye Be Slapped](#)

[Miss Cairo’s Guide To Drag Perfection: Because You’re F*cking Worth It](#)

Image Credit: VentureBeat

[Article on Camden Council website](http://news.camden.gov.uk/the-black-cap/)
<http://news.camden.gov.uk/the-black-cap/>

London, 17 April 2015

The Black Cap

Camden Council is disappointed to hear of the closure of this venue which has had an iconic status for Camden's gay community since the 1960s as a place to meet and socialise.

Unfortunately the council does not have the power to stop the closure of any commercial activities as this is the sole responsibility of the owners.

The council is currently considering its available options and has been working hard to use the powers it does have to protect this important community icon.

The council recently listed the property as an Asset of Community Value under the Localism Act 2011 following a nomination by the community. Because of this listing, if the owner wants to sell the Black Cap, in most cases they must tell the council triggering a six month timeframe which allows the community time to raise the required capital to bid for the property to buy the asset.

In the case of the Black Cap, when the Asset of Community Value listing was made by the Council a contract for sale was already in existence between the current owner and the intended purchaser which exempts it from this six month timeframe. However, if circumstances change and this sale does not proceed for any reason, if the owner wishes to sell in the future the six month period will apply.

The Asset of Community Value status also ensures that the current or any future owners of this property cannot change the use of the building as a pub and entertainment venue without applying to the council's Development and Control Committee for planning permission. In February this year the Council's Development Control Committee resolved to refuse a planning application for the redevelopment of the upper floors of the

property on the basis (amongst other reasons) that it would adversely impact on the operation of the Black Cap.

This shows the council's belief in the significance of this venue as no ordinary gay pub, but one that also plays an important cultural role as a renowned venue for drag and cabaret performances. The pub's heritage contributes to its continued central role in Camden and London's gay scene and means that the community value would not be easily replicable elsewhere.

Camden New Journal

'Re-open the Black Cap' call as Breakfast Club diner deal falls through



The Black Cap in Camden High Street was one of the UK's best known LGBT bars

Published: 27 August, 2015

By WILLIAM McLENNAN

CONTROVERSIAL plans to replace a historic gay bar with a trendy café have fallen through, leaving former customers urging owners to reopen the venue.

Protesters took to the streets of Camden Town in April after the Black Cap was unceremoniously closed by pub company Faucet Inn, which said at the time that sale of the building would "complete imminently".

A newly-formed investment company, Camden Securities LLP, surfaced as a potential buyer and restaurant chain the Breakfast Club agreed to take a lease on the ground floor.

But the deal with Jersey-registered owner KickingHorse Limited, which bought the lease for £11.4million in 2010, will no longer be going ahead, it can be revealed.

Faucet Inn had been running the venue on behalf of the owner, and chief executive Steve Cox confirmed yesterday (Wednesday) that the sale was not going ahead.

He refused to say if Faucet Inn would reopen the venue or if a new buyer was being sought, adding: "The future of the Black Cap is still undecided. We are looking at a number of different options at the moment."

Plans to open a restaurant on the site faced a fierce backlash after being revealed in the New Journal in June. Breakfast Club boss Jonathan Arana-Morton said he felt "caught in the crossfire" of the vociferous campaign to reopen the pub. He said the company had supported LGBT charities in Soho and Brighton, adding: "We're not used to dealing with controversy. We think we're good people."

The news sparked an intervention by Town Hall planning chief Phil Jones, who wrote to the Breakfast Club in July and warned that a change of use from bar to café would be a "breach of planning control" and would be met with "robust enforcement action" from the council.

More than 200 people closed Camden High Street during a protest over the bar's closure in April, while a petition, set up by Camden councillor Danny Beales, calling for the venue to reopen has collected 7,800 signatures.

The head of Camden LGBT Forum, Nigel Harris, who has been holding a "vigil" outside the Black Cap alongside fellow campaigners every Saturday, has called on KickingHorse Ltd to reopen the bar as a LGBT venue.

Asking for a meeting with the firm, he has said: "All of these displaced Black Cap customers will return, and along with the proven high level of interest throughout London, the community will guarantee a standing room-only reopening night before settling back to the previous high level of activity before closure.

"This gives you certainty of a dependable tenancy income for years ahead, and gives any tenant publican a first-rate business opportunity."



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Submitted by Anonymous on Fri, 2015-08-28 08:11.

Excellent article, and highlighting an emphasis

Black Cap campaigners would welcome hearing from any pub operator interested in re-opening The Black Cap in its current form. However it should be noted that whilst Faucet Inn may issue opinions about its future intention, which in any case can only be to realistically re-open the pub as it is, it does not presently seem to us have a stake in the pub.

It is only Kicking Horse as freeholder that can appoint a new operator, which is why campaigners wish to speak to them.

<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/iconic-camden-gay-and-drag-pub-the-black-cap-shuts-doors-despite-community-asset-listing-10174368.html>

The Black Cap Camden: Iconic gay and drag pub closed despite 'community asset' listing

- [RAMZY ALWAKEEL](#)
- Monday 13 April 2015 22:18
- [1 comment](#)
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The Evening Standard



Asset: The Black Cap pub, which Google Maps now lists as 'permanently closed'
(Picture: Google StreetView)

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An iconic gay pub in north London has reportedly been shut by its owners - despite having been recognised as an "asset of community value" just last week.

[This Is Cabaret reports](#) that The Black Cap in Camden was unexpectedly closed last night after owners Faucet Inn pulled down the shutters on the pub, which has been open since the 1960s and has recently hosted contestants from RuPaul's Drag Race.

"This is a sad and bewildering end to one of London's longest-serving drag dens and a gay haunt since at least the mid 1960s," the site added.

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Bafflingly the closure follows [Camden Council's recent decision](#) to list it as an "asset of community value". The council threw out a plan to redevelop it earlier this year.

"The Black Cap has had iconic status for Camden's gay community since the 1960s as a place to meet and socialise," the council's Michael Webb wrote, responding to the application to list it.

"It is no ordinary gay pub as it also plays an important cultural role as a renowned venue for drag and cabaret performances. The pub's heritage contributes to its continued central role in Camden and London's gay scene and means that the community value would not be easily replicable elsewhere.

"The community value of the pub is not solely recreational and cultural. The Black Cap plays the role of a community centre for the local LGBT community in the absence of such a dedicated facility. The council has received evidence of its important social role as a meeting point for various support groups - particularly for older LGBT people and those from ethnic

minorities for hate crime outreach work and as a venue for events, consultations and forums. While it could be argued that the recreational and cultural value of the pub is London-wide, even national and international, these groups very much serve Camden's large LGBT community specifically."

ACV status means the pub could not be sold without community groups first being given a chance to bid for it.

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Earlier this year gay pub the [Joiners' Arms in Shoreditch](#) was granted ACV status after fears it could be redeveloped, despite an attempt to get the ruling overturned by the building's owners. Sir Ian McKellan lent his voice to the campaign to save it.

The Black Cap's owners Faucet Inn did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Closing time for gay pubs – a new victim of London’s soaring property prices

LGBT venues are being lost and with them gay and lesbian heritage, but do cultural shifts also play a part in this trend?

Ben Walters

Wed 4 Feb 2015 07.29 GMT Last modified on Thu 22 Feb 2018 10.21 GMT

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Campaigners protest against the redevelopment of the Joiners Arms in east London. Photograph: Frantzesco Kangaris for the Guardian

Historically, the gay scene has been a moveable feast. **Pubs**, bars and clubs spring up in one area, thrive for a while and then fade away, only to pop up somewhere else. But the past couple of years have been notably hard for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) venues in the UK. In the capital alone, more than a dozen spaces have closed, from Vauxhall superclub Area in south London, to local pubs north of the river Thames, to lesbian institution Candy Bar in Soho and Madame Jojo’s, home to many queer nights. The future of four or five more hangs in the balance, and outside London, cities such as Brighton and Manchester are also suffering.

“There does seem to be a closure epidemic at the moment,” says Tony Butchart-Kelly of the Albert Kennedy Trust, a charity that works with at-risk LGBT youth. He sees it as a worrying development because bars and clubs aren’t just places to party but crucial sites of community and belonging. “Young people look to these as safe places where they can feel

accepted, especially if they've been rejected by their families. For most people, it's the first time they've been surrounded by LGBT people."

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Cliff Joannou, who edits London gay listings magazine QX, estimates that 25% of LGBT venues have closed in the capital since the recession. "And the gay community is small. Losing four or five in the space of a year is a big impact. And the more places that are threatened, the harder it is to maintain community – especially when whole locations are being lost. The sense of Soho as a gay village or Vauxhall as a gay village is going," he says. "It's like losing the Asian community from Brick Lane."

The commercial gay bar and pub sector boomed in the 1990s. Some continue to thrive. Some were bought by corporate breweries that turned them into straight venues. Others were hit by the recession. Now the soaring London property market makes many sites vulnerable to commercial and residential redevelopment when leases end.

"Every part of London has a pound sign on it now," says Joannou. "Take The Yard in Soho – a unique space with such character. But the owner can put a chain restaurant and a couple of floors of flats in there and make a lot more money." Westminster council is deciding whether to approve planning permission for just such a scheme, while Camden council considers another application that would convert the upper bar of The Black Cap – where drag acts such as Danny La Rue and Hinge and Bracket started their careers – into flats. The Royal Vauxhall Tavern has been bought by a property developer whose plans remain unclear.

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"It's not a homophobic issue," Joannou says. "It's independent venues versus big business." Planning procedures often privilege big corporate ventures, and give weight to residential concerns such as noise levels, even if these relate to new homes built in long-established entertainment districts.

“It’s making things impossible for independent businesses,” says Chris Amos, whose venue Manbar on Charing Cross Road closed recently following a dispute over noise levels. “I think they’re trying to do what they did in New York and homogenise the tourist centre. There’s more money in property than having gays in there drinking.”

But insisting that gay bars are good and property development bad might be oversimplifying things. “We shouldn’t just give in to the market, but nor can we hang on to a model of gay bars from the 90s, because that might not be what we need now,” says Matt Cook, senior lecturer in history and gender studies at Birkbeck College, University of London, and author of *A Gay History of Britain*.

“Pubs and bars have been very important in shaping ideas of community and identity, but they’ve rarely been motivated by purely altruistic impulses. Property prices and the profit motive are not a new consideration in gay bars.”

As well as economics, cultural and demographic shifts mean that the mainstream is less prejudiced than it used to be, leaving some LGBT people happy to socialise in mixed environments or via the internet and mobile apps. Many LGBT students in Brighton, for example, appear to be less enamoured of the bar scene than older LGBT people.

In Brighton, for example, where house prices have risen steeply new LGBT homeowners often work and socialise in London, leaving the city’s gay bars struggling – not least because, at the same time, the traditional annual influx of gay students is drying up. “There’s a gay pub crawl as part of the freshers’ fair. In the past, you might have expected 800 people to take part. This year it was maybe 100,” says James Ledward, editor of Brighton gay listings magazine GScene. “Now people can feel comfortable in their local bar, so the traditional gay venues are having a bit of an identity crisis.”

In Manchester, local institutions Taurus and Eden have recently closed their doors, perhaps forever, and a sense of vulnerability is in the air. According to local gay business leader Jackie Crozier, “Manchester’s student population often prefer to drink at home as opposed to bars to save on money, so whilst many of the clubs don’t suffer, the bars which close earlier do.”

Amos says: “It’s hard to put a business plan together now where your primary market is focused on gays. If people do want those venues, they have to go there and use them.” He is opening a new restaurant-bar-performance space in Southwark, called Atmos, but describes it as “gay-friendly” rather than as an LGBT venue.

Still, the appeal of the old-school gay bar may be more robust than it seems. “People still want gay venues to socialise in,” says Butchart-Kelly, who is 31. “I still feel uncomfortable holding a boyfriend’s hand or kissing him goodbye in predominantly straight places.”

And this applies to younger LGBT people as well. Travon Steadman is a 20-year-old student and Black Cap regular. “As a young gay boy, I still feel the need to connect with other people who understand where I’m coming from,” he says.

“It’s important to have a designated area – it’s about being validated and told you’re OK, and it’s about a community feel. You can end up talking to a gay man in his 60s and learn so much about gay history and culture. It’s like your nan passing on wisdom. We take advantage of the fact we can walk around and be gay, but too often we don’t know our history. Knowing your history, knowing your movement, gives you power.”

Perhaps what is vital isn’t access to pubs or bars per se but to places where LGBT people can socialise and build community. “What can result from this kind of thing [multiple venue closures] is more community-based reactions,” says Cook, “from squatters’ groups to people organising film nights or reading groups at home. Physical spaces are absolutely crucial, but they don’t only need to be bars.” Brighton seems to bear this out – even as the bar scene struggles, the city’s annual Pride event goes from strength to strength and gay choirs and sports clubs attract hundreds of members.

But the rate at which existing venues are closing remains a concern given how few new spaces are taking their place. “We know LGBT people, especially young LGBT people, have higher incidence of depression, self-harming and suicide,” says Butchart-Kelly. “Isolation is a major source of stress, and if you remove the ability to socialise, it’s a real issue.” The problem is made all the more acute by the closure of many youth groups and outreach projects in the wake of funding cuts. “I think it’s disgusting,” says Steadman. “It’s going to make us feel more lost.”

The idea that this could be the end of an era makes for a sobering start to [LGBT History Month](#), which runs throughout February.

Yet Joannou takes strength from the past. He says: “The gay scene has always found new ways to move with the times. Before decriminalisation, people found safe spaces to congregate – that’s how we survived for decades when it was illegal to be yourself. When times are hard, we come together and find new places.

‘Why bars are worth fighting for’

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Charlotte Gerada, left, and Jane Clendon are campaigning to save the Joiners Arms in Hackney, east London, as a bar and community space. Photograph: Frantzesco Kangaris/Frantzesco Kangaris for The Guardian

When the Joiners Arms opened as a venue for all sexualities in May 1997, Jane Clendon was among the first regulars. “The difference was the friendliness I found there, and the diversity,” she says. “You could go on your own and talk to people you wouldn’t meet otherwise.”

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The Joiners became an east London landmark, known for wild nights and good turns, such as helping fund treatment for asylum seekers with HIV. But in November, the pub on Hackney Road announced its closure: the site was earmarked for high-end property development.

Regulars created a group, The Joiners Lives On. “The idea was not only to save the Joiners but to create an inclusive community centre,” says Clendon. “Places for people to socialise are dropping like flies. People say there’s no need for gay places now that we can get married but all the old issues are still there.” [Last year, 19 UK police forces reported a rise in homophobic attacks.](#)

“Queer people still can’t go where they please and act how they want,” says fellow group member Charlotte Gerada. “You need spaces where people don’t have to worry about who they kiss or how they look.”

The Joiners Lives On swiftly secured [asset of community value status](#) for the pub – a local council designation that makes it harder to change a venue’s use and means it can’t be sold without giving the group the chance to bid for it themselves. They were too late to save the pub as it was – it closed last month - but they have not given up.

“As the developers are only at the pre-planning stage, we want to meet and discuss options for saving and evolving The Joiners Arms,” says Gerada. “It

is our vision to create a co-operatively run queer community centre and bar space.”

The campaign established links with other threatened LGBT venues, and groups resisting redevelopment such as [Save Soho](#) and the New Era estate’s [E15 Mums](#). “There’s a whole movement going on now,” Clendon says. “It shows the level of anger at what’s happening and surprise at how fast things are changing. But it is worth fighting. Together is the key.”

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London's historic gay pub The Black Cap in Camden closed by owners a week after being awarded 'asset of community value' status

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/londons-historic-gay-pub-the-black-cap-in-camden-closed-by-owners-a-week-after-being-awarded-asset-10176344.html>

The future of the venue is not clear, but owners have tried to gain permission to have the building redeveloped three times since 2011

- [Loulla-Mae Eleftheriou-Smith](#)
- Tuesday 14 April 2015 15:55 BST
- [0 comments](#)



The Black Cap *Google Images*

The Black Cap, one of London's best known LGBTQ pubs and drag venues, has been closed by its owners just one week after Camden Council awarded it the "[asset of community value](#)"(ACV) status.

The pub, which has been open as a gay venue since the 1960s, was closed for the last time by owners Faucett Inn on Sunday night, the latest in a string of alternative and LGBTQ venues that have been closed down across the capital, from Madame Jojo's in Soho to The Joiner's Arms in Hackney.

The self-declared “Home of RuPaul’s Drag Race in the UK,” The Black Cap’s ACV status was awarded in recognition of it “furthering [of] the social well-being or cultural, recreational or sporting interests of the local community,” according to Camden Council.

The owners have reportedly tried and failed to gain permission from the council to redevelop the area above the venue three times since 2011.

The latest of these attempts was made in February, when requests to have the first, second and third floor above the venue turned into flats, which was refused, the *Camden New Journal* [reports](#).

The future of the venue has yet to be revealed, Faucett Inn said it closed the historic pub as the sale of the venue’s freehold “will complete imminently”.

The ACV status is meant to give venues an added layer of protection from becoming sold and redeveloped.

If the landowner wishes to sell a property with this status, the council must be informed, and if a group wants to buy the asset, they can trigger a six month buffer period to attempt to raise the money for the site, though the owner is still within their rights to sell the property at the market rate.