

A DECADE OF SAPPHO IN LESBIAN HERSTORY



1968: The Killing of Sister George

Mentioned frequently throughout Sappho it was the first film to show the interior of a lesbian nightclub and thought of as the first British mainstream presentation of British lesbian women. Although the women are negatively typecast it was undoubtedly the first of its kind and an important move for lesbian visibility in British media.

CHE (Campaign for Homosexual Equality) is formed, 1969

CHE was the first British gay action group and they were politically active for many years. Sappho was very involved in early years but it wasn't without speculation. Since CHE was heavily male oriented questions were often raised about how positive this was for gay women. In the first edition, Jackie Forster cites: "Are some gays more equal than others?" It is a topic that pervades the magazine.

Oct 1970: GFL (Gay Liberation Front)

A group established at London School of Economics on 13th of October to rally activism against the oppression of LGBT people. In 1971, GLF (aided by Sappho) protested against The Nationwide Festival of Light. The festival was run by Christian organisations that were concerned about the growth of homosexuality in the U.K. and popular celebrities such as Cliff Richard performed.



Sappho Magazines, cc Glasgow Womens Library 2016

1971: The Nullity of Marriage Act

This act was passed in parliament explicitly banning same sex marriages in England and Wales.

1972: Sappho

After the closure of Arena Three editor Jackie Forster creates Sappho in 1972 and she remains with the magazine vehemently until its closure in 1981. In the first editorial she cites their aim to: "Disperse the isolation of Gay Ghettos... It will be subversively questioning our conformist tenets. Sappho will be a radical role."

Sappho reports (Vol. 1, No. 1):

The Jewish Homosexual Society of GLF held their first symposium at University of London: "many gay brothers and sisters spoke strongly against the way we are condemned by our own people."

MILITANT MADAMS

"Homosexuals are not oppressed: they are victims, as are many groups, of capitalist society."

HAPPY FAMILIES by Mac (Vol. 1, No. 2):

"I'm frightened by the vast army of stick in the mud's, smug in that narrow world believing life is a tight rope of convention and anyone who slips off it is doomed to eternal domination."

HETERACETERA (Vol. 1, No. 4)

"Having a baby is either a self indulgent luxury or an accidental curse exclusively the responsibility of the female."



July 1973: Sappho reports the first Dykes on Bikes

This was a lesbian motorcycle club known for their participation in events such as Gay Pride parades and international LGBT events like the international Gay Games. They are still prevalent in Pride marches today.

1974: London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard

Sappho helped establish the London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard

Vol.3 No.1: Joan Young on "Marital Mortality"

"I find it extraordinary that even the most enlightened people can take the utterly submissive view that marriage is something that happens to a woman, like menstruation or being caught in a thunderstorm... For it is at least possible that in refusing to remain in an entirely false position; in refusing to be something other than herself, she is establishing a pattern of integrity and courage that may prove in the end a pretty sound basis for the happiness of those she loves and even for the man she cannot love, perhaps as reluctant martyrdom."

HETERACETERA (Vol.3 No.2)
"I think why I married was not out of love but a sense of duty, family pressure, it was the right thing to do – and it was expected of me."



1975: Sappho reports (Vol. 3, No. 7) GAY DISORDER PSYCHOSEXPERTS

"The conference was called psychosexual disorders. Apparently some of the psychotic disorders are homosexuality, transvestitism and transexuality."

GAY PRIDE IS THE WILL TO OPPOSITION by Kim Freile (Vol. 3, No. 7)

"Homosexual liberation is to create one's own lifestyle based on the feelings of each other, and not on social based customs. I believe in openness and confrontation, as a means to change attitudes."

1978: I.G.A

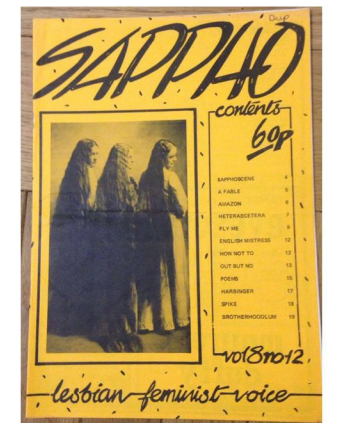
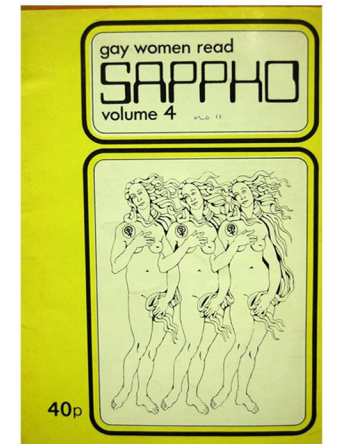
The International Lesbian and Gay association (I.G.A.) called upon Amnesty International to take action on the persecution of LGBT people.

HETERACETERA (Vol.6, No.5)

"In the pre-Sister George sixties the gay scene was hardly prominent, especially here in the provinces. Try and imagine the emotional turmoil when one discovers one's Sapphic tendencies when married to a kind, decent man with the added responsibility."

Vol.6, No.11

Jackie Forster reports "Sappho complains against the Evening News' methods of deception and infiltration in order to get a story on AID (Artificial insemination by donor) and lesbian parents was dismissed by the press council." She takes her argument to court but is left deflated stating: "We left knowing we hadn't even dented the implacable attitudes that weighed an obscene immorality (lesbians) against another immorality (deception) by straight women reporters) and of course the latter were justified."



Early and last issue of Sappho

1968

1981

1968: Arena Three

It is important to mention Sappho's predecessor Arena Three that was largely written by Esme Langley (founder of The Minorities Research Group) who accepted sole responsibility for the publishing so that a "lesbian conspiracy" would not be made. Her opening statement reads:

"In answer to numerous requests for information about activities of the group, we would explain that it was founded in the Spring of 1963 to conduct and collaborate in research into the homosexual condition—especially as it concerns women, to disseminate information and items of interest to universities, institutes, social and educational workers, writers, poets, editors, employees and, in short, all those genuinely in quest of enlightenment about what has been called "The misty unmapped world of feminine homosexuality."



Arena Three 1963-1972

Aug 1970: Arena Three

Mainstream publications such as The Sunday Times, Sunday Telegraph and The Observer refuse to advertise Arena Three. Langley devotes an entire issue to their rejection but the publication lasts less than a year after this.

1972: The First British Pride Rally

The First British Pride Rally was held in London with 1000 people marching from Trafalgar Square to Hyde Park.

Sappho reports women being discharged from the R.A.F. for being homosexual

HETERACETERA (Vol. 1, No. 8)

"Marriage is not a soulless contract making it above all a public declaration of love which some lesbian couples may wish to make. It's not compulsory for heterosexuals – they can choose to marry or not. Why should not homosexuals have the choice too?"



May 1973: Sappho reports (Vol.2, No.1)

EXPLOITERS EXPLOITED

"A rash of stickers bearing the legend: THIS ADVERTISEMENT EXPLOITS WOMEN has broken out all over the local underground station."

COURAGE AND CONVICTION (Vol. 2, No. 1)

"Let no-one put down or criticise the pansy and the stud, the drag queen and the radical femme, the transvestite and the transsexual, the GLF activist or the CHE spokesman. To dismiss those men and women as freaks, hysterics, show offs or martyrs is as uncomprehending as it is cruel."

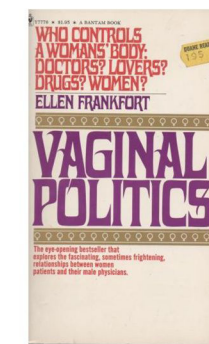
London Icebreakers forms a service offering 24-hour helpline staffed exclusively by LGB people for people in need within their community.

ROGER BAKER reports in Sappho summarising CHE's National Conference. (Vol. 2, No.2):

"There are, I believe, three major experiences that all gay people can claim to share:
1. The need to keep one's sexual preferences a secret
2. The awareness often suppressed or rationalised, that society casts the homosexual in the role of outsider
3. Heterosexually oriented conditioning and not coming to terms with one's own homosexuality"

1973 Sappho (Vol.2, No. 10): VAGINAL POLITICS

HAPPINESS IS YOUR OWN CERVIX. WE'VE HAD ENOUGH OF THIS RESEARCH OF MEN WITH THEIR SEMEN OF SHEEP FOR PROSTATE GLANDS AND THEIR LITTLE DEVICES THEY RAM INTO OUR UTERUS. THESE PILLS THAT THROW OUR WHOLE CHEMISTRY OFF AND MAKE US SICK. WE'RE QUITE TIRED OF THIS.



1974: Maureen Colquhoun

Maureen Colquhoun came out as the first lesbian M.P. for the Labour Party but was subsequently refused support by the party. She was in a heterosexual marriage when they employed her but left to be with Sappho magazine publisher Babs (Barbara) Todd. She was deselected in 1977.



1975: Joan Young for Sappho (Vol. 4, No.2)

"All political systems, all political parties from extreme left through middle centre to far right, are the same in one vital respect: they are all manifestations of the preoccupations of the typical heterosexual male as defined and conditioned from time innumerable, and of his attitudes towards the gods of power and wealth to which he enslaved himself... Once one becomes a feminist one becomes very aware of all the crap that conditioning has produced."

1977: Gay and Lesbian Trade Unions Congress

The first Gay and Lesbian Trade Unions Congress (TUC) conference took place to discuss workplace rights.

HETERACETERA (Vol. 5, No.5)

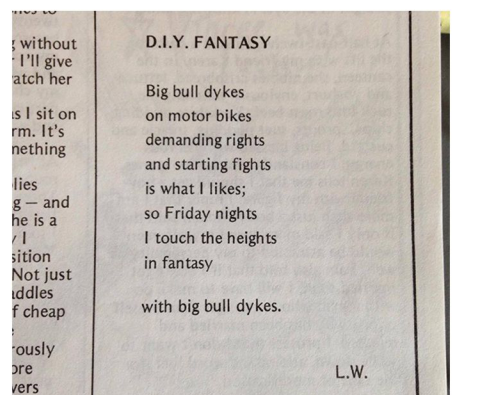
"Cliches are standard prejudices by which we injure the individual. It is so much easier to accommodate a person according to set clichés than to go to the trouble of discovering them individually."

1981: Sappho Last Edition

Last Sappho (Vol. 8, No. 12) was published in 1981 due to financial constraints.

Jackie Forster's editors note reads:

"Ten years of Sappho has taken up a decade of my life, at an age when most women are settled into a routine and are gracefully accepting a back seat in life's traffic... Our cover picture says it all: Remember the three Botticelli Beauties – lesbian, bi and straight on full frontals? Now they're turning away to move on to whatever the future holds for us. Bye..."



Anonymous Poem included in final issue of Sappho